A Global Communication M.A. Double Degree Program: Conceptualizing and Working Through Diversity

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Abstract: At a time when diversity and de-westernization are current buzz words for injecting social justice into the future of communication studies, we must address how we conceptualize and confront these concepts in practice. Academic Cosmopolitanism has been proposed as one way forward, but it remains in the trenches of cosmopolitan theory's difficulty of dealing with diversity in political systems. Simon Fraser University and the Communication University of China's Global Communication MA Double Degree Program embodies many of the core values of academic cosmopolitanism. Grounded in a transcultural political economy framework however, it embraces some of the kinds of conflicts that cosmopolitanism sets up as barriers. Via autoethnographic accounts from the program's first teaching assistant and an alumnae from its first cohort, we explore how the conflicts involved in conceptualizing and confronting diversity are experienced on the ground. We conclude by highlighting the ways in which transcultural political economy enriches discussions on diversity and inform efforts to de-colonize communication studies.

Keywords: Academic cosmopolitanism, transcultural political economy, diversity, transformation, de-westernization

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Introduction[1]

The ideals of academic cosmopolitanism, working with diversity for de-colonization, is difficult to practice. Responding to the call to discuss how communication studies can become more inclusive for scholarly exchange that can re-orient the discipline, we address both the theory and practice of academic cosmopolitanism through a case study of Simon Fraser University (SFU) and the Communication University of China's (CUC) Global Communication double Master of Arts program (GCMA). The GCMA embodies aspects of academic cosmopolitanism in practice and highlights the confrontations met by commitments for transforming academia through diversity. Underlying our claim that practicing academic cosmopolitanism is difficult, the GCMA has been put on pause for the coming 2021–2022 academic year.

Our case study puts national and institutional contexts in dialogue with a policy analysis of SFU Senate documents related to the GCMA to frame the founding and conflicts of the program. We flesh out our analysis with evidence of student experiences as recollected in the autoethnographies of the program's first teaching assistant, and an alumnus from the first student cohort. The case study highlights barriers and success involved in working with and through confrontations of various positionalities. We use this data to address both the theory and practice of academic cosmopolitanism to argue that transcultural political economy, a framework that informs the GCMA's pedagogy, can supplement some limitations within academic cosmopolitanism. We claim academic cosmopolitanism points to diversity in the world but lacks an account of how existing diversity is a result of historic and ongoing negotiation. While academic cosmopolitanism asks for openness to new ideas it does little to provide mechanisms to ground those ideas in the historical experiences that make them meaningful, nor does it offer mechanisms for people who lack privilege to counteract the vulnerabilities involved in being open. Transcultural political economy offers insights on the historical political and economic structuration that position contemporary inequitable encounters. We conclude with the suggestion that academic cosmopolitanism will benefit from a fuller reckoning of the differences that produce diversity and embrace conflicts in engagements as the means to transform subjective stances and academic practice.

The Academic Cosmopolitan Itinerary

Karl Mannheim's (1936) inauguration of the sociology of knowledge was written during a perceived cultural crisis where groups could no longer communicate with each other. For Mannheim, the solution to cultural and political fragmentation is a cosmopolitan able to navigate difference of ideas; a "free-floating" intellectual unburdened by their own local positionality capable of understanding and smoothing

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over differences between differently socialized groups within society. The free-floating cosmopolitanism ideal and its corresponding material reality has been criticized as elitist. In Calhoun's (2002) exaggerated but nevertheless poignant critique, these cosmopolitan varieties celebrated opportunities of boundarylessness without taking in to account how these free-floating subjectivities were bounded to elite economic classes and corresponding privileged experiences.

Globalization has renewed arguments both describing and prescribing the current era as cosmopolitan (Beck, 2006). Unlike Mannheim who saw the need for intellectuals to actively work out of their local bounded positionalities, Ulrich Beck sees a global cosmopolitan as being inevitable and describes it as a theory of boundarylessness and subjectivity of openness. He proposes a "methodological cosmopolitanism [that] is concerned with the implications in the present of a globally shared future" against a "methodological nationalist" approach which sets out boundaries for the production of knowledge and scope of political action (2006, p. 78). It is this clearing of the field that has led to the growth and interest in academic cosmopolitanism.

