

**CONTACT ZONES IN INTERNATIONALIZING ASIAN
UNIVERSITIES:
IDENTITIES, SPATIALITIES AND GLOBAL IMAGINATIONS**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

Foong Hui Ee, Michelle
23/01/13

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SUMMARY

In the last decade, East Asia has experienced exponential growth in student mobility within the region, fuelled by factors such as strengthening economies and increased recruiting efforts from East Asian universities. The National University of Singapore (NUS) and the University of Tokyo (Todai) represent two top universities in East Asia with globalizing ambitions---both have an explicit agenda to recruit international students primarily within Asia.

This study conceptualizes the globalizing East Asian university as a series of ‘contact zones’ which, according to Mary Louise Pratt (1997:63) are ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in the contexts of high asymmetrical relations of power such as colonialism...or their aftermaths’. These ‘spaces’ include the study environment, everyday activities and social networks. The complex ethno-historic links among East Asian countries further complicate the dynamics within these contact zones.

Specifically, this research investigates how international students in NUS and Todai are prompted to reflect, question and negotiate their ethno-national identities as a result of encountering differences in contact zones. Challenging dominant discourses of footloose global youth cultures, I illustrate the multiple and creative ways in which students continue to articulate emotional ties to home. Secondly, responding to recent calls to pay attention to the microgeographies of internationalizing university campuses (see Hopkins 2011 and Anderson et al 2012), I analyze contact zones on three interlinked spatial fronts of routinized, causal and episodic encounters, highlighting the politics at work and how safe houses, as spaces of refuge in frictional contact spaces constitute an integral coping strategy for international students. Finally, I interrogate the intersecting processes of students’ unique biographies, past mobility trajectories and experiences in the contact zones in shaping their multiple global imaginations, as well as students’ experiences of campus spaces and programmes that seek to develop ‘cosmopolitanism’.

Through a comparative perspective of students’ experiences in NUS and Todai, I wish to uncover common themes and where they depart, thereby contributing to a more nuanced, regional understanding of the complex identities of international students in Singapore and Japan, as well as to the growing transnational literature on youth and mobilities within East Asia.

Drawing primarily from 46 in-depth biographical interviews conducted with international students in NUS and Todai, the questions were designed to pay close attention to the particular pathways and experiences of individual students as they move through transnational education spaces, while encouraging respondents to develop their personal narratives. I also employ other qualitative methods of inquiry such as participant observation in campus-wide events and discourse analysis of print and online material to provide alternative readings to the interviews.

Keywords

Student mobilities, Contact zones, Identities, Campus geographies, Cosmopolitanism, East Asia

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the last decade, international student mobility has become an increasingly pervasive phenomenon within the global higher education landscape. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)¹, more than 3.6 million students were enrolled in tertiary education abroad in 2010, either for entire degree(s) or in a plethora of short-term study abroad opportunities. This represents an almost two-fold increase from 2 million international students in 2000. Expected to rise to 7 million by 2020 (UNESCO 2009:6), the surge in internationally mobile students reflects the rapid expansion of enrolment in higher education on a global scale.

1.1 Trend towards internationalization of universities in East Asia

As an emerging player in the field, East Asia is fast gaining significance as an important global driver of international education mobility. Traditionally a major sender of international students, countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore are now actively promoting their ‘world-class’ universities and competing for ‘global talent’ from within East Asia and beyond. Though still dominated by major English speaking destination countries such as the US, the UK and Australia, a British Council (2008) report confirmed ‘a shift towards a stronger Asian influence in global international education student flows’ (2008:5), attributing this phenomenon to individual/ societal factors such as the high value placed on higher education and international education by students and parents in East Asia, as well as governments desiring to position themselves within the international education arena (2008:6). Such a shared desire to be more visible on the global arena is encapsulated in the APAIE (Asia-Pacific Association for International Education) conference theme for 2013---aptly titled ‘An Ascendant Asia-Pacific: International Higher Education in the 21st Century’². Coupled with the emergence of region-specific university league tables, notably the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Asian University Rankings (since 2005), East Asian universities with globalizing ambitions are set to attract more international student flows from within the region and beyond.

¹ UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)—Global flow of tertiary-level students
<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>

² The 8th APAIE Conference and Exhibition
<http://apaie.org/conference/2013/>

While educational migration within East Asia is certainly not a new phenomenon, strong intra-regional growth in international student numbers, complex ethno-historic links among East Asian countries, the new spatialities that ‘internationalization’ of East Asian campuses produces, and the multiple global imaginations that students have, amongst other factors, make international student mobilities within East Asia worth investigating. It is in light of this context that this study considers international students’ experiences in Singapore and Japan, focusing on two leading universities in the region, namely the University of Tokyo (Todai) and the National University of Singapore (NUS).

1.2 Geographical contributions in student mobilities

Within migration and geographical scholarship, international students have gained attention as a distinctive group of (trans)migrants who engage in what Smith (2005:15) terms as ‘middling transnationalism’---‘the transnational practices of social actors occupying...middle class positions...in class structures of their countries of origin’. Acquiring an education abroad is often seen as an important social reproduction strategy for middle-class individuals and families to differentiate themselves in the competitive employment market and in the midst of credential inflation (see Waters 2005; 2006; 2007). Geographers have also been keen to investigate the place-making effects that international students have on host cities and the urban landscape through their consumption patterns and everyday mobilities (see Collins 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Fincher et al 2009; Fincher and Shaw 2008). Moreover, studying abroad is often considered an effective means to acquire cosmopolitan sensibilities and accumulate valuable spatial-specific cultural capital (Rizvi 2000, 2005, 2007; Holloway et al 2012) that are deemed essential for an appreciation of and survival in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

1.3 The case of NUS and Todai

Though both NUS and Todai have articulated their globalizing ambitions, their distinctive internationalizing strategies are invariably embedded in wider national goals and policies, and subjected to volatile socio-political conditions. Clearly, Japan and Singapore hold vastly different positions towards immigrants (and consequently international students), with these attitudes and resultant policies firmly rooted in historical, political and socio-cultural developments. Drawing parallels between these

two prominent East Asian universities whenever appropriate, this project aims to investigate international students' identity negotiations and the micro-geographies of encountering difference at various contact zones. In so doing, it seeks to advance broader regional understandings of international student mobilities in East Asia, of which the extant literature is still grossly lacking.

1.4 Contact zones and research design

Conceptually, I draw on Mary Louise Pratt's (1997: 63) 'contact zones' as a starting point to describe the internationalizing university as comprising of 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in the contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power'. Building on this concept, I investigate the material and immaterial spaces of contact--how they are constructed, negotiated and the impacts of these encounters on international students' ethnic, national, regional and cosmopolitan identities.

This research draws on data collected for the Globalizing Universities and International Student Mobilities in East Asia (GUISM) project, a multidisciplinary research that spans across 9 universities in 8 East Asian cities, of which NUS and Todai are participating institutions. As part of the qualitative component of this project, my primary research data consists of 46 in-depth biographical interviews with international students in NUS and Todai (21 from NUS, 25 from Todai), as well as participant observations during 'international' events on the respective campuses. I also draw upon relevant newspaper reports, social media posts, institution publications and promotional literature that shed light on current debates on international students in Singapore and Japan.

1.5 Thesis map and research objectives

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the key literature and current debates surrounding international student mobilities, students' identity negotiations, campus micro-geographies and cosmopolitan sensibilities. Where possible, I draw on insights from both Western contexts and Asia-based studies to highlight gaps in the existing literature that this research seeks to address. I then introduce Mary Pratt's concept of 'contact zones' and related to this, 'safe houses'---outlining its post-colonial origins, literature that relates contact zones to spatial boundaries, transnational negotiations

and education, as well as show how it can serve as a useful platform to investigate contact encounters and spaces in internationalizing universities. Locating these processes in the context of East Asia, Chapter 3 examines the varied pathways of internationalization for NUS and Todai, situating them in national and global contexts. I also highlight the strategies and challenges that each institution faces, drawing parallels in the wider East Asian context. Chapter 4 addresses the methodology, research methods and sampling matrix employed in this research as well as reflections on my positionality as a researcher.

Examining contact zones across various geographical scales, Chapter 5 begins by investigating how international students in NUS and Todai negotiate their multiple intersecting identities and (re)construct national imaginaries as a result of encountering sameness and differences in contact zones. Contact zones are productive spaces that prompt students to rethink relations between home/host/third countries (especially for those with long-standing histories of conflict, continuing to contemporary times). Locating their transnational selves in the midst of these tensions becomes an important project for some international students in the midst of confronting the identity politics at work. Such reflections play an integral role in shaping their performances and articulations of their identities abroad, which in turn affects their experience of contact zones. Challenging discourses of consumerist footloose global youth cultures, and education migration for credentials and work opportunities, student responses in this research articulate emotional ties to (ideas of) home, and strong desires to fulfil obligations to their countries and families in their future mobility trajectories, albeit in multiple and creative ways that contest the traditional spatial dichotomy of ‘home-bound’ versus ‘remaining in host country’.

In Chapter 6, I seek to spatialize contact zones in students’ study abroad experiences by investigating the micro-spaces and politics within material and immaterial spaces of contact, such as the classroom, hostels and other sites in which students may encounter differences. I suggest that contact spaces in the globalizing Asian university can be broadly analyzed on three interlinked spatial fronts—in formal, routinized spaces such as classrooms, in social, more casual spaces such as dormitories, and episodic sites/events such as incensed reactions to Facebook posts directed at students

of particular nationalities. I also show how safe houses, as spaces of refuge in frictional contact zones, are an integral coping strategy for international students. Challenging assumptions that studying abroad automatically inculcates cosmopolitan sensibilities in young people, Chapter 7 interrogates the multiple ways in which international students in NUS and Todai imagine their place in the world, arguing that it is the result of a continuous intersecting process of their unique biographies, past mobility trajectories and experiences in contact zones. Locating these articulations in the institutional settings of NUS and Todai, I investigate and compare students' experiences of campus spaces and programmes that seek to develop 'cosmopolitan world citizens'. Finally, I consider the dynamic societal challenges faced by both institutions in their respective countries that serve to promote or limit the formation of cosmopolitan sensibilities in international students. In conclusion, Chapter 8 exemplifies how the initial research objectives are met with key findings in this research, which examined students' identity negotiations at the frontiers of difference, as well as shed light on how contact zone dynamics shapes campus micro-geographies and vice versa. It also points out how this work can be advanced and future research agendas.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Junctures

2.1 Geographies of mobile youths in transit

While there is a vibrant body of literature on geographies of children and young people (see Matthews et al 1999; Aitken 2001), Valentine laments that the discipline has paid relatively scant attention to young people on the ‘cusp of childhood and adulthood, particularly those aged 16 to 25’ (2003:39). Hopkins and Pain (2007:288) echo this knowledge gap, that the ‘aged geographies’, particularly that of young adults, are ‘missing altogether’. While geographers like Skelton and Valentine have made insightful contributions to the lived spatial and material experiences of marginalized groups such as the deaf (Skelton 2003), lesbian and gay (Skelton and Valentine 2002) and working class youths (Skelton 2001), these tend to be in Western contexts, and focus on teenagers before reaching university-going age. Calling for the need to pay attention to the transnational mobility experiences of university students in Asian contexts, I seek to expand global and comparative understandings of youth mobilities and international education through my work with international students in Singapore and Japan.

Geographers have also been keen to explore the ways in which young people engage in transnational mobility projects [for examples, see Clarke (2004; 2005) on British working holiday makers in Australia, and Simpson’s (2005) work on gap year students and youth volunteer travel]. Apart from these alternative forms of mobility associated with tourism, both Western *and* Asian universities with globalizing ambitions are contributing to innovative ways that promote students’ transnational mobility---in the form of joint degrees, exchange programmes, and a plethora of projects that involve short-term travel such as work-and-travel programmes, and humanitarian aid programmes etc. This trend is in part fuelled by the recent addition of ‘internationalization’ as an important criterion for world university rankings³, as well as the exalted value of accumulated cultural capital as a marker of difference among overseas graduates. However, the extant literature on youth mobilities and international education remains largely Western-centric, for example, a significant body of literature focuses on Euro-zone student mobilities and the formation of

³ QS World University Rankings—Internationalization
<http://www.topuniversities.com/internationalization-0>

'European' identities (particularly those enrolled in the well-established Erasmus programme) (see Tremlay 2002; Murphy-Lejeune 2002; King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003). Elsewhere Nadine Dolby (2004; 2005; 2007) interrogates American and Australian exchange students' self, national and global identity negotiations.

Major streams of East to West student mobilities have also been a subject of interest for social and cultural geographers. These include, notably, Johanna Waters' earlier work on Hong Kong students to Vancouver (2005-2008) as a social reproduction strategy (drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital accumulation), and Collins' study of South Korean students' embodied corporeal experiences in Auckland. More recently, Holloway et al (2012) have expanded the geographical scope to include Central Asia (in particular Kazakhstan) student flows to the UK. They alert us to the gendered dimension of cultural capital accumulation, thereby problematizing earlier Bourdieusian theorizations that emphasized class. Brooks and Waters' (2009; 2010) more current work on UK students and the distinctive ways in which they engage with global circuits of higher education offer a refreshing glimpse on the recent reverse-flow phenomenon from the West to the rest of the world. Delving into intra-Asian student flows, sociologist Liu-Farrer (2004; 2008; 2009) has illuminated us to the various class and social dimensions of Chinese educational labour migration in Japan, while Huang and Yeoh (2011) demonstrate Chinese teenagers' (accompanied by their 'study mothers') agency in socially navigating through their transnational lives while studying in Singapore. From the above, it is clear that more work needs to be done to address the gap in geographical scholarship on intra-Asian youth mobilities, especially in light of the rise of internationalizing East Asian universities.

2.2 International student mobilities and identity negotiations

Transnational mobility impacts on students' concepts of self, and the formation of their ethnic, national, regional and global identities. This research seeks to engage critically with the intersections of ethnicity, race, nation and statehood—and the related ideas of home and belonging and situate them in the contact zones of the study abroad experience. The ways in which ethnic and national identities intersect with other forms of belonging such as shared ancestry and cultural heritage is particularly pertinent in my research with international students who have Asian origins. In this

light, I draw on Fenton and May's (2003 eds.) landmark study that sought to unpack complex notions of ethno-national identity. They proposed that 'assertions of ethnic identity and national identity are both intimately linked to beliefs in shared ancestry and ideas of common culture' and that these can be 'as much a matter of fiction and myth' depending on how they 'see themselves' or 'are being seen by others' since they are built upon discourses that 'hinge upon difference' and are 'relational' (Fenton and May 2003:2). In this research, I suggest that the above processes are often at work in contact encounters in internationalizing universities, where potentially frictional sites hasten students to simultaneously differentiate and identify themselves with 'others'. Fenton and May further elaborated that notions of race, ethnicity and nation, though have inherent 'points of departure', hark back to 'the shared terrain around ancestry, claims of family-like membership or belonging, and a sense of identity which may be expressed through custom and culture, language and religion' (Fenton and May 2003:3). In my analysis of students' responses in Chapter 5, I also consider the multiple forms of 'departures' and 'sharedness' that students experience in contact zones that contribute to shaping their identities.

Fleshing these complexities from a 'western' perspective, Dolby's (2004) work shows how American exchange students' concepts of self and nation are challenged by their transnational experience in Australia, in light of post-September 11. She reveals the multiple articulations of 'America' that students encountered and their range of responses (from fervent rejection and patriotism to the formation of a postnational American identity). Complicating these processes of identity formation, Vertovec's earlier work (1999) informs us that transmigrants experience multiple, yet often fractured identities and collective memories. Kong (1999:576) illustrates these complex negotiations in her study on Chinese Singaporean transmigrants in China. She shows how respondents sometimes become confused over their own choice of language (Mandarin and English) in daily transnational encounters and highlights their sense of 'in-betweenness' and 'placelessness' (1999:583), not least as a result of the shared ancestry and history between Singapore and China. Kong concludes that 'national identity is enhanced as transmigrants confront their transnational situations', elaborating on the ways they assert their 'Singaporeanness', (re)invent traditions to maintain their communal identity and construct their distinctive self-identities. More than simply a strengthened sense of national identity, Kong and Yeoh (2003:193)

stress that these Singaporeans have to 'renegotiate their ethnic identities' when confronted by transnational contexts. These studies alert us to the nuances within students' heightened sense national identity, particularly with respect to the complex inter-relationships (ethno-historical, colonial etc) between host and home countries.

Contrary to understanding national identity as progressive [see Calhoun's (2002) work on ethnocentric ('thick') to cosmopolitan ('thin') sense of national identity] as a result of transnationalism, international students are involved in creative identity-forming strategies to display complex allegiances, creating new forms of belonging that can be simultaneously national and global, or oscillating in-between. This fluidity is evident in Ghosh and Wang's (2003) work that highlights the shifting and fluid identities among international students. They employ self-reflexive narratives of their own distinctive experiences as Indian and Chinese students studying in Toronto. The authors vividly trace their journey in three periods--before their departure, daily routines in Toronto and thoughts during their first visit home. They raise interesting questions about the multiple, fluid, sometimes contradicting identities students take on in various spaces. Ghosh, for example adopted a dual lifestyle in Toronto, where in the public spaces, she 'wore trousers, drank coffee, ate pork and beef, spoke English all day' and privately in her room she finds solace in donning the Shalwar Kameez and listening to Bengali music (2003:274). Wang reflected on her own bilingualism and the embedded tensions where, 'my mind reads and speaks two languages, regards two countries as homes and forms a continuous dialogue between the two' (2003: 272). Together, they acknowledged their 'multiple, hyphenated selves' and consciousness of being perceived as the 'other' in Toronto. With increasing configurations of identities among the mobile youths in our study, not least as a result of complex migration histories and experiences of living abroad, I seek to highlight the complexities in students' identity construction processes, and the resulting tensions and negotiations in everyday spaces of encounters.

Apart from national identities, Yeoh and Willis, in a series of works on gendered dimensions of transmigrants (1999, 2000, 2002), including foreign domestic workers in Singapore (Yeoh and Huang 2000) and transnational women elites in China (2005a) explore not only the emancipatory potential of migration in terms of gender relations, but also how gendered identities are challenged and negotiated. Similarly I

am interested in exploring how family obligations and gender role expectations shape the contact zones in students' study abroad experiences, for example, how finding a 'worthy' partner in the host university is an important agenda for some of these elite students.

2.3 International student mobilities, urban processes and campus micro-geographies

Geographers have also been interested in drawing links between student mobility and urban processes. Notably, Smith (2005; 2008) and Smith and Holt (2007) explore the politics of studentification (a term coined in the UK context to refer to large student populations in non-student neighbourhoods) on gentrification processes in Britain's towns. The type and location of student housing often contribute to integrating or alienating student migrant populations. While Hubbard (2009) was concerned about how purpose-built accommodation for UK students in the English East Midlands segregates and impedes community cohesion, in the Australian context, there is concern over the politics of private international student housing (Fincher and Shaw 2009; 2011), and more recently how these student populations are actively contributing to 'place-making' in Melbourne as a 'creative city' (Fincher et al 2009; Fincher and Shaw 2010). Elsewhere in New Zealand, Collins' (2006) explores how South Korean students impact on the 'physical, economic, sensory and perceptual landscapes' of Auckland through their negotiations in everyday encounters. These works point to the significance of international students' lived materialities and geographies, and how they are embedded in greater urban politics of Singapore and Japan.

Apart from impacting the urban landscape, international students also embody transnational sensibilities. Using the transnational optic as a framework to study South Korean students' everyday lives in New Zealand, Collins demonstrates how these students embody transnationalism through their friendship networks, the use of the Internet and even culinary consumption choices (Collins 2008; 2009a; 2010). International students are therefore what Conradson and Latham (2005: 230) term as 'elite movers...(who are) embodied bearers of culture, ethnicity, class and gender'. Building on this approach, I explore how international students in NUS and Today

negotiate their social identities of nationality, culture, class and gender in the contact spaces of the study abroad experience.

Zooming in on micro-spaces within larger urban processes, a recent body of geographical scholarship has delved into examining the critical geographies within campus spaces, especially in light of a renewed attention given to encounters with difference and campus safety for minority groups. Hopkins (2011) critiques institutional ideals of providing a welcoming environment for a diverse student body by investigating micro-geographies in a British university, showing how Muslim students contest and negotiate campus spaces in light of dynamic global and national realities. In another illuminating longitudinal study (spanning from 1937 to 2006), Giseking (2007) examines the changing meanings of privilege and gender on the scale of the body, the institution and the extra-institution within an elite US women's college. In doing so she shows how overlapping scales etched in her respondents' stories can potentially disrupt and challenge traditional organization of space (2007:285). Taking the cue from these developments, in my research in NUS and Todai, I investigate (extra-) institutional influences on the construction of on-campus learning and living spaces, and the creative agency of international students in navigating them.

2.4 International student mobilities and cosmopolitan sensibilities

Studying abroad is often considered an effective way to acquire cosmopolitan sensibilities and global imaginations. Rizvi (2005:4) explains this connection --- 'international education has, in providing students with an understanding of global interconnectedness and in developing international friendship networks...could assist them to become savvier players in a globally networked economy and society', one that 'increasingly prizes the skills of inter-culturality and a cosmopolitan outlook' (Rizvi 2009:9). He suggests that students are fully aware of the material benefits and seek to acquire such cosmopolitan attributes. Citing the case of Australian universities, where international students invest in higher education 'with a strategic cosmopolitan imaginary already in mind', he asserts that education abroad merely 'perpetuates this instrumentalist view of the world' (2005:10). Apart from such strategic motivations, Brooks and Waters (2010) alert us to the desire of overseas UK students to seek encounters with cultural difference, though their actual engagements

with 'cultural diversity' in their study abroad experiences is limited to their prior knowledge and an exclusive social circle of international student friends. Also, on whether studying abroad effectively develops cosmopolitanism in students, Oikonomidou and Williams (2012) explore whether international students develop 'enriched' or 'latent' cosmopolitanism as a result of studying abroad. Working with Japanese female international students studying in the US, they argue that while for some students, 'the seeds previously planted by travel abroad and cultural diffusion were further cultivated by studying abroad', others displayed 'an expanded conscious as a result of relocation' (2012: 9-11).

Providing a more spatially grounded perspective, Anderson et al (2012) are critical of whether simply sharing campus space with diverse 'others' necessarily produces meaningful intercultural interactions. Investigating learning and leisure spaces at a British university, they observe that while ideally campus living provides a conducive environment for 'more intense and prolonged form of contact', students are likely to self-segregate in part due to communication difficulties and differences in consumption practices (for example food and alcohol). Indeed, these works provide a critical lens to engage with the spaces and subjects within a cosmopolitan internationalizing university. Though from a largely Anglo-American perspective, these findings challenge me to consider the taken-for-granted notions of campus spaces and student identities with regards to cosmopolitan sensibilities in the NUS and Todai contexts.

To conclude, more attention needs to be paid to international students' experiences in East Asia in order to bring forth a more inclusive understanding of geographies of youth. A comparative perspective between Todai and NUS is valuable in light of the recent internationalization of East Asian universities, and the absence of a clear regional model. Students studying abroad often experience a heightened sense of identity negotiation as a result of encounters in campus contact zones that range from more routinised spaces such as the classroom, to more casual, social spaces such as halls of residence. The morphologies and qualities of campus spaces that form the backdrop of such encounters call for greater geographical analysis. Disrupting national and institutional ideals of universities that welcome diversity, this research also aims to investigate the realities from ground up. To do so, I employ the concept

of ‘contact zones’ as a platform to interrogate encounters with difference in the internationalizing university. In the following section, I illustrate how this concept can be productive in our understandings of identity negotiations of international students.

2.5 Contact zones

In recent years, there has been renewed academic interest in the dynamics of contact between different social groups, in particular that of the heterogeneity of these encounters, embedded in greater socio-political realities. First championed by psychologist Gordon Allport (1954), the ‘contact hypothesis’ postulates that the most effective way to reduce prejudice and conflicts between majority and minority groups is to have more opportunities for meaningful encounters. In the context of multicultural cities, urban and social geographers have applied and developed the hypothesis to investigate complex interactions between existing and newly arrived migrant groups, with much focus on multiethnic British cities (see Amin 2002; Valentine 2008; Askins and Pain 2011).

Situating contact within post-colonial contexts, Mary Louise Pratt (1997:63) coined the term ‘contact zone’ as a way to theorize the ‘in-between’ spaces of imperial encounters. As ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other’ due to ‘highly asymmetrical relations of power such as colonialism and slavery’, Pratt asserts that contact zones are still being ‘lived out in many parts of the world today’. However, in contrast to hegemonic discourses, the ‘accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader’s perspective’, she stressed the ‘interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters’ (Pratt 2008: 8). Paying attention to these dimensions, while locating my research in Japan and Singapore, I explore how internationalizing universities become ‘contact zones’ when international students from distant and neighbouring countries that were previously separated by colonialism and/or migration, ‘meet, clash and grapple’ with one other.

A focus on the dynamics of contact encounters is a fruitful line of inquiry, in light of the growing interest in what constitutes culture and how cultures and identities are negotiated by transnational ‘sojourners’. Increasingly, internationalizing universities are paying attention to promoting meaningful intercultural experiences for their students, beyond the cross-cultural. While the latter stresses on boundaries,

differences, and diversity, the former suggests exchange and interaction (Landremann 2003). Within the contact zone literature, Morrissey's work on territories in late medieval Ireland informs us that far from watertight boundaries, contact zones are often interconnected, fluid and overlapping (Morrissey 2005). The conceptual framing of the contact zone is thus well-placed to ground these interactive encounters in space and time. The spaces of the contact zone are thus not simply a backdrop where 'clashing and grappling' of cultures and individuals take place, but depending on the ways they are constructed, take on different morphologies in various time-spaces.

The dynamism of contact zones also challenges us to rethink existing contact paradigms and the role of agency in the production of new/hybrid spaces and identities. Gu et al's recent work on international students' intercultural experiences in the UK conclude that the majority of their respondents are social actors and proactive. Their positive attitudes towards the host society and the ability to take control of their own process of adaptation shape their experiences (Gu et al 2010:19). Their work showed evidence of students' strong sense of agency and resilience in 'purposeful strategic adaptation'. Refraining from painting an overly rosy picture, my work seeks to delve into the situated processes at work in negotiating contact zones, paying attention to both the setbacks as well as successes.

The dynamic processes in contact zone encounters are fleshed out in Yeoh and Willis' (2005b: 269) research on Singaporean and British transmigrants in China, where they theorized the contact zone as 'frontiers where 'difference' is constantly encountered and negotiated'. They suggest how contact zones are constructed and experienced in different ways due to their different ethno-historical linkages. Contact is thus about 'co-presence', viewed 'not in terms of separateness but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices' (Pratt 2008:8). It is this relationality that results in the evocation of strong emotions in the contact zone, because the ideas and identities that each group or individual has held on to are put 'on the line' (Pratt 1997:63). In a similar vein, Lundström (2012) has employed contact zones to examine the unequal hierarchical relationships between Swedish women as both 'expatriate wives' and employers, and the gendered and racialized identities of their live-in maids. Elsewhere, Lan (2003), although not overtly using contact zones to frame her study, also discusses the fluid negotiations of power

between Taiwanese employers and Filipina domestics, while highlighting the latter's English proficiency which helps them to negotiate more privileged positions in these transnational encounters. Similarly, how proficiency (or the lack of) in the dominant language of the university (English in NUS and Japanese in Todai) shapes contact encounters among international students and locals is also an important thread in my research.

As mentioned, contact zones take on different morphologies and are far from static, imaginary social spaces. Somerville and Perkins (2003) illustrate, through their research on indigenous and non-indigenous border work collaboration in the Yarrowarra project in New South Wales, that how contact zones are experienced depends on how individuals are positioned within it. They concluded that 'the contact zone is constructed in different sites for different team members', and that 'the border work they do depends on that construction and the differing political investments of their position' (2003:264). This also suggests that there is a high degree of heterogeneity in the ways contact zones are constructed and experienced. Kenway and Bullen (2003) further illustrate this by mapping contact zones within the globalizing university context in Australian and Canadian institutions. They explored the intersections of race and gender in the self-representations of international women postgraduate students, revealing the 'multiplicity and complexity of students' understanding of themselves' (2003:12). These range from pragmatism, resistance, ambivalence, reinvention, affirmation and solidarity.

Amidst recent work that explores international students' adaptation and transitions, Gu et al (2010:8) called for 'more nuanced, differentiated account of ways in which different students in different phases of their studies adapt to their academic and social environment'. As such, in this research, I seek to investigate contact zones, not only as frictional social spaces that impact on students' identities, but also the ways that they are mapped onto material and immaterial spaces within the internationalizing university.

2.6 Safe houses

One aspect of contact zones that has received relatively less attention is that of ‘safe houses’, which Pratt (1997:71) describes as ‘social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings and temporary protection from legacies of protection’. According to Pratt, ‘safe houses’ are formed to cope with the uncertainty of traversing contact zones. While she did not elaborate on the formation and spatialities of ‘safe houses’, though others such as van Slyck (1997:167) have theorized it as an imagined space/site within the classroom where ‘cultural debate and dialogue can take place, a space in which complex feelings and attitudes on different sides of a question are dramatized’, I suggest that spontaneous contact in social settings such as hostels and students groups are examples of important safe houses within the study abroad experience.

The complexities involved in the formation of ‘safe houses’ have been highlighted by Watkins, who cautions that ‘a common cultural heritage does not inherently create a safe house’ (2003:5). Indeed, this prompts me to be sensitive to new ‘sites and spaces’ beyond conventional student groupings based on nationality, religion and ethnicity, to include alternative spaces of coming together across cultures and other forms of identities.

The concept of safe houses is especially pertinent in light of universities’ internationalizing projects to ‘develop a range of cosmopolitan sensibilities’ (Rizvi 2005:1) in their students. More work needs to be done on how ‘safe houses’ are formed, the dynamics and interaction within them, and to interrogate whether they truly lead to a greater understanding of cultures other than ones’ own in providing a ‘safe’ space for dialogue and communication. Thus while the contact zone is an emotional and potentially dangerous place, where people can experience hurt and miscomprehension, it also represents a hopeful space where moments of wonder and mutual understanding can take place.

However, there is an inherent danger in assuming that contact zones are rife with conflicts while ‘safe houses’ are protected havens. In my work with students, I further build upon Pratt’s theorizations of safe houses by paying attention to the nuances of

the contact zone, bearing in mind that in the post-colonial locationality of East Asian universities of today's highly interconnected world, contact zones rarely occupy the extremes of 'safe' and 'dangerous' spaces. Rather, contact zones are often found on a continuum between these two extremes. How students experience notions of 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces are also highly dependent on volatile changes in the socio-political and environmental climate. For example, while Indian students have had a long history of studying in Australia, a recent spate of violent attacks on Indians in Melbourne in mid-2009 had sparked off nation-wide fears where Indian and other racial minorities felt threatened and victimised (see Dunn et al 2011 for a geographical analysis that seeks to relate these attacks to students' mobility patterns). Another notable example of how volatile notions of safety are, is the recent Tohoku earthquake and subsequent nuclear crisis in Japan post 11th March 2011. While Japan is generally considered to be an attractive study destination due to low crime rates and general safety, this incident and its aftermath of nuclear radiation has momentarily caused international students to feel physically unsafe in Japan.

