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ABSTRACT

The international and global dimension of higher education continues to expand in an increasingly inter-dependent and connected world, notwithstanding geo-political tensions and conflicts. There are several different strands of research and scholarship in relation to international and global phenomena. Each has distinctive perspectives, methods, and concerns; issues that it seeks to investigate, understand, and explain; and often, policies and practices that it wants to develop and change. These strands of thought can be summarised as follows: comparative higher education, higher education and international development, post-colonial studies of higher education, global higher education studies, and studies of international education mobility. This Special Issue of *Oxford Review of Education* adds a further strand, one not prominent in the English-language literature but longstanding and influential in China, the perspective of thinking through the world (*tianxia*). Each of these strands is the starting point for one of the six articles in the Special Issue. The introduction compares the approaches taken in the six articles to matters of geo-spatiality, ethics and values, and relations of power. It also discusses how each perspective sees the other perspectives; and their respective suggestions about the future development of research and scholarship in relation to international and global higher education.

Introduction: international and global higher education

Higher education has long had a double spatiality. It is both fixed and mobile in its imagination and its practices. Correspondingly, it is both specific and universal in its vision and its discourse. It is always embedded locally and it is always looking beyond the local.

On one hand, education and research are entrenched in particular locations and marked by the diverse identities and agendas of those locations. On the other hand, higher education is immersed in knowledge, which flows easily between all locations, and its scholars and students cross between countries and often seem to find themselves readily at home in new scholarly locations. It was always thus. The Buddhist monasteries in Northern India in the first thousand years CE, Nalanda, Vikramashila and others, were centres of scholarship that drew visitors from all over East, Southeast and South Asia. The medieval universities in Europe fostered scholarship in Latin with universal intent and

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their scholars moved freely from one to the next. Today's higher education institutions serve local communities and carry nation-building missions while being joined to a vast network of communications, information, science, students, scholars and institutional personnel.

There were 235.3 million students in 2020, and in 75 country systems more than 50% of the school age cohort entered the tertiary sector (United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2021; World Bank, 2021; 2018). Almost the same number of countries have built their own self-reproducing science systems, indigenous sources of global knowledge that prepare local doctoral graduates in at least some academic disciplines (National Science Board [NSB], 2020). The collaboration that is endemic to cross-border higher education has been facilitated by the widespread – though not universal – dissemination of the research university form of institution, that began with Wilhelm von Humboldt in early nineteenth-century Germany, took root in the United States (US) by early in the twentieth century (Kerr, 1963) and radiated from there across the world. Higher education – especially when understood as 'tertiary education' – is also much larger and more varied than the research universities. Perhaps only a fifth or so of students are enrolled in recognisably Humboldtian institutions grounded in an active teaching/research nexus. Teaching and occupational preparation are much more widely practised than is creation of new knowledge. New kinds of institution and social mission are appearing in emerging countries, as Maia Chankseliani shows in her article in this issue. What makes the present era different to earlier higher education is that in an environment of networked communications, each local and national variation becomes universally visible.

In this respect alone higher education has become more global; and if 'international' means crossing national borders, literally between nations, 'inter-national', then in quantitative terms higher education is also becoming more international. This is clear in relation to science where growing cross-border collaboration is a major driver of activity, and collaboration and publication sustain a distinctive global system (Marginson, 2022; Wagner et al., 2015). Work in the global repository of knowledge in the two main bibliometric collections, Web of Science (WoS), and Scopus which grew by 4.9% a year between 2000 and 2018 (NSB, 2020), tends to lead epistemic developments in natural science-based fields. Further, as Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters note in their article in this issue, the growing weight of international relations is also apparent in the trend line for student mobility, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The worldwide number of those moving across borders for educational purposes for one year or more rose from 2.0 million in 1998 to 6.1 million in 2019, an average increase of 5.5% a year. Among enrolled doctoral students in OECD countries in 2019, 22% were international (OECD [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development],2021, p. 213). However, the enhanced international mobility of ideas, data and persons does not mean that higher education has somehow become less local and national than it used to be.

Higher education is multi-scalar. It is global, regional, national and local at the same time (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002), though the relation between activities in these differing scales, and the extent to which global prototypes or discourses shape local possibilities, vary from institution to institution and country to country. The worldwide dimension is not all powerful or always present. Some parts of higher education, especially the most research-intensive universities, are more internationally engaged than are others. Cross-border activities are articulated through national, regional and local

contexts and there is much nuancing and diversification. Along with its cross-border agendas, higher education is profoundly influenced by national government and funding. This has long shaped its ideas about the international realm, as Ariane de Gayardon notes in her article in this issue. It is also implicated in national social stratification, and every institution has a distinctive history and organisational culture. Local agency and self-formation are always part of the shaping of imaginings and practices.

