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ABSTRACT

The article moves from a theorisation of the global scale in higher education and knowledge to a critical review of actual global imaginings and practices. Geo-cognitive scales such 'the global' or 'the national' are constituted by three elements: pre-given material structures, the imaginings and interpretations of agents, and the social practices of agents. Synchronous networks, time/space compression and travel have materially expanded the scope for relationality, including world-spanning systems such as science, cross-border connections, and global diffusion of ideas and models. Potentials for multi-scalar understanding and 'thinking through the world' have been enhanced. However, these imaginaries are not dominant. More prevalent are methodological globalism, in which the global displaces the national, or methodological nationalism, which blocks one-world potentials from view. In a Hobbesian global space without relational ethics, global higher education is ordered by an Anglo-American hegemony, manifest in neo-liberal economics, cultural and linguistic homogeneity, and White Supremacy in continuity with colonialism. Methodological globalism facilitates the neo-imperial claim to intervene anywhere, while methodological nationalism justifies claims to cultural superiority without obligation to engage with the other. However, no relations of power are fixed or wholly homogeneous and in global higher education there is continuing potential for multiple positionality, mutual respect and unity-in-diversity.

Introduction

The worldwide web emerged in 1989 and in 1990 there were just 2.6 million users of the Internet, many in universities in the United States (US; Roser et al., 2021). The explosive growth of global connections which followed was a fundamental change in human relations, akin to the radiation of printing in fifteenth-century Europe, and the worldwide diffusion of fossil-fuelled transport in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By January 2021 there were 4.7 billion Internet users, 59.5% of the global population (Statista, 2021). Manuel Castells (2000) christens it 'the network society'. The transformation is incomplete, and the spatiality fostered by communicative globalisation is still evolving rapidly, notwithstanding the disruptions and fissures created by geopolitical conflicts.

Communicative globalisation has proven apt to higher education[1] and knowledge, and vice versa. From their beginnings in Bologna, Paris and Oxford the semi-autonomous universities sustained a dual spatiality. They were locally and nationally nested, and also housed mobile students and scholars and saw themselves engaged in universal knowledge. The same was true of the Buddhist monasteries in Northern India at an earlier time, such as Nalanda, Odantapuri and Vikramashila. Religious scholarship has now been superseded by universalising science, generated and shared in site-based institutions entrenched in cities and nations and manifest in the bibliometric collections Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus (Marginson, 2021c; Waltman, 2016). Though the bibliometric data bases omit much of the world's knowledge (Marginson & Xu, forthcoming) they are unambiguously global in form.

But what *is* 'global higher education'? In theoretical and empirical literatures there are divergent understandings of 'global' and 'globalisation'. In a widely cited formula, Held et al. (1999) define globalisation as processes of convergence and integration on the world scale. This is broadly agreed. Beyond that, the terms are used in two different ways.

In the normative approach, scholars understand the terms 'global' and 'globalisation' as associated with one or another political project. The meaning of 'global' is specific to its normative baggage. There are competing norms. Critics of globalisation in higher education stress that it is radically unequalising. It combines the formation of world economic markets and a neo-liberal policy sensibility with 'Western' (Anglo-European, and primarily Anglo-American) hegemony and the suppression of agency and cultural difference elsewhere. The 'global' is 'an imperialist discourse of domination' (Conrad, 2016, p. 53). In the opposite line of argument, global convergence is seen to broaden the potentials of networked democratic community on the world scale, fostering the exchange of information and knowledge, cosmopolitan cultural engagement and creative hybridisation. It is also associated with the narrowing of income gaps between countries, the growth of pan-national regional cooperation and new potentials for human agency in mobility and cross-cultural learning.

In contrast, in the explanatory approach, scholars use 'global' and 'globalisation' as conceptual tools for geo-spatial mapping of the natural-ecological and social worlds. The terms are neutral and the ultimate potentials of the global are open. The present article uses the explanatory approach. Theorisation, and conversations about theory, rest on clarity and consistency in definitions. It is unhelpful to work with terms that vary widely in meaning according to the norms attached to them. Shared understanding, based on agreed and consistent terms, is desirable, while ontological openness is essential (Sayer, 2000). However, this article also recognises that while global *possibilities* are open, *actual* global practices in higher education are neither neutral nor wholly open. They include hierarchy, hegemony and closure. It is crucial to understand the actual relations of power. Neutral geo-spatial terms are tools for analysing those relations of power. This is better than using language to pre-shape the understanding, prior to empirical observation and practice. The explanatory approach allows new developments to emerge freely in sight and a larger range of other possibilities to be glimpsed, than when using the normative approach.

Open-minded empirical observation can identify many different kinds of global convergence and integration. There are hierarchical vertical relations and flat horizontal networks. There are all of imperial, nation-centred, regional and locally grounded projects.

There are centralisation and dispersal, heteronomy and autonomy, homogeneity and heterogeneity. This actual existing diversity highlights the broad potentials of the global scale. It does not mean that the different kinds of global are in balance, or that all kinds of global practice are equivalent. Ever changing, in flux, the global is characterised by dynamism, difference, unevenness and disequlibria. It continually articulates with emergent and often unequalising power structures (Conrad, 2016, p. 55), including neo-colonial, North-South, East-West and East-South polarities. Arguably, though, the evolving inequalities are not in global spatiality itself but the ways in which it is socially practised.

This article is primarily conceptual, with illustrative examples throughout. It moves from a theorisation of the global scale to a critical review of the existing global scale in higher education. The first section discusses global spatiality, noting that communicative globalisation has enhanced the possibility of multi-scalar imagining, and thinking through the world (Zhao, 2021). The second section explains three mutually constitutive aspects of the global in higher education and knowledge: the pre-given material (structural), the imaginings and interpretations of agents, and the social practices of agents. It discusses the methodological lenses used by agents and their strategies for making and using space. The global scale as theorised in these first two sections of the paper could take many different forms. The subsequent sections focus on the actual global scale as experienced, and its possible futures. The third section summarises relations of power in global higher education and knowledge, arguing that the global space has been structured by a neo-imperial Anglo-American (especially US) ascendancy. The final section cautions against an overly determinist reading of this and foregrounds emergent possibilities in multipolarity, epistemic diversity, networks, decolonial ethical claims and *tianxia*.

I. The global as a geo-cognitive scale

Ontology and spatiality

How can we understand the global scale? For Andrew Herod (2008) a key issue is 'scale's ontological status, particularly whether scale is simply a mental device for categorising and organising the world or whether scales really exist as material social products' (p. 218). Arguably, scale is both 'material' and 'mental'. The term used in the present article is 'geo-cognitive scale'. But perhaps this is only the beginning of an understanding of spatiality.

