Voices of internationalisation of higher education from sub-Saharan Africa, China and Indonesia

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Abstract

From the perspective of peripheralised countries, internationalisation is imbalanced and hegemonic, as it is predominantly constructed by universities in the Global North. We explore the imbalanced internationalisation from the cases of sub-Saharan Africa through the dominance of Western knowledge systems and brain drain; China through isolation and playing 'catch up'; and Indonesia through the financial crisis, the bailout conditions of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and marketisation. By taking the cases of sub-Sahara Africa, China and Indonesia, this article problematises the idea of internationalisation and argues that it further relegates universities from the peripheralised countries to the margin.

Keywords

brain drain, imbalanced internationalisation, marketisation, peripheralised countries

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When internationalisation of higher education is written about from the perspectives of the Western industrialised world, it is considered a transformative process and strategy. But from the perspective of peripheralised countries or regions, internationalisation is challenging, imbalanced and hegemonic. This article presents three case studies, drawing on the research of Sintayehu Kassaye Alemu in sub-Sahara African countries, Mei Qu in China and Zulfa Sakhiyya in Indonesia. Although these countries vary in their economic, social, political and cultural situations, they are widely considered as less developed compared to the Western world. All three cases (though with different emphasis) involve two major questions: first, what impact(s) does internationalisation have on their universities; and second,

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how have universities in the three case studies been trying to reposition themselves in the world of internationalised higher education?

In what could be framed as a donor–recipient relationship, higher education institutions in all three case studies have tended to adopt the standards of the academic cultures of the West and benchmark themselves against their central counterparts as the purveyors of the standards, policies, initiatives and programmes of internationalisation. Often this is done without adequate consideration of contextual differences, whether social, structural or economic. Moreover, the developed world sets out to attract academic scholars from developing countries and triggers brain drain, which is a big hurdle to their home countries' research and knowledge production. As a result, peripherally located universities tend to benefit less from the process of internationalisation, and internationalisation initiatives end up reproducing more peripheral higher education landscapes.

Due to this imbalanced relationship, in the three cases studied here, governments have adopted policies and strategies to try and reposition their higher education systems in the world. Sub-Saharan Africa is intending to develop continental or regional internationalisation through the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Some individual African countries are also trying to develop policies to minimise the imbalanced benefits of internationalisation. For example, Ethiopia has already conducted research on the policy framework for the internationalisation of its higher education system (HESC 2019). China strives for creating internationalisation with Chinese characteristics and Indonesia is trying to compete in international markets for higher education. The economic development of a region and country is central for its ability to abandon its peripheral position. The emerging economies in Asia are trying to reposition themselves to minimise the Western central hegemonic pressures. However, such strategies and policies are not easy for sub-Saharan Africa and Indonesia, whose economies are not strong enough to change the situation and benefit more from internationalisation. Even China, which has manifested some success in moving from the periphery to the centre in its engagement with processes of internationalisation, is faced with new challenges due to China–USA economic and political tensions. These cases indicate to policy makers and academic activists in less developed countries the pitfalls of internationalisation and highlight some ways to improve the status of their higher education institutions in internationalisation.

Case study A. Internationalisation of higher education: Sub-Saharan Africa

Internationalisation is often closely related to the mobility of scholars, students, academic programmes and institutions, academic cooperation, knowledge production and transfer, and international education (Meek et al. 2009). However, the processes of internationalisation, in most cases, have been driven and dominated by the perspectives and interests of the Global North. This sub-Saharan case study addresses internationalisation in the periphery by focusing on knowledge production and brain drain. It also makes recommendations for rethinking present and future policy and practice of the internationalisation of higher education institutions.

Due to the various common features shared by higher education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa and without denying the differences in their higher education systems, the author has considered the sub-Sahara African higher education institutions as one system. For one thing, sub-Sahara African higher education systems are colonial establishments in terms of system, management, structure, curriculum and languages. Economically, most of them suffer from austerity and are highly dependent on foreign expertise and financial aid. As a result, sub-Sahara African higher education institutions are the most internationalised in the world, but from the perspectives of benefits, voices, participation and the model of internationalisation, they are the most marginalised, peripheralised and challenged.

The most devastating consequence of internationalisation in sub-Saharan Africa has been brain drain, which has had far-reaching repercussions in research, knowledge production, publication and teaching and learning. It has resulted in a ‘dependency syndrome,’ where sub-Sahara African higher education institutions and their academics are dependent on Western systems, standards, support, even knowledge. This attitude has placed African higher education institutions at the bottom of research productivity and publication rankings. The imbalances resulting from internationalisation are strongly critiqued by African and international scholars, and sub-Sahara African higher education institutions are attempting to reposition themselves through strategies of regionalisation, contextualisation, prioritisation and ‘de-internationalisation’. They are developing these approaches to internationalisation and reinvigorating higher education institutions through the application of an African philosophy of education and initiatives to promote brain gain. However, the prevailing socio-economic and political structures do not allow sub-Saharan Africa to realise these ambitions and efforts easily. In this respect, sub-Saharan African governments and higher education institutions can learn from China that economic development can help change the peripheral status of higher education institutions.

