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CHOOSING HOME: INTERNATIONAL PUSHES AND PULLS
FOR MALAYSIAN ALUMNI OF U.S. GRADUATE PROGRAMS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
Pauline Chhooi

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Beth Goldstein, Associate Professor
of Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation

Lexington, Kentucky

2013

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

CHOOSING HOME: INTERNATIONAL PUSHES AND PULLS FOR MALAYSIAN ALUMNI OF U.S. GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Malaysians' journeys to pursue graduate education in the U.S. generate more than just degree attainment. This dissertation looks at how experiences in the U.S., both in graduate school and in the workplace, influenced highly educated Malaysians, especially in their exploration of push and pull factors that influence their decisions to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia. This study focuses on twenty-two participants comprised of those who have returned to Malaysia, those who are working in the U.S. on non-immigrant visas, those who became Permanent Residents and those who are naturalized U.S. citizens.

The first major finding demonstrates that decisional turning points emerged mainly based upon national policies and employment opportunities prompted by the high demand for talented human capital. Such turning points are crucial telling moments of *when* individuals make decisions. The second major finding is that push and pull factors -- which include economic conditions and opportunities, quality of life, social justice and freedom perspectives, as well as social network/ social capital -- are assessed through the comparative views acquired between living in Malaysia and in the U.S. The third major finding is that the challenges and experiences participants encountered in the U.S. prompted the formation of transnationalism, wherein their identities, behaviors and values are not limited by the location in which they live. They use a dual frame of reference to evaluate their experiences in the U.S. and the continuous relationships with their family and communities in Malaysia.

Understanding the notion of transnationalism in the process of individuals' decision making could help states develop policies that promote brain circulation. Policies that support this global mobility of the highly educated and skilled workforce would not just benefit those nations that send and receive students for higher education enrollment. Because 1) the knowledge economy demands the global flow of highly educated workers and 2) people who study transnationally develop a flexible sense of identity and location, policies that enable international mobility for brain circulation are significant for all nations.

KEYWORDS: Push and Pull, Brain Circulation, Transnationalism, Higher Education, Malaysian Graduate Students

Pauline Chhooi

6/4/2013

CHOOSING HOME: INTERNATIONAL PUSHES AND PULLS
FOR MALAYSIAN ALUMNI OF U.S. GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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Date

Dedicated to...

My late grandmother, who taught me compassion,
and my parents who continuously encourage me to find my passion.

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My research would not have been successful without the contributions from my participants both in Malaysia and in the U.S., whose real names are not used to protect their confidentiality. I thank you, from the bottom of my heart -- for your voice, enthusiasm, and time in sharing with me some of your innermost thoughts and feelings, which helped me to develop such a meaningful academic project.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The journey to pursue a graduate degree in a foreign country might trigger more than just the attainment of that foreign degree. This dissertation looks at how higher education abroad may influence the immigration of the highly educated individuals, explores the push and pull factors for remaining in the host country or returning to their home country, and the implications for the government and individuals. In particular, the findings of this dissertation provide insight into how individual decisions to remain or return are influenced by their evolving sense of belonging and social construction of identity, and how these identities evolved through time and place.

Increased opportunities for international migration of highly educated and highly skilled individuals across international borders are made possible due to the high demand for talented human capital. International migration has further accelerated with better technology in the forms of modern transportation as well as improved communication tools that enable people and information to move around and communicate with each other rapidly in the globalized world. As stated by Mahroum (2000), the brain drain phenomenon, a shortage of skills and a lack of career opportunities are issues that worry policy makers in government, academia and industry. These issues may pose problems for one country but may actually solve other problems for another, depending on the perspectives from which the issues are viewed. While this dissertation acknowledges the significance of policy makers, its focus is on how individuals who are the highly educated, as denoted by a graduate degree and/or terminal degree, choose a place to live after they completed their graduate education away from their home country.

1.2. Background

1.2.1. International higher education

The pursuit of higher education in a foreign country can create a pathway for students to immigrate. Cross-national student mobility is often a channel to skilled migration, especially for students who earn graduate degrees such as master's and doctoral degrees. The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, a think tank based in Britain, finds that the United States is the most popular destination for international students to pursue a degree (Jaschik, 2007). Other popular countries include Britain, Australia, Germany, France, Japan, Canada and New Zealand (Jaschik, 2007). The Observatory's data also showed that some of these popular countries draw students from a broad range of countries while others have a narrow range. Categorized as "major players" or the countries that have the broadest range of students from different countries, are the U.S., Britain and Australia; the "middle powers" are Germany and France; and "evolving destinations" include Japan, Canada and New Zealand (Jaschik, 2007). In addition, there are also three "emerging contenders," Malaysia, Singapore and China. The data also showed that the top source countries for international students include India, China, Morocco, and South Korea (Jaschik, 2007). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) documents that the students from China are mostly in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the U.S. (OECD, 2011, p. 328). These destination countries have systems that enable the immigration of international students (OECD, 2011).

1.2.2. Higher education in the United States

The majority of the international students in the U.S. come from Asia. In the Open Doors' Report on International Educational Exchange prepared by the Institute of International Education (IIE) there are 588, 013 international students in academic year 2010-2011 enrolled in colleges and universities across the U.S. (Institute of International

Education, 2012). This number includes 291,439 undergraduate and 296,574 graduate students. According to that report, the top three leading countries of origin for international students in 2010-2011 are China (n=157,558), India (n=103,895) and South Korea (n=73,351) (IIE, 2012). These three countries make up 46 percent of the total international enrollments in U.S. higher education institutions; Canada, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia and Japan each had approximately three to four percent of the total international student population. All together, these seven countries of origin represented 60 percent of the total international students enrolled in the U.S. (IIE, 2012).

1.2.3. Reasons for studying abroad

People pursue graduate education for many reasons, to the extent that some even resign from a full time job and leave the comfort of their home country to go to a foreign country to pursue a graduate degree. One reason may be to gain experience working abroad in a more advanced and competitive environment. They expect this experience to improve their employment prospects whether in their home country or elsewhere in the world. Another reason is that students have a wider array of choices in academic programs and more opportunities for admission to universities abroad as compared to what is available in their home countries.

In addition, students may also find good sources of funding such as assistantships, fellowships, research grants, and scholarships especially for graduate studies in the U.S. universities. The availability of advanced research opportunities, support facilities, renowned professors and the reputation of the university are also some of the key determinants that students go abroad to pursue a graduate degree. Graduate assistantships are usually tied to work and research of one's graduate program, and will enable the graduate student to gain more knowledge through the research and work related to that assistantship, while in graduate school. Moreover, employers may also prefer foreign trained graduates, which indicate that employers' perception of foreign graduates that they are of better quality (Quah, Nasrudin, Guok, & Ignatius, 2009) and

this will influence what university and where one would want to pursue their higher education. The reputation of one's degree, program, professor, or university could influence her career path and future employment opportunities in the home country or anywhere in the world. Therefore the graduate degrees that come from the more reputable American universities may also be one of the reasons students choose to study in the U.S. According to the World University Rankings 2012-2013 among the top ten universities in the world, five of them are in the U.S. while the other five are in the United Kingdom (QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, n. d.). Moreover, the policy that allows international students in the U.S. to work part-time on campus while going to school seems to be an attractive prospect for many students, as some part-time jobs may be a channel to a full time and permanent employment, and subsequently may lead to permanent residency and citizenship in the U.S. if they have that opportunity and if they choose that route.

Hobsons, a student recruitment and enrollment management company, conducted a study that looks at reasons students study abroad (Redden, 2007). It involved approximately 28,000 prospective students from all over the world in a survey that was administered in 2006. The survey asked the prospective students to identify some of the major reasons they wish to study abroad, their perceptions of various English-speaking destinations and why some places are more appealing, what their expectations are, and the major concerns they have (Redden, 2007). The results from this survey highlighted some of the major reasons students study abroad -- the opportunities for careers and working experience abroad, the impression that the standard of education abroad is much more superior, the strength of the education system and career preparation, more attractive lifestyle, and ease of obtaining student visa (Redden, 2007). On the other hand, the cost of living and cost of tuition and fees were the most common stumbling blocks cited as reasons why students do not choose to study abroad, followed by concerns about obtaining student visas (Redden, 2007).

1.2.4. Malaysian students in the United States

Advanced study provides an avenue for Malaysian students to leave Malaysia to study in higher institutions abroad. Malaysians study in a foreign university for some of the variety of reasons discussed above, including having access to quality education and a wider array of choices in academic programs, and also, gaining academic, work and life experiences in a foreign country. And as discussed by Redden (2007), studying in the universities abroad gives the impression that the education attained is of higher standard, the career preparation is better, and the lifestyle in a foreign country is more attractive.

Malaysia is one country experiencing significant movement of students across international borders. Many students who enroll in local private Malaysian colleges have the opportunity via transfer and twinning programs, to complete their degrees abroad in countries such as Australia, Germany, United Kingdom, and the U.S. Others complete a first degree in Malaysia and then turn to international education for their graduate and professional degrees. According to the Open Doors report 2011, Malaysia was one of the top 20 countries whose undergraduate and graduate students studied in higher education institutions in the U.S. in 2010-2011, with an enrollment of 6,735 (IIE, 2012). The IIE reported that there were 4,622 undergraduates and 1,413 graduate students from Malaysia in the U.S. higher education institutions in the academic year 2010-2011, an increase of 12.8% (n=4,097) and 0.6% (n=1,405) respectively, from the previous year. The overall enrollment also included 105 non-degree students and 595 students on Optional Practical Training (OPT) in the U.S., an option available to students to work in the U.S. upon graduation from the higher institutions in the U.S. (IIE, 2012).

The education, knowledge and skills attained during graduate studies in the U.S. are crucial for the growth and development of their home countries. Yet, many graduates, especially those with doctoral degrees, are likely to remain in the developed countries like the U.S. where they studied and attained their degree (Castles & Miller, 2003, p. 171). When these graduate students choose not to return home after completing

their studies, they contribute to the problem of lost highly educated human capital in the developing countries from where they originate. After graduation, their decision to work and remain in the U.S. may be considered a drain or loss on the resources of Malaysia. Indeed, this is a loss for Malaysia since these individuals' primary and secondary public education have been paid by the Malaysian government through taxes contributed by Malaysian citizens. Yet, if these students choose to remain in the U.S. to work after they completed their graduate studies, Malaysia may not be able to reap the benefits of the knowledge and skills gained through their university and work training in a developed country like the U.S. As a result, the non-returning Malaysian-born migrants, especially with master's, doctoral and terminal professional degrees, may lead to shortages in the highly educated and highly skilled workforce in Malaysia.

On the other hand, emigration after advanced degree study is not guaranteed, so international study may actually reverse the brain drain phenomenon, and may cultivate the formation of human capital and develop intellectual growth for the developing source countries (Mountford, 1997). In other words, not everyone in Malaysia with an undergraduate degree will have the chance, interest, money, or option to further their graduate education. Moreover, not all Malaysians who have attained their master's, doctoral or terminal professional degrees in the U.S. are guaranteed to find a career opportunity and visa sponsorship that enable them to remain in the U.S. And some of those who have the career opportunity and relevant visa sponsorship to remain in the U.S. may not want to remain in the U.S. due to circumstances that revolve around their lives at that given time. Those Malaysians who have attained graduate education and training in the U.S. and choose to return to Malaysia, whether immediately after their graduation or after a period of time working in the U.S., will contribute to the intellectual human capital and development of Malaysia.

Highly educated individuals may not stay put in a place permanently. In fact, they may be quite mobile because they are in demand in many parts of the world as countries want the best talent to sustain a competitive edge in the global knowledge

economy. Moreover, studies have shown that individuals are more likely to immigrate when they are highly educated (Carrington & Detragiache, 1999). Their mobility denotes cross-border flow of knowledge, with different consequences for both the country which they come from and also the country they wish to remain after they attained their graduate degrees.

1.3. Interest and goals

1.3.1. Personal interest

I was born and raised in Malaysia, and lived in Malaysia for more than 25 years before coming to the U.S. in 2002 with my husband, with our goals of pursuing our graduate degrees. I initially had my own qualms about coming to the U.S. especially when I have never been abroad for my studies. I pursued my undergraduate education as an adult learner in one of the local colleges in Malaysia that had twinning programs with universities abroad. Before I started my higher education journey to the U.S., I had a lot of concerns about homesickness and missing my parents in Malaysia, about the change in weather, about getting used to the American education system, culture, food, environment and people, and about juggling school, work and family. However, I have lived in Malaysia, in a society where individuals and companies perceive graduates from foreign universities like in the U.S., as more competent, and therefore they are more in demand due to their exposure to the diversity of global views and experiences. In a subconscious way, that instilled the thought of getting a graduate degree in the U.S. It is not that Malaysia did not have graduate education we could pursue. In fact, there were a variety of opportunities; however, I personally felt that having a foreign degree was more valuable due to the other value-added student learning outcomes that come with being a full-time graduate student in the U.S. For example, as a graduate student in the U.S., I was given the chance to study and gain work experience in my field and interest. I know I might have had the same chance if I were in Malaysia, but the experience of “working abroad” especially in a developed country was viewed differently because it was like the

survival of the fittest beyond my comfort zone, in a land not called my home country. Indeed, I chose to come to the U.S. to be away from the comfort zone of my life and to learn to be independent, to learn from one of the best schools in the world, and to gain the experience and skills needed to survive and thrive. Therefore, having a strong determination and a goal of attaining a reputable graduate degree in the U.S. and achieving this goal one step at a time has helped me persist in my academic journey all these years.

During these years in two graduate schools in the U.S., first for my master's degree and now for my doctoral degree, many decisions have involved my family in the U.S., and my family back in Malaysia. Often, I am plagued with the question, "Are you coming back to Malaysia?" from my family members in Malaysia. I am also quite commonly asked this question by friends and colleagues, for different reasons. My decisions have never been made alone, and decisions made always depend on the situation back home in Malaysia, as well as in the U.S. I have taken a strong personal interest in this research topic because it has very close ties to my own identity in the U.S., my sense of assimilation to this new environment, my initial and future academic and life goals, the decision making factors that influence what I study, where I go to school, what I work as, where I work, and where I live. The decisions made are often times affected by who I am as a person, a Malaysian, a wife and a mother of three young children who are not exposed to the typical Malaysian culture, environment and languages. I often wonder if other Malaysians and Malaysian-born migrants have the same thought processes as I do as I make decisions about my personal, academic and work situations; decisions I always make with my husband, who was also born in Malaysia. Throughout the years as I have conducted this research I have often thought of my own decision making process and where I hope to live more permanently after this academic phase. Just last year, my husband and I became permanent residents of the U.S., one step closer to being more 'permanent' than one who is holding a H-1B work visa.

I often look back at the family and education environments in Malaysia and wonder if those environments would play a role in my future decision making of whether or not I want to remain in the U.S. to work and live, when I finish my doctoral studies. I also look at the experiences I have had and the friends I made during my time in the U.S. so far, and I wonder if those experiences and networks will help me determine where I want to be, where my family should be, where I want to raise my children or where I want to live and call *home*.

After eleven years in the U.S., I also find myself trying to understand myself and my identity: Am I a “Chinese” as I am labeled when I am in Malaysia, or am I a “Malaysian” or “Chinese-Malaysian” or an “Asian” when I identify myself in the U.S.? Does it matter? I do not identify myself as Chinese when in the U.S. as people perceive Chinese as individuals who originate from China. The longer I live in the U.S., the more I become self-aware of my Chinese and Malaysian beliefs and traditions, and what I was taught to do and believe in, since young. As I grow acculturated to the Western values and traditions, mainly due to the people I mix with and also due to my children’s school involvements, I also try to cultivate my attachment to my Chinese roots and Malaysian upbringing. I did not want to lose my Chinese-ness or Malaysian-ness in the social construction of my identity, through the myriad of cultures in the U.S. to which I am exposed now.

I am personally interested in investigating the narratives from Malaysian-born participants on how their life circumstances and different policies determine what the push and pull factors are for them, as they make their mind to choose a place to live or to call *home* after they completed their graduate education. As Portes (1998a) argues, transnational acts and identities are manifested through one another, where identities influence acts, acts create identities and over time both identities and acts change and branch into more extensions. Therefore, I want to understand too, the types of transnational acts the participants may have been involved in, the nature of the social networks to which the participants have access, and how these acts and networks may

have influenced their transnational identity and how that identity may in turn influence what they do.

1.3.2. Research goals

The main goal of this dissertation is to understand the push and pull dynamics that drive highly educated Malaysian-born graduates, especially those with master's, doctoral or terminal professional degrees from U.S. universities, to decide whether to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after the attainment of their graduate degrees. The first research goal is to understand the push and pull dynamics in the context of the government policies in Malaysia and the U.S. which contribute to the stiff competition for highly educated individuals. The second goal is to examine the context of these individuals' personal reasons through their experience with the economic, personal, political and socio-cultural domains, as they make that decision in choosing where they reside. The third goal is to explore how transnational activities may have influenced the development of their identity and their decision of where *home* should be.

The research questions are answered through in-depth interviews with two groups of Malaysian-born participants who have earned at least a master's, doctoral or terminal professional degree from the U.S. universities. While all of the participants were born in Malaysia, one group encompassed those who have chosen to remain in the U.S., most of whom are now permanent residents and naturalized American citizens. In another group, participants who were interviewed have chosen to return to Malaysia when they finished their graduate studies; some of them right after graduation and for some, after they have worked in the U.S. for a while. As some participants in this study have since become permanent residents and naturalized citizens of the U.S., all participants will be referred to as Malaysian-born participants or Malaysian-born migrants where appropriate.

1.3.3. Research questions

Three major research questions are explored. The first research question investigates “who” the participants are; those who remained in the U.S. and those who returned to Malaysia after they have finished their studies in the master’s, doctoral or terminal professional degree in the U.S. This encompasses learning about their demographic background including their age, ethnicities, gender, family and marital status; degree major, level and duration of their studies; reasons for studying in the U.S.; funding support and their experience and expectations. This research question will also explore their notion of *home*, identity and transnational acts by learning about their cultural associations and social networks both in Malaysia and the U.S. The second research question explores the reasons “why” they have chosen to remain in the U.S. or return to Malaysia. Questions look at their push and pull factors in relations to Malaysia and the United States, based on the economic, personal, political and socio-cultural domains. This approach helps to identify if there is a strong relationship between these domains and their decision making process. The third research question looks at what will motivate Malaysian-born migrants who have been living in the U.S., to repatriate. Participants speculated on motivations that might bring Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S. to return to Malaysia, whether it is short term or long term.

1.3.4. Significance of the research

In the context of international competition for highly skilled, knowledge workers, especially those with graduate and terminal professional degrees such as master’s and doctoral degrees, Moguerou (2006) argues that, “In the knowledge-based economy where the drivers of growth are exchanges of ideas, knowledge creation and innovation, the international mobility of researchers may have positive effects on knowledge creation” (p. 1). Therefore, the international movements of highly skilled knowledge workers increasingly capture the attention of governments of both the sending country and receiving country because of implications of the contribution of their knowledge and

skills. However, we cannot treat all highly skilled knowledge workers as homogeneous because they are not. The personal narratives of people who have made those decisions illuminate the practicality of those who have been there, and done that. For instance, the participants in this study have graduated with either a master's or doctoral degree and have since found a job either in the U.S. or in Malaysia. These participants have chosen either the U.S. or Malaysia as their *home*. In their interviews, they reflected on the experiences that culminated in their decision. This research also considers the question of later repatriation for the people who have settled in the U.S., a question of concern to the Malaysian government and one still in the minds of the participants themselves. Push and pull factors may not end even after professional lives have been established.

While some body of knowledge on Malaysia's diaspora is covered at the macro level in the World Bank report on Malaysia's Brain Drain (2011), this dissertation will focus on the human perspectives at a very micro level, through the participants' personal narratives¹. The 2011 World Bank report on Malaysia's Brain Drain includes an analysis of the general empirical evidence in cross-country studies in relevance to Malaysia, however it acknowledges that they do not analyze the push and pull factors in terms of the different personal backgrounds. The report also does not look in-depth at people's personal narratives and the changes during their experience in a foreign country that might have influenced their transnational identity and decision making process. The study is also limited by its sample, which is comprised primarily of Malaysian students and working individuals in Singapore, as well as some in Australia, the U.S., United Kingdom, Hong Kong and other countries (The World Bank, 2011). Singapore represents a unique geographic, cultural and political relationship with Malaysia and can not be used to understand the global Malaysian diaspora. Since many of the survey respondents are students, they have not reached the phase where they need to make that decision or could materialize that decision to live in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia, or decide where *home* is because they are still fulfilling their obligation as students. On the other hand, this dissertation explores Malaysian-born participants who have already

¹ Note that the interviews and research done for this dissertation were completed a couple of years before the release of the World Bank report.

attained a graduate or professional terminal degree from the U.S., and who now live by their decisions to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia, versus students who are only speculating what they might decide later, without evidence yet of how many of them would have graduated or would have a job, and working individuals who may have only undergraduate degrees.

This study also has implications for higher education. It is crucial for the governments and authorities in higher education to know the in-depth findings of this study through personal narratives. When Malaysian-born individuals decide to remain in the U.S. after graduation, the most obvious loss for Malaysia is its public investment in public education: elementary through high school, and local public university, where the government money and citizens' tax money is put into providing education. As such, it is not surprising that the Malaysian government has an expectation on the return on their investment of their citizens in the long run, through the return contribution of their knowledge and skills to Malaysia. Therefore, by understanding why some Malaysian students prefer to pursue graduate education in the U.S., the higher education constituencies such as the Higher Education Ministry and private higher education institutions in Malaysia may come up with plans for an educational reform initiative to make it more attractive to study in Malaysia so that students do not seek higher education abroad, in the first place. And by understanding why Malaysian graduates return to Malaysia, the analysis of these personal narratives provides the Malaysian government and its constituents an opportunity to understand more in-depth and to capitalize on the logic behind the return. On the other hand, the higher education institutions in the U.S. are also able to use these findings as a marketing tool when they review and understand some of the relevant information on why Malaysian students chose the U.S. for their graduate education, and why they remained after they graduated. Also, when both the U.S. and Malaysian universities want the best people to contribute to their own academic and research arenas, they may actually formulate some kind of joint effort to connect Malaysian higher institutions with Malaysian-born researchers and faculty in the U.S., and to connect U.S. higher institutions with Malaysians with American degrees in

Malaysia; to increase collaboration on various exchange programs, research and technology-focused projects, and to promote the transfer of knowledge through training and workshops.

Another significance of this research is its applicability to Malaysian government policies and programs designed to attract Malaysian-born knowledge workers to return from the U.S. (and elsewhere) to Malaysia. The speculative reasons of what might make the Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S. repatriate will help groups such as the TalentCorp Malaysia which develops and implements the current Malaysian Brain Gain programs (2011 to present), and other constituents. The personal narratives will provide value-added perspectives to the constituents to further understand, at a more personal level, what could be improved, what could be added, what could be eliminated and what is currently in place to entice the highly educated to return to Malaysia.

The idea is to determine how short term and long term arrangements could also provide some advantage in the development of human capital in Malaysia when the brain drain is transformed to brain circulation. This research includes the notion of how both countries could create a win-win situation for these individuals and both countries as the findings could be useful in formulating a whole range of initiatives that address transnationalism and circulation of the highly educated Malaysian-born individuals. Therefore, similar to how collaborations can exist between universities in the U.S. and Malaysia, constituents who learn more in-depth of why some Malaysian-born migrants may want to return for short stints but could not leave due to their family and career in the U.S. may come up with strategies to make it work through short-term collaborations in research and technology-focused projects. In sum, the findings from this study may contribute significantly to the development and enhancement of the current Malaysia Brain Gain program led by TalentCorp Malaysia and other similar initiatives in Malaysia.

Finally, I believe that this study is important for the highly educated Malaysian-born individuals themselves because it provides an avenue for them to share personal

narrative encompassing their deepest thoughts and reflections about their initial goals and expectations of coming to the U.S., factors that are involved in the decision making processes of where to live and work following graduation, their involvement in transnational activities and how the definition of *home* is diverse among them.

1.4. Structure of the dissertation chapters

Chapter Two introduces three theoretical strands that are used analytically in this dissertation. First, the theories of push and pull for the national perspectives are explored. The Government policies of both Malaysia and the U.S. create a basis for the push and pull for Malaysian-born participants to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia upon their graduation. Discussion about the implementation of certain policies in both countries plays a big role in migration of highly educated Malaysian-born participants. Second, the theories of push and pull for the individuals are looked at. These theories encompass the various factors that explain why certain immigrants are drawn to certain areas, for instance being “pulled” closer to that area, or being “pushed” away from it. In general, some of these personal determinants include being influenced by political stability, economic factors, and social-cultural aspects. This dissertation will focus only on the movement of the highly educated, in particular, movements that are not caused by war, extreme poverty, economic crisis, famine, family reunification or political reasons. Third, the emerging trends of transnational identity that examine people who identify with more than one place and culture, as well as flexible citizenship for those who may not strongly affiliate themselves with any one country -- are investigated. In these aspects, the review will include theories that explain how identities evolved through time, space, cultural and social construction and networks. Through this strand, the relationship between the Malaysian-born participants’ identity and how they define what *home* is to them, is also examined.

Chapter Three encompasses the research design and methodology. This chapter explains the research goals, research questions, and research design. In addition, it also

covers the subjects and settings, sampling procedure, instrumentation as well as how the data were collected and analyzed. Triangulation, credibility of the researcher, limitations and difficulties are also discussed. Conducting face-to-face interviews, phone interviews and interviews through available web tools of twenty-two participants, all of whom were born in Malaysia but were living in either Malaysia or the U.S. during the interview were the major methods of data collection for this study. Transcriptions of these interviews were then analyzed according to the three strands delineated in Chapter Two.

Chapter Four and Five include the results of the interviews that are categorized in general and specific themes. Chapter Four focuses on the first research question investigating “who” the participants are, their transitions and turning points. Chapter Five consists of the findings answering the second research question which explores the reasons “why” they have chosen to remain in the U.S. or return to Malaysia. Chapter Five also incorporates the findings of the third research question which looks at what will motivate Malaysian-born migrants who have been living in the U.S., to repatriate. These findings will not only form the basis for answering the research questions, they will also provide implications for further discussion in Chapter Six. Finally, Chapter Six covers the discussion of major findings, recommendations for future directions, limitations, future research ideas and conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Higher education abroad provides a pathway for international immigration of highly educated and highly skilled individuals. Three strands help define the push-pull factors that contribute to how the Malaysian-born participants of this study decide where to make their *home* after completing American graduate degrees -- national perspectives, personal perspectives, and identity perspectives.

2.1.1. The law of migration

The great migration of animals, insects and fish tells us that different species move for different motivations and reasons, such as for food, better living conditions, breeding, and mainly for survival. People also have reasons why they move, and back in 1889, Ravenstein first proposed the Laws of Migration as a way to explain the movement of people, that emphasized on approaches known as the push and pull theories (Corbett, n. d.). Beginning with Ravenstein's theory, we learn that people are prompted to leave their community of origin due to push factors, and people are attracted to a certain receiving country due to its pull factors. One of the laws of migration developed by Ravenstein is that historically most migrants traveled short distances, with their movement toward the great commercial centers. When we look at the contemporary movement of people from Asia to the U.S., their move between continents is not short. Even with the access and availability of modern transportation for most countries in Asia, people could still spend more than twenty hours on the plane before they reach the U.S. However, this law asserts that people move to larger centers of economic activities,

which appear to be true since the U.S. is a great center of commerce and industry, as compared to many countries in Asia.

Corbett (n. d.) explains Ravenstein's main concept of absorption as a country that took in more people than it gave up and his concept of dispersion as a country which, on the whole, gave up its population. According to Corbett (n. d.), Ravenstein understood that within the United Kingdom, the countries of absorption were mainly locations that hosted commercial and industrial activities, whereas countries of dispersion were mostly agricultural. Contemporary movements do have a trend of absorption and dispersion that is similar to Ravenstein's concept, for example, when we look at how the U.S. accepts more new immigrants each year than it gives up. This is evidenced by the current U.S. immigration law, which allows individuals to obtain permanent resident status in the U.S., on a per-year basis, of up to 226,000 under the family-sponsored preference categories; 140,000 employment-based preference visa; 55,000 diversity immigrant visa program and approximately 80,000 refugees (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n. d.-e; Immigration Policy Center, 2010). In other words, not only are there open doors, but more pull factors seem to attract immigrants to the U.S. than there are pull factors elsewhere for mass movements of American citizens to other countries.

The Department of Homeland Security reported that in 2009 among the 1,130,818 people obtaining legal permanent resident status in the U.S., 36.5 per cent (n=413,312) of them were from Asia. California has the highest number of Asian immigrants at 28.4 percent, followed by New Jersey and New York areas at 19.1 percent (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). Lopez (2002) also found that that at the regional level, California has approximately 20.9 percent of people residing in the San Francisco Bay Area who identified themselves as Asian. This scenario further supports the concept of absorption because these areas, generally in California, New Jersey and New York, or as specific as in San Francisco, are where the hub of more commercial activities are, which seem to be the pull factors of contemporary movements.

Ravenstein's laws of migration provide insight for some regions of the world during certain time periods in history, but in general, they could not entirely fit into the migration of Asians to the U.S. The law of migration helps us understand that there are opportunities to immigrate as they pertain to the countries' policies and demand; where most immigrants may choose to work and settle down.

2.2. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this research is comprised of the three strands to identify main elements in choosing home for Malaysian alumni of U.S. graduate programs. The first strand explores the push-pull factors through national perspectives by looking at related government policies of both Malaysia and the U.S., and discussing the related issues of brain drain. The second strand looks at the push-pull factors through the individuals' perspectives which would include personal aspirations and family influence. The third strand looks at the nature of transnationalism and how it transforms one's identity in relation to decision making.

2.2.1. Strand One: Push and pull factors from the national perspectives

Some government policies of both Malaysia and the U.S. create a basis for the push and pull for Malaysian-born individuals to make that decision to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia upon their attainment of their graduate degrees in the U.S. This strand explores how the implementation of certain policies in both countries plays a significant role in migration of highly educated Malaysians. Through this strand we can also introduce links to the issues of brain drain and its implications.

2.2.1.1. Early migration in Malaysia and the U.S.

Early Migration – U.S.A.

The migration of people, whether legal or illegal, and whether for a developing country like Malaysia or a more advanced country like the United States, has created serious issues that have affected more than those who immigrated. In reality, the problems that have elevated in recent years affect both the sending and receiving countries as well as the immigrants, which include issues of inflation, national security, tax, healthcare, public education, unemployment, criminal justice, loss of skilled labor, wages, remittances and illegal immigration. These issues are often debated in the nation's economic review, social activism and political discussions. Different immigration issues emerged for two distinct countries like Malaysia and the U.S., basically due to the disparity in the push-pull factors of each country. This section will provide an overview of the government policies in Malaysia and in the U.S, regarding the laws and policies that contribute to the push and pull factors in migration, in the context of historical, economic, societal and political perspectives.

The Population Reference Bureau (n. d.) defines push-pull hypothesis as:

A migration theory that suggests that circumstances at the place of origin (such as poverty and unemployment) repel or push people out of that place to other places that exert a positive attraction or pull (such as a high standard of living or job opportunities). (Glossary of Terms section, under letter "P")

The focus on policy development and its sources lies in the identification of the processes that span a considerable period of time (Pierson, 2005). This discussion will focus primarily on the trends of immigration over the past five to six decades, although early significant events may be briefly introduced. The timeline chosen will help provide a framework of how the trends have evolved over time. This framework will be studied

through its policies, examining some significant public and world events; looking at the objectives of the different laws and policies, and justifying the shift in the definition of contemporary immigration.

The impact of successive governments' legislative controls will be examined, not only through the rate of admission of migrants, but also by the conditions governing the integration of individuals into the employment market and society as well as in the education sector. According to Castles and Miller (2003), the main reason for international migration after the Second World War, from 1945 to the 1970's was due to the "concentration of investment and expansion of production in the existing highly developed countries which attracted many migrant workers from less developed countries to North America" (p. 68). The main type of migration at that time was the permanent migration to North America, initially from Europe and later from Asia and Latin America. However, the immigration to the U.S. before 1965 was based on a racially and ethnically discriminating quota system. For instance, the Immigration Act of 1924 limited the annual quota for each country to three percent for those born in that country, who were residing in the U.S. based on an 1890 census. The countries in northern and Western Europe received the largest quotas because majority of the white population in 1890 were from those areas. This system was considered was flawed and discriminatory because it restricted the immigration of people from Asia, the Pacific countries, Eastern and Southern Europe, and did not allow any immigrants from Africa (Abrams, 1984; Seller, 1984). Therefore, it resulted in racial tensions and economic problems at the beginning of the 20th century because it was believed that there was no equality in the growth in the number immigrants admitted and their mix of nationalities (Levine, Hill & Warren, 1985). The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the quotas that discriminated against certain nationalities, and reformed the policy to allow each country no more than 20,000 immigrants with a limitation of 170,000 immigrants from the Eastern hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western hemisphere each year (Castles & Miller, 2003). These numbers were based on a preference system favoring close relatives of the U.S. citizens and permanent residents, and did not include

number of refugees since there was a separate admission policy for those who seek refuge (Castles & Miller, 2003). The amendments of 1965 to the Immigration and Nationality Act “created a system of worldwide immigration, in which the most important criterion for admission was kinship with American citizens or residents” (Castles & Miller, 2003, p. 75). As a result, it created a huge pull in migration from Asia and Latin America (Castles & Miller, 2003).

Early migration – Malaysia

Malaysia’s citizens are made up of the natives of Malaysia, as well as descendents of immigrants who traveled to Malaysia mainly for economic opportunities, which occurred around the nineteenth and early twentieth century although these migrations throughout South East Asia started earlier.

Skeldon’s (2000) research found the following:

The Eastern movements of Indians from India, and southward movements of Chinese from China were part of the formative periods of the cultures of the nations of South East Asia. Movements westwards and eastwards out of Central Asia shook the foundations of both Chinese and European societies from thirteenth century to produce one of the most extensive land-based empires in history. (p.369)

During that time, labor migration comprised the capture and movement of slaves, and such labor was seen as the control of people which was viewed as more vital than control of land (Skeldon, 2000). Specifically since the mid-nineteenth century, many Chinese merchant families migrated to South East Asia and all over the Pacific to engage in trade activities such as rice milling, import and export businesses and rubber production (Ong, 1999). When Malaysia was a British colony from the early 1800’s to 1957, merchant traders from China traveled to Malaysia to start their merchant businesses

and work in tin mines, while people from India went to work in the rubber plantations and railway lines (Skeldon, 2000).

UNESCO (n.d.) explains how the multi-ethnic population in Malaysia was the result of in-migration:

Under the British colonial rule, capitalist economic enterprises were introduced and with them, the necessary infrastructure. The opening of large scale plantations of coffee, coconut and rubber, the expansion of tin mines and the construction of railways, roads and buildings required a large number of workers. As the local population was too small and generally not responsive to wage labor, the colonial authorities recruited and encouraged the entry of foreign labor, especially from China and India and to a lesser degree, from neighboring Indonesia. (Malaysia: A Brief Introduction section, para. 3)

As Skeldon (2000) notes, these nineteenth century and early twentieth century migrations play an important role in understanding the movement of today, because that was when the networks of Chinese and Indian communities of truly global extent were first created. Today, the Chinese and Indian descendants remain, and together with the native people of Malaysia, known as Malay or *Bumiputra*, form the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia. *Bumiputra*, or literally meaning “prince of the soil” refers to the Malays² assertion to be the original inhabitants of Malaysia, which has a multi-ethnic population mainly of the Chinese, Indian, Malay and indigenous groups (Ong, 1999, p. 284). A paper published by UNESCO (n.d.) that discusses migration issues in Malaysia further explains that the term *Bumiputra* refers to the Malays and the aborigines in Peninsular Malaysia; however the same term refers to over twenty indigenous ethnic groups, such as the Iban, Bidayuh, Kadazan, Murut, Dusun, and others in west Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak).

² All Malays are Muslims (Ong, 1999, p.284)

In addition, the ethnic groups termed as non-*Bumiputra* refers to the individuals of immigrant descent, mainly the Chinese and Indians (UNESCO, n.d.). In 2013, there were approximately 29.6 million people in Malaysia (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.). The Central Intelligence Agency website stated that were 50.4 percent Malay, 23.7 percent Chinese, 11 percent indigenous, 7.1 percent Indian, and 7.8 percent others in 2004 (CIA, n.d.). Today there are three main descent communities, the Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia. As Fenton (2003, p. 42) stated, the word “race”³ is used more frequently in Malaysia to refer to these communities, and also other associated words such as race relations and racial conflict in the Malaysian are often used in public dialogue. While the word “ethnicity” is more commonly used in the U.S., it is used less often in Malaysia. In the Malaysian context, “race” exclusively covers the cultural and physical attributes (Lee, 2004).

There were no strict policies that govern the immigration laws in Malaysia prior to the country’s independence from the British in 1957. According to Pillai (1999), although there was rapid growth in Malaysia after independence from 1957 up to 1970, unemployment remained relatively high. The researcher argues that with the divided internal labor markets and the open regional markets, coupled with geographical location and historical links to neighboring countries like Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines; these factors enabled workers to be easily transported and readily available (Pillai, 1999). And as early as the 1970’s, immigrants from Indonesia and Thailand were already working in the oil palm, rubber and sugar plantations in Malaysia (Pillai, 1999). The National Development Policy (NDP) established in 1990 was also targeted to restructure Malaysia’s employment to reflect the country’s ethnic composition as well as to support a more practical indigenous *Bumiputra* entrepreneurial class (Pillai, 1999). The NDP was later revised to New Economic Policy (NEP) which was effective from 2001-2010 and then National Vision Policy (NVP) from 2001-2010. This policy was intended as a pull factor even for the locals to move, especially from the rural areas to the more urban areas, when more manufacturing jobs were created due to the shift in country’s new

³ For the dissertation, I have chosen to use the words “ethnic group” and “ethnicity” instead of “race” and “racial groups” to represent the Malays, Chinese and Indians as well the other minority groups in Malaysia.

development strategy. The labor-intensive manufacturing jobs benefited mostly rural *Bumiputra*, which explained the rural-urban migration in the years 1970's through the 1980's. Pillai (1999) adds that this rural-urban migration and the return of many stateless Indian plantation workers to India posed a problem in the supply of labor in the plantation industry which is located in the more rural areas.

The demand for labor and offer of compensation that comes with the attractive currency exchange rate from Malaysia became the major pull factors for unskilled Indonesian workers to work in plantations in Malaysia. The construction industry in Malaysia saw a boom in the late 1970's and early 1980's, which elevated the wages and caused more labor shortages (Pillai, 1992, p. 10). As a result, Indonesian migrants were once again in high demand, and began to substitute the Malaysian construction workers, which comprised mainly Chinese tradesmen from family apprenticeships, China-born immigrant women workers and Malaysian peasants. Malaysia and Thailand are countries of both in-migration and out-migration, where the "workers from these countries leave to find better opportunities in more developed areas, while migrants from countries at the lower levels of development enter these areas in search of what cannot be found at home" (Skeldon, 2000, p.370). The workers brought in to work in the construction and other labor-intensive jobs were mostly low-skilled workers.

More recently, Asian migration includes a multitude of types of movers -- from those who are leaving Asian countries to become permanent residents of other countries, to those who are entering Asian countries to fill niche occupations of both high-skilled and low-skilled jobs, contract labor migrants, students, asylum seekers, those displaced for ecological reasons, and return migrants and retirees (Skeldon, 2000). Today, Malaysia's policy on immigration is different from the U.S. in that Malaysia does not have a limit to the number of immigrants to the country; although Malaysia has a strict system to control migration.

2.2.1.2. Why students study abroad

There are reasons why people go overseas to study. According to the OECD⁴ (2011) some of the considerations that students make when determining where they will study include language, culture, geographic location, networks, and entry requirements. For example, the OECD explains that geographic considerations and proximity as well as differences in entry requirements to the higher education institutions are probably the reasons for the influx of students from Germany in Austria, from Belgium in France and the Netherlands, from France in Belgium, from Canada in the U.S., and from New Zealand in Australia (OECD, 2011, p. 328). In addition, language and academic expectations may explain the tendency for English-speaking students to concentrate in other countries of the Commonwealth⁵ or in the U.S. despite the long distance. In addition, the OECD touched upon the importance of migration networks, as shown by their findings of the concentration of students with Portuguese citizenship in France, Turkish students in Germany and Mexican students in the U.S. (OECD, 2011). The OECD's analysis also shows that international students determine certain destinations for their higher education attractive due to their academic reputation and rigor, as well as due to the subsequent immigration opportunities. The OECD provides examples that students from China are mostly pursuing their degrees in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the U.S., and that most of these popular countries have systems that enable the immigration of international students (2011). Indian students go to higher education institutions in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States and these three destinations appeal to 77 percent of Indian citizens enrolled in higher education institutions overseas (OECD, 2011).

⁴ The OECD stands for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Its mission is to promote policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world (OECD, n. d.).

⁵ The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 54 countries that support each other and work together towards shared goals in democracy and development (Commonwealth, n. d.).

2.2.1.3. Affirmative action and higher education – the case of Malaysian students

Push factors coming from Malaysia

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy website, Fullinwider (2011) explained that:

Affirmative action means positive steps taken to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education, and business from which they have been historically excluded. When those steps involve *preferential* selection, selection on the basis of race, gender, or ethnicity, then affirmative action generates intense controversy. (Affirmative Action section, para. 1)

This definition could explain why access to higher education, fuelled by the ethnically-based quota system has been a hot debate in Malaysia for years, and could be seen as a push factor for Malaysians to seek alternative higher education within their means. Some Malaysian government policies have rendered as push factors, such as the Malaysia New Economic Policy (NEP) [which was later renamed National Development Policy (NDP) and then revised again to National Vision Policy (NVP)] as discussed in more detail below. Because access to public higher education is limited and governed by an affirmative action policy, the only way for many Malaysian students to complete their higher education has been through private colleges which are not allowed to be degree granting institutions. Via private colleges, Malaysian students excluded from the public higher education system have had opportunity through international transfer and twinning programs to complete their degrees abroad with partner universities of their private colleges. In this way, push factors may have been unintentionally created by the Malaysian government policies. For example, studying abroad is possible through credit transfer and twinning programs that enable students to first study one or two years at an accredited local college in Malaysia and then finish the degree requirements in the U.S.

and graduate with an American degree. This route is popular because it makes an American degree much cheaper than if one were to study the entire degree program in the U.S. since the expenditures for tuition, room and board in the U.S. are reduced by one to two years.

Malaysia got its independence from the British right after the Japanese Occupation ended (1942-1945). However in the next few years, the young country was riddled with leadership struggles and concerns among the Malays over identity, position and welfare from 1945 to 1957 (Lam & Yeoh, 2004). A coalition government was formed among the political parties that each advocated their respective ethnicity -- the Malay, Chinese and Indian (Lam & Yeoh, 2004). Special rights and political power for the Malays were acquired in exchange for the non-Malays' right to citizenship, most of whom were immigrants from China and India. This started the dichotomy of *Bumiputra* and non-*Bumiputra*, which further strained the ties among the ethnic groups. The Malays were still dissatisfied, due to the non-Malay threats and challenges to Malay rights (Cheah, 2002). Eventually the coalition government became disorganized and fell apart, which ended in the infamous May 13, 1969 racial riots (Khoo, 1999). As a result, the Malaysia New Economic Policy (NEP) was established in 1971 to promote affirmative action to help the ethnic Malays and indigenous Malaysians, also known as the *Bumiputra* as a way to eradicate poverty and minimize economic and social inequalities among the ethnic groups (Awang, 1992; Sundaram, 2004). In 1991, the NEP was replaced by the National Development Policy (1991-2000), which was also focused on helping the status of *Bumiputra* in terms of education, employment, political power and wealth (Ariffin, 1995). The NDP was later replaced with the National Vision Policy (2001-2010), which still had the NEP agenda although some rules were relaxed. Although these policies initially targeted to reduce resentment of the citizens due to socioeconomic disparities, the policy affected the access to higher education for the non-*Bumiputra* in Malaysia. Since 1971 the Malaysian public universities were subjected to the ethnic quota, with 55 percent of places reserved for *Bumiputra* and 45 percent for non-*Bumiputra* who are mainly the Chinese, Indians, and other minority races

(Richardson, 1996). In 2003, the Malaysian government abolished the use of quota system at its universities in hopes to increase more Chinese-Malaysian and Indian-Malaysian applicants in the local universities.

One foreseeable change due to the abolishment of the racial quota system at Malaysian universities is the decrease in the number of Malaysian students, especially the Chinese-Malaysians, going abroad for their higher education (Cohen, 2003). The affirmative action policies that existed for the past 30 years became push factors for many Malaysians, especially of the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, to go abroad for their tertiary education. When they went abroad and then did not return to Malaysia, this became an issue of brain drain for the country. As noted by Castles and Miller (2003), brain drain could happen when university-trained people move from the less developed countries to the highly developed countries. International student mobility can be seen as a bridge to skilled migration because many former students remain in developed countries upon graduation, especially those with doctorates (Castles & Miller, 2003).

In a broader sense, the affirmative action resulted in a lot of disgruntled citizens and created a rift between *Bumiputra* and non-*Bumiputra*. Under the policy, *Bumiputra* have not only received preferential treatment in higher education, they also had priority in government jobs (Sullivan & Gunasekaran, 1993). The later generations of non-*Bumiputra* came to feel that they were treated as second-class citizens even though they were born in Malaysia, and held Malaysian citizenship from birth (Nonini, 1997; Ong & Nonini, 1997, as cited in Lam & Yeoh, 2004). The feeling of being second-class citizens was also articulated in an article in the Wall Street Journal that discussed the implications of Malaysian racism (Malott, 2011). The article noted that approximately 500,000 Malaysians had left Malaysia to another country between 2007 and 2009, most of them Malaysians of Chinese and Indian ethnicities. According to Malott (2011), these two ethnic groups were, “tired of being treated as second-class citizens in their own country and denied the opportunity to compete on a level playing field, whether in education, business, or government” (The Price of Malaysia’s Racism, para. 8). Although there are

Malaysians who immigrate due to family in the U.S., career opportunities or even due to the U.S. diversity visa program, the majority of them first landed in the U.S. as university students.

Pull factors initiated in Malaysia

Arachi (2006) argues that the affirmative action that favors the *Bumiputra* in Malaysia has always implied that the minorities especially of the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, and other races, have only limited access to pursue higher education in the ethnic quota-based public universities. The Private Higher Educational Institution (PHEI) Act 1996 has encouraged the establishment of private universities, university colleges, branch campuses of foreign universities and local private colleges to meet the increasing demand for tertiary education to produce a highly educated and skilled human resource (Arachi, 2006). Then in 1997, the Malaysian government established the National Accreditation Board (LAN) as the country's accrediting agency to oversee the direction, procedures, and standards regarding the quality of courses especially in private tertiary education (Sohail & Saeed, 2003). According to the National Science Foundation (2012a), "branch campuses that are established give foreign students the opportunity to earn a Western degree without leaving their home country," (NSF website, Transnational Higher Education section, para. 3). This could be seen as a pull factor in Malaysia. There are five foreign university branch campuses in Malaysia – Curtin University of Technology Sarawak Campus (Australia), Monash University of Malaysia (Australia), Swinburne University of Technology (Australia), The University of Nottingham Malaysia (United Kingdom), and Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (United Kingdom) (Ministry of Higher Education - Malaysia, 2010). These foreign university branch campuses in Malaysia created a pull factor for Malaysian students to stay in Malaysia if they wanted a foreign degree. Not all twinning programs in local private colleges in Malaysia require that Malaysian students go to the U.S. to complete their American degrees. For instance, Malaysian students are able to complete an American degree through special arrangements, where the whole degree is completed without

having to leave Malaysia, and yet the degree is conferred by the foreign university (Sohail & Saeed, 2003). This international affiliation was made possible by the Malaysian government to answer the problems with access to the local universities since the government recognizes the need to provide more opportunities for higher education to meet the demands and challenges of its citizens.

In sum, the issues of access faced by some ethnic groups due to the affirmative action, the enforcement of this PHEI Act, and the Asian economic crisis 1997 marked the beginning of shifts in the landscape of Malaysian higher education. Malaysia strives to be an education hub by promoting and establishing its private higher education institutions to meet its local demands, as well as to attract foreign students especially those whose countries were also affected by the Asian economic crisis in 1997, which made pursuing higher education in places like the U.S and the U.K unaffordable. In addition, the problems and delays with issuance of visas by U.S. related to stricter regulations after September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks became a major hindrance for many prospective foreign students who wished to go to the U.S. to further their studies. Malaysia can transform itself as an attractive avenue for its local students as well as international students especially those that are geographically closer and find it relatively cheaper to study in Malaysia as compared to the U.S. With the inflation rates, stronger U.S. currency rates, as well as the rising tuition rates in the U.S. higher education institutions, many Malaysian families could no longer afford to send their children to the U.S. There was a sudden need to grow in-house quality higher education to instill confidence in the citizens, and to meet the increasing demand of students who could no longer afford to go overseas for their higher education. Malaysia is a strategic location to become an education hub for many international students from the Asian countries due to its proximity to their home countries, affordable fees, social stability and reasonable cost of living in Malaysia. Since the medium of language for most private higher education institutions is English, as approved by the Ministry of Education, international students find it easier to study in Malaysia than to study in a whole new language since English is more commonly studied and used in most countries (as compared to the need to learn

Japanese if one were to choose to study in Japan, for example). According to the Malaysian Higher Education Minister, the Malaysian government was attempting to attract 100,000 international students to study in local institutes of higher education by 2010 (Sulaiman, 2004). In particular, the Malaysian government is spearheading promotional efforts to attract international students from neighboring Southeast Asian nations, China and west Asia. In 2004, there were 40,686 international students in Malaysia pursuing their pre-tertiary and tertiary education in Malaysia (Sulaiman, 2004). The data provided on the Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education website show that in 2008, there were approximately 70,000 international students who were issued valid international student passes to study in private and public higher education institutions in Malaysia (Ministry of Higher Education - Malaysia, n. d.). Although this number is relatively low compared with the U.S., Malaysia is working toward its way to have a share in the competitive world to provide quality higher education.

Push factors imposed by the U.S.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, U.S. immigration placed more emphasis on the country's national security by imposing stricter rules in issuance of visa to foreign students who wish to study in the U.S. The stricter rules themselves discouraged many foreign students from going to the U.S., as did the long delays in the issuance of visas. This enticed many foreign students to go other countries instead, like Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Chellaraj, Maskus and Mattoo (2006) who investigate the contributions of foreign graduate students and skilled immigrants in U.S. science and technology, find that they play a significant role in innovation capacity and competitiveness, especially in the area of patenting. Therefore, the effects could be detrimental when policies are made as such to cause hindrance for international students to come to the U.S. for higher education. The American universities could have the capacity and facilities, but if they could only train "a declining share of international graduate students, their ability to perform both basic and applied research will suffer" (Chellaraj et al., 2006, p.246).

Pull factors prompted by the U.S.

Malaysia is listed as the top 21 country whose undergraduate and graduate students studied in higher education institutions in the U.S. in 2011-2012, with an enrollment of 6,743 according to the Open Doors report (IIE, 2012). The OECD (2011) stated that students choose certain destinations for their higher education mainly due to the academic reputation of particular programs or universities in that foreign country, and also due to the subsequent immigration opportunities. The opportunity to study in the U.S. creates a bridge for Malaysians, like for other foreign students, to immigrate especially through its employment opportunities. For example, in 2000, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (now the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services or USCIS) found that in a sample of 4,200 migrants holding the temporary work visa, H-1B, twenty-three percent of them had previously held student visa. The experience of having studied in a foreign country makes it easier to migrate to the country, and those whose intention is to immigrate permanently might choose this as a means to enter the country (Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011).

It is a pull factor for Malaysian students to go to the U.S. not only for subsequent economic reasons, but also because of the sociological factors. There is a notion in Malaysia that foreign degree holders are highly regarded and relatively more employable than local graduates. For instance, findings from research that investigated Malaysian employers' preference for foreign trained Malaysian graduates indicated that employers' perception of foreign graduates that they are of better quality compared to their local graduates and graduates from local colleges in Malaysia (Quah et al., 2009). The findings give us a glimpse that employers in Malaysia prefer foreign trained graduates to local graduates, and people do take into consideration such societal expectation when making a decision to study locally or abroad. It was also reported in the media that a major Information Communication Technology career fair in Malaysia attracted over 11,000 job seekers; out of whom 10,800 were Malaysian graduates from local Malaysian universities while only 300 were Malaysian graduates from foreign universities (The Star,

2005). In the report, the Malaysian Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation was questioning the disparity between the number of unemployed Malaysian graduates of the local and foreign universities, and asked whether it was because local graduates are less marketable than their foreign-trained peers (The Star, 2005).

In more recent developments, the Partnership for New American Economy (PNAE) and the Partnership for New York City (PNYC) (2012) prepared a report outlining the need for immigrants in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, and the need to respond strategically to the recent economic needs of the United States. Specifically, the report provided a quick snapshot: by 2018, the U.S. will face a projected shortfall of approximately 250,000 STEM workers.

The PNAE and PNYC (2012) report states that:

Although the U.S. will have 2.8 million jobs in the STEM fields by that year, about 800,000 of them will require workers with master's degree level training or higher but there will be only about 550,000 American-born graduates to fill them. (p. 6).

The report notes that qualified immigrant workers with the qualifications in STEM are needed to fill the gap especially when there is such a small share of native-born STEM graduates, slow growth of the group, and the time it takes to increase the growth rate. The focus is on qualified and trained immigrants because in general, immigrants do contribute to the STEM innovation since many of them are trained in science, technology, engineering and math, subjects that are not too popular among the native-born students (PNAE and PNYC, 2012).

2.2.1.4. Competition for human capital

As noted above, foreign students sometimes remain in the country where they pursued their higher education. Dreher and Poutvaara (2011) found that the foreign student flows result in a significant brain gain for the U.S. Their findings suggest that “hosting foreign students is an efficient way of attracting future migration” (Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011, p. 1302). In other words, countries that wish to attract immigrants from developing countries could use higher education incentives as a strategy to first attract them as university students.

Many countries, such as Australia, Canada, Finland, New Zealand, and Norway have policies that enable foreign students to stay and find a job, and eventually become citizens (OECD, 2010). Foreign students are sometimes inducted through promises of employment opportunities and citizenship, even before they completed their studies. Khadria’s (2001) study looked at the large-scale migration of Indians who are particularly skilled in information technology, which entails not only the fully trained and educated workers moving abroad for jobs, but also the Indian students who are pursuing degrees abroad. For example, Khadria (2001) noted that in 2000, New Zealand openly competed with other countries that host students from India. The researcher notes that New Zealand provided “citizenship opportunities for successful students as well as the promise of quality education backed by all the infrastructure of a developed country” (Khadria, 2001, p.54). Immigration was promoted to qualified people including both the Indian professionals and students in higher education. The potential prize, as stated by the Deputy High Commissioner in New Zealand, was, “Finish the degree in New Zealand, land a job, move on to residency and then citizenship” (as cited in Khadria, 2001, p.54).

One of the main pull factors that attract highly educated individuals is the demand for skills and talent that is perpetuated by the immigration policy of the host country. Due to the demand of skills in technological advancement, governments race to get the best brains out there in order to have a competitive advantage in the world of

knowledge-based industries (Kapur & McHale, 2005). Governments and businesses want the best talents and seek these highly skilled, knowledge workers themselves. One strategy from industry is, “to lobby for more liberal immigration policies to ease cost pressures, and strong skilled-wage growth will once again dampen domestic worker opposition” (Kapur & McHale, 2005, p. 3). More recently, the U.S. is facing the slow moving growth rate of their native workforce, therefore immigration, especially of the highly educated and highly skilled, “is the only way over time to slower growth of the native-born workforce and secure the nation’s economic vitality and the citizens’ quality of life in the future” (PNAE and PNYC, 2012, p. 5). Consequently, with the demand of knowledge workers in a country like the U.S., and with lobbying efforts in the works to provide even more opportunities for people to come to the U.S., this effort would seem like a pull factor initiated by the U.S.

Information technologies and advances in the management of human resources are two important factors that make globalization happen. Both of these factors need these highly educated and skilled knowledge workers who have the right qualifications and skills. Therefore, with the rapid growth in the globalization chain, more jobs are created, and these opportunities become the major pull factors for highly educated and skilled individuals. On the other hand, globalization may make people “move” but not necessarily immigrate to the new place (Kanjapan, 1995). Kanjapan (1995) stresses the importance of understanding the difference between “move” as defined as internal movement and “immigrate” as defined as international movement. According to the researcher, the major difference is that international migration is subject to immigration laws and policies, and therefore, just because someone wishes to immigrate and can afford to immigrate, does not necessarily mean he will succeed in doing so (Kanjapan, 1995). Immigration policies are not only pull factors but are also push factors, as they funnel who gets in and remain, and who gets out and stay out.

