

**The Hidden Narratives of Higher Education Internationalisation:  
Can Excellence and Inclusion Cohabit? The case of  
East Asian mobile academics in UK Universities**



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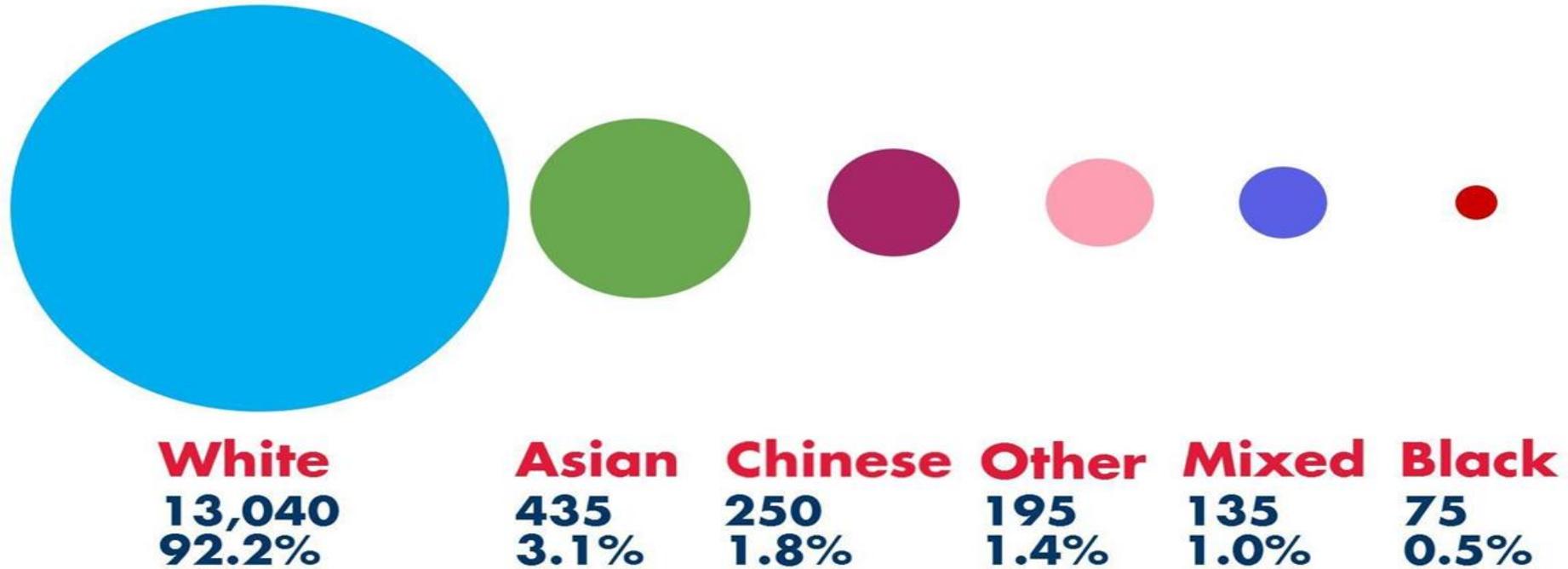
# University Presidents (with “BME” backgrounds) in the UK as of 2018



# Internationalisation of UK HE Leadership: Foreign Vice-Chancellors (Presidents) in major UK universities



# 0.5% OF PROFESSORS WERE BLACK



8: UK professors by ethnic group, 2014-15

All individuals have multiple identities, and the intersection of those identities should be considered wherever possible.

