Rethinking international education through the concept of capabilities: a bridge to development in Asia's emergent knowledge societies

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There has been a tremendous growth in student mobility in higher education in the last two decades as universities in the West respond to globalisation, economic growth and capacity building strategies of Asian countries. According to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) 2013 report "Education at a Glance"[1], the total number of foreign students enrolled in tertiary education in 2011 was 4.3 million with the United States receiving 16.6% of the total number, followed by the United Kingdom (13.0%), Australia (6.6%), Germany (6.4%), France (6.3) other OECD countries (35.6%) and non OECD countries (15.5%). Asian students account for 53% of all students studying abroad worldwide with the largest numbers of international students from China, India and Korea.[2] At the same time, the Asian region has begun to make its presence as countries like Singapore, Hong Kong (as part of China), Malaysia offer international education to neighbouring countries including Thailand, Vietnam and Taiwan.[3]

Stemming from preoccupation with globalisation, universities have been motivated to deliver international education as part of their internation

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[1] OECD, 2013.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ng, 2012.

alisation strategies to meet economic and political interests.[4] International education is referred to here as provision of higher education by universities to foreign students in the host countries. The increasing role of market forces in international education and positioning of universities on a global scale has seen a focus on marketisation, competition and management of student mobility with little attention to the humanistic values of a knowledge society, global learning and citizenship.[5] The delivery of international education as a market based commodity is as prevalent in Asia as it is in Western countries,[6] where policies and practices have been predominantly focused on developing human capital to meet economic growth, and duplicating Western ideas of a university.[7] The latter is underpinned by the assumption steeped in Enlightenment viewpoint of humanity, that the process of human development is cultivated through knowledge acquired in universities toward democracy, justice and equality.[8] The broad benefits that have often been advanced from countries and institutions offering international education are improved public diplomacy and trade relations between host and source countries, higher status qualifications and better job access for international education graduates, universities entrepreneurialism and market positioning.[9] In reality, according to Knight (2014), the motivation of international education is for benefits of political, economic and overall competitiveness, dominance of Anglo-Western knowledge and pedagogies, and commodification of knowledge. The nationalistic agenda determined by economic rationales and institutional interests leads to low priority of preparation of young people to understand social needs and challenges, and participate ethically in their local societies and be global citizens.[10]

It is not surprising, then, that research about international education has been mainly conducted by host countries and universities that offer international education focusing on the economic imperatives of demand and

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[4] Altbach and Knight, 2007; Ng, 2012; de Wit, 2014; Knight, 2014.
[5] Nahas, 2012; Teichler, 2004; Altbach, 2014.
[6] Ng, 2012.
[7] Altbach and Knight, 2007; Marginson, 2007.
[8] Gustavsson, 2014
[9] Murray, Hall, Leask, Marginson, and Ziguras, 2011; OECD, 2013.
[10] Knight, 2014.

supply, economic and labour outcomes, student mobility, or critiques of dominance of Anglo-Western perspectives in knowledge production and export as new forms of internationalism.[11] The various orientations of these studies have accumulated a large body of literature about student mobility, international student experiences, policies and practices in international education programs, pedagogy and curriculum delivery, student preparations, skills, jobs, and migration. However these studies tend to present international students as belonging to homogenous groups of nations, rather than examining the impacts of international education at individuals' levels and considering viewpoints of international students and their communities. Alongside with the awareness of opportunities for citizenship education, there are policies and practices of international education that focus on answers and results for education providers rather than questions and processes about goals of international education, and values and opportunities for international students.[12]

Despite much critique of the mass commercialisation and Western soft power in international education, there has been little attention to understanding how acquired international education may impact people's ability to debate, reason, and generate democratic freedom that may expand social justice within and beyond national boundaries. Without consideration of the social contexts that people exist and operate in, and their effects on people's choices and actions, the linkage of education and human development is often presented as instruments of economic and political rationalism. Without a focus on individuals and their communities, international education as a mission misses the opportunity to realise its potential in developing international students' critical perspectives of themselves, their societies, their roles in their societies and the capacity to see the world with the eyes of others.

This paper calls for rethinking international education towards a transformative agenda to engender international students' self-determination,

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[11] Altbach, 1989; 1999, 2014; Knight, 2014; Macgregor, 2014; de Wit and Jooste, 2014.
[12] Walker and Unterhalter, 2007.

self-reflection, agency and citizenship that would enable them to make valuable personal and social change for them and their communities when they return to their homeland. It argues for a reconceptualisation of the vision of international education to include both the instrumental objectives of skills development and jobs procurement, as well as the intrinsic value of creating substantive opportunities for people to live the lives they value. It further argues that there is a need to move research from institutional perspectives of international education providers to those of international students and graduates focussing on their personal and civic commitment within their home communities.

In the context of this paper, the terms "West" and "Western" generally refer to countries in the geographical regions of Europe including the United Kingdom, North America, and Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific region. The terms "Anglo-West" and "Euro-America" are also used interchangeably with the same meaning. The terms "Asia" and "Asian" generally refer to countries in the geographical regions of East and South East Asia, and South Asia.

This paper has four parts. The first part sketches the current discourses on international education in the emerging knowledge societies of Asia. It critiques the parochial Anglo-Western values in international education discourses and calls for contending viewpoints that consider diversity of students' cultural and social values. The second part presents Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) as an alternative framework for viewing and evaluating international education. The third part discusses the operationalising aspects of the CA in the practical contexts of its philosophical status and considers the potential of its epistemological benefits. The last part concludes the paper by summarising the discussion about the merits of the CA as a conceptualising and evaluating tool for international education.

