

The relative privilege

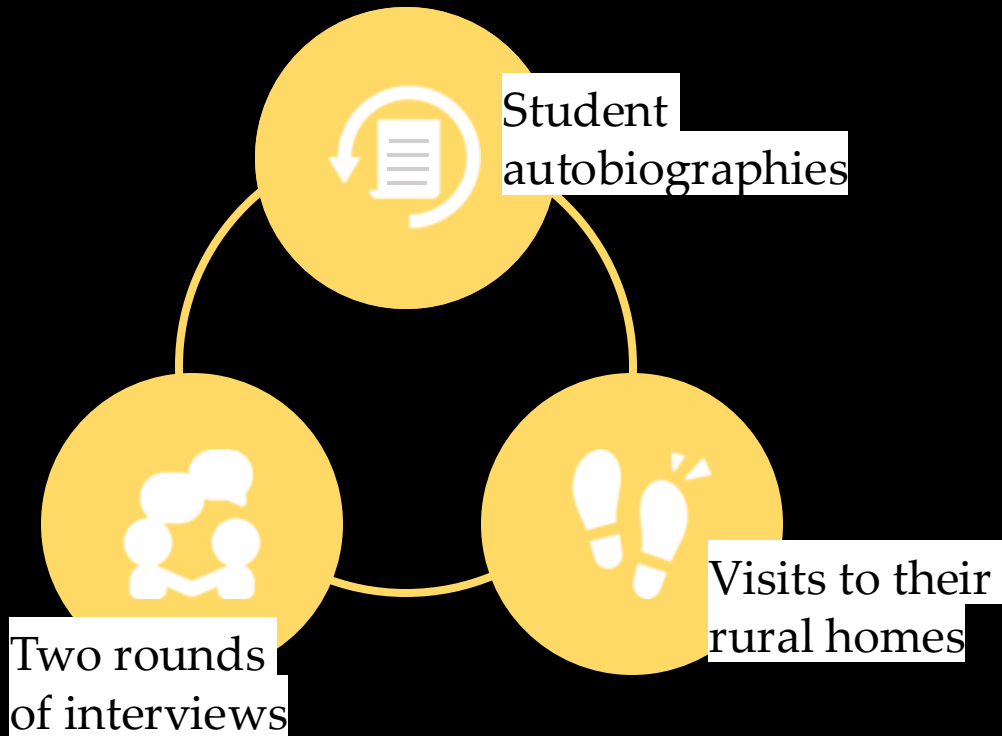
Student self-formation at lower-tier higher education institutions in China

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A narrative inquiry based at three lower-tier colleges in China



About the research

Focus on students' formation of the *self*

3 lower-tier colleges (*xueyuan*/ 学院)

300~400th in ranking

12-14 students at each HEIs, across year of study and subjects

37 participants in total

Oct 2022 ~ Jul 2023

* All the names mentioned in this presentation are pseudonyms.

‘They said I’m an owl-type. It’s a personality type that indicates that someone may not initially seem to stand out but possesses significant potential for growth and transformation.’

Golden Delight

F, 3rd, Humanities, Mountain College

‘The staff scolded me saying “The college you are attending is useless, and even if you get a postgraduate degree, it won’t help at all. You’d have greater potential if enrolling in our courses to study those topics and gain more experience.”’

Starry Night

F, 3rd, Humanities, Mountain College

Conceptualising the relative privilege

‘Currently, I’m just an undergraduate, and there are already so many undergraduates out there. On top of that, I’m from an ordinary, non-prestigious university, not even a good lower-tier one. It’s like, among the already common, I’m on the weaker side. That’s why I want to improve myself [through a postgraduate degree]. That’s all.’

Floating Petal

F, 2nd year, STEM, Lake | Interview 2

Conceptualising the relative privilege

‘In my village, the common perception is that most people’s education level stops at primary or junior secondary school, and there are very few who attend high school. So, when I was admitted to a university, my mum felt very proud.’

