

Examining Neocolonialism in International Branch Campuses in China: A Case Study of Mimicry

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ABSTRACT

The number of International Branch Campuses (IBCs) is increasing at a striking rate in Global South nations; however, structures that privilege colonizing countries arguably continue. On one hand, IBCs are considered by some scholars as a neocolonial expansion. On the other hand, IBCs are welcomed by many Global South shareholders since IBCs are considered a new model of world-class education that can contribute to local contexts. Nevertheless, Western knowledges and values can also be difficult to resonate with the receiving countries due to different social and political environments. In this paper, I first argue that a neocolonial attitude is embedded in the nature of Western IBCs in China through the framework of mimicry and resistance. Then, I raise questions concerning how shareholders in China legitimize IBCs as a supplementary form of Chinese higher education. Finally, I argue that IBCs risk the reproduction and reinforcement of coloniality and Western privilege in global contexts.

Keywords: international branch campuses, mimicry, neocolonialism, world-class universities

INTRODUCTION

The number of International Branch Campuses (IBCs) offered by universities from the West has dramatically increased during the past two decades. The number of IBCs expanded from 18 in 2002 to 82 in 2006 and doubled to 162 in 2009 (Garrett, 2002; Becker, 2009; Verbik & Merkle, 2006). As of 2017, there are 249 operating IBCs, and the number is still expanding steadily (Altbach, 2010; Escrivá-Beltrán, Muñoz-de-Prat & Villó, 2019, Verbik, 2017). Although there are a few IBCs set up by non-Western universities, such as China's Xiamen University in Malaysia, most IBCs are offered by Western universities from the US, the UK, Australia, and various nations in the European Union (Lanford & Tierney, 2016).

Statistics show that many Asian countries are the most popular and welcoming receiving territories for international branch campuses (OBHE/C-BERT, 2016). The phenomenon of the emergence of hundreds of Western international branch campuses in Asian countries in a short period can be partially attributed to the rise of neoliberalism and globalization. Globalization plays a significant role in the internationalization of higher education, and IBCs are therefore the products of geopolitical and economic changes (Sidhu &

Christie, 2014). Slaughter (2014)'s theory of academic capitalism analyzes the discourse of internationalization of higher education. According to academic capitalism, “the rise of neoliberalism [create] many openings for entrepreneurial educational and scientific endeavors” and “move universities toward markets” (p. 19). Government funding for higher education in Western countries started to decrease in the 1990s and accelerated after the 2008 financial crisis; specifically, state funding to public higher education institutions in the U.S. declined from 31% of public college and university revenues in 2008 to 23% in 2013 (Sav, 2016). The significant decline of government funding pushed Western universities to seek additional funding from Asia, the Middle East, and other Global South regions (Siltaoja et al., 2019). However, beyond funding considerations, some researchers (e.g., Hou, Hill, Chen, & Tsai, 2018; Nguyen, Elliott, & Pilot, 2009; Siltaoja et al., 2019) questioned the impact of IBCs in Asian contexts, noting that the establishment of international branch campuses in former colonial lands create neocolonial power relations and reproduce Eurocentric cultural hegemony (Bhabha 2004; Lo, 2011; Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009).

This article endeavors to specifically examine international branch campuses in China through a neocolonial theoretical lens. The case of the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC) has been studied through the frameworks of neocolonialism, mimicry, and coloniality, as well as the discourse of “world-class” higher education. This article first enables an understanding of how neocolonialism is embedded in the practice of IBCs in China. Then, it interrogates 1) why IBCs, to some extent, have become a more desirable and prestigious option for students than many other Chinese universities; 2) the dynamic power relations among players within IBCs; and 3) how relevant shareholders include officials, educators, and students in China legitimize and resist neocolonial practices in IBCs.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Neocolonialism

