Internationalisation of higher education: A critical analysis of the intercultural dimension of a visiting scholar programme

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This article reports the findings of a study on the intercultural dimension of internationalisation at two universities, located in China and Canada, as evidenced through their visiting scholar (VS) programme. Andreotti and her research team identified three articulations of internationalisation in higher education that are located in a modern/colonial imaginary. They propose a fourth articulation, relational trans-localism, that is located outside the modern/colonial imaginary. As participants in the VS programme, we used critical ethnography and critical discourse analysis to investigate the influences of the modern/colonial articulations on the intercultural dimension of the program, and our attempts to develop practices outside the modern/colonial imaginary. Our findings show that although the programme was profoundly affected by neoliberal and liberal discourses, we achieved some success in creating spaces of relational trans-localism. We conclude by identifying the factors that were enabling of these alternative spaces.

Keywords: critical interculturalism; visiting scholar programmes; neoliberalism; colonialism

Introduction

Visiting scholar (VS) programmes between China and the West have increased since the opening up of China by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. National initiatives in 1986, 1996 and 1998 were driven by the desire for Chinese scholars to align their teaching and research with international standards, resulting in some Chinese universities formulating institutional policies that linked overseas experience to promotion (Lui and Jiang, 2015). Within this context of heightened expectations, research into VS programmes is rare and that which exists seldom focuses on the intercultural dimension of such programmes.

This article reports on the findings of a longitudinal study into a VS programme between a Chinese Faculty of Foreign Languages and Cultures (CFLC) and a Canadian Faculty of Education (CFE). The programme takes place within the context of a formal partnership between the two universities. Two visiting scholars from the

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CFLC spend 3 months in the CFE, two to three times a year. A total of 16 scholars took part in the programme between 2013 and 2016, the period of time that forms the basis of this study, which aims to investigate the impact of the programme on the visiting scholars and their faculties. A particular focus was the nature of the intercultural interactions experienced by participants in the programme.

The first section sets out the context for our study. The second section provides a review of the relevant literature, framed by three articulations of internationalisation currently evident in higher education (HE) (Andreotti et al., 2016) that are located in a modern/colonial imaginary, and a fourth articulation which they propose would be located outside the modern/colonial imaginary. The third section details our study. The methodology section then describes how we applied the above articulations, while the findings reveal their influence on the intercultural dimension of the VS programme, and our attempts to develop practices outside the modern/colonial imaginary. We conclude by demonstrating how, in our capacity as participants in the VS programme and co-researchers of this study, we built on the work of Andreotti and her research team by providing examples of what it might mean in practice to create spaces for enacting the third (anti-oppressive) and fourth (relational trans-local) articulations.

Context

China, since the presidential decree of 1998, has promoted the internationalisation of HE, and an international education policy has been implemented since 2000 (Altbach, 2009). This was viewed as part of China’s ‘salvation movement’: to learn Western knowledge and technology to make China stronger (Neubauer and Zhang, 2015: 2); to enter into the global top 100 universities in QS rankings (Altbach, 2009); and to shape the international reputation of Chinese HE (Chen, 2011). However, the internationalisation of Chinese universities has been described as ‘higher education based on Western experiences’ (Wang, 2008), evident in English being a required course for all university students, and in the destinations of Chinese students studying abroad who choose ‘developed’ countries like America, Britain, Australia and Canada, locations which viewed China as having a negative influence on the world (Hail, 2015: 3). This has led to a desire to engage academically with the West to proactively influence China’s image overseas (Liu and Lin, 2016).

Unlike most Western countries, motivated more by economic and political considerations, Canada’s initial motives for internationalisation of HE were socio-cultural and academic, possibly because Canada was slower than other Western countries to develop a national strategy for the internationalisation of education (Trilokekar and Jones, 2013), leaving universities to develop their own strategies. However, in the last 10 years, economic motivations have dominated as evident in the 2014 national strategy’s emphasis on international students as a source of income generation (Guo and Guo, 2017). To influence ethical issues relating to this trend, the Canadian Deans of Education (CDE) published an Accord on Internationalisation (ACDE, 2014) addressing five areas of inter-related practice, including experiences of international mobility and international research partnerships. The ACDE acknowledges that while benefits may flow from internationalisation activities, there are also risks that...
practices may be exploitative, neo-colonial and exclusionary. How the benefits of building partnerships based on reciprocity, increased intercultural understanding and dialogue through a realisation of interdependence are interpreted and achieved in practice is not well understood, with little research focusing on the intercultural dimension of internationalisation.

