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“I Want to Feel That I Live in China”: Imaginaries and Hospitality in International Students’ (mis-)Encounters at a Top Chinese University

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Abstract Research on international students’ experiences abroad has tended to rely on models of adjustment, integration and/or acculturation to describe their (mis-)encounters with different kinds of people (e.g., co-nationals, locals and other international students). This paper proposes to use the more fluid concepts of *imaginaries* and *hospitality*, leaving behind stages and phases of adaption and acculturation, and focusing on the influence of the Structure on their experiences. Based on a discursive pragmatic analysis of interview data with 20 international students at a top Chinese university, the authors review how the students describe the kind of hospitality experienced at this institution and the influence that it has on their (mis-)encounters. Culturalist, differentialist and essentialist imaginaries (static and fixed views of Chineseness) are often used to justify the lack of encounters and the “segregation” and somewhat “positive discrimination” that they experienced. However, the paper shows that, amongst others, the institutional hospitality management for international students leads to closed contexts of encounters and feelings of exclusion. Although the study serves as a case study and cannot be generalized to the many and varied experiences of

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international students in other universities in China, some recommendations are made to solve, at least in part, misconceptions about what interculturality and hospitality entail in the internationalization of higher education.

Keywords study abroad, imaginaries, interculturality, hospitality, international students, culturalism

Introduction

In the introduction to her *History of Chinese Thought* (original title in French: *Histoire de la Pensée Chinoise*), Anne Cheng (2014) shares the following arguments about the perception of China in the “West”: “A confused brouhaha of extraordinary claims on her economy, alarming news about her politics, and interpretations more or less based on her culture. China is this huge portion of humanity and civilization which still remains unknown to the Western world, although she never ceases to spark its curiosity, dreams and appetites” (p. 6, our translation). Cheng’s words might sound exaggerated today since interconnections and travels back and forth between the “West” and China increased exponentially before the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. In the specific context of this paper, internationalization of Chinese higher education, we note that approximately half a million international students are educated in China yearly, with South Korea, Thailand, Pakistan, India and the United States ranking top five for incoming students (MoE, 2019). English-taught programmes are now offered at over 300 universities in 70 Chinese cities (MoE, 2019). However, regardless of the encounters that study abroad in China might lead to, and the potential impact it might have on perceptions of China “back home,” there seem to remain many fantasies about the Middle Kingdom. A quick look at the titles of books published on studying in China in recent years reveals a prevailing feeling of mystery towards the country: “Defeat your fears and break out of your bubble, just like in this student’s Chinese Odyssey” (Mejia Borja, 2019), “Decoding China” (Christensen, 2013). In an article published in the *Times Higher Education* of September 2016 (title of the piece: “Five reasons why you should study in China”; Minsky, 2016), an international student claims: “There is a saying that my friends who went to university together share, which is: if you survive living in China, you can survive and be prepared to face anything in the

world....”

Thousands of papers and books have been published on global study abroad experiences over the past decades (Jackson, 2018). Social and intercultural experiences have often been the foci of such research. While studies on the internationalization of Chinese higher education have been increasing steadily over the past years, there still remains a lot to be learnt about international students’ encounters in this context. Some publications have been identified on the topic. They tend to reveal that international students in China experience similar phenomena as the vast majority of mobile students in other contexts: Encounters with “local” people are limited, or even non-existent, while “cocooning” with co-nationals and other international students prevails (see Dervin, Du, & Härkönen, 2018; Tian, Dervin, & Lu, 2020). Like research in other contexts, the way these issues are examined tends to rely on what can be considered conceptual, analytical and interpretative problems:

- The concepts used to examine students’ encounters in China are contested in global research: *cultural identity* (Tian & Lowe, 2013), *culture shock* (Nseke, 2018), *cross-cultural/intercultural adaptation/immersion* (Yang, 2018), *engagement with culture* (Li, 2015), and *intercultural citizenship* (Fang & Baker, 2018). There is also a lack of explicitly critical and reflexive engagement with the omnipresent notion of *interculturality* (Su, 2017; Traore & Diarra, 2019). Holliday (2011), Piller (2010), and Phillips (2009) (amongst others) have offered constructive critiques of these concepts beyond the Euro-American axis, in the fields of intercultural communication education and political science.
- The models for analyzing encounters tend to be Western- and/or US-centric: Kim’s emergence of intercultural identity (*stress-adaptation-growth* cycle, in Tian & Lowe, 2013); Colleen Ward’s cultural adjustment process model (Ping et al., 2019); models of adaptation and/or acculturation influenced by J. W. Berry and his colleagues (Peng & Wu, 2019). In their important research, Bhatia (2007) and Bhatia & Ram (2009) provide an in-depth review of such models, which tend to claim that people undergo somewhat universal and linear processes of integration, adaptation and acculturation, in series of rigid stages and phases. What is more, the authors are critical of the individualistic

perspective of such models: “It is simplistic to assume that the burden of acculturation whether successful, failed, or reversed and reworked lies primarily with the individual” (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 147). They note that the influence of the Structure (beyond “mere” self) and the “web of socio-political and historical forces” (ibid.) must be taken into account. Finally, Bhatia & Ram (2009) propose powerful counterarguments and suggest that acculturation and identity should be considered as “contested and mixing and moving” (p. 142).

In contrast to these traditional views on international students' experiences, we aim to explore alternative ways of examining their (mis-)encounters to complexify the study abroad experience in a specific institution of higher education in China. In order to do so, we use critical perspectives around two concepts that have not been systematically explored in research on study abroad: *imaginarities* and *hospitality*. We argue that these two concepts can allow us to look into students' experiences and (mis-)encounters in a more fluid way, leaving behind “stages and phases” of adaption and acculturation, and focusing on the influence of the Structure and socio-political forces. We ask the following questions:

- What kind of hospitality did the students experience? How does the way the students' experience is organized seem to influence their (mis-)encounters? What are the relations between hospitality and (mis-)encounters?
- How do the students perceive their (mis-)encounters? How do they justify them during their time in China?

The context of our study is that of an elite university in Beijing where we interviewed 20 international students about their experiences, with a focus on their social and intercultural encounters.

Imaginarities, Hospitality and Encounters in Study Abroad

Interculturality beyond “Culture” in Analyzing Study Abroad Experiences?

