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# “What’s Love Got to Do With It?”

## Some reflections on the internationalisation of planning education

10<sup>th</sup> AESOP Heads of Schools Meeting & Plaza for Excellence in Education – Madrid 2015

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**I**ntroduction

The internationalisation of higher education and rise in international student mobility over recent decades has been accompanied by much reflection on the extent to which universities are equipping their students to be future world citizens or (in certain disciplines) ‘world professionals’. Whilst the managerial implications of internationalisation in higher education have been widely articulated, there is as yet a relative lack of research/studies from the perspective of teachers and their experience of internationalisation (Wihlborg, 2009). As a result, the pedagogical dimensions of internationalisation are less clearly apprehended, notably with respect to the practical implications for delivering learning and teaching in an internationalized educational context (Robson, 2009; Wihlborg, 2009). The relationships between tendencies inherent within the wider international academic system and teachers’ experiences of the internationalisation of higher education (HE) arguably also deserve more attention. This article offers some initial reflections on such issues in the context of the internationalisation of planning education.

### **An international context for planning and planning education**

It is commonly argued that the planning field increasingly needs to consider substantive development challenges from a cross-national perspective, in a manner capable of sustaining meaningful comparison, lesson-drawing and thoughtful policy transfer. UN Habitat has argued for the adoption a ‘one-world’ approach to planning education which equips students to work in different ‘world contexts’ (UN Habitat, 2009). Today a wide variety of degree programmes are offered internationally with the goal of preparing graduates to contribute to the habitability (Conley, 2012) and resilience (Davoudi, 2012) of cities and regions in the face of ‘current and future urban and development challenges’ relating to demography, environment, economy, socio-spatial issues, and institutions (UN Habitat, 2009). On a wider front, many universities have developed strategies and teaching programmes which seek to promote and respond to the challenges of internationalisation (Goldstein, et al., 2006). In British universities which host both the second highest number of international students in the world and

the second highest proportion of international students in the student body (Walker, 2014, p.325) planning programmes attract significant numbers of international students. In the present authors' own institution (the University of Liverpool), internationalisation has been a strategic objective over the past decade, with an emphasis being placed on the need for graduates to have an "ability to operate in culturally diverse contexts" and the importance of "creating a distinctive and exciting learning environment for both international and UK students". Internationalisation is a cross-cutting theme in the institution and also pursued through specific initiatives notably the founding in 2006 of a partner university XJTLU in Suzhou, China, which offers students the opportunity to study towards a Chinese and a UK degree with an option of transferring to Liverpool at the end of Level 1 to complete the rest of their undergraduate studies in the UK. As a result of such strategic initiatives, international students now comprise a significant proportion of student cohorts at the University of Liverpool and in planning they comprise the majority.

In exploring further the international context for planning and planning education it is useful to consider briefly the terms in which the field is defined and discussed - 'international', 'internationalisation' and (sometimes) 'internationalism'. A simple dictionary defines the 'international' as follows:

1. 'affecting or involving two or more nations';
2. 'being known or renowned in more than one country'; and
3. 'being open to all nations; not belonging to a particular country'.

It is worth bearing such definitional components in mind when reflecting on the descriptive and normative uses to which notions of the 'international' and derivative terms such as internationalisation are put in the current academic system. As an initial observation it can also be noted that currently the association of the adjective 'international' with any form of scholarly activity often means that it will probably be perceived as 'a good thing' in many HE institutions around the globe. In reviewing the context for the internationalisation of planning education, it is instructive to consider the distinction which a number of scholars

have made between internationalisation and internationalism. For some processes of 'internationalisation' are conceived as a result of globalisation, and driven largely by the profit-seeking motives of institutions operating in a neo-liberalized global academic system, whereas forms of 'internationalism' might rather emphasise "inter-cultural understanding over financial motives" and demands "a focus on personal engagement with the Cultural Other" (Tian and Lowe: 2009, 659; Jones, 1998) (see Tian and Lowe, 2009: 659-663 for an overview of this debate). 'Internationalisation' is thus seen as attractive given the growth opportunities that it offers, which derive principally from the contribution international student fee income makes to the revenue of receiving institutions. For Tian and Lowe (2009: 559):