The role of international education in a knowledge society

The idea of the knowledge society is far reaching, capturing the complex and dynamic societies across the world and the interdependencies between them.[13] The knowledge society relies upon the imagination and ingenuity of its people to create new possibilities, directions and outcomes. As such the knowledge society requires people to have intuition, imagination, interpersonal skills and communal responsibility to share ideas, experiences and solutions.[14] The United Nations in its 2005 report '*Towards Knowledge Societies'*, emphasises an agenda of human development where there are opportunities to cultivate human creativity and enrich tacit knowledge.[15] As Harris et al (2013) argued, the role of education in the knowledge society predicates on continuous learning and creation of originality and ingenuity, particularly in scientific, technological and research innovations.[16] More importantly, it raises questions about the nature, purpose and function of education and education systems. There is a need to focus not only on individual learning and outcome but also on individuals working together to enhance creativity, performance and outcome. This commitment to social responsibilities is fundamental to the workings and maintenance of a knowledge society.

The notion of "knowledge economy" in Asia

In reality, the practices of educational systems in emergent knowledge nations of Asia have to a great extent been about developing human capital to contribute to economic value. Wealth and creation in the economy is assumed to be dependent on high level of skills acquired by individuals through education. These economic ideologies transpire the idea of the knowledge society to narrow assumptions of the knowledge economy where education is pursued for vocational outcomes and financial rewards.[17]

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[13] Welch, 2013.
[14] Harris, Jones, Sharma and Kannan, 2013.
15 UNESCO, 2005.
[16] Harris, Jones, Sharma and Kannan, 2013.
[17] Welch, 2013.

The phenomenon of the knowledge economy in Asia serves as a stimulus in the race to internationalisation practices of universities in Europe, North America and the Pacific, particularly universities in the United Kingdom, Australia, and to a lesser extent those in the United States, Canada and New Zealand.[18] According to Knight (2013), the rationales underpinning the process of internationalisation in the last two decades have shifted from social and cultural motivations to increased commercial competitiveness and strategic alliances.[19] The competition between nations and regions increases the importance of international education as discursive practices of economic actors.[20] The reaction to and support for the 'competition' agenda presents free markets as appropriate in delivering and evaluating higher education where universities are managed as entrepreneurial business entities with international students as customers.[21] At the same time, the emerging economic growth coupled with the operation of multinational corporations in Asia implies a form of economic imperialism and knowledge capitalism that rationalise education purposes.[22] Knowledge production and transfers are viewed as means to fulfil economic motives of a knowledge economy that justify commercial activities by universities in the Asian region. The consequence is that practical and applied value of knowledge is seen as having a strategic occupation in the knowledge economy where universities' performance and graduates' outcomes are measured on ranking and employment outcomes. The role of education is thus seen as equipping students to meet the impetus of educational status and income generation over the importance of socialising students to be active citizens in civil society of their nation and of the world.[23]

Patrick (2013) refers to the narrow representation of the knowledge society as simply the knowledge economy as a *doxa*, as if it is an objective truth that credential-prepared people are able to make choices and act to

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[18] Brandenburg and de Wit, 2011; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Rhoades and Torres, 2006.
[19] Knight, 2013.
[20] Knight, 2013.
[21] Olssen and Peters, 2005.
[22] Choi, 2010; Ng, 2012.
[23] Knight, 2013.

realise their full potential in the labour market.[24] Yet, those choices are limited to those that they can observe and command in accordance with their position in the market place.[25] Viewing education only for the economy surrenders people to the conception of 'value' that depends on economic exchanges primarily in the market place, rather than engagement with knowledge as enabling individual and social develop ment within a set of broadly conceived development aims.[26] When knowledge is narrowly construed as having economic value and economic value is dominant, the person to which knowledge is acquired is disempowered and robbed of his/her opportunities to make real personal and social change.[27]

The soft power of Western knowledge

This paper centres on the context of Asia, thus it refers to international education in relation to mobility programs between Asian and Euro-American countries. It does not consider other forms of regionalisation programs like Bologna or Erasmus processes because within Europe, these programs have lighter knowledge transfer due to similar cultures and communication mechanisms compared to those between continents, [28] aided by a distinctive European managed process of internationalisation with salient political and cultural objectives of convergence and collaboration between countries and institutions.[29]

Teichler (2004) argued that international education programs between continents, those programs between Asia and Europe, North America and Australia, tend to result in vertical knowledge transfer from nations with higher knowledge to those with lower knowledge, and that knowledge exporting nations actively engage in shaping the types of knowledge transfer for their national interest. The economic prevalence in Asia stemming from the idea of knowledge economy as constituting

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[24] Patrick, 2013.
[25] Pham, 2013.
[26] Turner, 2012.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Teichler, 2004.
[29] Marginson, 2007; Robertson, 2009.

demands for international education has thus a further disempowering effect at the national level as universities in Asia strive to borrow policies from the Euro-American nations. Marginson (2007) refers to this as knowledge that relies on "subordination of peripheral countries to Europe-American intellectual dominance of research concentration and knowledge flows". The "Big Five" host nations of international students are the US, the UK, Germany, France and Australia, with the US leading in terms of top research intensive universities and can attract talent from countries in Asia.[30] The relationships between the West and Asia are thus constructed in a reductionist viewpoint of the West possessing the expertise, technology and management, and education that Asian countries lack thus desire and seek from the West.[31] It is this lack of expertise and capacity that is portrayed as the problem of Asia and economic development can be achieved by acquiring Western education. The emphasis of knowledge in this context is in response to catching up with the demands of globalisation and advance of technologies that are in line with Western values and through the use of English.[32] Under this framework, international students' identities are discursively manufactured as seekers of positional goods who will gain monetary rewards in the labour market abroad or at home without really considering their subject locations in either location. They are assumed to be global citizens with global and diverse tastes, senses and values that would allow them to fit into a global Western democratic society and capitalist economy, and that they can utilise these acquired tastes, senses and values to participate in society and achieve labour market advantage wherever they are.[33] However, as Gustavsson (2014) noted, rather than agreeing or rejecting Western values, we should be examining the power of interpretation and application of these values and impact to the lives of diasporas as they return to their local communities.[34]

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[30] Kell and Vogl, 2012.