In the many and multifaceted analyses of the study abroad experience, the notion

of interculturality has dominated conceptual, theoretical and methodological perspectives. According to Philosopher Henri Bergson (1911), “the different concepts that we form of the properties of a thing inscribe around it so many circles, each much too large and none of them fitting it exactly” (p. 19). When one thinks of the notion of interculturality, his words resonate very well. The notion appears to be everywhere, and sometimes, to “hide” under other labels such as *multicultural*, *transcultural*, *polycultural*, *crosscultural* and even *global*, which may mean the same or something different. Interculturality often serves the purpose of “boosting” hospitality in higher education (Aikman, 2012). Yet, it is a slippery and polyvalent notion that deserves to be unthought and rethought to examine the experiences of international students.

Interculturality has been used to describe both what people experience abroad (as in “intercultural adjustment/adaptation”) and what they learn from it (“intercultural competence”). Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, and Street (2000, p. 114) are critical of the shared assumption by decision-makers or study abroad promoters that intercultural learning is a somewhat guaranteed outcome of study abroad. The use of the notion relies predominantly on knowledge and skills in a particular language and culture, which pushes hospitality towards holding people “hostage” to certain cultural characteristics of Self and Other (Shi, 2001, p. 279).

It is important for us to review the concept of culture, which informs the notion of interculturality. Debates about the use of the concept have taken place in the social and human sciences for the past decades (Hammersley, 2020). The concept is said to be a misnomer, which has become unstable and practically unworkable (Philips, 2009). For Holliday (2011), culture leads “easily and sometimes innocently to the reduction of the foreign Other as culturally deficient” (p. ix). Chemla and Keller (2017, p. 139) argue that certain views of the concept tend to make it homogeneous, static, and fixed. Culture is everywhere and it tends to explain and justify everything, especially when we talk about interculturality and the Other (Piller, 2010). With many other critical scholars of the notion of interculturality (e.g., Abdallah-Preteceille, 2004), we maintain that the omnipresent ideas of “cultural difference,” “knowledge about other cultures,” “culture shock,” “the clash of cultures” in scholarship of study abroad and internationalization can easily represent caricatures and simplifications.

Placing the concept of culture at the center of interculturality leads to a certain

number of problems. The first issue is that a focus on culture (rather than inter- and -ality) can lead to a *differentialist bias*, or the obsession with what makes us different from others, rather than considering the continuum of differences and commonalities (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). As such, this “overlooks the transnational dimensions of current practices” (Ito, 2017, p. 51). Research on study abroad has not been immune to this incredibly resilient groupthink, often collecting lists of cultural differences to either explain or facilitate intercultural (mis-)encounters. Of course, differences matter and people are different (across and within “cultures”), but they can also share similarities in terms of values, ideas, behaviors, opinions, among others. In many cases, two individuals from different “cultures” might share more in common than people from the same country (Abdallah-Preteceille, 2004). Rethinking interculturality beyond the differentialist bias can help break down the borders between difference and similarity, take both into account in examining (mis-)encounters and adopt a perspective on students' (mis-)encounters that relies on “contested and mixing and moving” elements (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 142).

Another related issue, hinted at before, is the overreliance on culture as a single analytical category and sole marker of interculturality. Many fields of research such as sociology, cultural studies and Black Feminism, have delved into the benefits of a paradigm of research called *intersectionality* to complexify their analyses and to make sure that research participants can shift the categories and boxes that scholarly work can sometimes impose on them. McCall (2005) defines intersectionality as “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (p. 1771). Examining interculturality from an intersectional position requires combining and interrelating elements such as language, social status, gender and pushing for more political approaches that delve into issues of inequality/inequity and social justice (McCall, 2005). Intersectionality can help discuss the wider structural forces (beyond “mere” culture) in intercultural contexts. It can also help “individualize” analyses of intercultural encounters rather than generalize them based only on culture. We thus agree with Ito (2017) that culture is an individual's category and that it should not be “absorb(e)d automatically into [our] analytical toolbox” (p. 53). The way people use the concept to talk about themselves, others and experiences must be examined in a critical way (Ito, 2017).

For Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1965, p. 67), the way scholars deal with a specific issue is based on a range of concepts and notions which steer the questions they ask and, therefore, the answers they provide. In what follows, instead of using the notion of interculturality as a synonym for e.g., “acculturation,” “cultural adjustment” and in order to focus on the *inter-* and *-ality* of the notion, which translate negotiations and changes, we use the concept of *imaginaries* to analyze (mis-)encounters.

Imaginaries as Analytical Tools for (mis-)Encounters

In our previous research (Härkönen & Dervin, 2016; Yuan et al., 2020), we have demonstrated that international students’ discourses about their (mis-)encounters rely on two aspects, which go hand in hand: (1) interculturality and (2) the study abroad experience itself.

Any perspective and discourse on such a thorny and polysemic issue as interculturality is always ideological and political (Abdallah-Preteille, 2004). In *Radical Alterity*, Baudrillard and Guillaume (2008) claim that any given individual is “a kind of being who has protuberances [parts that stick out from the surface] going in all directions” (p. 37). In order to deal with these protuberances, people need to simplify Self and Other to be able to experience interculturality. This is where imaginaries intervene. Defined as widely shared implicit cognitive schemas about Self and Other, imaginaries support people in reflecting and problematizing their social existence, “how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (Taylor, 2004, p. 32). Being confronted with the Other, someone one has never met, usually puts into question what is considered as “normality.” For Lacan (1977), in response to psychological needs of “normality,” identity, belonging and inclusiveness, imaginaries are created. All in all, imaginaries about interculturality serve the purpose of meaning-making and world-shaping (Salazar, 2012, p. 865). They are constructed, expressed and negotiated as one experiences the world. This is why imaginaries are both stable (solid stereotypes) and unstable (revised representations of Self and Other).

