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Academic "Centres", Epistemic Differences and Brain Circulation

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Academic "Centres," Epistemic Differences and Brain Circulation

| Abstract: | This paper investigates the incentives and challenges that shape how migrant academics engage with universities and local counterparts within their countries of origin. We focus specifically on the mobility of Asian-born faculty between Singapore, a fast-developing education hub in Southeast Asia, and their "home" countries within the region. Based on qualitative interviews with 45 migrant academics, this paper argues that while education hubs like Singapore increase the possibility of brain circulation within Asia, epistemic differences between migrant academics and home country counterparts make it difficult to establish long-term collaboration for research. Singapore institutions also look towards the West in determining how research work is assessed for tenure and promotion, encouraging Singapore-based academics to focus on networking with colleagues and peers based in the US and Europe rather than those based in origin countries. Such conditions undermine the positive impact of academic mobility between Singapore and surrounding countries within the region. |

Amidst increasing cross-border movement among highly skilled professionals, researchers

and policymakers have raised the question of how migrant academics can contribute to their

countries of origin when return is not a viable or immediate option. Moving away from the

brain drain debates of the 1970s, recent studies have argued that overseas scholars can still

contribute to their home communities through diaspora networks, sharing knowledge and

resources through international collaboration, short visits, and internet communication

(Meyer, 2001; Meyer and Wattiau, 2006; Davenport, 2004; Laudel, 2005). Such phenomenon

is often encapsulated in the term, *brain circulation,* where studies cite the breaking down of

boundaries among nations and the potential benefits brought by the short-term mobility of

highly educated workers to and from their countries of origin (Singh and Krishna, 2015:

302).

Yet, scholars have also cautioned against depicting the mobility of highly skilled

workers as continuously fluid, free of structural barriers that impede people's movement

(Chou 2014; Cohen, Duberley and Ravishankar 2015; Mosneaga and Winther 2013; Yeoh

and Huang 2011). In addition to policy and administrative barrier (Chou 2014), they argue

that highly skilled mobility, such as brain circulation, can also be "temporally and spatially

stickier" as migrants can become "locked into" particular places or develop attachments

which restrain movement (Williams, Balaz and Wallace 2004: 42). Existing studies have also

largely focused on the circulation of highly skilled professionals such as scientists, engineers,

and IT workers. Fewer have looked specifically at migrant academics and the role that higher

education institutions play in their engagement and disengagement with counterparts within

their countries of origin. While a number of studies have investigated the role of universities

in promoting *return* migration among overseas scholars (see Lee and Kim 2010; Wang, Li

and Li 2015), we know little about how academic environments, institutional cultures, and

practices of knowledge production shape the temporary circulation of overseas academics

within their home countries and their subsequent impact on local knowledge production.

This paper seeks to contribute to the extant literature on brain circulation in two ways.

First, we respond to Ackers' (2005) call for a more nuanced understanding of the "stickiness"

or "frictions" that impact how members of an academic diaspora choose to interact with

counterparts within their countries of origin. While we acknowledge that there are many

ways migrant academics can engage with home country institutions, we focus specifically on

brain circulation in the form of academic research collaboration. In particular, this paper

investigates how such engagements are shaped by epistemic cultures or the norms, structures,

and values that define how knowledge is created and, more importantly, recognized within

migrant academics' home and host country institutions (Knorr Cetina 1999). We also analyze

the institutional policies that shape such epistemic cultures, emphasizing how opportunities

for collaboration are affected by the specific standards that drive research expectations, the

manner by which institutions assess academic work, and the politics of tenure and promotion.

We argue that such factors are important aspects of academic work across all fields, yet

remain an understudied aspect of how we understand brain circulation today.

Second, we focus on the mobility of migrant faculty between Singapore, a rapidly

developing education hub, and their "home" countries in the surrounding Asian region.

Empirical research on brain circulation has tended to focus on academics' movement

between developing nations and traditional "centers" of knowledge production in the West.

Yet, the last few decades has seen the rapid development of Asian universities, where

governments have invested heavily in higher education. Singapore universities, in particular,

have emerged as major players within international knowledge networks, cementing the

country's status as an emerging education hub. This paper investigates whether countries like

Singapore raise the possibility of establishing new centres of knowledge production away

from the West, thereby encouraging the productive circulation of migrant academics within

Asia. This paper looks specifically at the opportunities and challenges for academic

collaboration between Singapore-based academics and counterparts within their home

countries, and how Singapore universities shape brain circulation between Singapore and

surrounding countries within the region.