Brain drain

The internationalisation of higher education in Africa dates back to the period of colonialism. Sub-Saharan African higher education institutions were considered as branch campuses of the higher education institutions in colonial countries. They adopted the colonial higher education system, language, curriculum, structure, management and so on. However, as a result of colonialism and its socio-economic and political consequences, sub-Sahara African higher education institutions remained the most marginalised in their model, dimension and scope (Teferra 2014). African academics and higher education institutions are required to seek donor support for their departments, faculty and research institutes by forming links with more affluent universities in the industrialised world. They depend on these universities for research money, publication, keeping journals going and training for their junior staff (Brock-Utne 2003). This has a far-reaching repercussion on knowledge production in Africa. For one thing, the link or collaboration is not on equal terms; it assumes a donor–recipient relation, which affects academic equality and mutual respect, and disempowers the African research potential (Brock-Utne 2003). The editorial in the February 1990 issue of the University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly (UDASA) newsletter commented on the links with Western institutions as follows:

> Virtually every department, under the threat of material and intellectual starvation, has been forced to establish links with one or more institutions, mostly from the West. We depend on the links for the training of our junior staff, for teaching material and equipment, and a host of other things. The link agreements are, almost without exception, as unequal as would be expected. This is despite some efforts to include clauses suggesting reciprocity....What is primarily at stake is that as we lose confidence in our own ability to sustain our education system, we shall also have to abandon the pretence of determining our educational future. (UDASA 1990: 1)

As a result of forming such links, many African scholars and researchers have left their home higher education institution in search of a better academic and economic environment. This mobility has resulted in a devastating brain drain and research unproductivity and dependency. For instance, UNESCO (2008) reveals that 30 per cent of African scientists are lost due to brain drain mainly caused by internationalisation. Over twenty million Africans with tertiary education and aged 25 or over were living in OECD countries in 2000, a considerable increase from twelve million in 1990 (UNESCO 2008). In 15 years from 1960 to 1975, Africa lost twenty-seven thousand skilled people. The number increased to forty thousand between 1975 and 1984. Since 1990, at least twenty thousand qualified Africans have left the continent every year (UNESCO 2008). In 2002, the World Bank estimated that around seventy thousand highly qualified African professionals, experts, scholars and managers with internationally marketable skills left Africa every year. More than forty thousand African PhD holders were working abroad in the 2000s (Teklu 2008). By 2013, a United Nations report showed one in nine Africans with a tertiary education (2.9 million people) were living in developed countries – a 50 per cent growth over the previous 10 years and more than any other region in the world (Firsing 2016). For instance, before the civil war, the extent of brain drain from Ethiopian universities was thought to be more than 50 per cent (Habtamu 2003).

For Africa, the intention behind internationalising higher education was ‘to increase the visibility of African universities in areas such as Research and Development, and increase the contribution that the institutions are making to the development of Africa, and open channels for Africa to benefit from the global stock of scientific knowledge’ (Ogachi 2011: 23). However, these intentions and partnerships with Western universities have been alien, unequal and uncontextualised and have led African universities in the contrary direction. They have not made it possible to pursue local priorities and initiate the indigenising of research and innovation (Barrett et al. 2014; Ogachi 2011; Sawyerr 2004). According to Teferra and Greijn (2010), the challenge of African higher education institutions is a vicious circle where brain drain and poor productivity of knowledge leads to a poorly developed economy followed by increased brain drain.

Knowledge production

The political economy of knowledge production has changed. The economic and social prosperity of a nation state is imagined to depend primarily on knowledge. Knowledge production, as a public or private good, also shapes individual career paths and social hierarchies. Knowledge production has been changed by technological facilities and the process of internationalisation. Further transformations have occurred in the governance of knowledge and knowledge-based institutions, which is now shared between the state, the market and the academic institutions, whose interests do not always align. As a result, the wellbeing of societies and the competitiveness of economies are increasingly based on the ability of universities to deliver problem-solving and applied knowledge. Consequently, three modes of knowledge production are identified (Gibbons et al. 1994; Kim and Brooks 2012). Whereas Mode I is discipline-based, basic knowledge production, which is linked to traditional university-based research, Mode II knowledge is produced in collaboration between universities and a wide range of non-university institutions (Salazar-Clemena and Meek 2007). According to Gibbons et al. (1994), Mode II research is more multidisciplinary and oriented to problem-solving and professional practice. In contrast, Mode III knowledge is a biographical narrative of mobile academics who view the world from different perspectives (Kim and Brooks 2012). These new contexts of knowledge have been shaped by the Global North, whose universities, research and teaching institutes continue to reproduce their position and their styles of knowledge production as superior. Through the development of 'neutral' quality standards, knowledge production from the periphery is systematically placed on a lower ranking. In most cases, the periphery is caught in what would appear to be a one-way transaction; its universities remain as consumers of knowledge from the centre. The process of internationalisation has to be analysed in the light of this imbalanced reality.