Tranquil Harmony

M, 2nd year, Social science, Mountain | Interview 1

Conceptualising the relative privilege

‘Because both my parents and grandparents are farmers, they don’t really understand much about these things {about education}. In their eyes, getting into a university is considered achieving their goals for me, especially since it’s not easy for them to support a child. [...] Until six or seven years before I went to university, there had never been anyone who was admitted to a university from our village. When I passed the exam, it really made my parents proud, and I felt quite happy about it, too.’

Autumn Wind

M, 3rd year, Humanities, Ocean | Interview 1

Conceptualising the relative privilege

How to know both their marginality and privilege?
How to be critical and generous at the same time? (Parla, 2019)

How agency is exercised in tandem with degrees of privilege and predicaments of marginality?

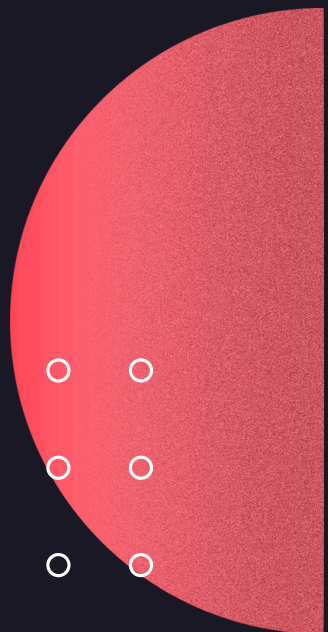
A reparative lens on a non-reparative project

Exploring constructions of merit and fairness
in the University of Oxford's
undergraduate admissions routes

Conceptions of teaching

"the students always say 'I wish we had a class' when they come to the tutorial, right, that they would have done so much better with the essay or the problem if they just had an hour talking about what they read before the tutorial...the experience of really fighting with the reading list by themselves, and coming to a tutorial, and realising where they've gone wrong, and then drawing on that experience next week is better for them than my just sitting in a room and scaffolding things for them...If you've come in worse prepared, which of course students do, and you struggle more with the reading list, you struggle more. The struggle is part of the point."

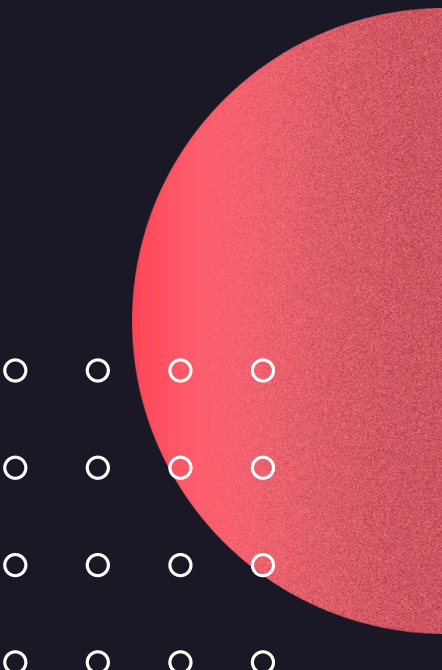
"Oxford is very, very sink or swim. And my view is you can teach people to swim. It doesn't mean you keep them in the shallow end forever with water wings. But you don't just drop them in and let them drown...we're making it hard for reasons it doesn't need to be hard. And that impairs their potential for learning, which is really counterproductive..."



The links between teaching and admissions

"that's the whole premise of how we do admissions, that's the reason why admissions is college based. It's the reason why it's basically the people who will be teaching these students...who are responsible for admitting them, means we have to take responsibility and take the consequences of the decisions that we make."

"...undergraduate teaching is, I suspect, for many colleagues a bit of a nuisance, and they would rather not have to make allowances for students that don't present with the same sort of, you know, readily available tools for cognition that most sort of middle-class privileged young people often have...not just assuming you can give someone a problem sheet, walk away, and then have it beautifully completed within 24 to 48 hours. So, yes, I think it is leading to a lot of interesting and challenging conversations about admissions."



