

**BRIDGING THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL?  
A LOOK AT LOCAL-INTERNATIONAL STUDENT  
INTERACTION IN SINGAPORE**

**ANNIE WATSON KARMEL**

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**

**2010**

**BRIDGING THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL?  
A LOOK AT LOCAL-INTERNATIONAL STUDENT  
INTERACTION IN SINGAPORE**

**ANNIE WATSON KARMEL  
(B. Int'l Studies (Hons.) Flinders University)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED**

**FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOUTHEAST  
ASIAN STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES**

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**

**2010**

## **Acknowledgements**

This is my opportunity to formally thank the many people that helped this thesis come into existence. First and foremost I would like to thank all of the students at the National University of Singapore who participated in this study. Their generosity and openness to share information was invaluable.

More specifically I would like to thank Associate Professor Goh Benglan, who supervised me over the last two years. Benglan was always open to my ideas and provided support when I felt I had lost my way. Her ability to keep up with a constant bombardment of drafts towards the end of my thesis writing journey was very helpful.

Tom Karmel also deserves a big thank you for taking time from his busy schedule to provide feedback on my work. His objective and matter-of-fact opinion always pushes me to think harder about what I am actually trying to say. I would also like to thank my husband, Ullas Narayana, along with the rest of my family and friends, for putting up with my moods and ramblings as this study came together.

Finally I would like to thank the National University of Singapore for providing me with a research scholarship. Without this assistance I may not have even made it to Singapore.

# Table of Contents

SUMMARY .....	I
LIST OF TABLES.....	II
LIST OF FIGURES .....	III
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION, INTERNATIONALISATION, AND AN INTEREST IN SINGAPORE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
PURPOSE.....	6
SIGNIFICANCE.....	7
LIMITATIONS .....	10
THESIS OUTLINE .....	11
<b>CHAPTER TWO: BRAINS AND BONDS.....</b>	<b>13</b>
EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE.....	14
SINGAPORE'S INTERNATIONALISATION.....	15
<i>Pre 1997</i> .....	15
<i>Post 1997</i> .....	17
ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS .....	21
PREPARING LOCAL STUDENTS.....	23
CONCLUSION.....	27
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHOD .....</b>	<b>29</b>
THE SETTING.....	29
PARTICIPANTS .....	31
<i>Age and Gender</i> .....	32
<i>Ethnicity and Country of Origin</i> .....	32
<i>Languages Spoken</i> .....	33
<i>Length of Time in Singapore</i> .....	34
<i>Faculty</i> .....	34
<i>Payment of Fees</i> .....	35
<i>Reasons for Going to NUS</i> .....	36
<i>Interview Participants</i> .....	37
MEASUREMENT TOOLS .....	39
<i>The Questionnaire</i> .....	39
<i>The Interviews</i> .....	43
<i>Validity and Reliability</i> .....	45
DATA COLLECTION .....	46
DATA ANALYSIS .....	47
CONCLUSION.....	49
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE.....</b>	<b>51</b>
INTERCULTURAL IDEALS .....	51
PRAGMATISM.....	56

THE DESIRE TO INTERACT.....	58
CONCLUSION.....	65
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: THE STATE OF INTERACTIONS.....</b>	<b>66</b>
LEVEL OF INTERACTION .....	66
<i>Meeting Places</i> .....	70
FAMILIARITY AND INTERACTION .....	75
<i>Studying in Singapore Before or Since NUS</i> .....	75
<i>Faculty</i> .....	80
<i>Country of Origin</i> .....	85
<i>Language</i> .....	91
<i>Culture</i> .....	100
CONCLUSION.....	105
<b>CHAPTER SIX: PROBLEMATIC OR REWARDING?.....</b>	<b>107</b>
DIFFICULTY WITH INTERACTION.....	107
PROBLEMATIC EXPERIENCES.....	108
REWARDING EXPERIENCES.....	120
SATISFACTION .....	129
CONCLUSION.....	137
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>138</b>
SUMMARY OF STUDY.....	139
'SMALL OTHERS' - NOT SMALL ENOUGH.....	141
FOREIGN PRESENCE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION .....	142
FUTURE PROSPECTS.....	145
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>APPENDIX A.....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>APPENDIX B.....</b>	<b>175</b>

## Summary

This thesis is primarily concerned with local-international student interaction in Singapore, and how it is affected by students' cultural closeness and the government's internationalisation of higher education agenda. It aims to explore the student perspective on internationalisation in Singapore, what types of interactions students are experiencing, and what they are gaining from their intercultural interactions. As there is very little literature on local-international student interactions in Singapore this thesis draws primarily on questionnaire and interview data from students at the National University of Singapore. The information shared by these students suggests that the cultural closeness of local and international students, as well as the government's internationalisation agenda, are not helping students have meaningful interactions or gain intercultural skills. This study argues the internationalisation of higher education in Singapore has great potential to provide students with rewarding intercultural experiences, yet this potential is not being realised as students are crossing paths in an environment that is making such rewards difficult to obtain.

## List of Tables

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Table 3.1 Interview Participant Outline .....	38
Table 5.1 Local students: general language use with international student friends in percentages .....	91
Table 5.2 International students: general language use with local student friends in percentages .....	91

## List of Figures

<b><u>FIGURE</u></b>	<b><u>PAGE</u></b>
Figure 3.1 International students: country of origin .....	33
Figure 3.2 Local and International students by faculty .....	35
Figure 3.3 Local students: reasons for coming to NUS .....	36
Figure 3.4 International students: reasons for coming to NUS .....	37
Figure 4.1 Local students: desire to interact with international students .....	59
Figure 4.2 International students: desire to interact with local students .....	59
Figure 5.1 Meeting places for intimate local-international friendships .....	71
Figure 5.2 Local students: number of casual international student friends.....	76
Figure 5.3 Local students: number of intimate international student friends.....	77
Figure 5.4 International students: number of casual local student friends.....	77
Figure 5.5 International students: number of intimate local student friends.....	78
Figure 5.6 Local students: number of casual international student friends by faculty .....	81
Figure 5.7 Local students: number of intimate international student friends by faculty .....	81
Figure 5.8 International students: number of casual local student friends by faculty .....	82
Figure 5.9 International students: number of intimate local student friends by faculty .....	83
Figure 5.10 Average number of intimate friends from the same country and different countries for local and international students .....	85
Figure 5.11 Local students: number of casual international student friends by language ability.....	92
Figure 5.12 Local students: number of intimate international student friends by language ability .....	93

Figure 5.13 International students: number of casual local student friends by language ability .....	93
Figure 5.14 International students: number of intimate local student friends by languages spoken .....	94
Figure 5.15 Local students: level of cultural similarity to international students from listed countries for local students with <i>no</i> intimate international friends from listed countries .....	101
Figure 5.16 International students: level of cultural similarity to Singaporean students from listed ethnicities for international students with <i>no</i> intimate local friends from listed ethnicities .....	102
Figure 6.1 Difficulty with local-international student interaction .....	108
Figure 6.2 Satisfaction with local-international interactions .....	130
Figure 6.3 Satisfaction by average number of casual local-international friends .....	131
Figure 6.4 Satisfaction by average number of intimate local-international friends.....	132

# **Chapter One: Intercultural Interaction, Internationalisation, and an Interest in Singapore**

When I moved to Singapore I became interested in intercultural interaction in an environment that appeared to be markedly different to Australia. The two main differences that struck me were that local and international students seemed to originate from similar places, and that international students in Singapore were not seen purely as walking dollar signs. I thought that these factors might mean universities in Singapore could be fostering good intercultural interactions and be closer to attaining the associated utopian ideals of internationalised higher education.

Internationalised higher education refers to tertiary education that has international connections and an international outlook (K. H. Mok, 2007)<sup>1</sup>. The most important element of internationalised higher education for this study is the presence of international students<sup>2</sup>, who can offer and gain intercultural learning

---

<sup>1</sup> Internationalised higher education involves enticing foreign universities to set up private campuses, joint degree programs with local universities, and summer school programs involving foreign and local students. Along with these initiatives that demonstrate international cooperation between tertiary institutions, internationalised education also includes attracting faculty, top postgraduate research students, and undergraduate students from abroad, as well as adopting a more international perspective in the curriculum. Internationalised education involves governments, institutions, and mobile individuals, and its complexity should not be underestimated (Knight, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> International students, in this study, are defined as students from countries other than Singapore who are studying full time in Singapore and will graduate with a degree from a Singaporean

experiences when they interact with local students. The attainment of intercultural skills or intercultural learning is one of the key ideals behind internationalised education (Hill, 2006, p. 6), and refers to gaining knowledge, attitudes, or behaviour that assist individuals when they interact with people from different cultures or come across different socio-cultural environments (Network on Intercultural Learning in Europe, 2010; Oliver & Howley, 1992). It is a process that helps people become aware of their own mindset and also see other ways of doing things as valid (Bartel-Radic, 2006). Such skills are gaining more importance as more workplaces around the world go more global, and the nation-state experiences greater fluidity. Therefore gaining such skills is a noble and important aspiration, and the university environment can offer a platform to attain them. Many policy makers cite access to diverse peoples as a “sure-fire” way to foster “global citizens” who will be able to traverse rugged, globalised terrain with ease. Despite this, most internationalised universities have experienced problems with local-international student integration and some scholars have even questioned whether the legacy of internationalised higher education will be positive or negative (Harrison & Peacock, 2009, p. 2; S.E. Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 5). This is because poor intercultural interaction can also exacerbate negative stereotypes (Summers & Volet, 2008).

---

university. For the purposes of this study the term “international student” does not refer to students who are on exchange.

From my personal experiences, and from looking at the existing literature, it became apparent that people usually think of a Western-Asian dichotomy when it comes to local-international student interactions. While Singapore continues to follow a centre-periphery<sup>3</sup> model of internationalised higher education the Western-Asian dichotomy does not apply. Most Singaporeans and international students originate from China, India, or Malaysia. Although these countries are vast and diverse within themselves, there are more linguistic and cultural links between people from these countries and Singaporeans than with westerners. Therefore the cultural distance between local and international students, which is frequently identified as a major obstacle in the west, should not be as large in Singapore. The “father” of cultural distance, Hofstede<sup>4</sup> (1980), developed a tool to measure how people from different countries generally rate certain values. By comparing the results you can see which countries have smaller or greater cultural distances. The greater the cultural distance, the more likely interactions will result in conflict. According to Hofstede’s study, Singaporeans and Singapore’s international students share relatively small cultural distances (Hofstede, 1980;

---

<sup>3</sup> Centre-periphery refers to universities as the centre in developed countries attracting students from the periphery who are from less developed countries. This model has become more complicated as the centres and peripheries have shifted and blurred over time (Postiglione, 2005, p. 212)

<sup>4</sup> Hofstede’s study has attracted considerable criticism regarding the relevancy of using a survey for such a subjective matter; assuming that the domestic population is homogenous; that nations do not bind cultures; that the political atmosphere of the time may have influenced participants’ choices; that only surveying employees of one company is insufficient; that the study is outdated; there are too few dimensions; and that the findings do not have statistical integrity. Despite this, Hofstede’s work is one of the most widely cited in existence, and after many debates where some of Hofstede’s arguments have faltered, others have remained strong enough for his work to continue to influence multinational practices (M. L. Jones, 2007, p. 2).

Narayanan, 2008). Culturally, Singaporean, Chinese, Indian, Malaysian and other Southeast Asian students generally come from collectivist cultures that emphasise interdependence, context, long-term group bonding, shared over individual goals, and rigid hierarchies (Harrison & Peacock, 2009, p. 5; Hofstede, 1980). Volet and Ang (1998) also found that Singaporean international students in Australia preferred interacting with Indonesian international students rather than local students. Although the reasons behind this finding are complicated, a smaller cultural distance was one of the factors attributed to this preference. Therefore, student interaction in Singapore occurs between what I would call “small Others” rather than “big Others”, suggesting that meaningful interaction ought face few obstacles in internationalised universities in Singapore.

The second distinctive characteristic was that I found the majority of international students in Singapore’s public universities were not full fee paying and those that were, paid relatively low fees when compared to those of western internationalised higher education providers. Most international students in public universities receive government subsidies, which carry a three year service bond requiring them to work for a Singapore listed company upon graduation (Gribble & McBurnie, 2007). This contrasts greatly to the situation in countries like Australia where international students are said to be treated as “cash cows” to fund universities (Moore, 12 April, 2009). The financial attractiveness of Singapore changes the dynamics greatly, and suggests that Singapore’s motives to

internationalise are different from many other providers. As Sugimura (2008) points out, the movement of students across borders is caused by political and economic strategies of countries, and the situation in Singapore is no different. International students in Singapore may not be walking dollar signs, yet their presence is economic. This is because those receiving subsidies are bonded to a Singaporean company after they graduate. This is argued as necessary as Singapore's population is not large enough to maintain the competitiveness of the national economy on its own. Singapore also hopes that by welcoming international students local students will experience intercultural learning at home and become more accepting of diversity, which will help with integration. Again, this is important as Singapore is a highly globalised city-state and "the successful integration of Singaporeans and newcomers is critical for Singapore's continued success as an economy, a society and a nation" (Fu, 2010). Not only this, but by filling twenty percent of university seats Singapore's public universities qualify to be "world class" (Gribble & McBurnie, 2007), which is important if Singapore wants to build a reputation as a quality higher education provider. All of this adds up to Singapore having heavily vested interests in internationalising its higher education. A deeper look at internationalised higher education in Singapore will be provided in chapter two.

## **Purpose**

As a study of all tertiary local and international students in Singapore was not feasible, the National University of Singapore (NUS) was chosen as the site for this study. My research questions are:

### ***Primary question:***

How are Singapore's distinctive characteristics as an internationalised higher education provider affecting the student experience?

### ***Secondary questions:***

Why do local and international students think internationalisation is happening in Singapore and what do they think they will get from it?

What interaction is occurring?

What are local and international students gaining from being a part of an internationalised student population?

The sub questions will be addressed in chapters four, five, and six. The main question will then be answered in the final chapter.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods, in the form of a questionnaire and in-depth interviews, were used to address the research questions. The questionnaire, filled out by 574 students, informed a wider picture of local-international student interaction at NUS, while the in-depth interviews provided a deeper insight into the complexities of the situation. Students were approached as the sole informers of their experiences in this research, as they are the best “insiders” and “experts” of student experience (Jackson in Chapman & Pyvis, 2005, p. 40). Literature on internationalised higher education, and particularly student experience, is gradually realising the importance of the student voice, and since the late 1990s it has started to be heard more in higher education literature (for example: Brown, 2009; Summers & Volet, 2008; S. E. Volet & Renshaw, 1995).

### **Significance**

Mentioned above, the internationalisation of higher education is an important development in Singapore. There is a lot riding on its success, and meaningful local-international student interaction will strengthen the possibility of seeing optimal fruition from internationalised higher education in Singapore. Unfortunately, however, social repercussions from the government’s open arms to foreign talent, including international students, has caused some hostility toward

international students apparent in the media and online<sup>5</sup> (also see: C. Tan, 2009; The Temasek Review, 08 Nov 2009; Yee, 2009). As many international students stay on and join Singapore's workforce, and local-international student interaction has direct implications for issues of diversity and integration in Singapore, it is imperative that a better understanding of student interaction in Singapore is gained.

Beyond Singapore, this research will expand the existing body of literature on internationalised higher education, which has been dominated by the Western-Asian dichotomy (for example: Bochner, Hutnik, & Furnham, 1985; Brown, 2009; Cooper, 2009; Halualani, 2008; Harrison & Peacock, 2009; Leask, 2009; Summers & Volet, 2008; S.E. Volet & Ang, 1998; S. E. Volet & Renshaw, 1995) to include research on intercultural interaction between Asian-local and Asian-international students, or "small Others". This type of research is important as many countries in Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, China, and Taiwan, are trying to get a bigger share of the US\$30 billion global education market (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2009), and most of the

---

<sup>5</sup> For example: "Foreign students – This is the group that probably causes the highest level of resentments. They compete with local students for scholarships, placings, positions (1st in PSLE was a PRC), and even educational resources (PRC students hogging university facilities). Needless to say, any anger in the students will also be in their parents. Who wants to see his child disadvantaged like that? The worst part is that it's not even clear what the foreign students' contribution is! To their victims, all they do is come in, hog the dean list, depress our grades, then disappear. It becomes worse if their future contribution is not to become foreign talents, but to become foreign workers who then steal jobs from the same students they stole scholarships and places from" (Alpha Tango, 25 Feb 2010).

students they are trying to attract come from within the region<sup>6</sup> (Baty, 2009). This study also furthers the maturation of the internationalised higher education industry in Singapore, by showing that student experiences are being taken seriously (Sanderson, 2002, p. 100).

Although Singapore's internationalised higher education situation has not been documented as thoroughly as those of Australia, America, and the United Kingdom, it has not been completely neglected either. There have been several papers which discuss Singapore's internationalised higher education efforts as a reaction to the growing importance of the knowledge based economy (for example: J. K. H. Mok & Lee, 2003; Sanderson, 2002; Sidhu, 2005). This literature, however, is preoccupied with policy and systems issues, and does not specifically look at the effects of Singapore's internationalisation on its students. There is also a very small amount of research that does look at what is happening on the ground, and mainly focuses on the adjustment of international students and faculty in transnational and public education institutions (Corbeil, 2006; Tsang, 2001). Such work is a start; however, it does not consider local students or the tensions which have resulted from Singapore's persistent drive to attract foreign

---

<sup>6</sup> As the higher education market booms, regional movements are likely to become more popular (Lee Kwok Cheong in Narayanan, 2008). Available data shows that 42%, or two out of five, mobile tertiary students in East Asia and the Pacific stay within the region, compared to 36% in 1999 (United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2009). The global higher education industry barely reaches 19% of the world's 18 to 24 year olds, which shows that the demand in the market is likely to grow. Many traditional higher education exporters are now feeling the competition as more Asian countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, China, South Korea and Taiwan, are seeing the potential of becoming higher education exporters themselves (Baty, 2009; Perkinson, 2006, pp. 18-19).

talent. As of yet, I have been unable to find any academic work on interaction between local and international students in Singapore.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study start with the lack of transparency regarding information on international students in Singapore. The Education Statistics Digest (2009b) does not mention the presence of international students at all, while the National University of Singapore Annual Report (2009) only documents the number of international students enrolled at the university. This means that inferences from the media mainly inform the information available to the public on how many international students there are in Singapore, where they are studying, where they are from, and what they are studying. Sanderson (2002) argues that this lack of available information is a result of Singapore's internationalisation still being at an "embryonic" stage, and that its higher education institutions are still quite young. Yet ten years have passed since the reports he cited were published, and there is still barely a mention of international students. This is despite international students playing a key role in the education industry, which has been labelled as one of Singapore's most important emerging industries (SingStat, 2002; Sugimura, 2008).

Another limitation was that obtaining the participation of students was rather difficult, especially as incentives were not offered for participation in the

questionnaire. Along with this, the questionnaire was sent out at a very busy time of the academic calendar, which may also have meant a lower participation rate. As the number of internet surveys NUS students receive is high, students may also be uninterested in participating in them due to over saturation. The relatively low participation rate, combined with being unable to use a random sampling method, means that care needs to be taken in generalising the questionnaire results beyond those who participated.

This brings us to another limitation. As this study collected data on students from the National University of Singapore, the findings may not reflect exactly the experiences of other universities in Singapore. This particular site was chosen as it is Singapore's largest public university, and was also the most convenient for research. It nevertheless remains a useful case study to illustrate the experiences of the participants, which will help to build a foundation for further studies in the future. As this study conducted research with students, it was necessary to gain ethics clearance prior to gathering information from participants. Ethics clearance was granted on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2009.

### **Thesis Outline**

This thesis aims to provide a starting point for a greater understanding of how local and international students are experiencing internationalisation in Singapore.

The following chapter provides a deeper look at the development of the internationalised higher education industry in Singapore to provide a setting for the thesis.

Chapter three then goes on to describe the methods used to collect the data that inform the findings, which are then presented in chapters four, five, and six.

Chapter four addresses why students think internationalisation is happening and what they expect to get from it; chapter five looks at the types of interactions that are occurring on campus; and chapter six presents data on what students are gaining from being a member of an internationalised student population. These chapters address the secondary research questions.

The final chapter draws the argument together by addressing the primary research question. It is argued that the distinctive characteristics of internationalisation in Singapore may not be fostering an environment for meaningful local-international student interaction and intercultural learning.

## Chapter Two: Brains and Bonds

Since independence Singapore's education system has played a very important role in shaping its future. Despite the nation-state's very humble beginnings, Singapore gained the status of an 'advanced economy' from the International Monetary Foundation in 1997. This amazing growth in the space of a single generation was largely thanks to then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's hard-nosed pragmatism. His government systematically implemented policies to build nationalism and the skills of Singapore's workforce so that they were equipped to address the needs of the economy. This was a result of his realisation that Singapore's greatest (or only) asset was its people, and that the education system needed to be reformed to inculcate moral values and appropriate labour skills for a fledgling nation of poor and ethnically disparate people<sup>7</sup>. Lee Kuan Yew stated that the development of Singapore's human resources would determine whether the nation would "sink or swim" (Minchin in Sanderson, 2002, p. 81).

---

<sup>7</sup> During the nineteenth century immigration was Singapore's source of population growth. Most migrants originated from China, India, the Malay Peninsula, or Sumatra. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the population was 80,000 with 62% Chinese, 16.5% Indian, 13.5% Malay, and 8.5% 'others'. Migrants from these countries continued to arrive in Singapore during the early twentieth century, although on a lesser scale, and after World War II most of Singapore's immigrants were from British Malaya. With independence, however, Singapore imposed tight controls over immigration and only let those with appropriate economic skills enter the country. These fit into one of two categories: unskilled or skilled. The former were mostly from Malaysia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, and stayed in Singapore for the duration of their short contracts. The latter were generally from Japan, Western Europe, Australia, and North America, and normally had little intention of settling in Singapore. Singapore's current population (not including non-residents) consists of 74.2% Chinese, 13.4% Malays, 9.2% Indians, and 3.2% 'others'(U.S. Library of Congress, 2008). It continues to source unskilled and skilled migrants for economic reasons. The process of becoming a permanent resident or citizen for skilled migrants has also become easier since the early days of independence.

## **Education in Singapore**

As the British had left Singapore with linguistically segregated, underfunded, poorly organised schools, the late 1960s saw the new government restructure the education system to be more consistent; to teach in the English language<sup>8</sup>; and to support its basic economic policies (Gopinathan in Sanderson, 2002, p. 88). In these first years of nationhood, primary schools were given the task of instilling a love of Singapore into its students, while secondary and tertiary schools were geared towards economic growth and manpower requirements, with a particular focus on technical (and later business) disciplines. The 1970s then saw the diversification of technical skills, which was followed by investment in polytechnics and universities in the 1980s<sup>9</sup>-90s to develop technically trained manpower (Sanderson, 2002, p. 88). Such developments in the education system ran parallel with Singapore's modernisation: the 1960s worked towards building nationalism; the 1970s introduced liberal business and immigration policies; 1980s witnessed increased value added economic activity; and the 1990s saw the

---

<sup>8</sup> This policy was not popular, however, PM Lee's determination and justification saw it implemented as he believed the English language was key for Singapore's economic success. Mandarin, Tamil, and Malay were also taught.

<sup>9</sup> In 1986, after Singapore's first economic recession since independence, a report titled "The Singapore Economy: New Directions" was released. This report suggested it was necessary to expand opportunities for post-secondary, polytechnic, and university education in order to gain a competitive edge (M. H. Lee & Gopinathan, 2003, p. 169).

reworking of the national identity towards that of a knowledge based economy<sup>10</sup> and a high skills society (Sidhu, 2005, pp. 48-50). Today the role of education continues to adapt to the economic and national agenda of Singapore, with education holding on to the role of providing young people with cultural and technical knowledge, but now with the added task of helping students understand the complexities and potential of globalisation (K. H. Mok, 2008, p. 529).

### **Singapore's Internationalisation**

Due to the growing importance of globalisation since the 1990s, Singapore sought to adjust its education sector to address new economic needs, while continuing to instil nationalist values in the youth. The changing economic environment was why Singapore's involvement in internationalised higher education changed.

#### ***Pre 1997***

Prior to 1997 Singapore was familiar with internationalised education in the form of a sending country. Post World War II many Singaporeans were recipients of scholarships as aid, provided by programs such as the Colombo Plan, the Fulbright Scholarship, and Commonwealth Scholarships. These programs offered opportunities to study in countries such as Australia, America, New Zealand, Canada, and England, and were shrouded in the rhetoric of developing peace and

---

<sup>10</sup> Knowledge based Economies (KBE) refer to economies where wealth is based on minds not muscle. It means a shift from blue collar to white collar employment, which is why higher education has gained an increased emphasis worldwide as it supports and creates knowledge, making it a part of sustainable development in today's globalised, knowledge based, environment (George, 2006, p. 590).

understanding through first hand cross-cultural contact<sup>11</sup> (Aydelotte, 1942). Beyond the rhetoric of world peace, these scholarships were backed by political concerns, with western countries trying to control the communist threat prevalent in the Asian region<sup>12</sup>. Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower espoused that educational exchange was a part of the global struggle for minds and will, and later, during the cold war such exchanges were about fostering ‘mutual understanding’ to combat Soviet propaganda (Bu, 1999). Many Singaporeans took advantage of these scholarships, for a range of reasons: Singapore did not possess the latest technical expertise needed for industrialisation; there were not enough places in local institutions; and the political motives of these receiving countries, to have stability in Asia, meant that there were many opportunities available (Sanderson, 2002, p. 90). In the 1970s and 80s, however, Singapore was no longer seen as a country in need of aid, and Singaporeans rarely received these scholarships. The country’s increased affluence saw self-funded overseas education become more common, and the number of Singaporean students studying and staying abroad caused a brain drain in Singapore. Today, Singapore remains a key market for British and Australian universities.

---

<sup>11</sup> These initiatives were also backed by the United Nations as it searched for ways to safeguard nonviolence and peaceful cooperation between nations after the World Wars. Education was regarded as a central ingredient in that process (Rasanen, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Many educational exchange programs are still steered by backed by politics. For example in 2002 the United States of America put US\$750 million towards promotional materials, cultural and educational exchanges, and radio and television channels to help foster diplomacy with the Middle East (Leonard, 2002).

