

# Transforming academic cultures: Relationships, respect and reciprocity

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With unprecedented numbers of international students and rapidly increasing international partnerships between institutions, it is timely for Anglophone universities to consider whether their current responses to internationalisation take full advantage of the opportunities for interculturalism offered by these developments and truly reflect globalised perspectives.

This article examines whether current approaches to internationalisation continue to be based upon the promotion of ‘Western’ academic values (and maximising financial returns to universities) rather than taking advantage of the possibilities for mutual learning that increased intercultural contact can offer. Intercultural interactions, if underpinned by more respectful, reciprocal and transcultural mindsets, can assist staff and students to enhance their intercultural skills and to work more effectively across cultures and between nations. However, several barriers exist to achieving this, including: limitations in prevailing concepts of internationalisation; unequal relationships between international partners; imperialist attitudes toward different academic traditions; and resistance to different cultural modes of language and expression.

This article interrogates notions of internationalisation, interculturalism and transculturalism and considers issues such as the relationship between culture and language and the situatedness of academic knowledge and expression. It proposes a transcultural approach to take better advantage of the transnational flows of students and staff and their knowledge, skills and dispositions. Using the United Kingdom’s Advance HE’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (2015), it sets out fundamental principles and values that should underpin higher institutions’ internationalisation policies, programs and pedagogy to cultivate more respectful and reciprocal intercultural partnerships and learning.

**Key words:** Internationalisation, transculturalism, interculturalism, global learning, contact theory.

## 1. Imperatives for internationalisation and interculturalism

Most Anglophone universities in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States include internationalisation in their mission statements and espouse values such as intercultural competence in their list of desired graduate attributes. These aim to equip graduates with the intercultural skills necessary where they may be working across cultures and national boundaries.

The UK's Advance HE *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (2014) outlines the benefits for (all) students of internationalisation and for students' intercultural skills as:

- enhancing their diversity of knowledge, experiences and cultures
- widening their horizons and networks
- promoting their learning and future employability
- equipping them for a future more interconnected world, working internationally (physically or virtually)

The Framework defines intercultural skills as:

- developing effective intercultural relations
- understanding cultural, linguistic, professional and personal ways of interacting, communicating and working with others
- promoting intercultural engagement underpinned by empathy, sociability and sensibility to all forms of diversity

The emphases on widening horizons and the development of networks and employability reflect a concern to equip graduates for their future careers and lives. The stated overall aim of the Framework is to 'prepare 21st century graduates to live in and contribute responsibly to a globally interconnected society'. When we consider that current undergraduate students may be working until the late 2060s – and that the future students of current young academics (who may be teaching for another 40 years) could be in the workforce until the start of the 22<sup>nd</sup> century – it is clear that their world will be a vastly different place. Students will need global knowledge, intercultural skills and a world view far beyond those of students in the past.

Intercultural skills are also highly desired by employers. The UK *Global Graduates* report (Diamond et al., 2011, p. 8) lists the top competences of a 'global graduate' desired by employers:

- an ability to work collaboratively with teams of people from a range of backgrounds and countries
- excellent communication skills: both speaking and listening
- a high degree of drive and resilience
- an ability to embrace multiple perspectives and challenge thinking
- a capacity to develop new skills and behaviours according to role requirements
- a high degree of self-awareness
- an ability to negotiate and influence clients across the globe from different cultures
- an ability to form professional, global networks
- an openness to and respect for a range of perspectives from around the world
- multi-cultural learning agility (e.g. able to learn in any culture or environment)
- multi-lingualism
- knowledge of foreign economies and own industry area overseas
- an understanding of one's position and role within a global context or economy
- a willingness to play an active role in society at a local, national and international level.

The list above includes both "hard" and "soft" skills. The "soft" skills relate to attitudes and personal values and can be seen in the use of language such as "self-awareness", "openness", "respect" and "willingness". Several chime with the values articulated in the Advance HE Framework, which we will come to later. Such skills and attitudes are clearly deemed necessary by employers for successful intercultural relationships and interactions:

The very attitudes and mindset of graduates and leaders can play an important role in their global employability. Some recruiters used the term global mindset to describe an individual whose outlook naturally considers wider global influences, and who sees themselves in relation to others. (Diamond et al., 2011, pp. 8-9)

The report argues that “global mindset” and “cultural agility” are essential attributes that employers operating at the geopolitical level most value. It must be remembered, however, that intercultural learning is not only necessary for students. The intercultural attitudes of teaching staff are paramount in assisting students in their own development of these skills through modelling and example, and staff who are themselves international can assist in the development of intercultural attitudes of their students and colleagues. Teaching staff need to interrogate their own attitudes and work toward what Sanderson (2008) calls “internationalizing the academic self”. This requires being an “anthropologist” of one’s own culture (Carroll & Ryan, 2005) and examining one’s own assumptions and attitudes about the academic culture we consciously or unconsciously promote, teach and assess.