*"Much of the 'internationalisation' that is currently observed in English universities is driven, whether directly or not, by economic and financial rationales associated with a particular neo-liberal discourse of globalisation into which higher education has been subsumed. This is particularly true for the recruitment of international students into English universities"*

In unpacking notions of internationalisation and internationalism in planning, ongoing debates about interpretations and characteristics of 'international' planning research and the relationship between such research and the 'real world' of planning practice in different world settings are highly relevant. In the academy, the word 'international' is often used as a proxy signifier of the **quality** of research (e.g. as in 'internationally' recognised, significant work etc.).<sup>1</sup> The definition of what 'counts' as "international" however takes place in an international academic system that is characterised by power and resource asymmetries which delineate more or less explicit 'cores and peripheries' (Paasi, 2015). This can become problematic - particularly for a disciplines which have a practice dimension such as planning, when notions of 'research quality', 'international excellence', or even 'relevance' are frequently defined by the standards, interests and biases of 'the core' (Paasi, 2015). In a discipline such as planning, where there has traditionally been a concern to ensure that the best academic work is relevant to, and communicates with and derives insight from,

practice this can be particularly problematic. Narrow or mechanistic notions of research “quality” or “rigour” (Campbell, 2015) and the crude use of ‘international’ as a qualifier to indicate research excellence, may unintentionally favour a paucity of originality and underplay the crucial importance of “relevance”, context and applicability in planning and wider social science research. The issues of context and relevance may become even more significant when viewed from an international perspective (Kunzmann, 2015). In light of such issues, it has been argued that there is a need to think about how far planning research and its dissemination fully reflects the notion of the ‘international’, in being ‘open to all nations’ and ‘not belonging to a particular country’. Certainly, in the context of trends towards dominance of the ‘international’ field of planning research by western (and notably Anglo-US) researchers and journals identified by Yiftachel (2006) and others (Paasi, 2015), there appears to be a need to think about how effectively the planning academy functions in building shared planning knowledge and delivering professional learning, ‘in and for all nations’.

Such debates have significant implications for planning education given the planning discipline’s dual academic and professional identities. The perception of a ‘gap’ between the theoretical and academic domains of planning and the contextualised practice of planners working ‘on the ground’ has been shared by many practitioners and researchers. As Allmendinger (2009: 24) notes: *‘To bemoan the theory-practice gap is now de rigueur for any exploration of planning theory’*. The dominance of certain ‘western’ perspectives over planning discourse has been cited as one reason for a significant disjuncture between the concerns and curricula of the academy and the realities of planning practice in certain global settings. Though comparative planning studies have long emphasised the ‘context dependency’ of planning, the question of whether the theories and techniques which are currently fashionable in the planning journals, schools and systems of developed countries necessarily relate well to, or work in practice, in different ‘world contexts’ remains very much open (UN Habitat, 2009; Kunzmann and Yuan, 2014). The present tendency towards and ongoing risk of a cleaving of the ‘Global and Local Worlds of Planning’ (Kunzmann, 2015) has been highlighted by

some scholars. This is clearly an important issue for research and practice in the planning field, but it is also a crucial question for the internationalisation of planning education. If the existence of a ‘theory – practice’ gap was claimed to be a feature of the discipline when it was largely taught within national contexts to cohorts of predominantly ‘home students’, then the challenge of ‘closing the gap’ may be plausibly much greater where students are drawn from, and often return to practice in, a far more diverse range of international contexts. This might be especially the case if as UN Habitat (2009) suggests:

*‘Some planning schools in developed countries do not educate students to work in different contexts, thus limiting their mobility and posing a major problem for developing country students who want to return home to practice their skills’.*

Responding to such issues is a major part of delivering the internationalisation of HE and can imply actions such as significant re-design of curricula and re-casting of teaching approaches.