### ***Post 1997***

With the release of a report in 1997 by an international advisory panel (Sanderson, 2002, p. 96) it became clear that Singapore would seek to change its higher education sector in order to develop a knowledge based economy. This change was in line with Singapore's ability to read the economic climate, and address it with "survival" policies<sup>13</sup>. Due to Singapore's brain drain and low fertility rates talent from abroad was identified as necessary to remain competitive at a global level. The international advisory panel's suggestions involved changes for Singapore's public universities, as well as setting up private higher education institutions, many of which would carry big brand names. In 1997 there was a target to have ten world-class foreign institutions by 2007. That number was exceeded by five<sup>14</sup>. As well as this, additional private universities would be set up in Singapore. 70% of these institutions would be filled by full fee-paying international students, forming the for profit sector of the country's higher education industry<sup>15</sup> (Gribble & McBurnie, 2007; M. H. Lee & Gopinathan, 2003;

---

<sup>13</sup> Sidhu (2005) argues that a discourse of crisis and pragmatism was/is used to convince the population that there is no alternative but to re-orient and become a knowledge based economy.

<sup>14</sup> Today these include, but are not limited to: INSEAD, Chicago GSB, MIT, Georgia Tech, Wharton (University of Pennsylvania), Technische Universiteit, Eindhoven, Technische Universitat, Munchen, James Cook University, University of Nevada Las Vegas Singapore, University of Adelaide, Tisch, John Hopkins University. Many of these institutions work in partnerships with local institutions rather than setting up their own campuses (Ministry of Education, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> It is important to distinguish between the roles of the big brand private universities, the public universities, and the additional private universities in Singapore. The big branded institutions are meant to focus on world-class post graduate research and development, and transferring knowledge to the industrial sector. The public universities fulfill the role of conducting R & D activities, catering to Singapore's manpower needs, and providing education as a public good. The other private universities focus on teaching and applied research and are intended to attract full-fee paying international students (M. H. Lee & Gopinathan, 2003).

Sidhu, 2005). For the public universities the panel suggested that its admissions criteria become more flexible, and more affordable fees should be offered in order to attract the best students from around the world. It was also recommended that they link up with world renowned institutions to collaborate on research; that the undergraduate curriculum ought to be broadened to appreciate non-technical issues; and that the teaching and research environment be improved to attract the best professors and researchers (Han, 1999). In 2008 Minister Mentor Lee stated that even if most young talents use Singapore as a ‘stepping stone’, Singapore will still make a net gain of talents, even if it only manages to keep thirty to forty percent of them (Ng, 14 February 2008). It is clear that the grander aim of these initiatives is to attract foreign talent, namely students, to eventually settle in Singapore as employees or entrepreneurs (Singapore Economic Development Board & Education Services Division of the Singapore Tourism Board, 2007).

As a part of Singapore’s push into educational services, in 2000 the government granted greater autonomy to the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) so that they could react and adjust more quickly to global education demands (J. K. H. Mok & Lee, 2003, pp. 27-28). In 2005 both universities were made even more autonomous by being corporatized as not-for-profit companies. Although both universities are now more autonomous, their strategic directions and major developments are still influenced by the government who appoints the members of the universities’ councils (K. H. Mok, 2008, p. 535).

Singapore's oldest and largest public university, the National University of Singapore has taken its recent opportunity to help build a knowledge based economy seriously. It has adopted many initiatives to build links with overseas universities and researchers, to employ internationally renowned faculty, encourage student exchanges and a culturally diverse environment for its local and international students<sup>16</sup>. The presence of these internationalising initiatives can be observed by visiting the NUS website or walking around the campus. The office of the president provides a clear example of how serious NUS is about its internationalised environment:

You will find that the NUS community is incredibly diverse and rich. As a leading English-speaking, global university centred in Asia, the NUS experience is also distinctively global and Asian. Our 30,000 students hail from 100 countries, with international students making up 20 per cent and 50 per cent of the undergraduate and graduate enrolment respectively. Our talented

---

<sup>16</sup> NUS offers numerous scholarships specifically to attract international students: ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship (AUS) (for ASEAN nationals, except Singaporeans); OCBC International Undergraduate Scholarship (for Indonesian or PRC nationals); SembCorp Industries Undergraduate Scholarship (for Indonesian nationals); Singapore Airlines (SIA)- Neptune Orient Lines (NOL) Undergraduate Scholarship (for Indian nationals); Undergraduate Scholarship for Hong Kong Students; Khoo Teck Puat Scholarship (for PRC Nationals) . These scholarships have different terms and conditions. The ASEAN undergraduate scholarship, the OCBC International Undergraduate Scholarship, and the Khoo Teck Puat Scholarship do not carry a bond, but require students to take advantage of the government's Tuition Grant Scheme which is bonded for three years. The other scholarships come with a six year bond to the company providing the scholarship or a Singapore listed company, and students must maintain a satisfactory CAP (Cumulative Average Point) (National University of Singapore, 2010b).

faculty are drawn from Singapore and the best centres around the world, with about half coming from overseas... About 50 per cent of our undergraduates have an overseas educational exposure, with 20 per cent spending a semester or more abroad. Our five NUS Overseas Colleges provide a year of intense experiential entrepreneurship education in vibrant entrepreneurial hubs in the US, China, Sweden and India. NUS has about 40 double-degree and joint-degree programmes with top universities internationally, allowing our students unparalleled access to some of the best professors in the world, while gaining valuable cross-cultural exposure (C. C. Tan, 2009).

The diverse and large presence of international students at NUS is one of the impressive selling points mentioned in this extract. It is also obvious that cross-cultural exposure is a core component of gaining an NUS education and with its East meets West environment it seeks to purvey the uniqueness and advantageous nature of the NUS experience. Such rhetoric suggests that the global nature and international quality of studying at NUS has become its key attraction.

## **Attracting International Students**

The advisory panel's suggestions were put into action. Since 1997 Singapore has invested significantly<sup>17</sup> in internationalising higher education and is now recognised as a “world class” provider (Ministry of Finance, 2010). In terms of international students, in 2006 there were 80,000 in Singapore, an eleven percent increase from 2005. In 2009 there were 95,000<sup>18</sup>, and by 2015 Singapore's Global Schoolhouse strategy aims to have attracted 150,000 international students. As public universities have a cap of 20% for international undergraduate students, approximately 5,173 of these students attend the National University of Singapore, and about 4320 go to the Nanyang Technological University (Nanyang Technological University, 2009; National University of Singapore, 2009; Sanderson, 2002). These students were attracted to Singapore primarily for economic reasons, but also due to Singapore's “unique” characteristics as a study destination.

The various advertising campaigns used to entice students to Singapore often refer to the city-state's cosmopolitan and harmonious society, the geographical proximity to other Asian countries, as well as Singapore's world class ‘East meets

---

<sup>17</sup> Since 2005 the government's investment in education increased by 40% from \$6.1 billion in the financial year of 2005 to \$8.7 billion in FY2009. Higher education has also been getting an increasing share of the budget from 36% in FY2005 to 42% in FY2009. The government expects to see similar investment increases, particularly in higher education over the next five years (Ministry of Finance, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> In 2008 there were 97,000 students. The dip from 2008 to 2009 was largely a result of the financial crisis and the numbers are projected to bounce back as currencies recover and jobs become more stable (The Straits Times, 4 June 2010).

West' education system. The Economic Development Board also directly markets employment opportunities in Singapore after graduation, with high employment rates, competitive remuneration packages, and great career opportunities for international students (Contact Singapore, 2010; Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, 2008; Singapore Economic Development Board & Education Services Division of the Singapore Tourism Board, 2007). These are important selling points for attracting international students who mostly come from over populated developing countries from the Asian region.

To complement these advertising campaigns student fees were also made affordable<sup>19</sup>. One of Singapore's distinctive features as a higher education provider is that it subsidises international student fees. Both local and international students can apply for government tuition grants, which cover around two thirds of the total tuition fee. While Singaporean citizens are not required to pay back the grant, permanent residents and international students are bonded to a Singapore listed company for three years after graduation. Due to the government's perceived need to demonstrate greater differentiation between local and international students, tuition fees were increased in 2010 (H. L. Lee, 15 September 2009), and international students now pay 15% more than locals, compared to 10% the year before (National University of Singapore, 2010a).

---

<sup>19</sup> For example: the current annual fee for an international student at the Australian National University for a Bachelor of Arts in 2010 is A\$21,408(Australian National University, 2010). We can see that this differs markedly to that of the same degree at NUS, which is currently SGD\$30,030 for the entire candidature, most of which can be covered by the Tuition Grant Scheme (National University of Singapore, 2010a).

Regardless of the fee increase, international students remain interested in Singapore as a study destination as the fees are still internationally competitive and the possibility of gaining employment after graduation is attractive. This differs greatly to countries like Australia who have not subsidised student fees since the mid-1980s<sup>20</sup> and do not want international students to settle in the country permanently, but rather seek to attract international students for financial profit. Singapore is not implementing an old model blindly, but rather addressing its needs that differ to other higher education providers: namely that it needs the brain power of students after they graduate (CNN, 2003; Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2005b; Sanderson, 2002; Sidhu, 2005). As one public university spokesman in Singapore stated “we don’t want your money, we want your brains” (Gribble & McBurnie, 2007).

### **Preparing Local Students**

International students are not the only ones involved in Singapore’s internationalisation efforts. In order to step up into a globalised environment, local students in Singapore’s institutions are now expected to undergo a shift in

---

<sup>20</sup> This occurred under the Overseas Student Charge until the Jackson report found that the program was costing a hidden AU\$70 million of tax payers money, and that if education was turned into an export industry universities could charge fees and use them with their own discretion (Sanderson, 2002, p. 94).

mindset<sup>21</sup>. On top of gaining technical skills, independent thinking, creative expression, and being ‘world ready’ are now commonly espoused characteristics of Singapore’s new ideal citizen (K. H. Mok, 2008, pp. 531-532). The Ministry of Education (2009a) states that all post secondary and tertiary students in Singapore should:

- be morally upright, be culturally rooted yet understanding and respecting differences, be responsible to family, community and country
- believe in our principles of multi-racialism and meritocracy, appreciate the national constraints but see the opportunities
- be constituents of a gracious society
- be willing to strive, take pride in work, value working with others
- be able to think, reason and deal confidently with the future, have courage and conviction in facing adversity
- be able to seek, process and apply knowledge
- be innovative - have a spirit of continual improvement, a lifelong habit of learning and an enterprising spirit in undertakings
- Think global, but be rooted to Singapore

---

<sup>21</sup> In a speech by the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to an audience of students at NTU in 2009, he made it clear that the way their generation deals with the current internationalizing atmosphere will determine Singapore’s success in the future. If local students can be more open and accommodating, and international students can make an effort to integrate, without losing their culture, then Singapore has a chance to remain competitive and avoid becoming a *kampong* (village) again (H. L. Lee, 15 September 2009).

Tan and Yeoh (2006) also identify Singapore's new ideal citizen as a 'rooted cosmopolitan' with "hybrid fluidity" and a strong attachment to Singapore. This shows that amidst Singapore's globalisation agenda, nation building remains important. This is particularly so due to the pressure that large numbers of immigrants can put on social cohesion. Less than ideal sentiments can already be heard from students in Singapore online and in newspapers. Resentment towards the government's heavy investment in the presence of international students in Singapore is frequently expressed. Many local Singaporeans feel like second class citizens; that they are being displaced by foreign talent in the workforce and the classroom; and that they are angry about the government saying they do not work hard enough to compete with foreigners (Appold, 2005; Lon, 3rd Feb, 2010; Teh, 23 January 2010; The Economist [US], 14 Nov 2009; Xuanwei, 2010). Comments on <http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg> illustrate the animosity that some students feel:

Who ask those KAYU (idiot) S'poreans to choose those bootlicker leaders for S'pore! This is what you get when your leader of the country focus of FT (foreign talent) more than local talents! (Perpperish, 08 Feb 2010)

It's a FACT that foreign students get more benefits than our own local students. They're also given places in our local universities first before our own local students even though our own students

are equally qualified. Wouldn't you be angry if you were a local student at NUS or NTU and your classmates who are foreigners get benefits which you don't have? (gspeedy09, 09 Feb 2010)

To some extent the government believes that Singapore is already cosmopolitan and open enough to see international students assimilate easily. Yet it appears that the blaringly obvious presence of international students has clashed with the nationalist sentiments of Singapore's citizens. Sanderson (2002) and the "Developing Singapore's Education Industry" report (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2005a) identified this as a potential problem that internationalised higher education could cause in Singapore. They argue that tension was likely to result from culturally diverse international students attending an education system that previously focused on nationalist needs.

Tension like this suggests that, although Singapore is familiar with hosting migrants from Southeast Asia, China, and India, and it shares cultural linguistic heritage with these countries, this does not necessarily translate into positive sentiments between locals and foreigners. Such tension poses a serious problem that threatens, not only the ruling party's position<sup>22</sup>, but also the returns on its

---

<sup>22</sup> Due to the strong political dominance of the People's Action Party (PAP) anti-immigrant sentiment is unlikely to gain a big political voice. Therefore, although some commentators call for laws to be re-written in favour of local talent, no drastic policy changes should be expected (The Economist [US], 14 Nov 2009). Yet as the PAP has been facing more difficult in the Polls, they do listen to the electorate to some degree, and milder policy changes have been put in place. These include slowing down the inflow of immigrants, introducing higher levies for foreign labourers, making greater distinctions between local, permanent resident, and international student fees, tweaking the balloting system to give Singaporeans a greater chance of getting in, and

massive investment in internationalised higher education that are meant to strengthen the national economy, not give it societal fragmentation.

Prime Minister Lee Hsieng Loong (15 September 2009) acknowledged that local students were worried about increasing competition, the presence of different cultures and habits, changes to the social landscape, and a lack of differentiation between citizens, permanent residents, and temporary guests. To address this, he informed students that “we will adjust the inflows so as not to dilute our national identity or weaken our social cohesion”. PM Lee also impressed upon students their responsibility to take advantage of the opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds. While intercultural interaction was defined as a university, rather than state, responsibility, it is hoped that local students will gain an extensive repertoire of globally relevant skills from interacting with international students (Economic Strategies Committee, 2010; Harrison & Peacock, 2009, p. 2; Lim, Feb 4, 2010; K. H. Mok, 2008; Ms Grace Fu, 2010; Yee, 2009). Like internationalisation after world war two, however, it is hard to tell whether the interest in fostering intercultural skills is genuine or rhetorical.

## **Conclusion**

The internationalisation of Singapore’s higher education sector lies between its intensely globalised economy and a shrinking population. International students

---

creating integration initiatives to increase interaction between locals and foreigners (Adam, 23 Feb 2010).

are being attracted to Singapore to supplement the workforce and hopefully become Singaporean citizens themselves; their presence is also meant to provide intercultural skills for the local population so that they can better deal with diversity in their personal and professional lives. Despite local and international students being “small Others”, the large presence of foreign talent has exacerbated resentment towards international students, jeopardising integration. This is why positive local-international student interaction is important and also why this study is interested in how Singapore’s distinctive environment may be affecting local and international students’ experiences.

## **Chapter Three: Method**

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. While a quantitative study was useful for a rough sketch, the actual voices of both local and international students were also vital for this study. Research concerning student interaction in Singapore is very thin and it is the goal of this research to provide a starting point for a deeper understanding. Existing literature from international education and educational psychology also call for this type of empirical research to be conducted (Sidhu, 2005; S.E. Volet & Ang, 1998). The following sections of this chapter provide an overview of the setting, the participants, the measurement tools, data collection, and data analysis.

### **The Setting**

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is the nation's oldest and largest public university. Twenty percent of its undergraduate students are international students, and the same percentage spends at least one semester abroad (Chuan, 2010). The NUS Annual Report, Student and Graduate statistics, and the NUS Facts & Figures reports do not include statistics on the origin countries of international students<sup>23</sup>, but newspaper articles and casual observations suggest

---

<sup>23</sup> The NUS Registrar's Office informed me that "information not found on these websites are [sic] classified as confidential information which we are unable to share openly" (National University of Singapore Registrar's Office, 2010). This raises a question as to why information regarding

that they mainly come from Southeast Asian countries, as well as China, and India (Corbeil, 2006; C. Tan, 2009; H. Y. Tan, 2009; Zauzmer, 2009). The number of local students by ethnicity is also unavailable. Reflecting the ethnic distribution of Singapore's population, Chinese Singaporeans seem to fill the majority of local undergraduate places. In terms of undergraduate enrolment, the 2009 annual report (2009) recorded the largest faculty as Engineering (6250) followed by the Arts and Social Sciences (5478), Science (4444), and Business (1966). The remaining faculties enrol smaller numbers of students.

The data were collected in two parts, and involved two main settings. The first stage involved inviting all third year students to fill out an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was disseminated before an exam period, and the interviews were conducted after the exam period, which, regrettably, meant many students were either very busy with their studies or leaving Singapore to go on holiday. The second stage of data collection involved in-depth interviews. The majority of the interviews were conducted in classrooms in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at NUS. One of the rooms was rather large and had nice big windows and a big conference table. The other room was quite the opposite with no windows and small stand alone tables. Whenever possible I tried to make the atmosphere of the interview informal and relaxed. Four of the interviews were conducted via email as the students were unable to come to campus. This

---

origin countries of international students should be considered confidential. This could be a result of the sensitivity surrounding immigration issues in Singapore.

involved emailing the students the interview questions, and then following their answers up with further questions.

## **Participants**

Third year students were selected for the study because they have had ample time to adjust to university life and a wide variety of opportunities to interact with one another. In order to access this sample, following the Registrar's office advice, I used the outlook address book available for all students with an NUS email address. A list of 8000 students who had enrolled in 2007 was compiled and the questionnaire invitation was sent to these<sup>24</sup>. It should be noted that not all 8000 of these addresses were still active as some students drop out before third year. The 2009 annual report shows that 5,850 students graduated in 2009 and, while this cohort is one year ahead of the one looked at in this study, it is estimated that the target group was of a similar size. From the invitations sent out, 460 local and 114 international students provided valid answers to the questionnaire. This is around 10%, a response rate quite common for online questionnaires with no incentives. From those who participated in the questionnaire, forty students indicated they were interested in being interviewed, and from these fourteen students were actually available to participate in an interview.

---

<sup>24</sup> There was no certain way to ascertain whether all of these students were in their third year of study from the outlook address book, only that their student identification numbers started with "u07" (meaning they enrolled in 2007 as undergraduates). This is why one of the questions in the online questionnaire was "Is this your fifth or sixth semester of study at NUS?" All students who answered "no" had their questionnaires removed before analysis.

Following is a description of the survey participants and the interview participants.

### ***Age and Gender***

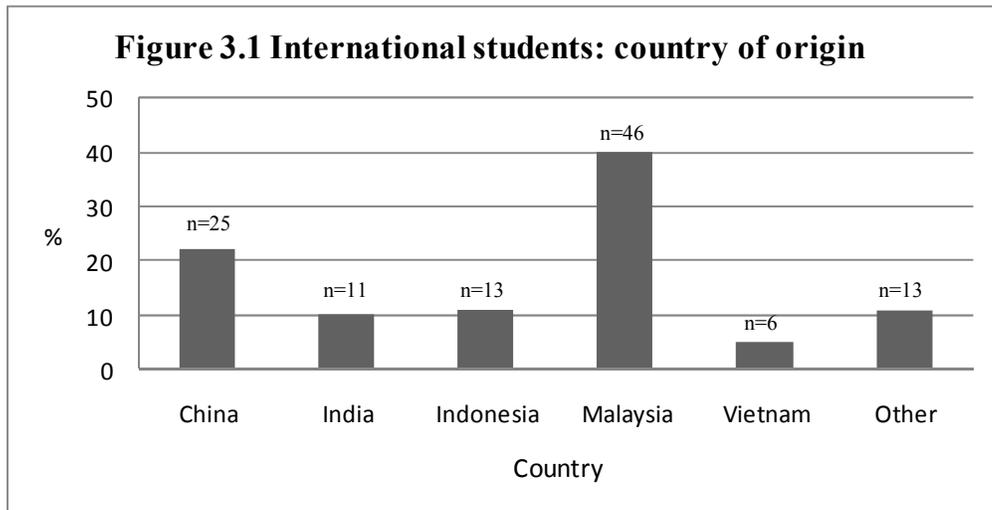
The majority of the local participants in this study were twenty one years of age, with a significant number being twenty three. The international students were also of similar ages, with the majority being twenty one or twenty two. Overall 70% of local and 43% of international participants were female.

### ***Ethnicity and Country of Origin***

The local students came from all three of the major ethnic groups in Singapore, with 87 % identifying as Chinese, 6% Indian, 4% Malay and 3% Others. Ninety percent of the local students originated from Singapore, while the remaining 10% came mostly from Malaysia, China, and India, with countries such as Australia, Myanmar, England, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Others accounting for less than 1% each.

The international students were also majority Chinese (75%), with Indians at 12% and Vietnamese at 5%. Other ethnicities all came in at under 1%. There were no ethnically Malay international student participants. Figure 3.1 illustrates that

most of the international participant came from Malaysia. There were also significant numbers of students from China, Indonesia, India, and Vietnam. Students coming from the Philippines, Pakistan, Australia, Cambodia, and Taiwan together formed 11%, with each country representing less than 3% each.



This reflects the fact that Singapore is mainly attracting international students from Asian countries, many of whom share similar ethnicities to Singaporeans, with ethnic Chinese students being the most dominant group.

***Languages Spoken***

Almost 65% of local students were bilingual, and almost a quarter trilingual, with one hundred percent speaking English (the questionnaire was in English and NUS is an English medium institution), and over 80% speaking Mandarin. As for their

mother tongue language, 62% selected Mandarin, 13% selected English, and 12% indicated a Chinese dialect.

A similar trend was also observed with the international students. Almost 50% were bilingual and over 30% could speak three languages. Mandarin was spoken by 97% of international students and 42% identified it as mother tongue. 18% spoke a Chinese dialect as their first language.

Besides English, the dominance of Mandarin points to the shared linguistic abilities between most Singaporean and international students.

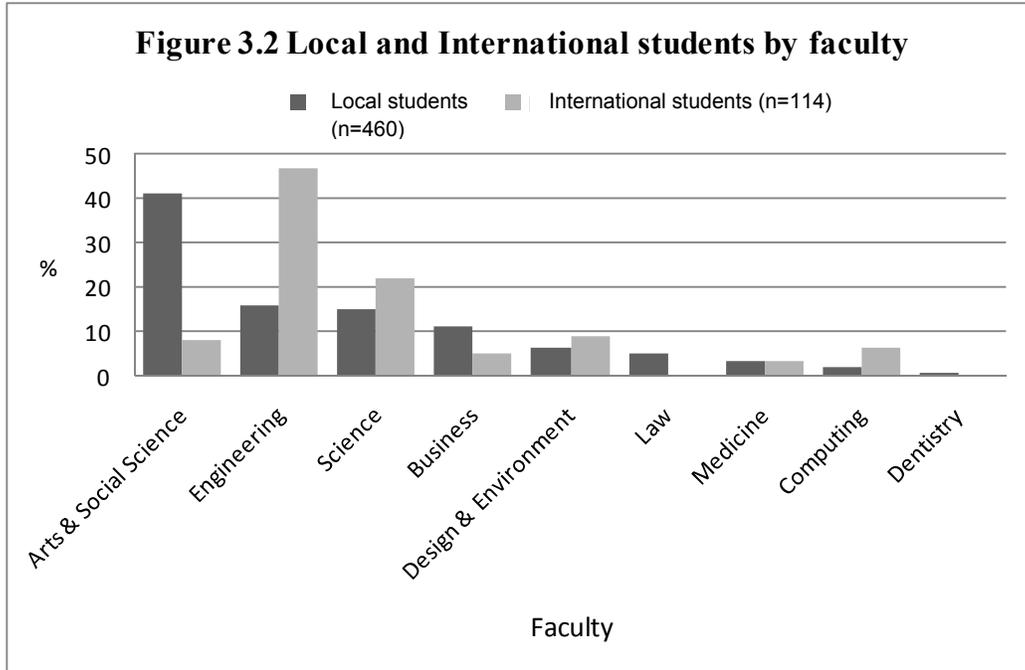
### ***Length of Time in Singapore***

Diversity exists within local and international student groups. 90% of the local participants were born in Singapore, while 10 % originated from other countries. 95% of local and 26% of the international students studied in Singapore prior to coming to NUS.

### ***Faculty***

Figure 3.2 shows the faculty distribution of students. Music was the only faculty not represented by local students. The largest group of local participants came from the Arts and Social Sciences (FASS). The international students came from

a smaller range of faculties, with no responses from Dentistry, Law, or Music. Engineering was the most represented faculty.



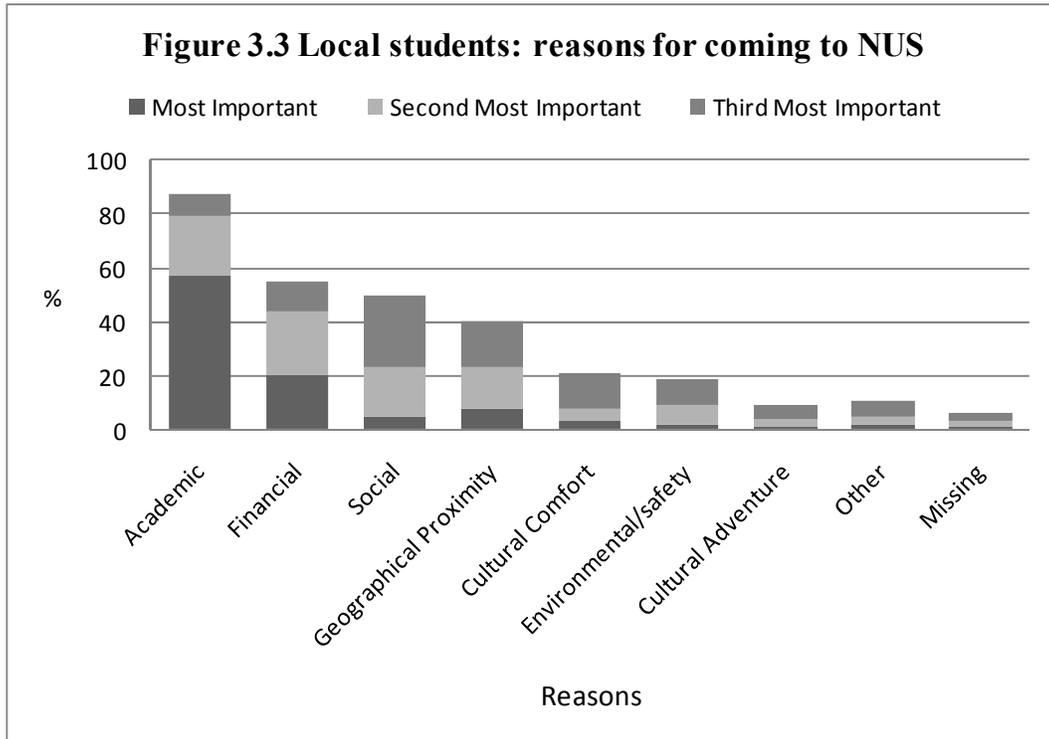
**Payment of Fees**

The large majority of local students, at around 70%, paid their fees through personal or family finances, while 15% received government subsidies with bonds, and three percent received government subsidies without bonds.

