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The capitalist dialectics of international student mobility in the modern world-system

John P. O'Regan 

IOE, Faculty of Education and Society, University College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

International higher education (IHE) and with that international student mobility (ISM) and internationalisation have become widely embedded in the educational mobility literature as commonplace conceptualisations in a world which is everywhere imagined as globalised. The present response paper considers the contribution of the papers of this special issue to our understanding of ISM and to international study-abroad in Asia while also locating this in the wider context of ISM in a capitalist modern world-system. The testimonies of the participants in these papers concerning their inter-Asian study-abroad experiences evidence their keen consciousness of the marketised nature of international higher education while also demonstrating how they negotiate and often resist this. The inter-Asian experience of international study-abroad while revealing of the racial and linguistic prejudices which some sojourners can face, also show how these international students may additionally discover accidental and unlooked for 'fringe' capitals which disrupt their 'neoliberal' positioning and are potentially transformative and self-liberating. In this brief response paper, I place ISM and inter-Asian study-abroad within a Marxist and critical realist dialectical ontology so as to be able to delve more deeply into this experience and to give greater theoretical context to the transformative possibilities which ISM presents.

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Introduction: capital and ISM

International higher education (IHE) and with that international student mobility (ISM) and internationalisation have become widely embedded in the educational mobility literature as commonplace conceptualisations in a world which is everywhere imagined as globalised. But as several of the papers in this special issue attest, it is most often in relation to the pursuit of English and EMI in normative 'Western' notions of educational development that IHE and ISM have been configured (Vida-Mannl 2022). It is something of a welcome departure then to find in this special issue a turn to inter-Asian mobility and other languages 'beyond English' in relation to ISM. The study destinations include South Korea, Mongolia, Brunei, Vietnam and the Philippines, while also incorporating the testimonies and experiences of international student sojourners from China, alongside those of Koreans, Mongolians and Vietnamese. Each paper presents an original take on ISM which illuminates facets of this experience which are not often focused upon, such as *temporality* (Kim 2022, this issue), *complicit mobility* (Kim and Cho 2022, this issue), *fringe capital*

CONTACT John P. O'Regan  john.oregan@ucl.ac.uk  IOE, Faculty of Education and Society, University College London, London, UK

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(Lipura 2022, this issue), *belonging otherwise* (Kang and Hwang 2022, this issue), *accidental internationalisation* (Phan et al. 2022a, this issue) and ISM destinations that are *less known* (Phan et al. 2022b, this issue).

Across the global terrain of ISM those who partake in study-abroad do so for a variety of reasons, but it seems that common to them all is the desire to accumulate diverse forms of capital, even if this is not always capital of the kind they originally envisaged it would be. For the Vietnamese and Mongolian students sojourning in South Korea (henceforth Korea) in D. Kim's paper, it is not so much unexpected capital accumulation that is at issue – theirs is the hoped-for cultural and linguistic capital of learning Korean – but when to return with it so as to be able to take advantage of the demand for Korean proficiency back home. That said, a more fortuitous pragmatolinguistic dimension of their capital accumulation has been the acquisition of the Korean attitude of 'kind greeting' in service work – 'Because Koreans [in Mongolia] are one of the most important groups of customers, they wanted someone who could greet them as Koreans' (testimony of Bayarmaa in Kim 2022, this issue). In the paper of S. Kim and Cho, the South-East Asian students of their study seek out degrees in Korean Studies in Korea for the avowed aim of aspiring to be 'global elites' and to become part of the narrative of the 'global dream'. This is glossed as 'an imaginary space carrying utopian representations such as civilisation, development and advancement' (Kim and Cho 2022, this issue). But even as these students pursue the Korean language and the 'global dream' so are they also confronted with the reality of the 'English complex' and the hegemony of English in Korean universities, such that Korea by means of the unquestioned necessity of English – 'Language goes where there is money' (testimony of L, *ibid*) – becomes framed as a potential 'stepping stone' or 'bridge' to the even greater prize of transfer to an anglophone destination in the West, such as the US (S. Kim & Cho, *ibid*; see also Lipura 2022; this issue).