A highly educated workforce is considered crucial for any country to face the challenges of a global competition in a knowledge-based economy. One of the reasons

for international competition for talent is due to the globalization of production and trade. Certain types of talent and skills are needed to fill in the gaps that the locals are not qualified or trained to meet the demand. According to Nsouli (2007), “globalization is the increasing integration of the world’s trade and financial markets. This integration is associated with the liberalization of trade flows and cross-border investment and helps countries converge over time in terms of wealth as well as welfare” (What is the IMF doing to help countries maximize the benefits of globalization section, para. 2). Nsouli (2007) further argues that this supposedly improved allocation of resources through the course of trade and investments which would not have happened without the presence of technological progress.

Castles and Miller (2003) state that:

One feature of globalization is the rapid improvement in technologies of transport and communication, making it increasingly easy for migrants to maintain close links with their country of origin. These developments also facilitate the growth of circulatory or repeated mobility, in which people migrate regularly between a number of places where they have economic, social or cultural linkages. (p.29)

In particular, developing countries may be at a disadvantage when they become a significant net exporter of academics and intellectual talent, also known as the brain drain (Schuster, 1994). Castles and Miller (2003) argue that many people who are university-trained are moving from developing countries to highly developed countries. For example, the researchers found that the more developed countries like, “Europe, North America and Australia have obtained thousands of doctors and engineers from India, Malaysia, and Hong Kong; while Britain look for nurses from the Philippines, and Germany competes with other highly developed countries to attract the Indian Information Technology specialists” (Castles & Miller, 2003, p. 170). With the outflow of their human capital, it has been considered a loss for the source countries and a benefit for the receiving countries.

Globalization does spur immigration, but to what extent this causes the phenomenon of brain drain depends on how loss is defined. For example, in the case of Indian knowledge workers, Khadria (2006) states that the cost of migration of the highly educated and highly skilled Indians out of India is claimed as a loss in financial investment in public education, in social skill of trained personnel, and of channels of necessary political change in the migration of young unemployed graduates. While these may show some lose and others gain, literature of brain circulation (Lowell 2001; Sassen, 1991; Saxenian, 2002; Séguin et al., 2006) and cyclical flow (Portes, 2009) which is covered in the next section, suggests that it does not necessarily mean a total loss for the countries whose highly educated and highly skilled have migrated.

The World Bank report on Malaysia's Brain Drain (2011) stated that, "estimating the magnitude of Malaysia's diaspora and brain drain is a complex undertaking" (p.89), since international migration data are neither comprehensive nor reliable despite considerable efforts to document cross-border migration. A significant question for Malaysia is whether migration of its skilled workers supports or obstructs the nation's development. On one hand, migration can be seen as a hindrance to the country's development when human capital is lost; the young, qualified individuals leave, causing brain drain, and potentially reducing pressures for social change (Castles, 2000). When the family, local community and country of origin invested time and money to raise and educate the individual to young adulthood, the immigration of the individual means that the new country reaps the benefits of this investment (Castles, 2000). On the other hand, migration can support development, especially through human capital flow. For example, migrants may have worked with more sophisticated and advanced technology in a country like the U.S. and therefore their knowledge and skills through this exposure can be beneficially transferred and applied if they return to their home country (Castles, 2000). In addition, Castles (2000) noted that the transfer of income from the migrant to the sending or home country may, in the long run, prevail over the costs of bringing up the migrant.

The potential of brain circulation

Séguin et al. (2006) suggests that a variety of options should be made available if source or sending countries want to utilize fully their highly educated and highly skilled workers for the country's advancement and developments, wherever they might be located. Furthermore, Lowell (2001) argues that 'brain circulation' or the contribution of highly educated workers to the sending country where they originally come from does not necessarily need their permanent return or physical presence to be accomplished. In fact, brain circulation can be encouraged by making sure that governments of both the sending and receiving countries develop and review policies that, "both act in concert with each other to harness the tremendous capital that skilled diaspora represent for international development" (Séguin et al., 2006, p.80).

As provided in the study by Séguin et al. (2006), some of the examples of options to utilize the highly educated and highly skilled transnational communities that showed a significant impact on the development of their home country include:

- Contributions of highly skilled Asian-Americans in the information technology sector in the 1980's and 1990's through the economic and social bridges that linked the economies of the Silicon Valley in the U.S. with the Hsinchu Park of Taiwan. This highly skilled immigrant community was said to be part of the 'brain drain' in Taiwan whose students studied and obtained graduate training in the U.S. but never returned to Taiwan then. The arrangement of brain circulation in Taiwan was later made possible with some encouraging conditions such as the emergence of Silicon Valley that developed these skills, the establishment of professional associations and networks that provided role models and assistance within this community, and the presence of entrepreneurship spirit within the community. In addition there was also the establishment of an initiative by the Taiwanese government that supports the IT industry and creates a proactive engagement of its engineers working and living

- abroad in the development of strategies to promote the growth in the Hsinchu region in Taiwan (Saxenian & Hsu, 2001, as cited in Séguin et al., 2006).
- Indian-Americans in the healthcare industry have helped to improve hospitals in India through their sabbatical residencies in India (Davone, R. n.d., as cited in Séguin et al., 2006).
 - Organizations of annual seminars by the highly skilled transnational communities in collaboration with their home country as a way to promote the transmission of information, which include the provisions of consultancy to the government of the home country (Abdelgafar et al., 2004; Lucas, 2001, as cited in Séguin et al., 2006), the transfer of technology through license agreements and filling managerial positions in home country (Zhenzhen et al., 2004, as cited in Séguin et al., 2006), the mentoring of new startup managers and bringing in investments by experienced entrepreneurs (Devesh, 2001, as cited in Séguin et al., 2006), and the development of diaspora business networks (Newland, 2004, as cited in Séguin et al., 2006).

The above examples somewhat echo what Portes (2009) defines as a ‘cyclical flow,’ although the slight difference is that cyclical flow is more of a permanent nature as compared to some of brain circulation initiatives above. Portes (2009) explains how the U.S. created temporary professional migration through its H-1B program, which then generates a cyclical flow of educated people. While many H-1B workers extended their stays and eventually immigrated permanently to the U.S., those who returned created the cyclical professional migration which, in turn, contributed to development of the home country. However, Portes (2009) notes that a cyclical flow can only be positive if the home country has established the infrastructure -- research centers and universities, as well as organizations, businesses and industries -- to absorb the scientific and technological innovations brought back by the professional returnees.

2.2.1.5. Employment-based visa and opportunities in U.S.

Employment-based visas and opportunities in the U.S. can be either a push or a pull factor. Work visa and temporary residence procedures are simplified for international students and graduates as noted by several OECD countries⁶ who have “eased their immigration policies to encourage the temporary or permanent immigration of international students” (OECD, 2011, p. 328). Between the year 2000 and 2011, the number of legal immigrants admitted in the U.S., those defined by the Department of Homeland Security as “persons obtaining legal Permanent Resident status,” is around one million people each year (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011, p.5). Moreover, there were about 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants estimated to be living in the U.S. in 2010, according to the findings from a project conducted by the Pew Research Center (Passel & Cohn, 2011). The presence of legal and illegal immigrants contributes to transformations in the ethnic, racial as well as the cultural composition of the U.S.

Understanding the immigration to the U.S. through employment is important because the influx of immigration fuelled by globalization is mainly to cater to commerce, economic and technology needs of the country. In the U.S., the H-1B is a visa category that allows non-immigrants to be employed temporarily in a job category that is considered by the USCIS part of specialty occupations, such as architecture, accounting, the arts, education, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, health, social sciences, medicine, business, law and theology. Currently the number of H-1B visas issued per year is limited to 65,000 with an additional 20,000 for those with U.S. graduate degrees and no limit for universities and non-profit as well as government research laboratories (USCIS, n. d. –a). Of the 65,000 visas, 6,800 are reserved for citizens of Chile and Singapore under free trade agreements with the countries, however unused visas will be returned to the general pool (USCIS, n. d. –a). Besides, an additional 10,500 visas outside the 65,000 quota are available annually to Australian citizens under

⁶ Current OECD countries can be found here: <http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/>

a similar program known as E-3 visa (USCIS, n. d. –a). The trade agreements that have political and economical agendas between the U.S. and a few of the selected countries provide an additional pull factor to the U.S. for citizens of these countries because the non-immigrant visas are set aside just for them. For the U.S. to maintain its economic and technological competition, highly skilled professionals are hired from countries that may also need them, and this causes the brain drain issue in the source countries, mainly which are developing countries.

Countries compete to attract the best talents they can possibly get from all over the world. A country as advanced as the U.S. knows that even though it has the potential to expand, it still needs the skilled professionals to help in its expansion. Without the continuous inflow of human capital that would meet the demands of globalization, U.S. will lose its competitive edge to other emerging economies such as China, Japan and South Korea. Before the dot com bubble burst in the late 1990's, many companies in the U.S. have advocated increasing the number of H-1B's so that they can hire more foreign skilled professionals. However, the issuance of these visas has since plummeted due to many observable events, such as the U.S. off-shore contracts in India and other countries; and terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Chellaraj et al., 2006). With the visa limitations imposed on hiring skilled immigration, this could pose a negative outcome in the long run because U.S. may not be able to fill the shortages of positions for its high-demand skills jobs such as doctors, engineers, professors and scientists with their own pool of citizens. An article published in NBC News (Linn, 2012) shows the analysis of workers in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, from a report prepared by the OECD in 2011. According to the article, the OECD analyzed the educational attainment of its member countries and found that the U.S. is below average in the relative number of 25- to 34-year- old workers who have STEM degrees, ranking just behind Spain and Turkey (Linn, 2012). This shows that the U.S. will still be actively looking for the best talent and skill to help the country's growth in many years to come. The growth rate of U.S. students studying in the STEM fields is among the lowest in any academic category (Manyika, J., Lund, S., Auguste, B., Mendonca, L., Welsh, T. &

Ramaswamy, S., 2011) while about 60 percent of all foreign graduate students in the U.S. were in the science and engineering majors (National Science Foundation, 2012b).

The main problem in the U.S. lies with the limited number of work visas and red tapes that often times prevent employers from hiring the people they need, and that also drive entrepreneurs to other countries (PNEA and PNYC, 2012). Moreover, the PNEA and PNYC report (2012) also notes that some foreign scientists and engineers who studied in American universities and later on trained in the U.S. are disheartened to go through the complicated path to obtain visas that can lead to their permanent settlement in the U.S.

2.2.1.6. Permanent residency in the U.S.

In the U.S., these are the four main mechanisms through which to become a permanent resident (PR) with eventual eligibility to apply for citizenship in the U.S. First, under the Family-Sponsored Immigration, up to 480,000 people are allowed to become a PR through being related to immediate family members, brothers and sisters (USCIS, n. d. –b). The second category is through the Employment-Based Immigrants where up to 140,000 people are allotted in five preference categories which include professors, researchers, executives, managers, professionals with advance degrees, skilled workers and investors (USCIS, n. d. –b). The third major way to become PR is through the Diversity Immigrants program where up to 55,000 are given through a lottery through six geographic regions, to promote immigration from those countries that are reported not currently the principal sources of immigration to the U.S. (USCIS, n. d. –b). Additionally, there is also a program for refugees and asylum seekers, and the number for admission varies each year. Each year, the U.S. President, in consultation with Congress, determines the number of refugees the country allows. For 2011, up to 80,000 refugees could be admitted to the U.S. based on the number allowed in each regional allocation (Immigration Policy Center, 2010). Typically those with H-1B's would apply to become PR as the next step to remain on a more permanent status in the U.S. The status of PR

indicates some level of security to remain in the U.S. Conversely, those with non-immigrant visas (H-1B) feel that they might need to leave the U.S. when their H-1B ends without a guarantee of a renewal by the employer. With the opportunity given to foreigners to become PR for those who meet the requirements, it is a pull factor for the U.S. to attract more foreign talent and skills, to work and stay in the U.S. for a longer period of time.

2.2.2. Strand Two: Push and pull factors from the individuals

This framework encompasses the various factors that explain why certain immigrants are drawn to certain areas, for instance being “pulled” closer to that area, or being “pushed” away from it. In general, some of these determinants include their personal considerations connected to what is going on around them; such as the political stability, economic factors, employment opportunities, work atmosphere, living environment, and family influence. This study is not focused on the movements that are caused by war, extreme poverty, economic crisis, famine, family reunification or political repatriation. In fact, this study looks at the push and pull of the highly educated as they plan their next chapter of life after graduating with American degrees.

In *Education at a Glance* report, the OECD notes that the different justifications as to why international students decide to remain in the host country after studying (OECD, 2011). Those justifications include work opportunities compared to the country where these international students originate, the ease of integration into the host country, as well as future career advantages that come with the prior work experience and training when returning to the country of origin or when moving to another country (OECD, 2011). According to the report, many OECD countries have made it easier for temporary or permanent immigration of their international students as evidenced by these examples -- in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, the governments make it easier for foreign students who have studied in their universities to settle by granting them additional points through those countries’ immigration point system whereas in Finland and Norway, the

naturalization policies are revised to consider the years of residence spent as students when they assess the eligibility for immigration (OECD, 2010). As discussed earlier, some foreign students remain in the country where they pursued their higher education which resulted in skilled migration in many OECD countries (Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011; Khadria, 2001).

Several reasons underlie why highly educated and highly skilled individuals immigrate to another country, or choose to remain in the foreign country where they studied. In most cases, they make such decisions for economic, political or social reasons such as for job opportunities and satisfaction, better career advancement and work environment, peace and security, and better cost of living and higher standard of living. Kapur and McHale (2005) claim that countries compete for talented human capital by creating pull factors such as offering these individuals different opportunities and then imposing selective barriers so that only specific types of migrants can emigrate. In addition, Oyowe (1996) states that throughout history, countries and centers of academic excellence which offer these pull factors have received the largest numbers of highly qualified professional migrants. As a result, these highly educated and highly skilled individuals have contributed substantially to the economic growth of the countries to which they immigrated, particularly to the scientific and technological fields. As noted above, even though the mobility and interaction of highly skilled people are positive on a global level, the costs to the home countries of losing their talented human capital are immeasurable, both in development opportunities and loss of investment (Oyowe, 1996).

2.2.2.1. Economic considerations

Checks and balances

The migration of highly educated and highly skilled can be examined through the same type of theoretical lens used to look at the migration of labor (Portes, 2009). For

example, neoclassical economic theory has been used to understand these labor movements as natural equilibrium-restoring mechanism between low-wage and high-wage countries, where the high-wage countries are able to pay workers according to their productivity (Borjas, 1990). Borjas (1990) observes that potential migrants estimate the costs and benefits of moving to alternative international locations, and migrate to where the expected discounted net returns are greatest over some time period. According to Borjas (1990), net returns in each future period are estimated by first taking the observed earnings related to the individual's skills in the receiving country and then multiplying them by the probability of obtaining a job in that country, thus to obtain the expected destination earnings. For illegal immigrants, this would also mean the additional factor of the likelihood of being able to avoid deportation. Then, these expected earnings are deducted from the expected earnings in the community of origin, where the observed earnings there are multiplied by the probability of getting a job (Borjas, 1990).

Compared to the macro neo-classical theory that looks at how a potential immigrant explores the wages in his home country or the sending country and the wages he could probably get in the receiving country minus costs for the immigration process, micro neo-classical theory explores in more breadth and depth on how each immigrant makes decisions. Massey, D., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1993) frame the scope of factors that usually covers the probability of avoiding deportation, the probability of employment at destination, one's earnings if employed at the place of destination, the probability of employment and earnings in the country of origin, and the total costs of movement including psychological costs (p. 435). All these factors are the basis for calculating the expected net return to migration just before departure. In other words, one major decision making question that immigrants have is, "Is it worth to migrate?" According to Massey et al. (1993), potential migrants use a set of cost-benefit calculation that make them anticipate a positive net monetary return from their migration. In order to acquire higher wages, individuals engage in the investment of human capital that would enable them to materialize their goals and hopes of immigration (Massey et al., 1993). These

investments include costs of traveling, maintenance during transition of moving and job searching; efforts involved in learning a new language and culture; the difficulty experienced in adapting to new labor market; and the psychological costs of leaving old community and building new ties (Massey et al., 1993, p. 434). Practically, the individual is most likely to migrate to a destination that yields the highest expected net returns. This theory is just based on probability of net income after taking into consideration all the variables mentioned above, however, it may be very subjective to know what one's psychological cost is, what individual characteristics and social conditions are, and how much effort should be put in, into learning of the new language and culture in order to justify the costs.

Neoclassical economic theory claims that people move to a place where they can earn more money (Borjas 1990). However the neoclassical economist's theory is challenged by Portes (2009) who notes that where most professionals come from are generally not from the poorest countries. In fact, he claims that professionals more likely come from mid-income and some, from developed countries where the wage differentials are lower. Neoclassical theory also does not explain why most professionals in sending countries do not migrate despite being exposed to the same wage differentials (Oteiza, 1971; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006, ch.2, as cited in Portes, 2009). To fill in some gaps of the neoclassical theory, Portes (2009) suggested the key concept of 'relative deprivation' which covers three strands:

- These professionals' incomes are not high enough to allow them a middle-class life, according to local standards. This income comparison is not with higher incomes one may earn abroad, but with those earned by other professionals at the home country which can create a motivation to move abroad and earn money abroad (Oteiza, 1971; Portes & Ross, 1976, as cited in Portes, 2009, p. 13)
- Their training is too advanced to local employment opportunities that they see their professional development stunted and they suffer due to lack opportunity for growth. These comparisons are made through looking at other professionals in

the First World countries, not because of their incomes but because of their better working conditions (Alarcon, 1999, as cited in Portes, 2009, p. 13)

- A structural imbalance that creates a roadblock. This happens when the implementation of cultural and technological developments from advanced nations into the less-developed countries would make it more difficult for those less-developed countries to produce home-grown talent or retain them for local employment (Portes & Walton, 1981, ch.2; Sassen, 1988, as cited in Portes, 2009, p.13)

According to Portes (2009), this difficulty is caused by a process where the:

Professional standards and training practices are disseminated from the core nations to the rest of the world, where it is copied by emerging countries. Young professionals trained under these First World standards then would look for occupational opportunities that would make use of their advanced skills, which are scarce in the local economy. Therefore, these young professionals are known to experience relative deprivation at home, and would seek occupational opportunities elsewhere, especially in the First World countries where these standards derived from, and where they are also in need of human capital with such training. (p. 14)

People who experience relative deprivation feel that they are disadvantaged and that they deserved more benefits. To understand relative deprivation in the context of labor migration and economic considerations, Portes (2009) explains the types of deficiencies that are experienced by the professionals in one country that cause them to want to move in search of economic opportunities -- for example, in their wages or in their professional development. This concept of relative deprivation will be used to understand part of the findings of this study. The difference between the professionals that Portes (2009) referred to, and the participants in this study, is that most of the participants first moved to the U.S. for advanced degree study. They did not originally move to the U.S. as professionals who wanted to earn more money. However the concept

of relative deprivation will provide an understanding of the participants' reasoning when they deliberated remaining in the U.S.

Purchasing power and cost of living

Under general economic consideration, costs and benefits of moving are not the main factors in consideration since the concept of relative deprivation is also included in the discussion within the context of labor migration and economic considerations. Another more specific example is the purchasing power and cost of living in both Malaysia and the U.S. The cost of living functions as an economic reason people consider as a push factor of Malaysia and a pull factor of the U.S. In general, the cost of living is discussed as a comparison of two places when it comes to which one is more expensive and which is more affordable to live with the amount of salary and costs of things and services. Related to the cost of living, is the bigger picture, which is the standard of living, which refers to the level of wealth, comfort, material goods and necessities available to a certain socioeconomic class in a certain geographic area. Some of the standard of living factors include income, quality and availability of employment, class disparity, poverty rate, quality and affordability of housing, inflation rate, number of vacation days per year, affordable or free access to quality healthcare, quality and availability of education, cost of goods and services, national economic growth, economic and political stability, political and religious freedom, environmental quality, and also climate and safety (Investopedia, n.d.).

In addition, the media coverage often paints the cost of living in Malaysia and the U.S., although there were more news about the cost of living in Malaysia as retrieved from two local newspapers, The Star and New Straits Times. The media coverage often publishes news about the rising cost of living in Malaysia, as well as government strategies and incentives to alleviate the issue. For example, here were some of the headlines:

- Helping Malaysians cope with the rising cost of living (The Star, May 28, 2012).

- Thumbs up for cost of living - National Key Result Area (NKRA) initiatives (The Star, April 30, 2012).
- Deputy Prime Minister: Tackling rising cost of living will be main agenda (News Straits Times, November 19, 2011).
- Fighting the cost of living (The Star, November 7, 2011).
- More items in basket of goods (The Star, March 23, 2010).
- Soaring cost of living in the Klang Valley (The Star, February 28, 2009).

The cost of living in the U.S. was also found on CNN's website; however, the U.S. the media coverage mainly focused on the best cities to live in, social security and pension benefits. Here were some of the headlines:

- Social Security increase should be bigger (CNN, October 10, 2011).
- U.S. cost of living hits record, passes pre-crisis high (USA Today, March 20, 2011).
- Keeping standard of living a worry – poll (CNN Money, March 19, 2009).
- U.S. still a bargain for expats (CNN Money, July 24, 2008).
- Inflation getting 'uglier' and 'uglier' (CNN Money, June 13, 2008).

Therefore it is not only speculation that participants feel that the cost of living in Malaysia make the country as a less attractive destination as compared to the U.S. since the media often times project images of the growing cost of living in Malaysia. In order to understand the cost of living, it is only fair to view it through the way purchasing power is determined. The United Nations Statistics Division (n.d.) defined purchasing power parity or also known as PPP as, "The number of currency units required to buy goods equivalent to what can be bought with one unit of the currency of the base country or with one unit of the common currency of a group of countries" (Glossary section, under Purchasing-power Parity [PPP]).

2.2.2.2. Assimilation and social capital

In general, the assimilation process includes the integration of one's life, culture and language into the U.S. mainstream society, which include the full adoption of English language, maybe some loss or gradually diminishing of foreign languages especially the mother tongue (Salomone, 2000). The process also includes the shift to American fashion and lifestyle that usually occur in the new second generation of immigrants. One of the main ways assimilation could occur is through schooling, where, "schooling is a prime vehicle for indoctrinating the young in a core of common values and political principles, teaching them a common language along with civic virtue, essentially making them good citizens" (Salomone, 2000, p. 38). Although Salomone's claim is that the U.S. school system helps the generations of newcomers into the mainstream society, I think that it could happen to new first generation of immigrants as well, not necessarily only those who go through the school system as children, but especially those who go through the American higher education system as adults.

Moreover, international students in the U.S. often face different types of challenges as they transition into a brand new academic and living atmosphere, which would affect their behavior and psychological well-being during their pursuit of a degree (Zhou et al., 2011). Zhou et al. (2011) conducted a study to understand international graduate students' academic adaptation in an American graduate school, and found three major themes. The researchers found that students find ways to adjust in the new foreign environment through constant communication with their family back in their home country and also with their professors and academic staff in their higher education institution in the U.S. Another way to learn to adjust is through strategies to improve on their English language skills and knowledge of U.S. culture; and finally, through getting graduate work experience like in research and assistantships. International students do not just come to the U.S. to study, they have to learn ways that would enable them to be successful in their academic journey in the foreign land (Zhou et al., 2011). The experience in higher education institutions in the U.S. is a means for many international

students and potential immigrants to assimilate, whether consciously or unconsciously, and whether they want to, or reluctantly do so.

The concepts of social capital and social network play an important role in immigrants' assimilation. The concept of social capital has been defined in different ways because of the vast variety of foci and application to different and diverse groups of immigrants across various locations and time (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998b; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Putnam et al., 1993). In a very general sense, social structures and interpersonal networks are some possible foundations of social capital. Social capital encompasses the resources and support that migrants get during their immigration process from members of a social network (Massey et al., 1987; Massey & Espinosa, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Wilson, 1998; Zahniser, 1999). It typically refers to the resources that are provided by family members, relatives, friends, and members of a network to help in the migration process which includes settlement and employment in a foreign country (Massey et al., 1987; Massey & Espinosa, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). While social capital is the ability to gain access to resources by being a member of a particular social network; the network is explained as a set of connections that may hold resources coming from the shared interests and made available to its members (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Social capital does not depend much on the relative economic or occupational success of immigrants, but it depends more on the extent of network ties among them (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p.65). Therefore, even if immigrants from the same country are highly educated and wealthy, but if they do feel any obligation to help each other, or if they are located far from each other geographically; it does not help in establishing good social capital (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

A specific example of how social capital and social network are crucial in assimilation of new immigrants is shown through the findings of a qualitative study on Albanian immigrants in Greece. The study examines the role that various forms of social capital play in the social, economic and institutional assimilation of Albanian immigrants in Greece (Iosifides, T., Lavrentiadou, M., Petracou, E., & Kontis, A., 2007). It focuses

on the importance of social capital that involves family, kinship, ethnic and other social networks when it comes to decisions immigrants make in adjusting to their new life in Greece. Their findings show that bonding social capital, which is related to the family bond and kinship networks, is considered the most important factor for the Albanian immigrants when they learn to assimilate into the Greek society (Iosifides et al., 2007). Another type of social network applied was the type of bonding social capital that involves the ethnic network. Through this ethnic network, social relationships are formed with other immigrants mainly of the same nationality because they share something in common such as their immigration challenges, journey and experience; the social assimilation in Greece and the familiarity of their language and culture (Iosifides et al., 2007).

2.2.2.3. Gendered injustice

Another personal consideration, especially for women, is the issues associated with gendered injustice. Sexism is defined as the systematic oppression of women on institutional, cultural and individual levels (Hackman, 2010). Bernstein (2010) found that the majority of the problems associated with discrimination against women “lies with the conflicting needs and norms of society and employers. A majority of men and women still work in largely sex-segregated occupations, leaving many women stuck in lower-paying jobs such as cashiers and maids” (p.347). Although today women can get equal treatment in the work place, they would have to behave like traditional men and sacrifice their primary family responsibilities that typically fall under their responsibility as women (Bernstein, 2010). To make it feasible, many women choose to take time off or work part time to that they can fulfill that family responsibility to care for their children (Bernstein, 2010). I think, in a way, women’s full potential may not be utilized, not because they are incapable, but because they had to sometimes make a choice between a career and family responsibilities that fall on their shoulders. The gender roles are still understood through the masculine and feminine roles where the roles are just the opposite, like in a binary and hierarchical, such as superior and inferior (Hackman, 2010).

Hackman (2010) defines masculine as:

... tough and superior, feminine would then be considered weak and inferior. Human attributes labeled as feminine are consistently devalued in the society and used to insult men, thus speaking volumes about the true status of women in the society. (p.317)

Due to historical oppression and societal expectations of what the women's role should entail, Malaysian women too, may have a lot of challenges being viewed as a capable contributing member of the society or being given equal chance to climb the corporate ladder. Another issue that would prevail in Malaysia within the context of sexism is the lack of freedom to choose what to wear. Botkin, Jones and Kachwaha (2007) argue that sexism influences one's choice of what to wear, that "sexism is often experienced in the most intimate parts of our lives. Restrictions ranging from open and safe expressions, physical safety, clothing preferences, control over one own body, physical movement, relationship choices, and sexuality are limitations imposed by cultural standards and enforced in private spaces" (p. 176). Choice and preference of clothing is one of the cultural elements that promote the discrimination of women. Women feel discriminated when they do not follow the norm of the society. Therefore, they might want to conform to societal expectations, even though that might restrict them. According to Losh (2003), conformity is defined as the situation when an individual accepts the social influence of a particular behavior due to the need to get approval and support, to seek social harmony, or to avoid disapproval and rejection. Moreover Miller, McIntype and Mantrala (1993) argue that the symbolic meaning connected to the clothing styles is established only after social interaction takes place, and is transferred to the wearer. Not surprisingly, women feel the need to conform to expectations of family and society when it comes to choice of clothing, whether it is communicated to these women, or simply implied because of societal pressure.

According to Lorber (2010) gender is a way for human beings to organize their lives especially in this society, where people depend on a conventional and expected

division of labor. People are chosen to do different tasks in this society based on their talents, motivations, and competence, which Lorber defined as their “demonstrated achievements” (2010, p.321). On the other hand, people can also be tasked for a job or responsibility based on their gender, race and ethnicity, what Lorber called “ascribed membership in a category of people” (2010, p.321). Malaysia is still a highly sex-segregated society, where some occupations are male-dominated such as gardeners, bus drivers, postal workers, engineers and lawyers, and some occupations are female-dominated such as sales promoters, cashiers, receptionists, and nurses. Comparatively, there are more women leaders and more women holding the top positions in organizations in the U.S. than in Malaysia. In addition, a woman’s freedom to choose what she wants to wear is also monitored, either by her husband or her family especially in an Islamic society.

Gendered injustice may be affected by the rising influence of Islam in Malaysia and the expectations of Muslims following the Islamic laws also affected the gendered opportunities in Malaysia. A report found under Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) shows that in 2011, the Gender Inequality Index placed Malaysia at 43 out of 146 countries with data, and “the World Economic Forum ranked Malaysia 97 out of 135 countries with a score of 0.6525 where 0 represents inequality and 1 represents equality” (SIGI, n.d., para. 2). Women’s status in Malaysia has gradually improved since the early 1990’s, especially in the areas of educational attainment, labor force participation in higher paying occupations, involvement in business activities, and improved health status (UNDP, 2007, p.xi). However, women are said to “remain unequal to men in measures of economic participation, opportunity and political empowerment” (World Economic Forum, 2010, p.204). This is mainly due to the existence of the dual legal systems of civil law and multiple versions of Syariah law (Islamic law) which contribute to discrimination against women, particularly in the field of marriage and family relations (SIGI, n. d.). Although Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, and Muslims form the largest single religious group (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of

Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], 2004, p.2), it is not mandatory for non-Malays to embrace Islam in Malaysia.

Although in general women have the freedom to move and conduct daily activities, some state-imposed restrictions based on Islamic laws such as the Syariah law, would apply to everyone, not only Muslims, in Islamic states such as Kelantan in Malaysia. For example, when the Kelantan state government introduced gender segregation policy in supermarkets, swimming pools, cinemas and other entertainment outlets it affected many businesses especially those run by women (National Council of Women's Organization, 2005, p.30). For example, a non-Muslim woman salon owner was fined many times because she was deemed as breaking the law for allowing her workers to cut men's hair (The Star, 2012, November 23). Therefore, the rising influence of Islam does matter to the aspects of gendered opportunities in Malaysia.

2.2.3. Strand Three: Identity perspectives

2.2.3.1. Transnationalism and identity formation

This third strand will include discussions of transnationalism as a changing process and how it transforms one's identity in relation to decision making. As Portes (1998a) argues, transnational acts and identities are manifested through one another, where identities influence acts, acts create identities and over time both identities and acts change and branch into more extensions. The term transnational refers to "individuals or groups who are settled in different national societies but they share some common territorial, religious and linguistic references, and use transnational networks to consolidate solidarity beyond national boundaries" (Faist, 1998, p. 308, as cited in Kastoryano, 2000). As Yeoh, Willis and Fakhri (2003) put it, "transnational identities while fluid and flexible, are at the same time grounded in particular places at particular times" (p.212) pointing to the same direction of Aihwa Ong's work (1999) which is discussed in more detail in the next section. For that reason, the identities are always

changing, the formation of identity is always changing, particularly through involvement of concurrent events and happenings in more than one society, what Huang, Teo and Yeoh (2000) called “simultaneous embeddedness” (p.392). Moreover, Louie (2006) also found evidence that immigrants often use a dual frame of reference to evaluate their experiences and meaning in the country in which they have settled. The researcher found that while immigrants may view the country they have settled in as their *home*, they do not separate themselves from their country of origin as it is embedded as part of their lives (Louie, 2006). Therefore, transnational identity is a new identity said to have developed through the immigrants’ experiences and interactions within their new society while still continuously maintaining contact with their country of origin, as evidenced in a study on the social construction of transnational identity of New Zealanders living in Australia (Green & Power, 2005). The researchers found that migration is not seen as the loss of one national identity, but the building of a transnational identity that derives from both the country of origin and the host country. Similarly, when migrants emigrate they do not just end all associations and ties with their home country, in fact, they still maintain strong relationships with their families and communities they left behind (Portes, 2009).

The notion of transnationalism is understood to encompass the intense traffic of communication, information and resources across places of origin and destination (Vertovec, 2004) and a process where “immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton, 1994, p.8). The different kinds of transnational organizations established by first generation immigrants include civic or cultural organizations, economic organizations, hometown associations, international philanthropic organizations, home country philanthropies, political committees, religious groups, sports groups, and student organizations; as demonstrated by the Colombian, Dominican and Mexican expatriates in the U.S. (Portes, 2009, p. 9). The research literature has also ascertained that the immigrations most likely to take part in these organizations are not those who have just arrived in the new country, but those who have

settled down, better established and with a more solid economic position in the host countries (Portes, Haller & Guarnizo, 2002; Guarnizo, Portes & Haller, 2003; Portes, Escobar & Walton Radford, 2007).

Hardwick (2010) projected that identity formation may be influenced by the conditions in the sending or home country, events that happen during the journey as well as the related economic, political, and cultural contexts of the receiving society. According to Hardwick (2010), “although transmigrants are often described in spatially interwoven terms as migrants who live in two worlds at the same time, in order to find ways to survive or even thrive in their new lives, they are forced to make decisions and produce actions in their new locales” (p.88). They focus their energies on surviving and adjusting to their new place of residence during the earliest years of resettlement, although most decisions and viewpoints still based on their past experience in the home country (Hardwick, 2010). Hardwick’s (2010) study looks at the international migration at the Canadian-U.S. borderland and issues faced by Americans especially in their sense of belonging and identity living in Canada. The researcher wants to find out if making the decision to remain an American citizen, or even to maintain dual citizenship, minimizes the American respondents’ sense of belonging in Canada. Her findings show that it depends on the spatial and temporal contexts of their Canadian settlement experience. In particular, the answer varied by the demographic and socioeconomic background of the migrants, their reasons for leaving the U.S. and the time they arrived in Canada. A scenario provided by the researcher is this -- those who left the U.S. during the Vietnam war era held on to their sense of belonging to Canada, despite what their eventual decision on their citizenship, and those who arrive later as retirees, academics, entrepreneurs, midlife mavericks and spiritual seekers were less likely to feel the attachment of “being Canadian” (Hardwick, 2010, p. 99). Hardwick speculated that this could be because they were quite mobile and were able to travel to the U.S. regularly, and relatively able to still maintain close connections with friends and families in the U.S. She found that those who had been in Canada the longest and who initially fled the U.S. for Canada for political reasons have a stronger sense belonging to Canada. On the other

hand, those from the U.S. who just came for economic reasons more recently were more likely to strongly hold on to the attachment of “being American” (Hardwick, 2010, p.99).

2.2.3.2. Flexible citizenship

As stated earlier, transnational theory looks at how people are flexible in their assimilation to the norms and values of the culture that immigrants are in. Ong (1999) focuses on overseas Chinese to discuss transnationalism because “not only have Chinese diasporas and their relationships with China and host countries historically been salient, there is also a huge body of scholarship concerning overseas Chinese, especially in Southeast Asia” (p. 17). Although Ong’s explanation focuses on overseas Chinese, it helps us understand how some Malaysians, especially the Chinese and Indians from Malaysia, develop their sense of belonging and national identity. According to Ong (1999), Chinese immigrants outside mainland China have always been ‘residual China,’ or considered as minorities in host or receiving countries, also identified as less culturally ‘authentic’ Chinese (p.22). This phenomenon is due to the displacement, travel, capital accumulation and other transnational processes that have affected a large numbers of late twentieth century Chinese immigrants (Ong, 1999). The researcher also claims that over the years, the evolving and varied status “chineseness” identified by immigrants who may not be strongly identified with a particular country, has been subjected to different forms of government policies that either fix them in place or disperse in space. Therefore, people’s identities depend on the implications of the country and markets in which they are in, in relation to the practices, beliefs and structures involved as they assimilate to the new country (Ong, 1999).

Aihwa Ong’s (1999) concept of flexible citizenship provides a framework to explain how identities are formed with immigrants especially Asians, who may not be strongly identified with a particular country. This is relevant to the case of Malaysians because some of them are descendents of immigrants from countries like China and India. The affirmative action policies in Malaysia that favor a particular ethnic group

(*Bumiputra*/Malays) make the other ethnic groups (such as Chinese, Indians and other minorities) feel lack of that sense of belonging, and relatively, impacted how they perceive their identity with Malaysia. In particular, flexible citizenship is a form of citizenship where its members are flexible in defining their own citizenship based on economic considerations as opposed to citizenship based on the allegiance to the country or political rights (Ong, 1999). When people emigrate, many personal changes take place in their lives especially when they are in the new location and experience new cultures and lifestyle. New immigrants may or may not be flexible in their assimilation to the norms and values of the culture they are in. Ong (1999) discusses how identities are transformed through association with transnational experiences, especially for immigrants who may not be strongly identified with a particular country. The researcher states that transnational processes are based on cultural practices stimulated by the operations of global markets. For example in Asia, the transnational flows and networks play a big role in shaping the formation of immigrants' identities (Ong, 1999). The researcher further notes that in the globalization era, people move from one place to another, and their identities are shaped by the elements associated with these movements and settlements. New forms of citizenships may be developed because of the globalization process. Therefore, the identities may also change with the openness to transnational experiences and activities, as well as through exposure to diverse people and cultures (Ong, 1999).

Transnationalism is an evolving process because of its relations with the changing condition of global capitalism and social conditions that represents the flexibility of a transnational (Ong, 1999). A transnational's flexibility in geographical and social positioning, as argued by the researcher is the outcome of expression between the management of the family, state, and capital (Ong, 1999, p.3). Due to the flexibility and mobility of transnationals who are highly educated and highly skilled, their rapid movement and constant travel between the receiving (host) and sending (home) countries would increasingly benefit both countries. In essence, transnationalism does promote brain circulation, or the circulation and sharing of knowledge and human capital, because

the social networks that bring together immigrants are in fact the global institutions that connect new immigrants with their counterparts at their home country (Saxenian, 2002). These new transnational communities provide the opportunity and access for people like themselves to involve in the ever demanding and evolving global economy.

Fong (2011) applies Ong's work in her research about Chinese students in their quest for flexible citizenship in developed countries. Fong's ethnographic work followed the experiences of young Chinese students in countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, Ireland, Japan, U.S., and Singapore. She found that most of her Chinese transnational students did not come from affluent families; in fact, they were those who had not achieve enough to get accepted into a Chinese university or those who were dissatisfied with their current jobs. These young Chinese participants experienced a "floating life" when abroad. They describe their journey in developed countries as "conditions of floating (*piao*), a concept associated with instability, transience, uncertainty and lack of rootedness" (p. 97). Fong provides the varied reasons given by her transnational Chinese students of wanting to be permanent residents or citizens of the developed country. Among them, one reason stood out -- they wanted to be flexible -- with PR or citizenship with the foreign country, they could live and work flexibly in China without being subjected to restrictions that Chinese citizens have to experience in their own home country, and that they could get work that would allow them to travel frequently between China and the developed country. It is not just about money, jobs or lifestyle, it concerns flexibility as well. With the many constraints and restrictions placed upon Chinese students, it is not surprising to note that Fong's Chinese students' aspirations included the quest for, "freedom to pursue a personal lifestyle in which one is free from competition, gossip, expectations, obligations, and constraints associated with social relationships" (Fong, 2011, p. 170).

2.2.3.3. Identity and home

In trying to understand how the decision to choose a home comes about, I need to first understand what *home* is. Home has different meaning and implication to different people, even when they were born and grew up in the same country such as Malaysia, studied in a graduate school in the U.S., have the same ethnicity, or speak the same dialects and languages. In a physical sense, a home is a structure such as a house, an apartment or a townhouse that is a shared space, shared between and among family members and relatives. Home is defined as “an attachment to a particular setting, environment, in comparison with which all other associations with places have only a limited significance” (Relph, 1976, p.39, as cited in Lam & Yeoh, 2004); and “an emotional attachment to a safe and stable physical center of the universe” (Rapoport, 1995, p. 27). The notions of ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ are said to be more ambiguous as international cross-border movements become more rampant, and in particular the migration was mainly due to the rise of globalization needs of skills and talents (Benjamin, 1995). In addition, Lam and Yeoh (2004) defined *home* as a place where one’s identity and affiliation to a particular community is established where its “meanings centered on family and kin relations, nostalgia, national pride and lifecourse events” (p. 158). In their study, they looked at how Chinese-Malaysian transmigrants in Singapore negotiate their own definition of home and national identity especially when these transmigrants live in several communities at the same time. Lam and Yeoh (2004) found that these transmigrants’ identities, behavior and values are often not limited by where they are, physically. They are still actively engaged in transnational activities, that is, being involved in activities that provide a relationship that ties back them back to their home country. One explanation as to why the migrants have formed multiple national identities is that they want to adapt, and to counter any setbacks so that they may be better equipped to face “the overwhelming social, economic and political pressures encountered in their daily lives” (Lam & Yeoh, 2004, p. 144).

To transnational migrants, *home* means more than one location, or one country. According to Levitt (2004), transnational migrants come with diverse backgrounds in terms of their cultures and where they originate, and so they work, pray, and partake in political activities in different and several contexts rather than in a single nation-state even though they may have immigrated to the U.S. Although they develop further ties and cultivate their roots in the host country where they now settled and call *home*, they still maintain strong homeland ties, and belong to religious, language and political movements throughout the world (Levitt, 2004). However, not all migrants are transnational migrants or have transnational identity, and not all who participate transnational practices do so all the time.

Ghosh and Wang (2003) cite the work of Vertovec (1999) to emphasize that transnational acts are often born out of an awareness of multiple locality and a desire to maintain multiple identities for different reasons. Ghosh and Wang conducted a study that was based on themselves as self-reflective narratives of two international doctoral students in Canada. It looks at their social and cultural associations that identified reasons that were instrumental in their cross-border involvements and how transnationalism influenced the development of their multiple identities (Ghosh & Wang, 2003). Their findings show that although both researchers seem to possess similar demographic and economic backgrounds, they believe that interactive psychological, socio-cultural and economic processes influence the formation of an individual's transnational identity. Bretell and Sargent (2008) indicate that some groups of immigrants may have choices about maintaining or rejecting continuous relationships with the country from where they originate. Immigrants could make choices due to political reasons such as becoming dual citizens and maintaining flexible citizenship; economic factors such as sending remittances and involving in global labor networks; cultural reasons such as visiting ethnic heritage sites and celebrating ethnic festivals; or due to religious and spiritual practice that combines 'here' and 'there' (Bretell & Sargent, 2008). The researchers found that these choices result in differing levels of immigrant transnationality in time and place.

2.3. Summary

The conceptual framework for my research is comprised of the three strands developed above: national perspectives, personal perspectives as well as identity perspectives. The national perspective strand addresses the early migratory flows in and out of Malaysia and the U.S.; why foreign students study abroad; governmental policies in Malaysia and in the U.S. and how they impacted Malaysians in their educational pursuits. The national perspectives also look at global competition for human capital, including the job and visa opportunities afforded to foreign students and foreign graduates with American degrees. These are important to explore because they can either be the push or pull factors in one's decision making. The personal perspectives strand are mainly the structural issues at the personal level that address individual determinants as understood through economic considerations; assimilation and social capital as well as gendered injustice. What I am interested to know is to what extent individuals are influenced by these factors especially given the comparative views they have gained, having lived in both Malaysia and the U.S. These are the personal perspectives that the analysis will be based on. In particular, adjustments are explored to understand what it takes to live in the U.S. – the process of being able to succeed as a student and making economic considerations. Having made that adjustment, though not necessarily to remain in the U.S., the identity perspectives explore how they now interchangeably use multiple frames of reference to assess their experience in the country in which they have settled and how they may have adopted a more flexible citizenship. Next, the third strand explores more deeply individuals' identity, including the concept of transnational identity and flexible citizenship, for those who identify with more than one place and culture, and can be flexible because they do not strongly affiliated themselves with any one country. Moreover I am also interested to look at the relationship between their identity and how they define what *home* is to them. Also, did their new identity influence their decision making, or the other more macro reasons did, and what can we learn from these findings?

Key theories that will be used to answer the research questions are through the framework of economic relative deprivation, brain circulation, transnational identity and flexible citizenship, assimilation and social capital. Through the conceptual framework, I hope I am able to answer the research questions of *who* the participants are, *what* are the push and pull dynamics that influence their decision making whether to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after the attainment of their graduate degrees, and finally to get a sense of reasons and suggestions for repatriation. With Malaysia trying different strategies to keep their students within Malaysia, and implementing other strategies to attract Malaysian-born migrants to return from abroad, as well as the U.S. creating opportunities for more highly skilled graduates to study, work and stay; the push and pull factors at the national perspectives are considerations not to be ignored. Once these research questions are answered, the findings could provide clues and foundation for recommendation and future research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Introduction to research goals

The main goal of this dissertation is to understand the push and pull dynamics that drive highly educated Malaysian-born graduates, especially those who with master's, doctoral or terminal professional degrees from U.S. universities, to decide whether to remain in the United States or to return to Malaysia after the attainment of their graduate degrees. Three theoretical strands inform this research. The first strand addresses the push and pull dynamics in the context of the national perspectives by looking at related government policies in Malaysia and the U.S. The second strand examines push and pull through individuals' personal reasons such as their economic considerations, assimilation and social capital, and also gendered injustice. The third strand explores the nature of transnationalism for these individuals in the development of their identity and how that influences their decision of where *home* should be.

As discussed in the previous chapter, I have a strong personal interest in this research topic because of its close ties to my own identity in the U.S., my sense of assimilation to this new environment, my initial and future academic and life goals, the decision making factors that influence what I study, where I go to school, what work I do, where I work, as well as what and where *home* is to me. I often wonder if other Malaysians have the same thought processes as I do as I make decisions about my personal, academic and work situations. I also look back at the family and education environments in Malaysia and wonder if those environments would play a role in my future decision making of whether or not I remain in the U.S. when I finish this dissertation. I also look at the experiences I have had and the friends I made during my time in the U.S., and I wonder if those experience and networks will help me determine

where I want to be, where my family should be, where I want to raise my children or where I want to live and call *home*.

3.2. Research questions

Three major research questions are explored. The first research question investigates *who* the participants are; those who remained in the U.S. and those who returned to Malaysia after they have finished their studies in the master's, doctoral or terminal professional degrees in the U.S. This includes learning about their demographic background including their age, ethnicities, gender, family and marital status; degree major, level and duration of their studies; reasons for studying in the U.S.; funding support and their experience and expectations. Through this first question, the notions of home, transnational identity and flexible citizenship are also explored. The second research question explores the reasons *why* these participants have chosen to return to Malaysia or remain in the U.S. Questions look at their push and pull factors in relations to Malaysia and the United States; based on the economic, personal, political and socio-cultural domains. This approach helps to identify if there is a strong relationship between these domains and their decision making process. The third research question is about repatriation. The question looks at what will motivate Malaysian-born migrants who have been living in the U.S., to return to Malaysia. Participants speculated on motivations that might bring Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S. to return to Malaysia, whether it is short term or long term.

We cannot treat all the highly skilled knowledge workers as homogeneous because they are not. Therefore, it is significant to hear the personal narratives of how those decisions are made by people who have made those decisions. The research strands and questions guided the conceptualization of the research design for this dissertation.

3.3. Research design

The qualitative research design is intended for participants to express their real life experiences situated in a diversity of contexts, contingencies, life stories and circumstances (Smith & Favell, 2006). The main inquiry method for this study was interviewing. The purpose of interviewing is to allow for the exploration of the other person's outlook (Patton, 2002). In essence, "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumptions that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, and to gather their stories" (Patton, 2002, p.341). Therefore, the major methods used to collect data are face-to-face interviews, phone interviews and web interviews which include Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger and Skype. Each interview took approximately one hour and each person was interviewed only once.

3.3.1. Subjects and settings

The research questions are answered through in-depth interviews with two groups of Malaysian alumni of U.S. graduate programs. While all of the participants were born in Malaysia, one group (n=15) encompassed those who have chosen to remain in the U.S., eleven of whom are now permanent residents and naturalized⁷ U.S. citizens while four are holding non-immigrant visas. Another group (n=7) comprised those who have since returned to Malaysia after they finished their graduate studies; some of them right after graduation and for some, after they have worked in the U.S. for a while.

⁷ Based on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics Annual Report Flow, naturalized U.S. citizens go through the naturalization process which is defined as, "the process by which U.S. citizenship is conferred upon foreign citizens or nationals after fulfilling requirements established by the Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act" (Lee, J., 2011, U.S. Naturalizations: 2010, para. 1).

3.3.2. Sampling procedure

For this study, both purposive and snowball sampling procedures are used. The purposive sampling is employed where the participants fall under the category of extreme or deviant case sampling (Patton, 2002). As defined by Patton (2002), “this strategy involves selecting cases that are information rich because they are unusual or special in some way” (p.230). Specifically, this study seek participants who were born in Malaysia, age between 23 and 50; female and male; of all ethnicities and marital status; who have attained an American master’s, doctoral or terminal professional degrees, and currently work and/or live in Malaysia or the U.S.A. Individuals who fit the criteria for the subjects of this study were invited to participate.

The purposive sampling procedure used in this study included first contacting those whom I knew to fit the criteria -- friends and acquaintances who are Malaysian-born individuals who have graduated from an American university with a graduate, professional or terminal degree. The resources included universities I have attended and organizations to which I have belonged. Online search and emails provided avenues to facilitate contact. As a student at University of Kentucky, I know some Malaysian students and former students personally and through acquaintances. I also have had access to University of Kentucky (UK) Malaysia Alumni Association listserv because I joined their mailing list, which is moderated by a Malaysian who is a former UK graduate now living in Malaysia.

Due to the complexity of finding Malaysian-born individuals with American graduate degrees in Malaysia and the U.S., this study also used a snowball sampling procedure. According to Creswell (2008), “snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling that typically proceeds after a study begins and occurs when the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to study” (p. 217). Also known as chain sampling, this procedure is a good strategy to locate specific information-rich, key informants. As stated by Patton (2002), the process starts by asking interviewees to

recommend other people who fit the criteria. Moreover, Creswell (2008) noted that this recruitment process leads to “purposeful sampling of individuals that had not been anticipated when the project began” (p. 217). Snowball sampling is effective especially for a target population that is hard to locate.

I initiated contact with the moderator of the online University of Kentucky (UK) alumni mailing group. This group has more than 100 members made up of UK alumni and present students living in Malaysia, U.S. and elsewhere in the world. An email invitation was sent to the members through the group mailing list. I also joined an online Yahoo group called the Malaysian Professional and Business Association (MPBA) whose members are mainly professionals born in Malaysia who have now immigrated to or work around San Francisco Bay Area, although this online group was also available to other Malaysian-born individuals in any location who wish to broaden their social network. This enabled me to send my initial invitation letter seeking participation for interviews via the group’s mailing list. I contacted the moderator of this group, who gave me the permission to send out email invitations to seek prospective participants from their online mailing list of 300 members. Another strategy used was through a Malaysian’s personal blog whose blog discusses current issues in education, charity and youth. Through one of the group mailing lists above, the owner of this blog contacted me and informed me that he would help me by posting the invitation email on his blog since many people visited this blog. He was a student at that time and did not fit the criteria for this study. Another participant also recommended I post the invitation in an online forum, www.mybuddies.net which had a discussion board mainly joined by Malaysian-born individuals living abroad and in Malaysia, as well as Malaysian-born migrants who lived in different parts of the world who shared questions, stories, insights about all sorts of topics such as immigration, government policies, food, gatherings, etc. There are more than 2,000 members in this online forum. Through these contact points, I sent out an email to listserv and a note for the forum to introduce myself and my research proposal and began the recruitment of participants. I explained the criteria for participants for the dissertation, and invited prospective participants to contact me via email if they meet

those criteria. In addition, I also asked these contacts to introduce me to any others who fit the criteria, which is part of the snowball sampling technique.

The study was open to persons born in Malaysia, age between 23 and 50; female and male; of all ethnicities and marital status; who have attained an American master's, doctoral or terminal professional degrees; and currently working and/or living in Malaysia or the U.S.A. An invitation letter (Appendix A) was emailed to the mailing lists. When a prospective participant contacted me of their interest, I followed up with screening questions (Appendix B) to make sure they meet the criteria for this study. Eventually I found twenty two participants for this study.

A sample of the invitation letter is included in Appendix A, and screening questions are found in Appendix B.

3.3.3. Abductive reasoning as an approach to the data

In the field of research, inductive reasoning is based on “the presumption that laws or generalizations can be developed from the accumulation of observations and cases that the close inspection of ever more data can be made to reveal regularities” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 155). The way the inductive reasoning is done is that the observations are collected, and continued on until a generalization is developed. At the end of the other spectrum is deductive reasoning which, “is founded on the assertion that empirical research can be used only to test theories” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 155). In other words through a deductive reasoning approach, the use of empirical research is only to test existing ideas with the aim to reach a particular conclusion. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) claim that this approach would mean that “there is little or no basis on which empirical research can inform the generation of new theories” (p. 155).

The focus of how this qualitative research is conducted is by looking at the method of developing the ideas and themes through abductive reasoning. As Coffey and

Atkinson (1996) put it, abductive reasoning starts from a particular happening or a surprising finding, which we find by, “inspecting our own experience, our stock of knowledge of similar, comparable phenomena and the equivalent stock of ideas that can be included from within our disciplines (including theories and framework) and neighboring fields and then try to account for that phenomenon by relating it to broader concepts” (p. 156). Abductive reasoning is not confined within the data only; in fact the authors find that it goes beyond the data themselves to locate them in explanatory framework (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 156).

This is what I did as I approached the data – I knew that there are international push and pull factors in immigration as a phenomenon. However, I had no specifics in mind and no a priori generalizations to these qualitative research data. In fact, I try to create meaning and understanding of what the data are telling me by linking them with existing ideas, former findings from other studies, as well as new observations (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). As stated by Coffey and Atkinson (1996), “abductive reasoning lies at the heart of grounded theorizing although not necessary to endorse grounded theory” (p. 155) and yet it is appropriate for qualitative work where, “an open-minded intellectual approach is normally advocated” (Kelle, 1995, as cited in Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 156). Although I had interview questions set, the approach allowed for participants to share their viewpoints which could come in any direction – which may be positive or negative in their own definition or perspective. Through the abductive reasoning approach, the concepts and ideas emerged from the data. However, some of these findings were also parallel to existing ideas as were found in other studies that used other means of data collection such as surveys (See World Bank report, 2011).

3.3.4. Data collection

The data were collected by way of interviews. The interview questions covered demographics, when and why the respondents came to the U.S. for their higher education, their educational and working experiences, as well as expectations from their

family, and also the social networks that they were a part of when they were students. In addition, there are also questions on their present employment, their decision making processes especially on the economic, personal, and socio-cultural factors they considered when considering to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after finishing their studies, as well as their present professional and social affiliations and networks. Finally, there are also questions about participants' future plans on settling down permanently, on how they define *home*, and questions that ask them to speculate on motivations that might bring Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S. back to Malaysia. The full version of the interview questions are in Appendices E and F.

All interviews were conducted in English. There was no problem conducting the interviews in English even though English is a second language in Malaysia and all of the participants were born in Malaysia. First of all, English is widely spoken and used in most places and in daily life in Malaysia. Moreover, I have expected that the participants would understand the questions in English and interact with me in English during the interview because they have demonstrated their English proficiency by studying and earning a graduate degree which was conducted fully in English language in the U.S.

I conducted interviews between June 2008 and November 2008. Each interview was performed on a one-on-one basis. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face, phone interview, or online interview depending on the location of the participants, and their availability to use one of these three modes of communication. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the site agreed between the participant and me. The phone interviews entailed talking and listening through the phone receiver, whereas the online interview encompassed talking through a headset and microphone. In addition, online interviews used synchronous discussion through Yahoo Messenger and MSN Messenger as well as Skype, which are instant messaging programs made available through the Internet, and which support the exchange of text messages, spoken language and files.

I interviewed a total of twenty-two participants; all except one have an American master's, doctoral or terminal professional degrees. The one who did not finish his doctoral degree provided a good perspective on why returning to Malaysia was a better choice for him, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five. I interviewed seven Malaysians who resided in Malaysia during the interview, and four who lived in the U.S. but held non-immigrant visas. Among the eleven Malaysian-born migrants interviewed, there were three naturalized U.S. citizens and eight were Permanent Residents of the U.S.

3.3.5. Consent form

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. When a prospective participant responded to my invitation email, I sent her a set of screening questions and if she met the requirements of this study based on the responses to those questions, I provided her with the consent form. All participants have signed the informed consent for participation in the study. The purpose of the consent is to inform participants what the study is about, that participation was voluntary and not paid, that they can withdraw any time, and that they will not be personally identified in any of the findings reports. The consent form also informs participants that the interviews are recorded. All research records that identify the participants to the extent allowed by law are kept confidential. All the participants' information, as well as interview transcripts, memos, and audio recordings are kept in a safe storage, under lock and key. However, as stated in the consent form, I may be required to show information which identifies the participants to people who need to be sure I have done the research correctly, and these people may be my dissertation committee or the IRB at the University of Kentucky.

A copy of the consent form for face-to-face interviews is found in Appendix C and the online consent form for phone and web interviews is found in Appendix D. The only difference between the two is that a signature is required for the face-to-face interview consent forms, while a checked mark in a check box on the online consent form indicated consent for the phone and web interviews.

