

Fit as a Balancing Act: Understanding Academic Hiring Decisions in Taiwanese Academia

Abstract

This study examines the application of ‘fit’ as a criterion in academic hiring for tenure-track positions within Taiwanese universities. While previous research studied fit as a means to match candidates with departmental and academic expectations, less is known about how fit functions as an evaluative criterion to aid in decision-making in the context of broader university internationalization strategies. Drawing on a mixed-method approach, quantitative factorial survey experiments, and qualitative interviews with tenured professors, we develop a theoretical argument that faculty evaluators’ use of fit serves as both evaluative criteria and a mechanism to balance departmental needs and internationalization directives. Specifically, we show: (1) fit to ensure departmental functioning, and (2) fit to fulfill the university’s internationalization goals. We argue that fit is more than just a criterion for matching individuals to jobs; it also serves as a mechanism used by faculty evaluators to balance their decisions in contexts of uncertainty and constraint. Preliminary findings suggest a preference for local candidates or foreign candidates with host-country qualifications for tenure-track positions, while non-tenure track roles tend to favor foreign candidates, aligning with internationalization directives. Our findings reveal the complexity of academic hiring reflecting both local match and internationalization agendas and contribute important theoretical insights about the role of fit in scholarship on inequality and the academic labor market.

Introduction

Research in academic hiring practices has shown a wide range of evaluative criteria employed by evaluators during candidate selection. Some advocate for universalist norms, emphasizing merit-based recognition through scholarly achievements like publications, citations, or awards (Merton 1973, Cole & Cole 1973), reality often diverges. Studies show evaluators also use particularist criteria, which are more important than the assessment of scholarly merit. These include the university prestige, race, gender, reputation of mentor or status (Crane 1970, Long et al 1979, Bedeian & Field 1980, Baldi 1995, Long & Fox 1995, Burris 2004, Bedeian et al 2010). Therefore, both universalist norms and particularist criteria have real consequences for the outcomes of candidates. Recent advances in understanding faculty evaluation for tenure-track positions

highlight the role of ‘fit’ in mitigating uncertainties and risks associated with finding not just a top researcher, but also a good colleague (Musselin 2010, Lamont 2009). This often involves favoring candidates who exhibit similarity with the evaluators, demonstrate a cultural match with departmental values, or come through trusted connections. These factors are perceived as indicators of a candidate’s likelihood to integrate well into the departmental culture. However, this pursuit of departmental fit, while valuable, risks limiting diversity in academia, as it often reinforces existing homogeneity.

Yet, this emphasis on fitting within the department, its colleagues, and values often conflicts with the macro-discourse of internationalization, which shapes policies and objectives at higher levels of university administration and government (Herschberg et al 2018). The discourse involves incorporating an international perspective into all university functions, including research, teaching, and service. (Fabricius et al. 2017, Knight 1994). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how academic evaluators manage conflicting ideas of fit in their hiring decisions. Hiring decisions, which are typically made at the departmental level, should be ratified at higher university levels. Evaluators are thus faced with the challenge of balancing the fit of a candidate within the department against the strategic goals of the university’s internationalization agenda in terms of diversifying and bringing an international perspective into university functions. In this paper, we address this issue by examining whether hiring decisions for entry-professoriate positions can be better explained by accounting for dynamics between selecting candidates fitting with the department's functioning and those who fulfill the university’s internationalization goals.

To investigate this question, we use a mixed-method approach, drawing insights from individual faculty members consisting of full-time tenured professors at management colleges of leading Taiwanese public universities. The quantitative analysis from the factorial survey experiment (vignette study) demonstrates a clear preference for local candidates or foreign candidates with host-country academic qualifications and language proficiency in tenure-track positions. Conversely, non-tenure-track roles appear to attract more foreign candidates. The qualitative data complements quantitative analysis and helps explain the mechanisms behind the hiring decisions. It suggests that evaluating early-career researchers extends beyond traditional merit-based academic criteria and explains that for tenure-track roles, the preference for local candidates or foreign candidates with local qualifications and language proficiency can be understood as

ensuring fit with departmental norms and expectations. While for non-tenure-track roles, which are typically contract-based and involve lower risks associated with the ‘wrong’ hire, there is a preference for hiring foreign candidates. This preference appears to be a practical approach in response to internationalization policies advocated by higher-level institutional bodies. These findings imply that departmental hiring decisions aim to balance the need for certainty in long-term roles, with the inclusion of a diverse, international faculty body in temporary positions. Thus, this approach in academic hiring seeks to balance immediate needs of the department with external global objectives at the university.

Our study contributes to the research on the academic labor market outcomes of early-career researchers by providing insights into the tensions between the articulations of fit within the department and diversity goals and has identified inequalities that emerge in the application of evaluative criteria.

Theory

How do faculty evaluators shortlist candidates for entry-level professoriate positions? One approach faculty evaluators may opt for is to maximize the match between a candidate’s qualifications and the requirements of the position or university. In academia, universalist approach in hiring decisions is consistent with the commitment to objective evaluation by prioritizing scholarly merit like publications, citation numbers, teaching, and grant writing experience (Hargens & Hagstrom 1967, Cole & Cole 1973). Universalist norms contrast with particularistic criteria that consider personal attributes such as nationality, race, gender, and university prestige (Crane 1970; Long 1978; Reskin 1979; Long & Fox 1995, Baldi 1995). Particularistic allocations in hiring are more likely under conditions of absence of clear information, ambiguous evaluation standards, less developed scientific paradigms, and secrecy in decision-making processes (Long & Fox 1995). These conditions stem from human tendencies to rely on social comparisons in the absence of objective data, a preference for similar candidates under ambiguous standards, a lack of consensus in less established scientific fields, and personal biases in secretive decision-making processes.