#### **Internationalising Planning Education at the University of Liverpool**

In Liverpool, teachers’ experience of internationalisation of learning and teaching has taken many forms ranging from taking small classes of 10 with nine students coming from nine different countries to teaching large modules of over one hundred students where more than 95% of the international students come from the same country (China). In both cases home/EU students now represent a much smaller percentage of class composition. Such a changing context has brought into play a host of pedagogical issues from curriculum development, to how lecturers engage in and beyond the classroom with diverse student groups and individual learners from overseas. At Liverpool work has been undertaken across the planning curriculum to broaden its international scope. This has involved both internationalizing the content of existing modules and the development of new modules to meet the needs of both the larger international student intake (primarily from XJTLU) and also those of home and EU students (in terms of their international knowledge of planning and future employability). The module ‘International

Planning Studies' which was awarded the AESOP Excellence in Teaching Award 2014 was an outcome of this process and designed to instill within students an awareness of the opportunities and challenges that the internationalisation of the planning discipline brings (in relation for example, to cultural, socio-economic & political issues; context dependency; and cross-national lesson drawing). The module is a compulsory component of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) accredited undergraduate 'MPlan' degree. It was developed collaboratively making use of the specialist and 'area' (in terms of global region) research expertise of colleagues at Liverpool and Manchester universities.

As well as broad changes to programmes to reflect the internationalisation of the discipline and the diversification of student cohorts the process of internationalisation has also been experienced by teachers in a host of other ways which it is not possible to fully explore here. Some very practical challenges have arisen, for example, planning and leading overseas field trips with large cohorts of international students has involved staff time in assisting with issues as basic as securing Schengen visas (as given the UK's non-membership of the Schengen area most international students require an additional visa). The introduction of a new Academic Integrity Policy (to address issues such as plagiarism, poor referencing and collusion in student work) has coincided with the arrival of large numbers of students from very different cultural contexts, academic traditions, and having very varied levels of confidence in written English. The number of very serious cases pursued under the policy remains small, but given the comprehensiveness of the regulations and the meetings and committee work that they generate, the time commitment for staff members involved in the policy's operation can be vast (running in some cases to 100s of hours a year). Delivering an excellent student learning experience for international students also requires sustained commitment to the educational part of one's academic vocation. As Kunzmann and Yuan (2014: 69) note "*Teaching foreign students requires experience, sensibility, and an understanding of cultural differences. It also requires time and patience*". Providing feedback which is tailored to the needs of international students, in terms of guidance

on language, context, and academic practices, can for example, be crucial but time intensive. Similarly, teachers have sometimes found themselves fielding very significant numbers queries of queries from international students in relation to certain assignments or project based modules. Teachers have also learned to be responsive to the different types of skill requirements and context setting which are appropriate when teaching international students. Some of the issues with group working in cohorts with large numbers of international students, especially when one international group is overwhelmingly represented have been described by others (Kunzmann and Yuan, 2014; Tian and Lowe, 2009), and some of these have also been experienced. There has been some less positive student feedback around group work and tutorial discussions since the 'big bang' of internationalisation in the late 2000s. Interestingly this has sometimes related to a perceived dilution of the international experience for **other** international students not from the majority Chinese international group. Overall though, the experience of internationalisation has been very positive. Colleagues have learned to progressively adapt and change teaching styles, for example by increasing the use of interactive classes which can help make the most of the experience of international students' and offer advantages for home students too in terms of building their international planning knowledge and awareness. Teaching innovation has been encouraged and interactions between colleagues at Liverpool and XJTLU are taking place. Within the wider institution the Educational Development Division has promoted debate and exchanges on internationalisation and specific issues like working with Chinese students. Following the AESOP Excellence in Teaching Award 2014 they have taken an interest in the work on internationalisation taking place within planning (Willis, 2014). In 2015 the Faculty of Science and Engineering Learning and Teaching Prize was awarded to the post-graduate client-based project module Spatial Planning in Action which is group-based and predominantly taken by international students. Such developments have helped represent the work taking place in planning to the wider institution. Collaborative working and sharing complementary expertise is proving invaluable and colleagues with a particular interest in educational issues are now commencing action

research and starting to locate the new teaching practices, research and reflections at Liverpool within the conceptual framework on internationalisation (for example, using Ryan's, 2011 – 3 Stages Towards a Transcultural Approach to Teaching and learning for international students), and wider policy debates in UK HE.