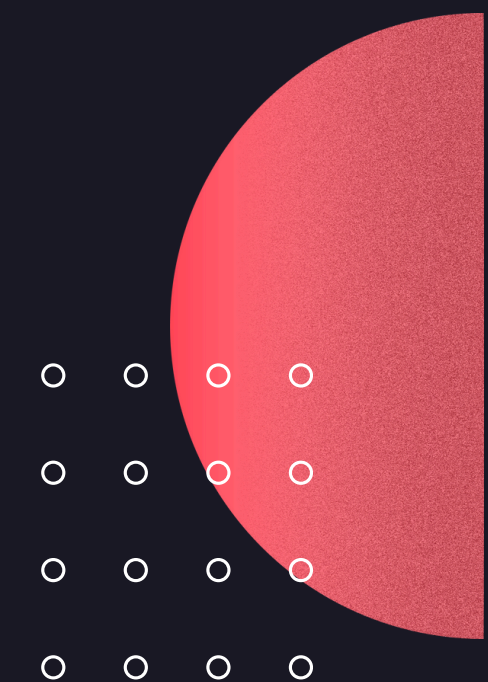
What values govern admissions and teaching?

Contested notions of merit and fairness

Credentialist
merit



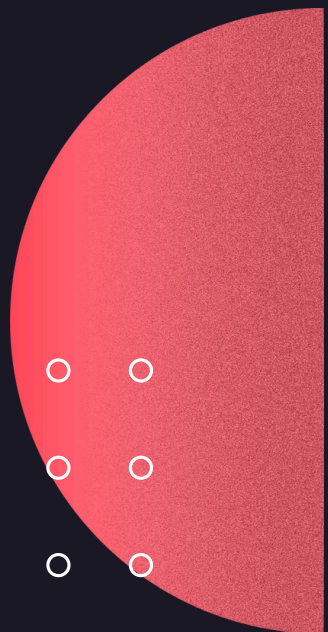
Contextualist
merit



Student conceptions of admissions interviews

"I think the same way that private school people can get better grades or can get better grades easier, they can do well in the interview easier because like you have practice interviews, you have training...They've got so much more coaching and their dad went to Oxford, their friend went to Oxford...you're more familiar with what the interview is."

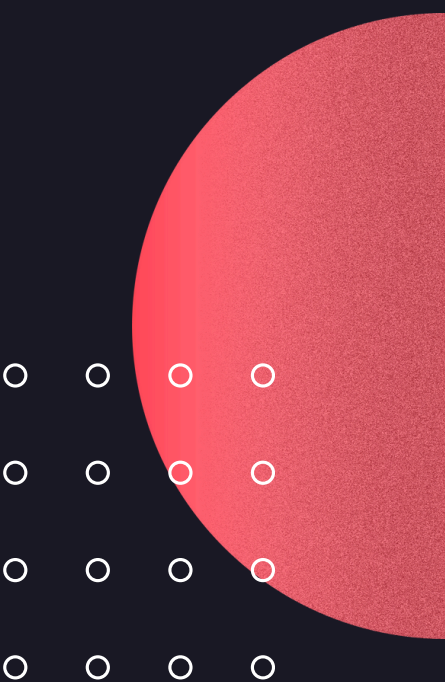
"I didn't understand what was being said. Like I didn't feel like I was in a place to respond, and I knew. I think I left those interviews feeling really upset because I knew that wasn't a true representation of my academic potential...[my friend] was telling me about, like, the questions that she got questioned in her interviews...if I had been asked that when I was like applying to the University for [subject], I genuinely would have like crumbled and been like I don't know what to say."