In addition to universalist and particularist evaluative criteria, scholars have studied fit as a criterion for selecting candidates to the tenure-track entry professoriate position (Musselin 2010,

Sagaria 2002, Liera & Ching 2019). Like evaluating research achievements and teaching abilities, faculty evaluators also evaluate candidate's fit when shortlisting from a pool of applicants. A candidate's fit is not a replacement for scholarly worth but rather holds the matching of candidates with the current faculty, the institutional culture, goals and values of the department. The definitions evaluators use for fit vary based upon specific criteria. For example, scholars find that matching can be based upon cultural capital, such as local language proficiency, presentation, and social interaction (Sagaria 2002 Pudenko & Tenzer 2019), personality and collegiality (Musselin 2010, Curran & Hyman 2000).

Therefore, selecting candidates using fit has become a part of the evaluation process. Despite having established criteria by which evaluators define fit, the hiring process is more complex than simply matching candidates based on evaluative criteria. In fact, evaluators face the uncertainty and constraint involved in the judgement process given minimal information about job seekers. These uncertainties revolve around the selection of "the best candidate", one who possesses both qualities of "top researcher" and "good citizen" in order to project into the future potential performance of the candidate (Musselin 2010). Studies show that in their hiring decisions, evaluators often interpret fit through various mechanisms – such as homophily, cultural matching, connections – as means to mitigate such uncertainties (Curran & Hyman 2000, Musselin 2002, Sagaria 2002, Rivera 2017). While these strategies may help reduce uncertainty, they also pose the risk of bias or inequality in their hiring decisions.

In tenure-track hiring, evaluators' preference for candidates with backgrounds similar to their own, or for local candidates, often stems from the risks and uncertainties in the evaluation process. When clear, objective criteria are lacking, evaluators may unconsciously lean toward candidates whose biographical backgrounds, attitudes, and perceived personalities align with theirs. This tendency, known as the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) or homophily (McPherson, 1983), suggests evaluators might prefer applicants who resemble themselves in various socio-demographic or professional aspects (Roebken 2010). Such preferences, rooted in the belief that candidates sharing values, personalities, and behavioral styles will be more productive and adaptable, are also consistent with the concept of person-organization fit (Chatman 1991). Evaluators may interpret similarity to include shared backgrounds and hobbies, sometimes fulfilling personal goals like forming in-department friendships or enhancing social dynamics

(Adkins et al. 1994, Rivera 2015). Furthermore, evaluators often define merit in terms of their own qualities, thus showing a preference for candidates with similar attributes (Brown 1986). The bias towards homophilous selection, particularly favoring local candidates, is thought to facilitate integration and productivity.

In addition to homophily, evaluators often refer to cultural matching when faced with uncertainties associated with limited information about candidates. This strategy extends beyond shared personal characteristics to include factors such as language proficiency and understanding of the local educational system (Musselin 2010; Van den Brink and Benschop 2011; Sagaria 2002). While local language skills are essential for effective teaching and administrative functions, they also play a key role in research collaborations and accessing regional resources (REFERENCE). Beyond linguistic abilities, cultural matching relates to the familiarity with educational system and practices, where local candidates are often perceived as more closely aligned with the educational norms. Furthermore, similar cultural backgrounds, including leisure pursuits and interests, can facilitate the integration of new hires into the department (Turco 2010; Rivera 2015). Cultural match criteria may enable evaluators to prioritize or exclude candidates based on their cultural fit rather than merit, often favoring local candidates who share more in common with the existing faculty in terms of informal codes and cultural experiences.

Another mechanism to address uncertainties in hiring for a tenure-track position, evaluators may give preference to candidates with strong local connections. The connections that refer a candidate serve as a support for a candidate while also signaling candidate's legitimacy (Bills et al., 2017, Castilla et al 2013). By using referrals evaluators can skirt the evaluative criteria typically used to assess a candidate relying instead on the conveyed trust in the quality of the candidate (Sagaria 2002, Musselin 2002). Candidates with local networks, often formed through regional education and professional circles, are presumed to be better informed about job requirements and more likely to integrate into the departmental environment (Fernandez & Weinberg 1997, Fernandez & Galperin 2014). While this approach aids in managing large pools of applicants using referrals in the hiring process, evaluators may prefer local candidates, who likely have existing networks (Jaraush 2005, Bauder 2015). These reasonings lead to our first hypothesis:

H1: Foreign candidates are less likely to be invited for a job interview for a tenure-track position than local applicants.

In the context of globalizing academia, evaluators are confronted with the challenge of aligning their decisions with internationalization trends while ensuring that candidates fit within the local academic framework (Herschberg et al 2018; Baruch et al., 2014, Pudenko & Tenzer, 2019, Pherali 2012). Although evaluators may prefer local candidates for their established networks and presumed cultural match, foreign candidates who earned their doctoral degrees from the host country may also be viewed favorably. Candidates' host country academic credentials signal familiarity with local standards and norms (Musselin, 2004), while their exposure to the host country's academic environment suggests proficiency in local communication practices and workplace ethics (Kuptsch et al. 2006). These candidates have often adapted to the local academic environment and meet domestic standards while also bringing a level of international perspective that complements the university's internationalization goals. Their integration into the local academic community is facilitated by their understanding of local systems and an already established network, making them competitive candidates relative to their peers with degrees from overseas.

Evaluators may exhibit a preference for foreign candidates with local doctoral degrees, valuing combination of their perceived international profile and familiarity with the host country's academic system (Gopal 2011, Crowne 2008). These candidates are perceived to understand local academic practices, much like local candidates, while also bringing diverse international perspectives, similar to foreign candidates. This combination of attributes meets both the practical need for departmental fit and the goal to enhance academic diversity. As a result, foreign candidates with local degrees are frequently viewed as well-suited to meet the demands of modern, globalized academic environments. Drawing on these insights, we propose the second hypothesis:

H2: Foreign candidates with a doctoral degree from a university in the host country are more likely to be invited for a job interview for a tenure-track job than foreign applicants with a doctoral degree from a foreign university.