The lofty ideals set out in university mission statements and lists of desired global attributes can be long on rhetoric but short on specific details on how they can be achieved. It can be difficult to realise these goals since they necessitate radical changes to existing mindsets about what internationalisation means and entails, which go to the very nature of the academy. Deep-seated attitudes and barriers are hindering the true globalisation of the operations and outcomes of higher education.

## 2. Definitions of internationalisation

One such barrier, ironically, is created by current definitions and conceptualisations of internationalisation. The most common definitions of internationalisation cited in Western literature and adopted by Anglophone universities are those by Jane Knight (2004) in Canada and Betty Leask (2015) in Australia:

Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the **purpose, functions or delivery** of postsecondary education (Knight, 2004, p.11). [emphasis added]

Internationalization of the curriculum is the incorporation of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the **learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services** of a program of study (Leask, 2015, p. 9). [emphasis added]

These definitions have been enormously useful to universities in expanding their ideas and actions about internationalisation beyond the mere recruitment of international students, to encompass all of the functions of a university and all aspects of teaching and learning. What these definitions in themselves lack, though, is a clear rationale and statement of the purposes of internationalisation (though Knight’s definition does refer to “purpose”). They tend to focus on the internal processes and operations of universities rather than their relationships and interconnections with other academic systems of practice and thought. They do not speak to what internationalisation is for, how it should be conducted, and the ethics of these operations.

A different definition, from a vastly different cultural context, China, is proposed by Gu Mingyuan (2001):

The internationalisation of education can be expressed in the exchange of culture and values, mutual understanding and a respect for difference...The in-

ternationalisation of education does not simply mean the integration of different national cultures or the suppression of one national culture by another culture. (Gu, 2001, p. 5).

Gu's definition not only places an emphasis on the role of internationalisation in the *exchange of cultures and values*, a tension can also be detected about a fear of Western hegemony and loss of indigenous academic cultures. That is, instead of being a vehicle for increased diversity of knowledge and learning, internationalisation may result in a homogeneity of academic practice. This is especially the case since much internationalisation work by Western universities involves one-way transactions of people and knowledge usually through importation of students into Western universities and exportation of Western teachers, programs and universities into non-Western countries. Gu's definition demonstrates that conceptualisations of internationalisation depend on one's own culture and location, and highlights the "situatedness" of one's attitudes and knowledge. That is, through whose and what "eyes" does one see and know the world?

Our notions of the world are deep-seated and hard to shift. This shift usually only happens when people have personally crossed borders and begun to understand their own culture through experiencing another. Bakhtin (1981) refers to this as gaining a "surplus of seeing". Getting people to "re-see" the world if they are "at home", however, and understand the perspective of the "other" is not easy. To give one simple example, in my own teaching, I show students an ["upside down" or "south-up" map of the world](#), inverting the traditional Mercator's projection that places Australia at the "bottom" of the world. Even if prompted to imagine they are looking at the earth from a revolving space station, students cannot accept that this can be "right". Cultural empathy and empathetic interactions require a deep "de-centering" of our world views and a change in mind-sets.

Turning again to the Advance HE Framework, interculturalism is discussed in terms of understanding cultural, linguistic, professional and personal ways of interacting, communicating and working with **others** [emphasis added], how **others** may have a different view of history, and how **others see you** [emphasis added].

These stances require much more than merely "accommodating" the "other" (such as international students), or the internationalisation of the curriculum through the inclusion of international examples. They need more than "tolerating" different behaviours but learning from them. Understanding the "other" first requires an understanding of how one's own culture may be foreign and difficult for others. As the Chinese sage Confucius was purported to have said over two and a half thousand years ago, "One must first understand the self in order to understand the other".

### 3. Unequal relationships between international partners

Most Anglophone universities now have well-established networks of international partnerships. These may include research collaborations, international consortia, staff and student exchanges, and transnational education (TNE) initiatives including joint ventures, overseas campuses, dual degree or articulation programs, and validation and franchise operations (Healey & Michael, 2014), and may involve "flying faculty" where lecturers typically teach for two weeks at an overseas campus. The largest growth in international higher education has been in TNE partnerships which are becoming more "complex, multidimensional and innovative" (Healey & Michael, 2014) and are increasing rapidly worldwide. In the case of the UK, for example, there are now more TNE students undertaking British degrees than on-campus international students.

Although this multitude of contact offers opportunities for reciprocal learning, in reality what occurs is generally only unidirectional learning. Very little effort is made to learn *from* the countries that either send international students to Western universities or host programs provided by Western universities. The movement of people is predominantly from under-developed to developed countries, and the learning that occurs essentially travels from the "West" to the "rest". Not only does this restrict the potential for intercultural cooperation and learning across cultures and

between nations, but places non-Anglophone and non-Western universities and their staff and students in inferior positions.

Allport's contact theory (1958) provides a useful tool in analysing barriers to successful intercultural learning between different cultural groups as well as for identifying which aspects need attention. He argued that four conditions need to be met for effective intercultural relationships: equal status of the groups in the situation; intergroup cooperation; common goals; and authority support.