Coming to China for the first time, one cannot but have (unstable) imaginaries about the Middle Kingdom—and asserting that one does not have such imaginaries is an imaginary in itself. Imaginaries about Self and Other are always

part of interculturality *nolens volens* (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2004). The case of China could be considered as special, since the way she is described in international media and even research today (especially since the COVID-19 crisis started), tends to represent many illusions and fantasies (Alleton, 2007, p. 249). Griffiths (2013) argues that “These stereotypes of Chinese culture date back through early Western sociological engagements with China, through Weber to Marx, to Christian missionaries’ early expeditions there: The radically different Oriental ‘Other’ has always been a function of ‘Western’ countries needs to define themselves in their own autonomous and individuated terms” (p. 5). As such, China has often been constructed through the imaginary of the *heterotopia*—a place of Otherness, characterized by a “four-hundred-year old stereotype of stasis” (Chu, 2013, p. 233). According to Frenkiel and Rocca (2013, p. 16), China is also often imagined as a homogeneous society (and “culture”). Laplantine (2012) argues that the way we tend to create a somewhat imagined division between the West and China, “set(s) up a wall of opacity between continents and locks down ‘cultures’ in immutable opposites” (p. 43, our translation). Although international students coming to China may not share such imaginaries about the Middle Kingdom, it is important to bear in mind that these imaginaries tend to represent shared implicit cognitive schemas—again: Even if people do not use them. In our analysis, imaginaries about China represent one of our foci in discourses of (mis-)encounters.

In Härkönen and Dervin (2016), we have examined the types of imaginaries that international students have their study abroad experiences in the Finnish context. Interestingly, the literature on the study abroad experience in China seems to share similar imaginaries. Having reviewed the literature on interculturality, international students and study in China, we have noted the following imaginaries about the way (mis-)encounters are said to be experienced. We offer counter-imaginaries for each of the observed imaginaries:

- An overemphasis on (cultural) difference in explaining how and why students’ (mis-)encounters occur is confirmed. We thus argue that there is a need to counterbalance this imaginary based on a “differentialist” bias by examining students’ discourses of (mis-)encounters within the continuum of difference and similarity (see the previous subsection).
- The focus on the “all cultural” (referred to in this article as the “culturalist” bias), especially from a national perspective, is also often

used as a way of explaining students' (mis-)encounters. Although such elements can be important, especially if used in critical and reflexive ways (Dervin, 2016), they tend to categorize people into "neat" categories (e.g., "Asian students" vs. "Western students") and to make use of imaginary explanations (e.g., Confucian values). Besides aspects such as the complexity of everyday life, cultural mixings, and other elements of an individual's identity which influence (mis-)encounters such as age, social class, gender, and level of education, tend to be ignored. Finally, the influence of the structure and socio-political forces is not systematically taken into account, focusing solely on individualistic-culturalist responsibilities.

- Success of interculturality in previous research also seems to rely mostly on encounters with local people. The students' mixophilia, i.e., their wish for mixing with other people (Bauman, 2004, p. 112), is often exclusively evaluated against their lack of interactions with so-called *local people*. However, interculturality is about diversity beyond geographical origins. During their stays abroad, students get to meet different kinds of people who come from other parts of the world (or even from different regions and cities/villages of their own countries), thus interculturality takes place with these people too.

It is important to note that all the aforementioned imaginaries about interculturality, the study abroad experience and China can represent impediments to encounters (Dervin, 2016).

Table 1 describes both limited imaginaries and alternative imaginaries of

Table 1 Limited and Alternative Imaginaries of (mis-)Encounters

Limited imaginaries guiding discourses of (mis-)encounters in study abroad	Alternative imaginaries
Differentialist bias (focusing on cultural difference)	Examining the discursive continuum of difference and similarity
Culturalist bias (culture as the sole explanatory force for [mis-]encounters)	Including complexity of everyday life, cultural mixings, and other elements of an individual's identity which influence (mis-)encounters such as age, social class, gender, and level of education
Limited view of mixophilia, with a focus on locals	Open view of mixophilia (beyond the exclusive focus on locals)
China as a radically different Oriental "Other"	China as heterogenous

(mis-)encounters. In the analytical part, we used the ones listed above as well as alternative counter-imaginarities, as templates for examining how the students perceive, describe and justify their (mis-)encounters.

Hospitality in Study Abroad

The notion of hospitality has been rarely used to discuss (mis-)encounters in study abroad. Etymologically, the word comes from Latin *hospitalitem*, “friendliness to guests” and from *hospes*, which refers to both *guest* and *host*. In Plato's (2016, pp. 435–437) *Laws*, hospitable rules about how to welcome “strangers” into Athens were clearly established. Four different categories of strangers were included in the *Laws*. For instance, those who travelled to Athens as “tourists” (an anachronistic term referring to Ancient Greece since the word appeared in the 18th century), were to be accommodated in hotels near temples and guided by priests and guardians of the temple. The fourth category of strangers traveling to Athens had to observe Athenian ways of living and see in them more “beauty” than in other states, and to show them off to other city states. In return, these strangers would be accommodated by magistrates responsible for education for the youth and/or in a virtuous citizen's home. They would also be given presents and honorific titles.

Xenia is the ancient Greek concept for hospitality, generosity and courtesy to strangers. The concept was embedded in Greek worldviews, whereby any stranger, any visitor was believed to be a potential deity in disguise. Thus, they had to be treated properly not to attract the wrath of a God. The god Zeus embodied protection of guests and thus the obligation to be hospitable. Based on the principle of reciprocity, hospitality led to both host and guest showing mutual respect, courteousness and politeness (Lashley, 2016).

The idea of reciprocity is also evident in the Proto-Indo-European root of the English word which referred to “a mutual exchange relationship” and to “someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality” (Watkins, 2000, p. 31). Although its archeology hints at “reciprocity,” hospitality today mostly entails “friendliness to guests” from the host's side.

In philosophy, the notion of hospitality has always been of interest (see Kristeva, 1989). For the philosophers Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2008), hospitality has been discussed as “universal” in all civilizations, especially in

relation to mobility and migration. Contractual, codified and sometimes ritualized, hospitality has related to the way the Other is categorized (in terms of language, religion, citizenship and nationality). Through the birth of Modernity in the 18th century, national identities and boundaries marked an era of hospitality that is linked to national cross-border movements (Bauman, 1993). The French philosopher Derrida (2000) is critical of the concept of hospitality since it tends to give a too simplistic and naive view of encounters. He maintains that hospitality requires of the host to give up security and authority to become “the hostage” to the guest (Derrida, 2000, p. 16). But the host cannot give all power to the guest since hospitality is based on implicit/explicit rights, duties, and obligations (Derrida, 2000, p. 4). In a sense, the guest is always “under control.” As such, the host can decide who enters, what the guest is entitled to do and say, where they are allowed to live and with whom they can spend time. Therefore, hospitality, although it is seen as a “good” value, creates power imbalance as well as symbolic violence: The guest is always at the mercy of the host (Derrida, 2000, p. 4).