This chapter has reviewed contact zones as a concept that stresses the interactive, co-present and intercultural aspects of contact among peoples who were previously separated historically and geographically. In the context of international students, I introduce how students' unique biographies have implications on how they come to terms with their identities in contact encounters. In terms of the spatialities of contact zones within internationalizing universities, I have highlighted the imperative need to consider the contours and politics of learning and social spaces in shaping contact encounters and cosmopolitan ideals, concluding with a call for more nuanced readings of contact zones and safe houses.

Chapter Three: Internationalizing universities in East Asia

3.1 Introduction

In contrast to a world history that was dominated by Western countries for the past few decades, ‘the 21st century will be ‘the Asian Century’” (Mahbubani 2007:1), as the locus of economic power shifts towards major economies in Asia. Responding to this fluid global environment, Asian universities’ play a central role in producing a ‘world-class’ research and labour force to propel this ‘Asian century’. The rise of Asian universities is regarded as one of the most important trends in global higher education today⁴ (Levin 2010)--- Japan, South Korea and more recently Hong Kong, Singapore, and the economic giants of China and India have all expressed ambitions to build ‘world-class universities’. Their efforts will present a significant challenge to their established counterparts in the West. Internationally ranked Asian universities have intensified the competition for ‘global talent’, attracting students from within Asia and beyond. As the international education market in Asia grows and develops, Sheng-Ju Chan (2012) observed a shift in student mobilities---from net outflows for traditional ‘Western’ destinations to a trend towards regionalization and greater horizontal mobility within Asia. Sugimura (2012) is also confident that there will be greater East Asian integration through regional networks and universities’ co-operation programmes, although she cautions against complex issues that need to be ironed out, such as immigration control with regards to student mobility, choice of language for programmes, and the need to retain national and institutional autonomy in the midst of collaboration. This said, it is certain that new, innovative forms of partnerships, such as the prestigious S³ Asia MBA⁵ that capitalizes on the strengths of three dynamic Asian cities of Seoul, Shanghai and Singapore, will continue to feature prominently in these regional collaborations.

⁴ ‘The Rise of Asian Universities’, Yale President Richard C. Levin, 1 February 2010, <http://opac.yale.edu/president/message.aspx?id=91>, last accessed 19 October 2011.

⁵ NUS formed a tri-university colloquium with Fudan University (Shanghai) and Korea University (Seoul) in 2005---aptly named the S³ University Alliance (S³ UA). As a key product of this alliance, an Asia MBA Double Degree Programme (i.e. the S³ Asia MBA) was started in 2008. To fill the growing demand for a pan-Asian MBA programme, the S³ Asia MBA prides itself with the tagline “through the eyes of Asia, ‘Asia to the world’ and ‘the world to Asia’”. Tapping on the strengths of the three respective cities and universities, the unique programme offers a situated understanding of regional economy, culture and business, attractive employment/internship opportunities within Asia-Pacific, and an extensive network of colleagues/alumni in Seoul, Shanghai and Singapore.

While universities are aware of the need to embark on novel and innovative models of internationalization that capitalize on their unique strengths, Ng (2012) offers a timely reminder for them to not only focus on economic gains, but also pay careful attention to incorporate internationalized curriculum and adopt ‘global citizenry’ as an important graduate outcome. He cautions against the blind adoption of internationalization models from more established Western university precedents (what he terms as ‘policy duplication’—to refer to policies that are not culturally sensitive to the peculiarities of the region), and urges instead for universities and state policies to ‘honour the rich and splendid cultures of Asia in the midst of internationalizing’. In light of these recent developments and as direct competitors for a similar pool of students within the region, this chapter highlights the pathways to internationalization of National University of Singapore (NUS) and the University of Tokyo (Todai). I first outline the particular contexts and rationales for internationalization of higher education, and then focus on some differing strategies and programmes adopted by these universities to achieve their goals. Finally I consider some of the country/ institution-specific challenges faced by NUS and Todai in the process of internationalization.

3.2 The ‘Singapore brand’—to be an education hub

From the early years where Singapore’s polytechnic institutes helped to secure regional advantage in the electronics manufacturing and oil refinery sectors, to the 1990s, when, responding to the wave of globalization, it started to focus on higher education, today, the country continues to invest heavily in research and development, as well as high-value knowledge creation and innovation⁶, most notably through its universities. Recognizing the limitations of a small and open economy, and human capital as its most valuable resource, the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) pushed forward the Global Schoolhouse initiative in 2002, with the aim to promote Singapore’s position as a ‘a hub of educational excellence’, capture a bigger share of the US\$2.2 trillion world education market, and thereby raise the education sector’s contribution to Singapore’s Gross National Product (GDP) from 1.9% to 5%⁷.

⁶ ‘Global education attracting global talent’, special advertising section in Universal News Inc, 1 September 2008, <http://www.universalnews-us.com/pdfs/singapore.pdf>

⁷ ‘Panel recommends Global Schoolhouse concept for Singapore to capture bigger slice of US\$2.2 trillion world education market’, Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry,

The initiative sought to re-model all levels of Singaporean education to nurture students who are creative and entrepreneurial (MTI 2007), and at the same time, attract 150,000 international students to study in a wide array of educational institutions in Singapore by 2015. Education is thus deemed as an important avenue to attract high-calibre talent to Singapore to supplement its labour capacity. While Singapore's public [namely NUS and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU)] and privately funded universities [such as Singapore Management University (SMU)] have since achieved global reputations in their respective fields, the concerted initiative also sought to diversify Singapore's education scene by drawing world-class institutions to set up campuses in the country. In this capacity, renowned institutions such as Duke, French business school INSEAD and the Technical University of Munich (TUM) have set up and grow their presence in Singapore. Behind this initiative is a belief that Singapore is 'well-placed to seize a strong position in the growing Asian market' due to 'a quality education brand name, a safe environment and good quality of life, and a unique East-meets-West cosmopolitan environment' (Aw Kah Peng, Assistant Managing Director of EDB, 2008). In spite of initial successes in this area, there were also painful lessons learnt from the closure of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Singapore in 2007⁸ and New York University (NYU) Tisch School of the Arts Asia in 2012⁹ largely due to issues pertaining to financial sustainability. In spite of this, Singapore is still in the midst of defining itself and its position as a 'global talent hub'¹⁰ as it builds its education brand name by attracting, developing and retaining 'global talent'.

3.2.1 The National University of Singapore (NUS) and its internationalization pathway

NUS started as a small medical college in 1905. As the pioneer institution of higher learning in Singapore, it has since grown to house 15 faculties and schools, boasting an enrolment of 25,391 undergraduates and 8,350 graduate students in 2010¹¹.

http://www.mti.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/Documents/app.mti.gov.sg/data/pages/507/doc/DSE_recommen_d.pdf

⁸ 'Grand plans crumble', The Straits Times, 24 May 2007.

⁹ 'One of the best film schools in the world closes its Singapore campus', Channel News Asia, 9 November 2012.

¹⁰ 'Singapore—A Global Schoolhouse', Singapore Economic Development Board, 2011, http://www.sedb.com/edb/sg/en_uk/index/industry_sectors/education/global_schoolhouse.html

¹¹ 'Facts and Figures', <http://www.nus.edu.sg/aboutus/factsfigures.php>, last accessed 10 August 2010.

Originally tasked to educate locals to fill workforce needed for industrialization, today it boasts of a diverse campus environment, with 20% of undergraduates and 60% of graduate students originating from more than 90 countries. Close to 40% of its total student population are foreigners. This is a relatively high figure, even compared to the more established Western universities¹². Also, more than half of the faculty hails from overseas¹³. NUS' internationalization efforts have thus been recognized by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), which attributed NUS' strong performance in world rankings to its international faculty, international students and inbound exchange change, as well as citations per paper. In 2011, based on the QS World University Rankings, NUS was in 28th position. It also has a strong regional presence within East Asia--in the Asian University Rankings in 2011/12, it came in third, up from 10th place in 2009. In an independent review of the top universities in Asia, Asiaweek provided a less orthodox, if equally pertinent view of NUS as 'all the things we expect of Singapore', referring to qualities of 'efficiency, professionalism and technical excellence'¹⁴.

In line with the Global Schoolhouse initiative, NUS is clear in its 'primacy given to attracting overseas talent' (Sidhu et al 2010), and has embarked on concerted marketing efforts (through overseas recruitment drives, attractive scholarships etc) to draw international students particularly from China, India and the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. To retain these international graduates to contribute to the local economy, Singapore has instituted a bond for international students, allowing them to obtain a generous tuition grant and loan scheme in return for a commitment to work in Singapore for three years upon graduating from university. This is in contrast to the situation in traditional study destinations in the West, as well as more mature Asian markets such as Japan, where it is increasingly difficult for international students in host countries to secure employment upon graduation.

¹² 'QS World University Rankings by Indicator—International Students', <http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2011/indicator-rankings/international-students>.

¹³ 'Emerging directions in Global Education', Speech by Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, New Delhi, India, 9-11 February 2009.

¹⁴ 'The Top 10', Asiaweek.com
<http://www-cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/97/0523/cs2.html>

Synonymous with the ‘Singapore brand’, which includes being ‘world-class’ on many fronts (including education) and being situated at the nexus of ‘East meets West’ (Mahbubani 2007), NUS strategically incorporates these taglines into its marketing strategies. It brands itself as ‘a leading global university centred in Asia’, emphasizing its global approach to education and research, as well as its situated expertise in Asia¹⁵. With English as the working language in the city-state, the adoption of English as the language of internationalization and instruction in NUS was deemed as a natural and straightforward extension. In this respect, it has a strong advantage over other internationalizing universities in the region, where English is not the primary language of instruction (see below for the case of Todai). According to Sidhu et al’s (2010) findings, an overwhelming 72.4% of international students surveyed chose to study in NUS because of its good reputation as a global institution, instruction in English and teaching quality. Moreover, commenting on the strength of the Singapore brand of education, Prime Minister Lee emphasized that ‘among Asian countries, Singapore is probably the least dissimilar in ethos to Western societies’. This, coupled with an ethnically diverse population who has ancestral roots with countries in the region, provides NUS with the advantage of attracting international students from the Asian region due to the proximity of cultures and languages.

As a relatively young university in Asia vying for a slice of the global higher education pie, NUS strategically does so by leveraging on the branding potential of internationally renowned universities to effectively catapult itself to the world arena. This is achieved through a variety of innovative partnerships that include more than 60 double-degree and joint degree programmes with top universities in the world, seven NUS Overseas Colleges (NOC) in major entrepreneurial hubs¹⁶, and more recently the Yale-NUS College.

¹⁵ ‘About NUS’, NUS, <http://www.nus.edu.sg/aboutus/>

¹⁶ NUS has established NOCs in Shanghai and Beijing (China), Israel, India, Stockholm (Sweden), Silicon Valley and Bio Valley (USA). It is an innovative programme that targets NUS undergraduates with the academic ability and entrepreneurial drive to be immersed as interns in start-ups located in leading entrepreneurial and academic hubs of the world. At the same time, they will study entrepreneurship related courses at highly prestigious partner universities. The aim is to cultivate and nurture them into enterprising, resourceful, independent self-starters and eventually blossom into successful entrepreneurs. (http://www.overseas.nus.edu.sg/aboutUs_aboutTheNOC.htm)

3.2.2 Advocating overseas/international experiences

A strong commitment to internationalization is also reflected in the expected education outcomes of its graduates. These are clearly articulated by Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, who hopes that an NUS education will produce graduates who are ‘critical thinkers, creative, articulate and globally effective’ (Tan, State of University Address 2009). Creativity and entrepreneurialism are key skills that NUS identifies as indispensable for the current economy. I suggest that while this is in line with Singapore’s efforts to engage with creative industries (see MICA 2002), inculcating these skills may also be a reaction to challenge stereotypes of Asian students as rote learners. One way to inculcate cosmopolitan sensibilities is to encourage students to participate in exchange programmes with partner universities. To this end, the International Relations Office (IRO) has been working with more than 200 partner universities to develop these programmes. Anne Pakir, the Director of the IRO aligns this move with the university’s ‘mission for globalization’, which is crucial to ‘mould global citizens among our youth’ (Pakir, Director’s Message, IRO). NUS students are encouraged to participate in at least one overseas programme ‘as learning to live in a different environment could transform their lives’. The view that an overseas experience helps to develop both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills is endorsed university-wide, as stressed by Professor Tan Eng Chye, that ‘overseas exposure not only allows students to learn from the world, but to also gain international mileage by acquiring linguistic skills and developing cultural sensitivity’¹⁷.

Apart from short-term exchange programmes, a plethora of opportunities for overseas exposure are available to NUS students. These have high take-up rate and hence are competitive in their selection criteria. Some examples include the Work and Travel programme to USA, overseas volunteer activities, and as part of academic programmes such as the University Scholars’ Programme, where students are taken on international field study trips. Intercultural understanding and appreciation of other cultures is encouraged through annual campus-wide events such as In-fusion, where international students in NUS set up booths that showcase their countries and unique cultures. Commenting on the event’s theme of ‘Connections’ in 2008, former Chancellor of NUS Professor Shih Choon Fong emphasized that ‘instead of focusing

¹⁷ ‘International Exchange Day offers international mileage to students’, 7 September 2009, http://newshub.nus.edu.sg/headlines/0909/ied_07Sep09.php.

on differences as a means to divide, we should see our differences as a means to connect'¹⁸. Through these efforts, we see how within the campus, the call to foster and maintain unity in diversity among students of various nationalities is a high priority in NUS.

NUS pushes the boundaries of the Singapore brand of education, with the establishment of the Yale-NUS College, Asia's first liberal arts college. Recognizing that 'Singaporeans are pragmatists' and 'world-renowned for students who answer set questions well', the institution is tasked to 'produce students who 'asks the right questions to produce solutions to complex problems''¹⁹ (Ng Eng Hen, 12 April 2011). Thus, through this partnership, NUS hopes to be the first to pioneer critical inquiry among students in Asia.

3.2.3 UTown—merging of learning and living spaces

NUS also seeks to pioneer new ways of teaching and learning, reflected in the establishment of the UTown, an innovative residential college that models after those of Oxford and Harvard. With the opening of its third residential college in 2012, it is to be an 'iconic landmark...(that) redefines Singapore's higher education landscape' by providing 'an integrated learning and living environment for up to 6,000 students from a diverse mix of different nationalities and cultures'. The merging of learning and living spaces is aimed at promoting informal learning as students attend seminars, take on projects and have discussions where they reside (Straits Times, 3 October 2012). UTown is tasked to 'nurture tomorrow's leaders for the global arena' through innovative pedagogy (for example, inter-disciplinary perspectives, rigorous inquiry and creative problem-solving) that will develop 'global minds', yet 'with a focus in helping students understand and engage Asia'²⁰. At the time of this research, the UTown was yet to be established and as such it was not included in my study, though it is certainly an exciting research prospect to investigate these students' experiences. While clear of the need to learn from best practices from world-renowned universities, it also seeks to build a new model for others to emulate, thus making a

¹⁸ 'Infusing global cultures in NUS', Newshub, NUS' News Portal, vol 7 no 9, April 2008, <http://newshub.nus.edu.sg/ke/0804/articles/pg08.php>.

¹⁹ 'Liberal arts college can blossom in Singapore, PM', The Straits Times, 12 April 2011.

²⁰ 'University Town: A new era of living and learning'-31 January 2008, http://newshub.nus.edu.sg/headlines/0108/UTown_31jan08.php.

mark in the international arena. This hope to be emulated is articulated by Professor Tan Eng Chye, a forerunner of the project, that UTown hopes to be ‘admired, studied and held up internationally as a model to be emulated’ (Tan Eng Chye, State of University Address, 2007).

3.2.4 Challenges

While Singapore has been accustomed to ethnic diversity since its inception, and Singaporeans are conditioned to accept migration as inevitable for its economy, there is a growing discomfort among residents, evidenced by recent foreign-local tensions over competition for services, including higher education. Though thus far we have witnessed the success of NUS’ internationalization, one notable concern that threatens to stall the progress of the initial Global Schoolhouse target of 150,000 foreign students by 2015, is the growing unease with the presence of foreign students in local universities. In the recent National Day Rally speech given by Singapore’s Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong, he pointedly addressed parents’ concerns about more university places going to foreign students instead of locals. With 18% of all university places going to foreigners (one of the highest in the region), he assured them that there would be increased capacity for Singaporeans, while expounding the benefits of having foreign classmates, which include a cosmopolitan campus environment that ‘better prepares local students for the global workplace’. He provided examples of how local and foreign students have partnered in successful innovative start-ups²¹ (PM Lee, National Day Rally Speech, August 14, 2011).

However in the following year (2012), the anti-foreigner sentiment (that was further fanned by social media) over isolated incidents of name-calling [Chinese student Sun Xu posted derogatory remarks on Singaporeans on *Weibo* (Chinese equivalent of Twitter)] and spats over the use of a soccer pitch in NUS added to perceptions of foreign students not ‘integrating’ into Singaporean society. To calm these negative sentiments, in the National Day speech in 2012, PM Lee cited the example of an SMU (Singapore Management University) Vietnamese undergraduate who had integrated

²¹ Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s National Day Rally 2011 (Speech in English), Sunday 14 August 2011
http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesinterviews/primeminister/2011/August/Prime_Minister_Lee_Hsien_Loongs_National_Day_Rally_2011_Speech_in_English.html

well academically and socially (Straits Times, 27 August 2012). Firm measures were also enforced to reduce foreign student numbers in 2012. These include a cap on the number of foreign students admitted into local institutions, and stricter regulations on private school admissions (Straits Times, 8 October 2012).

Singaporeans' concerns over increased competition in university places and employment are certainly not unique. While problems associated with international student flows continue to be a perennial challenge (often incited by episodic events) in traditional destination countries such as the UK and Australia (notably the violent 2009 Indian students attacks in Melbourne), these are surfacing, albeit in different forms, in East Asian countries such as Singapore and Japan, which have only relatively recently begun internationalizing their universities. As a direct competitor for a similar pool of students in Asia, Today's internationalization trajectory is closely tied to how Japanese society and its attitude towards internationalization evolves. The following section provides an overview of this dynamic movement, before zooming in on Today's internationalization pathway.

3.3. Internationalizing Japanese universities: An overview

Japan's first attempt to attract international students on a large scale was the 100,000 student plan---it was announced by then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1983. The plan was seen as a necessary strategy to catch up with Western countries that had readily opened their doors to welcome international students. The main tenets of the 100,000 international student plan was to promote mutual understanding and build networks with other countries, nurture Japanese students to have a global outlook, to increase the international competitiveness of Japanese universities and to contribute to the international community (MEXT, 2007). It was to be part of a wider national drive to 'transform Japan into an international country' in the spirit of *kokusaika* (internationalization) (Japan Times, 23 March 2010). Although the target of hosting 100,000 international students was eventually achieved in 2003, it was later criticized that the numbers were filled by Chinese students who flooded into Japan after the relaxation of immigration laws in 2000 (Lim, 2008:2).

With the globalization of the knowledge economy, increasing transparency of world university rankings and Japan's domestic problem of 'sagging enrollments' (and labour force) due to declining birth rates (Japan Times, 28 October 2008), Japan realized that its previous efforts needed to be more intensive and strategic. Japanese universities, and the Japanese university system as a whole was once again challenged to respond rapidly to these shifting global conditions. In particular, Yonezawa observed that the 'long-established, stable status of Japanese flagship universities'²² can no longer be considered a permanent phenomena' (2007:488) and that the need for universities to respond to internationalization is imperative amidst rapid population decline (Yonezawa 2012). Japan was also alarmed that it was losing out on the rapidly growing international student market, and that Western countries that were on par with Japan in terms of economic prowess, were taking a larger share of the pie. A general lowering in global rankings (according to Times Higher Education in 2012) of top Japanese universities have provoked outcries from Japanese academics with regards to how published research in English was favoured and therefore unfair to the Japanese context²³. As a strong economic power, it had an under-representation of world-class institutions relative to its economic might (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007). Adding to its woes, at the same time, the rapid development of world-class institutions in neighbouring countries like China, South Korea and Singapore is deemed to be 'threats' to Japan, which had been a traditional study destination for Asian students (Yonezawa, 2009: 201).

3.3.1 The Global 30 project and its dilemmas

These pressing conditions prompted then Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda to unveil the more ambitious 300,000 international students plan in January 2008. As opposed to a mass higher education market, the 300,000 student plan is part of a more comprehensive aim to attract 'top-class talent' from overseas to Japan's universities and industries (Japan Times, 23 Mar 2010). To meet the 300,000 international students target, the Global 30 Project was launched by MEXT to establish core universities for internationalization. This model of development was deemed to be a

²² According to Yonezawa (2007:483), 'flagship universities' in Japan are selected top national and private research institutions. They include the former 7 imperial universities (Tokyo, Kyoto, Hokkaido, Tohoku, Nagoya, Osaka, Kyushu) and the Tokyo Institute of Technology (the leading national university in engineering), and the 3 top private universities (Keio, Waseda and Ritsumeikan).

²³ 'Japanese universities scoffed at, fret over world rankings', Nikkei Report, 29 June 2012.

more efficient way to concentrate resources and create a trickle-down effect on other institutions. As part of the project, 13 universities (7 national universities and 6 private ones) were selected in July 2009 to function as core institutions to boost the number of international students in Japan, and increase the number of Japanese students studying abroad. These universities are tasked to implement programmes that can lead to the extensive recruitment of international students (MEXT, Global 30). With a generous funding, Global 30 universities have to offer English-only courses, specialist support for international staff and students, more opportunities for international students to learn Japanese language and culture, promote strategic international cooperation and establish 'overseas offices for shared utilization by universities'. A Global 30 fund recipient, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) has been singled out as having implemented successful bilingual programmes and providing students with an international environment that imbibes a cosmopolitan outlook in their graduates. This greatly increases their hiring potential for Japanese firms such as Uniqlo, which are looking to globalize their operations²⁴. Though not part of the Global 30, Akita International University, a relatively young university (established in 2004), has made headlines as the only 'all-English university' where students not only have to pass a gruelling intensive English course and score at least 500 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), but are also required to room with foreign students in an on-campus dormitory for a year. Such a bold move to immerse students in an all-English environment has been lauded as producing graduates who are in 'hot demand', boosting a near 100% employment rate which includes high profile listed companies²⁵.

However, critiques such as Burgess et al (2010) were quick to point out what they deem as contradictory goals of the Global 30 project---a simultaneous 'closing in' while seemingly 'opening up', and the continuing trend of 'dejima-isation' of the Japanese university, referring to how foreign students still end up being isolated on campus in spite of enthusiastic attempts to internationalize. They question whether Japanese society as a whole is ready to accept foreigners, and how internationalization

²⁴ 'Learning Curve: With a Push, Japan's Universities Go Global', Time, 17 September 2012, <http://world.time.com/2012/09/17/learning-curve-with-a-push-japans-universities-go-global/>

²⁵ 'All-English university turning heads in business world', Nikkei Report, 13 December 2012.

of Japanese universities must move in tandem with society-at-large (Burgess et al 2010: 471).

Another oft-cited barrier towards the successful implementation of the Global 30 is that ‘faculty members are not enthusiastic about welcoming large numbers of international staff and students’, reflected by the job postings in the Global 30 network---non-Japanese professors are only employed on a non-renewable four- or five-year limited-term contract (Japan Times, 30 March 2010). Moreover the ratio of international faculty to local teaching staff in Todai, Japan’s top-ranking institution, is a ‘dismal’ one to sixteen, compared with 50% in other leading Asian universities like the University of Hong Kong and NUS. Similarly, in terms of international student enrolment, Japan is ‘lagging significantly behind’. While absolute numbers rose past 100,000 in 2003, the increase is slow, with 132, 720 international students in 2009 (JASSO Statistics²⁶). The percentage of foreign students is still relatively low (a mere 10% in Todai, the most internationalized national university in Japan, compared to 36% in NUS²⁷). The general ‘xenophobic’ climate within higher education institutions will prove to be a major hurdle for Japanese universities. Japanese youths have also been criticized as ‘inward-looking’ and generally not keen on international exposure. As a result, they are deemed to have been ‘forced out of the pack’ by ‘enthusiastic peers’ in China, South Korea, Singapore and other Asian neighbours (Nikkei, 30 January 2012).

Though it remains to be seen how the 300,000 foreign students plan will materialize by 2020, Yonezawa (2007) called for a greater recognition that the success of Japanese universities’ internationalization plans is inextricably tied to the overall success of East Asia’s higher education scene. He suggested that the perceived language and cultural barriers and overall loss of pre-dominance in East Asia should lead to more innovative ways to internationalize Japanese universities so that they can maintain and increase their international status. Japanese universities have to recognize and harness their position within Asia. Yonezawa (2007:497) called for the government to take a more active role in building universities and to learn from other

²⁶ ‘International Students in Japan 2009’ http://www.jasso.go.jp/statistics/intl_student/data09_e.html

²⁷ ‘The University of Tokyo’, <http://www.topuniversities.com/university/618/university-of-tokyo>

countries to harness higher education for social and economic development so as to ‘reinvigorate a relatively mature country like Japan’.

3.3.2 Challenges towards internationalization

Other obstacles that continue to impede the realization of the 300,000 student plan also include the need to correct the perception of poor quality of Japanese education, relative to British and US (and increasingly Asian) counterparts. In interviews conducted with Chinese alumni who returned to China upon graduation from Todai (‘Survey Report-Interviews with International Alumni who returned to their homelands after Todai, 2008), participants cite that research techniques in US and European countries are considered to be of global standard, compared to Japanese universities (2008: 4). Also the difficulty of finding employment and adapting to life in Japan are major push factors that discourage international graduates from staying. The hiring of foreign graduates continues to be low as it appears that Japanese universities do not give sufficient support to foreign students who are keen to work in Japan, especially with regards to transparency of companies’ hiring policies for foreigners (see ‘Universities let down foreign students’ in Daily Yoimuri 28 February 2011). Lim (2008:9) notes that at present, fewer than 9000 international student graduates have found jobs in Japanese companies. With the government’s plans to increase the hiring rate to 50% of international graduates, it remains to be seen how these students can be absorbed into the Japanese job market, especially since some employers have complained about foreign students’ lack of understanding of Japanese customs and business style.

The March 2011 Great Tohoku earthquake and nuclear crisis at Fukushima provided yet another challenge for Japanese universities, who had to manage the national ‘mass exodus’ of foreign students. For the first time, universities were compelled to come up with up-to-date information of the crisis in various languages online, and be more flexible such as allowing deferment in enrolment to allay students’ fears²⁸.

²⁸ ‘Universities concerned over drop in overseas students’, Nikkei Report, 2 May 2011.

While reforms to reinvent and internationalize Japanese higher education continue to roll out at an unprecedented pace, Monte Cassim, former President of Ritsumeikan APU, warns that Japan's internationalization of higher education should not be a mere numbers game, but a long-term sustainable plan to create a particular type of society (Japan Times, 28 October 2008). It is in this context that we next examine Todai, a founding member of the Global 30 and an important barometer of higher education in Japan and its internationalization efforts.

3.4 The University of Tokyo (Todai)---propelling from national to international status

Compared to the relatively young NUS, the University of Tokyo or Todai was established in 1877 by the Meiji government as Japan's first national university. To safeguard its strategic interests as a rising world power, Todai was first entrusted with the task to 'produce great minds to enable Japan to catch up with the West' (Japan Times, 11 August 2009). Today, it comprises of three core campuses in metropolitan Tokyo, namely Hongo, Komaba, Kashiwa, housing a total of 10 faculties, 15 graduate schools and 32 institutes. With a history of producing Japan's top bureaucrats and a list of Nobel Laureates, the Todai brand continues to be a much-coveted credential by Japanese students and employers alike, with high barriers to entry in the form of rigorous entrance examinations. Todai's reputation is encapsulated in the fact that 'no institution in Japan, or perhaps all of Asia, is more associated with power and privilege than the University of Tokyo'. This power is also written in the space it occupies—the main Hongo campus in central Tokyo lies on the former estate of a feudal lord in the 18th century²⁹. Tradition and history is a rhetoric often drawn upon by university officials to assert Todai's position and status. In his message to international students, incumbent President Junichi Hamada emphasized Todai's 'time-honoured traditions of excellence in research and education' that forms the core of 'the oldest university in Japan'.

In terms of national university rankings, Todai is consistently the top university in Japan and continues to perform well in world rankings, though it has recently seen a slight drop in position. Todai ranks 30th according to the QS World University

²⁹ 'The Top 10', Asiaweek.com, <http://www-cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/97/0523/cs2.html>

ranking 2012 (it was 25th in 2010), while in the Asian University rankings 2012, it is ranked eighth³⁰, down from fifth position in 2010, signalling more intense competition from universities in the region. In 2011, Todai has an enrolment of 30,000 students, of which approximately 10% are international students. This is a significantly smaller percentage compared to NUS, which has close to 40% of international students. Notably, 80% of these students are from Asian countries, with China and South Korea as the dominant sending countries (see Appendix 1.5). Diversifying the international student population has been identified as a goal in Todai's internationalization strategies, as exemplified by the inaugural Todai Study Fair held in France in 2011, that hoped to recruit more European students. In terms of financing a Todai education, while a sizeable number of students are privately funded, a significant number are supported by the Monbugakusho scholarships, funded by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). These scholarships are available to high-achieving students from countries with diplomatic relations with Japan, with the clause that they 'must be willing to learn the Japanese language, interested in Japan and enthusiastic about deepening his/her understanding of Japan after arriving, and capable of engaging in study and research while adapting himself/herself to life in Japan'³¹.

As the oldest and largest national university in Japan, Todai recognizes its position as being the best in Japan, with hopes to build an even better global reputation (Todai 2005; *Monbu Kagaku Kyoiku Tsushin* 2005). In the Charter of the University of Tokyo, enacted in 2003, Todai clearly laid out its mission to become 'a globally preeminent university and one that serves the international community' (TODAI Internationalization Promotion Plan 2005-2008). However, in recent years, it has been observed that Todai is 'losing its uncontested prestige', partly as a result of a Prime Ministerial order in 1993 to employ fewer Todai graduates in government ministries in order to 'diversify the backgrounds of bureaucrats', employers who value more qualitative skills in employees (as opposed to paper qualifications), and Todai graduates who seek careers (notably in finance) other than bureaucracy (Japan Times, 11 August 2009). It is also criticized as the 'venerable institution' that has been slow

³⁰ 'QS Asian University Rankings', <http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings>

³¹ 'Japanese government scholarships', http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koTodaiou/ryugaku/boshu/1304055.htm

to join the ‘go-global shift’ particularly at the undergraduate level, comparing it with younger but clearly more internationalized universities such as Ritsumeikan APU³² (also see ‘University of Tokyo ramps up efforts to internationalize’, Nikkei Report, 25 May 2012).

Faced with challenges to keep up with relevancy and quality, coupled with strong government initiatives to globalize the Japanese brand of higher education, Todai plays a pivotal role in effecting the internationalization spirit in Japanese universities.