The present article works with critical and social realism (Archer, 1995; Sayer, 2000). The world is constantly changing, emergent. It is neither ordered, patterned nor predictable. The patterns that are the object of much of social science are sustained only temporarily, under conditions of closure. Ultimately the world is an open system in which both the actual and the possible are real and the future is unknown. Natural and social objects are prior to and independent of human knowledge of them. Yet the practices of human agents, including their ideas and interpretations, are among the causes of objects. Archer (1995) emphasises the irreducible autonomy of agency. Structure is prior to agency. However, 'people are not puppets of structures because they have their own emergent properties' (p. 71). The independent potentials of agents derive from their inner self-consciousness and their capacity for reflexivity and will-based action (Archer, 2000).

Antonio Gramsci (1971) makes a similar point. Hence spatiality, and specific geo-cognitive scales such as global and national, are both prior to agents and partly constituted by them.

In *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1991) Henri Lefebvre analyses 'not things in space but space itself, with a view to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it' (p. 89). He starts not from a two-way distinction between space as material and mental, but a three-way distinction between space as physical-material (nature), as mental-imaginative, and as social relations (pp. 11, 27). The imagined or 'ideal' (p. 14) space of the mental realm both presupposes and underpins social practices. Lefebvre also notes that social relations in space are 'a means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (p. 26). 'The dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there' (p. 49). Such efforts are never fully successful. The social space brought into being by human activity has a certain autonomy. It 'escapes in part from those who make use of it' (p. 26). This has been illustrated by communicative globalisation since 1990. This article will return to Lefebvre's idea of incomplete hegemony.

The global and other scales

Higher education and knowledge are practised in multiple geo-cognitive scales. The primary scales are the world as a whole, global, national and local. There are also intermediate scales: pan-national regions with multiple countries (e.g. the European Union), localised regions like states within nations (in higher education see Carnoy et al., 2018), and border zones with neighbouring nations (e.g. the Arctic Barents in Sundet, 2016). The geo-cognitive scales exist simultaneously, and are also distinct in terms of Lefebvre's categories. Each has a specific materiality, each is constituted imaginatively, each embodies social practices.

World and global

The interdependent world as a whole includes every scale, locality, agent, activity and relation. It has the visible materiality of the earth-from-space (Marginson, 2010), summoned in the ecological imaginary. There is no outer boundary. The single world, not a bounded territory within it, is the unit. An early idea of the world as a whole is *tianxia*, dating from the Western Zhou dynasty of 1046–771 BCE in China. Zhao (2021) calls this perspective 'thinking through the world' and argues that global convergence has made it more compelling (pp. 14–24). Interpretations of *tianxia* vary between China-centred and those without a centre. Worldwide communications, travel and financial transactions have brought the world scale closer but the totalising claims of nation-states still control thought.

In contrast, the term 'global' does not signify the whole world and everything in it. It is more limited, specific to activities and relations that stitch the different parts of the world closer together. It does not immediately diminish the potency of nations (something that *is* implied in *tianxia*); though globalisation relativises the national and other scales. It can transform them over time and may ultimately encourage thinking through the world.

‘Global’ can also be distinguished from ‘international’, as in cross-border student mobility. In geo-spatial terms ‘international’ simply means relations between nations, inter-national. International relations leave undisturbed the bounded and separated nation-state. Global relations always carry the potential to punch holes in the sacred national border.

In higher education, the global scale includes worldwide or part-world systems of knowledge and information flow, networks and people movement between institutions and systems, as discussed below. Globalisation enlarges global higher education as a space for agentic action. However, global convergence and integration are always provisional – and the existence of global phenomena does not mean everything is connected to everything else, or the global dimension is always determining, or global factors are privileged over local actors, and still less that global forces are independent of human agents (Conrad, 2016, p. 158). Global relations provide conditions in which people and organisations act, but so do nation-states, regions, kin and locality. In the global space the openness and interconnections between units are interspersed with fragmentation, disconnects, divergences and closures.

National and local

Most higher education institutions are established by government in the national scale of law and regulation, policy, funding and research organisation. The formal and informal hierarchies of institutions evolve primarily in national society, and though global rankings also matter, they are means to national as well as global prestige. When considering relations of power, it is difficult to think outside the national frame. Yet most activity in higher education and research is also local. It is useful to distinguish between the local institutional scale, typically joined to the national or sub-national region, though it connects to the global scale though research, student mobility and university ranking; and the local disciplinary scale, which joins to the global scale through the knowledge system in science.

Relations between scales

This article starts from four assumptions about the geo-cognitive scales. First, they co-exist and are irreducible to each other. Reality is multi-scalar. ‘No space disappears in the course of growth and development: the worldwide does not abolish the local’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 86). It is crucial to grasp the multiplicity of scale. Agents are simultaneously active in various scales and carry multiple identities and agendas (Sen, 1999). ‘Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of plurality, of the co-existence of difference’ (Massey, 2003).

Second, the scales are not equivalents at varying levels of size and aggregation, like the Russian Matryoshka dolls that fit inside each other. Scales often intersect, but are different, heterogeneous. For example, the national scale in science is normatively centred on nation-states and shaped by laws, policies and funding. In the global scale in science, there is no governing centre: there is a networked system of publication and collegial collaboration between individuals and groups (Marginson, 2021a, 2021b). Wagner et al. (2017) establish empirically ‘that the global network has a culture, pathways, and norms of communication specific to its structure, and diverging from national, regional, or disci-plinary norms’ (p. 1646). There is also scalar multiplicity. Global scientists are leaders in national scientific communities, and local institutions. The heterogeneity of on one hand

global-local science, on the other national-local science, means activities coexist without a contest over scalar sovereignty. There is still potential tension, for example, when global connections conflict with national security agendas, as in the US–China relation in science (Lee & Haupt, 2020).

Third, no single geo-cognitive scale is necessarily or always dominant (Conrad, 2016; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). The role of leading scale, where activity causally resonates in other scales, shifts in time and place. After the Internet emerged global activity was more determining in all areas entailing networked information, including knowledge. This enhanced global determination spilled over into activities outside networks, such as executive strategy in universities. In interviews with the presidents and vice-chancellors of elite anglophone universities, Friedman (2018) finds that in the public projection of mission, global themes are dominant. However, in moments when university financing or political embeddedness are at stake, an 'everyday nationalism' takes priority over global mission and identity.

Fourth, interfaces across scalar borders can be strategically significant. For example, universities can optimise effectiveness by synchronising actions in the global and national scales, as when using income from global student mobility to build local capacity.