[31] Marginson, 2007, 2008; Choi, 2010; Welch, 2013.

[32] Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Choi, 2010; Mahbubani 2007.

[33] Waters, 2009.

[34] Gusstavson, 2014.

Contending viewpoints

It is always problematic to try to align the values, knowledge and skills acquired from the global to the local because people's everyday practices respond to local conditions and contexts. When overseas trained graduates return to their home countries, they actively live and their motivations and actions are shaped by their local political, economic and social influences. The new skills and values that graduates have acquired overseas are adapted to their local environment.[35] A framework of interpretive analyses of processes of applying skills and knowledge learnt from global that draws on localised traditions and values can bring about opportunities to question the scale of politics and policy of education for ethical development.[36] Reflexive aspects of the individual returnees in terms of their positions in their communities ought to be examined to understand the significance of acquired international education in enabling or restricting their agency as local and global citizens.

The idea of the knowledge society demands thinking about human beings as agents who are in charge of their lives, where educational values are about what people can do with their knowledge. Under this conception, development of educational processes are about creating the kind of knowledge that enable people to make choices that they value rather than accommodating to those that are imposed on them.[37] International education can advance knowledge production and transfers when people foster diverse cultural values and openness, as well as having respect for their own cultures and traditions. This can only be achieved if international education is about creating and sustaining mutual advantages between countries, universities and students that are based on mutual human interest and altruism in conjunction with economic benefits. The link between education and individual productivity due to labour market advantages cannot be assumed because the extent to which people can exert their agency and their choices depend on their social, cultural, economic and political resources.[38] It is thus important that we understand

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[35] Brooks and Waters, 2013.
[36] Ozga and Lingard, 2007.
[37] Welch, 2013.
[38] Patrick, 2013.

how international education impacts people in different parts of the world.

The particularity in the case of Asia is multi-fold. First, there has been significant economic growth in the past two decades for East Asian nations such as South Korea and China, and in other parts of Asia like India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam. Second, the significant increase in the number of international students come from Asia is attributable to the region's economic growth and industrialisation progress, which has led to requirement for human capital, and increased private wealth in many nations. Third, the tremendous flow of international students from Asia to Euro-American countries is a reflection of Asians' pursuit of employment opportunities and skilled migration[39] in these countries, as well as their perception of the superiority of Europeans and North Americans. According to Mahubani (2007, 2008), 'mental colonisation' of many Asians due to many years of colonisation as in the case of Vietnam, or a lesser extent, Indonesia, Hong Kong and India, have led to embedded desires to catch up with the West by emulating the West.[40] Fourth, following from the works of scholars including Chen (2012) based on Takeuchi's (2007) "Asia as Method", and Connell's (2007) "Southern Theory", there are different conditions of knowledge that are in Asia today and if we compare patterns of modernisation processes in Asia to Europe and North America, then we may be able to recognise that Asia's mental colonisation is her complicity in moving towards capitalist imperialism in higher education. Fifth, such recognition may allow Asian scholars, policy makers and citizens to find a right balance in educating their students to be open to technological advances of the interconnected global universe, but remain conscious of indigenous cultures, in order to define their own personal, social and national identities and enhance their place in the world. The balancing act requires understanding of compatibility of the value systems between Anglo-Western and Asian traditions, and different utilisation of returnees' overseas-acquired competences and knowledge compared to those living in the West. Sixth, echoing Gustavsson's (2014) idea of 'bildung' as a development of humanity

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[39] Brooks and Waters, 2013.
[40] Mahubani, 2007, 2008; Takeuchi 2007, Chen, 2012; Connell, 2007.

by relating to other human beings,[41] examining particularism of Asia and Asian international students may also enable scholars in Europe-America to understand how Asian minds work in their aspirations to search for modernity while keeping to their traditions.[42] As Connell (2007, 2014) noted, which echoed Spivak's (1994), the West can go further than identifying the subaltern by recognising subaltern voices; with that is responsibility of structuring relationships to provide space for subalterns to do good and feel good without the implicit assumption of Western cultural supremacy.[43]

de Wit (2014) calls on us to rethink and reinvent international education by moving away from economic rationales of globalisation and internationalisation, and decolonize international education from an elitist approach, where Enlightenment values are seen as necessary for development efforts that then legitimise them as universal values, toward a social contract approach that recognises local-global interdependence, where intercultural and international cooperation is the focus. Furthermore, enquiries into experiences of diasporas who return home may reveal whether they are able to leverage on their "elitist" ability to negotiate different contexts to be cosmopolitan agents, or whether they encounter cultural differences that inhibit their ability to justify their actions and realise their goals. There is much needed research into the heterogeneity of global elites to further understand the nature and work ings of "elitism".[44] As Knight (2014) asks, "Do we buy in to soft power or should we think about mutual power? Do we want self-interests or mutual benefits?" Responses to these ideas and questions necessitate a shift in thinking about the aim of international education from a transfer of knowledge from the West to Asia towards understanding and committing to the diverse cultures of Asian students. If we understand and use plurality of Asian students' values and cultures to enhance and challenge ethnocentric lens of Western education through research, then we might develop

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[41] Gustavsson, 2014.
[42] Mahubani, 2007.
[43] Connell, 2007, 2014; Landry and Maclean, 1996.
[44] Brooks and Waters, 2013.

more theoretical insights about the reach and impact of international education.