While the development of "methodological cosmopolitanism" was short-lived, Sarah Ganter and Felix Ortega (2019) argue that the sustained push for de-westernization in communication studies presents a new opportunity for academic cosmopolitanism. Similarly, Silvio Waisbord (2014; 2016) has also developed the concept of academic cosmopolitanism in dialogue with the de-westernization of communication studies. However, while Ganter and Ortega (2019) position their work as a response to Beck's critique of nationalism, Waisbord (2014; 2016) is more cautious in arguing that Beck's critique of "methodological nationalism" is too strong while suggesting the value of exploring the ongoing importance of nation-states in the production of communication systems and academic cultures. A point of particular importance when considering current academic engagements with Chinese institutions as we explore later.

Ganter and Ortega have offered a robust definition of what academic cosmopolitanism means in practice that is useful for detailing similarities and contrasts of the GCMA from academic cosmopolitanism. They assert it,

> means (1) actively fostering and supporting institutional academic exchange across world regions and including staff from different world regions; (2) not automatically dismissing work from other regions... as well as becoming familiar with not only English-language literature, but also literature in other languages; (3) encouraging students to study languages from non-Western countries and to become familiar with other media and political systems, as well as to actively travel and study related contexts and scholarly works; and (4) actively creating room for this exchange on the administrative, logistical, and financial levels, in addition to fostering the requisite active intellectual exchange. (Ganter & Ortega, 2019, p. 84)

Ganter and Ortega describe the practice of academic cosmopolitanism as requiring a particular "reciprocal and mutual" subjectivity based on self-reflection and a "withdraw from artificial boundaries... [to] foster open exchange" (2019, pp. 83–84). Waisbord likewise argues that "nurturing intellectual kinship requires

openness to others…. require[ing] mutual curiosity" (2016, p. 880). The result of this self-reflective, open and mutual engagement results in the "trans-cultural event" of translation between academic cultures (Waisbord, 2016, p. 871).

Practicing academic cosmopolitanism is not a simple issue. Like Beck (2006) these authors recognize that it can result in a clash of interests with concerns ranging from "good scholarship" (Ganter & Ortega, 2019, p. 82) and the domestic politics of academic cultures (Waisbord, 2016). Waisbord bluntly claims that cosmopolitanism talk does not "necessarily crystalize in unified values embraced by all" (2016, p. 870). Ganter likewise writes that "AC [academic cosmopolitanism] is not a naïve way of seeing research" and that it demands ongoing commitment to face the challenges posed in opening dialogue (Carpentier, Ganter, & Torrico, 2020, p. 293).

With similar goals to de-westernize academia, Paula Chakravartty and Yuezhi Zhao (2008) position their original theorization of transcultural political economy against the context of theories of globalization in which the experience of Western modernity was not understood as one particular case but instead became the universal example by which the world was measured. transcultural political economy asks us to engage the historical materialism of ongoing and contested cultural transformations.

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between academic cosmopolitanism and transcultural political economy are their approaches to diversity. Academic cosmopolitanism is invested in the appearance of diversity, understood on its own terms as matters of fact, without reading history against the grain and locate why these forms of diversity become salient at the expense of others. Here difference is conceptualized as seemingly natural historical outcomes of internal cultural developments devoid of past and present political economic positioning or confrontation. While academic cosmopolitanism aims to "withdraw from artificial boundaries… [to] foster open exchange" (2019, p. 83) the nature of what is artificial is left open. When Beck (2006) talks of supranational interconnectedness, it is of our present and future global risk society. Likewise, Ganter and Ortega mention "political and economic arrangements" only in terms of possible future hybridities (2019, p. 71). These positions neglect insights from historical materialism which can provide insight into how the formation and boundaries of culture, as well as different imaginaries on the nature of participation within and through culture, are not simply internally developed but are historically inflected products of interaction and integration (Nicolai, 2017; Zhao & Huang, 2015).

While academic cosmopolitanism can be understood as calling for boundary breaking, some indigenous anti-colonial movements, both within and outside the Americas and Europe, are seeking restoration or at least recognition of boundaries lost to historic and ongoing violence. Whereas academic cosmopolitanism asserts diversity and hybrid transformations as means to problem solve our globalizing world, transcultural political economy roots itself in interrelated positionalities, inequitable

encounters, and friction as means to transcend existing power relations; to construct new subjectivities not only receptive of others, but able to recognize the awkwardness, emotional charges, and self-reflection needed for building actual transcultural solidarity (Zhao & Chakravartty, 2008).