Faculty evaluators also emphasize local language proficiency in foreign candidates' prospects for tenure-track positions, as it reflects an understanding of the host country's education system and

norms, facilitates communication necessary for engaging in academic discourse, and contributes to departmental discussions (Kuptsch, 2006, Veit and Thijsen 2021; Pudelko & Tenzer 2018). Language proficiency is especially important in teaching contexts, as the ability to effectively teach in both the host country's language and English greatly improves a candidate's prospects for faculty positions where teaching is a key component. For example, insufficient local language skills can limit foreign scholars in teaching roles, particularly in institutions with courses primarily in the local language (Pudelko & Tenzer 2018). Similarly, in Dutch universities, despite a focus on English for internationalization, proficiency in Dutch is a must requirement (Herschberg, 2018). Additionally, effective professor-student interactions as part of the mentorship duty also depend on language proficiency (Pherali 2012; Pudelko and Tenzer 2018).

Beyond teaching effectiveness, proficiency in the local language can be viewed as facilitating collegial interactions within department. Evaluators recognize that proficiency in the local language helps foreign candidates engage more effectively with colleagues within the department, fostering a sense of inclusion and addressing potential perceptions of inequality with local faculty (Sakura & Mason 2023). From their perspective, language skills are not merely for communication but also aid in integrating foreign candidates into the academic community. This proficiency is seen as beneficial for foreign candidates in effectively carrying out their departmental duties and establishing a positive professional standing. Evaluators also view language proficiency as key to creating a more balanced and equitable work environment, facilitating fair comparisons between foreign and local faculty. Based on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Foreign applicants with higher proficiency in the host-country language are more likely to be invited for a job interview for a tenure-track job than foreign applicants with lower language proficiency.

While faculty evaluators prioritize fit within the department's functioning over specific skills for tenure-track positions, as a form of risk management amidst uncertainty (Musselin 2010), their strategy for non-tenure-track roles shifts. In these roles, the temporary nature of the positions means that the stakes of hiring decisions are lower. Here, the impact of a 'wrong hire' is less concerning in the context of risk management. Despite this, evaluators still operate under the constraint of university directives focused on internationalization (Herschberg et al 2018). Given

the lower risk of non-tenure-track positions and the push for internationalization, evaluators may favor foreign candidates, relaxing the need for local expertise.

Furthermore, this strategy is in line with broader institutional goals prioritizing diversity and international outreach. Bauder (2012) notes the trend of universities seeking to diversify their academic staff, with a focus on hiring international faculty members who often bring robust research portfolios. Therefore, in seeking to enhance diversity, universities might show a preference for foreign candidates in non-tenure-track roles. This preference facilitates the introduction of varied international perspectives into the faculty body without the long-term obligations associated with tenure-track positions. Consequently, influenced by factors such as the university's internationalization goals, perceived risk, and language skills, the following hypothesis proposes:

H4: Foreign candidates are more likely to be invited for a job interview for a non-tenure track position than local applicants.

The case of Taiwan

We test the above hypotheses by examining whether hiring decisions for tenure-track and non-tenure-track entry-level professoriate jobs are influenced by departmental needs and internationalization goals within the context of Taiwan's universities, in management colleges. These colleges, which are reflective of both local emphases and the global push towards internationalization offer a relevant case study for understanding how selection criteria and candidates' fit are applied across diverse candidate backgrounds. On one side, in Taiwan's universities, shared academic standards coexist with local influences. Mandarin Chinese, as the official language (Scott & Tiun 2007, Hobbs 2012), predominates in both course instruction and administrative functions (Chang 2020, Lau & Lin 2017). This linguistic landscape shapes faculty composition, often favoring candidates proficient in Mandarin due to its important role in university operations. Consequently, the faculty largely comprises Taiwanese nationals. According to the Taiwanese Ministry of Education (MOE, 2017) as of 2016, international faculty accounted for 2% of faculty at public universities. This low representation of international faculty started to change after 2005 due to policies promoting global competitiveness (Chang 2020).

On the other side, Taiwan's commitment to internationalization in higher education is evident in its strategies to elevate the global standing of its universities. This commitment includes funding international students, developing international programs, recruiting international scholars, and implementing English-Medium Instruction (EMI) (Chang et al., 2009; Chang & Yeh, 2012; Chang et al., 2015). Such efforts reflect broader global trends in higher education, where universities strive to adapt to a more interconnected world. This focus on internationalization has influenced faculty hiring practices, reflecting academia's global trend towards bilingualism and aligning with global discourses on the impact of internationalization on early-career candidate evaluation (Herschberg, 2018; Reymert, 2020; Brink and Benshop, 2012).

In Taiwan's academia, the high value and competitiveness of tenure-track positions, with their secure employment and retirement benefits, contrast with the increasing prevalence of non-tenure-track, contractual positions. These latter roles, often resulting from demographic shifts and newly opened English-language programs at the universities, typically offer less job security and prestige (Ching 2021). In view of the above reasoning, evaluators face a balancing act, integrating local academic standards with internationalization pressures. This setting presents a comprehensive case for studying how academics evaluate candidates amid these competing demands in management colleges. These colleges often demonstrate this through English-language programs and a diverse student body. Additionally, considering the variation in hiring criteria across different university departments (Musselin 2004), examining hiring practices of management colleges offers insights into the intersection of local and global influences in academic hiring.

As described below, these main characteristics of Taiwanese management colleges formed the basis of our vignette experiment. Mainly, the differentiation between the local context and push for internationalization, and tenure-track and non-tenure-track positions.