3.3.6. Instrumentation and interview protocol

I was the only researcher involved in the recruitment of participants, advertisement for participants, and collection of data through a series of interviews. Before the interviews with the participants were conducted, I pilot-tested the questions on two Malaysian-born migrants who had been living in the U.S. for more than ten years. In this pilot study, they provided some input on the questions and changes were made to accommodate those suggestions. Some of the suggestions included being clearer in the questions, and providing opportunity for elaboration. One helpful suggestion was to ask specifically, about someone's religion rather than based on assumption. For example, someone who is of the Indian ethnicity may be a Hindu or he could also be a Christian or a free thinker⁸. For this study, there are two sets of interview questions, and although both sets have similar questions, each set is designed to focus on the particular group, one in the U.S. (Appendix E) and another group of participants residing in Malaysia (Appendix F). For those living in the U.S., the set of questions included one additional question that asked what motivations would bring *them* back, in addition to asking them to speculate what would make the other Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S. repatriate to Malaysia. The other slight difference between the two set of questions is the language, for example, for those in the U.S. I asked, "*How did you keep in touch with family and friends in Malaysia,*" and for those in Malaysia I asked, "*How did you keep in touch with family and friends in the U.S. (if any).*" A copy of the interview questions for participants residing in Malaysia is in Appendix F and interview questions for participants residing in the U.S. are found in Appendix E.

All interviews were recorded. For face-to-face interviews, a digital audio-recorder was used. Research activities were conducted at public sites for face-to-face interviews. These public sites included coffee shops, restaurants, and home of participants. For interviews conducted over the Internet and phone to the participants' phone or computer using one of the web conferencing tools (Yahoo, MSN and Skype);

⁸ A free thinker in Malaysia is similar to what is known as an atheist in the U.S.

the details of the recording are discussed in detail below. Three major instant messenger tools such as Yahoo and MSN messengers as well as Skype were used in this study. Some of the advantages of conducting online interviews include having the potential to reach participants from other parts of the world, the costs are lower because instant messaging can be done free or with very low call rates and that travel for the interviewer is not required; intuitive conversation can be developed between the interviewer and participants; and the likelihood of participants staying until the end of the interview as compared to a web-based questionnaire or survey (Stieger & Göritz, 2006).

Yahoo Instant Messenger is an instant messaging service provided by Yahoo. It is provided free-of-charge and is downloaded and used with a generic Yahoo ID. Similarly, Windows Live Messenger more popularly known as the MSN Messenger which is a freeware instant messaging client for Microsoft Windows. These two programs were used mainly for interviews using chat functions only where I typed in the questions in chat window and the participant responded in the same chat window. Recording of these chat sessions were made by saving each file in a document file after each interview.

Another program used is Skype, which also allows for calls to be made. When a participant also has the Skype program, the call made from my computer to hers was free as she is able to receive these calls and to talk, like on a conventional phone. Skype also has a function that allowed me to prepay for credits and then make calls, just like a prepaid phone. For this purpose, I was able to use Skype to make local and international calls to the participants' phones. To record digital audio from the Skype interviews, a program called PowerGramo was used as it was capable of recording sound from the Skype. This program saved all sound data flow into a file synchronously during the interview. The file showed what time the interview was done, for how long, and the number or Skype ID that was called.

I picked these three modes for interviews because they are inexpensive digital connections between my computer and the participants' computers or telephones. Moreover the variety gave participants a choice that fit well with their schedule and comfort. While Yahoo and MSN were mainly used for chat functions where the questions and answers were typed in a chat window, Skype was mainly used for interviews using audio. Before the start of each session, participants were informed that the interview would be recorded, as stated in the Informed Consent form.

All interview audio-recordings were downloaded and burned onto CD. Then, all participants' names and information, interview transcripts, memos, and audio recordings (CD) were placed in a safe storage, under lock and key. To protect data with respect to privacy and confidentiality, all CDs, analytic memos and audio recording files contain initials of their names and not their full name. These initials were later changed to pseudonyms when data were analyzed and reported. The data are stored in a safe place for further reference until the end of the study.

In addition to the recorded interviews, analytic memos were also written as I listened to and observed participants' responses, concerns, and reactions. Analytic memos served as a personal note to myself which I probed and reflected later. To transcribe the interviews, I used Express Scribe software that allowed me to control the pace of the conversation that took place during the interview. For example, when I slowed down the pace of that interview using Express Scribe, I was able to listen more clearly and had time to transcribe the interview. The software also allowed me to fast forward, rewind, pause and stop as necessary as I work through the transcription.

3.3.7. Data analysis

As stated by Coffey and Atkinson (1996), data should be collected only when extensive analysis is being done simultaneously. The steps involved in this qualitative analysis include listening to audio recordings or interviews prior to actually transcribing

them, during which I wrote notes to self, and analytic memos on what I heard in the data in order to develop ideas about categories and relationships that may be present (Maxwell, 2005, p.96). The data analysis consisted of identifying the most frequent themes, and understanding how such themes are related to the push and pull factors as well as the emergence of transnational identity among the participants of this study. As discussed above, for interviews with audio recordings, I transcribed them using Express Scribe where I listened and transcribed verbatim. For the interviews done through synchronous web messaging, the entire interview session done in the chat windows was saved electronically as a document file. I analyzed every narrative, and developed themes based on some of the general ideas that fall under each theme. The purpose is to see if there is an emerging trend among who the participants are, or why they made the decision they made; and speculative reasons that might bring or attract Malaysian-born migrants to repatriate to their home country. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) stated, “We are all involved in retelling our experiences and lives. In doing so, we chronicle our lives in terms of a series of events, happenings, influences, and decisions. Social actors organize their lives and experiences through stories and in doing so, make sense of them” (p. 68). I analyzed participants’ narratives as they answer my research questions, which included chronicled experiences, from the start of what made them come to the U.S., what prompted them to study in the U.S., and then the happenings, events and influences in their lives that go into that decision making process.

3.3.8. Discrepant cases

Discrepant cases are those who do not fall under the convention of all the other cases. For example, even though this study looks for those with master’s, doctoral and terminal degrees, a discrepant case would be one with only a bachelor’s degree but has started the doctoral program yet did not complete it. I included this discrepant case because it would help to provide an understanding as to the factors surrounding the decision to start working and ultimately return to Malaysia versus completing the doctoral program in the U.S. Another discrepant case was one participant whose

perspective on assimilation to American culture were opposite of those of most other participants who were living in the U.S. I included this discrepant case to show that participants sometimes do have a choice – just because one is living in the U.S. does not necessarily mean he would want to assimilate into the ways of life in the U.S. Including the discrepant case also contributes to the trustworthiness of the data interpretation.

3.4. Credibility

3.4.1. Procedures for determining credibility

It is imperative for studies to be credible. Golafshani (2003) stated that where the integrity in quantitative research depends on composition of the instrument, in qualitative research it depends on the ability and effort by the researcher. Golafshani quoted Patton that in understanding the credibility of qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument” (Patton, 2002, p. 14, as cited in Golafshani, 2003). As explained in Kember et al. (1990), in a naturalistic study such as one that involves interviews, the interaction between the interviewer and the participants is significant. The interviewer is very much part of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, while validity and reliability in quantitative research refer to a research that is credible, the credibility of a qualitative research really depends on the ability and effort of the interviewer as the researcher (Kember, et al., 1990). I took into consideration an important step based on what Patton said, that “the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). To make sure I have good quality data for my interview sessions, I organized my interview protocol which encompassed interview questions that should answer my research questions. During the interview process I was aware to establish the interview like a conversation and at the same time I focused on what the participants shared about themselves and their opinions. This interview protocol helped me to best utilize the limited amount of time I had and also to interview people more systematically by delimiting in advance the relevant issues to be

studied (Patton, 2002, p. 343). I have also practiced control in asking focused questions and listened attentively to recognize and distinguish appropriate from inappropriate data, as advised by Patton (2002). Additionally, I used an audio recorder because it enabled me the ease of data transcription. By working with transcriptions of the recorded interviews, I was able to analyze the data.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) have articulated that the social world as opposed to the physical world is as socially, politically and personally constructed as are human understandings and explanations of the physical world. To make sure that I understand why the participants made the decisions they have made, I interviewed the two groups; one group who chose to remain in the U.S., and another group who decided to return to Malaysia, all of whom earned their graduate degrees in the U.S. After interviewing both groups, I analyzed each of their interviews individually to look for emerging trends and themes. In another example, if the conclusion based on information gathered during interviews showed that immigration policies in the U.S. made it difficult for Malaysians to remain in the U.S., the validity of this conclusion could be assessed by examining immigration policies in the U.S. By data sources and theoretical models as ways to practice triangulation, I want to make sure that findings reflect the real situation, and are being backed by evidence, and that there is no reason to doubt the results (Guion, n. d.).

3.4.2. Triangulation

Triangulation entails the comparison of different types of data, for example quantitative and qualitative; or the use of different kinds of methods such as surveys, interviews or observations; different investigators working on the same dataset, and different theories to test the same data, to name a few. One way a triangulation can be done is comparing the data sources, for example checking for consistency of what people say about the same thing over time, comparing the perspectives of people from different points of views, and checking interviews against other written evidence that can corroborate what the participants report (Patton, 2002). For this dissertation, I looked at

the consistency of topic across individuals, comparing participant statements that touched upon the same concept or argument. The inclusion of statements from different participants whose views converged on a particular idea helps to support the data analysis. I have also included some comparisons of perspectives from three different ethnic groups as well as perspectives of those who returned to Malaysia and those who remained in the U.S. Moreover, I was also able to check the interviews against other written evidence that can corroborate what the participants noted such as news articles, job advertisements and the World Bank Report 2011. For instance, some of the findings of this study were similar with the findings of the World Bank as reported in 2011 although their methods (survey, brief interviews), participant backgrounds (students and professionals, pursuing a degree or have attained a degree, different degree levels) and locations of their participants (in Singapore, Australia, United Kingdom, U.S., etc.). – are different from this study.

According to Patton (2002), validity and reliability are two vital factors that must be considered in the course of designing a study, analyzing results and examining the quality of the study. One of the ways to answer the question of reliability in qualitative research is the notion of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define trustworthiness to include the conditions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. *Credibility* is comparable with internal validity, and focuses on “the issue of *fit* between respondents’ views and the researcher’s representation of them” (Schwandt, 2001, as cited in Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 391). Methods include use of “member checks, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, persistent observation and audit trails” (Lincoln, 1995, as cited in Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). In this study, one way to show credibility is to provide verbatim what the participants have said and then to analyze them through some of the emerging themes, and finally compare them with existing policies and phenomena. The analyses included what the participants stated quite straightforwardly and not through inferences of what those statements from the participants might mean. As stated by Patton (2002), “expert reviews can increase credibility for those who are unsure how to distinguish high quality work” (p. 562) where

the doctoral committee would take on this role for graduate students. Therefore, one way I established credibility was to have my committee chair review my coding of the data, with attention to whether or not themes made sense.

Transferability is comparable with external validity and refers to “the generalization of inquiry, where it mainly concerns only to case-to-case transfer especially in a naturalistic study” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). *Dependability* is comparable with reliability, and is done through auditing (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). The process of the research must be logical, traceable and documented (Schwandt, 2001 as cited in Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392) so that others can examine the documentation of the entire research. As stated earlier, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and as noted in the Consent Form, these transcriptions are kept securely but will be made available to my Committee members should they request review. *Confirmability* is comparable with objectivity and is about the establishment of data and interpretations that exist from data and not from the “figments of the inquirer’s imagination” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). For this study, confirmability can be demonstrated by the existing audio recordings and saved chat sessions between the participants and I. Transcriptions of these interviews are also saved in a secure location and can be made available to my Committee if confirmability of data is needed.

3.4.3. Researcher credibility

The credibility of a researcher is important because it affects the way findings are received. To ensure my credibility as a researcher in this study, any personal and professional information that could affect my data collection, analysis and interpretation in the minds of users of the findings are reported (Patton, 2002). For instance, I included the code of ethics for the protection of human subjects to the participants so that they know the overview of this study, the goals and that they can withdraw at any time, as well as how I would keep their identity confidential.

3.4.4. My position as a researcher

For face-to-face interviews, the social interaction that accompanied the interview provided a rich source of data. However, one challenge that I faced was the ability to easily bring me into the study participants' world, and as such, the quality of information in this interview was largely reliant on my competence as the interviewer. Luckily, most of the participants were very open and candid with their answers. I believe there was some sense of trust in me as far as keep confidential of their identity since this is a dissertation research. In addition, the participants and I were able to build rapport fast, perhaps because of my background as a Malaysian-born, who had gone through the same educational system in Malaysia, and now going through the American higher education system like they did. With some of these similar experiences, all participants were at ease to interact with me and to share with their experiences and thoughts.

Patton argues that, "Unless you are fascinated by the rich variation in human experience, qualitative interviewing will become drudgery. On the other hand, a deep and genuine interest in learning about people is insufficient without disciplined and rigorous inquiry based on skill and technique" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Indeed I was interested to know about the rich variation of experiences the participants have so far. My experience and skills in interviewing for my studies and work were put to good use for this dissertation too. Also, to address this important concern about the level of discipline and rigorous inquiry based on skill and technique, I have tried to keep disciplined and organized in following the procedures and time line for this study. I have initially organized my schedule to reflect a plan of action, but due to life and work commitments, throughout the years I have revised my timeline many times to reflect a more practical time line to conduct and complete this study. Overall, the interview protocol proposed in this study was followed systematically, with some flexibility given to probe interview questions being asked. I have also kept an open mind throughout the whole process because I know that the proposed schedules may not always work out as planned.

3.5. Time line for the study

Description	Month/Year
Emails to solicit pilot study participants	October 2007
Piloting the study	End of October 2007
Writing the proposal	November 2007-April 2008
Submission of proposal to Committee	May 2008
Proposal hearing	May 2008
IRB Application (Human Subjects)	June 2008
Meeting date for IRB Review of protocols	June 2008
Formal emails to solicit Study participants	June – September 2008
Pre-notification of interviews (set up dates)	June – October 2008
Interviews (personal, phone and web)	June – November 2008
Write-up: Interview Transcriptions	December 2008 – July 2009
Emerging themes	January 2010 – December 2010
Data Analysis	January 2011 – June 2011
Data Analysis	July 2011 – December 2011
Draft for advisor - Chapter 1	January 2012
Draft for advisor – Chapter 2	May 2012
Draft for advisor – Chapter 3	July 2012
Draft for advisor – Chapter 4, 5 and 6	December 2012
Submit final research findings	February 2013

Table 1: Time line for the study

3.6. Limitations and difficulties

My initial concern about the web conferencing tool was that it was hard to guarantee that everyone had access to the computer, Internet connection, and right gear for the communication, or that if they knew how to use the messengers for this purpose. However, this did not prove to be a problem because participants who had access to web conferencing tools used them for the interview while others preferred the conventional phone interview.

Another initial concern I had was the time zone issue, knowing that some participants were in different parts of the U.S. and in Malaysia, which meant there was a time difference of between one and thirteen hours. The main concern was the participant not being available because of the time zone difference at a time that I would be available. On the other hand, if I worked based on their time of convenience, managing the time for the interviews could have been tricky and inconvenient. Throughout the whole process, I was mindful of participants' time and made good effort to arrange the time for the interviews to take place especially those in another time zone.

One disadvantage in using phone interviews and web conferencing as compared to face-to-face interviews is the lack of social interaction and environment that come with having a face-to-face interview, which often provide another rich source of data. Using the phone interview did not enable me to observe the participant's expressions, reactions and concerns. However, I was able to effectively collect good stories from them especially when the participants who volunteered in this study were all enthusiastic to tell their stories and share their experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS – PART ONE

4.1. Introduction

Highly educated individuals are often sought after as the human capital that is vital to meet the demand of a competitive and globalized world. Pursuing higher education in the U.S. could be a pathway for Malaysians to immigrate to the U.S., however, the decision to remain in the U.S. is not always planned in advanced, or successful. During the pursuit of a degree, Malaysian students would have the opportunity to experience the educational system, lifestyle, work and living environments in the U.S. which could change their outlook about their lives. Such opportunity provides comparative views of what can be expected if one were to live in the U.S. versus in Malaysia. The overall goals of this dissertation are to understand the international push and pull dynamics in the context of the government policies in Malaysia and the U.S., and to examine them through the perspectives of the participants in this study as they contemplate where they will reside after completing their graduate school programs in the U.S. Their narratives illustrate international push and pull factors such as personal and national perspectives; individual and family influences; past and present experiences as well as their aspirations and obligations.

The main focus of this chapter is to investigate *who* the participants are, both those who remained in the U.S. and those who returned to Malaysia after they have finished their graduate studies. Major themes include kind of work, making the academic decision, transitions and turning points. To explore these themes, some of the key theoretical constructs used are relative deprivation, brain circulation, transnational identity, flexible citizenship, assimilation and social capital. The participants' experience in school and work helps to explain the transitions they go through which could provide an explanation to their sense of identity and their assimilation in the U.S. Moreover such

exposure could shift their thinking about how they identified themselves and why they had developed transnational and flexible identity.

4.2. Research question one: Knowing the participants – the *who*?

4.2.1. Demographic information

Twenty-two participants were interviewed for this study. For the demographic information, they are described as three groups:

- Participants in the U.S. who have not started the permanent immigration process, holding Non-Immigrant Visas (NIV) – four participants
- Participants in the U.S. who have chosen permanent residency (PR) and citizenship status in the U.S. – eleven participants
- Participants who have returned to Malaysia – seven participants

4.2.1.1. Participants in the U.S. who have not started the permanent immigration process, holding non-immigrant visas (NIV)

Four participants were working and living in the U.S. on non-immigrant visas such as work visa, business visa and Optional Practical Training (OPT)⁹ (Figure 1/Table 4 in Appendix G). Their ages ranged between 26 and 31. There were two female participants, one Malay¹⁰ and one Indian; and two Chinese male participants. One female participant was married while the rest were single. The two Chinese males stated they were free thinkers, while the Malay female participant was a Muslim and the Indian female was a Sikh. Three have attained a master's degree while one had a Ph.D. Among the four participants with non-immigrant visas, two were on H-1B work visas, one was

⁹ OPT is Optional Practical Training, a temporary employment that is directly related to an international student's major area of study. The student who has OPT may be authorized to receive up to twelve months of practical training either pre- and/or post-completion of studies.

¹⁰ In Malaysia, what is referred to as 'race' is known as 'ethnicity' in the U.S. For this paper, ethnicity will be used. There are three major ethnic groups in Malaysia; Malays, Chinese and Indians, as well as other smaller ethnic groups.

on OPT and one was on a business visa. Their present occupations include engineer, assistant professor, partner in a start-up business and business technology analyst. During the interview, two participants were living in the west coast, one was in the mid-west and one was in east coast state of the U.S.

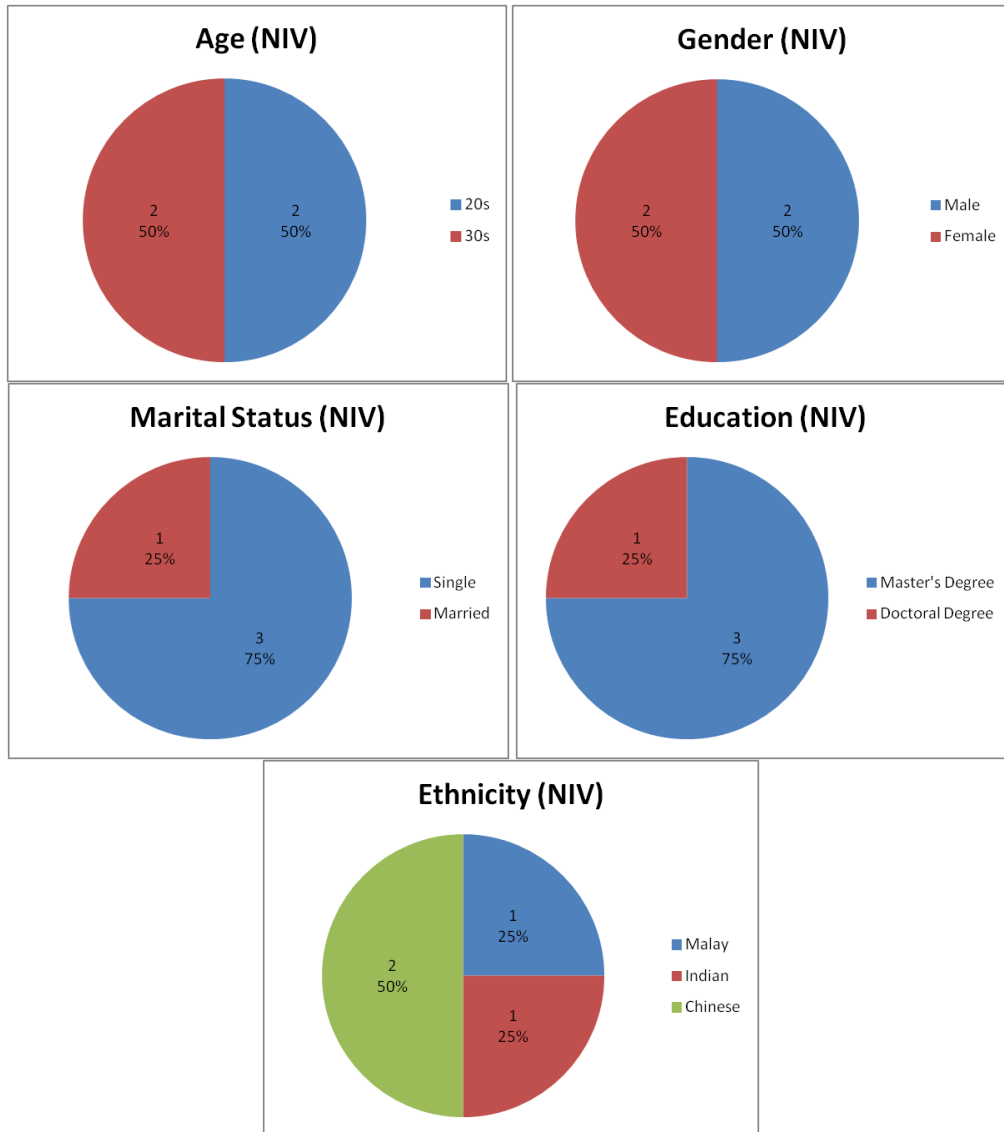


Figure 1: Participants who have not started the permanent immigration process, holding non-immigrant visas (NIV). A chart with this information is in Table 4, Appendix G.

4.2.1.2. Participants who have chosen permanent residency (PR) and citizenship status in the U.S.

Eleven participants have chosen to live in the U.S. more permanently (Figure 2/Table 5 in Appendix G). Among them, eight were Permanent Residents (PR) and three were naturalized U.S. citizens. Their ages ranged between 25 and 50, with six of them in their thirties. There were five female and six male. Overall there were six Chinese, three Malay and two Indian participants, and among the female participants, three of them were Malay and two were Chinese. Among the three Malay female participants, two stated they were Muslims and one stated she was a free thinker. Between the two Chinese female, one was a Catholic and one was a free thinker. Among the six male participants, there were four Chinese and two Indians. Three Chinese male participants stated they were Christians while one stated was a Buddhist. Between the two Indian male participants, one was a Catholic and one was a Hindu. As for their marital status, only one female and one male were single while the rest were married. These eleven participants have each attained a master's degree. Among them only one has attained a doctoral degree. Their degrees range from Master in Business Administration (MBA) to Master's in Civil Engineering, Computer Science, Economics, E-Commerce Technology, Intercultural Studies and Liberal Studies; and a Ph.D. Their occupations include actuary, engineer, investment analyst, pricing manager, program manager, research analyst, senior financial analyst, software engineer, stay-at-home mom, transportation engineer and web developer. Within the fifty states in the U.S., the west coast is the most popular among this group of migrants with six of them living in the west coast during the interview, while two lived in the mid-west, two in the mountain region, one in the east of the U.S. In some quotes, regions were used instead of specific cities or states to keep confidential the identity of the participants.

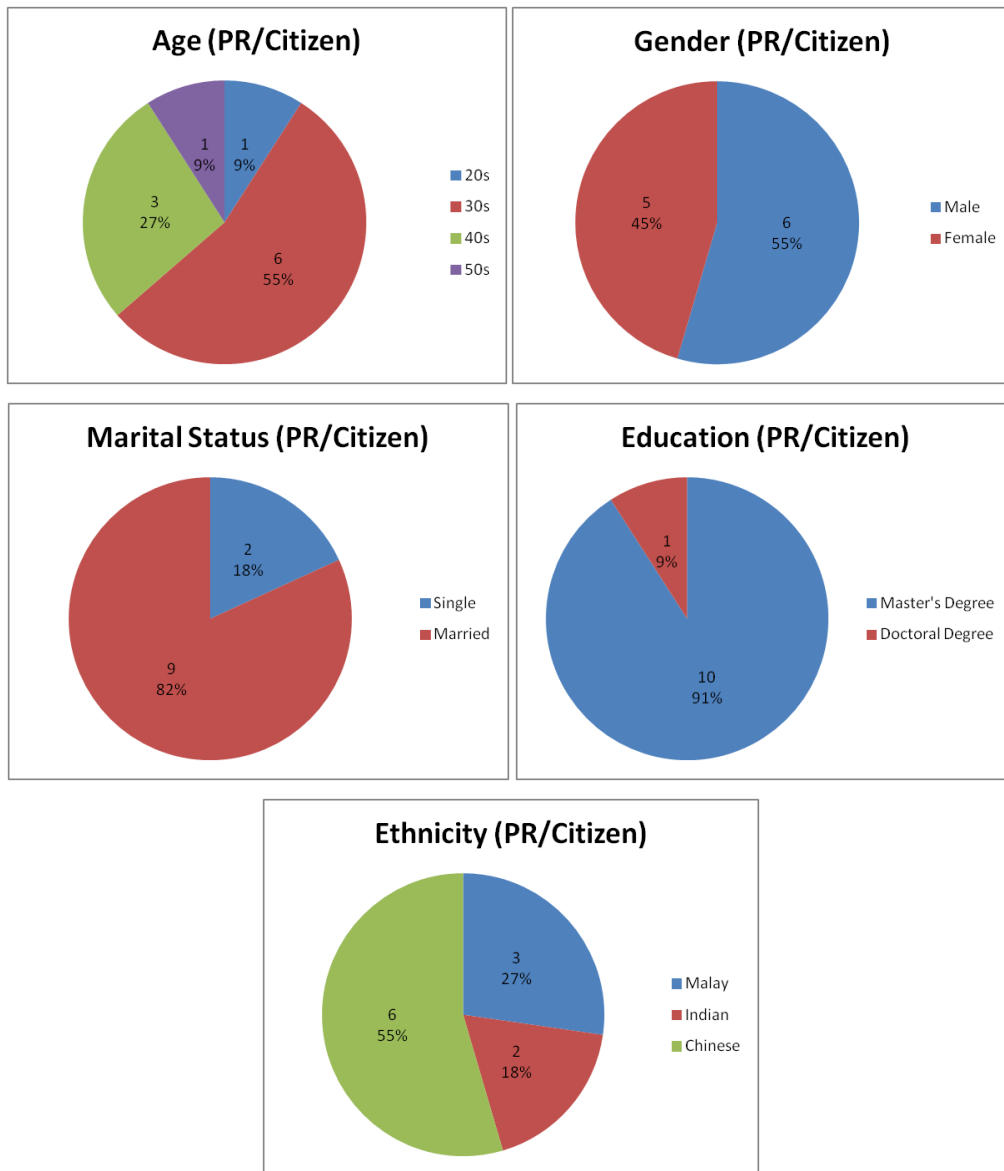


Figure 2. Participants who have chosen permanent residency (PR) and citizenship status in the U.S. A chart with this information is in Table 5, Appendix G.

4.2.1.3. Participants who have returned to Malaysia

The seven participants who decided to return to Malaysia after attaining their graduate degrees comprised three Chinese, two Malays and two Indians (Figure 3/Table 6 in Appendix G). Among the three Chinese, two claimed to be Buddhists and one Christian. The Malays stated they were Muslim, while one Indian's religious affiliation was Hinduism and another Indian stated that he was a free thinker. There were five male and two female participants. Among the five male participants, two of them were married while three were single. Both female participants were single during the time of the interview. Their ages ranged between 27 and 37. Six participants have received their master's degree and another one participant started his doctoral degree in the U.S., but did not finish the program. Although he had only a bachelor's and not a master's degree when he pursued his doctoral program, he was included in this study because I felt it was imperative to understand from his perspective why he returned to Malaysia to work instead of completing his doctoral degree in the U.S. The occupations of participants who returned to Malaysia include college administrator, engineers, founder of a start-up company, investment manager, manager, and senior finance manager.

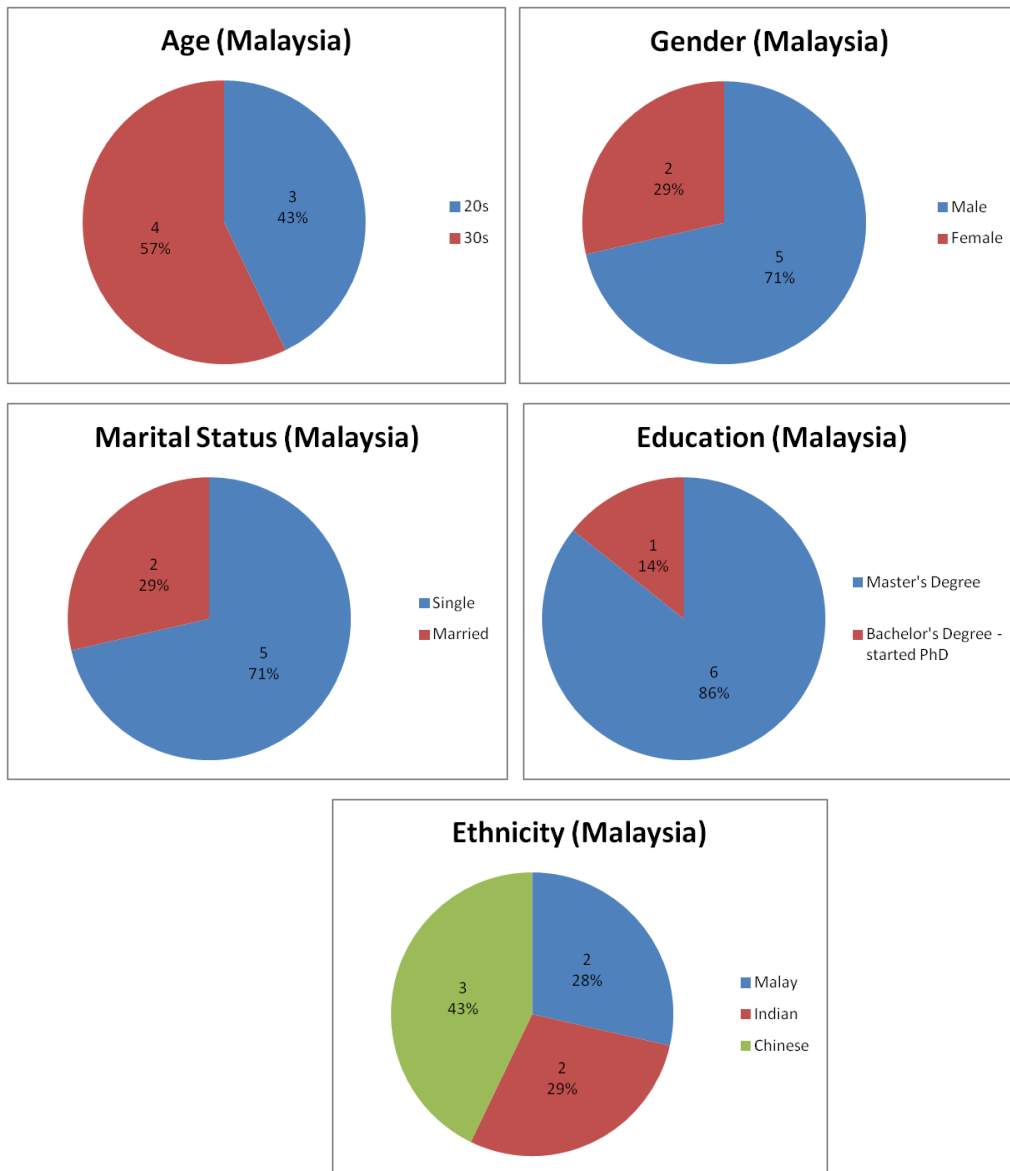


Figure 3. Participants who have returned to Malaysia.
 A chart with this information is in Table 6, Appendix G.

4.2.2. Marital status of participants

Marital status emerges as an important factor. Among the twenty-two participants in this study, twelve were married -- ten of them were living in the U.S. and only two have returned to Malaysia. Whereas among the ten single participants, five of them were in the U.S. and the other five moved back to Malaysia. Not all of the ten participants in the U.S. were already married when they made the decision to remain in the U.S. Two were already married before they came to the U.S. to pursue their graduate education, and they were still married when they decided to remain in the U.S. Eight of them were single when they decided to remain in the U.S., although based on what I have gathered, their marriages, some of which took place after graduation, provided a stronger conviction as to why they would want to remain in the U.S.

What I found interesting was that among those who were single when they made the decision to remain in the U.S., two female participants mentioned their 'boyfriend' as a determining factor in their decision. I have no evidence that they deliberately found American citizens to marry in order to remain in the U.S. although five of them had American-citizen spouses. In fact, the majority of them asserted that they found a job first or that they had already decided to stay in the U.S. before they met their spouses, and did not depend on their spouses' citizenship to remain in the U.S. Overall, five had American spouses, one had a South American spouse, one had a Chinese spouse (from China) and five had Malaysian spouses. Eventually those who decided that living in the U.S. was a better choice looked at that decision for the entire family, some citing the policy and culture in Malaysia that may not be a good fit for their spouses. However, their decision to remain and to leave was influenced by their spouses. For example, the two married participants who returned to Malaysia -- one was single when he was pursuing his graduate studies and one got married before he graduated. For the latter, his decision to return to Malaysia was strongly influenced by his wife due to her family issue in Malaysia.

4.2.3. Kind of work

4.2.3.1. The kind of work participants have during their studies

It is essential to know if the participants have worked or not during their pursuit of graduate education because their reflections of the experience provide insight of how they feel about working in the U.S., about their positive or negative work experience, and about their purchasing power in the U.S. Their work experience at college built a portfolio for future employment whether in the U.S., Malaysia, or elsewhere in the world. These work experiences may also change how they feel about themselves as they are exposed to different work cultures, people, and environments. Their identities may have also shifted due to the experience they had, and that may also affect their sense of belonging in the U.S., Malaysia or globally and provide a framework for decision making on where to live after graduation.

Most participants worked during their undergraduate studies. While they indicated that they had time to work as undergraduates, this changed when they were in graduate school, especially when the nature of work for graduate students is incorporated in their graduate assistantships, teaching assistantships or research assistantships. In general, international students in the U.S. higher institutions must be full-time students and with that, they are required to register for at least nine credits per semester except during the summer semester. As full-time international students, they are allowed to work up to twenty hours per week on campus, with special arrangements needed if they were to work off-campus, for example, as an intern for a private company. The types of academic-related positions during the participants' undergraduate education included being a grader, teaching assistant, tutor, researcher, research assistant for a professor, editor for the student journal, and an intern. The other kinds of work within the campus included working in the dining hall or campus café, custodial services, library, computer labs, camp counselor, residence halls, website development and editorial work. Besides working within the university vicinity, one participant had an internship with a program

of the United Nations foundation; one worked in the National Center for Data Mining; and one had the chance to intern in a start-up company in California's Silicon Valley. During their undergraduate years, most jobs were not in the form of an assistantship where the tuition can be covered and a stipend is provided in return of the 20-hour work per week. Many of them who came as undergraduates were sponsored by family funds or scholarships from Malaysia and Singapore, and their work was mainly for their personal pocket money, as it is not enough to pay for the tuition. However, assistantships that are usually available to graduate students come with not only a stipend and work experience, but also cover the full tuition fees and other miscellaneous costs such as student health insurance.

At the graduate student level, there are mainly two kinds of work; one is work that is related to academic pursuits such as graduate assistantships, research assistantships and teaching assistantships. The other is the kind of work that is solely for income, for example someone who works full-time and goes to school part-time or someone who works part-time on campus in a job that is not related to their studies. Having an assistantship for the experience, stipend or compensated tuition fee is an attractive avenue for many. However, one participant who completed her MBA claimed that work should not be part of a full college experience:

Siew Ling: I actually am against working while attending school because it takes away from the experience, and I really feel for people who have to do that kind of combo. I see the students always being so tired, and not really able to enjoy the full college experience.

The mindset of an MBA holder, like Siew Ling, could be different from someone who has with a different type of master's degree because most traditional full-time MBA programs do not come with assistantships, and they require their students to be in the program full-time. Students in traditional MBA programs spend their full college experience involving in rigorous activities in and out of the classroom throughout the

week, with “high level of extracurricular activities and involvement, including clubs, sports and other student-run initiatives and events. Intensive immersion in classes, learning teams, and informal networking with other students during program weekends fosters strong community” (Wharton Business School, n. d., Student Lifestyle section). Even though such activities or involvement in clubs and student government could be a diversion from academic life, participation is mostly related to the benefits such as networking and leadership opportunities, which builds the foundation for an MBA student. Harvard Business School states on its website, “With more than 70 clubs and over 200 leadership positions in the Student Association, there are many ways to refine your leadership and organizational management experience, explore interests, and make friendships that will last a lifetime” (Harvard Business School, n. d., Activities, Government & Clubs section, para. 2).

Another participant shared a similar experience of his MBA years:

Bala: During the two years I was extremely busy because first, I had my school, my school work. Secondly, I was focused on the research as well. Normally in MBA, the MBA is really for a new career. Every Friday we will time off to do our career search.

Participants like Siew Ling and Bala who have completed their MBA in the U.S. did not have as much work experience ‘during’ their graduate studies as those graduate students who were in other graduate programs. However, they might already have other work experience before entering the MBA program, which is typically one of the prerequisites of a traditional MBA program.

4.2.3.2. The kind of work experience participants have before they pursued their graduate degree

It is also important to learn of the participants’ work experience, if any, before they pursued their graduate education. For those who completed their undergraduate

education and worked in the U.S. before they pursue their graduate education, they were exposed to the U.S. work environment. This exposure may have contributed to their sense of belonging in the U.S. in terms of the work culture, life style, and community in which they live. For those who completed their undergraduate education and worked in Malaysia before coming to the U.S., they also had a chance to be exposed to the U.S. work environment. This happened while pursuing their graduate degrees or right after they graduated¹¹. Therefore, the participants who had the opportunity to work in Malaysia and also in the U.S are afforded the two possible perspectives of work environment, which could have contributed to decisions about where to live after graduation. When the comparative views point to a more preferred way of life, people would choose that location based on the judgment and options they had at that time when a decision had to be made.

Findings show that the majority of the participants did not work before they start their graduate school. Those who worked before they pursued their graduate education included one who did some research for a professor over the course of the summer right before the start of his master's program and one, whose work was related to the MBA program she embarked later. On the other hand, a couple of participants worked but then decided to go back to school to pursue a graduate degree. Salina did her undergraduate in the U.S. and then worked for a few years before she embarked on her MBA.

Salina: I worked for 5 years. After I graduated from (a university in the east coast), I worked in New York. I was in Investment Banking as an analyst for 2 years. I worked for two different companies. For 2 years I worked at an Investment Bank in New York as an analyst in the corporate finance group. And then, it was a two- year analyst program, and once I finished that, I worked in

¹¹ International students who have graduated are allowed to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT), if that employment directly related to the student's major area of study (USCIS, n. d.-c).

Washington D.C. So, also in finance, like investment banking related to my undergraduate degree. And I was there for 3 years.

As one of the prerequisites for an MBA is work experience, Salina's work experience was a progression toward her MBA program. Similarly, Bala had some work experience too before pursuing his MBA. He had an undergraduate degree in Engineering from the U.S. and worked as an engineer for approximately five years in a multi-national company in Malaysia. During his employment, he realized that he wanted to explore a career in finance, and decided to pursue an MBA in order to structure his career change.

Bala: I started undergraduate study in the United States, Electrical Engineering at (a top engineering school in west coast) from 1990 to 1994. I graduated in 1994, and I worked for a (multi-national company) back in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur for 5 years. I was working in sales and marketing, but it was not directly technical career but it was basically the technical equipments. Couple of years into my work, I realized that it wasn't quite what I wanted to do, and I was more fascinated by things in finance. So I started looking into my MBA. Right at the time when I started to look, the Asian financial crisis hit and RM (Ringgit Malaysia, the Malaysian currency) crashed from 2.5 of a dollar to nearly 5. I went ahead and I was quite selective in school to get into. Because of the exchange rate, I selected (a business school in New York state). I specialized in finance and strategies.

The findings also showed that participants decided to pursue their graduate education for different reasons, most of them personal. None of them pursued graduate education because of their employer or for their employer, as evidenced by their response. For instance Salina stated that she built her foundational studies through her undergraduate and developed a work portfolio. With the nature of her work as an analyst in finance, an MBA would create more opportunities and may help her progress to the

next level in her field. For Bala, a graduate degree such as an MBA would enable him to change his career path from the more technical side of engineering to more management capabilities. Having a graduate degree could provide a competitive edge in the employment market, and it also helps one modify his career path. Those who have work experience before they started their master's degree may be more certain about how they plan their next course of life – either to improve themselves through graduate education to get a higher position, or to be interdisciplinary in another field in order to change the prospects of going into another field, like what Bala did.

4.2.3.3. The kind of work after graduation

As stated earlier under demographic information, the participants who have immigrated to the U.S. were holding the following positions when they were interviewed for this study -- actuary, engineer, investment analyst, pricing manager, program manager, research analyst, senior financial analyst, software engineer, stay-at-home mom, transportation engineer and web developer. Meanwhile, participants who graduated, were holding non-immigrant visas and were working in the U.S. when they were interviewed had occupations such as engineer, assistant professor, partner in a start-up business and business technology analyst. Whereas participants who went back to Malaysia with graduate degrees from the U.S. held positions as college administrator, engineers, founder of a start-up company, investment manager, manager and senior finance manager.

The kind of work that participants sought after completing their graduate degrees was a factor in their decision making as well. The work opportunities either made them remain in the U.S. or return to Malaysia. In one example, one young entrepreneur left his doctoral degree program to join a family start-up company. Like many transfer students, Kok Kiong did his American twinning program at Taylor's College¹² in Malaysia, and

¹² Taylor's College is a private college in Malaysia. According to its website, it is known as a centre of excellence in Pre-University (Pre-U) Studies in Malaysia, providing British, Australian, Canadian and international Pre-University education (Taylor's College, n. d.).

took as many credits as could be transferred to universities in the U.S. He studied Computer Engineering in a four-year research university from 2000 to 2002 and then began doctoral studies. He left his doctoral degree in 2003 to work with his aunt in the U.S., eventually returning to Malaysia to begin his own company.

Kok Kiong explained the logic of these decisions as follows:

Kok Kiong: It was at that time, my aunt, who is a Venture Capitalist consultant at the Silicon Valley (CA) decided to start a new company. It is a start-up company developing wi-fi mash; it is very similar to sensor networking, except it is in a much larger scale, for infrastructure. Very related to the Ph.D. So she asked me to join her (in CA). Worth it or not is a question that is impossible to answer, because I don't know what situation I would be in. If I continue with my Ph.D., I would be a doctor now. I would say, it took me on a path, where right now I feel yeah, it was worth it but honestly, I won't be able to answer unless I know what the other path is like. Right now I am starting up my own company (in Malaysia) and I would not have done that if I didn't join my aunt at that point. The year 2002 is when I graduated (in undergraduate), and started Ph.D. In 2003 I quit Ph.D. and started working with my aunt in California. And I stopped working in 2008 and started own company (in Malaysia). I immediately formed my own venture. Did not work anywhere else. I now own a start-up (in Malaysia).

Even though the type of work influenced where people might want to go or be, family influence also played a crucial role in this decision making. According to Kok Kiong, who was single, his aunt was a main motivator for him to quit his doctoral studies and to start working with her. The choice he made seemed like a reasonable risk. Kok Kiong was later an entrepreneur of his own company, and felt that this prospect would not have materialized if not for the initial path he took to work with a family member. Eventually, 'family' may hold the key for many participants' decision, whether that person is single or married.

4.2.4. Making the academic decision

Pursuing higher education abroad provides an avenue for Malaysian students to leave Malaysia. Students have different reasons to study in a foreign university, including having access to quality education and a wider array of choices in academic programs and also, gaining academic, work and life experiences in a foreign country. The revolving higher education policies in Malaysia contribute to pushing Malaysians out of the country for higher education. Access to higher education, influenced by the ethically-based quota system, has been a hot debate in Malaysia for many years. Many Malaysians blamed the centralized system managed by the Ministry of Higher Education when qualified Malaysians could not enter the local universities, or did not have the choice to study in the field they wanted. In order to enter a local public university for undergraduate studies, one needs to complete two years of pre-university studies, known as Form Six¹³, offered at the public schools. Then she would need to sit for a standardized exam at the end of the two years in Form Six. The results of that exam are then used to meet the entrance criteria of the local public university, which would be more affordable than to study at a private college or university in Malaysia. Some parents and students did not want to go through the two years when there was no guarantee to enter the local public university, and no guarantee that one could go to the local university she wants (local universities are located in different states in Malaysia and may have different specializations) or to study in the program she prefers. Therefore, many students chose to enroll in local private colleges, and some, through transfer and twinning programs, completed their degrees abroad, for example, in countries such as Australia, Germany, United Kingdom, and the U.S. These admissions policies and their consequences for access to higher education in Malaysia provide a background to understanding why some Malaysian students would choose to pursue undergraduate degrees abroad, which can

¹³ Form Six is the next grade one goes to after graduating from high school in Form Five – it is also known as the Matriculation program, where students study two years of pre-university studies and then take an exam for entry into the local public universities. See footnote on Form Five.

eventually lead to their pursuit of graduate degrees abroad as well. Next, we turn to why they pursued graduate degrees in the U.S.

There are a variety of reasons why the participants in this study came to the United States to pursue graduate education. Although most of them came initially to study for their undergraduate degree, a few of them came to pursue their graduate degree, while a few of them did not first come to the U.S. to pursue higher education. While many Malaysians may still think and blame the higher education system in Malaysia for not providing access and quality in higher education in Malaysia, to what degree is that true to the participants in this study? There are other valid reasons based on family that eventually influence the participants' academic decision. In this section, the findings show how family plays a big role in one's academic decision.

4.2.4.1. Making the academic decision - Family influence

Making the decision to further one's study was not made in a vacuum, by herself or himself without considerations to the tangible and intangible factors that revolve around that person's life. The reasons and sources to pursue an undergraduate degree may differ from those to pursue a graduate degree. Although the emphasis of this study is to examine the decision of participants who came from Malaysia to the U.S. for graduate and terminal degree studies, it is essential to recognize how their decision was initially made at the undergraduate level as it provided background for why they made the decision to study for a graduate degree, and why they chose the U.S.

As noted earlier, at the undergraduate level, the decision to study in a foreign country such as Australia, Germany, United Kingdom or United States was associated with the quality and reputation of programs and universities in those countries, the opportunity for exposure to life abroad, as well as the trend and popularity of local college's twinning programs with universities abroad. It could also be related to the lack of access to study in the Malaysian public universities, or simply the family's

expectations and preference. In addition, it could also be due to the perception that many employers in Malaysia preferred graduates who graduated from universities abroad (Quah et al., 2009.). Moreover, the decision to study for an undergraduate degree in the chosen field, and in the chosen university was also associated with the affordability to pay for the tuition and expenses for pursuing the degree. This mainly involved the family's financial support, as well as the influence by immediate and extended family members. In some cases, the financial support came from government and private scholarships; with the choice of field, program, university, or country determined by the scholarship provider.

Not surprisingly, family expectations and influences echoed throughout this study as one of the most dominant factors in participants' academic decision making processes, although more so during the participants' undergraduate education than during the graduate studies. When explored further, participants discussed the multitude aspects of their family expectations as well as their own expectations on their academic pursuit. Some examples include being a role model to the younger siblings, attempting to achieve the dream of their parents, emulating their parents' academic achievements, and reaching their personal academic and economic goals.

Financial support is a major deciding factor when it comes to the choice of major or program and the university. As encapsulated by some participants, the influence of family is strong because making a decision on these choices all depended on the financial support afforded by the family, especially when they have no financial means of their own. As stated by some participants:

Stanley: You must understand, that before coming to the U.S., I thought I would not get a good degree. My dad wants it cheap and would rather I do a diploma course in Malaysia. Comparing U.K., Australia and the U.S., this track was the cheapest and got me a degree which is somewhat respectable. His biggest hesitation was the money, but honestly, I don't think he had high expectations on

my grades when I came (to the U.S.). At that time, it was a stretch, but not completely out of the question.

Henry: I went there because it was one of the good engineering schools; my dad was also there. I finished my high school in North Carolina too. I guess I heard it was a good school from friends and teachers from my high school. Many well-known public universities, NC State is one of them. Had to be public because of the cost too. During undergrad, family was the source. Went directly with master's.

Sebastian: To come to U.S., I just made up my mind. I went to MACEE¹⁴, choosing a college I just look at U.S. News for the top 20 schools for engineering, and then I applied. Obviously, money is an issue. I actually got into Michigan which I really wanted to go, but my parents couldn't afford it, so I chose Texas.

An interesting observation from these three quotes is that, while stating that their parents' financial support is what determined where they could or could not study, these participants seemed to have an expectation about where they wanted to study and equated an American degree as "good" and "respectable." Therefore their decision was to pick the U.S. as their destination of choice for higher education. Not surprisingly, universities in the U.S. are reputed to be some of the best in the world, as *Financial Times* described, "the epicenter of academic achievement" (Heenan, 2005, p. 22). Moreover, the World University Rankings 2012-2013 also showed that the top 10 universities are located in the United States and United Kingdom (See Appendix K) (QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, n. d.).

¹⁴ MACEE is the Malaysian-American Commission on Educational Exchange, located in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. It was founded in 1963 as a bi-national commission for Malaysia and the U.S. to promote educational exchange between the two countries. MACEE's founding document is a bilateral agreement ratified by the governments of Malaysia and the U.S. (Malaysian-American Commission on Educational Exchange, n. d.).

There was also a certain degree of expectation and influence from parents and other family members when it came to maintaining the status quo within the family, especially in academic accomplishments. A few participants explained the influence to further their study or to pick the U.S. for their graduate studies:

Henry: Well, undergrad degree is so common these days. Master's will make you stand out. Also, you know, Chinese family pressure their kids to excel in studies. My aunt insisted I must do master's (degree). She wanted me to do a Ph.D. too, but Master in Computer Science is good enough. Mainly my aunt, she's the smart one in the family. She has a Ph.D. too.

Salina: Well, both my parents are professors. So, I always knew that I would get an advanced degree. And since I was in Finance, and since then I always knew that I was going to get an MBA. I guess I didn't know, before, like when I left for the U.S.A. I mean, I knew that I have always wanted to go back to the U.S. since I have lived there in my childhood. And my parents got their degrees in the U.S. as well. They have Ph.D.'s. So they did their undergraduate, graduate and Ph.D.'s in the U.S.A. And we lived together in (a state the midwest of the U.S.) when they were getting their Ph.D.'s. But then they came back (to Malaysia), obviously.

There was no clear indication if the notion of studying for a graduate degree and particularly in the U.S. was an expectation embedded in these participants' lives. However, they reflected that because they have a parent or relative who has a higher degree, they too, are expected whether by their family, or personally, to achieve a certain academic level in their lives. Henry's own expectation demonstrated how he believed that a master's degree would give him the competitive edge in the field, in addition to what was expected of him by his aunt whom he considered the smart one in the family. One interesting observation is that although Henry mentioned that the Chinese family typically pressures their kids to excel, Henry and Salina are not from the same ethnic groups – Henry is of Chinese ethnicity while Salina is of Malay ethnicity. However, they

both come from families that not only value higher education pursuits, but probably have the means to do so. Hence, a prior expectation may be set for the later generation, such as children, nephews, or nieces, to follow suit what others in the family have gone through in terms of pursuing graduate degrees. Besides, Salina's statement also brought up a point about her own expectation to study in the U.S., besides emulating her parents who both received their doctorates from the U.S.A. Her childhood education and childhood experience in the U.S.A. also influenced how she viewed the U.S. as a familiar place she would choose for her higher education.

Related to family influence, Mawar had a difficult relationship with her father over her decision to study something she liked. She felt obligated to achieve her father's dream and hopes of completing a Ph.D., although that did not materialize. She was compelled to get a degree somehow, even though she was not interested in the programs she was initially pursuing as chosen by her father. She eventually ended up completing a bachelor's program in the U.S. and then continued with a master's degree in the U.S. That feeling of being too accommodating as a daughter due to the respect or fear for her father, to succeed in completing a degree is of utmost importance for her when she was younger. She shared how she felt, and how she eventually made the decision to go to the U.S. for her undergraduate degree:

Mawar: My dad, at that time... he was still kind of like....he has this dream one of his kids will get a doctorate, because neither.... none of us became a medical doctor. They expected that I will get a Ph.D. But that is not happening. Well in high school, I have two options, after Form 5¹⁵, I wanted to do either law, which I have to go to England for that, or international relations and I wanted to go to the States. However, I did not qualify for a government scholarship, so my dad was kind of upset, so he wanted me to pursue higher education in Malaysia. And being a girl, he was reluctant to let me go overseas anyway. So, it took me five years for

¹⁵ Form Five is similar to a Senior Year of high school in the U.S., which is the fifth year of one's secondary education in Malaysia.

being passive-aggressive, doing what he wanted me to do. He wanted me to do hotel management...so I did at Stamford (a private college in Malaysia). I did A-Levels¹⁶. I am fine, but then I quit. He wanted me to go to a specific school where his friend is the Principal who could send him weekly update on what I was doing. Long story short, after five years, I managed, he said ok, he gave me two weeks. I went to an agency, one of those agencies in Malaysia that does your application, that process visa and everything for you. They said two options if you want to leave in two weeks, there is one school in New Hampshire and one school in Honolulu, so I picked Honolulu.

Although Mawar was persistent about studying International Relations in the U.S., which her dad did not favor, she could not have done so without the financial support from her father. Therefore, financial support from the family, as in Mawar's situation, influenced what and where she could study.

Family is also pivotal to the process of choosing which university, even when the financial aspect has been taken care of. Sujitha explained how her family influenced her to go to a particular university:

Sujitha: When I lived in San Jose with my uncles who were already working with (an American company) and working in the (Silicon) Valley, so we just generally knew about UC (University of California) Berkeley and all the surrounding schools. You know, some of them came out from there. They will talk about them. They would attend a lot of high tech events. That was the other thing that I did a lot, was attend events. So I knew of UC Berkeley.

¹⁶ The A-level stands for Advanced Level of the General Certificate of Education. It is a qualification offered by education institutions mainly in England, and some other countries including Singapore, and was common when Malaysia was still a British colony. A-levels are now offered at private colleges. It is common for students to study for A-levels if they are interested to pursue higher education in England as the standardized exams at the end of the two-year A-levels (similar to Malaysia's Form Six) are accepted as entry requirements in universities in England.

One distinct characteristic of the participants is that they depended on their family for the financial and moral support in deciding about their undergraduate education. They were younger, and most of them came directly from high school to the local college and then the U.S. They had little experience and autonomy when it came to finances and eventual decisions on their undergraduate education. By the time they decided to pursue a graduate degree, their outlook was different. They were older, had become more self-directed and more determined about what they wanted for their graduate education, what they wanted to do with it and where they plan to go or be after that. In fact, I believe that the exposure to undergraduate education, new culture, new environment, or a culmination of all these factors provided them a sense of knowing who they are, what they want in life, and how they then make these decisions on their own with the family in mind, though not necessarily with explicit instructions or orders from the family.

4.2.4.2. Making the academic decision - Own expectations

Some participants stressed that they set their own expectations when it came to pursuing higher education. Participants talked about the trend and popularity of going abroad for a degree initially at the undergraduate level, which were mainly due to quality of programs and universities, preference by employers in Malaysia and peer pressure. A study has shown that employers have the perception that graduates who fully completed degrees abroad have better communication skills, confidence level, computer and information technology skills, creativity and innovation, analytical research skills and flexibility, as compared to the graduates from local universities and local twinning programs in Malaysia (Quah et al., 2009).

The tendency to study in a foreign university could also be due to peer pressure. For example, graduating high school friends may want to enroll in the same college and complete the same twinning programs, and then apply to the same universities abroad. In addition, young Malaysian undergraduate students tend to feel more comfortable going to a foreign university that enrolls more Malaysians, and staying with or near other

Malaysians on that foreign university campus. Ai Mee explained how she made her choice based on her expectations:

Ai Mee: I think it was the trend at the time, Australia and UK (United Kingdom) were the trend when I was little, but the U.S. attracted me when the time came. I got the information about American schools from MACEE which was a branch of the U.S. Embassy at the time, I think... I think that's the name of it. It had a comprehensive library of all school catalogs so I could look up programs, costs, etc. Well, first I had to pick by climate, and then by budget. I wanted temperate climate for four seasons, east coast and west coast too expensive, so I picked Midwest. Then I looked at schools that had good Communication programs that were not too expensive. I think I may have applied to three schools. I got accepted at University of Wisconsin at Madison and Iowa State. Both had a lot of Malaysian students, so I was not worried.