Academic cosmopolitanism's claim that research thrives in diversity must confront who and what informs the range and limit of the inclusion of diversity. Most importantly academic cosmopolitanism universalizes a condition of openness for future engagement to occur in, neglecting how this works in the extension of diversity to political systems. In this way academic cosmopolitanism has difficulties to account for what can be called the diversity of diversity. For an example, within global communication, we could understand flows in communication goods beyond the Western world as an example of diversity and solving the unilateral flow problem (Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974) *or* it can be understood as a further entrenchment of global capitalism (Schiller, 1991). The difference is not simply a matter of cultural differences of opinion, Mannheim's untethered diversity, but between what some might argue to be objective politics and outright depoliticization. This is the challenge which transcultural political economy puts to academic cosmopolitanism, to account for the political economic historical realities that emphasize the need to confront such structural relations in order to progress.

Zooming Out: National and Institutional Developments

The Communication University of China (CUC) is China's preeminent university specializing in research and training for China's media and communication industries. Like many universities and research institutions in the country, CUC has developed international agreements. However, China's wide range of institutional entry and collaborations into the global academic stage, as well as the presence of Chinese international students, was not welcomed by all. A recent report entitled the "China Question" (Johnson et al., 2021) on education collaboration between the UK and China from Harvard Kennedy School and King's College London highlight ways to remedy the perceived threats to national security, economic competition, and questions over freedom of speech that comes with not only the collaboration with Chinese higher education institutions but also the presence of Chinese students. They argue that UK universities must become less financially dependent on fee-paying Chinese students. They conclude by calling for the need to "ensure collaboration does not come at the cost of research autonomy, surveillance, or continued human rights abuses" in order to mitigate "reputational risk, research integrity and ethical standard" (Johnson et al., 2021, p. 71).

The above concerns over reputational risk, research integrity and ethical standards were all present in some way or another in the formation and practice of the Global Communication double Master of Arts program (GCMA). The initial proposal for the GCMA identifies CUC as having resources and capacity to help advance the

students' research. The trajectory of advancement however has been a matter of disagreement with concerns over the intellectual ranking of theories and empirical studies, access to journals and concerns of academic freedom. At the level of pedagogy, while the Institute of Communication Studies, which hosts the GCMA at CUC, as a graduate level research unit that offers a range of MA and Ph.D. programs, is diverse in its research orientations, it does not offer the same kind of courses as SFU does. At the level of individual teaching staff, they are spread out thin with many balancing multiple responsibilities with far less economic remuneration than is found at SFU. Moreover, although CUC has many supports for student education, there is an emphasis on Chinese language learning resources. On the one hand this made some English-speaking students complain about their ongoing reliance on continued use of SFU's electronic library services despite international access being a bonus of such international programs. On the other hand, SFU also has a limited selection of works in Chinese and lacks institutional access to one of the most important Chinese language databases (CNKI). Thus, rather than emphasizing deficiencies of any one institution we might see the GCMA as an opportunity for pooling resources and fostering more collaborative studies.

In the Canadian context, SFU was founded on unseated indigenous territory. To end the story there would be disingenuous. The creation of the university also came about as a working-class campus situating itself outside of the region's major traditional university and gained recognition as "Berkeley North" for its political radicalism during the 1960s. However, after years of drastic changes in public funding, the province which SFU is situated in began actively seeking out fee-paying international students, which pay exponentially more than domestic students, as a matter of policy. As much as this may be understood as a public policy for promoting academic cosmopolitanism it was underwritten by a need for the market to supplement the retreat of public funding from universities.

Within this briefly sketched international context, the GCMA is a two-year master's program based on students completing a year of courses, a field placement, and a capstone research paper first at SFU's School of Communication and then at CUC's Institute for Communication Studies. Its founding is premised on a history of relations between SFU's School of Communication and China when esteemed political economist Dallas Smythe first visited China. Following a series of faculty visits between the two universities in the 1980s and 1990s, a Memorandum of Understanding to develop collaboration between SFU and CUC was signed in 2001 and renewed in 2011. Just as important, the GCMA's founder Yuezhi Zhao graduated from CUC and SFU and was both a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair at SFU and the Changjiang Visiting Chair at CUC at the time of the program's founding. However, where Smythe reached out to China in the midst of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution theorizing of "cultural screens", the use of ideology and governance to protect socialist cultures from capitalist cultural exports, today Zhao's efforts to establish links with China via the GCMA expose her to racially tinged concerns that she might be "a threat to academic freedom" at SFU (Zhao, 2015, p. 241).