With a greater urgency to ‘stand tall amid intense international competition’, and the rapid growth of academic exchanges within Asian countries, Todai is eager to reposition itself in the international higher education scene. Geographically, it recognizes its position as ‘a Japanese university located in Asia’ and that it needs to ‘strengthen ties with Asian countries’ (UT Internationalization Promotion Plan 2005-2008). The urgent call to contextualize and internationalize Todai’s position is sounded by President Hamada, that ‘Todai cannot be sustained without the involvement of the rest of the world’ (Message from the President, Todai). There is thus a sense that Todai has been left out in the race to internationalize.

To alleviate this situation, Todai is exploring its potential to establish overseas branch campuses, improve scholarship programmes for international students and expand its recruiting activities through Todai overseas offices such as the Todai Beijing Office. It is also considering to shift enrollment of undergraduate programmes from April to autumn so as to facilitate the FLY (Freshers’ Leave Year) programme (a special leave period similar to gap year in Western countries). This leave period is to encourage incoming students to delve in more ‘experience-oriented activities’ such as volunteerism, part-time employment and internships in Japan and abroad³³, as a response over worries of the recent trend in students becoming ‘more passive and inward-looking’³⁴.

³² ‘Learning curve: with a push, Japan’s universities go global’, Lucy Birmingham, Time, 17 Sept 2012, <http://world.time.com/2012/09/17/learning-curve-with-a-push-japans-universities-go-global/>

³³ ‘Tokyo U. to introduce gap year’, Daily Yoimuri, 18 November 2012.

³⁴ ‘Encourage critical thinking’, Fumihiko Ito, Yoimuri Shimbun, 18 November 2012.

3.4.1 PEAK and the dilemma of English as the language of internationalization

Selected as part of the Global 30 Project, Todai is tasked to offer more courses in English, such that international students can eventually graduate with English-only classes. While it already has a handful of graduate classes conducted in English, the PEAK (Programmes in English at Komaba), a four year undergraduate liberal arts course introduced in fall 2012, aims to be a ‘novel’ programme that will help make Todai more attractive to international students in the face of intense regional competition. Under PEAK, Japanese language proficiency is not a requirement but students have to take intensive Japanese classes alongside³⁵. It is also a move towards augmenting the number of undergraduate international students, which is disproportionately low compared to graduate students.

However, unlike NUS where English as the main language of instruction fits in with the language being widely spoken in Singapore’s society, incorporating English-only courses in Japan seems to sit uncomfortably for Todai. In an interview on internationalizing Todai, former President Komiyama admitted the limitations of having English-only courses in Todai. He cited the difficulty faced by the teaching faculty [note that in 2009, the number of international faculty is only 357, out of 5,636³⁶] ---that it is ‘tough to teach in English’ and as a result the quality of teaching may be compromised. Also, on the part of the students, they ‘can’t keep up’ (IPMU News, June 2009). Stressing the ‘precarious position’ of even the top-tier Japanese universities, Ishikawa (2009:171) comments that they face ‘enormous challenges’ to remain competitive and relevant in the global context ‘where English is the dominant language of education and research’. The medium of instruction continues to be one of the dilemmas Todai faces in its strive to internationalize, and it remains to be seen how novel programmes such as PEAK can contribute to effective internationalization of Todai.

³⁵ PEAK-- Programmes in English at Komaba, <http://peak.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/intro/index.html>

³⁶ ‘University of Tokyo’, <http://www.topuniversities.com/university/618/university-of-tokyo>

3.4.2 Concluding remarks: Drawing parallels between NUS and Todai's internationalization pathways

In terms of student outcomes, NUS and Todai differ in the key qualities they hope to imbibe in its graduates, and I suggest that this is closely tied to Singapore and Japan's varied definitions of excellence. As discussed above, NUS hopes to nurture creative and entrepreneurial students through its programmes. On the other hand, Todai emphasizes the need to produce students who are resilient and possess 'intellectual toughness'. This quality, often synonymous with the Japanese culture, is encapsulated in the university-wide slogan ('T' for 'toughness' in FOREST 2015, unveiled by Todai's President Junichi Hamada in 2009), showing it to be upheld as a necessary ingredient to succeed as 'internationally competitive university students'³⁷ (Hamada, 2011). Thus in the case of Todai, we see how a globalizing university defines internationalization and its desired outcomes by injecting its own distinctive cultural element.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenge faced by Todai in its drive to internationalize, is to change existing mindsets of students, faculty and staff towards foreigners. Identified by President Hamada as the 'O' in FOREST 2015, standing for 'Openness', he explains that the Todai community needs to adopt an attitude of 'being wide open to people of diverse backgrounds and the world'³⁸ in order to have a 'truly global campus'. This is no easy feat in light of deep-seated fears that have long historical and cultural roots. Nevertheless, supported by major education reforms that increasingly encourage international students to enroll in Japanese universities, Todai's active branding and reinvention of itself as 'a leading university in Asia' will determine its success as a truly internationalized university.

The cases of NUS and Todai illustrate differentiated pathways to internationalization, and how these are closely tied to national goals and perceptions of the wider society. While both universities face unique challenges from within the university and society as a whole, as leading universities in Asia, they are well-positioned to invent new models of internationalization that will undoubtedly impact the global higher

³⁷ Hamada, J. (2011), 'Announcement of Action Scenario: FOREST 2015', Todai, http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/scenario/announcement_e.html.

³⁸ 'Announcement of Action Scenario: FOREST 2015', Junichi Hamada, http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/scenario/announcement_e.html.

education landscape. These dynamic changes will also significantly impact on international students' experiences.

Chapter Four: Research design

In order to investigate international students' identity negotiations and the spatialities of contact zones in internationalizing universities, this research adopts a mixed qualitative approach that draws data from student biographical interviews, participant observation in 'international' events held on respective campuses, discourse analysis of online and published material such as students' blogs, editorials, university promotional literature as well as relevant newspaper articles. In doing so, I hope to heed Collins' (2012: 303) call to 'embrace the particularity of research participants and site(s) of encounter' by being flexible in using a combination of qualitative methods appropriate to my research questions with regards to identity negotiations and spatialities.

4.1 Biographical interviews with international students

The primary mode of enquiry in this study is biographical interviews, one that acknowledges that students are 'pro-active, socially embedded and intentional agents who influence and are influenced by the social worlds in which they are located' (Findlay and Li, 1997:34). This stance is reflected in my interview approach, where key questions serve to guide students to construct their own 'stories', as they critically reflect on their experiences. In line with the aims of the GUIISM project (of which this research is a part of) to better understand international student mobilities in East Asia, including their profiles, decision-making processes, adjustment and future trajectories, the interview schedules (see Appendix 1.1 and 1.2) were designed to capture a wide range of information such as students' socio-economic backgrounds, motivations for studying abroad, choice of university and impressions and experiences in the host city and on campus.

In investigating student mobilities, Collins (2012:297) reminds us that interviews often provide the most direct access to respondents and data. Through these interviews, I hope to obtain 'rich stories' (Lawson 2000:174) as told by students themselves, that I believe can reveal their diverse subject positions, including negotiating the intersections of identities such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, class etc. Incorporating a temporal element in the interview schedule (through a biographical perspective) provides an important glimpse to how students derive their existing identities and how they construct and experience contact zones. However, in

analyzing students' biographical accounts, rather than being concerned with the authenticity of their experiences in the pursuit of 'truth', I recognize that these narratives are important ways of meaning-making for the respondents, and are invaluable in shedding light on how they experience spaces.

4.1.1 Interview matrix and process

Interviews were conducted with a total of 46 international students--21 from NUS and 25 from Todai from September 2010 to June 2011 (see Tables 1 and 2 below for a full list of respondents). Both undergraduates and graduates were recruited for this study, the majority of whom were pursuing full degrees, and a handful of short-term exchange students were included to see if their experiences may be contrasting. The students were recruited through a wide variety of avenues such as visits to annual campus-wide events such as Infusion (NUS) and the Hongo May Festival (Todai) and participation in international student booth activities, snowballing through contacts provided by respondents, online advertisements on Facebook groups, international student groups' message boards and personal contacts. My sample is reasonably diverse in terms of students' countries of origin (that aims to mirror the existing international student ratio in each university). While a significant proportion of respondents originate from neighbouring countries or within the Asian region, I also interviewed a selected number of students from other parts of the world to take into account the diversity of experiences.

One of my aims was to explore complex identity negotiations, and I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interview three students in Todai with migration histories—a French-Chinese female student, an Australian-Taiwanese female student and a Brazilian Japanese male student. Respondents' socio-economic class ranged from lower to upper middle classes. Since NUS and Todai are widely considered to be top-notch universities in Asia, it is not surprising that most of these international students have strong academic ability and had graduated from elite schools in their home countries.

The respondents were enrolled in a mix of science and non-science courses which reflects the existing ratio in the universities, although the numbers towards the sciences were notably more skewed in Todai due to language constraints and a strong

international reputation for scientific fields. They also differed in their year of study and time in the host country, ranging from 3 months to 5 years. I tried to obtain an equal ratio of female and male students, and their ages range from 19 to 35 years old. Due to the individualized nature of the interview schedules that emphasizes students' biographies, I acknowledge that the data obtained is not meant to be representative of all international students' experiences in these universities. Rather, I hope to draw out broad themes from these biographies that inform experiences of studying in NUS and Todai.

Interviews were set up via email a week before the actual meet-up, where a summarized interview schedule and an information sheet and consent were attached. Students were thus able to consider them before the interview. They were conducted at various venues on campus (Kent Ridge campus in NUS, and Hongo, Komaba and Kashiwa campuses in Todai), such as in the cafeterias and coffee joints to keep the atmosphere relaxed and informal so that students feel at ease to share their stories. Interviews usually lasted for about one to two hours. Taking into consideration the languages in which students feel most comfortable with, they were conducted in English, Mandarin, Japanese and in some cases, a mixture of the above. All names quoted in this study are pseudonyms in order to protect respondents' confidentiality.

4.1.2: Table1-Profile of NUS respondents

Note: Status—UG-Undergraduate/ MA-Masters/ PhD- Doctor of Philosophy

No.	Gender	Nationality	Status	Department/ Major	Duration in Singapore	Remarks
1	M	India	PhD	Sociology	1 year	Universities, credentials and their value are of utmost importance to him Feel that learning Sociology in NUS has 'expanded his mind' Stays in *yo:HA Boon Lay (sharing with Indians—arranged by the hostel)
2	F	Malaysia	UG	Sociology	1 year	Resident Assistant in **PGPR Visited Singapore many times, intends to work and settle down there
3	F	Philippines	PhD	Sociology	2 1/2 years	Received a short-term grant from East Asia Institute 4 years ago Met and married an American, who is also a researcher there Mother of a toddler, raising her child in Singapore
4	F	Indonesia	UG	Statistics	2 years	Indonesian-Chinese, visited Singapore at least once a year, is the only foreign country she has been to Attended tuition centre in Medan that specialises in Singapore universities admissions Her mother had studied in Singapore (polytechnic) Aspires to work in major Asian cities, mother urges her not to return for a brighter future elsewhere
5	M	UK	UG	Industrial Design	6 months	Exchange student (1 year) from University of Leeds Grandparents lived in Singapore during colonial years Currently dating a Singaporean-Malay girl, intends to return to Singapore
6	M	Indonesia	UG	English Language	5 years	Indonesian-Chinese, ASEAN scholar been in Singapore since Secondary 3 Followed his eldest sister path, did JC and eventually entered NUS, same hostel as sister Experienced identity changes in his years of education in Singapore
7	M	China	UG	Mathematic s	5 years	Received a scholarship by Chinese government and Singapore's Ministry of Education (MOE) Took a 20 month bridging course conducted by MOE (having skipped 3rd year of high school) Heavily involved in hostel activities, in particular cheerleading Stated preference to be interviewed in English, interviewer observes almost no chinese accent, speaks Singaporean English
8	F	Vietnam	UG	Business Administrat ion	3 years	Actively involved in campus associations such as entrepreneural and humanitarian clubs Travelled to the USA and India as part of these activities Social circle comprises mainly of international students (from various countries)
9	F	Sri Lanka	MA	Geography	1 1/2 years	Lived in Doha during childhood, studied in American school Social circle comprises mainly of international students (from various countries) Feel pressured into finding a marriage partner, being away is a good way to 'escape'
10	M	India	MA	Computer Science	1 year	Was a software developer at IBM India Travelled extensively in Europe as part of work Building useful social networks is important to him, and studying in NUS is a means in which he can do so

No.	Gender	Nationality	Status	Department/ Major	Duration in Singapore	Remarks
11	M	China	MA	Geography	1 year	His parents are fully funding his study in NUS Struggles with comprehending Singaporean English and catching up with classes and discussions in English
12	F	Iran	PhD	Chemical Engineering	3 years	From an elite university in Iran, her husband is also a PhD student in NUS Experienced culture shock in terms of classroom etiquette and respect for teachers Is interested in debates on how Islam is practiced in multi-religious Singapore
13	M	India	MA	Computer Science	1 year	Comes from a family of high achievers and feels the pressure to excel Went on an Erasmus exchange programme to Sweden His sister and brother-in-law are living in Singapore and he visits them often
14	F	South Korea	PhD	South Asian studies	1 year	Did her Masters in Political Science in New Delhi, inspite of worried objections from family Current social circle consists of mostly Indians and other South Asian students
15	F	Vietnam	UG	Psychology	3 years	Tries hard to live within the stipend given by NUS Inspite of thin resources, decided to go on a Work and Travel programme to the USA Convinced that overseas exposure will do her good She hopes to have Permanent Resident status in Singapore
16	M	UK	UG	History	6 months	Exchange student (1 year) from University of Sheffield Went on an internship programme to Beijing before university started, life-changing experience, aspires to be 'cosmopolitan' Currently dating a Singaporean-Chinese
17	M	Malaysia	UG	Sociology	3 years	'Block head' (in charge of hall matters in his block) of Kent Ridge hostel where he resides 'Had been an ASEAN scholar, came to Singapore to do 'A' levels at ACJC 'Will be going to George Washington University for exchange in the following semester 'Appointed to be an 'ambassador' to the Singapore brand of education in an education fair in Kuala Lumpur
18	F	China	PhD	Multimedia	2 years	From Fudan University in Shanghai Changed her specialisation from Mathematics (Fudan) to Multimedia (NUS), as it is more exciting to her and offers scope for contribution Awarded the prestigious NGS scholarship (Graduate School for Integrative Sciences and Engineering)
19	M	Malaysia	UG	Engineering	3 years	Came to Singapore on father's expectations to 'carve out career path because the market is more broad and international' Actively involved in hostel activities, close friends are Malaysian, Indonesian hostel mates Since it's his final year, he is actively job-hunting in Singapore

No.	Gender	Nationality	Status	Department/ Major	Duration in Singapore	Remarks
20	M	China	PhD	Computer Science	2 years	Feels that conducting research in China is more restrictive than in Singapore Finds classes and discussions in English challenging Almost exclusively hangs out with Chinese students, is dating a Chinese
21	F	Malaysia	UG	Sociology	1 year	Had intended to study in Australia but got accepted to NUS first instead Is in the University Scholars Programme Encountered negative stereotypes of Malaysians, and aspire to stand in the gap

*yo:HA- Private hostel operator in Singapore with 4 locations that serve accommodation demand of Singapore's universities

**PGP- Prince George's Park Residences in NUS is a self-contained student housing estate with an apartment-style living arrangement that caters to both undergraduates and graduates

4.1.3: Table2- Profile of Todai respondents Note: Status—AIKOM: Abroad in Komaba (one year exchange programme)

No.	Gender	Nationality	Status	Department/ Major	Duration in Japan	Remarks
1	M	Peru	MA	Civil Engineering	1 year	Received a Monbusho scholarship--he had a professor in Lima who used to study in Todai, who gave him on studying and living in Japan His programme is in English, which consists of mainly international students (few Japanese) Finds it challenging to have Japanese friends due to language and cultural differences, feels that the Latin American population is small compared to others, difficult to break into these circles
2	F	China	PhD	Mechanical Engineering	2 years	Had worked for GE in China before coming to Todai Her main reason for coming to Todai is because her boyfriend, also Chinese, was already studying in Todai--they are planning to tie the knot the following year Appreciated that as a foreigner, and as a girl (in a department dominated by men), she is well taken care of in terms of opportunities (compared to competition in China)
3	F	China	AIKO M	Teaching Chinese as a foreign language	3 months	Exchange student from Nanjing University on the AIKOM programme Her father works for a Japanese MNC in China, and has been on many business trips to Japan, her positive impression of Japan came from her father Regularly meets up with Japanese classmates who are interested in learning Chinese to have language exchange
4	F	Malaysia	PhD	Biomedicin e	3 years	Intended to go to the UK/ USA for her PhD, but missed the application deadlines, the monbusho application for Japan went smoothly Struggles with interactions in her lab due to lack of Japanese language proficiency She is close to a group of Malaysian Phd students (about 30 of them) who came to Japan on the monbusho together with her
5	F	China	PhD	Mechanical Engineering	2 years	On a Chinese government scholarship which stipulates that she has to return to work in China for 2 years Chose Japan as study destination due to physical and cultural proximity Her course is in English, but because she is still not confident in her English ability, she still hangs out with mostly fellow Chinese students
6	F	Malaysia	MA	Chemical System Engineering	1 year	Had worked for 2 years as an engineer in Kuala Lumpur before deciding to further her studies in Japan Had been fascinated by Japanese history (e.g. samurais) and looked forward to visiting historical sites while studying there Her course is in Japanese, she is the only foreigner in her lab and receives preferential treatment in terms of expectations and receiving help from labmates
7	M	UK	PhD	Engineering	3 years	Was an English teacher in parts of Europe and Asia Self-funded, teaches English to Japanese in cafes to earn extra income

No.	Gender	Nationality	Status	Department/ Major	Duration in Japan	Remarks
8	M	Germany	PhD	Engineering	2 years	Had been to Montreal for exchange programme during MA, desired to have more international experiences, Japan is the first East Asian country he has been Social circle consists of Asians, Europeans and Americans, laments difficulty of maintaining friendships with Japanese ('closed society') Feels obliged to be an ambassador of Germany, correcting stereotypes, German identity is strengthened as a result of being abroad
9	F	Madagascar	MA	Sustainability	1 1/2 years	This is her 2nd MA--first one was in Quebec in Finance One reason for coming to Japan is her boyfriend, who was already in Tokyo Institute of Technology (PhD) The sustainability programme interested her because it was marketed as 'international' and was in English
10	F	South Korea	PhD	Mechanical Engineering	2 years	Was in Paris for an exchange programme for a year as an undergraduate, realised the importance of brushing up on English Self-funded, does research assistant work for allowance Is in a religious group (a strand of Buddhism) of Koreans, who gather fortnightly to view teachings online (in Korean)
11	M	Pakistan	MA	Civil Engineering	1 year	Received early education in a public school in London, fondly remembers childhood years there He is residing in an international dormitory and enjoys interaction with other international students As the eldest boy (and also the most educated), he manages family disputes though he is physically in Japan, strong sense of responsibility over family matters
12	M	Colombia	PhD	Molecular Biology	8 months	Had studied English in Australia Thinks that studying in Japan requires one to be very adaptable, because it is very different from Latin countries Had taken Japanese language classes in Colombia--his Japanese teacher in Colombia introduced him to Japanese friends in Tokyo, who he socializes with often
13	F	South Korea	PhD	Comparative Education	5 + 2 years	Due to her father's job (works in a Japanese branch of a Korean MNC), she lived in Japan when she was 10 for 5 years Has close to native proficiency in Japanese She is on the monbusho scholarship, earns some allowance by translating research documents from Korean to Japanese

No.	Gender	Nationality	Status	Department/ Major	Duration in Japan	Remarks
14	M	Taiwan	PhD	Cultural Anthropology	4 years	His family owns a kiln factory in the Taiwanese countryside, and because there were Japanese tourists who visited them, parents allowed him to study in Japan (learn Japanese) He had a negative experience during an internship in a kiln at Tochigi-ken, felt like an 'outsider' and that the locals didn't really want to teach him Participates in discussions organized by Asia21, a international campus group which addresses politically sensitive issues in an open-minded environment
15	M	China	UG	Economics	2 years	He was from a high school in Tianjin that specialized in foreign languages (Japanese was his major but he didn't do well in it) He has a girlfriend who's in Waseda University, they met during preparatory Japanese classes in Kyoto Reflects that his views of China and Japan has changed in the course of time to be one that is more neutral
16	M	Brazilian	UG	International Relations	3 years	He is Brazilian-Japanese (grandparents had migrated to Brazil) Had studied Japanese since he was young at a cultural centre in Sao Paulo Felt that he did not learn much from lessons as it was mainly lectures, top-down style, preferred more discussions Is actively involved in an international aid NGO outside of Todai, and that's where he spends most of his time after school
17	F	China	AIKOM	Journalism and Communication	1 year	Watched a Japanese drama on life in Todai and was inspired to go there AIKOM students went through a specialized international programme, felt very welcomed as a foreigner Having gone back to Nanjing University, she is applying to be a research student at Todai upon graduation
18	F	Australian	MA	Biology	1 year	She is Australian-Taiwanese, parents had migrated to Australia when she was two, returned to Taiwan for middle school, and back to Australia for high school and university Struggles with identity issues, feels that being in Japan is liberating as she doesn't need to conform to either identities, and still feel a sense of respect from Japanese peers 'Is keen and actively seeks to have a boyfriend from Todai or equivalent (elite universities) in her time in Japan
19	F	Taiwan	PhD	Chemical System Engineering	1 1/2 years	She had been to Japan for an academic conference during her MA, left a good impression Her professor in Taiwan is Japanese, encouraged her to do her PhD in Japan Her mother allowed her to study abroad on condition that it is near to Taiwan, worried about her safety as a girl living overseas

No.	Gender	Nationality	Status	Department/ Major	Duration in Japan	Remarks
20	F	Taiwan	PhD	Biotechnology (Bio-energy)	1 year	Wanted to do her PhD in Japan on Bio-energy because economic and climatic conditions between Taiwan and Japan are similar Intends to find a job in Japan upon graduation but have long-term plans to return to Taiwan
21	F	Taiwan	PhD	Comparative Education	5 years	Earliest impression that she had of Japan was through a classic Japanese drama through which she felt showcased positive aspects of Japanese culture Did her MA in Todai before going on to PhD She knew her Taiwanese boyfriend from Todai (who had gone back to Taiwan), intends to marry after her course, go to a third country in USA or Europe
22	M	Taiwan	Research	Life Science	7 months	If he was more proficient in English, he would consider USA or UK as a study destination Found that older Japanese (compared to those in Todai) are friendlier to Taiwanese due to historical reasons, attends Taiwanese-Japanese exchange activities Reflects that his views of China and Japan has changed in the course of time to be one that is more neutral
23	F	French	MA	Civil Engineering	2 years	She is French-Chinese, born and bred in France Had been in Tokyo for a year prior to her enrolment on an internship in a French-Japanese company Felt that her identity as an Asian is challenged since going there
24	M	India	PhD	Aviation and Aerospace	1 1/2 years	Developed an interest in Japan since high school as he felt there were similarities in both countries especially in terms of religion (he is a practicing Buddhist) Was in Japan for an Asia-Pacific conference, and shortly after applied for the Monbusho As he is vegetarian, initially he felt that it eating out was a problem, but quickly found Indian and vegetarian options, and cooks more often
25	M	Indonesia	PhD	Bio-engineering (nano-material)	2 1/2 years	Considered Japan as a good study destination due to his field of study Had applied for Monbusho for 3 times (from high school to MA) before finally getting the scholarship His newly-wed wife is studying in Germany, if either graduates first, will join the other either in Japan or Germany
26	M	China	UG	Economics	2 1/2 years	His parents are artists and were based in Japan for 10 years while he stayed in China with relatives Had a positive impression of Japan (especially that of the countryside) when he visited his parents in Japan as a child Felt discriminated in the basketball club which he attributes to his playing style being different from his Japanese peers

4.2 Discourse analysis of print and online resources

Apart from biographical student interviews, print and online resources also provided rich secondary data that served to supplement interview material by providing alternative perspectives and voices. One notable example is the NUSpaper³⁹, an independent online student publication that aims to project student voices on campus matters. At a time when tensions between local and Mainland Chinese students were rife, it conducted a poll among NUS students on whether they were integrating well with locals on campus. The result showed that while the survey indicated strong negative opinions, interviews with students revealed a more accepting, forward-looking attitude to bridge differences. Online student blogs and reflections⁴⁰ of their study abroad experiences in NUS also provided a more candid, if not reflective perspective.

Print material such as 'J-Life'⁴¹ (published to promote Japanese universities to international students), a free magazine in English containing bite-size information about universities, courses in English, scholarship opportunities, interviews with university officials and testimonials from other international students on their experiences in Japan also provided a valuable glimpse the dynamic changes in how Japanese universities like Todai are marketing themselves on a global arena.

Collins and Huang (2012) have stressed the importance of both real and cyber spaces as productive sites for migration research. These sites are especially pertinent in my research with international students, who are undoubtedly tech-savvy and plugged into various forms of social media. Concerned with the contact zones of the study abroad experience, I look into Facebook posts and Singapore-based online social

³⁹ The NUSpaper, <http://nuspaper.net/index.htm>

⁴⁰ Paresh Mistry (2005), 'Making the most of international experiences to Singapore and England', <https://uwaterloo.ca/engineering/sites/ca.engineering/files/uploads/files/GENE-303-Paresh-Mistry-NUS-W04.pdf>

Hong Choon Chiet (2007), 'A walk to remember', <http://www.nus.edu.sg/campuslife/cl-story07.php>

⁴¹ J-Life also runs a website that boasts a search engine and comprehensive information on various schools, disciplines and work opportunities for international students upon graduation. At the time of this research, the website is still in construction, and some columns, such as 'Study in Japan Q and A' were available only in Japanese language. http://www.alc-jlife.com/v3_index_en

commentary forums like Temasek Review for episodic moments of ‘contact encounters’ in cyberspace.

4.3 Participant observation in campus ‘international’ events

I participated in the annual NUS In-Fusion international fair in February 2010 and the Hongo May Festival in Todai in May 2011 (see Appendix 1.8 and 1.9 for more details of these events). These university-wide events were helpful in terms of establishing contact with international student organizations, recruiting and building rapport with respondents for my research. Lending a hand at the Iranian booth at In-Fusion (while having my name written in Persian by an Iranian graduate student at NUS), and serving up plates of Taiwanese-style *yakisoba* (fried noodles) at the Taiwanese student booth in Todai, I also had the valuable opportunity of gathering rich data from observing students’ interactions with both local and other international students. As key events in both universities, the ways that campus spaces are utilized in these events also reflect their stance on internationalization and international students.

4.4 Positionality and reflexivity

In terms of my positionality as a Singaporean graduate student from NUS, talking to international students in NUS about their experiences with and attitudes towards local students can pose some sensitivities, and may impede them from sharing negative views. To alleviate this concern, I drew upon the shared experiences and challenges of studying abroad during my undergraduate years to establish rapport and a common understanding that I remain neutral to what they share.

Upon sharing about the experience of living in Japan while teaching English, the ‘ice’ was immediately broken with my Todai respondents. While this may be a strength, in terms of the ability to establish rapport and empathize with some experiences and challenges shared by respondents, I am also aware of the danger of leading students to articulate certain experiences that are reflective of my own stories, while erasing those that are less clear or obvious to me (Elmhirst 2012: 278). Bearing this in mind, I strive to heed Elmhirst’s (2012) call to adopt a more reflexive approach in my research on international students by recognizing that the researcher’s emotions is also an important component of positionality. Doing so would help to surface some ‘omissions and strategic erasures’ in the research process. Having outlined the

methods employed in this research, the following section will delve into an analysis of my key findings.

Chapter Five: (Re) constructing identities in the contact zone

5.1 Introduction

The politics of identity, citizenship and nationhood continue to receive considerable attention within socio-cultural geography as a result of globalization and increased people flows. Scholars have asserted the imperative need to move beyond essentialist views of identities as fixed, towards understanding them as multiple and intersecting with other markers such as ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality (Keith and Pile 1993, Jackson and Holbrook 1995, Giampapa 2004, Valentine 2007). Building on this premise, this chapter draws on international students' experiences in NUS and Today to examine the plurality of complex identity negotiation processes and outcomes at contact encounters. I consider some ways in which students perform their ethnic, cultural, national and regional identities as a result of encountering friction in the contact zone, and relate these to a myriad of resistance/coping strategies rooted in their everyday transnational lives.

Being in the contact zone constantly exposes students to politics both at home and abroad and at the same time, heightens their awareness of being part of the global space of flows. They are compelled to reflect, question and actively construct their identity discourses by searching for 'new points of orientation' (Paasi 2003:475), 'departures' and 'sharedness' (Fenton and May 2003), which often leads to efforts at strengthening old boundaries and creating new ones (Paasi 2003:475). Even at contact zones (where difference is emphasized), I show that through creative ways, students' identity movements are not always based on differences as it may be strategically beneficial to stress similarities.

It is timely to investigate mobile youths' identity negotiations at contact zones because identity discourses are becoming a 'personal self-fashioning project'. The cosmopolitan, well-travelled respondents in this study have more often than not shown that they shape their lives and environments through personal identities rather than through categorizations such as nationality, class, occupation or home region (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). The role of temporality is also an important factor as identity constructions are far from static but often change with the length of time away from home and in the host country.

Substantiating these insights with empirical data, this chapter hopes to contribute to a more grounded understanding of identity politics and the resultant negotiations in contact encounters within internationalizing universities, particularly in the context of East Asian universities.

5.2 Contact zones challenge international students' notions of nationhood, ethnicity and belonging

The 'joys and pains' experienced in the contact zones often result from students who, many for the first time, 'see the world described with him or her in it' (Pratt 1991). According to Pratt (1991: 39), the 'pains' may derive from hearing about how their country or culture is objectified, seeing their roots traced back to 'legacies of glory and shame', and/or coming face-to-face with ignorance, incomprehension and occasional hostility of others in the contact zones, while the 'joys of the contact zone' come from the 'exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understandings, and new wisdom'. These mixed feelings were experienced by NUS Vietnamese undergraduate Thi, who had been confronted with negative views of Vietnam and communism by her NUS friends. Being situated in the contact zone forced her to critically reflect upon the source of her Vietnamese identity,

'Being to NUS makes me question about more things, things I haven't been taught at home...(there) you're taught that Vietnam is a great country... We have a long history of victory and being communist is something we should be proud of...I have no doubt of being a communist because my grandparents were communists. They fought hard for the independence of the country. My granddad lost one eye because of fighting in the war...I am very proud of being their grandchild' (Thi, Vietnam, NUS, undergraduate)

While realizing the overt influence of a pro-communist education on her national identity formation, she also draws on familial ties such as her grandparents' legacy as the foundation of her Vietnamese identity. It is no wonder that she was shocked when she knew of the negative constructions of Vietnam and communism through interacting with her friends in NUS.