The 'spectacularization' of the global academic system and some challenges for the internationalisation of planning education

In engaging in the kinds of activities described above to foster the delivery of the sought after goal of internationalization, educators face challenges and tensions arising from wider tendencies and demands inherent to the contemporary internationalized academic system. Guy Debord's 1967 identification of the rise of what he termed the 'spectacle' in advanced capitalist societies might be usefully applied to help elucidate some of the issues. Debord argued that "*Le spectacle se présente comme une énorme positivité indiscutable et inaccessible. Il ne dit rien de plus que «ce qui apparaît est bon, ce qui est bon apparaît»*" (1967: 20; added emphases). In short he suggests that in a 'society of the spectacle' "*what is seen/represented is perceived to be good, and what is good is seen/represented*". Applying such thinking to the contemporary internationalized/ing academic system, it is arguable that classic traits of spectacularization can be discerned. Thus academic institutions and individual scholars must be constantly "on show/represented", and be "seen" in international league tables, or in the pages of international journals, that themselves must be seen in the most prestigious citation indices. Image and representations are all important given that there is an assumption that what is seen and represented must be good and what is good must be seen/represented. Academics may have once written when they felt they had **something to say**, now the pressure to 'publish or perish' is constant and they must publish because they need **something to show** - to represent. Participation in the spectacle is not really optional, one must participate if one wants to be represented (seen) as 'good'; one must prioritise engagement in activities that can be best represented. Such a system, and its rarely challenged assumptions have significant implications for teaching not least because so much

of the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 2006 cited in Campbell, 2012) may be hidden, or at least less easily represented than other forms of scholarly activity. One consequence of spectacularization is therefore a systematic and systemic undervaluing of the significance and value of the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1996), particularly in contributing to learning and knowledge development.

The position which planning and other educators find themselves as regards internationalisation is thus replete with contradictions. On the one hand the internationalisation agenda is driven (admittedly in some nation's HE systems more than in others) by a financial rationale that discerns opportunities for the accumulation of economic capital through international student recruitment. On the other hand academic institutions place great store on their performance, image and representation in the international academic spectacle in which they discern opportunities for the accumulation of 'prestige' and institutional symbolic capital (stretching Bourdieu's concept of the latter to the institutional scale). It is true that they may also discern linkages between economic and symbolic 'capitals', more specifically opportunities to exchange one into the other - e.g. prestige, image and reputation into increased [especially high fee paying international] student numbers. The differential fee rates that institutions in some countries are able to charge based on their representation and image in the spectacle of the internationalized academic system reflects this. Some observers have also pointed out that "*international student recruitment is the most significant internationalisation activity in terms of visibility, scale and institutional impact*" and "the dominant motivation behind internationalisation activity is economic" (Tian and Lowe, 2009: 660). Many leading research institutions in fact derive a majority of their income from teaching, with the teaching of international students making a significant contribution to their turnover. Yet as has been widely noted, despite the centrality of teaching to the academic vocation and the financial support it provides to the activities of HE institutions, the academic world is increasingly driven by an emphasis on 'pure' research and suspicion of scholarly activity which appears to detract attention from it (Campbell, 2012; Mattila et al. 2012). In such a context, the value of applied research, professionally-orientated degree programmes and the 'scholarship of teaching'

frequently needs to be explained and defended. This is despite the fact as Campbell has argued "...teaching at its best is about more than transmitting knowledge, it can and should be about exploring the boundaries of knowledge and even transforming what we know" (Campbell, 2012: 352). This may be particularly true in the case of internationalised teaching where exchanges with learners from different global contexts (which the educator often may not have visited or be very familiar with) can lead to mutual learning and a co-production of new ways of knowing the world which far transcend that which might be gained through the more fêted and 'spectacular' forms of scholarly exchange. Again as Campbell tellingly notes:

*"Personally, I can attribute the questions, which have come to dominate my research, to exchanges with students. Despite the relatively low esteem associated with classroom contact, such spaces may prove at least as fertile ground for scholarly endeavour as a windowless conference room in some downtown Hilton". (2012: 351)*

However, though many prestigious international academic institutions seek to differentiate their educational offer and demonstrate a high return on student's fee investment by claiming they offer 'research-led teaching' one hears far less about the value of 'teaching-led research'. The need to internationalise curricula to meet the requirements of international relevance and the needs of tomorrow's world citizens and professionals however, constantly leads scholars to explore and transcend the boundaries of their knowledge. This has certainly been part of the story of those who have engaged in internationalisation of planning education at Liverpool. In the field of Impact Assessment research on internationalising the curriculum, has for example contributed to wider understandings of national idiosyncrasies in terms of how the subject is conceptualised and taught (across Europe and south and south-east Asia) and its international relevance (Fischer et al., 2011). A key finding was that in setting the context for learning and practice a two-way process is essential.