Methods

Two datasets were collected simultaneously to study how academic evaluators in Taiwanese public universities balance local norms and internationalization in their assessment of job candidates. Investigating hiring decisions in academia is complex, and to gain a comprehensive understanding, we use a factorial survey experiment that enables a detailed examination of employer hiring strategies with high levels of internal and external validity (Di Stasio & Gërkhani, 2015). This

quantitative approach is complemented with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with Taiwanese management faculty experienced in recruitment. These interviews explore the underlying motivations and mechanisms behind their decisions, providing the quantitative findings with more detailed perspectives.

Quantitative Data

Research design and data

The vignette study, commonly used to examine how people make decisions and judgements in various circumstances including hiring process, is based on the factorial survey method (Rossi and Nock, 1982). In factorial survey experiments, participants are asked to evaluate fictional candidate profiles that vary across multiple characteristics (Auspurg and Hinz, 2015). The use of vignettes in our study addresses several problems that arise when examining the impact of evaluative criteria on candidates' chances of being shortlisted. Firstly, by its capacity to effectively control complex variables relevant to academic hiring, such as universalist criteria (e.g. publications) and particularist criteria (e.g. nationality, university prestige, gender, or local language proficiency), which is critical to identifying its impact on hiring outcomes. Secondly, a vignette study enables random conditions assignment, which is not possible in real-life situations where decisions may be influenced by uncontrolled external factors or inherent biases within the hiring process. Unlike correspondence tests, where fake job applications might be recognized based on candidates' publications or known presence at conferences, a vignette study avoids this issue by using hypothetical scenarios that are free from real-life identifiers. This approach allows researchers to isolate the effect of specific hiring criteria on candidates' chances of being shortlisted from other confounding factors more effectively.

The data for this study was collected from tenured faculty members across the management colleges of the top twelve public universities in Taiwan. We selected these colleges for their uniform evaluation criteria and PhD degree graduation requirements, which would allow for maintaining consistency across the study. These criteria include similar standards for teaching, the ability to instruct in the local language, offering English language courses to meet internationalization objectives, and expectations for high-quality publications needed to qualify for a doctoral degree. This uniformity enabled us to apply the vignette experiment consistently

across these institutions. The sampling frame included approximately 20 departments, institutes, and degree programs. Faculty members were identified by examining university websites, yielding 904 eligible participants. Data was gathered through online surveys on the Qualtrics® platform between 2020 and 2021.

Our initial outreach involved contacting participants via email and telephone. Participation was voluntary, with no incentives offered, and respondents typically took 15 to 20 minutes to complete the survey. If there was no response within a week, we sent reminders and made follow-up calls. We also visited some universities personally, through scheduled appointments or spontaneous visits, to improve response rates. Ultimately, 108 faculty members completed the study, achieving a 12% response rate. After removing incomplete vignettes, we obtained 1062 rated vignettes, reflecting a 98% completion rate. This response rate aligns with similar studies in European academic settings that explore gender bias (Gerkhani et al., 2022; Solga et al., 2023; Carlsson et al., 2020). Before starting the vignettes, participants filled in an online questionnaire about their background, including Ph.D. country, academic rank, gender, and experience. These variables were controlled for in the analysis to account for the effects they may have on the results.

Dependent variables

After reviewing each candidate profile, participants were asked to evaluate their suitability for academic positions based on three key variables: (1) academic potential, measuring the perceived qualifications and capabilities of the candidates; (2) likelihood of being invited for a tenure-track interview, evaluating suitability for permanent academic roles; and (3) likelihood of being invited for a non-tenure track interview, assessing fit for contractual or temporary positions. Each candidate's academic potential was rated on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent) using the following question: "Based on the characteristics of this candidate, please evaluate his/her academic potential". The intention to shortlist a candidate for a tenure-track position and non-tenure track position was rated on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely) using the following questions: "What is the likelihood that this candidate will be invited for an interview for a tenure-track position?" and "What is the likelihood that this candidate will be invited for an interview for a non-tenure-track position?"

Key independent variables

Fully multiplying all the levels associated with the six variables resulted in a vignette universe of 288 combinations (see Figure 1). To manage the large number of combinations, each participant reviewed ten resumes, with the platform's randomization feature ensuring that each characteristic combination was evenly distributed across vignettes. Each dimension was carefully chosen and described to reflect the characteristics of the Taiwanese academic system.

Nationality is constructed at four levels, distinguishing candidates from Taiwan, the USA, France, or India—to examine potential regional biases in hiring decisions. These choices represent a geographical mix that reflects the diversity among international students and faculty in Taiwan (MOE, 2020).

Country of University Granting PhD Degree consists of two levels where candidates are distinguished based on whether their PhD degree was granted by a Taiwanese or U.S. university reflecting the fact that the majority of faculty in our management colleges sample predominantly hold degrees from these two countries.

Chinese Language Proficiency is categorized at two levels for foreign candidates as either elementary or proficient, with an assumption of native fluency for Taiwanese nationals. This classification is designed to assess the importance of language skills for academic positions requiring Chinese for teaching and administrative duties.

Control Variables

Additionally, the *rankings of these PhD-granting universities* were classified into three tiers: top 100, middle, and lower-ranking, according to global university rankings to reflect the varying evaluation standards associated with university prestige (Burris 2004). To make an impression of more realistic profiles, *publications* are classified into quality: those in journals indexed by the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and those in non-SSCI-indexed journals, and number: two SSCI publications, two non-SSCI publications, or one in each category. This setup reflects the doctoral degree graduation requirements common in Taiwanese public management colleges, emphasizing internationally recognized academic output. Finally, *gender*, recorded as male or female, was included in response to extensive literature debating the presence of gender bias in

academic hiring and promotion (Rivera, Solga et al, 2023, Gërxhani et al 2023, Cruz-Castro et al 2023).

