

Reflections on Indigenous Allyship: Perspectives from an International Student and Emerging Scholar

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Abstract: This paper epitomizes my journey toward Indigenous allyship in relation to my lived experiences in Canada as a recently graduated international student and emerging community-based researcher. I reflect upon Tuck and Yang's (2012) concept of 'settler innocence' where I position myself as an international student struggling to fully adjust to Canada's socio-cultural sphere, but also as a settler scholar who often reverts to my academic niches to resume colonial occupation of research processes. Additionally, I share some challenges and insights of working across epistemological differences during my research intern in Baawaating. Such experience has at times engendered my feeling of inaction and fear of cultural appropriation. However, through stepwise community engagement, scaffolding, and trust-building, I argue that it is feasible for an ally scholar to transform apprehension and vulnerability into decolonizing actions and ethical research practices.

Keywords: Indigenous Allyship; international students; migrants; Baawaating; decolonization; settler colonialism; settler innocence; Indigenous paradigm

Introduction

The contribution of Indigenous traditional knowledges in academia has been woefully denied by the western scientific research standard (Smith, 2012). Historically, research has been employed as a colonial apparatus and used to justify how Indigenous peoples are deprived of the ability to enact self-determination. Distorted narratives portray Indigenous peoples as savages who need to be emancipated by big-hearted white saviours, which allows for settlers to situate themselves within white normality (Aronson, 2017). One of the ways to disseminate those narratives is through doing research. Smith (2012) argues that “the word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 30). Many scholars have presumed that the benefits of doing scientific research fulfill a greater purpose of benefiting humanity (Smith, 2012). But this presumption also reflects a romanticized ideal of good white researchers—a group of scholars who perpetuate the legitimacy of Eurocentric knowledge and do what they think is right for Indigenous peoples (Hart et al., 2017).

In face of intellectual arrogance and chronic exploitative practices in western academia, Indigenous research has been experiencing a renaissance in recent decades (Aveling, 2013). In Canada, the calling for self-governance, involving Indigenous communities’ demand to guide research with their epistemology, is backed up by “an Indigenous resurgence movement and a national truth and reconciliation process” (Hart et al., 2017, p. 332). Indigenous researchers have long been deploying decolonizing praxis that centre Indigenous knowledges, values, beliefs, and customs, critical inquiries, and ‘othered’ knowledges to uncover power dynamics in academia (Beeman-Cadwallader et al., 2011; Lavallée, 2009; McGregor et al., 2018). This paradigm shift in Indigenous research draws the attention of a growing number of settler researchers, self-identified as allies, who begin to acknowledge the colonial damage done to Indigenous peoples and intend to engage in collaborative and ethical research with Indigenous communities. Parallel to this, in the context of globalization and multiculturalism, migrants play a crucial role in decolonization and Indigenous allyship due to shared experiences of systemic oppression with Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups (Marom, 2016). Building upon this intersection, this paper explores meaning of Indigenous allyship, migrant allyship with Indigenous communities, decolonization challenges, and solutions within my personal narrative as an international student and emerging scholar.

Who is an Ally?

At this point, I intend to answer the question: Who is an ally? Researchers must take a precaution that an ally is not the same as a social justice warrior, who feels good about themselves by resisting the norms and snatching up the limited research, work, and graduate positions in equity, diversity, and inclusion, and community advocacy. In particular, many scholars who were trained in Eurocentric methods claim their credentials and rewards by fulfilling the basic needs of allyship but still inflict microaggressions toward Indigenous communities. While some carry good intentions, they may inadvertently appropriate Indigenous knowledges and disregard culturally appropriate research protocols, often without consulting local knowledge keepers to assess research’s potential benefits and harms (Aveling, 2013).

Conversely, Knudson (2015) argues that an ally must be a person who is eager to learn about local stories, histories, and teachings *with* Indigenous communities, and willing to reflect on power sharing from a critical reflexive stance. It is also imperative to acknowledge the importance of giving back. The act of giving back necessitates an ally taking real actions to deconstruct colonial power dynamics, integrate holistic approaches to research, support legitimacy of Indigenous peoples' knowledge system, ensuring transparency in data sharing with Indigenous communities as per OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) principle, and promote community-engaged learning and research opportunities (Hart et al., 2017; Knudson, 2015; Wilson, 2008). These methodologies are important decolonizing initiatives that hold a real decolonizing impact and are central to reclaiming Indigeneity in academia.

