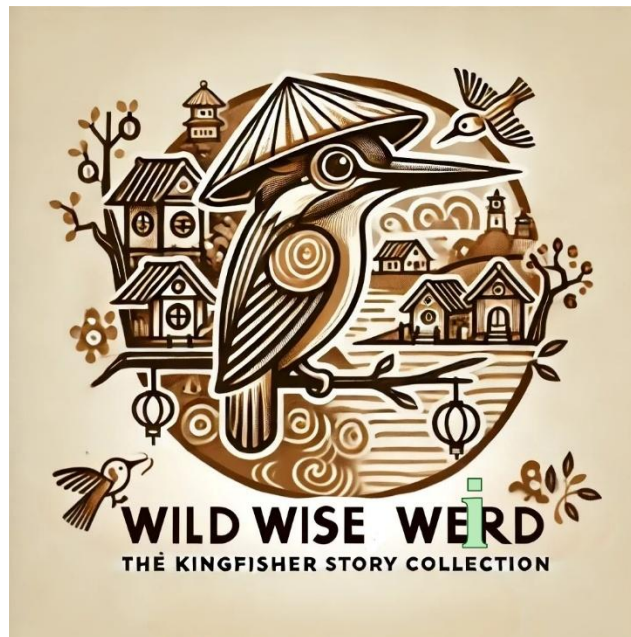


Navigating Conflicting Roles: How Academic Entrepreneurs in China Cope with Institutional Tensions

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“At a high level of knowledge, learning naturally has to be paired with practice. Kingfisher assigns Field Sparrow a “field trip” to nearby markets to study consumer needs, especially anything that may affect the Bird Village economy, particularly the Pond sub-economy, i.e., Kingfisher’s territory.”

In “Bird Village Economics”; *Wild Wise Weird* [1]



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Academic entrepreneurship—the commercialization of university research by faculty—has emerged as a critical driver of innovation worldwide [2,3]. However, in countries with underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystems like China, academic entrepreneurs (AEs) often face complex role conflicts that challenge both their professional identities and institutional relationships [4,5]. A recent study by Yin, Jiang, and Tong [6] explores these challenges and the coping strategies adopted by AEs within a Chinese research university.

Through interviews with 26 participants—including AEs, graduate students, non-entrepreneurial faculty, and university administrators—the study identifies two primary sources of tension. Inter-role conflict arises from the competing demands of being an educator, researcher, and entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship requires flexibility, risk-taking, and business acumen, whereas academic roles demand long-term focus, knowledge production, and student mentorship. These differing expectations create a significant strain on time management, skill application, and goal alignment.

Simultaneously, inter-sender conflict stems from inconsistent expectations among university stakeholders. Graduate students express concern when their involvement in entrepreneurial ventures feels exploitative or misaligned with their academic development. Colleagues question the legitimacy of commercial pursuits within academia, while administrators offer ambiguous guidance—promoting patents and commercialization yet evaluating faculty based primarily on traditional academic outputs.

To navigate these conflicts, AEs employ a range of coping strategies. Constructive approaches include role affirmation (reframing entrepreneurship as a scholarly responsibility), role integration (connecting business activities with research and teaching), and role compartmentalization (separating roles by time and space). However, maladaptive strategies such as delegating academic duties to students or retreating from teaching and research responsibilities can deepen distrust and fragment professional identity.

The authors emphasize the need for systemic support. Institutions should implement mentoring programs, ethical guidelines, and clear role expectations to help AEs balance their dual commitments [7]. Additionally, redefining success metrics to include both academic and entrepreneurial achievements can foster a healthier and more integrated academic entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The study underscores the importance of aligning institutional practices with the evolving roles of academic entrepreneurs. The broader nature-human nexus highlights how the translation of knowledge into real-world applications must be grounded in ethical, inclusive, and sustainable systems that support both innovation and education [8,9].

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