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Hospitality and internationalization-at-home: the intercultural experiences of ‘buddies’ at a summer school in China

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ABSTRACT

Like many institutions around the world, Chinese universities have established systems of ‘local student buddies’ to ensure international students’ smooth transition to university life in China. This paper examines this underexplored form of internationalization-at-home by focusing on the experiences of Chinese buddies, who host international students at a 4 week summer school. Focus groups were led with 10 buddies before and after the summer school. Focusing on the key concepts of hospitality and interculturality, and using enunciative pragmatics, the paper examines the kind of interculturality taking place between the buddies and the international students.

KEYWORDS

Hospitality; interculturality; China; buddies; internationalization-at-home

作者考察了北京一所高校的本校学生参加国际暑期学校项目的“伙伴计划”的经历，结合“跨文化性”和“好客”两个概念，并基于“文化主义-本质主义+好客的条件法则<...>过程性的跨文化性+无条件欢迎”的连续统一体，采用话语语用学的实证方法分析“中国伙伴”参与的焦点小组讨论。本文表明，本校学生之成为“伙伴”显示了中心主义和功利主义的动机。作者也观察到了与他们作为学校的“东道主”身份有关的“交易式关系”。然而，伙伴与国际学生的对话多围绕文化与政治，并不总是互利或开放。本校学生在经历中的收获则在本土国际化中的“跨文化性—好客”的两个极点之间转移。本文强调了以“跨文化性”展现的“好客”对中国伙伴和国际学生之间的影响。本文为在国内机构本土国际化过程中使用“伙伴系统”提供了建议。

Introduction

In 2018 492,000 international students from 196 countries were studying in 1,004 universities and research institutions in China (Ministry of Education, 2019). Like many institutions around the world, Chinese universities have established systems of ‘local student buddies’ (buddies hereafter) to ensure that international students’ transition to university life in China goes as smoothly as possible. Usually trained to welcome and assist international students, for Tan et al. (2016), buddies can enhance international students’ experience. Rhein and Jones (2020) see these systems as a boost to international students’ ‘sociocultural adjustment’. In summer 2019, a piece of news concerning Chinese buddies, circulated through Chinese social media, angered many people in China. It was revealed that, in a university located in the Eastern part of the country, each international student had at least three local Chinese buddies (mostly female) at their disposal. This news started a

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discussion around the perceived privileges of international students in terms of hospitality in China. Under the pressure of the public, the university in question modified its system of buddies, with now only one buddy allocated per international student.

The system of student buddies is an integral part of the strategy of internationalization-at-home in China, which is also meant to benefit local students. Developed in Europe in the 1990s, the concept of internationalization-at-home refers to '[...] the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments' (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 76). Introduced widely in China since the 2010s, internationalization-at-home goes hand in hand with the Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020), which proposes that 'a large number of talents shall be cultivated that are imbued with global vision, well-versed in international rules, and capable of participating in international affairs and competition' (MOE, 2010).

Although there is a plethora of research on the kinds of capabilities suggested by the Chinese Ministry of Education and experiences of different kinds of (long- and short-term) internationalization initiatives for students in China and elsewhere (e.g. Goertler & Schenker, 2021; Tian et al., 2020), scholarship on buddies is lacking (Motzo, 2016 represents a rare exception in language education). Considering the importance of buddies for international students around the world and of internationalization-at-home as a key component of today's universities and as a research trend (e.g. Robson et al., 2017), we argue that this research gap can provide us with new insights into the burning issue of interculturality within the context of internationalization. Since buddies act as 'hosts' appointed by an institution and are in direct contact with international students for a long- or short-term period 'at home', their intercultural experiences are somewhat unique, especially as they are meant to both represent their institution and serve as mediators between international students, the institution, other students and staff as well as (potentially) the host society at large. In this paper, we are especially interested in the potential links between the form of hospitality that they are asked to perform as representatives of their institution, which can be of a specific socially-conditioned nature (here: China, see Chen, 2018), and the kind of interculturality that they experience with international students.

Our paper examines the specific case of buddies at a four-week summer school at a leading university in Beijing (according to <https://edurank.org/>, 2021). Focus groups in English were led with ten buddies before and after the summer school. Focusing on the key concepts of hospitality and interculturality, we ask the following questions:

- While sharing their experiences of hosting international students, what do they reveal about the kind of interculturality taking place between them and international students?
- What kind of hospitality do the buddies offer to international students, bearing in mind that they represent an institution?
- Finally, what seems to be the influence of the kind of hospitality offered to international students on the buddies' views of the kind of interculturality taking place between them?

Hospitality and interculturality: two key concepts for examining the experiences of buddies

The context under review puts into play very specific forms of intercultural encounters. As such, two groups of individuals, 'local' students and international students, are made to meet. One group (local students), appointed by and representing an institution, hosts, helps and guides (amongst others) the other group (international students). The local students' acts of hospitality are mostly managed by the institution, which trains them and tells them what to do and how to behave with the international students. In 1.1. we start by problematizing the concept of hospitality, which has been rarely used to discuss internationalization (though see Dervin & Layne, 2013). Since

the context of the study is China, following Chen (2018), we discuss the importance of taking into account the socially-conditioned nature of hospitality. The second subsection is dedicated to the thorny and potentially polysemic notion of interculturality, which, we argue, is conditioned here by the buddies' acts of hospitality. One of our interests in this paper is to observe the way(s) interculturality is constructed by the buddies.