II. Global materiality, imagining and social practice

The interactions in global higher education between the material, the imaginative and the social (Lefebvre, 1991) can also be understood as relations between structure and agency (Archer, 1995). In Figure 1 the upper material domain A constitutes pre-given structure, such as worldwide communications networks, and the political economy. The lower two domains B and C embody individual, group and organisational agency. The neatness of the diagram is misleading. The domains are not necessarily symmetrical or reciprocal at a given moment. The location of agents is also variable. In leading Anglo-American universities, the dominant discourses and research norms that function as voluntary agentic social practices in C confront many other institutions in the world as structured materiality in A, part of the rules of the political economy of higher education that for them appear as determining. Relations between structure and agency are modulated by relations of power. Reality is always more messy, fluid and changeable than any theoretical model, belying its apparent universality (Sayer, 2000, p. 5).

The direction of arrows is significant. New imaginings are often sparked by material changes, for example, when geo-politics or recession shifts the political economy of nations, or previously separated elements are combined by time-space compression (see below). The effects of the material domain in social practices are mediated by the perceptions, interpretations and imaginings of agents, their readings of the global setting: for example, scientists can conceive their networks as open or closed. Some changes in social practices proceed solely from new imaginings, without a corresponding material driver; but when any imaginings are mediated by social practices, this can lead in turn to new materialities: for example, governments imagine science as an arms race in innovation and fund more research capacity. Meanwhile, the two agentic domains B and C, those of imagining/interpretation and social practice, continually constitute each other. Agentic imagining generates new normalising practices: for example, the manner that university rankings bring a global market into being. The passage from imagining to practice is
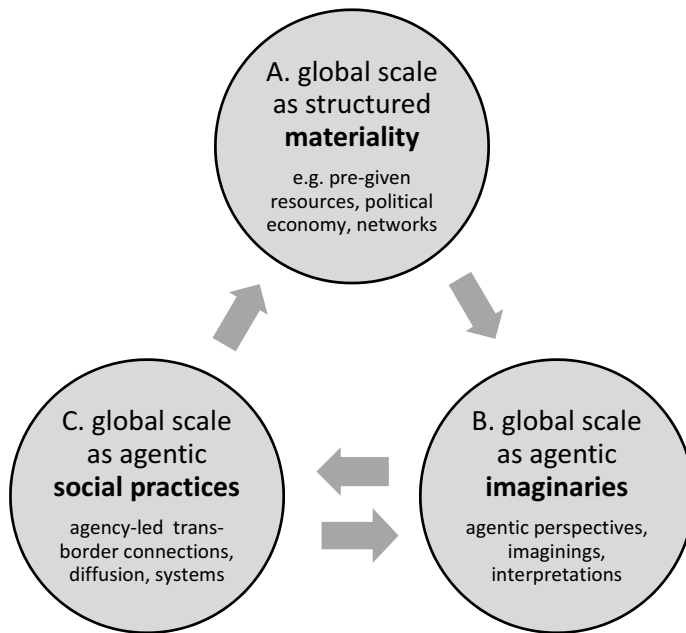
Figure 1. The global scale as materiality, imaginings and social practices. Source: Author.

mediated by discourses that 'systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Practical experiences also spark new imaginings that generate strategic innovations. There is nothing automatic about any of this. Material electronic networks do not programme thought and practice. Agents in the same material position respond in different ways to the unequal resource configuration. Necessity, history, discourses, contingency, timing and the whirl of contextual changes all play their parts.

Globally active agents – mobile students, scientists, universities, public agencies, NGOs, companies, governments, international organisations – experience geo-cognitive scale in two ways. On one hand, scales with their orders, relations and objects appear as pre-given spaces in which agents act with greater or less freedoms, depending on their material and mental resources, and the extent to which space is controlled and closed by other agents or there is scope to make and build. On the other hand, scales are continually constructed by the imaginings and practices of agents. There is a difference here between the national and global scales. For example, for university leaders the national scale is largely pre-given, framed by state authority and populated by an institutional hierarchy, allocation regimes and expectations of outcomes. In contrast, there are more porous boundaries within the global scale and no outer border, the operating rules are sparse and less fixed, and there seems to be limitless scope for alliances.

It must be emphasised that some agents have superior capacity in constructing global relations. Rectors have more scope for cross-border action than students, bibliometric companies more scope to define global science than young scientists, and educationally strong nations and leading universities have more sway than their counterparts in emerging countries. However, size alone does not constrain initiative and innovation: consider NYU's novel institutional structure in which students move between New York, Shanghai

and Abu Dhabi; and the global schoolhouse in Singapore, which remade a city-state of five million people as a new global hub. Further, because of the openness of the global, unequal resources do not absolutely determine opportunities. Studies of global science show that there is scope for free entry of new systems without gate keeping by strong players (Wagner et al., 2015). The fastest growth in global science is 'periphery to periphery' networking (e.g. Choi, 2012).

Global materiality in higher education

The materiality of the global scale, domain A in Figure 1, confronts agents as a pre-given structural fact yet it has mental-social as well as natural origins and is continually changing. There are irreducible planetary facts, like global geology and the ecological horizon, that predate humans. Yet some of these prior planetary facts are modified by human activity; and the global materiality of the Internet is again socially formed. Science created the 'space of flows' (Castells, 2000) with its transformative networks. Instant communication and data transfer turned dispersed spaces into synchronous conversations. Some (but by no means all) knowledge became global knowledge. Social practices also continuously generate the hierarchical relations of power, resource distributions and other brute facts which confront global agents as another kind of determining material structure. Though all of these structures are open to change by agents, large ships are slow and difficult to turn.

Network logic

Networks in higher education and science have multiple meanings. They can function as systems of power, as discussed below. They embody values and behaviours: those of collaboration, openness, expectations of connectedness, initiative and response. They also have specific material logics. While in human history networks have functioned in varied ways, in the Internet era their logic, hard wired into the form, is one of exponential growth.

Castells's *The Network Society* explains the expansionary dynamic of information-based networks, the way they readily quicken opportunities for action. Each successive node is added at negligible cost. It adds value to the existing nodes by increasing the potentially fruitful connections across the network and cheapening the average unit cost of each. Networks continually call new agents into being, expanding towards complete inclusion of every possible node, while adding every possible connection ('edge') between existing nodes. Globally networked higher education and science tend to extend outwards freely in the manner that information itself spreads, with an almost liquid fluency.

The expansionary logic is evident in the rapid growth of science papers and citations, in the number of countries with self-reproducing science systems, and in the proportion of papers that are co-authored (Marginson, 2021c). Tijssen et al. (2012), tracking 11.1 million WoS papers for 2000–2010, identify a 5.2% annual increase in average collaboration distance. In the process of growth the network 'allows metropolitan concentration and global networking to proceed simultaneously' (Castells, 2001, p. 225). Network analysis often seeks a summative resolution of the two trends, greater concentration *or* greater dispersion, but both tendencies are outcomes of the common dynamic and are not zero-sum. Hence the findings of empirical studies oscillate in an unstable manner between one

trend or the other. Networks, like globalisation as a whole, foster all of the expansion of connections, 'flat' horizontal relations and nodal power (Wagner et al., 2015). Both out-reach and 'metropolitan concentration' are realised by the investments of governments and universities. Nodes are junctions between national and global science (Marginson, 2021b).