Furthermore, if the current processes of international education are about hegemonic forces, and these forces are misrecognised, then we might miss opportunities to realise intrinsic value of education and cultural diversity of international students. [45] If we attend to it as humanising processes, then we can prepare students to be critical and democratic to address local and global issues with confidence and voice, and shape sustainable development and international collaboration in a highly interdependent world. As Bottery (2006) argued, international education should involve developing human flourishment and forging of communities together for ethical development. [46] What seems to be also missing is space to evaluate whether international education actually enhances students' learning, skills and knowledge as resources to live the kind of lives that they want. In this regards, benefits should be seen at the level of students as much has been about institutions. The vision and evaluation of international education could consider diasporas and returnees from overseas studying as active social and political agents who can negotiate, interpret and contest their social worlds by mobilising and materialising their knowledge through which that world is constituted.

Rethinking internationalisation has been the attention of many scholars in the field in various ways such as redefining identity, reaffirming core values and purposes, and reorienting delivery pathways. [47] Drawing particularly on de Wit's (2014) call for attention to norms, values and ethics of international education (as part of internationalisation policies and practices), this paper calls for a research focus on international students' values, motivation, choices, resources and freedom to participate in society as reasons for and results of acquiring education abroad. Inquiries into the opportunities and achievements of international education graduates

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[45] Yang, 2003.
[46] Bottery, 2006.
[47] Teichler, 2004; Egron-Polak, 2012; Brandenburgh and de Wit, 2012; Nahas, 2012; Hudson, 2012; de Wit, 2014; Knight, 2014; de Wit and Jooste, 2014; Altbach, 2014.

that question whether their actions reflect their own values of how they want to live their lives, may contribute to nuanced understanding about international education, and allow it to be a tool for reflection and tolerance of differences. Such an evaluative framework cannot be a universal set of checkpoints and must reflect upon the social, cultural, political and economic landscape that condition the values of graduates living in those contexts. This is no doubt pluralistic as graduates return home, they encounter contesting traditional values that are different to those acquired during their sojourns. In addition, graduates create new alumni and diaspora networks in their home countries. These new networks are forums where they share and exchange information, reflect on their new and old values and how these values mediate and mobilise their social positions. As Massey (1998) pointed out, people construct their own social imaginaries as agents in a global world and citizens of their nation.[48]

What we need to do is understand their agency freedom, the potential for self-determination and how it is conditioned by resources and historically grounded conditions of power, but we also have to understand individual agency itself because self-determining freedom is conditioned by agency itself, by the imagination and capacity of agents to work within their limits.[49] The subjectivities of returnees and their influences on their communities hold much relevance to knowledge production and transfers. A systematic inquiry into dimensions of social, cultural and economic capital that people have as a result of acquired international education can allow us to understand how people engage in differing states of knowledge, power and representation. To understand the rationale and potential of international education to make a difference in people's lives, there must be a space to imagine transformation at a local level. Thus the social, economic and political conditions that impact values of a person must be accounted for and considered relativised to agency and freedom of the person.[50] In addition, we must not conceptualise local as something distinct from global and seek to examine the reflexive aspects of relationship between individuals and global world in the day-to-day

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[48] Massey, 1998.
[49] Alkire, 2002.
[50] Sen, 1985.

experiences because individuals produce day-to-day actions actively in local conditions.[51] From this basis, theorising international education can reflect on people's forms of transformation as a result of their education abroad and build upon the characteristics of their cultural uniqueness.[52] The inquiry process would necessarily encompass intersecting and diverse informational and contextual principles of evaluative criteria.

The Capability Approach as an evaluative framework

This brings us to the potential of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) in viewing and evaluating education as it allows us to think about humans as ends of the process not as means to an end. The key features of the CA are now outlined to provide background and definitional terminologies, followed with a discussion of how the CA maybe beneficial as an evaluative framework for international education.

The CA has two parts: valuable doings and beings (*functionings*) and substantive opportunities (*freedom*).[53] Functionings represent multiple diverse things that people value doing and being, such as having food to eat, going to school, taking part in a political decision, being self-determined, being confident, being contented. The CA could thus be used to analyse all functionings of people in diverse situations, from rich to poor, from basic to complex functionings. The CA distinguishes between the *value* of doings and beings, and what people achieve doings and beings. In other words, activities or states that people do not value or have reason to value could not be called capabilities. For example, a person who is fasting is similar to a person who is starving in that they are both not eating and in a state of undernutrition. However, the fasting person could eat and chooses not to because he/she sees not eating as a valuable action, but the starving person has no choice and would eat if he/she could because he/she sees eating as valuable. Therefore, the fasting person can be said to have improved his/her capability by not eating, but the same cannot be said about the starving person. An analogy to this example in

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[51] Ng, 2012.
[52] Altbach, 2014.
[53] Robeynes, 2011.

the context of international students, is distinguishing between the skills that graduates acquire overseas and the opportunities to apply them as they see valuable in their local workplace.

A person's *achieved functionings* at any given time are the particular functionings that he/she has successfully pursued and realised.[54] An evaluation that only looks at achieved functionings does not adequately capture the relational functionings*,* nor those functionings that people deeply value. For example, if an evaluation of acquired international education outcomes only takes into account the achieved functionings of, say employment rates or level of income generated, it misses out on functionings that may have been expanded or contracted, or those that people have not achieved but see as valuable, say independent learning, or openness to other cultures. The essence of the CA requires a discussion of any initiative or educational program to take account of what people value and have reason to value in those programs. Not all functionings are relevant to every program evaluation. It is important that in each evaluation, the values that people hold which motivate them to realise achieved functionings are made explicit, in addition to the assessment of those achieved functionings.