BRAIN CIRCULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Early definitions of brain circulation refuted the notion that highly skilled workers would

remain overseas permanently, arguing that such migrants would eventually circulate back to

their home communities (Gaillard and Gaillard, 1997). Yet, recent studies have shown that in

reality, most highly educated professionals never return "home," choosing instead to settle

outside their countries of origin (Blachford and Zhang, 2014). As a result, researchers have

sought to understand whether highly skilled migrants can contribute to their home

communities from a distance, moving beyond the assumption that such "brains" are lost

when they leave national territories (Fahey and Kenway, 2010; Mahroum, Eldridge, and

Daar, 2006; Meyer, 2001; Saxenian, 2005). Such discourse has also permeated policy

discussions, not only among developing countries but wealthy nations competing in a so-

called knowledge-based economy (Cerna, 2016; Robertson, 2006). In particular,

policymakers emphasize the need for international collaboration between migrants and their

local counterparts, whether it be in the form of academic research, business ventures, or the

commercial development of innovative products (Edler, Fier and Grimpe, 2011; Xiang,

2011). Scholars have argued that successful brain circulation benefits migrants' host and

origin countries, promoting investment in local businesses and possibly providing

employment to local communities in both locations (Harvey 2008; Saxenian 2005).

In the case of migrant academics, governments have launched a wide range of

programs, providing research funding, institutional support, and opportunities for short-term

visits (Blachford and Zhang, 2014; Xiang, 2011). Researchers argue that migrant academics often express a desire to help improve teaching and research in universities within their home countries, and suggested that well-planned programs should provide them with the opportunity to do so effectively (Cohen, Duberley and Ravishankar, 2015). For example, Blachford and Zhang's (2014) research shows how Chinese Canadian academics work to support knowledge production within China by doing research related to Chinese issues, instituting joint research projects between Canadian universities and counterparts in China, and recruiting Chinese students into their graduate programs. Studies have also shown how collaboration and networks with co-ethnic counterparts living overseas enhance academics' research productivity, thereby benefiting local knowledge production (Scellato, Franzoni and Stephan, 2015).

Yet, scholars have also cautioned against an overly optimistic interpretation of how academics overseas can contribute to their countries of origin. Similar to the issues besetting return migration, migrant faculty who wish to engage in collaborative projects or short-term visits within their countries of origin can also face a lack of support from local state officials, fears of persecution, or frustrating bureaucracies within local institutions (Teferra, 2005; Yeoh and Eng 2008). Non-migrant academics can also become resentful of the benefits that their overseas counterparts receive from the state, thus fuelling possible conflict between local and international collaborators (Altbach, 2014; Author, 2011).

At the same time, researchers have questioned how states demarcate who "belongs" to the diaspora, and how migrant academics define their relationship to their countries of origin. Harvey's (2008) study of British and Indian scientists show that while individuals may maintain contact with industry counterparts in the UK and India, such connections do not necessarily translate into significant investments in their origin countries. In a study of Australian academics overseas, Fahey and Kenway (2010: 572) discuss how their participants

actually "shade in and out" of feeling any sense of responsibility to Australia, indicating that

any desire to contribute to the home country largely depends on a particular time or context

in a person's life course.

BRAIN CIRCULATION WITHIN THE GLOBAL SPACE OF ACADEMIA

Scholars have argued that compared other highly skilled migrants, academics and researchers

are more likely to express an attachment to a professional network of colleagues, rather than

a national or ethnic identity (Colic-Peisker, 2010; Fahey and Kenway, 2010). Mahroum

(2000) argues that these networks form *global spaces,* often organized at the level of a

particular profession, discipline, or technology. While global spaces are not grounded in a

particular place, they contain "poles of gravity" or "centres" where there is a concentration of

institutions accorded a high level of prestige. Philip Altbach (2006: 124) echoes the same

framework, defining academic "centres" as institutions with the funding, facilities, and

qualified staff to pursue high quality research and teaching. In contrast, higher education

institutions at the "periphery" are often found in nations whose research and teaching

programs would benefit greatly from the "expertise" of citizens who have studied or worked

in these centers for knowledge production.