Although the word hospitality is rarely used in global discourses of internationalization of higher education, the idea of hospitality is central in this context. For example, in order to be able to secure funding for exchange programs from the European Union, institutions of higher education need to demonstrate that they have clear “hospitality” strategies, which often include orientation programs, courses on “local language and culture,” systems of local tutorship for international students (amongst others). It is important to note that, although such forms of “hospitality management” are common, they tend to differ immensely in different countries. One finds similarities in e.g., the lodging arrangements for international students (separate quarters from local students), the courses they take (often because of a lack of skills in local languages), and the activities that are organized especially for them. In most research on study abroad around the world, these are showed (indirectly) to lead to the following issues: A lack of encounters with local people, a feeling of segregation amongst international students, but also, and more importantly an increase in intercultural imaginaries about local people, the host country and the study abroad experience itself, since encounters do not happen, results in viewing each other at a distance. Hospitality in international higher education could contribute indirectly to (mis-)encounters.

Table 2 takes into account these ideas and critiques of hospitality and presents the characteristics of “closed” and “open” hospitality. (Counter-)imaginarities related to interculturality, the study abroad experience and China (see the previous subsection) become part of these two perspectives since they go hand in hand with specific visions of hospitality.

Table 2 “Closed” and “Open” Hospitality in Study Abroad

“Closed” hospitality	“Open” hospitality
Guest at the mercy of the host	Reciprocity
Division (feeling of “segregation”)	Inclusion
Limited contexts of encounters leading to mis-encounters	Open contexts of encounters
Limited imaginaries about interculturality, China and the study abroad experience	Counter-imaginaries about interculturality, China and the study abroad experience

Methods

The data used in this paper consist of interviews with international students at a top university in Beijing in spring 2018. The interviews were collected by two of the authors, who were visiting European scholars on the campus for two months, and lived in the same building as the international students (“international building”), outside the main campus. They approached the students outside the building, explained what they were doing and asked for an interview. Usually, the students seemed willing to talk about their experiences. The semi-structured interviews took place outside of the building, sitting on a bench, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Ten questions about the students’ daily life, accommodation arrangements, and studies served as a basis for the interviews. They were recorded, anonymized and transcribed by us. While recruiting participants, the two European authors often had to confront their own prejudices in terms of what an “international student” was. Their first reaction when approaching the students was to focus on Caucasians, which meant that the majority of students they recruited at first were U.S. citizens. They then managed to interview students from Europe, and a few from non-Western countries: Brazil, Egypt, and Russia. It took a couple of days to realize that “Asian-/Chinese-looking” students could also be international students, so they also started asking them for interviews. It is important to note that the fact that

the data were collected by the European authors cannot but have an influence on what was shared by the students. For example, some European students used imaginaries that included the two authors (“We Europeans always do that, isn’t it right?”), which might have triggered some form of complicity between them. On the other hand, non-Western students might not have been so comfortable at first and might rely on different imaginaries to create a bond with the interviewers. We identified some imaginaries about China that seemed to have been created by what one of the interviewers said. Although the European authors had visited China on several occasions, they are not immune against limited imaginaries about the Middle Kingdom.

In total, 20 students were interviewed from the following countries: Australia, Austria, Brazil, Egypt, France (2), Kazakhstan, the Netherlands (2), Norway, the USA (8), Russia, and South Korea. Two U.S. students were of Hmong and Chinese heritage. One student from the Netherlands was originally from Hong Kong SAR and one student from South Korea was studying in the US. Twelve students were female and eight male. The vast majority of the students were exchange students (14), at bachelor’s (13) and master’s level (7) and studied Chinese as a foreign language (16). Their stay in Beijing ranged from 12 to 24 months. Four of the students had been to some other parts of China for short-/long-term studies and/or internships before joining this university.

Once the interview data were transcribed, we analyzed them by means of Discursive Pragmatics, an analytical tool well suited for examining discourses of imaginaries and hospitality, between the limited counter-imaginaries of (mis)-encounters and closed-open hospitality. The method is derived from Zienkowski, Östman and Verschueren (2011) and focuses on the many and varied pragmatic features of discourse. Two discursive pragmatic perspectives are used in this paper: *Énonciation* (French pragmatics) and *Dialogism*. *Énonciation* is based on the analysis of pragmatic features of discourse. According to Johansson and Suomela-Salmi (2001, p. 71), the following activities of the speaker are the main foci: Traces and indices left by the speaker in the utterance as well as the relationship the speaker maintains with her/his interlocutor. When analyzing what the international students say about their (mis)-encounters in the interviews, we focus on (1) how they construct their discourse and (2) how they negotiate the discourse with others (intersubjectivity). These two linguistic elements were used to analyze enunciation:

- *Deictics* (markers of person, time and space such as personal pronouns, adverbs, and verbs), which allow speakers to “stage themselves or make themselves manifest in utterances, or on the other hand may decide to distance themselves from it, leaving no explicit signs of their presence or manifesting their attitude in utterances” (Johansson & Suomela-Salmi, 2011, p. 94);
- *Utterance modalities* which can reveal the attitude of the speaker toward what they are saying (adverbs, shifters, etc.).

As far as dialogism is concerned, Roulet (2011, p. 209) argues that there is constant interplay between multiple voices in discourse and society. As such, a given discourse is always associated with former discourses and voices, is always a reaction to previous discourses and enters into dialog with these discourses. This means that we examine moments of intersubjectivity in the data (how discourses of [mis-]encounters and hospitality relate with other such discourses), by identifying the presence of other voices marked by the apparition of certain linguistic markers:

- pronouns such as *we, you*;
- reported discourses (they said “...”); and
- passive voices (they were taken there).

Both dialogism (the enmeshment of many and varied voices) and *énonciation* (subjectivity in language) will allow us to dig deeper into how the students describe, justify and comment on their (mis-)encounters in China. Using these methods, which rely on word choice and formulation, complex and intersubjective voices are made to emerge.

Results

Bearing in mind our research questions, as exposed in the introduction, the analytical section is composed of four subsections. In the first subsection, we focus on how the way the students describe the experienced hospitality seems to lead to (mis-)encounters. The next subsection describes how the students imagine what the study abroad experience should be like, and share their cocooning

fatigue and wish for an imagined Chinese life. Subsection three deepens our understanding of how the students imagine Chineseness in narrating their daily life and (mis-)encounters. Finally, the last subsection shows that, on top of hospitality and the imaginaries of culturalism-essentialism, some of the students, from an Asian-Chinese heritage background experience and represent (mis-)encounters somewhat differently.