At SFU, the GCMA fits into the University's strategic mission to engage the world. As a result, it was featured in the University's 2016 *Academic Plan Progress Report* as one of four international partnerships and "enhance[ing SFU's] national and international profile" (Driver, 2016, p. 51). The GCMA was also a central feature in the *External Review Committee Report* of SFU's School of Communication. Here the reviewers noting that "although it's a fee-paying program that is often associated internationally with diluted learning and quick profits… at the expense of quality education… [the] GCMA has achieved a rare standing of a premier program" (Burman, Qiu, & Neustaedter, 2019, p. 8). We might recognize it as an ideal example of Ganter and Ortega's academic cosmopolitan model, for it is the institutional embodiment of the "room" required for cosmopolitanism flourish with opportunities for faculty, staff and students to cross cultural and linguistic barriers.

This celebration of the program by the external reviewers is couched with a note of caution that "[s]trong support from the School and Faculty is essential to the thriving of the GCMA" (Burman et al., 2019, p. 8), suggesting unimpeded support of the program. However, there are grounds to believe that some faculty members at SFU see the GCMA as both a product of the neoliberalization of international education and as a means for students otherwise not able to get into the regular School of Communication program to obtain an SFU degree and lower the value of the school's degree (Zhao, 2015; Zhao & Huang, 2015).

Despite initial fears over a potential loss of resources and value of the degree, such concerns have not been realized. As documented in a 2019 external review of the School of Communication, the GCMA model is recognized as a successful framework to address the School's problem with the length of its graduate programs (running three years for MAs and eight years for PhDs). The GCMA did not reduce the quality of graduate education, but rather, as argued in its original proposal, has added to the efficiency of offered classes by adding students to classrooms and brought in additional classes than can be taken by any graduate student at SFU (Burman et al., 2019). Indeed, the 2019 external review notes that the GCMA is an indicator for the School's future and continued legacy of excellence in teaching. This shows that SFU's Communication MA degree's symbolic or market value has not decreased but is bolstered by the GCMA.

As this paper is being written however, the GCMA has been put on pause for the 2021–2022 academic year. This is ostensibly because of Covid-19, but one cannot fail to note that this pause is announced during a period of international tensions between China and international academic institutions. For instance, on May 24, 2021 the Albertan provincial government ordered its top four universities to suspend their pursuit of new partnerships with China, which could be understood as a McCarthy-era move based on suspicion and fear over involvement with the Chinese Communist Party as much as it could also be understood as a realpolitik response to ongoing contestations between the two countries.

Zooming In: GCMA's Pedagogy and Execution

In the GCMA, not only do students confront two institutional cultures, they are also required to bridge academic and professional boundaries and are provided the opportunity to confront urban and rural divisions. As Zhao argues, there is also an expectation that students will 'collide', "enabling them to learn from each other through their own culture and interaction and mutual construction with 'the other'" (Zhao & Huang, 2015). The SFU side of the cohort has a large representation of students from South American, African, and South Asian countries, as well as marginalized positionalities within the North, it works towards establishing a praxis of south-south engagement that, as it is partially hosted at SFU, happens within the eyesight of primarily western-trained academics.

At SFU, students take two core courses. The critique of political economic power relations begins with the first core course at SFU, *Communication and Global Power Shifts*. This was not without difficulties when it came to the practical problem of teaching a diverse group of students. Within the CUC contingent, some were members of the Chinese Communist Party, and some were upwardly mobile. Not all students within the SFU contingent were native English speakers and were of various economic and cultural backgrounds. We recall how some students arrived versed in Western academic theory while others were vulnerable because of their global positioning of their historical contexts. Zhao, who taught this class during her directorship of the program, would turn these differences in the students' diversity upside down, with an opening lecture challenging accepted starting points of what is understood as globalization and capitalism.

Katherine Reilly (2014), who is the current GCMA director and has taught *Communication and Global Social Justice,* reflects on asking students from the program to explore their positionality vis-à-vis knowledge production in one of the first class assignments. Positionality refers to the positioning of the researcher vis-a-vis the contexts of what is studied and came about from criticisms of research as representing a view from nowhere (Rose, 1997). While Reilly saw students taking the assignment as a kind of castigation, she reflects on how "the assignment itself embodied a violence—that asking people to publicly proclaim their epistemological commitments was not unlike subjecting people to a Maoist struggle session within a cultural revolution" (2014, p. 6). The result convinced Reilly that "commitments to knowledge production have a co-constitutive relationship with cultures and classes" and that while they may "be complex and polyvocal […] context will nonetheless bear some weight in our various engagements with the world" (Reilly, 2014, p. 6). In other words, the use of positionality, a method to bring equity between voices, quickly became marred in the context of Chinese students' socialist revolutionary heritage and even resistance from other students afraid of making tangible commitments and presenting their core values.