Existing studies on brain circulation (as well as brain drain in general) have largely

portrayed the mobility of migrant academics as a movement towards these "centres," often

located in places like Western Europe and the US. Here, they seek better training, credentials,

and recognition among their peers (Kim, 2010; Qiang, 2016; Robertson, 2006). In contrast,

fewer studies have investigated the role of "aspiring centers" like Singapore (Altbach, 2006),

where local universities are rapidly closing the gaps in global university rankings where

institutions at the centre lead. Institutions of higher learning in Singapore also possess better

resources and engage in more quality research in comparison to many of those at the

periphery. This gap in the literature is concerning given the growing number of emerging

education hubs, which are neither migrants' origin countries nor the country where they obtained their graduate education.

Why Singapore? Brain circulation from the aspiring centre

An island nation with no natural resources, Singapore has invested heavily in its higher education system, developing its local universities into key sites for knowledge production and innovation. Part of this development has been the aggressive recruitment of highly qualified faculty, making Singapore a major player in the competition for academic talent (Ng, 2013). Singapore institutions have been particularly successful in attracting doctoral graduates from some of the most prestigious universities in the world, offering generous compensation packages and research funding that rival those offered by Western countries. To date, foreign-born scholars account for more than 60 percent of tenure-track and tenured faculty within the country (Paul and Long, 2016; Gopinathan and Lee, 2011).

Migrant academics in Singapore not only bring their knowledge assets but also personal networks, raising the possibility of new opportunities for brain circulation within the Asian region. In many ways, the presence of such active collaboration networks would indicate a positive move towards Singapore becoming its own "centre" of knowledge production, no longer reliant on ties to prestigious institutions in the US and Europe. At their current state, Singapore universities are well-positioned to establish such collaboration networks with its neighbors. It is important to note that a significant number of Singapore-based academics come from nearby countries such as China, India, and other Southeast Asian nations like Malaysia and Thailand (Paul and Long, 2016). Many of these scholars travel back to their home communities as often as several times a year – a luxury made possible by Singapore's geographic location and its status as a regional transportation hub. This paper provides a preliminary investigation as to whether such conditions promote brain circulation and what factors impede or undermine such opportunities.

METHOD

This paper is based on qualitative interviews with 45 migrant academics (17 tenured and 28 tenure-track) who were born and grew up in countries geographically close to Singapore, but spent considerable time in Europe or North America either working in academic positions or pursuing a doctorate and/or postdoc (see Table 1). [1] This sampling decision reflects the shift in the demographics of migrant scholars. While earlier studies have tended to portray migrant faculty as a group of Western expatriates (see Cohen 1977; Hindman 2009), recent years have shown a growing proportion of migrant faculty and researchers who were born outside the West and pursued postgraduate study in North America or Western Europe (see Colic-Peisker 2010; Lawrence et al 2014). We define "migrant academics" as faculty members who were not born in Singapore but moved to the country to take on tenure track positions within its universities.

We interviewed a total of 17 women and 28 men, all employed at three of Singapore's major universities (the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Techological University, and Singapore Management University). The research team recruited interviewees by sending invitation emails to faculty members from two major fields: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM); and the Social and Behavioral Sciences. We then asked interviewees to connect us to other colleagues who might be interested in participating in the project ("snowball" sampling). To supplement this recruitment method, team members also promoted the project at university workshops and events, distributing fliers with project details to interested faculty members. Tables 1 and 2 show the breakdown of the sample by country of origin and by discipline (STEM, Social Science, Humanities, and Professional Schools).

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 here]

While scholars have used "brain circulation" to describe a range of activities, this project looks specifically at research collaborations, joint projects, and the sharing of knowledge and resources between migrant academics in Singapore and local counterparts within their countries of origin. Interview questions centered on participants' decision to come to Singapore, their work experience within Singapore universities, their research activities both within and outside Singapore, and their academic collaborations. Interviewees also reflected on their decision to settle in Singapore instead of returning to their home countries, often ruminating on whether there was a possibility of permanent return in the future.

While the time spent overseas varied widely, participants loosely referred to their countries of origin as "home," mainly defined as a place where they grew up, and, more importantly, where parents and siblings remain. As such, we refer to the "home country" in this way as well, while recognizing that scholars have problematized how this term is defined.[2] We also recognize that individual connections to "home" differ among our interviewees. Our study is limited in that we do not fully explore migrant academics' individual identities and how this might shape how they view their role in the development of their countries of origin. Rather, we focus on how they choose to engage with professional counterparts in their home countries, regardless of whether they still feel connected to their home countries or not. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo, a qualitative software.