While the power of concentration is obvious the dynamic of diffusion and dispersal is equally important. Communicative globalisation is associated with the multiplication of powerful nodes and a reduction in the historic gaps between the Euro-American countries and others. Between 1990 and 2010 the Theil index of income inequality between countries reduced from 0.734 to 0.479 (Bourguignon, 2015, p. 42). Pieterse (2018) notes the growing multi-polarity in political economy, indicated by the rise of China and middle powers outside Euro-America including India, Russia, Iran, Brazil and Indonesia. A parallel tendency to multi-polarity is evident in national scientific outputs. In 2020 China pro-duced almost one third of all papers in physical sciences STEM disciplines (NSB [National Science Board], 2022), and in 2016–2019 Tsinghua University led the world in top 5% STEM papers by citation (Leiden University, 2021).

Global imagining and activity are also conditioned and quickened by the website visibility of national systems, universities and rankings. These displays across the world facilitate both partnerships and competition. The Internet is the medium in which the global market in international education has evolved. Universities parade their wares and dangle user friendly application forms. Families allow web-based comparisons to frame and later to explain their choices.

Global imagining

Networked higher education is a junction between real institutions in real places, a virtual world populated by reified brand-identities, and fecund imaginings of the possible. This seems to catalyse the passage from the real to the imagined in Figure 1. Yet prior assumptions also shape mental processes. Agents make crucial methodological choices about their own positionality and trajectory in the emerging global space; and about the lenses that frame what they can see, as the materiality of global higher education and knowledge emerges before them and into clearer sight, like a leviathan coming into focus as it slowly rises from the sea. Much happens in domain B of Figure 1.

De-severing and synchrony
The change in global materiality triggered by an expanding communicative globalisation has greatly facilitated the potential for agentic engagement with others – same or different – and also for perceiving the world as a whole. The direct impact of time-space compression in imagining is summed up in two words: 'de-severing' and 'syn-chrony' (Marginson, 2010).

Instantaneous messaging, data transfer and online meetings provide favourable condi-tions for *de-severing*. 'De-severing' is the mental process whereby people vanish physical distance and bring remote locations close to them. Space is not a simple function of geography or message speed. De-severing is a state of mind. In *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962) Martin Heidegger notes how the logic of de-severing extends progressively outwards across the world (p. 139). There is no longer anything beyond its edge, no place that is

beyond our imagined proximity. This in turn naturalises the one-world imaginary. In *Theory of Society* Luhmann (2012) states that the decisive step towards world society was 'the full discovery of the globe as a closed sphere of meaningful communication' (p. 85).

'*Synchrony*' or synchronism is concurrence at the same point in time. Global synchrony is a shared rhythm of sociability across distance. Like de-severing, global synchrony is a feeling stimulated in time-space compression, and rests on a common use of global English that suggests cultural differences at least can be partly bridged. One feature of Internet-mediated talk is the affective power of such experiences. Yet electronic synchrony also enables dispersed agents to regulate their time and emotional investment, at a low level of risk, in multiple, loose and disposable ties. Scholar-researchers, doctoral students, or university executives out to make waves in the global setting feel free to explore it by connecting with the other on the basis of shared practices. Schott (1998) refers to 'outwardness': the desire of scientists to reach out across borders (p. 134). This might suggest that networks pass readily into free-wheeling cosmopolitanism in social relations. However, loose ties can conceal deep asymmetries in access to technology, facility in global language, and scope for initiative. Further, there is ample evidence of loose-tie communications that foster 'echo chamber' agreement while leaving differences unexplored.

In science prior cognitive agreement especially facilitates collaboration (Birnholtz, 2007, p. 2234), but some studies of science find that epistemic diversity is advantageous (e.g. Graf & Kalthaus, 2018; Melin, 2000; Winkler et al., 2015). This suggests a need to look beyond electronic networking alone. Much rests on the extent to which agents see global connections as means of forming common purposes, as distinct from solely individualised purposes. The balance varies. At bottom this comes down to the extent to which agents understand higher education as a relational space held together by communal values, including respect for diversity. Partnerships, institutional consortia and regional schemes like Horizon Europe in research are grounded in commonality and equivalent legitimacy, and assume that the whole will exceed the sum of the parts. In more self-regarding strategies like university competition for fee paying students or research talent, the global space is a zone of utility, opportunity and exploitation, and cooperation is just another strategy through which to pursue self interest. Some research on collaboration in science finds it to be driven by shared commitment to knowledge creation (e.g. Melin, 2000). Other studies highlight 'preferential attachment', whereby researchers secure career benefits by attaching themselves to others (e.g. Wagner & Leydesdorff, 2005). In reality, both kinds of global connection are present, sometimes operating together.

Methodological globalism

The lenses used by agents when interpreting the global setting are decisive in shaping possibilities for social practices, in the movement between domains B and C in Figure 1. Any lens – epistemic-disciplinary, ideological, cultural, positional or scalar – determines what can be perceived and what is valued. No single lens captures all phenomena in reality. Each lens highlights specific phenomena and hides others from sight. Differences in imagining the world constitute barriers to inter-subjectivity – unless there is a move to embrace the other on the basis of equality of respect, not just acknowledging the diversity in global higher education but also using multiple ways of seeing as a tool to expand understanding.

A key question is which geo-cognitive scalar lens or lenses are used. 'By changing the unit of analysis of operation at the reflexive level one obtains a different perspective on the system under study' (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000, p. 114). Conrad (2016) notes that 'the choice of scale always has normative implications' (p. 156). In this regard, understandings of global higher education and knowledge are often constrained by methodological globalism or methodological nationalism, and sometimes by both in the one argument (see Table 1).

Using *methodological globalism* the global scale is necessarily determining in relation to activity in the national and local scales. This view took root during the accelerated economic and cultural globalisation of the 1990s. Despite the long historical co-emergence of nation-states and globalisation, both neo-liberal advocates of global markets and many social theorists came to see globalisation as decisively undermining the nation-state form. The imaginings varied. Globalist social theorists highlighted cosmopolitanism and the space for bottom-up agency (e.g. Appadurai, 1996; Beck, 2005; Drache, 2008). Neo-liberals saw an Americanising world underpinned by a submerged US super-state, that would incrementally absorb national-cultural-political differences in the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992). Both groups proved completely wrong about the decline of the nation-state. Each was half right about the simultaneous and contrary tendencies to homogeneity and difference.

As Bayly (2004) points out, the mistake of methodological globalists is to assume a zero-sum relation between the global and national scales. In enhancing the weight of the global scale globalisation has relativised but not subtracted the nation-state form. There has been a wave of state building in East and Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Arab world.