Here the structure/agency distinction (Archer, 1995) cuts across the long antinomy in higher education between fixity and mobility, and plays into a third pairing, that of homogeneity and heterogeneity. There is individual and institutional agency, always with diverse potentials, in both the local and the cross-border domains – though the conditions that enable this agency are unjustly and unequally distributed. Even knowledge, which seems to flow easiest and often imagines itself as common and even singular, confronting most of the higher education world as a pre-given structural condition, is in fact highly agentic and heterogeneous. The globalisation of science is associated with cultural homogenisation and the exclusion of non-English language knowledge, as discussed in the articles by Simon Marginson and David Mills in this Special Issue. Yet by no means all human knowledge is part of a global conversation and signed off by dominant Anglo-European science. As the discussion by Lili Yang and Lin Tian shows, there is a huge volume of important work in languages other than English, especially in humanities and arts, and social sciences, but also in natural sciences. The Ulrichs repository lists 9,857 scholarly journals in Chinese, only 42 of which are in WoS (UlrichsWeb, 2021).

Much research is focused on local issues and problems, for example, in social sciences, medicine, health sciences and professional fields. This work mostly falls outside the global literature, unless the local concerns are those of the United States, in which case the research is often seen as de facto emblematic and global. When global benchmarks are being used, countries with large non-English language outputs, and less in English, can appear as impoverished, but this is an illusion (Vessuri et al., 2014). There is also resistance to global homogeneity, with various forms of push-back and reinterpretation of knowledge from across borders, and signs of growing regional identity in much of the higher education world (Robertson et al., 2016).

In addition to local/global and regional/global tensions in knowledge and education, there are ongoing tensions between activity and identity in the national and global scales. Consider the conflict between on one hand open cross-border research collaboration, and on the other hand national security agendas, and the way the latter have disrupted the massive US–China collaboration in science (Lee & Haupt, 2021). Migration resistance and calls for citizens first in higher education have led to reductions in international student numbers in Denmark. Higher education is inherently multi-scalar but the scales do not always sit comfortably with each other. The sector is dynamic and evolving and so is the geo-political space. No global/national/local equilibrium can remain unchanged forever.

As these examples suggest, in higher education global and international relations are also implicated in politics and relations of power. These relations have two characteristics.

First, there is dramatic global inequality in higher education and research. A quarter of all countries do not have mass higher education or university science. A handful of countries dominate epistemic agendas and the template of the 'world-class university'. Second, relations of power in higher education and research are in motion, and not always for the worse. There are signs of the emergence of more plural perspectives and voices

hitherto excluded. Here higher education is affected by a larger diversification of power in political economy. While income inequality *within* countries is growing, since 1980 there has been a sharp reduction in income inequalities *between* countries (Bourguignon, 2015). It is an era of growing multi-polarity in geo-politics (Pieterse, 2018). Accelerated modernisation and urbanisation in China and other large non-Euro-American countries is changing the global balance of power. Not all countries are rising, but higher education and research in China, South Korea, parts of Southeast Asia, India, Iran and Brazil are expanding rapidly. Middle-income countries and some low-income countries are building science systems. There is growing collaboration between emerging country scientists (Marginson, 2022). The world is changing.

Both parts of higher education's dual spatiality are affected by these developments. Many local institutions, and national systems, are being strengthened. The world has a larger set of localities that attract would-be mobile students and collaborative scholars. And in a more plural era in the material domain, 'theories and concepts become plural in a fundamental sense' (Pieterse, 2018, p. 182). Ideas and ways of seeing become more diverse also.

Ways of seeing cross-border higher education

This Special Issue of *Oxford Review of Education* is devoted to different ways of seeing cross-border higher education – the respective ideas and methodologies, and what they each tell us about the reality that they study. In investigating and theorising the empirical domain, scholar-researchers have created a range of disciplinary lenses, cultural perspectives, theorisations and research methods. Geography, sociology, anthropology, political economy, policy studies and international relations, among others, have all influenced thinking. Researchers use many methodological approaches to study cross-border education and knowledge, from inquiries using bibliometrics to investigate large patterns in global science (Mingers & Leydesdorff, 2015), to investigations based on surveys and structural equation modelling, case studies, ethnographic research, discourse analyses, policy analyses and historical synthesis. Underneath the variations in discipline, theory and method lurk divergent philosophical assumptions and a range of normative approaches.

Research on cross-border higher education is itself an act of power and a key question in these studies is researcher positionality and the assumptions brought to bear on the work. The traditional approach to international and global studies, from the Anglo-European world, was to compare everything beyond the border in terms of the norms of the scholar's own country. Often, divergences from the own-country norm were seen as defects. In more enlightened studies the researcher used such comparisons to relativise their own systems, thinking differently about the familiar, and groping towards a wider understanding across cases. The own-country comparison approach has by no means disappeared but is now more widely critiqued, and supplemented or replaced by other approaches. Many studies examine cross-border higher education from a post-colonial or decolonial perspective and there is a large literature on the challenges of higher education in emerging countries (e.g. McCowan, 2019). Some comparative approaches work with more than one national-cultural lens (e.g. Marginson & Yang, 2022) or are interested in hybrid visions (Yang, 2020).

In the articles that follow the reader can compare six different strands of thought, each of which provides a distinctive take on the international and global in higher education. There is significant overlap between them, at various points, and also differences and tensions. Arguably, no one of these six ways of seeing tells us all that we need to know, though all of them can take us part of the way. We trust that putting them together, comparing them, expands the total picture of the fast moving higher education landscape.