'(Now) I have a broader perspective of how people perceive communism...(and) it's really not all good...so I did some research. It doesn't

mean that I change my mind about the past...it's to understand what happened that made people think like that' (Thi, Vietnam, NUS, undergraduate)

The incongruence Thi experienced in the contact zone set forth the process of reconstructing her Vietnamese identity, as she actively takes ownership of her national identity by finding out more about Vietnam's history, in a personal project that attempts to piece together a coherent self from her past and present experiences.

While Thi had to negotiate opposing views of Vietnam and communism at the contact zone, Tom, a Todai PhD student from Germany describes how stark differences in relatively culturally homogeneous Japan led him to appreciate cultural diversity and provided the opportunity to define his own cultural identity (for Tom, it is a more loosely defined 'Western' identity) through the observed differences. He reflected upon a 'Western' culture in the contact zone of an Asian (Japanese) culture that seemed so dissimilar to his own, sharing that the cultural differences he encountered in Japan can at times be exhilarating and 'so cool', while at other times, unacceptable because it is 'so strange',

'There's always a positive and negative side to everything I've encountered here...but this is part of getting to know a country...I understand Japan better now, how different it is to mine, I also see what defines my own country...'

These differences led to an inward reflection of his cultural identity,

'What is Western culture? When I grew up I didn't really define what I do, or say that 'this is Western culture'. We do it because...of what we are. But being here, the differences are so stark, I have to think about them' (Tom, Germany, Todai, PhD)

Thus while differences are amplified in the contact zone, it also results in the reflection of one's identity, that prompted Tom to define the taken-for-granted notion of 'Western' culture and what it means to him. On the other hand, Hana, a South Korean PhD student in NUS, prefers to employ a more inclusive stance in the contact zone, by 'seeing Korea through the eyes of others'. Her interactions with classmates from various nationalities caused her to appreciate intercultural similarities, thereby strengthening her existing Korean identity,

‘I see Korea through people from other countries, I think that’s reflection. It gives me a stronger sense of (national) identity. Like I can see Korea through you, through Singaporeans and Malaysians, through how they talk about Korea. I am more affiliated to my Korean identity because of that’ (Hana, NUS, South Korea, PhD)

In the above accounts, we see how sites of contact in the study abroad experience can become a conducive, at times emotional space where new information about students’ home countries is encountered and processed. However, these ‘new understandings’ of nationhood do not necessarily override existing emotional ties to one’s home and country. This is so for Hong, a Chinese graduate student who has studied in Todai for four years. She describes her ‘idealization (of nation) from a distance’ as one that comprises of nostalgic feelings of home. However, she stresses that these emotional attachments are independent of reality on the ground. She aptly quotes the late US-based Chinese author Zhang Ai Ling, who has written prolifically on the American Chinese diaspora, to explain this emotional complexity,

‘Zhang Ai Ling has written about how the overseas Chinese see their country from a distance, and miss it (from afar)...most people say these are fortunate, blessed people. If you are in China, you may have many grouses against the government, but if you’re overseas, you don’t experience it, so what’s in your mind is just the feeling of home...therefore people abroad have stronger patriotic feelings...I think I’m like that...it doesn’t mean that I think China is good, just that China is in my roots’ (Hong, China, Todai, PhD)

Being in Japan has affirmed not only her Chinese identity, but more importantly, differentiating herself from other overseas Chinese, she displays a strong northeastern regional sense of identity.

‘I’m from northeastern China, it’s also known as the ‘rooster head’, people from that region feel more strongly about their roots...because the climate is very cold, the feeling of roots is very strong in their hearts, external factors cannot take it away’ (Hong, China, Todai, PhD)

These strong emotions and identification with ‘roots’ and ‘homeland’ echoes research on migration diasporas, where ‘because of geographical existence away from home,

coupled with an idealized longing for home’, migrants often have ‘imagined’ or ‘mythical’ homes (Rios and Adiv 2010:6). However, Hong is conscious of these imaginations and is rational in articulations of her identity. Identity negotiations in contact zones are thus often complicated by the relative openness of young peoples’ identities and their multiple sources, challenging pre-conceived ideas of nation and emotional attachments to home.

In light of contemporary youth mobilities, international students’ identity negotiations are further shaped by complex personal biographies, migration histories and ethno-cultural connections, especially for the Asian majority of international students in NUS and Todai. Indeed, Stuart Hall (1996: 225) reminds us that ‘far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, identities are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power’. He asserts that identities are often dynamic and complex, situated in both the ‘now’ and ‘then’. Reflecting this, Caroline, an Australian-Taiwanese graduate student in Todai shares about her struggles of renegotiating her ‘multiple, yet often fractured’ identities (Vertovec 1999),

‘Before coming to Japan, I felt strongly that I’m proud of being Taiwanese...when I met other Chinese, particularly those from Mainland, I might have some conflict with them...but having lived in Australia for 6 to 7 years, my identity as an Australian (versus Taiwanese) is slowly forming...so I feel very complex and ask myself what am I...I feel confused sometimes’ (Caroline, Taiwan, Todai, MA)

Since migrating with her parents to Australia when she was six, and being schooled in both Sydney and Taiwan at various stages of her childhood, Caroline laments about the difficulty of fitting in into either country. As a result she often feels out of place. Interestingly, Japan, a non-English speaking Asian country, provided the perfect environment where she feels most comfortable in.

‘In Sydney, I had inferiority complex because I wasn’t good at English...in Taiwan, they think my Taiwanese is strange...I’m used to mixing two languages in my conversations, but once I inject some English terms, they (Taiwanese) think I’m showing off...I think it’s very taxing. Coming here (to Japan) as an Asian, it felt like being back to my own territory...I actually feel that they (the Japanese) respect me because I know both Japanese and

Mandarin...I feel I've got more room to stretch and develop' (Caroline, Taiwan, Todai, MA)

Caroline's constant seeking illustrates that identity formation for young adults is a continuous process of finding one's place in the world. Her migration history, while an asset in some ways as she describes later, also bars her from full acceptance into either society. Hence, ironically, Tokyo is her 'ideal' place in that compared to Australia, it is 'Asian' territory and provides the solace she needs where she is happy to be known just as a 'gaijin' (Japanese for 'foreigner'), shaking off the excesses and demands of her Australian/ Taiwanese background.

Like Caroline, Hailey, a French student of Chinese descent studying in Todai, was also compelled to rethink her identity due to encounters with Japanese students. They naturally assumed that she is Japanese and treated her like one.

'It is my first time living abroad, especially in a country where I didn't speak the language and everyone thought I did...it was then that I had to question my identity' (Hailey, France, Todai, MA)

Though Hailey was born and grew up in France, her petite frame and oriental features made her fit in easily among local Japanese students. However, it is also this assumption that caused frequent misunderstandings in her contact with locals, resulting in her having to, for the first time, articulate and explain her complex background. Interestingly, Hailey also heads the European Students Association in Todai⁴² at the time of this research, putting an Asian face to a quintessentially European representation. In Hailey's case, we see how negotiating ethnic, national and regional identities in Asian universities are further complicated by Asian global diaspora.

Like Caroline, Hailey was also confronted with painful questions of her identity at the contact zone of her study experience in Japan, a reminder that 'renegotiations of ethnic identities' can be an emotionally tumultuous process (Kong 1999). She shares about her identity struggles as a second-generation French-Chinese immigrant,

⁴² Todai European Students Association , <http://www.todaistudents.eu/>

especially during her teenage years (how she had refused to speak Mandarin at home as an act of resistance to her parents' coercion to learn it). However, she had never really felt out of place, nor compelled to give deeper thought to her immigrant identity, till she came to Japan.

'In France, I never felt like a stranger. That's one thing I realized after I came to Japan. In the groups I was in, I really never felt like a stranger, never, though there were some jokes about Asians eating rice or noodles, I was okay with it. But when I was in Japan and there was talk about people not being integrated, I was like 'what the hell is that'...I felt troubled inside' (Hailey, France, Todai, MA)

Being in Japan provided the trigger to come to terms with the same identity issues she had struggled with while in France.

'That was the time I asked myself, 'am I really French?' I thought, 'yes, of course'. I remember in junior high, my close friends asked me if I felt more French or Chinese, at that time I couldn't answer them but I kept the question somewhere in my mind. When I came to Japan, it just resurfaced. I'm not sure of the answer yet' (Hailey, France, Todai, MA)

Here, we see that mobile youths' identity constructions are never static---they are malleable throughout their life course, such as through youth transitions and new mobility experiences. Contact zone encounters in the study abroad experience act as triggers that intersect space with particular points in students' life histories, conflating points in their past and present into the identity negotiation process. For Hailey, the nagging question of her identity and 'roots' compelled her to seek out opportunities to study in Asia, eventually settling for Todai due to a prior internship experience in Tokyo and geographical proximity to China (which she articulates as her father's 'homeland').

'I wanted to go to China, learn Chinese really hard so that I can maybe kind of find my roots **in tears**, so I can say now I know everything, and that's what I am. That was a big issue in my high school years actually' (Hailey, France, Todai, MA)

Though Japan as a study destination held different meanings for Caroline and Hailey, their familial migration histories continue to shape the ways in which they negotiate their complex identities in their study abroad experience. This is also true for Miguel, a third generation Brazilian-Japanese undergraduate student in Todai. Reflecting on whether he felt a special connection to Japan, he articulated his mixed feelings about ‘not feeling entirely Japanese’,

‘I never felt like because I’m Japanese, I’ve to be treated in a special way... like “he’s Japanese, he’s different, he must be treated differently”...because I’m not entirely Japanese’ (Miguel, Brazil, Todai, undergraduate)

However, his Japanese classmates and teachers in Todai affirmed that they felt culturally closer to him (compared to other international students), implying that there exists a scale of ‘proximity’ to Japanese culture among international students from other countries, depending on their country of origin. This echoes Liang Morita’s (2012) recent findings at Nagoya University, where she investigated the ‘myth’ of internationalisation in Japanese universities---that having more international students on campus will automatically produce a more internationalized institutional culture. Her research on discrimination in the Japanese campus illuminated that ‘there is a hint of hierarchy or distinction between various categories of foreigners’ (2012: 10). Clearly, in Miguel’s case, his Japanese ancestry has put him on a higher notch in the foreigner continuum, though he did not necessarily reciprocate the feelings,

‘I asked some Japanese friends what they think (about Japanese Brazilians), and they told me, “we feel that you’re closer to us”...it was in a class where a teacher discussed about identities, and my case was highlighted...he says that he feels that I’m closer to him! It’s strange because I don’t feel like that’ (Miguel, Brazil, Todai, undergraduate)

Instead, Miguel explains that his sense of belonging to Japan is attributed to having a fixed routine and ‘home’ to belong to in a sea of mobilities. Japan, thus becomes somewhat like an anchor,

‘I feel that Japan is my home, in a sense that if I go abroad...I went to England for two weeks... I kind of missed Japan. When I came back, I realized that I was happy to be in Japan. But I don’t think it has to do with identities, more

like I have a home in Japan now, I have a stable life, more about that, less about connections and identities' (Miguel, Brazil, Today, undergraduate)

Miguel's experience highlights the fact that in theorizing about contact zones and identity negotiations, there is a danger of overemphasizing the value placed on historical and cultural connections, while overlooking mobile youths' looser and more fluid constructions of places and identities. It also suggests that with increased mobility, identities become less attached to national boundaries, as shown in Jenny's (a Malaysian student in NUS) conclusion that the search is still on for a place to 'belong' to,

'I don't feel that I fully belong in Malaysia, nor do I feel that I fully belong in Singapore, it's just the process of finding where I feel comfortable in' (Jenny, Malaysia, NUS, undergraduate)

The above suggests that contact zones are fertile grounds that demand international students to critically reflect upon their multiple identities. They do so by engaging in identity (re)negotiations that take into account past influences and present mobility experiences. However, due to the political workings of the contact zone, this process is seldom smooth, and students continue to learn how to make sense of themselves and others as they traverse these spaces.

5.3 Confronting national politics in the contact zone

The globalizing university campus represents a politically-charged space where international students are made aware of, and learn to negotiate existing power relations with regards to their home countries. For Wenjie, a Malaysian Chinese undergraduate student in NUS, as he traverses between Singapore and Malaysia in the course of his study, he became more aware of the demarcating boundaries drawn in each country, which in turn determines how he picks and chooses the identities he takes on. As a Malaysian Chinese, he questions his identity as an ethnic Chinese in light of the sensitive racial politics in Singapore and Malaysia. The fluid characteristics of these identities, and the play of political power, are exemplified in Wenjie's dilemmatic response,

‘Back in Malaysia I’m more Chinese than Malaysian, over here I’m more Malaysian than Chinese because there are boundaries being drawn...I think there’s always the “other”’ (Wenjie, Malaysia, NUS, undergraduate)

When asked to quote an experience in NUS when he felt marginalized, he revealed that in his recent application for an overseas exchange programme, though he had better results than his Singaporean classmate, he lost the opportunity to him. Despite being unhappy with the outcome, he responded with being resigned and ‘used to it’, because ‘I’ve lived in *that* kind of environment’, drawing parallels to the Bumiputra policy in Malaysia,

‘We know there’s a quota system, we’ve come to accept it, we are not happy but learnt to live with it and get by, survive in that kind of environment’ (Wenjie, NUS, Malaysia, undergraduate)

In spite of these realizations of boundaries drawn by racial and national politics, he is optimistic that studying in Singapore, and being in the contact zone has helped him to be more adaptive to the harsh realities of surviving in an international environment,

‘All the boundaries drawn, inside and outside, as Malaysians (Chinese)--we’re used to being outside anyway, we’re always the other...but I think it actually helped me to adapt to Singapore...not just Singapore but in an international community or just anywhere...I’ve gotten used to it, be more accepting, don’t get too caught up, learn to live on despite the circumstances’ (Wenjie, Malaysia, NUS, undergraduate)

On the other hand, encountering the politics of the contact zone did not sit well for Mihika, a Sri Lankan graduate student in NUS. She was appalled by the deep-seated divide of Sinhala-Tamil relations that she experienced even on the NUS campus.

‘During orientation, I boarded the shuttle bus and some South Indian students smiled (at me)... so I said ‘hi’ and thought at least someone was friendly enough... they asked me ‘are you from India Chennai?’ and I said ‘no, I’m from Sri Lanka’...they asked again ‘so you’re Tamil?’, I said ‘no I’m Sinhala’. When I turned around, all of them were gone! That was the biggest cultural shock for me because I had taken for granted my Sinhala identity, and suddenly I realized I am a minority in a Tamil majority country. It has its

impacts (here) so I think I became more nervous about my identity when interacting with South Indians here' (Mihika, Sri Lanka, NUS, MA)

Here, the contact zone is not only limited local-international interactions, but also include encounters among international students whose countries have histories of conflicts. In Mihika's case, the Sinhala-Tamil conflict has been transplanted from Sri Lanka to the Singapore context. She becomes more sensitive to the space she inhabits, avoiding unnecessary contact with Tamil-speaking Indians when she can,

'If I'm lost, I'd ask directions from a Chinese (as opposed to Indians). I've had bad experiences (with Indians)... (they would say) '*oh* you're from Sri Lanka' **sneering tone**... People even think I am lying because I look very South Indian, even in Sri Lanka, people sometimes mistake me, but this is one place where I really felt it and it has worked to the negative, it was a huge shock for me'. (Mihika, Sri Lanka, NUS, MA)

In Mihika's case, interacting with South Indians in Singapore can be a fearful encounter that she would rather avoid. While she struggles with asserting her Sinhala-Sri Lankan identity in Singapore, Wei Zheng, a mainland Chinese student in Todai prefers to capitalize on the "oriental" physical similarities and masquerade as a Japanese, in order to avoid a potential direct confrontation. He is aware that his identity as a Chinese student in Todai is situated in the context of long-standing Sino-Japanese tensions.

'During orientation, some politically-affiliated student associations approached and invited me to join them...they passionately talked about Sino-Japanese relations...like the Nanking Massacre...of course those were the extremists... I even received a brochure on this...though I wasn't angry, at that moment, I felt that if I told them I'm Chinese maybe it's not that wise, so I just politely walked away' (Wei Zheng, China, Todai, undergraduate)

From Mihika and Wei Zheng's experiences in NUS and Todai, it is evident that within the globalising Asian university context, contact zones reflect ongoing socio-political tensions that force students to rethink about their home countries. Ethno-physical similarities among Asian students become a double-edged sword in that for Wei Zheng, he effectively uses it to subvert a potential conflict situation, while

Mihika struggles with asserting her Sinhala-Sri Lankan identity in a Tamil majority Singapore. However, in the midst of emotional identity struggles in the contact zone, many respondents in this research seize the opportunity in an international campus environment to promote a positive image of their countries from 'ground up'.

5.4 Being an 'ambassador' in the contact zone

At the contact zone where differences are amplified, international students often encounter stereotypes and prejudices of their countries, which some seek to actively correct and 'educate'. Thi recognizes that as an Vietnamese student in Singapore, she plays an important role in changing her friends' negative perceptions of Vietnam, which to her, are often misrepresented. In her three years in NUS, Thi has shared with her Singaporean and exchange student friends about the positive aspects of Vietnam,

'My Vietnamese friends and I try to make friends with people from all over...we try to show them how the Vietnamese are; that they are friendly, nice and gentle. They welcome you to their country. In fact, many of our friends are Singaporeans or exchange students; and they are very eager to visit Vietnam and explore the country'. I have two UK exchange friends who just came back from Vietnam because of our recommendation. They said they love Vietnam and that will definitely go back. That's a good reward for us' (Thi, Vietnam, NUS, undergraduate)

With regards to how communism is often viewed in a negative light, Thi explains,

'People have to know that a communist country is not a bad thing. They think that the communists will kill you if you don't obey them but I said "No, I have never heard that" because I grew up in that country and everything is good...unless you go against the government...even in Singapore, if you do that, you'd be blacklisted' (Thi, Vietnam, NUS, undergraduate)

Similarly for Tom, his stint in Todai has given him a stronger sense of national identity, because of the need to be an ambassador of where he is from. Like Thi, he recognizes that it is his personal responsibility to correct national stereotypes, and to share the notion of a more holistic German identity,

‘(Coming here) I still see myself as a German...because many people here in Japan ask me ‘how’s life in Germany? How is it different from Japan? I feel like I’m kind of an ambassador, a representative of my country, and this also puts me in a position of responsibility. If I behave unbecomingly people would say, ‘oh this must be normal for Germans’. What the Japanese usually think of about Germany is just beer and sausages which is perhaps not the best reputation. Of course we have those, but there’s still much more that makes German identity’ (Tom, Germany, Todai, PhD)

Charlene, a Malaysian student in Todai, is also more conscious of the way she carries herself, as she feels that she reflects the image of Malaysians in her Japanese-dominated laboratory,

‘I feel more Malaysian here...because I’m the only foreign student in my lab, I’m very conscious of the fact that I’m representing Malaysia. It sounds abit exaggerated...but I do feel like that, so in terms of work I try to give my best, like during presentations, every little bit like spelling and all I try to be perfect because I want them to think ‘so this is what Malaysians are like’. In meetings, I try to be punctual...to follow all the rules’ (Charlene, Malaysia, Todai, MA)

She makes conscious efforts to be faultless in her work, so that they may have a good impression of Malaysia(ns), and for her, like Thi, it is a worthy cause,

‘It is stressful but I find it worthwhile. I feel that my labmates are more interested in Malaysia and I feel good about that...recently I even tried to introduce Malaysian food to them’ (Charlene, Malaysia, Todai, MA)

While the experience of studying abroad offers a pair of ‘reflective lenses’ to re-encounter one’s country, it can also evoke contradictory feelings and confusion. Even then, students such as Thi, Tom and Charlene actively take it upon themselves to be ‘ambassadors’ of their countries, with Thi correcting negative opinions of Vietnam through friendships with other international students, Charlene striving to embody the ideal ‘Malaysian’ and Tom desiring to paint a more holistic picture of German culture. Through these examples, we see how notions of national identity comes to the forefront of identity negotiations of international students, and how in the contact zones, they can become effective brokers of cosmopolitanism.

Interestingly, being an ‘ambassador’ is not limited to promoting one’s home country. For Wenjie, a Malaysian undergraduate in NUS, studying in Singapore has been such a transformative experience, that he agreed to become an ambassador for the Singapore brand of education in Malaysia, as something he feels strongly for, thereby embodying the education link between Singapore and Malaysia.

‘(Studying in Singapore) is a life-changing experience and I’ve benefitted a lot; I’ve grown so much as a person, intellectual and maturity level...it’s not a decision I regret. It’s something that I will encourage others to take up. In fact, the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) roped me in to promote the ASEAN scholarship...I returned to Malaysia to share my experiences and promote Singapore education at an education fair, it is something that I believe in. They even featured me on the Malaysian Reader’s Digest. I genuinely believe that a Singapore education is a positive one and we Malaysians should take advantage of’ (Wenjie, Malaysia, NUS, undergraduate)

In the course of promoting one’s country in the globalizing university contact zones, being away from home also prompts students to inwardly reflect upon their ties with home and form various geographies of return.

5.5 A trigger to consider obligations to one’s family and country

The struggles and challenges encountered in the contact zone act as a catalyst for students to formulate narratives of return, which in turn sheds light on the contents of their national identities. For Abbas, a PhD student from Pakistan, studying in Todai has changed his local and global imaginaries, opening his eyes to how others view Pakistan, and this motivates him to return to contribute to his country,

‘I have a stronger motivation to return and help my country because the what I’ve learnt here show that my country is going down economically, and in terms of security...everything...but I don’t want to let that happen. Therefore I have a strong motivation to return and work really hard...I heard a lecture this weekend (in Todai), given by a Nobel Laureate, and he said he has no hope for Pakistan for the next thirty years, that it’s going to be even worse than Somalia, I don’t want that to happen’ (Abbas, Pakistan, Todai , PhD)

As a student in Todai, he has the opportunity to be exposed to information about his country which otherwise could be hard to access if he were in Pakistan. Having

acquired the ‘facts’ about Pakistan from abroad, Abbas is adamant about his responsibility to improve the situation in his own capacity, comparing himself to others who have shirked this calling.

‘I don’t want to be like those who have migrated to other countries just because they think our country is going down economically’ (Abbas, Pakistan, *Today*, PhD)

However, even with such a strong conviction, Abbas’ narrative of return is constantly dilemmatic, with his parents’ hopes for him to lead a better life abroad.

‘I want to go back but my parents are concerned...they want me to live abroad permanently...saying that it’s going to help me economically, a better future for me and my family...but I’ve always wanted to serve my country. I was born there, raised there, had my education there...I am a part of my country; how can I leave my country like that? I have to be responsible and return. I hope I really do it’ (Abbas, Pakistan, *Today*, PhD)

Here, we see that for Abbas, the desire to contribute to his country directly affects his future mobility trajectory. On the other hand, Kim, a NUS Vietnamese student who majors in Psychology, actively sought out an opportunity to contribute to social science research in Vietnam through an NUS alumni-led group based in Singapore, *Vietnam 2020*, seeing it as a way to fulfil her obligation to her country,

‘We formed a group to discuss how we can bring social sciences into Vietnam, because those of us who have graduated from NUS realized a greater need for graduates of Social sciences to return to Vietnam. The development in Vietnam is changing very rapidly whereas the Social Science infrastructure is absent. There are a great number of things that we can do in Vietnam. It is now recognizing the need to pull back the talent to do Social sciences...so we try to bridge the demand there and supply here...I’ve always wanted to do service for myself and for my country, so I think this is a good chance to do it’ (Kim, NUS, Vietnam, undergraduate)

Bridging Singapore and Vietnam, Kim shares similar sentiments with Abbas about the importance and desire to contribute to the academic research (and thus overall well-

being) in her country. However, unlike Abbas, this calling need not bind her physically to Vietnam.

‘I love my country, that’s something everybody would say, but while you can love someone, you don’t have to marry them. Even if you marry someone else you can still say you love the other person. I rationalize that I love my country, and I want to contribute to my country but that is not the place where I will shape my education, my future, my life, it must be somewhere else’ (Kim, Vietnam, NUS, undergraduate)

Her artful response attests to the fluid nature of mobile youth geographies.

Apart from desires to contribute to home countries upon acquiring an education abroad, students’ identities are also constantly bound up with familial obligations that continue to ‘follow’ them in their study abroad experience. This shows that, far from the dominant footloose, strategic and self-seeking discourses that depict students’ motivations for studying abroad, the experience of the contact zone is often influenced by their continuing roles in the family. Though Wenjie enjoys campus life in NUS, being in Singapore also meant bearing the guilt and responsibility for his younger sister’s poor academic performance.

‘My sister’s not doing well in school. I feel bad about it because I am not there...I wasn’t there to encourage her...as the elder brother, I’ve always been teaching and helping her with schoolwork. The year she entered secondary school, I came here to Singapore, so it was transition for me and her too. She didn’t adapt well and has failed several subjects already...this would be my biggest trade-off for coming here...because of my responsibility to my sister... I missed out on her, especially when she went through puberty, adolescent, the teenage years; I missed out on all that while I was living my life here. So there is always this regret’ (Wenjie, Malaysia, NUS, undergraduate)

The sense of having ‘lost time and space’ due to not being able to fulfil his responsibility to his sister makes Wenjie more aware of the geographical tensions of ‘being here and not there’ for his family in Malaysia. Familial ties are thus often tied

to ideas of national belonging, as Wenjie explains through the ‘exodus’ of local students from the hostel during weekends,

‘There has always been this tension in me of being in Singapore versus being in Malaysia...my parents are already past their fifties...over here (in NUS), there is no family life. My family is in Malaysia. Even in the hostel, the Singaporeans go back and have family dinners every week...whereas for Malaysians, our families are not here ... (for me) the biggest trade-off of studying here would have been family life’ (Wenjie, Malaysia, NUS, undergraduate)

At the contact zones of the study abroad experience, students become aware of their precarious position of straddling the divide between home and host countries. This compels them to (re)define and articulate ties to nation and family as a function of their own mobility projects. This process, far from being static, is subjected to changes along the course of time.

5.6 Contact zones, identities and the experience of time

Apart from spatial contexts, time plays an equally important role in shaping students’ ideas of nation and national identities in the contact zone, taking into account changing life courses and young people’s evolving selves. Responding to the emotionally-charged political debates surrounding Sino-Japanese relations, Wei Zheng, a Chinese undergraduate student in Todai, shares about his changing stance over time. When confronted by Japanese classmates on his views about the Tiananmen Square protests⁴³, Wei Zheng was initially defensive and refused to partake in any discussions regarding the event.

‘When I first left China, I felt very patriotic... but last year, it was the 20th anniversary of the Tianamen 6/4 incident, many Chinese around the world were holding memorial activities to commemorate it...at that time, my Japanese friends came to talk to me about this, but I refused to say anything, when I really had to, I’d just say ‘every generation has its standards, the

⁴³ The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, also known as the June fourth incident in Mandarin, refers to widespread student-led anti-government demonstrations in Beijing that was forcibly suppressed by the military. It became a symbolic human rights violation event in the international media.

government must have its reasons to do such things, those that we don't know of...' (Wei Zheng, China, Todai, undergraduate)

While he was evasive in this particular contact experience where he felt threatened, Wei Zheng later recounts how his own views of China have gradually changed in the past year due to various experiences in Japan. He is now more open to such sensitive political discussions with his Japanese counterparts.

To visualise this dynamism, Jeremy, an NUS Indonesian-Chinese undergraduate describes his national identifications as lying on a (changing) point of a spectrum between Indonesia and Singapore. He was an ASEAN scholar⁴⁴ who had completed his junior college education in Singapore before entering NUS. He consciously reflects on the concept of national identity during the years of education in Singapore, and concludes that through the passing of time, it has changed. This sheds light on the role of time in influencing contact zone encounters and therefore identity negotiations.

'Four years ago, I drew a line, with Indonesia and Singapore on each end. I drew a point, of where I stand at that point in time...when I drew that point, it was nearer to Indonesia. Now if I were to draw the same diagram, it will be more towards Singapore'

He explains this shift,

'Because now my life is Singapore (and) I've a lot to do here, first of all, I've to study here. Many of my activities and most of my friends are here. But back then (during junior college years), I didn't feel that attachment because I didn't really know what to do and didn't have a lot of friends. But it's different now. So if I really have to go back (to Indonesia), I'd lose a lot of things' (Jeremy, Indonesia, NUS undergraduate)

The notion of belonging is fluid and dynamic for Jeremy, and is closely tied to place, activities and social circle of friends. There is also the desire to settle and invest emotionally in a particular locality. Though acknowledging his current attachment to

⁴⁴ ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship , <http://admissions.nus.edu.sg/scholarship-nsg-aus.html>

Singapore, Jeremy adds that he is still in the process of layering, not watering down, his Indonesian identity,

‘Now, I still identify myself as an Indonesian, but more of an overseas Indonesian. I am Indonesian but I am also a resident staying here in Singapore. It’s hard to say where I am now (on the spectrum), but definitely I’m not forgetting my identity...at the same time, I’m constructing my identity as someone staying in Singapore’ (Jeremy, NUS, Indonesia, undergraduate)

Age and maturity also plays an important role in shaping Mihika’s experience of contact zones in NUS. As a graduate student from Sri Lanka, she asserts that one’s age is an important influence on how one experiences the contact zone, especially in terms of national identity negotiations. She compares her own proud display of her Sri Lankan identity through speaking Sinhala, to the younger Sri Lankan undergraduates she had met on campus, who preferred to speak English among themselves instead.

‘I’ve a strong feeling that had I entered NUS at a younger age, I would be quite stressed. (Now) I probably have a greater sense of who I am at this age than when I was an undergrad...I see that in the Sri Lankan undergrads here, and some of them I really want to shake...like ‘what’s wrong with you!’ When I meet other Sri Lankans here, we talk in Sinhala...they (the undergraduates) don’t. They speak in English...this sort of alienates me from them...but after I thought about it, I realised ‘I would have been like that too’...being older, I’ve a greater sense of who I am, my country...’ (Mihika, NUS, Sri Lanka, MA)

She rationalizes that speaking in Sinhala to fellow Sri Lankan students is an important display of her Sri Lankan identity in Singapore, and is proof that she is more mature and sure of her national identity. While she expresses her frustration in her younger co-nationals, her response sheds light on the politics of language in Sri Lanka, which has been transplanted to the NUS campus,

‘(I just want to say) come on! I finally meet a Sri Lankan after so many years and I want to speak to you in Sinhala, and you little brat have to go on in English! **joking tone**. There’s a whole dilemma, it’s not that they don’t know Sinhala...but there’s a catch, in Sri Lanka, we don’t speak in Sinhala,

whether it be in a restaurant, anywhere...it's sad, Sinhala is always downgraded, and English is oh my god, the vestiges of colonialism. You gain social capital just by speaking in English' (Mihika, NUS, Sri Lanka, MA)

5.7 Concluding thoughts

In this chapter, I have shown how contact zones in the study abroad experience constitute important sites that trigger students' complex negotiations and articulations of their multiple intersecting identities. Traversing transnational spaces, international students in NUS and Todai also become more aware of the politics of power exerted on the spaces they inhabit, resulting in coping/ resistance strategies that are enacted in site-specific practices. Regional politics, both historical and contemporary, are often encountered in a new light and conferred new meanings as students make sense of them in their interactions with others in the contact zone. Even in a more globalized flow of youth mobility today, a sense of national, ethnic and regional identity continues to be important for these international students. This is often tied to obligations and duties to one's country and family, though it need not bind them to traditional home-bound trajectories. Far from being static, young peoples' experience of time and 'growing up' intersect with contact zone encounters in a process that continually impacts on their identity negotiations.