Student conceptions of teaching spaces

"I think, you know, they do want to keep this like, Oxford as being like a very rigorous place, but I don't think Oxford being rigorous is why people come out of it doing like great things afterwards...**everyone is so smart and I just think like half the time, they're not even using their brains...like no one's ever gonna write a good essay at 3am. But it's just like the fear of not handing it in. So yeah, I do like, I think it's silly, the workload here...I always think like if I went to a different uni I'd be doing a lot better.**"

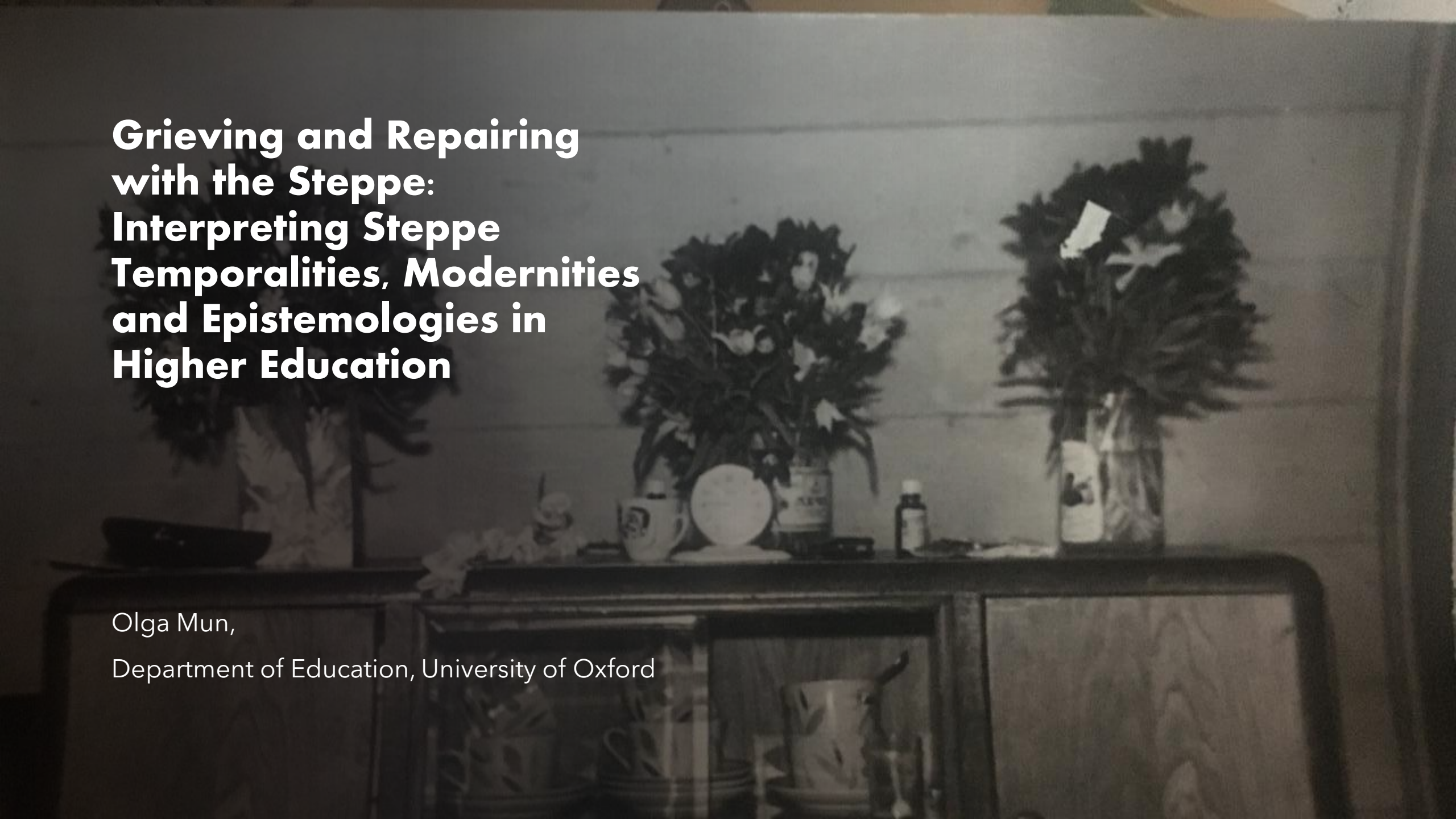
"I used to take so long just to get through like one paper that I was reading, like absolutely ages, just because the language was a bit less accessible to me or like the sentences were a bit longer...**if all your time is spending on like the evidence and like getting sort of the pieces of the puzzle to put your essay together, then you kind of don't have as much time to think critically** or even if you're struggling to understand evidence, how can you think critically about it?"