All but one of these approaches, that which uses *tianxia*, has a significant presence in the English-language literature on higher education. *Tianxia* is a key idea in Chinese thought and scholarship that, arguably, adds something important to the conversation about cross-border higher education (though as with the other five approaches, only the reader can determine the relevance of the ideas). The six approaches to scholarly work on cross-border higher education are as follows:

- Comparative higher education
- Higher education and international development
- Post-colonial studies of higher education
- Global higher education studies
- Studies of international education mobility
- Thinking through the world (*tianxia*)

These ways of seeing did not all spring up at the same time. As Ariane de Gayardon shows, the systematic study of comparative education dates from the early nineteenth century and there has been a long evolution of its methodologies and applications. It is the parent field of international studies in higher education. Beginning alongside the modern nation-state, the comparative vision was a tool of national governments whose idea of best practice in education – as in military matters, and in industrial development and technology – was to keep abreast of and ahead of other nations. The focus was not so much on the connections between countries, as on other systems as stand-alone objects of study.

Education for development and post-colonial studies are more recent nation-centred approaches, associated with differing (and at times opposing) geo-political agendas. Each strand has its primary origin in nation-building after World War II, when one former colony after another gained nominal independence but faced formidable obstacles within a largely neo-colonial world in attempting to apply autonomous national agency to national economic and social development. Studies of higher education and development are focused on economic and social transformation that began as Western-driven modernisation, though the geo-politics are now more ambiguous as Maia Chankseliani shows in her chapter. As David Mills shows, post-colonial studies are pitched against neo-imperial power in higher education and break continuity with the colonial period.

The other three approaches move further beyond national borders. Global higher education studies, and research on international mobility in higher education, have each emerged out of the more extensive and intensive cross-border activity of the last three decades. Global studies are focused on activities in higher education and knowledge that span large world regions and the world as a whole, such as science, communications in higher education, world-spanning partnerships and university consortia, online programmes and people mobility. One of these world-spanning activities is the movement of students between countries for educational purposes, now a lively domain

of research. These studies keep nations and borders at the centre of the picture but also see the potential for international connections to shape changes inside nations. *Tianxia*, an idea much older than the others discussed here, is arguably the largest and most inclusive global perspective of all.

The articles in the Special Issue do not claim to be definitive or representative of each perspective. There are many versions of comparative education, development education, post-colonial, global, international education and *tianxia*. However, the authors trust that they provided at least a glimpse of each distinctive viewpoint and its explanatory power.

This introduction will now briefly present the contents of each article in the Special Issue before reflecting on some of the commonalities, overlaps and differences.

Comparative higher education

In 'The state and "field" of comparative higher education' Ariane de Gayardon explains that the comparative approach is distinguished not by a normative agenda, an understanding of power or a transformative approach to spatiality, but by the distinctive methods it has built.

She traces its origins to the French scholar Marc Antoine Jullien who developed an analytical instrument for comparing European school systems. The comparative perspective was integral in the primary contributions to higher education studies that were made by US sociologists Martin Trow (1973) and Burton R. Clark (1983). The role of 'comparative education has undeniably been historically strengthened by nations' need to build competitive educational systems in the knowledge economy, to ensure their labour force and human capital reserve is competitive globally', states de Gayardon. International data-based comparisons are widely deployed for this purpose. This in turn points to one of the core features of comparative higher education as a strand of research. 'Comparative studies are associated with the nation-state as a unit of analysis'. Yet it can also be argued that 'higher education is influenced by global phenomena that are not bound by country borders', including the mobility of persons and of knowledge. Indeed, universities, particularly, have always been in some sense global. 'Methodological nationalism' is firmly critiqued by some scholars. Yet countries and nation-states also have an enduring role in higher education, and provide 'a clearly defined unit of analysis' supported by data.

De Gayardon argues that comparative higher education can encompass research in both the national and geo-spatial scales:

> ... comparative studies do not need to be constrained to using nation-states as units of analysis. They are flexible in the unit of analysis, providing a unique potential to reconcile the different ways researchers think about higher education internationally and to deal with closely interwoven local, national and global levels. It also allows research on knowledge and science which are not bound by national borders. Therefore, comparative higher education could provide frameworks and methodological tools to address concepts that go beyond the nation-states or that are contained within it, e.g. flows when analysing mobility or global cities when evaluating higher education inequity.

Nevertheless, de Gayardon finds that the social science of comparative higher education is less well developed than that of its parent field of comparative education. Understandings of higher education in all scales, global, inter-national and local, would benefit from a more rigorous comparative approach than has so far been developed: only about a third of comparative articles even explain the choice of countries used in comparisons. This also requires a more self-conscious discussion of the nature and purpose of the work, in a field that is reproduced within institutional structures such as societies, networks, journals and graduate educational programmes. 'Higher education comparativists need to create an identity which leads it to be considered an academic (sub-)field'. This evolution could enable comparative higher education to entrench a collective dynamic of continuous evolution and improvement.