Conversely, the inclination to study in a foreign university that has more Malaysian students is not a deciding factor when it comes to pursuing graduate education. The participants gave an impression that they knew what to expect during their graduate education more so than when they were pursuing their undergraduate education. This is a very important point to note because this provided evidence that linked their prior experience in the U.S., especially to how they are assimilated, or not, to the U.S. education system and life as a student abroad. In addition to Bala's comments earlier about his aspiration to change career from engineering to finance as his reason to pursue an MBA, Ai Mee set her eyes on two things:

Ai Mee: I pursued the master's because I felt I needed more technical background, and also at the time I felt it would be easier to apply for a Green Card¹⁷.

¹⁷ Green Card is the government-issued document that shows Permanent Residency status of the holder.

Ai Mee was already working but she wanted to move toward a more technical background, and a higher degree with a different major could do just that. More importantly, that higher degree would enable her to have an opportunity to live in the U.S. more permanently and one way to do so is to become a Permanent Resident, which is a pathway to U.S. citizenship. The Green Card is the documentation that shows that one is granted Permanent Residency.

Participants were asked where they studied, and why they chose to study in that university. When it came to own decision to make, some participants emphasized the location of the university, for example:

Subramaniam: The day I came to the U.S. in 1994, I went to New York. I just love that place. So multicultural, it was very different from Asia, for example. This is a place that I want to spend time. So, I really fell in love with the U.S. and there's where I really want to study, so I started reading a lot of books about U.S. I like Columbia for some reason. It could be... I was sort of, in touch with Bill Clinton. Somewhere, well, I read his book... about him, called First in Class. Sort of make sense. So I thought he went to Georgetown and did International Security. And so I thought I will go do the same thing. So I tried Georgetown, and Columbia also has a good program, you know, I was actually applying for undergrad degree. But Columbia sent me this graduate prospectus, you know, you should try graduate school. Might as well do graduate school. I didn't apply to Georgetown. Actually you asked for brochure, you write to them. I wrote to Georgetown, Princeton, Tufts and Columbia.

Yusof: When I did my application I was in the U.S. so I had some information from existing college... I guess from the books. There was sort of a college placement area near the local college that was there. But I specifically chose Columbia because it was in New York. I wanted to be in New York. I got accepted at several other places. University of Michigan, Penn State, but I wanted to be in New York. I don't know. I just wanted to be in New York. It is like, I just wanted to be in New York. It's kind of hard to say why exactly.

There may be reasons why Subramaniam and Yusof studied in a big city. For one, New York City is known as the melting pot, where a myriad of cultures and diversity of people can be found. Moreover, for a Malaysian student, it may be an easier place to blend in and assimilate because when there are more international students in that city or university, there may also be more programs, services and stores catering to their needs. Some universities are more popular among the international students for reasons such as the reputation of their professors and programs, the location, affordability, affiliation with home country, and popularity with others from the same country. In addition, in a big city, it is more likely to find local foods similar to those found in Malaysia. For example, many Malaysian-themed restaurants are operated in New York City by immigrants from Malaysia. There are also many local stores in Chinatown that sell foodstuff imported from Malaysia.

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) website, seven of the top ten U.S. institutions with the highest number of international students in 2011-2012 are in big cities with city population of more than one million*:

Top U.S Institutions Hosting International Students in 2011-2012				
	Institution	City	State	Total International Students
1	University of Southern California	<i>Los Angeles*</i>	CA	9,269
2	University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign	Champaign	IL	8,997
3	New York University	<i>New York*</i>	NY	8,660
4	Purdue University – Main Campus	West Lafayette	IN	8,563
5	Columbia University	<i>New York*</i>	NY	8,024
6	University of California – Los Angeles	<i>Los Angeles*</i>	CA	6,703
7	Northeastern University	<i>Boston*</i>	MA	6,486
8	University of Michigan – Ann Arbor	<i>Ann Arbor*</i>	MI	6,382
9	Michigan State University	East Lansing	MI	6,209
10	Ohio State University – Main Campus	<i>Columbus*</i>	OH	6,142

Table 2: Top U.S institutions hosting international students in 2011-2012 (*Source: Open Doors 2012, IIE*)

There were a few government and private sector scholarship recipients in this study at the undergraduate level. They discussed how the determination was made, what programs to enroll in or what universities to apply to. When asked why the U.S. was the

choice for higher education as an undergraduate, Khatijah explained that it was due to a scholarship from a large corporation in Malaysia.

Khatijah: (The company) sponsors many, many students to study abroad, primarily for the undergraduate degrees. And typically what happens is that students will go back to Malaysia to work for the company. (The company) says this is where you going to go, and this is what you are going to do. At first I wasn't very happy. I said I really don't need to learn English. I am not sure I really need to learn about American culture either. Just let me go to college. But basically they wanted us to spend a year learning English and entry exams. I spent two years in California doing an intensive English program, and went to college a year after that, at a university in the midwest.

She further explained how scholarship recipients were selected:

Khatijah: It is typically based off of your Form 5 exams, and then the program that I was selected for was immediately after Form 5 where they sent us to California to learn English, and to learn about the American culture, and also to do college prep work so to apply for colleges, to take the SAT and ACT exams. For this particular program, it is typically for the top 10 students in the country, because it is not based on your actual exam results. It was based on your trial exam results. So, I found out that I got the scholarship even before the actual results came out. There were probably around 25 or 30 of us that came to the U.S. in 1994 as part of the program. They all ended up at various colleges across the country.

Khatijah did not have her own choice when it came to where to go or what kind of entrance exams to take, as the scholarship provider decided where the scholarship recipients would go. Another scholarship recipient from the same company that Khatijah

referred to, was Salina. She described the similar one-year English and cultural immersion program to prepare her for her undergraduate studies in the U.S.:

Salina: I went to a university located in the east of the U.S., and studied Finance. Before the B.A., I spent a year in Oklahoma. I was a part of the (Company's) scholarship program. So after SPM¹⁸, I spent a year in Oklahoma, spending my time on SAT, and achievement tests, and applying to college. As part of the scholarship program, in addition to taking the test, it was an English language Institute, and the guidance counselor there suggested that I applied to one of the universities in eastern U.S. I have never heard of it before, obviously. I didn't know that if it was a good school, and she suggested it, and that was where I ended up going. I spent six months at the ELS (English Language School) I guess it is just a teaching language school. There were a lot of international students, and a bunch of Malaysian student under the same scholarship program. So I was there for six months and lived with a host family, with an American host family. And for the remainder six months, you know, once we have filled in our application and everything, I guess they called it a transition semester so we spent a semester at the University of Oklahoma, just taking some classes. The Company scholarship paid the full tuition and books, and they give you a living allowance as well.

Similar to Khatijah's financial circumstance at the undergraduate level, Salina also did not seem to have much say about the choices that were made for her especially when the full support of her undergraduate studies as well as her graduate studies both came through scholarships from the same Company in Malaysia.

¹⁸ SPM is the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* which is translated to English as the Malaysian Certificate of Education. It is the national exam that all Form 5 high school students in Malaysia would take at the end of their high school. This examination is set by the *Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia*, or also known as the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate.

Not all scholarship providers dictate what students study or where they go for their studies. There is some flexibility that will give an individual a choice in where to go to pursue their degree. For example, Yusof explained why he chose one scholarship provider over the other due to its flexibility:

Yusof: I got a scholarship with (the Government) and then I got one from (the Company) for Australia, which I wasn't really interested in. So I went the government scholarship which offered me to go to the U.S. For this government scholarship, you are free to choose any university.

Making the academic decision was not an easy and simple one, especially if it is due to external factors such as rules and regulation placed on the student by the scholarship provider. This is because the initial decision to accept financial assistance meant that the major program and university were determined by the scholarship provider, not by the student or her family. Moreover, the scholarship provider is also the one that would decide where a scholarship recipient would work after she completed her studies, and these expectations are usually spelled out in the contract between the scholarship provider and recipient. As Khatijah pointed out,

Khatijah: The prospects of employment in Malaysia terrify me. I was basically, you know, the Company's scholar. And the Company basically got to tell me where it wanted to put me, if they were to employ me.

While being recognized for achievements in school may culminate in scholarship offers, most of these scholarships mentioned by the participants come with a bond or contract that binds a scholarship recipient to the company or the government. In other words, some recipients would need to work for that scholarship provider (Company or government) for a certain number of years otherwise the monies paid for the pursuit of degree would need to be repaid by the student. This depended on the type of scholarship and providers. For example, although Yusof stated that (the Government) allowed him to

choose the university he wanted to go to, Rozzeta shared the predicament of having to work for the company determined by (the Government) since they provided her the scholarship:

Rozzeta: We had that contract. They are supposed to provide a job. But if you remember in 1988, 1990, bad recession, and before we came here they said they will release us, they still pay for school but we are on our own, they cannot provide a job. The scholarship is from the Government.

Furthermore, Salina echoed how scholarships that came with a contract or bond played a crucial role in determining where one studied, what program or major one pursued, and where one would later work after completing that degree:

Salina: All the education sponsorship policies obviously play a part into people making decisions. I know it did for me, in terms of undergrad and graduate school and being realistic about meeting financial obligation. Increasingly there is more now, and I should also tell you that my current employer has gone and paid for my MBA in retrospect. So, that is no longer a consideration for me.

Besides knowing the demographic information about the study participants and how their academic decision was made, it is essential to know if the participants have worked before, during and after their pursuit of graduate education. Their work experience prior to and during their studies, family's financial and moral support, external financial support, and exposure to the work environment in the U.S. all provided insight about how they came about making decisions. In addition, their work experience at college would build a portfolio for future employment and also changed how they felt about themselves as they were exposed to different work cultures, people, and environments. I argue that their identities also shifted due to the experience they had, and that also affected how they felt about their sense of belonging in the U.S. This provided a framework for decision making on where to live after graduation. The participants' past

work experience made them explore the comparative perspectives between work life in Malaysia and in the U.S., which later helped them make decisions about where to choose as their *home*.

4.2.5. Summary

Two things stand out most from the demographic information of three groups -- participants who have not started the permanent immigration process, holding Non-Immigrant Visas (NIV); participants who have chosen permanent residency (PR) and citizenship status in the U.S. and participants who have returned to Malaysia. One is that half of the participants from *each* group were of Chinese ethnicity. While it is hard to determine if this was because there were more Chinese (n=11) than the Malays (n=6) and Indians (n=5) in this study, in general it was also hard to make any generalization based on ethnicity alone, because of the small number of participants interviewed. However, the similarity of the bigger share of emigrants of Chinese ethnicity from Malaysia is apparent in other studies as well. For example, Malaysian emigrants to the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Singapore were of mostly of Chinese ethnicity, male, highly-qualified and experienced professionals and sub-professionals, with tertiary education, in the mid to late thirties, has a young family and in the middle or senior management position (Pillai, 1992; Sieh-Lee, 1988). In more recent research, the World Bank Report on Malaysia's Brain Drain (2011) also reported that the diaspora in their findings is of Chinese ethnicity as well. Nevertheless, that report did mention the possibility of bias of their own results because of their large concentration of respondents who are of Chinese ethnicity. They stated that among the Malaysian diaspora residing in the U.S. in 2000, ten percent have claimed that the Malay language as their mother tongue, which implied that they were of Malay ethnicity; while over sixty percent reported one of the Chinese languages and six percent reported one of the Indian languages (Lucas, 2008 based on U.S. Census in 2000, as cited in the World Bank Report 2011).

In addition, the World Bank report (2011) also stated:

Based on a limited sample of 64 respondents from the Australia's longitudinal immigrant survey available from Department of Immigration and Citizenship Australia in 2000, Lucas (2008) reports that among Principal Visa Applicants born in Malaysia and admitted to Australia between September 1999 and August 2000, 73 percent were ethnic Chinese and 15 percent ethnic Indian. These results should be interpreted with extreme caution due to its small sample size. These numbers suggest that the non-*Bumiputra* are highly overrepresented in the diaspora relative to their population shares -- 26 percent for the Chinese ethnicity and 7.7 percent for the Indian ethnicity (p. 125-126).

While data provided from other sources as well as from this study are not comprehensive, they are indicative that more Malaysian-born migrants of Chinese ethnicity choose to work and live abroad. Although there are no current data to show accurately that more Malaysian-born migrants of Chinese ethnicity choose to work and live abroad, the data provided in this study show that this is the pattern of immigration¹⁹.

The second thing that stood out is that the age of those who are on non-immigrant visas (Figure 1) and those who returned to Malaysia (Figure 3) are found to be in their twenties and thirties, whereas there is a bigger range of ages from the twenties to fifties for those who are already PR and naturalized U.S. citizens (Figure 2). Based on the data of this study, this suggests that those who returned to Malaysia made the decision earlier, in their twenties and thirties. Those in their forties and fifties are only found in the group who are PR and naturalized U.S. citizens, which indicates that the longer they stayed in the U.S., the less likely it may have been for them to repatriate to Malaysia. Noticing this pattern raises the question of *when* people make decisions about where to work and live following degree completion.

¹⁹ Given the past government policy that limited Chinese and Indian Malaysians' access to higher education and to public sector work; study and work abroad were the trends for those who could afford to do so.

4.3. The Transition

Before I look at the participants' discussion about the push and pull factors that influence them in choosing their *home* after graduating, I explored the transitions they have gone through and what their perception of *home* was. The following themes are the bridge to the question about understanding why participants who have finished their studies in the master's, doctoral or terminal professional degree in the U.S. have chosen either to remain in the U.S. or return to Malaysia – the notion of *home*, Malaysian lifestyle, sense of identity and turning points.

Participants in this study who first came to the U.S. to study may have gained more than just the degree that they initially sought. They were exposed to a different learning environment at the college, experienced a different work environment and culture, faced challenges of making new friends, and went through the assimilation process as they get used to the lifestyle in the U.S. Due to their exposure and experience, they might undergo a transformation in their identity whether or not they are aware of it. And this change could affect the decision-making. The decision making process itself does not happen overnight as the process is a culmination of the experience, exposure, comparative views, family influence, external pressure, and options available.

The first theme derived from the interviews is in terms of the notion of *home*. To capture the essence of decision making in choosing one place or another as their home after graduation, I first explore the attributes of *home*. What is home? Where is home?

4.3.1. The notion of home

People move from one place to another, either temporarily or permanently, relocate on their own or due to company transfer to other countries in search of a better economic and social life. This corresponded to the strong global demand of skills and talent notably in the more advanced countries. Migration of Asians is not a new

phenomenon. It dates back to many years of Eastern movements of Indians from India, and southward movements of Chinese from China that were part of the “formative periods of the cultures of the nations of South East Asia. Movements westwards and eastwards out of Central Asia shook the foundations of both Chinese and European societies from thirteenth century to produce one of the most extensive land-based empires in history” (Skeldon 2000, p. 369). More recently, the diversity of Asian migration is mainly due to the multitude of types of movers; from those who are leaving Asia to become permanent residents of other countries, to those who are entering countries in Asia to fill niche occupations of both high-skilled and low-skilled jobs, contract labor migrants, students, asylum-seekers, those displaced for ecological reasons and return migrants and retirees (Skeldon, 2000). The focus of my study is the migrants who fall under the category of highly skilled, those who have attained their graduate and terminal degrees. While they may have left their home country, they are still actively engaged in transnational²⁰ activities, where they “maintain multifaceted social ties across the political, geographic and cultural borders, linking their ‘home’ and ‘host’ countries together” (Lam & Yeoh, 2004, p. 141). These transmigrants are said to have identities, behaviors and values that are not just limited by the location in which they live (Lam & Yeoh, 2004). Although Lam and Yeoh’s research was focused only on Chinese-Malaysians working and residing in Singapore, some aspects of their discussion provided an understanding of how transmigrants negotiate the thoughts of *home* and national identity.

Participants in this study were not specifically asked to define what *home* is to them, although this study is about the decision making in choosing their home after attaining their higher education goals in the United States. Therefore, are we talking about an apartment or a house, the environment in which one lives, or the sense of belonging wherever they may be? Even when one is looking to buy a house, she would

²⁰ Ong (1999) used “trans” to suggest, “a movement through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something” (p.4).

have a list of preferences -- four bedrooms, two-car garages, a particular school district, a pool, and the list goes on. However, *home* in this particular context is more than just the four walls of a house, and it means different things to different people, even when these individuals were born and grew up in the same country, could speak the same dialects and languages, or studied in the U.S. graduate schools. The meaning of *home* was subjective, and what I found from the participants was that *home* has a deeper meaning than just a place of residence. There are different notions of *home*, as discussed in some studies (Benjamin, 1995; Lam & Yeoh, 2004; Rapoport, 1995; Relph, 1976). According to Benjamin (1995), it is more ambiguous to understand the notions of home and homeland due to the rampant international cross-border movements; while Relph (1976) defined home as “an attachment to a particular setting, environment, in comparison with which all other associations with places have only a limited significance” (p. 39, as cited in Lam & Yeoh, 2004). In addition, Rapoport (1995) defined home as “an emotional attachment to a safe and stable physical center of the universe” (p. 27) while Lam and Yeoh (2004) defined it as a place where one’s identity and affiliation to a particular community is established.

This research was not set up to look at the type of abode or the physical roof above participants’ head. I started by looking at *home* as the place people choose to live more permanently than during their transition in graduate school. Making that decision to choose a *home* may be due to the family, a career, freedom, lifestyle, or whatever factors that play the determining role. However, as the interview analysis unfolded, I found that how they chose their next *home* after graduation and how *home* was defined, was not as straightforward as I had thought. What then is considered a *home* to those who had left their homeland and now lived in another country? The findings showed that all participants interviewed in this study referred to Malaysia as their *home*, whether they were living in Malaysia or in the U.S. at the time of this interview. Interestingly, none of the permanent residents (PR) and naturalized U.S. citizens has referred to the U.S. as their *home*, even when they have family living with them, for example, their spouse and children living with them in the U.S. This notion of *home* provided the link to

understanding what *home* means to the participants, for instance, that it is a place where their identity and affiliation to a particular community has been established (Lam & Yeoh, 2004), and not necessarily where their place of residence is.

In the interview, I asked the question if they missed home, keeping the broad sense of *home*. The responses below amplified the meaning of *home* to the participants. Most of the participants in this study defined *home* as where their parents live, even when the participants themselves are married, have their own family and are living in the U.S.

Khatijah: I miss my family, my parents, my mom, dad more than anything, but I am not homesick for Malaysia, let's put it that way. And if you think about it, like friends, the last time I had real friends in Malaysia was in high school.

Siew Ling: Yes, I missed home very much my first two years, and in fact, wanted to and quit school. It was that much of a culture shock for me. I didn't really miss friends because I didn't grow up in that manner. Our family was very insular because of my mom, so it was always just the three of us getting through life. I didn't really have close friends growing up, and maybe that's the reason I didn't know how to socialize at college.

It was intriguing to note that participants who are PR and naturalized U.S. citizens referred to Malaysia as their *home* even though in some of their quotes they said they did not want to return to Malaysia. The following quotes derived from different parts of the interview, not specifically to the question *do you miss home?* While they were not specifically talking about defining *home* at that time, the connections were clear about how *home* was defined as 'Malaysia.'

Siew Ling was a PR married to a U.S. citizen. However, she referred to Malaysia as *home* throughout the interview:

*Every time I go **home**, I have to wear clothes that cover up, and I have to be aware and careful of pick pockets and mugging, safety is such a concern! I could have gone **home**, but I knew I would hate it and be very unhappy. My mom has unrealistic expectations when it comes to men, but I promised her I would go **home** after college.*

The only participant who stated where she wanted to call *home*:

*Sujitha (Business visa): I think that is the way that I am thinking right now... that I want the U.S. to be my **home** and my permanent **home**.*

Evidently, there is a difference between a *home* and a place of residence. For participants who are PR, naturalized U.S. citizens and those who are on temporary work visas, the U.S. is a place of residence and a choice they made, but *home* means more than just a place of residence. The findings show that participants tend to make a distinction between *home* and where they live, whether consciously or unconsciously, as they think of the interview questions and topics in context with their current life situations. These findings are comparable to what Lam and Yeoh (2004) found, where a *home* is full of, “meanings centered on family and kin relations, nostalgia, national pride and lifecycle event” (p. 158). Along the same lines, I found that for the participants of this study, the most apparent reference to a *home* is where one grew up, where one’s parents still reside, the community where one’s siblings and relatives live, and where they had childhood memories. Moreover, these nostalgic memories do not depart from their lives; they seem to be embedded as part of who they are today and how they view themselves in their new *home*. In essence, *home* is closely tied to family relationships, which indicates that kinship is more needed than nationalism (Spivak, 1992, p. 773, as cited in Lam & Yeoh, 2004).

Other similar studies have also shown that *home* carries a meaning and a connection deeper than a physical dwelling or location. A *home* is said to encompass life events and stories structured by communications and routines; such as words, jokes, opinions, gestures, actions, individual habits, routines and idiosyncrasies (Berger, 1984, as cited in Lam & Yeoh, 2004). In other words, the participants might have chosen to live in the U.S., but they still think of and refer to Malaysia as their *home* due to the roots they have already established and left behind in Malaysia, something that they never really abandoned.

The idea of national identity is said to be clearly associated to *home* for a small number of Lam and Yeoh's study respondents, however, the ideologies of *home* and country no longer form a functional equation in many cases (Bammer, 1994, as cited in Lam & Yeoh, 2004). Lam and Yeoh (2004) further provided a scenario, where holding Malaysian citizenship and subscribing to "Malaysian identity" often did not prevent their study respondents from establishing homes elsewhere – their respondents established homes in Singapore. Similarly, the participants of this study who are non-immigrant visa holders working in the U.S. still hold Malaysian citizenship and may identify themselves as Malaysians; but that did not prevent them from establishing their residence in the U.S., which was possible due to their work in the U.S. after graduation. Two quotes demonstrate this:

*Wei Aun (was on H-1B work visa): I wanted to go to California where there was more sun, nearer to the sea, more Asians, closer to **home** if I wanted to fly home for a visit.*

*Khatijah (was on OPT): I am not sure if I ever have the expectations of going **home**. I am not sure, necessarily, that I have an expectation of higher education, for example, or expectations of going **home** to Malaysia. I have no regret. Sometimes I am terrified of what the future brings, because sometimes you know, you always talk about all these foreigners, and regardless how well... often I*

*adapt, the reality is we are always going to be foreigners. It is always going to be a foreign country. We will never going to give up our Malaysian citizenship. We will be PR for the rest of our life if we decided to be here (U.S.). Sometimes those questions terrify me. It is as though you don't have a permanent **home**. My husband and I took a very big step, my parents gave us a house in Malaysia when we were married. We are in the process to try to sell that house, which in reality the severing of all permanent ties to Malaysia.*

Their national identity seems to be associated with *home*, and with the roots or where they grew up, with the Asian beliefs, values and practices, and with the feeling of being a Malaysian yet not “entirely Malaysian.” Therefore, I do not think that national identity is synonymous with citizenship. A citizenship does not define a person’s national identity. Moreover, the rise of transnational mobility made citizenship become increasingly separated from national identity and belonging (Lam & Yeoh, 2004).

The data have shown that the participants still refer to *home* as Malaysia, yet may hold a different citizenship. For example, Mawar is a naturalized U.S. citizen. She lives in the U.S. with her husband and child, yet she also talked about *home* with reference to Malaysia:

*Actually, I preferred not to go **home** [to Malaysia], because I know that will be hard for me. It wasn't that I don't want to go **home** [to Malaysia]. I want to go home just for 3 months and then come back.*

Similarly, Rozzeta, a naturalized U.S. citizen also stated:

*When we used to go **home** you talk to people, they are not like that. They are still, I don't know if they have changed. Well of course they (my parents) wanted me to finish my study and go **home**.*

Moreover, Ai Mee may refer to Malaysia as *home*, but she provided a reminder that she is now a citizen of another country. Ai Mee, who was married to an American citizen, had two children born in the U.S. and was living in the U.S. during this interview first talked about *home* in reference to Malaysia as I gathered from some of her statements:

*Not that American corporate life is not political, but there seems to be more of a system to doing things, the feeling I get back **home** is that it is more based on relationships.*

*I think if my family needed me, then yes, that would highly influence my decision to go **home**. The biggest pull factors for me **going home** would be family, food, friends okay, maybe friends first before food.*

When it comes to national identity, however, Ai Mee identified herself as an American citizen, where she argues, “As a U.S. citizen, at least I know that they (the U.S. government) will get pissed off if something happens to their citizens.”

If they have chosen to live in the U.S. due to the many pull factors from the U.S. and push factors from Malaysia, then why did they still refer to Malaysia as *home*? When will the time come when the U.S. is their *home*? Just as the saying goes, *Rome was not built in a day*, so are decisions such as these, where people make decisions as life events unfold, just as the policies change in the countries, and just as their life changes throughout the years when they came to the U.S. from Malaysia, to pursue higher education. Based on the perspectives gathered from the participants, *home* is like the root or place of origin, with a familiar social network such as family and friends. Therefore, I think for the first generation migrants from Malaysia, their *home* will most likely be Malaysia. In other words, when they refer to *home*, it would be Malaysia. For their children, the second generation, it will be a different experience. The second generation migrants may know of Malaysia, but if they grow up in the U.S., have their close family

and friends in the U.S. and developed their social network in the U.S., even with occasional visits to Malaysia, the U.S. will be considered their *home* for the same reason their parents considered Malaysia as *home*.

4.3.2. The Malaysian lifestyle

Another theme that provided a link to understanding how decisions are made when it comes to choosing *home* is aspects of lifestyle. I explored the question of what participants meant by *lifestyle*. Siew Ling commented,

Siew Ling: I just felt I could not assimilate back into the Malaysian way of life. I know we were trying to decipher what that means and although I cannot explain it, I know it isn't for me.

Siew Ling could not explain the Malaysian lifestyle, yet she felt she could not assimilate to the Malaysian lifestyle, and that she knew it was not for her. Then what is it that she could not assimilate back to, and what is it that she knew was not for her? After being in the U.S. for a few years exposed to the culture and environment, the lifestyle in the U.S. is probably what Siew Ling has grown accustomed to. Moving back to Malaysia would mean another learning curve since many things have changed in Malaysia, and in Siew Ling's life that made her recognize that it is not easy to go back to the lifestyle in Malaysia. Further discussion with the participants helped to understand what they perceived as the Malaysian lifestyle. In particular, food is one of the topics that came up as a cultural practice that gives meaning to what the Malaysian lifestyle entails.

Food is a significant factor because it is not only a means of survival, it is also a source of familiarity and comfort. Here are discussions about food as part of the lifestyle in Malaysia:

Mawar (U.S.): I miss the home. Things, you know, hanging out, “makan” (eating)... but I just don’t I really don’t fit into the ... I could pretend, you know, if I live in KL (Kuala Lumpur, capital of Malaysia) I can still dress whatever I am, but still, hmm..... it is unacceptable to be an imposter. And I like the way the system is run here (U.S.). I prefer to be here and I don’t think I will go back. It doesn’t really matter whether or not you are a Malaysian in the U.S. at that time, the thing that I missed is, like food. I would go home, you know. That was what mattered most, is more of the social, the whole “eating food.”

Rozzeta (U.S.): Food.... I don’t miss much because in CA you can find a lot of stuff. Even easier here than Malaysia, because my parents came, they said you have these and that. So, I don’t miss. I also cook, you know, cook Malaysian food.

Lily (U.S.): And of course, not being able to eat the Malaysian food was a major drawback, because out of 7 years I have been there in the U.S.A., I came back to Malaysia three times. Each time I came back, I have a whole list of things I have to eat. I have to try. Food was definitely something that was lacking, but we tried our best.

From the responses above, I found that the participants missed food, family and friends in Malaysia during their stay in the U.S. These three factors are the major components in their definition of the Malaysian lifestyle. The Malaysian lifestyle includes hanging out with close-knit friends, eating at open air food courts, having a variety of multi-cultural Malaysian food, and being close to the family.

When Malaysians talk about eating out with friends or food culture, they mean more than just basic food consumption. It is deeply embedded in the Malaysian culture that “let’s eat” or “eating food” or “*makan*” as emphasized by Mawar means more than just to have a meal or to eat. Although none of the participants specifically said anything about open air food courts or multi-cultural foods, the culture of eating in Malaysia “was

no longer anchored in the household” (Ali & Abdullah, 2012, p. 157). In particular, “restaurants, food courts and food stalls were service not only those who wanted to eat at meal times but those who wanted to enjoy food with friends and family members in a festive and relaxed manner” (Ali & Abdullah, 2012, p. 157). One website on Countries and Their Cultures had a section covering the culture of Malaysia (Countries and Their Cultures, n. d.). The website describes the food culture in Malaysia and states that due to Malaysia’s diverse population, it is a country with some of the most exquisite cuisines encompassing the elements of Malay, Chinese and Indian cooking. Malaysians also eat outside the home quite often where “small hawker stalls offer prepared food 24 hours a day in urban areas” (Food and Economy section, para. 1). Food customs are quite pronounced when Malaysians have guests; guests are treated with good hospitality, with food treated as “a critical etiquette requirement” (Food and Economy section, para. 2).

While many family activities in the U.S. are influenced by the weather and season, for example visiting the corn maze and pumpkin patch in the Fall, skiing in winter, going to theme parks and beach during the summer season, and watching baseball games starting in Spring; family activities and pastimes in Malaysia are not the same or varied as in the U.S. For example, Malaysian families spend their time at malls during the weekend, for shopping or meeting with friends. And as Ali and Abdullah (2012) put it, families would take the opportunity while at the shopping mall to dine at the food court or restaurants. In a sense, working parents could spend some time with their children while “families also entertain relatives and friends at food premises over meals” (Ali & Abdullah, 2012, p. 163). Meals are not seen as only food consumption; in fact, they are regarded as a time to spend with friends, to hang out with them and to ‘entertain’ them with news and updates. Entertaining at food premises is a common practice especially by business people whose intentions are to “foster economic relations with their partner (business) or clients” (Ali & Abdullah, 2012, p. 163).

Conversely, even though some participants have lived in the U.S. for a while and some have become permanent residents and naturalized U.S. citizens, and also have their

own family in the U.S.; they did not talk about food, family and friends in the U.S. when they talked about the American lifestyle. Instead, they talked about how they liked the American work environment, freedom and ethics, as well as career opportunities, cost of living and purchasing power.

One of the reasons why some participants missed the Malaysian lifestyle when in the U.S. was because to them, it was not easy to make friends in the U.S., or to maintain friendship ties like what they would have if they were in Malaysia. This difficulty was due to the different cultures, food, practices and values that may be hard for two people with divergent views to reach a common ground. For example, Stanley shared this view:

Stanley: It was lonely when I first got there because the Americans students come from rural background. Not much interaction with outside world, not as friendly. But everyone, other Malaysians, had their cliques. It's not like back home when there is critical mass of people that friendship is very possible. Once in a while, it is pretty lonesome.

Stanley was not the only participant who expressed loneliness while in the U.S. More discussion about friends and social network is covered in Chapter Five.

When participants discussed about food in Malaysia, I believe that they viewed food as a cultural practice; where its availability, delivery and consumption are connected to the cultural identity and meaning of the Malaysian lifestyle. What Malaysia has a lot of, which is not common in the U.S., are the open air food courts and hawker stalls. Some of these food courts and coffee shops in Malaysia are opened to the late hours. More than just places for people to eat, they represent a symbol of a way of life in Malaysia, a cultural practice common in other Asian countries, though largely absent in the U.S. For those who have lived in both Malaysia and the U.S., they felt that the food culture plays a role in their association with Malaysia more so than with the U.S. In the U.S., open air food courts are not open the whole year because of the changing weather;

however, even in warmer states like California, the concept of such open air food courts may be different because it is just not the “culture” of Americans to have food vendors all lined up their food stands in one dedicated street, and have tables and chairs set up ready for their customers in the evenings up to late nights.

In general, street vendors have been known to play a vital role in the livelihood and lifestyle in many Asian countries such as in Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam and of course, Malaysia. They play a role in providing a variety of low-priced goods which have helped keep the cost of living down since many people especially the workers, students and the poor depend on them for their daily meals (Bhowmik, 2005). Moreover, the practice of eating out in Malaysia is due to the rapid urbanization, where people emigrate from rural areas coupled with the long work hours and low salary of workers would often leave the urban poor with little time to cook proper meals (Bhowmik, 2005). Similarly, Ali and Abdullah (2012) also found that this practice has become a trend mainly among urban workers, students and families due to working away from home, working mothers, and the ease of availability of local and international food varieties served at many food outlets. Through the views of the participants, eating out has a deeper meaning – the meaning of a way of life in Malaysia. It is not only a time to eat but also a time to gather with family and friends to chit chat over a meal. And due to the affordability of food offered by street food vendors, as compared to proper restaurants, eating out in Malaysia may be more common than eating out in the U.S., where street food vendors are not so common.

Based on what I gathered from the participants, both the type of food and the culture of eating out found in Malaysia are associated with their definition of the ‘Malaysian lifestyle.’ Based on my data, the participants seem to have lost the freedom to enjoy the Malaysian lifestyle like they used to enjoying local foods with friends and family. This finding is comparable to Fong’s (2011) study, where she found similar outcomes among the Chinese international students. The transnational students in her study stated that they “missed the easy access to Chinese food and leisure activities such

as karaoke singing, chatting, going to restaurants and bars and playing soccer, basketball, *mahjong*, or poker with friends and relatives willing to meet up at a moment's notice" (Fong, 2011, p. 152). On the contrary, these may be only a small price to pay in order to live in the U.S., comparing the other types of freedom that the participants have enjoyed in the U.S. such as in clothing, religion, making friends and freedom from parents while in the U.S., which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

4.3.3. Sense of identity

4.3.3.1. Is there a 'Malaysian' identity'?

The participants in this study come from a country with a long history of how the national identity was understood and formed, through migratory patterns and events in the South East Asia, political rights and sovereignty (Cheah, 2002; Khoo, 1999; Lam & Yeoh, 2004; Lee, 2004). In trying to understand the participants' sense of Malaysian identity, I tried to gather the factors that may have shaped their identification based on the past events discussed briefly above. Then I look at other new factors that may have shaped how they identify themselves such as through their experience in higher education institutions, as well as their general assimilation in the U.S.

Some participants living in the U.S. seemed have a more amplified sense of their identity, as they felt they needed to make a point about their identity to me and explain how they feel as they approach the subject of a Malaysian identity. This is a significant note, considering how they first brought up the issue of their identity in the interview. For example, Ai Mee who was a naturalized U.S. citizen, mentioned during the interview that sometimes her Malaysian friends would tease her, "*Eh, you Malaysian or not?*" when, as she stated, she did not "know about something Malaysian." This statement begged for the answer to, "What does *something Malaysian* mean?" Having the Malaysian identity, I believe, extends beyond just the Malaysian citizenship one holds. It ties in with the memories, culture, food, practices, and belief system of the home country.

The participants who are PR and naturalized U.S. citizens used the term “being a Malaysian” sporadically, however some of them offered differing views and questions that hold the key to their belief system of what it means to “be a Malaysian.” For example, Minah stated:

Minah (PR): I am still a Malaysian. I love Malaysian culture, food....

Khatijah, who was on OPT and was working in the U.S., shared what she thinks about this subject:

Khatijah (OPT): I don't think there is a sense of what it means to be a Malaysian per se. I think there is a need to become stronger, cordoning in that direction and trying to instill that, you know, you got the Rukunegara²¹ and all these things going on, but I am not sure what makes me a Malaysian. The adaptability I think, the type of chameleon-like identity must have been a part of what it means to be a Malaysian. The question is how you deal with the issue identity for my son, who was born in U.S.A. Who is he?

Both Henry and Thiru were PR of the U.S. when they were interviewed. There were no immediate plans for them to return Malaysia. Yet they describe themselves and their roots with a strong link to Malaysia:

Henry (PR): I still consider myself as a Malaysian, I have more Asian values and culture than American ones. More giving, less calculative, for example, when splitting the dinner bill. I don't wear shoes in my house. Care more for family. I would never leave my parents in a nursing home. I still send money to my mom every month. Just little things like that.

²¹ The *Rukunegara* is a set of “National Principles” is the national philosophy introduced on August 31, 1970 with the purpose to serve as a guideline in the country’s nation-building efforts. (Malaysian Government Official Portal, n. d.).

Thiru (PR): I think you are rooted there (Malaysia)...but grow your branches here (U.S.). It sort of doesn't matter how bad one's country is, you are always rooted where you were born.

Bala returned to Malaysia and chose Malaysia as home. He shared how he viewed his identity as a Malaysian:

Bala (Malaysia): When you ask me about my identity as a Malaysian and all that, and also how difficult to blend in the U.S., in a way, it wasn't that difficult because I didn't feel I was up-rooted. I think it has to do with the fact that when you are in Malaysia, you do have these kinds of conflicting tension surround you which kind of where you are Malaysian, but sometimes you don't quite feel that you are entirely Malaysian. Maybe it is a young country.

What Bala felt is not uncommon among other participants in this study, which is covered more under reasons why they preferred to remain in the U.S. in Chapter Five. Although Malaysia may seem to project an image of ethnic integration and progress, “the enduring ordeal of postcolonial racial politics is only possible and still maintained as long as the economy remains robust and the ruling coalition is able to adopt measures for mitigating racial estrangement” (Lee, 2004, p. 139). Not surprisingly, many minorities especially the Chinese-Malaysians in Malaysia feel a sense of resentment because of their second-class citizenship status, even though they hold legal citizenship (Nonini, 1997; Ong & Nonini, 1997). According to Lee (2004) the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other minorities still consider themselves as “separate groups with pre-existing cultural identities and political intent” (p. 139) and so, do not leave their own ethnic identities to embrace a single national identity. However, it was not obvious with the small group of participants that they emphasize solely their own ethnic identities when discussing their Malaysian identity. Based on these responses, none of the participants have pointed to one definition of what it means to have a Malaysian identity, although there are

associations with the roots or where one grew up; with the Asian beliefs, values and practices; and with the feeling of being a Malaysian yet not “entirely Malaysian.” What stood out the most were Khatijah’s comments of, “*chameleon-like identity*,” as though being a Malaysian means having the ability to adapt and evolve in different environments, in order to survive wherever they may be. Could this be due to the multiculturalism practiced in Malaysia that made Malaysians more adaptable to another multicultural country like the U.S.? Based on what Khatijah and other participants have expressed, they sometimes feel they have a Malaysian identity, and sometimes not, depending on the context and situation. This interview provided them an avenue to reflect on how they think of themselves in terms of having a Malaysian identity.

Aihwa Ong’s (1999) work helps to explain how identities are formed with immigrants especially Asians, who may not be strongly identified with a particular country. Ong examines the domains of national and international identities of immigrants through their lives as contemporary transnational actors, especially of Chinese elites in Asia, as they approach the politics and global markets. In particular, Ong introduced the model of “flexible citizenship”²² where the concept is based on how globalization has made people choose their citizenship based on economic reasons, as opposed to choosing their citizenship based on the allegiance to the country. When it comes to citizenship, economic considerations will trump the political rights and participation in the country they reside (Ong, 1999). The researcher argues that in the age of globalization, “individuals develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power” (Ong, 1999, p.6) and in order to make that accumulation happen, individuals are affected and influenced by “practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relations to markets, governments, and cultural regimes (Ong, 1999, p.6). This new kind of transnational identity is said to have

²² Ong (1999) uses the *flexible citizenship* to refer to, “the cultural logic of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (p.6).

developed through the immigrants' experiences and interactions within their new society, together with their continued contact with their country of origin, as found in a study on the social construction of transnational identity of New Zealanders living in Australia (Green & Power, 2005). Their findings showed that that migration is not viewed as the loss of one's national identity. Instead it is the building of a transnational identity that derives from both the country of origin and the host country.

The participants in this study who have lived in the U.S. for several years did not seem to see themselves as having a Malaysian identity, yet they do not see themselves as having an American identity. Before further implications can be made on the formation of the transnational identity, I will explore their experience and transitions that bear on identity formation when they pursued higher education in the U.S.

4.3.3.2. Experience and transitions in American schools

One's identity can evolve in different places at different times for different reasons. As Erikson (1968) proposed, the college years mark the time when an individual frames her identity in terms of other persons, institutions and the social and historical contexts in which she is embedded. Therefore, some of the factors that contributed to the development of transnational identity, I believe, are the experience and transitions the participants have gone through while pursuing their graduate degrees in the American higher education institutions. International students in the U.S. often face different types of challenges as they transition into a brand new academic and living atmosphere, which would affect their behavior and psychological well-being during their pursuit of a degree (Zhou et al., 2011). These researchers found that international graduate students are able to adjust in the new foreign environment through communication, language improvement and work experience in the U.S. Their transitional experience in school is closely related with their general assimilation in the U.S.

One of the questions I asked the participants is about difficulties they may have in school. Most of them shared that initially, it was difficult but gradually that changed:

Minah (U.S.): I would say my MBA studies went pretty smoothly. I had a little difficulty adjusting in the beginning because I was new to the city (Chicago) and making new friends. Professors helped a lot, and acknowledged that getting a higher education is not the main thing in life. And also the University I was in had a great diversity. A diverse environment is important.

Sujitha (U.S.): I didn't feel that it was such a big deal, in particular because it is in the city (New York City), you don't feel very different from everyone else in the city, it's a very cosmopolitan city.

Sebastian (U.S.): I think I didn't study for 6 to 7 years. The first few months were pretty tough in a sense that, you know, you are suddenly back to studies. Secondly, when you do your bachelor's, you just go to front of the class and listen to lectures and then maybe do some homework and stuff. But in an MBA program, you have to prep for your class in advance, which you know, can be a lot of reading, and understanding, and really preparing. It is a very different environment. Yes, even though engineering may be tougher than business, just to factor in the time to prepare and read through everything like 40 pages of material, that is tough.

Siew Ling (U.S.): I actually enjoyed being a minority (in the U.S.). Maybe it's being female, but we have an advantage. I know people have issues with being a minority, but I was fortunate to obtain my education and higher learning experiences from two institutions with very high international student populations, so I think in a sense, the Americans were the minority. The irony is that I wanted to go to a very white school, but that obviously didn't happen. Well, I consider them a minority if they don't make up 80 percent of the student body. I think in both schools, Americans were maybe 60 percent or less. Well, people are

kinder to you and curious about you, so they are more apt to open a dialogue and ask about you. I was too shy to walk up and just insert myself into a conversation.

Henry (U.S.): For undergraduate, in bigger city, more diverse. I fit in more (compared to his high school experience in U.S. school). People focused more on their studies. Had many friends; even few of my high school friends were at same university with me. I stayed with my dad during undergrad, so no roommate. Didn't really have difficulties in undergrad. Lots of homework and projects though; but friends made it bearable. No problems fitting in. Was in the National Honor Society, basically students with high GPAs. All my friends knew I was from Malaysia. I thought grad school was much easier. Less projects and homework compared to undergrad. Less credit hours. Grad school was in Chicago IL, by the way. Asians were the majority there, it seemed. We have a nickname for University of Illinois at Chicago also known as UIC or University of Indians and Chinese. I had many Indian friends; plenty at the research lab I worked in. I wasn't really involved as a grad student. I was in a computer science for grad student organization but all we did was socialize on Fridays and eat pizza.

Subramaniam (Malaysia): It depends, whether you have a mustache, a beard and what type of hairstyle. I can fit different profiles based on how I look. Unless I declare I am an Indian, people maybe not be able place me exactly. I can maybe a Middle Eastern. Or could be Latin American or could be Indian or Asian. Especially in New York City, everyone looks like that. New York (City) is different, because people don't really try to brand you. They make a conscious effort not to do that, I think.

Rozzeta (U.S.): In University of X, there is not many Malaysian and the population at school is only 10,000 students at the school. Taking Mathematics, I was the only international student in the class. So I feel kind of like a foreign student, kind of intimidated by other American students.

The experiences and transitions during the pursuit of the American degrees, as shared by the participants, contributed to the shaping of their views about life in the U.S. These experiences made the participants conscious of who they are as they face the challenges of being in a foreign country and making sense of the education system, of life as a student, of a brand new view in life. Minah, Sujitha and Henry emphasized the importance of being in a bigger city because it has more diversity is that helped them feel less out of place in the U.S. For Sebastian the difficulty was not so much the environment, but the fact he has not been in school for years and so, coming back to school needs some adjusting to do. Therefore, as evidenced from the quotes above, participants generally experienced the different cultures, environments and transitions, and met diverse people while pursuing their higher education in the U.S. In sum, each of them has their own way to assimilate in these uncharted territories. For example, one of them had no issue being a minority (Siew Ling), or being confused because of his looks (Subramaniam); one liked being in a university in a big city with many Asians (Henry) while one had to overcome the intimidation she felt being a minority in a small town university (Rozzeta).

One experience that I noticed was Salina's, where she claimed that because of her childhood experience in the U.S., she felt that her transition going to Malaysia from the U.S. as a child was harder than the transition she experienced when she went to the U.S. from Malaysia for her undergraduate education. When Salina was young, she studied in the American elementary school while her parents pursued graduate education in the U.S. Then her parents completed their studies and returned to Malaysia. Salina completed fourth grade then returned to Malaysia to finish her elementary and high school in Malaysia before she came to the U.S. again for her undergraduate and graduate education. Here was her reflection of the transition:

Salina: I would say the transition was probably more difficult (going to Malaysia), than the one coming back to the U.S. (for my undergrad). I have gone to the Kindergarten in Malaysia when I was 3 to 5, and then to the U.S., to go to

school, and then back when I was in Standard 4²³. So then it was pretty difficult. My brother adjusted better than I did. And I didn't really. It was challenging in terms of ...I guess, making new friends, getting adjusted to the ways school was in Malaysia. Well, we (my family) spoke Malay in the U.S.A. So the Malay was fine, since we spoke it at home when in the U.S. Yes, I got teased because I guess I had an American accent from that time we lived in the U.S. When I came back here (Malaysia), everyone was speaking with a British accent, or pronouncing things the British do. I guess that was a challenge. So, I did get in trouble in class for not pronouncing things correctly and stuff.

An explanation to this is that while there may not be a choice for Salina to follow her parents back to Malaysia as a child, going to the U.S. for further study is a choice. And in order to make it work for her, she would need to find ways to adjust in the new foreign environment in the U.S., like what the international students did in the study conducted by Zhou et al. (2011). These experiences should not be overlooked, because the transition in American higher education environment brings us to further explore the general assimilation in the U.S.

4.3.3.3. General assimilation in the U.S.

As discussed in literature review, Salomone (2000) has found that the assimilation process includes the integration of one's life, culture and language into the U.S. mainstream society. This could include the full adoption of English language, and maybe some loss of foreign languages especially the mother tongue (Salomone, 2000). The assimilation process also includes the shift to American fashion and lifestyle that usually occur in the new second generation of immigrants (Salomone, 2000). One of the main ways assimilation could occur is through schooling. Although Salomone claims that the American school system helps the generations of newcomers, for instance the second

²³ Similar to Fourth Grade in the U.S.

generation of immigrants, assimilate into the mainstream society, it could happen to new first generation of immigrants as well, such as the participants in this study.

Subramaniam, Henry and Lily talked about their ways to assimilate while in the American higher institution, and how they felt in the process:

Subramaniam (Malaysia): I was studying in an international school. The school was School of International and Public Affairs. So 50 percent of the student population was foreign students. On top of that, everyone there, the locals, people, students who were studying with me, my classmates, they have all lived abroad for a few years. You are unique in some sense, but you are not like oh, from alien species. Everyone has a lot of overseas experience. Everyone in my school because the school requires us to have some overseas experiences before admission. Everyone must learn a second or third language, also a requirement. I never felt out of place. In fact I felt very welcomed. They want to learn about your country. I mentioned about Malaysia, they really attentively listen to your perspective. In that sense, it is very, very positive.

Henry (U.S.): I had a diverse group of friends during undergrad, many Americans, African American, Indonesian, another from Uganda. I knew a girl who studied in Malaysia's Taylor's College, but she's from Indonesia. I didn't consider myself an international student because I was there with my dad paying in-state tuition. I always consider myself a Malaysian, but on forms, I always choose Asian cause that's the only choice which fits. I'm not an ABC (American born Chinese) because I wasn't born here (U.S.). I was living slightly away from campus that took me 2 years to finish, one year I was living with a roommate, a stranger. Chicago was a very diverse place. First year was tougher than the second year of course. So grad school was the first time I was living by myself away from parents. Didn't really miss food because there's a Chinatown in Chicago. Didn't really miss parents because I was glad to be independent.

Lily (Malaysia): I lived with Malaysians. I have my own apartment but people in the apartment units were also Malaysians, although there were also international students as well. My main interaction group was with the international students. I didn't have as much difficulty as someone who goes there fresh without knowing anyone. I already have friends there, I already knew some people, some of them from the local college in Malaysia where I did my twinning program. Some, I already know, I got connected with many people through those friends, not only Malaysians, but other people as well.

Based on what Subramaniam, Henry and Lily stated, it shows that those who go through the American higher education system as adults can become assimilated in the U.S. mainstream society. Most importantly, they are aware of what or who were helpful to them as they went through their assimilation process. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2011) found that international graduate students in the U.S. face challenges during their transition into a brand new academic and living atmosphere. These challenges can sometimes be detrimental and would affect their behavior and psychological well-being, and relatively their academic performance. The researcher found that international graduate students find ways to adjust in the new foreign environment through constant communication with their family back in their home country and their university personnel in the U.S.; improvement of their English language skills and knowledge of U.S. culture and through graduate work experience in the U.S. (Zhou et al., 2011). By finding ways to adjust, it shows that international students do not necessarily give up their old culture and language, but they learn to weave them with the new culture and new main language so that they can assimilate into the new country. It was probably pertinent to them so that their well-being and academic performance are not adversely affected.

As discussed earlier, the type of university the participants were in may have played a vital role. It was as if these participants have deliberately picked a school that is more diverse, or have peers and friends who are also from Malaysia, or a school with a

high enrollment of international students. This could provide a key to how they overcame challenges in the new environment. The observation I had through analyzing Subramaniam, Henry and Lily's responses is that being around other international students just like them help them to assimilate easier into the new American culture and way of life. The main reason, I think, is that it does help to diminish the fear knowing that they are not alone fighting this challenge, or trying to adapt, and relatively, that might give them more confidence to learn ways to assimilate. In general, their exposure and experience navigating American higher education institutions provides an opportunity for them to assimilate to the cultures of the U.S. as they learn to make sense of their own culture and language in their new environment. I believe that the more they are assimilated, the more they feel they want to remain in the U.S. after graduation.

In addition, there is another angle by which assimilation can be viewed. Lily's challenge during her graduate studies was not about her assimilation into the American lifestyle, but about being more independent as compared to when she was in Malaysia where she may have more help and support. She quotes,

Lily (Malaysia): My support system was already quite strong. In terms of getting to know people, it wasn't really a difficulty. I think the challenge more was moving there (U.S.) being independent in doing housework, cleaning, cooking and all those stuff which I have to do now as no one is going to do it for me. In terms of social, it wasn't really much of a problem.

What Lily felt was more a question of how to adapt in a new environment by being independent and away from family, rather than a question of assimilation to the American way of life.

The findings from this study demonstrate that there are certain features that encompass American lifestyle, which are different from what the participants define Malaysian lifestyle as evidenced below. For example, here are some quotes from

participants about how they liked their ‘American’ lifestyle, perhaps as a way they are signaling that they are trying to assimilate to the way of life in the U.S.:

Wei Aun: Dancing is pretty important to me now. I don't know much about the social dance scene in Malaysia, but I would guess that it would not be as good as it is here (U.S.). I think I did not really when I came here at first, but sometime during my undergrad I got used to life in the U.S. and thought that it would be great to stay here as long as I can.

Siew Ling: I've always loved the U.S. lifestyle. It just took a longer time for me to understand, appreciate and get accustomed to it. Or rather, to find my place in this country and culture. I think I was able to do so once I started my career in New York City. I always knew I wanted to stay in the U.S., so it was never a particular event that affected it. In fact, my firm wanted to transfer me to the Tokyo office, which meant an immediate promotion, and I turned it down because I did not want to go back to Asia.

Both Wei Aun and Siew Ling expressed how they liked the U.S. lifestyle, and associated lifestyle with certain type of social activities and career in a big city like New York City. The positive experience they have at school and at work could have contributed to the notion of “*got used to life in the U.S.*” (Wei Aun) and “*I've always loved the U.S. lifestyle*” (Siew Ling)

On the other hand, not everyone who is in the U.S. is willing to assimilate. For example, Andrew provided his views about why he did not wish to adapt to the American lifestyle:

Andrew (U.S.): What I basically just want to say about the lifestyle here (U.S.) and the culture here is something that I cannot adapt to. I cannot say that yes my way is always correct, and that nothing else should be... and anything else should

be wrong unless you are Malaysian. To me is that I believe every single culture, every single nation has something very important to contribute to the lifestyle of everyone. And to be able to adapt, to be able to identify what is it, and to bring it out of them, and that is what I am concerned about. So that is why I know consciously that definitely I am not wanting to adapt to the U.S. culture. I mean I don't share the meaning behind it, I don't understand the meaning behind it, it doesn't make any sense to me. They talk about Thanksgiving, I think that is great for them, it works really perfectly well for them but other than that is that you know it doesn't mean anything to me at all.

Cheng and Katz (1998) have explained that many Asian migrants have preserved the relationships with societies from which they came, more than have the European migrants because Asian migrants are often subjected to more challenges in assimilating into the mainstream host society. However, as the researchers found, one of the reasons that influence migrants' decision to move was associated with the lifestyle they preferred, among the other factors.

Cheng and Katz (1998) further explained that:

Their actual decisions about where to move, however, will be further determined by the transferability of their credentials, by the pre-existence of personal and professional networks, and by the ability to reproduce in the new location the social and cultural lifestyles they prefer. This latter criterion is facilitated by the emergence of a global, cosmopolitan and hybridized culture. Just as the flows of people are expanded and accelerated by globalization of communications and transportation networks, so are flows of consumer goods and services and other forms of cultural production. (p.68)

Andrew was aware that he was not willing to adapt to the lifestyle in the U.S. despite choosing to live in the U.S. It tells me that choosing to assimilate, or not, is a

personal choice and preference. People assimilate at a different rate, different time, and through different means. A sense of resistance from someone like Andrew may signal his discontent with the U.S. lifestyle he was living in. This is an example of someone who claims that he did not want to assimilate into the American culture, and that he is aware of it. Based on his response, he did not seem to have a flexible identity or want to maintain simultaneous and multi-stranded social relations that link together Malaysia and his place of residence in the U.S. It would be very difficult for someone to have to feel this kind of resistance every day, yet it is something he has to face because of where his current residence is situated.

In summary, the majority of the participants have embraced the new culture and new language without detaching from the old home culture and language while they were pursuing their graduate education which helped them assimilate in the U.S. They survive the challenges of assimilation by applying different strategies during their arrival in the U.S., such as picking a university or location with more Malaysians, more Asians, more international students or more diverse population. They are aware that they can successfully live in the American mainstream society, while still preserving certain aspects of the beliefs, values and languages that they brought with them when they moved to the U.S. from Malaysia. The general assimilation in the U.S. could create a positive or negative experience that may influence participants' decision to return to Malaysia or to remain in the U.S.

4.3.3.4. What is transnational identity?

What is intriguing to me was that the participants did not strongly identify as Malaysians, yet they also did not feel like they have an American identity. One major observation from this study is the development of transnational identity in some of the participants. In general the term *trans*, is defined as Ong (1999) as, "both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something" (p. 4). As discussed in literature review, several understandings of transnational identity were

discussed and they all converged to one similar ground – where the term ‘transnational’ refers to individuals or groups who live in different national societies, however they share common territorial, religious and linguistic references (Faist, 1998); where these immigrants maintain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton, 1994). Therefore, these immigrants are said to have a transnational identity which is fluid, flexible and often changing especially due to the exposure and involvement of concurrent events that happen in more than one society (Huang, Teo & Yeoh, 2000).

The formation of transnational identities is caused by the transnational acts and practices where identities influence acts and acts create these identities (Portes, 1998a). These transnational acts and practices could take place when individuals are in a foreign land to pursue their higher education, and at the same time are challenged with different cultures and practices that they have to adapt to, get assimilated in, or try to make sense of the changes that were happening. It was indeed a juggling act, they not only have to be independent and away from their families in Malaysia, they have to adapt to the different education system in the U.S., converse mainly in the English language, in addition to being in a whole new world with changing seasons, disparate cultures and diverse people. Participants may have been involved in the nature of the social networks to which the participants have access, and how these acts and networks may have influenced their transnational identity and how that identity may in turn influence what they do, or how they make the decision to pick where they want to live. When people emigrate, many personal changes take place in their lives especially when they are in the new location and new culture. Immigrants in their new place may or may not be flexible in their assimilation to the norms and values of the culture they are in.