The second dimension of the CA is the *freedom* to bring about achieved functionings. Sen argues that a focus on achieved functionings, and the values that people have on those functionings is not enough.[55] It is also important to consider people's freedom to decide which path to take to bring about the achieved functionings. Sen argues that is important to evaluate freedom in this way because it has both instrumental as well as an intrinsic value.[56] He contends that a good life is one which a person has reason to value and achieve based on genuine choice, not one in which the person is being forced into by others' conception of what a good life is. From this understanding, essence of freedom is the option that a person is free to promote and achieve valuable functionings. Capability is thus a vector of functionings that reflects the person's freedom to

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[54] Agee and Crocker, 2013.
[55] Sen, 1999.
[56] Ibid.

lead the type of life that he/she values. It is a budget set of real opportunities that people can use and that are open to them.[57]

Sen's use of the term freedom needs to be clarified to avoid misconception of the CA. Freedom is defined here as the "real" opportunity that one has to accomplish what one values.[58] It is different to the idea of freedom as something that people hold theoretically or legally, but in reality they cannot reach. In liberalism, freedom refers to the idea of choice, but Sen argues that increase in choice per se does not necessarily lead to a meaningful increase in freedom unless the increase in choice options comprises the options that one values.[59] Another distinction is that freedom in the CA does not depend on the person's control, whereas in liberalism freedom tends to refer to something that one can control. In the CA, freedom can occur even if somebody else is exerting control. For example, a smoke-free workplace policy increases one's freedom if one values a smoke-free environment at work even though one does not implement or can make changes to the policy. An evaluation using the capability framework has to include both elements of functionings and freedom otherwise it risks being misrepresented.[60]

The CA denotes a person's well-being in terms of his/her functionings and freedom. In other words, achievements indicate realised well-being, freedom to achieve indicate potential to well-being. According to Sen, people adapt their preferences and well-being to their cultural and socio-economic contexts.[61] Therefore whilst well-being is an important consideration, an evaluation that is solely based on well-being risks missing opportunities to identify real opportunity for improving conditions for human flourishing. It is more fruitful to think of human as ends and in that they are able to reason their values and aspirations towards these ends.[62] An evaluation that takes account of "values" is thus not limited by the circumstantial factors that people have to contend with as it assumes that

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[57] Robeynes, 2011.
[58] Alkire, 2002.
[59] Sen, 1993.
[60] Robeynes, 2011.
[61] Sen, 1985.
[62] Sen, 1997.

people have the capacity to reason and make informed decisions about their lives.

The CA emphasises the agency notion, as it centres on how people shape their own lives in light of their goals to bring about change rather than simply being shaped or instructed on how to think. Agency is intrinsically important for freedom but also for collective action and democratic participation.[63] The CA allows for evaluation of agency as individuals and in cooperation with others.[64] It embraces agency through education that links outcomes with people's origins by making explicit people's cultural values and social norms in shaping participation in education, educational achievements and the conditions that give rise to such achievements.[65] It allows for questioning how people with education might make claims on resources and opportunities to realise what they aspire to do. It offers some conceptual elements that can be drawn upon to evaluate potentials of education to enhance one's quality of life and the circumstances around such potentialities. A sketch of a possible research approach to exemplify some of these elements is suggested in the next section.

Agency is important to consider as a purpose of education because if well-being is worthwhile then agency has to be seen as sense of well-being and is required for well-being to materialise.[66] This is because agency is important for intrinsically freedom and is also instrumental for collective and democratic participation. These two aspects are distinguishable and linked aspects of human life.[67] Agency enables individuals to develop a sense of self. As Patrick (2013) pointed out, agentic self can resist strong social suggestion by locating a position and role within social practices that is consistent with his/her subjectivity and identity. According to Sen (1999), a role of education is to expand human agency and freedom, both as an end in itself and as a means of further expansion of freedom. Thus

[63] Crocker, 2008.
[64] Ballet, Dubois and Mahieu, 2007.
[65] Unterhalter, 2003.
[66] Crocker, 2008.
[67] Sen, 1999.

learning to expand agency should encourage people to examine themselves and their place in the world, their subjective conditions and forms that they can use to consider the role of knowledge in imagining and developing their own futures. This is a powerful contribution that the CA can bring to argue for vision and processes of international education. Seeing education as linked to expanding a person's valued choices requires evaluation that goes beyond economic measures or quantitative indicators that relate to educational outcomes only, to understanding both intrinsic and instrumental purposes of education for human flourishing. The "normative" refers to the values that each person has that determines their preferences, choices and actions. Its emphasis on value judgement and ethical reasoning by and for people is the essence of its normative framework which can assist evaluative studies to investigate issues of distribution, justice and equality in education.[68]

Operationalising the Capability Approach

The CA has been criticised for lacking the operational explicitness to allow empirical application. The critiques mainly focus on the lack of objective definitions and measurements of functionings;[69] the concept of freedom which is untestable empirically;[70] and the lack of auxiliary theory of what provokes choices and behaviours.[71] It is argued here that the CA can be operationalised in two ways, based on the philosophical premise of freedom and the practice of participatory dialogue with participants in the context of the specific research problem. In the context of this paper, operationalising is discussed within the practical strand of the philosophical approach, not its empirical manifestation. The latter necessitates a separate in-depth discussion, which will not be attempted here, of the assumptions underpinning well-being, choice, behaviour, and use of additional theory to examine conditional factors of structure and agency. However, a brief outline of possible elements that may be used as analytic

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[68] Robeynes, 2011.
[69] Alkire, 2002; Clark, 2005, Robeynes, 2006.
[70] Nussbaum, 1998, Pogge, 2002.
[71] Agee and Crocker, 2008.

criteria will be sketched in an illustrative example of a case study in Vietnam.