Higher education and development

Unlike most of the strands discussed in this special issue, research on higher education and development is explicitly concerned about the relationship between on one hand higher education, on the other hand the larger processes of economic and social development in which higher education is nested. In her article on 'International development higher education: Looking from the past, looking to the future' Maia Chankseliani explains how international development funding from national governments, international agencies and other donors has played a key role in constituting this space.

> International development assistance to higher education started in the post WWII period and can be linked with the Cold War. During the Cold War, the USA and European countries provided support for the development of higher education in poor countries. The USA was mostly investing in Latin America and later in Africa and Asia, to counter the Soviet influence. Western European countries mostly focused on their former colonies. The Northern European countries had more altruistic considerations.

However, she adds, this is not to say that development higher education is solely linear North-South.

> If we strip out of international development the modernist, neo-colonial, and ethnocentric assumptions, we would be left with the basic idea of 'development' that has equivalents in many languages and means broadly: change, growth, transformation, or improvement over a period of time.

This is a practical field, wanting to maximise the positive contribution of higher education, through human capital and innovation, ecology, public health, gender equality, democracy and governance. There are plural understandings of how education contributes to development and theoretical debates with considerable divergence. Some search for laws of development within conventional paradigms. Other researchers emphasise contextualisation, and/or focus on the capacity to imagine alternatives. The practices of the 'developmental university' cultivate plural knowledge, local relevance and embeddedness, and de-institutionalisation.

Research on higher education and development draws on methods of comparative education and is touched by concurrent scholarship on global and international relations in education. It is also affected by related studies in political economy. It uses quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches. Connecting with the range of stakeholders, it

is often politically ambiguous, sitting on the fault-lines between the neo-colonial and the post-colonial, global agendas and local-national cultures, and growth and ecological sustainability. However, higher education is about building the agency of people and emerging societies. Though the agency of funders has been pivotal in shaping education for development, local agency is the ultimate key to resolving the dilemmas of development.

Post-colonial studies of higher education

'Northern European university models have become globally hegemonic', states David Mills in this issue. This model reinforces colonial hierarchies, as well as building new planetary connections and flows. Euro-American cultures claim to be universally applicable while treating all knowledge external to them as only locally relevant. Indigenous knowledges are wholly excluded from recognised global data bases. But how is this hegemony sustained?

In 'Decolonial perspectives on global higher education: Disassembling data infrastructures, reassembling the field', David Mills begins with the critiques of Euro-hegemony in Africa, and parallel scholarship in Latin America, and the efforts of emerging postcolonial nation-states to build endogenous universities. Nevertheless, 'despite a century of anti-colonial organising, postcolonial theorising and decolonial activism, Euro-American ways of organising and classifying knowledge continue to define the work of African universities'. Mills focuses on infrastructures and instruments that sustain the neo-imperial practice of 'global higher education'. The decontextualised indicators shaped by international agencies, university rankers and commercial bibliometrics are grounded in 'data infrastructures' that embody and privilege Anglo-American norms.

This process has unfolded in three interlocking domains. First, the assembly of comparative national data by UNESCO and especially the performative data of the OECD, aided by the growing statistical capability of national and pan-national governance:

> The exponential growth in computational power across the 1990s allowed policy makers to aggregate global student mobility and research data, whilst digital networks facilitated the process of distributing knowledge. Both combined to accelerate higher education's 'globalisability'. Aided by the production, aggregation and representation of statistical data, 'global higher education' could now be made visible as a knowledge and policy assemblage.

Second, global university ranking, first with the Shanghai ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities) in 2004 and then with the business-research methods of the *Times Higher Education* and QS ranking, has constructed a world in which Anglo-American universities are positioned at the global peak and command the imagined global market in international education, while every other university can imagine itself briefly as Harvard. Third, the citation metrics developed by WoS and Scopus, which are used not only to determine legitimacy in science, in that process excluding most of the world's knowledge, but also serve as a primary basis for global ranking. In these processes 'universities have not just been willing accomplices but active cheerleaders of higher education's globalisation, fostering cross-border partnerships and student mobility, participating in the rankings game, and marketising their activities'.

Mills notes that 'The policy appeal of metrics, indicators and rankings is that they seem to offer an information short-cut, effacing other genres of knowledge and expertise'. The challenge is 'to foster more locatable and accountable sources of data and insight' into the emerging 'new world system', to move 'beyond critique' and 'find ways to democratise data infrastructures and foster epistemological inclusivity and diversity. The future of decolonial higher education will be determined by the political economy of data infrastructures'.

Global higher education studies

Strictly, 'global higher education' refers to cross-border relations, flows and systems in higher education and knowledge that extend beyond the nation-state. In 'What is global higher education?' Simon Marginson sets out to ground global higher education as a field of critical inquiry. He argues that the global scale in higher education and research is constituted by three interactive domains: material (structural) elements such as inherited resources and communications networks, the imagination and interpretations of agents, and the social practices of agents. Marginson notes the accumulation of cross-border connections, the global diffusion of ideas, practices and models, and the formation of global systems, especially in science. In the last three decades global information flows, time/space compression and cross-border travel have been associated with the explosive growth of collaborative science, people mobility, education hubs, cross-border campuses and online learning, not to mention the world-wide diffusion of ideas and models of higher education, which are presented as universal but are grounded in specific cultures.