While thus far I have sought to critically engage and unpack the complex notions of identity constructions at the contact zones of study abroad experiences in NUS and Todai, it is timely to next examine spatiality as part of identity formation. Keith and Pile (1993:2) note that space, whether real, imagined or symbolic is neither neutral nor passive, but an active part of the discourse of identity politics. It is in this light that the following chapter investigates the spatialities and materialities of contact zones through delving into the micro-processes that take place within them.

Chapter Six: Spatializing contact zones in internationalizing Asian universities

6.1 Introduction

As ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other’ (Pratt 1991), contact zones have often been applied to socio-linguistic and pedagogical research (Canagarajah 1997; Singh and Doherty 2004, 2005), in which the heterogeneity of contact encounters and the resultant coping strategies by students and education practitioners are often highlighted. While geographers have extended the concept to problematize transnational cultural politics (Yeoh and Willis 2005) and spatialize power relations in collaborative partnerships (Sommerville and Perkins 2003), the role of space has, more often than not, been underplayed in contact zone theorizations. In recent years, increasingly diverse populations on university campuses have drawn interest from scholars such as Kenway and Bullen (2003), Giseking (2007), Fincher and Shaw (2011) and Hopkins (2011), adding valuable empirical research and theorizations on the spatial politics of campus spaces, albeit in Western contexts. Borrowing from the contact zone concept, I suggest that a focus on the spatialities of contact encounters can advance our understandings of the critical geographies in internationalizing Asian universities such as NUS and Todai. Receiving a high percentage of intra-Asian student flows, the ways in which physical and social spaces of contact are constructed and experienced often give rise to ‘more concurrent and ambiguous constructions of social distinctions’ (Lan 2003: 134) along various axes of social differences, compared to traditional East to West student mobilities.

As such, in this chapter, I seek to spatialize contact zones by investigating the micro-spaces and politics within material and immaterial spaces of contact, such as the classroom, hostels and other locations in which students may encounter differences. Drawing on ethnographic accounts and vignettes from student respondents, as well as an analysis of NUS and Todai’s promotional literature, newspaper articles and social media posts, I suggest that contact spaces in the globalizing Asian university can be broadly analyzed on three interlinked spatial fronts—namely in institutionalized spaces such as in classrooms and laboratories, where there is a degree of routinisation and underlying codes of conduct, secondly, in social settings and casual spaces such as dormitories and student organizations, and finally in one-off episodic or

catastrophic spaces/events such as Facebook posts directed towards particular nationalities. In these contact encounters, I also show how ‘safe houses’, as refuge spaces and important coping strategies, are an integral part of contact zones, and consider their various morphologies and the conditions that lead to their development.

In doing so, I hope to shed light on how forces of institutional geographies and built environments in the NUS and Todai impact on contact zone encounters, as well as interrogate students’ experiences as they traverse these frictional spaces, providing insights as to what qualities of spaces promote which kinds of contact encounters. Whilst recognizing the unique contexts of internationalization in the respective universities, I hope to draw meaningful comparisons and suggest policy implications in which contact zones and safe houses can inform globalizing strategies in East Asian universities.

6.2 Institutionalised/ Routinised contact zones

Educational spaces are often overtly or subtly governed by institutions, according privileges to certain ‘norms’, which continue to be spatially reproduced over time (though subject to challenges) (Giesecking 2007). On the internationalizing campus, classrooms and laboratories, as primary locations where teaching, learning and more formal interactions take place, constitute important sites in which contact occur on an everyday basis. As spaces where diverse students are brought together by formalized learning, they facilitate routinised interactions that privilege some and marginalize others along axes of differences such as proficiency in the dominant language, national divides, class and gender.

In the globalizing Asian university context, proficiency in the language(s) of internationalization often conditions social interactions in the campus space. In the case of Singapore, English has been institutionalized as the official language since independence, and since it is now widely regarded as the global language, NUS counts on instruction in English, and an internationalized curriculum as one of its strengths to attract international students (Sidhu et al 2010). Whilst seemingly uncontested, the use of English among students can present a struggle for international students whose first language is not English, not least due to how in the postcolonial era, English ‘embodies economic and symbolic domination’ (Lan

2003:133). This was strongly felt by Thi, a Vietnamese undergraduate student at NUS. Having worked in an Australian company in Vietnam before coming to Singapore, she had felt confident of her English language proficiency, and that ‘there was nothing wrong’ with her in terms of her English language ability. However, she recounted her shock when first encountered the NUS classroom---it was there that her ‘whole world shattered’ and she started to ‘doubt everything’, from her English proficiency to overall competency. The intensity of these repeated confrontations is felt especially strongly in the tutorial classroom. While she could get away with catching up on lectures at her own pace outside of class, the tutorial class became ‘very terrifying’ for her because she was required to present her ideas in English and field questions from her tutors and classmates on a weekly basis. But perhaps the most defining experience of exclusion from the campus space for Thi was in a group project discussion with other Singaporean students.

‘That group didn’t let me participate much in the work, they didn’t trust me, and gave me all the trivial tasks...when we had group discussions, they would say things like “does anyone have any idea what she’s talking about?” that kind of thing’ (Thi, NUS, Vietnam, undergraduate)

More importantly, Thi realized that English proficiency is tied to notions of superiority, especially in the East Asian context, where Singapore is the only country with an English-speaking population. She laments that some classmates ‘look upon foreigners (like her) as if they are from somewhere very rural and undeveloped’, ‘inferior compared to Singapore’. In this sense, the ability to speak English well in the classroom becomes what Bourdieu (1986) calls ‘linguistic capital’, being accorded institutional recognition and dominant use by NUS.

These sentiments of competition, discrimination, exclusion through language proficiency in the classroom are also shared by Jenny, a Malaysian Chinese undergraduate in NUS, albeit in a different manner. In her second year at NUS, Jenny continues to struggle with issues of socialization on campus. Unlike Thi, Jenny is fluent in English and shares physical and ethno-cultural similarities with Singaporean Chinese classmates. However, it is these qualities that became a major source of her frustration in class,

‘People don’t *even* recognize me as an international student, they’d assume that I’m Singaporean and when they find out (that I’m Malaysian), they’d say, “oh you’re Malaysian, (but) you speak English so well, you don’t look Malaysian”...it’s very irritating, insulting...the mentality that they (Singaporeans) are so much better than everyone else’ (Jenny, NUS, Malaysia, undergraduate)

Her response is intriguing in that while it is assumed that stark differences trigger conflicts in the contact zone, in Jenny’s case, it is the strong similarities across the Singapore-Malaysian border that makes her want to assert her Malaysian identity (and differentiate herself from Singaporeans) more.

The situation is more complex in Todai’s case, as institutionally it aspires to be a global campus through developing ‘human resources capable of thinking and expressing their views in English’ (since it is ‘the global common language’), while acknowledging the dilemma that ‘it is not simply a case of doing everything in English’, that the Japanese language is also ‘an important element’ in order for Todai to achieve ‘diversity’ (Masashi Haneda, Vice President, Todai, J-Life special edition, August 2012). This institutional dilemma has trickled down into the contact zones in the classrooms and laboratories.

Hyun, a South Korean Todai graduate student, describes the relationship with her Japanese classmates as at most superficial due to the lack of Japanese proficiency and she thinks that this feeling is probably mutual. In Hyun’s words, there is always ‘some tension’ in the contact zone due to language differences.

‘My relationship with them (Japanese classmates) is not like “I’m happy to see you” or “I really like you”. No, it’s not like that. How do I put it? They try to hold a conversation in English and I try to speak in Japanese. Both are not very good, *that* kind of conversation. For them, the problem is English, for me, it’s Japanese. It’s not that smooth an atmosphere, there is always some tension’. (Hyun, Todai, South Korea, PhD)

In Hyun's response and tone of voice, I sense a degree of guilt towards contributing to the awkward interactions with Japanese students in the classroom space. These emotions can result in an invisible burden on international students to smoothen out frictional everyday encounters.

Hyun later points out that over time, she experienced progressive changes (in terms of language and cultural distance) in these encounters, and eventually the classroom has become a more 'comfortable' space. This harks back to the previous chapter on how students' constructions of identities in the contact zone also changes through time. Hyun has gotten 'quite used to that' now after two years in Todai and feels 'more comfortable' compared to the initial period when she first arrived.

This tension and discomfort is also experienced by Hong, a Chinese PhD candidate at Todai who had obtained her master degree in the same institution. Reflecting on her MA experience, she lamented that the lab space was defined by Japanese language and work culture, and that it was impossible to juggle the double burden of research and Japanese language classes although she has tried to do so. As the only foreigner and female in the lab, she felt resigned —'when I ask them (Japanese labmates) something in English, they won't reject me outrightly but find it hard to understand me, it's also difficult for them to express themselves (in English), (*sigh*) therefore I felt there was no point speaking (in the lab)'. It did not help that her professor had curtly advised her 'we are not in the West, you had better learn Japanese'. In Hong's experience, the lab space is normalized by speaking and working like the other Japanese students, and thus she felt marginalized and powerless, especially when it is also a site where these norms are imposed upon her through hierarchical supervisor-supervisee relations.

In spite of how the lack of 'linguistic capital' negatively shapes contact zones in the classroom and labs, some Todai students have effectively turned these 'discomfort zones' to their gain. Todai Malaysian graduate student Charlene attributed her overall positive experience to her labmates, because she 'feels the support from them'. As the only foreigner in her lab of nine Japanese students, she describes it as having 'a family sort of atmosphere' due to the intense, daily interactions they share in this

space. It is in this environment of acceptance that she harnessed the lack of Japanese language proficiency to her favour,

‘I actually think it’s less stressful here (in Todai) because as an international student in my lab, I get away with a lot, my Japanese labmates often tell me ‘it’s okay Charlene’. For example, during lab seminars the Japanese students have to translate some lab reports from English to Japanese, and present it to everyone. I don’t have to do that because it’s not my native language, so I only have to present in English. Also since their English proficiency is not that good, I don’t get bombarded with many questions. I think in Malaysia, I’d not be able to get away with it.’ (Charlene, Malaysia, Todai, MA)

In Charlene’s case, due to the less strict requirements on international students to conduct presentations in Japanese, the lab space represents a suspension from the usual academic requirements in Japan and Malaysia---it is a space where she can ‘get away with things’. The contact zone of the classroom is, in this case, also a place of relative relief as one’s nationality and lack of local language proficiency excludes international students from standard benchmarks.

Interestingly, language demands in the classroom/ lab spaces also intersect with other social axes of differences such as gender. For Hong, studying in Japan, a supposedly strong patriarchal society, meant fewer expectations and stress as a female student, especially since her field is in Nanotechnology, where the majority of students are male. She explains that on the contrary, ‘the Japanese are more patient with girls compared to China---it is easier for girls to survive in Japanese society’. She elaborates that there are different optimal levels of achievement for men and women in Japan, and some lecturers go by the benchmark that ‘since you’re a girl, and have already achieved this standard, it’s good enough, you can pass’. In this way, the usual demands of language proficiency and academic performance as an international student can be subverted in routinised learning spaces.

Apart from classrooms and labs, the institutionalized spaces in which international students have to traverse also include university administrative offices, where some may grapple with understanding administrative procedures due to a lack of foreign language skills among administrators. This is especially so in the case of

internationalizing Japanese universities. The language deficiency among university staff was highlighted in a report which focused on efforts to ‘sharpen the foreign language skills and international sensibilities of their administrators’, ‘provide better support to international students through subsidised language e-learning programmes for staff (particularly in Chinese and Korean), and send staff for immersion stints to South East Asian countries to better understand the cultures of students⁴⁵. Hailey, a French-Chinese graduate student who is an executive member of the Todai European Students Association at the time this interview describes her frustration with the Todai administration when trying to set up a booth in the annual May Festival. Wanting to clarify guidelines given by the authorities, Hailey approached the students’ office with her committee to seek assistance, ‘we don’t understand this, could you explain?’ She admitted that the chairperson of the European association was reluctant to try speaking in Japanese, and would first ask ‘Do you speak English?’, though the response from the admin staff was always negative, to which he would reply ‘I’ll come back later’. There is almost an underlying assumption that in this administrative space, international students are expected to possess a certain level of Japanese language proficiency or at least show a willingness to speak in Japanese, in order to be accorded the right to be ‘assisted’. As a result of this deadlock, Hailey felt that it delayed them from efficiently planning for the event. In the end, she decided that they should put their pride down and ‘try with our poor Japanese and Iphone dictionary to make them understand that we had a problem’. With this it ‘worked better’ and she concluded that ‘the problem is we didn’t speak Japanese’. This is akin to the institutionalized separating practices in a certain Melbourne university, where Fincher and Shaw (2011:152) highlight the necessity of institutions to ‘learn from the resources of its diverse communities’ if it wants to ‘succeed in preparing members (both staff and students) for life in a pluralistic and multicultural society’.

In spite of the intensity of contact in routinised classroom and lab spaces, it is worthwhile to note students’ agency to actively form ‘safe houses’ often beyond traditional lines of co-nationality. Compared to interacting with Japanese classmates in a intense contact zone, where interaction is at most ‘superficial’, South Korean graduate student Hyun prefers to retreat into the international student community

⁴⁵ ‘Colleges learn to speak foreign students’ language’, Nikkei Report, 31 October 2011.

where they share a common language--English. This echoes Montgomery and McDowell's (2009) findings that international students prefer to seek out interactions with international students rather than with locals. In the case of Hyun's international friends, though English might not be their first language, it is still more 'comfortable', because they have the common experience of 'nervousness' of being in a Japanese-speaking environment,

'There are many international students here in my lab, and that's why I feel comfortable. We can use English... the international students are closer to one other compared to with the Japanese because it is easier to have a conversation about our common situation. They feel the same nervousness in the laboratory...but we try to have some interaction with the Japanese students, it is not that smooth but I believe there is some progress' (Hyun, Todai, South Korea, PhD)

Since the majority of international students hail from Asian countries, students with Asian backgrounds tend to 'feel closer' to one another. For example, Hong's (a Chinese PhD student) closest friend in Todai is her Thai labmate, who has 'Chinese ancestry'. She attributes the closeness they share to this attribute of 'Chineseness', 'though he doesn't speak Mandarin, we feel closer, compared to with the Japanese...perhaps the Japanese way of thinking is kind of different from other foreigners.' This suggests that while sharing a common language plays an important role in the formation of safe houses, it is certainly not a prerequisite. Notions of similarities and differences are reconfigured at the contact zone to cope with homogenizing forces.

Hence from the above, we can conclude that while the routinised spaces of the classroom, labs and student offices tend to normalize certain institutional ideals, international students can draw on various resources and strategies to subvert potential discomfort and conflicts in these contact zones.

6.3 Spontaneous contact in social/ casual settings

Expanding my analysis of contact zones to include spaces of more casual encounters such as hostels, sports venues and other non-academic based student gatherings, I propose that these relatively looser configurations of space (though not free from

political workings) in the internationalizing university can provide opportunities for more ‘meaningful urban encounters’ (Valentine 2008). They constitute sites where students can learn to negotiate differences and diversity, and potentially open up opportunities for cosmopolitan sensibilities to develop.

Investigating geographies of encounter in a British university context, Anderson et al (2012:502) aptly pointed out that campus living spaces provide ‘more intense and prolonged form of contact than ephemeral micro-scale interactions’. Indeed, the physical configuration of campus residences can promote the formation of safe houses through common spaces that encourage interactions. Nathan, a Todai Chinese undergraduate, describes his dormitory as consisting of about 15% international students, and that for every 20 rooms, there is a common lounge. He shares this common area with 4 or 5 international students (the rest are Japanese students), and they hail from China, Korea, Taiwan and Germany. While international students from the former three Asian countries form the majority of the international cohort and is a common sight in Todai, Nathan was excited that he could get to interact with the German student in the hostel. He quipped ‘when the German guy came, our space became more vibrant and we started to have more parties and gatherings’. This injection of vitality by a student deemed ‘more foreign’ was welcomed in the dormitory where spontaneous, casual and fun gatherings take place, in the absence of the competitive pressure to perform (as opposed to a classroom setting). Here, speaking the same language, or having similar cultures is less important than the routinised spaces of learning as seen above, and such conformity is temporarily suspended to make way for more inclusive geographies in these leisure spaces.

From my research in Todai and NUS, it appears that hostel interactions are much more intense in NUS, where some international students come to identify with a strong hall culture as a primary source of their student identity. This can be exemplified in Wenjie’s experience,

‘My closest friends are definitely hall mates, we are in a hall (hostel) bubble...it’s a big mix (of nationalities), my closest friends are locals because we spent 3 months organizing the orientation programme...this committee ‘ate, slept and shit’ went through it together, so the 12 of us are very close’ (Wenjie, NUS, Malaysia, undergraduate)

More than a social space, the hostel and its closed circle of activities materializes the contact zone in physical spaces where strong friendships can develop beyond nationalities and differences in this 'safe house', where national and racial stereotypes and boundaries can be replaced with a more open, inclusive identity. However, while there can be a myriad of activities in the hostel, Ren Cheng, a Chinese student in the same hostel as Wenjie explains that the prerequisite to be a part of this 'hall culture' is that 'you have to participate, if not, you won't feel welcomed'. He adds that this is because 'hall culture' demands that one be actively involved in it, and if this is done 'others will welcome you regardless of your nationality'. Responding to negative stereotypes of Chinese students in NUS hostels, Ren Cheng reasons that 'the reputation of Chinese students is bad because most of them do not participate in hostel activities, and since the hall has limited spaces, they want those who can contribute more (to the hostel)'.

To dispel the stereotype of passive Chinese students who make little effort to fit into the hall culture, Ren Cheng is very active in hostel activities, especially in the cheerleading team, which consists of mainly Singaporean and Malaysian students,

'My closest friends are my hall friends in cheerleading...I think it's the sport itself, a lot of teamwork, trust and training time will automatically bring people closer...for the entire year, all of us have the same goal, that's to win the national competition...I think if a bunch of people work together for a year, 'suffering', all the blood, sweat and tears, you'll be bonded really tightly' (Ren Cheng, NUS, China, undergraduate)

Thus, not only is the physical shared living space of the hostel crucial for the formation of safe houses, participation in shared activities that go beyond superficial 'international parties' is important to 'break down' differences in the frontiers of contact.

Owing to the intensity of socio-spatial interactions in hostel activities, the attachment to the hostel space and community can be so strong that international students are willing to take the initiative to serve in leadership positions. Such passion and commitment to the 'safe house' and 'giving back to the community' is exemplified by

Wenjie, whose main activities outside of academic classes is in the hostel. He recently took up the position to head a block of hostelites, which involves looking after the welfare of students who are ‘mostly locals, and a sizeable community of international students, such as Malaysians, Indonesians, Vietnamese and exchange students from all over’. He added that he enjoys interacting with different people, and that this is something done, ‘not out of obligation, but to serve people and give back to Singapore, to this community’.

The above shows that shared living spaces, in shaking off the excessive expectations of the classroom, are productive contact sites that present opportunities and avenues for deeper engagement with a diverse student population. However, in order for it to be an effective space to bridge differences, thus becoming ‘sites of prosaic negotiations’ (Amin 2002), it requires students’ active participation. In Amin’s words, they have to ‘step out of their daily environment into...spaces of cultural displacement and destabilisation’ in order to ‘become different through new patterns of social interaction’. More importantly, how to promote the creation of more diverse safe houses will continue to be a challenge for NUS and Todai, which have clearly articulated their aims to develop cosmopolitan sensibilities in their students.

Contact zones can also become hopeful spaces when long-standing animosities with third party countries are given an opportunity to be re-evaluated through first-hand contact with students from other countries. This is particularly so in the context of Asian countries with turbulent relationships even up to contemporary times. For Ming Yang and Yuankai, two Taiwanese students in Todai, having the opportunity to share living and learning spaces, and have meaningful contact with students from Mainland China on campus, have prompted them to re-evaluate their preconceptions of cross-straits relations. For Ming Yang, having a large number of Mainland Chinese students in Todai makes personal contact with them inevitable. These encounters led him to reflect that historically, ‘Taiwan has always been pro-Japan’ and so he took for granted that the Taiwanese should side with Japan and ‘be closer’ to them so that ‘it can be a defence against China’. However, having had positive encounters and friendships with Chinese students, he confessed that his political views have changed, and that he no longer views China ‘as an enemy’.

Similarly, Abbas, a Pakistani graduate student in Todai was amazed at how deep-rooted prejudices between India-Pakistan can be dispelled through the micro-space interactions in the dormitory. He proudly professes that he has many friends from different countries in the dormitories, 'even India'. To him, the animosity and fragile relationship between Pakistan and India makes it difficult to imagine how, even in a third country context, people from these two nationalities can get along peacefully. However, through living closely with Indians in the dormitory, he realized that 'the language, jokes, things we like to do, and what we eat are all the similar, maybe except religion'. He often has heated discussions with his close Indian friends as they contemplate 'what the hell is going on? In our own countries, all we hear is that Pakistan is bad, or India is bad, but when we live in the dormitory, we can become such good friends'. He shares that together with his friends, they hope to change the situation in their own small ways as they are 'saddened about what the current situation is and we want our countries to become friends', concluding that 'Pakistani and Indians are considered to get along best with each other when they are abroad'.

Here, we see that the more spontaneous and casual interactions in the shared spaces of the dormitory provide room for meaningful friendships across nationalities with historical and contemporary volatile relations to grow, that would be a near impossibility if it were in their respective countries. 'The contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power...or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today' (Pratt 1997:63) thus have the potential to be temporarily suspended to make way for meaningful connections. Abbas also reminds us of the power of youth to effect change, and that safe houses can provide the space needed to sow the seed of change and understanding.

In the same way, for Mihika, a Sri Lankan NUS student who had an Indian roommate, this room-sharing experience was life-changing, as her eyes became open to the similarities that both cultures share. Having struggled with her Sri Lankan identity and issues of fitting in since young (she had lived abroad for during her childhood years), staying with an Indian national in Singapore made her feel that 'I didn't need to be so strongly linked to Sri Lanka, because of the whole Pan-Indian identity...that was good enough for me'. She fondly recalls how they share 'similar interests', and

would ‘talk for five hours about silly movies, songs, politics, anything’. She felt that she was able to ‘blend in with the whole Indianness’ and that made her comfortable.

Apart from shared living spaces, other informal learning spaces outside the classroom also provide valuable opportunities for meaningful contact. Jing, a Chinese undergraduate on the AIKOM exchange programme in Todai actively seeks out language-exchange opportunities with Japanese students who are interested in learning Mandarin. As a Chinese language teaching major, she asserts that her daily interactions with the Japanese have led her to conclude that there exists a greater regional East Asian identity due to shared cultural values.

‘I get to interact with many Japanese students in my daily life here, (through these interactions) I feel that the influence of a Confucian cultural circle is quite significant...there isn’t an extremely strong nation-territoriality...I think that there is a greater East Asian identity’ (Jing, China, undergraduate)

Her drive to seek out similarities in a potentially frictional contact zone shows that there is an openness and fluidity in the formation of safe houses that goes beyond fixed notions of nationality and ethnicity. Language exchange meetings, wherein both languages (in this case Mandarin and Japanese) and cultures are essentially accorded similar status, provide fertile grounds for safe houses to develop.

Intercultural student groups in the internationalizing university can also be productive sites for creating shared spaces of understanding, wherein students can establish meaningful connections that go beyond national prejudices and stereotypes. Ming Yang, a Taiwanese graduate student in Todai is an active participant of ‘Asia 21’, consisting of a group of Todai students from various East Asian countries. They hold regular meetings where participants can voice their honest opinions regarding sensitive socio-political relations in an open and accepting environment, without the fear of being criticized. His eyes brightened with excitement as he shared about the group being ‘very liberal in its thoughts’, and how students would share freely on topics such as ‘why the Koreans do not publicly praise the Japanese’ and ‘why the Chinese are so assertive about their history with Japan’. He stressed that ‘the atmosphere is one of logical communication’, as compared to emotional displays often portrayed in the media.

Nathan, a Todai Chinese undergraduate sums it up with how such contact zones inspire young people to create spaces of co-operation and understanding beyond national prejudices, because ‘no matter what has happened in the past, there is only one way forward, and that is to co-operate’. He suggests that the most effective way is ‘from the grassroots level, from students, lay people, through young people’s interaction’. To him, studying abroad situates one in contact zones where ‘the things you learnt are different, perspectives are different’ and therefore ‘only through interaction will there be more understanding. And if you don’t understand each other, you can’t co-operate, right?’

However, it is noteworthy that apart from the classroom, spaces for more casual gatherings such as sports venues can also perpetuate homogenizing forces. Nathan, the Todai Chinese undergraduate quoted earlier, who has been passionate about basketball since young, experienced conflicts with his Japanese counterparts on the court. Fluent in Japanese, he revealed that the only time that he had felt discriminated in Todai was when he joined the basketball club. He compares the different styles of playing the game in Japan and China, ‘the Japanese are very serious when they play basketball, they really go by the rules, by the book. In China, we were more free-and-easy, we played 3 on 3, or in other configurations, like street basketball...people could join in anytime, some would sit by the side and watch, everyone was happy.’ Because he was used to playing the game in a more spontaneous way, he found it hard to adapt to the Japanese style. He shares that sometimes he would just ignore the rules, to the displeasure of the Japanese students, who would say, ‘why is this person like that?’ To this end, Nathan concludes that ‘they (the Japanese) dislike people who are different from them. They like homogeneity, if you’re different, they’ll be like, ‘why is he so different?’ This shows that even in more casual interactions on the basketball court, the pressure to conform to the dominant culture is embodied in the unique set of rules that serve to govern the body (and its actions) in this leisure space.

6.4 Conflation of learning and living spaces---the beginnings of cosmopolitan sensibilities?

While I have shown that contact encounters tend to be more fluid and open in casual social settings, it is heartening to note that in recent years, internationalizing universities in Singapore and Japan are recognizing the need to relook at how learning can take place in a more spontaneous environment. Innovative campus spatial designs can encourage sustained and meaningful interactions among students from diverse backgrounds, promote cosmopolitan sensibilities⁴⁶ (that according to Keck 2008:155, who aptly quotes Appiah, is one that accommodates and promotes a wide range of diverse cultural practices and beliefs within that underlying unity) among students, smoothen potential frictional spaces, and thereby create more opportunities for the formation of a plethora of ‘safe houses’ within the campus.

In 2011, NUS’ University Town (UTown) had taken the lead in Singapore to build residential colleges that merge living and learning spaces, one that is ‘loosely modelled on Oxford’s and Cambridge’s practice of having students learn and live side by side professors’. The colleges specifically recruit local and international students ‘with a willingness to participate in community life’, that goes beyond ‘just attending classes on campus’, marking the difference from traditional campus accommodation⁴⁷. While the notion of spatial design for social engineering is not a new one in Singapore, it is evident that with rapid internationalization and domestic challenges such as decreasing local enrolment (also a pressing problem faced by Japanese universities), university administrators are challenged to think out-of-the-box to design campus spaces that reduces friction in contact, and make it a safe environment for an increasingly diverse student population⁴⁸. While the UTown as a pilot project promises a new paradigm to international campus learning and living, it

⁴⁷ ‘New Utown college’s community spirit, by Stacey Chia, Straits Times, 3 October 2012.

⁴⁸ Another notable example of innovative spatial design to encourage more casual informal contact encounters is reflected in Nanyang Technological University (NTU) recent masterplan. As one of the two largest public universities in Singapore, NTU has recently engaged renowned British architect Thomas Heatherwick to design a centrepiece building for its masterplan to ‘support the university’s move onto the global stage’⁴⁸. The learning hub will have ‘tutorial rooms that face one another, no corridors and casual, open meeting spaces such as shaded terraces and pergolas’, and be ‘a place where there would be people around all the time’⁴⁸. In the Singapore context where the highly educated are increasingly choosing to be single, this varsity space would ideally be, according to NTU’s Provost Professor Freddy Boey, a place where ‘students would want to hang out at...meet their sweethearts and get married...in the hope of increasing the low national fertility rate’.

remains to be seen if existing tensions in classroom contact encounters, such as the negative stereotypes experienced by Thi and Jenny can be reduced through such new spatial arrangements and pedagogies.

The emphasis on changing campus' physical built environments to create more opportunities for local and international students to interact, is also reflected in Japanese universities recent efforts to build mixed (local and international students) dormitories, where it is hoped that they will 'create interactions between native and foreign students' such that both groups can 'brush up on language skills', 'nurture a sense of collaboration' and 'help them to learn different values', thereby 'take the lead in internationalizing the campus'. It is of no surprise that in Todai the lack of Japanese language proficiency and cultural sensitivities have often led to uneasiness and even conflicts in contact encounters, as reflected by Hong, Hyun and Hailey's experiences in Todai. It is thus evident that in the Japanese context, creating safe houses through language exchange and intercultural communication is a high priority⁴⁹, whereas in the NUS context, the emphasis is on multidisciplinary learning and active community involvement for both local and international students.

Apart from merging learning and living spaces within the campus to ease the friction of contact, Todai, recognizing that contact zone encounters in classroom spaces is primarily shaped by students' Japanese language proficiency, has recently launched the PEAK (Programmes in English at Komaba) in the fall of 2012 in hopes to relieve linguistic pressures. Two undergraduate liberal arts courses—the International Program on Japan in East Asia and the International Program on Environmental Sciences will be conducted in English. These programmes mainly target foreign students, as they do not need to be proficient in Japanese language to enrol. However, students are required to take intensive Japanese language classes especially during the first two years, so that they will 'have the opportunity to enhance their Japanese-language skills' (<http://peak.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/intro/deanintro.html>) and 'to make them competent in the language'. This is a gospel for students with who already have

⁴⁹ For example, Ochanomizu University's new dormitory that opened in April was built with the concept of 'living together, growing up together'. Five students share a unit that consists of five bedrooms and a shared living space, equipped with TVs in the hope that students will spend time together. Through sharing living spaces, the university wants students to 'learn how to deal with the friction that comes with living with others'⁴⁹.

Japanese proficiency like Singaporean student Su Xinle. She was attracted to PEAK because it ‘provides a completely international platform to mingle with students from diverse backgrounds, and not only with Japanese students’⁵⁰. However it remains to be seen how ‘novel’ this programme is for students with no Japanese proficiency to cope with the double-burden of coursework and Japanese language studies (especially those whose first language is not English), and how this programme and its students can successfully integrate into the greater campus environment, especially since about 30% of those admitted to PEAK chose instead to go to top-tier European or U.S schools instead, which is rare for Todai thus far (Todai usually enrolls more than 99 percent of admitted students)⁵¹.