The reverse trend, however, was observed for international students with almost 70% receiving government subsidies with a bond, while less than 15% supported their studies through personal or family finances.

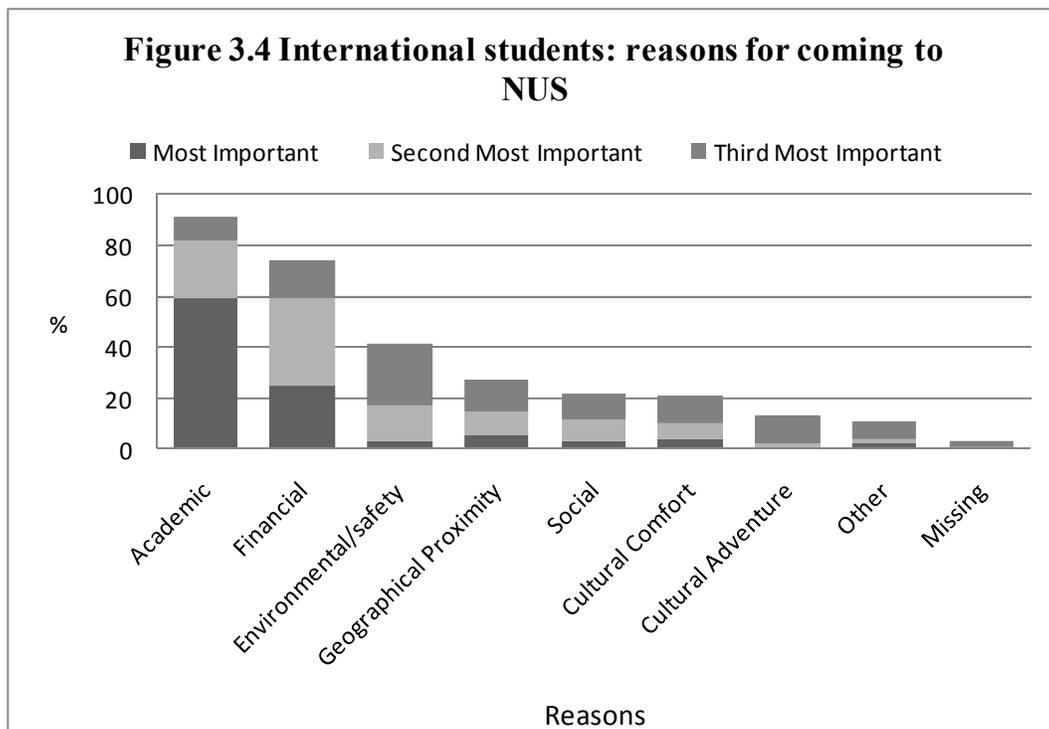
**Reasons for Going to NUS**

Local students chose to go to NUS primarily for academic reasons<sup>25</sup>. The second most important reason was based on the financial cost, while social reasons came in at number three. Geographical proximity also came in as a popular choice, indicating that these students like to stay close to home. Figure 3.3 shows the percentage of students who elected each reason as the most, second most, or third most important reason for choosing to come to NUS.



<sup>25</sup> In the questionnaire academic reasons were defined as “high quality courses, good networks, stepping stone”.

Figure 3.4 illustrates that international students also chose to come to NUS for academic and financial reasons. Cultural adventure, which is often a key aspect of studying away from home, was the only reason that received no votes as the most important, and came in second last to other reasons. On the contrary, around 20% of international students put cultural comfort (similarity to home) as one of their top three reasons for coming to NUS.



### ***Interview Participants***

Eight of the fourteen in-depth interview participants were local students, two of whom were permanent residents; one from Malaysia and the other from Britain.

All of the local interviewees were Chinese, except one Singaporean who was ethnically Malay, while the British born permanent resident was English

The remaining six participants were international students from Malaysia, Indonesia, China, and India. All, except the Indian participant, were ethnically Chinese. Even though the number of interviewees was relatively small, Chinese ethnicity was the most common factor shared by both local and international students.

Five of the participants were from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, these were all local students. One local and two international students were from Engineering; one local and one international student were from computing; Design and Environment, Business, and Medicine were each represented by one international student; and one local student came from Science. Ten of them were female. Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis to refer to the interview participants.

**Table 3.1 Interview Participant Outline**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Li Ying</b>	Engineering	Singapore	Chinese	Female
<b>Kathryn</b>	FASS	Singapore	Chinese	Female
<b>Xin Ying</b>	Computing	Singapore	Chinese	Female
<b>Siska</b>	FASS	Singapore	Malay	Female
<b>Huang Yang</b>	Science	Singapore	Chinese	Male
<b>Sabrina</b>	FASS	Singapore	Chinese	Female
<b>Pamela</b>	FASS	Malaysia (PR)	Chinese	Female
<b>David</b>	FASS	Britain (PR)	English	Male
<b>Chun Hua</b>	Computing	Malaysia	Chinese	Male

<b>Yana</b>	Design & Environment	Malaysia	Chinese	Female
<b>Sook Chan</b>	Business	China PRC	Chinese	Female
<b>Liam</b>	Engineering	Indonesia	Chinese	Male
<b>Ricky</b>	Medicine	Indonesia	Chinese	Male
<b>Deepa</b>	Engineering	India	Indian	Female

## Measurement Tools

### *The Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was used to gain data on student interaction as well as the factors that may influence the ease and depth of local-international student interactions on campus. It consisted of thirty-three questions on participants' types of interactions with local and international students; the level of difficulty interacting with different students; the depth of their interactions; how they communicate; where they met their local and international friends; their satisfaction with their interactions; perceived cultural similarities with students from other countries and ethnicities; languages spoken; and their background. The questionnaire included the following questions:

#### **Local International student Interaction**

What type of interaction with international students do you desire in general?

What amount of difficulty have you experienced interacting with the following groups of people?

### **Depth of Interaction**

How many casual friends do you have from NUS?

How many intimate friends do you have from NUS?

How many of your intimate international student friends are from the groups below?

How many of your intimate international student friends are from the groups below?

How many of your intimate Singaporean student friends are from the groups below?

### **Interaction and Communication**

In general what languages do you use the most with your casual international student friends?

In general what languages do you use the most with your intimate international student friends?

In general what languages do you use the most with your casual Singaporean student friends?

In general what languages do you use the most with your intimate Singaporean student friends?

### **Interaction and Introductions**

Where did you meet your intimate international student friends?

Where did you meet your intimate Singaporean student friends?

### **Interaction and Satisfaction**

I am satisfied with my interactions with international students.

How would you like your interactions with international students to change?

What are the worst things about international students?

What are the best things about international students?

### **Cultural Similarities**

I share cultural similarities with students from the below lists.

How foreign from your self do you consider students from the following groups?

### **Language**

What is your Mother tongue?

What languages can you communicate in?

### **Background Information**

Did you go to secondary school in Singapore?

Were you on a scholarship during your secondary or JC education in Singapore?

How do you pay for your tertiary education at NUS?

What were the three most important reasons why you came to NUS?

What is your faculty of study?

What year are you currently in?

Are you in your fifth or sixth semester?

Where are you from?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your gender?

How old are you?

Please see appendix A for a complete copy of the questionnaire. The questions were mostly multiple choice, with two open ended questions asking about the best and worst aspects of international/local students. These open ended questions were coded using thematic analysis to highlight the perceptions that students have of one another. Local and international students essentially filled out the same questionnaire, except where the term “local” or “international” had to be switched. The questionnaire was hosted by SurveyMonkey.com, which is a widely used online survey host. The first page of the questionnaire had a link to the Information Sheet about the research, as well as my contact details, and those of my supervisor. The last page was a consent form.

### ***The Interviews***

The in-depth interviews were used to discover the opinions and experiences of local and international students with regards to internationalisation and interaction. Each interview was tailored to the individual student's responses. There were no multiple choice questions, and the participants were free to express their opinions and tell their stories. The four students who were interviewed via email, answered the questions that I used to guide the face-to-face interviews, and then sent their responses back to me, after which I sent follow up questions, and the process continued. While face-to-face interviews are far more desirable, these interviews nevertheless expressed the individual opinions and experiences of these students. With each interview, I went in with the same interview guide, which had sixteen questions for local students and an additional three questions on adjustment for international students. The questions asked were as follows:

1. Tell me about why you came to NUS.
2. How would you describe your current group of friends?
3. What types of experiences have you had with international students?
4. Do you have any international student friends? How would you describe your friendship(s)?
5. How do you feel about your friendships with international students?
6. Do you think it is important for local and international students to be friends? What type of friendship is most important (casual or intimate)?

Why?

7. Do you put in much effort to interact with international students?
8. What could you learn from international students? Are these things important to you as a student?
9. How would you describe the majority of international students?
10. How would you describe the way you feel toward international students?
11. What do you see as the biggest obstacles for local- international student friendships?
12. Do you think Singapore is a cosmopolitan place? In what way? Should this make it easier for local and international students to become friends? Has it made it easier for you to become friends with international students?
13. Do you think it is a fair assumption that local and international students in Singapore should make friends with each other easily because many of them share cultural, ethnic, and linguistic similarities?
14. Do you think Singapore is a good host for international students?
15. Do you think it is easier for international students in Singapore compared to those in America or Australia? Why/why not?
16. What are your own plans for your future?
17. How did you find Singapore when you first got here?
18. What/who helped you overcome the challenges you first faced (if any)?
19. How well adjusted do you feel to Singapore now?

### ***Validity and Reliability***

The questionnaire was pilot tested prior to being sent out. As the target group consisted of all third year students none of them could pilot test the questionnaire. Therefore students from second year were asked to participate in the questionnaire and provide feedback on items that were unclear. Ten students filled out the questionnaire and gave useful suggestions. The pilot test confirmed that defining depths of interaction is difficult due to its subjective nature and a “relativity” problem (G. Jones, 1989). Therefore, after consulting relevant literature (Berndt, 2002, p. 7), I decided to change the terms used to gauge the depth of friendships from “shallow” and “deep” to “casual” and “intimate”. In the questionnaire casual interaction was defined as “interact on campus – during university time, talk about studies and interests” and intimate interaction was defined as “interact off campus – during leisure time, share more personal information”. While I understand that all interactions cannot be neatly categorized into these two definitions (it is possible to have casual interaction with fellow students off campus for example), it was deemed appropriate to use these definitions for student interaction in order to minimise confusion for participants and collect meaningful data. Professor Ho Kong Chong, a sociologist at the National University of Singapore with extensive survey experience, commented on a draft. He gave suggestions on the layout of the questionnaire, wording, and length. This led to moving the background information questions and the consent form to the end of the questionnaire to minimise disincentives.

The interview question guide was influenced by other studies on student interaction (Brown, 2009; S.E. Volet & Ang, 1998), and also incorporated my own questions, specific to the topic. The question guide was there solely as a reference. Questions were adapted depending on the conversational flow and the need to probe into certain issues raised by the participants. Nevertheless, the topic of local-international student interaction at the National University of Singapore was always the main focus of the interviews. All of the interviews and questionnaires were analysed by me, therefore maximising the consistency of interpretation.

### **Data Collection**

The invitation to participate in the online questionnaire was sent out to students on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2009, the same day the questionnaire opened. A reminder email was sent out to non-respondents on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, and a final reminder was sent out on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November. In each invitation (except the final one) the recipient was informed that there would be a reminder email sent out. Each invitation emphasised that participation was completely voluntary, and also included an option to be removed from the email list for this research.<sup>26</sup>

The majority of participants took fifteen to twenty minutes to complete the

---

<sup>26</sup> This follows the recommendations of studies which have looked at survey ethics and maximising participation in online and mail surveys (Deutskens, Ruyter, Wetzels, & Oosterveld, February 2004; Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009; Schirmer, 2009).

questionnaire, and upon completion were thanked. The questionnaire closed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November. It should be noted that the timing of the survey was less than desirable as it fell close to an exam period, and this likely affected the response rate. Having said this, after talking to students further, it seems that they are always incredibly busy with their studies, or away on holidays, so it is hard to tell when a good time to conduct this type of research would be.

### **Data Analysis**

After the questionnaire was closed the data were imported into STATA, a data analysis and statistical software program, and then cleaned before analysis. Please see appendix B for the code frame. Once the data were cleaned I performed tabulations and graphical analysis, which were then used to inform the findings along with the interview data. After the interview data were collected it was transcribed. Twelve themes emerged from the interview data. Quotations were organised into the appropriate themes and then coded again into sub-themes. The themes (T) and sub-themes were then clustered to address the research questions (R) and are as follows:

R.1 What are student perceptions on internationalisation and local-international student interaction at NUS?

T.1 Intercultural Learning

*Nice to have*

*Necessary*

*Un-applied benefits*

*Interaction assists intercultural learning.*

T.3 Desire

*Effort to engage versus no need to bother*

*Hospitality versus Apathy*

*Individual Initiative*

T.2 Pragmatism

*Foreign talent policy*

R.2 What is the state of local-international student interaction at NUS?

T.4 Level of Interaction

*Intimate*

*Casual*

*Minimal*

T.6 Ghettoism

*General*

*Lecture*

*Causes*

T.5 Meeting Places

*Projects*

*Class*

*Extra curricular*

*Halls*

T.7 Opportunities

*No chance to meet them*

*No time to maintain friendship*

*Need time to become friends*

*No time for intercultural learning*

*Temporary guests*

*The education system*

T.8 Language

*Second languages*

*Accents*

*English*

T.9 Culture

*Cultural Differences*

R.3 What are students gaining from being a part of an internationalised student population?

T.10 Problematic Experiences

*Hygiene*

*Dress*

*Stereotypes*

*Economic differences*

*Arrogance*

*Threat*

*Too competitive*

*Lazy*

*Individualistic/self-fish*

T.11 Rewarding Experiences

*Interaction assists general adjustment*

*Interaction assists adjustment to new systems*

*Interaction helps loneliness*

*Good workers*

*Intercultural skills*

T.12 Satisfaction

*Singapore as a good host*

*Singapore as a poor host*

*Satisfied*

*Unsatisfied*

**Conclusion**

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data on student interactions and their opinions. By marrying these two methods a broad picture

with detailed insights was gained to better understand how local and international students are interacting and experiencing Singapore's internationalised higher education.

## **Chapter Four: The Student Perspective**

Students' perspectives on internationalisation and intercultural interaction influence their attitudes towards their local or international counterparts on campus. These attitudes help determine the types of interactions students then desire (Zhai & Scheer, 2004, p. 49). Students' opinions on internationalisation and interaction fell into two themes: intercultural ideals and economic pragmatism. This chapter finds that although students are aware of the benefits they can gain from intercultural interaction, there are pragmatic factors that influence students to generally desire easy and casual, over more meaningful, interactions.

### **Intercultural Ideals**

Many students recognised their opportunity to experience intercultural learning by attending an internationalised campus. Students suggested that having closer friends from other countries was important for personal growth, becoming more open minded, and gaining more rounded knowledge. This was in fact one of the most expressed sentiments by local students when they were asked what the best thing about international students was in the questionnaire:

International students provide a different perspective regarding Singapore and NUS. (Local student, questionnaire response)

They provide an opportunity for us to learn about their culture and their way of life. (Local student, questionnaire response)

Most of the interviewees expressed their perspectives on the potential for intercultural learning at NUS. Below Liam and Kathryn provide greater detail.

I believe that life is about appreciating differences and hence I think it is important that the locals and the international students get to interact and be friends so that they will know and understand the different cultures and come to appreciate them. I would prefer my friends to be from all over the world in general because it lets me have a connection and be part of the world, instead of being stuck to the country. (Liam, Personal Communication, 8th December 2009)

I think that if you are exposed to different cultures you become more open minded, more compassionate, more understanding... And then you get to see like very different things and hear different stories and you realise that the world is a much bigger place and why am I studying so much! But yeah I think it is important

because Singapore is like really small, and on the one hand we are very international and...we depend on everybody to survive, but it's a kind of intellectual internationalised thing, not like when you go overseas and people are genuinely interested. (Kathryn, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

For these students the prospect of learning about another culture through interaction is a potential and exciting aspect of attending an internationalised campus. It is something they believe internationalisation can offer and they can gain. Liam expressed notions of using diversity on campus to help him become a 'global citizen' through having better connections with the world. Kathryn pointed out, however, that such knowledge in Singapore is a necessity rather than a curiosity as Singapore depends on people from abroad to survive. Interaction with people from other countries was expressed as necessary by other students as well. This was generally associated with globalization and employment or university assignments.

It's important to be friends especially since many of us will eventually move on to global jobs in the future, which means greater contact and interaction with people beyond Singapore's borders... (The) social skills (necessary for such interaction) are what Pierre Bourdieu would classify as a 'capital'- it helps to elevate our social standing/status, giving us an advantage in

whichever field we're in/might be in. Having the right social skills and cultural sensitivity would be an advantage when it comes to networking or even simply, in presenting a proposal effectively...Meeting international students in school is like practice for the future. (Siska, Personal Communication, 21st December 2009)

Well with this globalised economy yes (intercultural interaction is important). It's fun, it's desirable, it's the corner stone of liberal political thought isn't it. If not for fun at least better trade and stuff. Course it's important... If it's not useful then I'll be gutted. I could've buggered off back to Britain, gotten the dole and been in dept to the government for my uni education and been a yobo. But I'm sure my interactions in Asia will be great because it comes with an attitude of being open to new people and stuff, and today they're going for this global citizen buzz word, and I mean my aunts were doing that decades ago, and my dad, so I suppose it's very useful in our new world. (David, Personal Communication, 14th December 2009)

Both Siska and David show believe it is now a highly valued and important skill to be able to interact and work with people from all over the world. Siska and

Pamela, however, admitted that intercultural learning is a difficult thing to actually incorporate into daily student life:

Having international students in NUS/Singapore is *supposed* to ensure that we have enough contact with the world out there, to be ready when it comes to employment opportunities. I think that while the government and schools have the right idea to prepare us for the transnational world out there, the method is somewhat forced- expecting people to interact just because they occupy the same space. (Siska, Personal Communication, 21st December 2009)

It might be challenging to think of it in that way when we interact with international students, like "what can we learn from them" and why we don't think like that more I think is also because of the education system and how it really focuses on getting what it taught to us right, like getting our essays done right, so that has to be the focus. Like what we are getting out of school is what we are supposed to be learning from our course and we really only value other peoples' ideas and all when we are part of a group project. But other than that I don't think there is a lot... like they always speak about it, but there is very little that is practically done to put it in the mainstream system... I think it's actually something that

we undervalue a lot even though it's a skill that is very useful in a whole range of jobs. (Pamela, Personal Communication, 4th December 2009)

These data demonstrate that students are aware of the intercultural rewards of being a part of a diverse student population. While local-international student interaction has massive potential, it was also illustrated that students may find it difficult to utilise diversity on campus to gain these rewards. Siska does not believe that occupying the same space is enough to lead to meaningful interaction, while Pamela agrees, and blames a lack of action to put such ideas into the mainstream system where students cannot help but access it. This line of thought is backed by other research that argues intercultural learning is not just a result of a diverse student body, but comes through opportunities for positive interaction, as well as exposure to curricula that includes intercultural knowledge (Pike, 2002, in Zhai & Scheer, 2004, p. 40).

### **Pragmatism**

When asked why NUS had become more internationalised, students generally covered both the intercultural reasons mentioned above, as well as pragmatic economic ones so often espoused by Singapore's government. The economic reasons behind the presence of international students were expressed most explicitly during interviews from both local and international students.

For Government, this is a form of investment in Singapore's soft power. For NUS this is to increase interaction with foreign institutions and to move NUS into a globalised university. (Huang Yang, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

Well you can think of it as a way to make it a bit more international, but you can also think of it on a practical thing by the government...'cause they need Singapore to y'know... human resources so education is really important to get all the talents to come (laughs), yeah but I think it's actually quite a political move actually, but I don't really mind, although sometimes I think that I am at a loss... (Kathryn, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

...basically Singaporeans just see this influx of foreigners as competitors, it's more for economic purposes, not for cultural ones. Yeah it's like "we are just going to take your job, but in your place we are going to create a hundred jobs!" (Xin Ying, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

Money, resources. I have to say that it is a trade. Everybody knows that education here is good and the government is taking that as a

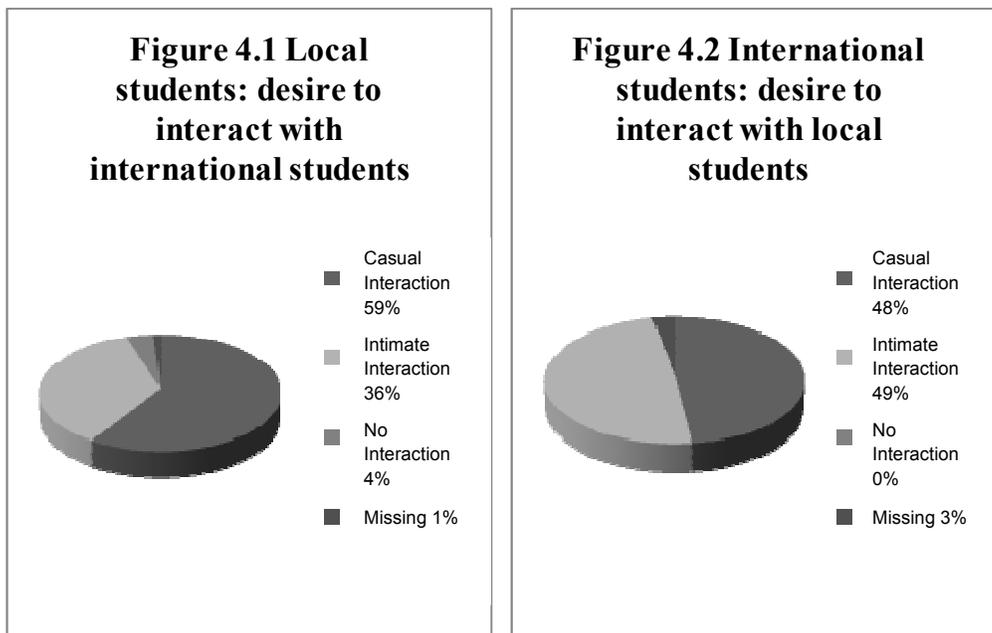
leverage point to get clever and outstanding individuals to stay and work here. I think it is a fair trade where both sides get to win something. It is part of give and take. (Liam, Personal Communication, 8th December 2009)

We can see from these quotes that students see international students' presence mainly as a result of the government needing the human resources. Yet the different roles local and international students play in reference to the government's internationalisation agenda shape their perspectives in different ways. Liam, an international student, did not refer to local students when he talked about internationalisation, while local students talked about their international counterparts rather heatedly. This suggests that the perspectives students have about internationalisation are affected by the positive and negative consequences that students see as affecting themselves.

### **The Desire to Interact**

Students know of the intercultural benefits that can occur from intercultural interaction, but the pragmatic reasons behind Singapore's internationalisation may put more immediate pressures on students that detract from intercultural ideals. As such perceptions are said to affect students' attitudes, let us see what types of interaction students want from their diverse student body.

In line with local students' perception of international students as somewhat threatening and transient, figure 4.1 shows us that the majority of local students desired casual interactions rather than intimate ones. International students displayed less concern about their local counterparts; therefore it was not surprising to find in figure 4.2 that more of them were open to more intimate interactions.



We can see from these findings that international students in this study are slightly more interested in interaction, particularly intimate interaction, with local students than visa-versa.

While the questionnaire data showed that local students desired intimate interactions less than international students, during the interviews the blame largely fell on the latter. The temporary nature of international students was identified as one reason why they did not want to be close friends with locals. International students were also blamed for not being interested in getting to know local students as they were too focused on academic work.

I think that casual is most important or rather, most feasible as there's always the possibility of my international friends going back to their home countries. (Siska, Personal Communication, 21st December 2009)

This is my opinion, but I think a lot of PRCs (students from China) they come here and treat Singapore just like a stepping stone for them to go somewhere else, and so they don't really want to be very close friends with you. So even when we share the same language it's quite difficult to engage them for deeper friendship. (Li Ying, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

Like twenty percent here are international students, so if they want to talk to us they have the chance, it's just whether they want to talk to us or stay with their own groups...I think it will be easier (to interact because of a shared Asian culture) but only if those

SM3 (newly arrived from China) students are willing to make friends with them (locals), because maybe it's my own opinion, but some of them are really very focused on their work and they do not want to waste their time to hang out with these people that they don't know very well. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

Sook Chan's quote is particularly interesting as she is an international student from China but sometimes refers to herself as a local. This is because Sook Chan has been in Singapore since junior college, feels rather localized, and identifies that there are differences between different groups of international students. Her comment suggests that newer international students are less likely to want meaningful interactions with locals compared to international students who have been in Singapore longer. To elaborate on this however, the questionnaire results showed that 47% of the international students that were studying in Singapore before university desired casual interactions, and 47% desired intimate interactions. The same pattern was observed for those students who only started studying in Singapore at NUS. As the interview quote and the questionnaire results do not support one another it is unclear whether the amount of time studying in Singapore affects the desire for a particular type of interaction.

Students during the interviews also stated that often, desire for intimate interaction is not strong in Singapore because people already have established friendship groups.