Hospitality: a polysemic notion in Chinese and English

Etymologically the English word *hospitality* comes from Latin *hospitalitem*, 'friendliness to guests' and from *hospes*, which refers to both *guest* and *host*. The word *hospitality* also derives from the Proto-Indo-European root **ghos-ti* meaning 'stranger, guest, host'. According to Watkins (2000, p. 31), in ancient Indo-European societies, **ghos-ti* also meant 'a mutual exchange relationship' and to 'someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality'. In Ancient Greece, the rituals of hospitality also represented first and foremost a reciprocal relationship between guest and host. Through the term *theoxeny*, a specific understanding of hospitality was expressed: Gods were omnipresent in Greece and behind any guest, any traveller, any stranger, might have hidden a deity (*theos*). If one mistreated a guest, one could attract the wrath of a God. This led to three rules: first, the host should respect the guest and the guest the host; second, no insult was to be uttered by either figures towards the other; third, gift exchange was to be conducted (Wilson, 2006, p. 370). The origins of the word 'hospitality' in the English language thus refers to the right to hospitality but also to the negotiated interactions between the host and the guest (Sheringham & Daruwalla, 2007).

In the twentieth century, these principles of hospitality (reciprocity and the right to hospitality) were questioned by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (2000). In his seminar *Of Hospitality*, he argued that a certain hostility is present in every act of hospitality: the latter always brings with itself the former (2000). As such in Latin the word *hospes* witnessed a semantic change over the centuries: from initially referring to a guest/host it shifted to the *enemy* and the 'hostile' stranger. Thus hospitality, Derrida argues (2000), always hides potential hostility, triggered by the potential fear of and lack of trust for the stranger (in a broad sense: the one whom we don't know). Derrida maintains that hospitality requires the host to give up security and authority to become 'the hostage' to the guest (Derrida, 2000, p. 16). However, Derrida also claims that this is impossible since the host cannot give all power to the guest. The laws of hospitality (2000, p. 124), Derrida argues, still presuppose the host's sovereignty over their home. The host can decide who enters, what the guest is entitled to do and say, where they are allowed to live and (thus indirectly) with whom they can be or interact. So, one can identify power imbalance and symbolic violence in hospitality: the guest is always at the mercy of the host (Derrida, 2000, p. 4).

Interestingly, Derrida's discussions around hospitality are reminiscent of Chen's (2018) study of hospitality and the *host-guest* paradigm in Chinese. Starting from the context of tourism studies, the scholar argues that understanding and communicating hospitality in different languages and contexts require adopting a comprehensive approach that goes beyond 'Anglo-Western centrism' (2017, p. 495). In order to problematize the ideas of hospitality and host/guest from a Chinese perspective, he suggests looking into how these are conditioned culturally and socially, especially by examining the connotations of words in the Chinese language (2018, p. 496). Chen observes that e.g. the *Oxford Advanced English-Chinese Dictionary* (2014) contains two words for *hospitality*: 'friendly and generous behaviour towards guests, 好客 (hàokè);' and 'food, drink or services that are provided by an organization for guests, customers, etc. (...): 接待 (jiēdài)' (2018, p. 498). He thus notes (2014) that the Chinese words have much narrower meanings and connotations than the English word 'hospitality', not referring to the principle of 'welcome', for example. Chen also discusses the words 主 (zhǔ: host) and 客 (kè: guest) and finds that, unlike English, the two terms are etymologically independent of one another (and of the words for hospitality, see *hospes* in Latin which refers to both guest and host) and thus lacks the coherence of the English words. As a consequence, Chen (2018, p. 503) asserts that 'the presupposed hospitality between the host and the

culturalism and essentialism in this paper, i.e. systematically invoking ‘culture’ as essentially homogeneous and static (Chemla & Keller, 2017), reducing, in the process, ‘people’ to certain generic characteristics (Shi-xu, 2001, p. 279). This conceptualization of interculturality relies heavily on differentialist discourses that consider ‘us’ and ‘them’ solely through the lens of cultural difference (Abdallah-Preteceille, 2004). What is more cultural and national identities, in their solid features, dominate such discourses of interculturality. Alongside many other critical scholars of the notion, we argue that the ideas of ‘cultural difference’, ‘knowledge about other cultures’ (amongst others), all represent, willy-nilly, caricatures and simplifications (Piller, 2010). In their book *Seeing Culture Everywhere*, Breidenbach and Nyíri (2009, p. 25) explain: ‘Today’s world is a world shaped by a consciousness of culture that penetrates everyday life as well as matters of state in an unprecedented way. Culture – or rather, cultural difference – is now held to be the main explanation for the way the human world functions’. Culturalism-essentialism can create *intercultural imaginaries* in the form of stereotypes, representations and categorizations (Bauman, 1993, p. 164; Holliday, 2010). Finally, this perspective can lead to a ‘guest’ being ‘ordered’ to learn and to adjust to a host’s cultural habits (amongst others). This side of the pole is often negatively evaluated in research on interculturality today, and is included in so-called critical perspectives as a phenomenon to ‘eradicate’ from e.g. students learning about interculturality (Humphreys, 2021). Our approach takes note of the critiques of essentialism and culturalism but does not claim that they can be ‘unlearned’ or fully avoided. Discourses of interculturality require negotiations of complex discourses that cannot be located outside the (limiting) framework of such -isms (Dervin & Simpson, 2021). What is more a culturalist-essentialist statement ‘thrown on the table’ with a given other in a specific context may not be recurrent with another interlocutor in a different context – or correspond to practices of ‘doing’ interculturality.