Hospitality Leading to (mis-)Encounters?

To start with, it is important to note that most of the students feel privileged to be able to study at such a prestigious university. And, as a reminder, we do not intend to generalize their experience of this context to other study abroad experiences in China. The students were often reminded of the status of this university by their teachers, friends and the Chinese they met. They realized that, without their identity as the Other (international/exchange students), they would probably never be able to get in.

During the interviews, one after the other, the students note that they experience Foucault's (1984) heterotopia (i.e., places of otherness, parallel spaces containing individuals whose behavior is considered to be outside the norm [e.g., hospitals, asylums, prisons, rest homes, cemetery]), whereby they are separated from local students in terms of accommodation and studies, spending time mostly with (some) co-nationals and international students. They use different metaphors, which represent imaginaries about these individuals, to describe these interactions: "the international bubble" and "cocooning with other international students." Research on international students in some other countries have identified the use of very similar imaginaries to refer to such encounters (Papatsiba, 2003). A student from the US evaluates the impact of this phenomenon on mis-encounters with Chinese students in this first excerpt:

Excerpt 1

It is not really great in terms of like maintaining contacts with Chinese students. We only take classes with other foreign students and we only live with other foreign students.

In the interviews, the students systematically oppose "Chinese students" to

“foreign” and/or “international” students, forming two large (imagined) homogeneous entities. This, again, is not specific to this context of research, since many other scholars have noted the same phenomenon (Ballatore, 2015). However, the way they try to explain the fact that they are surrounded by co-nationals and international students only, shows that this has led them to create specific imaginaries both about the Chinese and the way Chinese institutions of higher education function in terms of internationalization. For instance, a student from the Netherlands asserts:

Excerpt 2

I think the Chinese like to think in boxes. We are labelled as exchange students in this box. We even live in a different building. So, everything is made for us to not meet Chinese people.

In this excerpt, the student generalizes about the Chinese while commenting on institutional organization (accommodation, courses). The keyword here is the “box” which is repeated twice to determine an imagined Chinese mentality (“the Chinese like to think in boxes”), and emphasize a difference between “us” and “them” (see Alleton, 2007 on the construction of such fantasies about the Chinese). For the students, the fact that they live in a building far away from Chinese students symbolizes this “box,” which becomes the main reason for “mis-encountering” them. Interestingly, the “box” of separated accommodation for international students has been described by most scholars working on internationalization in other countries too (Papatsiba, 2003), which means that it is not specific to Chinese higher education and thus represents a culturalist-essentialist argument. The students seem not to be aware of the fact that international students would face the same situation in many other countries.

The following student from Russia, offers another imagined explanation as to why institutions (“they” in the excerpt) treat international students differently:

Excerpt 3

I think it is unconscious because they want us to have a very good view of China, so they give us privileges. From this point we have been discriminated from the Chinese because we have advantages they don't have.

It is important to note that this different treatment is considered to be a privilege by the students. However, it is also perceived as discrimination and segregation. In the students' discourses, these two notions appear to be the only narratives they can find to explain their separation from local students. Counter-narratives such as *administrative justifications* (easier to manage the Other by placing them in the same building) or *practical issues* (international students come and go while Chinese students remain on campus for the entire duration of their studies), are absent from the discourses of the students we interviewed.

“China” (i.e., the institution) is systematically described as hospitable by all the students, although they do not use the word directly. Two aspects of this hospitality are especially commented upon: *spatial* and *financial arrangements*. Commenting on these two issues, the students explain that they feel uncomfortable about how well treated they are and about the high level of hospitality towards them, which in their opinion, is better than hospitality towards local Chinese students.

In terms of spatial arrangement, the students share their views on how spacious their accommodation is, the fact that they only need to share with another student—while Chinese students live with up to five other students, and access to a bathroom in their own corridor versus Chinese students having to go to common bathrooms outside their dormitories:

Excerpt 4

It is actually... they have four people in the space... I feel quite uncomfortable. It is very spacious... the Chinese students should have the same standards. There shouldn't be different standards.

Excerpt 5

I feel guilty sometimes in the winter they have to go to the common baths. Horrible! We see them with their buckets!

Excerpt 6

I discuss this with my Chinese language partners. They know that the international students have it better, which is a bit sad.

In these excerpts, the way the students comment on this aspect of hospitality is

structured the same: *hospitality problem* + *sympathy towards Chinese students* + *evaluation*. They also position their own feelings using similar adjectives such as “uncomfortable” and “guilty.” Finally, the three aforementioned students evaluate what they perceive as differential treatment (in their own favor) by using evaluative adjectives (“horrible,” “a bit sad”) and a sentence containing a strong modal verb (“there shouldn’t be different standards”). The following student from Austria even goes as far as evaluating this situation as being “discriminatory” against the Chinese:

Excerpt 7

I think it’s discrimination, really. I don’t know why but they treat foreigners better than they treat their own people, which is strange to me. Yes, a lot of Chinese students, they share their dorms with like six people, something crazy like that.

Again, in this excerpt, emotional evaluative terms are found to accompany intercultural imaginaries about “them”: “strange,” “crazy.” The use of “they” in “they treat foreigners better than they treat their own people,” is also interesting since it is difficult to identify the “real” utterer behind this pronoun. It could refer to the university, the authorities, or the Chinese in general.

Financial benefits represent the other dimension of hospitality that seems to disturb somewhat the students. Most of them receive a monthly allowance from the Chinese government to study at this university, which makes them feel privileged compared to Chinese students. For example, a student from the Netherlands explains: “I feel very lucky... I am getting paid to live here... 3,000 yuan and a free place to stay.” A student from France, who is critical of the accommodation arrangement since he would have preferred a single room, argues that “It is not ideal but I put up with it because it is free.” The same student makes an (imagined) comparison to his own context to express his surprise at the positive differential treatment that he is getting: “In Europe public opinion would be against it... we get treated differently.” Other students who comment on the financial aspects of the institutional hospitality also express discomfort leading to them censoring the topic when they talk to Chinese students. This is the case of two students from Kazakhstan and Australia, respectively:

Excerpt 8

Yes. It was... I haven't spoken... I feel very uncomfortable, it is a lot of money which could be spread among the Chinese. It is a way of bringing students here. It is very generous.