Globalisation is associated with part-pluralisation of capacity and activity in higher education and science, including the national systems outside Euro-America, especially (but not only) in China and East Asia. However, global tendencies to diversification are also contained, limited by global structures of power. The potential breadth, openness and inclusion in higher education and knowledge articulate into steeply hierarchical global relations, led from the same old Euro-American (primarily Anglo-American) core. Marginson argues that global hegemony in higher education has been sustained by world marketisation and neo-liberal economics, cultural and linguistic homogeneity, and White Supremacy in continuity with colonialism. Here,

> The global scale is practised as a space in which the nation is advanced or defended, without mutual obligation. In a world ordered on the basis of Hobbesian global openness, the possibilities are partly closed. They are maximised for those that are strongest. The best prospect for collective projects, especially in research and knowledge, is in the free space outside nation-states; but without either state resources or a firm egalitarian ethic, capacity in that space is very unequal.

Yet, Marginson argues, these relations of power are not fixed. Nothing ever is. Global convergence and integration have enhanced potentials for multi-scalar 'glonacal' thinking, which understands higher education as simultaneously active in local, national, regional and global domains. Effective agency is exercised in any and all domains. New kinds of world building are possible, different from those of global companies and pan-national agencies. The open global ontology quickens the imagining of cross-border practices in which there is scope for emerging agents, and a higher education world in

which capacity building is joined to epistemic inclusion and multiplicity. Even now small countries and individual networks, institutions and scholars are taking bold initiatives and creating new phenomena in the unregulated global space.

Globalisation has also brought closer the potentials of one world thinking, for example in ecology, and in the Chinese idea of *tianxia*. One world thinking has not been dominant in higher education. The present global hegemony is supported by methodological globalism, which facilitates the neo-liberal claim to intervene anywhere in the higher education world by overriding local-national agency; and methodological nationalism, which justifies the assumption of cultural superiority without any obligation to engage with the other. Dismantling the exercise of Anglo-American hegemony means challenging both parts of this double act. The crucial issue is the kind of cross-border relations that can be developed in what is still a nation-bound world. Critical scholarship can help to pave the way to a more mutual and egalitarian global higher education space. There is no higher calling in international and global studies.

Studies of international education mobility

In 'Partial, hierarchical and stratified space? Understanding "the international" in studies of international student mobility' Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters note that 'international' is mobilised in different ways in different contexts. It is evident that 'an increasing number' of students 'move nationally, regionally and internationally for education'. Some are consciously 'choosing within an international circuit', which includes imaginings of cross-border movement into cities as well as into countries. As with all forms of massification in higher education, global mobility is now accessed by a broader group of students, some being encouraged by migration routes into vocational occupations, while at the same time, a matching social stratification of the mobile student cohort is also increasingly evident. Some students are being relegated to less enabling forms of international mobility.

Brooks and Waters remark that international student mobility is not always understood as a distinctive relational or developmental space. There is a tendency to see it in methodological nationalist terms, as a function of one national higher education system or another. They are especially interested in the potentials of mobility as a space for transformations in student agency, in which the student self is shaped by, and self-shaped, among multiple cultures.

> Often, such identities turn out to be multi-scalar and multi-sited and rarely attach to particular nation-states. Transnational identities might be a more appropriate term, reflecting the fact that many international students develop a sense of self that transcends national boundaries. Other research has described these new identities (developed through international study) in terms of 'cosmopolitanism', 'becoming' or 'self-formation'. All of these ideas invoke a sense of identity that is *more than* 'international' (if we take 'international' to mean between two or more nation-states) and does not rely on or fall back on 'national' descriptors.

Mobility also allows inherited identities to be reworked. For example, some non-White experiences of racism lead to the deepening of regional identities. The agentic potentials of mobility are not always understood, however, and the humanist dimension of the student experience could receive more attention than it does. There is much scope to

advance research on international education, including the complex intersections between the hierarchical positioning of students and the stratified opportunities that they encounter.

International students often pay higher fees than local students, and can undergo regular surveillance by immigration authorities. Some studies highlight these issues, and other ways that international students are positioned as 'struggling foreigners'. Brooks and Waters also note that although there is growing student mobility into regional hubs in different parts of the world, there remains a widespread tendency to see the Euro-American zone as a privileged space of internationalisation within the global, even to equate 'internationalisation' in neo-colonial terms simply with learning English and an 'international career' with living and working in the Anglophone North. The fact that most researchers of international student mobility are from the Global North may contribute to this. 'The limits to the specific ways in which the concept of "international" is deployed need to be exposed and addressed', they state, through engagement with other disciplinary perspectives, and scholars from outside the Global North. Otherwise there is a danger of scholarship 'inadvertently perpetuating the myth that "the international" can be equated to Anglophone, Western locations and thereby enacting a form of neo-colonialism'.