Some participants who have studied in the U.S. have developed a transnational identity as evidenced by their transnational activities. As mentioned earlier, Ong’s (1999) work helps to explain how identities are formed with immigrants especially Asians, who may not be strongly identified with a particular country. I believe this is relevant to the participants in this study because some ethnic group members are

descendants of immigrants from countries like China and India. The affirmative action policies in Malaysia that favor a particular ethnic group, such as *Bumiputra* or the majority Malays, made the other ethnic groups feel lack of that sense of belonging, and relatively, their identity with Malaysia. Therefore, it may be easier for the Chinese and Indian who were born in Malaysia but lived in the U.S. to develop a transnational identity, than for the Malays in the U.S. However, there were also Malays in this study who developed transnational identity after being in the U.S. for a period of time. Simply, having a transnational identity means one could adopt several identities at the same time – the Malaysian identity when in Malaysia, when with friends or other Asian friends, when talking to others about where you were from, and when it comes to food and celebrations. On the other hand, the same person may also adopt the American identity when it comes to the attitude towards school and work, perhaps as a way to assimilate into the mainstream society. Below are some transitions that illustrate some of the tenets of transnational identity.

4.3.3.5. Being transnational: the need to connect with other Malaysians

One of the transnational acts is the need to connect with others from the home country. There are participants who seemed to adapt a more transnational identity where they want to get involved with events that connect them back to their roots in Malaysia. One example is networking and putting in effort to make connections with others from the same home country:

Henry: I always love to meet Malaysians and Singaporeans, but from experience, there aren't many around or maybe I'm not looking hard enough? Maybe if I move to California. I had a good time at Chicago; Chinatown was great, there's a good Penang²⁴ restaurant there. I know the boss there; whenever I go with my aunt, we get a discount.

²⁴ Penang is a state in Malaysia.

Thiru: Well, I just started connecting with my past. Don't know why yet. So I joined MPBA²⁵, less than 6 months. And also joined my Indian school alumni. I have no idea (why), just one day decided to do it. I think I used to be very very busy. My old job, I put 300,000 miles a year on planes alone, traveled all over the world. Now I have my own business, semi retired I guess, I started thinking about old friends. I wanted to know what was going on in Malaysia.

Sujitha: I did not get involved in the schools, but I was involved sometimes with the MPBA. I didn't get involved because first I have family and we have too much going on with a lot of things. Pretty much my family, we go for vacations every weekend we have parties. We get together and the other thing is I was also working during the day with the CPT²⁶. Honestly, I never really got involved in extra activities in school, I just didn't have the time.

Sujitha: I have some friends from Malaysia (in the U.S.) they don't have actually any relatives to begin with. And I noticed, like during the weekend, they are always asking me out. I just don't have the time and I think it is hard for them, you know. I think some of my friends have come back (to Malaysia) for that reason alone, because they feel very lonely after working hours, or during the weekends, during the long holidays, after class, after work. When I went home, there were like six or seven of us at home. We have to cook. We have to do this. At one time, I moved into a new house with my uncle, we have to go and do shopping, so we were really really busy. I was busy, but yes, I can understand that when other people come they don't have anybody, their life becomes very lonely and I think that would have been with me if I didn't have family. I am not sure,

²⁵ MPBA stands for the Malaysian Professional and Business Association located in the San Francisco Bay Area. On its website it states that their mission is to broaden the network of their growing community of professionals, leveraging resources across the U.S.A. and Malaysia (Malaysian Professional & Business Association. n. d.).

²⁶ CPT is the Curricular Practical Training, filed at the USCIS, that allows international students in the U.S. to get paid through work, internships, cooperative education, internship or practicum that involves cooperative agreements with the student's school. The CPT must be related to the student's field of study (USCIS, n. d. -c).

but my family was, like now I am right here temporarily for business (in Malaysia)...and they are there (U.S.). I have bills, I have cars, I have things that are running. They help me maintain those bills, make sure they are paid on time. If there are any issues they sort it out for me.

Thiru: I travel down there (Malaysia) about 4 to 5 times a year. We are Hindus. Sort of non-religious affiliation. I go to church and temple. My wife is Caucasian but she says she is Hindu now. We are very flexible, religion is not an issue. We celebrate Halloween, Easter, Christmas and Diwali. I always went to church, even in Malaysia and India. I also went to temples in Malaysia, India and U.S. So we sort of cover all bases.

Transnational lifestyles may instill participants in the U.S. with the new practicality of daily life which they have grown to be accustomed to. However, one participant felt as if she was looking at the Malaysians in Malaysia as “others”:

Minah: Lifestyle in Malaysia seemed superficial nowadays. People tend to care more about brand things, the latest party place, the cars you drive, etc.

Participants considered different push and pull factors when choosing their *home* after graduation. Choosing to remain in the U.S. does not necessarily mean that someone feels fully assimilated. The following demonstrates that Andrew felt he did not have to assimilate:

Andrew (PR): I guess what it is, is that I don't initiate the (American) celebration, let's put it this way, you know how Thanksgiving, for instance, they always have a party going on, or the family will all be coming together and things like that. We do not usually tend to host the Thanksgiving dinner. However, if a family would like to invite us all to a Thanksgiving (dinner), hey, by all means, we would love to eat, I am still Malaysian, I love to eat, hahaha. However when it

comes to Chinese New Year, it is my culture, I want to celebrate it and it is something that I would host a party, host a celebration in my house.

And choosing to leave the U.S. does not necessarily mean they were unable to assimilate. However, how this was perceived by Siew Ling tells a different story:

Siew Ling: I think everyone has different motivations for staying and for returning home. My take is that the ones who choose to go home (Malaysia), for the most part, were unable to assimilate and embrace the American culture. For them, the familiarity of home was better. For me, it's the opposite. I like change, and I like something different, as I'm constantly reinventing myself. I get bored easily so anything predictable becomes a problem for me, as would life in Malaysia be.

Siew Ling's perception is that those who have left the U.S. were “unable to assimilate and embrace the American culture” and that the “familiarity of home was better.” To what extent is this true? It is hard to know if participants are honest to tell me that they have left the U.S. because they were unable to assimilate in the American way of life. In quoting an example from above, Andrew's unwillingness to adapt to the culture and lifestyle in the U.S. signals his discontent with the U.S. lifestyle he was living in, however it was not an indication that that he was unable to assimilate. It was more about his personal preference. He did not leave the U.S. yet, even though he expressed his resistance as he was still living in the U.S. when he was interviewed. The next chapter will provide us with a clearer picture as to why some participants left the U.S. and whether or not that has to do with the challenges with assimilation, or some other pressing issues.

4.3.3.6. Being transnational: offering to help others in home country

Another factor in the development of transnational identity is the suggestion to offer to help Malaysians in Malaysia. A few participants felt that with the knowledge and

experience that they had have acquired in studying and working in a developed country like the United States, they could offer to improve the lives of Malaysians. And this is how Thiru framed the issues in Malaysia, why and how he wished to help.

Thiru: I am trying to help Indian kids in Malaysia to get to colleges. There's not much help for them in Malaysia. Well, when I retire, I want to make U.S. and Malaysia my homes, so travel in between, go back and help kids. Help what the government doesn't give. Scholarships, advice, get them into colleges here and in India, show them that they don't have to depend on the government to improve themselves, maybe start a non-profit for both Indians and Chinese. I also want to start a non-profit for Kadazans²⁷ in Sabah. They are really suffering there. I have relatives who are Kadazans. My younger brother who is married to a Kadazan actually goes into rural area and helps the poor. His wife's got a very very large family, you know, living in the rumah panjang²⁸. I want to go help in the future, that's why retire there in the future half time. I can't give up U.S.A. It has given me so much. I am more allegiant to this country, do you know what I mean?

Portes (2009) points out that it is due to one's "national loyalty that the migrant professional often felt that sense of obligation to the institutions that educated them, when on that basis of that education, they achieve wealth, security, and status abroad, it is only natural that they seek to repay the debt" (p. 16). Similarly, although Thiru grew up in Malaysia, his claim of national loyalty is toward the U.S. where he completed his graduate studies, because he felt he was given a chance to pursue higher education and relatively, live a better life. At the same time, he still had a sense of obligation to help others improve, but it was for the minority community in which he grew up, in Malaysia. He felt that they needed help because they are mainly minorities like him, and that they came from the less privileged group that may not have access to government assistance.

²⁷ Kadazans form one of the indigenous groups in the state of Sabah, in East Malaysia.

²⁸ *Rumah panjang* is the Malay translation of longhouses, the type of abode the Kadazans live in.

These plans and thoughts Thiru had are like some of the transnational activities as outlined by Portes (2009), where transnational activities carried out by others who offered to help are usually through philanthropic activities; transferring of information and technology; and sponsoring of the training of younger colleagues. In addition, other transnational activities carried out by the more established and successful entrepreneurs abroad include endowments to their Alma Maters or establishment of higher learning centers at their home country (Saxenian, 1999, 2002; Vertovec, 2004) – which are not apparent within this group of participants.

Researchers have claimed that contemporary migrants are mainly volunteer migrants, who are not forced to adapt to a new culture and society (Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton, 1995). Therefore, they are not considered uprooted individuals, in fact, as discussed in literature review, due to the globalization of communications and transportation networks, these migrants still maintained strong ties to their homeland. Moreover, as stated by Portes (2009), when migrants emigrate, they do not just end all associations and ties. In other words, they do not just leave everything behind as they still continue to maintain strong relationships with their families and communities they left behind. Because they continue to have access to their networks of friends and family back in their home country, the need to fully assimilate in the new country may not be an issue. When they live in the U.S., they still maintain cultural practices of their homeland as a strategy to live the best of both worlds. They feel they wanted to connect with their homeland, either through maintaining their social network with the others like them -- migrants in the U.S., other Malaysians in Malaysia or to reach out to help those in Malaysia. They are considered transnational because although they live in the U.S; they are able to adapt to the two nations, feel they belong to the two countries, and as Louie (2006) notes, transnationals adopt a dual frame of reference to evaluate their experiences in the country in which they have settled. Although the participants belong to a group or two that affiliate them with other Malaysians and Malaysian-born migrants in their cities, such as the Stanford Club of Malaysia – Stanford Alumni Association and the Malaysia Professional Business Association (MPBA) of San Francisco, the data I collected did not

describe the participants as active contributors to the transnational activities as defined by other researchers. For example, other researchers noted that established first generation immigrants create organizations as part of their involvement in transnational activities, such as hometown communities to civic associations, branches of home country political parties, civic or cultural organizations, economic organizations, international philanthropic organizations, home country philanthropies, political committees, etc. (Portes, 2009). However research literature has also documented that the migrants most likely to take part in these organizations are not the most recent arrivals; in fact they are better established individuals with more solid economic position in the host countries, older and more educated migrants (Portes, Haller & Guarnizo, 2002; Guarnizo, Portes & Haller 2003; Portes, Escobar & Walton Radford, 2007). The data I gathered about the participants did not provide evidence that they ‘created’ such organizations, however they sometimes attend the transnational activities hosted by such organizations, for example, by the Stanford Club of Malaysia – Stanford Alumni Association and the Malaysia Professional Business Association of San Francisco.

4.3.4. Turning points

Some very distinct events become turning points for *when* someone makes that decision to either to stay in the U.S., or return to Malaysia, or go elsewhere. These turning points can be grouped into two categories, which fall under the push-pull framework of the national perspectives and the push-pull framework of the individual perspectives. The Malaysian students in the U.S. would need to take part in this decision making process at some point, that involves whether or not they would like to and could stay in the U.S. or if they would want to or had to return to Malaysia, or go elsewhere.

4.3.4.1. Turning points – national perspectives

Before completing their degree, foreign students in the U.S. would have considered what they wanted to do, and where they wanted to work after graduating,

because their student visa, F-1, only allows them to stay in the U.S. to pursue higher education and not for full time employment. Therefore, in order to legally stay in the U.S. after graduation, they must still maintain a valid visa, for example, by applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT) to work, or to get to a job with a company in the U.S. that sponsors their work visa such as the H-1B non-immigrant work visa. It is this time that the Malaysian students who have just completed their graduate degrees must make a decision either to:

- return to Malaysia and then look for a job, or
- go to another country to look for a job, or
- continue staying in the U.S. with an OPT to look for a job, or
- apply for a job with an American company that sponsors their work visa (H-1B non-immigrant work visa).

During the employment using the H-1B work visa which is renewable up to a maximum of six years, the non-immigrant needs to decide whether to apply for the green card²⁹ to become a Permanent Resident (PR), which will allow her to legally live and work in the U.S. with more security than a H-1B work visa. If she does not pursue the green card, she would need to leave the U.S. when her H-1B expired. As most of the green card applications are employment-based, the decision to apply for the green card is not entirely up to the individual because the American company who is the H-1B sponsor must agree to sponsor that individual for the green card as well. Being a PR will enable one to live and work in the U.S.A. legally, and that person will have the option to apply to become a naturalized U.S. citizen after being a PR for five years. However, if the PR does not apply to become an American citizen after she becomes eligible in five years, the green card can only last for ten years before one needs to renew the card. Ten years is a long time for one to consider becoming a U.S. citizen. The next step after being a PR is to decide whether to file for the U.S. citizenship or to abandon being a PR and leave the U.S. for good. Other ways to a U.S. citizenship include -- someone who was born in the U.S., born to a parent who is an American citizen, went through parents' naturalization,

²⁹ The green card is an important travel and identification document for a PR.

or is married to a U.S. citizen. The PR route is one of the different ways of naturalization to become a U.S. citizen.

The decision turning point to stay in the U.S. on a more permanent basis is when one decides to apply for citizenship through naturalization. One of the main requirements includes having continuous residence in the U.S. as a green card holder for at least five years (USCIS, n. d. –b). Since Malaysia does not permit dual citizenship, this turning point is very crucial because a green card holder whose validity period is expiring can either renew the green card or proceed to apply for the U.S. citizenship through naturalization. On the other hand, if a green card holder does not apply for the U.S. citizenship at the end of the green card validity period, and if she does not wish to renew her green card, the only option is to leave the U.S. It is during this time that permanent residents need to make a decision. For example, Thiru took this turning point and decided to become a U.S. citizen through naturalization:

Thiru: Ten years later is when I really thought of settling down here when my green card was expiring and I had to make a decision to stay here permanently. To really, really, stay....I don't know....just went with the flow, but definitely when my green card was expiring and I had to apply for citizenship, I thought about it. Yeah, I never let go of Malaysia until it came to a point where I had to reapply for my green card or apply for citizenship, ten years later. Funny, I still sometimes want to go back (to Malaysia).

Other turns of events or prior engagement led participants in this study to return to Malaysia. It is not that they did not try to remain in the U.S. Bala, for example, graduated in May 2001, and accepted a consultant position offer in the Silicon Valley in California. However, during that time, the economic situation in the U.S. was not very strong and many businesses were affected. The week before his official start date, the firm who hired Bala called him up to defer the job offer for another six months due to the uncertainties in their business front. Instead, they offered him a three-month contracted

position rather than a full-time position. More turn of events happened that eventually made him decide to return to Malaysia:

Bala: In the middle of it, September 11 (2001) happened. They called for a meeting, everything is off the table we can't guarantee anything to anyone. Before that, maybe we can, things will pick up in January, when the business starts coming back. But after September 11, we don't know what is going to happen. After my work is over, I hunted around for a while, stayed in my friend's apartment. It was very grim. No companies were hiring. Really bad atmosphere at that time. The fact that I was holding a Malaysia passport does not help, because at that time, Malaysia was also implicated in the bombing. Some of the terrorists apparently met in Kuala Lumpur. There was also this Anthrax scares. No one was hiring. I waited until around December, then I could see that things were not improving and I was getting down myself because it is just a very difficult time. One of my very close friends was getting married in December, so I took that as a good opportunity to come back to Malaysia. At that time, I don't know whether I am coming back for good, or going back. I have all my stuffs packed, storage in U.S. I just didn't have the energy or heart to pack everything and come back, because that would put a sense of finality to the whole thing. Don't know what happen to the storage as he did not try to transport it back. Travel to the U.S. is not the easiest; I have not been back to the U.S. since I got back. At that time when I came back (to Malaysia), I was just in no mood to deal with all this. I was holding up a hope that I would be coming back (to the U.S.). It turned out that I never have to go back (to the U.S.).

Conversely, there are also those who do not try to remain in the U.S. For example, Malaysian students whose higher education in the U.S. is funded through scholarships or loans by the Malaysian government or private company would need to return to serve the bond or contract by working for their scholarship sponsor. The turning point for them will be at the end of their studies, where they will need to return

to Malaysia. On the other hand, there are also those who may have decided not to fulfill that bond requirements, and to work instead in the U.S. For them, the turning point is deciding how they could apply for a waiver from their sponsor or to repay their sponsor in lieu of serving that bond. Michael received a scholarship from the government of Singapore, and although he mentioned that he returned to Malaysia due to family, his initial turning point was that he knew he had to serve the bond with the Singaporean government after he completed his studies.

Michael: The bond is a matter of after you are done with your studies, you need to go back to Singapore to work for a period of six years. I did three years. Then I broke my bond and came back to Malaysia. I had to pay them in a proportionate amount. Supposed to work for them for six years, so I pay back half. The actual fact is that I get the Malaysian company to help me to break it.

Summary – national perspectives

Visa stipulations, job market and scholarship bonds fall under the national perspectives of turning points as they are factored in when participants make the decision whether to remain in the U.S. or leave the U.S. The existence of policies and availability of employment opportunities are prompted by the high demand for talented human capital and would enable international students to stay and find a job in the U.S. after completing their degrees in the U.S. If we look at the national perspectives, we can see that temporary migration is first made possible by legislation, such as the H-1B program in the U.S. The timing of the OPT, job opportunities and H-1B, as well as when a scholarship bond needs to be fulfilled are all indicative of when the turning points are – *when* the decisions have to be made. Important to note is that these turning points are some of the most vulnerable moments especially in the lives of soon-to-be graduates, especially when policies and opportunities in either the home country or host country can influence one's decision.

4.3.4.2. Turning points – personal perspectives

A national perspective such as serving a government bond can later be turned into a personal perspective. Like in the case of Michael, when he graduated from his master's degree in the U.S., he returned to work for the Singaporean government as they have sponsored his scholarship. However, he returned to Malaysia before serving the full bond in Singapore. Michael shared his reason for returning to Malaysia:

Michael: It is very much like, one thing is the family, right? Because I have been away from my family for almost ten years, that is one reason. And another thing is that while you explore opportunity outside the country and sort of things. I mean, to me, it's just like wondering how is it like, working in Malaysia? Singapore and Malaysia is just so close, if you compare right now, Malaysia and the U.S.A., the distance is pretty far.

Salina has lived in the U.S. for twelve years for her undergraduate, graduate education and work. Initially after her undergraduate degree was completed in the late 1990's in the U.S., her parents wanted her to return to Malaysia to fulfill her bond of working for the scholarship sponsor. The requirement was that she needed to serve a working bond of ten years when she received her scholarship; failure to fulfill that requirement would mean that she needs to return the entire scholarship money. However, due to the Asian economic crisis, she got a two-year deferment from having to fulfill that bond, and she used this reason to continue living and working in the U.S. After the two years, she still did not want to return to Malaysia, and because of that she was asked to repay the scholarship money to the sponsoring agency. For Salina, the first turning point was right after the attainment of her undergraduate degree:

Salina: I guess I knew I wanted to go to the U.S., but just didn't know I'd stay and work after graduation. This is something I probably decided in my 4th year. ...my final year of college...my undergrad.

However, she then discussed more about yearning to be with family that made her decide it was time to return to Malaysia.

Salina: I definitely miss my family. I generally I would say over at the 12 years that I have lived in the U.S, you know from undergraduate until end of the business school, I probably went home once a year. So, I miss my family and they only come, in the 12 years that I was there, they came three times. So I definitely missed my family a lot, which is the big reason about, you know, why I came back after business school. But I miss my family, and definitely miss the food, but I don't really miss lifestyle in Malaysia. I knew that after undergraduate, I didn't want to come back to Malaysia because I did not want the lifestyle here. So that is why I have decided to stay and work there (U.S.). After I finished my MBA in 2005, I came back to Malaysia. So my second quarter, second year, so 6 months before I was coming back, or graduating, I decided that I wanted to work in Malaysia after business school. So, you know my thinking about coming back to Malaysia is that eventually I want to be in U.S. So, to have an international development job in the U.S., I really needed to get developing countries experience and I was going to leave the U.S. and go work in a developing country, the only choice was Malaysia. Once I made that decision about coming back to Malaysia and then I was first thinking about working for an American company, then I decided that I wanted to work with a headquarters of a company, instead of working in the KL (Kuala Lumpur) office of a New York headquartered firm.

Another event that became a turning point for one of the participants was due to family. Just as family was also one of the most influential factors in helping to make decisions about pursuing higher education, family also plays an important role in making one make that decision to return to Malaysia even when a person has a permanent job in the U.S. Yusof explained the turning point from his experience:

Yusof: In 1998 I still continued my job. I did look around for other offers, but I eventually I continue, just stayed in NY. I came back to Malaysia in 2002, where I worked for small company. It was family issue. What happened was that my on my wife's side, my wife is from Malaysia. So, on my wife's side, her niece died because of cancer. The girl was (a few) months old, so it was very difficult for my in-laws, because my wife just delivered my daughter at that time, she was about 3 months. So we decided we should go back.

All the other participants who returned mentioned that they have tried to find jobs or stayed in the U.S. However, most of them returned not because they wanted to, but because of the push factors, such as not finding a job in the U.S., or the need to fulfill the scholarship contract. Kok Kiong was one of the participants who did not try to remain in the U.S. He stated that he returned to Malaysia because he wanted to, and he decided to not to continue with his doctoral program and started his own company instead. To him, this decision came through two turning points:

Kok Kiong: There were two decisions. One was whether to study, or to work. That decision was made early 2003. I made the decision to work instead of studying for my Ph.D. Later on as I continue to work for the company (in the U.S.), I was faced with the second decision whether I want to work in the U.S., or to work in Malaysia. As I learn more about doing business in Malaysia, I realized that there are a lot of Government resources that we can call upon if you are a Malaysian. So at that point, I decided if I want to start a business, I won't start in the U.S., I will start in Malaysia.

Bretell and Sargent (2008) indicate that some groups of immigrants may have choices about keeping or rejecting continuous relationships with their homeland. This is mainly because for immigrants from certain countries, they could make choices due to political reasons such as becoming dual citizens and maintaining flexible citizenship; economic factors; cultural reasons such as visiting ethnic heritage sites and celebrating

ethnic festivals; or due to religious and spiritual practice that combines ‘here’ and ‘there’ (Bretell & Sargent, 2008). The researchers found that these choices result in different levels of immigrant transnationality in time and place. However for the case of the participants of this study, Malaysia does not allow their citizens to hold dual citizenships. While they might maintain a transnational identity and the ideology of flexible citizenships as discussed earlier, for political reasons they cannot literally keep both Malaysian and U.S. citizenships, a choice would need to be made about their citizenship when the time comes. Therefore the participants have to make a decision at one point of their lives, or another.

The significance of these turning points stated above demonstrates one thing -- that the decision must be made. It was not a choice to wait and see, because it was a moment of truth – either one chooses to permanently remain, going through all the legal aspects of the process that necessitate this migration; or chooses to return to Malaysia. These turning points require careful consideration, with the weighing of all options and opportunities available to the individual at that particular point in time. For instance, there will come a time when the participants who were working in the U.S. with their non-immigrant visas (H-1B) have to make a decision whether to pursue permanent residency (PR) in the U.S., or return to Malaysia, or to go to another country. Their non-immigrant visas were only valid for a period of time and when that time is up, the decision needs to be made and such a decision is not a simple one. This Permanent Residency (PR) petition takes about one to two years; money, paper trails and creates anxiety for anyone who goes through the process. In a typical path to the PR process, it starts one to two years before the end of the sixth year of the H-1B and is considered a turning point because it is a complicated process that could bring one closer to remaining in the U.S. more permanently, or bring one to have to leave the country if the PR petition was not successful and that the H-1B has expired at that time. There are also those who shared reasons why they remained on a more permanent status, and those who returned to Malaysia due to personal reasons as well. Their years living, studying and working in the U.S. helped to shape their sense of identity and their notion of *home*. While the data

showed that there seems to be a convoluted definition of identity amongst the participants, one thing was obvious to me. Participants did not self-designate as transnational. Yet studies on transnationalism provide a great source to grasp the idea that it is feasible for transnational individuals from different social groups to behave and think simultaneously at multiple scales, and to apply transnational social practices by being both 'here' and 'there' (Smith, 2001, p. 164, as cited in Yeoh et al., 2003).

Summary – personal perspectives

As personal perspectives to the turning points one had to make, there is some overlap between the personal and national perspectives. For example, even though it seems like it was initially to fulfill a scholarship bond obligation, both Michael and Salina admitted that eventually it was due to family that they returned to Malaysia. Michael ended up not fulfilling the scholarship bond with the provider in Singapore, and returned to work in Malaysia; while Salina, although she stated that she did not want to return to Malaysia because she did not want the Malaysian lifestyle, returned to Malaysia because of a personal plan to fulfill her career goals. Her plan was that she wanted to eventually have an international development job in the U.S., and in order to do that, she claimed that she needed to get experience in a developing country and one choice was to work in Malaysia. Therefore she eventually decided to return to Malaysia because of this personal plan for future employment, and at the same time, she also yearned for her family. In addition, Yusof admitted that he and his wife had to suddenly return to Malaysia due to a family crisis that needed them being there. Kok Kiong, on the other hand, felt that his personal turning point was to make that decision to discontinue with his doctoral program so that he can join his aunt to start a new business, which he felt it was a chance that would not wait.

4.4. Summary

The majority of the participants did not come to the U.S. with concrete plans to stay and work in the U.S. Their main objective was to complete their degree, however along the way, they have learned not only about their degree program, but also about themselves, the life in the U.S., and relatively about what they wanted to do after they graduated. Major themes found in this chapter include kind of work, making the academic decision, transitions and turning points. To explore these themes, some of key the theoretical constructs used are relative deprivation, brain circulation, transnational identity, flexible citizenship, assimilation and social capital.

One of the major findings from this chapter is that as the participants pursue their degrees, they were exposed to a different learning environment at the college, experienced a different work environment and culture, faced challenges of making new friends, and went through assimilation process. These exposure, experiences, challenges, and assimilation processes shifted their thinking about how they identified themselves, the kind of lifestyle they desired, the notion of *home* and place of residence. Specifically, one important factor to note is that the findings show that although some participants have settled in the U.S. permanently, they still have the identities, behaviors and values that are not just limited by the location in which they live (Lam & Yeoh, 2004). In fact, some of them are still actively engaged in transnational activities and maintain multifaceted social ties across the political, geographic and cultural borders. In other words, due to their exposure and experience, they might undergo a transformation in their identity whether or not they are aware of it, and this change could affect the decision making. The decision making process itself does not happen overnight as the process is a culmination of the experience, exposure, comparative views, family influence, external pressure, and options available.

Another important focus in this chapter is the national and personal aspects of the participants' turning points. It is during a particular period of time – either at the end of their studies, or the end of the period of work visa (H-1B) that they would need to make a decision to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia. Moreover, it could also be due to scholarship obligation, or the timing of family events that provide some clues as to when to expect decisions to be made. On the other hand, turning points are not indicative of why and how decisions are made, only *when* they had to be made. These turning points are some of the most vulnerable moments for the participants especially when policies, opportunities or personal events in either Malaysia or the U.S. can affect the decision they make.

With the brief background of who they are and the transitions they have gone through in higher education institutions as well as their turning points discussed in this chapter, the next chapter covers the reasons why the participants have chosen to remain in the U.S. or return to Malaysia and opinions about repatriation. Some of the major push and pull factors that are found pertinent to the highly educated participants fall under the categories of economic considerations, quality of life, social justice concerns, freedom perspectives and influence of the social network.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS – PART TWO

5.1. Introduction

Now that we have learned more about the participants, their transition and turning points (in Chapter Four), we will explore the reasons why they have chosen to remain in the U.S. or return to Malaysia. This chapter encompasses the findings of two research questions – what the push and pull factors for the decision to choosing home are, and motivations that might support repatriation decisions. Economic considerations are of major concern to the participants to some extent in regards to being able to provide for the needs of themselves and their families comfortably. Therefore, this chapter explores the implications of cost of living and career opportunities. Cost of living refers to “the amount of money needed to sustain a certain level of living, including basic expenses such as housing, food, taxes, and healthcare” (Investopedia, n.d.). Career opportunities include both its availability and its benefits such as job security and professional growth. Such factors could resonate as both push and pull factors relative to that individual. Quality of life is another area of concern for most of the participants. This includes the state of the general environment and people, safety concerns, as well as learning experience and opportunities.

Social justice is another significant factor, which in the Malaysian context refers to the principles of equality among the diverse citizens of Malaysia. The Malaysian government has introduced somewhat contested policies through affirmative action strategies proposed to advocate equal opportunity. Thus, some participants are concerned about the social injustice and discontent created by these strategies. The findings also point to the perspectives of freedom. While freedom may be tied to quality of life and social justice, freedom was so extensively discussed that there appears to be different themes from which we could analyze what freedom means to different people in the study. Finally, while social network and social capital play important roles in

immigrants' assimilation to the new culture and country, they can also explain why one may choose not to immigrate due to the influence of family ties and kinship networks back in their home country.

5.2. Research question two: Exploration of push and pull factors

5.2.1. Economic factors

The migration of professionals can be examined through the same type of theoretical lens used to look at the migration of labor (Portes, 2009). For example, neoclassical economic theory has been used to understand these labor movements as natural equilibrium-restoring mechanism between low-wage and high-wage countries, where the high-wage countries are able to pay workers according to their productivity (Borjas, 1989, 1990). Neoclassical economic theory claims that people move to a place where they can earn more money. However the neoclassical economist's theory is challenged by the reality of where most professionals come from, because according to Portes (2009) most professionals who emigrate do not generally come from the poorest countries. In fact, he claimed that professionals more likely come from mid-income and that some, from developed countries where the wage differentials are lower. Neoclassical theory also "does not explain why most professionals in sending countries do not migrate despite being exposed to the same wage differentials" (Oteiza, 1971; Portes & Rumbaut ch.2, as cited in Portes, 2009, p. 13).

To fill in some gaps of the neoclassical theory, Portes (2009) suggested the key concept of 'relative deprivation' which covers three strands as discussed in more detail in Literature Review – one, incomes are not high enough to allow professionals a middle-class life (Oteiza, 1971; Portes & Ross, 1976, as cited in Portes, 2009); two, the professionals' training is too advanced for local employment opportunities resulting in poor working conditions that made them feel that their professional development is negatively impacted (Alarcon, 1999, as cited in Portes, 2009); and three, a structural

imbalance causing more difficulty for those less-developed countries to produce home-grown talent or retain them for local employment (Portes & Walton, 1981, ch.2; Sassen 1988; as cited in Portes, 2009). In sum, relative deprivation, as noted by Portes (2009), explains the types of deficiencies that are experienced by the professionals in one country that cause them to want to move abroad to another country, in search of economic opportunities, for example in their wages or in their professional development. I argue that the concept of relative deprivation helps us understand the findings of this study. The difference between the professionals that Portes referred to and the participants is that most of the participants did not move to the U.S. as ‘professionals’ who wanted to earn more money because they were advance degree students in higher education abroad. However the aspiration is the same – they wanted a higher paying job to allow them for a middle-class life, which they could probably get in the U.S. after they attained their graduate degrees. Secondly the training which they received while in college, internships and work in the U.S. could be considered superior to employment opportunities in a developing country like Malaysia. Therefore they could envision that their chances for professional development may be pessimistically affected if they were to return and work in Malaysia. Comparatively this feeling of potential relative deprivation could be a reason why they plan to remain in the U.S. and later on go through the immigration process, instead of returning to Malaysia after completing their graduate education in the U.S. This type of relative deprivation is not uncommon, especially since participants are mostly aware of the economic situations in both Malaysia and the U.S. Their awareness could be triggered by past and present experience living in both countries and by having access to information of current economic situations through different means of communications. The relative deprivation helps to explain the reasons why some participants feel the way they do about choosing to remain in the U.S., and this is evident throughout the data, however Alvin’s views directly sums up this concern:

Alvin: After the Ph.D., if I were to go back to Malaysia, I think there were limited numbers of jobs that I could get that could fully utilized the training that I have had here. So like, I could always go back to one of the universities in Malaysia

and....it I didn't really appeal to me, partly because the compensation was low, the nature of the job wasn't too interesting, it was more focused on teaching and extracurricular activities rather than research. I think I like the idea of staying on in the U.S. and learn the more, the latest stuff, more sophisticated stuff.

5.2.1.1. Cost of living and purchasing power

The cost of living functions as an economic reason the participants consider as a push factor of Malaysia and of a pull factor of the U.S. Related to the cost of living is the standard of living, which include into considerations factors such as income, availability of jobs, class disparity, housing, availability and quality of education, cost of goods and services and other factors. As discussed in Literature Review, the media coverage often paints the image of high cost of living in Malaysia and also government strategies and incentives to alleviate the issues. On the other hand, when it comes to the cost of living in the U.S., the media, for example CNN mainly focused on the best cities to live in, social security and pension benefits. Participants who have personally lived and worked in the U.S. provided firsthand experience of what cost of living and the relative purchasing power mean to them. For example, Lily made a comparison of purchasing power between the U.S. and Malaysia.

Lily: Another thing I noticed is the purchasing power. When I first got back (Malaysia), of course I still used my savings from the U.S.A., certain things I can still afford but once I started working, once you really see how things cost, it is really not cheap. It is really difficult to live and have the same kind of life style like I would have had there in the U.S.A. while I am here earning the amount of money that most people do. A lot of people there (U.S.) if they get a good first job, they can afford to buy a car and start saving for a house, for most people it is a doable and an achievable thing. Even fresh out of school, an engineer could make USD40-USD60k a year. But here (Malaysia) is not easy, because everything here in terms of amounts are higher. Cost RM50k-RM60k for a car,

RM400K for a house, how can anyone afford it? How many years before I can even think about it? It is very different in terms of purchasing power here and there. Even when I was a grad student on a TA (teaching assistant) salary I still was able to travel and go to many places during my break. But here (Malaysia), ya, it is possible with AirAsia (local airline) but without AirAsia I think I will be stuck here for good not going anywhere without driving. It is expensive to travel.

To further explain purchasing power, for example, those who have lived or are living in the U.S. might have an idea of affordability to buy a brand new Toyota Camry for USD22,000 (Toyota U.S. website, n.d.) with their USD4,000 per month salary, but if they were working in Malaysia, they need to consider how they can afford a RM150,000 imported Toyota Camry (Toyota Malaysia website, n.d.) with their RM4,000 per month salary in Malaysia. The cheapest locally manufactured car is Perodua Viva, which costs approximately RM25,000 (Perodua website, n.d.). Not only the specifications of Perodua Viva and Camry are different, imported cars come with import taxes and other added costs; which helps explain the price differentials.

Therefore individuals could experience how different the purchasing power is, relative to the cost of living, and how that affects their overall standard of living both in Malaysia and the U.S. Participants' comments about the higher cost of living in Malaysia as a push factor provide a sign as to why returning to Malaysia is not as attractive as remaining in the U.S. to live and work:

Yusof: When you look at jobs, yes there are many jobs, but I would say that Malaysian jobs are some of the lowest paid in the world. Ten years ago, twelve years ago.... when I first graduated 1995, I got an offer from a local telecommunication company, so you know, the initial offer was, I think about RM2,400 per month. Today if you graduate, it is still RM2,400 per month, thirteen years later, nothing has really gone up. The fact of it is that inflation has gone up, the cost of living has gone up. So Malaysian jobs don't pay a lot.

Salina: Every year I kind of evaluate when it is that I am ready to go back. And the three to five- year plan, was kind of based also, on financial reasons. Because I knew I was going to be taking a pay cut going to work in Malaysia as opposed to staying in the U.S.

A search from Malaysia’s largest online recruitment website, Jobstreet Malaysia (n.d.) found a few examples of advertisements that had the salary or salary range that Yusof and Lily brought up during the interview. To make a comparison, I found that Salary.com has the salary range for the U.S. for the same type of job title. For this example, I looked at the salaries of different kinds of engineers:

Job title	Malaysia – salary per month	U.S. – salary per month
Process engineer	Between RM2,000 and RM3,500	Between USD3,570 and USD5,800
Sales engineer	Between RM1,800 and RM2,700	Between USD4,400 and USD5,800
Service engineer	Between RM2,650 and RM3,650	Between USD4,000 and USD5,750
Research and development engineer	Between RM2,00 and RM2,500 (plus allowances)	Between USD4,900 and USD9,000

Table 3: Comparison of engineers’ salaries

Note: U.S. Dollar (USD)1 ≈ Ringgit Malaysia (RM)3.00 (January 2013)

Source: Jobstreet.com.my and salary.com. Specific samples of the salary ranges are shown in Appendix H.

Based on the comments by Yusof, Lily and Salina, the purchasing power is of more concern to them, although it is related closely to the cost of living of that particular location which also eventually affects the standard of living. In other words, the purchasing power and cost of living are relative, and that their concern with the cost of living in fact affects their purchasing power. More data showed the extent of this concern.

Below, Salina also echoed Yusof's comment about the abundance of job opportunities in Malaysia that Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S. could consider to repatriate. Although Salina believes that a higher salary might bring back the Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S.A. to Malaysia, she felt that there are some financial setbacks people would think further before simply making that decision to return to Malaysia. According to her own experience after returning to Malaysia, she considered that it was financially difficult to work in Malaysia because of the cost of living:

Salina: I recently met more Malaysians who are thinking about coming back to Malaysia, having worked in, and gone to school in the U.S. or the U.K. for people similar to myself. And I think it is kind of the quality of work, so I think the business and this is mainly all in business and the private sector here, I think the company is matured to the extent that there is a lot of good job opportunities. But generally, people know that they have to pick up a slight pay cut, but I think that the pay cut is commensurate with cost of living, so I think it is higher compare to maybe other Malaysians, but not as high as in terms of dollars as you were working in the U.S., where the cost of living is lower.

The purchasing power in Malaysia when one works and lives there is not as favorable as when one works and lives in the U.S. because the number of currency units required to buy things and services in Malaysia is higher than what can be bought with one unit of the currency in the U.S. With the stronger U.S. currency compared to the Malaysian Ringgit (U.S. Dollar 1 \approx Ringgit Malaysia 3.00, as of January 2013), the exchange rate is high and that would make pursuing a degree in the U.S. expensive,

especially when considering the tuition fees and living expenses associated with pursuing that degree. Therefore, Salina further expressed the dilemma:

Salina: Realistically if you are paying for your own education, it is hard to work in Malaysia, you really just can't make enough money, and there is not as many post graduate scholarships or master's degree scholarships especially for MBAs. Our company itself sponsors people for master's degree, especially MBAs. Because generally if you are getting a U.S. MBA, it is not possible if you are paying for yourself through loans, but it's not possible to come back and work in Malaysia, it is very hard.

It is a dilemma, according to Salina, because the scholarship recipients are obligated to fulfill the contract of working with the Malaysian scholarship provider. However, they may feel that due to the cost of living relative to the purchasing power in Malaysia, it is difficult to survive and live up to the middle-class lifestyle they may aspire. Moreover, if they choose not to fulfill that obligation, they would need to repay the entire loan and related higher education costs that were paid for them in U.S. Dollars, which are quite exorbitant if they are now earning in Ringgit Malaysia. Another participant shared her point about purchasing power in Malaysia:

Sujitha: It's really nice to go out, go places, and whatever, but I still think it is very expensive here (in Malaysia). If you say, earn RM2,000 or RM3,000 on an average you can't go to Hard Rock Café to have a meal. It's the cost of living, the dollar doesn't stretch. I mean, like grocery shopping, every time you go grocery shopping, it is around RM200 to RM300. In the U.S., it is like USD\$40, that's it. I really feel that the government hasn't really done a good job in strengthening the economy.

The interview data findings demonstrate that participants comprehend the differences in the cost of living and purchasing power between Malaysia and the U.S. because they have lived in both countries, whereas Malaysians who never had a chance to work and live in the U.S. may not comprehend as much. However, those who have not worked in the U.S. may have only read about the cost of living through media coverage or heard it from family, friends and relatives who have experienced the difference. Although they may read about stronger purchasing power working in the U.S., being able to experience it first-hand as a student or even as someone who works in the U.S. after graduating, would further influence how they review their decision whether to return to Malaysia or to continue living in the U.S. after graduation. The decision for highly educated individuals to repatriate after living in the U.S. for a while is a complex process. Besides issues of assimilation and identity shift after being away from home country for years as discussed in Chapter Four, one important factor is the question of purchasing power in Malaysia. The lifestyle associated with living the “American dream” is not something Malaysian-born migrants might want to give up especially when they have invested their effort, money and time to come this far.

5.2.1.2. Career opportunities

The economic aspects of one’s life provide a strong basis as to why someone considers one location better than the other. For example, Massey et al. (1993) determined that potential migrants use a set of cost-benefit calculations to anticipate a positive net monetary return from their migration. In other words, they engage in the investment of human capital that would enable them to materialize their goals and hopes of immigration. Some of these investments include the costs of traveling, maintenance during transition of moving and job searching, efforts involved in learning a new language and culture, strategies to overcome the difficulty experienced in adapting to a new labor market and the psychological costs of leaving their old community and building new ties (Massey et al., 1993, p. 434). They probably do this consciously because they would need to weigh the pros and cons, before deciding whether or not

emigrating is an option. Along the same lines, the data from this study suggest that to the participants, advancing in higher education in the U.S. is an investment of their human capital to provide them with the competitive edge when securing a job in the U.S., creating new social networks, and assimilating into the new American culture. For example, Bala discussed the outlook of career opportunities:

Bala: Before I started my MBA, it was part of the cost analysis. If I were to spend the money to get a MBA, look, how do I recoup this. The whole prospect of working overseas was also an interesting idea.

To Bala and many others, higher education is an investment of effort, money and time. Their response shows that they had plans mapped out and while those plans may have happened before, during and after their studies in the U.S., the likelihood for them to consider how to manipulate their new skills usually happened during the pursuit of their graduate education when they had more life and work experience as compared to the time when they were undergraduates. They are probably more conscious now than before, when considering how their investment in higher education would benefit them and their family in the long run. Conversely this consideration is not only tied to economic reasons alone, although economic factors form basic guidelines for their decision making.

Borjas (1990) found that prospective migrants would estimate the costs and benefits of moving across international borders, and place considerations of migrating to different locations, but would migrate to where they find it most beneficial in the long run. A few highlights to Massey et al.'s (1993) observation is that international migration could happen with the international differentials in both earnings and employment rates; increased or improved human capital; and factors that lower migration costs such as social conditions or technologies, among others. Borjas (1990) and Masey et al. (1993) found that prospective migrants would typically look into the advantages and disadvantages in terms of economics first, where they believe they would benefit most in

terms of their skills and the job prospects in the country they wish to immigrate to. As I relate the notion of benefits of migration to the data I collected, the participants who have obtained their American graduate degrees felt that they have the qualifications and skills in the U.S. which give them a higher probability of obtaining a job in the U.S. Although they may also have a high probability of getting a job in their home country Malaysia, the work environment in Malaysia was not rewarding, as expressed by Khatijah:

Khatijah: The policy enables you to go. The policy is incentive enough for you to go back, but the work environment and the racial backstabbing discourage you from wanting to stay (in Malaysia). I think that they perceive that just because you come back, you get this Brain Gain program, you are better than them. And it really creates a rift in the workplace. That's part of the reason why....he's like, "I'm done."

I probed Khatijah about her friend, who was a medical doctor who was attracted by some of the benefits of the Malaysia Brain Gain program and returned to Malaysia. Many people assumed that the Brain Gain program participants are given special privileges and resources to challenge the hierarchies in the work place. This may have caused constraints among the others who may have been working there longer, or have not been overseas, or who have not exposed to benefits of the Brain Gain program, and who may be ignorant about the program in the first place. Khatijah shared with me the ordeal that her friend, who returned to Malaysia, had to endure:

Khatijah: According to my friend, it became a big deal. The office politics. Like, he was constantly given the hard work, the worst shifts because people can boss him because the fact that is being paid more than his boss. He's constantly getting the worst shift, the shifts that are back-to-back. You know, (he said) "I am not in medical school, I am not in residency, I have earned my dues. I do not deserve these kinds of shifts."

There are also stories of people who experienced not being able to get job opportunities due to non-recognition of a foreign degree in Malaysia. For example, Thiru who received his Master's degree in Civil Engineering on the west coast of the U.S., did his four-year undergraduate studies at an engineering college in India in the 1980's. He shared with me how he ended up in the U.S.:

Thiru: No opportunity in Malaysia. It wasn't a choice. There was no opportunity in Malaysia. My undergraduate was recognized all over the world except in Malaysia. So even if I had a Ph.D., because my undergraduate was not recognized, couldn't get a job in the engineering field in Malaysia. Malaysian government doesn't recognize a lot of degrees from India, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong³⁰. My school is one of the top schools in India. Universities from here (U.S.) go there (India) to recruit grad students. You can meet a lot of Chinese and Indian Malaysians around who couldn't go back. They stayed and succeeded here (U.S.) to a point where it was not really worth it to go back to Malaysia

Based on his encounter with two other Malaysians who had similar experiences, Thiru explained how other Malaysians could have ended up working elsewhere:

Thiru: Same thing with another Malaysian I went to school with in India. He got his Ph.D. at Clemson in Civil Engineering. He spent a year looking for a job, then came back to the U.S. He's a professor somewhere he in the U.S. My brother got his undergraduate degree from India in Civil Engineering. He came back, couldn't get a job in Malaysia because his degree was not recognized. For twelve years he worked as a technician at one of the largest engineering companies in Malaysia. One day an Australian engineer visited his office in KL to see the

³⁰ The Malaysian Government's entity that facilitates the recognition and articulation of qualifications of any degree is the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) which was an establishment that merged National Accreditation Board (LAN) and the Quality Assurance Division, Ministry of Higher Education (QAD). Established on November 1, 2007, its responsibility is to monitor and oversee the quality assurance practices and accreditation of national higher education. In other words, a degree that is not 'recognized' is considered not accredited by the government (Malaysian Qualification Agency, n. d.)

“engineer,” discovered this technician actually designed all the highways. He designed the Kajang Highway (in Malaysia) and some of the other highways, and wasn’t recognized or rewarded for it. So he convinced my brother to go with him to Australia and started a new job at the RTA (Roads and Traffic Authority in Australia) as Senior Design Engineer about five years ago. So, it is the Malaysian government policies. Prevent a lot of highly skilled and gifted people of working in Malaysia, and so they work elsewhere.

There is also further evidence to show that having career opportunities in Malaysia is not strong enough to be a pull factor to Malaysia. Here are some of the arguments why they are not adequate for non-returning migrants in the U.S. to consider repatriating:

Sebastian: You know, Malaysia has changed a bit, it is losing a lot of good jobs to India and China. It is hard. Malaysia is to evolve and that is one of the concerns everybody has because education is not up to par, and it is affecting people’s perception of Malaysia. You already have a lot of issues with being ethical and all that which Malaysia has to deal with. Then you have substandard education system, which is providing some substandard work force. I mean, even when I was working there (Malaysia), you hire people (who graduated) from UK (United Kingdom) or local universities, they can’t even communicate properly. It is very hard to work in that environment, I think.

Based on Sebastian’s viewpoints, many other factors must be considered, including the work environment, co-workers, ethical and social issues; which are all related to the quality of life one may seek.

In addition, Lily was concerned with the career opportunities in Malaysia due to the issue of inequality in the hiring process:

Lily: Another thing I noticed, of course, is..... I even journal it, ads in the papers where, in the U.S.A., it's all equal opportunity, and you really cannot be discriminatory in your hiring process, here you see things in the ad like single Chinese female preferred. To me, this is not right. I felt it was unjust. Something was unfair. Based on the background I had been in, it was very glaring thing to me, I really noticed it. In terms of equality and the amount of control that is placed on you, it is very different. Everything is censored. Well when living abroad, you have to do everything on your own.

It is a common practice in Malaysia for companies to include in their advertisement, the specific gender or race of their ideal candidate, for example to state “a single Chinese female preferred” or “*Bumiputra* preferred.” In addition, most job applicants are expected and sometimes required to submit a passport-size photograph (See Appendix I for a few samples of the job advertisement in Malaysia that specified the ethnic group, or sex of the preferred applicant, and asked for a photograph of the applicant). Therefore the criteria to shortlist candidates and to hire someone are very subjective because the criteria do not only include qualifications and experience, but also one’s gender, ethnicity, marital status and appearance; all of which are illegal to ask in job advertisement, during the interview and selection processes in the U.S. The U.S. federal laws prohibit employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, and genetics. A list of the federal laws listed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on their website is found in Appendix J.

The data from this study show that having career opportunities is not good enough; participants want equal opportunity to be embedded in these career opportunities in Malaysia. For those who have never studied abroad, they may not be exposed as much

as those who have studied abroad therefore, the former may accept the common practice when it comes to job advertisements while the latter finds it problematic because such requirements show the lack of equal opportunity when a job vacancy is advertised in Malaysia.

For Sujitha and Kok Kiong, they shared their thoughts about the possibilities and opportunities of entrepreneurship in Malaysia. While Sujitha held a U.S. business visa, and was contemplating permanent residency in the U.S., her consideration to stay and work in Malaysia was strongly related to opportunities and ease of getting such opportunities in Malaysia:

Sujitha: Personally, it has to be, from a business perspective, it has to be much more attractive, more better incentive, faster turnaround time, and less red tape (in Malaysia). I tell you, when we were registering an LLC (Limited Liability Company) in Kuala Lumpur, it was hell....to get a bank account, to register. It took two months. And when in the U.S., when I went to register an LLC, it took three hours with a bank account. So, you know, these kinds of things are not functional. It is a complete waste of time. If you are coming here (Malaysia) for only two weeks, you need to register a company and go off, you could never possibly do so.

On the other hand, Kok Kiong felt that there were a lot of opportunities in Malaysia especially for someone who wants to establish his own company:

Kok Kiong: Talking about being an employee, you can be a very comfortable employee in the U.S.A. If you are coming back to Malaysia, your intent and purpose is not to be an employee. You are here in Malaysia to start a business. There are a lot of opportunities here, a lot of funding opportunities, there are gaps in the technology where someone with the experience like I have, can make a difference. That is why I came back here to Malaysia. I never have the intention

of working for someone when I came back. A lot of our Government policies are beneficial to Malaysians to begin with. So if you are a Malaysian you are at no disadvantage coming home. If you are a foreigner and if you are choosing Malaysia, yes then there is a disadvantage.

Kok Kiong made an argument that there are financial and support opportunities for entrepreneurs to start a business in Malaysia, especially in the areas of science and technology which would benefit potential Malaysian entrepreneurs. He realized that there are some gaps in the technology in Malaysia that someone with such knowledge, skills and training through studying and working in the U.S., could make a difference contributing to the developments in such areas back in Malaysia. Moreover, as an entrepreneur in Malaysia, Kok Kiong also noted that there are funding opportunities for people to take advantage of, if they have such knowledge and skills to meet the country's demand. Similarly, Sujitha compared both her experiences of opening a limited liability company (LLC) in Malaysia and in the U.S. These viewpoints are significant to demonstrate two things: one, there may be opportunities Malaysians are not aware about, and two, there are opportunities that are hard to be taken up successfully if people are discouraged by the cumbersomeness of initial process, for example, to register for a company in Malaysia. Therefore, if there are indeed funding opportunities to encourage entrepreneurship in Malaysia, then it should be made more apparent and accessible to attract more highly talented and skilled individuals in the U.S. who may want to start their own business in Malaysia but lacked funding. It could be an attractive pull factor to Malaysia for those who wish to return because it may be more attractive for someone with the knowledge, skills and training from the U.S. to start their own company, versus having to work for an employer.

5.2.2. Quality of life factors

People are drawn to live where they can have better quality of life. Yet what constitutes a desirable quality of life is often subjective. Defining quality of life emerged through the comparative lenses that participants developed when they have lived and experienced environments in both Malaysia and the U.S.

5.2.2.1. General environment and people

This section covers the general perception of environment in the workplace as well as of people. This section is different from the previous section on career opportunities because while the section on career opportunities is about the gatekeepers or hurdles impinging the career opportunities, this section is about the atmosphere of work when one gets passed those gatekeepers. Understanding the perception and encounters in the work environment provides vital information as to how people make decisions based on what they experienced or heard from friends. The comments below demonstrate that even when there are career opportunities in Malaysia, the lack of a conducive work environment would drive people away.

Stanley: I hear horror stories back home, like going to work is having to puke. Dreading each day having to get to work. Really, really, long hours. Lots of office politics.

Rozzeta: In Malaysia, you have to work until 8, 10 o'clock at night. Over here (U.S.) I work eight hours a day. I get off work at 3:30. I got to work at 6:30, 3:30 get off work. It is even more flexible hours. We can go to work anytime we want as long as you put in eight hours a day.

Quality of life is an important consideration because positive attitude amongst people you work with promotes a better working environment and gives positive vibes in the work place. Although the issue with work ethics could happen in any organization and anywhere in the world, the speculation of dishonesty and self-centeredness in the workplace has become a push factor because people do not want to feel they have been taken advantage of. And it could ultimately push someone away, hence looking for opportunity elsewhere, or not wanting to return when abroad. Sebastian, who lived in the U.S. during the interview, talked about his frustration while he was working with people in Malaysia whom he thought have no regard for ethics and integrity:

Sebastian: Just Malaysians in general always want to make money. Take advantage of people.

During his tenure at a Malaysian company, Sebastian witnessed how his then-colleagues would start-up their own small company and secure contracts with another competitor telecommunication company at the side, which was a conflict of interest. He expressed how he felt about the notion of accountability, ethics and integrity, and although he expressed that such occurrence may happen anywhere else, he sensed that if Malaysians continued to disregard code of ethics in work and business, it would be hurting the economy in general:

Sebastian: From ethical... it is just not right. They are not concerned about ethics, they are not concerned about anything, it is all about money. I mean this is everywhere, there is this issue right? I mean in Malaysia it is at the max level, it is like.... everybody. Yeah, nobody wants to work hard and do something honestly, people always want to find the easy way out. And there is no sense of integrity, there is no sense of accountability, right? So after something you work, you just feel frustrated that this continues, and you know how is Malaysia going to improve with this type of attitude, right?

Other participants in this study commented on what they perceived as undesirable attributes that seem to be part of the push factors that crafted Malaysia as an unattractive place to call *home*. For example, Malaysians are seen as competitive and self-centered.

Minah: If I were to do this (to pursue MBA) in Malaysia, gosh, maybe I would have more difficulty. I am not sure whether students in Malaysia would be more open and willing to help each other. We probably compete against each other. I wouldn't know. It's just my guess.

Andrew: Malaysian culture, and even Singaporean, we have never felt good enough. You know the "kiasu" (in the Chinese-Hokkien dialect it literally means "afraid of losing out") things, and then always want something better.

In Malaysia and especially in Singapore, the concept of "kiasu," which literally means "afraid of losing out," (in Chinese-Hokkien dialect) is not new, as competition is prevalent in many aspects of people's daily lives.

Investopedia (n. d.) defined *kiasu* as:

State of being or a person who is greedy, unwilling to share, or competitive in order to advance one's self. Examples of *kiasu* include driving aggressively to get to the front of a traffic line or registering young children early at top schools, prior even to knowing the child's aptitude. *Kiasu* describes the idea that one must outdo and outshine all others, have more of any given thing, pay the least amount for items thereby getting the best deal and always be the first or best. (Definition of Kiasu, para. 2)

This concept has also been explored and applied to financial ideas as people try to understand market psychology and sales campaigns (Investopedia, n. d.). In a study about the impacts of the *kiasu* tendency on task performance, Kirby and Ross III (2007) quoted Hwang, Ang, & Francesco that, "*Kiasu* reflects an obsessive concern with getting

the most out of every transaction and a desire to get ahead of others” (Hwang, Ang & Francesco, 2002, p. 75, as cited in Kirby and Ross III, 2007). In their paper, Kirby and Ross III (2007) explored the pros and cons of this self-centered attitude, and stated that although a competitive character can encourage someone to outshine others, that same competitive spirit can also be detrimental when it turns into an obsession which make that person become aggressive in his quest to win. And while *kiasuism* is a well-known culture of Singapore (Kirby & Ross III, 2007), it is also quite common in the Asian communities as people compete for getting a place into the best schools, the best housing development, and many other aspects in their lives as well as in their children’s lives. This is mainly caused by limited allocation of resources made available, where the supply may be way below the demand of such services and opportunities. Competitiveness in Malaysia could adversely affect the quality of life because people feel they have to do more, do better, and compete to outdo each other – all of which could create stress and other psychological concerns³¹.

The work environment is related to both economic factors and quality of life because even if there are career opportunities for economic considerations, the lack of a good work environment would drive people away or make people not wanting to return. A couple of participants commented that in order for Malaysia as a nation to improve for the better, its people should be the ones to change:

Sebastian: People make everything and if people don't change the way they think about life, it is very hard for things to change. And that is the thing that I believe that Malaysians just are too engrossed with money and being successful. I mean, obviously you want to be successful, but this factor is a big issue to me, I think people just don't look any other way.