The other pole for interculturality, which relates to the notion as a process of constant negotiations of identities and mixings, is based first and foremost on considering both difference and similarity between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In interculturality as a process, several aspects of a person’s identity are considered against difference and similarity: gender, social class, age, profession, ethnicity, etc. (beyond the sole marker of culture). Many fields of research such as sociology, cultural studies and Black Feminism, have delved into the benefits of a major paradigm of research called intersectionality to complexify their analyses and to make sure that research participants can shift the boxes that scholarly work can impose on them. For instance, McCall (2005, p. 1771) defines intersectionality as ‘the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations.’ Examining interculturality from an intersectional position demands taking into account the combination and interrelation of elements such as language, social status, gender and pushing for more political approaches that delve into issues of inequality/inequity and social justice (McCall, 2005). Taking into consideration intersectionality can support critiquing intercultural imaginaries and objectivizing knowledge about ‘us’ and ‘them’ (stereotypes, representations, categorizations). Finally, interculturality as a process discursively signifies that both guest and host negotiate adjustment since culturalist visions become obsolete. Interculturality is thus not so much here about ‘knowing’ people through their cultural characteristics/differences, but about allowing an ever-changing *inter-* to emerge, whereby those involved co-construct a relationship based on identity negotiations. In this pole, interculturality represents a process that relies on the continuum of difference-similarity (rather than mere cultural difference); a complex set of identity markers that go beyond ‘culture’ (e.g. gender, social class, generation, worldview/religion, ethnicity); as well as the critique of intercultural imaginaries and objectivizing knowledge about ‘us’ and ‘them’ (stereotypes, representations, categorizations) (see Abdallah-Preteceille, 2004; Piller, 2010). As the opposite side of the culturalist-essentialist pole, interculturality as a process represents an ideal-type that cannot be reached fully either by e.g. the interlocutors under review or by researchers.

In analysing discourses about interculturality, the two poles can help identify how research participants navigate the complexities of the notion, shifting back and forth from one pole to the other. In this paper, we argue that the specific context of internationalization-at-home, and especially, a form of hospitality framed by an institution, have an influence on these discourses.

Data description and research method

The context of the study is one of the leading interdisciplinary universities in Beijing which organizes a four-week summer school with about 100 courses every summer. Each student from the university is required to take at least one summer course which is included in their study plans. The courses are also open to students from outside China, who are allocated a Chinese buddy during their stays.

The data consist of transcribed recordings of six focus groups carried out in English with ten Chinese buddies from the same university (duration of each focus group is about one hour).¹ Since the buddies 'performed' their tasks in English as an international language and were all advanced users of the language (a criterion for being selected into the programme), we decided to use this language for data collection purposes – allowing them, of course, to code-switch and -mix in Chinese if needed (which did not happen). During the discussions, the students seemed comfortable enough to express their ideas in English and to disagree with others if needed. The use of Chinese could have made a difference in terms of what the students said, as much as discussions with different people in a different context in English might have had an influence on their discourses – it is impossible to say and irrelevant here. The discussions took place in a meeting room on campus, before and after the summer school. During the two meetings (before and after the summer school), the buddies were asked to form 3 groups randomly by the authors and to discuss different aspects of their experiences, sitting on comfortable sofas around a small table, drinking tea. We did not take part in the discussions and just sat in the same room, observing discreetly what was happening and answering potential queries. We wanted the buddies to feel 'freer' talking to each other in English during the focus groups, without us intervening. Five questions printed on a piece of paper were left on the table in front of them to discuss but they were free to ask other questions. We chose this research method of open-ended focus groups since it can allow us to explore a particular issue or a set of issues by having participants negotiate meanings, create new meanings and generate diversities as well as consensus of opinions, without the presence of researchers (Marková et al., 2007). In focus groups, participants can interrupt each other, finish each other's sentences, play roles, get angry, tell stories, jokes or even sing (Salazar Orvig & Grossen, 2004, p. 267). Confrontation of ideas, polemics, multi-dialogues, but also unexpectedness can also occur. This makes focus groups very suitable for collecting data on the complex issue of interculturality in internationalization-at-home and to explore the 'navigation' between the two poles of interculturality.

A few words about what a buddy is in the context of the research are needed here: Buddies for the summer school are selected based on their English skills (minimum B2 in the European Framework). They do not receive any salary for their work but can gain voluntary activity credits for their studies and have priority for registering for courses in the summer programme. At the beginning of the summer school, the staff of the summer school office give them a short lecture on how to interact with international students, emphasizing somewhat 'culturalist' do's and don'ts (e.g. how to deal with food taboos and requirements). At the end of the summer, the buddies are asked to write a short reflexive report for the summer school office. It is important to bear in mind throughout the presentation of our results that the buddies are trained to represent their institution and that the activities they are involved in are organized by the summer school office – not by the buddies themselves. At first sight, the buddies thus appear to have little freeway in terms of working with the international students.

A specific form of discourse analysis was used to examine the data. Being at the crossroads of different fields of research (linguistics, sociology, psychology, etc.) and methodological perspectives, discourse analysis is a rich yet unstable theory and 'toolbox'. In this paper, we use enunciative pragmatics (*énonciation*) which was developed by scholars such as Benveniste, Culioli and Ducrot in France and is currently used in different parts of the world (Angermüller et al., 2014, p. 135). Concerned with *subjectivity* and *language as a system* in the production of discourse this perspective seems to fit well the purpose of this paper: to analyse how Chinese buddies express, construct and negotiate interculturality, and the role of hospitality in this process.