Most of them only click with the china friends, and also I think because of their environment like most of them are taking engineering and there are a lot of PRC students in engineering, so they don't really feel the need to socialise with the local students, unlike us (international students who came to Singapore earlier) because we are put under this local environment we have to talk to those local friends in order to make friends in order to survive in our environment. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

Many Malaysian freshmen came to NUS with their high-schoolmates. Hence, they have a stable community of friends. On the contrary, I was the only freshmen that came to NUS from my hometown. Hence, I needed to take initiative to make friends with strangers. Otherwise, I will remain isolated. (Chun Hua, Personal Communication, 7th December 2009)

I don't put in much effort to interact with the local students because I already have a bunch of them since my younger days

here in Singapore. (Liam, Personal Communication, 8th December 2009)

Sook Chan thought that, unlike the situation in high school, new international students did not need to make local friends because the international community was big and the environment was more internationalised. It is unclear whether Chun Hua made local friends, but when he arrived in Singapore he found that he was socially isolated as a lot of other international students arrived with existing friends. His personal lack of such a support network made him need and desire new friends. Liam also illustrated international students who have existing local friends no longer feel any urgency to make new ones.

For those students who did experience more intimate intercultural interactions at NUS, putting in the effort and having a desire to get to know people from different places was a key component.

I have a couple of Malaysian, Indian, Korean and Vietnamese friends - all international students. I met most of them at my Mandarin module where more than two-thirds were foreigners. I thought that they were really friendly and open, and it helped that most of them made the effort to get to know me rather than interact only among their own nationalities. (Siska, Personal Communication, 21st December 2009)

I'm open myself, I like to go talk to people and interact with people and I think one thing is when you open yourself to others then they generally have no problem... I didn't have some seniors to advise me on how to approach people or something, so for me it was more the only way to approach people. But for others they know people before they come, so for those the outside perspective gets handed down the chain, like if you know those people they are like this they are not nice they don't communicate with you. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

It takes two hands to clap I think. But whether or not all of them are open or warm and easy going, humane and sociable, that's another matter. I believe it takes a while. (David, Personal Communication, 14th December 2009)

The individual desire to interact is an important component of experiencing meaningful interaction. Siska explicitly stated that it was easier to make friends with international students as they put in the effort. Deepa's experience was more general than Siska's. She found being open minded, and not coming with preconceived negative ideas, helped her have a more diverse group of friends. Her comment illustrated that there are those that like to stay in tight groups and

those that dare to find other experiences. David also acknowledged that both local and international students have to want interaction for anything to occur.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly students are aware that diversity is meant to be a good thing that can offer many intercultural rewards. With globalisation students also acknowledged that such rewards can be useful skills for functioning in a diverse workforce, which many of them will be doing, especially if they stay in Singapore. Gaining intercultural skills, however, is not as simple as occupying the same space. Students faced other more pressing issues to worry too much about intercultural learning. Both local and international students know the economic reasons behind internationalisation, and that incoming students are meant to be very intelligent in order to meaningfully contribute to the economy. From the international student perspective this may be a fair enough trade, but for local students it is a threatening prospect. This mentality is reflected in students' desire to have certain types of intercultural interaction. Local students generally desire casual interactions, with this being deemed sufficient, but not overly demanding. Equal percentages of international students, however, desired both casual and intimate friendships. The next chapter looks at whether students' desires have translated into action.

## **Chapter Five: The State of Interactions**

Students at NUS are attending a culturally diverse campus. Previous literature has shown that simply being in a diverse environment, however, does not guarantee meaningful interaction (Zhai & Scheer, 2004, p. 47). Meaningful or intimate interaction between students should be the goal for internationalised universities as it can develop empathy, respect, caring, trust, and understanding. Compared to casual interactions, intimate ones are more likely to “break down naive and over generalised stereotypes, and avoid conflict” (Lowe, Askling, & Bates, 1984, p. 47). This chapter unveils the state of local-international student interaction at NUS to ascertain whether student diversity is translating into casual, intimate, or no contact.

### **Level of Interaction**

There are many different levels of interaction occurring between local and international students at NUS. There are students who have intimate relationships and enjoy each other’s company on a more personal level off campus; there are those who have casual interactions mostly to do with class and group work on campus; there are students who have no intimate or casual interactions

whatsoever; and of course those whose interactions fit somewhere along the spectrum between casual and intimate<sup>27</sup>.

As Siska and Pamela expressed in the previous chapter, being open and desiring a certain type of interaction is one step closer to attaining them. The findings illustrated that 81% (n=219) of local students who desired casual interactions had casual international student interactions, while 52% of those who desired intimate interactions experienced them. Interestingly 60% (n=12) of local students who desired no interaction also had casual international student friends and 25% had intimate friendships. This questions how positive these interactions were.

Casual interactions were also easier to obtain for international students, with 95% (n=52) of those who desired casual interactions having casual local friends. Intimate interactions were again more elusive, with 71% (n=40) of those who wanted them having intimate local friends. The domination of casual interactions was also supported by comments during the questionnaire:

---

<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that, although it is unlikely that all interactions could fit into one of the three categories used in this research (intimate: off campus and share personal information; casual: on campus, talk about studies and interests; and none), no participant voiced an opinion objecting to the usage of these categories. This suggests that participants had a good sense of whether they should classify their interactions as intimate or casual. Despite this, it is unclear whether or not students strictly abided by the definers of “off campus” versus “on campus”; or paid more attention to “share more personal information” versus “talk about studies and interests”; or simply went with a gut feeling, when using these classifications. More time and more rigorous pilot testing could have helped understand the true meaning of these terms for participants.

They (local students) easily accept you as a casual friend and hang out with you, despite not revealing anything personal about themselves. (International student, questionnaire data)

Overall the questionnaire found that casual friendships were far more common than intimate ones. Eighty percent of local students overall had casual international student interactions, while 50% had intimate ones. More international students experienced local interaction, with 94% having casual, and 70% having intimate interactions.

The relatively easy obtainment of casual interactions is not surprising as there are many opportunities on campus for local and international students to cross paths. Casual interactions, for example through group projects, can be a good opportunity for intercultural learning if they are managed properly. However, if left unmanaged they can easily result in conflict and misunderstanding (S.E. Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 6).

The interviews supported the general finding that local and international students do not interact very much, or on a very deep level. This was particularly the case for students in the Arts and Social Sciences faculty.

I know there are a lot of international students in other faculties, like from India, China and Southeast Asia but I don't really get a

chance to meet a lot of them....when you look at the NUS population it's relatively diverse but it doesn't translate like trickle down to the social aspect of us really integrating and interacting with them. (Pamela, Personal Communication, 4th December 2009)

Pamela acknowledges the diversity of students at NUS, but identifies that it does not necessarily affect students as they are not integrated and do not interact. Although casual or minimal interactions dominate, some students did express that they had good and intimate intercultural interactions. During the interviews this was only expressed by international students who actually saw themselves as an anomaly because of their bonds with their hosts.

Actually I don't know whether you would find my case a bit particular or not. Because for my own case I don't have any friends from my own community. I'm quite close to the locals actually. Because my batch is engineering so I think 50% are PRCS and the rest Singaporeans and very few other nationalities. But for my case I am very very close to locals... I always see that people tend to remain away from the locals sometimes because they feel that they won't open themselves up, but I think it's the other way around because they are scared to approach you

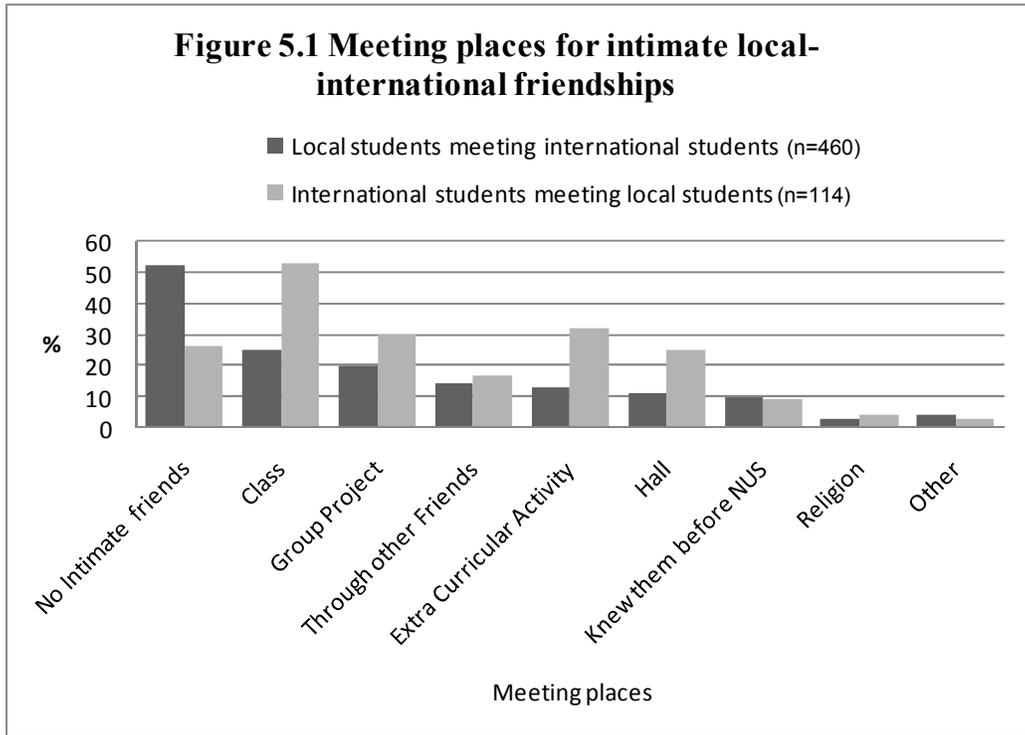
and you carry the same mentality so in the end you don't mix up at all. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009).

In this quote Deepa identifies herself as though she were the only Indian in her engineering batch, which was why she had no friends from her own community and was able to make local friends. The questionnaire and interview data suggested that local and international students were experiencing different types of intercultural interactions. A simple explanation of why international students appeared to have more interactions with locals than vice versa may simply be because there are far more local students. This means that international students are exposed to local students more than locals are to international students. It could also be because international students with more interaction were interested in participating in this research compared to those who were apathetic.

### ***Meeting Places***

While illustrating the prevalence of casual interaction, the above data also pointed towards interactions largely occurring through academic experiences. Figure 5.1 illustrates that classes and group projects were primary meeting places for locals to meet international students. International students also met their local peers primarily in class, but extra-curricular activities appeared to be more important than group projects when it came to making friends. Unfortunately the questionnaire only inquired about meeting intimate friends and not casual ones.

The figures below tally up to more than one hundred percent as all options that applied could be selected.



During the interviews, many students explained to me that making new friends was difficult, but mainly revolved around campus, and when it came to interacting with students from different backgrounds convenient and “forced” interactions were the most common.

I only got to know them through the course, and only get to know them better through forced interaction, or during group projects.

(Xin Ying, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

Here we make friends in the classroom; there (Canada) we make friends outside the classroom. There it's like drinking beers and then you talk, but here it's like through project work. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

Sook Chan not only states that friendships are mostly made in the classroom, but also that this is a very different situation to most western universities. Although group work may be a common way to meet local or international students it seems that the relationships formed often remained very casual and did not necessarily continue past the project deadline.

Especially if it is a large lecture environment and you do not talk to them or do not stay in the same project group then you only recognise them, it's very difficult to actually get to know them....although I met some other friends through project work at uni, but most of those I hang out with after school are still those old friends... (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

While group work was frequently mentioned as a meeting point, students also expressed that many of their peers were not interested in working in groups with students from different backgrounds.

...but I try to talk to people in my class or in my project group and not *avoid* people in project groups, which is something people tend to do here, 'cause they think they might not write as well so they tend to avoid them in the project work ...but that also means that you avoid them socially, because you limit your opportunities to interact with them...but I try not to do that...in the past, lecturers used to let us choose groups, so if you are in the same major you have probably stuck with the same group for every module. (Pamela, Personal Communication, 4th December 2009)

... if you don't know this person before the course it's very difficult to say "hi will you be my project mate?" Maybe it's better if some lecturers say that each group should have at least one international student or maybe we have a more informal or free and easy introduction session before the real lecture, so that people will know each other better, so they can offer them to come to their group. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

Group work was a somewhat sensitive topic for some students. It was the most direct way to meet new students, but it also affected students' grades. This seemed to result in a general feeling of hesitation towards forming intercultural

groups as students did not want to deal with the hassles that come with intercultural interaction.

Although not as common a meeting place as the classroom, some students did identify extra-curricular activities as providing a good opportunity to meet students from Singapore or abroad.

For those local friends that I got to know after entering university, it was either because we are in the same course, or because we are involved in the same activity. I am in a sports club and have been in it since my first year and so this is one of the ways that I got to know more local students after entering university. (Liam, Personal Communication, 8th December 2009)

David agrees that extracurricular activities are a good way to meet people, but also expresses that you have to persevere in order to get any social benefit, and even then, it is not guaranteed.

Oh they are little bit more open minded here (university), at least they talk I suppose - a little bit more. You have to get into groups, social groups like Eusoff hall or NUS studio, and you have to keep going every week for years and you'll become a member and a friend and get into conversations, although in the end you don't

really get to the intimate level. (David, Personal Communication,  
14th December 2009)

The above two quotations also show that familiarity is important for forming intercultural friendships. David, however, found that sometimes even familiarity was not enough to get beyond casual interactions.

### **Familiarity and Interaction**

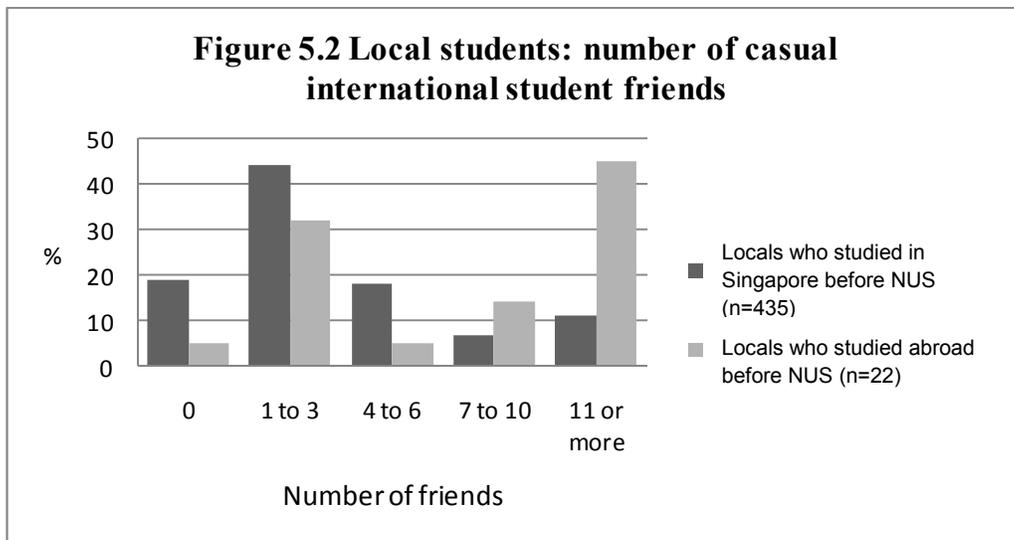
This next section will look at how, or whether, the patterns of interaction vary depending on studying in Singapore or abroad before university, faculty, country of origin and ethnicity, language, and culture. By looking at these variables it will be easier to ascertain which types of familiarity, if any, translate into higher numbers of intercultural friends, and more meaningful relationships.

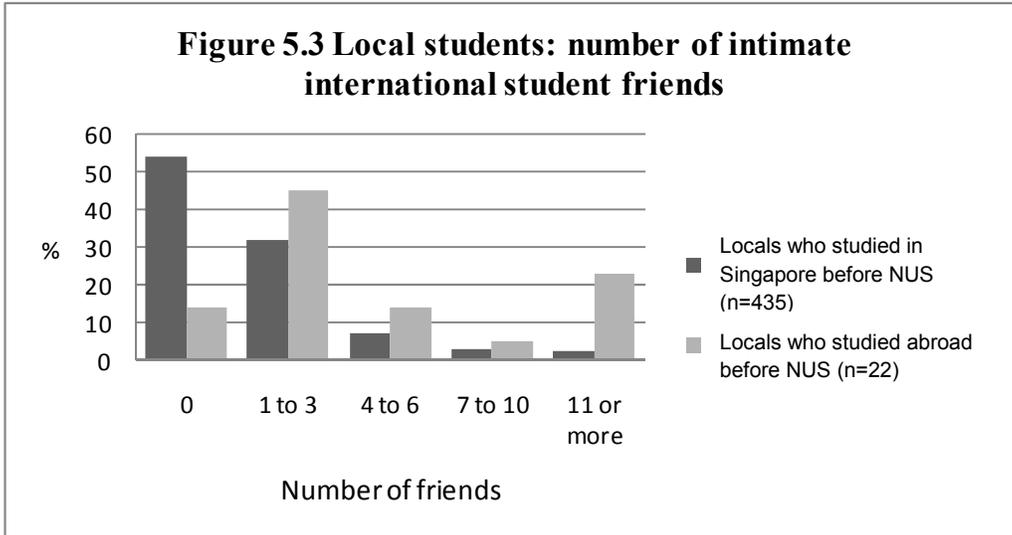
### ***Studying in Singapore Before or Since NUS***

This section highlights that local and international students are not homogenous groups. One aspect of heterogeneity is that there are local and international students who have been in Singapore longer than others. Not surprisingly the majority of local students (95% n=435), and a minority of international students (26% n=29) studied in Singapore prior to coming to NUS. As these students have had more experience in Singapore, compared to those who studied elsewhere,

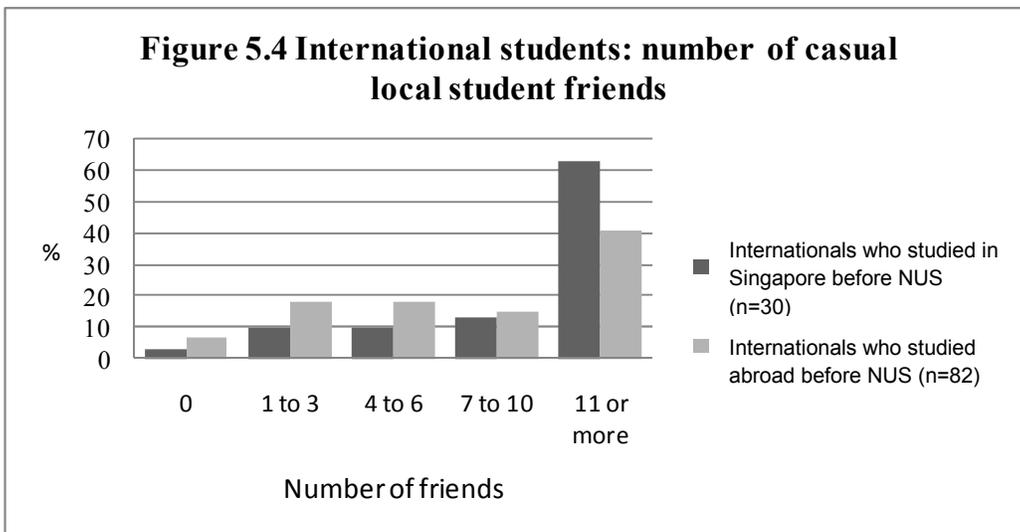
they are likely to have different friendship patterns, and to be more comfortable interacting with local students.

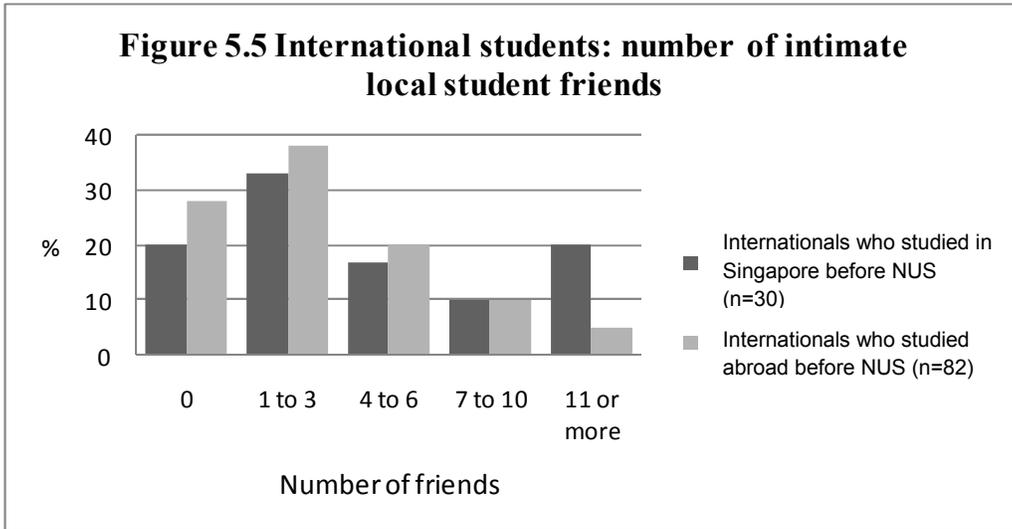
Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show us local students, who studied abroad before NUS, had higher numbers of casual and intimate international student friends, and lower numbers of local friends. This suggests that local students who studied abroad find international students more accessible compared to local students who studied in Singapore. This could be a result of “new” local students not having existing cliques, so like most international students, they need to find new friends. “New” local students could also have larger numbers of international student friends as their previous experiences abroad make them more familiar than other local students. It could also be because these students are more open minded to befriending international students.





Not surprisingly a similar trend was found with international students. Figures 5.4 and 5.5 illustrate international students who studied in Singapore before coming to NUS had larger numbers of local student friends, than their “new” counterparts.





During the interviews the difference between students who studied in Singapore before or since university was only talked about by a few international students. Sook Chan provided the greatest detail about the differences between international students from China:

For PRC scholars we have different names we have SM1, SM2 and SM3, SM stands for senior middle school, so SM1, we came here since senior middle school one, so we have about seven years of living in Singapore and we are the most localised group. SM2 came here after senior middle school in China, but they came here earlier than the SM3s and did the university entrance exam here. And SM3 are those who are very good at their studies because they studied the longest in China and that's why they are very good at

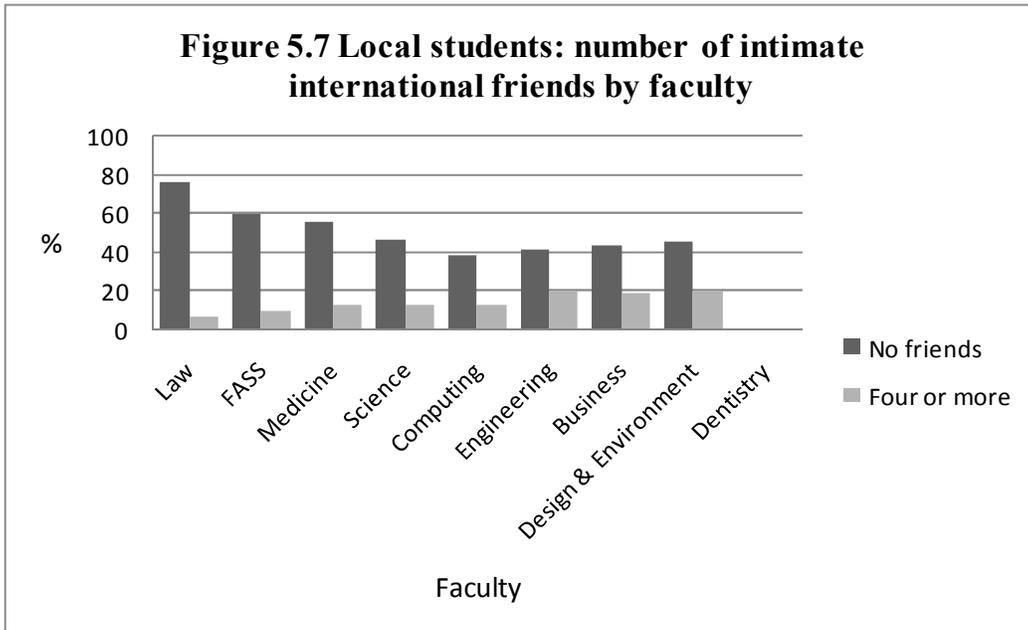
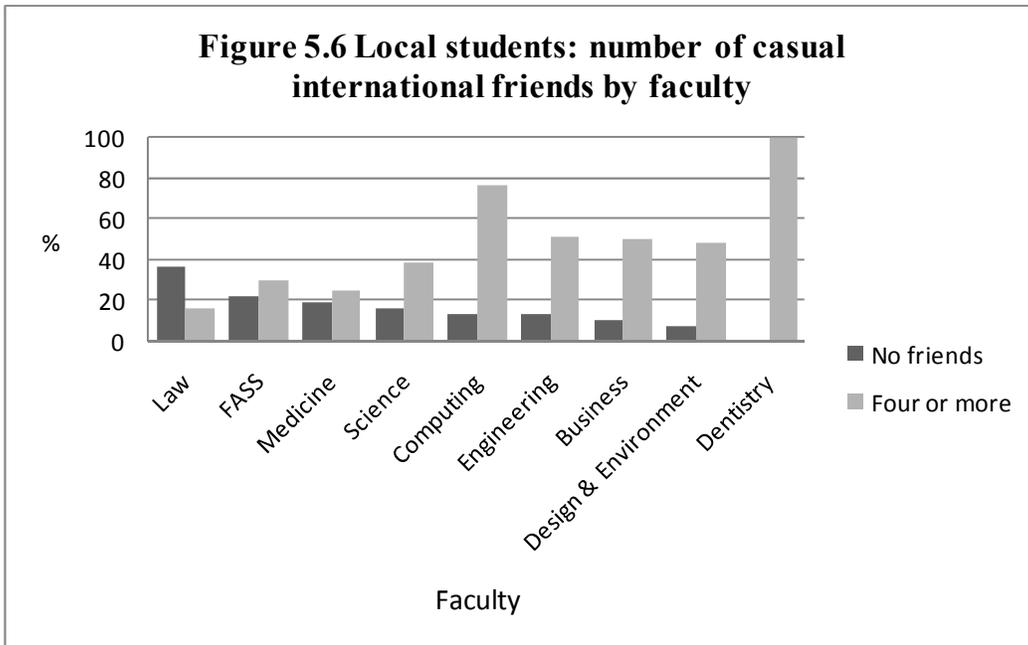
their academic works, and they tend to bond together with those students because they have the same interests. ...SM1, 2 and 3 sometimes don't get along well because some of the SM3s think we are very localised and that we have lost our own colour or something, and SM1s think SM3s only study and don't know how to hang out with other people and tend to click with their own... there really is a big difference. When we hang out with our friends and some people walk by you can be like oh he is from China I think he is SM1 or SM2 or SM3, like you can tell by the way they talk and dress and their accent is all different. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

These differences suggest that international students who studied in Singapore before coming to university are more comfortable interacting with local students. Sook Chan, does however, feel that those who spend longer in China are smarter. This raises a question about the most desirable time for Singapore to attract international students as those who study in the country from a younger age could integrate better, but those who come for university may be more economically attractive.