**Review: Internationalisation and intercultural learning**

Knight’s (2003) definition of internationalisation as ‘the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education’ (p. 2) intended to provide clarity to the field as universities sought to respond to the forces of globalisation, but it has become almost ubiquitous in the field and is frequently quoted without question, as if it was neutral (Stein, 2017). However, as internationalisation of HE has developed, criticisms have been levelled at what some view as the increasingly exploitative nature of its activities (Knight, 2003). It is in this context that a major study into internationalisation across 20 universities was conducted. Andreotti et al. (2016) developed a social cartography aimed at making explicit the ideologies underpinning different articulations of internationalisation. Three main articulations were identified and mapped against the different functions of the university: internationalisation for the knowledge economy (based on a neoliberal, corporate imaginary); internationalisation for the global public good (based on a liberal, civic imaginary); and anti-oppressive internationalisation for systemic transformation (based on a critical, social justice imaginary). Their study found that most universities showed a varying mixture of neoliberal/corporate and liberal/civic functions for internationalisation, while only a few showed evidence of a social justice function. In addition, they argued that all three functions are framed by a modern/colonial imaginary. They therefore mapped a fourth articulation, relational trans-localism, positioned at the margins and outside the modern/colonial imaginary, which:

challenges what is currently possible within the logics and structures of most mainstream universities. There is a strong commitment to recognize complicity in the harmful practices identified by the anti-oppressive articulation, to disinvest in them, and to affirm relationships based on connections not mediated through them. Thus, this articulation replaces ‘internationalisation’ with ‘trans-localism’, recognizing that interconnection and ethical obligations exceed the borders of the nation-state and the onto-epistemic grammar of modernity.

(Andreotti et al., 2016: 94)

The intercultural dimension of internationalisation is not explicitly discussed within this cartography, but as the second and third authors were participants in the project, it provided us with a framework for making visible the ideologies and discourses that are evident at the intersection of ‘international’ and ‘intercultural’, an intersection that Knight (2003) and de Wit (2010) have argued needs greater prominence in research.

For example, Liu and Jiang’s (2015) study of a VS programme from China to Canada interviewed 17 Chinese scholars who had spent up to 12 months in five Canadian university faculties of education between 2002 and 2014. The study
analyses the outcomes in relation to the development of intercultural competencies and identifies internationalisation as a key driver in China that ‘necessitates internationalisation of faculty members to help align the curriculum and research with international academic standards (p. 440). The authors also identify pedagogical benefits for the Chinese scholars, which are framed as ‘closing the gap between Chinese scholarship and that of the international academy’ (p. 461). They conclude that while there was evidence of the development of intercultural competence and pedagogical knowledge, it was often perceived by the visiting scholars to be one-sided for themselves and not transformative in terms of either the enhanced collaboration between the universities or the outcomes for the Chinese faculty. The neoliberal and liberal discourses described by Andreotti and her research team are clearly evident, but so too is the overarching modern/colonial imaginary in which they are located. The standards of the Western academy are universalised, and the Chinese scholars are ‘othered’ through being positioned as deficient and in need of the West’s pedagogic and research expertise in order to compete in the global marketplace. This is typical of the modern/colonial ‘stages of development’ model that positions Western HE as superior and something for other countries in the world to aspire to, a discourse that is evident in much of the English-medium literature on China’s changing HE landscape (Altbach, 2009). However, many Chinese show ‘willingness to participate in the “civilising mission” of Western modernity which regards what they offer … as “superior” knowledge to enhance their marketability’ (Song, 2019, p. 6).

Liu and Lin’s (2016) study on mutual learning between Chinese and Canadian universities focuses on the processes involved in intercultural learning and what scholars could learn from each other about the differences between their respective university governance models, goals for internationalisation and approaches to international student services. The authors conclude that reciprocal intercultural learning is possible if there is a disposition towards differences that sees them as providing ‘fertile ground for innovation’ (Liu and Lin, 2016: 13). In contrast to Liu and Jiang’s (2015) article, Liu and Lin frame the differences as alternatives that stem from differences in national policies and institutional approaches, each of which are limiting to a degree and could benefit from each other through dialogue.

What is common to both studies is that intercultural seems to be equated with international. In the field of cultural and intercultural studies, it has long been recognised that when national boundaries are taken to inscribe a culture, the characteristics of that culture can become essentialised. For example, ‘Americans are regarded as independent and questioning, able to challenge tutors, while Chinese students are seen as obedient and conservative, accepting and respecting the views of the tutor’ (Hammersley-Fletcher and Hanley, 2016: 983). The logic that categorises and essentialises culture in these ways is based on a modern/colonial imaginary. Using a relational epistemology, cultural identity is fluid and emergent, something that emerges from, and comes into being through, encounters with difference. Our understanding of these dialogic encounters is based on a co-orientational model that focuses on the construction of both ‘self’ and ‘other’ at the micro level and also attends to the effects of the modern/colonial imaginary at the macro level (Stein, 2017). With regard to partnerships and intercultural exchanges between universities in Canada and China, Hayhoe (2018) and Song (2019) both discuss the different geopolitical and historical
pathways taken to internationalisation. Song argues that ‘the imaginary of what is counted as modernity is not the same when examined from the perspectives of different historical conditions’ (p. 10), and Western universities do not appear to be open to ‘a rethinking of what is considered as universal knowledge and what is deemed a right way of knowing’ (p. 8). Hayhoe is more optimistic, viewing the differences between alternative traditions as a rich source of learning that has the potential to challenge ‘the neo-liberal tendency to conceptualize [international collaborative] processes in terms of competition and technical efficiency rather than in terms of relationships’ (p. 19). Both authors invite us to re-orientate the focus of our learning from intercultural differences to the more profound inter-epistemological positions that underlie those differences.

Intercultural or inter-epistemological?