Enunciation is defined by Benveniste (1970, p. 80) as ‘putting the language into operation through an individual act of use’ in a given situational context. Subjectivity or how the speaker inscribes themselves im-/explicitly in what they say is thus of importance here. For Johansson and Suomela-Salmi (2011, p. 94), by focusing on enunciation researchers can examine how research participants ‘stage themselves or make themselves manifest in utterances, or on the other hand may decide to distance themselves from it, leaving no explicit signs of their presence or manifesting their attitude in utterances’. Traces of subjectivity can be multiple. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1980) named these traces *subjectivemes* and included shifters (indications of *person, place and time*) and evaluative elements such as (*positive, negative*) words, (*affective and evaluative*) adjectives, and verbs. As far as adjectives are concerned *affective* ones involve adjectives that express the property of an object as well as an emotional reaction to it by the enunciator (*funny, amazing, moving, excellent*); *evaluative adjectives* are divided into *axiological* (evaluation of a norm accompanied by a positive or negative judgment, e.g. beautiful or ridiculous) and *non-axiological* (non-judgmental yet evaluating a norm, ‘this coat is warm’ based on how the utterer conceives of ‘warm’). The use of modalities (e.g. adverbs indicating uncertainty) can also be indicators of attitude towards what is being said. Often, enunciation intends to communicate more than what their utterance means on the surface. By looking into subjectivemes and modalities one can get a sense of extra layers of discourses in what people say, and e.g. identify traces of evaluation, contradictions and, in the case of this paper, ‘navigation’ between different ways of framing interculturality.

Another interesting aspect of enunciation is to provide access to enunciative heterogeneity, constituted by the omnipresence of others in any given discourse. For Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1990, p. 13), ‘Any discourse is a collective construction’. As such multiple enunciators are made to speak by a concrete locutor (the speaker, ‘the puppet master’, the buddies in this paper) when s/he speaks. For example, when one expresses oneself one might include *pre-constructs* (e.g. a stereotype, a representation) to convince one’s listener. Some voices are clearly identifiable (e.g. in the way they are included directly by means of e.g. a direct quote with a clear speaker) or unidentifiable (presence of a ‘voice’ with an unclear reference – *who is made to talk?* Dervin, 2008). This has been problematized as the interdiscursive multitude of intersecting voices, sources and perspectives by e.g. Angermuller (2014). Bearing in mind that the buddies represent an institution, it is to be expected that, as locutors during the focus groups, they will manipulate different voices – one of them being potentially that of the institution – in the way they construct interculturality. Examining un-/identifiable enunciators can show us how the buddies navigate the intercultural poles while revealing the potential influences of hospitality.

All in all, we will focus on three enunciative phenomena indicating the buddies’ discursive activity: *subjectivemes* (use of pronouns and adjectives), the use of *modalities* (which can indicate attitude towards what is being said) and the multiplicity of *enunciators* (voices put into play through represented speech). Absence of these elements can also serve as an interesting discursive strategy. This will help us examine how the buddies position themselves in relation to what they say about interculturality, how they position others in relation to interculturality and what influences hospitality might have on these elements.

Analysis

The analysis revolves around three aspects. We start by examining the buddies’ discourses on interculturality before meeting the international students (Section 3.1). We then move on to how the buddies describe their engagement with the students (Section 3.2). Finally, we look into what the buddies claim to have learnt ‘interculturally’ through the experience (Section 3.3).

Before ‘hosting’ the international students: culturalism-essentialism as an official duty

During the first focus groups organized after the short intercultural training that the buddies received and before meeting the international students, the buddies explain that their main

motivation for acting as a buddy during the summer school is related to ‘interculturality’ – without defining the notion. The fact that they use the notion might relate to the research goals that we presented to them at the beginning of the study – which means that we might be the responsible co-enunciator for this aspect and play an unidentifiable voice at first (Maingueneau, 2003).

Very few of the buddies have had the opportunity to interact with foreigners before the summer school – except with some visiting foreign teachers at their university. One buddy from focus group 3 summarizes the main benefit of what she was going to be part of by means of an utterance that sounds like a motto: ‘cross-cultural communication is good for us’. This utterance appears to be ‘objectified’ here. As such no modality such as *could be* indicating possibility is used (Johansson & Suomela-Salmi, 2001). The inclusion of ‘us’ as one enunciator, which probably means ‘us buddies’, also seems to mark a distance between the speaker and what they are saying. Another enunciator is present in this utterance. Maybe here one could hear the voice of a co-enunciator such as the doxa, i.e. common sense, about interculturality in internationalization or that of the institution, the summer school office – as in ‘interculturality is good for our students’. Such beautified but unproblematic discourses about interculturality have been noted to be omnipresent in the sphere of internationalization (Ballatore, 2015). During the discussion no one urges the buddy to explain further why she believes it is ‘good for us’ or what *cross-cultural* means, suggesting that, as co-enunciators included in the ‘us’ she uses, they might agree with her.