Bordogna (2019) also identifies the importance of equal status, power relations and intergroup cooperation in TNE programs and stresses the need for collaboration and collaborative partnerships as necessary precursors for effective transnational education:

To achieve collaboration, organisations must seek to develop integrative bonds, which are achieved through the continuous acts of conscious effort made by each partner... In terms of power relations, collaboration seeks to produce democracy and equity between its members, with no member placed higher in rank than the other. (pp. 3-4)

Without mutual understanding, Bordogna (2019) argues, staff involved on both sides can feel isolated, frustrated, or aggrieved. It is clear, therefore, that ethical and responsible approaches to international partnerships can avoid unequal power relationships, prevent cynical attitudes of operational staff and ensure programme sustainability. These approaches should underpin not just transnational programs, but also relations between staff and students, and between students and their student peers in all intercultural encounters.

#### **4. Academic imperialism?**

Unequal power relations can also arise from attitudes to academic knowledge and practice. That is, whose knowledge holds value and should be recognised and valourised? Despite the fact that cultures around the world over the millennia have contributed to understanding and knowledge in areas such as mathematics, philosophy and astronomy, to name but a few, Eurocentric scholarship and ideas are seen as superior and even as universal or international norms. As Ryan and Viete (2009, p. 304) put it, "Western knowledge is legitimised as international in focus, yet there is no indication that the focus is developing through genuine intercultural dialogue".

The Westernisation of the academy reflects a core-periphery dynamic from "West" to "rest" with levels of power and influence diminishing as they move further from the centre as World Systems Theory has posited (Wallerstein, 2000). Academia is not a level playing field and international higher education reproduces and reinforces this dynamic. International higher education tends to be a unilateralist endeavour to "export" Western academic knowledge and mores. Marginson (2010) argues that "equal cultural respect is hard to secure in Anglo-American countries in which systems are monocultural; there is usually an innate belief in Western superiority" while Huisman (2010) contends that internationalisation has become a "synonym" for the "export of the Anglo/American model".

It is important to note here that there is no simple dichotomy between "East" and "West" due to complexities *within* these systems as well as *between* them, with sometimes even greater diversity within cultures than between them (Ryan & Louie, 2007). This is especially the case since many non-Western countries are experiencing rapid change. These terms do hold some value, nevertheless, in describing the prevailing flow of people in the international education arena and current predominant patterns of scholarship and learning.

There is of course also much diversity within European cultures of academic practice but, as Marginson (2010) points out, it is the Anglo/American model of higher education that has become prevalent. Furthermore, the academy is characterised by Anglophone dominance, something Klitgård (2011) refers to as the "tyranny of the Anglosphere". English has become the medium

of instruction for any university wishing to attract international students and this also pervades academic research publication. Publications in British and American international research journals are seen as the “gold standard” and are increasingly essential for those seeking academic appointment or promotion in many universities around the world. The Science Citation Index (SCI), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) and the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) only take into account English-language publications.

This domination can lead to complacency in Anglophone higher education and can have a negative impact on students’ linguistic and intercultural skills in those countries as well as on the development of international partnerships. According to the British Association of University Language Communities (AULC) (2020):

With the proliferation of international courses and degree programmes using English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI), and English the dominant language in academic publication, it is perhaps inevitable that Anglophone universities do not prioritise the development of language and inter-cultural skills in taking forward collaborations with international partners. (p. 4)

It is not just the West that is complicit in this. China and other countries also privilege Western/Eurocentric scholarship and modes of expression, through insistence on replication of Western curriculum in TNE programs; by seeking to train staff and students in Western research methods; and through efforts to emulate Western scholarship. These unequal relationships create invisible hierarchies of academic value. International students and staff can internalise these negative messages about their own academic cultures and abilities and see themselves in “deficit” terms (Ryan & Louie, 2007; Wang, 2017).

The consequences of these attitudes can be seen in practices and expectations relating to teaching, learning and particularly assessment in Western universities. Despite the eulogising of intercultural competencies, intercultural learning, and internationalisation, academic practice at Anglophone universities privileges Western modes of thought and expression. International students are taught to conform without question to Western rhetorical styles in order to be successful. This has an impact not only on limiting the creative possibilities for (all) students but also has negative consequences for the international partners with whom we work.

The academic conventions to which international students (and staff) are expected to conform are sometimes ill-defined and can be idiosyncratic depending on the discipline and the individual academic or assessor. Duong’s (2005) study of definitions of the term “critical thinking” by academics in a Business Faculty at an Australian university, for example, found little common understanding or expression of the term; many claimed that although they could not easily define the concept, they “knew it when they saw it”. In such circumstances, and in the absence of the many years of previous educational experience possessed by their home student counterparts (with whom they compete for grades and rewards), international students can be at a disadvantage, left trying to guess the expectations of the discipline and the individual academic. Further, they need to “unlearn” academic behaviours for which they were previously rewarded. This unilateralist approach to learning is not only failing to take account of the diversity that international students bring but could be viewed as academic imperialism.