Although Indigenous research is inherently community-based, Leeuw et al. (2012) and Morton Ninomiya and Pollock (2017) emphasize the need for non-Indigenous researchers to not conflate Indigenous research methodologies with community-based and/or participatory research. It is crucial to note that land-based knowledges, local narratives, and geography can still be divorced from community-based research which may not necessarily require one to critically analyze the relational context that destabilizes a singular, timeless, and standardized way of knowing. Simpson (2017) uses the term 'grounded normativity' as a reminder for researchers that decolonizing praxis is not just about community; it is a place-based system that encompasses spiritual, relational, physical, and emotional domains of learning, grounded in the relationship between the land and traditional knowledges. Ally scholars who conduct research within Indigenous communities must view themselves as a guest within the relational context (Aveling, 2013). They need to do the research with humility and accept that doing these kinds of research in a good way would be virtually unattainable without the ongoing scaffolding from local knowledge keepers.

Given the importance of acknowledging one's own epistemological limits, it thus becomes important to engage in self-location activities to inform their positionality and reflect on differential power dynamics in research relationships. This also holds true for international students who would later become scholars, educators, scientists, and so on. When they work in an unfamiliar cultural context, it is of great benefit for them to actively seek guidance with the local knowledge keepers about their stories, ceremonies, and land-based teachings. This offers them a unique chance to draw thoughtful horizontal connections with their own cultural roots, and come to accept that we are merely stewards of our own knowledges and experiences. Hence, I intend to situate myself in the context of my work, study, and living, my culturally grounded scheme, and response-ability as an ally in decolonizing research. Kovach (2010) expounds that the act of self-location is instinctive in Indigenist research, as 'subjectivity is a given' in Indigenous knowledge construction, and it is only through purposeful monitoring of inner subjectivities that researchers can remain accountable to themselves, their ancestors, and their relationships with communities (p. 111).

Situating Myself

My name is Xuechen Yuan. I came to Canada as an international student and a first-generation settler, being the first member of my foreign-born family to settle permanently in Canada. I was born in Shanghai, China, and grew up with my family in a highly homogeneous environment in a country that claims to be a multiethnic nation. When I was young, I was taught that there are 55 *shaoshu minzu* (ethnic minorities) in China. But the notion 'Indigenous' has always been a taboo concept among Chinese since there has never been an official state recognition of Indigenous peoples in China (Luo, 2017). At the age of 17, I moved to Toronto which locates on the territory of Treaty 13 and attended a Catholic high school where I learnt the word 'Indigenous' for the first time in an ESL course. Since then, I have been studying, working, and living on this land for over seven years and completed my Master's degree in Social Justice and Indigenous Education.

Upon completing my studies, I moved to Sault Ste. Marie to commence my role as a community-based research intern at the NORDIK Institute, Algoma University. Sault Ste. Marie is a small city nestled in Northern Ontario, with Indigenous populations comprising approximately 13.1 percent of its total residents ("Census," 2022). Baawaating is the traditional name used by Ojibwe peoples for Sault Ste. Marie, meaning 'Place of the Rapids,' is home to the Batchewana First Nation, Garden River First Nation, the historical homelands of the Métis Nation and other Indigenous communities such as Missanabie Cree ("Canada Water Agency", n.d.).

During my internship, I experienced culture shock because of language barriers, cultural distances, and the absence of Chinese diaspora communities. Transitioning from urban to rural areas poses more significant challenges for me than a mere geographical shift from one urban context (Shanghai) to another (Toronto). As is common in most acculturation processes, I initially experienced a honeymoon phase when I eagerly explored the city and met different people, but that initial enthusiasm was soon replaced by a shock phase when I began working with the Indigenous community. The nature of community-based research obligates culturally appropriate protocols as per the research ethics agreements. However, because of my unfamiliarity with the culture, I experienced stress regarding the possibility of wrongdoing and being judged by Indigenous communities, especially in the era of accountability culture. Beyond my work, I also faced difficulties in forming relationships with locals for many reasons, including the instances of people struggling to pronounce my name, lack of shared interest, lifestyle differences, and my limited discourse competence. Several of my friends and fellow migrants have encountered challenges in coping with situations where they have experienced microaggressions and blatant racial hostility from certain people in the local community, making them feel unsafe living in this city.