At the time of this research, the effects of and students’ experiences of these new initiatives to ease the friction in contact zones in Singapore and Japan’s universities are yet to be known, of which I propose is an exciting extension for future research especially in light of fierce competition for international students. Anderson et al (2012:502) have casted their doubts about whether ‘sharing campus space with a number of ‘others’ necessarily produces any significant cross-cultural interaction’ that can meaningfully ‘shape attitudes towards difference’. This said, it is most certain that physical spaces and design of the campus will continue to play an increasingly integral role to create innovative ‘safe houses’ to accommodate growing diversity in both staff and students. However, because the ‘micro-geographies of the campus’ is inevitably connected to ‘national and global issues’ (Hopkins 2011:158), episodic events may tip the delicate balance in contact zones.

6.5 Episodic and catastrophic events/ encounters

With an increasingly internet-savvy student population and the ubiquitous use of social media, cyberspace becomes an important site through which students broadcast their campus experiences. It is thus also an avenue where one-off, episodic contact encounters can erupt and ignite incensed responses that may threaten to destabilize real material contact spaces. This is exemplified by a blog posted by Chinese national NUS student Sun Xu, who in it made derogatory comments about Singaporeans

⁵⁰ ‘Tokyo Uni offers novel course, in English’, by Kawn Weng Kin, Straits Times, 18 October 2012.

⁵¹ ‘Autumn school year kicks off at Todai’, Daily Yojimuri, 5 October 2012.

(commenting that there were ‘more dogs than humans’ in Singapore⁵²). The aftermath of this ‘online rant’ led to a spate of anti foreign student sentiments and measures in Singapore, which included calling upon the Ministry of Education (MOE) to re-examine their selection of overseas scholars (Sun Xu was a government scholarship recipient), as well as effecting measures like fee hikes to curb foreign enrolment in local education institutions⁵³. These came at a time when Singapore is trying to position itself as an emerging hub for education in the region. Responding to this furore, NUSpaper, an independent student newspaper by NUS students conducted an online poll to find out how Singaporean students perceive their Chinese counterparts⁵⁴. The results of the poll revealed that 67% of students hold negative stereotypes towards Chinese students on campus. These include grievances over ‘Chinese nationals who do not use English to communicate with tutors in class’ or ‘with Singaporeans who do not speak Mandarin’, and other opinions such as ‘competitive nature’ and the ‘lack of courtesy’. However most students maintain a more reconciliatory approach, calling upon tackling stereotypes and more university-wide events and activities to bring Chinese nationals and Singaporeans together. The spatial politics of who has rights and priorities to campus spaces, once uprooted onto cyberspace, tend to incite viral reactions that may be biased and removed from grounded realities.

Following the Sun Xu episode, a Facebook post by a local NUS student sparked off an online article entitled ‘NUS Vietnamese scholars bully local students and chased them away from a soccer pitch which was earlier booked’⁵⁵. The emotionally rousing word ‘bully’ was deliberately chosen to highlight the uneven power relations in this space. The grouse was that the Vietnamese students refused to leave by citing that ‘they are foreigners on scholarship in Singapore’. As opposed to the above case of Sun Xu, here, conflicts over the use of material spaces such as the soccer pitch crosses

⁵² ‘Did NUS student get what he deserved for online rant?’, Straits Times, Prime News, 30 March 2012.

⁵³ ‘Fewer foreigners in Singapore varsities’, Straits Times, 13 October 2012.

⁵⁴ ‘Chinese nationals on campus should make effort to integrate, local students say’, by Melody Zaccheus, The NUS Paper, http://nuspaper.net/Melody_art4.html

⁵⁵ ‘NUS Vietnamese scholars bully local students and chased them away from soccer pitch which was earlier booked’, The Temasek Times, March 6 2012. <http://temasektimes.wordpress.com/2012/03/06/nus-vietnamese-scholars-bully-local-students-and-chased-them-away-from-soccer-pitch-which-was-earlier-booked/>

into cyberspace through the internet and social media. This episode prompted higher education institutions in Singapore to impose codes of conduct for students in terms of internet behaviour, especially in posting insensitive comments or articles online. While these online furores may threaten to sour real contact encounters on campus spaces, the majority of level-headed responses of NUS students attest that the negative sentiments sparked by these episodes are generally not sustained, compared to the more grounded negotiations in the two sets of contact spaces that I have elaborated on earlier in this chapter.

Apart from verbal contentions over contact encounters in cyberspace, we should also be mindful of the potential emotional trauma that episodic contact can cause. Nathan shared about how his junior in Todai, a girl also from Nanjing (where Nathan's hometown is), was shaken by an encounter with a Japanese student at a party. He recounted that this Chinese girl was approached by a drunk Japanese student, who cornered her and reproached "so you're from Nanjing, you know of the massacre? Actually that's a fake incident isn't it?" The girl was very upset about the taunting remark and it continues to leave a deep impression on her.

The above accounts show that contact zones on campus can easily become contested sites of conflict, volatile to social sentiments in episodic events. With the rampant use of the internet and social media by young people, these conflict zones can be mapped onto and carried on in cyberspace. Episodic encounters can have long-lasting impacts on students' present and future experiences of contact zones, which may lead to self-segregating practices once one is deemed to be marginalized.

Apart from episodic encounters in material and cyberspaces, catastrophic events can also result in students experiencing real fear and danger. The March 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, and the lingering worries over the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant crisis dealt a heavy blow on foreign student numbers in Japan, including Todai, which registered a 9% drop in growth of international student enrolment⁵⁶ as of May 1 2011, compared to the previous year. This mass exodus of international students included those who had yet to return from home countries, who deferred their

⁵⁶ 'Where are all the foreign students going?', by Kaori Takahashi, Nikkei Report, 24 October 2011.

studies, or request to be transferred from universities in eastern Japan to those in the West⁵⁷. In spite of these pessimistic figures, it is heartening to note that Todai students like Hailey ‘felt really sorry for Japan, and really wanted to go back to help’, though she was back in France for the spring vacation when the quake occurred. She took great pains to assure her anxious family that it was safe to return, especially when most of them had thought of Japan as a safe country to be in. To this end, the student respondents in Todai have provided positive feedback in the way disaster information was disseminated, as echoed by Hailey-- ‘an assistant professor in my lab kept sending email updates...first in English, then in Japanese every other day, so I was updated with what was happening here’. In the face of possible danger, she strongly felt the need to ‘come back to Japan and be part of the recovery of Japan’.

This desire to return to this ‘danger zone’ is also echoed by a Singaporean Todai student Ku Ka Tsai, who received an award for tsunami relief⁵⁸. Similar to Hailey, he felt ‘a sense of duty’ on the part of those who were studying in Japan, and hence whilst physically in Singapore, he organized a concert that raised \$20,150 for the disaster victims. The unfortunate catastrophe thus becomes a catalyst for international students to consider their attachments to the so-called ‘dangerous zones’ post-March 2011.

6.6 Summary—towards building global imaginations

From the above, we see that while episodic and catastrophic events have the potential to arouse strong sentiments and create real fear of contact spaces, they are essentially reactive in nature, and hence the aftermaths tend to be less sustained. This is in comparison to the daily negotiations in both the more routinised and spontaneous spaces of contact. While the extant contact zone literature has typically focused on hostile host-home contact, here we see that in the contexts of NUS and Todai, contact zones and safe houses can be multiplied across various nationalities and inter-relations between countries on the three broad interlinked scales of institutionalized, spontaneous and episodic encounters. In these sites, students learn to negotiate the micro-politics of contact zones. A focus on contact spaces in the internationalizing university is timely in that it sheds light on Fincher and Shaw’s (2011:540) concern

⁵⁷ ‘Universities concerned over drop in overseas students’, Nikkei Report, 2 May 2011.

⁵⁸ ‘S’pore student gets award for tsunami relief’, by Lin Zhaowei, Straits Times, 14 October 2011.

for the ‘myth’ of internationalization, where universities often seem to suggest ‘cosmopolitan visions’ for their students, while failing to ‘acknowledge the ever-presence of difference’ in ‘contexts of great diversity in student population’. While sound spatial designs and the creation of innovative spaces can encourage inter-group mixing and meaningful relationships to develop, students have to actively participate in shared activities in order to build new bridges at the frontiers of differences. The stage of life as students and young adults, and their more fluid and open identity negotiations, also provides a fertile ground to explore politically sensitive issues brought to light in a more accepting environment. In a globalized world, as more youths lead lives that exemplify a ‘postmodern lifestyle’ of ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2005), it is timely to examine how contact zones in the study abroad experience impacts on international students’ global imaginations.

Chapter Seven: Global imaginations in the internationalizing university contact zone

7.1 Introduction

Studying abroad has been considered an effective strategy for young people to ‘better position themselves within the changing structures of the global economy’, one that ‘increasingly prizes the skills of inter-culturality and a cosmopolitan outlook’ (Rizvi 2009:9). However, it is often assumed that an international education can automatically shape students to become ‘savvier players in a globally networked economy’ by arming them with ‘an understanding of global interconnectedness’ and ‘international friendship networks’ (Rizvi 2005:4). Echoing Mitchell’s (1997) understanding of study abroad as a continuous ‘self-fashioning project’ where students’ learn to capitalize on educational and cultural capital (Waters 2006), I suggest that depending on their unique biographies, past mobility experiences, and experiences in contact zones, students derive multiple articulations of cosmopolitanism that includes accumulating cosmopolitan capital for strategic self-advancement purposes to taking on cosmopolitanism as an attitude—having a genuine interest and appreciation for ‘a shared world’ (Appiah 2005). Situating these articulations in the respective institutional settings of NUS and Todai, I investigate and compare students’ experiences of campus spaces and programmes that overtly seek to develop ‘cosmopolitan world citizens’ (Fincher 2011) and their global imaginations. Finally, I explore the dynamic societal challenges faced by both institutions in their respective countries that serve to promote or impede the formation of cosmopolitan sensibilities in international students.

7.2 Multiple articulations of a ‘global identity’

Cosmopolitan capital

Echoing earlier findings of how international education is a tool in which students can tap onto global circuits of education, Waters (2003; 2004; 2005; 2006) has employed Bourdieu’s (1977; 1984) concept of symbolic capital accumulation to show how Hong Kong students acquire a Western education to increase their employability status in a competitive global economy. For Rajesh, an NUS graduate student from India, having both ‘Western’ and ‘Asian’ perspectives is important. He had been an Erasmus scholar to Sweden during his undergraduate years. To him, his study

experience in Sweden, and subsequently in Singapore, adds cumulative ‘layers’ to his identity, such that he is now more than ‘just an Indian student’.

‘Since coming here (to NUS), my identity would be someone who has a European⁵⁹ and Singaporean education, an Asian education as a whole, rather than just being a student from India’ (Rajesh, NUS, India, MA)

The educational experiences and implied acquired cultural competences (in Rajesh’s case, of broader European and Asian cultures) are in fact powerful tools that Rajesh strategically uses to network with others. Describing the interactions during ‘networking’ parties in Singapore, he reveals that when he meets people, ‘they just connect the dots for where I’ve been’, that these similarly globalized others ‘understand’ and value his overseas experiences, and they become an important conversation starter, ‘we talk and every thing sort of opens up’. Responding to the question of how he would then define his identity in such highly internationalized spaces, Rajesh quips, ‘my identity changes with where I go (and who I meet)’. His response suggests the emergence of a spatially-contingent strategic form of cosmopolitan identity, which Aihwa Ong (1999) theorized as a product of ‘the era of globalization’, where mobile individuals develop a flexible notion of citizenship as strategies to accumulate capital and power’. In Rajesh’s case, he desires to keep his identities fluid, and recognizes that in a highly competitive network of ‘global talents’, overseas credentials are prized in advancing his personal interests in a globalizing world.

Cosmopolitan capital, often acquired through the strategic accumulation of ‘networks’ is an important component of international students’ global imaginations, reflecting the beginnings of an exclusive Transnational Capitalist Class (TNCC) (Sklair 2001). These selective networks can be such an important consideration that it may become the main determinant of which institution students enroll in. Capitalizing on alumni networks, international students can extend the ‘benefits’ of institution-specific advantages beyond graduation. This is reflected in Anosh’s (also an Indian MA student at NUS) intentions,

⁵⁹ In the final year of his undergraduate programme in India, Rajesh received an ERASMUS scholarship by which he went to Sweden to study for 6 months.

‘NUS is a global university (and) it’s recognized everywhere. Nowadays it’s all about working with a team of people from all over (the world). It’s always good to have studied somewhere that is very well-known. That’s a big thing in itself’

‘I’m really hoping to cultivate a network of people (whom) I have worked with in this one year (in NUS)... tap on the Alumni network once I graduate, because that’s one of the things people come to good universities for--- to tap into their Alumni network, they come in really handy; in ways you don’t expect them to be’ (Anosh, NUS, India, MA student)

Capitalizing on specialized internet tools for networking purposes, Anosh maintains an updated detailed profile page on ‘LinkedIn⁶⁰’ with his credentials (he had worked for IBM prior to coming to NUS) and biography. He describes the website as a powerful virtual networking platform ‘where you put up your business profile, anyone can look at, so it’s very easy to find out who you are (and) what you have worked on’. He emphasizes that ‘it is very job and business-oriented, with ‘vital’ information such as ‘I worked for this company, from this year to that year’, recommendations from superiors or customers, and where you were educated, ‘it’s like Facebook but it’s not for making friends. It’s for business relationships’. Before coming to NUS, he effectively used this site to contact members of the NUS alumni to ‘get some advice from them’. For Anosh, maintaining these international networks---which includes ‘not only the Indians who (have) settled here, but also other Asians and a wide network of people who do a bunch of different things (and) live in different countries’, are ‘very valuable’ both now and in the future.

‘I hope that I can keep these networks alive, it’s always nice to have (them) because you can reach out and ask for whatever. If you are in that country, you can ask for something or if you want something in the field that they are working in, you can ask for it. I have tried to preserve the networks I had from work; I stay in touch with that bunch of people, so I hope that I can do that here in NUS’ (Anosh, NUS, India, MA student)

⁶⁰ ‘LinkedIn’ is an online networking site that facilitates ‘staying in touch’ with past and present colleagues and classmates. It also assists one in ‘discovering inside connections’ to facilitate job-hunting, as well as tap on ‘industry experts’ from one’s existing network to seek advice.
http://sg.linkedin.com/static?key=what_is_linkedin&trk=hb_what

Anosh and Rajesh's responses suggest a rather utilitarian view towards 'networks', and that the value of these networks is site-specific. In the same way, if not more apparent, students are also well aware of the powerful networks they can acquire from Todai, which has historically stood out as a symbolic institution of power and privilege in Asia, having produced a large number of Japanese cabinet ministers and heads of Japan's top corporations. In an independent Asiaweek review on top Asian universities⁶¹, its prestigious law school is even held up as 'a premier breeding ground for future leaders'. Thus it is not surprising that local and international students are willing to brave a 'gruelling battle' to pass the challenging university entrance exams because they 'value the experience for the network of creative and "inspirational" people' whom they eventually get to rub shoulders with in Todai, despite the fact that its exclusivity has been widely criticized as 'an elitist old boys club'.

Interestingly, apart from imagining a world connected by strategic networks of elite international students who have graduated from the same alma mater (that can be drawn upon for use both now and in the future), Caroline, an Australian-Taiwanese Todai student presents a more gender-specific concern that these spatially-grounded networks can address. She reveals that one of her priorities to study in Todai is to find a partner of similar, if not higher calibre, 'he must be from the same or a better university than me'. She reasons that this is a fair expectation because 'here in Todai, the people I hang out with have studied in Yale, one girl is from Todai, her boyfriend is from *MIT* ---there is always someone better...so wanting to find a boyfriend from Todai is only fair'. Her global imagination is thus simultaneously shaped by the agenda to network with high calibre students in the hope of finding a 'worthy' partner.

Cosmopolitanism as an attitude

However, apart from strategically using acquired cosmopolitan identities to advance self-interests, among my respondents, I also observe the emergence of what Rizvi terms as 'morally cosmopolitan identities', a cosmopolitan attitude where students

⁶¹ 'The Top 10', Asiaweek.com, November 30, 2000.
<http://www-cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/97/0523/cs2.html>

become more aware and appreciative of a global interdependence and a ‘cosmopolitan solidarity’ (Rizvi 2005:10). Ron, a British exchange student in NUS asserts that studying in Singapore has made him more discerning and appreciative of the similarities and differences among different cultures. He defines his identity as ‘a citizen of the global knowledge of the world’ because he can ‘see the crossovers, commonalities, similarities that people have...though they are from very different parts of the world’. However, he is also able to appreciate and value cultural differences ‘there’s always going to be particular things that are different, which should be, otherwise it’s lost’. He stresses that this form of intercultural competence is more ‘genuine’ because it derives from first-hand knowledge, through his social networks in NUS, ‘not through books, government perceptions, but people, friends, through networks of people’. As a result, he now sees himself as ‘a more connected person, with more insight to the world’. In fact, his mobility experiences have become an indispensable part of his biographical story,

‘My friends tried to make me give up the line ‘when I was in China/ Vietnam/ Korea/ Singapore...’ it’s naturally something you want to share’ (Ron, NUS, UK, exchange student)

This expanded global consciousness is also evident in Tim, also a British exchange student in NUS, who speaks of feeling ‘more part of an entire world, rather than just my little local insular bit’. It empowers him in terms of future mobility trajectories, in that he now feels ‘less stuck in one place’. He shares about how the initial thought of going to university in a very different cultural setting in Singapore was daunting, and how later on, ‘surviving the experience’ now empowers him to explore ‘working anywhere and not feel intimidated’, because ‘a lot more opportunities seem achievable and more realistic’. Singapore was his first step into Asia due to its Westernized ways and a largely English-speaking population. This results in a relatively smooth encounter in the contact zones of his experiences in NUS, providing just enough impetus for him to take on more exotic challenges such as ‘spending a year in China or something’.

While NUS seems to have provided a relatively safe environment in which students can have opportunities to expand their global consciousness, in Today’s context where most of its international students originate from countries that share turbulent colonial

and/or migration histories with Japan, the first step towards a more cosmopolitan outlook may be to address national prejudices and stereotypes. Miguel, a third generation Brazilian-Japanese student talks about how through numerous contact encounters with Japanese students, he realised that ‘even though they have the same culture, they don’t all behave in the same way’, ‘maybe this Japanese will be like this, that Japanese will be like that, it doesn’t mean that just because they are Japanese they have a common trait, maybe they do, but maybe its just coincidence’. Suggesting that each contact encounter is unique and therefore cannot be generalized, Miguel realized that he should, instead, take into account the individual and the context of the encounter. Having overcome these generalizations, he now feels that ‘(national) identity is not as important anymore’, rather, he belongs to ‘part of a global village’. Instead of a watered down sense of national identity, it is interesting to note that Oikonomidoy and Williams’ (2012:12) findings on Japanese undergraduates in US universities have shown the emergence of an ‘enriched cosmopolitanism’—where strong national affiliations continue to exist alongside an increasingly cosmopolitan self.

How contact zones are constructed is evidently important in influencing the types of cosmopolitan sensibilities that international students develop. For example, Ling, a Taiwanese PhD student at Todai is conscious of how historically, and in contemporary times, Taiwanese youths have tended to blindly worship Japanese culture. Hence, having spent some time in Japan, she remarks that ‘some Taiwanese may feel that the Japanese are very good or better in this or that, but to me it might just be because the circumstances are different, it doesn’t mean it’s better than the Taiwanese way’. Her views have become ‘more comparative and relative’ because being abroad makes her feel that ‘culture has no good or bad, just different...the way of doing things is a result of the culture and circumstances here’. This enlightened appreciation of situated cultural differences takes place in the context of stereotypical superior-inferior Japan-Taiwan ties which Ling had herself struggled to address. Interestingly, she reflects that if she had not left Taiwan, she might eventually ‘feel the same way with age and maturity’, however it would not be ‘to this extent’. The element of time highlighted in Ling’s response is an interesting one---it hints at the possibility of acquiring cosmopolitan sensibilities with the passing of time (‘age and maturity’) without physically being in the contact zone. However, she stresses that the

intensity of encountering differences in the study abroad experience speeds up the formation of such sensibilities.

The call to develop effective ‘global human resources’⁶² and cosmopolitan citizens, both from a practical and cultural point of view, has often been cited by internationalizing universities as an important deliverable, yet little research has investigated the spatial processes and extent to which these desired traits are achieved from ground up [for an exception, see Fincher (2011)]. I have sought to unpack the kinds of cosmopolitan articulations and imaginations that international students in NUS and Todai display, which includes the accumulation of valuable cosmopolitan capital through institution-based networks, a cosmopolitan attitude that displays an expanded global consciousness through a genuine appreciation of other cultures and even towards bearing a greater burden towards global causes. However, it is important to situate these spatial imaginations in the varied contact encounters located within the study abroad experience, recognizing that they are not only influenced by institutional expectations, but also by students’ dynamic reflections on their personal mobility trajectories, relationships between home, host countries and the world at large. In the following section, I investigate the spatialities of university-wide events and other programmes that seek to promote cosmopolitan sensibilities in their students and their limits.

7.3 Global imaginations in university settings and programmes

Drawing on Fincher’s (2011) work that explored the limitations of internationalized universities’ expectations on students’ to be cosmopolitan, I focus on material sites and specific programmes within Todai and NUS that have explicit aims to develop students’ intercultural competencies. These sites are also interesting because more often than not, they straddle the boundaries of institutionalised, spontaneous and episodic contact encounters (see Chapter Six). Where relevant, I seek to draw parallels between the two institutions and suggest some considerations for future research.

⁶² Defined by Mr Akio Mimura, the chairperson of the Central Council for Education (Japan), as those ‘who can work overseas with colleagues having different cultural backgrounds, listen to others and effectively communicate their views’ (Nikkei Report, 19 April 2012)

7.3.1 *'International' events on campus spaces*

As part of my fieldwork research, I attended the annual Hongo May Festival (also known as *gogatsusai*) in Todai in 2011. It is one of the most prominent university events that is open to the public, held on the main Hongo campus grounds over a three-day period. With the support of the university, it represents an opportunity for student groups to promote their academic and extracurricular activities. Since my research focuses on international students, I was interested in how international student groups 'promoted' their respective cultures to a largely Japanese audience. Also, in this carnival-like space where the hidden rules of competition in classroom contact zones are temporarily suspended, I would like to see if this particular space could positively influence students' cosmopolitan imaginations.

Speaking to Tien, the chairperson of the Todai Taiwan Students Association, I found out that as with previous years, several international student groups get together to market their booths collectively so as to attract more visitors. It was 'a necessary measure' to group together because as a large-scale event, they had to 'compete' with numerous participating booths. For the 2011 May Festival, the European, Indian, Vietnamese and Taiwanese associations came together and decided to capitalize on the popular 'point card' system in Japan, where a token gift would be awarded to the person who visits all of the participating international booths, spread over different locations on the campus. Reflecting upon this collaboration, Sanjay, the leader of the Indian students group said that it was a win-win situation---the May festival, while uniting the respective cultural groups, also promoted inter-cultural understandings and friendships among the international groups through the rounds of inter-group meetings prior to the festival. I personally witnessed the friendly banter among the leaders and members of the respective associations as they visited and cheered one another on due to the sustained rains and resultant low turnout. In this sense, though the Hongo May Festival is not a dedicated event for international students to showcase their respective countries or cultures, it nonetheless is a productive site for organic and innovative forms of intercultural collaboration and networking to take place.

In NUS, a similar event aptly known as 'In-Fusion' is an annual international bazaar held in February at the NUS Forum, a prominent meeting place on campus. It is

organized by the NUS Student Union International Relations Committee (NUSSU IRC). I attended In-Fusion in 2010 and the theme that year was ‘Diversity at its Convergence’. Unlike Todai’s Hongo May Festival, it is much smaller in scale and consists of various booths that represent the cosmopolitan student mix in NUS. With a clear focus to “showcase cultural diversity among NUS students’, it also gives local and international students and staff the opportunity to ‘appreciate and directly interact with ‘foreign’ cultures” such that they can be ‘assisted’ to ‘acknowledge the cultural diversity among the NUS community’⁶³. Having the opportunity to talk at lengths with students mending the Iranian, Bangladeshi and Indonesian booths, I had the impression that apart from offering interesting hands-on cultural activities (such as calligraphic writing of names in Persian, henna drawings, batik painting), the booths were designed in such a way that focuses on ‘educating’ visitors about lesser-known aspects of the culture. This contrasted with Todai’s May Festival, where international booths were given clear directives to have food-related activities, which at that time and context was also restrictive due to radiation food scares, a result of the nuclear effects of the 2011 March Tohoku earthquake. In that sense, the ‘internationalizing’ focus was much more overt in In-fusion---spatially, the diverse booths and activities converged upon the ‘heart’ of the campus (the NUS forum), thereby sending a clear symbolic message to visitors and participants about the university’s acknowledgement and appreciation of the cultural diversity among its students. On the other hand, the international booths in Todai’s May Festival were spaced apart on the sprawling Hongo campus. Located between booths that featured local Todai student groups, it gave me the impression that student diversity ‘just happened to be there’, and suggests an institutional stance that instead of highlighting diversity, seeks to ‘water down’ cultural differences. This said, perhaps due to the different scales of the events, I did feel that the atmosphere at the Todai festival seemed more spontaneous, international students were more keen and enthusiastic to share about their cultures, and visitors lingered longer to chat. In contrast, perhaps being used to a culturally diverse population in everyday campus and city life, the atmosphere at In-Fusion seemed to be more of a touch-and-go experience.

⁶³ NUSSU IRC—Awesomeness beyond Borders
<http://nussu.org.sg/irc/infusion.html>

It is evident then, that these two ‘international’ events in Todai and NUS are symbolically significant in a sense that the cultural diversity of students becomes acknowledged and marked on campus spaces, endorsed by the universities. For students, they represent a break from the frictional contact zones (particularly of the classroom and learning spaces) on a day-to-day basis. The ways in which the events are organized, and the resulting social-spatial interactions among local and international students can significantly contribute to expanding or limiting students’ global imaginations. With growing pressures of Asian universities to internationalize in order to remain competitive in the global higher education landscape, university-wide events such as In-fusion and the May festival are important avenues through which institutions can advocate their dedication to meaningful intercultural interactions.

7.3.2 *‘Take me to places’*

While insofar we have looked at how cosmopolitan sensibilities can be developed through intercultural interactions at university-wide events, it is also important to note that international students themselves often desire and demand for international experiences. As seen from the above, the internationalizing message advocated by NUS is comparatively stronger than that of Todai, and this in part contributes to a greater enthusiasm and higher participation rate in international programmes (on and off-campus) for the NUS students in my research. In fact, Rajesh, who had earlier spoken about the importance he attaches to his education experiences in Asia and Europe, laments about the lack of exchange students in classes and hostels, as well as his desire for more exchange programmes for graduate students (he feels that most of the exchange opportunities in NUS are only available for undergraduates).

Third year NUS undergraduate Vietnamese student Thi had already been on three overseas experiences, which she had taken up a part-time waitress job to finance. As an active member of the NUS Entrepreneurship Club, she had visited Silicon Valley on the prestigious iLead programme (an ‘experiential learning of entrepreneurship through internship at innovative local enterprises and overseas study mission’⁶⁴). She

⁶⁴ NUS Entrepreneurship Centre’s iLead Programme, <http://www.nus.edu.sg/nec/ee/ilead/index.html>

is also involved in the NUS Humanitarian Affairs⁶⁵ group with which she had gone to India to teach underprivileged primary school students. Reflecting on this experience, she said that she had ‘understood more about Indian culture and the underprivileged’, and that it was also ‘good fun’. Both Thi and Kim (also a Vietnamese undergraduate in NUS) were willing to pay close to S\$4000 to participate in the Work and Travel Programme to USA. Coming from an average income household in Vietnam, Kim was already having difficulties coping with daily expenses in Singapore, yet she was convinced that the overseas experience will benefit her, and that she could earn back the cost of her trip by working there (which she did!). After a three-month work stint in a restaurant in Yellowstone Montana, she shared that it was ‘an awesome life-changing experience’ that changed her paradigm of ‘what it meant to be successful’,

‘I realized many things that I didn’t know when I was in NUS. In Singapore, I felt that one could only be defined by his/her qualifications and CCA (co-curricular activities) achievements that can be put into their CVs. If you don’t have those, you would be a loser and there would be no way out for you in life. But after I went there (USA) I realized that there are many things other than official qualifications, you can still enjoy yourself in many ways...maybe those ways are not in the mainstream or it doesn’t fall into what people think is good for you, (but) as long as it’s good, you find enjoyable, then it’s good. You live your life the way you want it, not the way people expect you to’ (Kim, Vietnam, NUS, undergraduate)

Departing from the mainstream, more ‘practical’ value of increasing one’s employability through cosmopolitan sensibilities acquired from overseas experiences, both Kim and Thi were willing to invest their time and money to seek ‘life-changing experiences’ by exposing themselves to other contact encounters that can be vastly different from those in NUS. In fact, with the wide array of overseas programmes available to NUS students (evident through the number of posters throughout the campus regarding some sort of overseas experience including both academic and non-academic related ones), many of my respondents in NUS are echoing Dr Alice Gast, an adviser to Singapore’s Ministry of Education’s academic research council, that ‘it

⁶⁵ NUS Humanitarian Affairs, <http://nusha101.tumblr.com/>

doesn't matter so much where you go...it's more about the experience of having adapted to another culture and being immersed in it' because it can then 'give you that confidence and ability to do it again in yet another country'⁶⁶, implying some degree of replicability and a skill that one can get better at with more 'practice'.

In contrast, Todai has often been criticized as being relatively slow to internationalize. Ramping up its efforts in order to 'play a bigger role on the international stage', the 'Todai Go Global' campaign kickstarted in 2012, and one such resultant measure is to make campus facilities more 'foreigner-friendly' to handle a new influx of foreign students. This includes offering halal meals for Muslim students in its Komaba campus⁶⁷. While such a move towards making campus spaces more inclusive is encouraging, externally, Todai's international exchange programme, established just two years ago, only lists 12 university partners, which it intends to expand. Not surprisingly, among my Todai respondents, only a handful mentioned about how overseas experiences have widened their global imaginations, and these tended to be graduate students who were expected to present papers at international conferences. Hong, a Chinese PhD student in the Engineering faculty has been to several European countries for meetings, and shared enthusiastically about how she had benefited from informal discussions with other international academics on Chinese politics. At the time of our interview, she was preparing for a conference in Hawaii the following week. Commenting on the choice of conference locations, she quips 'my professor likes to choose places that are good for vacations!' Adding to an earlier remark about how she feels more relaxed in Japan because her professor has less academic expectations on girls, she confirms that 'that's why I say that the Japanese take good care of girls...my professor feels that research work is rather 'dry' and that girls will not fancy it, so as an encouragement, at appropriate times he would give me a break to travel to these places'. As a result, in her laboratory (where Hong is the only female student), she is often given priority to attend international meetings and conferences. Commenting on the international opportunities available for Todai students, she explains that PhD students in the Engineering faculty have the option to go on a three-month overseas internship where they can 'choose any lab in the world' to do

⁶⁶ 'Don has no doubt that foreign students are an asset', The Straits Times, Tan Hui Yee, 18 January 2012.

⁶⁷ 'University of Tokyo ramps up efforts to internationalize', Nikkei Report, 25 May 2012.

research, and if selected, Todai would cover airfare and living expenses. However, when asked if she would consider this, she responded that ‘the PhD programme is already quite busy here, so I don’t think I’ll have the time...’ thus suggesting that the take-up for such longer term exchange programmes is rather low in Todai.