The philosophical premise

Drawing on Kant's philosophy, there are two ways of viewing human beings, as empirical beings or as intelligible beings.[72] If we look at human beings as empirical beings, humans cannot be capable of freedom because every exercise is conditioned by the influence social structures have on interests and desires. Any choice the person makes is a heterogeneous choice governed by some pursuit of some end. The will that drives agency could never be the first cause, only an effect of some prior cause.[73] From this viewpoint, agency is an instrument of one or others' impulse or inclination. On the other hand, intelligible beings act autonomously, out of free will, because their actions are based on reasons rather than choice. If we reason then we abstract from particular interests. It follows that if we think of ourselves as free, we cannot think of ourselves as only empirical beings but rather as intelligible beings. There is no need to prove freedom empirically because it is presupposed when human beings are viewed as intelligible beings.[74]

Following Kant, Sen presupposes that people can see themselves as agents rather than objects.[75] If they see themselves as agents then they cannot disprove freedom, at the same time they act as objects which means they cannot prove freedom. Sen argues that human beings have to be seen from both standpoints of agency. The first standpoint is that as people consider themselves as belonging to the empirical world, they act heterogeneously in the contexts that they operate within. At the same time, they consider themselves as belonging to the intelligible world where they operate under the law independent of contexts and thus have grounds of operations in reason.[76] Autonomy under the CA rests on

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[72] Kant, 2013.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Kant, 2013.
[75] Sen, 2001.
[76] Kant, 2013.

these two standpoints of agency that operate simultaneously. People inhabit simultaneously both standpoints in the realm of necessity (empirical) and in the realm of freedom (intelligible). There will always be a gap between the two realms due to existence of social structures or the law of nature in the empirical world. Research in sciences cannot disprove freedom because it is not an empirical concept. We cannot make sense of free life if we do not presuppose it but at the same time we cannot prove that it exists.[77]

The CA understands the role of education is to instil or foster in people the ability to reason because without reason, people will not have free will to come up with their own consent of their societies. The conception of what is good for them cannot come about without their ability and the freedom to reason it. According to Sen, people can come up with the notion of good life through the process of public reasoning and collective consent.[78] That is why Sen insists that the definition of capability cannot be restricted to a certain set of proposed capabilities as of utmost importance to be derived by one author.[79] The selection of capabilities is one of value judgement, which is also dependent on the purpose of the program or policy initiative. Here lies the complexity because people's values are involved both in the identification of purpose of the program and in the processes that these purposes are realised. The value judgements in the CA will need to be made on the ground over and over again with the people for whom the program is intended for. The selection of capabilities to focus on will have to be done repeatedly and for each evaluation,[80] because there is not one set of capabilities that can be universal and relevant for all situations.

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[77] Sandel, 2010.
[78] Sen, 1999.
[79] Robeynes, 2011.
[80] Alkire, 2002.

Plurality and participatory dialogues

Robeynes (2008) argued that the CA allows heterogeneity of people and connects individual biographies and social arrangements through its emphasis on individuals' ability to rationalise their choices and actions ethically.[81] The idea of individualism in the CA thus is an ethical dimension rather than a methodological base.[82] The process of achieving functionings depends on people's ability to convert their social, cultural and economic resources and their personal attributes into functionings. In other words, it takes the individuals as the unit of evaluation when considering the outcomes of social arrangements, but does not assume that only individuals and their properties exist, nor that explanations are only in terms of individuals.[83] Social, cultural and economic factors contribute to different aspirations and participation in programs and the outcomes depend on intersecting differences of people's resources and social surroundings. An evaluation process through capability space considers whether social opportunities or social norms expand agency or diminish it and on the other hand, how agency contributes to social norms. The CA is mainly about an evaluative space and can be used with widely different positions on social reality and relationships.[84]

Thus, the salient aspect of operationalising the CA is the engagement of participants in the process of evaluating capabilities because without that, researchers may run the risk of defining response categories in questionnaires that are biased and unduly reflect their own value judgements. As Sen (1999) argues, the participatory approach is about 'people decide on what count as valuable capabilities.[85] In other words, attention will be on the process of making the choice to act not so much the action itself because education should be about the processes that explore systematic, cogent and effective use of the moral concerns that people have without telling them what the concerns ought to be.[86] It is important to be open

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[81] Robeynes, 2008.
[82] Robeynes, 2011.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Robeynes, 2011.
[85] Sen, 1999.
[86] Ibid.

rather than follow specific content of capabilities as the CA concerns about participatory dialogue with people in conceptualising their capabilities. It centres on understanding people's cultural and social influences that may shape their idea of functionings and freedom, and the plurality of a conception of meaningful life rather than endorsing a particular view of good life.[87]

Evaluating international education using the Capability Approach – an illustrative example

To illustrate a specific problem for applying the CA, I come back to the vision and evaluation of international education outcomes. In the context of international students from Asia, it is important to understand the effects of their acquired international education in light of their countries' political, social, cultural and economic specificities, and with local views on education and its relationship to individuals and their society. The options that a person has depend greatly on his/her relations with others and on what the States and other institutions do. The CA is particularly focused on the opportunities that are influenced by social circumstances, such as demography and labour force, economic development and markets structure, culture and society.[88] These sociocultural factors can be examined at a country level or regions within the country. Given the limitation of space within one paper, and the philosophical focus of this paper, the following is offered as a sketch of a possible research design of a case of Vietnamese nationals who have studied overseas and returned home to illustrate the possible empirical workings of the CA. An actual research program would require much more in depth consideration of political, economic and cultural settings, individual circumstances, methodological application of auxiliary theory of what provokes choice and behaviours, and sociological analysis of agency and structures.