In contrast to the Korean culture of 'kind greeting', the paper of Kang and Hwang documents the inhospitality of the international student experience in Korean universities as their 'non-elite' Chinese student participants go in search of cultural capital by means of a 'cut-price' Korean study-abroad experience which they hope can be exchanged for 'middle-class reproduction' back home (Kang and Hwang 2022, this issue). In the deeply racialised process of being culturally othered by their host universities and by the hierarchised imperialist 'whiteness' of wider Korean society, these students pick up unlooked-for capital in the Korean language through other ways of belonging, such as in K-Pop-fandom and fangirling. The accidental and the unlooked for in the accumulation of capital through ISM is also marked in the papers of Lipura and of Phan et al. (2022a, this issue). In Lipura's study of Korean study-abroad students in the Philippines, it is the pursuit of a discounted *English-centric capital* – 'the presumptive language of globalisation' (Lipura 2022, this issue) – which is one of the initial primary motivations for these students' international mobility. But alongside their quest for 'cheap English' they soon meet with '*accidental externalities, unconsciously discovered, negotiated and embraced*' (*ibid*; original emphasis). These take the form of unintended 'mind-changing' confrontations with local poverty and inequality which bring to the surface affective emotions such as empathy, gratitude, hospitality and tolerance, and so generate the accumulation of 'fringe capital', understood as a decentering and shifting of capital '*away from the deterministic value of English towards multiple values existing at its margins*' (*ibid*; original emphasis). This enables Lipura's participants to reclaim their agency to act otherwise – from *multiple* motivations and values – and not only according to the narrow calculus of accumulative self-interest which is common to 'neoliberal' framings of ISM and the pursuit of affordable English.

The paper of Phan et al. (2022a, this issue) switches the focus from Korean study-abroad in the Philippines to Korean study-abroad in Vietnam and what they refer to as *accidental internationalisation* (Phan et al. 2022a, this issue). But instead of the accumulation of capital in English, it is the accumulation of capital in Vietnamese which is the priority in the form that this has been determined by demand locally from governments, businesses, institutions, administrators, teachers and students. Rising Korean FDI over the last few decades and the increased movement of Korean businesspeople and their spouses to Vietnam has seen local demand for Vietnamese Studies surge.

Alongside this, has been increased interest in Vietnam from university-age Koreans as a destination for international study-abroad (ISA), while also being much cheaper than the Western equivalent. A concomitant effect has been heightened interest amongst the Vietnamese in the learning of Korean both locally and in Korea (Kim 2022, this issue). As Phan et al. (2022a, this issue) note, this accidental internationalisation in addition to not being planned or strategised 'is also a manifestation of internationalisation beyond English' (2022b, this issue) and so also beyond its deterministic hegemony. More than this, like Lipura's paper (this issue), they also detect economic and social transformational potentialities in the lived experiences of Koreans sojourning in Vietnam. The theme of transformation is returned to in the paper of Phan et al. (2022b, this issue) as is evidenced in the mobility experiences of Koreans studying in Brunei Darussalam. But here, as is also the case with some of the other papers in this issue, it is the desire to accumulate English at a cut-price rate which appears as the initial impetus for mobility and ISA. As the sojourning of the Korean students in Brunei evolves, so like their compatriots in Vietnam and the Philippines (see Phan et al. 2022a, this issue), they come to appreciate and 'value' additional aspects of the host society and culture, including the local Malay language and Bruneian hospitality. This leads the authors to invite us 'to take seriously the dynamic of less-known places ... and the role of human-place relations in theorising international student mobility' (Phan et al. 2022b, this issue).

The implicit capitalist ontology of ISM

It is from this call to theorise that I take my cue. I would like to discuss how the testimonies and experiences contained in the papers of this special issue fit into a theorisation of international student mobility (ISM) within a world-system that is both capitalist and *real*, and *dialectically* structured by causal mechanisms, events and experiences. This is what Bhaskar (2008/1975) from the perspective of critical realism refers to as the *real*, the *actual* and the *empirical*, or $R > A > E$. These constitute 'three overlapping domains of reality' (Bhaskar, *ibid*: 56). They are placed in this order to show that one constellationally encapsulates the other as well as being in a constant intense relation. The *real* refers to underlying generative (causal) mechanisms or structures that co-produce events and experiences. The *actual* refers to events, including beliefs about the world, which inform those events. The *empirical* refers to experiences and empirical observations of events; that is, what we find happening or present when we look at events. In the world of ISM, for example, university rankings are an almost constant reference point, whether one cares about them, or as some of the participants in these papers demonstrate, one does not care about them at all. Still, the participants of these papers show themselves to be very aware of international rankings being part of the global reality of international higher education, as do the authors of the papers themselves. As we all know, around the world universities are in a regular state of convulsion over the annual announcement of the university rankings with huge pressures and stresses being brought to bear on university staff to meet the international performance indicators that will enable their institutions to advance.