# PROPORTIONALLY FEWER PROFESSORS WERE BME AND FEMALE

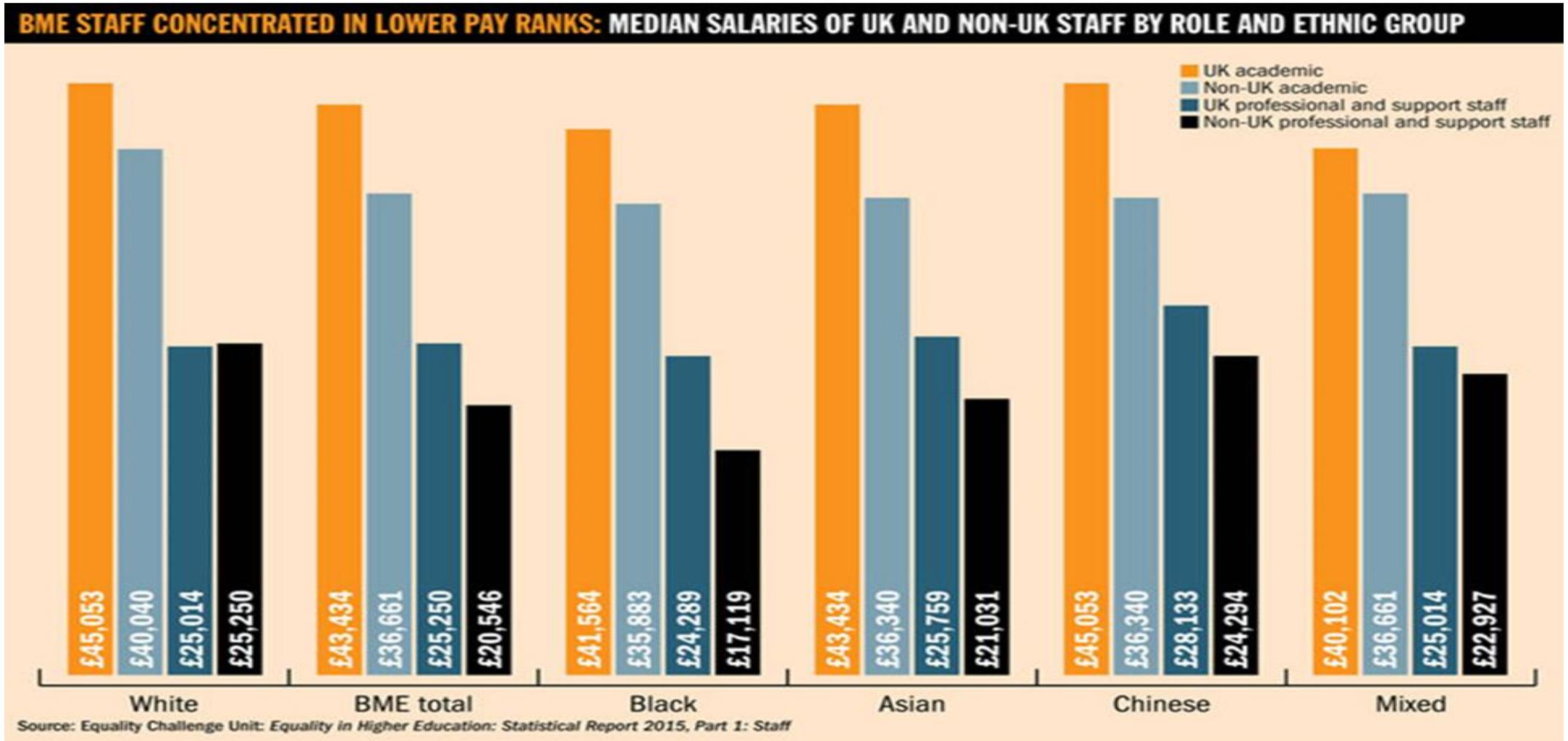
UK professors:

- White male - 9,960 (70.5%)
- White female - 3,080 (21.8%)
- BME male - 860 (6.1%)
- BME female - 230 (1.6%)



9: UK professors by gender and BME/white identity, 2014-15

# Chinese or East Asian? UK academic or non-UK academic?

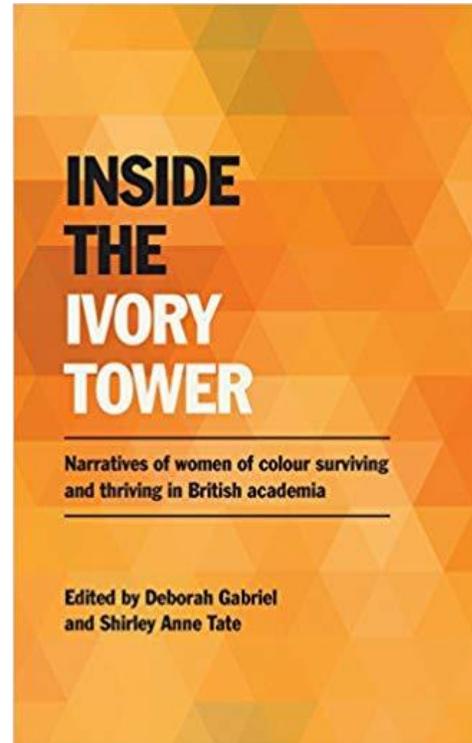


# “Racism at university: Inquiry launched by UK's equality body”

BBC  
NEWS

“The level [of racial harassment] that we have seen occurring within universities is particularly concerning.”

- David Isaac, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission  
(BBC report, 4 Dec. 2018)



\*\* Pictures courtesy of Prof. Fiona Ross's ICIS seminar

The 'decolonise' Cambridge row is yet another attack on students of colour

*Jason Osamede Okundaye*

It's time for universities to make race equality a priority

*Valerie Amos*

Universities say they are taking steps to promote BAME staff and address the attainment gap, but progress is far too slow



# **Yellow Peril (and a Model Minority) in Silence**

**“East Asians are considered a neoliberal, multicultural success story.”  
(BBC, 31 January 2018)**

**Identity politics has become a basis of normative research industry and there is a danger of doing self-sustaining advocacy research.**

**Danger of ‘sanctification of victimisation’ (Chow, 1993)**

**Given the Racial Equality and Diversity policy framework, East Asian academics are perpetual ‘others’ from within – often voluntarily.**

“I don’t think of myself falling into that category because of my upbringing. **I know I am being categorised in the BME group, but I don’t think I am the short end of the stick.**

**I am *not* part of repression and discrimination.** In my department, there are three non-white academics but **I am the only non-white non-British national. In my workplace, I have never experienced any discrimination.**

The racial equality and diversity policy discourse indicates that the UK is explicitly multicultural. In that regard, I don’t feel I need to work so hard to fit in the UK society.