***Faculty***

Different faculties provide different environments for interaction. Some courses are more “hands on” and offer laboratories or work rooms for their students, which also double as a social space. Other courses do not offer this space, and students tend to come across less familiar peers during lectures and tutorials with fewer opportunities to actually get to know one another.

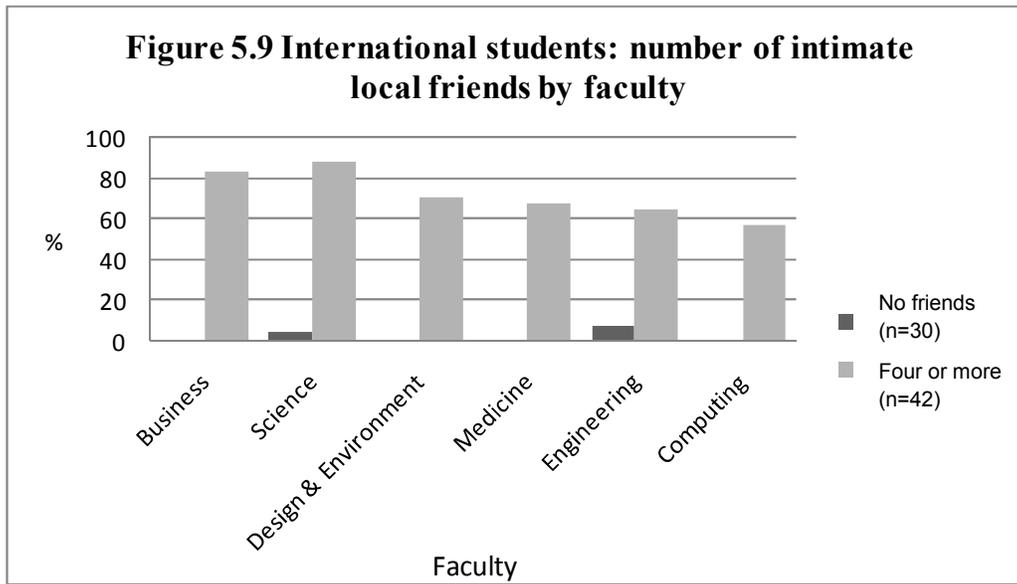
Figures 5.6 and 5.7 tell us local students across almost faculties are making both casual and intimate friends with international students, but to varying degrees. Local students in the Faculty of Law seem to be the least successful at making casual and intimate international student friends compared to the other faculties. Students from Design and Environment, Business, and Engineering appear to be more likely to have more intimate international friends. Courses in these faculties attract more international students, and also provide more opportunities for local and international students to interact compared to, for example, the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.



The pattern for international students was not as apparent. Quite clearly figure 5.8 shows international students found a lot of casual local friends regardless of

their faculty of study. As for intimate friendships (figure 5.9), Science seemed to provide a more conducive environment. Despite this, Science, along with the Arts and Social Sciences, and Engineering were the only faculties with international students who had no intimate local friends. This is interesting as Science and Engineering are known to have relatively large numbers of international students. This may mean that on the one hand there is greater opportunity for local-international interaction, but on the other, there may also be more opportunity for mono-national interaction.





The interviews provided a deeper insight into how different faculties may influence student interactions.

Yeah most of my friends are from architecture. And it's quite mixed, as in we have a few internationals as well, maybe it's the course itself, 'cause we have a lot of interaction, yeah 'cause we study studios and we work in groups, so basically we have more interaction with the people and yeah they are the kind of people who y'know are fun (laughs)... you just have to go to the studio and you will have friends. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

It was year two semester two when we actually took modules only for bio engineering and it was like "oh now I realise you are also in bio engineering" I think it's like when you become a smaller cohort it's actually a need to look out for people when you are doing a tutorial question or something like that. Like this direction was based very on academic lah, but I think after that as you get to know more, you get to spend more time with them (local students). By year three semester two ... it's like now we are so close.

(Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

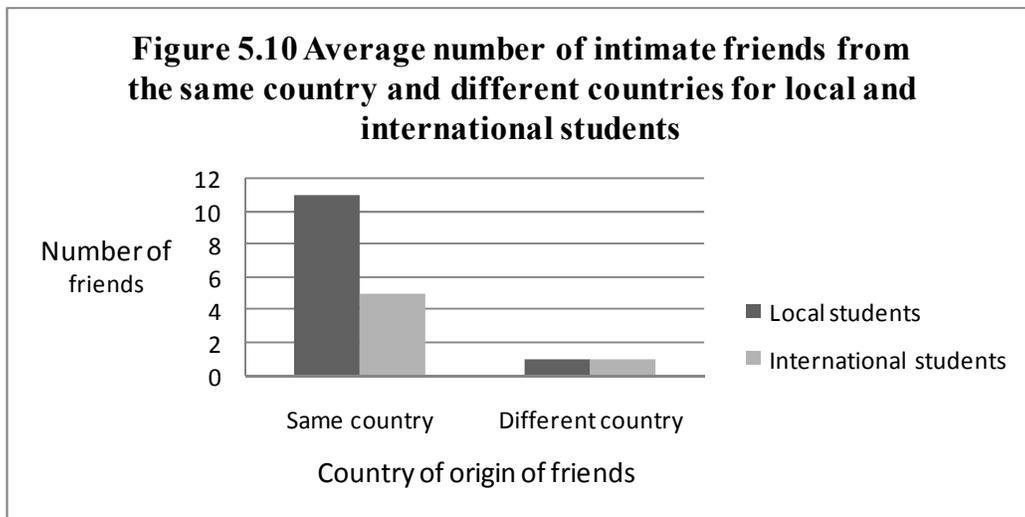
Yana and Deepa explicitly identify their study environments as conducive to student interaction. Yana works in studios where she can continuously interact with different people in a sociable manner. Deepa found that it took a long time to make close local friends, but as her cohort got smaller and faces became more familiar, closer friendships started to form. Li Ying identified why Deepa may have faced some difficulties when her cohort was large:

In general...for my faculty (engineering) right, it's kind of threatening lah 'cause we have like a lot of international students who come compared to the Medical School, or Arts and Social Sciences. So they are actually our competitors. (Li Ying, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

These quotes suggests that familiarity over time is an important factor for forming more meaningful intercultural friendships, and certain courses, where smaller groups can get to know each other, provide more opportunities for students to become familiar compared to others.

### **Country of Origin**

Previous data presented suggested the preference of students to mingle with students from similar backgrounds rather than make new friends. Like most internationalised universities, co-national groups of friends were a prevalent feature of the student landscape at NUS. The term used to describe this phenomenon by Brown (2009) is “Ghettoism”. Figure 5.10 demonstrates a general pattern of “ghettoism”, with most students’ friends originating from the same place as them.



Singaporeans are mainly close friends with other Singaporeans. Not explicitly shown in the above figure, however, Singaporeans on average also had one intimate Malaysian friend. A similar trend was seen for Malaysian students, who also had intimate Singaporean friends. The questionnaire results also illustrated that international students were not on average forming intimate friendships with international students from other countries. Both students from Malaysia and China, on average had intimate friends from Singapore and their own country, but not others. Indian students were the only group to display a particularly monocultural preference by having only Indian friends. The most common comment in response to the open ended question in the questionnaire also highlighted the cliquishness of campus. Out of over fifty comments here are some examples from local students:

They (international students) stick to themselves, forming coalitions which I believe isn't for the benefit nor good of the Singaporeans in school; refer to complaints of international student behavior in halls of residence, public washrooms etc etc. In addition, from a political standpoint I don't see why we even HAVE to have that many foreign students. (Local student, questionnaire data)

They move in packs and talk loudly. (Local student, questionnaire data)

Such comments illustrated that many local students find international students too cliquey, with strong words like “coalition” indicating that groups of international students are seen with disdain by some local students. International students had very similar things to say about their local counterparts too. The examples below are typical responses from international students:

This applies to all students and not just the Singaporeans that people tend to stick to people of their own nationality. I believe in internationalism and multiculturalism and hence, try my best to be best friends with people from any country. However, I am rarely able to become intimate friends with anybody except Indians.  
(International student, questionnaire data)

They tend to stick strongly to their own JC (Junior College) groups and local orientation groups for which most of us aren't able to attend. (International student, questionnaire data)

The above quote again points out the importance of going to school in Singapore as a key factor behind friendship groups that are generally mono-cultural.

The interview data supported that of the questionnaire. Both local and international students talked about “ghettoism” as common knowledge and a

natural occurrence on campus. International students, however, gained a lot of attention during the interviews for being too cliquy.

There is like a gang. The Malaysian gang in my architecture course; just I'm not in the gang. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

In chemistry we say the like dissolve the like, in international students, the foreign student will mix with their own clan. (Huang Yang, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

They like to hang out in their little enclaves. You would seldom see a local with a bunch of international students in school. I think it's a little strange actually...from day one of school, they're already stuck in their own cliques...when they stick in their cliques, it's pretty intimidating. (Sabrina, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

All of these comments, even that of Yana's, point to the cliquishness of international students rather than local students. This is interesting as the questionnaire findings found that local students were just as cliquy, if not more so than international students. We can see from the quotes above that ghettoism is generally observed or assumed, yet the speakers either stated that they were not

like that, or talked about it without referring to themselves. When asked about where their own friends came from, however, it also became clear that most local students' close friends were from the same background, whereas casual interactions were more likely to be mixed.

[Most of my friends are] from Secondary and JC (Junior College).

Umm, I have one friend from Hong Kong, but that doesn't count because she's been staying here for the past 15 years. (Xin Ying, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

The international students that were interviewed seemed to have slightly more diverse groups of friends.

Some are local and some are also from China, some other Malaysia and some Indonesians. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

Aaah, yeah most of them are from Singapore, and some from China, Malaysia, where else? Um the Philippines. Yeah that's about it. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

This again shows that the perceptions of international students as being particularly cliquy compared to local students is not necessarily true on the

ground. While international students were generally blamed for being too insular, local students were also recognised as being very cliquish.

They've lived among themselves in their HDBs gone to the same schools, they all have their own cliques, it's very cliquish here and generally it's very hard to penetrate into that. So that's why they don't interact with foreign students...if you're a foreigner and you try to make friends they just try to stick to their own. So you don't bother making an effort anymore because there's no point. So you only make an effort with other foreigners. Or some locals that are not provincial - they do exist, a certain percentile. (David, Personal Communication, 14th December 2009)

Even as a permanent resident who had spent over a decade in Singapore, David found local friendship circles difficult to break into. He called the mentality of being cliquish “provincial” – quite a strong contrast to notions of the “global citizen”, which internationalisation is meant to encourage. David’s comment also points out the potential differences between Singapore born locals and permanent residents. This data strongly suggests, that like most internationalised campuses around the world, students prefer to socialise with people from similar backgrounds.

**Language**

Local and international students in Singapore generally share the ability to speak in a language other than English. This section looks at how sharing a non-English language affects intercultural interactions. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate which languages are used during interactions.

**Table 5.1 Local students: general language use with international student friends in percentage**

	English only	English and Mandarin	English and another language	Mandarin Only	Other
Casual international student friends	66	28	3	2	2
Intimate international student friends	60	25	4	6	5

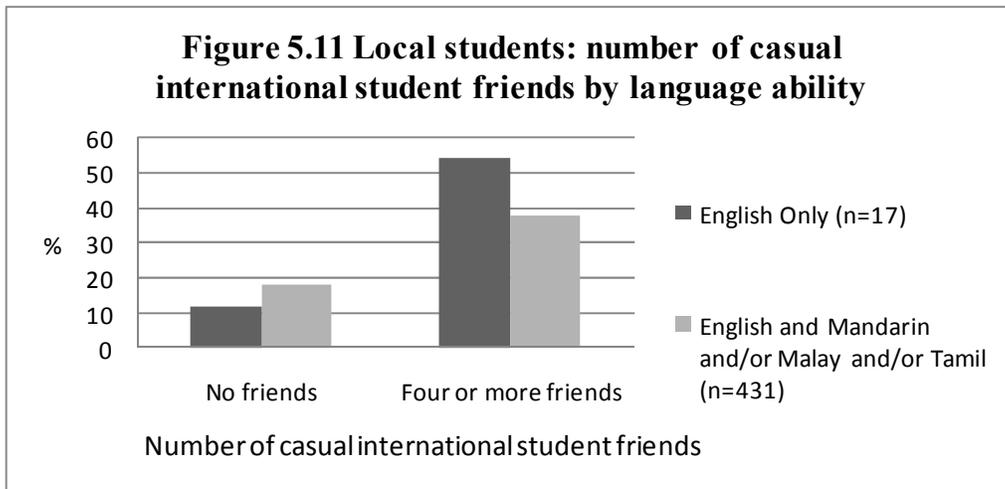
**Table 5.2 International students: general language use with local student friends in percentage**

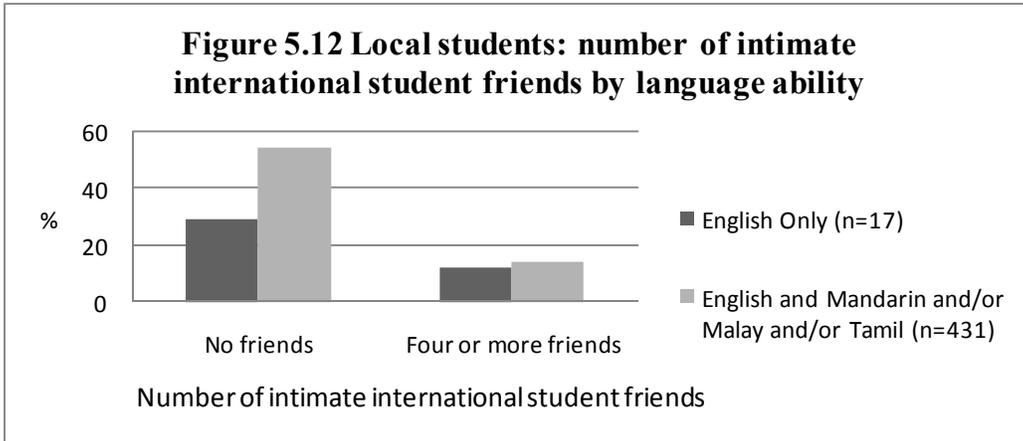
	English only	English and Mandarin	English and another language	Mandarin Only	Other
Casual local student friends	57	38	1	3	1
Intimate local student friends	47	38	1	12	1

The questionnaire data showed that English was the most used language for all local-international interactions. The sole use of English was slightly higher

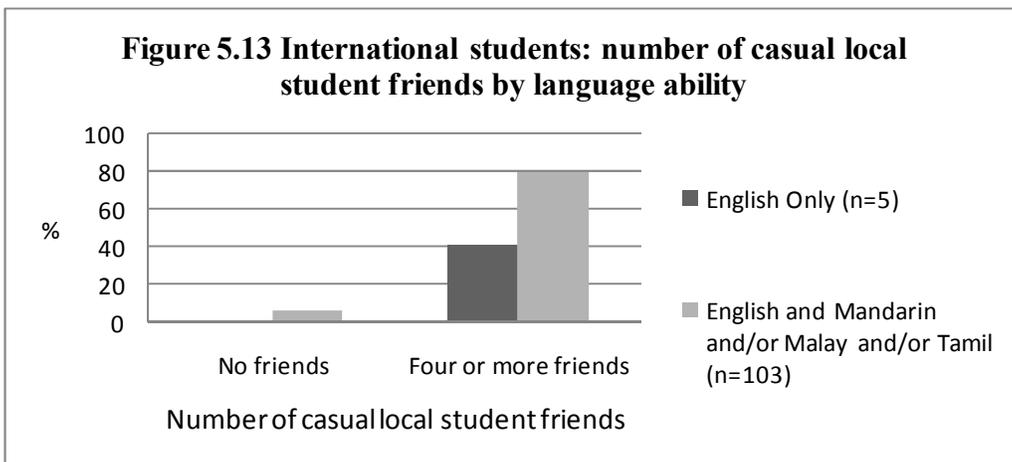
during casual interactions compared to intimate ones and Mandarin dominated as the most widely used non-English language.

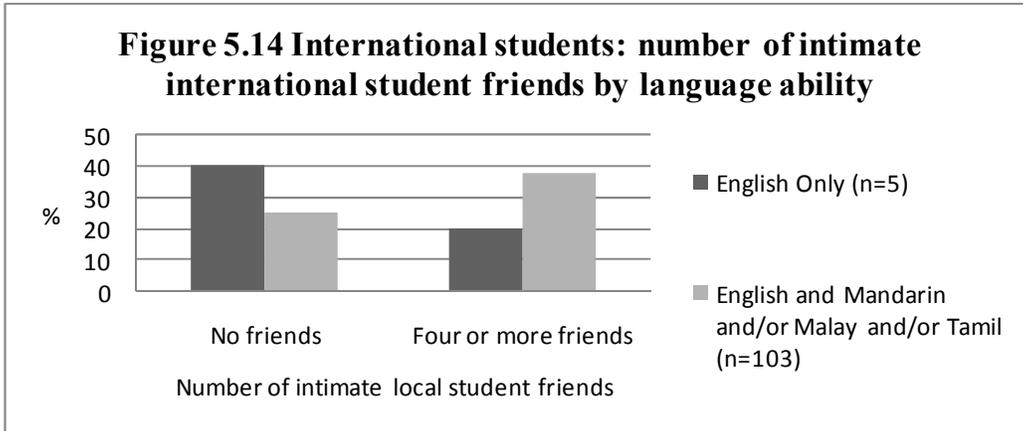
Despite this, speaking a non-English language did not appear in to give a distinct advantage in terms of getting more intercultural friends, or intimate ones. Although the number of English Only speakers is small for both local and international students, figures 5.11 and 5.12 clearly show that speaking languages other than English does not translate into more international friends. Local students who spoke English and another language did have slightly more intimate friends, but the majority of this group still had no intimate international student friends.





A slightly different pattern is observed in figures 5.13 and 5.14 with more international students who speak English and (an)other language(s) having higher numbers of casual and intimate local friends. This suggests that speaking multiple languages could be useful for international students, but it may also be a result of the very small number of international students who only speak English. Further research into local-international student communication is needed to ascertain the importance of various languages for interaction.





During the interviews language was thought to be a strong factor for affecting intercultural interactions. Language was talked about in reference to international students' English abilities, speaking an "exclusive" language, and also accents. Although English was the most widely used language for communication, it was also seen as one of the reasons why interaction was generally limited. Both local and international students described English proficiency as an obstacle for interaction between local and international students.

The biggest obstacle is a poor command of English. At university, English is the most important mode of communication. (Siska, Personal Communication, 21st December 2009)

One big problem that I can think of is the language barrier. Before I came here, I had English lessons back in Indonesia, but nonetheless, I was not using it frequently enough to either converse

or understand the language adequately. (Liam, Personal Communication, 8th December 2009)

Not only was interaction assisted or hindered by students' level of English, but also their pronunciation. Some students thought the main reason why local and international students had trouble interacting was because of their accents.

Sometimes they (local students) will complain that when they talk to PRC scholars they have a very strong accent that they don't quite understand. I think that sort of keeps them away from these people...it will be nice for the local students to be more welcoming to the foreign students, sometimes they feel more comfortable to talk to their own country's people, mostly because of the accent I think that they cannot communicate well with people from other countries. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

These comments highlight the importance of English at NUS, but also identify that students from different countries have different types of English. For some students the differences between their English and other peoples' make interaction difficult and unappealing. International students also said that when they first arrived in Singapore they felt afraid of using their English because of their accents. This type of fear is likely to exacerbate ghettoism and, if not overcome,

inhibit international students from being able to communicate on a meaningful level with local students.

Coming from a Chinese environment, I did not dare to communicate with classmates in English at first, having the fear that I might be judged by them due to my poor English and weird accent. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

I think initial difficulties were in approaching people since I was worried that my accent/my language might be a barrier. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

Deepa, however, adjusted to life in Singapore very well and now has no fear of communicating with her peers. In fact her accent has become very Singaporean, and she now finds the way she is received back home is a bit different.

I actually have a very strong Singaporean accent, so if somebody doesn't actually know that I'm an international, they would just think that I am already a PR or a citizen or something, but for my case, I never bothered to pick up a Singlish accent right, it just happened. Like when I go back to India and talk to my friends they find it quite weird... they tend to give me that kind of look, "oh

you've become very...you think so highly of yourself', but it's not the case. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

So while accents made it somewhat difficult for local and international students to communicate in English, it also seemed that different accents rendered languages other than English less than useful as well.

Like sometimes they will just say "you sound so Malaysian" and at a certain point I will be like "oh so I don't sound Malaysian most of the time?" Yeah but I am Malaysian, so why can't I sound like a Malaysian! But yeah it's quite weird. (I don't really use) Malay, just once in a while, 'cause of my local Malay friends, but that's very rare. Yeah, Mandarin is ok, a little bit, but not so often 'cause my mandarin sounds Malaysian (laughs). That's what they say "oh my goodness, you sound so Malaysian when you speak Chinese". So ok fine, I don't speak Mandarin that much. But my Mandarin is not thaaaat good... (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

Yana felt she was teased because of her Malaysian accent when she spoke Mandarin, and she also rarely used Malay to communicate. This helps us understand why being multi-lingual may not necessarily translate into using these languages more, or them giving students a platform to build friendships from.

Some local students, did however, find speaking a non-English language useful, not as a main mode of communication, but to help clarify things for international students.

Sometimes when I am working with Chinese students, we use Chinese, because they are more fluent, and their spoken English is not as fluent...it's definitely useful because sometimes we speak English a bit fast here, so umm we can just switch to Mandarin pretty quickly when we realise we lost them. So it's like I just want to clarify some stuff and then you can repeat again in Chinese.

(Xin Ying, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

To further complicate language use on a multi-cultural campus, students also acknowledged that speaking a language other than English can have an alienating effect.

It's like when you laugh and joke and then like sometimes you pop something in Chinese, or even in dialect, and then if there is someone who is not in, I mean if there is someone who doesn't understand then they won't find it funny, and then maybe after sometime of conversing in Chinese they might feel offended and not part of the group. So I think it's just natural lah. It's not like

really want to exclude anybody. (Li Ying, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

I hardly speak mandarin with the locals because they tend to like to speak in English versus Chinese and like there are some people who have this third world mindset, they think English is more cool or AMERICAN slang is much more cool...So I was at Zouk in a queue on Halloween and this was with some foreign friends, with clubbing and stuff very few locals will go with you, we were there and we wanted to take a picture with these Chinese Singaporean girls in their sailor moon costumes and I was saying "excuse me can we take a picture" and she didn't really respond, so I said it in Mandarin and she got so upset "I can speak English you know, I understand what you say, you don't have to speak to me in Mandarin" and that was that. But yes sometimes I speak Mandarin at least to PRCs because I like to practice, but generally with Singaporeans you use English that's the common vernacular. Or Singlish. (David, Personal Communication, 14th December 2009)

This last quote illustrates that sometimes choosing between English or a non-English language is not always a straight forward matter. David believes that English in Singapore holds a certain socio-economic status, and that being able to speak a second language does not mean that everyone will appreciate you using it,

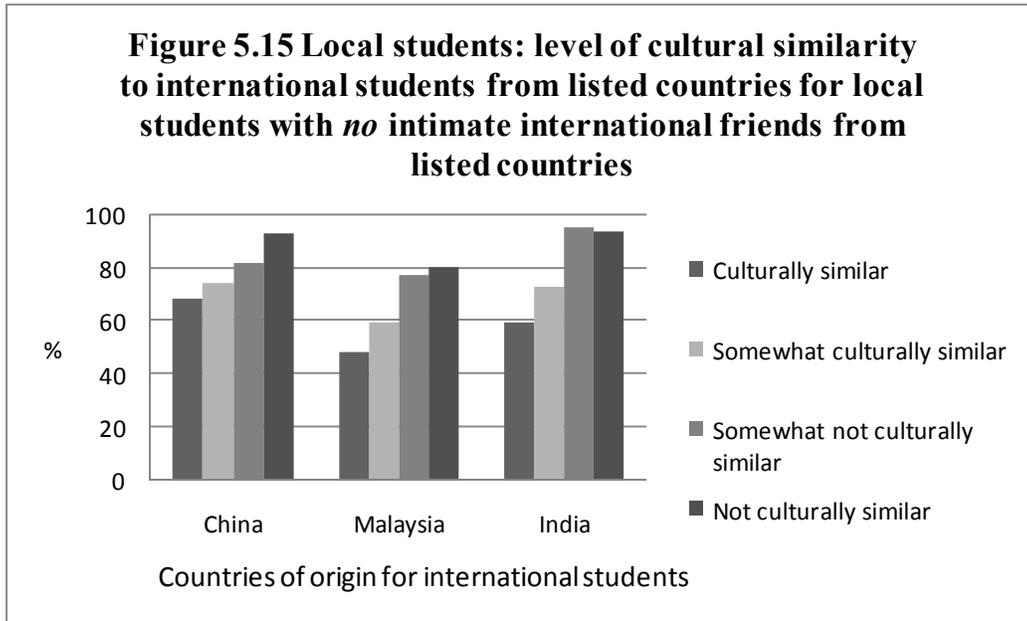
and may in fact make interaction offensive when it was not intended to be. Perhaps this is why, despite most students speaking multiple languages, English remains the most important, and intimate intercultural interactions, which require more complicated forms of expression, are less common.

