British degrees made in Hong Kong: an enquiry into the role of space and place in transnational education

Maggi W. H. Leung · Johanna L. Waters

Abstract The fundamental logic of transnational education programmes is a one-to-one transfer of institutional capital across space and an unimportance of place. This article interrogates these presumptions and argues that space and place play an important role in transnational education. Drawing on research that examines the experiences of students and graduates of British degree programmes offered in Hong Kong, we conclude that institutional capital does not always travel wholly and smoothly due to a combination of policy-related, social, cultural and economic factors. Our findings also underline the importance of place in students' experiences, which are not sufficiently recognised by the providers. This, in turn, affects the ability of students to cultivate institutional and other forms of social capital, with implications for subsequent employment opportunities and social mobility.

Keywords Transnational education · British degree programmes · Hong Kong

Introduction

Advertisement 1:

'Transnational education can provide internationally recognised awards and the prestige of international institutions, while offering the convenience of studying

M. W. H. Leung (✉)
Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands
e-mail: W.H.M.Leung@uu.nl

J. L. Waters
The University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

within your home country' (British Council website 'Study a UK qualification in Hong Kong').
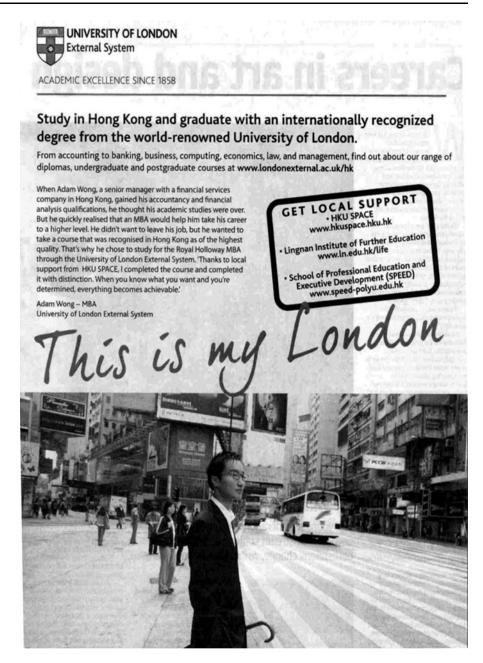
Advertisement 2:

'Study in Hong Kong and graduate with an internationally recognized degree from the world renowned University of London'. The newspaper advertisement features a young man in a business suit, looking hopeful, waiting to cross a road in Hong Kong, with 'This is my London' bannered above the photograph (Fig. 1).

Both of the above advertisements for transnational education (TNE) programmes confirm and challenge the importance of place. On the one hand, they pledge a complete transfer of course content, recognition and prestige across space by means of TNE apparatus. On the other hand, they sell the UK and University of London as places of promises, as desirable brands, underpinning the hierarchy in the 'international knowledge system' (Altbach 1989) where hegemony is assigned to certain actors and institutions, and their affiliated knowledge and practices predominantly in a few English-speaking countries in the global North (Yang 2003). TNE programmes are sold as time–space compressors, extending the spatial reach of immobile consumers (potential students) who aspire to tap cultural and social capital nurtured at universities (what Brinton (2000) has termed 'institutional social capital') located at the core of the global knowledge economy. How well do these promises deliver? How moveable is institutional capital across geographical space? In this paper, we examine the material and symbolic significance of place and space in shaping TNE students' learning experiences 'on the ground'. Our analysis is based on the findings of recent research that examines the experiences of students and graduates of British degree programmes offered in Hong Kong.

Fig. 1 Transnational education programmes advertisement

In the following, we begin with a summary of the nature and development of TNE focusing on the UK–Hong Kong context. This is followed by a review of the diverse approaches in which place and space have been applied in education studies, which helps us map out some points of departure for our analysis. Drawing on our project findings, we shall illustrate how taking place and space more seriously in our analysis can help us make sense of the design and implementation of TNE programmes and students' experiences thereof. We probe the validity of the (a)spatial TNE promises sold in the advertisements cited in the beginning of the paper and assess the moveability of institutional social capital. Most importantly, we bring forth the processes of segregation that can be detected in different places and at varied spatial levels, (re)producing uneven geographies of opportunities in higher education. In conclusion, we emphasise the contribution of a higher sensitivity to the power of place and space in understanding the workings and experiences of TNE.

Transnational education: learning/business opportunities sans frontier?

The recent expansion of TNE has further internationalised the global higher education marketplace, offering foreign (or 'international') credentials to students who lack mobility capital (Leung 2012; Murphy-Lejeune 2002), or cannot/ prefer not to travel. TNE is an export trade, denoting 'all

types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based' (UNESCO/Council of Europe 2001). There are multiple models of TNE delivered by distance, face-to-face or in a mixed mode, collaborating with local partners or not (e.g. full-scale branch campuses), and packaged in a variety of formats: validation of local programmes by degree-conferring institutions, collaborative delivery with shared input in curriculum (e.g. joint/double/dual degrees), franchising of foreign degrees for local delivery, faculties in educational villages, twinning arrangements with study in both the local country and where the degree-conferring institutions are based, distance learning programmes and advanced standing or articulation agreements (HEGlobal website: http://heglobal.international.ac.uk/tne.aspx). As reflected by the advertisements that open this article, the fundamental logic of such programme set-ups—at least what is being sold—is a one-to-one transfer of academic credentials across space and an irrelevance of place as to where the courses are conducted.