The conditions under which research has been carried out in developing countries and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa has raised some essential questions: How much of the research carried out in universities in developing countries is directly relevant to their needs and suitable to their socio-cultural and economic contexts and priorities? To what extent have local researchers been able to manage, possess and utilise the research conducted in their universities? Whose policies, methods and priorities have been implemented? What are the standards and parameters for research competency and quality? Researchers in developing countries measure their competence and quality in terms of Western standards, and eventually they lose the self-esteem needed for independent research endeavours. Subsequently, they become highly dependent on Western approaches, methods, training, teaching systems and curriculum. Evangelia Papoutsaki (2008) has explained this dilemma as follows:

> The needs of institutions to develop within a global academic and research community and thereby adopt the predominant Western models of higher education and the development needs of these countries are often clashing, posing a dilemma between satisfying market forces and the need to nurture education within socio-cultural specificities of the country. (Papoutsaki 2008: 246)

In African universities, research and its dissemination are challenging and frustrating. The practices of dependency and unequal collaboration, brain drain and poor research infrastructures are big hurdles in most African universities. Partly because of brain drain, knowledge production in Africa is characterised by many as ‘subjugated knowledge’ that is disqualified or unqualified as insufficiently elaborated and ‘located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of recognition or scientificity’ (Foucault 1980: 82). This is reflected in the output of African research publications, which is the lowest in the world (Teferra and Greijn 2010). Most of the successful African scientific research publications are produced in collaboration with researchers from the United States, the UK, France, and so on. The experience of ‘failure’ has stifled research individualism and affected the continent’s research evolution and priorities. Sixty-six percent of the continent’s research was collaborative in a five-year period (2004–2008), and single-author articles appear to be ‘on the verge of extinction’ (Dell 2014). These limitations have been further intensified by the international marginalisation of sub-Sahara African higher education. According to the IAU (2010), other world regions do not prioritise links with African institutions in their internationalisation strategies.

Adams et al. (2010) have confirmed that the major cause of the research problem of African higher education ‘is the haemorrhage of talent. Many of its best students take their higher degrees at universities in Europe, Asia and North America. Too few Africans return’ (Adams et al. 2010: Introduction). Generally, the current trends are more likely to widen, or at least maintain the gap between higher education and research in the developed and developing countries of the world (Meek et al. 2009). Hence, university futures should reconsider this unequal collaboration in the process of internationalisation.

Attempts to reposition African universities in the world

The internationalisation of higher education has been conceived by many as the responsibility of developed countries. It is designed and defined by developed nations; it benefits them more than others. Global relations between universities are imbalanced and, in some ways, have negative impacts on developing countries (e.g. brain drain and hegemonic academic culture). Internationalisation of higher education in developing countries has genuine risks and challenges. For example, Wilson observes the following:

> As the global pressure to develop knowledge societies accelerates, there is a risk that the gap between the developed and the developing countries will continue to widen. Brain drain, the large-scale emigration of highly skilled human capital, is a major concern to society at large, and for the higher education and research community. In spite of attempts to promote 'brain circulation', it will surely remain a major concern in the decades to come. (Wilson 2013: 33)

Hans De Wit states, 'Until recently "internationalisation" like "international education" was predominantly a Western phenomenon, in which the developing countries played only a reactive role' (2013: 6). He continues to recommend the need to 'de-internationalise' higher education in Africa, or at least, African universities have to first move away from their past dominance by Western structures, concepts and learning models and develop their own style of internationalisation. The increasing economic importance of emerging and developing countries requires the alteration of the landscape of internationalisation. The 2012 action plan of the International Association of Universities (IAU 2012) calls for new visions and strategies to challenge traditional views about the internationalisation of higher education. Moreover, Goolam Mohamedbhai (2013) has proposed that African higher education institutions, which share common challenges, need to contextualise and prioritise their internationalisation activities in a regional context.