I begin by clarifying the concept of neocolonialism that I draw on. According to Nkrumah (1969), “[t]he essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. Its economic system and political policy is directed from outside” (p. ix). Despite the reality of Eurocentric power relations, many countries in the Global South are independent and have complete sovereignty of their territories and economies while politics and culture are deeply influenced by the West. Nkrumah (1969) further contended that “[t]he result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world” (p. x). As such, neocolonialism can, therefore, be situated in the field of education. As described by Altbach (1971), neocolonialism “is partly a planned policy of advanced nations to maintain their influence in developing countries” (p. 237). In the field of education, neocolonialism can be through multiple practices: using the foreign model of administrative structures to manage a school; adopting Western pedagogy and curriculum; using English or other languages of the former colonial power as the medium of instruction; and/or seeking foreign aid and technical assistance. Nguyen et al. (2009) noted that the establishment of IBCs can probably be seen as the practice of neocolonialism in the education field in the Global South countries. Although certain values that are not neocolonial in nature, such as equity and diversity, might be worth pursuing in the Global South contexts, the blind importation of Western administrative structures and pedagogies in a foreign context is unlikely to be successful. Moreover, duplication of Western education would possibly have a substantial negative effect on the host country, as some of the imported norms and values could weaken its cultural influence and research capacity (Nguyen

et al., 2009). From a neocolonial perspective, the operations of IBC campuses with Western models of administration and instruction could be viewed as a tactic to raise extra funding for Western institutions and maintain the influence of Western culture. IBCs as simple duplications of Western institutions would also be considered a neocolonial practice.

Mimicry and Resistance

The concepts of *mimicry* and *resistance* are raised by postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha (2004) and have recently been adopted by Siltaoja, Juusola, and Kivijärvi (2019) to analyze IBCs in the United Arab Emirates. The authors specifically employed both concepts “to understand how IBCs reproduce the fantasy of being world-class operators and how the onsite Western faculty members identify with or resist this world-class fantasy” (p. 76). Mimicry, according to Siltaoja et al. (2019), offers a useful theoretical approach to study the complexities of construction and destruction, negotiating identities, and resistance to the colonialism of neo-colonization (p. 78). I draw on Siltaoja et al.’s approach to analyze neocolonialism embedded at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China in this article to examine its world-class assumptions and the negotiation and resistance of the practice of neocolonialism within UNNC.

I begin by introducing three forms of mimicry: cynical mimicry, bounded mimicry, and failed mimicry. According to Siltaoja et al. (2019), cynical mimicry means that “knowledge from the West [that] is transferred to IBCs [is] contested but nonetheless performed” (p. 85). In other words, IBCs import faculty members, textbooks, and courses from the West without considering whether the contexts fit the needs of local students and the environment. Bounded mimicry indicates power relations between the West and the Other. Foreign faculty members are regarded as the carriers of Western practices, yet Westerners are also considered the Other as they constitute a threat from the perspective of administrators representing the host country. As such, the local management is, to some extent, in opposition to Westerners as a form of resistance to the influence of neocolonialism on their students (Siltaja et al., 2019). The concept of failed mimicry contends that the introduction of IBCs to local contexts for the purposes of developing a “world-class” education is destined to be unsuccessful, as IBCs can never become true duplications of their home universities. Even though students at IBCs are taking English-language courses generally developed by Western faculty members, the experience cannot ostensibly be the same partially because students at the main campus usually have more programs, more elective courses, and more library resources; nevertheless, it is also arguable that the smaller campuses provide greater opportunities for interaction with academic staff and other students. Inherently, international branch campuses located in other countries that have completely different geopolitical and cultural backgrounds, as well as different educational policies and student populations, cannot replicate the main campuses in the Western contexts. Therefore, an analysis through the lens of failed mimicry might show that, although main campuses at home countries portray themselves as world-class due to their high rankings and Western curricula, IBCs as “colonies” fail to replicate the entire features of the original campuses (Siltaja et al., 2019).