In comparison, the plethora of overseas opportunities available in NUS and the higher participation rate seems to overtake even the more established internationalized universities in the UK. Tim, an exchange student from a renowned British university talks about how being in NUS opens up his ‘so many options’ he had not known were possible.

‘Speaking to Singaporean students on where they’ve been on exchanges, I felt like my choices were quite limited, we didn’t get any other options in the UK, like going to other Asian countries. Many Singaporeans I spoke to are going to Korea for exchange...the course is in English...in England, if you were thinking of doing that, you’d assume that you have to speak Korean...though actually that’s probably not true...(but) we didn’t even think about (the possibility of) going to Korea for exchange’ (Tim, NUS, UK, exchange student)

From the above, we see that universities play a crucial role in facilitating the development of cosmopolitan attributes in students. While university-wide events and the ways in which spaces are marked on campus (with regards to international students) are some overt avenues in which institutional stances about internationalization is conveyed, the availability of and participation in wide-ranging overseas experiences seems to be a critical factor, due to its sustained intensity, that influence students’ global consciousness. Whilst I have sought to compare the realities on the ground in NUS and Todai, it is important here, to finally situate these in the wider social contexts of the respective countries.

7.4 Cities and limits to global imaginations

Being highly cosmopolitan, international students in NUS in my research often appreciate the sheer diversity of the population within the city and the university. Tim explains how, in fact, this has influenced his choice of NUS as an exchange programme destination,

‘I think I’d definitely have chosen Singapore (again)...it is the best by far, partly because the university is really good and also because it’s got so many options, many places to visit from here, many different people from diverse backgrounds coming here. I don’t think in Canada I’d (have the chance to) be flatmates with an Indonesian guy, Vietnamese guy, or German guy, you wouldn’t get that mixture and that much experience of meeting so many people in one place’ (Tim, NUS, UK, exchange student)

While this spatial convergence of diversity both within the university is exciting for Tim, Anosh talks about how a multicultural Singapore helps to reduce possible tensions at contact encounters---it is difficult to differentiate who is a foreigner and who is not. He explains, ‘one advantage of being in Singapore is that there are so many types of people living here, such that few who would point at you and say “You are a foreigner”’. Having experienced some degree of discrimination in the UK and Sweden, he realised that in Singapore, ‘there are Indians (and) other people from everywhere’, such that Singaporeans have become ‘used to’ the diverse mix. He also commented on how public spaces, by having signboards in English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese, shows that Singapore is ‘sending the signal that they welcome all kinds of people’. This sense of a more inclusive public space is contrasted with Manuel’s (a Colombian graduate student at Today) experience in Tokyo, where he is always conscious of how conspicuous he is (in terms of physical differences from the Japanese) in public spaces outside the campus. Commenting on how he is gradually less sensitive to perceived differences and more adapted to Japan, he says ‘even now when I’m on the train, (I know that) I look different from everyone else, (but) I don’t feel so strange...after eight months here I feel that I can live my life in Japan, not as a Japanese, but closer to the way they live, and not feel so much like an outsider’.

While it is tempting to assume that the relatively more cosmopolitan population in Singapore provides an inclusive and welcoming environment for international students, it is timely to consider the recent growing unease among Singaporeans on the influx of foreigners. It is not surprising that international students were the first ‘targets’ of perceived rise in competition for places. This led the government to eventually put a cap on the number of foreign students in Singapore, from 18 percent to 15% by 2015, even though it is aspiring to be a regional education hub.⁶⁸ Isolated cases of name-calling and squabbles between local and international students were made ‘louder’ and had a greater reach through social media, resulting in heightened sensitivities on campuses as well as society at large⁶⁹. There are also concerns over the (un)willingness of new migrants to integrate into the Singaporean society, which prompted Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong to cite the ‘success’ story of a ‘localised’ graduate from the Singapore Management University (SMU) from Vietnam, who had been in Singapore for 6 years. He even quoted her as saying ‘I feel as much a Singaporean as I am a Vietnamese’⁷⁰, and urged Singaporean students to empathize with the difficulties of being away from home and to help foreign students to integrate.

On the other hand, Japan has often been criticized for being unwelcoming towards foreigners. However, in the wake of the ‘exodus’ of international students post-March 11, as well as the sustained economic downturn and a sudden realisation that Japanese universities are falling away from its competitive Asian counterparts, severe reforms such as a renewed focus on liberal arts education⁷¹ (to ‘turn out graduates who can function well in a global environment’), designing more shared living and learning spaces on Japanese campuses, and a greater urgency to open up the restrictive job market to foreign students are welcomed measures. Internally, the new generation of Japanese youths is often blamed for being ‘inward-looking’ and ‘not hungry’, being

⁶⁸ ‘Foreign student numbers drop sharply after climbing steadily’, The Straits Times, 8 October 2012.

⁶⁹ ‘Are Singaporeans ungracious? NO: it’s a minority made louder by social media’, The Straits Times, Goh Chin Lian, 28 August 2012.

⁷⁰ ‘Meet the people who moved PM: Classmates helped Vietnamese student fit in’, The Straits Times, 27 August 2012.

⁷¹ ‘Japan universities rediscovering liberal arts’, Nikkei Report, 19 April 2012.

‘forced out of the pack by their enthusiastic peers from China, India and South Korea’ in terms of their desire to study abroad and interest in international encounters⁷².

In the face of dynamic developments in the internationalizing university landscape within East Asia, it remains to be seen how NUS and Todai can effectively address these societal dilemmas, not only in physically creating a more foreigner-friendly campus environment, but also inculcating life-long cosmopolitan sensibilities in their students.

⁷² ‘Rather than turning inward, perhaps Japanese youths simply reflect society’, Nikkei Report, 30 January 2012.

Chapter Eight: Concluding remarks and the way forward

With the rise of East Asian universities, as attested by their increasing presence in international league tables, this study has sought to shed light on the new spatialities that ‘internationalization’ of East Asian campuses are producing, as well as students’ identity negotiations at the frontiers of differences in the study abroad experience. Geographers have long been interested in the ways that international education has shaped macro and micro-spaces, in terms of how they are constructed, experienced and negotiated.

In light of a more pervasive trend towards greater intra-Asian student mobility and the complex ethno-historic links among Asian countries, I have employed and built upon the concept of ‘contact zones’ and ‘safe houses’ as a productive way to spatialize and analyze the tensions and dilemmas of contact encounters. In line with the aims of the Globalizing Universities and International Student Mobilities in East Asia project, of which this research is a part of, I hope to contribute to more grounded, situated understandings of identities and spaces in the internationalizing Asian university context, which I assert, deviates from previous works on western predecessors. Drawing comparisons and parallels between NUS and Todai, two prominent institutions in the region, I also hope that this research can be a platform to encourage more debate in the field of comparative international education, illuminating educational policy, planning and practice that are situated in the particular socio-cultural and political contexts.

Interviews with international students in these two institutions have revealed that contact zones are powerful catalysts that trigger students’ negotiations of identities. One impact of globalisation and increasing people flows is that more young people have experienced migration either first-hand or are second/ third generation migrants, as shown by some of the respondents in this study. These familial histories often result in complex intersecting identities that are brought into, and continue to complicate contact encounters in their study abroad experience. I have also shown that NUS and Todai, as internationalizing universities with an increasingly diverse student population, are politically-charged spaces, especially since the majority of the international students originate from neighbouring/ regional countries that have

historical and contemporary strife with one another, not precluding the host country. Students are compelled to negotiate and make sense of national, ethnic and racial politics at contact zones, doing so through a myriad of coping and resistance strategies that ranges from resignation, avoidance to subversion. They also creatively forge new connections and/or renew old ties in contact zones, while constructing identity discourses that connect their past (such as family upbringing and education backgrounds) with the present (new experiences in the host university/country) as they chart their future trajectories. There is also a sense of individualization and self-authorship in shaping their identities such that they defy attempts to be boxed up into neat categories. This will pose a challenge not only to sending and host countries, but also to internationalizing universities.

Apart from being productive sites where identity negotiations take place, contact encounters also differ across the scales of routinized/institutionalised spaces such as the classroom, spontaneous and more casual settings like the dormitories, and episodic encounters through social media sites. It is in these spaces that students learn to negotiate the micro-politics of contact zones, and construct various safe houses as a coping strategy. In institutionalized contact zones, hegemony is often exerted through proficiency in the dominant language (in this case English in NUS and Japanese in Todai), which also brings with it notions of inclusion (and exclusion), class and social standing. I considered the uncomfortable position of English in Todai's internationalization strategy, as reflected in both classroom and administrative spaces. In spite of this, we saw how some Todai students capitalize on their lack of Japanese language proficiency to their benefit in the classroom. Adding to theorizations of safe houses in the contact zone, student responses revealed a creative myriad of safe houses that they establish on various points of connection that includes language, culture, ethnicity and region that goes beyond mere nationality.

In contrast, campus residences, their activities and the resultant interaction, with the absence of the competitiveness and rigidity in institutionalized spaces, are fertile grounds for meaningful encounters to take place, and thus have the potential to challenge long-standing national animosities, paving the way for more cosmopolitan understandings among students. This may also explain why Singapore and Japanese universities continue to invest substantially in constructing innovative learning and

living spaces that intermesh, seeing their potential to reduce friction at contact zones, encourage inter-group mixing and help develop meaningful relationships among local and international students. I have also shown how social media, and its rampant use by mobile youths, are volatile contact zones where insensitive remarks or isolated incidents have the potential to become viral, presenting a challenge for institutions and governments to contain.

Finally, in successfully negotiating contact zones in the study abroad experience, it is hoped that with the help of institutional directives, internationalizing universities like NUS and Todai can inculcate cosmopolitan sensibilities in their students and prepare them to be 'global leaders' who are well-adapted and 'globally effective'. My study has revealed that students themselves have varied articulations of what it means to be 'global' and 'cosmopolitan', and also actively seek to achieve accumulate cosmopolitan capital. They do so by strategically drawing on networks created among peers and international experiences within and outside of the university, with the hope of not only improving employability in the internationalized economy, but also harbouring a genuine desire to be plugged into an international network. Respondents such as Caroline have also echoed how at this stage of her life as an graduate student, an environment with high-calibre students from various countries provide a potential pool in which she can seek a suitable marriage partner. Apart from accumulating cosmopolitan capital, international students also develop cosmopolitan attitudes through reflecting on their position in the global space of flows. In the case of Todai, where the majority of international students derive from countries that have turbulent relations with Japan, interactions at platforms that allow for different voices to be heard challenge public opinions and media portrayals of animosity, paving the way for more grounded, genuine communication among young people.

Campus-wide events that highlight student diversity also shed light on how internationalization is construed in different ways by NUS and Todai. This said, as premier institutions in their respective countries, both universities are also subjected to the dynamic, often volatile societal sentiments towards foreigners, and this may impede the rate and effectiveness of internationalization. Thus, in researching international student mobilities, it is crucial to also pay attention to social

undercurrents that may not be immediately apparent, especially in the Singapore context where cosmopolitan values are politically upheld.

In terms of research design, I have used biographical in-depth student interviews as my main mode of enquiry to investigate contact zones. This, I believe, is particularly useful given the constraints of time (for a longitudinal study), because it allows the researcher a glimpse into the life-course of the student, which has a direct impact on how he/she experiences and negotiates contact encounters. Participating in campus events such as the Hongo May Festival and In-Fusion was illuminating in that it shed light on campus spaces can become 'internationalized' in various ways. The interaction with international students, and observing how they interact with one another in such casual, fun and spontaneous settings further supplemented data obtained from the interviews. The wide use of blogs and other forms of social media such as Facebook and twitter by young people make them fertile sites for contact to occur, with the potential to fan and incite negative sentiments that are rarely grounded in real material events or spaces. Hence, since virtual worlds are as important (if not more) for these international students, it is imperative to also pay attention these virtual sites of contact.

As an extension to this study, with the availability of funding and time, it would be productive to embark on a longitudinal study (from the start of their course to their graduation) that can serve to highlight not only the spatial aspects of contact, but also the temporal. This is especially true since students are often highly adaptable and are themselves maturing over time through their experiences of studying and living abroad. It would also be a fruitful to investigate how local students and staff negotiate contact zones, and how internationalizing universities' protocol for internationalization has affected how locals construct and make sense of contact encounters with foreign students. One intriguing issue that emerged while conducting this research is the politics surrounding the language (s) of internationalization. While the dilemma is more apparent in the context of Todai (and Japan as a whole), it is nonetheless also present in Singapore (and NUS), which hails itself as one of the few English-speaking countries in the region. In contributing to understandings of identity negotiations and global imaginations of students, as well as the spatialities of contact zones on campuses in both NUS and Todai, I hope to have provided more grounded

research that is valuable to informing institutional policies in the context of dynamic new initiatives in the East Asian region.

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Appendix 1.1 Interview schedule for NUS international students- Biographical interviews

1) Individual background

Key information: basic facts (age, gender, nationality etc); characteristics of upbringing; educational experiences; work experiences; travel/mobility experiences

Describe your upbringing (where you grew up, what kind of city/town it is, your family/household)

What kind of education have you had before coming to study in Singapore? (schools, tertiary study, languages learnt)

Did you travel or live abroad when you were growing up? Did your parents/siblings? What about your friends?

2) Familial background

Key information: parents education, employment, ages, nationality/cultural background; siblings education, employment, ages, residence etc.

Tell me about your parents: their education and jobs, how old are they? Where did they grow up?

Do your parents have particular expectations of you and your siblings? What do they value most?

Tell me about your siblings: how many, what are their ages, what are they doing now?

3) (Overseas study) Decision making process

Key information: reasons for studying overseas; when the decision was made to study overseas; who made the decision; what alternatives were considered; possibility to remain in country of origin for study.

When did you first think about or consider the possibility of studying overseas?

Who made the decision to study overseas?

Why did you feel that studying abroad was important for you?

What are the major reasons for studying overseas? (quality of education, money, career prospect, culture, escape from something, independence, impulse)

What are the major reasons you decided to study in Singapore? (What was your impression of Singapore?)

How and why did you choose to study at NUS?

(To suggest the gender/class aspects) Was your family more/less worried about you studying abroad? What were their concerns?

What is the reputation of NUS? How does it compare to other international universities? Universities in your country of origin?

Do you know anyone else who has studied here or at another university overseas?

Is it common for people in your country of origin to study overseas? (region, city/town, school etc)

If you didn't study NUS what would the next alternative be?

Did you ever consider remaining in your country of origin? Where would you have studied? What would the consequences be?

If you were making this decision five years earlier would it be the same? What has changed in this time?

4) Information finding process/awareness of initiatives to promote overseas study

Key information: involvement of family, friends, colleagues, alumni, official sources in information provision; knowledge of university strategy; awareness of scholarships and other schemes; government strategies to encourage overseas stud (origin or destination)

Questions

When you were making the decision to study abroad where did you find information?

What were the key sources of information? Was there a particular person who helped you a lot?

Are you aware of any schemes run by your country's government or the Singapore government to encourage overseas study?

Did you apply for any scholarships to study overseas?

Do you think that universities are actively trying to recruit international students? In what ways have you seen this?

5) Process of arranging and moving overseas to study

Key information: individuals, businesses and institutions involved in move; time between decision, planning and move; challenges involved in arranging move;

Questions

Who is supporting your study overseas? (self, parents, scholarship, other)

Please describe for me how you arranged your enrolment at NUS and travel to Singapore.

Have you ever used the services of an education agent?

What sort of role did NUS play in the process of enrolling and moving?

Did you receive any help from friends and family?

6) Initial experiences of study destination and campus (identify contact zones)

Key information: narrative of first few days in country/city; narrative of first few days at university; initial impressions of both study and broader environment

Questions

Take me through when you first arrived in Singapore? (describe first few days)

How did you feel? What were your first impressions of the city? Was it what you expected?

Describe for me your first few days on campus?

Did you feel welcome? Was there enough support for new international students?

7) Experience of study environment: peers, curriculum, pedagogy, value of education

Key information: what is studied, differences from origin country in terms of curriculum, pedagogy; make-up of student body at university in general, in classes specifically; impressions about the quality/value of education they have received

Typical Questions

What are you studying? What sort of classes do you have to take?

If you were speaking to a friend or family member at home how would you describe NUS?

What is campus life like? Is it similar to universities that you know in your home town/city or country?

Has it been easy adjusting to the curriculum and style of teaching at NUS?

What do you think about the quality of education at NUS? Is the quality of education the same as what you expected?

Who are your classmates? Are there many other international students? Where are they from? Do you think your classmates experiences are similar to yours?

8) Interactions with university organisations:

Key information: use of international office; student associations; learning centre's; language assistance; career planning; administration; departmental office;

Questions

Tell me about the services available to international students at NUS. (give examples: international office, student association, learning centre, language etc)

Have you utilised these services? For what purpose?

Do you feel that there are adequate support services at NUS? What could be improved?

What have been the challenges of interacting with the university?

9) Everyday activities, living situation etc (contact zones)

Key information: housing situation (where, what, who with), narrative of daily itinerary/activities, regular interactions with people, regular places; any kind of work

Questions

Please describe for me your housing situation. (Who do you live with? What kind of housing do you reside in? -University, private, apartment, what kind of area, who lives in that area).

Describe for me the neighbourhood that you live in. (Who lives there? Are they positive about your presence? Do you spend your free time there? Do you feel part of the neighbourhood?)

Take me through a typical day for you from start to finish. (where do you go, how do you get there, dressing, what do you eat, who do you meet, do you have regular activities, choice of language used)

Are you working while you are in Singapore? What kind of work?

10) Peer/social networks, social activities (identities)

Key information: close friendships and acquaintances (nationality and city/region of origin, pre-existing or new, gender characteristics); friendships inside and outside of

university; membership of associations/clubs; socialising – where, when and with whom; value of friendships while abroad

Questions

Can we talk a little about your immediate social networks – i.e., your friends and daily contacts? How do you know these people?

How many people do you know here? Acquaintances or close friends? Was it easy to meet friends? How? Did you have any friends here before you came?

Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend, partner, husband/wife etc? Where did you meet them?

Would you like to have more friends here? Who would you like to meet?

Are your networks centred on NUS? How ‘nationality’ based is it?

Are they usually other international students? Do you know many Singaporean students?

How valuable are these social networks to you in adjusting to life away from home?

What kinds of things do you do socially? Which parts of Singapore do you spend most of your free time in? (Where, describe these areas, what do you like about them) What is the social mix there?

Are you a member of a sports club? Religious organization/group/church? Association? Band? Other group? (‘safe houses’)

11) Maintenance of connections/communication with friends and family at home/elsewhere

Key information: use of different kinds of communication technologies; regularity of contact; regularity of trips back to home (and elsewhere); value/importance of these relationships while abroad

Questions

How do you keep in contact with your family? How often?

Do you keep in regular contact with your friends in your city/country of origin? Those who have moved elsewhere?

What would you say is the most important communication technology for you?

Have you travelled back home during your time in ‘Study Country’?

What was it like seeing your family and friends again? Did you feel different?

12) Transition to adulthood/independence, changing relations with family (young adults identity formation and negotiation processes)

Key information: challenges and benefits of living independently; personal changes; changing relations with family; role of overseas study in influencing these changes (independence more important or different study environment)

Questions

What has it been like living overseas by yourself and away from your family? Do you find it exciting? Is it challenging? Do you miss being at home?

Do you think that you have become more independent while you have been overseas?

What are the main reasons for this?

What about your family, do they view you differently now that you are living by yourself? (and friends?)

13) Identity: national, cultural, regional, global etc; role of overseas study in changing this; changing views (intersecting identities, transnational space is implicated in the formation of these identities)

Key Information: means of identifying; changes over time; role of overseas study in changes; social/political views before study and after; role of overseas study in any changes; possibilities for multicultural/cosmopolitan orientations through overseas study

Questions

How do you identify yourself primarily? (local, gender, class, race, national, regional, cultural group, global etc)

Do you feel that your identity has changed at all while you have been studying overseas?

Do you think that you have contributed to Singapore as an international student?

How would you describe your political views? (e.g. How do you view Sino-Singapore relations, Does it affect your decision to study in Singapore/ experience studying here?)

Have you experienced any identity clashes? Describe some incidents when this occurred.

Do you think it's a good idea for people to live outside the country that they grew up in?

Do you think that the place you grew up in would benefit from having a more diverse population?

Would you welcome more international students or other migrants to the places that you grew up?

Have your views about any of these things changed while you have been abroad?

14) Future plans: role of family, belonging, identity in these decisions; opportunities as a result of overseas study

Key information: where, what and with who; how future decisions are made; whether overseas study has expanded or limited opportunities at home/abroad; whether belonging has any role in this; family and friends involvement; duty to family or nation/community; identity (as described above) as part of decisions;

Questions

What are your future plans? (what, where and with who)

How did you make these decisions? When did you make these decisions? (before departure for overseas study, during, at the end)

Could you imagine living in Singapore or another place outside your home permanently? Could you be at home here?

Does belonging, or the question of where you belong play any role in these decisions?

Does the way you identify influence your decision?

Do your parents or other family members have any influence/opinion on your future plans?

Do you feel a sense of duty or obligation to your family, community or country?

Do you feel that studying overseas has given you more or less opportunities?

Do you think that the reputation of NUS will help you to get the kind of career you desire?

Have you achieved what you wanted to achieve from your time studying and living abroad?

If you could make the choice again, would you still choose to study overseas? Would you still choose to study at NUS? Would you do something different?

Appendix 1.2 Interview schedule for Todai international students- Biographical interviews

1. Individual background:

Could you tell me about the place you grew up (what kind of city/town is it, your family)?

What kind of education did you have before coming to Japan? (school, tertiary, language) Have you ever had a job before coming to Japan?

Did you travel or live abroad when you were growing up? Did your parents, siblings or friends?

2. Family background:

Tell me about your parents: where they grew up, their education and jobs, ages?

Do your parents have particular expectations of you and your siblings?

3. Decision making process

When did you first consider the possibility of studying overseas?

How and why did you choose to study at Todai?

4. Information finding process/awareness of initiatives to promote overseas study:

When you were making the decision to study abroad how did you find information?

5. Process of arranging and moving overseas to study:

Please describe for me how you arranged your enrolment at Todai and travel to Japan/Tokyo.

6. Initial experiences of study destination and campus:

Tell me about your first few days in Tokyo.

Describe for me your first few days on campus.

7. Experience of study environment: peers, curriculum, pedagogy, value of education

If you were speaking to a friend at home how would you describe Todai? What sort of classes do you have to take? Has it been easy adjusting to the curriculum and style of teaching at Todai?

Who are your classmates? Are there many other international students? Where are they from?

Do you think your classmates' experiences are similar to yours? How do your experiences compare with any friends, etc who are studying elsewhere?

8. Interactions with university organisations:

Tell me about services available to international students at Todai (international office, student association, learning centre, language etc)

9. Everyday activities, living situation etc

Please describe for me the place that you live (What kind of housing? Who with? Describe for me the neighbourhood that you live in).

Take me through a typical weekday and a typical weekend for you from start to finish. (where do you go, how do you get there, what do you eat, who do you meet, do you have regular activities)

10. Peer/social networks, social activities:

Tell me about your social networks – your friends and daily contacts. How many people do you know here? How many of these people do you consider friends?

Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend, partner, husband/wife etc? Where did you meet them?

Tell me about your social life. What kinds of things do you do socially? What parts of Tokyo do you spend your free time in? (Where, describe areas, what do you like, what is social mix)

11. Connections and communication with friends and family home/elsewhere:

*Do you keep in regular contact with friends and family in your city/country of origin? How often? How do you usually keep in contact with friends and family?

12. Transition to adulthood/independence

What has it been like living overseas by yourself and away from your family? How do you think that you have changed while you have been overseas? (independent, world perspective)

13. Identity

How do you identify yourself? (local, national, regional, cultural group, global etc) Do you feel that your identity has changed at all while you have been studying overseas?

Do you think it's a good idea for people to live outside the country that they grew up in? Do you think that the place you grew up in would benefit from having a more diverse population? Would you welcome more international students or other migrants to the places that you grew up?

14. Future plans:

What are your plans for the future? How did you make these decisions? When did you make these decisions?

Could you imagine living in Japan or another place outside your home permanently? Could you be at home here? Does the question of where you belong play any role in these decisions of your future? Does the way you identify influence your decision?

Do your parents or other family members have any influence or opinion on your future plans? Do you feel a sense of duty or obligation to your family, community or country?

Do you feel that studying overseas has given you more or less opportunities? Have you achieved what you wanted to achieve from your time studying and living abroad?

If you made this decision five years earlier would it be the same? Why same or different?

If you could make the choice again, would you still choose to study overseas? Would you still choose to study at Todai? Would you do something different? How so?

Appendix 1.3: Number of international students in Japan by institutional type and countries/regions of origin, 2011

There were 138,075 international students in Japan as of May 1, 2011, 2.6% down from the previous year.

Number of international students by institutional type

Graduate school	39,749	(1.7% up)
University (undergraduate)/ Junior college/ College of technology	71,244	(2.0% down)
Professional training college	25,463	(8.6% down)
University preparatory course	1,619	(24.3% down)

5 major countries / regions of origin

China	87,533	(1.6% up)
Republic of Korea	17,640	(12.7% down)
Taiwan	4,571	(13.7% down)
Vietnam	4,033	(12.1% up)
Malaysia	2,417	(1.9% down)

Source: Japan Student Services Organization

Appendix 1.4 Interview transcript with Wenjie (Malaysian, UG, NUS)

Date	:	6 Oct 2010
Duration	:	1hr 25min
Location of interview	:	NUS
Institution	:	NUS
Respondent	:	Male (W)
Country of origin	:	Malaysia
Department/ Year of study	:	Sociology/ UG

Note: M denotes the interviewer

M: Could you tell me about the place you grew up in? What kind of town? What kind of city?

W: Before my pre-Primary school, I grew up in a small town actually, where the shops closed early.

M: Where is this place? Which part of Malaysia?

W: The town itself is called Kulim; it's in the state of Kedah. It's about forty-five minutes away from Penang.

M: So it's a very small ...

W: Small, sleepy town. Everybody goes to bed by ten. That was till when I was about six. The my dad got a job offer in KL (Kuala Lumpur), so we moved there.

M: Big city?

W: Yes. We stayed in Subang Jaya, which is like an aged city.

M: Around KL?

W: Yes. Again, another forty-five minutes from KL but it's an urban area.

M: So you studied there?

W: In Subang?

M: Yes.

W: I did my Primary School in a Chinese medium school.

M: So it's a private school?

W: No, it's a vernacular school. Chinese medium national school in that sense. Then in Secondary school, I went to a Malay medium national school, which was a rather big transition but ya.

M: Did you have any problems adapting? It was ok?

W: It was fine but just a little difficult because of the demographics.

M: Why didn't you? You could have gone all the way right in a Chinese medium school?

W: There were a number of schools, but my parents sent me to the national school closest to my home. It's about a ten minute walk away.

M: So you never did stay away from home?

W: No.

M: So from a small town to a bigger city, any problems?

W: You bet but I cannot really remember.

M: You remember that you enjoyed yourself anyway.

W: We were young, as in we had so much space then. We could cycle, go crazy and run around. Whereas, in the big city, everyone is afraid that 'oh later you may be kidnapped'. And our town, our area, Subang, was quite notorious for kidnapping cases, really really (stressed) and snatch theft. My mother got snatched as well.

M: What's the demographics there in Subang? The racial mix is quite even?

W: Quite even? Okay, not really. It can never be completely even but as in, it wasn't as bad.

M: Quite a lot of Chinese

W: Quite a lot of Chinese and mostly, it's a middle class area.

M: Your parents? Where were they from? They were from that town of Kulin? They grew up there?

W: No, my mum was a kampong girl actually, from this little village. They are both from Penang, my dad from the island; my mum's from the mainland. So they grew up in a village environment. She only had secondary education, up till secondary, in a Chinese medium school, both.

M: Both of them?

W: Both. No, both of the primary and secondary schools. My dad, on the other hand, was the complete opposite.

M: Ang mo?

W: Ang mo, even my grandparents, as in my paternal grandparents don't speak Mandarin at all (stressed), so my dad was English-educated. He went to, I forgot which primary school, but a Penang primary school, which is one of the top schools in

Penang right. But all (were) Anglophiles. And my dad did his degree in New Zealand, so he had an overseas education.

M: What are they doing now?

W: My mum's a clerk, my dad's an engineer with the power utilities. They are both in the power utility. That's where they met.

M: Oh, so they are like civil servants?

W: Semi, they privatized. They are listed on the stock exchange ... privatized ... (unsure)

M: Half, half kind?

W: Half, half kind. But the government still owns something like eighty percent of the shares, something like that.

M: How about when you were growing up? Did you travel or lived abroad?

W: No (slight pause) we couldn't afford it basically. I only made my passport at the age of sixteen. And that was because my dad was doing his MBA and the company actually sent him to Montreal for three months.

M: Three months is enough to complete the programme?

W: No, as in like he did most of it in Malaysia already. And for the last three months, they just sent him over to do some modules; exposure. He could afford to bring us there because it was sponsored by the company and on top of that, he gets his basic pay; his monthly pay even though he was not working, so we could afford to go.

M: But you all only stayed there for a while?

W: Three weeks.

M: Three weeks is a long time right? And that was your first overseas (trip)?

W: First ever.

M: And it's far.

W: But it was breath-taking.

M: What did you remember of it?

W: Niagara falls and also the lifestyle, as in you come out from ...

M: Kampong?

W: Yeah, as in you grow up in a kampong and you go out to city life, you know. You think that you have seen a lot of it then you go to a completely different country, as in Canada was a (slight pause) ... new experience because the people there; their thinking is very different and again the demographics of it, you have never been in a majority of Caucasians. And the surroundings, you are so free and everybody is walking around shirtless in the summer.

M: And Montreal was French right?

W: Yes, Montreal was French. And it was kind of interesting also.

M: Do you have any siblings?

W: Yes, younger sister, five years younger so I am twenty two this year (and) she is seventeen.

M: And she is in ...?

W: Still in Malaysia.

M: So she is studying in Malaysia?

W: Yes, same primary school, same secondary school.

M: That's easy.

W: Oh yes, it was. Of course, they have to fight for a place in Trans Primary School because places were very limited in Chinese schools.

M: Is it expensive?

W: No.

M: Since it's vernacular?

W: No, it's a government school.

M: Fight for a place?

W: In a sense, there was a really long waiting list. As in I didn't get into the primary school in my first year. I only entered midway through because they opened up extra classes, so they had extra places, so then we managed to squeeze ourselves in.

M: So if (you did) not get into the school, you will have to travel to somewhere?

W: Yes, about an hour and a half drive away, to another Chinese school. My parents were quite insistent on me going through the Chinese medium school.

M: As in they want you to know how to speak the language right?

W: Yes. Again, it was rather interesting because my mum is Chinese educated and my dad is English educated. My dad doesn't speak Mandarin at all.

M: What do you all speak at home?

W: Interesting, I speak to my mum in Chinese and I speak to my dad in English.

M: What do they communicate through?

W: Hokkien.