³¹ Extreme competitiveness is not unique to Malaysia; elsewhere in the world there is also competition to get into the best schools, jobs, for financial rewards such as scholarships and grants, and many more. Due to that, many parents send their children to tuition centers (In Malaysia, Singapore, China, etc.) after school to get additional academic enrichment of the school subjects, not because the children are failing behind in school, but because they want to have a competitive edge in school striving to be ahead of others.

Andrew: Malaysians have to change ourselves that would trigger a change in the country policy, government to political policy. Our hearts, our being the way we are should need to change. I am saying that Malaysians have to realize their potential and how much more they can offer, of who they are and not to be someone else that they are not.

In addition, Andrew noted that he has more confidence that Malaysians can do well if they want to, but only if they change their mindset about themselves. He offered his opinion on what Malaysians in the U.S. need to think about before deciding not to return to Malaysia.

Andrew: The problem is that in Malaysia, our culture does not allow us to say, "Hey, you are actually good in what we do and we can actually do it very well," and we do not need to have anyone else to tell us how to run our own country besides Malaysia. To answer your question, how would we get Malaysians from U.S. back to Malaysia, is that, they have to understand...they have to change their mindset, that Malaysia is good, that Malaysia has a lot to offer, that they have to believe in themselves. Malaysians have to come back and believe who they are. We are a nation that we understand that we have so much to offer to the other countries around us. But the problem is, that we are so limited to how we see things because we were brought up in a culture that we are not good enough.

Bala has returned to Malaysia and believes that everyone has a different approach in life. With his comparative views of life in the U.S. and Malaysia, he explained why he chose to return to Malaysia and consider it *home* :

Bala: I think I am quite happy where I am now. I think that phase of my life where I needed to go overseas, I have passed that phase. I don't feel any urge to go back, because I've seen things over there (U.S.), and I've seen things over here (Malaysia). There isn't anything that I find that is compelling me to go there

(U.S.) because I realize that a lot of the things that I am looking for I can find it over here (Malaysia). It is all in terms of how one approaches the issues that we deal over here. I have lots of friends who are looking at migrating to Australia. There are whole set of challenges there, in terms of setting up a social network, family and all that. I think when you grow older, you value more.

Quality of life has different meaning to different people. While it is subjective, it could still be tied back to the basic needs of individuals. When looking at the work, people and environment factors, it really depends on each individual and how long that individual has spent in Malaysia and in the U.S. for one to make a comparison. For example, Bala did not have a lot of work experience or work exposure in the U.S. and relatively, have a short period for comparison. He has worked in Malaysia for a few years before going to the U.S. for his graduate education. After finishing his MBA he worked for a few months in the U.S. as a contractor and then found out that due to the economic downturn, the company who initially wanted to hire him full time no longer could hire him, and he had to return to Malaysia. Therefore, it could be easier for Bala to return to the work environment and work culture in Malaysia as compared to someone who may have worked and lived longer in the U.S. to return to Malaysia.

5.2.2.2. Safety

Another quality of life concern is safety. A few of the participants were concerned for their own safety and the safety of their family because of the escalating report of crimes in Malaysia. Although no place in the world is safe from crimes, and crimes are relative to where one lives, it was somewhat ironic that many participants talked about the safety concern in Malaysia as if the country was laden with crimes. There are also many safety concerns in the U.S. but they do not come up during the interview. For example, some of the more popular types of crime in the U.S. are school and public shootings, gang fights and drug crimes. While both local and national media in the U.S. seem to reflect a relatively large crime rate, this does not factor as a hindrance

to participants' concerns in the U.S. Instead, safety was a concern in Malaysia more so than it was in the U.S., for some of participants.

Crime rate is escalating in Malaysia and many people live in fear. There were news reports of home invasions, snatch thieves, and even random acid attacks. For example, the Malaysian media reported that there was a serial acid attacker who splashed pedestrians with the corrosive liquid, acid (The Star/Yahoo News, 2011, May). According to the police, the victims were picked at random by the attacker, and that the acid was splashed either when the victims were in their car through the window, or when they were walking at the sidewalk, or waiting at a bus stop. Such local news travel fast especially among the community of family and friends. News is likely amplified because Malaysia is a very small country as compared to the U.S. Participants talked about fear and crimes in Malaysia but did not mention at all about fear due to crimes in the U.S.

A few participants from both Malaysia and the U.S. related how they and their family members in Malaysia were worried about their safety.

Minah: They (my family) think the U.S. is much safer than K.L. (Kuala Lumpur). So they were not reluctant to let me go (to the U.S.). There were so many crimes in K.L.

Sebastian: Like I said, the last few years when we went back, it is just not safe in Malaysia anymore. Not safe, too much crime. I mean even like my family, my cousins and all have been robbed and my aunt, they robbed her, they stole two of her cars, they ransacked the whole house, it is just ridiculous. I mean, before this, none of my family members have ever had any issue, but the last year it is just like, a lot of cases. Too many. And there are a lot of gangs, I think. I mean, obviously, economy plays a part, but I think even before the economy takes effect, I think there is already this problem.

Another safety concern is the driving condition in Malaysia, as experienced by Lily:

Lily: During my first three months when I was back, I really experiencing reverse culture shock. First of all, pure shock at the road conditions, at how people are driving, I was seriously....closed my eyes when people were driving me on the road because I was so scared.

A sense of general safety is important as people consider where to live and raise a family. An open yard with no fence overlooking the neighbor's yard in the U.S. is quite common especially in most suburban neighborhoods. However, most houses in Malaysia except in the *kampong* (villages), have high fences made of steel or concrete, surrounding each house; and a gate that is typically locked at night. General safety is a concern because no one wants to live in fear. The World Bank Malaysia Economic Monitor report (The World Bank, 2011) which had a similar finding that focused on safety and security issues states, "In the Malaysian context, stories of kidnappings and armed robberies appear to be shared widely in the diaspora community and form a narrative to justify the decision to remain abroad" (p. 120). The government of Malaysia has already developed a program known as the Government Transformation Program (GTP) in 2009, "which aims to improve the efficiency of delivery of government services in six National Key Results Areas (NKRAs)" (The World Bank, 2011, p.77). The six key areas being focused to improve the nation are to lower crime rates, fight corruption, improve student outcomes, raise living standards of low income households, improve rural basic infrastructure and improve urban public transportation (The World Bank, 2011).

5.2.2.3. Learning experience

Participants in this study expressed an awareness of how different they have found the U.S. education system compared to the Malaysian education system. For example, a few participants quoted that Malaysian education system has too much rote-learning or memorization, and less application of critical thinking skills, when compared to the American way of learning; a lot of spoon-feeding from the instructors coupled with

passive learning and too many exams without a clear purpose why exams are implemented. Conversely, these participants argued that the American education system developed them to be more independent and more creative, as the classroom setting and teaching promote self efficacy in their learning.

The participants shared their comparative learning experience:

Siew Ling: I didn't want to be part of the commonwealth or British education system that I found stifling. My first degree was a challenge because it was my first time being in an English-speaking educational environment, and also because I was dealing with culture shock. I'm such a different person than I was when I first came (to the U.S.). Literally fresh off the plane, I was extremely shy and quiet, so I didn't optimize my experience, culturally immersing myself as I had wanted to. I spent a lot of time studying because I needed to keep my GPA (Grade Point Average) high to maintain that scholarship. The most challenging part was the essay written exams. I regurgitated because of our rote learning system and the professors penalized me. And I was shocked to tears, literally, and told them that I nailed all the facts. They explained that they are interested in my interpretation, not my replication of the facts. So, that was the beginning to changing my way of thinking. And that's what I like best about the U.S. education system, it's about critical thinking that is missing in our Malaysian education system. The professor who penalized that one exam was probably the best wake-up call I had, because I started to write and think differently. That was the beginning of change for me.

Subramaniam: Generally, my experience was positive because it is very different from what you get in U.K. or in Singapore, where professors don't seem to ask your opinion much. In my school (in the U.S.), we actually sit with the professor and argue a lot of things. The class develops based on your input. It was really

good, I felt then, learning stuff because of my own work, forced to do stuff, which may have helped. It was good, it was a different experience.

Mawar: I don't like the way Malaysians sit and listen. I like to talk in class. I always like, from little that I know, I like the American system, and don't think I should just swallow whatever the instructor say. I read a lot about the American education system and what I know, I just know that they don't spoon feed you. How else? The whole culture thing, where I am supposed to be subservient, that's something that I just could not tolerate.

On one hand, we could see how the rigorous and strict exam-based type education system in Malaysia may promote passive learning and rote learning because it was all about excelling in the exams than to really applying critical skills and other skill sets in solving problems. On the other hand, it seemed to have positively prepared some Malaysians to fare well in their exams in the U.S. because they felt that they have gone through the more stringent ways of studying in the Malaysia. Therefore getting through school in the U.S. is a breeze, for example as indicated by Yusof:

Yusof: Well, during undergraduate, in a way it was a change from the difficult exam- oriented education that I was used to, so that was different. But I got to fit in reasonably well over the year, like in the first year. By my sophomore year I was already okay.

To some extent, participants' education experience made an impact in their lives as they reflected on what they experienced in Malaysia and the U.S. The comparative learning experience could be a factor to consider when participants think of the future investment in education for their child or children. Knowing what was better for them or what worked better in terms of knowledge acquisition and application, they might consider where would be a better place for their future generation to pursue education and especially higher education.

5.2.3. Social justice

One main social justice issue that emerged is the preferential treatment given to a certain ethnic group. It is common elsewhere in the world that affirmative action is mainly to help make up for past inequality, discrimination and persecution; as well as to maintain equality and address present discrimination, especially of the minority groups such as women, minority ethnic and racial groups, and others (Sowell, 2004).

5.2.3.1. Affirmative action in Malaysia

Many Malaysians tend to believe that no matter how diligently they study or work, they will meet obstacles along the way caused by government policies that would stop them or discourage them to get ahead in employment, promotion and in the pursuit of higher education. These obstacles are considered push factors that push them out of Malaysia to seek opportunities elsewhere. In an article in the Wall Street Journal (2011), John Malott who was the U.S. ambassador to Malaysia from 1995-1998 argued that Malaysia's economic reform and improvements to the government's affirmative action did not materialize, which meant "a further loss in competitiveness and slower growth. It also means that the cronyism and no-bid contracts that favor the well-connected will continue" (The Price of Malaysia's Racism, para.12). The justification for affirmative action in Malaysia is to compensate for the past disproportionately low economic opportunity for the majority ethnic group, the Malays. Malaysia's affirmative action policy provides preferential treatment to *Bumiputra* who are the ethnic Malays and indigenous groups. The policy includes opportunities in government jobs and contracts, business licenses, access to public universities and scholarships, as well as special allotment of house and land, and discounted house prices. The idea of affirmative action is for positive action to happen so that better representation of women and minorities can be promoted in employment, education and business; however these steps can be controversial when there is preferential selection (Fullinwider, 2011)

While affirmative action is intended to promote equality, it has become a controversial and sensitive topic in Malaysia for many years. Some participants in this study felt it was unfair in general, as evidenced by the following excerpts:

Mawar (Malay/Bumiputra): I believe in meritocracy. I don't believe in affirmative action that we have in Malaysia. I think it's time that they change. Change the Bumiputra status thing. I think the scholarship should be given to anyone who's qualified, not based on a quota system. I think that company cannot force to hire Malays, you know, there is that 30% of your employees have to be Malays. I don't think that should be it. I don't think people should get contracts based on if you are a Malay, you know, or not. So these are things that I disagree...despite of the culture, you know.

Rozzeta (Malay/Bumiputra): I don't like in Malaysia the discrimination thing. I went to school and I have a lot of friends, the Chinese and Indian and I don't like that I get scholarship how come my best friend don't get scholarship just because she is Chinese. So that is what I made my main decision because of the politics over there (Malaysia). It would benefit all of us, all the people in Malaysia. You know a lot of my friends from Malaysia the Chinese and Indians, they live here (U.S.), they don't want to go back, why should they go back? Actually Malaysia is losing all these smart people because of that. It is a waste. So that was my main thing, I see it differently over here (U.S.).

Both Mawar and Rozzeta are *Bumiputra* (Malay). However they believed that meritocracy would benefit citizens as well as the nation of Malaysia in the long run. The interview data show that they have both seen the unequal opportunity in Malaysia when it comes to scholarships, business contracts and opportunities for the different ethnic groups. Because of their exposure of people being rewarded or getting a job due to merit in the U.S., they understood better that for a country like Malaysia to progress and

advance, opportunities for higher education and for businesses should be given based on merit than on ethnicity alone.

In addition, Kok Kiong, who chose to venture into his own start-up company instead of completing his Ph.D., also sees the difference between doing business in Malaysia and in the U.S.:

Kok Kiong (Chinese): In the U.S. it is very meritocracy-based. When you have something of value, someone sees. Someone sees value in you, you have the business then. In Malaysia, it is not really that simple. There is a lot of stuff that goes on that does not necessarily gets recorded in the books. I have a hard time adjusting to that. I started doing business in the U.S. I came here (Malaysia) with that mentality. But as you do business more here in Malaysia, then you realize how to play the game. I think, that is the only thing I would change about Malaysia.

Thiru added how being older makes him more aware of the issue of social justice:

Thiru (Indian): Yeah, if the policies were different, I would have definitely gone back to Malaysia. At that time (right after graduation) just policies, but now I am older and mature I consider everything else including equal status for Chinese and Indians as compared to Malays. I knew a lot of very smart non-Malay friends, most whom are languishing. So, in Malaysia things have to change.

Many factors are taken into consideration when making the decision to stay in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after completing graduate school. And social justice specifically to ethnicity is one that weighs heavily in anyone's mind. People want to be treated fairly, so if things do not change in Malaysia, they can choose not to return since they believed that the grass is greener somewhere else. For example, a participant stated,

Subramaniam (Indian): Malaysia is a unique country. I think the Malaysians in Malaysia love their country, is what I generally feel. But sometimes, they are a little disappointed with the politics and how things are organized which discriminates against you at every turn, you know, which is frustrating and makes us angry about things.

Around the time of the interview, one of the participants, Ai Mee became eligible to apply for American citizenship. She became a permanent resident through her marriage with an American citizen. She shared how she felt about the social injustice in Malaysia, and what her decision was about pursuing the American citizenship:

Ai Mee (Chinese): I am leaning towards doing it. One of the big reasons is because as a Malaysian citizen, I am second class. The Bumis (Bumiputra) will always have the first choice. I feel like just by being out here (U.S.), the Malaysian government already has written me off. Just look at how they handle people who are renewing their passports. They don't give them a document when they hold their passports. So, if anyone asks them for national ID (identification), they have nothing. They don't give you any piece of paper to say "This person came here legally, we the Embassy have their passport." Hah, at one point it was held for six months. I felt very insecure. And the U.S. now is so paranoid about terrorism. What happens if they question a Malaysian who has no passport on hand? As a U.S. citizen, at least I know that they will get pissed off if something happens to their citizens.

Malaysia's affirmative action policy that gives preferential treatment to *Bumiputra* explains why someone like Ai Mee felt like she wanted pursue her American citizenship for the long term sake. In addition, Kong Ming felt that he was treated unfairly even though he was born in Malaysia and was a citizen from birth. Similar to what Ai Mee felt, Kong Ming also believed that he was treated as a second class citizen in Malaysia because of his non-*Bumiputra* status. He is of Chinese ethnicity whose

ancestors immigrated to Malaysia from China, like most Chinese immigrants who first came to Malaysia at the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for trade and other work during the British colonization of Malaysia, as discussed in Literature Review (UNESCO, n.d.; Skeldon, 2000). Kong Ming, aged 50, was one of the Malaysian-born migrants who is now a naturalized U.S. citizen, and lived in the east coast of the U.S. when he was interviewed. The decision to live in the U.S. and become a U.S. citizen came years after his pursuit of graduate education in the U.S. To Kong Ming, the freedom and equality as a citizen in Malaysia was of importance and he gave his reason why he chose to live in the U.S.:

Kong Ming (Chinese): I think one reason is the freedom. I think U.S.A. is a lot freer than in Malaysia. In Malaysia, I always felt like a second class citizen. Malaysian government discriminates against some people which I really, really resent that. In fact, I thank the U.S. for giving me a second chance. To understand that, when you are treated as a second class citizen, or even third class citizen, and when you were young and you felt you did not have much hope to advance yourself, then at least that is how I felt, you know, it was just not a good feeling.

What could have contributed to Ai Mee and Kong Ming's claim is the preferential treatment based on ethnic differences and treatment of second-class citizenship even though they were born in Malaysia and held Malaysian citizenship (Nonini, 1997; Ong & Nonini, 1997). Moreover, feeling like a second-class citizen is not an isolated scenario, as it was also reported in the media what others have felt. For example, a Wall Street Journal article noted that many Malaysians of the Chinese and Indian ethnicities emigrated to another country have felt that they were being treated as second-class citizens and did not have the opportunity to compete on a level playing field in business, education and government (Malott, 2011).

Although the interviews provided a window to open discussion about concern of accessibility to, and placement in local universities in Malaysia due to affirmative action

policies, the participants in this study did not specifically state that the lack of opportunity to get into a local university or opportunity to a program of their choice in the local university as reasons why they chose to study in the U.S. For instance, Siew Ling did not specifically say that she did not manage to get placement into the local university. However she was aware of the obstacles and chances of getting into one:

Siew Ling (Chinese): I think the brain drain was affected by the affirmative action to some extent, and there was no loyalty to go back to a country that didn't give the Chinese (in Malaysia) a fair chance at a good education. Oh wow, I've been so out of the loop.... I wonder were there still as many Chinese leaving the country for higher education after the abolishment of the quota? So then the abolishment of the quota may have done some good in addressing the brain drain problem.

In The World Bank report on Malaysia's Brain Drain (2011), the sense of social injustice in Malaysia is so rampant that it becomes one of the major factors people consider when it comes to the decision to emigrate. Social injustice is experienced through the disproportionate opportunities such as access to scholarships and higher education especially among the college-going and young population (The World Bank, 2011).

5.2.3.2. Who do you know?

Another aspect of social injustice is getting preferential treatment or special favors due to connections with someone of a certain status. Although this is related to social capital (what resources are available) and social network (who do you know), I would like to highlight it under the social justice perspective because it shows how social injustice can happen simply due to one's connection or another person's status.

For example, Sebastian noted that when someone gets a job or wins a contract due to her or his connections, it was unfair as it did not necessarily mean that person has the experience or qualifications to do the job well, and that could be disadvantageous:

Sebastian (Indian): You know, at least in U.S., even though you might win a deal because of your connection, but you still can deliver what you are asked to do. But in Malaysia, it is not like that, right? Yes, you got a 'connection,' but I still cannot do it, I don't care. And they can't even perform the job. You know, so, then they have to find somebody else to do for them, right? I mean, sometimes they don't even find the right person, then the whole project is screwed up. You are paying tax dollars, and you see all these projects getting wasted.... tax payers' money and the government's... I don't know, it is frustrating, that's all.

Sebastian pointed out that when a contract was given to someone because of that person's connection, or because that person knows somebody who is in the authority to give the contract, not because that someone can do the job required of that contract, it is only a disservice done for the country. In his opinion, jobs should be given to qualified contractors based on reference, experience and knowledge, instead of the preferential treatment because it has become an issue of social injustice.

One of the more specific connections echoed by the participants is the association with a *Datuk*. Malaysia has a system of titles and honorifics. *Datuk* is a non-hereditary, honorary and life title bestowed by state and federal governments to individuals with outstanding public service who have contributed significantly to the nation or state (Hooker, 2003, p. 290). A few participants noted that one would get a job based on her or his connection to a *Datuk*. A few participants reflected on their own questions when relating to how people in Malaysia can get ahead, such as, “*Who do you know? Do you know a Datuk? Is your dad a Datuk? Are you related to a Datuk or someone from a political party?*” Some participants have an aversion to the idea of people who could get

‘somewhere’ whether in education or jobs, when they know a *Datuk*, are connected or related to one.

Mawar (Malay/Bumiputra): Oh yes, of course, there is a brain drain, even the Malays are migrating. You know, even with the whole affirmative action, but if you don't know Datuk so and so, you just can't get anything done. Unless your family is rich or knows 'somebody' ...it is pretty hard, I think. I was thinking of joining the Malaysian Foreign Service. Typically you cannot proceed based on merit, in foreign service, they look at your age, they said oh you are only 35. Age, and also if you know 'someone,' you know.

Minah (Malay/Bumiputra): Well, if they, the Malaysian government policies, are not so rigid...and not use politics in career wise too much. Like, you need to know someone important to get ahead in your career.

Ai Mee (Chinese): I must say I do not have a good impression of corporate life in Malaysia. Not that American corporate life is not political, but there seems to be more of a system to doing things, the feeling I get back home (in Malaysia) is that it is more based on relationships. Who you know? And I'm not a very good people person.

These statements above are from participants from all the three major ethnic groups --Sebastian - Indian; Mawar and Minah - Malay/Bumiputra; Ai Mee - Chinese, and they were living in the United States during the interview. Their ethnicity did not seem to influence how they feel about the notion of securing a job through connections with someone higher up, or with a *Datuk*. However, they gave their opinions of such treatments and special favors, and each critiqued the unfairness of jobs or contracts being given to people who know ‘somebody’ or are connected to ‘somebody’ who is influential.

A daughter of a *Datuk*, Khatijah was among the participants in this study. While the previous participants provided their opinions as observers and did not identify themselves as having any connection to *Datuk*, Khatijah provided her personal experience:

Khatijah: I think part of the other thing is, it is different sense of growing up, and different sense of maturing when you know that you have gotten to where you are today because of your own efforts. In Malaysia, especially in the town and state where my parents live, my parents are influential enough that sometimes you can't separate, whether you got a job because of your qualification, or you got a job because someone wants to butter up your dad. Sometimes you question your own self. When I was applying for the scholarship, at the interview, they asked me who my parents were, and the interviewer said, oh I know her mom and her dad and so and so, they do this, this, this. And then you step back and think, you got the scholarship because of my parents' work or you got the scholarship because of merit?

Khatijah asserted that it is quite typical in Malaysia to be given special favors when you are associated or related to someone who is a *Datuk*. However, she made a point that, personally, she wanted to prove that she could still achieve great results on her own and wanted to feel the empowerment given to her through her own hard work and effort. She further emphasized that hard work pays, whether or not one is a daughter of a *Datuk*:

*Khatijah: I think it is a lot more common in Malaysia than it is here in the U.S. So there is a different sense of self worth and a different value to the fact that I did a master's degree, I paid all by myself. But I got into the program by my own merit, got into a Ph.D. program, you know, my husband has gotten so far he is now without having to rely on being the son-in-law of this *Datuk* or whatever, you know. Where else if I am in Malaysia, it would be oh yeah, she is this *Datuk's**

daughter. The benefits come from who my parents are, not because of what I deserve or what my merits are. I value my accomplishment so much more, because I know it is my sweat. I've gotten to where I am now, not because it was given to me, because somebody wanted a favor from this Datuk or that Datin (Datin is the wife of a Datuk). You know, I think, there is a different stance here and the network that I have here, are networks that I have built, that I have to nurture myself.

While getting ahead due to connections with someone influential could happen anywhere in the world, imagine this as a reason that pushed people out of their country of origin to seek opportunities elsewhere - in a totally new environment, a whole new other country where they may be faced with possibly other types of obstacles such as assimilation issues in the new community and country. Yet, there are people who preferred to take this chance in a new country, such as the U.S. for their merits to be recognized rather than to live in Malaysia only to see the well-connected progress while their own hard work of attaining the credentials and academic qualifications go nowhere because they do not brush shoulders with a *Datuk*, or someone influential in the society. In other words, special favors should not be given to people without the proper credentials or experience because of who they know, as it contributes further to the feeling of social injustice in Malaysia.

5.2.3.3. Gendered injustice

Social injustice also happens when there are more limitations, implicit or explicit, placed on women because of their gender. Sexism is defined as “the systematic oppression of women on institutional, cultural and individual levels” (Hackman, 2010, p. 316). Peer pressure and societal expectations in Malaysia further emphasize the limitations enforced by the society.

For example, one of the participants, a single Malay woman who chose to live in the U.S., believed that the Malaysian society tends to be judgmental of women, especially if they are single:

Minah: My parents thought it was ambitious (to live in the U.S.). I enjoy my life right now, as a single woman. In a western world, I don't think anyone judges too quickly. But if I were back in Malaysia, it would be a different story. You could be successful, rich, etc. but people still judge you if you are single.

In addition, Siew Ling who was married and lived in the west coast of the U.S when the interview concurred stated:

Siew Ling: I think the ability for women to advance themselves without the whole protocol or culture thing was also important to me. Here (in the U.S.A), I felt that the sky is the limit. If I were in Malaysia, I imagine I would always have to be aware of politics, gender and culture issues.

According to Siew Ling's observation, it seems like it was difficult for women to advance in careers in Malaysia. Historically, women all over the world are discriminated against, exploited or oppressed. Bernstein (2010) found that the majority of the problems associated with discrimination against women are because of the society's acceptance of the norm that men and women work in the largely sex-segregated occupations. Moreover, people use the label 'feminine' to insult men, which tend to bring down the status of women in society (Hackman, 2010, p.317). In other words, due to historical oppression and societal expectations of what the women's role should entail, Malaysian women too, may have a lot of challenges climbing the career ladder.

Rozzeta expressed that she was used to the environment and system in the U.S. and likes what she sees. She shared about what she sees as a push factor from Malaysia:

Rozzeta: I don't know, in Malaysia, some of my cousins, I don't know in Chinese community same or not, but in Malay community, wow, women cannot do these certain things because women are not as smart as men. My parents brought me up that men and women are equal. Even though we lived in kampung (village), my parents are very open-minded. I believe in that, I came here (U.S.), the first thing I see, you know, my God...people treat men and women equal.

One reason why men and women are not treated equally in Malaysia can be explained by a more general definition of gender as a social institution. Lorber (2010) attests that the division of labor in society is sometimes based on gender, race and ethnicity known as ascribed membership in a category of people. Moreover, what Rozzeta said touched upon the influence of religion in gendered injustice. The rising influence of Islam in Malaysia and the expectations of Muslims following the *Syariah*/Islamic laws matter to the gendered opportunities in Malaysia because it may affect the overall gender equality of women in Malaysia. As discussed in Literature Review, although women's status in Malaysia has made improvements since the early 1990's, women still remain unequal to men in measure of economic participation, opportunity and political empowerment (p. xi, UNDP, 2007; World Economic Forum, 2010). This is mainly due to the existence of the dual legal systems of civil law and multiple versions of *Syariah* law (Islamic law) which contribute to discrimination against women, particularly in the fields of marriage and family relations. Although Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, and Muslims form the largest single religious group (CEDAW, 2004, p.2), it is not mandatory for non-Malays to embrace Islam in Malaysia.

Women may have the freedom to work, however what they do may be affected, since some states in Malaysia have state-imposed restrictions based on the *Syariah* law, which would apply to everyone, not only Muslims. A news report showed that one of the states in Malaysia (Kelantan) prohibits women salon workers from cutting the hair of men, and vice versa regardless of religion (The Star, 2012, November 23). This shows

that that the influence of Islam does matter to the aspects of gendered opportunities in Malaysia.

5.2.4. Freedom perspectives

One of the main themes that emerged in this study is the notion of freedom, as one of the determining factors in a migration decision. This theme comes with substantial focus on a variety of freedom -- from the freedom of speech to the freedom of clothing choice, to religious freedom and freedom as a citizen. The participants in this study painted a picture of Malaysia as a country with deficiencies in the areas of freedom within the cultural norm of the society as well as the country's censorship policies and laws such as the Printing Press Act (media and speech), Universities and University College Act (Malaysian university students), *Syariah* laws (for Muslims) and Internal Security Act (threat to the country, government or ruler), to name a few.

This notion of freedom has also been found among transnational students in Fong's (2011) research of Chinese students in their quest for flexible citizenship in developed countries. She found that many of the transnational students in her study wanted to go abroad to experience and gain different kinds of freedom. Particularly relevant to the Malaysian students is their quest for "freedom to pursue a personal lifestyle in which one is free from competition, gossip, expectations, obligations, and constraints associated with social relationships" (Fong, 2011, p. 170).

5.2.4.1. Choice of clothing

As noted above, many women face oppression and discrimination because of their gender. One of the issues of sexism includes the freedom and lack of freedom to choose what to wear. Botkin, Jones and Kachwaha (2007) argue that sexism influences one's choice of what to wear, where, "restrictions ranging from open and safe expressions, physical safety, clothing preferences, control over one's own body, physical movement,

relationship choices, and sexuality are limitations imposed by cultural standards and enforced in private spaces” (p. 176). The interview excerpts below show the female participants’ concerns about their personal freedom to choose what to wear and when, on top of how they felt about being judged based on what they wear. Khatijah who was working in the U.S.A., explained how her freedom to choose what to wear is restricted or considered a taboo by her Muslim family members, especially the elders, when she visited Malaysia. She explained how the issue of freedom to choose what to wear is mediated by her Muslim husband:

Khatijah: Often I went home to stay with my husband’s family (in Malaysia) for two weeks, three years ago. That was rough because it was constantly, you can’t wear that, you don’t leave the house with that.³² And that even came after careful thought. But my husband and I have to go through what was appropriate and what was not appropriate. And granted we have been living apart (from family in Malaysia) for so long we tend to forget what is appropriate...really appropriate, and on the verge of appropriate. So what we thought was appropriate was on the verge of appropriate (to our family back in Malaysia), to his very traditional family it was totally not appropriate. Even my mother will periodically say, “You are not going out wearing that, are you?”

As echoed strongly by Mawar, an immigrant who is now a naturalized American citizen, freedom is the most important thing to her as she makes that decision to live in the U.S.:

Mawar: (In the U.S.) I can be free to be myself. I can wear whatever I want, you know, I can wear shorts, and not have the neighbor or everyone talks about me.

³² There are many definitions to dressing appropriately, for example, it is expected that if one were to visit government offices such as the post office or places of religious activities such as the mosque or temples, a stricter dress code is adhered. For example, a woman must not be too revealing when they are at these places.

Siew Ling who was living in the U.S. during the interview, also emphasized the freedom for clothes choices especially when she goes back to Malaysia.

Siew Ling: Every time I go home (Malaysia), I have to wear clothes that cover up, and I have to be aware and careful of pick pockets and mugging, safety is such a concern!

While Khatijah and Mawar are both Malays and Muslim, Siew Ling is of Chinese ethnicity. The similarity among the three is that they are women, and live in the U.S., and that they are concerned about how the society perceives and feels about their attitudes on choice of clothing. This societal expectation of how women in Malaysia should dress creates a level of anxiety even though these participants only went to Malaysia for visits. Perhaps this was due to the general perception of how women in Malaysia should act and dress. The difference is that for Muslim women in Malaysia, the society expects them to comply with the Islamic/*Syariah* laws where they have to maintain modesty by wearing clothes that cover all of their body except the hands and feet. Some Muslim women wear a head scarf. Although choice of clothing is typically optional in Malaysia, there are still certain expectations placed upon women in the Muslim community, with different expectations for single and married women, and which Malaysian state they are in. Some states are stricter and have laws that govern the clothing requirements, for example as given above, in the state of Kelantan.

Omar and Che Dan (2006) noted that the construction of “Islamic Malaysia” through national declarations by the government officials has influenced Malaysian policies to embed Islamic principles with its goal of improving the Malaysian society, specifically the Malay-Muslim society (p.44). Throughout the years, the government has campaigned to declare Malaysia as an Islamic country by promoting Islamic values in the work ethics in Malaysia, as well as documents launched to promote a “civilized society” through the inclusion of Islam in practices and policies (Omar & Che Dan, 2006, p.44). According to the researchers, the influence of Islam affects many Malay women who

conform to the prescribed gendered divisions of power that reflect the patriarchal values promoted by the society. These women conform to the notions of femininity within the Malay society.

Omar and Che Dan (2006) stated that:

In the celebration of 'Islamic femininity' through Islamic dress whereby the *hijab*, represented simply by adorning the *tudung* or the headscarf and now a common sight in Malaysia, is worn by majority of Malay women. The increased visibility of women wearing the *tudung* in the media, by political leaders, religious figures, pop stars and others may be perceived as a manifestation of the construction of the 'ideal Malay/Muslim woman' within the context of modern-day Islamic Malaysia: she is one who celebrates her femininity without transgressing religious boundaries, and who also plays active roles in modern society. (p.49)

Along the same lines, choice and preference of clothing is one of the cultural elements that promote the issue of sexism, or the discrimination of women. Women felt the need to conform to expectations of family and society when it comes to choice of clothing, whether it is communicated to these women, or simply implied because of societal pressure. According to Losh (2003), conformity is defined as the situation when an individual accepts the social influence of a particular behavior due to the need to get approval and support, to seek social harmony, or to avoid disapproval and rejection. It is affected by the motivation and norm of the society (Losh, 2003). The symbolic meaning connected to the clothing styles is established only after social interaction takes place and is transferred to the woman who was wearing those clothes (Miller et al.,1993). For the female participants in this study, they could choose to ignore what others said or implied, but they cannot be oblivious of the Malaysian society's expectations and practice when they were in Malaysia. In a way, they do not want to feel like an 'outsider' in Malaysia; what Khatijah and Siew Ling said showed that they still wanted to be part of the society even though they have chosen to live in the U.S. permanently. Although some women in

this study who live in U.S. looked at this angle as lack of freedom for clothing preferences in Malaysia, it does symbolize some degree of freedom they have in the U.S., something which is lacking in Malaysia.

On the other hand, the female participants in Malaysia did not discuss this as a problem for them. There are some possible reasons why it was not discussed. One is that they may have become accustomed to the way of life and dressing in Malaysia that they do not make the conscious effort to differentiate what they would have worn in the U.S. versus in Malaysia. In other words, people take for granted of what they have been accustomed to. Conversely, for immigrants who live in the U.S. and then visit Malaysia, the stark contrast on the reaction people get with their liberal clothing preferences raises a concern for them. This issue would make them wonder if they could ever get used to the lack of freedom if they were to return and live in Malaysia. While it might not be discussed openly as a problem in Malaysia, participants in this study who have lived both in Malaysia and in the U.S. could see the difference in how the Malaysian society at large and their own community would judge a woman based on how she dresses. And while they could still choose to wear clothes they want, they would first need to consider what is appropriate and acceptable by their family, and society. They did not want to wear something that is deemed inappropriate and disgraceful that will bring shame to the family, even during their short visit to Malaysia. That act itself is a reminder of what freedom is and is not.

5.2.4.2. Religious freedom

Although the participants in this study come from different ethnic groups and different religious backgrounds, a few of them discussed their opinions about religion in terms of freedom to choose what to believe in, what to embrace, and the disconnectedness of their identity today with what that would be expected of them if they were living in Malaysia. In general, they consider religious freedom as something they should have a say in, and did not want to feel obligated due to family, societal pressure,

or the law. They shared their exposure to the other cultures and religious celebrations in the U.S.A., and felt reluctant to be part of the conventional beliefs espoused by the religion they were brought up in.

Minah: As a Muslim, I realized that religion is my own thing and nothing to do with anyone else. Sometimes, I celebrate Halloween and Christmas, for the fun of it. Technically we are not allowed to, if I were in Malaysia. For Chinese, they don't have much advantages as the Malay people. And for Malays, they need to raise their family as Muslims. So, it is kind of one-sided. No freedom.

Wei Aun: Another thing about Bay Area and perhaps U.S. in general, I am free to be less religious here, unlike in Malaysia. On the family front, my dad wants me to go to church, but I have in fact stopped believing but I have not the guts to tell him. My family is quite religious, but I do not share that anymore.

Mawar: I am not a typical Malay. I always question religion and all that. So, studying in Malaysia was difficult for me because of, you know, I try to. I tried ITM (Institute Teknologi MARA). Then I quit. I just couldn't, coz it is just... it is very, very Malay. I am just not. I don't believe in the whole "pakai tudung" thing (wearing the head scarf as an optional head dress code for Muslim women). Why do I need to explain to someone why I am not praying, or why I am not covering my head to toe? So, that was very difficult.

Mawar expressed difficulty adjusting to the rules of being born a Muslim. She felt that she could not share her feelings about those difficulties about embracing the religion to anyone for fear of persecution. She further expressed her concern:

Mawar: Although when I go home (to Malaysia) I try to meet with them, my siblings and friends, but I have to be careful not to say anything about religion. And for a long time, I was very careful, because I was still a Malaysian citizen

and I didn't want to be detained, and put into rehab, goes into Syariah court. So now I am more open, more relaxed, because I am an American citizen. I don't have to worry about that.

Mawar felt the tremendous pressure to conceal who she was as her identity and beliefs may have evolved throughout the years, and she is now more used to the different and new cultures due to her life experience as a student in the U.S. and as a spouse to an American citizen. She further explained why she liked living in the U.S. and why she chose U.S. as her *home*:

Mawar: I like the fact that religion is not brought into class, unless you are learning in world religion. I don't like it to be incorporated into the schedule. I don't like people asking you so do you pray....are you fasting... hey, why aren't you covering your hair? And here (U.S.A), it doesn't matter, and they accept you, you know. They don't ask you. Well, rarely they will ask you like what are you? I think that's probably the most important thing for me.

Along the same lines, Khatijah talked about the constraints of the religious practice, and how she felt growing up in Malaysia, as well as why she preferred living in the U.S.:

Khatijah: I always have trouble growing up in Malaysia because I didn't like the constraints that were placed on me. For example, I was raised a Muslim. And my parents are Muslims, and they are very devout Muslims. But religion never really mattered very much for me. Yet, the constraints of religion, the constraints of the Malay community, and they made growing up for me very difficult. I mean, like, listening to, you can't do that, you are a bad person, because you do that. Sometimes it makes you question who you are. And here (in the U.S.A.), there's nobody to tell me that I can't do that or I should do that, or it is expected of me to do that.

Khatijah further clarified that as a Muslim woman, there are also certain protocols to be followed, however, she noted that if her husband felt it was appropriate, then it would not be questioned by the other members of the family. In regards to the definition of what is considered appropriate clothing as covered by another section earlier, Khatijah further explained that as a Malay and Muslim, if her husband thinks it is alright, then it should be accepted by others as well:

Khatijah: Well, I am a bit different because in the Malay...and especially in the Islamic tradition somewhat, the burden of ensuring that things are appropriate falls on the husband. So you know, nowadays, it is a lot easier, I think, in a way with what my husband has to deal with. I think, you know my (unmarried) sister has run into the same problem. You know my sister likes to wear T-shirts and shorts, and we were on family vacation and she came out in shorts, and my mom was like, "You are not wearing that!" And she is like, "But big sister is wearing shorts!" And my mom said, "Well, her husband said it is okay."

5.2.4.3. Freedom in making friends

Rozzeta is a Malay woman who is a naturalized U.S. citizen living in California. She provided a comparative view how the ethnicity factor into the realms of making friends in Malaysia, and how the society perceives a divergent view when it comes to making friends with someone of a different ethnicity.

Rozzeta: Oh yeah another thing you know in Malaysia, I grew up with my friends, Chinese and Indian. Most of my friends are Chinese and Indian. On the weekend, we go to each other's house, I go to their house, they came to my house. We ate and we talked. Their parents know me, and my parents know them. I expect everybody was like that until I met somebody from other school, in Malaysia. We were all like brothers and sisters. Even now when I went back to Malaysia, my Chinese friend my Indian friend came to my house. With their

family, with their husband, with their wife. My best friend lives in Santa Clara. She is Chinese, she came and stayed with me, overnight, with kids. Kids just enjoyed, called me auntie, Auntie Rozzeta..... hugging me. You know these Malay people(in Malaysia) just ask, "How can you do that?"

Rozzeta explained how discriminatory reaction was common in Malaysia as she stepped out of her comfort zone, out of her own community or village:

Rozzeta: Malay in Malaysia, they cannot believe that Chinese, Indian and Malay can be friends, brothers and sisters. Even not just Malay, even Chinese, my friend who works in the same company as me. He is from Melaka. This Chinese is from Melaka, he said to me, "I never heard anything like this before, Rozzeta." And then I met him and met his wife. Finally he realized that, he said "....because in Malaysia, at work you nice to each other, but that is it. After work you don't mix anymore." So you know, I guess Malaysia, because some of my friends in Malaysia said it is not like that anymore.

The subtle strain between and among the different ethnic groups in Malaysia could be caused by the affirmative action approach that has the preferential treatment based on ethnicity. Arachi (2006) stated that that the affirmative action that favors the majority *Bumiputra* in Malaysia has always implied that the minorities especially of the Chinese, Indian and other ethnic groups, have only limited access to pursue higher education in the racial quota-based public universities as well other opportunities such as business, contracts and housing. This has created other unintended consequences at the personal level, because social injustice was magnified between and among the ethnic groups. Now they see each other as their competitors rather than their peers, and with everyone wanting a piece of the pie, it was no surprise that being friends with someone of another ethnicity was not easy and are sometimes being frowned upon.

5.2.4.4. Freedom from family

Fong's (2011) study finds that the transnational Chinese students in her study liked being abroad for another type of freedom: freedom from parents and relatives. Because of the distance, their parents, relatives and friends in China had little contact with them, therefore the likelihood of them being pressured is minimized. In a sense, it is "an escape from the web of social obligations woven by their friends, family members, co-workers, and relatives" (Fong, 2011, p. 171). This similar experience was felt by Wei Aun who talked about the liberty of being away from his parents as a young graduate living in the U.S.:

Wei Aun: I think I'm at that age where I want to be independent and not be nagged, or have to answer to my parents all the time. People are generally very liberal here, which suits me well.

One factor that is very important to any young individual is freedom, and being very far away from parents means exactly that. In the U.S., it is a common practice that children above the age of 18 who are unmarried move out to live on their own. In Malaysia, however, it is quite common for unmarried children above 18 to still live with their parents (personal experience). Sometimes, even when they are married, they still live with their parents -- this could be especially so because of the expectations to take care of parents in their old age, which is discussed further in the section on major considerations to repatriate. Therefore it is an assumption that if Wei Aun were to return to Malaysia, he might live with his parents or live close by, hence the feeling of lack of freedom. Even if his parents gave him the liberty to do whatever he wants, the close proximity of his parents could have given him the impression that freedom is still monitored. Malaysia is a small country, how far can one live away from their parents in order to enjoy the freedom?

5.2.5. Social network and social capital

“Whereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts, and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationship.”

(Portes, 1998b, p. 7)

While social capital is the ability to gain access to resources by being a member of a particular social network; the network is explained as a set of connections that may hold resources coming from the shared interests and made available to its members (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). As discussed in Literature Review, social capital encompasses the resources and support that migrants get during their immigration process from members of a social network. Social capital represents the resources and support that are provided by family members, relatives, friends, and members of a network to help in the migration process. One thing that stood out is the notion of social capital through family and kinship networks, which were argued by Iosifides et al. (2007). The researchers examined the role that various forms of social capital play in the social, economic and institutional assimilation of Albanian immigrants in Greece and focused on the importance of social capital that involves family, kinship, ethnic and other social networks when it comes to decisions of the immigrants’ life paths in Greece (Iosifides et al., 2007). The researcher found that social capital is essential to decision making in immigration. Since family ties and kinship network play such an important role in one’s decision to choose to settle down in a foreign country, the same principle can also be considered when it is a decision for Malaysian graduates to choose either to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after attaining their graduate degree. I argue that the significance of social capital could work both ways for the participants, for one to make that decision to remain in the U.S. or to make that decision to return to their home country, Malaysia. For instance, when the social capital (benefits and support) and social network (relationships and ties) are more prominent in Malaysia than in the U.S. for that individual, the decision to return to Malaysia will be more likely. The significance of

family influence, the responsibility of taking care of family, and influence of friends are explored in the next section.

5.2.5.1. Family influence

Family ties and kinship network play an important role in one's decision to choose to settle down in a foreign country because they have access to the resources and assistance to help with the assimilation to the new culture and new environment (Iosifides et al., 2007). As stated earlier, the same theory can also be considered when it is a decision for individuals to choose either to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after attaining the degree they set out to pursue in the U.S. There are findings that show that the higher the social capital, the more likelihood one would immigrate to the foreign country due to the fact that they have the help and resources to help them settle down and assimilate (Portes, 2009). In particular, the experience and knowledge of others who have previously undertaken the same migratory journey could be the social capital of a prospective migrant, if he is a member of this social network (Portes, 2009). Thus, the role of social networks in maintaining the continuity of cross-border labor migration is crucial especially for labor migration because social capital, as made available through such social networks, helps lower the costs and uncertainty of the migration (Portes, 2009, p. 7). Having social capital through social networks in the foreign country means that one would have the resources to help with assimilation to the foreign and new environment. Therefore, having the social capital and social network in Malaysia, such as family and friends would also influence one to return to Malaysia. The following quotes demonstrate how family, which is part of one's social network, could be a strong influence in one's decision making process.

As discussed in Chapter Four under the personal perspective of turning points, Michael explained that he had to work in Singapore due to a contract for the scholarship from the Singaporean government. He went to Singapore to work to fulfill that bond after he graduated with his master's degree from the U.S. However, he eventually broke

the bond and returned to Malaysia. When I asked him the main reason to return to Malaysia, he talked about wanting to be geographically closer to his family and to explore work opportunities in Malaysia. Although Singapore is Malaysia's immediate neighbor, Michael's return to Malaysia to be closer to family after being away from them for almost a decade shows that family plays a vital role in his decision making process.

Lily had a similar stance:

Lily: Besides scholarship, mainly because of family. My family has gone through some issues and difficulties in the few years I was away. Since it has been 7 years that I was gone, I felt that I really should come back and participate in my family's life again. That was the other part of the consideration.

The family, including the extended families, plays a pivotal role in the social structure. Children are expected to care for their parents as they grow old or become incapable of taking care of themselves. Here we could see that Malaysians preserve hierarchical relationships that can be observed in the social relationships not only between the parents and the children, but also between teachers and students, as well as between employers and employees. Therefore, not surprisingly, the parents of some participants have an expectation that their children finish their degree and return to Malaysia to take care of them, or to live close by as opposed to living in the United States, or elsewhere.

One of the participants interviewed in this study had future plans after she completed her undergraduate degree, though the plans were not necessarily shared with her parents because she did not want to disappoint her parents. Salina's parents have expected her to return to Malaysia upon graduating, however she shared her other plans:

Salina: Well, they (my family) definitely wanted me to come back after my undergraduate. And that was in 1998. That was right after the financial crisis,

and so I got deferment from my scholarship. They (scholarship provider) said I didn't have to come back (to Malaysia) to work. Their requirement is that to work for ten years, to serve a bond. And since it was 1998, I asked for a deferment, and they said okay for two years to work in New York. And when that was over, I still didn't want to come back because I know I still wanted to get my MBA. And the best work experience will be in the U.S. In terms of answering your question, my parents definitely expected me to come back, after graduation, but then I stayed for two years. The government-owned organization which provided my scholarship also, you know, told me that my postponement was over and that I had to come back to work in Malaysia as well. But I, basically at that point, cancelled my scholarship and started repaying that government-owned organization. And then decided to stay on in the U.S. and work for a couple more years before applying for business school. At that point in time, no, they (my parents) didn't know about my plan (to study for an MBA). So, every year, I kind of evaluate when it is that I am ready to go back (to Malaysia). And the three-to-five year plan, was kind of based also on financial reasons, because I knew I was going to be taking a pay cut going to work in Malaysia as opposed to staying in the U.S. I financed 90% of my MBA myself through loans, in the U.S.

Even though Salina had her own plans about staying in the U.S., and evaluated her options every year as she discussed about, she eventually returned to Malaysia after she completed her MBA in the U.S. Similarly Rozzeta, who is now a U.S. citizen, also talked about her parents' expectations of her to return to Malaysia after finishing her higher education.

Rozzeta: Well, of course they wanted me to finish my study (undergraduate) and go home. For graduate, the same thing, you know, they're hoping that I would finish it and then go back to Malaysia.

Expectations from parents echoed in this study show that the influence from family does not go unnoticed. Even though for some participants, their parents were the main financial resource during the undergraduate and sometimes the graduate pursuit, their financial support was not a major influencing factor for them when it came to making the decision to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after the attainment of their graduate degree. While the scholarship recipients were obligated due to the contract they signed with the government, or a private scholarship provider; those who received financial support did not say they feel obligated to their parents; however, they were still aware of their family expectations. Asked what their family's expectations were, when it comes to the decision to stay in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia:

Sujitha: They just said, "do well." They never said that "you have to come back or you have to stay there." Even then in graduate school they supported me. I just said that I wanted to finish my master's. And that took a while, it is just I was doing it part-time. And even after I was done, I was still working and they were supportive.

Alvin : I think my parents yes, they would like me to go back, they probably expected me to go back after I took my undergrad. For the graduate degree, I think they probably hope that I would still go back, but they probably knew that it would be maybe slightly less likely. I guess they would prefer that I go back home, so that they can see me more often... but then you know once they started seeing that I was having a better life here and I could send money home, so I guess they thought okay, there is a good side to this as well, provided that I go home at least once a year or so.

Sometimes parents make their children stay away and not to return to Malaysia. Ai Mee, for example, shared that her mother has hoped that she would be able to stay in the U.S. like her aunt did.

Ai Mee: Well, my mother's sister came to the U.S. for a long time, about ten years, when I was still a kid. My mother, I guess, didn't really have any expectations. She hoped I would be able to stay (in the U.S.), but would have been happy to have me home (in Malaysia) as well. I know she misses me a lot. Most of my decisions regarding work and education after that, I made on my own, and my parents just provided their support.

Ai Mee's mother has, in a way, influenced her thinking about remaining in the U.S. This could be related to earlier discussion of why parents and family pushed their children to study abroad and to remain abroad. The Malaysian society puts a lot of emphasis in education, academic competitiveness and excellence, and like many of those in Asia, this is possibly related to the honor and name for the family. Some of the members of the Malaysian society also associate the family status not only with one's academic achievements, but also with where one studies for their higher education and where one works. To be able to graduate from a foreign university and then to get a job in a developed country such as the U.S. will definitely bring pride to the family. Coupled with the anxiety of access to higher education and quality education in Malaysia, many parents wanted their children to have a better life. They equated better life with better economic opportunities and better lifestyle of a developed country versus living in a developing country like Malaysia.

One participant shared her experience she had with her parents who have divergent views from each other about the decision to be abroad or to stay near to them in Malaysia:

Sujitha: Well, they have no expectation. They just want you to finish it on time. My mom is in Malaysia. My parents are in Malaysia. So I think when it came to my parents, there was a big split. My mother was definitely.....she felt that she wanted her children to go abroad because they have better opportunities there, that was her thinking. My father, on the other hand, was completely against the

idea. He wanted to keep everybody at home close. So there was a split actually between the two of them.

Furthermore, Sujitha's mother works in a U.S.-based company in Kuala Lumpur, and was very supportive of her studying and working in the U.S., with the impression that the U.S. would have more opportunities. Sujitha further reflected on her mother's thoughts about going abroad to study and then to work:

Sujitha: It helps to have someone like my mother who is pro-U.S., so it helps to have somebody that encourages you to do that. So you know, you don't feel like a burden when you are going there because you know you have support. I think the support makes it easier, at least emotionally; that I think is a crucial thing for somebody. I have friends that go and study abroad, and then their parents keep saying, "Come back, come back.....even if you get less job satisfaction, just come back, we are here, you know." My dad was not encouraging though, but he never said it, he never said, "Don't go." He ultimately said, "It is your decision." He doesn't want to comment. But my mother is very encouraging, when things were not working well for me in the U.S., she was still telling me that, "No, you know, this is life, it will happen one point or the other, you have to go through it. It is better to go through it there (in the U.S.) than here (Malaysia)."

A similar feedback was given by Sebastian's parents, as follows:

Sebastian: No, the first time (during undergraduate) I think there was no expectation set. The second time (MBA), my mom probably wanted me to stay and work here (U.S.). Anyway, that is the rationale coming back to do my master's, MBA...to stay in U.S. The first time my mom... my parents were indifferent. After working in Malaysia for six years, my mom wanted me to stay in the U.S. after that, so she encouraged me to do my master's and everything. I think she didn't feel very comfortable of what is happening in Malaysia... she had some instincts.

Not surprisingly, there are also instances where parents play a big role in influencing the decision making even if it was made years prior to one finishing that graduate degree, as evidenced by Subramaniam's recollection of what his parents said when he decided to give up a full-time engineering job in Malaysia and to pursue a graduate degree in the U.S.:

Subramaniam: Well, my parents were disappointed. For most Malaysians, Columbia (University) is just a name. So it doesn't matter. So one, it was a difficult experience, and the other was that my parents thought I was making a big mistake. Yeah, because they thought that engineering is a much better job. Generally, they are supporters. Disappointment is one, but they are supporters of my decision. They still give me some money for studies.

The driving force behind the timing of one's decision making is quite complex, and often reflects practical evaluations of employment prospects at the home country, and many other related factors, influenced by the family or extended family. Listening to parents is obviously one of the cultural considerations shown by the participants. Evidence is provided by the following statement from Mawar:

Mawar: Yes, you know, my father, he is very nice. I am the first, I am the eldest, I am a girl, you know, very protective. It is very hard for him to let me go, he was very mad of me because I did not do well in calculus because I am in science stream. And so, he kept saying that you don't qualify. I said no, they don't care about calculus. I can still qualify to go to the States, because he grew up in the British system, he could not get past that, so he kept saying no no no universities in the States would accept you. At that time I was 18. It took me 5 yrs until I was 23, it was very hard, I was brought up in a way like you must listen to your parents. There's a lot of guilt even just to question, it is his decision. I was like.... okay. You need to set good example for your younger siblings and I said okay.

In a way Mawar has provided a clue to the earlier discussion about social capital – resources and support from her social network such as family. Here we see that Mawar’s father could provide her the financial support for her to pursue her degree; however he monitored what he wanted her to study. The above statement is an example of how social capital is needed for Mawar to go overseas to pursue her higher education.

Here is another testament to show that the spouse and the family’s expectation of that decision were highly regarded:

Khatijah: I knew beforehand that I would definitely be staying (in U.S.A). But I also knew it is contingent on how my husband would feel, because my husband has much stronger ties with his family in Malaysia than I do, necessarily. His parents had come visit us once. My parents, they come every year. They have already come here twice... once when my son was born, and a month later. So he (my husband) has stronger ties and roots to his family in Malaysia, that it was a big deal.

As expected in the Asian society, high respect must be given to the elders, especially one’s own parents. These are shown through listening to or obeying them, fulfilling their expectations and taking care of them when they are old. The participants in this study placed what their parents and elders think highly and weighed their decision with them in mind. Even though in most instances they have expressed that it is their own decision and thought process, the mere acknowledgement of how their parents felt, said and reacted, albeit that may have happened many years ago; proposed that their family plays an essential part in their decision making process.

The consideration of family and self in the decision making process whether to stay in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia is complex because there is no one answer that is homogeneous among the participants even though they may share a few similar backgrounds such as the fact that they were born in Malaysia and that they came to the

United States for their graduate degrees. Moreover, even when a decision was made to leave the U.S., it does not imply at all that they definitely would return to Malaysia.

5.2.5.2. Friends

There may not be a lot of social capital for the participants in the U.S. to help them to assimilate to the American culture and life, like what the study of Albanian immigrants were afforded, in Greece (Iosifides et al., 2007). Even when the participants feel they are assimilated to the American life, it does not mean that everything will fall into place easily. For example, they have other social challenges such as difficulty in making new friends. Therefore, the reception of the community in which an immigrant goes to is important because a negative reception could hinder the process of assimilation for that individual. Friends also form a part of the social network, and having friends create that sense of belonging and acceptance in the new and foreign environment. The quotes below also speak to the significance of friendships and difficulty of making non-Malaysian friends in the U.S.:

Bala: When you don't have your family, and maybe a friend around you, you feel a bit alienated (when in the U.S.).

Sebastian: Oh yeah, of course. I think friend, family, and this thing.... It is hard. Sometimes we also debate whether we should go back because you know you just have less friend around. The (San Francisco) Bay area is easier because you have more Malaysians, South East Asians. Study I think, two years.... I never, even in my undergrad, I didn't feel so homesick. No I don't get that feeling. I think when you are studying you feel less, probably when you work you feel it more because when you work, you know, working environment is different, harder to make friends. I think when you are studying it is easier. And obviously when you are studying, people are around the same age group. That could be an issue.

The “issue” that Sebastian was referring to was the significance of friendships, and the difficulty of making non-Malaysian friends in the U.S. While exposure to a new place and environment could be exciting, it could also be a setback when the new environment does not come with new friends that easily. This could also be a reason why more Malaysians migrated to the west coast, such as California, than any other states in the U.S. A quick example of why California comes to mind:

Henry: Grad school was in a big city in mid-west. Asians were the majority there it seemed. I had many Indian friends; plenty at the research lab I worked in. I always love to meet Malaysians and Singaporeans, but from experience, there aren't many around... or maybe I'm not looking hard enough? Maybe if I move to California?