The fact that engaging in the scholarship of teaching can be a productive two-way process that develops both the learner's and the teacher's state of knowledge (and may 'even' lead to publications!) is not however,

a message which is strongly heard in the current academic system. As Kunzmann and Yuan (2014: 69) note:

*"Given the pressure on universities to demonstrate excellence in academic research (proven by publications in refereed academic journals), teaching is not given the highest priority. Teaching tasks are given to junior staff or to staff members who can easily communicate with foreign students,..."*

For understandable reasons scholars in the spectacularized academic system are very concerned at the representation of their image in the spectacle. For the junior staff alluded to above, their appointment, or confirmation in post after a period of probation may well depend largely on this and to 'survive' they need to make constant assessments of which activities are most amenable to successful representation. As they take stock of the 'field' in which they find themselves, they may also note that some who seem to have flown fastest and furthest through the academic echelons are not infrequently those who have largely eschewed the educational mission of the academic and managed to divest themselves most completely and precociously from teaching duties. Furthermore, as Kunzmann and Yuan (2014: 69) note teaching foreign students "requires time and patience". Given this, and the fact that internationalisation may accentuate some of the demands which arise from teaching (e.g. fielding more queries from students about assignments and academic expectations; dealing with challenges surrounding verbal and written communication when working with non-native speakers; providing tailored assessment feedback etc.), those reluctant to invest their time and patience in the mission of internationalization may seek to further minimise their exposure to teaching.

In such a field and one can hardly blame scholars from feeling wary about devoting too much time to the less visible (at least to the institutional gaze) and often demanding work associated with delivering the internationalisation of learning and teaching. Given that engagement in internationalisation of teaching and learning can bring clear (personal) enrichment and value as well as challenges and risks, this stance might be seen as regrettable and can certainly be problematic for the wider delivery of internationalisation of

education and a quality learning experience for all students. Addressing such feelings amongst staff should be a task for academic leaders. For example, developing, or more transparently and fairly applying mechanisms for “compensation”, or “adjustment” between classes of scholarly activities may help to reassure colleagues and foster a greater willingness to undertake an appropriately balanced and collegial share of academic tasks.

**Conclusions: the internationalisation of urban planning education, so what has love got to do with it?**

This paper has reviewed the context for; teachers’ experiences of; and, some of the challenges facing, the internationalisation of learning and teaching in HE with an emphasis on the planning discipline. Though it may seem a little surprising given the perhaps rather critical and ‘problematizing’ stance taken in some of the passages above, one of the first observations in concluding might be that - whilst it is clear that there are many issues and contradictions which educators have to grapple with in delivering internationalisation and a quality learning experience for all students, there are also many positive stories and experiences, not least in planning education. A valuable literature on the internationalisation of learning and teaching is emerging, but perhaps there is a greater need to make sure positive and inspirational stories are being told to academic institutions, others working in the planning discipline, and the wider community of scholars. Planning education is certainly facing some challenges at present in many places, but it is also often at the forefront of the internationalisation of learning and teaching, and has a developing track record of experience and delivery. This contribution perhaps needs to be more effectively represented given that it accords directly with the strategic objectives of many institutions. Planning has a ‘good story to tell’ on internationalisation particularly as for the present time there continues to be demand for qualified planners and an international experience and education from places like China (Kunzmann and Yuan, 2014).

Initiatives such as the AESOP Excellence in Teaching Award are one way of raising the profile of what is happening in the planning discipline as regards internationalisation of learning and teaching. Their impact

locally at an institutional level should not be underestimated given that “*local factors of place, tradition and individual agency are important items in shaping internationalisation endeavours*” (Willis, 2010). At Liverpool, where international students now comprise the majority of learners, a range of teacher experiences from curriculum and module development through to interactions with individual overseas learners are being shared and discussed. Debates about ‘internationalisation of the curriculum’ (for both home and international students) and the broader ‘internationalisation’ of higher education and discussions about practical issues related to internationalisation are now routine in informal exchanges between colleagues and staff meetings. Those with an interest in educational issues are engaging in research and reflection which aims to situate personal and local experience and practice against the backdrop of work on internationalisation using frameworks such as Ryan’s (2011) ‘3 Stages Towards a Transcultural Approach to Teaching and learning for international students’.