The first two months of living in Baawaating/Sault Ste. Marie were challenging as I juggled with work and acculturation stress. However, a turning point of my adjustment occurred when local elders in Batchewana First Nation communities recognized my acculturation stress and embraced me with the greatest warmth and generosity. They invited me to different cultural events such as powwows, painting nights, beading, maple harvesting, and fire burning, which acquainted me with their sacred ceremonial practices so that I did not feel isolated in a strange city. Besides their generous sharing of teachings, they held me accountable by offering guidance in a non-judgmental manner whenever I erred. Their teachings serve as a map for my research journey, enabling me to navigate through the shock phase and wholeheartedly dedicate myself to working as a researcher. I learnt to constantly reflect on culturally appropriate research protocols to ensure that I remain accountable to the knowledges generously imparted to me by the elders. The next few paragraphs will expand on these local teachings.

I position myself as a settler who is just beginning my learning journey of Indigenous allyship with Indigenous communities. It is also a journey without a final destination because our fluid life experiences continue to influence how we act as settler allies. Being an ally means that I need to evaluate my social position in changing contexts constantly. Especially as a migrant, my hybrid positions of power require me to reconcile my discomfort and confronting my deep-seated subjectivity and my privileges walking between two worlds, even though this process is uneasy (Hart et al., 2017).

Reflections Upon ‘Settler Move to Innocence’

In the article *Decolonization is not a metaphor*, Tuck and Yang (2012) describe that “a settler move to innocence... is an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land” (p. 11). This quote warns me not to equate the experiences of oppression to an embracive depiction of colonization. Although the assertion that describes all oppressed groups as being ‘colonized’ by the settler-colonial nation is partially accurate because of their collective experiences of colonial injustice, such assertion is questionable as it fails to account for people’s complex identities (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Curthoys (2000) argues that all non-Indigenous peoples who reside on someone else’s land, including white peoples and other minorities (migrants/refugees), regardless of their intents and experiences with racial hostility, remain colonizers. When my fellow migrants speak up about their experiences of facing different injustices in schools and workplaces, they spontaneously claim those experiences from the perspective of Canada’s colonial and racist legacies. But they fail to acknowledge their own complicity in the colonial process (Hart et al., 2017). Memmi (1965) describes this type of behaviour as ‘self-refusing’ - a colonizer’s dialectic that condemns settler nation’s ideology while gaining privileges through a well-intended subjugation of fellow citizens and their settler status which they defensively renounced (p. 20). Multiculturalism in Canada often results in a blurring of cultural identities, allowing individuals to seek solace in a national mosaic, potentially distancing themselves from their colonial identity and settler guilt (Lee, 2013).

I think that being a migrant and a graduate student who wants to become an ally, I must remind myself not to be caught in the middle of the settler-colonized dichotomy (i.e. who are settlers and who are colonized) like some of my acquaintances. I must move away from the binary thinking, and begin to recognize the “complex dynamics of colonialism” or, more precisely, settler colonialism (Hart et al., 2017, p. 334). This is a particular form of

colonialism used to perpetuate the coloniality of power through settler sovereignty, homemaking, and commodification of the Indigenous land (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

It is only through my experience of walking in two worlds that I am able to look clearly over my relationship with settler colonialism. I agree with what Marom (2016) says, “immigration destabilizes one’s social location and unveils cultural constructions that may have been invisible to the immigrant before” (p. 29). Now being a recent graduate with a bicultural background, I am aware of how my experience of being a member of the dominant Chinese culture shapes my privileges of coming to Canada for study. Given that I have lived in two countries that have both been settler empires, losing part of my original privileges by adapting to a new racialized minority status, while maintaining my colonial identity, cannot sufficiently prove my innocence.