This phenomenon goes to the very core of the academy – to ontological and epistemological questions regarding knowledge production and thought and expression. International academics also have to play a foreign and unfamiliar game in order to be published and this can lead to a loss of indigenous academic voices and what could be viewed as “self-colonisation”. Yet, there have been calls by several theorists (Connell, 2007; Huisman, 2010; Rizvi 2010; and Singh, 2009) for Western higher education to become less ethnocentric and to take more account of other academic values. Explicit and resounding challenges to the Eurocentric nature of the academy have been made by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) and in more recent times by Raewyn Connell in *Southern Theory* (2007) and Kuan-hsing Chen in *Asia as Method* (2010). These theories may

have little impact in practice, however. Montgomery's (2019) study of British doctoral theses on internationalisation in the decade 2008 to 2018 found that although they offer new "Southern" perspectives on internationalisation, they also essentially "reproduced Western knowledge" (p. 123)

Some international scholars are beginning to resist the loss of native voices. The development of pride in indigenous academic voices is becoming a distinctive feature of Chinese scholarship as China becomes more powerful and nationalistic and re-asserts its role as a leader on the global stage. There is some reason for such pride as China has rapidly increased the number of its universities in the top 100 in the world and improved its international research output. Three universities, Peking, Tsinghua and the University of Science and Technology of China, were listed in the Times Higher Education world top 100 universities 2020 (THE, 2020), with Peking and Tsinghua gaining 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> positions respectively, an astonishing achievement given that no almost no Chinese university featured in lists of top world universities only a few years ago. Further, in 2017, China overtook the UK in having the second highest number of research citations in the world (the US remaining at number one) with a 7.1 percent increase since 2014 (Elsevier, 2017). This new pride can be seen in a comment by Deng (2014) that China's Social Sciences should "make their own contribution to the world scholarship, thus challenging the cultural hegemony of the West" (p. 240).

It should be added that in Australia, the value of indigenous ways of knowing are being increasingly recognised and embedded within teaching and learning and many universities now offer much more than individual subjects in Aboriginal history and culture. For example, in 2019, Queensland University of Technology became the first Australian university to receive accreditation from Advance HE for including indigenous perspectives in teaching and learning and for providing opportunities for staff to become an Associate Fellow (Indigenous) of the Higher Education Academy (part of Advance HE), the first specialist associate category to be established (Advance HE, 2019).

Imperatives for change also arise from significant shifts in the broader international contexts of higher education. The movement of people from "East" to "West" is beginning to change as non-Western countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong improve the appeal of their own higher education systems and create international education "hubs" of multiple institutions – which Knight (2011) refers to as the "third generation" of international education – to attract students from within their own region. China is establishing large "education cities" in places such as Suzhou, comprising multiple single and joint venture foreign and Chinese universities. The "core-periphery" movement of international students is changing to multiple movements across the world (IIE, 2014) and is presenting a challenge to the dominance of Anglophone universities. Many non-Anglophone universities in Europe are also offering courses in English to attract a larger share of the international student market. It should be noted, however, that the coronavirus pandemic situation at the time of writing is causing some shifts in international education mobility and, combined with the global shift toward more nationalistic stances, may or may not have longer-term consequences.

With these multiple movements around the world and with the number of international students travelling *to* China now approaching the number of those travelling *from* China— 490,000 versus 600,000 (World University News, 2018) – Wu and Zha (2018) argue that international education should now be seen not just as an inward *or* outward movement but as a both inward *and* outward phenomenon. They promote the notion of "transculturalism diffusion" and argue for a new typology to take account of this:

new dynamics are emerging from countries of the developing world, which need to be taken into account in the typologies being used for analyzing HE internationalization. Some semi-peripheral countries in the world knowledge

system, such as South Korea, China, and India, which were traditionally recipients of foreign/Western innovations, have become more active in introducing their own innovations to the world through HE internationalization... We use the notion of transcultural diffusion of innovations to describe the spread of knowledge, culture, HE models, and norms through HE internationalization. (p. 260)

Others have also called for more transcultural approaches in the realm of international education. Murray (2010, p. 52) defines transculturalism as “contact between two or more different cultures” which results in “a new, composite culture in which some existing cultural features are combined, while some are lost, and new features are generated”. Cuccioletta (2002) views transculturalism as “seeing ones’ self in the other” (p. 1), arguing that this should lead to a “cosmopolitan citizenship” (p. 2). Transculturalism is “a recognition that modern societies are no longer monolithic . . . we are in an era where interculturality, transculturalism and the eventual prospect of identifying a cosmopolitan citizenship can become a reality” (p. 2). The smooth and upward trajectory of such developments, however, cannot be confidently predicted since they are competing with and simultaneously occurring against the backdrop of increasing nationalism around the world. Nevertheless, such calls require an examination of the knowledge, skills and dispositions of those in other cultural systems of academic practice to see which elements can be combined to form these “new features” and, as Murray (2010) espouses, create a “new, composite culture”. We will come to such an examination later.