### ***Culture***

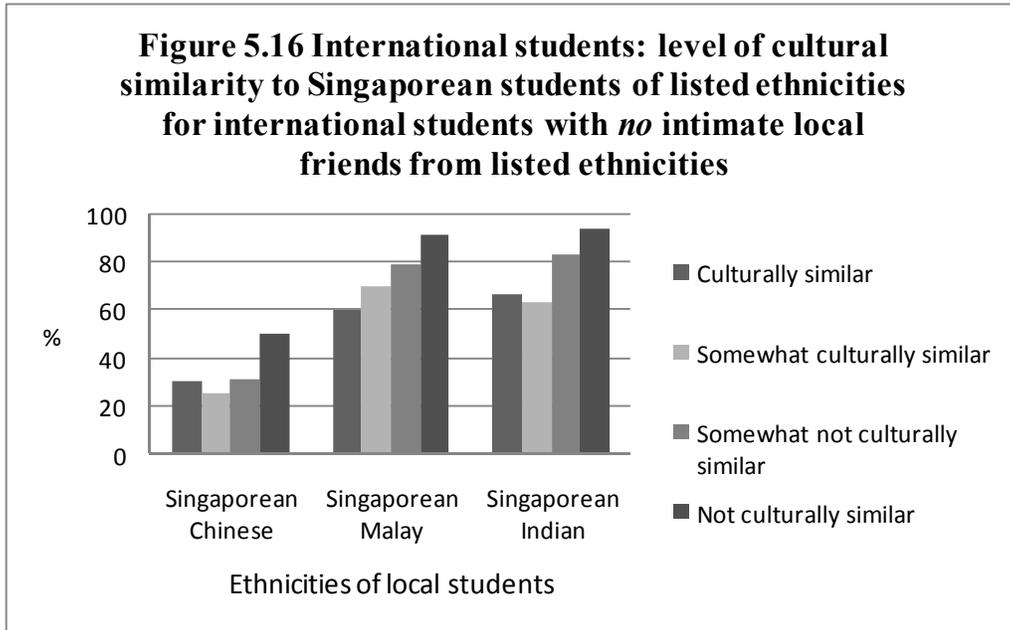
The final section of this chapter looks at Singaporean and international students' cultural similarities and whether they affect their interactions. While the extent of this cultural similarity may be questionable, it is clear that local and international students in Singapore are culturally closer than those in western institutions. Because of this, it was of interest to see if students from different countries who felt culturally similar to students from certain backgrounds had more intimate friends from this group. During the questionnaire students were asked how culturally similar they saw themselves to different groups of students. They were also asked more specifically about how many intimate international or local friends they had from different countries or ethnic groups.

As seen in figure 5.15, the majority of local students had no intimate friends from China, Malaysia, and India regardless of feeling culturally similar or not. But, generally, smaller percentages of those who felt culturally similar (the blue column) had no intimate friends from the country in question. This suggests that feeling culturally similar to certain students may not necessarily equate to

becoming intimate friends, but that it may have a small positive influence, and increase the chances of intimate friendships forming.



The data from international students shared a similar pattern to the local student data. Figure 5.16 shows the majority of international students had no Singaporean Malay and Singaporean Indian friends regardless of how culturally similar they felt. Yet most international students had one or more Singaporean Chinese friends despite feeling culturally similar or dissimilar. This suggests that although feeling culturally similar may have a positive influence on the number of intercultural friendships, other factors such as exposure could be more important.



During the interviews students drew attention to the complexities of cultural similarities and differences between local and international students. Sometimes students identified local and international students as culturally similar, but other times cultural differences were talked about as major obstacles to interaction.

But um if you are going to talk about Chinese or Indian students or sometimes Vietnamese, I wouldn't think of them any differently (after going on exchange) because they are similar to us, not the same, but similar... but if you are talking about Caucasian – ‘cause they stick out like a sore thumb, no offence, I could sort of understand better their perspective. (Xin Ying, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

Here Xin Ying says that Chinese, Indian, and sometimes Vietnamese students are similar to Singaporean students, and therefore she did not think of them differently after her own experience as an international student. This raises questions about the attainment of intercultural skills from exchange programs, and also suggests that the cultural closeness of international students in Singapore may prevent locals from feeling sympathetic towards their experiences. Pamela, however, thought that Singaporeans saw themselves as different to students from other Southeast Asian countries:

I think we still tend to see other Southeast Asian countries as the “Other” and I think also because the way our country has always tried to model itself after these benchmark countries which tend to be from the west. So there is this sense that we are in Southeast Asia, but not *within* it. (Pamela, Personal Communication, 4th December 2009)

Pamela’s statement suggests that Singapore’s economic advancements have set it apart from other Southeast Asia countries, not only in terms of economic development, but also mentality. So while Xin Ying sees other Asian international students as culturally similar, Pamela identifies them as different. Liam illustrates this complexity:

It is true that we are all Asians but my experiences tell me that getting them to mix is like mixing oil and water. They are next to immiscible. We are all under this category called Asian but honestly, it covers way too much stuff for it to be a bond to link us together... despite what I said about Asians being divided into many cultures, that is just viewing it microscopically. If we are looking at the bigger picture, comparing across the globe, the same rule still applies and that is, the group with similar people will gather together. As a whole, in this campus, the international students don't really mix with the local students but to zoom in even further, we can see that even among international students themselves, there is some form of division, namely between the Caucasians and the Asians. (Liam, Personal Communication, 8th December 2009)

One thing that all of the quotes have in common is the dichotomy of East versus West. Xin Ying felt that she better understood the perspectives of Caucasian international students after studying abroad, but that she did not need to think about Asian international students in the same way. Pamela thought that Singaporeans saw themselves as culturally superior to other Asian students due to the western benchmarks Singapore enforced, and Liam expressed that Asian students were very different from one another, but not as different as Asian and Caucasian students. This raises some interesting questions about the mentality

towards intercultural interaction when cultural distances are seen as small, but meaningful interactions between these “small Others” remain elusive.

## **Conclusion**

The data strongly illustrated the dominance of casual interactions between local and international students at NUS. Students were found to largely use the classroom and academic activities as sites of getting to know new people. These interactions, however, did not see local-international student relations make the transition from casual to intimate, unless they had the opportunity to continue to socialise on campus in places such as studios. Going to high school in Singapore had the most apparent influence on local-international student interactions, with local students who studied abroad before university having more intimate international student friends, and international students who studied in Singapore having more intimate local student friends. The data also found that, although Singaporeans and their international student counterparts may share some degree of linguistic and cultural familiarity, it did not translate into watering down the natural occurrence of “ghettoism” on campus. Cultural familiarity was found to be complicated due to the fact that most international students comes from the Asian region, which resulted in students seeing themselves both as culturally similar and dissimilar depending on the context. The dominance of casual interaction is not unique to the National University of Singapore, but nevertheless

illustrates that most students are not experiencing the intimate interactions that are more likely to translate into intercultural capital.

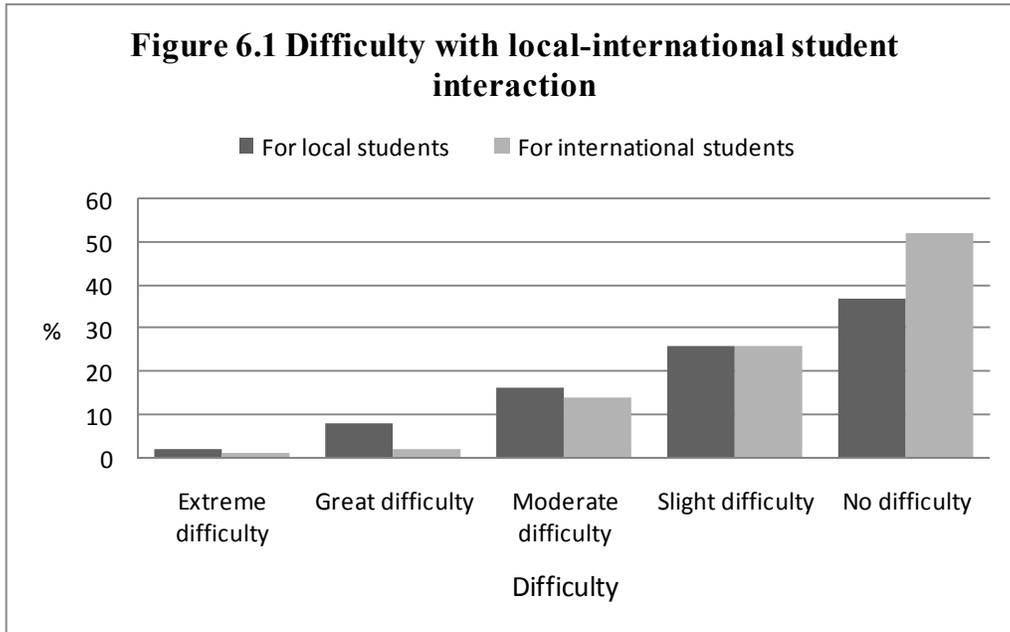
## **Chapter Six: Problematic or Rewarding?**

After two and a half years at an internationalised university, local and international students have had an opportunity to interact, form emotional ties, and gain intercultural skills. This study, however, has found that most local-international student interactions are casual, rather than intimate, the latter of which is meant to be the most rewarding. This chapter looks at what local and international students have attained in reference to their intercultural interactions, and their satisfaction with such attainments. Have students gained the ability to interact easily with people from different countries? What are the problematic and rewarding intercultural experiences students have had from their interactions? These questions will be addressed before looking at students' satisfaction.

### **Difficulty with Interaction**

By the time students are in their third year at an internationalised university they ought to be able to smoothly interact with students from different backgrounds. Figure 6.1 shows us that the majority of local and international students are experiencing slight to no difficulty interacting with one another. A larger percentage of local students, however, were having more moderate to extreme difficulty interacting with international students than the other way around. This

suggests that local students may face more problems with intercultural interaction than international students.



Further research needs to be conducted to ascertain whether having slight or no difficulty with interactions means the greater attainment of intercultural skills, or is more a reflection of having easy and casual, rather than intimate and confrontational, interactions.

### **Problematic Experiences**

During the open ended section of the questionnaire students made acute judgements on different behaviours between local and international students, particularly concerning hygiene, dress, arrogance, and academic attitude. This

illustrated that after two and a half years at university many students had, or heard about, problematic local-international experiences. Such experiences can easily result in negative stereotypes when intercultural interaction that has not been managed properly, or where individuals have not learnt the necessary skills to deal with overcoming intercultural conflict and misunderstandings (S.E. Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 6).

I can't stand their accent. I'm strongly xenophobic (Local student, questionnaire response)

(International students have a) different mentality and culture. Just can't click with them. Also, they look different from us. Therefore, feel stress talking to them. (Local student, questionnaire response)

Poor hygiene. Bad English, especially PRCs and Vietnamese. Dirty - did not wash hands after pissing or shitting. Toes digging in canteen. Smelly clothes. Haughty attitude. Rich and snobbish. Indians like to rush up the bus even when people are still alighting. Stick to their own cliques. Crazy about competition. Inconsiderate. Rude. Bootlickers of lecturers. Looks sickly and diseased. No common topic to talk about. No manners. Unwilling to help Singaporeans. Steal. Make love everywhere.

NO NEED TO DO NATIONAL SERVICE! (Local student, questionnaire response)

(Local students) can be kind of "stuck-up" sometimes but this I have concluded is part of the 'national' Singaporean attitude.

(International student, questionnaire response)

(Local students) shop a lot! Create peer pressure. (International student, questionnaire response)

These stereotypes reinforce the distinctions that students see between themselves and their counterparts from different backgrounds. While the open ended question asked about international or local students in general, we can see from the second quote that there are distinctions between international students from different countries, and in this case Chinese and Vietnamese students were singled out. These comments further demonstrated that casual interactions and co-national cliques may dominate on campus because local and international students find it difficult to understand one another on a personal level. During the interviews students elaborated on the stereotypes of local and international students.

... they (international students) haven't changed their clothes for days and they come in the same clothes every day, unless they

have like a lot of the same set. And sometimes their hair smells, like if you sit close to them they have a very very weird smell... I heard the clothes thing comes from PRC, but the smell thing I think is the Indians. And then my friends had leeches from an Indian before - not leeches, what d'you call that?...lice! so yeah these kind of horror stories. (Li Ying, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

When Li Ying talked about international students as being less hygienic it was interesting that she told her stories as hearsay, rather than happening directly to herself. In fact, the story about the lice happened to her friend in Malaysia, but Li Ying applied it to reinforce the unhygienic stereotype of Indian international students. This may reflect her limited personal exposure to international students compared to the ample stories she had heard about them.

Besides issues of hygiene, fashion was also talked about by both local and international students. It seemed that international students were labeled as having bad dress sense, which made them unattractive to some local students.

Well for starters they (international students) dress more slobishly than us, even though I'm just in jeans, but yeah, they sometimes come even more worse dressed than me, and I'm like "huh, you

wear that to school, ok". (Xin Ying, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

I was taking this module lah, and they were asking for opinions towards foreigners, and someone said that you cannot approach those people because their dressing style is different, their talking style is different. And I was quite struck by that fact. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

Being poorly dressed at NUS came across as a social faux pas for international students, that rendered them unapproachable. This was despite Xin Ying clearly stating that she also dressed rather sloppishly. Superficial judgements on fashion appear to be a petty stereotype that perhaps illustrates a wider trend of close mindedness. Following on from local students looking down on international students' dress sense, Singaporeans identified themselves, and were seen by international students, as superior or arrogant.

I would say there is actually still quite a big gap, because we still hold ourselves as different from these people. It's like the city people, and the countryside people, it's kinda distinguished. I think Singaporeans try to hold themselves as separate from the countryside counterparts because we like to think that we are better

than them. (Xin Ying, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

I think Singapore has gone a good job in making people really love Singapore...But I guess Singaporeans tend to be like “Singapore is so much better” “The transportation system is so much better” “Oh wow it sucks here, I miss Singapore”. Most of my local friends are like, they are really attached to their own, to their country. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

Xin Ying and Yana’s comments reflect Singapore’s status as a developed country compared to the status of most international students who come from developing countries. They also suggest that Singapore’s education system fulfilled its mission to instil love and loyalty for the nation into Singaporeans. Local students, however, were not alone when it came to being proud.

They (Indian students) have this high and mighty feeling that they are very good, like superior to everyone. Given like back in their country like they are the bright minds and all that, and then they come here and they still like portray that kind of thing, and I don’t really like it. And like doing projects they just give substandard work and it’s quite annoying lah. (Li Ying, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

Here Li Ying finds that international students are arrogant due to their scholar status, even though she believes they produce bad work. Singaporean's focus on being successful was cited as one reason why students did not experience each other as potential new friends.

But then the way we've been socialised and the constraints we are faced with, like having everything counted, so you are so calculative with everything like the groups you work with, the way you spend your time in school, it really limits our ability to step forward and try to interact more with foreigners. (Pamela, Personal Communication, 4th December 2009)

Here Pamela did not identify international students as a threat, but more that academic pressure meant students had little ability to be open to new intercultural friendships. This point also ties in with students physically not having the time to socialise even if they wanted to.

I don't get to interact with them much 'cause um basically you are in class and running all over the place. I mean I think it's fun to meet new people, but things are busy, so I don't really have much of a social life in the first place (laughs). I think it's important but I don't know if in being here (NUS) it's that important, 'cause I

think here you don't really get much of a chance. ... Yeah I think there are enough grounds to claim that (there are avenues to interact with international students). Yeah the avenues are there, but we don't have the abilities to go there, like if we did that then something else would suffer. It's about survival, it's kinda sad. (Kathryn, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

Time, I mean everyone is studying so much, with a basic five modules per semester. I mean everyone just studies a lot because they have to they want to churn out degrees, to help the nation grow it's a tiger economy blah blah blah. Time. I'm trying to organise a bloody barbeque, but very few people are in to that, very low response, all they want to do is study. And they only live life when they're 30, which is why local women over 30 are really nice, and they're open to going out, because they realise they've spoilt their youth. Not that 30 is old, but when you're in your 20s your meant to have fun, but here they don't get to do it. Here it's "Save now and Enjoy later" it's just different... Everyone's pressed for time here. (David, Personal Communication, 14th December 2009)

The busy life of students at NUS, and the pressure they feel to study, seems to result in a lack of ability to really experience and enjoy the diversity on campus.

Kathryn finds that being so busy at university leaves her little time to have any form of a social life. She also feels that NUS is not serious about encouraging interaction between local and international students, as the avenues for interaction are impractical for busy students. David goes on to say that the amount of pressure on students to perform at NUS means that they are wasting the part of their lives that they are meant to be using to socialise and have fun. A lack of time, also meant that friendships were difficult to maintain.

Usually there are those who are very very busy, so usually we have one meeting after every exam and we still keep in touch a lot and we know everything that is going on. Yeah like there is really no time to meet up a lot. But where your own cohort is concerned, like now I'm also close to a few locals, but it's still the same problem really, there's no difference...Y'know it is very difficult to do that (hang out outside university), because there is like no time, because things are usually quite hectic with labs and everything. It's more after exams we just hang out a lot and have more of a personal life than just an academic life. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

While Deepa has made close local friends, she finds she can only really enjoy them during holidays. During her interview Deepa said she had not been home for two years, so her holidays were free to hang out with her local friends. But if

this is the only time students really have to socialise properly, then meaningful intercultural friendships will be difficult to form as many international students do go home during the holidays. The lack of time to socialise could help explain why many students who desired more intimate interactions found attaining casual ones, and maintaining existing intimate friendships, easier.

This last theme discussed in this section is the presence of international students as a threat. International students were often talked about with tension and resentment by local students that seemed to stem from the government's pro-immigration policies.

I dunno, maybe it's y'know how they always talk about foreign labour as like a threat or a blessing. I think it's like sometimes you feel, like those in science or engineering, you kinda know that the best students are not Singaporeans, so there is this kind of resentment. (Kathryn, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

Even now there is a sense of fear, not really a very strong sense as xenophobia, but you can still sense it. Umm, it's like I think we are partial towards our own people and so we are not that open minded yet...I think it's just going to get worse. (Xin Ying, Personal Communication, 10th December 2009)

Kathryn and Xin Ying feel that the presence of international students is causing some local students to fear them. Kathryn explicitly linked this to the government's foreign talent policy, while Xin Ying stated that she thought Singaporeans were not yet open minded. She also believed the situation would not improve. Some comments and experiences of international students illustrate why this may be:

‘cause of the opportunities, maybe it's more competitive when we come up for work, and then it's like “oh the opportunity was given to non-locals” not being fair and all that. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

I've met some of them (locals) that are quite offending like they don't want to talk to international students. I've heard some of my friends say that when we were in Junior College, then they want to go to America for university studies and they need a reference letter, so they go to the teacher, but the teacher says I won't write a reference letter because our government gives so much for you to come here to study and now you just want to leave like that, I will not let this thing happen. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

Both of these comments clearly reflect the tension revolving around foreign talent in Singapore. On the one hand international students provide too much competition, but on the other they have been invested in by the Singapore government and supposedly taken opportunities from locals; therefore they owe the country to stay and work. Clearly Singapore's foreign talent policy is complicated by feelings of people on the ground who cannot decide if they are a threat or a blessing. While international students were said to be competitive and threatening, the comments made in the questionnaire by international students expressed seeing local students' competitive nature as a positive thing.

They are enthusiastic and energetic. It's not a boring experience to work with Singaporeans and most of the time they are cheerful. Some Singaporeans also have excellent leadership qualities which I think I lack, so sometimes I feel happy when I have to work with a Singaporean because in such cases I don't have to take the leader's role! (International student, questionnaire response)

These findings illustrate that locals may be experiencing international students as a threat more than the other way around. This study did not hear directly from any international students who considered local students a threat to their success, even though technically they will be competing for the same jobs. This may also be one aspect of an explanation as to why local students in this study desired and had less intimate interactions with international students.

All tertiary students in Singapore are at university to do well and get jobs. This gives students little time to develop new friendships, and also makes local and international students direct competitors. When combined with negative stereotypes about hygiene and fashion, as well as arrogance, it appears that many students, particularly locals, are not open to, or able to deal with, the diversity that they are experiencing on campus. These sentiments demonstrated that although Singaporeans are an ethnically diverse group, who technically share a common heritage with many international students, the current attitudes of students reflect very distinct identities and individual agendas. This poses obstacles for better interactions and also illustrates that after two and a half years at university many students remain or become close minded.

### **Rewarding Experiences**

It is not all doom and gloom. Some students are gaining rewarding experiences from being a part of an internationalised student body. From the open ended section of the questionnaire and the interviews, it was predominantly international students who expressed having positive intercultural experiences and attitudes towards local students. This seems to relate to international students in this study not expressing fear toward local students, having a greater desire to form more intimate friendships, and having more casual and intimate local friends than their local counterparts. Undoubtedly, local students were involved in these

interactions, but their voices were not heard here. Many international students, did however, state that they found local students to be quite open and friendly:

(Local students are) friendly, resourceful, know when to have fun and to be serious on studies. (International student, questionnaire response)

(Local students are) very friendly, polite and courteous. Calm and patient as well. (International student, questionnaire response)

They are typically welcoming and warm hearted. (International student, questionnaire response)

I find some of the typical stereotypes not true. Some Singaporeans are quite friendly. (International student, questionnaire response)

This last quote suggests, however, that generally local students are stereotyped as being unwelcoming to international students. When local students were open and welcoming many international students expressed that they were an important resource that helped them adjust to Singapore.

My studio mates in Architecture were very helpful and were being very good Singaporean hosts. They brought me around Singapore,

visiting local places. In a way, giving me an insight of the local culture. This helped me adjust very easily in a new environment...to further understand the culture, like how sometimes we talk about school, like how the education system is here, it's different from Malaysia, and given we are quite close, the two countries, it's quite a big difference. Yeah getting to know more about Singapore day to day, and they get to know about the Malaysian way to do stuff. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

Yana found that her local friends made it easy for her to adjust to Singapore, and although Malaysia and Singapore are quite close, there are still differences that can make adjustment challenging. She also mentioned exchanging knowledge with her local friends, resulting in both learning about new places. This shows that local-international student interaction can offer multiple benefits in terms of both adjusting to a new place, learning about different cultures, and also gaining experience dealing with people from different backgrounds. While Sook Chan found that fellow international students helped her adjust to Singapore, after which she was able to make many local friends, she also believed that friendships with locals were very important for “new” international students who needed to form ties with Singapore.

I think for those who just came they also cannot leave because they are under scholarship and they are bonded for a longer time so they have to start liking Singapore or get used to the life style here...I think if they don't get to know the locals here they won't have a very strong bond with Singapore. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

Most of the international students interviewed felt that their positive experiences with Singaporeans and Singapore had helped them adjust, which also transformed into strong emotional bonds with the country.

I think it (interaction with locals) is very important. Just to have this feeling at home, feeling comfortable with the place, don't feel like a foreign, so you get less of this home sick feeling I think. Yeah it's good... I think, I am quite adjusted right now... I have to be in Singapore for at least three years because of the bond, and after that...I don't think I'll stay here...I'll move on to somewhere else, not sure yet... (Laughs) I take Singapore like a stepping stone for me to move on further, cos it's quite close to Malaysia, so it's just one step then moving on to somewhere big. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

(I am) very (adjusted to Singapore). More than what my parents would have wanted. Gone were the feelings of homesickness as I grew up, to be replaced with a preference for this country for its order and cleanliness. Now they are finding it hard to convince me to go back to Indonesia... I intend to move out after staying here for over a decade but of course I have to serve my three year bond and even then, I still have not decided where I want to move to.

(Liam, Personal Communication, 8th December 2009)

It's like when I come here it's like oh I'm back, but when I go to China it's also like Oh I'm back". It's like two homes...I don't mind staying in Singapore for another four years because I like this place. Although the weather here is humid, I don't like the weather.

(Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

(I feel) very (adjusted), in fact, I don't think I can live in Indonesia anymore. (Ricky, Personal Communication, 7th December 2009)

Anybody who doesn't know me asks me this "Are you a Singaporean? Which JC (junior college) are you from? So I guess I am quite well adjusted!...I mean it just feels like home, I haven't actually gone back home for the past two years, I just don't feel the need to go back. I just want to settle down here. So yeah that's the

plan as of now but I don't know how the future will be. It's quite funny now like because of my friends I introduced both my parents to the Korean and Chinese drama, and now they are very happy that I got to know such friends and they got to see such entertainment. So my mum is like yeah I think you should find a Chinese boyfriend now, it will be very good for you. So yeah that's my parent's outlook as well. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

All of these international students felt very comfortable in Singapore. Yana, Liam, and Sook Chan said that they did not mind fulfilling their bonds, but after that they would probably move on to other places. Deepa, who was particularly proud of her strong local friendships, was the only international student who said she would consider settling in Singapore after graduating. These feelings are positive outcomes for internationalisation in Singapore, both for the individuals, but also for the government who invested in their being here. Actually, all of these students were bonded, except for Deepa, whose parents decided to pay for her education privately in case she did not want to stay in Singapore after graduation. Nevertheless, these students all formed strong ties with Singapore, which will likely play a role in their futures. Besides feeling adjusted and having emotional ties to Singapore, internationalised universities, are also ideally meant to provide intercultural learning. Both local and international students expressed attaining some intercultural knowledge or skills.

I knew one girl from Mauritius and I never knew how Mauritius people were, I always just thought they were like tribes, like very dark skin but she looks like a Chinese, I don't know why because she is from Mauritius. So it is very interesting when you talk about their country and you learn about their culture... It (having international student friends) will help me more than it will affect me. (Li Ying, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

I find that the international students I've interacted with were mostly very worldly and have very refreshing perspectives on certain issues. I think being exposed to different perspectives and experiences is really important especially as more modules are increasingly demanding for more creative or innovative answers. (Siska, Personal Communication, 21st December 2009)

I'm sure I could be a spy or an informer of some sort, I can speak the language, and I can work anywhere, I've lived in Jakarta, Malaysia, China, here, but my interactions, yeah well I won't be your average yobo hooligan...I'm definitely not (one of) those because of my experiences in Asia, growing up in Southeast Asia, I'm sure it will be useful... But yeah in that sense I do have an affinity with Singapore, or Jakarta, or Asia, or as a traveler.