In July 2009, the Network of African Science Academies submitted a statement to the heads of state and government attending the G8+5 Summit in Italy, for consideration and action on brain drain. The statement made clear that 'one-third of all African scientists live and work in developed countries. This outflow represents a significant loss of economic potential for the continent, especially in today's global society where scientific and technological knowledge drive development' (NASAC 2009: 1). As a result, Africa remains the world's least scientifically proficient region and the world's poorest continent. The NASAC (2009), statement called upon the G8+5 countries to invest adequately, extend financial support, launch regional and international centres of excellence for study and research, and widen endeavours to encourage the diaspora to return home. Such a call for Western intervention will be helpful if and only if it renders honest and unconditional support for Africa to solve its problems by itself. African universities should consider global internationalisation with caution and at the same time they should develop regional internationalisation. One way to do this is by considering the African philosophy of education, Botho or Ubuntu, in its engagement in global internationalisation. Botho or Ubuntu refers to communal relationships and emphasises that an 'I' is always connected to and always understood in relationship with others. The philosophy of Botho or Ubuntu is defined as humanistic nature and aims to re-centre African education around the collective wellbeing of the African people (Assié-Lumumba 2005). Ubuntu, for instance, in the context of the society of South Africa, is the act of being human, of caring, sympathy, empathy, forgiveness or any values of humanness towards others. Ubuntu is a capacity for expressing compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring (Lefa 2015).

Concluding remarks

In spite of their historical engagement in internationalisation through colonial ties, sub-Saharan African higher education institutions have been suffering from a vicious circle of economic and academic underdevelopment. African higher education institutions have been losing their brightest minds through brain drain, a phenomenon with far-reaching repercussions on knowledge production, publication and development. The application of colonial languages, curricula, models, systems, policies and administration has alienated sub-Sahara African higher education institutions from their society. The pressures have minimised the amount and quality of knowledge production and made Africa more dependent on the West. To change these scenarios and the peripheral status of the higher education institutions, sub-Saharan Africa is reconsidering a regional form of internationalisation and a balanced and integrated form of international partnership through cautious, planned and balanced engagement.

The discussion in this case study is not intended to isolate the continent of Africa from the rest of the world. It is an attempt at highlighting the imbalanced features of internationalisation of higher education in practice. Generally, this and the other case studies in this article call for informed reconsideration of the internationalisation of higher education in both centre and periphery perspectives.

Case study B. Striving for a 'balanced internationalisation': The case of Chinese universities

Getting rid of their peripheral status in the global higher education landscape is not just a priority of African universities. It has been a major concern for decades for Chinese universities. This case study reviews how Chinese universities have tried to reposition themselves from the periphery to the centre in the global higher education hierarchy. This effort has focused on balancing Chinese interests, tradition and culture with foreign influences in the universities' internationalisation process.

The consistent awareness of a 'balanced internationalisation'

Although the history of Chinese higher education dates back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BC), in 1895 the first modern university (Peiyang University), based on a Western model, was established in China. Since then, Chinese universities have been continuously looking for the ways to integrate and balance Chinese culture and traditions of higher education with those of foreign and especially Western countries. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a series of experiments in university building guided by the mainstream thought 'Chinese learning as the essence, and Western learning for its usefulness' (中学为体，西学为用), an idea that appeared in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal late Qing Dynasty (1840–1919). This was followed by a short period of total acceptance of Soviet-style higher education in the early 1950s, which resulted in the nurturing of a very small group of specialists coming from the families of the old intellectual class and the new political elite. This educational strategy was thus in opposition to the socialists' wish to foster a generation of professionals mobilised from among working-class or peasant families (Hayhoe 1996). Accompanying the conflicts between China and the 'Social Imperialism' of the Soviet Union from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, another round of educational experiments was promoted. These experiments took an extreme form in the Cultural Revolution decade, during which the Chinese higher education system was seriously damaged and almost all exchange and cooperation with the outside world was broken off.

The promulgation of the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978 marked a new beginning for China as well as for Chinese universities. However, after almost a century of wars, political turmoil and poverty, Chinese universities were marginalised on the international arena. As a result, the internationalisation of Chinese universities in the early stage of 'reform and opening-up' was characterised by a 'one-way import of foreign (Western) knowledge into China' (Yang 2014: 157). For instance, China tried to acquire advanced knowledge by sending students to Western countries and Japan. Although the importation of foreign (Western) knowledge did benefit the economic development in China, it also caused worries, particularly related to brain drain or loss of higher education sovereignty. Having learned the lessons of going to extremes in the past, since 1978 Chinese universities have cautiously tried to maintain a balance between Chinese interests and foreign influence in the internationalisation process.

This striving for a balanced internationalisation can be detected from the internationalisation terminology used in formal policy documents and in daily life. Terms such as internationalisation and internationalisation activities are not as popular as 'international exchange and collaboration' (国际交流与合作) or 'exchange/collaboration with the outside world' (对外交流/合作). This is because the suffix '-ise' as in 'internationalise' is translated into the Chinese character '化' (Hua, meaning transform), which implies that Chinese universities might be transformed according to international or, more specifically, Western standards. This carries the danger of losing particular Chinese higher educational traditions and culture (Qu 2017). Therefore, efforts to internationalise Chinese higher education since 1978 have emphasised 'exchange and collaboration' between China and foreign, international, regional and global actors, in order to ensure that outcomes are balanced.