## **5. Resistance to different cultural modes of language and expression**

Despite these global shifts in international education, internationalisation efforts such as Internationalisation of the Curriculum and Internationalisation at Home, though laudable, may only result in superficial changes and small-scale initiatives such as campus cultural events. They can fail to address deeper questions such as: where does our knowledge come from, whose knowledge is it, what forms of knowledge and expression are privileged and why?

The decolonisation of the curriculum agenda is starting to address such questions (AULC, 2020; Finn, 2019) and clearly has parallels with internationalisation debates. These debates focus on how non-Western knowledge and perspectives can be drawn upon to diversify and strengthen more globally-orientated curricula. As yet, such discussions have not extended to include academic writing and expression in terms of what is considered of value or acceptable especially in the assessment of students’ work.

Wider recent debates call for the decolonisation and dewesternisation of the academy itself. Citing Mignolo (2011), Silova, Rappaley and You (2020, p. 4) call for alternative ontological and epistemological paradigms which:

aim to decenter Western hegemony in knowledge and subjectivity without claiming universality. Unfolding toward ‘an open horizon of pluriversity’ (Mignolo, 2011, p. 275) . . . to divest or ‘delink’ from Western starting points, particularly epistemic and subjective ones, with the aim of ‘contributing to building a world in which many worlds exist’ (Mignolo, 2011, p. 54).

Despite such movements, there is little evidence of change “on the ground”. We promote interculturalism yet we teach our international students how to conform to Western rhetorical styles and to “fit in” to the dominant Anglophone academic culture (AULC, 2020, p. 5). Many international students do welcome learning these styles but for others, this can result in a threat to their social identity (Aronson, 2002; Gee, 2001) or loss of self-esteem (Ryan & Viete, 2009). Aronson (2002, p. 154) claims that stereotyping of minority groups can result in “short-term impairment of intelligent thought and performance” and can “prompt defensive adaptations that have far-reaching effects, such as disengaging from activities or domains where the stereotype is relevant, and, as a result, impaired intellectual development”. Cultural and academic hegemony, according



to Gee (2001), ascribes certain identities to individuals where they feel they have to lose their cultural identity. They move from being a successful “insider” in their own system of academic practice to an “outsider” in the new one and often try to take on unfamiliar modes of participation.

This hegemony stymies the expansion and enrichment of writing and expression in the academy. Many non-English speaking background students report that even if they do have good proficiency in English, writing in a second language (or third or fourth) doesn’t allow them to demonstrate their ideas or any sophistication of thought and their abilities may be unrecognised or undervalued (Ryan & Viète, 2009). Their language proficiency is often conflated with competence in the disciplinary discourses. According to Ryan and Viète (2009), many of the problems international students experience relate to:

the academic literacy and pedagogical practices in the English-speaking academic environment, which international students time and again have reported assume local linguistic and cultural knowledge and can result in feelings of disengagement and a sense that their own knowledge and experiences are undervalued. (p. 303)

Wang (2017) reports on the shock she received on her essay feedback as an early writer at an Anglophone university and the dilemma it posed for her own identity:

Even though I had devoted a great amount of energy and time to the writing, it was returned by my tutor with directions for significant revisions. Her comments included statements like: “Your language is too florid and not suitable for academic writing”; “You should go straight to the main point” ... At that time, writing posed a dilemma for me. On the one hand, I wanted to acculturate into the western community. On the other hand, I wanted to ‘be myself’ as a Chinese young woman studying in Australia. I was extremely reluctant to discard my own writing ‘style’ and identity as a writer which I had developed over nearly ten years. (p. 6)

Such experiences can result in feelings of alienation and cause cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) leading to failure. Viète and Le Ha (2007) argue that writing “in two tongues is like a two-edged knife. If one can handle it skillfully, one can achieve many purposes; otherwise one will cut oneself” (p. 13).

As Vygotsky (1962) argues, language is a profoundly social activity and the “tool for thinking” so stymying language can also stymie thought as well as social interactions. Since English is the *lingua franca* of academia “this dominance, and the attitudes it encourages, allow only for a very specific way of looking at the world” (AULC, 2020, p. 5).

International researchers who have to work in English as a second language in research collaborations can also feel this constraint on their thinking and interactions with others. In 2016, the President of the European Language Council, Manuel Célio Conceição, stressed the role of language in the construction of knowledge and identities. He maintained that using only English in research collaborations may not only create inequality among team members but also stifle creativity, stating that “A failure to take into account the multi- and plurilingual nature of research teams limits the very research being undertaken, both in its construct and in its dissemination” (cited in AULC, 2020, p. 4). Silova, Rappleye and You (2020) contend that “[d]espite awareness that simple dichotomies are cul-de-sacs for our research imagination, these academic standoffs continue to shape cultural space and research alike” (p. 3).

Language and writing are embedded within cultures and cannot be removed from their historic, political and social contexts. Culture cannot be separated from language, and thinking itself is shaped by cultural “scripts”. As Schmitt (2005) argues, native speaker fluency is derived from the use of a shared set of memorised stock phrases that native speakers understand and tacitly agree are efficient and expected ways of expressing ideas.