Analytical strategy

Given a nested data structure, where each evaluator assesses multiple candidate profiles, the responses within each evaluator are not independently distributed. We applied multilevel modeling techniques to account for correlated errors. Considering the ordinal nature of dependent variables measured on a 5-point rating scale, we used multilevel ordinal logistic regression with random intercept to estimate the influence of key independent variables and control factors on the likelihood of being shortlisted for tenure-track and non-tenure track positions (Hedeker 2008). These modeling approaches allow the impact of each variable to vary systematically by vignettes and among respondents. Since the candidate profiles are presented randomly, the models allow us to investigate how the profile conditions (i.e., nationality, the country of university granting the PhD, and Chinese language proficiency) influence evaluators' hiring decisions. Meanwhile, these approaches also allow the likelihood of hiring to vary across evaluators, enabling the examination of the association between evaluator characteristics (which vary across evaluators) and their hiring decisions.

For each dependent variable, we implemented two types of models: a main effect model and an interaction effect model. The main effect models include key variables: nationality, the country of the university granting the PhD, and Chinese language proficiency, while also controlling for the control variables: publications, the ranking of the university, and gender. This model tests our first hypothesis (H1) which examines the direct effects of these variables on hiring decisions. To understand if the preferences for local versus foreign candidates with local degrees differ (Testing H2), we include the interaction between nationality and the country of the university granting the PhD. The interaction effect models further include interaction terms among these key independent variables to examine if the impact of a candidate's qualifications on hiring decisions is moderated by their proficiency in the local language, assessing our third hypothesis (H3). Finally, to test hypothesis H4, we examine if foreign candidates are more likely than local ones to be considered for non-tenure track positions, highlighting the university's aim to broaden international engagement and diversity.

Due to the mildly skewed distribution of the dependent variables, we used multilevel linear regression with random intercepts as a robustness check to ensure that our findings are consistent under different modeling assumptions. Additionally, our models controlled for respondent characteristics, including the country of the university granting the PhD degree (a categorical variable encompassing numerous countries), academic rank (categorized as assistant, associate, full, or distinguished professor), affiliated university, and gender (binary variable for male and female). These controls facilitate balance checks and enhance the analytical robustness of our study.

Qualitative Data

Given the factorial survey experiment identifies factors influencing faculty hiring decisions but does not reveal the underlying reasons or contextual details, we incorporated a qualitative component into our study to better capture these aspects. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 37 faculty members who had participated in recruiting for assistant professor positions, including 7 of foreign nationality. Some interviews were held after participants completed the survey to further explore their responses. The interviews, ranging from 10 to 50 minutes and averaging about 20 minutes, were conducted either in-person in the faculty members' offices or online, especially during the Covid-19 restrictions. Each interview was recorded and transcribed with the consent of the participants. We applied thematic analysis to the transcripts to identify key themes and patterns regarding the criteria used in academic hiring. The primary aim of this qualitative analysis is to enrich our understanding of the decision-making processes in faculty recruitment at public universities. Appendix 1 includes the profiles of the interviewees. The primary purpose of reporting the qualitative data in this article is to facilitate our understanding of the criteria and decision-making processes that faculty members employ during the recruitment of assistant professors in public universities.

Results

Multivariate analyses

Table 1 presents the results from a multilevel ordinal logistic regression examining the influence of various candidates' characteristics the potential of a candidate (Model 1).

When evaluating an academic potential, a candidate's nationality does not appear to affect the evaluation process. The publication quantity and quality, and the university rankings, on the other hand, do; having two publications in non-SSCI-indexed journals or one publication in SSCI-indexed journal and another in non-SSCI-indexed journal (vs two publications in SSCI-indexed journal) negatively impacts potential productivity evaluation. Similarly, the lower the university rankings, the less potentially productive a candidate is believed to be. Based on these evaluators' ratings, we can assume that there is no overt discrimination based on nationality in assessing candidates for their potential productivity.

Other characteristics in the vignettes, such as Chinese language proficiency and candidate gender, showed minor differences in ratings, though not statistically significant. Candidates with proficient Chinese (vs basic Chinese) and female (vs male) candidates were rated lower. The lack of statistical significance suggests these factors do not impact evaluations for potential productivity.

Further examining how foreign nationality influences the likelihood of being invited for a tenure-track job interview, Table 2 (Model 2) is a baseline model including all the control variables. This model shows that nationality has a statistically significant impact on hiring decisions. Evaluators are less likely to invite for a tenure-track job interview foreign candidate ($B = -0.499$, $p < 0.01$) in the selection process compared to Taiwanese nationals. This result suggests a preference for local candidates, who are perceived to integrate more effectively into the departmental culture and workflow. Additionally, the model assesses the impact of the geographic origin of the candidates' PhD degrees. Candidates with PhDs from Taiwanese universities are found to be less preferred than those with US PhDs, with a significant negative coefficient, reflecting a higher value placed on US educational credentials ($B = -0.626$, $p < 0.01$). This preference indicates that while local candidates are favored for their potential cultural fit, those with international degrees from prestigious US institutions are regarded as bringing valuable global perspectives. Taken together, these results support hypothesis 1 and show that foreign candidates face a disadvantage in the hiring process for a tenure-track position.

In addressing hypothesis 2, Model 3 (Table 2) extends the analysis to explore the mitigating effects of having a Taiwanese doctoral degree on the hiring disadvantages faced by foreign nationals. Including the interaction term between foreign nationality and a Taiwanese doctoral degree

demonstrates a positive and significant effect ($B = 0.579$, $p < 0.05$). This result suggests that possessing a Taiwanese PhD can substantially lessen the negative impact associated with being a foreign candidate. The statistically significant interaction term indicates that Taiwanese degrees are highly valued and considered an important factor in overcoming biases against foreign nationals, likely due to perceived familiarity with and adaptation to the local academic and cultural contexts while earning their doctoral degree in Taiwanese universities. Consequently, this supports Hypothesis 2 by showing that Taiwanese doctoral degrees are effective in counteracting nationality-based biases in hiring practices within the Taiwanese public universities.