Coloniality

An integration of the theory of coloniality of power by Quijano (2007) is important to understand why China and some of the other countries in the Global South welcome international branch campuses that offer Western curricula and ideologies. Coloniality of power is an unbalanced power relationship that proposes the notion that other cultures, epistemologies, and races are inferior to the West (Quijano, 2007). In the Asian context, though, Quijano argues that “the high cultures could never be destroyed...they were nevertheless placed in a subordinate relation not only in the European view but also in the eyes of their own

bearers” (p. 170). Totality in knowledge is another notion derived from the coloniality of power. As argued by Quijano, the West believes it is the ideal model for the rest of the world. Additionally, the West succeeded in imposing this imagination, and the consumption of the supremacy of Western culture is welcomed by many other cultures that once had been colonized (Quijano, 2007). As stated by Quijano, “European culture was made seductive and became a universal cultural model” (p. 169), and the fantasy that the coloniality of power created is thus believed by many people from the Global South. Hence, nations from the Global South created a welcoming environment for international branch campuses that could recruit local students, although the cost of studying in IBCs is often lower than studying at the main campuses in the West, the tuition fee in IBCs are usually much higher compared with local institutions (Wilkins et al., 2012).

This article endeavors to link the analytical frameworks of neocolonialism, mimicry, and coloniality with the context of China. This approach is guided by three questions: How is neocolonialism embedded in the practices at IBCs in China? Why have IBCs become more desirable and prestigious institutions than many other Chinese universities? And how do China’s higher education policies both legitimize and resist neocolonial practices from the West at IBCs? I will introduce the context of Chinese higher education and the case of UNNC in the following sections. After explaining those contexts, I will describe my findings and conclude with a final discussion.

THE CONTEXT OF CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Since the late Qing dynasty and the establishment of the first modern university in the 1890s, knowledge from the West had been noted as the primary way to save China and make the nation strong again (Yang, 2014). Chinese higher education is hugely influenced and reformed by higher education practices in Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Particularly, I would suggest that Tsinghua University is the first Chinese university that experienced neocolonialism from the West because Tsinghua was partially funded by the “Gengzi Indemnity” (also known as “Boxer Indemnity”) – payments made by China approved by the U.S. for educational use, specifically, to send a maximum of 400 students to the U.S. (King, 2006). As such, the “Gengzi Indemnity” functioned first as a preparatory school for students who were sent by the government to study in the United States.¹ With the proposal and promotion of the “Four Modernizations Policy,” Chinese higher education was reformed so it could emerge on a more international stage (Yang, 2014), particularly after China's economic opening in the 1980s (Zha et al., 2019). After the Cold War, Chinese universities started to learn and adapt mostly from the higher education system in the United States (Yang, 2018).

To promote the internationalization of Chinese higher education, more Chinese students and scholars traveled abroad to study; Chinese universities integrated foreign textbooks and adopted English as a supplementary medium of instruction; and the Chinese government encouraged foreign institutions to partner with local universities or programs (Yang, 2014; Zha et al., 2019). Chinese universities also attracted more international students by offering government scholarships and developing English-taught classes (Zha et al, 2019). However, Zha et al. (2019) contend that the ways Chinese higher education promotes its internationalization are framed with a Western neocolonial imaginary without stressing epistemic differences (Zha et al., 2019). This critique argues that the internationalization of Chinese higher education is a Westernization of its higher education system and unintentionally devalues Chinese

¹ See <https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/About/History.htm>

epistemologies. Mimicking Western institutions alone without merging the favorable aspects from both Western and Chinese higher education foundations would not make Chinese universities more competitive in the era of globalization; on the other hand, it promotes Western higher education and reproduces Eurocentric cultural hegemony. A critique of international branch campuses in China as the product of the internationalization of higher education is rooted in similar issues.