Methodological nationalism

However, the greater limitation of perspective is through methodological nationalism. While the methodological globalist cannot avoid the actual existence of nation-states, the methodological nationalist can completely suppress the global scale from sight. Using this lens the world appears as a mosaic of separated states without a larger interdependence.

Methodological nationalism is grounded in 'the belief that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world' (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002, p. 301). Shahjahan and Kezar (2013) discuss the 'national container' limiting perception and theory in higher education studies. Global phenomena are perceived only within the national scale, as functions or outgrowths of the nation. Conrad (2016) discusses the 'internalist' fallacy, in which national societies are the sole causation of their own affairs, leading to 'explanations that slight or even completely disregard external influences and factors' (p. 88).

In science, when a methodological nationalist lens is used, nationally bordered phenomena are sharply illuminated, while cross-national activity is diminished or lost, such as cross-border partnerships. In methodologically nationalist studies that use bibliometric data, co-authored papers on, say, astrophysics, are arbitrarily split between nations on the basis of author share though there is nothing specifically national about them (see Cimini et al., 2016, p. 200 for justification of a nation-bound 'science of science policy'). The global relational science system is re-worked as a performance hierarchy of nations. This national

Table 1. Global social practices and global imaginings (B and C in Figure 1).

Social practices	Geo-spatial imaginaries (lenses and trajectories)	Other features	Selected references
Global science system	MG, distributed-collegial power but partly neo-imperial	Network materiality and its dynamism, openness	Wagner et al., ; Marginson, 2021a, Marginson, 2021b, Marginson, 2021c
Global ranking of universities	MG with MN national-cultural bias: neo-imperial world order	World university market as quasi-feudal prestige hierarchy	Hazelkorn, 2015; Moed, 2017
International student mobility, *including:*	Distributed but partly neo-imperial, centripetal	Mixed imaginaries in both provision and access	Brooks & Waters, 2011; Marginson et al., 2010
commercial fee-based education 'export'	MG/MN, predominantly neo-imperial, centripetal	Global market imaginary: world ripe for exploitation	Bashir, 2007; OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), 2004
Global hubs and knowledge cities	Often MN, nation-centred or city-centred, centripetal	Core focus on national-locational identity	Knight, 2014
International branch campuses, franchising	MG/MN, largely neo-imperial, centrifugal	Global business, soft power, missionary imaginaries	Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011; Chankseliani, 2021
e-university distance education	MG, culturally neo-imperial, hence MN, centrifugal	Solely virtual (model lacked prestige, market failure)	OECD, 2005
MOOCs	MG, partly neo-imperial and culturally MN, centrifugal	Solely virtual but linked to established universities	Baturay, 2015
Partnerships and university consortia	No necessary primary scale or trajectory, distributed power	Some university partners more equal than others	Beerkens, 2004
Guidelines for cross-border cooperation	No necessary primary scale, partly neo-imperial drivers	Multiple agents, including pan-national organisations	e.g. OECD, 2004

MG = methodological globalism MN = methodological nationalism MOOCs = Massive Online Open Courseware
Source: Author

normalisation does not suppress the possibility of difference within the global space, but it confines difference to calibrations based on single nations. The global phenomena concealed by methodological nationalism include student and faculty mobility between countries, cross-border partnerships, and the often-striking imitative parallelism in policy.

Methodological nationalism and methodological globalism appear to be opposites. Yet they are also practised together, being combined to generate a highly reified imagining of the global that facilitates global action by dominant institutions and countries, as will be discussed.

Position and trajectory
Individual, institutional and national agents also position themselves strategically within the global space in varying ways, leading to differing trajectories in relations with others. Some strategies in Table 1 involve single agents in primary locations, other are pursued by multiple agents and from multiple locations. University partnerships and consortia are premised on a distributed approach. A few agents have no physical location at all, the virtual e-universities.

Geographical fixity is integral to hub strategies in Singapore and its imitators in the Gulf states (Knight, 2014). Hubs manipulate global flows by following centralising trajectories, pulling in students, research talent, capital, business and tourism while fostering world attention. National and institutional identity and performance all function as tools of attraction. In contrast, nations and institutions also pursue centrifugal strategies, taking their education to the world, as in international branch campuses and virtual delivery. Both centripetal and centrifugal trajectories have implications for relations of power, as will be discussed, though what matters is the nature of the global project in which they are situated.

Global social practices

In the social practices listed in Table 1, the strategies pursued by agents foster global integration and convergence in three modes, entailing escalating levels of worldness – global connections, global diffusion and global systems. These practices in turn reproduce and augment global materiality and global imaginings in higher education, as Figure 1 shows. The social meanings of these connections, diffusions and systems are determined by the relations of power in which they are embedded, as Part III will discuss.

Global connections

Cross-border connections once operated at the edge of nations, the port zones. In a more global era they run through nodal centres, in the airports and communications systems. They are no longer marginal. In higher education, inter-national connections include student mobility, some produced in commercial services (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Marginson et al., 2010), faculty visits and longer-term mobility, and cross-border provision in branch campus and online modes. Inter-national connections, especially people movement, are regulated by nation-states, though online education eludes full governmental control. Cross-border connections do not necessarily alter practices in the national and local scales, but when such connections are 'regular and sustained' they can be 'embedded in processes of structural transformation' (Conrad, 2016, p. 64) and even 'shape societies in profound ways' (p. 9). For example, over time universities and whole cities can become increasingly dependent on incoming foreign income and/or foreign talent.

International student mobility entails a complex and variable mix of imaginings, positionalities, motives and objectives. These variations are shaped by different agents (nations, institutions, educators, students and families), and variations in the extent to which the imagining, in domain B of Figure 1, involves mutuality and reciprocity, and the willingness to embrace global multi-positionality, for example, in languages of use.

Half of all international students enter English language systems. There, on the provider side, methodological globalism ('the world is our oyster') and methodological nationalism ('our education is best') prevail. Both trajectories, centripetal and centrifugal, drawing the world in and intervening beyond the border, are confidently used. Revenues are primary in the UK and Australia; in the US the focus shifts to soft power and recruiting global talent; but in all English language countries global reciprocity is low. Their own student nationals rarely go abroad and often enter countries similar to home when they do. Commercial provision extends to English-medium programmes in Europe

and East and Southeast Asia. However, most EU institutions, and Japan and China, operate in less commercial fashion, subsidising their own students abroad and also foreign students at home, to secure both internationalisation at home and national soft power. The large Erasmus mobility programme in Europe is committed to building regional identity and regional professional labour markets. Many individual educators, everywhere, focus on cultural exchange and learning benefits. Regional personnel circulation and hubs (e.g. Southern Africa, East Asia, the Southern Cone in South America, Russia in the post-Soviet countries) have a growing importance.