Model 4 (Table 2) tested whether language proficiency affects the likelihood of foreign candidates being invited for tenure-track job interviews. To focus on the impact of language skills among foreign candidates, the analysis excluded Taiwanese nationals, thus addressing the high collinearity between nationality and Chinese language proficiency. This adjustment resulted in the creation of separate interaction dummy variables for foreign candidates, differentiating between those with basic and those with proficient Chinese language skills. The results indicate a statistically significant advantage for foreign candidates with proficient Chinese language skills over those with basic skills ($B = 0.295$, $p < 0.05$). This finding supports hypothesis 3 that higher language proficiency in Chinese significantly enhances the prospects for foreign academics seeking tenure-track positions. The positive coefficient for proficient language skills suggests that such abilities are valued within Taiwanese universities, potentially because they facilitate better communication and integration into the university community.

Turning now to the analysis of non-tenure track positions, Model 5 describes whether foreign candidates are favored for these roles compared to local applicants. The analysis supports the hypothesis 4, showing a statistically significant positive coefficient for foreign nationality in non-tenure track job interviews ($B = 0.432$, $p < 0.01$). This result indicates a preference for foreign candidates in non-tenure track roles, suggesting that while foreign candidates may face challenges in securing tenure-track roles, they benefit from an advantage in non-tenure-track opportunities within this academic context. A possible explanation for this preference is the strategic efforts by Taiwanese universities to enhance diversity and promote internationalization within their faculty ranks.

Faculty members interviews

Balancing local norms and internationalization for tenure-track positions

So far, the results from our quantitative data analysis highlight that evaluators apply different criteria for tenure-track and non-tenure-track positions. The disadvantage of foreignness in tenure-track roles may be mitigated by local degrees and host country language proficiency. This highlights a preference for local integration and familiarity with the local academic and cultural environment among evaluators. Whereas being a foreign becomes advantageous for non-tenure track positions. This suggests that while tenure-track roles prioritize candidates who can integrate into the local academic culture, non-tenure-track positions are seen as opportunities to introduce diverse perspectives and enhance the institution's global profile without the long-term commitment associated with tenure-track hires. The qualitative interviews shed further light on why these criteria differ, providing insights into the evaluators' perspectives on balancing local norms and internationalization and explaining the motivations behind their decisions.

Throughout the interviews, for tenure-track positions faculty evaluators emphasized quality publications as an important criterion for early-career candidates. However, when publications are lacking, the ranking of the candidate's university becomes significant. These are just general criteria for the preliminary screening process. Proceeding the process, evaluators consistently emphasized the tension between adhering to local academic norms and the ability to integrate with the existing faculty.

One such emphasized aspect is cultural and linguistic compatibility, particularly proficiency in the Chinese language proficiency, which serves as a gatekeeping mechanism to ensure that new hires can fully engage with all aspects of their academic roles. Evaluators mentioned the importance of effective communication in local language for teaching purposes. Moreover, the need for language proficiency extends beyond teaching and includes all aspects of departmental life, including service duties and routine administrative responsibilities. Proficiency in the local language is considered a practical necessity, as ineffective communication can lead to an increased workload for existing faculty. One interviewed assistant professor, for instance, expressed his concern about host country language proficiency:

“The key point is still if you can speak Mandarin, we know you can participate in the departmental meetings. You know as a professor you need to do two jobs not only teaching and research but also doing some service, so you should participate in some routine jobs, a lot of routine jobs. We think if he can speak good Mandarin, he's a very good and nice candidate, meaning he can stay here he can participate a lot... He can engage in all our stuff. We have a lot of things we have to do, if we always hire people who cannot engage then my loading job will increase right? So those who can stay longer can engage in it will only be better for us. I just say unfortunately right now our system is still all in Chinese. I think if people have a good command of Chinese, we can see some future in this candidate. Of course, if in the future our system transfers into English then it is not a big deal. But right now there are a lot of things with the government with people from other offices all in Chinese” (Assist., prof. Taiwanese national, male).

The interviewee thus reported that there is a concern about increased workloads if new hires lack the necessary language skills, directly impacting the department's efficiency. Thus, language proficiency is a key component of 'fit,' facilitating better integration, enhancing collaboration, and reducing potential friction within academic departments (Musselin, 2010; Pudenko & Tenzer, 2019). By prioritizing candidates who are proficient in Mandarin, evaluators are not only ensuring effective communication but also fostering a more inclusive and functional academic environment.

Besides local language proficiency, some interviewees also noted how local credentials facilitate the chances of foreign candidates to secure tenure-track positions. Holding a doctoral degree from a Taiwanese university is seen as an asset, as it indicates familiarity with the local academic standards. This familiarity may also foster integration into the academic community and meet the expectations of both colleagues and students. The preference for foreign candidates with local qualifications at the same time may be perceived as an effort to balance the benefits of international perspectives with the practical need for cultural and institutional match. Such a balance is necessary for maintaining departmental operations and ensuring that new hires can contribute equally. For instance, one associate professor described to us how she evaluated foreign candidates during the first resumes screening process recalling her experience working with foreign faculty:

“We actually have a foreign faculty member, and I think he’s good because he graduated from a Taiwanese university and is already familiar with the culture in Taiwan. We’re very comfortable working with him because sometimes foreigners have a different culture. Therefore, we not only consider personality but also cultural match” (Assoc. prof., Taiwanese national, female).