The UK–Hong Kong TNE landscape is an exemplary case study. The UK is currently the largest TNE exporter worldwide. TNE 'sits at the heart of the internationalisation strategies of many UK universities' (HEGlobal website: http://heglobal.international.ac.uk/tne.aspx). In 2010, over 408,000 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) were studying for a UK degree overseas, more than the number of international students studying in the UK (405,000) (HEGlobal website). The top five countries/region hosting UK TNE programmes in 2009/2010 were former British colonies: Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Pakistan and Nigeria, with Mainland China following closely in sixth place, according to the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (cited on HEGlobal website). The export of TNE is a lucrative trade. According to figures released in April 2009, around £260 million in fees were generated from the then almost 200,000 students who were studying UK TNE programmes around the world (British Council website: http://www.britishcouncil.org/tne-about.htm).

The UK is the biggest TNE provider in Hong Kong. More than 22,170 students in Hong Kong enrolled in UK TNE programmes in 2008–2009—compared to just over 10,000 Hong Kong students in higher education programmes in the UK (British Council 2011). UK universities provided 68 % of all non-local courses provided in conjunction with Hong Kong HEIs in 2010–2011—followed by Australian providers (19 %) and Mainland China (7 %) (Education Bureau 2011). Thirty-six UK HEIs offered approximately 625 different degree courses (at Bachelors-, Masters- and PhD-level) in Hong Kong, and the number of programmes continues to grow (British Council 2011). As

Rizvi et al. (2006, p. 257) contend, 'Education is also a site where legacies of colonialism and the contemporary processes of globalisation intersect'; British dominance in the TNE field in Hong Kong can be explained by these two highly power-charged processes that have connected the two places deeply. As summarised by a recent report on TNE by the British Council (2011, p. 8):

> [Hong Kong is] a highly attractive environment for UK providers, given the common approaches in higher education in Hong Kong; professional experience among local partners; widespread use of English; as well as a legal framework inherited from UK and strong UK-Hong Kong relations.

Some of our student and graduate interviewees explained their choice of a UK programme also in relation to their confidence in the British 'brand' (this could be a result of colonial impacts but also the UK Government's effort in promoting its higher education overseas in recent years) and the fact that UK undergraduate top-up degrees offer an 'honours' option (as opposed to Australian programmes). 'Honours' on one's diploma carries high (prestige) value as local Hong Kong degrees have also adopted the British grading system, and the distinction affects the graduates' employability prospects.

The above overview helps to account for the booming UK TNE business and its relative popularity in Hong Kong. Before turning to our fieldwork data to gauge the quality of these 'made in Hong Kong' British degrees, we shall briefly review how space and place has been examined in education research.

Space and place in education research

Researchers in Geography, Education Studies, Sociology and related disciplines have operated various notions of space and place to frame their work on education. Studies on spatial and social patterns of access and achievement represent a classical geographical approach. The rural–urban divide has been highlighted by Roscigno et al. (2006) and Tayyaba (2012), among others, whilst intra-urban differences have been illustrated in other work (Robson 1969; Warrington 2005). A long-standing line of research has demonstrated and reconfirmed the dominant but differentiated impact of class, gender and race/ethnicity, in shaping, in interactive ways, the geography of education (Butler and Hamnett 2007, see also other contributions in the special issue *Urban Studies, 44*(7), edited by them).

Research has also engaged critical 'reading' of the everyday spaces of education, especially in schools. A number of studies provide Foucauldian analyses of place, deconstructing the school premise as disciplinary space (Thomson 2005; Tupper et al. 2008). Spatial and

different forms of social segregation at schools represent a popular area of enquiry (Thomas 2005; Holt 2007; Johnston et al. 2007; van Ingen and Halas 2006; Woolley et al. 2006). A recent special issue of *Social & Cultural Geography, 12*(1) (2001) on the embodied dimensions and dynamics of education spaces also focuses exclusively on schools (see Cook and Hemming 2011). Compared to this vibrant body of work on schools, such 'grounded' analysis of places and space on university campuses is less developed. Some research has examined the spatial and social segregation at universities, charting the politics of inclusion/exclusion in micro-spaces on campuses such as classrooms, cafeteria and other socialising space (Durrheima et al. 2004; Fisher and Hartmann 1995; Hanassab 2006; Hopkins 2011; Alexander and Tredoux 2010).

In the geographical scholarship on international education, a strong focus has been put on the relationship between international student migration and the broader urban space (hence, beyond the university campus) (Fincher and Shaw 2009, 2011; Hubbard 2009; Smith 2008). Lifting the analysis 'off the ground', a number of studies have powerfully underlined the (re)production of class and other social differences across transnational spaces through international education (Ong 1999; Waters 2006; Waters and Brooks 2010; Xiang and Shen 2009).