Thinking through the world: the Chinese idea of tianxia

In 'Rethinking the "global" in global higher education studies: From the lens of the Chinese idea of *tianxia*', Lili Yang and Lin Tian open 'an approach to viewing the world that is fundamentally different from the dominant Euro-American worldviews'. There is a large Sinic literature on *tianxia*, ancient and modern. Yang and Tian focus on the geospatial imagining and ethical framework of a *tianxia* order. In contrast with the other articles in the Special Issue which explain international and global relations, the *tianxia* framework is more normative. It can be used to interrogate present practices, and it can function as a basis for developing new world-wide relations in higher education.

Tianxia means 'all under heaven'. In the most expansive and egalitarian form of *tianxia* the world as a whole is the primary unit, not the nation-state (though a more hierarchical meaning of *tianxia* places China at the centre). There is no 'other'. This contrasts with the Euro-American division of the world into I/not I. *Tianxia* includes both nature and the human world and is compatible with the ecological imaginary. The care of the world is its central principle. Zhao Tingyang, a contemporary scholar of *tianxia*, states: 'The worldview of imperialism views the world as an object to be conquered, dominated and exploited – never recognising the world as a political agency in its own right' (Zhao, 2021, p. 2). No-one takes responsibility for it. It is a 'non-world ... Anyone can abuse and plunder its resources ... It is just a contested and damaged living space (Zhao, 2011, p. 74). The classical Chinese idea opens the possibility of something better.

Tianxia originated in the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE). The Zhou were not the strongest power in Northern China but held the different states together in an association that transcended geographical, cultural and racial boundaries, based on shared values and the perception that all should benefit from mutual association. The shared values included benevolence and humanity (*ren*), propriety (*li*), wisdom, integrity, common prosperity and government that is necessarily grounded in popular consent. Loose as this seems, the consensual framework of governance in Northern China lasted in one form

and another for almost 800 years and has resonated throughout Chinese history ever since, alongside another and different Imperial spatial tradition, that of the centralised state which began with the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE).

Tianxia embodies a commitment to 'harmony in diversity' (*he er butong*). It can work in no other manner. One-worldism and the notion of relations in higher education that are grounded in mutual respect suggests Santos' (2007) idea of an 'ecology of knowledges' Yang and Tian state:

> One-worldism in global higher education captures the fact that higher education is global in character, even though it continues to be national also. National boundaries are less important here, reflecting the notion of "no boundary" in *tianxia*. For example, with regard to knowledge, one-worldism not only expresses knowledge's characteristic of being globally owned and shared, but promotes the idea of globally open knowledge … In global higher education, diversity in harmony recognises the existence of diverse higher education approaches, knowledges, cultures and processes within a global higher education and knowledge system. Further, it refutes the argument that there exists one universal set of principles in higher education and a single set of knowledge.

Arguably, *tianxia*, and *heer butong*, are more readily applied to relations between autonomous higher education institutions than to relations between states. The vision of worldwide relations held together on the basis of ethics, rituals, consent, mutual respect and benefit rather than force is especially apt to higher education. The *tianxia* imagining suggests a long-term framework for mutually satisfactory cross-border cooperation between institutions.

Similarities and differences

In *The archaeology of knowledge* (1972) Michel Foucault describes an intellectual order in which fields of study are internally incoherent, a miscellany with porous boundaries, while being episodically enlivened by various stimuli. But all fields have histories, and their practitioners understand them readily enough. In the six different approaches to cross-border higher education that follow this introduction there are overlaps in topics, values and perspectives. There are also differences between the six approaches, not just in objects of study but in modes of perception, and hence some variations in what each approach reveals about the higher education world.

The discussion here focuses on two aspects of the various approaches: perspectives in relation to geo-spatiality, and perspectives on questions of values and of power.

Geo-spatiality in research

Most of our authors make use of multiple scales and explore the implications of movement between scales. Four explicitly reference the 'glonacal' paper by Marginson and Rhoades (2002) which theorises a geo-spatiality both multiple and simultaneous. Chankseliani proposes in higher education for development the notion of 'glonacal development', an agency-based process of self-realisation of individuals, collectives of individuals, and nation-states that expands individual and collective freedoms and ultimately leads to development, understood broadly.' Yang and Tian see *tianxia* as a concept

and practice inclusive of the local and national. Like Chankseliani they also note the positive effects of cross-border connections, within the larger inclusive space, in fostering national development.

As noted, de Gayardon makes the point that comparative studies, grounded in 'the nation-state as a unit of analysis', can become locked into what Shahjahan and Kezar (2013) describe as 'the national container' in their work on methodological nationalism. Yet, states de Gayardon, 'academics and students are mobile on global markets, while knowledge has no physical border'; and 'the nation-state concept seems to fail to capture the essence of higher education, its global character, and its porousness beyond physical borders'. Nevertheless, carefully handled, and with due regard for relations between national systems, the nation-state remains relevant and comparisons between countries play a significant part when constructing a global picture. The relative autonomy and efficacy of nation-states, within the global setting, can also be compared.

Brooks and Waters state that 'the literature tends to construct international space as something closely related to nation-states, and often bi-lateral in nature, rather than viewing it through a more global, multi-national, transnational or cosmopolitan optic'. As noted, they provide a scale-aware discussion of open, multiple and changing identities. Marginson's article emphasises the heterogeneity of scale – global, regional, national and local are not replicates of each other at different 'levels' of spatiality, they have differing dynamics. For example, national higher education is normatively centred by the nation-state. There are hegemonic relations in global higher education and knowledge but there is no normative centre. This heterogeneity of scale enables the more open global systems in science and mobility to readily co-exist with nation-state agendas. University leaders and scientists can be very flexible when moving between their global and local-national identities in science.