International branch campuses, which are called Sino-foreign joint universities in China, have been regarded as supplementary in the process of the internationalization of Chinese higher education. Chinese government and universities have imported Western educational resources to encourage international exchange with - and within - Chinese universities and use foreign qualifications to attract both domestic students who can afford the high cost of tuition and international students who want to study in China and earn Western degrees without the requirement of Chinese language proficiency (Yang, 2014). According to Escriva-Beltran, Muñoz-de-Prat, and Villó (2019), the number of IBCs of China has surpassed the United Arab Emirates, and China has become the top host country of IBCs during the past five years because of considerable financial and political support from the Chinese government. As of January 2017, the total number of IBCs in China had increased to 32 (Escriva-Beltran et al, 2019). On the other hand, China is also exporting its own IBCs to other countries, especially countries located in Southeast Asia and Central Asia that embrace the "One Belt, One Road" initiative (e.g., Xiamen University Malaysia; Soochow University in Laos).

THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM NINGBO CHINA

Higher education in China used to be disengaged from the rest of the world and strongly influenced by the Soviet model before China's "reform and opening-up" policy in 1978 (Ennew & Yang, 2009). Concurrent with globalization and internationalization in higher education, however, China has been striving to transform its universities into so-called "world-class" universities which concentrate on Anglo-Saxon criteria (Deem et al., 2008). Rather than reforming its own universities, the establishment of IBCs as a form of Western importation of higher education to China has become a simpler approach to make the illusory "world-class education" accessible to Chinese students (Siltaoja et al, 2019). I introduce an international branch campus in China offered by the U.K. named the University of Nottingham Ningbo China and apply this case to specifically examine the possible neocolonial endeavors embedded in IBCs in China.

The University of Nottingham Ningbo China is an important case to analyze because it is the first IBC to gain legal status as an independent campus in China (Ennew & Yang, 2009). UNNC offers 29 undergraduate and 18 graduate degree programs, employs more than 900 academic and professional staff, and has over 500 doctoral students.² The definition of UNNC is however contested. I noticed that there is a nuance between the definitions of UNNC on its website and the website of the UK main campus. The Chinese website of UNNC ("About the University," n.d.) states the following:

The University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC) was the first Sino-foreign university to open its doors in China. Established in 2004, with the full approval of the Chinese Ministry of Education, we are run by the University of Nottingham with co-operation from Zhejiang Wanli Education Group, a key player in the education sector in China.

Nonetheless, Nottingham's British main campus website simply categorizes UNNC as its overseas

² See <https://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/About/Who-we-are.aspx>

independent campus, without mentioning its cooperation as a joint-venture campus with Zhejiang Wanli Education Group (“China Campus,” n.d.). Although the Zhejiang Wanli Educational Group provides financial investment and management of the services on the UNNC campus (Feng, 2013), its effort and support are not well acknowledged on the side of the U.K. This situation is described by Feng (2013) as an “unequal academic marriage” because of the two universities’ unequal footing, and “the lack of academic status of Zhejiang Wanli (University) [allows] Nottingham to clone the University of Nottingham in China” (p. 482). The difference in the descriptions of UNNC indicates that the influence of the host countries has been weakened due to neo-colonization from the West. This nuance will be further discussed in the following sections of the article.

FINDINGS

Neocolonialism through the Lens of the Mimicries

Cynical mimicry mainly indicates that the transference of Western knowledge to IBCs is contested but still practiced, and resistance presented by faculty, staff, and students is an expression of frustration and irony (Siltaoja et al., 2019). The curricula at UNNC are offered by its British main campus, including teaching materials (Feng, 2013; Yang, 2012). Some programs and courses introduced by the British campus are highly in line with the demand of the Chinese market, such as business and computer science programs (Feng, 2013). However, not all courses fit local demand and the cultural and political background of Chinese students. For instance, Business Law, Accounting Information Systems, and Business Ethics are some of the compulsory courses for B.Sc. Finance, Accounting and Management students at UNNC.³ The law, accounting, taxation systems, and ethical norms in the UK cannot just simply be applied to the Chinese contexts, and instructors could somehow feel awkward teaching students practices that are not even a part of Chinese society, while students are very likely to feel that the course content does not resonate with their interests and needs. Some case studies in the textbooks can be changed to cases that happened in China, “but the foundational issues and the epistemology of the knowledge remain Western” (Siltaoja, 2019, p. 86).