Exploring normative frameworks of fairness through
(relational) institutional habitus in Oxford's undergraduate
admissions process

British Journal of Sociology 75(4): 519-534



Grieving and Repairing with the Steppe: Interpreting Steppe Temporalities, Modernities and Epistemologies in Higher Education

Olga Mun,
Department of Education, University of Oxford

Global Public Good in Korea as *Jeong*

Olga Mun and Yunkyoung Min

Introduction: Setting the Scene

In the past four decades, Korea's higher education has experienced a dramatic increase in participation. The rate of college matriculation grew from 27.2 per cent in 1980 to 70.4 per cent in 2019, making Korea the first ranked country in terms of student enrolment among the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries for the past ten years (KEDI Statistics 2020). The growth might be partially attributed to the strong value of education by individuals and the society at large and, possibly, by the flourishing of private universities. As of 2019, out of the total 191 universities, 156 are private, 34 national and 1 public. Not only the majority of the universities are private, 62.4 per cent of higher education funding comes from private sector investments in contrast to 37.6 per cent support from the government. The Korean government's investment in higher education is low compared to the OECD average of 66.1 per cent.

Despite most of the financing coming from private sources, the government takes an active role in shaping the higher education policy for all universities in the spheres of autonomy, tuition fees, student recruitment and internationalization. Private universities cannot set their own tuition fees as these are defined by

Epistemic Injustices in Internationalizing Humanities and Social Sciences: A Case Study of Higher Education and Science Institutes in Kazakhstan

Olga Mun

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In the first three decades of independence from the Soviet Union since 1991, Kazakhstan "aggressively" introduced a series of modernization and internationalization reforms in the field of higher education (HE) (Ahn et al., 2018). Internationalization of research (IoR) and the increase of international research outputs became central pillars in a wider internationalization of the higher education reform agenda. The aim of this paper based on my ongoing doctoral project is to understand how the IoR policy affects the knowledge creation process by academics in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) disciplines based in a range of higher education and science institutes (HESIs) in Kazakhstan. It draws primarily on the conceptualizations of epistemic injustice, testimonial injustice (TI), and hermeneutic injustice (HI) developed by Fricker (2007), in order to unpack the injustices that might be happening during the IoR process.

The purpose of my study is to reveal whether epistemic injustices occur in the global or national academic publishing industries, and whether the global sphere is dominated by a certain set of exclusive systemic practices. It also invites the international community to see academic communities in "developing" countries as not linguistically or culturally homogenous.

Internationalization of Research: New Publication Requirements in Kazakhstan

As a continuation of the internationalization reforms, on January 1, 2019, new requirements regarding publishing in international peer reviewed journals of a particular quartile, preferably Q1, and cited in selected Web of Science and Scopus databases, were introduced for holders of academic titles. Similar international publication requirements

Changing Higher Education in East Asia

PROCEEDINGS
HIGHER
EDUCATION
RESEARCH

No. 18

Innovative and Inclusive Internationalization:

Proceedings of the WES–CIHE Summer Institute 2020
Boston College

Hans de Wit and Tessa DeLaquil
Editors



BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education and Human Development

Addressing Epistemic Injustice in Higher Education Research

Conceptual Diversity in Higher Education Research: Setting the Scene

THINKING WITH THE STEPPES AS AN
ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIO-POLITICAL,
AND EPISTEMIC SPACE

GAIL BRATCHER (UCHICAGO)

OLGA MUN (OXFORD)

DARYA TSYMBALYUK (UCHICAGO)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 4PM