Working in the field of Science, Technology and Society (STS), Law and Lin (2015) conduct such an interrogation of the intersection of Western and Chinese medicine as practiced in Taiwan. They argue that a prevailing discourse is one of coloniality and postcolonial power, positioning the West as a globalising force that dominates and controls markets through a discourse of Chinese medicine as ‘other’ and inferior to Western medicine. The epistemological foundation of this discourse is Euro-Western. They identify a second discourse, one of hybridity, which is found in the practices of a Taiwanese doctor who combines biomedicine with Chinese medicine in her treatment of a patient. The epistemological foundation of this discourse is ‘Chinese inflected’ and ‘has to do with hybridity, the refusal to embrace reductionist forms of explanation, and the assumption that objects are relational, not given’ (p. 10). Their point is that in intercultural research, representation (of the contrasting cultural practices) becomes relatively less important, while sensibility to different ontological and epistemological positions becomes more important.

Aman (2014, 2017) similarly argues that intercultural education is limited by its lack of attention to the geopolitics of knowledge and that those engaged in intercultural learning need to ask critical questions about where knowledge is produced in the world and what forms of epistemology are privileged in intercultural education. Aman goes further, to construct difference not as cultural difference, but as colonial difference, in recognition of the colonial foundation of Euro-Western thinking that informs how interculturalism is conceptualised in education. In the context of a Canadian–Chinese visiting scholar programme, this seems particularly apposite since the programme is a site of encounter between alternative knowledge traditions. The encounters, while saturated with power, will bring different realities and normativities into contact with one another, with the potential for self-evidences of the faculties involved to be undermined (Law and Lin, 2015; Hayhoe, 2018). This supports the idea that intercultural spaces are far from neutral; they are profoundly affected by the politico-historical and cultural relations of those in dialogue. It reminds us to be attentive to our own positionalities and subjectivities, and the intercultural and inter-epistemological blind spots that will affect each of us as researchers, as discussed below.
The study

As argued above, when policies and practices in internationalisation of HE are analysed, they are dominated by the neoliberal/corporate and liberal/civic articulations, with some critiques offered that represent an anti-oppressive/social justice articulation. Our study aimed to identify these different articulations and their expressions within a specific VS programme between China and Canada. We hypothesised that the intercultural dimension (interactions at institutional, faculty and individual scales) would be influenced by these articulations and that there would be tensions between goals and motivations at the intersubjective level compared to the institutional level. As critical educators, we took an anti-oppressive position towards the processes involved in the VS programme and, as the programme developed, we sought to divest ourselves of complicity in the harmful practices of the corporate and civic articulations to the extent that we could, and to develop relational ways of working. For us this meant taking a self-reflexive, critical relational approach to our study (see methods and counter-narratives subsections for examples), while also heeding Stein’s (2017: 44) warning of the risks involved; because academics are employed by a system that is colonial, their efforts to be otherwise may ‘challenge the content but not the framing of the [modern/colonial] imaginary’ of interculturalism and internationalisation.

The main research question for the study was therefore: What is the contribution of a China–Canada visiting scholar programme to the participants’ knowledge and practices as academics working in language and literacy education?

Three supplementary questions were identified:

• How do dominant discourses in internationalisation affect the visiting scholar programme’s activities?
• How do visiting scholars make sense of the diverse intercultural encounters they experience during the programme; what is learnt from these experiences?
• What are the implications for visiting scholar programmes that seek to reduce the adverse effects of the modern/colonial imaginary?

Participants

Scholars from a CFLC have visited a CFE since 2013. Two scholars visit at a time and 16 participated in the study reported here. Of these, 3 are male and 13 female, aged 30–52; holding posts from lecturer to associate dean, they come from working- and middle-class families. All visiting scholars are academics teaching English as a subject area and/or as a foreign language in their institution.

At the time of conducting the research, the first author was Associate Dean of the CFLC and a visiting scholar in the CFE in 2014; the fourth author was studying for her Masters in the CFLC, with the first author as her supervisor; both are Chinese nationals. The second author is the principal investigator and the host academic for the Chinese VS from 2014 onwards; she is a Canadian scholar of colour with African-Desi heritage. The third author is the co-investigator; she is white British and located in a Faculty of Education in a UK university. The second author has made reciprocal
visits to the CFLC on a yearly basis since 2015; the third author has participated in two of these visits.

**Methodology**

We employed critical ethnography (Noblit *et al.*, 2004; Madison, 2012) as a methodology suited to the investigation of a specific case (micro-level ethnography) located within broader ideologically driven systems and structures (macro-level critical analysis), ‘bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control’ (Madison, 2012: 5). Critical ethnography aims to represent and analyse social life ‘for the political purpose of overcoming social oppression’ (Madison, 2012: 7). Noblit *et al.* (2004) discuss four ‘promises’ of critical ethnography—voice, social critique, power and agency—and the tensions that inevitably exist between them. To address the tension between voice and social critique, they propose a fifth promise of self-reflexivity; to address the tension between power and agency, they propose a sixth promise of non-exploitation. Thus, we paid attention to self-reflexivity using research diaries and reflective conversations between the authors of this article, and to non-exploitation through the actions that were taken in light of the outcomes of these reflexive processes.