The interviewed associate professor provides us with insight into why faculty evaluators consider it important for candidates to have a cultural match. Having local credentials acquired by foreign candidates demonstrates their familiarity with the local academic environment and cultural expectations. This familiarity is seen as beneficial for integration into departmental operations and for fostering effective collaboration with colleagues and students.

These results align with previous research, which finds that faculty evaluators consider cultural match as an evaluative metric to match candidates to jobs (Rivera, 2012). Evaluators prioritize candidates who demonstrate both linguistic proficiency and an understanding of local academic norms, as these attributes are perceived to enhance the candidate’s ability to integrate into the department. Consequently, this focus on cultural match reflects the dual objectives of internationalization and maintaining local traditions within public universities. For local candidates, knowledge of the Chinese language ensures internal fit and effective participation in departmental activities. However, for foreign candidates, host country language proficiency and local credentials signify not only an ability to integrate but also a commitment to understanding and respecting local academic norms. Faculty evaluators’ reliance on these criteria reveals a commitment to maintaining communication, collaboration, and academic excellence.

Non-tenure track position

The interviewees highlighted how different criteria are emphasized for non-tenure-track positions compared to tenure-track roles. One major distinction is the level of proficiency in Chinese, which varies depending on the specific department and program. For instance, within international programs, Chinese proficiency is not a requirement but is seen as a beneficial addition. For instance, one assistant professor noted:

“That depends on the department program because we have international programs. So, if applicants apply for those positions (non-tenure-track positions) the level of proficiency in Chinese will not be very influential. However, having fluent Chinese ability would be a plus” (Assist. Prof., Taiwanese national, male).

Another criterion for non-tenure-track positions is the focus on English language ability. This shift highlights the specific requirements of these roles, particularly in teaching and interacting with students in international programs. One assistant professor reported:

“For the non-tenure-track, we will not check whether he has a strong publication record or not that may be a plus but my main focus is English language ability” (Assist. Prof., Taiwanese national, male).

In this scenario, the emphasis on English proficiency underscores the importance of being able to effectively teach and engage with students, especially in programs where English is the medium of instruction.

Taken together, the interviews and the quantitative analyses reveal how local credentials and language proficiency are important for foreign candidates seeking tenure-track positions. These factors help evaluators identify candidates who can easily integrate into the departmental culture and effectively participate in academic and administrative tasks. Conversely, for non-tenure-track positions, the emphasis shifts towards English language ability, reflecting the requirements of international programs. These insights highlight how different criteria are applied depending on the type of academic role, balancing the immediate practical needs of the department with broader internationalization goals.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how and why faculty evaluators in Taiwanese public universities differ in their criteria for recruiting candidates for tenure-track and non-tenure-track positions. By analyzing hiring decisions through regression models complemented with qualitative interviews, this mixed method study demonstrates how evaluators balance departmental fit with the internationalization objectives in their hiring decisions. While merit metrics determine the potential of early-career candidates during the initial screening process, this study shows what

mechanisms increase the likelihood that candidates are invited for an interview for tenure-track positions in the subsequent screening stage. Additionally, the present study offered insights into the chances of early-career candidates for less prestigious non-tenure-track positions.

This study contributes to the literature on academic hiring practices (Musselin 2010, Hersheberg et al 2018, Lamont 2009) by showing that faculty evaluators decisions are not made independently; their decisions are shaped by both departmental norms and institutional policies. The present study makes two contributions to research on hiring practices in academic labor markets. The first contribution is that it demonstrates how faculty evaluators face dual pressures: maintaining departmental fit while adhering to higher-level internationalization goals. This balancing act reflects the tensions and potential biases in the hiring process. Findings suggest that while fit is important to ensure departmental operations, highlights the need for a balanced approach that includes both local and international perspectives. While previous studies have often focused on either universalist norms (emphasizing merit-based criteria like publications, citations, or other measurable merit attributes) or particularist criteria (such as university prestige, cultural match, or connections) during the evaluation process for an academic position, this study addressed how these factors are balanced in the context of both tenure-track and non-tenure-track positions, particularly in relation to local versus foreign candidates. For tenure-track positions, in addition to attributes of candidates' potential such as publication quality, and strong university affiliations, there is a demand for proficiency in the local language, ensuring they can integrate well into the department's operations. Foreign candidates face a disadvantage for this role unless they possess a local university doctoral degree or/and proficient local language skills. Conversely, for non-tenure-track position evaluators place more emphasis on English language ability, especially for roles in international programs, where foreign candidates benefit reflecting a strategic effort to contribute to internationalization goals.

The second contribution of this study is the identification of disparities in both the initial and subsequent stages of the candidate screening process. One such disparity arises from the use of particularistic criteria in evaluating candidates' potential, such as the preference for doctoral degrees from the USA and the importance placed on university rankings. Possessing a doctoral degree from abroad is often equated with having valuable international work experience. Although international experience might be considered a formal criterion, some evaluators limit this by

recognizing only a select few countries and institutions as providing valuable experience. This finding corresponds with research indicating that predominantly major English-speaking universities in the Western world are esteemed (Altbach 2004), thereby excluding candidates who gained international experience outside these favored regions. Additionally, the ranking of the university plays a role in evaluators' perceptions, often leading to an implicit bias towards candidates from top-ranked institutions. This bias can significantly disadvantage candidates from lower-ranked or less-recognized universities, regardless of their qualifications.

Taken together, these contributions speak to a wider body of research examining how academic hiring decisions are shaped by the institutional context (Musselin, 2010; Herschberg et al., 2018), by showing how the uncertainties and constraints within the hiring process explain why evaluators need to consider various scenarios in their decision-making. Such differences in applying various evaluative criteria also suggest that whether candidates are preferred for tenure-track or non-tenure-track positions depends on the specific requirements and goals of the academic department. On the one hand, for tenure-track positions, evaluators prioritize candidates with local language proficiency and familiarity with local academic practices to ensure stable operations within the department, thus mitigating the uncertainties and risks associated with long-term commitments. On the other hand, non-tenure-track roles, which are less risky and more transient, show a preference for foreign candidates, consistent with the goal of enhancing international standing. The constraints of needing to fulfill internationalization goals and diversify the academic profiles make non-tenure-track roles more suitable for hiring foreign candidates. These positions provide an opportunity to integrate international talent without long-term commitment, thus balancing the immediate departmental needs with broader institutional objectives.