Research on TNE represents a modest subset within the scholarship on international higher education. Previous studies are concerned mostly with the institutional aspects (Naidoo 2006; McBurnie and Ziguras 2007). Reflecting its active engagement in TNE, Hong Kong and Singapore have inspired a number of studies (Chan and Lo 2007; French 1999; Mok 2005; Sidhu 2009a, b). The importance of space and place has by and large been sidelined in this growing body of literature. Lacking in this growing body of literature is also an understanding of the individuals (students, graduates, staff members, administrators, policy makers and (potential) employers) who are important stakeholders in these operations. Our recent qualitative project on UK TNE programmes offered in Hong Kong is one of the very few endeavours undertaken thus far (see also British Council 2011; Leung et al. 2010). We query the meanings and experiences of students' in situ experiences of 'international' education (Waters and Leung 2013b) and gauge the effect of TNE education in the reproduction of capital and disadvantage among students and graduates (Waters and Leung 2012). This article provides a grounded analysis of the lived experiences of 'international' students who do not travel—a subset of international students whom we, as academic researchers, know very little about. By examining the role of place and space in shaping TNE students' learning experiences, we pin down the workings of some segregating processes against local but 'international' Hong Kong students. Ultimately, we ask critically: how mobile are

international (in this case, British) university experiences and related institutional social capital across space through TNE operations?

Methodology

This article draws on data collected between 2009 and 2011, as part of a project on the development of UK TNE programmes offered in Hong Kong. A total of 70 in-depth interviews were completed with students ($n = 38$) and graduates ($n = 32$) of UK–Hong Kong partnership degree programmes at different levels (undergraduate, Master and Doctoral). In this study, only programmes that involved UK-based HEIs and Hong Kong public HEIs (i.e. those funded via the University Grants Committee) or quasi-Government bodies (e.g. institutes of the Vocational Training Council) were considered. The 70 students/graduates had been enrolled in 73 programmes (three interviewees had studied more than one programme). Interviews with students and graduates were semi-structured to explore their motivations, expectations and experiences in their study, as well as their career and mobility plans and/or experiences. Efforts were made to gather a sample of student and graduates considering their gender (43 females, 27 males), age (20–40 s) and academic and social backgrounds. In addition, 18 'education providers' representing 16 different UK HEIs were interviewed to gauge their views on the purposes, success and failure as well as other relevant experiences of these partnership programmes. Nine recruiters (potential employers, human resources managers) were also interviewed in Hong Kong for some perspectives from the job market. Participating students and graduates were recruited through a number of channels, including advertisements placed via individual HEIs, the British Council, personal contacts and subsequent snowball sampling. Education providers were contacted through phone calls and emails—either directly or through international offices, with a few exceptions of further referrals by interviewees. (Potential) recruiters were identified through personal contacts. All the interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Research participants were given a choice to be interviewed either in Cantonese Chinese or English. All interviews were fully transcribed in English (first translated when conducted in Cantonese) for detailed qualitative analyses. Pseudonyms are used for individuals and affiliated universities.

The power of place and space in transnational education: views from below

In this section, we interrogate how space and place (still) matters in education models that claim to transcend spatial limits. Neither the students enrolled in these programmes nor

we are so naïve to expect that Hong Kong can be turned into London and that a TNE course can replicate its 'original' programme and be transplanted as a coherent whole. Despite all shortcomings, TNE programmes provide students, who have failed to attain through the regular admission system and who can afford it, with a backup route to higher education. Graduates are conferred with a university degree that has become a 'normal' qualification or an 'entrance ticket' to enter the job market in Hong Kong. Recognising the incomplete transfer, it is, however, important to ask 'What moves?' 'What accounts for the transferability of learning experiences and related capital?' Specifically, we focus on material spaces such as university campus, classrooms, library and virtual learning spaces in shaping students' 'international' education experiences—an aspect that has been overlooked in the extant TNE literature.

Currently, more than half of the TNE programmes in Hong Kong are delivered in partnership with a local HEI. Quite a number of our student and graduate interviewees reasoned their choice not only with the particulars of the UK programme, but also with the local partner institutions. Understandably, programmes hosted by the higher-ranked local HEIs are often considered to be better and more worthwhile. Many students, in particular those who study a top-up undergraduate degree programme,[1] hope to get a taste of the 'colourful university life' (Waters and Leung 2013a) that they had failed to gain entrance to via the 'normal' university admission procedure (Webster and Yang 2012). This dream is, however, often left unfulfilled. Angel Tam (aged 27), who graduated in 2005, with a UK top-up degree, bemoaned:

> We thought we would have lessons on X University main campus [which, depending on traffic, is about 20-30-minute bus ride from the city centre], and we thought it would be quite good, and took the offer [of a place]. However, about a week before the lessons started they sent us a letter – they told me that we would have lessons in [city area A, an extension of central business district].... When I registered and paid for this programme, I was not [aware] that the separation was so clear-cut between X University and X University's continuing education school.