CIRCULATING CLOSER TO HOME: POTENTIALS FOR COLLABORATION

The majority of migrant faculty in this study saw Singapore as a place that allowed them to be closer to aging parents and siblings, while still pursuing their careers in highly ranked and well-resourced institutions. Although many of our interviewees had considered returning to their home communities, they felt that doing so would compromise the research work they had begun as graduate students. Singapore then served as an ideal "middle ground" where

migrant academics could be "close enough" to their families, while working in a university

that allowed them to pursue their academic careers (Authors, forthcoming).

Yet, their decision to remain overseas did not mean that interviewees had no interest

in engaging with local counterparts in their countries of origin. Most of the migrant faculty in

this study had friends and former classmates who continued to work in higher education

institutions within their home communities. In some of these places, state agencies have also

increased support for research, thus improving local facilities and funding opportunities far

beyond what migrant faculty had before they left to pursue their doctorates overseas. Many of

our interviewees from the social sciences and humanities also researched topics that involved

their home countries. As such, working with colleagues rooted in local contexts was an ideal

way to keep up with issues within their areas of interest. As noted by one Assistant Professor

from Japan,

> I wanted to move closer to Japan. I started doing more policy-oriented work and my
>
> research is about Japan so I wanted to start working with, you know, people in Japan,
>
> academics and NGOs. I thought about Australia but it was a bit too far away from
>
> Japan, and you know, Singapore, it's close enough to Japan.

Other academics felt that collaboration with colleagues in their home countries would allow

them to broaden their research areas and provide better opportunities to gather data. One

Assistant Professor from China explained that this was especially advantageous for her work,

which required large samples of survey respondents,

> If I have more collaboration with China, my productivity will actually be higher.
>
> Getting participants is so hard in Singapore but in China, it's so easy (laughs). They
>
> can just collect all the data, few thousands in one day or one week…their population
>
> is very huge and I think that [the consent requirements] in China is not as strict as
>
> Singapore.

Other interviewees echoed this sentiment, arguing that it would be difficult if all academics in

Singapore limited their data-gathering within the nation's boundaries. Aside from

Singapore's small population, its unique history also made it an exceptional case – one that is

sometimes difficult to market to academic journals seeking more general theoretical

contributions building from larger data samples. Working with home country institutions then

offered an opportunity for comparative work, or at least access to a larger population of

research participants.

Yet, despite recognizing the advantages of working with academics and institutions in

their home countries, the majority of our interviewees admitted that they rarely engaged in

such forms of collaboration. While they travelled to home regularly, few of these visits

translated to meaningful exchanges in terms of joint research projects, co-authored papers, or

even teaching opportunities. Some of the migrant faculty in our study served as invited

speakers for local events and organized conference panels with friends working in home

country institutions. Yet, they admitted that they tended to avoid becoming involved in more

long-term collaboration. Some of the reasons for their limited academic engagement reflected

issues discussed in previous studies: repressive government policies, local university politics,

and a lack of long-term support for "cutting edge" research. For migrant faculty from poorer

nations such as Indonesia and the Philippines, available facilities and funding was an

especially difficult problem, with most of their home country universities unable to access

international journals. In this paper, we highlight how differences in the cultures of

knowledge production also shape migrant faculty's engagement with colleagues and

institutions within their home countries. Such disjunctures involve epistemic differences in

defining the purpose and outcomes of research, and the standards that drive tenure and

promotion within universities.

EPISTEMIC DIFFERENCES: REDEFINING THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

In seeking home country collaboration, one challenge migrant faculty often encountered was

finding local colleagues who shared similar "priorities" in defining the objectives of their

research work. Interviewees shared that, while there was no shortage of local scholars willing

to collaborate with them, they often had different ideas of what the outcomes of their research

should be. One Assistant Professor from India recalled a previous collaboration with a

colleague in India, whose research approach was more driven towards solving problems for

practitioners on the ground,

> Actually it's easy to build the collaboration but the thing is, it's hard to translate into a
>
> tangible project with *Singapore values* [emphasis added]…You know, the kind of
>
> journals in which [university administrators] expects us to publish is pretty high in
>
> terms of the standard. But [colleagues in India], they don't care. This colleague of
>
> mine, she is the dean of the Business School there. She is very much into how
>
> relevant is my research to managers. Given so many companies, she would pick some
>
> of their problems, convert that into a research statement, and then work on it. That is
>
> the kind of approach she had. Many of these times, that is not publishable. We learn a
>
> lot but it doesn't eventually turn into a paper.