Different “cultures of learning” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011) thus have different writing traditions which, according to Lu, Li, and Ottewell (2016), can generally be divided into writer-responsible versus reader-responsible writing approaches. Lu et al. (2016) draw on the contrastive rhetoric work of Connor (2011) and Hinds (1987), and what Connor (2011) later re-termed “intercultural rhetoric”, to describe the expectations of the reader:

[I]n English writing “effective written communication [...] is the sole provenance of the writer” (Hinds, 1987, p. 152), whereby readers’ lack of understanding is not due to the fact that they have not exerted sufficient effort to understand, but that the writer has not been sufficiently clear enough. Reader-responsible languages, by contrast, charge readers with the responsibility to extract the meaning from the text. (p. 102)

English (Anglophone) academic writers are responsible for effective communication with the reader and use logic, candour, rigorous editing and prescribed formats. In reader-responsible writing (for example, in China), the reader is usually guided by the writer with the use of elegant language, metaphor, suggestion and tact. A writer moving from one academic system to another therefore faces a quantum shift in the style expected of them and for students (and staff wanting to publish in another language) this can present a significant challenge. This explains why “[a]s Kaplan (1966) noted, L2 students’ research papers can often seem ‘out of focus’ because they are employing a rhetoric and sequence of thought which ‘violate the expectations of the native reader’” (Lu, Li & Ottewell, 2016, p. 13).

Research by Ryan (2012) at the University of Oxford shows that international students’ difficulties often stem less from problems with language, as is commonly thought, than with different cultural academic writing norms:

Writing is the main problem. **It’s not the language**, it’s more about **sentence structure and style**, about how to structure an analytical essay. (p. 16) (1st year Philosophy, Politics and Economics student from the Netherlands) [emphasis added]

My main problem is writing. I don’t know where to start. At first, I thought it was just cultural and language, just grammatical issues, **then I realised it was about writing**, about formulating ideas. (p. 17) (Chinese doctoral candidate in Politics) [emphasis added]

Academia in any system has its own language culture and conventions and these can be opaque even to those who have grown up in that system. Academic English is “no one’s mother tongue” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1994, p. 8); it must be learnt, but academics may forget that they too had to learn this. Furthermore, as McAlinden and Zagoria (2013) argue, English writing norms are understood differently even in “inner circle” English nations, so should L2 English language speakers be held up to nebulous norms? This raises questions beyond whose knowledge, whose curriculum and whose internationalisation are we promoting and assessing, but also whose culture, whose language, and whose English?

For international students, moving from one academic system to another requires them to change behaviours from those which they have previously been taught and rewarded. Table 1 outlines differences between educational “ideals” or values between those in the UK and China, as an example of different expectations on learners in different cultural academic systems.

**Table 1.** British and Chinese educational values (adapted from Ryan, 2014).

UK	China
Type of (critical) thinking	Level of knowledge
Independent learning	Learn from the teacher
Question teachers	Respect for the teacher
Student-centred learning	Harmony of the group
Argumentation and assertiveness	Consensus and avoiding conflict
Achievement of the individual	Respect for text
'Deep' learners seeking meaning	'Reflective' learners
Strategic learners	Hard workers

As can be seen, these expectations are vastly different and involve different relations between teachers and learners and, at a deeper level, divergent ways of knowing and being. This is not to say that either of these approaches is superior or inferior to the other, they are simply different. It does also not imply that all students in each system will embody these values or attributes. It simply means that the general pattern of expectations in each system about what constitutes a "good learner" or "good learning behaviours" can be almost diametrically opposed and can explain why students moving from one system to another may experience "academic shock" (Ryan, 2005). Academic shock may endure long after initial cultural and language shock dissipate. Another way of looking at this is to examine the utility of these ideals for transcultural learning; how might these ideals be combined to enrich learning behaviours and student achievement; facilitate understanding of cultural "others"; and lead to more reciprocal and respectful interactions and to the "compositive culture" that Murray (2010) advocates? Rather than viewing these ideals as opposites they can be recognised as complimentary.

In such discussions, it is important to be mindful that "culture" is not an essentialist notion but a complex one; culture is multifaceted, dynamic and ever-changing. As mentioned above, many of the national and cultural contexts of higher education are undergoing rapid change and bringing with it changes to attitudes and knowledge. However, although academic cultures in countries such as China are learning from other systems of cultural academic practice, such as Japan and Western countries, by contrast, educators in Western countries appear complacent and are not engaging in two-way learning. In a study by Ryan (2014) of the views of senior academics in Anglophone (in the study, those in the US, UK and Australia) and a "Confucian-heritage culture" (CHC) country (including mainland China and Hong Kong) about "Western" and "CHC" paradigms of scholarship and learning and whether they think they are changing, one Western linguistics lecturer commented:

In CHC things are changing so fast that it is breath taking. The CHC scholars and learners are eager to catch up with the West, which has meant eagerness, openness, hard work in such measures that today the Western scholars and learners seem to be meandering along in leisurely pace. (p. 64).