Someone who aims to work abroad like my father. It's part of our family. My Aunties, Uncles, Father and my Mother have all been travelers. I was born during the Asia phase. I mean my uncle would say "Go join the British Army, they'll show you the world." And I would say no thank you I don't want to see Afghanistan... It's about being exposed, y'know I do have an affinity with the places I've been. But I still do consider myself British. (David, Personal Communication, 14th December 2009)

These examples from local students all touch on different types of intercultural learning. For Li Ying she was able to learn something new about a place she was very unfamiliar with. She found this knowledge interesting, and she also thought that having international student friends could help her in the future. Siska found international students helped her to “think outside of the box”. Although David is technically a local student, his experiences were very different to those of Li Ying, and Siska mainly because he was from Britain, but grew up in different countries in Asia, including Singapore. He believed that his intercultural experiences definitely distinguished him from other people, and had provided him with a wealth of knowledge and skills that he could use to follow in his father’s footsteps as a “professional traveller”. Similarly international students expressed feelings of transformation from their intercultural experiences.

I never used to wear shorts, never feel comfortable about it. But when I came here it was like, ooh, everyone here is wearing shorts, and you just feel so out of place not wearing one (laughs) it's like "don't you feel warm, and hot, wearing jeans and long pants and whatever (laughs). I dunno. Then I got more shorts myself, and changed a bit. I think (my attitude has changed) a little bit, yeah definitely. I think it would be the same for everyone right, to have step out of your own country, and to see more people, and because NUS has so many other internationals there is also getting to know more and more different countries. So I think in exposure wise, knowledge and culture, its already quite different...I think I look at things, I dunno, just a bit different...I guess more acceptable to different cultures I think. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

I think I have developed a lot. I tend to learn more things when you meet different people because you realise they have different way of thinking and approaching things and sometimes their ways are better than yours so yeah lah I think like it's the good things you pick up along the way, I think I am quite proud that I am quite close to everyone. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

Now I know how to interact with different people, because I went to Canada early this year for exchange and I met a lot of different people there, and it was easy for me to talk to them, because in Singapore I also talk to a lot of people from other countries so I have learned how to interact with them. So it's easier for me and I enjoy it. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

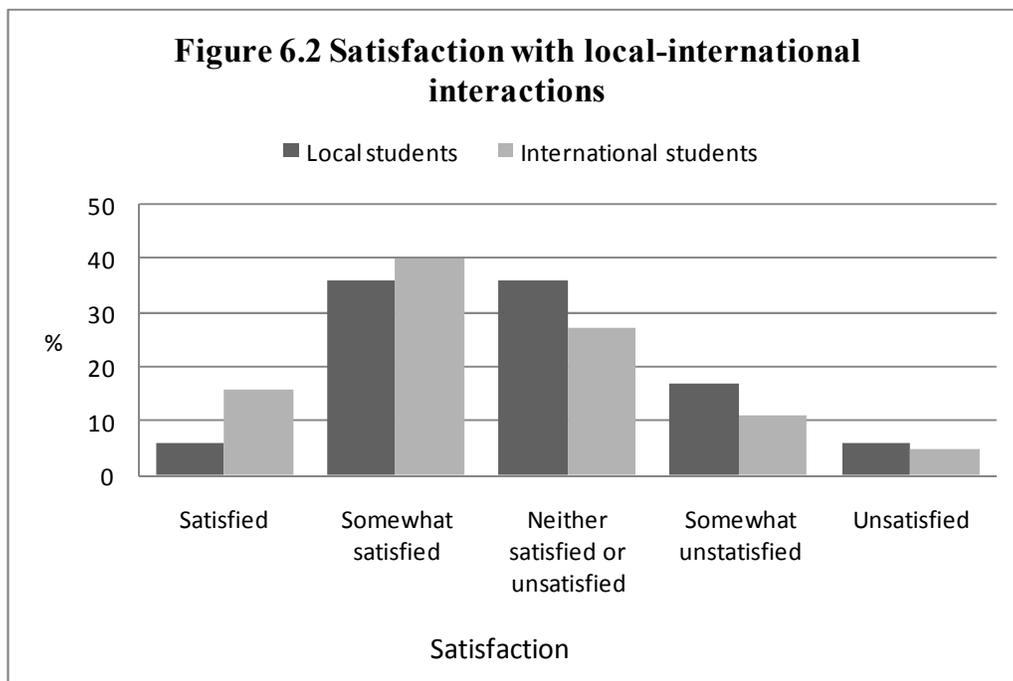
These students experienced change in many ways due to attending NUS. Yana changed not only the way she presented herself, but also the way she thought about people from different cultures. Deepa also felt proud she had become more open minded and accepting of different points of view. Sook Chan put her intercultural skills to the test when she went on exchange to Canada, where she found it easy to talk to a wide array of people due to her experiences in Singapore. Such rewarding experiences from both local and international students demonstrate the variety of benefits that students can and are gaining from NUS' internationalisation, despite academic, societal, and personal pressures to stay in comfortable cliques.

### **Satisfaction**

By now we know what students think about internationalisation in Singapore, what types of interactions are occurring on campus, and the types of mentalities

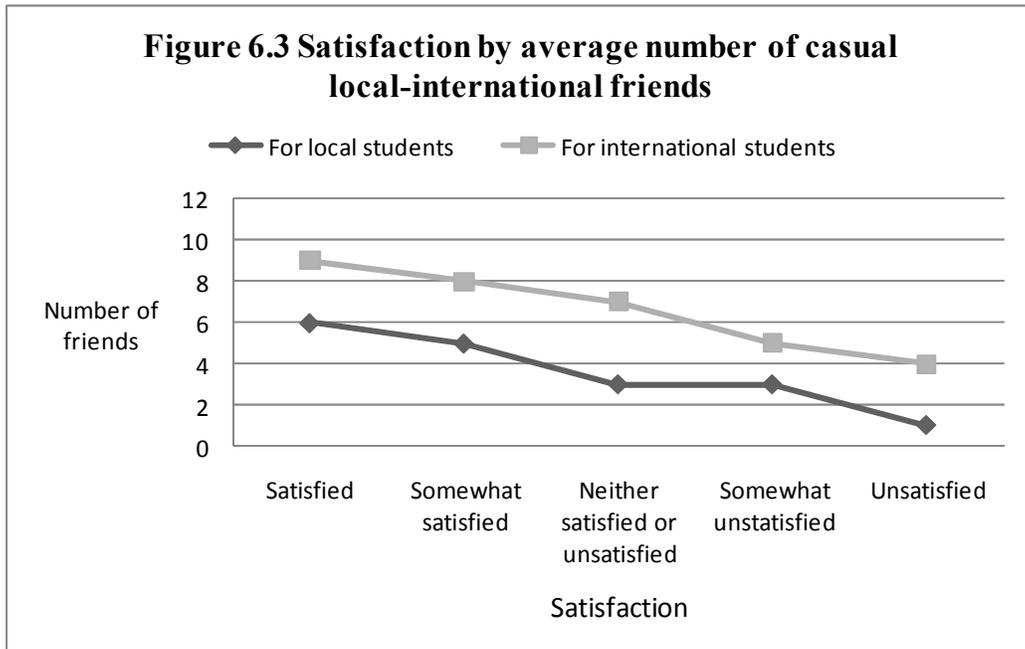
and intercultural skills students will be graduating with. This final section looks at how satisfied students are with their international interactions on campus.

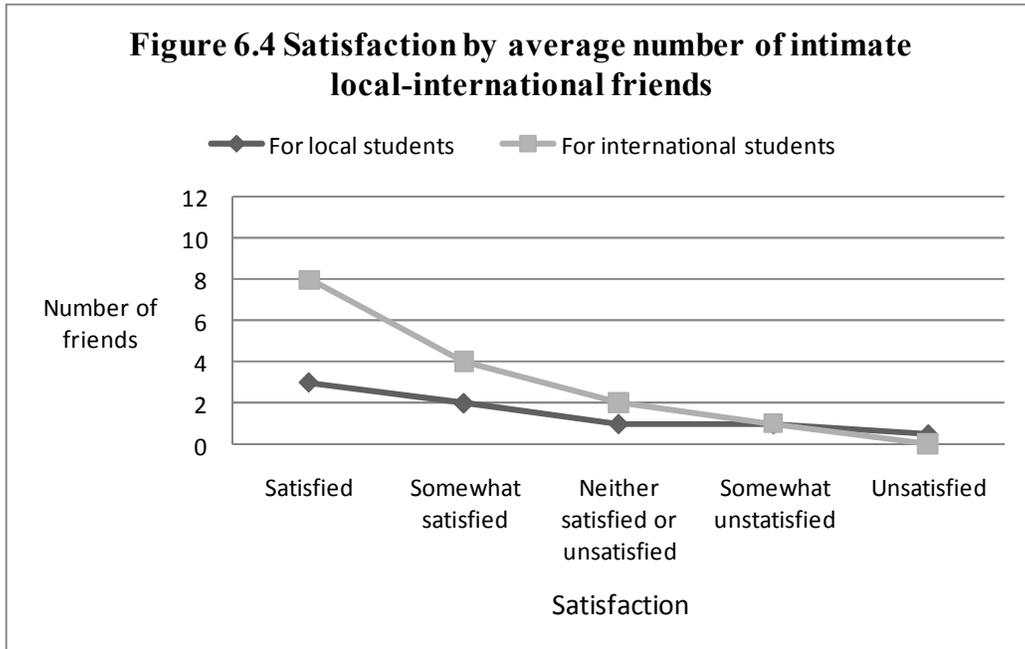
In figure 6.2 local students appeared to be more prominent on the lower levels of satisfaction than international students. International students were more satisfied with over 55% being somewhat satisfied to satisfied compared to 42% of locals. These are decent percentages for both groups; however, it seems that local students are less satisfied overall.



Here I want to explore whether students who have more local-international friendships are more satisfied with their interactions. Figures 6.3 and 6.4 clearly

show that students with more local-international friendships are more satisfied with their interactions. This is reassuring as it shows that students are not happy with having small numbers of local-international student friendships. The figures also show that local students are more easily satisfied with fewer casual and/or intimate international student friends than the other way around. This is in line with international students having a greater desire for more intimate local friendships, and also being able to attain higher numbers of local friends.





The interviews illustrated that some local students regretted not having more international interactions, but also demonstrated a lack of effort, time, and opportunity to make the most of their internationally diverse campus.

(I am) not really (satisfied). There isn't really that much of an opportunity unless I devote my time to get to know international students outside of my modules- which I don't. (Siska, Personal Communication, 21st December 2009)

For Southeast Asia maybe it's enough compared to the Indians and PRCs, but it's not very internationalised like say I don't think I know a lot of Caucasians who are here. We don't really get many

opportunities to interact with them. So maybe that part is not enough...I mean I have no complaints, I'll just accept any situation that comes along my way. (Li Ying, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

Both of these comments show that these students are not really satisfied, but also cannot be bothered to put in more effort to have better intercultural interactions. From the interviews, it was definitely more the international students who expressed being happy with their intercultural interactions at NUS. This is an interesting point, as in countries such as Australia and the U.K. international students are generally dissatisfied with their interactions with locals as they were hoping for a far deeper experience (Harrison & Peacock, 2009, p. 3). This may again tie into expectations of cultural adventure being low for international students who come to Singapore, as well as local students in this study generally finding it more difficult to be open to interactions. When asked if they were satisfied with their interactions international student responses included:

Yeah I guess. They (local students) are quite nice, some of them have invited me to their homes for study, like stay over and all that, and one time because I had H1N1, and this friend brought me to her house to stay for almost a week. So yeah they took care of me...her parents are doctors so they could take good care of me. ...because her house was big, she's rich, yeah so it was really nice,

I had someone to wash my clothes, to cook, y'know, I mean, if my friend didn't bring me there, I probably would have just been alone in the house eating instant noodles. I was quite blessed to have her. (Yana, Personal Communication, 26th November 2009)

I am very happy (with my experience studying at NUS), 'cause I think that if you just stick to your own kind you don't really get to know what other kinds of people are there in the world. (Deepa, Personal Communication, 11th December 2009)

I wish I would have more chance to make other friends. Like everyone says Singapore is a multiracial multicultural society like we enjoy their food and celebrate their festivals, it's good to have some of their friends so you can know more about their culture. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

Yana and Deepa were satisfied and quite proud of their interactions with local students. Yana specifically told how one close local friend took care of her when she got sick. Deepa was most satisfied with her interactions as she thought they had opened her view of the world. Although Sook Chan had made a lot of friends from studying in Singapore before university, and she felt she had gained intercultural skills, she also felt that she wanted more local friends so that she could be more involved in Singapore's culture. This brings us to students' final

comments on their satisfaction with whether or not Singapore is a good host for internationalised higher education.

Yes and No. Yes because the language allows most international students to cope with their study here. However, I don't think that Singapore is the best place for international students because we do participate in selective teaching where only the desired topics and non-controversial ones will be taught. (Please don't tell anyone I said that!) They will not really learn as much as if they went to a country which is more liberal and open with their systems. (Sabrina, Personal Communication, 1st December 2009)

Whether or not one is in Singapore, America or Australia, I think that international students would inevitably be placed in situations where they'll be faced with some prejudice, discrimination or other difficulties. Just because you're Asian, doesn't mean that you would have an easier time in Singapore; just because you're a Caucasian, doesn't guarantee you an easier time in Australia/America either. (Siska, Personal Communication, 21st December 2009)

Out of 100 I would give it 70 maybe. Like the country itself is very welcoming, like they say they welcome foreign talents to join

us and make our country stronger and most of the people are very friendly and they offer help to those foreigners and make friends with them. But I think it's better if they have a more welcoming attitude like the country. I still feel that the country is more welcoming than the people; it's not really consistent between the people behaviour and the country's attitude. But I think they are on the right track. (Sook Chan, Personal Communication, 9th December 2009)

These three comments all talk about Singapore and internationalisation in different ways. Sabrina believes that it is a good host because the language similarities between local and international students help the latter cope with their studies. Yet on a purely academic level she believes Singapore cannot teach as much as other countries when it comes to more controversial issues. In a sense Siska disagrees with Sabrina, and feels that Singapore is not a better or worse host for international students from Asian countries, but that no matter where international students go they will face discrimination and other difficulties. Sook Chan's comment is very interesting as it clearly illustrates that she feels the difference between the government's agenda and the local students' attitude. And although a score of seventy out of a hundred is not bad, she believes that Singapore could become a great host if local students were more open to their international counterparts.

## **Conclusion**

After two and a half years at an internationalised university local students experienced slightly more difficulty interacting with their international counterparts than the other way around. Local students also expressed negative stereotypes more freely than international students, although both groups were judged by each other as being distinct and inferior in certain ways. As was mentioned, this is a common occurrence in diverse places where intercultural interaction has not been properly managed. It was also found, however, that the avenues NUS had developed to help facilitate better interactions were inaccessible for busy students. Despite the various problems for meaningful intercultural interactions, some students did attain positive and rewarding experiences. International students seemed to gain such experiences more than local students, which may reflect the former being more open to, and having more, intimate intercultural interactions. It was not surprising, therefore, to find that they were also slightly more satisfied with their interactions than local students who were found to be slightly more apathetic and less satisfied. From the voices heard here it seems that the international students in this study may be gaining more intercultural rewards, while the local students may be graduating with less open attitudes, and poorer intercultural skills.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

Singapore's distinctiveness as a higher education provider is twofold: it is an Asian nation with 'world class' education attracting Asian students; and it offers extremely competitive higher education fees that the government is willing to subsidise for a three year bond. This first point of distinction identifies the cultural closeness of local and international students in Singapore, compared to the much greater cultural differences seen in western countries. The second point of distinction stems from the foundation for internationalised higher education in Singapore - Singapore's need to tap into external labour sources so that the nation's skilled workforce can grow. Beyond the three years of bonded work, Singapore hopes that some of these international students will integrate into Singaporean society and join its "nation-building journey". This is the ideal outcome from the government's perspective as it means Singapore's shrinking population will be boosted by skilled people who are loyal to the city-state. The hope for an integrated and growing Singaporean society points to the importance of interaction and intercultural learning in Singapore's internationalised universities, and the cultural closeness of local and international students in Singapore suggests that intercultural interaction should be easily attainable.

### **Summary of Study**

Local and international students were found to be aware of the intercultural rewards that internationalised higher education can provide, as well as the agenda behind internationalisation in Singapore. Weighing up the possible benefits with the pragmatic need to complete a qualification, the majority of local students, and fifty percent of international students desired casual interactions. Unsurprisingly then, casual interactions, rather than more intimate interactions were the norm.

Most intercultural interactions happened, or were started, in class or group projects. Courses that offered spaces, for example studios, for more student interaction outside lectures and tutorials had a positive effect on intercultural relationships. This reflects the importance of spaces on campus for supplying opportunities to socialise in Singapore, especially as students have heavy workloads and little free time.

The study also found that studying in Singapore before university for international students, or abroad for local students, had a positive effect on local-international student interactions. This suggests that students who come to Singapore at the university level find it more difficult to make meaningful connections, and integrate, with local students. This could be due to a number of reasons. Those suggested by this study included strong existing local cliques, as well as the large international student community. Existing international student networks

between those who were already at NUS and those who newly arrived provided immediate support for international students, and also influenced newcomers with existing students' attitudes. The lower levels of education, however, are less internationalised and also have more opportunities for frequent, meaningful interaction.

Other factors such as country of origin, language, and cultural similarity also seemed to encourage cliques of students from the same countries. This was an interesting finding as local and international students share a small cultural distance compared to those in western countries, yet this did not translate providing a common foundation for intimate interactions. This issue will be expanded upon in the next section.

The majority of local students experienced slightly more difficulty interacting with international students than vice-a-versa. To elaborate on the varying levels of difficulty, we saw that negative stereotypes were attached to both local and international students; with the strength of feelings being greatest for locals in their views of international students. This suggested that the internationalisation of NUS is possibly exacerbating close minded and prejudiced attitudes for local students towards people from different countries.

Both local and international students did gain intercultural rewards from attending NUS and making intercultural friends, although international students seemed to

attain them more. Overall both local and international students were somewhat satisfied with their interactions, although local students were more apathetic, while international students were slightly more satisfied. Those who were more satisfied generally had more casual and/or intimate local-international friendships, however, the number of international student friends required for local satisfaction was much lower than the other way around.

These findings tell us that meaningful local-international student interaction can lead to beneficial intercultural learning, while poor local-international student interaction can exacerbate negative intercultural view points. The remainder of this chapter concludes by arguing that small cultural distances, and Singapore's foreign talent policy may not be helping students experience meaningful interactions or gain intercultural skills.

### **'Small Others' - not Small Enough**

Singapore's local and international students are what I would call 'small Others', yet they nevertheless remain 'Others'. The cultural and linguistic ties that students share do not seem to help meaningful or intimate interaction happen easily or frequently. It seems that rather than drawing on each others' similarities, students took their differences and accentuated them. For example, most local and international students speak Mandarin, yet the differences in accents were emphasised to distinguish students from different backgrounds. Emphasising and

even exaggerating differences is a natural occurrence when people from different groups meet, and even when groups may have a familiar platform to build from, small differences can be just as powerful as larger ones.

Beyond cultural and linguistic similarities, local and international students in Singapore still fit into the centre and periphery model of internationalised higher education. Singapore is the developed centre, offering 'world class' higher education in a wealthy and safe city, while international students come from the periphery of developing countries. The difference in the socio-economic status of local and international students is reflected in students' feelings towards one another. While local and international students may come from similar ethnicities, speak similar languages, and see each other as culturally similar in some ways, they see themselves as fundamentally different. Singaporeans have developed beyond their original migrant roots and now have a strong identity of their own. Therefore the intercultural experiences of local and international students are not affected positively by their shared cultural and linguistic characteristics.

### **Foreign Presence and Social Integration**

Further affecting the attitudes students have towards each other is the state agenda behind internationalisation. Singapore's economy and nation building mission make its internationalisation of higher education distinct from that in the west.

Although the government knows that most international students will leave Singapore after fulfilling their bonds, it believes enough of them will stay more permanently to continue supplementing the economy. For those that do stay on, social integration is important for the stability of Singapore as a nation-state.

Ironically, however, Singapore's success at attracting large numbers of international students, threatens the intercultural sensitivity that it needs in order to build an integrated society amidst a globalised economy. Local students see that the government is more interested in international students than its own, and this breeds resentment and concern. There is resentment that the government favours other countries' students who are direct competitors for limited resources, and there is concern that these students will not pay back the favour by integrating into Singaporean society. Such feelings were clearly expressed by local students who felt immense pressure to succeed, but also that the government had stacked the odds against them. This suggests that opening the nation to foreign talent via internationalised universities could be deterring the patriotism of local Singaporean students. Such a situation puts the government in a double-bind, whereby it needs foreign talent, but this talent may erode its harmonious society.

In return, it can be argued that many international students see little need to form deep connections with Singaporeans or Singapore. The large international student community provides enough support to help newcomers adjust to a foreign environment, and the academic and economic opportunities make for a perfect

stepping stone to other countries. Although it is unclear from this study whether conational or third country friendships actually help or hinder an emotional bond between international students and Singapore, the negative associations with “ghettoism” by participants suggest, at best, social coexistence rather than integration is the likely outcome. Despite much talk of observed “ghettoism”, more international students expressed being interested in, and successful at, forming meaningful relationships with locals and gaining intercultural skills, than having only international friendship groups. International students who have positive sentiments with Singapore, either through casual or intimate interaction, may help build good global networks if they leave, but will those who stay behind help build a socially integrated society?

The bitter taste left in many mouths by internationalisation, raises the issue over whether the more common casual interactions, through internationalised higher education, are enough to develop open minded people to a degree that could assist integration in Singapore. At its extreme, such a situation could threaten social fragmentation and, at the very least, questions the current ability of internationalised higher education in Singapore to truly help students build a bridge between the global and local.

### **Future Prospects**

This study has offered a starting point for better understanding the internationalisation of higher education in Singapore, and how it is affecting the local-international student experience. It has raised many possibilities for further research into internationalised higher education in Singapore with a concern for the students that it involves.

Beyond a study with a wider random sample, particularly including more students from China and India, a multi-sited study may unveil telling findings. Different public universities have different atmospheres and characteristics, which may offer models for good intercultural practices. A comparative study between public and private or transnational institutions could highlight how the experiences of students are affected by the different purposes of these institutions in Singapore. This could further substantiate how the state agenda affects local-international student interactions as international students in transnational institutions are not enticed to join Singapore's nation like those in its public institutions.

Further research into some of the dominant characteristics of local-international student interaction in Singapore, such as the role of casual ties and conational or third country friendships, is greatly needed. Perhaps these relationships are important for the mental health of students and ensure positive and comfortable

experiences in Singapore. These relationships play a pivotal role in internationalised education and deeper research could discover not only why they occur, but also how they can be made the most of to meet the personal, institutional, and state goals of internationalisation.

Another possibility for future studies is to look at the effect local-international student interactions have on students' abilities when they enter the workforce. This could raise questions on the necessity of having intercultural skills in Singapore's workplaces, and whether those with more meaningful intercultural experiences at university found it easier to find a job and successfully work with diverse people. Studies into the lives of students after university could also look at how many international students fulfil their bonds and join Singapore's nation more permanently. Understanding the experiences of these students could be useful for determining why internationals stay or go, whether their interactions with local students affected their decisions, and how important undertaking their undergraduate studies in Singapore was.

Finally I would like to suggest an area of research that I believe could greatly benefit local and international students in Singapore: curriculum design. Little attention has been paid to incorporating internationalisation into the course curriculum and pedagogy of Singapore's universities, yet this is one area of research that could significantly help students have more meaningful intercultural interactions and gain intercultural skills. Students clearly expressed how difficult

it was to put in effort to find opportunities to meet students from different countries, as well as how busy their schedules were, and that class was the most important place for meeting new people. Therefore, future research into making local-international student interaction easily attainable through an internationalised curriculum could be very useful.

I end this thesis with the belief that meaningful local-international student interaction is a rewarding and valuable experience. Universities in Singapore have great potential to foster such experiences, and I hope more students will benefit from them as the country's internationalisation of higher education matures.

## Bibliography

- Adam, S. (23 Feb 2010). Singapore Withdraws Red Carpet for Foreigners With Eye on Vote. Retrieved 9 April 2010, from <http://www.transitioning.org>
- Alpha Tango. (25 Feb 2010). Forum Post: Foreigners give back to Singapore society By Maxie Aw Yeong and Cerelia Lim. Retrieved 09 April 2010, from <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2010/02/foreigners-give-back-to-singapore-society/comment-page-1/>
- Appold, S. J. (2005). The Weakening Position of University Graduates in Singapore's Labor Market: Causes and Consequences. *Population and Development Review*, 31(1), 85-112.
- Australian National University. (2010). International Students: University Programs and Fees 2010. Retrieved 08 April 2010, from <http://www.anu.edu.au/sas/fees/Fee%20Schedules/ISF.pdf>
- Aydelotte, F. (1942). International Scholarships and Fellowships. *Science*, 96(2481), 52-54.
- Bartel-Radic, A. (2006). Intercultural Learning in Global Teams. *Management International Review*, 46(6).
- Baty, P. (2009). Challenges and Threats to Top Institutions. *University World News* Retrieved 09 November 2009, from <http://www.universityworldnews.com>

- Berndt, T. J. (2002). Friendship Quality and Social Development. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11(1), 7-10.
- Bochner, S., Hutnik, N., & Furnham, A. (1985). The Friendship Patterns of Overseas and Host Students in an Oxford Student Residence. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 125(6), 689-694.
- Brown, L. (2009). An ethnographic study of friendship patterns of international students in England: An attempt to recreate home through conational interaction. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 48, 184-193.
- Bu, L. (1999). Educational Exchange and Cultural Diplomacy in the Cold War. *Journal of American Studies*, 33(3), 393-415.
- Chapman, A., & Pyvis, D. (2005). Identity and social practice in higher education: student experiences of postgraduate courses delivered “offshore” in Singapore and Hong Kong by an Australian university. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 25(1), 39–52.
- Chuan, T. C. (2010). Welcome from the President. Retrieved 23 March 2010, from <http://www.nus.edu.sg/president/>
- CNN. (2003). Singapore hopes to become global education hub. *CNN education*. Retrieved 10 April 2009, from <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/EDUCATION/10/13/singapore.education.reut/>.
- Contact Singapore. (2010). About Singapore. Retrieved 2 July 2010, from [http://www.contactsingapore.sg/students/about\\_sg/](http://www.contactsingapore.sg/students/about_sg/)

- Cooper, V. A. (2009). Inter-cultural student interaction in post-graduate business and information technology programs: the potentialities of global study tours. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28(6), 557-570.
- Corbeil, A. (2006). *The experiences of international students in transnational higher education programs in Singapore*. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto.
- Deutskens, E., Ruyter, K. d., Wetzels, M., & Oosterveld, P. (February 2004). Response Rate and Response Quality of Internet-Based Surveys: An Experimental Study. *Marketing Letters*, 15(1).
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys : the tailored design method* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley & Sons.
- Economic Strategies Committee. (2010). Making Singapore a Leading Global City. Committee co-chaired by Mr. Lui Tuck Yew Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, and Mr Gautam Banerjee Executive Chairman, Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP. Singapore: Economic Strategies Committee.
- Fu, G. (2010). Forward to Integration in Singapore's schools: A Best Practices Package. Singapore: Ministry of Education Singapore.
- George, E. S. (2006). Positioning Higher Education for the Knowledge Based Economy. *Higher Education*, 52(4), 589-610.