In general, and maybe without much surprise, bearing in mind that they have been provided with culturalist ideas in relation to their role as hosts by the institution, before meeting the international students, the buddies seem to refer to interculturality by means of culturalist-essentialist arguments about China, without being explicit about which aspects of *culture* they refer to (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2004). Before the summer school, their intercultural interests appear to be Sinocentric rather than reciprocal as indicated in the *inter-* of interculturality. As such many buddies see their role as hosts as that of mediators between ‘China’ and the international students – and here we find pre-constructs passed onto them by the institution (amongst others) (Dervin, 2008). In focus group 1 a buddy uses implicit *culturespeak* in a categorical utterance: ‘our culture is worth learning’ (which most likely refers to *Chinese culture*). Culturespeak (Hannerz, 1999) represents a somewhat empty use of the signifier of culture. The use of the pronoun ‘our’ – which is contrasted indirectly to an invisible counter-enunciator, *their, the international students* – seems to strengthen the Sinocentric perspective on interculturality that was passed onto them as ‘ambassadors of Chinese culture’. Like the previous excerpt, the utterance is objectified by the locutor through the use of ‘our’, which seems to place a discursive distance between the locutor as an individual and as a member of the group of buddies (Maingueneau, 1996). Another buddy in the same group makes a strong, possibly stereotypical, statement about foreigners’ views of China, again in an utterance that does not attempt to mitigate the generic statement: ‘Many foreigners have discrimination about China. It is our duty to help them by teaching them our culture’. No subjectivemes such as modalities of doubt or uncertainty (e.g. *might*) is used to moderate the assertion made about ‘many foreigners’ (Kerbrat-orecchioni, 1980). It seems to be presented as a ‘truth’. The buddy concludes that her position as an actor of hospitality urges her to help foreigners to learn about it. By using ‘our’ in ‘it is our duty to’, she seems to play the role of the spokesperson for other buddies but also the institutional ventriloquist, rehearsing what might have been expressed about their special hospitality mission (Johansson & Suomela-Salmi, 2011). As such, during the short training session that the buddies followed, they were urged to introduce the international students to specific aspects of ‘Chinese culture’ – without specifying what this might mean.

About the short lecture on issues of intercultural communication that they listened to, a buddy from group 3 finds this session to be very useful for their future engagement with international students. She explains:

I think it is important to know how to share about Chinese culture in English. I think because as China's influence increases, we should export our own Chinese culture to the foreigners. First thing is we should know how to translate Chinese culture in English. The foreigners will have better understanding of our Chinese culture.

The excerpt starts with the buddy as a locutor taking charge of her discourse (repetition of 'I think' ...), giving a first impression of self-inclusion in her views on what both her mission and thus interculturality should be about. As we move into the excerpt, her enunciation starts relying on others' voices, i.e. a generic 'we' that could include buddies like her or 'the Chinese' in general. The repetition of a strong deontic modality (*should*, see Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980), which seems to include a voice giving an 'order' to 'we', which could be that of the institution, represents a contrast with the discursive distancing indicated by 'I think'.

Interculturality for this buddy seems to mean first and foremost being able to 'spread' and 'translate' knowledge about Chinese culture by means of English, as 'ordered' by the unidentifiable voice in *should* (see Dervin & Yuan, 2021). 'Exporting' and 'translating' Chinese culture are processes that are presented to lead to smooth understanding from the other through the use of a generic future tense in 'the foreigners will have better understanding', which is not modified by any modality such as *could*, thus evacuating any potential hurdles. Although, again, there are no hints of what aspects of culture would be included here, we assume that the mentions of Chinese culture refer to 'common national culture', in its differentialist perspective, as in 'our own Chinese culture' vs. other cultures. However, what seems to be expected of the 'foreigners' here is to *understand* better rather than, for example, *copy* and *become like 'us'*. All in all, this seems to give an image of potentially distanced positions between the buddy and the international students: *the buddy explains their culture to the guest, the guest understands*. What is more, the distance is reinforced by the projected one-way strategy of telling them about their culture rather than, e.g., trying to negotiate co-understanding of each other's relationships and identities. This could confirm an approach to hospitality that is host-centric, first and foremost (Chen, 2018).

As aforementioned, the buddies often criticize what they refer to as the wrong perceptions and representations of Chinese culture that the international students have before meeting them. Through these speculations ('imaginaries', Maffesoli, 1997), they show some awareness of potential intercultural imaginaries regarding China, thus leaning towards the pole of *interculturality as a process*. However, this approach to intercultural imaginaries might create situations of domination whereby the 'truth' about ('our') Chinese culture might create new intercultural imaginaries and thus move towards the pole of culturalism-essentialism again. As such any discourse on a given culture, be it from 'locals' and/or 'internationals', can lead to new forms of essentialism and solid visions of, e.g., cultural practices (Holliday, 2010). Objectivizing cultural knowledge, i.e. presenting a culture as a 'block', can also place boundaries between 'us' and 'them' instead of leading to the process of interculturality (Abdallah-Preteuille, 2004). This could also add to the potential borders between the host and the guest.

To conclude this section, let us mention one student from group 1, who was the only one to discuss one aspect of interculturality that appears to be original. The student came from a small town in the south of China and described the homesickness that she experienced when she moved to Beijing:

When I came to Beijing it was difficult for me to adapt ... like in a foreign country. My hometown is very small compared to Beijing and I have all my friends and family there. Beijing is too big and I didn't know anyone at first. The food was different and sometimes I could not even understand what the local people said. It was difficult and depressing. So I want to help international people to adapt to our capital city.

Her main motivation to be a buddy is to help international students deal with their own (potential) feeling of homesickness, having experienced it herself. This altruistic motivation could reveal an approach to interculturality that moves beyond differentialism, regardless of the status of the foreign student the buddy sees a potential similarity, i.e. that of a stranger in a different place. This could have an interesting impact on intercultural encounters: potentially rebalancing power statuses between host and guest and creating bonds between them by having identified this potential similarity.

What this first section reveals is that the way the buddies enunciate their future role and engagement with international students is often uncompromising, containing few subjectivemes, based on group identities, i.e. ‘us’ buddies, *Chinese people*. Their discourses on interculturality at this stage thus appear to be very much framed by ‘objectifying’, ‘external’ voices that leave little space for future disrupting dialogue with international students, allowing them to navigate between the poles of interculturality, beyond culturalism-essentialism. This section therefore can strengthen the claim that institutional/official accounts have an influence on hospitality and the projected role of the buddies, and on how they first engage with the idea of interculturality.