A possible way to approach research is to design a list of elements that serve as proxy indicators of capabilities that distinguish conditions of agency and achieved functionings of Vietnamese returnees. The former

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[87] Sen, 1985.
[88] Dreze and Sen, 2002.

may include cultural and social conditions of power such as income, education, qualification types, disciplines, skills acquired, family background, political affiliations and social networks; motivation; goals; and values indicators. The latter may include jobs; civic actions; and well-being indicators such as satisfaction with job. These elements should be examined as connecting points which operate differently in different domains whether in the professional fields or in community participation fields. There are fields that are more bounded by political factors like law and government, and fields that are more open such as finance and information and technology, and some in between such as higher education. Individuals' positions within the organisations that they are members of shape their understanding and construction of opportunities that are permissible and relevant to them, which influence their preferences and choices making. Evaluation of capabilities then need to identify the factors that lead people to taking choice x or y, and specify how other variables for making preferences or taking choices are generated. Any restrictions would in practice be specific to the context of the individuals, or at least within the fields that they operate within. In addition, the skills and knowledge indicators can be expressed as resources to be surveyed and analysed in relation to achieved functionings. These elements of capability proxies are then surveyed and followed up with participatory discussion with research participants to understand further their conceptualisation and derivation, and how people make choices and use their resources to achieve their functionings.

It is essential that we also evaluate these elements at the individuals' levels in light of their social influences. For example, in the traditional society of Vietnam, fondness for learning and emphasis on morality in education are important sociocultural values. The Confucian traditions were adopted from Chinese colonialists and adapted by Vietnamese imperials to cement fundamental virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, ritual, knowledge and loyalty.[89] The embedded respect for learning and education as a form of social mobility, coupled with economic growth and competing dimensions of market economy, have encouraged studiousness and industriousness of its people. This has stimulated people especially

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[89] Marr, 1981.

the youth to study actively and to seek opportunities to enhance their competitive skills and competencies, through international education.[90] Colonisation by China for 1000 years followed by years of domination by the France, Portugal, Japan and the US have also encouraged Vietnamese people to open themselves to foreigners' cultural ideas which they use to augment their own cultural resources.[91] Participatory discussion with Vietnamese international graduates could enquire in depth about how these historical, social and cultural values may impact their aspirations for overseas studies, and predispositions to conception of their choices and actions that are embedded in foreign ideas, nationalism or both.

In addition, there should be consideration of socio-political aspects in conjunction with Vietnamese socialist market based economy in the evaluation of international education outcomes for graduates who return to Vietnam. The emphasis on economic necessity of education in a socialist transition economy could be examined in relation to their impact on Vietnamese graduates' ability to reflect and justify their own values. For Vietnam, nationalism is a salient aspect of national identity which the governments continue to foster at all levels. The patriotism and piety to the nation is bestowed and constantly upheld by the State as the most important Vietnamese ethics. At the same time, the Vietnamese government welcome foreign ideas and knowledge through development programs with bilateral and multilateral organisations. As with other countries in East and Southeast Asia, the higher education sector has also seen reforms that orient towards Western knowledge and ideas which have led to creating partnerships between local and foreign universities, and increased number of government scholarships for Vietnamese academics to study overseas.[92] Drawing on the "values" indicators surveyed, and through interviews, we can examine the nuances of acquired international education in relation to the knowledge values and social contingencies that these overseas trained academics rely upon to go through the daily lives as interdependencies between local political governance and global

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[90] Pham and Fry, 2004.
[91] Marr, 1981.
[92] Welch, 2013.

knowledge. In particular the capabilities that individuals realise as adjustment to local contexts may differ considerably to what they expect to achieve from international education.

These participatory dialogues can then be incorporated into the result of proxy capabilities indicators in the survey to compile a list of capabilities and achieved functionings. In other words, capabilities are drawn from voices of actors from the local contexts. Overtime, we can use capabilities and achieved functionings derived from other research in other domains or countries as proxy indicators of capabilities to be surveyed and evaluated and then reconceptualised in different sets of research problem.

Epistemological benefits of the Capability Approach for international education

Based on the theoretical reflections provided earlier in the paper, and some of the empirical dimensions sketched in the last section, I will now offer some implications for future research on international education through the concept of capabilities. The operational focus of the CA is upon characterising and evaluating gaps between potential and realised capabilities that assume association with a person's goals and agency for personal and social change.[93] The epistemological implications for using the CA thus are paramount because it asks us to consider whether the knowledge gained through international education can be liberating and emancipatory.[94] Acquisition of knowledge is thus far more open and goes beyond the learning that an individual can acquire. There is an emphasis on not only personal characteristics like cognitive skills or intellectual skills and social attributes, but on social, political and economic determinants that people have and can employ to convert their resources to derive real capabilities.[95] The central concern is not only what lessons are offered to students, but also what opportunities these students have and can make as a result of their education. By looking at graduates and their personal and social change through the lens of capabilities, the contrast

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[93] Agee and Crocker, 2008.
[94] Unterhalter, 2009.
[95] Hill, 2003.

between rhetoric and social reality is understood as a process of enabling people to live more freely and fully by asking whether people develop the ability to criticise reasonings of their lives and their society, and make conscious ethical actions to bring about personal and social change.