To follow this tenet of 'exchange and collaboration' and reach the expected balance, Chinese universities have to be competent partners first. Therefore, the goal, since 1978, has been to strengthen and nurture competence in research and teaching in Chinese universities. The national government has been playing a significant role in pushing forward and reaching this ambition. The national government's most important strategy has been to focus financial resources on funding a small and handpicked group of promising universities and disciplinary units first. This can be exemplified by a series of flagship projects such as Project 211 (to strengthen about one hundred institutions of higher education and key disciplinary areas, 1995–2016), Project 985 (to build a number of first-rate universities of international advanced level, 1999–2016), and Project 2011 (to improve the innovative capacity of higher education, started in 2012). Most recently, the 'Double First-rate' scheme aims to build first-rate universities and first-rate disciplines by world standards (started in 2015). With strong financial and policy support as well as the contribution of Chinese returnees from overseas studies and jobs, a number of Chinese universities have now achieved the membership of 'the world-class university club'. According to the QS2021 World University Ranking, twenty-six universities in mainland China were among the top five hundred, and six of them among the top one hundred (QS Top Universities 2020). The Nature Index offered another persuasive proof of the competency of Chinese universities: of the countries that produced the world's top research in natural science in 2019, China ranked second in the world to the United States (Nature Index 2020).

The defensive and the enterprising ways of balancing internationalisation

There have always been voices within the official discourse insisting that even if they gain high ranking in international evaluations, Chinese universities should also nurture their special cultural legacy. This legacy is usually referred to as 'being socialist' and 'Chinese characteristics'.

To ensure that universities will not lose their Chinese and socialist characteristics as a result of internationalisation, the Chinese government set up some 'baselines' that universities cannot violate (Gao 2020: 168), which is a defensive way of striving for a 'balanced internationalisation'. These included encouraging more domestic publishing (Sharma 2020) and attracting international students and scholars (Huang 2021). One example is the *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* (The Central People's Government of the Republic of China 2003). These, which stipulated that no fewer than half the members of the governing body of the institution should be Chinese citizens (Article 21) and the president or the principal administrator of such an institution should not only have work experience in the field of education and compatible professional expertise but also be 'a person with the nationality of the People's Republic of China, domicile in the territory of China, love the motherland and possess moral integrity' (Article 25).

Since early 2010s, the government has been encouraging universities to adopt an enterprising way of striving for internationalisation – sharing knowledge developed on Chinese soil through various programmes. One of the programmes which manifests this enterprising way is the Road and Belt Educational Action Plan (the Action Plan) initiated in July 2016. The Action Plan covers various types and levels of education, with higher education as the main priority. It aims at establishing a two-way exchange with mutual benefits to be gained. What is being exported via this Action Plan is not only Chinese language, culture, science and technology but also the idea of building a 'Belt and Road Educational Community' ('一带一路'教育共同体) (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2016). The Action Plan marks a milestone in Chinese educational history as it is the first time that the Chinese government has proposed a supranational plan for educational development.

Although the majority of Chinese universities have not entered the top rank of the international higher education field, since 1978 they have gradually been moving away from their peripheral status. The government seems to have contributed to this positive development by ensuring Chinese universities internationalise in a balanced way. This close relationship between the Chinese government and universities was not a communist invention. Throughout their history Chinese higher education institutions have had close ties with the national ruling elites and developed the knowledge underpinning this ruling relation (Hayhoe 1996; Li 2012; Yang 2011). This alliance is further strengthened by a tradition for political and social responsibility in Chinese scholarship and for undertaking these responsibilities directly (Li 2012; Zha 2012). Finally, almost two centuries of anti-colonial and anti-feudal wars and poverty together with a strong will to rejuvenate the nation might be the catalyst for strengthening the ties.

Still peripheral? The emerging uncertainties of a 'balanced internationalisation'

Do the rising status of Chinese universities and their active image in international exchange and collaboration prove that they have moved away from the peripheral status and achieved 'balanced internationalisation'? The latest international experiences of some Chinese universities, students and scholars made this question difficult to answer.

The fast development of China has stimulated a strong sense of national pride among Chinese people. However, this has aroused worries and dissatisfaction from people of other countries, especially those who are not familiar with China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal history or those who are sensitive to the harm of ultra-nationalism. Unfortunately, Chinese higher education institutions, students, scholars and their international partners have become scapegoats of international misunderstandings and geopolitical tensions, no matter whether their studies are funded by the Chinese government or not.

Many non-profit educational organisations aiming at the global promotion of Chinese language and culture – Confucius Institutes (CI) and Confucius Classes (CC) – have been closed or reformed. One of the important reasons is that CIs or CCs are backed by Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters (CIH), a public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education, even though its executive bodies mainly consist of Chinese universities who collaborate with foreign universities or companies. With the rising US–China tensions, the FBI has opened a new China-related counter-intelligence case every 10 hours and has increased its scrutiny of Chinese STEM students (Feng 2020). Students who were suspected to have 'stolen' technology have been interrogated about their potential ties with the Chinese Communist Party, and some students' electronic devices have been taken away for weeks (Feng 2020). At the same time, fifteen visiting students and scholars were suddenly expelled by the University of North Texas for the reason that they were funded by China Scholarship Council, a non-profit organisation headed by the Chinese government's Ministry of Education, which seeks to provide financial assistance for international study (Goldkorn 2020).