TNE programmes are not considered as part of the standard repertoire of local HEIs. Most Hong Kong partners administer these 'adopted' courses through their continuing education (CE) sections—that can be interpreted as a gesture to mark distance from these international education programmes. Some of our interviewees, like Angel Tam above, felt that they had been misled by the UK provider about the exact

relationship between their TNE programme and the local HEI. Such 'segregating' space allocation, on the contrary, makes perfect sense to the administrators. A senior staff member in charge of facilities planning and management of the CE arm of X University explained to us that as most of those enrolled in CE programmes have work during daytime, they prefer having their class meetings in or close to city centres. Since TNE programmes are administered by the CE section of the university, facility allocation for these courses undergoes the same procedure. The current lack of space on various university campuses will be under extra pressure in the advent of the '334 Academic Reform', through which all universities in Hong Kong, starting in September 2012, will extend the existing 3-year undergraduate programmes to 4 years. Though the reform has long been planned, providing extra learning and living space for one-third more students on campus remains a huge challenge. Needless to say, demand by the 'normal' educational degree programmes will enjoy priority for space allocation on the main campuses.

Being zoned away from the main campus of the host universities, TNE students feel that they are not 'real' university students, not 'the sons and daughters of the university' and do not belong to the university community. George Law (aged 26), who completed a UK TNE Bachelor degree in 2005, reflects that attending classes in an office building in the city centre is 'like going to work', discounting what he imagines being a university student should feel. Like other places, university buildings and campus are not only key in the production of symbolic meanings (Cosgrove 1989) that mould students' sense of place and identity, their materiality in shaping students' learning experiences is at least as important. Attending lessons outside the main university campus leads to reduced (convenient) access to university facilities and resources, as well as isolation from the university community and happenings on campus. Some students, for instance, complained that there is no library in the office building where they meet for class. Even having made their way to the main campus, TNE students are often confronted with different standards compared to those set for regular students. Peter Chan (aged 27), who graduated with a UK top-up degree in 2007, notes the reduced privileges in the university library:

> Local students could borrow 10 books from the library, but we could only borrow 5 books. Local students could borrow for 20 days; we could only borrow for 10 days...The resources they gave us were obviously less than the local degree students.

In addition, our interviewees also reported reduced access to computing facilities, sports facilities, student discount shops and halls of residence as compared to their local peers. Service providers explain such reduced access with the

---

[1] Students who have completed Associate Degrees, Higher Diploma or other equivalent courses in Hong Kong may study on a top-up degree programme to gain a full ordinary or honours Bachelor degree.

shortage of physical space on campus. Exclusion is, however, also practised in the e-learning environment, in forms of denied or restricted access to e-journals and wireless internet access on main campus. Considering the generally world-class standard of e-learning services regular university students enjoy in Hong Kong, the substandard infrastructure imposed on TNE students seems unreasonable, especially when one takes into account the high tuition fees they need to pay.[2] This arguably 'unnecessary' but intentional exercise of exclusion confirms the politics of segregation.

The effect of spatial exclusion is compounded by the time organisation of these courses. Whilst some (especially postgraduate level) participants considered the short course duration and infrequent meetings as 'convenient' and 'flexible', many (especially top-up degree) students regretted the limited time spent with peers and the lecturers. Hanson Lee (aged 22), who was almost finishing his 1-year full-time top-up degree programme, noted:

> The relationship among classmates is not good. Unlike local universities, we do not have any student societies or organisations. We just go to school to attend lectures. It is rare to make new friends during this year… We have a weak sense of belonging.
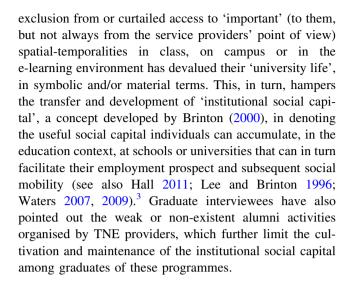
Emily Yeung (aged 22), Hanson's classmate, concurred and lamented that 'We do not have any school life' and 'I will not even know some of their names after graduation'. Not only was it difficult to build relationship with their peers, they were also very distant from their fly-in lecturers. Hanson explained:

> A lecturer stayed for four days and left, and then the next lecturer came. And then we would not see them anymore. It would be meaningless to get closer to the professors.

There are many reasons accouting for the limited time fly-in lecturers can spend with the students. One of them is the highly internationalised and compact nature of TNE organisation. Lectures are often sent on tour with multiple stops in a short period of time. Robert Ko (aged 23), who was at the end stage of his 1-year full-time MSc course, recalled:

> Some of the lecturers went to Malaysia first, then to Singapore and finally to Hong Kong. They were already very exhausted when they arrived in Hong Kong.

This time-/cost-saving tactic further reduces the quality of the already short and sporadic encounters. In one way or another, most or our interviewees commented that

exclusion from or curtailed access to 'important' (to them, but not always from the service providers' point of view) spatial-temporalities in class, on campus or in the e-learning environment has devalued their 'university life', in symbolic and/or material terms. This, in turn, hampers the transfer and development of 'institutional social capital', a concept developed by Brinton (2000), in denoting the useful social capital individuals can accumulate, in the education context, at schools or universities that can in turn facilitate their employment prospect and subsequent social mobility (see also Hall 2011; Lee and Brinton 1996; Waters 2007, 2009).[3] Graduate interviewees have also pointed out the weak or non-existent alumni activities organised by TNE providers, which further limit the cultivation and maintenance of the institutional social capital among graduates of these programmes.