Our research is also informed by positioning theory, which is concerned with revealing the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that are realised in the ways that people use language to position themselves and others (Harré, 2004). Positioning theory supports the analysis of text (micro-scale) and context (macro-scale) and is applicable for identifying the underlying structure of presuppositions that influence the intercultural interactions in this study.

**Methods**

Data were gathered by the second and third authors. For the VS programme, when scholars went from China to Canada between 2013 and 2017 (Table 1), data were gathered between May 2015 and January 2017 using the following methods: written reflections guided by the critical incident approach (McAllister *et al.*, 2006); semi-structured interviews using the written reflections; and focus group discussions. For the visits of the Canadian and UK academics to China in 2015 and 2016, data were gathered using participant observations and reflective research diaries.

The total number of participants is 18, 16 Chinese, 1 Canadian and 1 British. Although this is a small sample size, the study aims to throw light on the phenomenon of VS programmes between countries of vastly different cultures and it is the relatability of the findings that will potentially offer insights that may be transferable to those running other VS programmes. Three of the participants are authors of this article, raising questions about potential bias. Our position is that it is precisely these biases that our study is designed to reveal. As researchers we were therefore attentive to our biases by being hyper-self-reflexive with regard to our cultural and epistemological positions as we conducted the research, examples of which are provided in the counter-narratives subsection of the findings and in the discussion section.
Although the VS programme began in 2013, we gathered data from May 2015. Data gathered from scholars taking part in the programme in 2013 and 2014 therefore differed from those who took part in the programme from 2015 onwards. For visiting scholars in 2013–2014, we were not able to conduct pre-visit interviews and we acknowledge that the reliability of their interviews may be compromised due to the length of time between their visit and the interview. However, as our interest is in the visiting scholars’ perspectives on the VS programme as a site for critical intercultural learning, and the discourses evident in these perspectives, they add valuable insight particularly because in 2013 the host academic in Canada changed from one group to the next, whereas from 2014 onwards the host academic has consistently been the second author of this article.

Data analysis

Data were collaboratively analysed with the visiting scholars during the 2016 visits of the second and third authors to the CFLC, using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 2001). CDA assumes that all discourse has an ideological stance, and that power is at the heart of every instantiation of language use. We used CDA to reveal
dominant discourses, the ways in which power might be enacted and used to [re]produce inequalities and the ways in which it might be possible to act in ethical relational ways. Our analyses included:

Step 1 Taking each research question in turn, an initial pass of all data was undertaken to identify themes.
Step 2 A second pass was undertaken to colour code according to the themes.
Step 3 A third pass was undertaken to identify discourses evident in the themes (micro-level).
Step 4 A final pass was undertaken to identify socio-political and historical contexts influencing the discourses (macro-level).

Following Fairclough (1992), we were attentive to the ways in which discourses are evident—in text, as discursive practice and as social practice. This fits well with the text–context analysis that is part of critical ethnography. As discussed earlier, the discourses were informed by Andreotti et al.’s (2016) social cartography and four articulations of internationalisation.

**Ethical considerations**

Several ethical issues arise from the fact that the research involves international collaboration. Of prime importance is the need to establish ethical relations that avoid keeping the Western academy and the Western academic at the centre. The project addressed this concern by using a participatory approach, where the priorities for research were collaboratively determined by the first and second authors, and in which the participants worked with us to analyse the data. As an intercultural project, we were mindful of the challenges this presented to our understanding. Kamaara et al. (2012) make a distinction between ‘learning about’ and ‘learning with’. The former ‘is a gesture that is often tinged with arrogance and an air [of] superiority’, while the latter ‘requires a high dose of humility tinged with civility. Learning about often produces arrogant interrogators; learning from requires humble listeners’ (Kamaara et al., 2012: 49). For us, adopting the second stance was an ethical decision. However, a limitation of the research—which has a profound ethical dimension—is that it was conducted in English.

English language competence was a key focus for the Chinese visiting scholars, who primarily sought opportunities to develop their English through conversations with ‘native’ English speakers and who also wanted to experience how language and literacy is taught to education students in Canada. All participants were English speakers with varying degrees of proficiency, and taking part in the research gave an additional ‘authentic communication context’ (Koulouriotis, 2011: 7). The CFLC has a goal for building research capacity through conducting research and co-authoring papers for publication in Western journals. English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) is a response to the needs of globalisation that locates it as a Global English and therefore positions it as one of many Englishes rather than evaluated against Standard English. Critiques of Standard English are well known (Janks, 2010), and in our study we found ourselves negotiating the terrain of the paradox between the goals of the visiting scholars and their faculty, which are clearly linked to the neoliberal, corporate
articulation of internationalisation, and conducting a study in English that—using a de/colonial lens—put the investigators in a privileged position. This paradox was part of the research, as evidenced in the findings.

**Findings**

Here, we report on the findings from analysis of documents, post-visit written reflections, interviews and research diaries. The findings are presented so that they broadly align with the research questions. The context of the VS programme identifies discourses influencing the programme at a strategic level; direct intercultural experiences of visiting scholars identifies the discourses evident in the data at an interpersonal level and the counter-narratives evident in the data suggest a shift in the programme from intercultural to inter-epistemological concerns.