As with many other IBCs, the promotion of UNNC’s international and world-class aspirations seems more important than satisfying local needs. This phenomenon can be explained by several reasons. First, even though the curricular content offered by UNNC might not fit the Chinese context well, they can still be good preparation for Chinese students who intend to enroll in Western institutions in the future. According to UNNC's Annual Quality Report of 2017-2019 Academic year (2019), 82.4% of the graduates chose to study abroad, and 81.7% of them went to universities that rank in the top 100 of the QS higher education rankings. British and U.S. universities occupy the dominant number of universities in the QS top 100. Second, providing courses that are independent of the local contexts but in an international setting could be a strategy to attract more international students. In fact, 8.9% of undergraduates and 12.5% of postgraduate students at UNNC are international students or students from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, as well as exchange students from the British main campus, Malaysia campus, and other partnership universities.

Aside from the 82.4 % of students who went abroad for graduate school, other graduates needed to get jobs in the Chinese labor market. According to Feng (2013), job placement rates of UNNC students are very high; the results of the *UNNC 2018-2019 Annual Quality Report* show that after six months after

³ See <https://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/old-business/undergraduate-programmes/bsc-hons-finance-accounting-and-management.aspx>

graduation, “84.3% of class 2019 graduates went on to further study, and 11.4% of graduates went directly to work” (University of Nottingham Ningbo China, 2020). Feng (2013) suggested that such success is because UNNC students are trained to think broadly and critically. Due to the Western liberal education at UNNC, one could argue that students have good English skills, extensive training in critical thinking, and a well-chosen specialization, and these strengths make students who already have extensive social capital more competitive and preferable in the Chinese labor market. According to Sitaoja et al. (2019), “the world-class fantasy operates as an invisible power that calls upon the imposing of standardized practices and enforces Western hegemony” (p. 85), and, at UNNC, the situation is similar because the educational quality, Western practices, and British degrees offered at UNNC are believed by many people to be superior to other Chinese universities (Yang, 2012). This is evidenced by the fact that UNNC admitted top the 6% of *Gaokao* (Chinese National College Entrance Examination) participants, and the enrollment score ranks only second to Zhejiang University (The University of Nottingham Ningbo China, 2019). In terms of the lens of coloniality, high-achieving Chinese students attend UNNC and believe Western education is superior to other Chinese universities, which is different from the forms of colonialism. For instance, Indigenous people in Canada were compelled to attend “Indian residential schools” run by Canadian settlers to be reformed as civilized “Canadians” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Coloniality of power that put forward by Quijano (2007) explained that Eurocentrism plays a dominant role in the intellectual field of China and cultural coloniality is still rooted in Chinese society and its people. Through the decisions of students, usually from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, to attend IBCs voluntarily, coloniality is therefore perpetuated in China. The coloniality of Chinese society aided the practice of neocolonialism through an intellectual form that is invisible and peaceful but might cause potential long-term risks. It could reinforce the global imaginary that Western education is superior and preferable, thereby devaluing Chinese traditions and epistemologies.

Bounded mimicry has been analyzed through the different definitions of UNNC as an entity. As mentioned, the official website of UNNC states clearly that the institution is a joint venture between the University of Nottingham and Zhejiang Wanli Education group. However, Nottingham's British main campus's website simply defines UNNC as an overseas campus in China, which is a part of the Nottingham system along with its British main campus and Malaysia campus. The definition of UNNC on its British main campus' website overlooks the roles of Zhejiang Wanli Education Group and the Chinese government's support as well as the nature of UNNC as a Sino-British cooperative institution. The reasons that UNNC might be less prone to highlight its arrangement with Zhejiang Wanli Education Group in the U.K. might contribute to the factors that the joint partner Zhejiang Wanli University, which used to be a vocational college, is not a well-known and prestigious university in China (Feng, 2013), and an emphasis on UNNC as an overseas campus could attract more attention and support from individuals on its British main campus. Another potential conflict can be seen by how Fujia Yang, the president of UNNC and the former chancellor of Nottingham, described UNNC in different circumstances. President Yang once maintained, when UNNC was established as a new campus, that one of the initiatives was “to bring together the best of the UK and Chinese educational values and practices” (Ennew & Yang, 2009, p. 30). However, Yang later asserted that “we want the University of Nottingham Ningbo China to be like the University of Nottingham in Britain” (Feng, 2013, p. 477). These conflicting statements show that the relationships among the Chinese government, UNNC, and its British main campus remain ambiguous.