Friction in UK–Hong Kong TNE space, or the limits of 'British to go'

In this section, we interrogate the second spatial claim made by TNE providers that serves as the basis of the first one we assessed above. TNEs are designed as time–space compressors, convenience products in a way, for delivering British degrees to distant consumers. Hence, the logic goes, as long as the course is British, it does not matter where they are taken. How well do these 'British to go' programmes travel? As mentioned earlier, the fact that UK undergraduate top-up degrees offer an 'honours' option (that has British roots) and the British 'brand' explains to some extent students' choice for TNE programmes offered by UK providers. What does this 'brand' entail? What sort of British education do/can students expect when they commit their time, energy and money into such programmes?

Language is a common topic in our interviews with students and graduates when we spoke about expectations from and experiences of the British TNE courses. In Hong Kong, where a colonial legacy is apparent and forces of neo-colonialism run strong, English is an important form of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). Responding to this demand, TNE sells explicitly its capacity to improve students' English proficiency, highlighting: 'The medium of instruction is English, the language of business, science and technology (British Council 2009, Guide to UK qualifications in Hong Kong, p. 6)'. The reality is rather different. Kitty Ng (aged 24), who completed a British 1-year, full-time, honours degree programme in 2008, explained:

> Well, written things are in English, but orally, it's all Cantonese, as we have all local teachers, classmates

---

[2] TNE courses are generally more expensive than local subsidised undergraduate programs, with fees for the latter set at HK$42,000 (with more to offer in terms of campus facilities, services and experiences), whilst TNE courses typically range from HK$46,000 to HK$119,000 (British Council 2011, p. 7).

[3] For a more detailed analysis regarding institutional social capital based on our fieldwork findings, see Waters and Leung (2013a).

also local…Foreign lecturers flew into come. But they only gave lectures, but it was like only they spoke, and not really communicated [with us]'.

Sophie Cheng (aged 26) graduated in 2010 with a British TNE degree. Recalling how English was used in the classroom, she doubted the contribution of TNE education in students' accumulation of the desirable cultural capital of English proficiency:

Although we used English in our presentations, and also [in] assignments, it was just like we used English in those few minutes of presenting. I don't think it helped much. The lecturers just followed the power-point to read it….I don't think it helped us much with our English.

Using English as teaching medium is a double-edged sword in the TNE setting in Hong Kong, especially in undergraduate top-up programmes in which admission requirement for English is low, lower than that set for local 'regular' degree programmes. Whilst some students would have welcomed more chances to practise their English, communication can, however, be hindered when the courses were taught in English. Janice Chan (aged 24), who was completing her 1-year full-time top-up degree programme, commented on the barrier:

No one would ask questions because the lessons were conducted in English. We were not confident in our English. I am not sure if anyone has ever challenged them, but I would not.

Paradoxically, some of our interviewees claimed that the intensity of English usage is lower in UK TNE programmes than in local regular university programmes, partly because local universities are committed to internationalise their curricula and their students have better proficiency to follow the course and communicate in English.

When asked to recall the 'British' elements in his programme, Stephen Chow (aged 24), who was studying part-time for a 2-year MSc programme, provided a cynical reply, 'there were none…unless the strong Scottish accent of the professors can be counted'. Study visits to the UK, overseas fieldtrip and exchange opportunities that have become more-or-less standard elements of tertiary (and even secondary-school) curricula, are rare exceptions in TNE bachelor programmes. Leon Lam (aged 26), who received a British TNE BA (Hons.) in business in 2006, considered the 'British input' in the form of fly-in faculty for teaching for a short period, often in highly standardised format, 'just a kind of gimmick'. Nevertheless, the physical presence of fly-in staff, especially for graduate ceremonies, where students enjoy taking many photographs with the 'British professors' (who in reality are sometimes not from

the UK universities that offer their degrees), is appreciated. This confers the importance of 'British' and 'international' in students' spatial imaginary. Even though the course is predominantly local, a piece of British (or international) wrapping paper around it is still perceived as institutional social capital of a kind, no matter how superficial and symbolic it may appear.

Whilst the language-related blockade in the transfer of a more 'genuine' British education to Hong Kong seems systemic and hard to avoid, another mechanism that curtails the moveability of the British learning experience is practised with intention. Technological advance in communication has offered opportunities for more effective learning and teaching in a distance. Nevertheless, some of our interviews have complained about the insufficient access to virtual learning platforms of their 'mother' UK universities. The deliberate exclusion in e-learning space, similar to how it is practised by the Hong Kong partner HEIs, deepens students' feeling of being degraded to 'second-class citizens'. At a workshop in London (sponsored by the UK Departments for Trade and Investment and Business, Innovation and Skills) where we presented our research findings, a representative of one of the TNE-providing UK universities rationalised, though not being supportive of, the biased treatment in an informal conversation with one of us:

In a way, it is understandable to make a difference between what students get in Hong Kong and what local [UK] students get from the programmes. Local students pay much more for tuition [than what is charged for TNE in e.g. Hong Kong] after all. And it will get worse with the new policy.

According to the new regulation, UK universities are allowed to charge students up to £9,000 a year for tuition. He carried on with his speculation:

If the programmes are indeed identical, UK students might as well go to Hong Kong or Singapore to study a British degree course there. They pay less for tuition and can use what they save from the UK fees for travelling. International experience looks good on your CV. Studying a British degree overseas would be like killing two birds with one stone.