**Context of internationalisation: The VS programme**

In 2011, a partnership was set up between the two aforementioned Chinese and Canadian universities. In 2013, the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two universities was signed. The explicit purpose of the MoU was that the partnership should further promote lateral communication and cooperation. Under the MoU, the Canadian university set up a presidential scholarship programme to support visits from the CFLC to the CFE. This was the first time that a foreign university created a scholarship programme for teachers at the Chinese university. The period of validity of the MoU was 5 years, effective from 1 May 2015. Internationalisation is a high priority for both universities, evident in the significant investments of funding, faculty time and other supporting resources. Politically, the partnership holds strategic value in both contexts.

In China, this is felt more at the faculty level, as the benefits of the VS programme have increased the capacity of scholars, leading to some positive outcomes. Many of the 12 returned visiting scholars have attempted to apply what they have learned about language and literacy content and pedagogies to their teaching. This knowledge supported their submissions to China’s Multimedia Courseware Contest in 2014 and 2015, for which they won second and first prize, respectively. They have since developed a massive open online course (MOOC) entitled ‘Chinese English Culture Exchange’. In addition, this article represents the first of several planned co-authored academic papers to be submitted for publication in China, Canada and the UK. These benefits directly address a key motivating force for internationalisation in China, that of enhancing the international reputation of higher education institutions (Chen, 2011). The mixture of enhancing teaching and research capacity, cultural exchange and reputational benefits reflects the neoliberal and liberal articulations for internationalisation.

The strategic value in Canada is felt more at the university level. The university website states: ‘The adoption of strategies and processes oriented towards the effective internationalisation of HE institutions is considered by many leaders as crucial to strengthening their institution’s ability to attract the best students, scholars and administrators’ (University of Regina, 2015). The VS programme is one such strategy.
and has, to date, attracted four doctoral students from the Chinese faculty to study at the Canadian institution. Additionally, an Internationalisation Strategic Plan (University of Regina, 2016) explicitly states a key objective of working ‘to engage faculty and staff in the process of further and deeper internationalisation by increasing international research opportunities, including providing more opportunities for international opportunities for faculty and work exchanges for staff’ (p. 1). Research grants from the Saskatchewan Instructional Development Research Unit and the President’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council have supported the study reported here, which in turn has benefitted the reputation of the university and faculty through international conference presentations. Strategically, the Canadian university discourse seems to reflect a predominantly neoliberal articulation.

Direct intercultural experiences

Analysis of data on intercultural experiences through direct contact gives insight into how internationalisation programmes are experienced in the visiting scholars’ daily lives. We report on these at national, institutional and social scales, highlighting the discourses that are evident and the insights these provide in relation to positioning theory. Data were gathered from the visiting scholars using a critical incident approach (McAllister et al., 2006) in which participants were asked to identify a significant moment or insight from their time in Canada, and an experience that they found challenging. Their written reflections on these became the basis for the interviews.

Intercultural experiences at the national scale. Critical incidents around visas and border control reflected the increasingly stringent measures in both China and Canada. Although not formally part of the VS programme, they are the first experiences of Canada and will influence how visiting scholars orientate themselves to subsequent experiences.

Two Chinese visiting scholars who came to Canada in 2013, the first year of the programme, described how they were refused entry into the country by immigration control. A mistake had been made on their visas, which named a different Canadian university to the one that was hosting their visit, and they were refused entry until the mix-up had been resolved. In 2015 a change in policy meant that visiting scholars to Canada had to come on a work, rather than a tourist, visa. Two scholars who were due to visit in January 2016 had a delay of 6 months before their visas were granted. The Canadian scholar obtained a visa for 2015 without difficulty, but experienced a long delay when applying in 2016 and had to provide additional supporting information to verify the reasons for her visit to China. In contrast, the UK scholar obtained a visa within the space of 2 weeks in both 2015 and 2016 and was required to provide minimal paperwork compared to the Chinese and Canadian scholars. Visa issues for visiting scholars and international students are not uncommon; however, the literature shows that visa policies lead to unequal access to countries in the Global North by those in the Global South (Mau et al., 2012). Our data suggest that there are further differentials, with the UK/white British scholar being privileged compared to the
Canadian and Chinese scholars who are from non-Caucasian/non-European backgrounds.

Two discourses seem to dominate here, neoliberal and colonial. The neoliberal discourse of terrorism, leading to protection of national borders and interests, is seen in the changing visa regulations between China and Canada. The three countries’ language around border agencies reveals differences in positioning. For example, the UK and China’s border agencies have an explicit policing discourse: Border Force (UK Government, 2017) and State Commission of Border and Coastal Defense (China.org.cn, 2017); Canada’s agency title, Border Services Agency (CBSA, 2017), appears to reflect a more open, liberal stance towards immigration. However, recent changes have led to all ports of entry now having armed officers, who are to ‘detain those who may pose a threat to Canada’ (CBSA, 2017). A colonial, ‘othering’ discourse is evident in the positioning of foreigners as people whose motives for entry are to be mistrusted, particularly considering the heightened sensitivities over immigration and refugees that were part of the international context during the research period.