Questions of power, questions about relational values

For the most part the abiding purpose of the scholarly approaches discussed in this Special Issue is the formation of knowledge: understanding and explanation. This is the explicit mission of comparative education as outlined by de Gayardon, to understand national similarities and differences, and in some variations of the field, to draw out general lessons about the role and character of higher education. For Marginson, the purpose of studying the global is to ground higher education historically and to better understand the potentials of agency, which on one hand are structurally inherited and conditioned, and on the other hand are always partly open, to varying degrees. These understandings can inform various political or educational projects. However, the scholarly fields of comparative higher education, or global higher education studies, do not in themselves provide guides to action. Normative agendas are external to them. The same social science – for example, the insight into the glonacal multi-scalar spatiality – can be used in more than one way. Marginson's article moves from a neutral geo-spatial explanation of the global, to his own take on relations of power in global higher education. There are other possible takes.

Brooks and Waters are primarily interested in understanding international student mobility rather than making a case for one or another practice of it. Nevertheless, like all of the authors, they carry with them in their work a humanist commitment to the

higher education subjects they discuss. Understanding international students entails respect for their lives and positionalities. Theconclusion by Brooks and Waters spotlights the limitations of Eurocentrism in studies of international student mobility. One way or another, Eurocentrism concerns all the authors.

Yang and Tian come closer to arguing a case for a particular construction of the higher education world throughout their article, though their *tianxia* is by its nature broad and inclusive of maximum diversity. Mills investigates global higher education from a normative starting point, a post-colonial perspective, and this determines both his deconstruction of the prevailing discourse and his argument at the end of the article for an alternative bottom-up approach to data, and perhaps Latour's (2017) idea of a more inclusive 'globalisation plus'. One suspects that Latour's reconstruction of the global, like the ideas of 'ecology of knowledges' and 'pluriversity' in the decolonial literature, would be shared by several authors in this issue.

Perhaps Chankseliani, writing about the pre-eminently practical field of international development higher education, is the author most directly focused on normative agendas – though agendas which, as she notes, are the object of differing stakeholder interests and policy claims, and are supported by intellectual efforts that are not necessarily less rigorous than the other approaches. It can be argued that in its practical orientation, international development higher education follows the mainstream of academic studies in education. Worldwide, the field of education studies is typically and primarily concerned with the improvement of institution-based student learning and its contribution to individuals, societies and the world. Perhaps all the authors here carry that broad purpose in the back of their minds, but in international development higher education it is explicit.

This orientation leads Chankseliani to her discussion of the 'developmental university', which 'assumes a close connection of university with local needs'. Mostly in Africa and Latin America, these institutions equip students with skills and knowledge immediately relevant to local/national contexts. Developmental universities 'conduct mostly applied research to find solutions to local challenges and engage with local communities in areas such as health clinics, adult education, and agro-tourism' (McCowan, 2019). Their impact is mostly non-academic and they focus on the short-term. According to McCowan, 'this model corresponds most closely to the ideal vision of higher education outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals.' It is also argued that these universities can democratise knowledge. This is not as straight-forward as it looks. 'Might the democratisation of purely instrumental knowledge support the perpetuation of disadvantage?', asks Chankseliani. To what extent are these institutions able to change relations of power in emerging countries? We need to know more about teaching and learning in developmental universities, the types of knowledge they provide, and whether and it what ways student learning fosters graduate agency.

Issues of relations of power in cross-border higher education arise in all articles but some of the authors are especially concerned with them. Mills provides a thoroughgoing deconstruction of the epistemic power of international agencies, university rankers and bibliometric companies. Marginson devotes Part III of his article to a summation of neo-imperial Anglo-American hegemony in global higher education. One indication of how research is evolving is that that the passages in these articles about epistemic injustice and global Whiteness (see alsoShahjahan & Edwards, 2022) are now less marginal and less

controversial than they would have been a decade ago – indeed, many would now see such passages as less exclusively normative and more as statements of fact. Nevertheless, the global order in higher education and science has continued to march on with scarcely a blink, despite the critiques. Large ships are not turned around quickly, perhaps. Time will tell how much the gathering critiques of the global order in higher education, the various re-imaginings of global and international that are discussed in this issue, are contributing to lasting changes in practice.

Nevertheless, it is striking how all of the strands of research and scholarship discussed in these articles are affected by common critiques that refer to asymmetric relations of power; and with the critiques now partly shared between the first five approaches, the lines between them are now more blurred in some ways (which is not to say that the strands have merged). Hence, in development higher education, which along with comparative higher education has been the stand most subjected to policy instrument-alism, Chankseliani envisions an epistemic reconstruction in two respects. First, beyond modernism's assumptions about linear development, the inevitably of progress and hierarchies of expertise and disciplinary knowledge. Second, beyond the current config-uration of global power. 'The concept of international development is also neo-colonial', she argues, 'perpetuating uneven power relations and the epistemological legacy of the post-colonial period' including 'the supremacy of the Western knowledge and expertise'. It is grounded in a sense of superiority. Development is 'development of "the other"' from outside, 'treating the patient' who is thereby de-authorised, rather than developing oneself as the agent.