Unlearning and Reconstructing ‘Colonial’ Mentality

A critical reflection on Indigenous allyship must first acknowledge that all relationships are interconnected, including our relationships with settler colonialism (Blackstock, 2010). A settler researcher identified as an ally must first learn to face their privileges and be cognizant that their privileges are not simply the result of their personal merits but are also entangled with unconscious investments in the colonial/whiteness framework, as all of us have been steeped in Eurocentric values and colonialism (Battiste, 2005; Knudson, 2015). My privilege of receiving university education and writing this position paper also anchors me within a colonial mentality that marginalizes ‘othered’ knowledges. Thus, settler researchers must learn to set aside their imperial ways of knowing and learn to reconstruct their intellectual habitus.

Throughout my research journey, there have been numerous occasions where I attempted to expedite research processes by prioritizing efficiency over appropriateness and ethics. Nevertheless, I am grateful that the community partners consistently held me accountable via their invaluable guidances and teachings. Sometimes, I receive critical feedback from my research advisory for not consulting with them on tasks I initially considered trivial, but are significant for safeguarding cultural safety for community. These tasks can range from making minor word adjustments to information letters, expanding participant recruitment, sending informal emails, and doing transcriptions. Initially, I perceived these feedback to be carping. However, my realization of the necessity of unlearning and ongoing consultation has come slowly. These seemingly mundane consultations helped prevent me from inadvertently falling into a rabbit hole of colonial knowledge extraction and working in silos, as Aveling (2013) aptly notes, one must learn to be “uncomfortable with comfortable.”

To present another example, during a community workshop, I learnt about making liquid smudge spray with witch hazel, distilled water, and essential oils made with four sacred medicines. In my naivety, I initially considered using these teachings to create my own spray bottles as gifts for participants, without thinking about potential implications of cultural appropriation. A colleague of mine advised me to always stay reflexive and accountable to the knowledges I received. This may involve either avoiding controversial situations by purchasing ready-made spray bottles from gift stores, or always acknowledging the source of my teachings when giving them to participants. Over time, I have gradually realized that everything I recently learnt has a teaching. These teachings are not just catchphrases but ways of life deeply valued by Indigenous peoples over generations. It may not be my place to claim that I hold any community knowledges. The process of reconstructing intellectual habitus allows one to show vulnerability and gain humility throughout the research process as an indication of authentic commitment and partnership with Indigenous communities (Simpson, 2017).

Vulnerability in Code-Switching

While working with Indigenous communities in Baawaating as an ally scholar, I am often caught up with a sense of being an imposter, as I struggle with working across epistemological differences between Indigenous and western ways of knowing. Using two-eyed seeing principle, which involves reconciling such difference, is not a simple task, as both ‘eyes’ attempt to focus on the same feature within our perceptual field (Bartlett et al., 2012). On numerous occasions, I kept reverting back to my academic niche. When I was first presented with tree as a metaphor and sacred pedagogy to foster holistic lifelong learning, my initial passion for learning was swiftly overshadowed by thoughts oriented toward the western concept of collective unconscious. I began contemplating the similarities between ancestral teachings about trees found in different cultures worldwide (e.g., tree of life). Unfortunately, I

found myself being caught up in a series of anthropological reasoning while losing focus on the contextualized stories themselves. My mind went from an eagerness to learn with community toward a dismissive assumption of “it is just another teaching shared by peoples worldwide.”

Upon reflection, I acknowledge my biases in code-switching between different ways of knowing in the moment, as I was educated to think analytically, innovatively, and generalizably. However, I understand that with more lived experiences and engagement, it becomes feasible to develop the skill of code-switching. Such skill will enable me to immerse myself in the ancestral teachings while interweaving different research tools to serve and give back to the community more effectively, leveraging the unique strengths of our own discipline. Indigenous and western ways of knowing, though addressing similar issues in nature, use different approaches to understanding that (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011). Western science represents just one facet of complex knowledge systems across the globe, and diverse approaches can co-exist by rebraiding the “ecologies of relationships that shape the cultural interface” (McGregor et al., 2018, p. 13).