Intercultural experiences at the institutional scale. Following the invitation from the CFE to the CFLC, it was up to the selected visiting scholars to find CFE scholars to host their visit. In the first year, many letters were sent before a host was found. The visiting scholars either did not get a response to their letters, or were declined. Once in Canada, visiting scholars reported that they had little interaction with Canadian scholars or students. They also experienced incidences of scholars who refused to let them observe classes and, when they did take part in courses, many spoke of how they were marginalised by white students:

“We wrote to another … professor and she said she was not prepared to let us observe her classes because it would be disruptive to her students and her students’ needs came first. 

(2013F1, interview)

The difficult[y] to deal with is that we couldn’t merge ourselves with the white students in the class. We had to stay with the students from African, Asian countries. Maybe we have quite different cultures/ backgrounds.

(2014F3, interview)

In these early days of the partnership, the host scholar did not seem to be clear about what the implications of hosting a visiting scholar might be. Although international research partnerships form part of the strategy for achieving the goals embedded in the university’s strategic plan, they also add to scholars’ workloads, which could mitigate against the time needed to meet increasing demands of the neoliberal university for research income and outputs. Nevertheless, the Chinese visiting scholars created their own opportunities for intercultural interactions, such as attending weekly faculty research seminars and getting involved in the university’s global centre, where they could make friendships with other foreign students. In so doing, the scholars showed agency; they were unhappy with the social structure as they experienced it and acted in creative ways to change this—inviting people to engage with them who may not have done otherwise.
Since the autumn of 2014, the second author hosted the Chinese scholars’ visits. This created stability around the programme and enabled the second author and the CFLC to develop a more coherent programme with consistency in expectations:

I decided to create a programme for their time at the university. The VS would attend all my classes and I would adapt the material to explicitly include ESL/EFL students—this was no hardship because I teach culturally responsive literacy education.

(2015, host academic research diary)

The host academic facilitated the visiting scholars’ participation in class, enabling them to work with the students to prepare and give group presentations, give presentations on the Chinese education system and gain experience in marking some assignments at the end of the course. After each class, the host academic and visiting scholars would meet to discuss the readings and the class, and weekly meetings were held to reflect on their learning.

However, a modern/colonial ‘othering’ discourse continued to be evident in the interactions between Chinese visiting scholars and some Canadian scholars, and in the visiting scholars’ attempts to interact with white settler students in and out of class. There is also the associated discourse of inferiority noted by Song (2019) in the Chinese visiting scholars’ accounts. This was evident in the VS programme itself, and in the scholars’ written accounts and the interview data, where they position their abilities as speakers of English as inferior because they speak it with a Chinese accent and find it hard to make themselves understood, despite their achievements with regard to the context in which they learnt English in the first place:

We can’t speak English as native speakers, we cannot make [ourselves] understood. . . . There are misunderstandings and conflicts between western world and Chinese world, but if we take English as our 2nd official language, there will be less misunderstandings and conflicts. I’m so sorry for this barrier of language. It’s partially explain (sic) why learning English is important in China.

(2015F5, written reflection)

This same discourse is evident in how the visiting scholars spoke about the pedagogies observed in the literacy classes in Canada, which were described as ‘systematic’ and valuable in comparison with the approaches they commonly used in their own classes in China.

To sum up, the VS programme was framed in their institutional interactions by the neoliberal and liberal articulations of the modern/colonial imaginary. The Chinese scholars positioned themselves as in need of the West’s pedagogic and research expertise and the Canadian and British scholars as teachers and researchers who could provide this expertise. However, consistency in the host academic, who was a scholar of colour, from autumn 2014 enabled the introduction of a critical, anti-oppressive dimension through the development of a programme that was culturally responsive to the Chinese scholars’ needs.

Social and interpersonal intercultural experiences. All Chinese VS said they found few opportunities to experience Canadian social life beyond those extended by their host academic and her social circle:
we didn’t have enough opportunities . . . , to take part in [Canadian] social function.
(2014F3, interview)

One visiting scholar observed that, in contrast to China, Canadian people separate
life and work:

but here [in Canada] I see every household they just keep in their own circle. Then . . . at home
they close the doors and . . . keep everybody outside. That’s [a] signal for us to see we don’t want
to get close to you.
(2015F5, interview)

This was said in the context of whether the Chinese visiting scholars had social
interactions with academics from the CFE scholars. All scholars said they had not
been invited to socialise with other academics. There are obvious parallels between
‘closed doors’ at the social level, and the border agency and immigration interactions
noted at national scale. The closed doors by academics appear to be ‘othering’, but
they could also be yet another expression of neoliberalism—exhaustion from high
workloads and the ever-increasing demands to publish and generate research income.
Again, the visiting scholars showed agency, with some attending churches to meet
‘real Canadians’ and to attend their free English language classes. Although not of the
Christian faith, this presented an opportunity to socialise, and the people they met at
church invited them for coffee after the services and showed them around the city.

More than 50% of the visiting scholars experienced racial micro-aggressions in
social and public settings. These were evident in the portrayals of Chinese in films
they saw at the cinema; and in assumptions that they would practice martial arts and
eat exotic foods—based on a lack of understanding of how developed China is. How-
ever, they also spoke of how the Canadians they met at the church, at the shops and
on the bus were very nice, and very friendly towards people from different cultural
backgrounds. This discourse could be seen to fit with the liberal image Canada likes
to portray of itself, as a nation of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious her-
itage that is open-minded and tolerant.