(Excerpt from an East Asian non-British national /int’l academic’s interview narrative, April 2018)

**“When people casually ask if the bullying I experienced in my previous university (before moving to the current one) was due to racism, I strongly deny. I think such attribute is a psychological projection and oversimplifies the complex situation....**

**.....When BME academics or white British academics with working class backgrounds talk about their experiences of ‘impostor’ syndrome in the traditional academic environment, I feel silenced because I am not one of them. I am very comfortable with traditional academe - due to my family background and upbringing. ....**

**.....I appreciate the UK government’s widening participation in HE policy, and I am very proud of my current institution’s strong commitment to fighting for social justice and social change. However, I don’t really define myself in racial, ethnic terms. I don’t have a “chip on my shoulder”, which is the term I actually heard from a fellow ‘BME’ colleague recently. On the contrary, I enjoy being a foreigner here. I find my inside-outsider position useful for my academic work and life in general.”**

(Excerpt from an East Asian non-British/int’l academic’s interview narrative, 11/2017)

**“Why do I need to be bothered about my ethnicity that is not related to my academic work? I think the BME advocacy policy will make no tangible outcome. I have never experienced racism. I wouldn't be bothered. I don't want to spend time on racial politics. I really don't think the BME policy package based on racial ethnic categories will help my academic career progression. I believe in meritocracy.**

The common view of “hard working” is not necessarily the trait of East Asian academics or ethnic minority, and individual work ethics is not related to the ethnic minority position. **There are just individual attributes, individual choices and individual disadvantages.**

**I don't benchmark the British or anyone. I am happy to live in limbo. Being categorised as Japanese doesn't help. I like the freedom to define myself. I don't need to follow the game. For the moment, I enjoy not being categorised.”**

(Japanese non-British national/int'l academic, Russell Group University, March 2018)

At the same time, she thinks international academics make distinctive contributions to the internationalisation of UK universities and new knowledge creation.

**“Yes, these [international] people add the diversity of the university culture. My academic colleagues in my immediate unit are UK, Romanian, Italian, Canadian nationalities... There are so many non-UK colleagues in my department. Sometimes Brits may feel like a minority? I like this diversity of the British HEIs and I do hope this diversity remains after Brexit...”**

(A Japanese international academic in a Russell Group University, March 2018).

# But they have experienced microaggressions - although they didn't voluntarily articulate them before I specifically asked..

- **There are frequent Misrecognition, infantilisation, and undermining** leadership calibre or academic achievements - as experienced by East Asian female academics:
- **Examples of workplace bullying and/or harassment are defined by UCU as listed here.**
  - ✓ Constantly criticising competent staff, removing their responsibilities, or giving them trivial tasks to do
  - ✓ Shouting at staff
  - ✓ Persistently picking on staff in front of others, or in private
  - ✓ Obstructing professional development/ blocking promotion
  - ✓ Regularly making the same person the butt of jokes
  - ✓ Constantly attacking a member of staff in terms of their professional or personal standing
  - ✓ Seeing a person up to fail by overloading them with work or setting impossible deadlines
  - ✓ Regularly and deliberately ignoring or excluding individuals from work activities – such as the decision making process even though she is involved in the area
  - ✓ Ignoring staff views and opinions
  - ✓ Different rules for different people
  - ✓ Criticism and threats
  - ✓ Excessive monitoring – lack of trust, especially in relation to leadership capacity
  - ✓ Unrealistic expectations

# Commonalities of East Asian academics' Perceptions and positionalities

- **Identities - not a victim but a stranger**
- **Pride (no stigma)** - ethnic/ national / cultural/ civilizational entity
- **Resilience and flexibility** in pursuing academic careers in the UK as well as internationally
- **Strong individuality** in their institutions – not joining the BME racial equality and diversity network group but actively engaging in the mainstream networks.
- **Significant international networks** - not necessarily ethnicity-based
- Keeping the “**low profile**” nature of **ambidexterity: socially passive-loyal and yet individually pro-active**

# Common attributes identified among the East Asian academics in UK universities

**Are they Confucian value-laden?**

- **Revering the existing social order**
- **Believing in the meritocracy**
  - Believing that anyone who survived the rigour of study and exams could be upwardly mobile.
  - **A high level of aspiration and attainment**
- **Emphasis on self cultivation to determine one's proper position in the network of social relationships and to behave properly according to one's position**
- **Emphasis on individual accountability, diligence, thrift, cooperation, loyalty to one's group/ organisation**

# East Asian academics' self-accountability and strong belief in meritocracy – may be Confucian neoliberal?

**“Only after the self is cultivated, can the family be regulated; only after the family is regulated, can the state be governed; and only after the state is governed, can peace be brought to the land”** (Confucius, *The great learning & the doctrine of the mean*.

B. Bruya (trans.) (original work traced back to 2,500 years ago).  
Beijing: Xiandai Press. 2006: 8).

# Thank you

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