The Asia region is no different to anywhere else in this, as several of these papers show. One of the measures for moving up the rankings is by attracting international students, which is the reason why in places like Korea and Brunei there appear to be plentiful scholarships and bursaries on offer to do that. The tuition fees are often much lower too, and then in the Philippines and in Brunei there is also the prospect of 'cheap English' as an added inducement. Each of the papers in this issue provide much empirical detail of the experiences of participants during their study-abroad, concerning what actually happens to them while on their sojourning journeys, from being 'lucky' in the timing of their ISA (D. Kim paper), to the mediocrity of their academic experiences (S. Kim & Cho paper), to the inhospitality of local professors and students (Kang & Hwang paper), to the unexpected 'fringe' capital they discover (Lipura paper), to the accidental internationalisation and transformative possibilities they are exposed to (Phan et al. 2022a paper), and to the fulfilment they find in the nature, culture and hospitality of their host society (Phan et al. 2022b paper). These *empirical* experiences which the papers of this special issue document occur within the *actual* events

and contexts of ISA and ISM and the *actual* unquestioned reality of the capitalist global rankings pathology, which most of the participants of these papers seem to accept as a background reality for their international mobility and their future job prospects. But a significant reason for many of them engaging in ISA at all is because it is the rankings pathology which has placed these destinations within their reach through the host societies providing scholarships, bursaries and other inducements so that their universities can move up the rankings. The experiences these participants have in the contexts they find themselves in – and which include beliefs about the purposes and ‘value’ of study-abroad – are therefore aspects of the domains of the empirical and the actual. As such, these papers for the most part discuss ISM from the perspective of *empirical realism*, and they do this very well. But in their empirical realism they also *imply* and evidence a deeper ontology which is causally responsible for configuring international higher education and ISM in the way that these exist and are experienced. This reality is comprised of the structures and mechanisms of the modern world-system, which I take to be a *capitalist world-system*. This is the domain of the *real*. It is capitalism in its ‘neoliberal’ format – although I am no longer persuaded of the pertinence of this term for describing the present era – which determines the apparent necessity for university rankings, which in turn compels national governments and universities to encourage inward ISM, and within which international study-abroad is then experienced and apprehended (Bhaskar 1998, 2008/1975, 2016).

The domains of the real, the actual and the empirical as overlapping domains of reality and of analysis can serve as a useful theoretical frame for an understanding of ISM and study-abroad, and as part of that for the accounts that are presented in this excellent range of papers. That there is a diversity and mix of negative and positive study-abroad experiences documented in these papers is not so unexpected, from the barely concealed racism projected towards Chinese students in Korea to the more uplifting transformational experiences of sojourners in Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei. On the one hand, the racism in Korea seems to be a function in part of the predominantly US-influenced ‘capitalisation’ of South Korea post-1945 during which ‘Korea adopted Euro-American and Japanese imperialist hierarchies of whiteness over other racial categories, and aspired to be ‘white’ like its American patrons while framing the rest of Asia as cultural Others’ (Kang and Hwang 2022, this issue). On the other, the ‘transformative possibilities’ evident in the mobility experiences documented in the papers on Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei, reveal the agentic potentialities which still exist for individuals to resist the hegemonic framing of ISA as an exercise in enhancing one’s future competitiveness in the job market while also, through their *complicit mobility* (Kim and Cho 2022, this issue), serving the ‘neoliberal’ internationalisation interests of the host governments and their higher education institutions. It seems then, even as we resist, so also we reproduce. But even if that is true, what this still shows is that *we do have agency* and can transform ourselves, although this must be with the recognition that it does not follow from this that when we act in this way we are also transforming the *real* structures by which we are constrained and oppressed, and nor are we doing that in any cumulative way either (Bhaskar 1998, 34; O’Regan 2021a, 154–5). For as these papers reveal, the structural pathology of capitalism and of capital accumulation (in whatever form) persists despite these participants’ individual ‘awakenings’, whether what is being invoked is choosing the right moment to return (D. Kim, this issue), or brokering (S. Kim & Cho, this issue), or belonging otherwise (Kang & Hwang, this issue), or decentring (Lipura, this issue), or renewal (Phan et al. 2022a, this issue) or valuing human place relations (Phan et al. 2022b, this issue). That these activities may have some impact in the empirical domain – and perhaps to a marginal extent in the actual domain as well – is welcome, but real structures are obdurate things and are not easily argued away or cumulatively resisted out of existence.