Global diffusion

The global diffusion of ideas, models and behaviours, in policy and agentic practices, is more pervasive and harder to pin down empirically. One case is the spread of the comprehensive research-intensive university, from nineteenth-century Germany to the US and across the world in the twentieth century. Global diffusion is a process of convergence through parallel evolution by autonomous agents. Over time it leads to growing synchrony across the world. Policy borrowing ranges from rhetoric, financing systems, and infrastructures (e.g. quality assurance, research assessment), to academic structures like the Euro-American disciplines and doctorate, and organisational norms like performance management, social engagement and public accountability. Some practices in higher education institutions become so commonplace that they seem to lodge in domain A of Figure 1, part of the pre-given materiality, beyond the scope of agentic re-interpretation in domain B, though this is never quite right. Within nationally ordered higher education the diffusion of global tendencies is always nationally and locally nuanced, even when ministries and leaders of institutions opt to follow an international template.

Though global diffusion is not driven from a single centre it is led by strong countries and universities. In a world in which international relations are shaped by a combination of coercive geopolitics and negotiated multilateralism between seprarated nations, rather than thinking through the world, the templates used by cross-national organisations tend to be dominated by the practices of leading countries and blocs. These organisations, especially the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), play a key role in conceiving, transmitting and accelerating policy diffusion in higher education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009).

Global systems

Global systems are the sharp end of globalisation in higher education. They include the communication and information networks in higher education; global science; and global comparisons, classifications and rankings. These systems embody a full global imaginary in domain B of Figure 1, and their practices in domain C embody closer global integration. They are partly detached from nation-states, while being potentially transformative of national and local practices. Communications and science are not governed from one centre, they accumulate activity in multiple centres. The global comparisons are not directly controlled by individual nation states, though OECD and UNESCO are very active in generating comparative data. Global systems advance potentials for thinking through the world, especially in relation to knowledge, yet they also facilitate neo-imperialism: stratified global ranking helps to reproduce hegemonic global science.

Global science has no declared centre but is imprinted by Anglo-European norms. It also has firm boundaries. It combines bottom-up building of the science network with the regulation of codified knowledge by the bibliometric companies. Science is enmeshed in all of the global, pan-national regional, national and local scales. Collaborative cross-country publication in the global scale and work authored within the strongest nations is dominant in shaping prestige (Adams & Gurney, 2018; Kwiek, 2020). Global science as bibliometrics and global university ranking each entail a form of methodological globalism, though in different ways. The objects of interest (science papers, universities) are abstracted from their national contexts and arranged in a single set on the basis of nominal equivalence. This conceals from view the profoundly contextual drivers of difference within the global system.

The most prominent university rankings secure media visibility and determine decisions by governments, institutions, faculty, students and families (Hazelkorn, 2015). The premier comparison of national systems is the OECD's (2021) annual *Education at a Glance*. Taken together all comparisons and rankings constitute higher education as a single global field of countries and universities, notwithstanding the methodological flaws, normalising effects, perverse outcomes, cultural homogenisation, de-contextualisation and injustices entailed (Marginson, 2016). With research performance the main factor in determining ranked position, ranking provides a meritocratic scientific gloss for the self-reproducing semi-feudal hierarchy of universities, in which 'quality' as determined in rankings recycles the order of the universities which define that quality. Ranking has a compelling affect, entrenching the dominant imaginary of the field as competitive, hierarchical, and Anglo-American. For many agents this imagined world market, the child of fecund domain B and C work by diverse rankers in publishing companies, business services and a Chinese university, has become fixed as a component of the materiality in domain A, part of the brute reality they face.

More fragmented global systems, with fluctuating purchase, include the vast range of formal/informal guidelines, frameworks and practices formed by multilateral organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and OECD – where again, the negotiated guidelines tend to embody the interests and ideologies of the leading powers – and by professional networks and international associations. Some cross-border frameworks involve states; some operate in the institutional scale; some, as in bottom-up cooperation in science, entail individuals and local groupings. These frameworks include interlocking protocols for recognition of national higher education systems, institutions and qualifications, that facilitate mobility. There are also regional systems that facilitate collaboration. The European Higher Education Area includes Erasmus student mobility, the Bologna agreement, curriculum descriptors, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, the diploma supplement that records graduate attributes, and the European Research Area including Horizon Europe (EC [European Commission], 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is accumulating its own set of regional protocols and formal processes.

The e-university ventures of the 1990s/early 2000s were less successful in working the global system structure (Olssen & Peters, 2005). In each case, a grand prospectus and investment in software was followed by negligible student recruitment and collapse. MOOCs are also solely virtual. However, they are mostly developed by faculty from existing universities and embedded in university curricula, rather than presented as stand-

alone institutions. This hybrid model retains an essential legitimacy. It falls short of the earlier goal of a wholly Internet based institution, indicating that prestige in higher education depends on the older materiality, even though it is enhanced by online visibility, as in university ranking.

The three modes of globalisation constitute each other. For example, cross-border connections in research have accumulated into a full global system, while the diffusion of norms and practices in the leading science nations facilitates the commonality essential to that system. The global system is a continuing shelter for growth of connections through cross-border data transfer and people mobility. Hence, the globalisation of science proceeds on all fronts. As national systems and university forms converge via isomorphic borrowing, it seems that a singular world higher education is emerging. But how broadly does it encompass the self-realisation of agents?

III. Relations of power in global higher education

Agents in higher education are active in all of the local, national and global scales. Global systems, connections and diffusion increase the possibility of thinking through the world. Nevertheless, zero-sum national jurisdictions, which imprint methodological nationalism in imagining and relations, constitute formidable barriers to structural integration and multi-scalar spatial understandings. This tends to marginalise one-world imaginings and affect.

A Hobbesian openness

The national imagining of higher education normalises social order, common purposes and collaboration in the national and local scales. The global scale lacks practices that would constitute it as a common space: there is neither a central sovereign authority, nor deeply felt collective values in the sense of *tianxia*. The default position is the world without either that is imagined by Thomas Hobbes (2017) in *Leviathan*: brutish, an open struggle for power and survival. 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.

In such a Hobbseian world the guiding principle is one of might is right. Until now this has largely meant Euro-America is right. Methodological nationalism lifts from Euro-American agents the disturbing obligation to reflect on the self when engaging with the other. It enables those agents to imagine the global as a field for unchanging self-interest as they move from domain B of Figure 1 to practical action in domain C. But how do they then practise world higher education? How do they reconcile a narrow self-identity, which might appear to reduce their grasp of the global and hence their scope for action, with the 'world is wide' 'sense of a planetary space open to any and every possible neo-imperial venture?