According to the Director of Center of Research on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running

Schools, Xiamen University, Jinhui Lin, and the *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* (Lin & Liu, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2004), Sino-foreign cooperative universities are Chinese universities, and branch campuses of foreign countries are not allowed. In practice, although UNNC is hugely supported by Wanli Group and the Chinese government with funding and policy, Nottingham, to some degree, conceals its affiliation with Chinese educational and governmental groups by maintaining degrees that are offered by and are identical to those at the British home campus (Yang, 2012). Another possibility is that Nottingham is emphasizing the supremacy of its Western educational model. President Yang's different descriptions of UNNC reveal the conflict of values between individuals who hope UNNC would be an extension of the British campus in China, while others might hope for cooperation and a merging of the educational advantages between the U.K. and China, justified and regulated by Sino-foreign cooperative education policy in China.

I also maintain that the intentional neglect of UNNC's close ties with China is a strategy to attract Western faculty and students. At UNNC, faculty members and students are perhaps more willing to regard themselves as working and studying in an overseas campus instead of in a Chinese university. For some faculty members, working at the University of Nottingham without mentioning the location of China may facilitate entry to other faculty positions in Western countries. As for some of the students, a transcript or degree issued by Nottingham's main campus in the UK, without an indication of where they did their coursework, can be an asset when applying for top Western graduate schools. Coloniality plays a significant role in these perspectives. Stein and Andreotti (2016) noted that the dominant global imaginary assumes Western knowledge and education are superior and universal. In China, Western education is also believed by many as synonymous with "world-class" education, and there is an increase in upper- and middle-class families in China choosing to send their children to study abroad (Zha et al., 2019). Likewise, some students studying at IBCs might believe their degree could show their capability of studying at Western, English-speaking institutions, rather than indicating their experience and knowledge of non-Western contexts could contribute to the internationalization of Western institutions. Coloniality, to some degree, shows the lack of cultural confidence in their home countries and cultures, which results in the embrace of neo-colonization from the West.

Although UNNC, as a Sino-British cooperative institution, strives to highlight its British origins, the mimicry is still flawed because China's cultural, economic, and political environment is quite different from the U.K. UNNC endeavors to make its campus a British style university - from its physical appearance to its curricula. The style of the UNNC campus was built as an "elite private college in the West," and, in particular, "the administrative building, with its august-looking steeple clock tower, is a replica of the Trent Building on the home campus in Britain" (Feng, 2013, pp. 477-478). Such decisions create an illusion that students are studying in a "world-class" Western campus. Beyond the buildings and facilities, the courses provided by UNNC are "anchored in Western liberal education," with English as the medium of instruction. Additionally, the course materials, the exams, and the standards of recruiting staff and faculty are all decided by the British campus (Ennew, 2009; Feng, 2013; Yang, 2012).