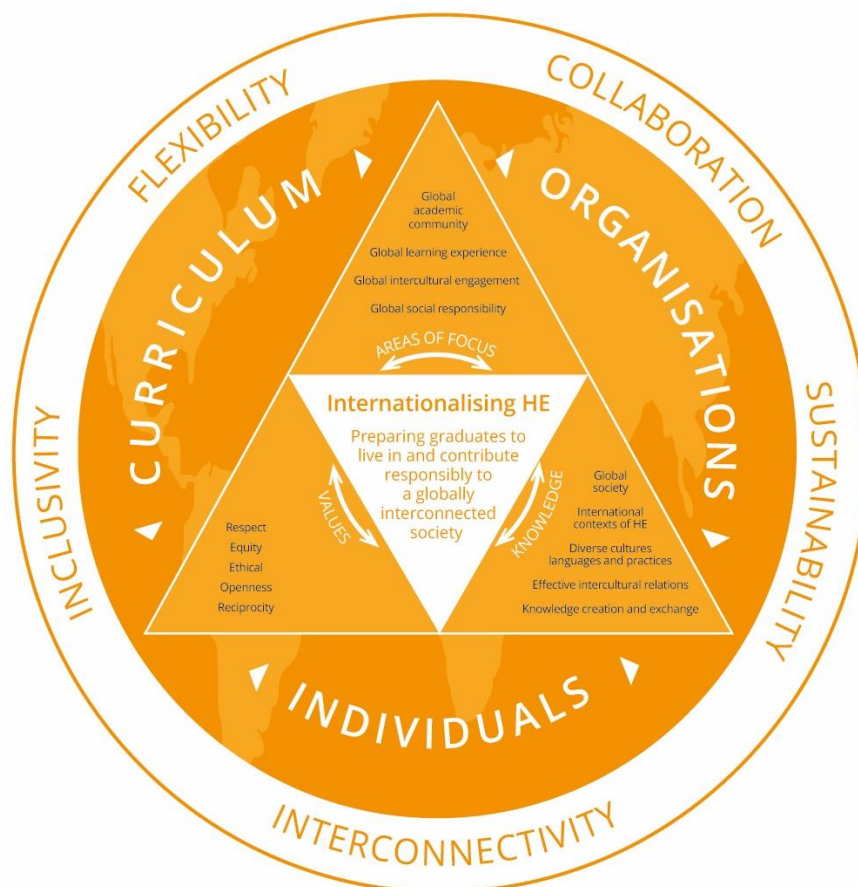
Engaging in two-way learning holds many benefits. Diverse forms of English expression are valuable and enriching and, as I am aware from my own experience studying and working in China over several decades, can open up other possibilities. Operating in a different language can enable one to become a "different person", to change one's world view, and to become more culturally empathetic, an asset when teaching students from other academic systems. Many international students also express such a personal transformational capacity of international study (Wang, 2017).

Those who work closely with international students, such as language and learning professionals, are often more aware than academic staff of the potential and benefits of learning from students and colleagues from different academic cultures and traditions for the enhancement of knowledge, the expansion of ways of thinking and knowing and the enrichment of styles of expression.

## 6. Beyond interculturalism to transculturalism

The changing contexts outlined above mean that we need new ways of working. We currently may have *transnational* education, but do we have *transcultural* education? Transcultural education means working with international students and staff and international partners to seek alternative ideas and knowledge and new ways of thinking. It means looking beyond national borders and promoting *global learning* amongst students and in international research alliances to solve global challenges. Addressing issues such as climate crises, food insecurity, species extinction, desertification, refugee crises, pandemics and global poverty necessitates good intercultural and language skills on the part of those working on these problems, as they “are largely focused outside of the English-speaking world” (AULC, 2020, p. 4). It is only through global efforts that such crises can be solved.

Transcultural approaches mean *learning from* other cultures and creating *new* academic cultures. This requires considerable and comprehensive efforts across a range of dimensions. The Advance HE *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* offers a roadmap for such endeavours. The framework is driven by a vision to promote a high quality, equitable and global learning experience for all students, irrespective of their geographical location or background. It comprises three dimensions of Knowledge, Areas of Focus and Values (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Advance HE Internationalising Higher Education Framework (The framework for internationalising higher education ©Advance HE 2015. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission.).

The global representation is encircled by five driving principles providing a holistic way of enhancing the quality and variety of policy and practice. The outer circle illustrates five areas integral to internationalising HE. These include **interconnectivity**, **inclusivity**, **collaboration**, **flexibility** and **sustainability**, which are elaborated below (and as listed in the Framework).