SOCIAL SCIENCE TEA ROOM (201), 1126 E. 59TH


OR REGISTER FOR ZOOM AT
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RUSSIAN, AND EURASIAN STUDIES

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Proverbial teachings on sustainability: critical dialogues on traditional proverbs and zine-making in higher education

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ABSTRACT

What ethical and political considerations does zine-making raise in teaching and learning across knowledge systems and artful expression? This question guides the critical dialogue about a research project on teaching sustainability through traditional proverbs from Malaysia and Kazakhstan within a zine-making workshop in a UK university. Merging our reflections with that of students and their zine artworks alongside traditional proverbs, we dialogue across two tensions associated with the challenges of proverbial learning as decolonial connections or appropriation, and the politics and pedagogy of zine-making. Through these tensions which reveal the messy, ambivalent, and unsettled practices within the neoliberal university, we offer some reflections for researchers and teachers engaging in decolonial and arts-based praxis.

Apakah pertimbangan etika dan politik yang dibangkitkan oleh pembuatan zine dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran merentas sistem pengetahuan dan ekspresi kesenian? Persoalan ini membimbing dialog kritikal seputar satu projek penyelidikan tentang pengajaran kelestarian menerusi narikabasa tradisional

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KEYWORDS

Traditional proverbs;
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neoliberal; decolonial;
arts-based research

Original Article

Jeong and asar: Theorising reparative concepts in gendered artistic, activist, and academic spaces

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Abstract

In this article, we argue that the concepts developed in Central Asia are largely absent from the conceptual toolbox of the national and international academics researching the region in the field of art, activism studies, and education. We maintain that the exclusion is happening for multiple reasons: the domination of English language in global academic debates, the policy pressures for academics to meet global publications expectations in a narrow set of Western academic outlets and the multiple ongoing colonialities and hierarchies in the artistic, civic, and knowledge production processes. By specifically focusing on the case of gendered art, activism, and academic spaces in Central Asia, we show that while the region is used as an empirical testing ground for ready-made Western theories, local art, feminist-activist, and academic initiatives may play as credible sources of knowledge production, forms of resistance, and spaces for transnational solidarity and theorisations. We highlight more caring ways of producing scholarship by describing the concepts of asar and jeong and theorising the three cases of sonic, feminist, and academic asar and jeong. We conclude by urging scholars to

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**Proverbs on sustainability from
Malaysia and Kazakhstan**

Proverbial Wisdom and Obal philosophy

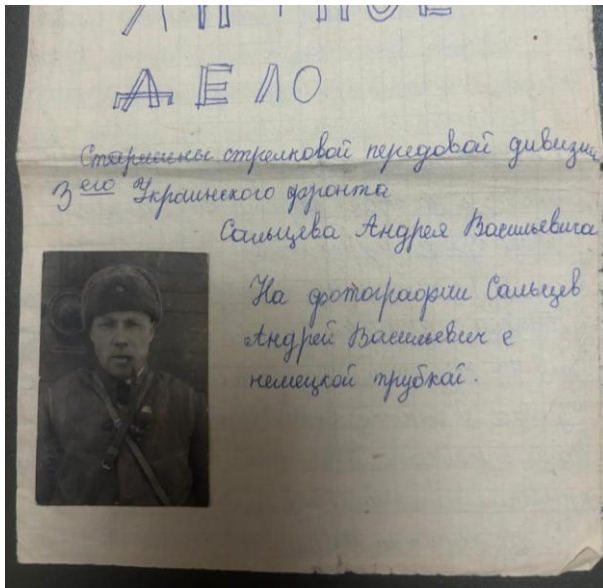
In Kazakh philosophy and upbringing (*tarbiye*), early childhood education is centered around three key concepts: *uyat* (shame), *obal*, and *sauap* (reward) (Suiyerkul & Mursal, 2019). While *uyat* discourages impudence and greed, *obal* teaches children to avoid causing harm, such as destroying nests, hurting animals, insulting the vulnerable, or engaging in extravagance. *Obal* usually goes along *sauap* or "reward" whereby parents encourage children to perform good deeds (ibid.).