Allyship is Embedded in Action

Engaging in allyship is an emotional-laden process for many non-Indigenous and ally researchers. This is partially because allyship requires non-Indigenous scholars to step out of their academic and cultural comfort zones to be in a position of doing research over which they have no control (Aveling, 2013). An ally has to get off their privilege and be willing to commit to their vulnerability of making limited progress when researching in unfamiliar communities (Aveling, 2013). In my research work, navigating the recruitment process for community partners/participants often baffles me due to a shortage of responses, which can woefully cause delays in the research process. Securing support letters and clearance to conduct research among First Nation community partners has been particularly challenging, as they do not often respond to my outreach via email. Such non-response engenders my feelings of loneliness and rejection, as if my outsider status and lack of trust-building hinders collaboration with them.

Despite these negative emotions, a part of me questions whether the issue lies within how I approach them. After consulting with a local knowledge keeper at Algoma University, I was advised that the First Nation communities in Baawaating may perceive ‘time’ and event priorities differently than western perspectives that view time as a linear entity. This connects with Janca and Bullen (2003) who argue that the Indigenous concept of time may locate individuals within ‘time-circles,’ wherein events are prioritized based on their importance and hence, temporal closeness to the individual. Thus, time is not a linear concept but circular. I have then come to understand that conducting decolonizing research requires prioritizing what the Indigenous community considers important, rather than what I view as priority, and culturally appropriate ways to engage with community partners instead of relying on normative methods like email recruitment which I am used to.

Despite the discomfort of ally scholars, ongoing reflection about settler positionality needs to be reoriented toward acting up to confront discomfort in decolonizing research, which hold hostage settler researchers' commitment to shift away from their colonial gaze and act as an excuse for inaction (Aveling, 2013; Higgins et al., 2013). As ally researchers, our initial reflection should revolve around ensuring community partners the autonomy to self-determine, thereby avoiding the reproduction of colonial relations with our best intentions. Additionally, it is necessary for researchers to learn the ancestral teachings of the community before engaging in research. Anishinaabe communities in Baawaating, among many Indigenous communities across North America, hold the Seven Grandfather Teachings (Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility, and Wisdom) as principles for living, and researchers shall bear these teachings in mind to conduct research respectfully and transparently (Simpson, 2017). Research as a ceremony signifies an ongoing commitment to seek the guidance and stories of local knowledge keepers, which entails nurturing a positive connection with community partners and ensuring that research continues in a safe space for all individuals involved (Wilson, 2008).

Through my internship experience, I found that lack of entitlement to the local culture is not an excuse for ally scholars for inaction and perpetuating colonial traditions. Action is the cornerstone of making transformative social change in our communities (Tuck & Yang, 2012). It does not require one to rely on textbook knowledge, but rather necessitates humility, seeking advice when necessary, reflecting on one’s power as a researcher, and most importantly, actively participating in community events and gatherings that are enjoyable and thought-provoking. One may connect with community partners to share their research work and rationale behind it. Such engagement

piece is an essential aspect of living amongst peoples, and it should not be an arduous task at all. However, this does not imply that action is always right. Sometimes, one can inadvertently cross boundaries by being overly proactive without considering each other's capacity to enact decolonization efforts or the need for personal well-being. When community partners operate in silos, it is imperative to remain non-judgmental and receptive to their challenges and systemic factors leading to their conditions. Consequentially, researchers can stay creative in engaging and maintaining positive research relationships with the community.

At this point, I must admit that the Indigenous knowledge systems, which encompasses spiritual, holistic, metaphysical, and symbolic spheres of knowledge, is complicated for me as an international student to grapple with. Since I came from a national background where the notion of Indigeneity is romanticized as local ecological diversity and almost non-existent from a political standpoint (Luo, 2017), I may not have a deep spiritual connection with the concept of Indigeneity. Recognizing that limit, an essential part of my decolonizing mission is to formulate a critical consciousness of, and to create, real decolonizing action through my credential as a researcher against the colonial/ideological/socio-political structure and its psychological impacts. In an essay of Tuck and Yang (2012) where they carefully critique a settler statement "free your mind and the rest will follow," they argue that achieving individual emancipation through freeing the colonial mind does not ultimately create a good allyship, because the reflection process itself, is not a decolonizing act, and does nothing constructive against oppressive influences (p. 19). Settler narratives that intend to romanticize systemic colonial regimes as merely colonial mentality nimbly downplay the need to confront larger structural inequality including lack of governmental measures to fulfill TRC's Calls to Action and MMIWG Calls for Justice which requires ongoing advocacy and research to create policy recommendations.