Yet there are also tensions and pressures arising from the wider context of the international academic system. The balance between ‘internationalisation’ as a strategy of institutional economic and symbolic capital accumulation in the context of globalization, or forms of ‘internationalism’ or ‘international mindedness’ (Tian and Low, 2009: 679) is one issue. Another is the relative value accorded to different aspects of scholarship notably research and teaching. At an individual level, lecturers involved in the internationalisation of learning and teaching devote substantial time and effort to ‘making it work’ which inevitably affects the time and energy available to devote to their research, and beyond this perhaps their ‘work life balance’. Without transparent mechanisms for “Compensation/adjustment” in career and role terms and managers who are prepared to uphold these, those who have worked hard to further the strategic objective of internationalizing learning and teaching may find this is less easy to represent as a fundamental contribution to their institution than other forms of more visible scholarship. This not only raises issues of equity but is also problematic in that it underplays the wider value of the ‘scholarship of teaching’ both to learners and to researchers and in pushing the boundaries of knowledge (Campbell,



2012). Another conclusion from the discussions above might be that, perhaps the internationalisation of learning and teaching, rather like love cannot be viewed, or work, in purely instrumental terms. Such thinking perhaps underlies Tian and Lowe's (2009: 659):

*“recasting of the higher education internationalisation agenda in terms of Sanderson's existential internationalism”*

which:

*“promotes inter-cultural understanding over financial motives and demands a focus on personal engagement with the Cultural Other”.*

With due acknowledgement to Jørgensen (1998) perhaps some of the issues and choices facing those who are prepared to engage with internationalisation in the way described by Tian and Lowe are encapsulated by some lines from the Tina Turner song ‘What's Love Got to do With It?’. In these she sings firstly “I've been taking on a new direction” which may be akin to the new direction that many educators have taken in becoming involved in the internationalisation of learning and teaching. The next line states that “I've been thinking about my own protection” which may resonate with the planning academic who, surveying the academic system and their immediate context grows, concerned that “this internationalisation of education business is taking rather a lot of my time, will this impact my career? I must, keep publishing!” Finally, the protagonist of the song admits that “*It scares me to feel this way*” which in the academic's mind may translate as “*I am finding engagement with the internationalisation of learning and teaching enriching and enjoyable. I like spending time with students! Internationalisation of HE is becoming a research interest. Is there something wrong with me? How can I represent my activities as a major contribution to the institution and academy? Will I be pigeonholed as a ‘teacher’?*”

Though the preceding lines are presented somewhat tongue in cheek they drive at some key issues about the environment in which academics are currently working to deliver the internationalisation of teaching and learning. In a context where internationalisation

is widely regarded in the HE sector as a good thing the general question raised by authors like Tian and Lowe (2009) and Ryan (2011) and discussed above, is perhaps ‘how can it really be made to happen?’ When this question is unpicked some relevant questions might actually become ‘*Who will make it happen?; Who will teach the modules?; Who will organise and lead the trips?; Who are we recruiting?; and, Are we still expecting students to change and adapt, what about us, what about the system?*’ All these are questions which effectively place people, be they learners or teachers at the centre of delivering internationalisation. This why intangible human values, attributes like goodwill, empathy, and Tian and Lowe's ‘international mindedness’ which “*promotes inter-cultural understanding over financial motives and demands a focus on personal engagement with the Cultural Other*” (2009: 659) will ultimately be so fundamental to making internationalisation work.

1. Thus in the recent Research Excellence Framework exercise undertaken in the UK the following Overall Quality Profile was applied to research (<http://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/assessmentcriteriaandleveldefinitions/>) (added emphases)
  - Four star - Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
  - Three star - Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence.
  - Two star - Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
2. Acknowledging the ongoing theoretical debates surrounding whether the 'gap' matters, or can/should ever be 'closed' (Lord, 2014).

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