Global power is exerted by selectively, temporarily, negating a nation-bound vision – by *double-filtering* the higher education world, through both a methodological globalist lens, and a methodologically national (and also regional-civilisational) Euro-American lens. In global university ranking universities are abstracted from their context and arranged in the imagined global scale on the basis of the template of the US research university. Methodological globalism includes subaltern agents within the world order; methodological nationalism determines how and how much they are valued (or not). The same neo-imperial wide/narrow approach is apparent in those English-speaking university websites that present any and every 'internationalisation' project as intrinsically desirable – regardless of the dislocation in non Euro-American settings, for example, through brain drain, and the imposition of Euro-American models and epistemic agendas (Yang, 2014). Strategies of 'internationalisation' are presented as universal yet their cultural content is solely Euro-American. This coupling of the two lenses, which turns internationalisation into Anglo-Americanisation, is apparent in each of commercial marketing to international students, international branch campuses, and e-Universities. Many MOOCs, proceeding from Euro-American universities, employ the same double lenses.

As with global science, the MOOC form in itself is not the problem – it could be pursued using more distributed approaches and a larger cultural range. There could be other kinds of MOOC. Likewise, distributed partnerships, based on nominal equivalence between parties, can be turned to either open growth or closed oligopoly. Both centripetal and centrifugal trajectories – both drawing the world to the higher education agent, and pushing agency out in the world – could involve cultural sharing and equality of respect. But the potentials for reciprocal cosmopolitan higher education, opened by communicative globalisation, are largely wasted. The centripetal and centrifugal trajectories that are vigorously pursued by leading countries and institutions mostly constitute acts of power in which higher education in other locations is transformed to serve the needs of the neo-imperial agent. Other agents lack the same flexibility with lenses and freedom of global movement. Hub strategies in emerging countries try to break the lop-sided patterns, but only Singapore, which is able to draw on a very high per capita income, has been successful.

In short, in global higher education the lenses, and the tools of position and trajectory, are mostly deployed for the classical self-centred Hobbesian purposes of fear, greed and glory. Here globalisation in higher education and knowledge has paralleled the larger post-1990 globalisation in political economy and culture, which for the first 20 years at least was Euro-American (and primarily Anglo-American) dominated. Yet in the multipolar era now emerging, Anglo-American global dominance has persisted more completely in higher education, particularly in knowledge, than in the larger political economy and geo-politics. Why is the inherited hegemony in higher education still so potent?

Global hierarchy in higher education is reproduced in three mutually reinforcing ways: worldwide diffusion of neo-liberal norms and policies, social-cultural reproduction of White Supremacy, and linguistic-cultural monoculture in knowledge. These are now considered.

The global market hierarchy

The post-1990 roll-out of global communications coincided with the spread of state-led strategies of corporate devolution and quasi-market reform. The association was not causal, it was conjunctural. There was always more to globalisation than world markets. Neo-liberal policies did not drive global convergence, though they influenced its forms and contents. Nor did global synchrony create neo-liberalism though it probably quickened its spread. Nevertheless, the neo-liberal discourse that equates social relations with economic markets has colonised globalisation successfully at many points. One example is the commercial model of international education led by the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

The effects of neo-liberalism in education are a story often told (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Markets gain purchase from prior inequality in society and education and expand on it (Marginson, 2016). Competition exacerbates hierarchies between persons, groups, institutions and national systems. The idea of higher education as a global market is normalised by nation-states which imagine themselves competing with other states, and reproduced by global university ranking as a war of all against all. Over time, competition rewards people, groups, universities and nations with prior advantages, moving them further ahead through cumulative advantage (Davies & Zarifa, 2012).

In policy norms in higher education the dominant model of institution and system is the Anglo-American science university in a competitive market. The model exercises varying practical influence across the world. Its application is nuanced according to national and local histories, traditions, resources, and configurations of power. Some nations have tuition fees and others none (OECD, 2021). Some nations have a steeper hierarchy of institutions than others. However, there is no competing model with equivalent potential for global diffusion.

Global White Supremacy

As suggested, the 'idea of a university' in global rankings, the code of value imposed on the higher education world, is derived from the last two centuries of Anglo-American imperial control. This underpins English language science and language, international magnetism and reputation, corporate executive leadership and student-as-consumer. In domain B of Figure 1 the imperial vision combines self-referencing agency with the widest freedom of action. Inexorably, as with neo-liberal economics, practices in domain C are applied on a non-mutual basisr. All other agents are measured against the self and found wanting; all other locations are inferior versions of home. Anglo-American higher education is deeply confident in its sense of superiority. What sustains this deep confidence, this utter certainty? Shahjahan and Edwards (2022) argue that students across the world experience global higher education as a racialised hierarchy, a White Supremacy, as in the colonial era.

The White Supremacy in higher education is associated with English as the primary language and the normalisation of middle-class Anglo-American professional life, including its appearance, dress and politeness rituals. Non-White persons can aspire to this life but never wholly share it. However, the globalisation of higher education has taken the

racialised aspiration to every corner of the earth. It fosters 'a global subjectivity oriented towards Whiteness' that sustains the authority of education in the United States and UK, the 'Whitest of the White'. This both elevates White persons and shapes student and familial desires and migration patterns everywhere else. Within this discursive framework non-White students invest in international higher education to secure what they can of a 'White future'. Status hierarchies in higher education mean that it is culturally and economically harmful *not* to invest in the highest obtainable level of Whiteness Shahjahan and Edwards, pp. 751-753.

The Whiteness argument helps to explain the compulsive attraction to the US and the UK within international student flows. Many other countries now have strong domestic higher education, the US is not as economically central as it was, while the UK is less wealthy and offers more limited career and migration options. Yet both these national systems can enrol as many qualified international students as they wish to accept. Shahjahan and Edwards show that race is a key factor in sustaining global domination and control in higher education and knowledge.

Cultural and linguistic hegemony

Global processes in higher education have forcibly imposed the primacy of Anglo-American language, culture and science and stigmatised and excluded everything different. The common disciplinary mix is grounded in the European (Hellenic-Judeo-Christian) cultural heritage, but in linguistic terms even non-Anglo-American Europe has been suppressed.

The two main bibliometric collections that constitute globally recognised science and social science, Scopus and WOS, are structured by an inclusion/exclusion binary that determines what counts as codified science and orders value within it. These collections shape science and scholarship, university rankings and all performance measures.

English is the first language of 378 million people, 5% of the global population, and the second language of 750 million (Ethologue, 2018). However, it has displaced Latin, French, German and Russian as scientific languages. In WOS 95.4% of publications are in English, in Scopus 92.6% (Vera-Baceta et al., 2019). There are no standard translation protocols that bring non-English papers into global English. All endogenous (indigenous) knowledge is excluded (Connell, 2014; Nyamnjoh, 2019), which continues the colonial mindset with its imagined 'abyss' between hegemonic truth of the modern Western world and the untruths and superstitions of the marginalised (Santos, 2007).