The modern world-system and ISM

With reference to structure, it seems something of a truism to state that ISM occurs against the structural backdrop of a modern world-system. But it is a modern world-system that is also a

capitalist world-system; one which has its origins in the sixteenth century (Marx 1976/1867; Sweezy 1972; Wallerstein 2011a; O'Regan 2021a, 2021b). At its outset, this world-system did not encompass the whole of the globe, but over time it expanded, first under the hegemony of Britain and then, from about 1919, under the hegemony of the United States. As it expanded, it incorporated the diverse regions and 'geocultures' of the world within it. The first regions to be incorporated were Europe and North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, followed at different points of time thereafter by Latin America, South Asia, Africa and East Asia. The order of incorporation is in some dispute. Opinions differ, for example, on whether Latin America became capitalist from the time of the arrival of Columbus in 1492, or whether this transition comes much later (Brewer 1990). Taking a world-systems perspective, what we can say is that the capitalist world-system is hierarchised and structurally differentiated between core (C) and periphery (P) regions in which the unit of analysis is the system rather than individual states (Wallerstein 2011a, 7). Between the core and periphery are the regions and states of the semi-periphery (SP). As a modern world-system, the capitalist world-system exists as 'a unit with a single division of labour and multiple cultural systems' (Wallerstein 2000/1974, 75). This naturally includes linguistic systems as well. The division of labour is based upon the production for profit in a world market, where some regions and some languages benefit at the expense of other regions and other languages within the frame of the core/semi-periphery/periphery relationship, or $C > SP > P$, in which there is a graduated order of dominance such that C exploits/incorporates SP, which exploits/incorporates P (Wallerstein 2011a, 349; O'Regan 2021a, 2021b).

The capitalist world-system when dominated by Britain is best conceived as a *world-economy*, with Britain and the City of London at its centre (Cain and Hopkins 2013). Similarly, with British hegemony being transferred to the United States in the first quarter of the twentieth century, so it was that a US world-economy took the place of the British world-economy. It is an oversimplification to think that this only occurs after 1945. The transition to a US world-economy is more accurately dated to the impoverished financial position that Britain found itself in at the end of the First World War (Panitch and Gindin 2012; Cain and Hopkins 2013). Here begins the process of the cession of hegemony in the world-system to what becomes the world-economy of the United States; a process that is further consolidated through the allied defeats of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in 1945. The distinction of a world-system that is dominated by consecutive world-economies is important since it removes from the calculation the idea that the hegemony of a world-economy is a function of territorial possession and control. That is to say that world-economies are not limited to the exercise of power within colonies but are integrated global systems incorporating both formal and informal domains of influence and control (Gallagher and Robinson 1953). Britain's world-economy was at the end of the nineteenth century much larger than the colonial empire of its formal domain and incorporated huge swathes of South Asia, Latin America, Africa and East Asia. It was upon the capital networks of this world-economy that the United States established its own world-economy after 1918 (Hobsbawm 1995; Arrighi 2010; O'Regan 2021a). Regions that were outside the British/US world-economies at the time they became established formed part of an *external arena* (EA) which was adjacent to but not fully incorporated into the capitalist world-system (Wallerstein 2011a, 301–2); so, $C > SP > P > EA$. Regions beyond the external arena and yet to experience capitalist accumulation of any kind formed part of a *historical arena* (HA) (O'Regan 2021b); so, $C > SP > P > EA > HA$. The regions of the external and the historical arenas were in time incorporated into the capitalist world-system as well, and included China, the Philippines, Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam and Brunei, but not necessarily in that order, and also not according to a timeline that dates the onset of globalisation only to the 1980s, as should be evident by now.