Key Obal aspects:

1. To live in a harmony with nature, living ethically
 2. Comply with the 'do not harm' principle
 3. Human relations
1. This proverb so beautifully compares a father to a mountain, a mother to a mountain river, and a child to a plant: Ата – асқар тау, Ана – бауырындағы бұлақ, Бала – жағасындағы құрақ.
 2. Kazakh proverb: Жоқтық ұят емес, Тоқтық мұрат емес (literal translation: Absence is not shameful, abundance isn't a goal in itself and is not ideal)
 3. Ағаш тамырымен, Адам досымен мықты, meaning, a lonely man without the community will not achieve many goals, as a tree derives strength from the soil via the root system.

My Steppe Shezhire

1. Steppe Time in my research
2. Steppe Time in my intergenerational story



Tulip or 'uprooted' epistemology?

Learning from the steppe tulips in creating beyond human internationalisation of higher education policies and imaginations

- “There is a short period of time in-between cold winters and hot summers when little endemic tulips bloom in the vast steppes of Central Asia. These resilient flowers show determination and beauty of flourishing at a time of their choosing. Gentle and little, they fill the steppe with abundant beauty and bright red, yellow and white sea of colour. One needs to be contemplative, attentive and patient – arguably, skills necessary in 21st century living, to catch them in short-lived bursts of full bloom.”



Nourish Small Initiatives That Reimagine an Inclusive Alternative Beyond Human Visions of Internationalization

Olga Mun

There is a short period of time in-between cold winters and hot summers when little endemic tulips bloom in the vast steppes of Central Asia. These resilient flowers show determination and beauty in flourishing at a time of their choosing. Gentle and little, they fill the steppe with abundant beauty in a sea of colors of bright red, yellow, and white. One needs to be contemplative, attentive, and patient—arguably, skills necessary in 21st-century living—to catch them in short-lived bursts of full bloom.

Although past and current practices in international research collaborations are diverse and complex, it could be argued that not all voices and knowledges are equally heard (Mun, 2020). Traditionally internationalization of higher education is seen through the lenses of human mobility or curriculum studies, while not taking into account fully the environmental embeddedness of HEIs. Furthermore, the epistemologies of local environments are rarely

Indeed, it is not possible to outline the infinite possibilities of doing so *ex ante*, but a spectrum of micro-level onto-epistemological transformations might precede larger level transformations. Micro-level practices might include offering modules highlighting nature and animals' epistemologies. Macro-level changes might entail larger sectoral revision of the impact of student mobility or higher education in general on the environment. Like carefully sustaining or beholding new tulip sprouts, research centers as well as academic and funding bodies need to nourish small initiatives that reimagine an inclusive alternative beyond human visions of internationalization, not least in epistemic realms (Mun, 2020).

FORCED INTERNATIONALIZATION

The refugee crises of the past decade (Syria, North Africa, Venezuela, Myanmar) have placed more attention on the role of higher education in addressing the risk of lost generations without (higher) education. This applies both in the developed world and in the developing world, where the largest population of refugees is living



Towards Reparative Futures, Concepts and Beyond Human Relations in Higher Education?

- Identifying the injustices, coming up with new terms (does it make sense to talk about petro-universities?)
- How can we find the scales of repair: policy, socio-economic, epistemic, environmental and biblio-dimensions
- The importance of micro-repair 😊 E.g. steppe tulips
- What concepts/systems/institutions do we need to repair versus the ones beyond repair and might need to be 'hospiced'

Discussion questions

- What's the relationship between participatory methods and reparative approaches to justice in HE?
- Question to address: The politics of access, experience, equality, and justice in higher education

Resources

- Mun, O., & Kudaibergen, D. T. (2025). Jeong and asar: Theorising reparative concepts in gendered artistic, activist, and academic spaces. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068251330986>
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