Stepping away from the host position and evaluating the kind of interculturality desired by the international students

At the end of the summer school, the buddies reconvened with us and spent one hour together in groups discussing their experiences of the four-week hosting of the international students. Most of the conversations were dedicated to direct interaction with them.

When the buddies described what they did with the international students, without any surprise, many of the encounters and activities they shared are directly related to the tasks set by the summer school for them, i.e. their hospitality framework of being ‘friendly’ (Chen, 2018). At first sight, interactions are thus mostly transactional. What is more, according to what the buddies explain, their relations appear to be unidirectional in the sense that they ‘served’ the international students – but never vice-versa (Chen, 2018).

The buddies supported the international students with practicalities on campus, showing them around, taking them to lecture halls, canteens. They introduced them to the use of Chinese social media such as WeChat, an omnipresent Chinese multifunctional application that can be used for texting and paying (amongst others). They also served as interpreters and translators for them and report helping them with homework, for example, if the international students were studying Chinese. Finally, in order to complement the activities organized by the University for the international students, buddies often recommended places of interest to visit in Beijing. A buddy from group 3 maintains that she ‘wanted to help them to get a real picture of China’, while another buddy from the same group wished to help them get ‘a deeper understanding of China’. This seems to reveal again a somewhat culturalist-essentialist perspective on the kind of interculturality the buddies provided (see the use of subjectivemes such as ‘real’ and ‘deeper’).

However, when the buddies go deeper into the topics that were discussed with the international students, in less formal and transactional situations, beyond the imposed framework of hospitality from the institution (for example, over a meal), these images are complexified. More profound conversations seem to have taken place then, although they often revolved solely around the voice of the buddies in the way they are reported during the group discussions (Maingueneau, 1996).

A buddy from group 2, who was hosting an American student, recalls many conversations around Chinese food. He explains that he wanted to introduce her to the ‘diversity of China through its diverse food’. For the buddy, the American student has intercultural imaginaries about Chinese food, which limits her interest in it as well as curiosity towards Chinese diversity. These imaginaries seem to relate to the way ‘Asian’ food is marketized in the USA. Generalizing around the case of one American student, using the pronoun ‘they’, and operating a comparison with Korea and Japan, the buddy argues: ‘at first, they don’t like Chinese food, they prefer Korean and Japanese’. This appears to be a good example of a shift from the culturalist-essentialist pole to the interculturality as a process one: first the buddies realize that international students have culturalist views on Chinese food and then shift towards the other pole by appreciating the diversity and complexity of Chinese food.

The wish for the international students to develop a more complex picture of China is omnipresent in all the discussion groups after the summer school. In group 1 a long discussion takes place around the intercultural imaginaries of the international students and the wish for buddies to ‘correct’ them:

Buddy 1: I want them to know some interesting Chinese culture, not all the Chinese culture. Because I think many of them may be interested in something that we Chinese will never be interested in, such as Taiji, you know. At first, they are very interested in Taiji because they think it will be very interesting. And I told them, no, no, no, no, no, it's far from interesting. It's boring. They don't believe me. And after the first class, they spent a lot of time playing Taiji and they finally believed me that is very boring. I think they should try something interesting.

Buddy 2: Maybe something they know about Chinese culture is a fixed impression, like Kungfu. Most Chinese people don't know about Kungfu. I would like them to know some interesting Chinese culture, interesting history.

Buddy 3: What they know about China is just from textbook or movies.

Buddy 4: Yes, it's the fixed impression. Because the textbook always tells Taiji and Kungfu are interesting. Actually, they are not interesting at all.

This excerpt contains many complex enunciative elements (Angermuller et al., 2014). Many free indirect dialogues take place here between the buddies and the students around what is 'interesting' and 'boring' concerning Chinese culture. The excerpt, a dialogue between four buddies, contains the repetition of the two affective adjectives, *interesting*: eight times; *boring*: twice (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980). These subjectivemes serve different purposes: in four cases *interesting* is linked to the buddies as enunciators, i.e. what they consider to be 'interesting' aspects of Chinese culture; in other cases they are embedded in indirect discourses from the international students ('They think [Taiji] will be interesting'), and 'textbooks' ('the textbook always tells Taiji and Kungfu are interesting') and in the indirect responses from the buddies ('Actually, they are not interesting at all') about Taiji and Kungfu. As to the evaluative adjective *boring*, it is only used by the buddies as an enunciator. In this excerpt there seems to be confrontations of evaluations of the kind of knowledge that should be 'known' about Chinese culture. Although the opinion of the buddies could be considered as helping international students shift away from a certain form of culturalist-essentialist view, i.e. Taiji/Kungfu are 'fixed impressions', a direct translation of the characters 刻板印象, the Chinese word for *stereotype*, the buddies fail to specify however what the 'interesting' aspects of Chinese culture could be interesting for the students. So they seem to be urging them to step away from what they consider to be culturalist-essentialist but with no concrete direction to navigate to. What the buddies seem to claim here is that there are aspects of Chinese culture that are not of interest, maybe in relation to their age and generation, and that the international students should look for other elements. In the focus groups, where the buddies co-constructed their experiences of discussing Chinese culture with the students, none of them mentions alternative views of Chinese culture that would be 'more interesting', except maybe buddy 2 who mentions in passing 'history'. It is important to remember that focus groups without having the researchers sitting with the participants, deliver data which show how the buddies negotiate, create but also silence meanings. Such silences, which can also be considered as absent enunciators (Maingueneau, 1996), are always significant (Marková et al., 2007). In this case, it might reveal that the buddies have not been able to reflect deeply on the meanings of 'interesting culture' or that they use the word *culture* in such a broad sense that it loses any potential bearing (see Eriksen, 2001). Here the hospitality framework imposed by the institution and the summer school to welcome the other seems fruitless for them to think of and/or offer alternatives.