Alvin: So I think having grown up in Malaysia, I am still very much influence by my Asian culture and everything. So I actually didn't do too well at the South (high school). But then I had visited places like California and New York before where there is more Asian food, Asian culture, Asian people and so on. So I felt that these were places if I were to stay on in the U.S. these were places that I could feel comfortable and I could feel somewhat like I was at home. I think that was my thinking along those lines. Basically when I was at grad school, I was deciding whether to go on to academic, to get an academic job, to go for a private sector or a government job. Towards the end, I pretty much decided I was going to go for the finance kind of job. And most of these jobs were located in the big cities... they are mainly either New York City, Boston, San Francisco or Los Angeles. I think those are the places that I would be comfortable living. So I then applied for jobs, and I just happened to get the one in San Francisco.

Henry and Alvin's points are not too far from reality. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security database showed that in 2010 that among the 1,042,625 persons who obtained legal permanent resident (PR) status in the U.S., 40.5 percent (n=422,063) of

them were born in Asia. California was reported as the state of residence for 20 percent (n=208,446) of persons who were granted the legal permanent resident status in 2010 (USDHS, n.d.). Moreover, in 2010 a total of 619,913 persons became naturalized U.S. citizens, and 40.6 percent (n=251,598) of them were born in Asia. Approximately 20.9 percent of the total 619,913 (n=129,354) were naturalized in the state of California, making it the state with the largest percentage of persons naturalizing (USDHS, n.d.). In addition, during the fiscal year 2010, there were a total of 1,714 individuals born in Malaysia who obtained the PR status (USDHS, n.d.). Furthermore, the top three leading states of residence of who are PR and who registered Malaysia as their country of birth are California (n=335), New York (n=281) and Texas (n=185) (USDHS, n.d.). Also, among the 1,211 Malaysian-born migrants who became naturalized American citizens during the fiscal year 2010, the highest number was recorded living in California (n=334) which was more than in any other states (USDHS, n.d.).

However, even if there were more migrants in the west coast, it does not necessarily mean one would have more social capital. As stated by Portes and Rumbaut (2001), having social capital is having the ability to gain access to resources by being a member of a particular social network, and that network is explained as a set of connections that may hold resources coming from the shared interests and made available to its members. Social capital does not depend much on the relative economic or occupational success of immigrants, but it depends more on the extent of network ties among them (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p.65). Therefore, even if there are many migrants in one particular city or state in the U.S., if they do feel any obligation to help each other, it does not help in establishing good social capital (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Similarly, if migrants are located far from each other, social capital is hard to establish. Likewise, even if an individual is a member of a particular social network, for example, at a university or at work, that network may be restricted to only university-related or work-related, and making friends with non-Malaysians is still problematic.

Even if there is financial fulfillment working and living in the U.S., the lack of sense of belonging and friends in the U.S. may be a push factor for them to return to Malaysia. Here are data that showed the significance of friends in their lives.

Rozzeta: Family and friends of course I miss them. Kind of like, sometimes feel lonely here especially at that time I was in graduate school, I did not mix with Malaysians as much.

Minah: I had a little difficulty adjusting in the beginning because I was new to the city and making new friends.

Henry: I would go back. Asian ladies are more appealing to me anyway. I guess I would fit in more. But if talking about standard of living, U.S. is better. I don't have friends in Malaysia anymore... too long ago. Well, I wouldn't just go back to Malaysia for marriage, like meet someone on the Internet and then fly back? I would love to go back and visit my primary schools too I guess. I always have dreams about my childhood places.

We know that participants have learned different strategies to overcome barriers and challenges of being in a new and foreign location. For example, as discussed earlier, international students in the U.S. often face different types of challenges as they transition into a brand new academic and living atmosphere, and this could affect their behavior and psychological well-being in school (Zhou et al., 2011). However, they have to learn ways that would enable them to be successful in their academic journey in the foreign land and this might include having to make friends and connect with other students while in the classroom or at work on campus. Experience in school is associated with their general assimilation in the U.S. As I argued earlier, those who go through the American higher education system as adults can become assimilated in the U.S. mainstream society. This is due to their exposure and experience they got as they

navigate the American higher education institutions and as they try to understand the cultures of the U.S.

Friendships give people the feeling that they belong to a particular social network where they feel accepted by peers and the community. It gives them a sense of belonging. While I do not think these participants would deliberately go out to make friends, they have derived different ways to face challenges in a foreign environment where friends may not come easy. Therefore, even though they might initially feel lonely without many friends in the U.S., I do not think they are totally isolated from the world because one, the advance development of communications and transportation contributed to their ability to keep in touch with family and friends in their home country, and two, if they were really affected in the long run, they would not have remained in the U.S. until now. For instance, among these participants who talked about friendships, or the lack of, Alvin, Henry, Minah, Sebastian and Rozzeta remained in the U.S., while Bala was the only one who returned to Malaysia although his return was not caused by difficulty in making friends in the U.S. While it is not a major consideration for most of the participants, it is one of the factors that a potential migrant will think of when considering whether or not to move to a new place full of strangers or to stay at a place where friendships and social networks have already been established.

The findings also show that friends, in the context of the highly educated individuals like the participants in this study, do not provide the kind of social capital as found in the “connections” that are supposed to be central to one’s opportunity for employment, career advancement mobility and entrepreneurial success (Loury, 1977, as cited in Portes, 1998b, p.12), or the kind of social capital as found in the assimilation of immigrants as demonstrated by Iosifides et al. (2007). The development of transnational identity may have worked in their favor, which has developed through their experiences and interactions within their new society, together with their continued contact with their country of origin (Green & Power, 2005). Although participants in this study are settled in a different national society but they are still engaged in some transnational activities,

for example by using transnational networks in the U.S. such as clubs and associations established by other Malaysian-born migrants, to meet others like them (Malaysian-born) or to celebrate Malaysian holidays and religious celebrations such as the Chinese New Year, *Hari Raya* and *Divali*.

Push and pull factors help us understand the reasons behind the decision to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after attaining the graduate degrees. However, making a decision to repatriate is not a quick or simple one. A person would weigh the pros and cons, at that particular situation, place and time. Moreover, for a Malaysian-born migrant who has developed ‘roots’ in the U.S., it is difficult to just pack up and return to Malaysia, as Malaysia could have become the ‘foreign’ land to them. They might even need to assimilate back to the culture that was once *home* as the environment in Malaysia may have changed significantly for them over the years.

5.3. Research question three: Motivations and reasons for repatriation

The final research question asked what might motivate Malaysian-born migrants to consider repatriating after they have settled in the U.S. Although some of the answers were infused in the previous section, as participants addressed why they returned or did not to return to Malaysia, this section covers those factors that might entice people who have already established their *homes* outside Malaysia, to return to Malaysia. It is important to hear these reflections because the policy makers who plan and implement the strategies and programs to entice Malaysian-born immigrants to repatriate are not the same people who sit on the other side of the fence: the prospective returnees. Understanding the personal thoughts, experience and expectations of the participants in this study could provide insight as to why there may be still gaps in incentive programs, and why there should be a re-examination of the Malaysia’s strategic plans to make them more viable for Malaysian-born migrants to return for both short term and long term stints.

According to the World Bank Report (2011), the Malaysian-born diaspora had 657,000 people all over the world in the year 2000³³. The report stated that Singapore, Malaysia's neighboring country, represented 46 percent of the worldwide diaspora although that was just for the Malaysian-born migrants who were registered as Singaporean residents. The next most popular country is Australia (12%), followed by Brunei (9%), United Kingdom (8%) and the U.S. (8%) -- these four countries accounted for 83 percent of Malaysian diaspora (The World Bank, 2011). More recent data are available on Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S. According to the U.S. Homeland Security website, during the fiscal year 2010, there were 1,714 Malaysian-born migrants who have obtained legal permanent resident (PR) status in the U.S.; and 1,211 Malaysian-born migrants who became naturalized American citizens (USDHS, 2011).

The Malaysian government has established repatriation programs, such as the Brain Gain Program (2006-2010) and TalentCorp programs (2010-present), to attract highly talented Malaysian-born migrants from all over the world to return to Malaysia. The current program, run by TalentCorp provided the following as the benefits: an optional flat tax rate 15 percent for employment income for five years, tax exemption for all personal items brought into Malaysia, foreign spouse or children are eligible to apply for Permanent Resident (PR) status within six months, foreign-born children or children already studying in an international stream overseas are allowed to enroll in any international school in Malaysia, and returnees are eligible to buy two locally-assembled vehicles, tax-free (TalentCorp Malaysia, 2012). The benefits, as listed on the TalentCorp's website, do not seem address the fundamental issues that represented the push factors in Malaysia such as concerns about policies, meritocracy, opportunities, safety concern, high cost of living, and quality higher education in Malaysia. The Malaysian-born individuals who are already PR and naturalized U.S. citizens have chosen the U.S. as their residence. With the many push and pull factors that resulted in

³³ According to the World Bank report, the year 2000 is the most recent year that information (where the Malaysian diaspora is located around the world) is consistently available across all the countries to provide a comprehensive illustration. These countries where the diaspora is spread out are Singapore, Australia, Brunei, U.S., United Kingdom, Canada, Hong Kong, India, New Zealand and other countries.

their decision to live in the U.S., what would be the reasons that might make them want to repatriate to Malaysia?

5.3.1. Major considerations to repatriate

5.3.1.1. Family

Family is a strong motivator for Malaysian-born migrants to repatriate. As discussed earlier, the social capital and social network with regards to the influence of the family ties and kinship play a significant role when it comes to the decision about migration. In other words, if one has a higher social capital in Malaysia due to their family ties, kinship network and social network than in the U.S., then they are likely to return to Malaysia. Though this is a strong motivator, it does not always lead to the decision to return especially when there are other variables attached to the decision making process. The influence from the family could also be a determination for repatriation of Malaysian-born migrants who have been living in the U.S. As stated by Salina in the earlier section of push and pull, *“I think generally people come back for the family. That was a big consideration for me as well. I am not tied to the country, I am tied to the family.”* This demonstrates that people do have a sense of responsibility to their family, and they would not hesitate to return to Malaysia if it was due to the family.

One particular factor is the obligation toward their family, especially in taking care of their parents. In the more conservative Asian families, it is a practice and expectation that the grown-up children, especially the son, would be responsible for taking care of their parents. When I probed Alvin about his responsibility, he shared his family’s social responsibility of taking care of their parents:

Alvin (U.S.): I guess I am lucky, in the sense that my parents have four kids and I already have two brothers in Penang (Malaysia) who are taking care of them. I am here, my sister actually married someone from Shanghai (China), so she is in

Shanghai now. That is one of the things they always say to try to get me to go back. But I think we can live with that somehow. That is going on now (brothers caring for parents). So, in a sense that if at some point I feel that maybe I should share the burden on something, I may move to Singapore or Hong Kong, so that it is closer to them, and I can fly home on the weekends if I need to. I don't think they would like it here (U.S.). I doubt they will like it here. They may come here and visit, say for a couple of months but I don't think they will want to live here. They don't really feel like home here.

Whereas the senior residence is a common community in the U.S., such a notion, including sending parents to an old folks' home, or a senior citizen community is generally shunned by the Malaysian society as it is considered disrespectful of the ones who raised you and gave you an education. Children are expected to take care of their parents in their old age, and not let them be taken care of by strangers such as in a nursing home, even though most of these children are in fact working and the parents ended up being at their home alone or with a maid in Malaysia.

Salina (Malaysia): I think people generally come back for the family, for family reasons. That was the big consideration for me as well as. I knew I wanted to work outside the U.S., but I would only work in Malaysia, because I wanted to be close to my family and I feel like my parents are getting older and I want to be spend more time with them.

Ai Mee (U.S.): What would bring me back? Old aged- parents, for sure, I think that would be the main thing.

While different countries derive different strategies to win the tug-of-war for human capital and talent, the closeness to the family and the chance to reconnect with one's roots while contributing to the society are influential as considerations to return to the home country. However, there is more to the decision than just the emphasis on filial

piety or worrying about aging parents. Meritocracy and opportunities are also considered another strong factor, in consideration with having the family close by.

5.3.1.2. Meritocracy and opportunities

Different types of opportunities factor into weighing whether or not it is feasible for that individual to repatriate. Like the push and pull factors discussed in an earlier section, opportunities alone are not strong enough as a determinant for someone to repatriate. Meritocracy and opportunities are important factors to include in consideration whether or not to repatriate, as evidenced by those who returned as well as those who remained:

Yusof (Malaysia): I guess one of them would be opportunity, I mean, opportunity could be from individual perspective, it could be from for the future for your family that kind of thing. So many people feel that, I know friends who left Malaysia work in the U.S. and they feel that they don't really have enough opportunity to be in Malaysia and in a way, I myself.

Rozzeta (U.S.): If the government equalize everything, like Chinese, Indian and Malay are all equal, just not favoritism in anything, then they might go back. The reason they came here (to U.S.) and stayed here is because if they have kids, why should they go back and have their kids suffer like them? We see the benefits. In U.S., you see the U.S. they just take anybody with brains. You come over here, just fine. We give you green card or whatever. And look at the U.S., the most powerful... they have the strongest economy, at least before. Compared to Malaysia, if you go back to Malaysia, and you still have this problem about people not doing as well as over here, because all the bright people stay here in the U.S., don't want to go back.

In a general sense, participants thought of the notion of meritocracy and opportunities not only for themselves, but also for their next generations. Due to their exposure to life in the U.S. and Malaysia, they are able to make the comparison of meritocracy and opportunities in both countries, and make a choice that best fits them and their family.

As discussed in Literature Review, the Malaysia New Economic Policy (NEP 1971-1990), and National Development Policy (NDP 1991-2000) were established increase ethnic affirmative action, on behalf of the ethnic Malays and indigenous Malaysians who are also known as the *Bumiputra* (Sundaram, 2004). Later, a new policy known as the National Vision Policy (2001-2010) was established. Two participants mentioned how these policies have affected people's decisions:

Bala (Malaysia): I think it is a big structural mindset change would need to happen in this country. They need to place more emphasis on meritocracy. Unfortunately the whole NEP program overhere has just resulted in distorted incentives for people. Until the genuine change, I can't see how you can reverse the brain drain. Malaysians do come back, but mainly for family. I don't hear anyone saying that, "I decided to come back because I see great career prospects."

Thiru (U.S.): They have to change the NEP. Actually, get rid of it. Get rid of Bumi status, or treat everyone as Bumi's. Anyone should be able to start a business freely. And if a person can do a job, give it to him or her, doesn't matter what race (ethnicity) he is. If a policy is bad, it should be debated but that can't be done in Malaysia. I think, personally what made me stay (in the U.S.) more was the lack of opportunity in Malaysia directly related to these policies than the abundance of opportunities in the U.S.A.

Although these policies initially aimed to reduce socioeconomic disparities, the policy affected many people. Even with the name changes, the essence of the policy remains the same, and for the most part causes some citizens to feel discontent and discriminated against, due to their ethnicity. Moreover, participants talked about the importance of meritocracy and believed that opportunities should be given to everyone who qualifies for it and earns it, even in business. For Sujitha and Kok Kiong, opportunities for business and entrepreneurship are contemplations when it comes to the idea of returning to Malaysia:

Sujitha (On Business visa): I think it would be the policies. If this would be a less structured environment and more economically free. That would encourage me to come back. Because that is what driving me out, you know? I think, when business and politics are separate, I think that would be a reason why I would come back to Malaysia. Well, I think, personally, it has to be, from a business perspective, it has to be much more attractive, more better incentive, faster turnaround time, and less red tape.

Kok Kiong (Malaysia): If it were up to me, I would provide them opportunity to start businesses here. I think that would be a very simple angle. It doesn't cost that much in terms of mobilization and they could launch it small and gather some momentum, and then build it up. Malaysia is a very good platform to launch this. We have reasonable skill sets here that people here have, like they can converse in multiple languages, technical skill set is also here, it is a good place to launch.

In addition to the family reasons, political environment, and opportunities; people look at whether or not it is economically feasible to work and live in Malaysia. Most specifically, they compare the cost of living and relatively, purchasing power in Malaysia and the U.S. Kong Ming sums up meritocracy, opportunities and economic considerations:

Kong Ming (U.S.): One, the government needs to be a little bit more transparent, a little bit more open, a little bit fair to other ethnic groups. Another thing is the government needs to give them opportunities. I think a lot of people decide to settle down in the U.S. because of opportunities also. When you can make say US\$80,000 a year in the U.S. versus says, you know, US\$8,000 in Malaysia, I think it is pretty clear that economically, most people would stay to stay in this country (U.S.A.).

Sebastian was a permanent resident of the U.S. When asked what factors would have made non-returning Malaysian-born migrants to repatriate, he argued that:

Sebastian (U.S.): If they get a good job. If they miss their family. I mean those are the things that probably (reasons) to go back. You know, Malaysia has changed a bit, it is losing a lot of good jobs with India and China. It is hard. Malaysia is to evolve and that is one of the concerns everybody has because education is not up to par and it is affecting people's perception of Malaysia. You already have a lot of issues with being ethical and all that which Malaysia has to deal with. Then you have sub-standard education system, which is providing sub-standard work force. In my perspective, the reason why I would not even bother is because I work in Malaysia I know what is happening right? If you have a level playing field, if you give people good opportunities, I think people will go back, but for me it is not going to happen, now with all the crime rate going up, it just makes it even worse.

In many instances, the participants were saying that the challenging and rewarding opportunities they hope to find are not found in Malaysia. For this to happen, they suggested that the Malaysian government could provide more opportunities based on merit, not ethnicity. Next the government could create highly skilled positions by increasing the number of world class colleges and universities; by attracting investments of multinational companies to setup research centers and business regional headquarters;

and by providing more funding for the research and development. These developments and incentives could increase the demand of highly skilled professionals such as Malaysian-born migrants who are now working in the U.S. in research centers, research universities, and IT companies.

People want meritocracy and they want opportunities to go with it. To explore further, needs assessments would need to be made to investigate the types of career, professional and research opportunities that should be developed for those who have graduated. Therefore having a place to seek and secure such opportunities in Malaysia may entice them to return to Malaysia as soon as they finish their studies.

5.3.1.3. Economic consideration

Besides family, meritocracy and opportunities, economic considerations also play a big role as well. People are discouraged to repatriate because although there are job opportunities in Malaysia, the salary does not match the cost of living or keeps up with the inflation rates. As argued by Alvin,

Alvin (U.S.): My sense is most Malaysians, at least the Malaysian Chinese right, these guys tend to be pretty practical people. They want to do well for themselves, for their families, they care about their kids education and so on. So, if economic prospects in Malaysia improve, things booming, then I think that will bring them back.

Another economic consideration is the funding and grants available for research. Yusof gave an example of the lack of funding that does not help in the repatriation efforts:

Yusof (Malaysia): I was working in my university (in the U.S.) at the medical school, so more on the bio informatics science. So when I came back (to

Malaysia), I was doing that support and basically selling services for the local universities on bio informatics side. The biggest problem (in Malaysia) that I see is that there is really a lack of funding for research on just basic sciences. Everyone is saying you have to commercialize your research, but there must be some basic science money available and there is really not much. It is really difficult to get by. When you get funding, it is difficult to get Ph.D. students, post docs available and that kind of things. I do see professors, for example, that are very, very good in what they do, but they are hampered by the whole system itself which is not supporting them. They are not supportive in funding, they are not supportive in terms of making it easy too. For example there is a lot of competition, too much politics in the university itself.

According to Mahroum, Eldridge and Daar (2006), some of the issues that developing countries face are pessimistic outlooks of the economies, political state, research and development opportunities, educational prospects and work environments, which are blamed for brain drain or the loss of intellectual human capital. While people in general may continue to be pessimistic about the economic situation in the home country, these participants also make comparison of the economic situations of both Malaysia and the U.S. as a consideration whether or not to repatriate.

5.3.1.4. Political environment

The political environment in Malaysia was another hot topic brought up by participants when asked what would entice Malaysian-born migrants to repatriate.

Sujitha (U.S.): The political environment that is also one of the reasons why I still prefer the U.S. I like to compare Malaysia and Thailand. You know, like for instance in Thailand, government is just one minor part of the large framework there. The government can come and go, change whatever, doesn't matter. Their policies go on, their economy goes on, and their lives go on. In Malaysia

whatever the government does or says, it just affects everyone and everything, and I don't like to live in that kind of environment. I need an independent economy.

Alvin (U.S.): There might be people who are more politically conscious, they may be more concerned about how is the political situation doing. If they liberalize lots of things, open up the press, and all those kind of things, then some people who are more idealistic may want to go back and contribute to the country from that sense.

In any given country, the political situation was not developed in a day and certainly would not change overnight. Typically, it is a long term process of ten years or more. Malaysian-born migrants located overseas do not have the opportunity to experience the changes that have been implemented in Malaysia. In order to experience any changes that may be implemented, they would need to be in Malaysia to experience the changes. Perhaps they could have that opportunity to experience the change during a temporary stay in Malaysia. For example, that six-month or one-year work assignment in Malaysia will facilitate the understanding of any changes at that time, and they could then consider if the change, or the lack of, will fit her or his expectations of living in Malaysia in the long run.

5.4. Summary

The data in this chapter have addressed the second research question as to why the participants in this study have chosen to remain in the U.S. or return to Malaysia, as well as the third research question which looks at factors that motivate Malaysian-born migrants who have been living in the U.S., to return to Malaysia. In answering research question two, the data showed that although each participant's story is unique, the data given were grouped under five most themes. These themes comprise the economic prospects, quality of life, social justice, freedom perspectives as well as social network and social capital. One recurring topic I came across is the concept of relative

deprivation (Portes, 2009). Well aware of the economic situation in both Malaysia and the U.S., many participants felt deprived of what they should be entitled to, if they were to return to Malaysia. Moreover, participants found freedom in engaging in activities seen as prohibited in Malaysia. For example, some enjoyed having less restrictions in terms of clothing, religion, friends and parental influence while in the U.S., even though this meant a loss of close relationships with friends and family in Malaysia, as well as nostalgia for the food, culture and lifestyle there.

The third research question looks at factors that motivate Malaysian-born migrants who have been living in the U.S., to return to Malaysia. The findings show that family influence, meritocracy, and career opportunities, are brought up as the most important factors for residential preference across all three ethnic groups. However, even though policy changes to promote meritocracy and opportunities have been brought up as possible reasons to repatriate, my findings suggest that family influence has a greater impact on repatriation than these, or even economic considerations.

Chapter Six explores and assesses the most notable international push and pull factors under consideration when study participants make the decision about choosing where to live after completing their graduate education. In particular, emphasis has been given to discussions of turning points and some major findings from the research questions. The final section of the chapter seeks to address any gaps in the study's findings, to include a discussion on the possibilities of the findings, how the findings can be explored in the broader context and to provide an overall conclusion.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses Malaysian alumni of U.S. graduate programs' experience, concerns, push and pull factors in their decision making that explain when, how and why they decide where their next *home* should be. The goal of this discussion is to present significant findings or observations as experienced and shared by Malaysian-born participants in this study. The limitations of this research and the possibilities below call for introduction of possible approaches to problems that Malaysia has faced for years. In addition, it will incorporate knowledge-building initiatives and target some of the key issues that are persistent today in social justice and higher education.

6.2. Major findings

This dissertation looks particularly at how highly educated individuals with a graduate degree or terminal degree choose a place to live after they have completed their graduate education. Three major findings emerged from this study. First, turning points in the participants' lives are crucial because it is during those moments that the decision whether to remain in the U.S. or leave the U.S. had to be made. These decision making moments do not occur in a vacuum. Policies allow for the increased opportunities for international students to stay and find a job in the U.S. after completing their higher education in the U.S., however these policies come with strict stipulations and deadlines. The existence of such policies and availability of employment opportunities are prompted by the high demand for talented human capital. On the other hand, turning points are not indicative of *why* and *how* decisions are made, only *when* they had to be made. Turning points precipitate decisions and create a time of high vulnerable to individuals that make visible the inherent push and pull forces.

The second major finding is that comparative perspectives between what is known or experienced in Malaysia and the more recent life and work environment in the U.S. as expressed by the participants contributed to understanding how they make decisions about where to live and work after the completion of their degrees. Five main factors of consideration form the push and pull factors. These factors are the economic, quality of life, social justice, freedom perspectives, and social network/social capital as discussed in Chapter Five. Portes' (2009) concept of relative deprivation helps to explain the types of deficiencies experienced by the professionals in one country that trigger them to move abroad to another country in search of economic opportunities and professional development. Although the participants in this study moved to the U.S. as students and not as professionals, findings show that their aspiration to remain in the U.S. was similar to the concept of relative deprivation experienced by professionals. Participants wanted a higher paying job to enable a middle-class life, which they could probably get in the U.S. after they attained their graduate degree. In addition, they wanted to continue the professional development they have had through trainings, internships and work in a developed country like the U.S. that may not be available if they were to return to a developing country like Malaysia. Although the participants have initially moved to the U.S. to pursue higher education, their comparative views explain their thoughts about possible relative deprivation, after the attainment of their academic goals. This finding elucidates the push and pull factors in the decision making regarding returning to Malaysia.

The third major finding is that the exposure, experiences, challenges, and assimilation processes participants faced in the American higher education institutions, in the workplace, and in everyday life in the U.S., shifted their thinking. The assimilation processes contributed to changes in how they identified themselves, the kind of lifestyle they desired, as well as the notion of *home* and place of residence. Although some participants have settled in the U.S. permanently, their identities, behaviors and values are not limited by the location in which they live (Lam & Yeoh, 2004). They constantly apply a dual frame of reference to evaluate their experiences in the country in which they

have settled (Louie, 2006). The notion of transnationalism is understood to encompass the intense traffic of communication, information and resources across places of origin and destination (Vertovec, 2004), the aspects that the participants have been engaging in, to maintain those relationships with family and communities in Malaysia. In other words, transnational theory addresses how people are flexible in their assimilation to the norms and values of the new socio-cultural setting, while maintaining relationships and cultures of the homeland (Ong, 1999). Moreover, the model of “flexible citizenship” as introduced by AiHwa Ong (1999) provides a framework to explain how identities are formed with immigrants, especially Asians, who may not strongly identify with a particular country. In the case of Malaysian-born migrants of this study, the historical, political and racial issues in Malaysia contribute to the decisions of many to strive for flexible citizenship. In particular, participants are flexible in defining their own citizenship based on economic considerations as opposed to citizenship based on the allegiance to the country or political rights. Therefore, their identities change with the openness to transnational experiences and activities, as well as through exposure to diverse people and cultures (Ong, 1999).

Due to the flexibility and mobility of transnationals who are highly educated and highly skilled, their rapid movement and constant travel between the receiving and sending countries can benefit both countries. In other words, transnationalism could promote brain circulation. The circulation and sharing of knowledge and human capital can happen because the social networks that link immigrants with each other are now the global institutions that connect new immigrants with their counterparts in their home country (Saxenian, 2002). Interestingly, participants of this study demonstrated that while they may have settled in the U.S., they still maintained social ties with Malaysia, and expressed a hope to contribute to Malaysia even though none of them had yet made concrete plans to help with the development of Malaysia. The missing link is a safe way for them to participate in programs that promote brain circulation without losing what they have already worked for in the U.S. The concept of brain circulation tells us that it does not necessarily mean a total loss for the countries whose highly educated and highly

skilled have migrated. One specific example given by Portes (2009) is the cyclical flow, which could happen when people returned after studies and work in the U.S. either because they did not pursue their H-1B (turning point 1) or their PR (turning point 2) or citizenship (turning point 3), and their return would create the cyclical professional flow. Therefore, their return would create the cyclical professional flow. This flow which could contribute to development of the home country can only be positive if the home country has established research centers and universities, as well as organizations to absorb the scientific and technological innovations brought back by the professional returnees (Portes, 2009). The third finding thus also helps to paint a picture of *who* the participants are, and what might encourage them to repatriate.

6.3. Turning Points

Findings show that turning points are crucial because despite what the push and pull factors are, the turning points are periods of time during which decisions had to be made. Specifically, turning points are not the reasons of *why* and *how* decisions are made, they are pinpointing *when* decisions had to be made.

6.3.1. Turning point one: Immediately after the completion of studies

Four factors can cause turning point one, but any one of these factors by itself, could either cause a Malaysian to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia after the attainment of the degree. These factors are visa restrictions, job opportunities, family needs and scholarship obligation.

One of the factors in turning point one is the visa restrictions. Malaysians pursuing their degrees in the U.S. are issued international student visas, known as the F-1. Students with this visa must maintain the minimum course load to ensure full-time student status, which typically means their priority is their studies, and that they cannot work full-time. A Malaysian with the F-1 visa can continue to remain for twelve months

after completing the degree, under the OPT³⁴, which is a temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study (USCIS, n. d. –d). With the OPT, a Malaysian student can stay legally in the U.S. as she searches for a job. If she finds a job, she could work under the OPT, during which, her employer would need to sponsor her for the H-1B work visa. If she does not find a job within the twelve months of the OPT validity period, she would need to leave the U.S., or otherwise faces deportation. Temporary migration is first made possible by legislation, such as the H-1B program in the U.S. Securing the H-1B work visa is a way for a Malaysian to continue working in the U.S. Some graduates may even skip the OPT phase if they found an employer willing to file the H-1B in advance, as they are nearing the completion of their degree (while still holding F-1 student visa). Through the U.S. government policy, the chances of successful H-1B petitions for workers with an American master's degree or Ph.D.'s are higher than those with only bachelor's degrees³⁵.

Another factor to consider in this first turning point is the aspect of job opportunities. Although there are visa options that allow a Malaysian student to remain in the U.S. temporarily, there still needs to be job opportunities to make the stay legitimate. Just because one has an OPT does not mean a job can be found or guaranteed. With the OPT, the Malaysian student hoping to remain in the U.S. would still need to find a job in her major area of study, failing which, she would need to return to Malaysia. While one can still have an OPT without a job, one cannot be sponsored H-1B work visa without a job offer and a willing sponsor (the American employer). The findings from this study also did not indicate a difference in the decision making between male and female participants when it comes to job opportunities. While a female Muslim

³⁴ The U.S. government revised the Optional Practical Training (OPT) rules to give U.S. employers more opportunities to recruit STEM degree holders. Under the new rule, certain students will be eligible to receive a 17-month extension of post-completion OPT. The extension is long enough to allow for H-1B petitions to be filed in two successive fiscal years (Retrieved from USCIS, n. d. –d).

³⁵ The H-1B visa program has an annual numerical limit or "cap" of 65,000 visas each fiscal year. The first 20,000 petitions filed on behalf of beneficiaries with a U.S. master's degree or higher are exempt from the cap. Additionally, H-1B workers who are employed at an institution of higher education or its affiliates, related non-profit entities, a non-profit research organization, or a government research organization, are not subject to this numerical cap (Retrieved from USCIS, n. d. –a).

participant indicated she would follow her husband's decision on the conformity of clothing, the fact that her husband and children moved to a state in west coast of the U.S. when she took a job there indicated that the decision to move was not dictated by her husband. In fact, the move was decided for economic reasons where she found a full time job. Moreover, with their newly acquired advanced degree from the U.S., the participants are open to job opportunities whether in Malaysia, the U.S., or in another country, however the job opportunity alone does not make someone make that final decision whether to stay or to move. While participants have preferred a certain location, for example a big city versus a small town, in the end they would also need to see what opportunities arise in that particular location. The decision to move to another state in the U.S., or to move to another location that has more vibrant economies and competitive industries such as Shanghai, Hong Kong or Singapore, also indicates the growing pressure of globalization where people move to where the jobs are. Then again, job opportunities would need to encompass the economics consideration as well, such as the salary, benefits, location and cost of living in that location as well as quality of life.

Another factor, which can happen at any point in life, is that family events or needs may trump other factors. Just as family was also one of the most influential factors in helping to make decisions about pursuing higher education, family also plays a pivotal role in influencing one to return to Malaysia even when a person has a permanent job in the U.S. This happened to one of the participants, Yusof, and his family, who had to return to Malaysia due to a family tragedy in Malaysia that needed their support in Malaysia.

A scholarship obligation is another factor that ties on to this first turning point. For a scholarship recipient who is subjected to the contract, it is a turning point because she would have to fulfill the contract of the scholarship by returning to Malaysia (and for one participant, to Singapore because the scholarship was given by the government of Singapore), to work for the company or the government that provided the scholarship. On the other hand, some participants may also choose not to return, in which case they

would need to make arrangements to repay the scholarship monies in lieu of fulfilling the obligation set forth in the contract, or be prepared to face the legal consequences.

6.3.2. Turning point two: To become a Permanent Resident

The U.S. immigration policy provides an opportunity for foreigners to be permanent residents (PR). Therefore, this becomes the second turning point for the Malaysians who have been in the U.S. for a while, and are holding the H-1B work visa. The turning point to pay attention to, is when the H-1B work visa is about to expire after six years³⁶. If the H-1B expires and the PR route was not pursued, the H-1B visa holder can no longer work in the U.S., even if she still has a 'job' since the H-1B is the visa that allows her to continue working in the job legally. In the legal process to the permanent residency (PR), it starts one to two years before the end of the sixth year of the H-1B. It is considered one of the major turning points of decision making because it is a complicated process that would bring one closer to remaining in the U.S. more permanently. On the other hand, it might also bring one to have to leave the country if the PR petition was not successful and that the H-1B has expired at that time. As most of PR petitions are employment-based, the decision to apply for the green card³⁷ is not entirely up to the individual because the American company who is the H-1B sponsor must also agree to sponsor the individual for the PR. The PR petition takes about one to two years, but could be longer for those whose countries of origin are China and India due to the volume of petitions from citizens of those countries. It also requires money which is incurred by employer if it is employer-sponsored, and also by the individual if they have dependents filing jointly as well. It is one of the major turning points as the decision would need to be made somehow before the expiration of the H-1B, because if one does not want to become a PR, she can then return to Malaysia or find a job in

³⁶ A H-1B non-immigrant may be admitted for a period of up to three years; and the time period may be renewed once for another three years, but do not go beyond a total of six years, though some exceptions do apply under the American Competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century Act (Retrieved from (USCIS). (n. d. -a).

³⁷ The green card is an important travel and identification document for a PR.

another country. However, if she wants to remain in the U.S. for a longer term she would need to make that decision early and ask the company to initiate the petition, especially if the PR is sponsored by the employer. Such decisions cannot wait since there is a deadline along with a waiting time and the entire process is time-consuming. Anything can happen during this time, for example, the PR process may fail due to lack of paperwork, or requirements. Similar to turning point 1, family emergencies or needs may change one's decision to remain in the U.S. during this turning point 2.

6.3.3. Turning point three: To become a naturalized U.S. citizen

Being a permanent resident (PR) will enable one to live and work in the U.S.A. legally, and the PR has the option to apply to become a naturalized U.S. citizen after being a PR for five years. However, if the PR does not start the citizenship application after she becomes eligible in five years, the green card can only last for a total of ten years before one needs to renew the card. As discussed earlier, ten years is a long time for one to consider becoming a U.S. citizen and to finally give up the Malaysian citizenship. Since Malaysia does not permit dual citizenship, this turning point is very crucial because a green card holder whose validity period is expiring can either renew the green card or proceed to apply for the U.S. citizenship through naturalization. On the other hand, if a green card holder does not apply for the U.S. citizenship at the end of the green card validity period, and if she does not wish to renew their green card, the only option is to leave the U.S. It is during this time that the permanent resident needs to make a decision for the next step to long term commitment to the U.S. The permanent resident would need to give up the Malaysian citizenship in order to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. Even at this third turning point, family events and needs in Malaysia may still change one's decision to remain permanently in the U.S.

6.3.4. Summary

For many participants, a decision to choose the U.S. as their permanent *home* starts with the time right after they completed their study; but such a decision is riddled with different factors in the turning points. However one important finding is that once the participants start working in the U.S. after they completed their studies, they are more likely to remain in the U.S. In essence it is unlikely for the permanent resident who holds the green card to return to Malaysia, rather than someone who still holds the non-immigrant visa such as the H-1B. The reason is clear -- if the non-immigrant visa holders lose the job in the U.S., or the employer does not sponsor the H-1B renewal, or if they reach the six-year H-1B period (and did not start the PR process prior to the H-1B expiration); they cannot remain in the U.S. without valid immigration documents. However, permanent residents and naturalized U.S. citizens can still remain in the U.S. even if they lose their job because they have time to look for jobs -- time that H-1B or other temporary non-immigrant visa holders do not have due to their visa validity period.

Moreover, it was also evident from the findings that none of the participants who returned to Malaysia had been PR or naturalized U.S. citizens. This is an important observation. If there is a program to attract Malaysians to return to Malaysia (by the Malaysian government), or a program to attract Malaysians to stay in the U.S. (by the U.S. government), the program would need to be aware of *when* those turning points are, and *whom* to focus on. For instance, those who are going to graduate soon or have graduated, but not yet found a job would be the best targets because of their transitory phase – the phase where they face their first turning point and are forced to make a decision. However, once they have found jobs in the U.S., they tend to stay in the U.S. and eventually go through the immigration process to make sure they can remain in the U.S. more permanently. This study's findings also showed that those who have remained for several years in the U.S. did not contemplate repatriating to Malaysia.

6.4. Research question one: Who are the participants?

For the majority of the participants, the main objective for coming to the U.S. was to pursue their degree, not to immigrate. However, pursuing this degree provided them a pathway to immigration. Along the way, they learned more about their identity and flexible citizenship, life in the U.S., and relatively about what they wanted to do after they graduate. In addition, for the married participants, “family” was central to their migration decisions. Participants who have a spouse and/or children deliberated on the pros and cons of continuing to stay in the U.S. and returning to Malaysia, or moving to a new country altogether with considerations that included the perspectives of the spouse and children. This observation shows that most of the married participants, while not mobile, have decided that living in the U.S. has more advantages for the whole family. Eventually those who decided that living in the U.S. was a better choice; some cited the policy and lifestyle in Malaysia that may not be a good fit for their non-Malaysian spouses. A decision to repatriate is more difficult because the circumstances of the entire family will need to be taken into consideration. Some considerations include ease of foreign spouse getting a job in Malaysia and the assimilation to the Malaysian way of life when the participants and their family members have been in the U.S. for a while.

On the other hand, those who are single are more mobile; however, at the same time they also worry about their prospects of finding a life partner. A few participants mentioned that although they liked living in the U.S., they wanted to find an Asian life partner. Furthermore, some find that Asians are more appealing, and that they want to bring up their children to have Asian values. Most obvious is the fact that they are mobile and make the decision based on their own circumstances; therefore it was easier for the single participants to pack their bags and return to Malaysia, if they want to.

Overall, based on the data collected in this study, when participants have found jobs in the U.S., they tend to stay in the U.S. and eventually go through the immigration process to becoming PR and later, naturalized U.S. citizens. This statement is supported

by the findings as discussed in Chapter Four where the demographic information shows that those who returned to Malaysia made the decision earlier, in their twenties and thirties. Moreover, based on these data those in their forties and fifties are found in the group who are PR and naturalized U.S. citizens. This pattern raises the question of *when* decisions are made about where to live after completing their degree in the U.S. Due to their high academic qualifications and work experience in the U.S., the successful petition for PR and U.S. citizenship is promising. The findings also showed that those who have remained for several years in the U.S. did not contemplate repatriating to Malaysia.

6.5. Research question two: What are the push and pull factors in the decision making?

6.5.1. The dilemma of making a decision

For the majority of the participants, the decision to go to the U.S. was primarily to pursue higher education. However, when they completed their studies, it was not an easy decision whether to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia. At this point they had to decide what they wanted to do with their lives and where they wanted to live to accomplish those goals. They were ready for the next phase in life. This was a crossroad for many of the participants with only a short timeframe and small window of opportunity. They have to find a job and to decide to remain in the U.S. or choose to return to Malaysia, as discussed earlier under turning points. If they chose to go back to Malaysia, it would be difficult to re-enter the U.S. unless they have a valid visa. On the other hand, if they got a job and remained in the U.S., they could still return to Malaysia if things did not work out. Once they get a job in the U.S., it could lead to the path of permanent residency and eventually to naturalized U.S. citizenship.

6.5.2. Push and pull factors

One interesting finding is that the comparative perspectives between previous work-life experience in Malaysia and the U.S. contributed to decisions about where to live and work after the completion of their higher degrees. There are five main factors of consideration that form the push and pull factors and among them, quality of life is the most significant to the participants. Participants had a certain set of expectations when it came to the quality of life they aspired for themselves and their family. These factors included their desire to be in touch with family and friends wherever they might be, the safety of their well-being, the need to have a conducive work environment, equal opportunities, good ethics and positive attitude. The aspects of quality of life that are highlighted are equality in job opportunities and growth, as well as safety and economic factors.

The findings show that participants felt that they now deserved to have a better quality of life after the attainment of graduate or terminal degree. Living abroad for a few years opened up a new horizon and while one may argue it is a preference of lifestyle, it is also the quality of life the participants desired. The subjectivity of quality of life is connected with the fear of the lack of meritocracy and opportunities which they felt would hinder their personal and professional growth in Malaysia. The participants voiced their concern about the social injustice and discontent created by the affirmative action policies in Malaysia. Although such policies have been evolving for years, the participants still feel stigmatized by the past events and present direction. Therefore, they want to remain in the U.S. as they believed that they had a better chance to enjoy personal and professional growth in the U.S. than in Malaysia. Overall, the participants felt that their quality of life is affected if they were to return to Malaysia because of pay cut, high inflation rates, and public safety due to escalating crime rates as reported in the media.

Quality of life is partly related to economic factors. When it comes to the considerations of economic factors, the participants had to weigh all other factors beyond the direct economic consideration covered by the neoclassical economics theory. For example, they have to consider not only the salary but the anticipated long term prospects and growth. In addition, they also consider the cost of living as well as the purchasing power of the location where they would want to work. Findings show that they compared the cost of living and purchasing power in the U.S. and in Malaysia, and found that things in the U.S. are more affordable, such as houses and cars. One explanation to understand their consideration in terms of economic factor is the notion of relative deprivation. As argued by Portes (2009), relative deprivation explains the types of deficiencies that are experienced by the professionals in one country that trigger them to move abroad to another country, in search of economic opportunities and professional development. Although the participants have initially moved to the U.S. to study and not to immigrate to work, the relative deprivation concept helps us understand why they have decided to remain in the U.S. Important to note is that the participants represent a select group of those with master's degrees and above, and the likelihood of them experiencing relative deprivation is higher than someone with lower qualifications. According to Malaysia's main career website, Jobstreet Malaysia (n.d.), there are jobs that are parallel to the kind of positions they held in the U.S. However, with their qualifications and training in the U.S., they have the opportunity to get into cutting-edge industries or top notch research universities in the U.S. In contrast, if they return to Malaysia, they can still get a job, but it may not be with Tier 1 research universities that are comparable with U.S. universities. Accordingly, they may not have the opportunity to work in an infrastructure that could further develop their skills and professional growth.

Another example for engineers and MBA holders is that while they still can find a job, there could be difference between working in the U.S. and in Malaysia. In the U.S., they can work in the headquarters where all the designs or business decisions are made. Conversely, if they work in the Malaysia they most likely would work at the regional business segment, or manufacturing facility where all the research and design are

conducted. Therefore, if they got their graduate degree in the U.S., and were given the opportunity to work in the U.S. they would likely choose to remain in the U.S. Given the types of degrees they hold and the types of trainings they have had in the U.S., they might not want to settle for just a 'job.' Having the opportunity to study, work and live in the U.S., participants are able to weigh their pros and cons by comparing the economic opportunities and professional development between Malaysia and the U.S. Knowing that they can earn better salaries and have a better purchasing power in addition to having professional development opportunities in a more advanced country like the U.S., would make strong pull factors from the U.S. Therefore, although there are job opportunities in Malaysia, returning to Malaysia may not be the choice for graduates as it may result in relative deprivation.

The most glaring point was under the social justice factors. The participants noted that the affirmative action policies in Malaysia created unfair access issues to higher education, leading some of them to pursue their degree in a foreign country like the U.S. Higher education overseas provides a gateway to immigration, as it provides a means for people to leave the home country and have the option not to return. In addition, the participants felt that other policies and regulations also created social injustice in Malaysia that overall hurt the economy and livelihood of the country. Surprisingly, these comments came from all the ethnic groups including the *Bumiputra* ethnic group to which the affirmative action policies are meant to help. Looking at the experience and thoughts of the participations, there seems to be a strong need to provide a better environment to nurture and keep local talent.

Most of the participants grew up in Malaysia and some shared how they were stigmatized by the societal implication of freedom. Although the participants in the U.S. glorified the freedom they enjoyed in the U.S., one observation is that they are not leaving the U.S. With this in mind, is that the reason why they do not mention if they ever experience a problem with freedom in the U.S. related to being a minority or a foreigner? Those who chose to stay in the U.S. mostly spoke positively and fondly of the life in the U.S. as if everything is good and perfect. Is it? In another study, Fong

(2011) observed that many Chinese citizens in China “downplayed their unpleasant aspects of their lives abroad that they had frequently complained about while living abroad” (p. 194). Fong’s subjects were reluctant to talk about anything that was negative related to their study or life abroad especially to those who were not close to them because they presumed others do not empathize. Fong (2011) found that it could be because they were afraid of losing face to tell others of their negative incidents abroad as others might assume they made bad decisions or cannot adapt to the foreign environment. This could be true with the participants in this study as well. Possibly talking with me about how much they liked the freedom in the U.S. and how lack of freedom there is in Malaysia could provide some kind of reflection to justify the decision to choose U.S. as their new *home*.

Social capital includes the resources and support that migrants get during their immigration process, and these resources are usually provided by those in their social network such as family members, relatives, friends, and members of a network to help in the migration process which includes settlement and employment in a foreign country (Massey et al., 1987; Massey & Espinosa, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Iosifides et al. (2007) states that family ties and kinship network play an important role in one’s decision to choose to immigrate to a foreign country because of the access to the resources and assistance to facilitate assimilation to the new culture and new environment. However it was not the same circumstances for the participants of this study. Their immigration path is different because the majority of those who immigrated did not immigrate to the U.S. directly, in fact, they came to the U.S. to pursue higher education (Barlett, 2004; Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011; Kaushal, 2011; Khadria, 2001; NSF, 1998; USA Today, 2009).

During that pursuit of higher education, the participants had a chance to learn to assimilate into the new environment although not all international students choose to assimilate. Their social networks (relationships with others) and social capital (resources and support deriving from the social network) were initially established in Malaysia.

There they had family and friends. And initially, they also needed social capital to “make it” in the U.S. The majority mentioned that they had financial support from their family, and their decision making was therefore significantly influenced by family. The funding from family and relatives for higher education forms the social capital that enables some of the participants to first go to the U.S. for their study. In addition, some participants also had scholarships provided by corporations and the government in Malaysia to pursue their higher education in the U.S. The scholarship providers which are companies or the government of Malaysia impacted where the participants studied and in some cases, what they studied and for how long. At the same time these providers also influenced whether or not the students have to return to Malaysia due to the scholarship contracts. However, when it was time to decide if immigration was viable for them, some participants still sought advice from their family members. Their ultimate decision was mainly centered on human capital based on their high educational level and skills -- what they can do, what jobs they can get, what salary they can command, and what opportunities are presented to them. In other words, human capital was more crucial in the immigration decision than social capital (resources and support) from their social networks (who do they know and who can help them).

In general, social networks were mainly used to facilitate the immigration process, where the “knowledge of others who have previously undertaken the journey represents the prospective migrant’s social capital, as it lowers the costs and the uncertainty of the enterprise” (Portes, 2009, p.8). However, the social capital and social network work differently for this particular group of participants. Social capital did help some of the participants when they first came to the U.S. as international students because the form of social capital was through financial help and support from family members. Moreover, social capital such as help and support were also available from friends whom they know by being members of the same social network, such as from the same local college in Malaysia. Unlike the role of social capital used in labor migration, this group of highly educated participants did not use the social capital and social network at the host country (U.S.) to help them immigrate and assimilate successfully to

the U.S. However, when it comes to some participants' decision to return to Malaysia, social network such as family ties do play an important role. Having the social network in Malaysia such as family and friends would also influence one to return to Malaysia. Several participants have returned to Malaysia because their families need them or that they want to stay close to family. They returned because they have their social network in Malaysia and they want to continue to be a part of that network, that community. There did not seem to be connection between returning to Malaysia and using their social capital in Malaysia to be successful. Basically, social network that involves mainly family ties could be influential in both ways – family members may encourage a person to stay in the U.S. to find a job after graduation, or family members may also encourage one to return to Malaysia. For this group of participants, social network is one of the many factors they took into consideration when deciding whether or not to stay or to return, but is not the most significant factor.

The assimilation process includes the integration of one's life, culture and language into the U.S. mainstream society, which includes the full adoption of English language, and maybe some loss of their own dialects and languages. One of the main ways assimilation could occur is through the exposure of American culture and lifestyle during the pursuit of the degree. The years participants spent in the higher education institution could serve as a way to "test the water" as the arena provides them the time and space to assimilate. If they tested the water and they liked it, they can pursue the next steps that enable them to remain in the U.S. after graduation, but if they did not like it, they can choose not to remain. There are choices to make, but these choices have to be made within the confines of the turning points such as visa stipulations and job opportunities.

6.6. Research question three: What would make them repatriate?

The third research question looks at factors that will motivate Malaysian-born migrants who have been living in the U.S., to return to Malaysia. Findings show that for this group of participants who have master's or doctoral degrees across all three ethnic groups, meritocracy and opportunities as well as family are the main factors that could entice them to repatriate. In reality, the feedback on the lack of meritocracy and opportunities is more of a way to express the nation's policy deficiency that would need to be fixed before they can even think of returning. Whereas, family seems like a more valid reason one would consider repatriating. The decision to repatriate or not was not just based on a simple yes or no answer. Participants speculated on what could make Malaysian-born migrants repatriate – their response mainly point to family, economics, meritocracy and opportunities as well as political environment. These reasons are similar to the major push and pull factors discussed, for example, social capital/social network, the aspects of economic considerations, quality of life, freedom perspectives and social justice as discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Even though meritocracy and opportunities have been brought up as reasons to repatriate if Malaysia changes to a more merit-based and fair environment with ample opportunities for growth, I believe that family will remain the main motivator and a more realistic reason to repatriate. One participant did repatriate when his family had a personal emergency. The other participants who have chosen to live in the U.S. shared the perception that their families would understand that they have a life in the U.S., however the majority of them said that they would repatriate if their families in Malaysia needed them. As discussed in Chapter Five, one strong pull factor that would pull one back to Malaysia is the obligation toward their family, especially in taking care of their parents as they grow older. In addition, the closeness to the family and the chance to reconnect with one's roots while contributing to the society and to help shape the developing country are strong motivators for Malaysian-born migrants when considering repatriating.

One of the concerns of leaving the U.S. for Malaysia is more the fear of the known than the unknown. Participants are aware of what is going on in Malaysia based on their experience, news reported by the media or updates from family members and friends in Malaysia. Many participants fear the lack of meritocracy and opportunities would hinder their personal and professional growth as well as the overall quality of life returning to Malaysia. This would also mean taking a pay cut, especially in looking at the cost of living as well as the inflation rates between the U.S. and Malaysia. Although the participants provided the “if” scenarios such as, if there is meritocracy, if it is safe, and if there is a change in policies; they also expressed the concern that a national reform will take many years to plan and implement. Based on the other factors discussed in Chapter Five, I did not think that it was that easy to repatriate despite the changes that could have taken place at the national level in Malaysia, especially when one has already established his life, career, and family in the U.S.

In general, repatriation initiatives may be harder to implement and may take longer to show results because policy changes do not happen overnight. A cyclical flow as introduced by Portes (2009) could work especially for the younger or more recent graduates, such as those facing the turning point 1. This is because although many H-1B workers extended their stays and eventually immigrated permanently to the U.S., those who returned could contribute to the development of the home country. The main criterion to make cyclical flow works effectively is that Malaysia should first establish the means and capability to build research centers and universities (Portes, 2009). In addition, there should also be organizations that are prepared to absorb the scientific and technological advancements brought back by those professionals who returned (Portes, 2009). It would be a waste of talent if Malaysia is not prepared to retain and provide opportunity for growth to the returnees who may have higher degrees and advanced training and experience.

On the other hand, cyclical flow most likely does not happen with those who have more experience or stronger commitment to the host countries (those in turning points 2 and 3) especially those who are already PR and naturalized U.S. citizens because they are not willing to repatriate. As the findings show, participants are willing to spend some time with the family, have a chance to reconnect with their roots while contributing to the community in Malaysia. The flexibility and mobility of this group of transnationals who are highly educated, highly skilled, and have years of experience would benefit both countries via brain circulation initiatives. As noted, transnationalism promotes the circulation and sharing of knowledge and human capital, because the social networks that link immigrants with each other have become global institutions that connect immigrants with their counterparts at their home country (Saxenian, 2002). The idea is to provide an opportunity for those in the U.S. who are willing to exchange their knowledge and experience, but are not willing to return to Malaysia permanently. This temporary trip home would be beneficial to the individual because he has the chance to connect with family, old roots and *home*. It is also beneficial to both Malaysia and the U.S. because they would benefit from the exchange of knowledge and ideas.

6.7. The possibilities of the findings: Where do we go from here?

To maintain its competitive and economic edge, it is time for Malaysia to look not only at the human capital within the nation, but to provide to those who may have already found their permanent homes in another country, such as the U.S. There have been programs in place established by the Malaysian government, such as the Brain Gain Program (2006-2010) and Talent Corporation programs (2010-present) to attract highly talented Malaysian-born migrants from all over the world to return to Malaysia. If years of trying to entice people to return to Malaysia are futile, why not focus the effort, money and time on different and innovative approaches to take advantage of what people would be willing to do for Malaysia provisionally, but would not return to Malaysia permanently?

This study looks at the in-depth personal experiences and thought-processes that underpin the decision of Malaysian-born graduates of American universities. The findings suggest that Malaysia may want to look at different ways to promote ‘brain circulation’ instead of reversing the brain drain. This should not be the end, but the start of a conversation about how Malaysia could take a more proactive approach and examine how to move closer to achieving the vision of becoming a developed country. The possibilities below call for introduction of approaches to problems that Malaysia has faced for years, and for incorporation of the knowledge-building initiatives that target some of the issues that are persistent today.

6.7.1. Improve the quality of life

6.7.1.1. Promote social justice

The concerns with regards to the issue of social injustice that prevailed in this study are fundamental for the improvement of quality of life and welfare of those who are living in Malaysia. Social justice education should start at home and school in Malaysia. I am not claiming that social injustice did not happen to the Malaysian-born participants when they were in the U.S., but even if there was, the findings from this study did not provide evidence that any one left the U.S. due to social injustice. What we see in the findings is that Malaysian-born migrants would not consider repatriating unless the problems with social injustice in Malaysia are addressed and that there are positive outcomes. A national campaign to support the social justice education in Malaysia could be a good initiative to create awareness of how diversity in Malaysia could be turned into something positive so that it can promote a more welcoming and safer atmosphere for Malaysian-born migrants and their family to repatriate. With the diversity of the make-up of its citizens, social justice education in Malaysia will require the quest to infuse the meaning and application of inclusiveness at school, at home and in the community. Many Malaysians felt the brunt of social injustice because of their age, ethnicity, sex, religious beliefs, and disability. In addition, social injustice also includes preferential

treatment because of whom they are related to or who they know. Further research and proper implementation of the social justice education at the grassroots levels are essential. Through social justice education, Malaysians might be more encouraged to learn about, and respect the differences of their fellow citizens, and learn not to simply make judgments without understanding how the blaming game will hurt the nation in the long run.

6.7.1.2. Improve the safety

Another important factor pertaining to the quality of life and welfare of citizens is to improve the safety issues in Malaysia. Many participants have expressed concerns about the quality of life, and one of the major concerns involved the safety of the people. If the crime rate continues to rise, tourists and Malaysian-born migrants also fear for their own safety when they plan their travels to Malaysia. This will eventually hurt the economy and the tourism industry. Therefore, one way to combat this fear is to provide opportunities for the citizens and communities to implement safety campaigns in villages, communities, towns and cities. People have the right to feel safe. To do this, the government or some non-profit organizations might want to look at the root of the problem – could this be due to unemployment? Or is it due to the influx of illegal immigrants in Malaysia? For example, people may resort to stealing and robbing because they are unemployed. While we want to promote continuing and higher education, there are also those who may need the basic skills to secure employment. In addition, citizens should also learn to self-defend in times of need. Therefore, the safety campaign should include self-defense workshops. The challenge would be the money allocation provided by the government and organizations to promote and implement safety campaigns throughout the country. Combating social issues like this is not a uniquely-Malaysia problem; research should be done to see what other countries have done to overcome such social issues. Input from experts in understanding social issues and public policies should also be included in the implementation to promote public safety.

6.7.2. Quality and accessibility of higher education

There should be a national campaign to guarantee that higher education is accessible and of high quality to Malaysians.

6.7.2.1. Improve quality of higher education

If the country cannot bring back the human capital that is lost through the brain drain, then why not focus on enhancing the quality of higher education in Malaysia in order to help develop those who are in the country? We hear calls for higher education reform. Instead of focusing and constantly debating on the accessibility issues, the quality of higher education should first be improved. Through investing in the quality of higher education in Malaysia, the country could cast a bigger net, capturing more human capital that may be untapped. The focus should shift from just trying to attract the ‘best’ to go back home, or to tap the talents of only the conventional college-age students. Quality and accessibility of higher education should be made a crucial necessity for all citizens.