It will also be evident that the type of capital accumulation that marks out a capitalist world-system is not of the same order as that which marks out international study-abroad; for what defines the world-system as capitalist is the endless accumulation of capital in its *economic* form (Wallerstein 2011b, xiv). This capital is referred to by Marx as 'the all dominating economic power of bourgeois

society' (1973, 107). The ISA participants in the papers of this special issue are arguably motivated at an implicit and *real* level by the accumulation of this type of capital since it is one of the significant rationales for them wanting to be mobile, i.e., so that they can obtain 'good jobs' back home or in the host country (Kim 2022; Kang and Hwang 2022; Phan et al. 2022a, this issue; Phan et al. 2022b; this issue), can become members of 'elite' groups (Kim and Cho 2022, this issue), or, in some cases, can use the ISA experience and the credentials gained as a 'stepping stone' to 'more desirable' and economically rewarding destinations, especially in the West (Lipura 2022, this issue). These participants also place a good deal of emphasis on the accumulation of capital *beyond* the economic, and 'beyond English' too (Phan et al. 2022a, this issue). That is, on capital that is cultural, social, symbolic as well as linguistic. While one may reasonably think, following Bourdieu (1977, 1986), that these other kinds of capital can be 'exchanged' for economic capital, that would be to promote to the status of commodities and 'things' – e.g., language and languages, degree qualifications, and the ISA experience itself – entities which are not really commodities or saleable 'things' and so not in themselves exchangeable; at least, not in any direct way, as William Simpson and I have argued elsewhere (Simpson and O'Regan 2018, 2021). These culturally symbolic capitals come under the heading of what might be called *imaginary commodities*, or commodities as metaphors, since their 'value' is a social property rather than a material or economic one (Marx 1976/1867, 197; Marx 1973, 289; Grin 2018; Simpson and O'Regan 2018, 2021). What these capitals have in common, including the economic one of capitalism, is that they are animated by the idea of modernisation and (economic) development as *progress* (Wallerstein 2011a, xviii). This is a very Weberian notion, according to which it is the instilment of (protestant Western) values that promotes economic development (Weber 2001/1930). A nation or state only has to adopt the requisite 'values' to develop, or so the argument goes; and one of these values is ISM. This idealisation of reality is also known as *developmentalism*: 'Developmentalism is the truth from the point of view of the centre of power; it is the theorisation (or rather ideologisation) of its own path of development' (Nederveen Pieterse 2010, 19) and is a dominant ideology of the modern world-system and all of its supra-national institutions (Dussel 1996, 4; Taylor 1996, 283; Harvey 2003, 55, 58; Hartwig 2011, 500).

Capitalist dialectics and ISM

The origins of developmentalism lie in the system's fidelity to the Western-originating philosophical discourse of modernity, or PDM (Hegel 1956/1837; Habermas 1987; Hartwig 2011; Bhaskar 2016) of which Weber's protestant ethic is only a relatively recent manifestation. The PDM is the defining discourse of the capitalist mode of production and has been around for a very long time, being a philosophical reflection of the process of *primitive accumulation* – the 'economic original sin' – by which producers in Europe in the sixteenth century were divorced from the means of production (and the holding of land in common) and forced into the private marketplace as embodied labour for sale (Marx 1973; Harvey 2010; Nichols 2015). The remorseless logic of capitalist private accumulation in which human exploitation and the 'annihilation' of space that has not been appropriated by capital begins at this time, driving into all corners of the world the PDM as 'a very pure ideology of the capitalist mode of production' (Bhaskar 2002, 64). Of essence to the PDM has been the mobility of capital and of human beings, whether as contracted labour, coerced labour, migrant labour, trafficked labour or slave labour (Williams 1994/1944; Rodney 2018/1972). Capital always needs labour, and this includes *future labour* through ISM. It is out of the PDM and its associated discourses that the notion of *mobility as progress* arises, according to which 'geographic mobility facilitates political, intellectual, and economic progress for individuals and societies' (Canagarajah 2022, 574) with political primitiveness, intellectual backwardness and economic stagnation being the preserve of the sedentary and immobile and of societies which are 'stationary and fixed' (Hegel 1956/1837, 139).