Interviewees interpreted such differences as a reflection of the expectations that their local

counterparts faced from both the university and government agencies within their home

countries. On the one hand, limited state funding meant that academic research should have a

clear and immediate benefit to society, beyond academic publications. The Assistant

Professor who shared the previous quote was quick to clarify that she valued the more

"applied" research that her colleague did because it allowed her to reach out to practitioners

and made more of an impact on the industrial settings she studied. However, she also felt that

continuing on such collaborations required her to "play a different game" from the more

theoretical work she was trained to do in her PhD. As such, she chose not to develop the

collaboration further, saying that she did not want to force her local colleagues to adapt her standards for research and "do things they don't want to do."

A number of interviewees also noted that few of their home country institutions required academics to establish themselves internationally – a situation made more apparent by a general lack of access to international journals. As a result, many academics based in countries neighboring Singapore tended to focus mainly on domestic issues, without consulting the latest publications in their research areas. One professor from Malaysia shared that, while research produced by Malaysia-based scholars remained relevant to local problems, such studies were too "insular" and out of date with current scientific trends. An Associate Professor from Vietnam echoed this observation, noting that due to a lack of access to scientific journals, Vietnam-based academics often getting "stuck" in projects that other scientists had already done. He explained,

> They make compounds that nobody needs. They aren't aware that all these things
>
> have been done. I mean [one group] was doing this anti-tumor compound that
>
> thousands of scientists have already investigated. What you can do there? You are
>
> basically competing with all these big groups who have so much experience there. As
>
> a newcomer, you don't join them. So that's why they need my assistance --- I suggest
>
> them something to do, share some of the ideas to them.

In many cases, such limitations did not adversely affect local academics' careers within their institutions. As noted by one Assistant Professor from Korea, most of his former professors in Korea published mostly in Korean journals and often did not understand the long process of getting work published in a highly ranked journal. He attributed such differences to a "strong local culture" in Korean academia that made it harder for him to engage with local colleagues. In this sense, he found it easier to collaborate with his professors and former

graduate school friends in the US. He noted, "Singapore to Korea, geographically it's a

nearby, but still probably for me it's a [bigger step]."

As such, the migrant academics who did engage in collaboration within their home

countries often relied on "like-minded" local colleagues – fellow scholars who also obtained

their degrees in universities in the US or UK and were eager to continue their academic

practices as they have been trained. One Assistant Professor from the Philippines admitted

that he only collaborates with one faculty member in his alma mater, a fellow Fulbright

scholar who also obtained her degree from an American university. "There are very few

people who do media research in the Philippines," he explained. "The culture itself is not

very conducive for research. So even when I was looking for a job, we were already making

plans to do research together and I was very excited about that." Another Assistant Professor

from India has maintained an active collaboration with a former graduate school classmate

who returned to India after obtaining his degree. "It really depends on the person, right. I

have known Dr. K for ten years now so I can work with him. We talk on phone and via email

almost every day. We have the same work ethic and we complement each other."

In many ways, migrant academics' search for like-minded colleagues meant looking

for local scholars who shared the same research goals and priorities, despite the existing

differences in the way scholars in their home countries defined and went about research

work. In lamenting the academic "culture" of their home country institutions, migrant faculty

highlighted the difference between the type of work they did as PhD graduates trained in the

West and the more locally-oriented scholarship within their home countries. Migrant

academics in this study were driven towards publications in highly ranked journals and

pursued topics that they felt were theoretically relevant in their general academic fields. In

contrast, many of their local counterparts focused on problem-based research within local

contexts and not all were willing to go through the long process of publishing in top

international journals. These epistemic differences thus discouraged brain circulation from Singapore to migrant academics' home countries, with few migrant academics willing to "translate" their research objectives in line with the values and priorities of local knowledge production.