- Gribble, C., & McBurnie, G. (2007). Problems within Singapore's Global Schoolhouse. *48*(International Higher Education).
- gspeedy09. (09 Feb 2010). Forum response: Foul Mouthed Undergrads complain about foreign students in NUS. Retrieved 10 Feb 2010, from [http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg/stomp/sgseen/what\\_bugs\\_me/317380/foulmouthed\\_undergrads\\_complain\\_about\\_foreign\\_students\\_in\\_nus.html](http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg/stomp/sgseen/what_bugs_me/317380/foulmouthed_undergrads_complain_about_foreign_students_in_nus.html)
- Halualani, R. T. (2008). How do multicultural university students define and make sense of intercultural contact? A qualitative study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *32*(1), 1-16.
- Han, C. (1999). Singapore: Review of Educational Events in 1998. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Education*, *19*(2), 103-113.
- Harrison, N., & Peacock, N. (2009). Cultural distance, mindfulness and passive xenophobia: using Integrated Threat Theory to explore home higher education students' perspectives on 'internationalisation at home'. *British Education Research Journal, iFirst Artical*, 1-26.
- Hill, I. (2006). Student types, school types and their combined influence on the development of intercultural understanding. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *5*, 5-33.
- Hofstede, G. H. (1980). *Culture's consequences: international differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.
- Immigration and Checkpoints Authority. (2008). Foreign Students. Retrieved 2 July 2010, from <http://ica.gov.sg/page.aspx?pageid=276&secid=89>

- Jones, G. (1989). Age and Sex Role Differences in Intimate Friendships During Childhood and Adolescence. *Merrill Palmer Quarterly*, 35(4), 445-462.
- Jones, M. L. (2007). *Hofstede - Culturally Questionable?* Paper presented at the Oxford Business & Economics Conference.
- Knight, J. (2008). The Internationalization of Higher Education: Are We on the Right Track? Retrieved 05 Feb 2010, from [http://www.academicmatters.ca/current\\_issue.article.gk?catalog\\_item\\_id=1234&category=featured\\_articles](http://www.academicmatters.ca/current_issue.article.gk?catalog_item_id=1234&category=featured_articles)
- Leask, B. (2009). Using Formal and Informal Curricula to Improve Interactions Between Home and International Students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(2), 205-223.
- Lee, H. L. (15 September 2009). Speech by Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister., *NTU Student's Union Ministerial Forum 2009*. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
- Lee, M. H., & Gopinathan, S. (2003). Reforming University Education in Hong Kong and Singapore. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 22(2).
- Leonard, M. (2002). Diplomacy by Other Means. *Foreign Policy*(132), 48-56.
- Lim, W. (Feb 4, 2010). 5 World-Class Institutions. *Straits Times*.
- Lon. (3rd Feb, 2010). Indoctrinated Guilt. Retrieved 3rd Feb 2010, from <http://www.temasekreview.com/2010/02/03/69-year-old-singapore-lady-commits-suicide-due-to-financial-distress/>

- Lowe, G., Askling, L. R., & Bates, A. (1984). The impact of intercultural contact on host families. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 8(1), 45-60.
- Ministry of Education. (2009a). *Desired Outcomes of Education*. Singapore: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education. (2009b). *Education Statistics Digest: Ministry of Education*, Singapore.
- Ministry of Education. (2010). *Post-Secondary Education*. Retrieved 22 April 2010, from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/post-secondary/>
- Ministry of Finance. (2010). *Government Spending on Higher Education*. Singapore: Ministry of Finance.
- Ministry of Trade and Industry. (2005a). *Developing Singapore's Education Industry*. Singapore: Ministry of Trade and Industry.
- Ministry of Trade and Industry. (2005b). Panel recommends Global Schoolhouse concept for Singapore to capture bigger slice of US\$2.2 trillion world education market. Retrieved 12 March 2009, from [http://app.mti.gov.sg/data/pages/507/doc/DSE\\_recommend.pdf](http://app.mti.gov.sg/data/pages/507/doc/DSE_recommend.pdf)
- Mok, J. K. H., & Lee, M. H. H. (2003). Globalization or Glocalization? Higher Education Reforms in Singapore. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 23(1), 15-42.

- Mok, K. H. (2007). Questing for Internationalization of Universities in Asia: Critical Reflections. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4).
- Mok, K. H. (2008). Singapore's global education hub ambitions: University governance change and transnational higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 22(6), 527-546.
- Moore, J. (12 April, 2009). Rudd's Education Revolution...Not. *Green Left Weekly Issue*, from <http://www.greenleft.org.au/2009/788/40594>.
- Ms Grace Fu. (2010). Forward to Integration in Singapore's schools: A Best Practices Package. Singapore: Ministry of Education Singapore.
- Nanyang Technological University. (2009). *Nanyang Technological University Annual Report 2009*. Singapore: Nanyang Technological University.
- Narayanan, S. (2008). Singapore: The global schoolhouse. *Asiaone from Tabla!* Retrieved 26 March 2009, from <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Education/Story/A1Story20081128-104128.html>.
- National University of Singapore. (2009). *Annual Report 2009*. Singapore: National University of Singapore.
- National University of Singapore. (2010a). Current Annual Tuition Fees. Retrieved 04 Feb 2010, from <https://share.nus.edu.sg/registrar/info/ug/UGTuitionCurrent.pdf>

National University of Singapore. (2010b). Scholarships and Financial Aid: Non-Singaporean Citizens. Retrieved 08 April 2010, from

<http://www.nus.edu.sg/oam/scholarships-financialaid/scholarships/freshmen/nsg/scholarship-nsg-citizens.html>

National University of Singapore Registrar's Office. (2010). Research Enquiry Regarding International Students' Countries of Origin (Personal Communication).

Network on Intercultural Learning in Europe. (2010). Intercultural Learning.

Retrieved 22 March 2010, from <http://www.intercultural-learning.net/nile/index.php?k=6180>

Ng, J. (14 February 2008). MM Lee says Singapore facing brain drain problem.

*Channel NewsAsia*, from

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/328684/1/.html>.

Oliver, J. P., & Howley, C. (1992). Charting New Maps: Multicultural Education in Rural Schools. [Electronic Version]. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools Charleston WV*. Retrieved 22 March 2010, from <http://www.ericdigests.org/1992-2/maps.htm>.

Perkinson, R. (2006). *International Higher Education: Seizing the opportunity for innovation and international responsibility!* Paper presented at the 'Global 2' Education Conference.

Perpperish. (08 Feb 2010). Forum Response: Foulmouthed Undergrads Complain about Foreign Students at NUS. Retrieved 10 Feb 2010, from

[http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg/stomp/sgseen/what\\_bugs\\_me/317380/foulmouthed\\_undergrads\\_complain\\_about\\_foreign\\_students\\_in\\_nus.html#commentSection](http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg/stomp/sgseen/what_bugs_me/317380/foulmouthed_undergrads_complain_about_foreign_students_in_nus.html#commentSection)

Postiglione, G. A. (2005). Questioning Centre-Periphery Platforms. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 25(2), 209-225.

Rasanen, R. (2007). *International Education as an Ethical Issue. The SAGE Handbook of Research in International Education. SAGE Publications, Ltd.* London, UK: SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Sanderson, G. (2002). International Education Developments in Singapore. *International Education Journal*, 3(2).

Schirmer, J. (2009). Ethical Issues in the Use of Multiple Survey Reminders. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 7, 125-139.

Sidhu, R. (2005). Building a global schoolhouse: International Education in Singapore. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(1), 46-65.

Singapore Economic Development Board, & Education Services Division of the Singapore Tourism Board. (2007). Singapore: The Global Schoolhouse [Electronic Version]. *Institute of International Education*. Retrieved 24 July 2009, from <http://www.iienetwork.org/page/116259/>.

SingStat. (2002). The Education Industry in Singapore. Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics.

- Sugimura, M. (2008). *International Student Mobility and Asian Higher Education Framework for Global Network*. Paper presented at the Asia-Pacific Sub-regional Preparatory Conference For the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education 24-26 September.
- Summers, M., & Volet, S. (2008). Students' attitudes towards culturally mixed groups on international campuses: impact of participation in diverse and non-diverse groups. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(4).
- Tan, C. (2009). Do More to Help Singaporean Students. *The Straights Times*.
- Tan, C. C. (2009). Office of the President. Retrieved 6 April 2009, from [www.nus.edu.sg/president](http://www.nus.edu.sg/president)
- Tan, H. Y. (2009). Not Enough Mixing at University, says Student. *The Straights Times*.
- Tan, S., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2006). Negotiating cosmopolitanism in Singapore's fiction. In J. Binnie (Ed.), *Cosmopolitan Urbanism* (pp. 146-169). Singapore: Routledge.
- Teh, S. N. (23 January 2010). S'pore must grow, draw, retain talent: Eng Hen. *Business Times Singapore*.
- The Economist [US]. (14 Nov 2009). A PR problem; Singapore and immigration. [Electronic Version]. *The Economist [US]*.
- The Straits Times. (4 June 2010). Quantity counts too in the education business. *Asiaone Education*.

- The Temasek Review. (08 Nov 2009). Singaporean Indian shocked that daughter in now a minority in Indian Kindergarten. Retrieved 10 Nov 2009, 2009, from <http://www.temasekreview.com/2009/11/08/singapore-indian-shocked-that-daughter-is-now-in-the-minority-in-indian-kindergarten/>
- Tsang, E. W. K. (2001). Adjustment of mainland Chinese academics and students to Singapore. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25, 347-372.
- U.S. Library of Congress. (2008). Singapore: Population. from <http://countrystudies.us/singapore/14.htm>
- United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (2009). Global Education Digest: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World. Montreal, Quebec, Canada: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
- Volet, S. E., & Ang, G. (1998). Culturally Mixed Groups on International Campuses: an Opportunity for Inter-cultural Learning. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 17(1), 5-23.
- Volet, S. E., & Renshaw, P. (1995). Cross-Cultural Differences in University Students' Goals and Perceptions of Study Setting for Achieving Their Own Goals. *Higher Education*, 30(4), 407-433.
- Xuanwei, T. (2010). A cosmopolitan, open society critical. *Todayonline*.
- Yee, T. H. (2009). Not Enough Mixing at University, say Student. *The Straights Times*.

Zauzmer, J. M. (2009). Asian Schools Draw More Locals. *The Harvard Crimson*.

Retrieved 23 September 2009, from

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=529091>.

Zhai, L., & Scheer, S. D. (2004). Global Perspectives and Attitudes toward Cultural Diversity among Summer Agriculture Students at the Ohio State University. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 45(2).

# APPENDIX A

## Online Questionnaire

Local-International Student Interaction Questionnaire

Information Sheet

Thank you for choosing to participate in this questionnaire!

Click **Next** to begin.

If you have any questions about this project please follow the link to the information sheet.

[Information sheet](#)

The information sheet will open in a separate window,

**Next**

**Pg.1/10**

\*1. What type of student are you?

(Once you have selected your answer and clicked **Next** you will not be able to return to this page to select a different answer)

- Singaporean/Permanent Resident students
- International Students
- Exchange student (You will be redirected to page 10/10)

**Previous**

**Next**

**Pg.2/10: Local-International Student Interaction**

The term “International students” DOES NOT refer to SHORT TERM or EXCHANGE students.

1. What type of interaction with international students do you desire in general?

- No interaction
- Casual (Interact on campus – during university time, talk about studies and interests)
- Intimate (Interact off campus – during leisure time, share more personal information)

2. What amount of difficulty have you experienced interacting with the following groups of students?

	No difficulty	Slight difficulty	Moderate difficulty	Great difficulty	Extreme difficulty	No interaction
Mainland Chinese						
Indians						
Malaysians						
Indonesians						
Filipinos						
Vietnamese						
Thais						
Other Southeast Asians						
Westerners						
Japanese/Koreans/ Taiwanese						
Singaporean Chinese						

Singaporean Malays						
Singaporean Indians						
Singaporean Others						

**Previous**

**Next**

**Pg.3/10: Depth of Interaction**

1. How many casual friends (interact on campus – during university time, talk about studies and interests) do you have from NUS?

	0	1-3	4-6	7-10	11 or more
International students (EXCLUDING exchange students)					
Singaporean Students					

2. How many intimate friends (interact off campus – during leisure time, share more personal information) do you have from NUS?

	0	1-3	4-6	7-10	11 or more
International students (EXCLUDING exchange students)					
Singaporean					

Students					
----------	--	--	--	--	--

3. How many of your intimate international student friends are from the groups below? (Please select the number of friends you have from each group)

	Malaysian	Indonesian	Filipino	Vietnamese	Thai	Other Southeast Asian
International students (EXCLUDING exchange students)						

4. How many of your intimate international student friends are from the groups below? (Please select the number of friends you have from each group)

	Mainland Chinese	Indian	Western	Japanese/ Korean/ Taiwanese	Other
International students (EXCLUDING exchange students)					

5. How many of your intimate Singaporean student friends are from the groups below?

	Singaporean	Singaporean	Singaporean	Singaporean
--	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------

	Chinese	Indian	Malay	Other
Singaporean Students				

**Previous**

**Next**

**Pg. 4/10: Interaction and Communication**

CASUAL: Interact on campus – during university time, talk about studies and interests.

INTIMATE: interact off campus – during leisure time, share more personal information

1. In general what languages do you use the most with your casual international student friends? (Select all that apply)

- No casual international student friends
- English
- Mandarin
- Malay
- Tamil
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

2. In general what languages do you use the most with your intimate international student friends? (Select all that apply)

- No intimate international student friends
- English
- Mandarin
- Malay
- Tamil
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

3. In general what languages do you use the most with your casual Singaporean student friends? (Select all that apply)

- No casual international student friends
- English
- Mandarin
- Malay
- Tamil
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

4. In general what languages do you use the most with your intimate Singaporean student friends? (Select all that apply)

- No intimate international student friends
- English
- Mandarin
- Malay
- Tamil
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

**Previous**

**Next**

### **Pg. 5/10: Interaction and Introductions**

INTIMATE: interact off campus – during leisure time, share more personal information

1. Where did you meet your intimate international student friends? (Select all that apply)

- No intimate international student friends
- Extra Curricular Activities (ECA)
- Hall of residence
- Class
- Group Projects

- Through other friends
- Through religious activities
- Knew them before coming to NUS
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

2. Where did you meet your intimate Singaporean student friends? (Select all that apply)

- No intimate international student friends
- Extra Curricular Activities (ECA)
- Hall of residence
- Class
- Group Projects
- Through other friends
- Through religious activities
- Knew them before coming to NUS
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

**Previous**

**Next**

**Pg. 6/10: Interaction and Satisfaction**

1. How satisfied are you with your international student interactions?

- Satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied or unsatisfied
- Somewhat unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied

2. How would you like your interactions with international students to change?

- Become more casual
- No change
- Become more intimate

3. What are the worst things about international students at NUS?

4. What are the best things about international students at NUS?

**Previous**

**Next**

**Pg.7/10: Cultural Similarities**

1. I share cultural similarities with students from the below lists

	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
Singaporean Chinese				
Singaporean Malays				
Singaporean Indians				
Singaporean Others				
Mainland Chinese				
Indians				
Malaysians				
Indonesians				
Filipinos				
Vietnamese				
Thais				

Other Southeast Asians				
Westerners				
Japanese/Kor eans/ Taiwanese				

2. How foreign from your self do you consider students from the following groups?

	Foreign	Somewhat foreign	Not at all foreign
Singaporean Chinese			
Singaporean Malays			
Singaporean Indians			
Singaporean Others			
Mainland Chinese			
Indians			
Malaysians			
Indonesians			

Filipinos			
Vietnamese			
Thais			
Other Southeast Asians			
Westerners			
Japanese/Koreans/ Taiwanese			

**Previous**

**Next**

**Pg. 8/10: Language**

1. What is your Mother tongue?

- English
- Mandarin
- Malay
- Chinese dialect
- Tamil
- Hindi
- Indonesian
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

2. What language(s) can you verbally communicate in? (Select all that apply)

- English
- Malay/Indonesian
- Mandarin

- Tamil
- Hindi
- Other (Please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

**Previous**                      **Next**

**Pg. 9/10: Background Information**

1. Did you go to secondary school or Junior College in Singapore?

- Yes
- No

2. Were you on a scholarship/subsidy during your secondary or Junior College education in Singapore?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

3. How do you pay for your tertiary education at NUS?

- Singapore government subsidy with bond
- Singapore government scholarship without bond
- Other scholarship
- Personal/family finances
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

4. What were the three most important reasons why you came to NUS?

	Most Important	Second Most Important	Third Most Important
Social Reasons (to make friends, to stay with existing friends)			

Financial Reasons (subsidized, scholarship, affordable cost)			
Cultural adventure (to learn about (an)other culture(s))			
Cultural comfort (similarity to your own culture)			
Academic reasons (high quality courses, good networks, stepping stone)			
Environment/safety reasons (safe and secure environment)			
Geographical Proximity (NUS is relatively close to your home)			
Other (please specify)_____			

\*5. What is your faculty of study?

- Arts and Social Sciences
- Business
- Engineering
- Science
- Design and Environment
- Law
- Dentistry
- Medicine

- Computing

6. What year are you currently in?

- 1st
- 2nd
- 3<sup>rd</sup>
- 4th

\*7. Are you in your fifth or sixth semester?

- Yes
- No

\*8. Where are you from?

- Australia
- Burma
- China
- Europe
- India
- Indonesia
- Malaysia
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Other

\*9. What is your ethnicity?

- Chinese
- Indian
- Malay
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

11. How old are you?

\*12. Would you be willing to participate in an interview on this topic? Interviews are a very important part of this research. They will be held at a time and location convenient to the participant and will take approximately 30-60 minutes.

- No
- Yes (please insert your email address) \_\_\_\_\_

**Previous**

**Next**

**Pg. 10/10: Consent Form**

Project title:

Local International Student Interaction in Singapore.

Principal Investigator with the contact number and organisation:

Annie Karmel

Department of Southeast Asian Studies

National University of Singapore

+65 8336\*\*\*\*

Associate Professor Goh Beng Lan (Supervisor)

Department of Southeast Asian Studies

National University of Singapore

+65 6516 \*\*\*\*\*/+65 6515\*\*\*\*

\*1. I hereby acknowledge that:

1. I have read the participation information sheet and clarified any queries related to this research.

2. By clicking the “I Agree” button below I acknowledge that I have given my consent to take part in the above research.

3. I can withdraw from the research at any point of time by discontinuing the questionnaire, or by informing the Principal Investigator and all my data will be discarded.

4. I will not have any financial benefits that result from the commercial development of this research.

**I Agree**

**I Disagree (your questionnaire response will be deleted)**

**Previous**

**Done!**

## APPENDIX B

### Coding Frame for Questionnaire

#### *Question 1*

What type of student are you? (status)

Singaporean/PR	2
International	1

#### **Local International student Interaction**

#### *Question 2*

What type of interaction with international students do you desire in general? (desire)

No interaction	3
Casual	1
Intimate	2

#### *Question 3*

What amount of difficulty have you experienced interacting with the following groups of students? (difficultyC; difficultyI; difficultyM etc)

Mainland Chinese/etc

No difficulty	4
Slight difficulty	6
Moderate difficulty	3
Great difficulty	2
Extreme difficulty	1
No interaction	5

## Depth of Interaction

### *Question 4*

How many casual friends do you have from NUS?

International (howmanyCI)/Singaporean (howmanyCS)

0	1
1-3	2
4-6	4
7-10	5
11 or more	3

### *Question 5*

How many intimate friends do you have from NUS?

International (howmanyII)/Singaporean (howmanyIS)

0	1
1-3	2
4-6	4
7-10	5
11 or more	3

### *Question 6. & 7*

How many of your intimate international student friends are from the groups below?  
(howmanyM; howmanyF etc)

Malaysian/etc

0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3

4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9
10	10
11 or more	

**Question 6**

How many of your intimate international student friends are from the groups below?  
(howmanyIndon)

Indonesians ONLY

0	1
1	2
2	4
3	5
4	6
5	7
6	
7	8
8	9
9	
10	
11 or more	3

**Question 8**

How many of your intimate Singaporean student friends are from the groups below?  
(howmanySC etc)

Singaporean Chinese/etc

0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9
10	10
11 or more	

## Interaction and Communication

### *Question 9*

In general what languages do you use the most with your casual international student friends?

No casual international student friend (languageNoCIS)
English (languageCISEng)
Mandarin (languageCISMan)
Malay (languageCISMal)
Tamil (languageCISTam)
<i>Other: (languageCISO)</i>
<i>Mandarin</i>

<i>German</i>
<i>Vietnamese</i>
<i>Thai</i>
<i>Singlish</i>
<i>Hindi</i>
<i>Jibberish</i>
<i>Myanmar</i>
<i>Korean</i>

**Question 10**

In general what languages do you use the most with your intimate international student friends?

No intimate international student friend (languageNoIIS)
English(languageIISEng)
Mandarin (languageIISMan)
Malay (langaugeIISMal)
Tamil (languageIISTam)
<i>Other: (langaugeIISO)</i>
<i>Mandarin</i>
<i>German</i>
<i>Vietnamese</i>
<i>Hokkien</i>
<i>Singlish</i>
<i>Hindi</i>
<i>Jibberish</i>
<i>Myanmar</i>
<i>Korean</i>
<i>Bahasa Indonesia</i>

<i>Japanese</i>
<i>japanese</i>

**Question 11**

In general what languages do you use the most with your casual Singaporean student friends?

No casual Singaporean student friends  
English

No casual Singaporean student friends (languageNoCS)
English (languageCSEng)
Mandarin (languageC SMan)
Malay
Tamil
<i>Other:</i>
<i>Hokkien</i>
<i>Singlish</i>
<i>Japanese</i>
<i>Singlish, French</i>
<i>SINGLISH</i>
<i>hokkien</i>
<i>mandarin</i>
<i>Thai</i>
<i>singlish</i>

**Question 12**

In general what languages do you use the most with your intimate Singaporean student friends?

No intimate Singaporean student	1
---------------------------------	---

friends	
English	1
Mandarin	1
Malay	1
Tamil	1
<i>Other:</i>	
<i>Hokkien</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Singlish</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Japanese</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Singlish, French</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>SINGLISH</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>hokkien</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>mandarin</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Cantonese</i>	<i>6</i>

## Interaction and Introductions

### *Question 13*

Where did you meet your intimate international student friends?

No intimate international student friends	1
ECA	1
Hall	1
Class	1
Group Project	1
Through other friends	1
Through religious activities	1
Knew then before coming to NUS	1

Other	1
-------	---

**Question 14**

Where did you meet your intimate Singaporean student friends?

No intimate Singaporean student friends	1
ECA	1
Hall	1
Class	1
Group Project	1
Through other friends	1
Through religious activities	1
Knew then before coming to NUS	1
Other	1

**Interaction and Satisfaction**

**Question 15**

How satisfied are you with your international student interactions?

Satisfied	4
Somewhat satisfied	1
Neither satisfied or unsatisfied	3
Somewhat unsatisfied	2
Unsatisfied	5

**Question 16**

How would you like your interactions with international students to change?

Become more casual	1
--------------------	---

No change	3
Become more intimate	2

**Question 17. & 18**

What are the worst things about international students?  
 What are the best things about international students?

**Cultural Similarities**

**Question 19**

I share cultural similarities with students from the below lists.  
 Singaporean Chinese/etc

Disagree	2
Somewhat disagree	4
Somewhat Agree	3
Agree	1

**Question 20**

How foreign from your self do you consider students from the following groups?  
 Singaporean Chinese/etc

Foreign	1
Somewhat foreign	3
Not at all foreign	2

**Language**

**Question 21**

What is your Mother tongue?

English	2
Mandarin	6

Malay	5
Chinese dialect	1
Tamil	9
Other	7
Hindi	3
Indonesian	4

**Question 22**

What languages can you communicate in?

English	1
Malay/Indonesian	1
Mandarin	1
Tamil	1
Hindi	1
Other	
Korean, dialects	34
French	13
Japanese, Chinese Dialects	29
japanese	52
Basic Japanese	2
Burmese	4
German and French	18

**Background Information**

**Question 23**

Did you go to secondary school in Singapore?

Yes	2
No	1

**Question 24**

Were you on a scholarship during your secondary or JC education in Singapore?

Yes	3
No	1
Not applicable	2

**Question 25**

How do you pay for your tertiary education at NUS?

Gov subsidy with bond	5
Gov scholarship without Bond	4
Other scholarship	2
Personal/family finances	3
Other	1

**Question 26**

What were the 3 most important reasons why you came to NUS?

Social reasons/etc

Most important	1
Second most important	2
Third most important	3

**Question 27**

What is your faculty of study?

Arts and Social Sciences	1
Business	2
Engineering	6
Science	9
Design and Environment	5
Law	7
Dentistry	4
Medicine	8
Computing	3

**Question 28**

What year are you currently in?

1st  
2nd

3rd	1
4th	2

**Question 29**

Are you in your fifth or sixth semester?

Yes	2
No	1

**Question 30**

Where are you from?

Singapore	10
Indonesia	6
Malaysia	7

Burma	2
China	3
India	5
Other	8
Europe	4
Philippines	9
Australia	1

***Question 31***

What is your ethnicity?

Chinese	1
Indian	2
Malay	3
Other	4

***Question 32***

What is your gender?

Male	2
Female	1

***Question 33***

How old are you?

***Question 34***

Interview?