Excerpt 9

When I speak to my Chinese friends, I keep quiet. You won't go to them and tell them.

In this first analytical section, we note that the kind of hospitality that is offered to the students—a somewhat “closed” form of hospitality—seems to create division, a feeling of segregation while, at the same time, a sense of positive discrimination. The resulting lack of inclusion seems to limit the contexts of encounters with the Chinese, although some of the students in the excerpts above mention “Chinese friends” and/or “acquaintances.” The spatial and financial benefits for the students become platforms for creating (unfortunate) imaginaries about “the Chinese,” who are said to “box” and to wish for them to see (exclusively) the positive sides of China. Interculturally, the students position their discourses within differentialism (“they box”) and a vision of the Chinese from a distance. Their discourses about hospitality lead to meaning-making and world-shaping about interculturality (Salazar, 2012). Although the students describe phenomena that have been described elsewhere (division, a feeling of discrimination), the idea of *privilege* compared to local students has not been systematically identified in previous research on study abroad.

Imagining What the Study Abroad Experience Should Be Like: Cocooning Fatigue and Wish for an Imagined Chinese Life

In the university under review, as reported earlier, international students live in a specific district, off campus. Students share a room with a person from their own study program back at their home university (case of exchange students) or with a student from another country. In general, student life in the international building appears to be very similar to any other international student dormitories: Daily life consists of studying, cooking and eating together in the common kitchens; helping each other with practical matters; going to restaurants, cafés,

bars and clubs and having fun with students from all corners of the world (Ballatore, 2015). Interestingly, none of the students that we interviewed mention the problems of e.g., “cultural difference” or “culture shock,” which are often mentioned in research on study abroad. Problems of “culture,” which become systematically imaginaries about China, appear solely when the students talk about China and the Chinese.

The “international bubble” metaphor, which seems to symbolize an imaginary community and that many students use to describe their experiences, is often accompanied by somewhat negative evaluations:

Excerpt 10

It is a lot of fun but I am also weary of the international bubble.

Excerpt 11

We live in an international bubble. We are not very well integrated.

Excerpt 12

I don't like the international building that much because I think it is like a fake thing to live here. It is fake because there are only foreigners.

This leads to most students describing some sort of *cocooning fatigue* with other international and co-national students (“I am weary of”; “it is fake”). Spending time exclusively with them also leads the students to feel somewhat isolated. For example, a student from Australia goes as far as claiming that living in this specific context “doesn't feel like living in China somewhat.” Having to use English with other international students also seems to disappoint those who wish to improve their Chinese. Students claim to often “fall into the trap” of speaking English with each other both on campus and in the international building, because it is not easy to “suddenly talk in broken Chinese when there is a common language” (student from the Netherlands). Only one out of the 20 students, from Egypt, seemed satisfied with the isolated position of the international building where the students live: “It is better to be aside than inside the campus [like Chinese students]... just the feeling... I live in this building not too close to where I study is a totally different place.”

When the students discuss their fatigue of the “bubble”—which, again, derives

from the institution's "closed" hospitality—wishes for spending more time with Chinese people and experiencing a "Chinese life" are shared by the students. Most international students have been paired with either a so-called Chinese buddy or a language partner—with whom they teach their language and learn Chinese at the same time. However, most students complain about one similar issue: The local students from their institution have to work so hard that they do not have time to socialize with them. This complaint seems to lead to imagining the local students—not in terms of "nationality" but of "institutional belonging." For instance, a student from the US claims: "You don't meet people. They are constantly busy. They don't have the time." In another student's interview (from Austria), he uses a somewhat contradictory argument to oppose imaginary visions of international students and Chinese students when he rehearses the idea that Chinese students are too busy: "I don't have friends in here but I have international students... but Chinese students don't help me because maybe they are very busy, they don't have time maybe." The shift between the word *friends* and *international students* seems to reveal that the student categorizes people differently and that these different people seem to belong to different spaces ("in here but..."). By using the adverb *maybe* several times when he refers to Chinese students, the student shares his uncertainty as to why they are not much involved with international students—hinting at a distant view triggered by mis-encounters. This is how another student, from Brazil, determines the local Chinese students: "The students are too hard-working at [name of institution]. Their life experience is different. Their vision of the world is different, maybe they never left China. We go to bars and drink alcohol." In this excerpt, the student evaluates in a sense the local students, starting with the use of "too" in "the students are *too* hard-working," and with a potentially negative evaluation when he asserts that "their vision of the world is different, maybe they never left China," which could hint at the fact that this student believes that they are not open-minded or that their life experience is limited (compared to his and/or international students'). The way he opposes these students and "we" (an imaginary for the category of international students) could confirm this judgmental comparison. About language partners, a student from France argues that "it is forced," i.e., they feel that these encounters don't lead to authentic relations. He adds: "We just meet each other... okay, let's talk something. It is not a real friend, at least at the beginning." The combination of the adjective

“real” and the word “friend” could hint here at mis-encounters.

Throughout the interviews, the word *a friend* is used regularly to refer to or distance oneself from others. However, the word appears to be somewhat of an empty signifier in most cases, since it is never contextualized. Often in the students' utterances about Chinese friends/acquaintances, one notices hesitation when labelling these people. This French student explains:

Excerpt 13

Well I have a few [Chinese friends]. No, not as much I wish, of course. Cause I don't know. They are just not interested in speaking with us, sometimes. That is the feeling I have. Of course, I have friends who have a lot of Chinese friends. But I didn't succeed. But I have a few.

Other students claim to have Chinese friends outside Beijing. They seem to have met them before starting their studies in other parts of the country, before arriving in the capital city. One student explained that “my best friend is from Chengdu, she lives in Beijing and works at another university, so we rarely meet...” When the students are asked who they consider as “locals,” one American student uses an interesting imaginary about identity when he maintains that locals are “real Chinese,” adding that “American-Chinese friends—they don't count.” The adjective “real” (as in “real” friends before) could reveal confrontation between different realities as perceived by the students—and filtered by culturalist-essentialist views of “us” and “them.” We will return to the interesting case of Asian/Chinese heritage students in the last analytical subsection.

While discussing the issues of cocooning and mis-encounters with Chinese students, the interviewees all make predictions for the rest of their stays in China:

Excerpt 14

I have to put myself really out there and interact with Chinese people. You have to try to break that shell... it is hard for every foreigner here.