However, not all interviewees in this study saw epistemic disjunctures as a major impediment to collaborations with home country institutions. In some places, increasing pressures to develop local universities had actually strengthened the research culture among local academics, increasing the number of local scholars also driven towards international publications. Such situations heightened the opportunity for joint research projects and opportunities to share both knowledge and resources. Yet, the migrant academics in our study remained hesitant to engage in such activities. The following section discusses how such reticence is partly due to current policies for promotion and tenure within Singapore universities, which inadvertently discourage academic collaboration between Singapore and surrounding countries.

PRESSURES OF PROMOTION: RECOGNIZING ACADEMIC WORK

While Singapore's geographic location allowed Asian-born academics to move closer to their home countries, Singapore universities, like other "aspiring centers" in the global knowledge economy, adapted the academic norms and standards of prestigious institutions in the West (Kim 2010: 588). Eager to emulate established centres in the global space of academia, Singapore institutions looked towards highly ranked institutions in the West in assessing the work of their faculty, requiring publications in Western journals and university presses, and promoting links to well-known universities based in the US and UK. University administrators also implemented a tenure and promotion system based on their interpretation of the requirements of American higher education institutions, where junior faculty were expected to demonstrate substantial capability in research and teaching within a time period

of six to seven years. Like many other universities, international publications carried a heavy

weight, and individuals unable to publish enough before going up for tenure did not have

their contracts renewed or extended.

This academic environment and structure undermined brain circulation in two ways.

First, untenured migrant academics were less inclined to do research in "new" areas or

projects that would not immediately lead to journal publications. Such "risky" endeavors

included exploring research collaboration with their home country institutions, where

working with local scholars might require more time and effort. For one Associate Professor

from China, this extra work was the reason why he held off from collaborating with Chinese

colleagues until he obtained tenure in 2014. He explained,

> I have quite a lot of friends in China…They always remind me to be there, to attend
>
> seminars or collaborate with them. But before I get my tenure, I actually am not very
>
> active in this one because I don't see how it adds any value to my CV or to my case.
>
> I don't want to spread too thin because it will actually damage your development
>
> here. You have to spend a lot of time to go to China, you have to supervise students,
>
> you have to do a lot of things…Collaboration can help you get more resources, you
>
> can get more publications and do more interesting things. But before this year, I was
>
> not very active on that.

As noted by this interviewee, home country collaborations could provide many benefits such

as additional resources and opportunities to learn new things. Yet, given the limited time to

build their CVs for tenure, many interviewees felt it was more strategic to either focus on

projects rooted in Singapore or continue publishing with their PhD and postdoc advisers.

Untenured faculty members were also well aware that by the time they came up for

promotion, university administrators were likely to send their dossiers to anonymous

reviewers based in Western institutions. As such, there was more incentive to network or

collaborate with colleagues in American or British institutions or what some interviewees had

dubbed as "mainstream" academia. As explained by an Associate Professor from India,

> You have to keep in touch with as many people as you can, because eventually they
>
> require six people to write letters for you. These are people outside. It's not going to
>
> be people here. They're looking for people outside, so you really have to be keeping
>
> in touch with people in the US, people in Europe.

As such, attaining tenure provided migrant academics with more space to explore projects

with home country institutions. Tenure took away the pressure to publish and provided

academics with more time to finally begin more "exploratory" projects. One Associate

Professor from Vietnam shared that he often gets emails from Vietnamese scholars seeking

advice or possible opportunities for collaboration. None of these invitations provide much

benefit for his academic career, yet his tenured status gives him the space to "help" local

counterparts develop scientific projects. He shared,

> There was this woman from [Vietnamese university] who applied for [a post-doc
>
> position]. It was clear to me that she will never become my post-doc, because of the
>
> lack of qualification. But then I applied for some sort of collaboration funds for
>
> maybe just 5,000 dollars. I said, I invite you to come to my lab to do something. You
>
> bring your compounds and then we see what we can do. And so in the end she spent
>
> two months here…It's for them, actually. It's not for me. Maybe the only thing I get
>
> out of it is a few travels to Vietnam.