After decades of development, the Chinese university and its students and scholars can still be marginalised immediately. And the Chinese government, which used to be an enabler of Chinese universities' internationalisation processes, has gradually found itself considered 'trouble'. As a result, the Chinese government has intentionally started to retreat from some internationalisation activities. For instance, in 2020, a large majority of the functions of Hanban have been taken over by a new foundation initiated and set up by universities, NGOs and companies (Confucius Institute n.d.), with a purpose of cooling down the suspicions on CIs/CCs' relation with Chinese government. Whether this can improve the situation needs to be tested.

Concluding remarks

In this case study I have presented the argument that awareness of 'balanced internationalisation' was deeply rooted in the history of Chinese modern universities. In striving for a balanced internationalisation since the Reform and Opening-up in late 1970s, Chinese universities have been supported, required and encouraged by the government to keep its Chinese and socialist characteristics.

The universities were supported with funding and preferential policies, so that they could develop fast and enjoy equal status in international exchanges and collaboration. They were required to follow regulations so that their Chinese and socialist characteristics could be preserved. They were also encouraged to be more active in sharing knowledge in the internationalisation process. However, against the backdrop of current geopolitical tensions, the role of the Chinese government in Chinese universities' international process is being challenged. Whether and how Chinese universities can be internationalised in a balanced way in the future is hard to predict. The changes in the past and the uncertainties of the future indicate that the internationalisation of universities is a dynamic process that involves continual negotiations between the national and global actors.

Case study C. Indonesian case: Global discourses, local struggles

While the African case illustrates certain imbalanced features of internationalisation of higher education in practice, such as brain drain, and the

Chinese case exemplifies how internationalisation reforms and policies can drive their universities towards the centre of global higher education, the Indonesian case argues that internationalisation might further peripheralise Indonesian universities. This case examines how the internationalisation of higher education in Indonesia emerged through a number of discursive strategies and highlights how this seemingly localised set of strategies is intricately connected to global processes.

Although Indonesia has been hailed as Asia's third giant due to its growing economy (Reid 2012), the level of inequality relegates the nation to the periphery (Tadjoeddin et al. 2021). The past decade has witnessed two major reforms in the higher education sector in Indonesia: privatisation and internationalisation. Privatisation is characterised by transferring resources that are in public ownership to private ownership and control, whereas internationalisation refers to increasing global partnerships (between higher education institutions) and mobility (of knowledge and human resources). Privatisation and internationalisation are generally recognised features of a global ensemble of higher education, but in the Indonesian context, privatisation is heavily resisted, while internationalisation is widely accepted. This resistance to privatisation can be seen as an attempt to reject the peripheralisation of Indonesian higher education within the global geopolitical order. However, internationalisation might still be a Trojan horse that would let privatisation in (Sakhiyya 2018).

Failed attempts of the privatisation reforms

The origin of privatisation in Indonesia, as in many other peripheral countries which are not located in the centre of internationalisation, can be traced back to the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Varghese 2001) and its context within the global capitalist system (Harvey 2005). During the monetary crisis, peripheral countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand and South Korea, sought bailout from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to restore market confidence and stabilise their currencies. In return for this financial assistance, there were fundamental reforms, which in Indonesia involved privatising sixteen state-owned enterprises, including the higher education sector (Purwadi 2001). Privatisation refers to the process of shifting the public resources to the private realm and is constituted according to ideas about the primacy of market relations. The social relations established through the mechanisms of the market are often considered to be the best way to allocate resources and opportunities for rational and self-interested individuals (Olssen and Peters 2005). In the higher education sector, according to the World Bank, privatisation is believed to increase competition amongst universities and therefore increase their productivity and accountability (Robertson and Dale 2013). According to critics of the market forces approach, privatisation is a mechanism by which global forces can yoke public sectors across the globe, including higher education, into the global market (Ball 2012; Calhoun 2006; Robertson and Dale 2013). In this case privatisation involved, firstly, changing four top-tier public universities into 'autonomous legal institutions', a move needed to be followed by other public universities. Intense contestation within and beyond universities showed the resistance to what was seen as the commodification of education (Darmaningtyas et al. 2009) and the embrace of opportunities to respond to market demands (Nugroho 2005). The policy fed into national debates about whether privatisation was an attempt to shift the role of higher education as a public good into a money-generating business (Calhoun 2006), an attempt that was meant to make universities more competitive and thus seen as a route out of peripheralisation.