Overall, being a migrant and an international student, I understand that my disembeddedness of Indigenous cultures is not an excuse for endorsing a 'perfect stranger' standpoint (Higgins et al., 2013). The pathway to decolonization as an ally not only involves liberating oneself from colonial mentality but also involves establishing stepwise goals that ultimately lead to collaborative action against a hegemonic status-quo targeting social change. However, a notable concern engendering ally scholars in moving from consciousness to action is their apprehension of using Indigenous paradigm and methods for decolonizing their research.

Working From an Indigenist Paradigm

During my journey as an ally, I often encounter this question: Can I utilize an Indigenist paradigm when working with Indigenous communities? This question leads me to think about cultural-specific values held by both Indigenous and Chinese societies. Leong et al. (2010) suggest that specific Chinese cultural aspects resonate with the relational facets of Indigenous values which are also pivotal in other collectivist cultures. This includes but is not limited to interconnectedness of all beings, reverence for ancestors, storytelling tradition, communal living, peace and harmony, and preservation of traditional knowledges. Like my peers, I was nourished under a cultural-historical context where *Guanxi* (relationality in Chinese) plays a dominant role in modern Chinese epistemology. Similar to the concept of continuous rebirth (promoting new lives), *Guanxi* taps into the spiritual, intuitive, and timeless features of the relationship network that focuses on "continuing relations and processes that unfold in time" (Babones, 2017, p. 8).

I was somehow hesitant to decide whether I should draw upon the Indigenist paradigm, despite the noticeable similarities between *Guanxi* and Indigenous relationality which makes it relatively easy for me as a Chinese to grasp Indigenous philosophies on a surface level. The underlying reasons that impede my decision boil down to my unconscious bias rooted in my Sinocentric or Chinese colonial thoughts, which then compels me to reevaluate *Guanxi* from a political and historical framework. One controversial issue around *Guanxi* lies in what constitutes it besides its literal definition (Han, 2020). Babones (2017), Han (2020), and Kris and Fang (2011) argue that *Guanxi*, when defined as a person's or an institution's social capital, could become a means of interpersonal connections that are used to maximize self-interests by establishing exploitative and hierarchical relationships. This trend is prevalent in modern China and is known as *zouhoumen* (i.e. use the back door) - a metaphorical representation of taking shortcuts through close relations to gain power and privilege in various institutions (Kris & Fang, 2011). Such tendency is also prevalent among many other vertical collectivist cultures, defined as societies with strong collectivist value and hierarchical dominance with rigid social statuses assigned to individuals to maintain societal stability (Hofstede, 2011).

Being a sojourner residing outside of China for nearly seven years, I have felt disconnected from the community I grew up in. However, I always search for peace and sense of community wherever I go, and I am fortunate to find these elements in Baawaating while doing community-based research. This experience helps me to reconnect with my own cultural roots and renew my sense of belonging. But as a non-Indigenous person from China, I cannot assert to hold the same lived experiences, historical struggles, and colonial contexts as minorities such as Tibetans, Mongolians, and Uyghurs, which requires me to undergo a deep reflection of power relations engendering my research act and my privilege as a member of majority group and someone enculturated in urban environments. The epistemology I have carried into my overseas experience was grounded in a sense of community belonging, but it lacks a deep connection to the land, tribal affiliations, and ancestral relationships. Such absence of land-based knowledges prevents me from applying my cultural and community-based lens in making sense of Anishinaabe knowledge or even claiming myself as an ‘insider.’

My fear of culturally appropriating land-based philosophies that are highly fluid and nuanced sometimes poses an obstacle for me to enact practices of decolonization. I know this barrier is not only limited to me but also affects Indigenous allies who wish to work from an Indigenist paradigm. It is because there is often limited and superficial knowledge for an ally to draw upon without grounding themselves in, or ‘coming to know’ the land, languages, and ancestral teachings rooted in the intergenerational spiritual connections (Broadhead & Howard, 2021).