Yet, for some migrant academics, tenure does not necessarily ensure freedom from other

university expectations. Similar to other universities, faculty in Singapore were also

encouraged to bring in research money for their respective departments – a requirement that

is often not possible with overseas funding. As such, migrant academics were less likely to

collaborate with counterparts in their home countries even if the project was likely to

translate to good publications. One Associate Professor from China explained,

> The university has to recognize the funding. Does the money trail go into the
>
> university? Normally, research money cannot cross borders. That's the rules
>
> normally, lah. So even if I get the money from China, I have to spend in China. I have
>
> to recruit students in China using that money. The student can do something for me --
>
> - I mean, I can write a paper using my [Singapore] affiliation. It's good for my career
>
> but for overall career, it isn't good. For the university, I don't think they will see it as
>
> a benefit.

The expectations outlined in this section indicate that while there may be migrant academics

eager to explore collaborative work with scholars and institutions within their home

countries, policies and expectations within their host universities make such work a risky

endeavor. As such, interviewees without tenure were more likely to limit such activities until

they had more job security. Meanwhile, those with tenure often weighed the benefits of such

collaboration against the other expectations of senior faculty such as the need to bring in

grants and take on more administrative tasks. Whether intentional or not, these policies then

encourage migrant academics to maintain ties to their colleagues in the *West,* where

collaborative links are seen as more likely to lead to higher visibility in "mainstream"

academia.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the stickiness or frictions (Ackers, 2005) that can impede brain

circulation among migrant academics. Focusing on the mobility of Asian-born faculty based

in Singapore, our findings indicate that migrant academics frequently move to and from their

countries of origin, maintaining contact with counterparts within local universities. Yet, few

of our interviewees actively engaged in research collaboration with these scholars. This paper

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investigates two significant reason for such disengagement: epistemic differences in terms of academic priorities within the home country and unfavorable policies within host institutions that discourage migrant academics from collaborating with home country counterparts. As such, migrant academics were more likely to devote their time and energy towards developing links to established centers of knowledge in the West, even if competent collaborators exist within home country institutions as well.

It is important to note that while tenure and promotion within Singapore universities are largely patterned against the standards of prestigious institutions in the US, such policies do not indicate a deliberate attempt to discourage brain circulation within the region. In fact, state funding agencies have increasingly encouraged Singapore-based academics to conduct research with a focus on Asia, providing funding opportunities that would otherwise be more difficult to attain in the West. Migrant faculty in this study also recognized the benefits that collaborative projects with home country counterparts would bring, citing the importance of sharing resources, networking with scholars on the ground, and doing more comparative research. We also do not intend to depict academics within migrants' home countries as unable to produce important knowledge and research. Interviewees in this study often emphasized the value of their local colleagues' research, the outcomes of which often have more immediate implications for pressing social issues.

Rather, this paper emphasizes how geographic location and frequent mobility are not enough to ensure the more productive circulation of migrant academics within the region. In a global hierarchy of higher education institutions, epistemic differences and conflicting assessments of academic work create a gap between migrant academics and their home country counterparts that many find difficult to overcome. Migrant academics trained in Western institutions adapt epistemic practices and values that may not coincide with counterparts within home country institutions; meanwhile, global standards for university

rankings and prestige continue to favor networks and publications in venues based in

established centres in the US and Europe. In many ways, these limitations demonstrate how

the powerful status of highly ranked Western institutions is reinforced, despite the

development of aspiring centres of higher education such as Singapore. Promoting brain

circulation and active collaboration networks between Singapore and its neighboring

countries means allowing academics to adopt different epistemic values for research and

recognizing research work beyond the usual standards that have defined academic standards

for tenure in well-known and established US institutions. Such issues remain understudied in

the current discussions surrounding the mobility of academics and knowledge workers, as

well as their implications for their countries of origin.

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[1] This paper is part of an ongoing project on the migration decisions and experiences of migrant scientists and academics in Singapore. The research team interviewed a total of 80 foreign academics currently working in Singapore. Aside from the interviews included in this study, research participants originate from countries such as the US, UK, France, Germany, and Spain.

[2] Migration scholars have studied issues of integration, belonging, and identity, using a more critical analysis of what the "home country" means to different immigrant groups (see Ahmed 1999; Espiritu 2003; Ralph 2009)

Table 1. Interview Participants' Countries of Origin

Country of Origin	
China	13
India	11
Malaysia	4
Taiwan	4
Philippines	3
Thailand	3
Japan	3
Indonesia	2
Korea	1
Vietnam	1
Total:	45

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Table 2. Interview Participants' Academic Disciplines

Discipline		
STEM		22
Social Science		23
	Total:	45