In a counter-narrative to the ‘othering’ discourses, from 2014, the Chinese visiting
scholars had social experiences with their host academic that prompted feelings of
‘being at home’. As an immigrant to Canada who arrived in the 1970s from Tan-
ganyika, her country of birth, she understood the importance of interacting with the
visiting scholars in ways that were not bounded by the professional sphere. She had
her own lived experience of being immersed in a place where few of one’s cultural ref-
erents are relevant, and so opened up her personal space to the visiting scholars to
spend weekends in her home, cooking together, shopping together and generally
spending leisure time together. Similarly, personal spaces were opened up to the sec-
ond and third authors during their visits to the CFLC in China.

[She] let us experience many aspects of Canadian cultures.
(2015F5, interview)

I think she just guided us to experience Canadian daily life. That is what we cannot learn from the
classroom, from the courses, right?
(2015F7, interview)

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Counter-narratives and inter-epistemic understanding. From 2013 to 2016, the Chinese and Canadian universities have been through a relationship of growing stability. The presidential scholarship programme supported many teachers from China to go to Canada. In the early years, these visits were not reciprocal, however, in 2015 the situation changed when the second and third authors were invited to visit the Chinese university as visiting professors. We gave lectures to teachers and students, worked with the scholars to build research capacity and increased the recruitment of international students to the Canadian university. We broadened their socio-political, academic and cultural knowledge in a Chinese context, which has informed our own teaching and research.

The change from a one-way to a reciprocal academic exchange has benefitted both universities. It has been a deliberate strategy to challenge the privileged positioning of the Western academy in international partnerships where it is often assumed that the Eastern scholars will need to learn from the Western scholars’ ‘superior’ pedagogical and curriculum knowledge. However, due in part to the open and trusting relationship between the first and second authors, and the co-creation of priorities for the research programme, the nature of the exchange turned into one of international communication, intercultural understanding and reciprocal learning. Opportunities for regular reflexive discussions were opened up as the research progressed and we began to share it at international conferences and to write papers together. To illustrate this, during one research conversation about family values the discussion started by comparing the differences between China and Canada, but then moved on to a discussion about why there were these differences, and what that said about the ways of being and knowing that underpinned those differences. In giving this explanation, the visiting scholar needed to switch between Mandarin and English to convey his meaning:

\[\ldots\] most Chinese would not to, eh, would not like, eh, maybe mobile life, you know? Right, not the same as Americans, you know? You can just try to \ldots move their whole family from one state to another. They can do this, but most of us cannot, ok. We have the idea of, eh, root, you know? In Chinese, we have a, maybe an idiom, \textit{叶落归根} (\textit{ye luo gui gen}), that means what? The leaves, \textit{eh}, of the tree, they just come down from the top of the tree, but they just fall down, the tree’s, root, roots, right? So that is the family values and the marriage values.

\textit{(2015M1, interview)}

We see this as evidence of learning beginning to move from the intercultural to a deeper, inter-epistemological level, with the possibility of new knowledge about the concept of ‘mobility’ emerging. Because the interviews were transcribed by CFLC English major Masters’ students, they included both Mandarin characters and the roman script PinYin equivalent. Although we present only one example of an extension beyond culture to include epistemology, our point is that it may not have taken place without our commitment to working together in ways that disrupted the dominant neoliberal and liberal articulations of interculturality and internationalisation.

Discussion

Using Andreotti \textit{et al.}’s (2016) social cartographies and articulations of internationalisation enabled us to reveal the over-riding influence of modernity/coloniality, including that our own anti-oppressive, social justice orientation is also located in the same
grid because, in order to be ‘anti’, we have to engage with the realities of the thing we are against. Our findings demonstrate that the modern/colonial discourses of neoliberalism and liberalism were evident at all levels of the VS programme (Figure 1).

The goals for internationalisation of each university were predominantly driven by the neoliberal discourses that position knowledge as a commodity, and universities as economic units competing in a global marketplace. These forces heavily influenced the intercultural dimension of the VS programme, where the modern/colonial discourses inherent in neoliberalism and liberalism were evident in varying degrees at national, institutional and interpersonal scales. While there are critiques of the increasing dominance of neoliberalism in much of the literature on internationalisation and intercultural exchanges, these tend to position neoliberalism as ‘bad’ and liberalism as ‘good’ (Knight, 2003; de Wit, 2010; Liu and Jiang, 2015). In keeping with scholars such as Aman (2017) and Song (2019), our findings indicate that liberal ideals are also problematic because they are just as influenced by the modern/colonial imaginary as neoliberalism, and that this was evident in how visiting scholars were positioned by the modern/colonial imaginary that continues to divide the world into superior–inferior, teacher–learner, expert–novice.