When it comes to quality of the graduates, this needs to be improved further. A study conducted by Quah et al. (2009) has shown that employers in Malaysia preferred graduates who have fully completed their degrees abroad. Malaysian employers perceived that these graduates are better in terms of their knowledge and skills from their higher education abroad as compared to their local peers (Quah et al., 2009). Moreover, rankings of public universities in Malaysia tell us how Malaysia compares with the rest of the world. Under the World University Rankings 2012/2013, the top universities are located in the United States and United Kingdom (Appendix K) (QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, n. d.). The top Asian universities are in Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore. Universiti of Malaya (Malaysia) is ranked at 156, followed by UKM: 261, USM: 326, UTM: 358, UPM: 360 and IIUM 401. According to The Star (2012, September 11), Universiti Malaya has made an improvement from the previous year

because it moved up to 11 places to 156 in 2012 compared to 167 in 2011, and 207 in 2010. Overall, the higher education in Malaysia should be improved both at the local and public colleges.

To improve the quality of higher education in Malaysia, openness to change and transparency of the outcomes must be implemented for effectiveness of the transformation. Malaysians should not just leave the fate of higher education as it is. While university administrators and politicians may influence what the reform of higher education would include, the citizens' voices would also need to be heard. In addition, the Malaysian government or foundations could benefit from hearing what those who have immigrated to another developed country have to share about how improvements can be made to include a broader and deeper curriculum that most developed countries embraced. Some ingredients for a quality higher education that would prepare the citizens to meet the 21st century challenges and global competitiveness include investments in outstanding faculty, academic freedom, research and collaborative opportunities and peer support.

6.7.2.2. Accessibility of higher education

Malaysia would need to have the human capital to be prepared to face the competition in terms of intellectual capacity and economic leadership in the ever-changing globalized world. People should be made aware of the implications of globalization, knowing that to improve human capital we need its citizens to attain a certain level of competency which can be achieved through higher education. If higher education is expensive and not easily available, it will not be affordable or attractive to the many workers in Malaysia who may not be prepared for the challenges ahead. Therefore, higher education must be inclusive and should be made available to anyone who wants to pursue higher education. At the same time, a quality college education in Malaysia should be made affordable to anyone can benefit from it.

Reform in higher education could be instrumental. As stated by the World Bank (2011), “education policies can also mitigate migration more directly since quality of education is considered as one of the factors motivating the decision to seek overseas education” (p. 123). In order to improve the country’s higher education, it is reasonable to start at the grassroots – starting from the elementary education and the teachers. This direction is exactly what Malaysia will be moving towards, as Malaysia’s Prime Minister recently launched the new National Education Blueprint on September 11, 2012 (The Star, 2012, September 11). This blueprint encompassed plans and recommendations to improve Malaysia’s education system, and will focus on six student attributes which include knowledge, thinking skills, leadership, bilingual proficiency, ethics and national identity. There are transformations that will be implemented in three stages within the next thirteen years, 2013-2025, which included the following as priorities -- teachers, school leaders, school quality, curriculum and evaluation, multilingual proficiency, post-school opportunities, the role of parents and the community, the efficacy of resources and information sharing and the administrative structure of the Education Ministry (The Star, 2012, September 11; Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2012). Transformations in a country are not something that can be done overnight, and seeing positive results may take time, but there should be a starting point and this initiative is a great example of a starting point for an educational reform in Malaysia.

6.7.3. Promote continuing education

A strong workforce with good human capital is vital for the development of a nation. Quality continuing education should be made available, and be promoted to adult learners. With the emphasis of adult and continuing education in the developed countries, Malaysia could also emulate such successes in building a strong human capital through tapping their adult learners and encouraging them to return to school. Therefore, Malaysia could do more by reaching out to the adult population who might want to go back to school, if given a chance. While many people need to keep their jobs and often do not find time to study, incorporating continuing education as part of the professional

development of employees should be seen as a positive move to improve the quality of human capital in Malaysia. Employees who need the time off to study could be given tax exemptions and work time as part of the incentive. The employers should be compensated for providing such an opportunity to their employees. With the “kiasu” or “afraid of losing out” attitude in the Asian culture as discussed in Chapter Five, it is understandable that some employers do not want to spend the effort, money and time to provide opportunities for continuing education. They fear that their employees might leave for better prospects when they are more ‘qualified’ with the credentials earned during their ‘time off’ from work. Therefore there may be some employers who are selfish in keeping their employees to themselves without any opportunity for the employees to pursue higher education. However, to make it a practical and a win-win situation for both parties, perhaps employers could establish bonds and legal contracts whereby any employee who got time off to study would work with the company for a certain number of years. This would provisionally allow the employee to pursue a degree while still working with her employer.

Another idea could be to promote distance learning for adult education so that they can keep their job while studying online at a time and space that are convenient. In the long run, human capital can be improved, and local talents will be recognized and enhanced, and relatively companies could expect better quality employees. By encouraging adult and continuing education, the focus is on nation- building for more knowledgeable and prepared citizens to face the competition of a global economy. It may seem easier said than done, but every little step should count toward building a nation with good human capital.

6.7.4. Revisit brain gain initiatives in Malaysia

One important question for Malaysia is whether migration of their talented and skilled supports or obstructs the nation's development. On a negative note, migration can be seen as a hindrance to the country's development when human capital is lost, and where the young and qualified individuals leave, causing what is known as 'brain drain.' This may also hinder the development of the country by reducing pressures for social change (Castles, 2000, p. 275). The family, local community and state of the country of origin invested time and money for the upbringing and education of the individual up to young adulthood. Therefore, the young adult's move out of the country means that the new host country, for example, the U.S. is the one reaping the benefits of this investment. On a positive note, migration can be a support to development in the future, especially in terms of the human capital of the migrant. For example, migrants may have worked with more sophisticated and advanced technology in countries like the U.S., Australia, Great Britain, and Germany. Therefore, their knowledge and skills through this research, training and work exposure can be beneficially transferred and applied upon their return to the home country. Moreover, Portes (2009) further explains how the H-1B program is considered a temporary professional migration because H-1B holders could return to their home country at any time if they lose their U.S. work visa sponsorship. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, H-1B workers who did not extend their stay eventually returned, which created the cyclical professional flow. This cyclical flow can be either positive or negative. To make sure it is positive and benefits the country, Malaysia should be ready with infrastructure to continue to provide support and growth to the scientific and technological advancements brought back by the those professionals who returned (Portes, 2009). Moreover, understanding the effects of relative deprivation that is relevant to the case of Malaysia could provide a key to improve on the strategies of the current Brain Gain initiatives because it will help address the fundamental concerns raised by the potential migrants who could repatriate.

The repatriation trend in Malaysia is not gaining popularity, although there have been programs in place such as the Brain Gain Program (2006-2010) and Talent Corporation programs (2010-present), and although there are also Malaysian-born migrants who expressed an interest and a passion to help develop the country. The interest and passion to help develop Malaysia is different from the interest to repatriate to Malaysia in order to help develop the country. Malaysia is one of the countries that does not allow its citizens to have dual citizenships. Therefore, if one were to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, she would have to give up her Malaysian citizenship. Moreover, she would have lived in the U.S. for a while and has established her 'roots' in the U.S. and the option to just repatriate may not be a practical one for her life at the moment. By understanding the in-depth personal thoughts, experience and expectations of the participants in this study, as well as how they tend to maintain flexible citizenships, perhaps there should be a re-examination of the country's strategic plans to make it more viable for Malaysian-born migrants to return even for a short term stint. Some of the examples of such initiatives from other countries as discussed in Literature Review include the contributions of highly skilled Asian-Americans in the information technology sector through economic and social linkages between the Silicon Valley in the U.S. and the Hsinchu Park of Taiwan (Saxenian & Hsu, 2001); the Indian-Americans who contributed their expertise in hospitals in India through their sabbatical residencies (Davone, R., n.d.); the organizations of annual seminars by the highly skilled transnational communities in collaboration with their home country as a way to promote the transmission of information (Abdelgafar et al., 2004; Lucas, 2001); the transfer of technology through license agreements and filling managerial positions in home country (Zhenzhen et al., 2004); the mentoring of new startup managers and bringing in investments by experienced entrepreneurs (Devesh, 2001); the development of diaspora business networks (Newland, 2004); and the "Balik Trabaho sa Pilipinas" brain gain program for overseas Filipino workers (GMA News Online, 2011, April 25) .

To start with, there should be more flexibility to allow the Malaysian-born migrants with permanent residency status to hold on to their green cards, and naturalized U.S. citizens to hang on to their American passports while they are given the opportunity to work and contribute, short-term or for a fixed period of time, in Malaysia. Like an exchange program that is implemented for students or scholars, this is organized for professionals, researchers and scientists. A bilateral exchange program involving universities and multinational organizations could be beneficial for both Malaysia and the U.S. especially when there is an exchange of innovative ideas and sharing of human capital. It would seem like a win-win situation for the following possibilities:

- international and diplomatic ties between Malaysia and the U.S. are strengthened
- the U.S. does not lose their now home-grown talent (their PR and naturalized U.S. citizens) -- those whose degrees are completed in the U.S., who have been trained in the U.S. and who have worked and settled in the U.S. for a number of years
- the government and organizations in Malaysia benefit from the sharing of innovative ideas in agriculture, business, education, STEM fields
- Malaysian-born migrants do not have to make that tough choice of having to leave their new *home* in the U.S. to return to their old *home* in Malaysia
- Malaysian-born migrants have the opportunity to reconnect with family and communities as well as fulfill their interest and passion to help develop Malaysia
- Malaysian-born migrants still have their job in the U.S. while facilitating the exchange and transfer of knowledge between the two countries

These possibilities could address the issues that the Malaysia brain gain initiatives have faced. The Malaysian Brain Gain Program, which was launched in 2006 by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation Malaysia (MOSTI), was established with the goal of attracting talent from certain targeted industries and specializations to Malaysia. Its goal was to attract fifty top scientists and 500 to 1,000 exceptional Malaysian-born and foreign scientists to go to Malaysia, by the year 2010. However,

these expectations were not met, and the program is now non-operational. Then in 2010, a new organization called Talent Corporation (TalentCorp) was established by the government to develop strategies and implement a more effective action plan to alleviate the brain drain issues in Malaysia.

TalentCorp proposed to attract talent from industries listed under the Malaysia's National Key Economic Areas in the Economic Transformation Program, which include the business services, agriculture and tourism. Its Returning Expert Program is mapped to entice Malaysian-born migrants, however it is only available to those who have met the following criteria:

- Diploma education level with a minimum of ten years of working experience overseas
- Bachelor's degree and six years of working experience
- Master's degree and four years of working experience
- Doctoral degrees and two years of working experience

(Returning Expert Programme, TalentCorp Malaysia website, n.d.)

If the eligibility requirements to participate in TalentCorp's Returning Expert Program (REP) mean a prospective returnee would need to work several years in the foreign country before he can partake in the REP, it is unclear how or why that is an 'attractive option' to the prospective returnee. During these years of work in the U.S., assimilation that occurred would have made it more difficult for Malaysian-born migrants to detach themselves from their *home* in the U.S. where they are accustomed to the life in the U.S., and not to forget, the implications for their family members should they choose to repatriate. For example, someone who has a master's degree and four years of work experience (as per one of the REP criteria) may find it more difficult to decide to repatriate as compared to someone who has a master's degree and one year of work experience. Such criteria should be less stringent in order for them to be more attractive to prospective returnees. In fact, it would be beneficial to Malaysia to have the graduates

abroad with bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees to return, even if they do not have that many years of experience as stipulated by the REP. Therefore the REP should reconsider enticing prospective returnees with any degree and any number of years to return to Malaysia, even though they may have fewer years of working experience abroad.

According to the TalentCorp's website, these are the benefits offered to those who meet the minimum educational qualifications and years of work experience:

- An optional flat tax rate 15 percent for employment income for five years
- Tax exemption for all personal items brought into Malaysia
- Foreign spouse or children are eligible to apply for Permanent Resident (PR) status within six months
- Foreign-born children or children already studying in an international stream overseas are allowed to enroll in any international school in Malaysia
- Eligible to buy two locally-assembled vehicles, tax-free

(Source: Returning Expert Programme, TalentCorp Malaysia website, 2012)

The benefits, as listed on the TalentCorp's website, do not address the fundamental issues that represented the push factors in Malaysia such as concerns about policies, meritocracy, opportunities, safety concern, high cost of living/weak purchasing power, and quality higher education in Malaysia. Other considerations would need to include the long term plan in order to attract potential returnees; such as continuous support, establishment of community of scholars and professionals, professional development, help with assimilation to the Malaysian culture and community as well as investment in their children's education. Then again, the primary issues that were brought up in this study's findings would need to be addressed first before such perks can become attractive enough for one to consider repatriating.

6.7.5. Implications for the U.S. government policy

This research has implications for debates around demand and supply issues of human capital in the United States. On one hand there is demand in the U.S. for highly skilled human capital in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. On the other hand many qualified and trained STEM workers may already be in the country to supply that demand; all they need is the policy to allow them to stay as workers to fill this need. Knowing that many international graduates in the U.S. are prospective immigrants, some of whom are trained in the STEM fields, it is vital for the U.S. government to revisit the policy that pushes many international students out of the country following degree completion.

Another discussion that needs further thought-to-action strategy pertains to the notion of brain circulation. Through this study I have learned that there are not only implications for a developing country like Malaysia, but for a developed country like the U.S. as well for other countries. Globalization is the flows of goods, information, people and services between and among countries. We know that these efforts cannot be implemented without governments working together in terms of setting the policies to allow for the global exchange of knowledge and ideas. The sharing of innovative ideas in agriculture, business, education, and the STEM fields cannot be done without policies that allow for such exchange. One way to explore further is to look at existing programs such as the ones administered by the Fulbright Program which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (Institute of International Education, n. d.), to examine ways this can be expanded to include more professionals. The Fulbright Program currently serves American citizens as well as scientists from all over the world by providing funding for graduate study, advance research, and teaching.

6.8. Limitations and future research

First, this is a small group with only twenty-two participants. Because of that, the views about life in the U.S. and about how they have experienced life in the U.S. are not representative of all Malaysians who returned and Malaysian-born migrants in the U.S. Second, participants self-selected themselves to be interviewed, limiting the range of responses that could have been collected from a randomly selected sample. Third, the individual interview may be biased because participants might not disclose information that could be reflect them in a bad light or information that may hurt their reputation, even though confidentiality of their identity is assured. Fourth, participants might not tell the truth about everything they feel because of fear of retaliation especially with regards to their view points about government and religious policies.

A similar study to gather push and pull factors on graduate students, master's, terminal and doctoral degree recipients between other top host countries (Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore) and Malaysia is needed. Another suggestion includes a study to understand the push and pull factors at the undergraduate level – between top host countries (Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore and U.S.) and Malaysia. Another possible idea is a study to explore the relationship between one's major of study (for example in one of the STEM fields) and migration decision. Next, there should be a study to explore the extent of transnational identity of Malaysian-born migrants who have been living in countries such as Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, and Singapore after a certain period of time.

In looking at how findings like these are pertinent to the broader context, one important factor that could be explored more in-depth is the theory of migration return, including brain circulation. Some of the aspects of understanding the theory of return migration may start with exploring the international return migration justifications, understanding why migration happens in the first place in that particular country and

finding answers to how the theory of migration is understood across nationalities in the contexts of different policies.

6.9. Conclusion

The research main goal of this dissertation was to offer a description of the participants' backgrounds; reasons they came to the U.S. to study; and how their experiences influence the way they thought about Malaysia, the U.S., and in connection to their push and pull factors, as they make the decision to settle down. Knowing *when* the turning points are and each step of the way is important because turning points may not be optional to some individuals yet there is no ready "net" to catch them when they fall. Those turning points force people to make a decision. The knowledge of these turning points will help to identify *when* to entice and recruit fresh graduates, and to get ready to assist them as they adapt themselves as newcomers in the workforce. The exposure and experience people had when they were in the U.S. pursuing higher education and working, does not only give them paper qualifications and work experience. It gives them a different outlook in life; changes their identity and makes them reflect on who they are and what they want in life; and also makes them see comparative perspectives of living in two different countries and of working in two different work environments.

Some pragmatic strategies are suggested to address the issues raised in this study. Although some of these strategies are already in place in Malaysia, the findings reinforce the need to make sure these strategies meet the current demands to build a better nation. The positive outcomes of these strategies already in place should be made more open and known so that Malaysian-born migrants overseas are aware of these outcomes and the strategies being planned and implemented in Malaysia. By improving the quality of life through promoting social justice and improving safety for all, Malaysia will not only be an attractive *home* to go back to, but it will also attract other foreign investors, foreign 'brains' and also tourists. Hopefully the National Education Blueprint that was launched

in September 2012 would meet the needs to invest in quality higher education in Malaysia, and relatively, to make it accessible to the Malaysian citizens young and old. Concurrently working alongside the mission and objective of the National Education Blueprint, colleges should work together with organizations and industries to help and make possible continuing education to the adult learners in the workforce in order to increase the human capital in Malaysia. The Brain Gain initiatives in Malaysia have been in place for years. If the fundamental issues are looked into and addressed, such as the issues raised by the participants, or conducting needs analysis for potential returnees, perhaps the initiatives would receive better reception if they are revised to allow for brain circulation to happen. As discussed above, the establishment of research and design centers that could support the scientific and technological innovations would promote the concept of brain circulation and cyclical flow, which would help in the development of the nation.

Although this study concentrates on Malaysian-born individuals, the findings can be considered significant to the broader context of highly educated individuals globally. The notion of *turning points* when decisions have to be made demonstrates that governments from different countries, not just the host or sending countries, should be prepared to have a “net” to provide an alternative assistance plan those highly educated individuals who may not get a chance to stay in the host country and who may not want to return to their home country. Many of these highly educated individuals are in demand because of their valued human capital. In particular, global mobility is made possible for the highly educated individuals in globally competitive markets for certain talent and skills to drive the knowledge economy. Many countries find ways to attract and keep foreign talent pool, and some even recruited the international student pool when they are still in school. Therefore policymakers need to know *when* individuals’ migration decisions are made – to remain or to move.

Some government policies have changed to allow for a wider “net” to be cast. For examples, the United Kingdom and Canada have a point system in their immigration

processes to attract the highly educated and highly skilled to immigrate to their country and even for foreign students studying in those countries to have a higher opportunity to remain in the host country after graduating. The higher the degree and the more training as well as work experience one has, more points are given, which translates to higher chances of immigration success. Another strategy by some countries include changing the policy to promote brain circulation, for instance as stated by Khadria (2009), “a return migration policy vis-à-vis dual citizenship has very different social costs to individual workers and their families in comparison to many deprivations experienced by those offered only the possibility of temporary migration” (p. 113). In order to have a competitive edge, newer immigration policy amendments include the provision of dual citizenship as a way to promote temporary migration policies aimed at the return of migrants to their home countries (Khadria, 2009). Therefore, instead of losing their highly educated citizens to other countries where they have chosen to become naturalized citizens, some countries have decided to allow for dual citizenships so that being a citizen of the “other” country does not seem so permanent after all. In a way, dual citizenship can be seen as a reversal from permanent to temporary migration although as Khadria stated, the difference is that “it would arrive primarily from the return migration to the country of origin becoming more voluntary and less permanent in nature” (2009, p. 112). While Malaysia does not allow its citizens to hold dual citizenships, my findings suggest that brain circulation would work in the broader context if the government policies allow for the establishment of conditions and opportunities for highly educated professionals to engage with their home countries. Exchange programs or engagements need to be further refined, but generally may be in the areas of “knowledge transfer, business creation, and the promotion of technology intensive foreign direct investment” (Khadria, 2009, p. 120).

Another important aspect to look at is that *relative deprivation* is prevalent in developing countries. Citizens of those countries are eager to immigrate to developed countries because they want to earn more money and have a better quality of life. Modern technology such as the Internet and social media helped in the decision-making of future immigrants because they provide opportunities for many to look at the outside world.

Advancement in the areas of telecommunications and transportation also helped in easing the immigration process especially when considering the ease to travel and move, as well as to keep in touch with family members and members of the social network. In other words, it is now easier than ever to travel and to communicate, therefore immigrating to a foreign country does not mean one is cut off or feel isolated from their own community. Moreover, returning to visit is also quite common and convenient these days enabling migrants to stay connected to the old “roots.” We understand from the findings of this study that experiences migrants may have in the U.S. can prompt transnational identities. They use a dual frame of reference to evaluate their experiences in the U.S. and the continuous relationships with their family and communities in Malaysia. With their willingness to return to visit and with continuous social network with home countries, the notion of transnationalism could promote brain circulation.

We can explore the possibilities through understanding the theory of return. Even when one is a naturalized citizen, return migration to the country of origin is still possible. As stated by Duval (2004), “return visits are periodic but temporary sojourns made by members of migrant communities to their external homeland where strong social ties exist. The return visit is a transnational exercise that may facilitate return” (p.51). Duval’s (2004) study discusses the link between return visits and return migration among the Commonwealth Eastern Caribbean migrants in Toronto. Temporary and short term return visits can instigate return migration, if the policy and circumstances create a pathway for it.

We learned that people have a choice, and they would make that choice that is best fit for their circumstance, while weighing the economic factors, quality of life factors, social justice factors, freedom perspectives and social network/social capital aspects at that time when the choice was made. Although the participants have chosen the physical location as their new *home*, their identities and values are not restricted by the location alone since *home* means more than just that physical location. In fact, understanding the realms of transnationalism will help us explore how it promotes brain

circulation, and how it does not necessarily mean a total loss for the countries whose highly educated and highly skilled have migrated.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Invitation letter

Invitation to participate in research study – Email

Pauline Chhooi [Email: pchhooi@uky.edu]
Ph.D. candidate, Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation
College of Education, University of Kentucky

Dear participant,

I am writing to ask for your help in my dissertation research that that will look at how a journey to a foreign land to pursue a graduate degree might trigger more than just the attainment of that degree. I propose to look at how higher education contributes to understanding the immigration of highly educated individuals, the push-pull factors for remaining (in the host country) or returning (to their home country), and the effects on the government and individuals.

For my dissertation project, I am seeking Malaysians and Malaysian-born migrants, both female and male, age between 23 and 50, who have already earned an American master's (i.e. M.A., M.Sc., etc.), doctoral (i.e. Ed.D., JD, Ph.D., etc.) or terminal professional degree (i.e. MBA, MD, law degree), currently working in the U.S. or in Malaysia on a permanent basis (i.e. not on official overseas work assignments or as visitors) to be interviewed.

This is not an evaluation of your graduate degree(s) or university/ies, your job or the company you work for, or you as a person. Your participation in the study is *voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential*. You may decline to answer specific questions or end your participation at any time by letting me know. Although the interview will be audio-recorded, all information will be reported in a form that does not identify you. You will only need to be interviewed once, and the interview is expected to take approximately one hour. Interviews will be conducted by phone, Internet, or in person, depending on the convenience and location.

If you can and would like to help me in my dissertation research, please contact me at pchhooi@uky.edu or call me at (859)227-7736, and let me know the best way I can reach you. Also, if you have questions about this study, please contact me. Please keep this email for your own records and future reference. Your assistance and input in this study is highly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Pauline Chhooi

Appendix B – Screening questions

Screening Questions (When subjects contact investigator after receiving the invitation email/recruitment letter)

Inclusion criteria questions: (questions are in italics)

1. *Were you born in Malaysia?*
 2. *Are you between the age of 23 and 50?*
 3. *Have you already earned a U.S. master's, doctoral or terminal professional degree (MBA, law, MD) in the U.S.?*
- If **no** to at least one of the questions above, thank the individual and let them know that they are not able to participate in this study.
 - If **yes**, to all of the above, then to continue with the following screening questions:
 4. *Where do you live?* – This question is to determine how the interview can take place. If within travelling means of the PI, a face-to-face interview is possible, otherwise, other means will be used or suggested.
 5. *Please note that all interviews will be recorded. If you do not want to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in the research. How would you prefer to be interviewed?*
 - a. Face-to-face (To be determined if location is convenient for the PI too)
 - b. Phone interview
 - c. Web conference/ interview through the Internet using Yahoo, MSN, Skype
 6. If subject chooses 5a): Appointment will be arranged with the subject – to schedule a day, time and location.
 7. If subject chooses 5b): Ask for phone number to reach and schedule a day and time for the phone interview.
 8. If they choose 5c):
 - a. Ask them which program they would prefer, and have on their machine. (e.g. Yahoo, MSN, Skype programs)
 - b. Ask them if they have a headset (with ear phone and microphone)?
 - i. If yes, then schedule a day, time and location.
 - ii. If no, then ask them if they would be willing to participate in a phone interview. If yes, then get the phone number and schedule a day, time and location. If they are not willing to participate, then thank them for their time.

Appendix C – Consent form for face-to-face interviews

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

TITLE OF THE STUDY:

Choosing the Next Home:

International Pushes and Pulls for Malaysians with U.S. Graduate Degrees

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in an interview for a doctoral dissertation research about *Choosing the Next Home: International Pushes and Pulls for Malaysians with U.S. Graduate Degrees*. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you are the one of the approximately 24 people that will be interviewed for this study.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Pauline Chhooi, doctoral candidate for Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation, College of Education, University of Kentucky. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Beth Goldstein, Committee Chair and Professor, College of Education, University of Kentucky.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to look at how a journey to a foreign land to pursue a graduate degree might trigger more than just the attainment of that degree. It is to look at how higher education abroad may influence the immigration of the highly-educated individuals, the push-pull factors for remaining (in the host country) or returning (to their home country), and the effects on the government and individuals. This study will also look at how individual decisions to remain or return are influenced by their transnational identities and how these identities evolved through time and place.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

One reason that you should not take part in this study is if you do not fit the criteria that are set forth for the subjects in this study. The criteria to be a subject in this study include: persons born in Malaysia, age between 23 and 50; both female and male. You must have already earned U.S. master's, doctoral or terminal professional degrees in the U.S. Half of the subjects will currently be working and residing in the U.S. and half of them will be in Malaysia. Malaysian students currently enrolled in American colleges and universities, other Malaysians on official overseas work assignments here in the U.S., and visitors to the U.S., even if they have been in the United States for more than one year, will not be included in this study. You must be willing to have your interview audio-recorded. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate in this study. Another reason that you should not take part in this study is if you do not wish to participate.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study will be conducted through face-to-face-interview. The interview will only take place once, unless there is something that needs to be clarified or followed up on. This interview will take about one hour, and any follow-up will mostly be done through the phone or email.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

For this research study, you will take part in an interview one-on-one in person. Our interview will take approximately one hour, and will entail semi-structured open-ended questions to gauge your feelings, ideas and experience on the research topic. The interview will have to be audio-recorded, however, you can ask me to stop recording at any time or let me know if you would like some comments to be off-the-record and the interview will stop. And if you decided not to have the interview recorded, the interview will end.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of my knowledge, the interviews you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, your willingness to take part may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can also choose not to answer a particular question during the interview by informing me. You can also stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES? I

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information I have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your name and other identifying information private. I will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team or authorized from knowing that you gave me information. All subjects' names and information, interview transcripts, memos, and audio recordings will be kept in a safe storage, under lock and key. I will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require me to show your information to a court. Also, I may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure I have done the research correctly; these would be authorized people at the University of Kentucky.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the principal investigator, Pauline Chhooi at 859-227-7736 or email pchhooi@uky.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. I will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

You allow this interview to be audio-recorded.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of authorized person obtaining informed consent

Date

Appendix D – Consent form for phone and web interviews

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

TITLE OF THE STUDY:

Choosing the Next Home:

International Pushes and Pulls for Malaysians with U.S. Graduate Degrees

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in an interview for a doctoral dissertation research about *Choosing the Next Home: International Pushes and Pulls for Malaysians with U.S. Graduate Degrees*. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you are the one of the approximately 24 people that will be interviewed for this study.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Pauline Chhooi, doctoral candidate for Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation, College of Education, University of Kentucky. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Beth Goldstein, Committee Chair and Professor, College of Education, University of Kentucky.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to look at how a journey to a foreign land to pursue a graduate degree might trigger more than just the attainment of that degree. It is to look at how higher education abroad may influence the immigration of the highly-educated individuals, the push-pull factors for remaining (in the host country) or returning (to their home country), and the effects on the government and individuals. This study will also look at how individual decisions to remain or return are influenced by their transnational identities and how these identities evolved through time and place.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

One reason that you should not take part in this study is if you do not fit the criteria that are set forth for the subjects in this study. The criteria to be a subject in this study include: persons born in Malaysia, age between 23 and 50; both female and male. You must have already earned U.S. master's, doctoral or terminal professional degrees in the U.S. Half of the subjects will currently be working and residing in the U.S. and half of them will be in Malaysia. Malaysian students currently enrolled in American colleges and universities, other Malaysians on official overseas work assignments here in the U.S., and visitors to the U.S., even if they have been in the United States for more than one year, will not be included in this study. You must be willing to have your interview audio-recorded. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate in this study. Another reason that you should not take part in this study is if you do not wish to participate.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study will be conducted through phone interview, or web conferencing such as using programs like Yahoo!, MSN and Skype. The interview will only take place once, unless there is something that needs to be clarified or followed up on. This interview will take about one hour, and any follow-up will mostly be done through the phone or email.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

For this research study, you will take part in an interview through the phone or through web conferencing, whichever way that is most convenient to you. Our interview will take approximately one hour, and will entail semi-structured open-ended questions to gauge your feelings, ideas and experience on the research topic. The interview will have to be audio-recorded, however, you can ask me to stop recording at any time or let me know if you would like some comments to be off-the-record and the interview will stop. And if you decided not to have the interview recorded, the interview will end.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, your willingness to take part may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can also choose not to answer a particular question during the interview by informing me. You can also stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES? I

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information I have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your name and other identifying information private. I will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team or authorized from knowing that you gave me information. All subjects' names and information, interview transcripts, memos, and audio recordings will be kept in a safe storage, under lock and key. I will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require me to show your information to a court. Also, I may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure I have done the research correctly; these would be authorized people at the University of Kentucky.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the principal investigator, Pauline Chhooi at 859-227-7736 or email pchhooi@uky.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. If you have decided not to participate in this study, you do not have to check the boxes below to give your consent. You can close this browser, and inform me that you have decided not to participate in the study. Please send me an email at pchhooi@uky.edu.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE:

By checking this box, you agree to participate in this study and be audio-recorded under the conditions outlined above. You also acknowledge that you have received a copy of this form (please print for your records). You hereby consent to allow your comments to be published without your identifying information.

Type name for verification of consent process

Date

Please click "Submit" below to send to investigator to document your consent to participate.

Submit

Appendix E – Interview questions for participants who remained in the U.S.

Group I: Participants who have remained in the U.S. after finishing their studies

A. Demographics

1. What is your sex? Age?
2. What is your place of birth in Malaysia? (Town or city)
 - Do you grow up in an urban, suburban or rural area?
3. What is your ethnic group?
4. What is your religion?
5. What is your marital status?
6. Do you have family members living with you?
 - Family – spouse and/or children
 - Family – elders/ parents
7. What is your visa status now? (H-1B, PR, citizen). If citizen, when naturalized?

B. The pursuit of higher education

8. When did you come to the United States for your studies?
9. When you first came to the U.S., was it for an undergraduate degree or graduate degree?
 - Probe: If for undergraduate: in what area of study? At what institution?
 - Probe: If for a graduate degree: what graduate professional degrees did you complete in the U.S.? In what areas of study? At what institutions?
10. Why did you choose the United States?
 - Probe: Where did you get the sources of information about American schools?
 - Probe: Did your school have any affiliations and transfer arrangements with Malaysia? If yes, please explain.
11. What were your sources of funding (family, funding from the government or private organizations, support from the U.S. institution or state)?
12. What kind of work experience did you have during your studies?
13. What kind of work experience did you have before you pursued your master's/doctoral degree?
 - Probe: What did you do between completing one degree and starting the next?
14. When you first came to the U.S. for your graduate studies, did you come alone or with any family member (spouse, or spouse and child or children)?
15. What kind of expectations did your family have of you when you first came to the U.S. for your studies?
16. Please describe your graduate experience in the American higher education system and the U.S. in terms of:
 - environment in school, academic support system, studies, the difficulties while in school, professors, classmates, room mates
 - involvement in student organizations, academic societies
 - being a Malaysian, an international student

- living in the U.S., fitting into a new place
 - missing home, friends, food, lifestyle
17. What were your expectations and goals when you came to the U.S. for your studies?
18. When did you complete your last degree? What did you do immediately following completion of this degree?

C. Employment

19. Please describe your employment history. What kind of employment do you have today? Please tell me a little bit about your position and industry.
20. When considering to remain in the U.S., how did you decide where to reside (among the 50 states in the U.S.)?
21. In choosing to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia, what guided your decision to remain in the U.S.?
- Probe: Employment and career: Job offer, research/financial opportunities, salary, career path.
 - Probe: Policies: What government policies may have played a role in your decision making and why? (e.g. OPT, H-1B, PR, post-doc, Malaysia Brain Gain program, etc.)
 - Probe: Family expectations, role as a graduate, expectations for self, goals
 - Probe: Social contexts: Family already living in the U.S., social networks, marriage, other lifestyle options, healthcare, etc.
22. Please describe how this decision (to remain in the U.S.) was made?
- Probe: When was that decision made?
 - Probe: How was the timing of this decision with your graduate studies?
 - Probe: Who played a role in your decision making? How?
23. Do you keep in touch with friends and families in Malaysia?
- Probe: What are the common modes of communication?
 - Probe: Do you visit them in Malaysia? Do they visit you in the U.S.? How often?
 - Probe: Do you send remittances to them?
24. What are the professional and social affiliations or networks you belong to, and why?
- Probe: Please describe to me the kind of social networks that you have established or belonged to, both in the U.S. and Malaysia.
25. What do you think as you reflect on this decision to live and work in the U.S. after you finished your studies?

Future Plans

26. What are your future plans (on settling down permanently)?
- Probe: Do you plan to settle forever in the U.S.; or do you have plans to leave the U.S. and return to Malaysia? If you do, approximately when, why?
27. What might bring you back to Malaysia? For example, due to...
- Probe: Employment and career: Job offer, research/financial opportunities, salary, career path.

- Probe: Policies: What government policies may have played a role in your decision making and why? (e.g. OPT, H-1B, PR, post-doc, Malaysia Brain Gain program, etc.)
 - Probe: Family expectations, role as a graduate, expectations for self, goals
 - Probe: Social contexts: Family already living in the U.S., social networks, marriage, other lifestyle options, healthcare, etc.
28. What do you think might bring *the other non-returning Malaysians* in the U.S. back to Malaysia?

Appendix F – Interview questions for participants who have returned to Malaysia

Group II: Participants who have returned to Malaysia after finishing their studies

A. Demographics

1. What is your sex? Age?
2. What is your place of birth in Malaysia? (Town or city)
 - Do you grow up in an urban, suburban or rural area?
3. What is your ethnic group?
4. What is your religion?
5. What is your marital status?
6. Do you have family members living with you?
 - Family – spouse and/or children
 - Family – elders/ parents
7. What is your visa status now? (H-1B, PR, citizen). If citizen, when naturalized?

B. The pursuit of higher education

8. When did you go to the United States for your studies?
9. When you first went to the U.S., was it for an undergraduate degree or graduate degree?
 - Probe: If for undergraduate: in what area of study? At what institution?
 - Probe: If for a graduate degree: what graduate professional degrees did you complete in the U.S.? In what areas of study? At what institutions?
10. Why did you choose the United States?
 - Probe: Where did you get the sources of information about American schools?
 - Probe: Did your school have any affiliations and transfer arrangements with Malaysia? If yes, please explain.
11. What were your sources of funding (family, funding from the government or private organizations, support from the U.S. institution or state)?
12. What kind of work experience did you have during your undergrad studies?
13. What kind of work experience did you have before you pursued your master's/doctoral degree?
 - Probe: What did you do between completing one degree and starting the next?
14. When you first went to the U.S. for your graduate studies, did you go alone or with any family member (spouse, or spouse and child or children)?
15. What kind of expectations did your family have of you when you first went to the U.S. for your studies?
16. Please describe your graduate experience in the American higher education system and the U.S. in terms of:
 - environment in school, academic support system, studies, the difficulties while in school, professors, classmates, room mates
 - involvement in student organizations, academic societies

- being a Malaysian, an international student
- living in the U.S., fitting into a new place
- missing home, friends, food, lifestyle

17. What were your expectations and goals when you went to the U.S. for your studies?
 18. When did you complete your last degree? What did you do immediately following completion of this degree?

C. Employment

19. Please describe your employment history.

Probe: What kind of employment do you have today?

Probe: Please tell me a little bit about your position and industry.

20. When considering to return to Malaysia, how did you decide where to reside (what state and why?)

21. In choosing to remain in the U.S. or to return to Malaysia, what guided your decision to return to Malaysia?

- Probe: Employment and career: Job offer, research/financial opportunities, salary, career path.
- Probe: Policies: What government policies may have played a role in your decision making and why? (e.g. OPT, H-1B, PR, post-doc, Malaysia Brain Gain program, etc.)
- Probe: Family expectations, role as a graduate, expectations for self, goals
- Probe: Social contexts: Family already living in the U.S., social networks, marriage, other lifestyle options, healthcare, etc.

22. Please describe how this decision (to return to Malaysia) was made?

- Probe: When was that decision made?
- Probe: How was the timing of this decision with your graduate studies?
- Probe: Who played a role in your decision making? How?

23. Do you keep in touch with friends and/or families in the U.S.?

- Probe: What are the common modes of communication?
- Probe: Do you visit them in the U.S.? Do they visit you in Malaysia? How often?

24. What are the professional and social affiliations or networks you belong to, and why?

- Probe: Please describe to me the kind of social networks that you have established or belonged to, both in the U.S. and Malaysia.

25. What do you think as you reflect on this decision to choose to live and work in Malaysia after you finished your studies?

Future Plans

26. What are your future plans (on settling down permanently)?

- Probe: Do you plan to settle forever in Malaysia; or do you have plans to leave and immigrate to the U.S. or elsewhere? If you do, approximately where, when, why?

27. What do you think might bring *the non-returning Malaysians* in the U.S. back to Malaysia? For example, due to...

- Probe: Employment and career: Job offer, research/financial opportunities, salary, career path.
- Probe: Policies: What government policies may have played a role in your decision making and why? (e.g. OPT, H-1B, PR, post-doc, Malaysia Brain Gain program, etc.)
- Probe: Family expectations, role as a graduate, expectations for self, goals
- Probe: Social contexts: Family already living in the U.S., social networks, marriage, other lifestyle options, healthcare, etc.

Appendix G – Demographic information of participants

Table 4: Participants who have not started the permanent immigration process, holding non-immigrant visas (NIV)

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Ethnicity	Religion	Degree	Location	Position	Visa Status
1	Khatijah	30's	Female	Married	Malay	Muslim	Doctorate	East coast	Academic	OPT
2	Stanley	20's	Male	Single	Chinese	Free Thinker	Master's	Midwest	Engineer	H1B
3	Sujitha	30's	Female	Single	Indian	Sikh	Master's	West coast	Business	Business Visa
4	Wei Aun	20's	Male	Single	Chinese	Free Thinker	Master's	West coast	Analyst	H1B

Table 5: Participants who have chosen permanent residency (PR) and citizenship status in the U.S.

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Ethnicity	Religion	Degree	Location	Position	Visa Status
1	Ai Mee	30's	Female	Married	Chinese	Catholic	Master's	Midwest	Web Developer	PR
2	Alvin	30's	Male	Married	Chinese	Buddhist	Doctorate	West Coast	Analyst	PR
3	Andrew	30's	Male	Married	Chinese	Christian	Master's	Mountain	Manager	PR
4	Henry	20's	Male	Single	Chinese	Christian	Master's	Mountain	Engineer	PR
5	Kong Ming	50's	Male	Married	Chinese	Christian	Master's	East coast	Analyst	U.S. Cit.
6	Mawar	40's	Female	Married	Malay	Free Thinker	Master's	Midwest	Home-maker	U.S. Cit.
7	Minah	30's	Female	Single	Malay	Muslim	Master's	West Coast	Engineer	PR
8	Rozzeta	40's	Female	Married	Malay	Muslim	Master's	West Coast	Analyst	U.S. Cit.
9	Sebastian	30's	Male	Married	Indian	Catholic	Master's	West coast	Manager	PR
10	Siew Ling	30's	Female	Married	Chinese	Free Thinker	Master's	West coast	Analyst	PR
11	Thiru	40's	Male	Married	Indian	Hindu	Master's	West coast	Engineer	PR

Appendix G – Demographic information of participants

Table 6: Participants who have returned to Malaysia

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Ethnicity	Religion	Degree	Location	Position	Visa Status
1	Bala	30's	Male	Single	Indian	Hindu	Master's	Malaysia	Manager	N/A
2	Kok Kiong	20's	Male	Single	Chinese	Buddhist	Bachelor's & incomplete doctorate	Malaysia	Business	N/A
3	Lily	20's	Female	Single	Chinese	Christian	Master's	Malaysia	Academic	N/A
4	Michael	20's	Male	Single	Chinese	Buddhist	Master's	Malaysia	Engineer	N/A
5	Salina	30's	Female	Single	Malay	Muslim	Master's	Malaysia	Manager	N/A
6	Subramaniam	30's	Male	Married	Indian	Free Thinker	Master's	Malaysia	Manager	N/A
7	Yusof	30's	Male	Married	Malay	Muslim	Master's	Malaysia	Engineer	N/A

Appendix H – Salary comparisons for engineers’ salaries in Malaysia and the U.S.

Example 1 – Process Engineer

MALAYSIA:

Process Engineer – Salary: RM2000 – RM3500 (**RM24,000-RM42,000 per year**)

Location: Selangor - Klang

Requirements:

- Candidate must possess at least Bachelor’s Degree in Electrical, Chemical, Industrial, Mechanical, or equivalent.
- Must be able to read and write Mandarin
- Fresh graduates/ entry level applicants are encouraged to apply.

If you are the TALENT that best match the jobs, kindly email us your latest CV or write-in to the below address with current and expected salary and benefits plus a non returnable latest photograph to.....

Source: www.jobstreet.com.my ad posted June 26, 2012

U.S.A.:

Process Engineer – Salary: ranges from **USD45,000 to USD70,000** with a median of USD59,000 per year

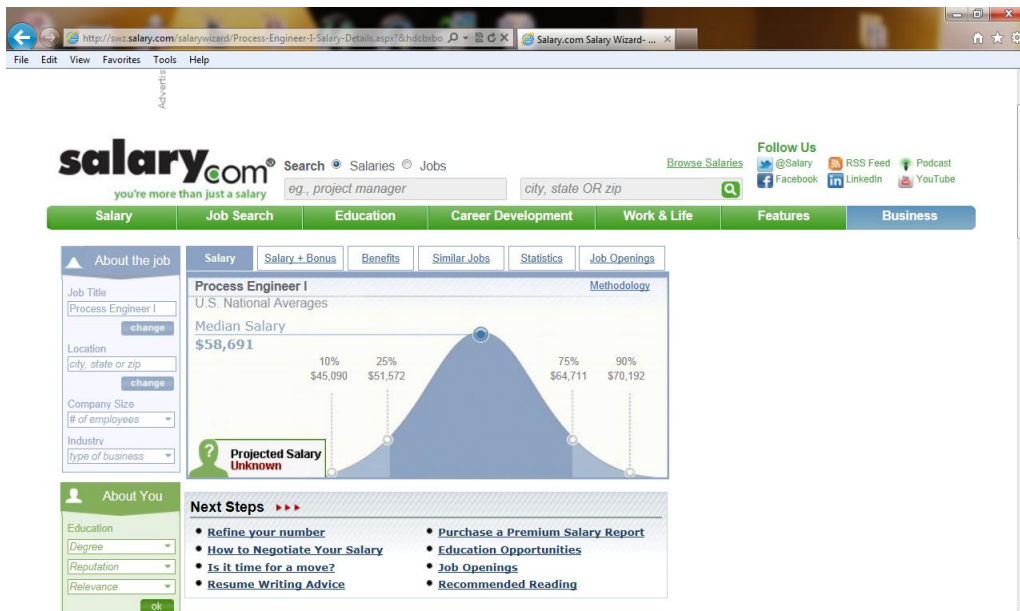


Figure 4: Salary range for process engineers in the U.S.

Source: www.salary.com retrieved July 2, 2012

Note: U.S. Dollar (USD)1 ≈ Ringgit Malaysia (RM)3.00 (January 2013)

Example 2 – Sales Engineer

MALAYSIA:

Sales Engineer – Salary RM1800 – RM2700 (**RM21,600 – RM32,400 per year**)

Location: Selangor

Requirements:

- Candidate must possess at least a Higher Secondary/STPM/ “A” Level/Pre-U, Diploma, Advanced/ Higher/ Graduate Diploma, Engineering (Industrial), Engineering (Mechanical), Business Studies/ Administration/ Management or equivalent.
- Required language(s): Chinese, English
- Fresh graduates/ entry level applicants are encouraged to apply.

Source: www.jobstreet.com.my ad posted June 28, 2012

U.S.A.:

Sales Engineer – Salary: ranges from **USD39,000 to USD70,000** with a median of USD53,000 per year

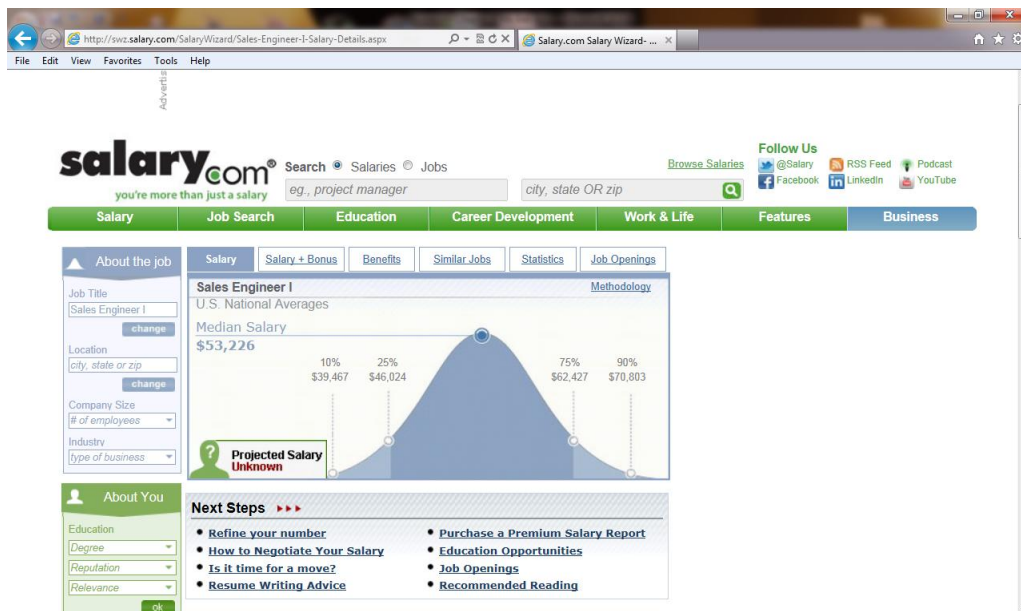


Figure 5: Salary range for sales engineers in the U.S.

Source: www.salary.com retrieved July 2, 2012

Note: U.S. Dollar (USD)1 ≈ Ringgit Malaysia (RM)3.00 (January 2013)

Example 3 – Service Engineer

MALAYSIA:

Service Engineer - Salary RM2650 - RM3650 (inclusive of allowances) (**RM31,800 – RM43,800 per year**)

Location: Selangor

Requirements:

- Candidate must possess at least a Diploma, Advanced/ Higher/ Graduate Diploma in Computer Science/ Information Technology/ Engineering (Computer/ Telecommunication)/ Engineering (Electrical/Electronic)/ Engineering (Bioengineering/ Biomedical) or equivalent.
- Fresh graduates/ entry level applicants are encouraged to apply.
- Able to converse in Bahasa Malaysia and English.

Applicants are invited to mail or email or fax a detailed resume with a recent passport sized photograph by 11 July 2012 and address it to :

Source: www.jobstreet.com.my ad posted July 2, 2012

U.S.A.:

Service Engineer – Salary: ranges from **USD24,000 to USD70,000** with a median of USD49,000 per year

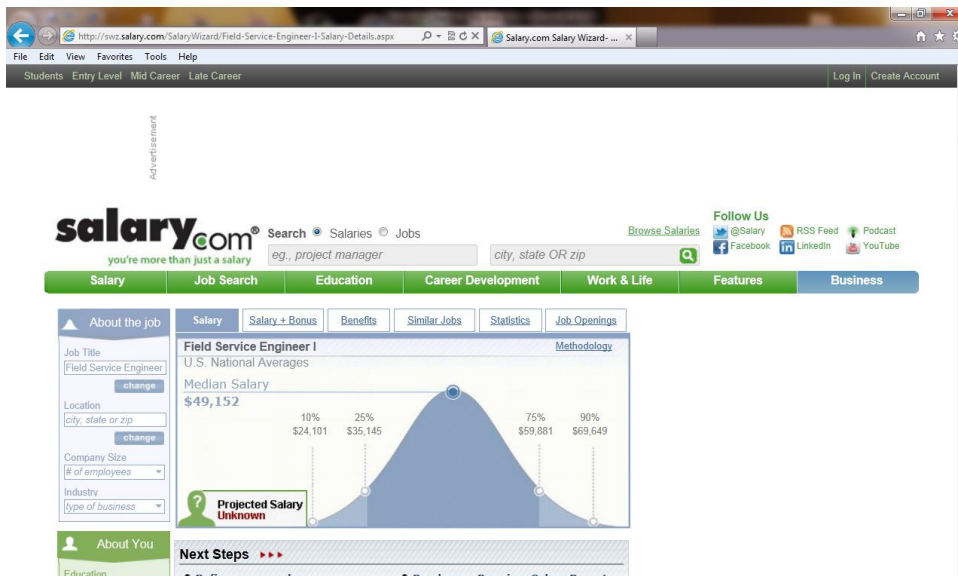


Figure 6: Salary range for service engineers in the U.S.

Source: www.salary.com retrieved July 2, 2012

Note: U.S. Dollar (USD)1 ≈ Ringgit Malaysia (RM)3.00 (January 2013)

Example 4 – Research and Development Engineer

MALAYSIA:

R & D Engineer / Japanese Speaking R & D Engineer – Salary: RM2000 - RM2500 + Allowance (**RM24,000 – RM30,000**)

Location: Shah Alam / Subang (Selangor)

Requirements:

- Candidate must possess Degree or Diploma in Chemistry, Science & Technology or equivalent.
- Required language(s): Chinese, English, Japanese.
- Fresh graduate applicants are encouraged to apply.
- Preferably background in Semiconductor Field.
- Applicant must be willing to travel outstation.
- Applicant must be willing to work in Shah Alam.

Source: www.jobstreet.com.my ad posted June 29, 2012

U.S.A.:

Research and Development Engineer – Salary: ranges from **USD59,000 to USD109,000** with a median of USD85,000 per year

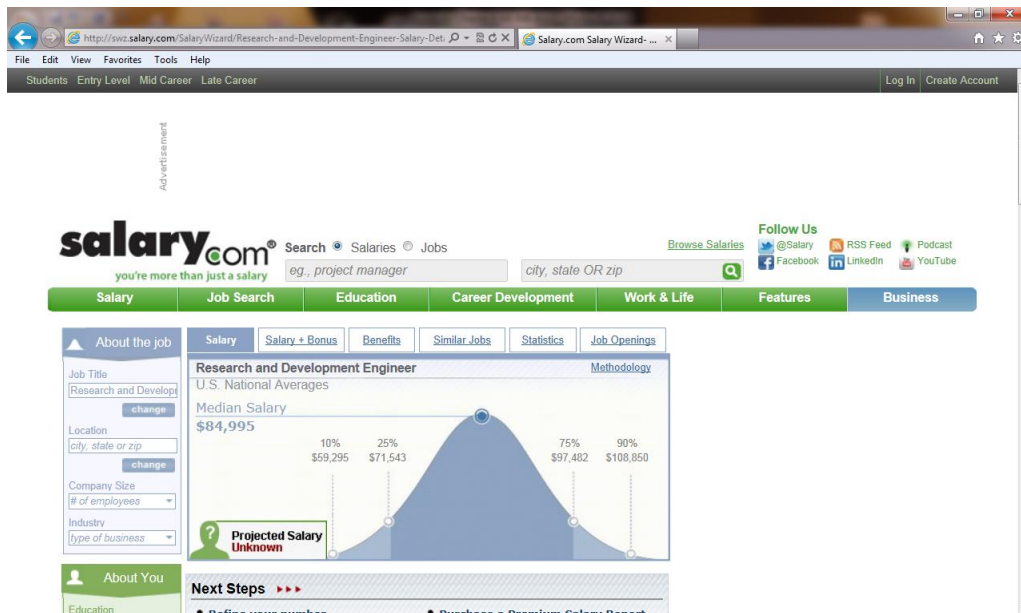


Figure 7: Salary range for research and development engineers in the U.S.

Source: www.salary.com retrieved July 2, 2012

Note: U.S. Dollar (USD)1 ≈ Ringgit Malaysia (RM)3.00 (January 2013)

Appendix I – Job advertisements in Malaysia

These are some of the advertisements retrieved from one of the biggest online job search websites in Malaysia, www.jobstreet.com.my. These job vacancies were from different companies located in different states in Malaysia.

Example 1

Senior Sales & Marketing Executive

Location: Selangor

Requirements:

- At least 2 years of working experience in the related field
- Preferably **Malay female**
- Good interpersonal skills, aggressive and committed
- Able to work independently
- Possess own transport
- Fresh graduates interested on the above market sectors are also encourage to apply
- With monthly basic salary of RM3,000 to RM4,000 and attractive commission scheme

Source: www.jobstreet.com.my ad posted June 1, 2012

Example 2

Admin and Accounts Executive

Location: Kuala Lumpur

Requirements:

- Preferably **Bumiputera** candidate.
- Candidate **MUST** possess a Degree in Accounting/ Accountancy.
- 0 - 1 year working experience in handling accounts.
- Fresh graduate is encouraged to apply.
- Knowledge of UBS Accounting System is an added advantage.
- PC Literate in MS Words and Excel.
- Fluent in spoken and written English and Bahasa Melayu.

All applicants should include a detailed resume with current and expected salary and a **recent photograph**.

Source: www.jobstreet.com.my ad posted June 7, 2012

Example 3

Human Resource and Admin Officer

Location: Kuala Lumpur

Requirements:

- Certificate in HR/ Business Admin/ Management from a reputable Institution.
- At least 1 year of working experience in the related field is required for this position. Knowledge of ISO 9001 or ISO 14001 will be an added advantage.
- Ability to write and communicate in Malay and English.
- Strong organizational skills, Strong communication skills; Good inter-personal skills; Good analytical skills; well-versed with Microsoft Application
- **Bumiputera are encouraged to apply**

Interested candidates are encouraged to apply online. Otherwise, write in with a comprehensive resume stating qualifications and working experience, current and expected salary, contact telephone number and **recent-sized photograph** to;

Source: www.jobstreet.com.my ad posted June 14, 2012

Example 4

Management Trainees

Locations: Kuala Lumpur, Sabah, Selangor, Sarawak

Requirements:

- Diploma holder in any discipline. Diploma holder in Marketing or Business Administration would be an advantage.
- Minimum 2 to 3 years of sales/ marketing experience.
- Resident of West or East Malaysia.
- Possess own transport and willing to travel.
- **Preferably male, but interested females may also apply.**
- Malaysian nationality only.
- Self-motivated, hard working and able to work independently.

Source: www.jobstreet.com.my ad posted June 29, 2012

Appendix J – Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

In the U.S., there are Federal Laws in place that prohibit job discrimination. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) listed the following on their website:

- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin;
- the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA), which protects men and women who perform substantially equal work in the same establishment from sex-based wage discrimination;
- the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), which protects individuals who are 40 years of age or older;
- Title I and Title V of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (ADA), which prohibit employment discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in the private sector, and in state and local governments;
- Sections 501 and 505 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibit discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities who work in the federal government;
- Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA), which prohibits employment discrimination based on genetic information about an applicant, employee, or former employee; and
- the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which, among other things, provides monetary damages in cases of intentional employment discrimination.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces all of these laws. The EEOC also provides oversight and coordination of all federal equal employment opportunity regulations, practices, and policies.

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n. d.)

Appendix K – World University Rankings 2012-2013

World University Rankings 2012-2013

1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States
2. University of Cambridge, United Kingdom
3. Harvard University, United States
4. University College London, United Kingdom
5. University of Oxford, United Kingdom
6. Imperial College London, United Kingdom
7. Yale University, United States
8. University of Chicago, United States
9. Princeton University, United States,
10. California Institute of Technology (Caltech), United States

23. University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
25. National University of Singapore, Singapore
30. University of Tokyo, Japan
47. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

156. Universiti Malaya (UM), Malaysia
261. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia
326. Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia
358. University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Malaysia
360. Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Malaysia
401. International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Malaysia

Source: QS Quacquarelli Symonds -World University Rankings 2012-2013

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