The exclusion of all knowledge aside from knowledge in English cements the racialised system of value: White English is superior. Meanwhile the epistemic definitions, validations and exclusions are legitimated by Euro-American bibliometric companies and professional scientists. The Leiden University (2021) ranking carries data on 2016–2019 WOS papers in the top 5% by citation. Of the top 50 universities on this measure, 70% were Anglophone.

Conclusions

The question in the title of this article, 'what is global higher education?', can be answered as follows. Global higher education and knowledge take place in a distinctive geo-cognitive scale where worldwide relations are constituted. The global scale continually interfaces with the national, regional and local scales. As Figure 1 shows, it is brought into being by material structural factors such as global communications, while also constituted by the imaginings and social practices of agents: individuals, groups, institutions, nations and cross-national organisations. Agents, with differing capabilities, including resources, experience global higher education as a space of action where they pursue various agendas and strategies, individual and collective. The growing global systems, connections and diffusion have fostered worldwide convergence and integration.

In these more global circumstances, a wide range of arrangements and behaviours are possible. In the outcome methodological nationalism has been potent, limiting the potential to imagine and practice global commonality on the basis of unity-in-diversity. Arguably, this is because relations of power are overhung by a Euro-American (primarily Anglo-American) hegemony, especially in knowledge and its valuation. This has restricted openness and diversity and reproduced a steep global hierarchy of institutions and countries, manifest also as a hierarchy of cultures, languages, sensibilities, ideas, and personal qualities.

Nevertheless, nothing stays the same, and no global imaginary is wholly realised. Lefebvre's (1991) point about incomplete hegemony is that no spatiality, once made, is locked forever. The fact that post-1990 global communications and the radiation of higher education and science evolved in an Anglo-American and neo-liberal-dominated order does not mean they are bound to that project. Neo-imperial hegemony and racialisation are inherently partial.

An overly determinist reading of the future based on extrapolation of the present would be almost certainly wrong. Possibilities are as much part of reality as are today's materialities, imaginings and social practices. This conclusion will speculate on the potential for larger imaginings of the global space, including epistemic diversity in higher education.

Epistemic diversity

Global monoculture may not hold. Paralleling the multi-polarity in geo-politics, China has created a nation-bound Internet that is globally connected, and abolished preference for English-language papers in universities. Russia, Iran and possibly India also want a semi-autonomous Internet. Global language may pluralise over time. Some commentators anticipate a world in which continued global convergence is combined with political-cultural differences between large civilisational blocs, each irreducible and with its own conceptions of society, governance and knowledge (Macaes, 2018, p. 2), and perhaps higher education.

However, decoupling the Internet achieves a de-globalised kind of diversity, fragmenting global common goods. A better approach is to render the network less neo-imperial and more inclusive, expanding the potential for difference, commonality and hybridities. The struggle to pluralise knowledge is about language, institutions, and processes. Mbembe (2016) suggests a 'pluriversity' in place of the university, with 'a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity. It is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic

traditions' (p. 37). Santos (2007) proposes an 'ecology of knowledges' with 'sustained and dynamic interconnections between' heterogeneous knowledges, 'without compromising their autonomy' (p. 66), and intercultural translation. 'This requires renouncing any general epistemology' (p. 70) and promoting epistemic interaction and interdependence.

One step towards epistemic diversity is to move to multi-lingual publishing and translation of the primary repository in each field. English would remain the common pool language, but every effort would be made to bring other knowledge into it, and both global field journals and national journals would be available in major languages. Book publishers would facilitate online translation from all languages to each other. The pluralisation of global academic language and contents deconstructs the claim to intrinsic superiority.

Thinking through the world

The intellectual and ethical cases for epistemic diversity are advanced by a larger imagining of globality. Globalisation challenges us 'to conceptualise a new form of society … made up of specific configurations of global, national and local networks in a multidimensional space of social interaction' (Castells, 2009, p. 199). What methods in domain B can bring more of higher education and knowledge into view, replacing the neo-imperial monoculture with a multi-positional understanding of the global materiality, imagining and practices in Figure 1?

A multi-positional understanding in domain B has two aspects. First, multiple scales: global, regional, national, local. Second, multiple lenses, which may be grounded in multiple interests: plural global higher education.

Tianxia

Thinking through the world (Zhao, 2021) suggests one method. In its most expansive and least China-centred form *tianxia* includes activity in all geo-cognitive scales. Normatively, given the ecological conditions, the case for understanding the world as a whole is obvious and urgent. The potential of *tianxia* as a method of understanding and practising global higher education is reviewed in Yang et al. (forthcoming), and Tian and Yang in this issue of the Oxford Review of Education. *Tianxia* rests on both an open ontology and unity that sustains diversity (*he er butong*) (see also Fei, 2015). There are many strands of *tianxia* in the large literature in Chinese.

The practical implications are challenging. First, the *tianxia* perspective works more readily in relation to knowledge, which can flow into a single pool, than in nationally embedded higher education. Second, what are the common values so compelling as to hold together a worldwide *tianxia* order, in general and in higher education and knowledge? What kind of practices, in domain C of Figure 1, could implement a domain B tianxia imagining? There is also a threshold question. From which position, or multiple positions, can one know the world as a whole? How to move beyond methodological singularity?

Transpositionality

Amartya Sen (2002) suggests a 'transpositional' method for observing an object from more than one position in domain B, for example, with different scalar lenses, or from differing political cultures (e.g. Marginson & Yang, 2022). Sen states:

> Observations are unavoidably position-based, but scientific reasoning need not, of course, be based on observational information from one specific position only. There is a need for what may be called 'trans-positional' assessment—drawing on but going beyond different positional observations. The constructed 'view from nowhere' would then be based on synthesizing different views from distinct positions . . . A trans-positional scrutiny would also demand some kind of coherence between different positional views. (Sen, 2002, p. 467)

The task then in domain B, where global higher education is imagined and interpreted, is to combine what each position can tell, while minimising the loss of content from each. Again, as with *tianxia*, the goal is to combine diverse multiplicity with unity/commonality in a non-reductionist way. This is challenging, but it enables a richer vision than is achievable from any one position. In an open global setting there is no limit to the number of positions that can be incorporated into a transpositional approach. As the number of positions included in the transpositional analysis expands, the process of thinking through the higher education world becomes both more inclusive and more concrete.

Note

1. In this article, higher education is understood in the broad United States sense that includes degree and sub-degree programmes classified by UNESCO as 'tertiary', and encompasses 235 million students (UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation], 2022) and about 90,000 institutions. The primary discussion is about the most globally active institutions, the 2,000 or so research-intensive universities.

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