As the above summary shows, furthering of international and global relations based on equality of respect is a key theme of the articles. The *tianxia* imagining of Yang and Tian is a toolkit for rethinking the ethics of global relations in higher education. In the practical sense, those global relations are practised most often in student mobility and in collabora-tions between researchers/scholars, so we should look especially to those domains. Brooks and Waters make the crucial point that international students are often 'othered' in such a way that 'international' becomes a proxy for 'less than national'. This includes the differentiated treatment of international and domestic students in policy. Some studies also identify an imposed differentiation within international student populations, between those who are seen as desirable or model students, and those understood as in educational or cultural deficit or problematic in other ways. In research, there is the 'othering' of scientists with Chinese names by the US authorities

Field connections and field evolution

How do our authors want to see their fields or strands develop? None has quite achieved the strongly defined infrastructural presence that de Gayardon advocates as desirable for comparative higher education studies: specific societies, journals, educational pro-grammes. 'Global' comes closest, with the UK-based Centre for Global Higher Education, and a single subject within the Oxford MSc (Education) with parallels elsewhere. For the most part scholars in the fields discussed here publish in journals in higher education and comparative education, and journals servicing a broader community in educational studies, such as *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. Post-colonial studies are widely published outside the specifically education journals.

De Gayardon, with the parent field of comparative education as a reference point, is firm about the need for greater rigour in her field of comparative higher education. Brooks and Waters emphasise lacunae in the literature on international student mobility. Marginson suggests two methodological innovations for taking forward empirical work in global higher education studies. Mills would remake that field from the ground up. Chankseliani has several suggestions about the development of research. She proposes a study of international development funding for higher education, including 'factors that impact the size and concentration of aid to higher education', including the 'commercial and political interests of bilateral donors'. Aid designed to expand the market or support foreign policy 'can reinforce the existing power structures and disparities between donors and recipients'. Further, 'the bulk of international aid for post-secondary education is spent on scholarships to study in donor countries'. Direct investment in higher education in low-income and low middle-income countries is also needed. She also suggests more research on teaching and learning in different countries, and the effects of higher education in shaping individual mindsets, civic awareness and professional expertise, as well as work on institutional models such as the developmental university, as discussed above.

How do these fields connect and how do they see each other? This is an interesting question for a Special Issue such as this, which has been designed to delineate what the differing perspectives can tell us and how they might complement each other. However, other than de Gayardon and Chankseliani, the authors discuss the interfaces less than might be expected.

There are explicit synergies. De Gayardon sees comparative perspectives and methods as a central strand in higher education studies. She also notes that 'development studies have revealed a new path for comparative education to contribute to global development goals'. Both Chankseliani's article on higher education and development, and Marginson's article on global higher education, take in the decolonial agenda. Chankseliani signals explicit connections into global studies, as does de Gayardon. Brooks and Waters speak to all of the other strands of thought at different intersecting points in their article.

There are also points of difference. The comparative data produced by global agencies, valued by de Gayardon as part of the contribution of comparative education, are seen by Mills as highly problematic. There is also contrast between Mills and Marginson on the meaning of 'the global', though they see the world higher education setting in otherwise similar terms. For Mills 'the global' is, or has primarily become, a discursive artefact of neo-liberal and neo-colonial agendas, fostered by pan-national organisations, rankings and global bibliometrics. For Marginson, 'global' is a geo-spatial descriptor like 'national' or 'regional', neutral and signifying a space of possibles that is accessed by agents with various geo-political agendas (again, like 'national'). The theorised, geo-spatial understanding of 'global' as a material fact connects to a large scholarly literature in geography and social theory, including Arjun Appadurai (1995) for whom the global is an expanded space for subaltern agency. Mills can also claim wide scholarly support for his reading of 'global' as normative, including work by Jane Knight (e.g. 1999) and others which originally juxtaposed a neo-liberal economic idea of 'global' and 'globalisation' against an educationally positive and respectful 'international', though that dualism became modified in later redefinitions of 'internationalisation'.

Arguably, however, the differences between scholars in this Special Issue are out-weighed by the commonalities. Given the overlaps between the fields in method and subject matter, and obvious similarities of purpose, the separations between the six approaches may seem arbitrary or unclear. International, comparative and global per-spectives on the same subject matter have related things to say, and to erect a firm wall between these three sets of insights makes no sense. Intellectual openness, correspond-ing to the open ontology of the real, is always crucial.

Yet these are also distinctive literatures with arguments and insights that continually accumulate along particular tracks. That is no bad thing. If in future each strand of discussion grounds its agency and evolution in the research material itself, in what research can tell us about the real world, simultaneously working with its distinctive perspectives and methods, while also listening to the others, together they will take forward this illuminating conversation about international and global higher education on the basis of *he er butong* (unity in difference).

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