Excerpt 15

I'd like to live somewhere more Chinese. Because I want to feel that I live in China. I like the Chinese surroundings more.

The kind of “closed” hospitality that the students experience from an institutional

perspective has two consequences for (mis-)encounters. The cocooning, and a fatigue of it, as well as a wish for a “Chinese life” (which is never explicitly described) and encounters with the “Chinese,” are confirmed in this subsection. Interculturally, very few (general) imaginaries about the Chinese and cocooning with other international students were identified when the students discussed these issues. The only imaginaries that we identified relate to the hard-working identity prescribed to the local students.

Imagining Chineseness: From Culturalism-Differentialism to Interculturality?

As hinted at in the earlier subsections, the students often refer to Chineseness (Chinese culture, mentality and society, although they never use the last word) to discuss their experiences, especially their (mis-)encounters. Discussions about the role of the Structure and/or socio-political and historical aspects never materialize in the interviews. They also wish for a life that is more “Chinese.” The way Chineseness is described, in most cases, relies on culturalist-essentialist imaginaries (see Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009), and as we shall see later, on counter-imaginaries linked to interculturality as a process (beyond difference and emphasizing intersectionality).

The student from Kazakhstan suspects that different cultures and busy schedules may not be the only reasons why Chinese students are not so easy to reach and because of that she questions their interest in meeting international students in general:

Excerpt 16

The culture is not same. With Chinese people I don't have same hobby, so it is so hard for me because I don't have friends in here. I have friends here, but international friends. I want... I must have Chinese students help me. But maybe because Chinese students are very busy. Maybe—I think—Chinese people don't like international people. I don't know why.

In this excerpt, one notices hesitations in what the student says (shift in word use: “I want... I must have”), which could demonstrate some confusion in relation to (mis-)encounters with the Chinese. After listing several arguments to explain the

distance between the student and the Chinese, the student seems to come to an (imagined) conclusion that “Chinese people don’t like international students,” opposing the two groups. The discourse is not culturalist as such but seems to hint at a fixed (imagined) perception of how the Chinese see the Other.

Some students also believe that the difficulty in making friends with the Chinese is based on the different understanding of the notion of friendship in China. In this excerpt from a Dutch student, we find a typical of example of what Abdallah-Preteille (2004) calls “culture as an alibi”:

Excerpt 17

Having a Chinese good friend is difficult because of the culture, because it is different, also the definition of friendship is different. In China, you have a lot of friends but it is very superficial sort of American style.

This quote could not be more explicit about how culture is used as a differentialist excuse to explain mis-encounters. Culture is presented here as homogeneous, static and fixed (Chemla & Keller, 2017, p. 139). Interestingly, although the student puts a boundary between her conception of friendship and that of the Chinese, she concludes by referring to some imagined American understanding of friendship to explicate Chinese friendship: “It is very superficial sort of American style.” “American ways” become similar to “Chinese ways” here (and *vice versa*). The word *superficial* connotes negatively and seems to place indirectly the student’s perception of friendship more positively (compared to both American and Chinese conceptions of friendship).

Multiple comments made by the students about Chineseness also confirm the influence of imagined differentialism, leading to negative judgement expressed in “confident” language (use of clear-cut forms such as “they are... they are not...” in what follows). Excerpt 18 is from a Brazilian student and excerpt 19 from a Norwegian student:

Excerpt 18

Living in China is a very good experience but for not more than three years. Values, the way of thinking, humor, people are different.

Excerpt 19

They [Chinese people] are not innovative. They are very material[istic].

While culturalism-differentialism dominates, due to distance and (mis-)encounters, we identified discourses about Chineseness that tend to be leaning towards critical and reflexive forms of interculturality. Four students out of the 20 we interviewed propose to unthink and rethink Chineseness at times in their answers to our questions. In these two excerpts, the students question the imagined picture of China that has been identified before:

Excerpt 20

There is not like the Chinese person. There is no such a thing like that. Because every person is different. I mean, imagine, China is as big as Europe. Would you say every European person has the same humor or the same thing? It is like everyone is different, every city is different.

Excerpt 21

Chinese culture is so diverse across China, for example, they would make a big deal in Beijing but in Sichuan they wouldn't make such a fuss.

What these two students have in common is that, before moving to Beijing to study in the institution under review, they had lived in other parts of the country for their studies. Excerpt 20 (student from France) contains typical critical and reflexive interculturality discourses (Holliday, 2011): beyond mere differentialism; considering the Other beyond the lens of culture and beyond China as homogeneous. Excerpt 21 (student from the Netherlands) is the conclusion that the student draws when asked to explain what differences and similarities they had observed in different parts of China. The student gives the example of “splitting the bill at a restaurant,” comparing Beijing and Sichuan. We need to bear in mind, obviously, that the student seems to recreate another imaginary about “people from Beijing and people from Sichuan” here. However, she seems to show that she has created imaginaries that go beyond the “national.” Although their experience of hospitality is the same as the others in the institution under review, we note that a previous experience of a different context in China seems to lead them to revise their imaginaries about the Chinese.

Finally, Excerpt 22 is taken from an Egyptian student's interview where she discusses the similarities and differences that she had observed between Chineseness and her own Egyptianness:

Excerpt 22

Before I came I felt I didn't know anything. They are different from us and they have different traditions. But now that I have met many I feel, we have many similarities. But in the way of living, they are different. I am talking about Confucius very similar to Islam. When I studied Confucius, I felt it was very similar but in the normal life, sometimes, I felt difference more than similarities.

The student seems to show intercultural openness here by mentioning similarities (Confucius and Islam). However, the dichotomy of "Chinese thought" (Confucius) and "normal life" could demonstrate that the student uses different categories to create an imaginary divide between "us" and "them." Culturalism could still be dominating here.

In his work, Dervin (2016) has argued that "pure" interculturality discourses of similarity-difference, intersectionality and heterogenization of Self and Other are unstable and often enmeshed in networks of culturalist-differentialist discourses. What this subsection shows is that while the latter seem to dominate how the students describe their experiences of studying and living in China and their (mis-)encounters, the way that some of them seem to re-imagine Chineseness occasionally falls within alternative discourses of interculturality. Although their life in Beijing follows the same pattern as that of other international students (heterotopia), what these somewhat different students share in common is their experiences of other places in China.