As noted in the illustrative sketch of the operationalising the CA earlier, for any set of research problems, the problems are posed specifically and analysis is narrowed within the scope of the defined problem, thus capabilities are conceptualised at different levels in different problems. For the CA to retain its spirit of pluralism in information and principle, we must resist the needs to turn it into a set of list or checkpoints that can then be ticked off and filled. [96] The openness of the CA ought to be retained and used in a critical way with other disciplinary theories, as without this, the explications of the CA's incompleteness are not there and its implications are lost.[97]

The other contribution of envisioning international education through the concept of capabilities is that it places ethical individualism at the heart of education, rather than national aggregated economic benefits or other quantitative educational measures like student enrolment or number of international partnerships.[98] Sen's ideas of functionings and freedom extend beyond economic values of education to look at quality of life between people and the information that could be provided to assess these comparisons.[99] Citizenship is accorded with Sen's (1999) idea of agency in enabling individuals to decide their education and converting their education aspirations into something that they value and can do.[100]

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[96] Robeynes, 2005.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Walker and Unterhalter, 2007.
[99] Robeynes, 2006.
[100] Sen, 1999.

Summary of discussion and conclusion

In this paper, I reflect on de Wit's (2014) call for reconceptualising the vision of international education to articulate and justify purposes that are worthy of educational efforts and can serve as a valuable reference point for educational policies.[101] On that basis, I argue for a rethinking of international education towards focusing on its role in expanding people's agency to enable them to be directors and actors of their own lives, who are able to conceive their own self-esteem in the global world and can realise their possibilities with local values and traditions. There is a space and place for connecting international education between Asia and the West to presuppose a tradition of cultural plurality, and ethical dimensions of development beyond the Western values of modernity, humanity, knowledge and learning.

I emphasize the importance of knowledge societies in Asia to not lose ground to the economic rationales of a knowledge economy. The new modes of knowledge production and transfers in Asia are fortified through international education at a fast rate and with that come opportunities and challenges. The opportunities are the growth of service sector and the weight of highly educated workers within and external to universities. The challenges are the increasingly market-based internationalisation of universities that borrow policies from the Anglo West either through direct transfer of scholars, programs and policies but also in terms of more international partnership programs and student mobil ity. Such programs have the consequences of infusing local universities with Western perspectives as a model for understanding and delivering higher education reform and internationalisation in market based formats, which might not be relevant or equitable for local communities, due to their lack of genuine value and high costs.[102] A way to shift this paradigm is to envision an alternative viewpoint that can integrate the non-Western model and the Western model together through the experiences of a person. The CA offers such fundamental insight into the objective of education to develop human as ends not means. It allows

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[101] de Wit, 2014.
[102] Altbach, 2014.

us to look at the context of research in international education through what international students bring home from the West.

In the emerging market of China, India, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong as international education host countries, the CA can also enable us to understand Asian perspectives of internationalisation through the eyes of Anglo-Western trained academics working in universities in these countries. In this sense, research through the lens of capabilities can examine reflexive aspects of the effects of international practices largely driven by Euro-America upon Asia, and at the same time, provides a shift to incorporate more pluralistic view of universities with multidimensional processes and attention to interculturalism. The focus is upon discursive production of individual values and goals and how colonisation may operate through people's choices and everyday practices. Rather than binary thinking of West and Asia or rejecting the West, the boundaries which reify differences can be bridged by acknowledging differences as barriers and re-contextualising representations of a knowledge society. As Aman (2013) noted, there are possibilities for local actors in the non-West to create their world of modernity and civil society beyond Western imperatives and neoliberalism.[103] This can and should be done through the will and deliberation of those who have studied overseas and thus should benefit from international education rather than from interests of providers of international education.

Noting the current writings of scholars in international education[104] and the Global Dialogue organized by the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) in 2014,[105] I reflect on the rationales of universities in Anglo-West nations in engaging in international education for knowledge dominance, economic interest, strategic alliance, global competition, and draw on the declaration of mutual benefit and more equitable and ethical global education agenda in international education. In recognising that benefits of international education are different among

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[103] Aman, 2013.

[104] Teichler, 2004; Egron-Polak, 2012; Brandenburgh and de Wit, 2012; Nahas, 2012; Hudson, 2012; de Wit, 2014; Knight, 2014; de Wit and Jooste, 2014; Altbach, 2014.

[105] Macgregor, 2014.

actors, particularly for those in Asia compared to those in Europe and North America with similar cultures and knowledge values, it is important that leadership in international education programs across continents have equal opportunity to take part in constructing the conditions and shape the future of international education. This calls for a pathway of international education towards knowledge diplomacy and improved relations between nations at the institutional levels,[106] and a focus on individuals' human agency, civic values and global participation.

The ideal model of any society is where people have the real freedom to lead the lives they want to live and have reason to live. Through the lens of the CA, we can rethink international education towards that purpose for Asia's emergent knowledge societies, to allow people to examine their values, motivations and reason their chosen paths. The focus of the CA is on asking people to question the society that they live in, rather than take for granted the assumptions of a good life in a society that they happen to live in. Agency entails the capacity to make personal and social change. The goal for international education should allow people to conceptualise and mobilise their beings and doings in their societies as they see valuable rather than aligning to existing social norms without questioning them. We should then ask whether acquired international education transforms their lives, their actions and how they can use that to change their society.

From the perspective of the CA, the intrinsic value of international education is seen through the expansion of real freedom of people that put them above and in awareness of the economic oriented and ecclesiastical authorities. The CA does not underestimate the importance of economic participation as a goal of education, but it forces us to value graduates' involvement in social, economic and political initiatives in their lives. It opts for a qualitative self-referenced evaluation system that depend on the valuations that graduates make for themselves and the extent that their overseas education has enabled them to develop life projects that they have reason to value.

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[106] Knight, 2014.

Thinking about international education in terms of capabilities allows us the space to conceptualise education towards enabling people to make real ethical changes for themselves and their communities. The concern with human diversity in social contexts renders the CA its deliberate incompleteness which allows its integration with other disciplinary theories to inquire into specific sets of research problems. More research into the capabilities that international students value in a wide range of countries can be fruitful in anchoring international education as a bridge for ethical human development.

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