Notwithstanding, the experience of studying in the UK cannot - and should not - be duplicated in China. First, the "long-term equivalency in teaching standards" is hard to guarantee (Yang, 2012, p. 147). Secondly, the distance of UNNCC from the Nottingham home campus can cause inefficient communication. In addition, since the campus of UNNC is located in Ningbo China and the majority of its students are Chinese, many students may not reach the admission standard of English proficiency at the main campus,

and teaching standards and expectations could be impacted (Yang, 2012). Students at the British campus usually complete their degree in three years, while students at UNNC complete their bachelor's in four years. This is because English for Academic Purposes courses are required during the first year to make sure students are well adjusted to a fully English teaching environment (Ennew & Yang, 2009). Furthermore, although branch campuses in China claim to have full academic freedom, instructors of humanities and social science disciplines often have to be careful when discussing culturally and politically sensitive topics (Du, 2020). In addition, foreign faculty members may have difficulty maintaining their Chinese working visas if they are reported for discussing politically sensitive topics with students in the class. Therefore, though branch campuses can simulate the appearance of a foreign-style campus, the real experience of studying abroad cannot be easily duplicated, which speaks to the failed mimicry of IBCs from a neocolonial lens.

Justifications of IBCs from China's perspective

China, as the receiving country of IBCs from the West, has its justifications for importing Western higher education as a cooperative model. Although mimicking Western institutions through the operations of IBCs can be seen as neocolonial, the local government legitimates IBCs as cooperative institutions and as a supplementary form of the Chinese higher education system that contributes to the local contexts. First, IBCs such as UNNC contribute to economic development and the needs of the domestic labor market. Second, IBCs are an affordable way to increase domestic higher education capacity and can provide access to high-quality education while bolstering the academic reputation of the host country (Taji, 2004; Lane, 2011; Kinser, 2011; Khoury, 2013; cited in Siltaoja, 2009). In the case of China, Chinese officials also employ their specific approaches to legitimize IBCs in China, arguing that they are not simply “colonies” of Western universities. Rather, IBCs in China are justified as a form of cooperation to combine the essence of Chinese education and Western education, thereby educating Chinese students to have an international and multicultural horizon to serve the local labor market in a more global environment (Ennew & Yang, 2019). In addition, IBCs are justified to retain Chinese students to stay in China to pursue their postsecondary degrees instead of going abroad. However, since many programs offered by UNNC fall under the “2+2” model (students study in China for their first two years and then move to the British main campus for their last two years), UNNC encourages its students to travel overseas to study in its partner universities (Ennew & Yang 2009; Feng, 2013; Yang 2012). In addition, the university's annual report indicated that 82.4% of undergraduate students at UNNC went to graduate school outside of China (University of Nottingham Ningbo China, 2019). That said, instead of keeping students to study in China, IBCs in fact motivate more Chinese students to study abroad for graduate school. Encouraging more students to study abroad expands their international horizons, but also arguably reinforce and reproduce the supremacy of Western higher education.

China's educational policy documents also legitimize IBCs. According to the *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* (Ministry of Education, 2004) and the interpretation by Lin and Liu (2007), the establishment of an overseas campus in China by foreign countries is prohibited by China's educational policy. Also, according to the interpretation of Chinese education officials, Sino-foreign cooperative universities do not simply branch campuses, as defined by Western institutions; rather, they are a new form of Chinese institution that supplements the Chinese higher education system. One policy forbids Sino-foreign cooperative universities to adopt the phrase, “China campus.” Therefore, the Chinese names of IBCs must start with the names of the Chinese

cities (Ministry of Education, 2004). For example, the Chinese version of UNNC is translated to Ningbo Nottingham University, and the name of NYU Shanghai in the Chinese version is Shanghai New York University. Although the Chinese names of IBCs sound like joint-venture universities, the English versions of the names of these IBCs still convey the sense that they are overseas campuses, which make the regulations tokenistic since English is the official language of IBCs while Chinese is a supplementary language only used in certain unofficial circumstances.