The Minister of National Education at the time (2009–2014) argued that the policy was not to make universities more expensive but rather to make them more independent and less bureaucratic (Susanto 2009). It might sound progressive, but universities lacked the necessary expertise to manage this decentralised policy because the authoritarian legacy of the New Order regime had left university bureaucracies with only a narrow technocratic role (Heryanto 2005; Nugroho 2005; Rakhmani and Siregar 2016; Rosser 2016). As a consequence of the universities' new status as 'autonomous legal institutions' and the withdrawal of state funding, universities had the 'autonomy' to find their own means to fund themselves, mostly relying on students and parents (Susanti 2011; Welch 2007). The cost of going to university soared. This direct nature of privatisation and the top four universities' soaring tuition fees could be easily identified by the public, and this led to an enduring debate and strong resistance.

After ten years of struggle without any significant result, the education activists and public intellectuals filed judicial reviews to the Constitutional Court. They argued that the Act violated the 1945 Constitution because it removed universities from the purview of the government and strongly indicated an attempt of privatisation (Susanti 2011). Privatisation policy was then declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court and lost its binding force on public universities. The revocation of the policy was considered a victory for civil society and education activists, while government officials saw the verdict as a setback in reforming Indonesian higher education's capacity to compete in the global higher education field (Rakhmani and Siregar 2016).

There were two significant forces that have contributed to the rejection of privatisation: the economic crisis that resulted in increasing social inequality, and the undisguised nature of the policy. The attempt to privatise Indonesian higher education was a case of top-down policy with institutional command and control imposed from above. That is, the House of Representatives, the regulatory body, exercised its legislative power, and the Ministry of Education and Culture exercised its executive power. This top-down policy was characterised by a formal and direct way of managing educational reform which bound all public universities. However, despite the power of those seeking to impose privatisation, the policy was annulled, and thus higher education as a sector needed a new legal umbrella.

Internationalisation reforms: Sneaking privatisation in through the back door?

In the midst of the legal vacuum created by the rejection of privatisation, internationalisation came to the fore. Internationalisation has been considered as a more benign force, one that would advance the higher education sector by progressively seeking global recognition and building a world-class reputation for Indonesia's top ranked universities. Internationalisation refers to the integration of the global dimension or perspective into teaching, research and all areas of university life (de Wit 2002; Knight and de Wit 1995; Yang 2002). While the rationale of internationalisation emphasises academic issues, its worldwide policies and practices are overshadowed by economic interests (Codd 2004; Martens and Starke 2008; Olssen and Peters 2005; Singh 2010; Stier and Börjesson 2010). In this way, it connects the higher education sector to global market forces but less directly than the explicit privatisation approach. Indonesia's large population and thriving middle class have been identified as a potential market for internationalisation of higher education.

There are at least three factors that contributed to the emergence of internationalisation in the higher education sector in Indonesia: the pressure from the international government organisations (Bassett and Maldonado-

Maldonado 2009; Purwadi 2001; Rizvi and Lingard 2006; Robertson 2009), the request from local universities as a consequence of the increasing middle class demand on the improved quality of higher education provision (Basri 2012; Hill and Wie 2013), and the momentum created by the very process itself.

The Higher Education Bill, drafted in 2011, defined the ambitious project of internationalisation as: 'the process of aligning local universities with international institutions' (Ministry of Education 2011: 3). The Bill created a regulatory framework for the internationalisation agenda, placing responsibility with the Minister for research, technology and higher education (Ministry of Education 2011: 16). The Bill also set out the steps of internationalisation, which were to happen through: (a) an international standard learning process; (b) international partnerships between Indonesian higher education institutions and foreign institutions; and (c) higher education provision by foreign institutions (Ministry of Education 2011: 16).

This definition of internationalisation and description of how internationalisation operates have drawn criticism within and beyond the parliament. Some commentators interpreted internationalisation as allowing foreign universities and investors to operate inside the country and argued that it would put local universities at risk (The Jakarta Post 2012), something that was no different from privatisation. The main concern of the public intellectuals was that the initiative would render local universities susceptible to falling prey to global competition by allowing foreign universities to establish branch campuses in the country. The 'international standard learning process' also drew criticism in light of the failure that occurred when international standards in secondary schooling were adopted (Sakhiyya 2011). The government's responsibility in managing public goods and resources was also questioned. Reflecting on the hard lesson learned from the rejection of privatisation reforms, particularly the attempt to impose it from the top, internationalisation policies emerged in the form of a more indirect and seemingly bottom-up route.

International partnership: Softening the marketisation and internationalisation strategies?