"Confusing" Identities Add to Mis-encounters

In the previous subsections, we have demonstrated that hospitality management and certain views of interculturality (imaginarities) do seem to lead to mis-encounters. In this last subsection, we focus on how some of the students that we interviewed experience an extra layer of problems: students of Asian/Chinese heritage. As we explained in the data description, when we recruited students for this project, the European authors hesitated in approaching "Asian-/Chinese-looking" students around the international building since they were not sure if they were "international." As a reminder, two U.S. students are of Hmong and Chinese heritage, one student from the Netherlands was originally

from Hong Kong SAR and one student from South Korea was studying in the US. Since they live in the international building, and receive the same kind of “closed” hospitality, their experiences are first described in similar terms as the other students. However, we soon discover that their experiences are slightly different, especially in relation to how they are seen by both the Chinese and internationals.

All the Asian-/Chinese-heritage students report first being asked repeatedly if they are Chinese and the question “Where are you really from?” by both international and Chinese people. The American students share the same viewpoint about how differently they get treated by the Chinese as “Asian-looking” individuals:

Excerpt 23

I think in general they are very kind to Americans. They are very kind and they are more attentive to them than to me or someone else with an Asian face.

Excerpt 24

Some people can be very rude. My foreign friends can get treated better.

Such narratives turn into imaginary discourses of “the Chinese are very rude to us” or “they ignore us and focus on Caucasians.” The student from the US, who is of Hmong background, told us this story: When she is together with her international friends, very often some Chinese would ask them to pose with them for a picture. Systematically, the Chinese would give her the phone to take the picture—and thus exclude her.

The South Korean student explains that her “confusing” identity of an Asian-/Chinese-looking person often leads to what she perceives as Chinese people not being pleasant to her when she speaks “broken” Chinese:

Excerpt 25

In the cases where they do at first assume that I am Chinese and from my Chinese they have a way to pick up that I am obviously not Chinese. I have had experiences... they aren't that very accepting or tolerant for my bad broken Chinese. Some of them might become very frustrated when talking

to me.

A different attitude from locals is also reported by the Dutch student who is of Chinese Hong Kong origins:

Excerpt 26

When we are together they always talk to her, not to me. I've been into some weird situations with teachers. It's a pretty negative stereotype [meaning a stereotype about overseas Chinese]. I am supposed to be very lazy and arrogant.

Although most of these experiences appear negative, some of these students also report being admired by the Chinese for example when they speak English ("When I speak English, the Chinese are like *wow!*"). Seeing an Asian-/Chinese-looking face, some of the Chinese whom they met are surprised to hear them speak American-/British-English. Finally, two of the students mention that they are often used as translators by the Chinese when they were in an international group. The Chinese would turn automatically to them for help with interpreting from English to Chinese. The students feel flattered by these requests, however, their Chinese does not always allow them to play the "interpreter."

The experiences of Asian-Chinese-background students share similarities with other international students since their context of encounters is the same ("closed" hospitality). However, since they look different from the "imagined" picture of an international student because of their Asian features, there are signs that their experience in China contains an extra layer of impediments to interculturality and encounters with both local and international students.

Conclusion

Based on interview data with 20 students from different parts of the world based at a prestigious university in Beijing, China, this paper focused on students' (mis-)encounters during their stay. Using the two key concepts of imaginaries and hospitality as alternatives to models of adjustment, integration and/or acculturation, we showed that the type of "closed" hospitality that they received

from the institution (accommodation, financial benefits, amongst others) seemed to lead to mis-encounters with the Chinese students. However, the students used culturalist, differentialist and essentialist elements to justify the lack of encounters as well as the “segregation” and somewhat “positive discrimination” that they experienced. The acts of hospitality thus seemed to prevent the students from considering further the continuum of difference-similarity and an open view of mixophilia (Bauman, 1993), beyond the “locals.” The lack of reciprocity, feelings of exclusion and closed contexts of encounters contributed to “culturalizing” their (mis-)encounters and to generalizing about Chineseness while ignoring Chinese “protuberances” (Baudrillard & Guillaume, 2008, p. 37). Interestingly, the students never mentioned the Structure or socio-political aspects as explanations for their specific experiences.

What the analysis also shows is that the students were somewhat tired of spending their time exclusively with other international students and co-nationals (“cocooning fatigue”) while wishing for an imagined Chinese life, which was never fully described. Some instances of critical and reflexive interculturality, beyond culturalist imaginaries, were identified in students who had had other experiences in different parts of China. Finally, the last subsection on Asian-Chinese heritage background students hinted at the fact that “closed” hospitality was not the only reason for (mis-)encounters and that prescribed identities and (mis-)perceptions of who the Other is also had an influence on these students.

Our article does not represent a critique of the kind of hospitality and good intentions created by the Chinese institution. Again, most studies of internationalization describe very similar phenomena in different parts of the world in terms of accommodation. What the paper reveals is that there seems to be a lack of understanding and interaction around the topics of hospitality and (mis-)encounters between the students and the institution. Although the results from this study should not be used to generalize for other institutions in China, we propose the following recommendations for decision-makers and institutions of higher education. The phenomena created by “closed” hospitality, which are perceived as problems by the students, tend to rely on ideologies of interculturality that would deserve to be questioned. For example, the “obsession” with socializing exclusively with Chinese students, and disregarding, in a sense, the benefits of being with other international students—and even

co-nationals, seems to reflect a view of interculturality that is still very much grounded in (national) geography and solid views of “us” and “them”—not a fully global and critical perspective. Opportunities for interculturality are multiple in an “international building” but the students seem to not see them as such. There is thus a need to empower students to rethink these issues, to reflect on the pros and cons of and influence of hospitality on (mis-)encounters from critical perspectives, but also to question their views of what interculturality is about so that discourses of culture, which tend to contain imaginaries, do not remain the only explanation for mis-encounters. Institutions could offer courses on mobility, migration and (mis-)encounters that support the students to reflect on the issues of hospitality (from “closed” to “open”) and interculturality through unthinking and rethinking imaginaries. This could help them to reconsider any misconceptions they might have about their experience and (mis-)encounters. Finally, institutions could try to be more transparent about their practices and to provide space for discussions around perceptions of hospitality to take place between international students, institutional representatives and local students.

Acknowledgements The study was supported by the Ministry of Education Youth Project of 2020 National Education Science Planning Project (No. EMA200394; title: The Construction of Internationalization Quality Model of Teachers in Minzu Colleges and Universities).

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