Whilst TNE courses are generally more expensive than local subsidised programmes in Hong Kong (approximately £3,740–£9,675) (British Council 2011, p. 7), they are not costly when compared to the new fees (going to be) charged by UK universities. Indeed, as tuition fees soar in the UK, fewer students are applying to local universities. The socio-economic segregating impact and hence the perpetuating effect on class reproduction of such policy is apparent and worrisome. Furthermore, it injects an

incentive for students to look abroad for other 'value-for-money' tertiary education opportunities. Curiously, studying a British-made-elsewhere degree offshore might become an option for some UK students. This form of student mobility would, in turn, add a dose of Britishness in this 'take-away' business.

Conclusion

Adding to the governance and institutional focus of the extant body of work on TNE, we have 'populated' this growing literature by foregrounding the lived experiences of students who have invested in a British education in Hong Kong. In particular, we have sharpened our spatial lenses to scrutinise the rationalities and implementation of these programmes and contextualise students' experiences thereof. We have identified arguments against both of the spatial claims made in the TNE advertisements we cited in the beginning of this paper. Reflections of our interviewees have underlined the symbolic and material significance of concrete and virtual places and spaces, such as classrooms, libraries and campuses in fostering an identity as a 'real' or 'normal' student, a sense of belonging to the university community and more effective learning. This challenges the first claim that it does not matter if one studies a British degree on a university campus in the UK, or in an office building in the city centre of Hong Kong. It also echoes what Findlay et al. (2012, p. 128) conclude that an international education is:

> …not only about gaining the kinds of formal knowledge that can be imparted through high-quality university training (that could arguably be offered by a leading national university in a student's country of origin), but also about other socially and culturally constructed knowledge.

We concur with their argument and emphasise the spatial dimension of the (re)production of knowledge and the social, cultural and symbolic capital that are attached to them. Here, we have particularly pinned down these processes as they unfold and are being negotiated in daily lived spaces.

We also unsettled the second claim that academic credentials, education experiences and related social and cultural capital can, when packaged as TNE, travel across space. Factors ranging from framework conditions such as the language competency of the students and shortage of physical space for classes to differentiating policies exercised both by the Hong Kong and UK partner universities upon TNE students are barriers that exclude these local but international students from the (British) university education they aspire. Quality educational experiences,

credentials and related capital are not only sticky to places; they also need nurturing time–spaces to germinate and grow. Many of our interviewees end up falling between two stools whilst they strive to have the best of both worlds as portrayed on the British Council website that sells TNE to Singaporeans:

> Study in the way that suits your lifestyle and budget with a UK qualification in your own country. You can benefit from a UK education without leaving your job, disrupting your family, or spending a long time away from home.

To address these issues, TNE providers (both the UK and Hong Kong partners) should be more proactive in understanding these important specialised concerns of their students and identifying solutions. They should recognise that classroom location and space for networking (housing and other spaces for social activities) among students and lecturers are critical elements that make-up 'a colourful university life'. First and foremost, more transparency regarding classroom location and availability of social activities spaces is called for in order to avoid misunderstanding and disappointment. Inclusion of TNE students into (more or less) readily available physical and e-learning/social spaces should be implemented, so that TNE would cease to/will not become a 'cheap, fast, low-quality option', as Michelle Li, Deputy Secretary for Education in Hong Kong, recently warned against at the seminar 'Transnational Education Forum: The Road Ahead' held in October 2011. Ultimately, more efforts should be made to integrate TNE students to the 'normal' university time-space. Without extra resources for infrastructural development, such accommodation will, however, be unlikely especially when Hong Kong HEIs are dealing with the spatial squeeze on campus as a result of the new 334 reform, through which higher education has been extended by one year.

Many of our interviewees who have completed a top-up degree were cynical about the lack of British or international element in their programme. The conundrum regarding language should be dealt with. As discussed earlier, many TNE students do not have high English proficiency when they commence their programmes. Instead of taking the short cut and turning the language of instruction to Cantonese, timely support should be provided to (needy) students to improve their English proficiency. Making productive use of the 1-year extension of the new Bachelor curriculum, extra language immersion modules, overseas (language) courses and exchange opportunities can/should be integrated into existing TNE programmes, enhancing their marketed/promised 'international element'.

At the heart of the matter is, we would argue, the differentiated and differentiating social implication of TNE

programmes. In this paper, we have focused on various kinds of socio-spatial segregation that are exercised upon the students during the programme duration—hence without discussing other important aspects regarding exclusion in the job market and the society at large (see Waters and Leung 2012, 2013a, b). Sadly, our findings reveal that exclusion is commonly experienced among TNE students, striking parallel with observations made in many studies on international students studying abroad. Peter Chan (aged 27), who graduated with a UK top-up degree in 2007, made the analogy apparent for us:

> I did not feel that X University [in Hong Kong] treated us as their real 'sons and daughters'. Local degree students were their real 'sons and daughters'. I was like a new immigrant; there was a feeling of hierarchy.

Here, we have made some conceptual linkages across subsets of research on international education. Our findings remind us that the politics of inclusion and exclusion in international education runs across geographies and along a range of axes, beyond national and ethnic differences, as often highlighted in research on identity politics between international students and their host societies. In our case study, local Hong Kong students, branded with the perceived or at least marketed-to-be, desirable 'international' label, are paradoxically treated as outsiders or 'second-class citizens' in a place where they aspire, pay and work to feel to belong.