Under the conditions of capitalism, the PDM 'obtains at the level of the real' (Hartwig 2011, 486) and operates in tandem with capital accumulation as an implicit structuring mechanism underlying

the obsession of international higher education institutions with global rankings and ISM. Weber's protestant ethic and the ideology of developmentalism imply that values precede and are determining of structures, since it is only necessary to apply the right beliefs to achieve the desired outcomes. But this is a rationalist fiction or the structural C>SP>P hierarchisation of the capitalist world-system would not have proved so implacable. Not only that, but reality reveals that society and structures always precede us (Marx 1978/1852, 595; Bhaskar 1998, 34; Wallerstein 2011a, xviii). That is to say, human beings do not construct the structures of social formations themselves because such structures do not spontaneously arise from the activity of people – 'people do not create society [because] all activity presupposes the prior existence of social forms' (Bhaskar, *ibid*: 36, 34). This is, however, no simple determinism. Structures do not determine human experience in any unidirectional way. As the papers of this issue make clear, there is still room for 'being otherwise'; because, as Marx reminds us, it is our *social being* that determines our consciousness and not the other way round (Marx, 1976/1859, 3; O'Regan 2021a, 20). It is this that leaves room for agency. Nevertheless, just as people do not consciously use bank cards in order to speed up the fluidity of capital or apply for passports so as to sustain the idea of bordered nation states or learn languages in order to demonstrate that they are bounded and fixed, so students participating in international study-abroad do not consciously seek to sustain a capitalist market in global university rankings. But this structural effect 'is nevertheless the unintended consequence (and inexorable result) of, as it is also a necessary condition for, their activity' (Bhaskar 1998, 35).

Blockages and disruptions in the mobility of capital and people are to be avoided, for they lead to crises in the system (Harvey 2013, 63), as the policies of national governments when confronted with Covid-19 have shown – either they attempt a total lockdown of society so risking serious damage to the economy (e.g., China), or they do not, so allowing Covid-19 to run riot and kill (e.g., UK), or they try to go somewhere in between.¹ In all cases it is the circulation of capital that is at stake. The more it is impeded the worse the economic situation becomes and the more capital demands to be 'set free' to resume its natural rhythm of accumulation, exploitation and destruction (Polanyi 2001/1944; Schumpeter 2010/1943). In other words, without the mobility of capital, capitalism dies. This is why Marx refers to capital in motion as the 'adequate form of capital' (Marx 1973, 694) – it is a capital *in process*: 'Capital is not a simple relation, but a *process*, in whose moments it is always capital' (*ibid*: 258; original emphasis). In the same way that capital in motion is the adequate form of capital, so in a capitalist world-system is ISM the adequate form of internationalisation in international higher education, because advancement in the global university rankings as well as national 'reputational gain' (Kang and Hwang 2022, this issue) depend upon it. Endless motion is thus the defining feature of the capitalist world-system and of the dialectical reality of ISM. This reveals, as the papers of this issue go some way to confirm, that society, and as part of that, ISM, are not in any simplistic economically reductive manner determined according to a base-superstructure model of the inter-relation of economy and ideas, but that both society and ISM are structurally differentiated – R>A>E – and *overdetermined*, i.e., having or manifesting *multiple determinations*, and that the economic is only one of these (Marx 1976/1867, 493n, 1991/1894, 927–8; Althusser 1996/1965; Williams 1977, 88; Harvey 2010, 193; O'Regan 2021a, 20–22).

If we deal with ISM in this dialectical way, we can see that the experiences of the participants in the international study-abroad destinations of this issue are aspects of events behind which there are underlying causal mechanisms at play. These, I have suggested, may be traced to processes of endless capital accumulation in a capitalist world-system which drive forward the PDM and its obsessive framing of mobility as progress, as several of the papers of this issue show. Not only this, but that the multiple experiences of participants in ISM within the study-abroad circumstances in which they experience them are also more readily explicable from this perspective, since this shows that ISM is empirically overdetermined, which is a good thing. However, that we may welcome the demonstrations of disruption, dissonance, rethinking and belonging otherwise in the empirical domain, and the unintended positive impacts on individuals which can result, there is little to suggest that this has any significant cumulative effect on the actual and the real domains

of ISM, university rankings, capital accumulation and the PDM, although it may still allow us to make the argument for better internationalisation and ISM. This has to be with the knowledge that while ISM may potentially provide spaces for life-time transformations and the crafting of alternative futures, as individuated acts they are unlikely to make much difference to the traditional tropes of human capital accumulation and progress through ISM.