The fact that English is compulsory for all university students in China can be located in colonialism and subsequently the neoliberal, corporate function of universities. Thus, speaking English as ‘native’ speakers do is high stakes for the visiting scholars, given their roles as teachers of English for academic purposes across the whole university, while also putting them at a disadvantage in their intercultural exchanges (the second and third authors were not required to learn or communicate in Mandarin during their visits to China). As critical scholars we were aware that to speak only English was ‘to remain in its epistemology and ontology’ (Stein, 2017: 38). At the same time, we recognised that for the Chinese university in this study it

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Figure 1. Findings mapped against the four articulations of internationalisation
Adapted from Andreotti et al. (2016 figure 5, p. 93)
was important to publish in high-ranking Western journals, which meant using English. On the one hand, there is the desire to access the language of the powerful to have a voice; on the other hand, ‘those very languages echo the imperial order, ... languages in which the very act of speaking immediately connects the postcolonial subject to a history of violence and subjugation’ (Aman, 2017: 105). This reflects the dilemma that ‘because social imaginaries both produce and are (re)produced by individual subjects, efforts to resist and/or enact alternative imaginaries tend to be complex and contradictory’ (Stein, 2017: 29), which is a problem for intercultural communication because ‘the epistemologies of the subaltern are not recognized within a Western hegemonic vocabulary’, showing the need to ‘break out of the prison house of colonial vocabulary’ (Aman, 2017: 104) and to enlarge the scope of intercultural education to include epistemology.

Using the critical anti-oppressive imaginary enabled us to identify practices that were oppressive and to consider which offered spaces for the articulation of relational trans-localism (Figure 1). For example, one could argue that the hegemony of the Western academy controls what and whose research is published in the West. We sought to challenge this through an anti-oppressive approach to this article; the second and third authors understood their privileged position and avoided, as far as possible, imposing their ways of being and doing by creating spaces in which the Chinese perspectives were centred and the article’s direction led by the first author. In all, three spaces were created: spaces of stability; spaces of collaboration; and spaces of reciprocity. Spaces of stability opened up as the second author became the permanent lead foreign academic in China. Stability led to spaces of collaboration and reciprocity as invitations were also extended to the third author to go to China as a visiting scholar, as a result of which an international collaboration on a research study of the VS programme became possible. This in turn opened up the possibility to create a deeper relational space in which we began to engage with each other at an onto-epistemological level. We argue that these spaces reflect the relational trans-local articulation (Andreotti et al., 2016).

Our findings therefore reveal a complex picture of the tensions that Noblit et al. (2004) discuss between voice and social critique, power and agency. These tensions were felt by the authors as we strove to be self-reflexive, to show humility in our orientations towards each other and to take actions to develop the programme in ways that were non-exploitative. Our efforts to be self-reflexive were supported by the action of undertaking this study and working with the visiting scholars as collaborators as well as participants. This generated further possibilities of ‘coming to know the other’, as the data gathered in 2015 were collaboratively analysed in 2016 and ideas developed for this article.

**Conclusion**

In internationalisation research, the intercultural dimension does not receive enough attention; while in intercultural research, criticality does not receive enough attention. Bringing these three elements together—internationalisation, interculturality and criticality—has enabled us to present a more complex picture of the processes at work as universities internationalise through partnership activities, including revealing a
tension between internationalisation and interculturality. Applying Andreotti et al.’s (2016) framework to our study has demonstrated how, in the context of a VS programme, this tension is in part due to the competing discourses of neoliberalism and liberalism, but it has also enabled us to demonstrate how both these discourses are located in, with differing articulations of, the modern/colonial imaginary—an imaginary that by its very nature it seeks to control and recreate in its own image.

In Andreotti and team’s research project they found it ‘rare for mainstream universities to enact either “anti-oppressive” or “trans-local” articulations in an official capacity, as these two articulations challenge normative understandings of the obligations and primary purposes of the university in both the civic and corporate imaginaries’ (p. 94). In our capacity as participants in the VS programme, and co-researchers of this study, we have been able to build on Andreotti and team’s study by investigating what it might mean to enact anti-oppressive and relational trans-local articulations. These were enacted in an unofficial capacity at the start of the VS programme but, as stability, reciprocity and deeper collaboration were built into the project, the opportunity to enact them in an official capacity was opened up. Creating spaces for relational trans-localism meant divesting ourselves of binarised notions of interculturalism that created oppositional categories of East/China and West/Canada, positioning their HE systems in a hierarchy of inferior–superior. It meant divesting ourselves of the nation scale and paying attention to the ways in which we related to each other in the different locales we inhabited. It meant divesting ourselves of understanding through drawing cultural comparisons and engaging with each other’s onto-epistemological differences. This implies a pluralisation of knowledge and an approach to the co-production of new knowledge that is not in the service of some instrumental end, but something that is emergent and therefore unanticipated. Admittedly, the spaces we created for enacting a relational trans-local articulation were small and often fleeting as the pressures and controlling forces of the neoliberal and liberal articulations overtook us. But with commitment, humility and a willingness to recognise our own epistemic blindness, we were able to create spaces at the edges of the modern/colonial imaginary and we offer our study to those who are interested in not only thinking, but also being ‘otherwise’ in their practices at the intersection between interculturalism and internationalisation.

Data statement

Research data are not shared.

Ethics statement

The research was carried out under the Canadian Research Council ethical guidelines with approval from the University of Regina ethics committee.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.
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