In the field of TNE study, we are likely to witness even more direct relevance of lessons learned on social and spatial segregation from research on international education that involves student mobility. Identity politics and negotiations will likely to take on new dimensions and with higher complexity as (higher) education continues to be internationalised. In tandem with many other countries in Asia (e.g. Singapore, South Korea, United Arab Emirates), the Hong Kong government has announced its vision to turn the city into an 'education hub'. Among other strategies such as increasing the quota for non-local students to be admitted to 'regular' degree programmes, TNE is considered as a time- and cost-efficient way to expand education provision for local as well as non-local students (Hussin and Ismail 2009). It is likely that non-local students, particularly those from Mainland China and Southeast Asia, will be allowed and actively enticed to enrol in TNE programmes offered in Hong Kong in the near future. As Hong Kong and other aspired-to-be education hubs become crossroads where students, staff and non-human components (e.g. education programmes, teaching and learning materials, philosophy and methods, etc.) of diverse backgrounds, interests, agendas and influences converge, they will likely evolve into hotbeds of tensions and contradictions both within and beyond the education field.

Our findings presented in this paper have provided some of the first grounded insights, from the students' perspectives, in assessing the potential and limits of TNE. By bringing the analysis to the ground, we have added some more texture to our hitherto knowledge of this form of international education. Much of the discontent we have uncovered stems from contrasting conceptions of space and place. Reconciling some of these differences might present one way forward in the (re)conception and implementation of future TNE programmes. As various nation states and cities in Asia are working hard to turn themselves into regional education hubs, getting prepared to avert and handle the various forms of social and spatial segregating implications of (further) internationalisation in and beyond the education field is imperative.

References

Alexander, L., & Tredoux, C. (2010). The spaces between us: A spatial analysis of informal segregation at a South African university. *Journal of Social Issues, 66*(2), 367–386.

Altbach, P. (1989). The new internationalism: Foreign students and scholars. *Studies in Higher Education, 14*(2), 125–136.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). NY: Greenwood Press.

Brinton, M. (2000). Social capital in the Japanese youth labour market: Labour market policy, schools, and norms. *Policy Studies, 33*, 289–306.

British Council. (2009). Guide to UK qualifications in Hong Kong. Retrieved from http://issuu.com/juhanie/docs/guide_to_uk_qualifications_in_hong_kong_2009_10.

British Council. (2011). *Transnational education in HK.* Retrieved from http://www.britishcouncil.org/transnational-education-in-hong-kong.pdf.

Butler, T., & Hamnett, C. (2007). The geography of education: Introduction. *Urban Studies, 44*(7), 1161–1174.

Chan, D., & Lo, W. (2007). Running universities as enterprises: University governance changes in Hong Kong. *Asian Pacific Journal of Education, 27*(3), 305–322.

Cook, V., & Hemming, P. (2011). Education spaces: Embodied dimensions and dynamics. *Social & Cultural Geography, 12*(1), 1–8.

Cosgrove, D. (1989). Geography is everywhere: Culture and symbolism in human landscapes. In D. Gregory & R. Walford (Eds.), *Horizons in human geography* (pp. 118–135). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Durrheima, K., Trotter, K., Manicom, D., & Piper, L. (2004). From exclusion to informal segregation: The limits to racial transformation at the University of Natal. *Social Dynamics, 30*(1), 141–169.

Education Bureau of Hong Kong. (2011). Post-secondary education: Statistical information. Retrieved from http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=1250&langno=1.

Fincher, R., & Shaw, K. (2009). The unintended segregation of transnational students in central Melbourne. *Environmental and Planning A, 41*(8), 1884–1902.

Fincher, R., & Shaw, K. (2011). Enacting separate social words: International and local students in public space in central Melbourne. *Geoforum, 42*(5), 39–549.

Findlay, A. R., King, R., Smith, F. M., Geddes, A., & Skeldon, R. (2012). World class? An investigation of globalisation, difference and international student mobility. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 37*(1), 118–131.

Fisher, B. J., & Hartmann, D. J. (1995). The impact of race on the social experience of college students at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Black Studies, 26*(2), 117–133.

French, N. (1999). Transnational education—competition or complementarity: The case of Hong Kong. *Higher Education in Europe, 24*(2), 219–223.

Hall, S. (2011). Educational ties, social capital and the trans-local reproduction of MBA alumni networks. *Global Networks, 11*(1), 118–138.

Hanassab, S. (2006). Diversity, international students, and perceived discrimination: Implications for educators and counsellors. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 10*(2), 157–172.

Holt, L. (2007). Children's sociospatial (re)production of disability within primary school playgrounds. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 25*(5), 783–802.

Hopkins, P. (2011). Towards critical geographies of the university campus: Understanding the contested experiences of Muslim students. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 36*(1), 157–169.

Hubbard, P. (2009). Geographies of studentification and purpose-built student accommodation: Leading separate lives? *Environment and Planning A, 41*(8), 1903–1923.

Hussin, S. & Ismail, A. (2009). Goals, components, and factors considered in university development. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 10*(1), 83–91.