In my research work, I often find myself hesitating to label any gathering as a ‘sharing circle’ without the availability of elders. Instead, I would name it as a focus group to avoid appropriating cultural terms. Similarly, when creating a consent form for study, I find it necessary to seek advice from local knowledge keepers to design alternative cultural protocols for consenting to a study, such as offering an Asemaa (tobacco), rather than relying solely on a universal protocol like obtaining a signature. These small nuances and considerations become imperative when conducting study from a decolonizing stance.

Nonetheless, it is important to note here that one may never truly do a research study appropriately for various reasons—Your teacher may be wrong themselves; the teachings from one community may be different from a neighbouring community just 5km away; your relationship-building with the community may be insufficient. As Haig-Brown (2010) points out, cultural appropriation can arise when individuals do not know what is truly appropriate when they adapt knowledges for their own expressive purposes. Given the difficulty of upholding appropriateness, admitting mistakes is not embarrassing, as it is nearly impossible to avoid offending anyone. However, it is a crucial lesson to be candid to undo the harms and remain respectful to peoples’ own perceptions of appropriateness and their own preferences to be represented (Haig-Brown, 2010).

As a non-Indigenous migrant, I hold no right to define or use the Indigenist paradigm, based on my current progress of allyship. I feel that I have not yet taken enough action to disrupt my privileged and extractive ways of thinking/doing despite writing my essay on it. I think that writing is a reflective process but not an action upon decolonization, even though it helps me recognize my unconscious bias and begin to do something about it (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 20). While writing may evoke critical consciousness among the readers, working from an Indigenist paradigm requires more than that. Ultimately, the Indigenist paradigm that aims to foster knowledge co-creation with communities must be defined based on mutual trust and equal relationships (Hart et al., 2017). Through my self-location journey, I came to acknowledge that Guanxi (relationality) and trust are separate concepts. I may establish Guanxi with Indigenous communities. Still, to situate myself fully in Indigenous cultures, it is the mutual trust that ultimately opens up the pathway for a deeper relationship. This trust-building, however, may require a life-long process of learning and self-reflection from the stories, sacred teachings, and land-based practices of Indigenous communities.

Conclusion

This position paper epitomizes the role of migrants in Indigenous allyship and challenges related to settler identity, cultural distance, and apprehension. Table 1 summarizes key recommendations from this article for ally scholars and migrants who are interested in allying with Indigenous communities. Engaging with Indigenous communities can help migrants connect with their own cultural roots, appreciate the sacredness of culture, gain awareness about own positionality, and navigate epistemological differences in making transformative changes.

I hope that this position paper may inspire more migrant researchers or students to acknowledge their decolonizing responsibilities as settlers, to disrupt colonial legacies in Canada and ‘white’ cloaks that shield settlers from guilt. Meanwhile, it is crucial to remain cognizant of the power dynamics at play and avoid appropriating voices beyond our own, as the intricate and fragile balance of settler-Indigenous relations often sways inadvertently.

The limitation of this paper is that my restricted community work experience does not allow this personal reflection to represent the nature of decolonizing research or working with Indigenous communities in general. My privilege of conducting research as an ally scholar may not be a shared attribute with other migrants. Thus, this paper calls for future international student/immigrant research to examine socio-cultural and acculturation factors that potentially influence one’s active citizenship development and proclivity to engage in Indigenous allyship.

Table 1

Suggestions for Indigenous Allyship Among Scholars and Migrants

Allyship is an ongoing journey requiring self-reflection, learning, humility, engagement, and resilience to discomfort.
An ally clearly defines realistic decolonization goals in consultation with Indigenous knowledge keepers.
Allyship is a way of life and character development, not just a set of methods.
An ally recognizes limits as an uninvited guest when working with Indigenous paradigms and seeks consultation when needed.
An ally avoids reverting back to inaction when making mistakes, but remains bravery, honesty, and humility as working to minimize the harms.
Inaction can perpetuate colonialism, while action may lead to cultural appropriation. Navigating between cultural appropriateness and appropriation is a crucial skill for an ally.
Allyship is embedded in action through trial and error, as consciousness is not a decolonizing act.
Migrants, while not responsible for colonialism, are accountable to it and should be cognizant of structural inequality and their subjectivity to avoid perpetuating colonialism.

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