In two of the focus groups, two buddies mention elements that we believe could complement the previous discussions of culture. Buddy 2 from the previous excerpt (group 1), who mentioned earlier the fact that 'history' could be an interesting aspect of Chinese culture to discuss, spent time with her Korean student talking about political issues. Considering the somewhat complex historical relationships between the two neighbouring countries, the way history is perceived between the two is highly politicized and controversial. The buddy concludes that through their discussions she was able to 'eradicate their prejudice about China'. In a somewhat similar vein, a buddy from group 2 spends time describing her daily life at her campus in Beijing. She uses an indirect dialogue with the buddy to explain: 'I told her that I was sharing a dorm with five other students and that we have to do our military training during our studies ... she was astonished by our conditions'. According

to the buddy these elements triggered interesting conversations about living conditions on campuses and patriotism.

What this section shows, unlike the previous one which was framed mostly by the official host status of the buddies prior to encountering the students, is that interaction between the buddies and international students as constructed during the focus groups, seems to oscillate between the two poles of *Culturalism-essentialism* < ... > *Interculturality as a process* or at least, at times, away from the culturalist-essentialist pole. Once the students step outside their official roles as hosts their discourses start containing more obvious marks of subjectivity (evaluations around interculturality) and clearer hints at multivoicedness. At first and throughout the summer school, the interactions between the buddies and students relate to their different statuses: the buddies guide and serve the international students, as requested and framed by the institution through their imposed hospitality. Discussions of ‘culture’ (as in *Chinese culture*), which seem to take place outside the ‘official’ framework of hospitality, during e.g. meals, lead to buddies’ awareness of what they consider to be stereotypical views of China, questioning their interests in ‘uninteresting’ aspects of Chinese culture and mentioning the need for them to try out other cultural elements that are not explicitly described. There appears to be however a lack of reciprocity between the buddies and the students, although we have identified a few signs of creating bonds and trust (see the example of political discussions). Finally, the international students’ voices are never heard directly, for example, about ‘their’ own food or about the potential influence they might have had on changing the buddies’ opinions.

Reflecting on learning: from culturalism-essentialism to process interculturality and reciprocity?

This last analytical section focuses on what the buddies report to have learnt from their experiences at the summer school during the final focus groups, after the summer school. The international students had already left and the buddies’ role of host had finished. This is where interculturality seems to shift the most between the two poles.

At the end of the summer school, when the buddies start talking about what they learnt they tend to rely first on culturalist-essentialist arguments, whereby they seem to be eager to identify ‘truths’:

- About the way international students see China and the Chinese: a buddy from group 3 is adamant about ‘finding out if their views are true or not’.
- About other ‘cultures’: A buddy from group 1 seems to use a culturalist-essentialist argument when she claims in a somewhat resolute way, not restricting the possibility that this might be too idealistic with a conditional modality for instance (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980): ‘I learnt a lot about Korean culture and what Korean people are like’. Another buddy from the same group is ‘curious about Switzerland [her student’s country]’ and wants to ‘check things ... and see if they are facts’.

At first sight, these statements seem to rely on differentialist and culturalist perspectives and intercultural imaginaries: ‘I learnt a lot about (...) what Korean people are like’ (see Piller, 2010). Yet many buddies show signs of having been able to learn to go beyond some of these issues by triggering some form of openness and reciprocity with their international students. A student from group 1 provides us with a good example:

(...) from my experience, we had very nice conversations because we have known lots of things about each other. We have a lot of common topics to talk. So we are not very embarrassed.

For this buddy knowledge about each other and commonalities (‘common topics’) can lead to dialogue, reciprocity and maybe even bonds (‘we are not very embarrassed’). In this excerpt, there seems to be a slight shift from the ‘passive’ position of a host who introduces China to the

students (as requested by the institution) to the rebalancing of the hierarchy of the host–guest relationship, leading to the *inter-* of interculturality (see the evaluative non-axiological subjectivemene in ‘we had very nice conversations’, Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980).

The theme of similarities leading to reciprocity with international students is also present in many other buddies’ statements. For example, a buddy from group 2 explains that she realized through her interaction with her student that, as both young people, they ‘share similar worries about our future’. She mentions her fear of not finding a job in the future, the environment (pollution), starting a family, etc. Referring to a student from South Korea, a buddy from group 3 also realizes that they share similar musical taste and even admire the same ‘idol from China’. Moreover, the theme of politics also leads to considering interculturality through the lens of similarity. In this dialogue from group 2, the buddies negotiate meaning around South Korean and Chinese views of a historical event:

Buddy 1: I know that my South Korean friend has the similar points with Chinese towards anti-Japanese war.

Buddy 2: Sorry?

Buddy 1: You know, Chinese have some negative view towards anti-Japanese war and it’s the same for the Korean.

Buddy 2: OK, OK.

Finally, in group 3, a buddy seems to surprise one of her interlocutors when she claims that she feels her international student and her were from the same country:

Buddy 1: Actually, I think my buddy and my friends are all from Asia and I am so surprised that we have so many similar ideas. I even felt that just like we are from the same country.

Buddy 2: Really?

Buddy 1: So it’s not difficult and I didn’t find something that I should fear when I communicate with them. I think it’s really easy and comfortable when we are talking about some questions about our future plan and some jobs in our countries. It’s not so much differences between our countries.