Johnston, R., Wilson, D., & Burgess, S. (2007). Ethnic segregation and educational performance at secondary school in Bradford and Leicester. *Environment and Planning A, 39*(3), 609–629.

Lee, S., & Brinton, M. (1996). Elite education and social capital: The case of South Korea. *Sociology of Education, 69*(3), 177–192.

Leung, M. W. H. (2012). Read ten thousand books, walk ten thousand miles: Geographical mobility and capital accumulation among Chinese scholars. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Retrieved from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00526.x/pdf.

Leung, M., Kyriakidou, N., & Zhang, C. (2010) The great British 'education takeaway': A case study on transnational education in Hong Kong. *Poster presentation at British Council Going Global 4 Conference*. London, UK, 25–16 March 2010.

McBurnie, G., & Ziguras, C. (2007). *Transnational education: Issues and trends in offshore higher education*. Florence: Routledge.

Mok, K. (2005). The quest for work class university: Quality assurance and international benchmarking in Hong Kong. *Quality Assurance in Education, 13*(4), 277–304.

Murphy-Lejeune, E. (2002). *Student mobility and narrative in Europe: The new strangers*. London: Routledge.

Naidoo, V. (2006). International education: A tertiary-level industry update. *Journal of Research in International Education, 5*(3), 323–345.

Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., & Lavai, J. (2006). Post-colonialism and education: Negotiating a contested terrain. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society, 14*(3), 249–262.

Robson, B. (1969). *Urban analysis: A study of city structure with special reference to Sunderland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roscigno, V. J., Tomaskovic-Devey, D., & Crowley, M. (2006). Education and the inequalities of place. *Social Forces, 84*(4), 2121–2145.

Sidhu, R. (2009a). Running to stay still in the knowledge economy. *Journal of Education Policy, 24*(3), 237–253.

Sidhu, R. (2009b). The brand name research university goes global. *Higher Education, 57*(2), 125–140.

Smith, D. (2008). The politics of studentification and '(un)balanced' urban populations: Lessons for gentrification and sustainable communities? *Urban Studies, 45*(12), 2541–2564.

Tayyaba, S. (2012). Rural-urban gaps in academic achievement, schooling conditions, student, and teachers' characteristics in Pakistan. *International Journal of Educational Management, 26*(1), 6–26.

Thomas, M. E. (2005). I think it's just natural: The spatiality of racial segregation at a US high school. *Environmental and Planning A, 37*(7), 1233–1248.

Thomson, S. (2005). Territorialising the primary school playground: Deconstructing the geography of playtime. *Children's Geographies, 3*(1), 63–78.

Tupper, J., Carson, T., Johnson, I., & Mangat, J. (2008). Building place: Students' negotiation of spaces and citizenship in schools. *Canadian Journal of Education, 31*(4), 1065–1092.

UNESCO/Council of Europe. (2001). *Code of good practice in the provision of transnational education*. Retrieved from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/code%20of%20good%20practice_EN.asp

Van Ingen, C., & Halas, J. (2006). Claiming space: Aboriginal students within school landscapes. *Children's Geographies, 4*(3), 379–398.

Warrington, M. (2005). Mirage in the desert? Access to educational opportunities in an area of social exclusion. *Antipode, 37*(4), 796–816.

Waters, J. L. (2006). Geographies of cultural capital: Education, international migration and families strategies between Hong Kong and Canada. *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers, 31*(2), 179–192.

Waters, J. L. (2007). Roundabout routes and sanctuary schools: The role of situated educational practices and habitus in the creation of transnational professionals. *Global Networks, 7*(4), 477–497.

Waters, J. L. (2009). Transnational geographies of academic distinction: The role of social capital in the recognition and evaluation of overseas credentials. *Globalization, Societies and Education, 7*(2), 113–129.

Waters, J. L., & Brooks, R. (2010). Accidental achievers? International higher education, class reproduction and privileged in the experiences of UK students overseas. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 31*(2), 217–228.

Waters, J. L., & Leung, M. W. H. (2012). Young people and the reproduction of disadvantage through transnational higher education in Hong Kong. *Sociological Research Online, 17*(3), 6. Retrieved from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/17/3/6.html.

Waters, J. L., & Leung, M. W. H. (2013a). A colourful university life? Transnational higher education and the spatial dimensions of institutional social capital in Hong Kong. *Population, Space and Place, 19*(2), 155–167.

Waters, J. L., & Leung, M. W. H. (2013b). Immobile transnationalisms? Young people and their in situ experiences of 'international' education in Hong Kong. *Urban Studies, 50*(3), 606–620.

Webster, B. J., & Yang, M. (2012). Transition, induction and goal achievement: First-year experiences of Hong Kong undergraduates. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 13*(2), 359–368.

Woolley, H., Armitagea, M., Bishopa, J., Curtisa, M., & Ginsborga, J. (2006). Going outside together: Good practice with respect to the inclusion of disabled children in primary school playgrounds. *Children's Geographies, 4*(3), 303–318.

Xiang, B., & Shen, W. (2009). International student migration and social stratification in China. *International Journal of Educational Development, 29*(5), 513–522.

Yang, R. (2003). Globalisation and higher education development: A critical analysis. *International Review of Education, 49*(3–4), 269–291.