A potential limitation of our study to the external validity of our results could arise from the focus on a single discipline. Despite this, at the same time, it provides a focused understanding of hiring practices within management colleges, enhancing the internal validity of our findings. Still, we have fixed other possible limitations to external validity by inviting all tenure-track faculty members from the colleges of management, thus reducing self-selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of our sample, unlike studies that have limitations from self-selection of respondents into the sample. We also addressed the possible limits to the external validity of our results which could arise due to the hypothetical nature of the vignette scenarios we simulated,

even though studies show that vignette studies can reflect real-life behaviors (Heinmueller, et al 2015), respondents might evaluate candidates differently in real-life situations. We mitigated this by complementing our quantitative data with qualitative interviews. These interviews provide more insights into real-life decision-making processes, adding context to our findings. By integrating qualitative data, we ensure our results are grounded in the actual experiences and practices of faculty evaluators, thereby supporting and reinforcing the validity of our quantitative findings.

A possible direction for future research is to take an in-depth look at how foreign faculty members evaluate foreign candidates compared to local faculty members. Although our study initiated this exploration, the small sample size of foreign faculty respondents limited our ability to conduct nationality-specific analyses and comparisons.

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Appendix:

Figure 1. Dimensions of candidates' profiles included in the vignettes

Dimension	Vignette levels
1. Gender	1. Male 2. Female
2. Nationality	1. Taiwan 2. India 3. USA 4. France
3. Country of PhD University	1. Taiwan 2. USA
4. PhD degree university rankings (QS WUR 2020)	1. Top 100 2. 101-300 3. 301-500
5. Publications record	1. 2 papers in SSCI journals 2. 1 paper in SSCI journal and 1 in non- SSCI 3. 2 papers in non- SSCI journal
6. Language skills	1. Chinese Elementary 2. Chinese Proficient 3. Native

Notes:

1. Gender and nationality were signaled by selecting common names typically associated with a specific gender and nationality as well as prefixes "Mr." and "Ms." to indicate gender.

Table 1. Multi-level ordered regressions with random intercept: Potential

Variables	M1
Foreigners (ref.: Taiwanese)	-0.060 (0.172)
PhD from Taiwan (ref.: PhD from the USA)	-0.555*** (0.141)
Proficient Chinese level (ref.: Basic Chinese level)	-0.206 (0.163)
University Ranking (ref.: top 100)	
301-500	-0.827*** (0.171)
101-300	-1.327*** (0.176)
Publications (ref.: 2 SSCI)	
1 Non-SSCI	-3.869*** (0.215)
1 SSCI & 1 Non-SSCI	-1.940*** (0.185)
Female (ref.: Male)	-0.037 (0.133)
Variance (evaluator)	4.873*** (0.818)
Likelihood log	30025
N vignettes	1062
N evaluators	108

*** P < 0.01, ** P < 0.05

Table 2. Multi-level ordered regressions with random intercept: Likelihood to be invited for a tenure-track job interview

Variables	M2	M3	M4
Foreigners (ref.: Taiwanese)	-0.499*** (0.157)	-0.791*** (0.214)	-0.258 (0.160)
PhD from Taiwan (ref.: PhD from the USA)	-0.626*** (0.128)	-1.064*** (0.253)	-0.546*** (0.151)
Proficient Chinese level (ref.: Basic Chinese level)	0.242 (0.146)	0.234 (0.147)	
University Ranking (ref.: top 100)			
301-500	-0.730*** (0.155)	-0.719*** (0.155)	-0.741*** (0.182)
101-300	-1.122*** (0.158)	-1.110*** (0.158)	-1.219*** (0.188)
Publications (ref.: 2 SSCI)			
1 Non-SSCI	-2.431*** (0.170)	-2.434*** (0.170)	-2.431*** (0.201)
1 SSCI & 1 Non-SSCI	-1.241*** (0.158)	-1.250*** (0.158)	-1.249*** (0.189)
Female (ref.: Male)	0.034 (0.121)	0.046 (0.121)	-0.220 (0.142)
Foreigners * PhD from Taiwan		0.579** (0.289)	
Foreigners * Proficient Chinese level (ref: Foreigners with basic Chinese level)			0.242 (0.146)
Variance (evaluator)	3.526*** (0.592)	3.532*** (0.593)	3.526*** (0.592)
Likelihood log	19847	19873	19847
N vignettes	1062	1062	1062
N evaluators	108	108	108

*** P < 0.01, ** P < 0.05

Table 3. Multi-level ordered regressions with random intercept: Likelihood to be invited for a non-tenure-track job interview

Variables	M5
Foreigners (ref.: Taiwanese)	0.432*** (0.166)
PhD from Taiwan (ref.: PhD from the USA)	-0.533*** (0.133)
Proficient Chinese level (ref.: Basic Chinese level)	0.198 (0.154)
University Ranking (ref.: top 100)	
301-500	-0.569*** (0.161)
101-300	-1.058*** (0.164)
Publications (ref.: 2 SSCI)	
1 Non-SSCI	-1.737*** (0.169)
1 SSCI & 1 Non-SSCI	-0.919*** (0.164)
Female (ref.: Male)	-0.056 (0.126)
Variance (evaluator)	5.528*** (0.912)
Likelihood log	29563
N vignettes	1062
N evaluators	108

*** P < 0.01, ** P < 0.05