The Regulations of 2004 also stipulate that some of the leaders and the president at Sino-foreign cooperative universities must be Chinese citizens. According to Feng (2013), the board of UNNC has seven members from Britain and eight from China, and, in 2019, according to UNNC's official website, the number of university leaders with Anglo-Saxon names decreased to four (“University Leadership,” n.d.). In addition, UNNC also sets the position of Secretary of the Communist Party of China to make sure that UNNC is in line with the laws and policies of China, to help the university to gain more support from the local government as well as helping the university to solve conflicts on campus (Feng, 2013). Having a Secretary of the Communist Party is one of the dominant features of Chinese universities, and supervision of the Chinese Communist Party can possibly be the most convincing evidence to argue that an IBC is not totally controlled by the Western institution. However, it is also noticeable that the Provost and most Deans at UNNC are not Chinese, and their responsibilities typically focus on the academic affairs of the university (“University Leadership,” n.d.). Whether the leadership roles held by Chinese citizens and the Communist Party have enough power to intervene with British academic interests remains unknown and is worthy of further investigation.

Chinese culture courses are required exclusively for Mainland Chinese students at UNNC and are different from the politics courses required by other Chinese universities, such as “Theories of Marxism and Maoism” and “Deng Xiaoping's thought” (Tu, 2011, p. 430). UNNC students take Chinese culture and politics courses in a non-traditional fashion. The courses are divided into two parts, which concern the theme of “Modernization and China.” These courses are intended to improve student’s critical thinking skills and their ability to handle complex Chinese and international affairs.⁴ However, only a small page on the official website of UNNC mentions the Chinese culture courses, and there is no corresponding English version of the page. Also, the Chinese students of UNNC are only required to pass these courses with the lowest requirement, and the Chinese culture courses would not show on the Nottingham transcript. This exclusion might indicate the relative unimportance of these courses (at least from the perspective of the academic affairs department), and the existence of these courses may simply satisfy the regulations of the Chinese Ministry of Education.

CONCLUSION

Discourses of internationalization, modernization, and world-class education are dominant in justifying the existence of IBCs as key to improving cross-cultural exchange, modernizing local society, contributing to domestic and global economies, and exchanging knowledge. Inherently, the resonance of neocolonialism from the West and the nature of coloniality from the Global South is leading to an increase of IBCs. By introducing Western “world-class” higher education and expanding Western-trained academics to the Global South, colonialism becomes invisible with the notions of modernity (Mignolo, 2002). Less has been written that examines IBCs from a neocolonial perspective in both Chinese and English literature.

⁴ See <https://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/research-centres/crsfu/home.aspx>

This article sheds some light on the neocolonial nature of IBCs in the Global South contexts. IBCs not only provide courses and degrees from the West, but IBCs also assert that they share the same values - such as equity, diversity, and inclusion - as their main campuses. However, these values are neither well implemented in the West nor their IBCs. For instance, the tuition of UNNC for domestic undergraduates is almost ten times higher than most of other public Chinese universities. The high tuition of IBCs only allows Chinese students from high-income families to attend IBCs in China and excludes most Chinese students who could not afford the cost. IBCs, as a supplementary form of local higher education, are not for everyone; they are exclusive and reproduce social inequality.

Additionally, a desire to achieve the “world-class” fantasy, such as through the promotion of university ranking criteria, arguably moves IBCs away from achieving the goal of combining Chinese and Western traditions in education (Stack, 2019). By contrast, at UNNC, as well as many other IBCs in the Global South, Eurocentric knowledge is highly valued, but local knowledges are overlooked. Western supremacy is therefore reinforced and reproduced through IBCs. In the case of UNNC, though it uses some strategic approaches to defend itself as a new and supplementary type of institution in the Chinese higher education system, and provides some Chinese culture courses, these justifications are still compromising and ostensibly only satisfy the requirements of Sino-foreign regulations and educational policies.

What is clear is that, despite the interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international branch campuses in some of the Global South countries will continue to increase, and they provide unique opportunities for students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. However, as argued, IBCs created more inequalities in the Chinese higher education landscape and promoted Western knowledge in the Global South contexts. Therefore, it would be important to decentralize coloniality and promote cultural confidence instead of Westernizing Chinese higher education. It would be important for Chinese higher education sectors to integrate their own knowledges, cultures, and traditions into curricula, which might further contribute to the work of decolonization and interrupting Western hegemony in the global higher education landscape.

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