In terms of classes at CUC, students took *Communication and Chinese society in Theoretical and Historical Contexts*, *Asian Regional Communications and Cultural Industries, Markets, and Regulatory Environments*. Most GCMA alumnae would compare their classroom experiences between SFU and CUC as SFU fostering more class discussion and CUC being more lecture-based. Added to this, CUC's pedagogy is teaching pragmatic empirical studies and basic industry development facts. Grounded in the mentality that advancing theory is of more academic value than developing empirical case studies some SFU admitted students viewed instructors focus on basics about China and contextual approaches to censorship as examples of self-censorship or white-washing historical problems—as if Smythe's notion of "cultural screens" was irrelevant. However, we recall many students appreciating the importance of grounding theory in practical problems and using the GCMA's combined pedagogical direction to motivate them to apply what they learn outside the classroom. As such while there were some concerns that there would be politically motivated academic censorship, students who leaned into the program were able to develop original, progressive, and critical capstone papers.

Student Confrontations and Transformations

The above section engaged the planning and organization that the organizing faculty of the GCMA have invested into the program as a means for them to put a transcultural political economy perspective into practice. It is just as important to draw out more of the experience from the student and teaching staff side.

In pursuing this end many examples come to mind. On the teaching staff side, one visiting scholar from CUC recorded lectures while at SFU. Language learners may appreciate the opportunity to listen, pause, and check a dictionary when confronting high paced academic discussion. However, the CUC scholar was not accepted as a cosmopolitan and before long 'jokes' circulated that she could be a "spy". Moreover, concerns that this CUC visiting scholar brought up regarding GCMA students viewing a film which included explicit sexual scenes was not accepted as a cosmopolitan feminist voice, but was confronted for possibly promoting self-censorship within the program. Depicting the core of our argument, within an academic cosmopolitanism framework, this can be understood as a missed opportunity for the inclusion of diversity. However, within transcultural political economy, it cannot be separated from a long socio-economic history of subjugating marginal voices within the accepted limits of diversity and longstanding claims of Chinese censorship.

While sometimes critiqued for difficulties in keeping up at SFU, CUC students have a drastically different experience of the GCMA than their SFU counterparts. As noted, the GCMA is based on one year at SFU and one year at CUC with two capstone papers. These expectations, however, are only for students admitted through SFU. CUC admitted students cannot apply directly to the GCMA but must complete a year of MA classes at CUC before applying to international programs. In their final year,

they were not required to write one capstone, as the SFU students, but one capstone in English, the requirement of the GCMA, and one MA thesis in Chinese, which is required by their initial program of study at CUC. We might also point out that the students from CUC and other non-English speaking countries must demonstrate high English fluency, evidenced with exams and written work, before being admitted to the program. In contrast, non-Chinese speaking students are only required ungraded entry-level Mandarin Chinese language classes at SFU. These contrasting expectations point out that however much the GCMA is working towards more equitable global engagements, students' experiences are still deeply rooted in their differentiated positions within the global community: one is an optional audit and the other a core prerequisite for entry in to the program.

These contrasting positions are rooted in individual subjectivities. One way this came out at CUC amongst the international side of the cohort is that some of their members would inevitably confront CUC administrative staff over living conditions. Unlike CUC students at SFU, many SFU students at CUC received Chinese government scholarships that cover tuition fees and living expenses and are housed in dormitories for international students that offer less occupancy than dormitories segregated for locals. The international dormitories were a site for regular complaints. These complaints would sometimes be treated as matters of fundamental justice by GCMA students. Instead of reflecting on the privilege of having special dorms for international students or simply bypass the problem by participating in the local rental market, they demanded improved dorms from an institution that already heavily subsidized their presence. This was repeated yearly on one level or another. We should note that these were brief and do not reflect the holistic experience of GCMA students while at CUC, however, they serve as examples not of academic cosmopolitanism but of what Zhao calls a form of academic colonialism (in Zhao & Huang, 2015); a privileged parochialism rather than openness in engaging and sharing others' negotiations of structural hardships and positioning.

From these examples we see how cosmopolitan treatment of other political systems can function as a type of "academic colonialism" (Zhao & Huang, 2015). In the rejections of Chinese subjectivity for administering international students we find practices recalling the colonial era when rather than being tried in a local Chinese court, foreigners would be judged by a European authority. The above example of the neglect of Chinese academic literature and privileging of anglophone academia and use of library resources is another example of the colonialism that asserts a western-centric vantage on Chinese soil. This is not to say that those involved intentionally reproduce colonial behavior. However, it highlights Zhao's argument that we must acknowledge diversity of political systems if we are to commit to genuine internationalism (Zhao & Huang, 2015).