In terms of enunciation, while in previous sections, there is no sign of real dialogue between the buddies and the students, this excerpt shows ‘symbiosis’ between the buddy and her student: The repeated use of the pronoun ‘we’ to describe similarities and to share excerpts from the discussions they had (e.g. ‘when we are talking about some questions about our future plan and some jobs in our countries’); the use of modals to mark positive surprise in the use of ‘so’ (e.g. ‘we have so many similar ideas’) and ‘even’ (e.g. ‘I even felt just like we are from the same country’) (Maingueneau, 1996). Buddy 1’s discourse thus reflects an understanding of interculturality that leans towards interculturality as a process, placing emphasis on the continuum of difference-similarity, putting aside mere cultural difference to include e.g. future career plans and questioning intercultural imaginaries that place boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The same student even notes that, as a shy person, she was encouraged by her buddy ‘to speak up and be less shy’.

This section, based on the last focus groups where the buddies discussed what they learnt, indicates some changes in the ways the buddies engage with interculturality. Although elements of the culturalism-essentialism pole remain, shifts towards the other pole of interculturality are taking place. Getting to know the international students better, out of the imposed framework of hospitality, transaction-based with the status of ‘Chinese cultural ambassadors’, seems to lead to the possibility of navigating between the two poles of interculturality.

Discussion and conclusions

Internationalization-at-home represents one important way of allowing students who cannot study abroad to engage with interculturality (Beelen & Jones, 2015). In this paper, focusing on hospitality and interculturality, we have examined Chinese buddies’ discourses about their experiences at an international summer school in Beijing. Using elements from enunciative pragmatics (Benveniste, 1970), which have allowed us to examine how the buddies stage interculturality by using (or not)

signs of their presence and that of others in their discourse, we first focused on the buddies' positions before the summer school started and identified Sinocentric, culturalist-essentialist discourses about their expectations concerning the international students. Somewhat host-centric perspectives (telling about the 'real' China), constructed in objectivizing, distant ways, seemed to 'govern' the buddies' representations of interculturality prior to meeting the international students (Chen, 2018). The distance between the buddies as locutors and what they uttered could show the potential impact of the institution they represent or of the summer school on the way they see interculturality as future hosts (Angermuller et al., 2014). The buddies shared somewhat typical culturalist-essentialist views about Chinese traditions and the Chinese but also about international students' countries and cultures. In their descriptions of their engagement with the students during the summer school we noted that their relations were often transactional, relating to their status as 'official hosts' for an institution. No reciprocity in terms of hospitality was reported. This might have to do with the 'mission' of the students as tasked by the institution.

Culturalism-essentialism shifted towards snapshots of the *interculturality as a process* pole when it came to discussing the diversity of Chinese food and when the buddies and international students engaged in more political and somewhat taboo issues. In the last focus group discussions, this shift also took place when the students stepped out of their role as hosts and recalled informal situations such as sharing a meal. Furthermore, in the students' claims about what they had learnt through the experience of hosting international students, we were able to identify many shifts between the two proposed poles for analysing interculturality in internationalization-at-home. As such signs of interculturality as a process, intersection of identity markers beyond 'culture' and acts of reciprocity ('friendships') were shared by some buddies. The continuum of difference-similarity was present when the students discussed e.g. homesickness and shared history (Dervin, 2016). In previous research on intercultural learning in internationalization, some scholars have also noted the tendency for international students to navigate between culturalism-essentialism and interculturality as a process at the end of a stay abroad (e.g. Jackson, 2018). Through their specific status as individuals involved in intercultural encounters as official hosts in internationalization-at-home, the buddies' experiences of interculturality both resemble and differ from other types of students in internationalization-at-home (Robson et al., 2017).

All in all, the originality of our study is to have identified the influence of the acts of hospitality as framed by the institution (i.e. transactional) status of cultural ambassadors, amongst other things, on how interculturality was expressed and constructed and the by the buddies. The main difference in the shifts on the interculturality continuum appears to be based on having to navigate between their status as representatives of the institution and their position as young people engaging in discussions with students from other countries.

To conclude we wish to make a few recommendations for institutions using the buddy system as a way of triggering further interculturality within internationalization-at-home on their campuses. There is obviously a need to prepare students to engage in multiple ways about: first, their role as hosts and that of the guests (beyond host-centric relations, Chen, 2018); second, the influence of acts of hospitality on the experiences of interculturality and vice versa; third, interculturality in general (navigating and problematizing culturalism-essentialism and interculturality as a process). At times, it appeared that the buddies did not have the words to move beyond certain limited views of e.g. culture. That was the case when some buddies discussed the need for international students to experience 'interesting' aspects of Chinese culture. Beyond an emphasis on 'typical' and 'traditional' aspects of Chinese culture (visits to museums, Chinese opera, etc.), buddies would need to be trained to enter into meaningful dialogues around today's China (politics included) with international students so they can both question their own perceptions of what they consider to be 'realities' or 'truths', as some buddies called them (see Piller, 2010). There is thus a need for institutions to create discursive, experiential and physical spaces of intercultural engagements between buddies and students. Finally, one could also unthink and rethink the form of hospitality that was 'performed' by the buddies. Too rigid and transactional a form of hospitality might not be the best platform for enriching

interculturality, unless the buddies are made fully aware of its potential influence on their engagement with international students, for example, in discussions around interculturality.

Note

1. The international students came from different parts of the world (e.g. South Korea, Switzerland, the US, Zimbabwe). They were accommodated in a different part of the campus from the Chinese students and they took courses where very few local students were to be found. During their free time, the summer school office organized specific tourist and cultural activities for them (e.g. museum visits, an evening at a Chinese opera, trips to the Great wall). The buddies accompanied their partners during these activities. Apart from the buddies, the international students had very few encounters with Chinese people but met many people from other countries.

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