In 2012, the word 'internationalisation' disappeared from the text of the Higher Education Act. It was substituted with 'international partnership' (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012). Unlike international partnerships in Africa in the first case study, the term 'international partnership' in Indonesia's context emphasises 'the process of integrating international dimensions into (local) academic activities to take part in global interactions' (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012: 36). This was an attempt to soften what is still a global marketisation strategy and could potentially create an unequal relationship with global institutions (Rakhmani and Siregar 2016; Sakhiyya and Rata 2019; Susanti 2011). The abandonment of the word 'internationalisation' did not mean that it did not exist. Rather, it was to proceed via bottom-up initiatives from universities rather than the more obvious approach imposed from above.

The shift from 'internationalisation' to 'international partnership' in the Higher Education Act signals an attempt to use a more politically appropriate language while maintaining a dual articulation of internationalisation discourses (i.e., the discourse and intention of internationalisation). Fairclough (1995) and Corbel (2014) call this a nodal discourse, one which articulates many other discourses.

What is left in the current Act is an article on international partnership that defines and details what counts as international partnership. According to the Act, international partnership is 'the process of integrating an international dimension into academic activities to take part in global interaction without losing Indonesian values' (Clause 1). The other clause details the ways to establish international partnership, such as 'establishing partnership between higher education institutions in Indonesia with those of overseas in organising quality education'. This way, international partnership is portrayed as neutral and positive in supporting university excellence and national values. The word 'partnership' with its positive connotation in the portrayal of 'international partnership' and its definition might be intended to soften criticism of internationalisation as well as display a neutral position towards internationalisation. It demonstrates a certain political positioning in encouraging the idea of a bottom-up aspiration for internationalisation with the universities being seen as partners in the process.

Nevertheless, the neutral nodal discourse of international partnership disguises the long-standing asymmetrical power and international partnership amongst universities from peripheral countries with those of the Anglo-Saxon research universities (Singh 2010). It has created a legal framework and pathway to connect Indonesian universities to global market forces but less directly than the marketisation and privatisation approach, given the large population and thriving middle class.

It is interesting to note this discursive adjustment about how a global discourse influences national policy making. These two processes of privatisation and internationalisation appear as national political matters. However, this seemingly localised form of higher education politics and policy making is intricately connected to global processes. The discursive adjustment is noticeable from the word ‘internationalisation’ which appeared, disappeared, and then reappeared in the form of ‘international partnership’ in the Act. These significant changes in policy discourse vividly illustrate the high flexibility and reflexivity of legal framework in enabling certain concepts and ideas in pursuit of strategic goals (Wedel 2017). In short, the appearance, disappearance and reappearance of the term ‘internationalisation’ are useful to trace the strategies of global marketisation of higher education in the localised form of Indonesian higher education.

Concluding remarks

When discussing internationalisation, Kehm and Teichler have cautioned that ‘internationalisation in higher education tends to be treated as a highly normative topic with strong political undercurrents’ (2007: 262). My case shares this concern by advancing the analysis through the lens of discursive adjustment of how internationalisation emerged and is accepted in Indonesia.

In addition, the case of the internationalisation of Indonesian higher education illustrates a shift to how knowledge, as the core business of universities, is valued within the context of the global knowledge economy (Sakhiyya and Rata 2019). The internationalisation attempts as imposed by the global and national forces have met with the local universities’ desire for recognised global status. The unintended consequences of this are that Indonesia has become a huge market for its large population and increasing middle class. In short, both privatisation and internationalisation are the strategies of global marketisation of higher education with internationalisation reflecting the existing international inequality between nations and world regions.

Conclusion

Even though internationalisation of higher education is considered, by many, as an informative and transformative instrument for academic achievement, the foregoing case studies testify that internationalisation involves an imbalanced relationship between the 'central' and 'peripheral' higher education institutions. Internationalisation has affected sub-Saharan Africa in terms of furthering brain drain due to the academic and economic attraction of the West, brought China worries about losing 'Chinese characteristics', whereas the commodification and privatisation that result from internationalisation are a source of worry in Indonesia. Brain drain, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, has seriously affected the quality and productivity of knowledge production. Internationalisation's pressure on local academic culture, tradition and language are a source of worry in all three contexts, especially in the case of China. For that reason, peripheral countries and higher education institutions are adapting diverse measures to renegotiate and reposition their status and engagement in internationalisation. Sub-Saharan African countries increasingly prefer regionalisation to internationalisation; China is moving out of its peripheral status through, among others, a close alliance between the government and the higher education institutions. Indonesia is striving for international partnerships that could be managed by legal means rather than mere market competition. The efforts of repositioning in the case of sub-Saharan Africa and Indonesia show people's belief that the centre-periphery relations are not static but dynamic and can be changed, and the achievements of Chinese HEIs confirms this belief.

The outcomes in the three case studies varied due to internal socio-economic differences. However, all demand a similar future: repositioning the engagement of their higher education institutions and calling for balanced internationalisation. This will reduce the speed and breadth of re-peripheralisation. The calls, the question of repositioning higher education institutions and policy reconsiderations are not only voices coming from the peripheral countries but also an issue of peripheries in the centre as we can read in the next article.

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