Not all of the experiences of the program are examples of unresolved conflict. Some speak to moments of transformation praxis. This process is evident in an example of one cohorts' confrontations with racialization in China. When they confronted

one CUC professor about the difference in racialization between people of whiter skin versus those darker than Chinese, they and the professor were conflicted in how to understand the situation. At pains to explain that racism is a combination of prejudice and a system for enforcing differential treatment of people, the professor related that the Chinese state has not been part of Europe's imperial colonial history and its corresponding institutional racism. He also highlighted how under Mao, Chinese soldiers participated in post-World War Two liberation movements in Africa and what the students experienced may have been forms of absolute naïveté or grass-roots racism. These explanations did not sit well with students and their interpretations of their experiences. This confrontation preceded their cohorts' annual trip to the village of Heyang. In Heyang we remember hearing how students reflecting on how they were not racialized in the same way as in Beijing or even Vancouver. This shift in how they were being socially positioned enabled students to engage the particularities of rural Chinese disadvantages and link them with those of their home countries. Reflexively, the students broke away from their conceptual categories for interpreting their individual experiences and began to engage with the complex dynamics of economic poverty, the impact of urban-rural divides on professional development, and how these are reproduced globally in their capstone papers. Their trip then was not simply a question of acceptance and diversity but working through economic and political history to transcend difference in new forms of solidarity.

The above example of the transformative impact of traveling to rural China is part of the GCMA pedagogy whose aims to balance students' urban learning with rural experience. Developing her pedagogical application of TPE into academic productivity Zhao began these trips with the first cohort opening the Heyang Institute for Rural Studies and had students publish their research as part of her Global to Village research project published as a special section of the *International Journal of Communication* "Global to Village: Grounding Communication Research in Rural China" (Zhao, 2017). The resulting eight papers emphasize the politics of listening so as to "reduce the conceptual distance between" the research directions of western theories of global communication with the experiences and interests of people in rural China (Hauck, 2017, p. 4445).

This reflexivity enabled our team to appreciate issues as varied as Chinese villagers' desires for communication systems that can strengthen their relations with local officials (Hauck, 2017) to cultural heritage and diversity narratives ignoring and displacing communist legacies (Nicolai, 2017) and beyond. Perhaps most striking is Vanessa Kong's (2017) research on villagers' reception of protest movements in Hong Kong. Rather than being sheltered by state censorship, villagers were aware of the complexity of the protesters' concerns and offered translocal interpretations of the protests linking the concerns of Hong Kongers to their own, offering Vanessa new grounds on which to view her Hong Kong identity in connection with Chinese villagers based on finding commonality in one another's positionality. This special section and resulting annual excursion for subsequent cohorts highlights the

GCMA's pedagogical practice and means for grounding theories in lived and shared experiences.

Concluding Remarks

From the above account we can see that the GCMA matches up with many of the theoretical concerns and proposed practices outlined for academic cosmopolitanism. The GCMA fosters academic exchange across national borders creating space for administrative and intellectual exchange, exposes students to theories beyond those derived from English academic sources, provides an opportunity to study in both Canadian and Chinese academic cultures reinforced with a structure to help students learn Mandarin Chinese and engage in Academic English. The analysis however bookmarks this struggle for affecting transformations by embracing diversity in the context of professional, linguistic and economic barriers. As much as academic cosmopolitanism may be required to promote a progressive transformation of academia, the indefinite pausing of the GCMA signals the import of the political and economic contexts in which collaboration and confrontation occur.

The difficulty of putting the ideals of academic cosmopolitanism to practice and the demise of the GCMA does not take away from the important movement they embody in their respective fashion. As shown with our case study, academic cosmopolitanism must come to terms with engaging the structural terrain in which diversity is produced, recognized and possibly transcended. To realize a de-westernized academia, we need mechanisms to affect the subjective transformation of knowledge producers and institutions. The transformations that the GCMA has worked to achieve in individual students, faculty and at SFU are not the result of untethered hybridity but of working in and confronting the global positioning of historic and ongoing political, economic and cultural structures. In conceptualizing and confronting the diversity of diversity, positionalities must be engaged so that economic and cultural privileges do not become blind spots of those empowered to live as free-floating intellectuals.

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