### INTERCONNECTIVITY

connecting with and impacting on global developments and communities



### INCLUSIVITY

regard for the plurality, impact and benefit of cultural, individual and linguistic diversities



### COLLABORATION

using collegial approaches, transcending national and international boundaries



### FLEXIBILITY

enabling agility structures, systems and approaches, and effective use of technology



### SUSTAINABILITY

securing environmental, economic and social development into the future

The main triangle depicts **areas of focus** (activity), as well as the underpinning and interconnected sets of **knowledge** and values required to implement them effectively. Global graduates are placed at the heart of the framework in the inverted triangle pointing to the audience fundamental to its effective implementation.

### Areas of focus

#### GLOBAL ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

driven by international knowledge generation, exchange, networking, partnerships and collaboration



#### GLOBAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

informed by outward, inward and virtual mobility, cultural immersion, language acquisition, international interactions and/or perspectives



### **GLOBAL INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT**

underpinned by empathy, sociability and sensitivity to all forms of diversity and the plurality of language



### **GLOBAL SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

demonstrated by a commitment to addressing global issues and inequalities, as well as their impact on cultures and wider society

#### **Areas of knowledge**

### **GLOBAL SOCIETY**

understand the role of HE in shaping and sustaining global society and addressing its challenges, as well as the reciprocal influence of global society on HE



### **INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS OF HE**

understand the relevance and impact of different international contexts to your organisation, professional responsibilities and discipline area



### **DIVERSE CULTURES, LANGUAGES, AND PRACTICES**

understand the potential of diverse or divergent pedagogical approaches, cultural, linguistic and social capital within the global academic community to enrich and impact upon learning, teaching and research



### **EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS**

understand cultural, linguistic, professional and personal ways of interacting, communicating and working with others



### **KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND EXCHANGE**

understanding various means of creating, contesting and exchanging knowledge within and across global academic communities, including the function and impact of technology

### Underpinning values

#### RESPECT

show consideration for individual, cultural and linguistic diversities



#### EQUITY

ensure parity and fairness in approaches to, and opportunities for, participation and success



#### ETHICAL

act with integrity and transparency with regard to moral, social and legal considerations



#### OPENNESS

be receptive to different ideas, forms of communication, and ways of working across cultures and learning contexts



#### RECIPROCITY

mutually generate and exchange knowledge, ideas and resources within and across cultures, languages, and intellectual traditions

As can be seen, the framework combines both “hard” and “soft” knowledge, skills and dispositions with an emphasis on empathy, respect, ethics and reciprocity in its underpinning values, and global responsibility, collaboration and collegiality as fundamental principles in all intercultural encounters.

## 7. Conclusion

As has been shown, conceptualisations of internationalisation are culturally and geographically situated. If we see internationalisation as an exchange of cultures, we can move beyond “intercultural” learning – *learning between* – to “transcultural” learning – *learning across*. This can result in hybridised, enriched forms of expression and writing. The use of China and the UK as a case study shows how different cultural academic traditions can be drawn upon for more intercultural, two-way learning based not on Western or Anglophone dominance but on more reciprocal and respectful relationships between staff and students, and between universities and their international partners. What Western countries can learn from China’s cultures of learning and system of academic practice are: respect for learning; the importance of hard work; high aspirations for academic success; a willingness to learn from other countries; an eagerness to reform and invest in education; and the importance of self-reflection (Ryan, 2020).

The different approaches to knowledge and expression in China and Western countries such as the UK and Australia demonstrate how, for all students, and for staff as well, more transcultural learning can result in more pluralistic curricula, more diverse ontology and epistemology, and

richer forms of expression. The Advance HE *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* offers a blueprint for assisting in the achievement of these goals.

However, unequal power dynamics at the institutional level; narrow, internally-focused views of internationalisation and expenditure-driven agendas at the policy and structural level; and ideas about scholarship and knowledge at the pedagogical level, are persisting in hindering efforts to build more respectful intercultural relationships between Western universities and their international partners. As argued above, these breach the fundamental principles that Allport (1958) asserted as being necessary for successful intercultural contact, especially those relating to equal status of the groups in the situation and intergroup cooperation.

As those working most closely with international students, language and learning professionals can act as champions of inter- and trans-culturalism and conduits for ideas about what other academic cultures and traditions can offer. To truly take advantage of the opportunities of our rapidly changing contexts in higher education, we need to move beyond “intercultural” in terms of learning to work with cultural “others”, and toward “transcultural” approaches to achieve Gu Mingyuan’s call (2001) for the exchange of culture and values and mutual understanding.

In these endeavours, we need to interrogate our own mindsets and their origins; recognise that culture is dynamic and multidimensional and not simply about ethnicity; and be mindful of whose language and culture we are embodying and unconsciously promoting when we talk about interculturalism and internationalisation. This means that we need to develop a “meta-awareness” of not only our students’ cultures of learning (Louie, 2005) but also our own.

Higher education is at the forefront of the movement of people and ideas across the globe and is well-placed to take a leading role in forging global cooperation and understanding. This is sorely needed at this point in time given the global challenges facing the world. We need new approaches and theorisations so that higher education can be a beacon of light in a rapidly changing world order and in the midst of a more populist, isolationist and nativist global community.

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