Concluding comments

The modern world-system is a capitalist world-system that is currently under the hegemony of the world-economy of the United States. Within the C>SP>P hierarchised relation of this world-economy and the ISA destinations which this special issue documents, it is only South Korea that economically operates at a point anywhere near the core. Without wishing to place 'fixed' empirical categorisations on the other study destinations of this issue, they are either in a semi-peripheral or peripheral position in relation to the regions of the core, mainly due to the geo-historicity of their integration into the capitalist world-system. Vietnam, for example, was integrated into the world-system by France's colonisation of Indochina in the later nineteenth century. But following the 1954 defeat of the French army at Dien Bien Phu, North Vietnam deliberately removed itself to the extreme margins of the periphery and as 'Vietnam' remained there after the end of the Vietnam War (also known in Vietnam as the Anti-US War) in 1975 and Vietnam's enforced banishment thereafter. It was not until its 'Doi Moi' re-opening in 1994 that Vietnam as a whole was able to step back from that position.

The dialectical theme which I have developed in this response paper applies equally across the economic-exploitative relations of the core, semi-periphery and periphery relationship – C>SP>P – and the realist relations which pertain between the ontological and epistemological philosophical categories of the real, the actual and the empirical; R>A>E. They are both intensely relational and *overdetermined*, with the understanding that 'amid the endless host of accidents ... the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary' (Engels, 1951, *Letter to J. Bloch*, September 21-22, 1951/1890). From the empirical through to the actual there is some space for resistance, multiplicity and doing otherwise, but the real is more implacable and it does not follow that isolated and individuated resistances in the empirical domain have any automatic or temporally cumulative impact on the domains of the actual and the real. Change is in the collective and it is the dialectics of the world-system as a stratified and differentiated reality which reveals this.

Dialectics shows us that the world is not to be grasped as a static or given thing but is always in a state of motion – that what *appears* is not always as it seems. As I have written elsewhere, 'Dialectics is an attempt to understand the motion behind ... what appears on the surface of things' (O'Regan 2021a, 19), for what one sees on the surface is '*the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it*' (Marx 1973, 255; original emphasis). In the study of ISM, while the act of mobility and responses to this are always evident *on the surface*, the underlying causal mechanisms which might explain them are not, or not always very clearly. What we see is that universities around the world are obsessed with internationalisation and with global rankings and with anything that will positively enhance the measure of this perception. A number of the contexts presented in this issue demonstrate this too, particularly Korea, and participants also show awareness and anxiety about this in equal measure by their concern for their marketability (Kang and Hwang 2022, this issue) and choosing the right moment to return home (Kim 2022, this issue). We also see 'the nationalist, globalist and even sub-imperialist motives of national governments for pursuing transnational education' and the complicity of students and universities in buying into the 'global dream' (S. Kim and Cho 2022, this issue). Further, we also see the incorporation of Vietnam, Mongolia, Brunei and the Philippines into regional sub-networks of the capitalist world-system and how even in the destinations where Korean or Vietnamese Studies have become popular, English and the global 'English complex' have in one way or another still been an aspect of these processes as well (Kim 2022; Kim and Cho 2022; Phan et al 2022a, this issue; Phan et al. 2022b, this issue). Still further, we also

see how the underlying determinations of ISA are subject to the accidental and unlooked for, leading to ‘multiple forms of value including intangible and unexpected experiences, resources and sensibilities’ (Lipura 2022, this issue). These are important phenomena to record and analyse, for as Phan et al rightly point out, ‘Rigorous conceptualisation and theorisation of alternative international HE spaces and what underlies such spaces, who goes through them, and what could be learnt from them is a huge scholarly gap in current literature’ (2022b, this issue). The contributors to this special issue are to be congratulated for opening up new lines of thinking and enquiry in this area. I hope then that it will be taken in good spirit if I suggest that there is more to ISM than what is experienced and seen, as Phan et al (ibid) also seem to imply. I would therefore argue that by giving attention to the capitalist dialectics of mobility as R>A>E a deeper and more critical understanding and theorisation of ISM in a capitalist world-system may be obtained.

Note

1. <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-stringency-index>. Accessed May 14, 2022.

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Notes on contributor

John P. O'Regan is Professor of Critical Applied Linguistics at IOE, Faculty of Education and Society, University College London. He is IOE Vice-Dean (International) and Deputy Director of the International Centre for Intercultural Studies. His latest book is *Global English and Political Economy* (2021) in the Routledge Language, Society and Political Economy series.

ORCID

John P. O'Regan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1335-820X>

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