M: Oh yes. That's Penang right?

W: Yes, it's Penang.

M: They speak Hokkien. That's so fun but of course you can't speak right?

W: I picked it up from them.

M: So you are the eldest boy?

W: Elder. The only son.

M: So do your parents have any expectations on you? Either they voice it out or they didn't voice it out.

W: In a sense, academic expectations; they don't really emphasise it like I like have to top the class but they do insist that I go through a good education and it's to get the foundations right. I did okay in class and in school and they were okay; they were generally supportive. But being the elder one... because both my parents were incidentally the elder ones in their families. My dad was the eldest of four siblings while my mum was the eldest amongst six or seven. So in a way, they exemplified and my paternal grandparents were also the eldest of their families. It's rather unspoken but 'You are the first boy then you have to do this and you have to do that'. When I was young, they roped me in to do all the rites (stressed), like opening doors for the bride and the groom.

M: And religious stuff as well?

W: Religious stuff, not because my family is Christian. My parents are.

M: So do they expect you to be someone or to take care of them?

W: The expectations are drilled into my name already. But I don't think it's overtly spoken that I have to take care of them when they are old. My mum even jokes that when I am old and sick, just let me die. But again, if they are doing it to their parents then we are in this society, and in a way, they spend so much money sending me here, so ...we have to pay back their debt.

M: When did you first consider coming to Singapore?

W: Actually, we have this ASEAN Scholarship option.

M: How did you know about that?

W: Right at the primary level. Yes, even in primary school, as in there were a few entry points; in secondary one, in secondary three and in JC and of course university. As in it's quite a prestigious scholarship in Malaysia. So the first time I heard of it, it was already in primary school.

M: Oh, so the teachers actually tell you about it?

W: Yes, the school actually announces, or rather they handpick a few students.

M: And they say make sure you get it?

W: They train the students.

M: To take examinations?

W: Because there are some tests to go through. It's a selection test and my batch was actually the first year they were going to send students over.

M: But this is throughout Malaysia right?

W: Throughout Malaysia but our school was one of the, in a sense, an elite Chinese primary school. So the school actually encouraged and groomed but I opted out of it. That was the first time we considered but we decided (against it).

M: Yeah, you were so young.

W: At age thirteen.

M: But was there an unspoken rule that it's better elsewhere than here?

W: It's not an unspoken rule, it's an overtly spoken rule.

M: 'If you can get out, get out'.

W: Oh yes. And something about my parents; because when my dad had an overseas education, and they were both in semi-government (organizations), it was tough being a minority there. And up till now, it's still the same.

M: You feel it? You can feel it when you were in school?

W: Oh yes. Definitely.

M: So you gave up that first opportunity because you thought you were too young to live alone is it?

W: Yes.

M: And too scary?

W: Yes and to leave home. The second time was in Secondary three. And again, it was still too young.

M: This was to do the O Levels here?

W: Yes, so I did my Malaysian O Levels, SPM then I applied to come over.

M: Okay, that was another entry point.

W: It was the later one, at the JC stage.

M: This is a very competitive scholarship right?

W: Oh yes, I wasn't expecting to get it actually but miracles happen and one day, I just got a letter. As in previously we applied, submitted the forms, went for the test and at the test, we knew that there were almost two thousand students who were shortlisted for the placement test itself. Then it was English, we wrote an essay, some Math questions, some IQ questions. But there wasn't an interview back then. Our cohort of scholars that they took in was abnormally large. I'm not sure because we were in the Dragon Year. I'm not sure that affects it but the ASEAN scholarship intake, for one reason or another, was a hundred or more, or there about; which is abnormal.

M: So the ASEAN scholarship is just for coming to Singapore is t? It's the Singapore government?

W: Yes, it's an MOE thing. We get our school fees waived and we get an allowance.

M: It's comfortable?

W: Comfort as in?

M: Comfortable enough, as in the allowance part?

W: We get by. My parents top up.

M: Top up? They have to?

W: Because in Malaysia, if you want to do a post-secondary, as in pre-university education ...

M: College?

W: You will be going to a private college vas well.

M: So it's going to be expensive?

W: It's going to be expensive. With the amount that you spend, the benefits will be less; a Singaporean education versus a Malaysian private college.

M: What was your impression of Singapore? I mean you were still young and you haven't been to Singapore, thinking that you will study there.

W: Actually we came to Singapore for a short trip with friends.

M: With friends?

W: As in I had a short trip here in primary school with other primary school leavers. It was a trip organized by the school, for primary six kids.

M: Wow, overseas trip? That's funny.

W: That was interesting but I barely remembered anything from it. We were all kids and so young. It was in primary five and I was eleven.

M: That's quite amazing because usually primary schools would not have overseas trips then.

W: Yes, we were in a Chinese school, so in a sense, they had more ... they organized it. It's a tradition for the school; they always organize it for the school leavers.

M: To Singapore?

W: Different places. Our year, they came to Singapore and the next, they went to East Malaysia. Actually those were barely the only times we travelled out, I think. Later, when I was sixteen, after I made my own passport then I came here for a three to four day holiday.

M: With friends.

W: Yes, just to check out the zoo, Science Centre and Night Safari. Short trip, it was the first trip on the MRT. It was exciting at that time.

M: What was your impression at that time? I mean you have been thinking about coming here already?

W: Yes, kind of. I have a very close friend who was studying here already. She came in Secondary three. She came here earlier.

M: Slightly earlier?

W: She came in slightly earlier. From her, we heard a lot of it. In a sense, she influenced ...

M: Your decision to come here?

W: Yes, my decision to come here.

M: So she had good things to say?

W: Oh yes, she had amazing things to say. She was one of the first IP students when they introduced the programme with NJC and she had a good time. She would talk about the mass dance, the Student Council experience ...as in Malaysia, you don't get this kind of experiences.

M: In the college?

W: Yes, (it was all about) study, study, study.

M: Really?

W: In a sense.

M: So it was more intensive, less fun?

W: My first Singaporean experience was the school orientation.

M: Which JC were you in?

W: ACJC. The first thing we get to school was orientation games; it was like rolling in the mud. It was very different, it was the first time I got down and dirty. It was very different, it was a life-changing experience rolling in the mud. You form solitary bonds with people because you were all dirty at the same time. That for me was a life-defining experience. In Malaysia, it's very different; you will never have gotten into the mud for playing games. I mean you get dirty and all playing soccer but it's not part of the school programme. In Singapore, the emphasis was, I felt, very great on CCAs. Whereas, in Malaysia, it was compulsory to join a uniformed group, society or sport but then again, they are not entirely important. You just make sure you get your As. At least that was I felt, it was slightly different in Singapore. And also, the whole emphasis on student life. In Malaysia, I remembered that for the last day of school, on the last day of the examinations, they actually shooed all the students out of the school because they were afraid that the students will vandalize. It was our last day and you would vandalize the school. There was no such thing as school spirit.

M: Do you think it's only specific to your school?

W: I don't know (softly). I don't think so. As in, there were really a few good (stressed) schools, they probably had a better experience but for the rest of us where the majority are national schools, I figured that our experiences are not that different. In ACJA, it was different because it was such a strong school spirit. There is a very strong sense of belonging and the atmosphere was very family-like. But then, it's mission school and I may have been influenced by that also. I'm not sure.

M: How did you choose ACJC then?

W: It chose me.

M: Oh, they chose you?

W: No, MOE allocated the scholars to different schools.

M: It was great and you enjoyed?

W: Oh yes. The best two years of my life, like really.

M: But how was living on your own here been like? You were in a boarding school?

W: We had an offer and freedom from parents. In Malaysia, mobility is a problem because of ...

M: Driving?

W: Driving, you have to drive everywhere. The buses won't come to you like to hours away. You have to squeeze and to hang precariously around the stores until the bus comes. I either wait for my parents to come and fetch me or we wait for friends who have gotten their licences. It was troublesome and activities were limited, limited in that sense as to when my parents can fetch me. Whereas here I just hop onto the bus and I can get to anywhere in Singapore and without parental supervision. In that sense I get that freedom to do whatever I want; I did not need to come back early but there is a curfew time by the hostel.

M: But it's just beside the school right?

W: No, it's a ten minute bus ride.

M: Oh, I thought they have (a hostel)?

W: No, ACJC does not have its own (hostel).

M: Oh yes yes, that's for ACSI.

W: And living alone means being independent.

M: Like doing your own laundry?

W: Laundry was the least of our problems because you just shove a coin in and you press a button. Actually in the hostel, we are quite taken care of. Meals were provided.

M: So you didn't have to cook?

W: Like breakfast, lunch and dinner on weekends and breakfast and dinner on weekdays, so we didn't have to cook. But we (have to do) decision-making.

M: Like how much to spend?

W: Yes, how much to spend. The first thing I got here was which phone plan should I get. There were three major operators then I had to do my own research, find out the perks of it and ... as in making independent decisions, I would say (for) living away from parents. It was a big transition but I think I got used to it. It was more exciting than anything. And also, facing up to authorities on my own without involving our parents because in school, if you did something wrong, in Malaysia; they will call your parents. But I guess here, we don't have parents to call also. Basically, we are answerable to ourselves and for whatever actions that we do, whatever rules that we break; that whole sense of 'You are responsible for it'. No one is going to take care of you and also I love it lah.

M: So you also felt that responsibility that you have grown?

W: Maturity.

M: Like you are growing a bit faster than your peers?

W: Oh yes, especially our Singaporean peers. Because when I came over here, I had to take care of myself. But after a while, you are fine with taking care of yourself then you start taking care of other people as well.

M: Take care of other people?

W: Yes, in a sense. Especially when you are in your second year as seniors, there is a rather close scholar community. The school formed the committee for us, which was the Foreign Scholars Welfare Committee and I am in the committee.

M: So there were a lot of foreign students?

W: Yes, right from JC. Because as ASEAN scholars, we have representatives from all the ASEAN countries, including Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Philippines; everywhere basically.

M: So you were taking care (of fellow ASEAN scholars), making transitions?

W: Yes, in a sense.

M: Any problems that they faced?

W: In a sense because when we stepped up as seniors, all these wide-eyed juniors they come in and they are so lost ... 'Where am I going to get these?', 'Oh, I need a student pass, I need a guardian'. (They have) so many questions coming in and so many uncertainties. And I will be like 'Oh relax, chill'. Basically, we take care of them. I guess it is also part of my upbringing because I am an elder brother. It is almost second nature and I am still doing it now.

M: Mothering people?

W: Oh while, in a sense.

M: Do you still keep in touch with this close group of ASEAN scholars? Your close friends?

W: Especially in NUS because I am staying in the hall.

M: Which hall are you in?

W: Kent Ridge Hall and some of my batch students, those who came together into the hall and also I roped in some of my juniors. Now my closest friend is my direct opposite neighbour in the hall.

M: Let me come back to NUS. There is one more thing I want to ask, what does studying abroad mean to you? You know getting away from Malaysia? What does it mean to you? Like some people say, career prospects.

W: Actually it's the whole package, in the sense that there are many many reasons for us to study overseas. But I was (stressed) on scholarship. The first thing that came to mind was financial burden, the most practical reason; as in my education would be paid for. I need to do sufficiently well in school. Career prospect wise, I'm not an ambitious person. I want to teach but there's something that I ... (hesitant) want to go for.

M: I think you will be a great teacher.

W: I hope so, in the Singaporean experience because teaching as a profession in Malaysia is; I mean it's a noble profession anywhere but it is particularly bad in Malaysia.

M: Welfare?

W: Yes, not being well paid is one. I heard from some of my teachers that they do not even need to pay income tax because their wages are so low; not enough to qualify to pay taxes, sad right? Also, the teaching environment. Because I am from the minority group and if I am going to teach in a national school, there is a lot of; that's again what I heard from the teachers, it's very politicized inside. It's interesting how they get promoted and stuff. And the whole teaching environment, students don't care about teachers. The respect for teachers is not there.

M: So it's going to be difficult.

W: Yes, it's going to be difficult. That's why when I came over here, JC was very different. The Singaporean education; I meant teachers are well taken care of and it's ingrained (and) drilled into your minds that you have to respect your teachers. Here, I felt that teachers were more outgoing and approachable than my Malaysian teachers. That is career wise. Back to why I came here.

M: Yes.

W: Again, the non-academic part of education, like growing up and going back to (what's said earlier), living independently.

M: That was what you wanted?

W: Yes and that was what my parents wanted.

M: Oh they wanted?

W: They were like 'Go out and live your own life' and not just be taken care of at home; like being spoilt and stuff. In my mum's own words, she wanted me to open up my eyes to the world and know how it is like living on your own. A major factor would have been the growth, as in not the academic growth. My dad even commented that if I don't get a scholarship, they would try to ...

M: Get you in?

W: If you couldn't get in, they would pay for it because the school fees would have amounted to the same thing as the private colleges in Malaysia.

M: So it was a blessing?

W: Oh yes, definitely.

M: Why did you choose to study in NUS? Was it just a natural transition for you?

W: It was the most natural transition because we were in the Singaporean system already. After taking the Singapore A Levels, it was so easy. I don't even have to fill in most forms and everything was there for you. You just click, click and click. I didn't even have to write a testimonial or any recommendation. Everything was done, so it was most natural.

M: Did you consider other universities?

W: I applied to ANU, Australian National University.

M: ANU? Oh, you wanted to go abroad?

W: Yes, abroad from Malaysia.

M: Abroad from Singapore?

W: Abroad from Singapore, yes. I applied to ANU and they offered me a place but (there were) financial constraints at that time. We calculated, one year at ANU itself would fund three years in NUS. It was a big amount and my dad was saying that if my parents used their savings to educate me in Australia, they would have to use all (stressed) their savings and they would have gone back down to zero.

M: Then your sister (would not have the funds)?

W: I would have to fund my sister. It was a big decision because we have the Singaporean education system through the JC system and it would be another eye-opener if I had gone to Australia. And I have heard from a couple of friends.

M: In ANU?

W: One of my closest room-mates from hostel, he was in ANU, telling me about life (there).

M: That was why you wanted to there?

W: And also in my father's eyes, its ranking is comparable to that of Singapore's.

M: ANU?

W: Yes.

M: So were you disappointed in a sense?

W: In a sense, I understood the limitations of not being able to go. It would have been exciting also because again it's a different experience and it's further (stressed) from home. I mean in Singapore, it's a nice transition. While I was still young and away from home, my mother used to call every other day. It's understood that it will be a different system in Australia and expectations of the society. And that's comparative in a sense, I don't have to struggle for grades as much but my father's perspective was that, in ANU, you have to rough it out. You have to get a job there and supplement my father's funding, whereas in Singapore, you could lead a more comfortable life. You could afford to go out a little more to enjoy yourself.

M: So he analysed that for you?

W: Yes, the financial aspect. In a sense, I wasn't harbouring too much hope of going there. It's a dream to get out of Malaysia and at that in Singapore, it was a dream to get out of Singapore; greener pastures, the grass is always greener on the other side. But we understood the constraints and I came to NUS, which I guess it isn't too bad.

M: (You sound quite unconvinced). But you wanted to do Arts?

W: Yes, I wanted to do Arts because in JC, I did science, which was a big mistake. In a sense, it costs me my scholarship because I discovered a little too late that I am not geared (towards Science). My teachers also commented that you are in the wrong stream, especially my GP teacher because she sees how I write and she says 'You are not a science student'. And I struggled with Physics and Chemistry.

M: And you didn't drop (the subjects)?

W: It was a little too late and also because I was on scholarship.

M: So you didn't.

W: But it was part of the Malaysian mentality; to always go for the Sciences. It's more secured and better job prospects. And even now, as I go back to tell my teachers, so they would asked 'Where are you studying?' and when I say NUS, they go wow. 'So what are you studying in NUS?' 'Arts'; 'Oh, why Arts?', 'Because I want to teach'. They would then ask why do you want to teach. Again, the Malaysian mindset is very geared towards the Science as a professional degree. It's still very traditional thinking of being lawyers, doctors, engineers blah, blah, blah. No one would say they want to teach especially when you are on a scholarship. You go to Singapore and you get into NUS, again a very prestigious university back in Malaysia and they would go why. Teaching in Malaysia is not a very prestigious thing.

M: But Sociology is not exactly a teaching subject.

W: It's not. Actually I came here intending to major in English, Linguistics.

M: Yes.

W: But my first year ...

M: You took EL1101?

W: Yes, the foundational modules. I took Sociology Exposure, English Language and Philosophy. Because my GP teacher also said I might want to look into Sociology because of the way I wrote, it shows.

M: Wow, that's quite early (to tell).

W: Amazing teacher, she was a linguist. She said if you are really keen to teach, why don't you try something linguistic but at the same time, you seem to be geared towards Sociology. I think it should be fun for you also, go and take it. And philosophy is interesting, go for it also. In my first semester here, I took all three and English wasn't for me. It was a little too technical for my liking. Social science, yes because it's more of a science. As for Sociology, I love Sociology; it's the most exciting part of my university life because we are studying society. I, myself, am someone who loves observing people about the things they do, right from a very young age. Looking back at the experiences and taking up the modules, and reflecting on our experiences, it's very telling that I had this interest since young. Even in primary school, I could remember sitting at the canteen and I would look at how people are eating noodles today. Why are these people running about? Oh and this group of students are, every morning, particularly studying; as in reflecting back, it was something that I love to do even from a young age. Sociology in Malaysia is unheard of. The closest that we have to hear of is Psych.

M: Psychology?

W: Psychology. And because we hear so much of it, it was something that I wanted to do back in Malaysia but screw it. I came here and did Sociology. That was actually the most exciting part of NUS, for me because I got to pursue something that I really love to do. Especially in my year one, I thoroughly love the subject and I got Eugene as my tutor. He made me love the subject even more. It opened up my eyes to the different aspects of Sociology. And in NUS, one of the major draws was the hall life. Because we came from hostel and so in that sense, we have experience of communal living and it's so fun.

M: But is the experience very different?

W: As in NUS?

M: Yes, from your hall last time

W: It's different but same. It's the same concept of communal living and the bonds that you form. In NUS, there is so much more freedom, we don't have a curfew. Because back in NUS High, there was a curfew. There are people looking after you.

M: Chaperons?

W: Yes, but over here, we are completely free. It's a student-run community. What I relish was just having people around me. I guess I am a people person.

M: Fear of loneliness is it?

W: I think it's a paradox because like this semester, I rather take all lessons alone. I have all my lunches alone because I don't have course mates, as in people taking the same modules as me. But I am actually a very people person, especially in communal living. I think for me, one of the things is to live in a hall. Whereas compared to living in Australia, I would have to live in a house with house-mates, almost like two, three, almost four of them. In the halls, one block has a hundred people and one hall has five blocks, so you have the chance to get to know like five hundred people just under one roof and I enjoy that.

M: Who do you hang out with? I mean who are your closest mates? Are they your hall mates?

W: Oh yes, definitely. We are in a hall bubble. The demographics are very interesting. Because back in hostel, we were all international students, mainly all the ASEAN scholars in ...

M: KR?

W: No, in JC. All ASEAN scholars, so my room-mates were my closest friends, like Malaysians, as in there were also like Indonesians. We were fine with anyone. And in KR in NUS, it's a bit mixed. Right now, my closest friends are locals.

M: Singaporeans?

W: Singaporeans. It's ok because we did a committee together, we did an orientation together. We spent three months organizing it and in a sense, it was fun. We went through it together, so the twelve of us basically are very close; mostly locals but three of us were Malaysians. It was a given opportunity but even in my JC, the classmates whom I am closest to are all locals.

M: Do you find any difficulty in mixing with the locals, at least in the beginning?

W: Not really.

M: Not at all?

W: My first Singapore friend was a local whom I talked to during JC in the orientation group. In a sense, we came from a largely similar culture and our ethnicity; we were largely Chinese. We were not too different as compared to others who looked racially different, unlike some of them came from Indonesia or India, racially, it's obvious.

M: Let's talk about your classes. Are your classmates or course mates largely Singaporean?

W: Yes.

M: Not much international students?

W: No. I think Sociology is a rather different course, very writing based.

M: Very ang mo (westernized)?

W: In that sense, so it filters out people who don't have the attitude for it, as in they don't like it. Like if you go to Engineering, you hear about the concentration of PRC students. We don't get it, at least not in the Sociology department, not even the PRC students. It's mostly Singaporeans peppered with a few Indonesian students and Filipinos, just peppered. They are very few, so my classmates are mostly Singaporeans. Course dependent in that sense.

M: Yes. So how often do you go back to Penang?

W: KL?

M: Oh KL, yes.

W: It depends. When I was in JC, I went back twice a year.

M: Oh, during Chinese New Year ...

W: Yes, Chinese New Year.

M: And end of the year?

W: Yes, end of the year and then there is June. Maximum is three times a year because they imposed a limit as to how many times you can go back (home). You need to get approval from the school before you can go back to Malaysia. Over here, it's freedom but then again...

M: (How about) since you came to NUS?

W: On average, not much actually, three to four times.

M: Three to four times a year?

W: Three to four times a year. Every time I go back, it's for a very short time period, at most one week. I guess it's because of hall life. There are ever so many things happening in the hall, even on the weekends. Even when you have e-learning and you don't have classes, you have hall activities going on. In my first two years, I joined a committee that required me to stay in hall because I am the one organizing them.

M: So you like to be involved in many things?

W: Oh yes.

M: So when you go back, you meet up with your friends in KL? Are they close friends or they have all left for abroad?

W: Yes. Most of them would have left for overseas education.

M: So you have a friend in ANU there? And then where else do they go usually?

W: All over actually; UK, States, Australia is the biggest portion, I guess. It's relatively easy to obtain entry into.

M: More than the rest?

W: I think in that sense.

M: Do you keep in touch with them?

W: Yes, the wonders of Facebook.

M: Do people at home or even your family say that you have changed?

W: Oh yes (stressed) for sure. I know that I have changed ... (pause) being brought up in a traditional Chinese primary school, we were very competitive; we were very competitive about marks like crazy.

M: You must be in the top kind?

W: It's ingrained into you that if you want to do well, you have to work for it. It's very Chinese mentality. Even up to secondary school, I was ...

M: A mugger?

W: A mugger. I used to be able to just memorise the whole textbook. I resent that now. Because coming to Singapore and the whole Singaporean experience, especially JC; well to put in a very cliché way, it just feels that there is more to life than just studying.

M: But there is still a lot of studying (in Singapore).

W: There is a lot of studying but the emphasis was not purely on studying. Whereas in Malaysia, (you just) study, study, study (stressed). Like from school to tuition then from tuition to home, and then the whole day is just tuition (repeats 3 times).

M: But I thought it's more relaxed (in Malaysia)?

W: It's more relaxed if you want it to.

M: Yes.

W: But again you are drilled that you are to do well.

M: So how have you changed then?

W: Oh, my social life is thriving now for one and it's a direct opposite of what I used to do. I remember my mum telling me that she was worried because I wasn't going out with friends in primary school and during early secondary school. It was just 'friend-less' I guess. It was all running around the park but you couldn't really connect to them because the maturity level and the ...

M: Maturity level?

W: Those kids, as in ...even at a young age.

M: You already felt that you were ...

W: They were talking about trading cards and I had no interest in it. I would have loved to talk about all the planets. It was true ... (pause). Instead of all the Enid Blyton (books), Peter and Jane books..., I went straight for...

M: Science?

W: All the science books, again Astronomy was a big interest to me. I loved watching documentaries (while) they were still watching cartoons and all. We were of a different level in that sense. Right now I loved watching _____. It was a different experience. In a way, it's a 'been there, done that'; been through a very competitive ...

M: So it wasn't that bad?

W: It's not my priority anymore. In a sense, I know how it felt like to be at the top of the class and top of the school but ... it's an identity thing. Back in Malaysia, my identity was based on my grades; I'm known as the top student in the school and everybody comes to me for academic questions like how to 'answer this question'. It was empty, very empty. Over here, I get a more personal feel, social thing.

M: Do you also think that competition here is more stiff?

W: Yes, much stiffer but not as bad. Back in Malaysia, it was more competitive as they were some who were competitive but also selfish; as in they would not share their notes with you whereas in Singapore, everybody is somewhat 'there' because in Malaysia, there is this lower ranking and there are the top few students. In Singapore, at least in ACJC, everyone was at that level and there was not much difference, it's how much (effort) you put in that sets you apart from the rest. So in a sense, it's more competitive but it's not selfish.

M: So there is more copying of tutorials?

W: Oh yes, totally! The competition didn't affect as much. Of course, I was not in that competitive mood anymore.

M: And you were not singled out already?

W: Actually (there) are different expectations on scholars, like they expect you to do well. I wasn't doing particularly well.

M: Because of the course right?

W: Yes, but to me it was of secondary importance because I was learning about life. We talk about our socialization from young, I missed out on it.

M: What do your parents think about this change in you?

W: They are happy, for sure; just as long as my grades didn't suffer too much. As long as I could stay in school and maintain that scholarship. Looking back, I would say I was socially awkward, like back in primary and secondary. Like my mum said 'She was afraid that this kid would not grow up normally', so they were quite happy with me being here, making lots of friends; social learning.

M: And your parents have come here to visit you many times?

W: Oh yes. Not many times but in JC, they came twice. I made sure I brought my mum to school to meet some of my teachers, to reassure her that I am doing okay. I'm particularly attached to my GP tutor because she encouraged me a lot. So I brought my mum to see her and to reassure my mum basically.

M: Now that you are in university, how often have they come?

W: Nope, never. I'm in my third year, they have never come down to see me. One constraint is that it's hard to find a place to stay and it's expensive to stay in hotels. Back in JC, our hostel had some guest rooms.

M: For visiting parents?

W: Renting at about sixty (dollars) a night, which was very cheap, so they could come in and stay and visit me. Whereas over here, it's a hundred bucks. Actually the hundred bucks is cheap; it's at least two hundred per night at the hotel.

M: Do you think your achievements have influenced your sister? I mean now?

W: Yes, for sure because my sister is not doing particularly well in school. I feel for it because I am not there.

M: To encourage her?

W: Yes. And again, I have always been the elder brother, teaching her and helping her with school work. The very year she entered secondary school, I came here to Singapore, so it was transition for me, transition for her. She didn't adapt to well into it. She is not doing particularly well in school, she is doing not at all well in school; failed a few subjects already.

M: So your parents are worried about her?

W: Worried about that and that will be my biggest trade-off.

M: For coming here?

W: Yes, my biggest regret because of my responsibility to my sister.

M: Everyone has their own path to take?

W: Yes, in a sense, there has always been this being in Singapore versus being in Malaysia thing.

M: Yes, you always feel that how would life be.

W: Family life especially because my parents are past their fifties.

M: It's just slightly right? Just early fifties?

W: Yes, my mum's fifty two and my dad is fifty one. I missed out on my sister especially, as in when she was going through puberty, adolescent, that teenage year; I missed out on that while I was living my life here. So there is always this ...

M: 遗憾?

W: Yes, 遗憾. That's a nice word. Over here, there is no family life here. My family is back in Malaysia. Even in hall, they go back and have family dinners every week.

M: The Singaporeans right?

W: Whereas for Malaysians, our families are ... the biggest trade-off would have been family life for studying in Singapore.

M: Does that make you want to go back after you have graduated?

W: (pause) No.

M: You felt it was not yet?

W: There are practical reasons; we have a three year bond, as in for tuition grant bond, I have to work three years with a Singapore-registered company. I have applied to teach so if I get the MOE Teaching Award.

M: They will offset you right, with your education? No?

W: My subsequent (tuition fees) because I just applied for it, Sociology is not a teaching subject.

M: So they will put you in a primary school?

W: Depends. Hopefully I will still get to teach in a JC, hopefully. We will how it goes but practically I have a bond to fulfill; three to four years bond. If I really want to teach, not much teaching prospects in Malaysia.

M: You have prospects here?

W: To be at least here. Because I am the guy and I'm expected to feed my family in that sense. But in Malaysia, with a teacher's income, you are not going to be able to sustain a family.

M: Do you think there is a possibility of you staying here and then your parents coming over?

W: It will be a more likely situation than for me to go back to Malaysia.

M: Do you think they are open to that?

W: They are definitely open to that but one thing about Singapore is it is not a good place to retire in and my parents understand it as well, especially my father. He is more well-travelled than my mum.

M: So we will see how?

W: We will see how but it's a possibility although at this point, it's a rather remote one.

M: So you still have to be here for a while?

W: I have to be, they don't have to be. And also, Singapore is a small country. We feel that where we came from, living a kampong life and village life, land is never a

problem, the land is so sparse. You have a big huge field for us to run around and in Singapore; we were just talking about playing catching, you know ice and water?

M: Like hide and seek?

W: Comparing childhood experiences, they were talking about running around and (they asked) 'So where do you run?' Their reply would be we run around in the park and our reply is we can afford to run around in our houses. As in right outside our doorstep, we don't even have to go down to the park. Also, the whole concept of a house, that is something I'm not looking forward to when I graduate.

M: HDB flat?

W: Yes, HDB flat. As in because if I don't have a family, if I'm going to rent a room in someone else's house, that's not a home. It's a very ... (hesitant), what's the word for it? Sanc ... (tries hard to say the word but failed). Home is a very sacred word for us.

M: Like a sanctuary, where you can retreat.

W: Yes, that's the word.

M: So if it's like a room, it's like ...

W: It's not a home. Home is not a home in someone else's house. That's one thing and also a HDB flat. I have never lived in one but I have been to; like everyone could just peer into your house. Like you are in the living room and someone comes and just look and someone is there. Whereas in Malaysia, we have our own houses, nobody can look into you; it's a very private place. It's very protected in that sense. No one can come and disturb you; there's a gate that separates you.

M: Oh, but you are living in the hall. Everyone is looking into your room?

W: That's fine because I find myself looking in their rooms. You know private space especially if I'm going to have a family. That is one big major concern.

M: Any concerns? Do you have a girlfriend?

W: No, not yet. Hopefully, we will see how it goes.

M: In God' times?

W: When it comes, it comes.

M: Are you doing part time work? No?

W: The closest work to part time work was this thing because my dad is against the idea of me working, even in an internship because he said that 'Well you got to work for the rest of your life, what's the hurry?' He says you are not in particular need for money; it's not like we are impoverished or something. We can afford to pay and he said 'Go out, enjoy your life. Instead of working, go and do something valuable', like organize my hall orientation which is a rather big project. Or he said 'Go learn a skill'. He is against the idea of me working.

M: To feed yourself.

W: Again, the emphasis on life skills rather than immediate monetary gratification.

M: That's wonderful.

W: That's the right thing, I discovered.

M: Do you call back to your parents very often?

W: Many times. My mum calls three to four times a week.

M: So what you all talk about?

W: Nothing much, just the 'How are you doing?'

M: Do they ask you about your grades?

W: She does but she will ask when is your next test (and I will reply) 'Oh long time, November'. Then she will call again and (ask the same thing). As in, there is not much to talk about. There is just ...

M: To hear your voice?

W: To talk or if there is the latest gossip back home. She just called me yesterday and like 'Mrs Lee Kuan Yew just passed away and so how? Are you going to her funeral?' and I am like no. It's not what we talk about; it's just that we actually talk. Sometimes back in hall, she would sometimes call in the middle of meetings and I will tell her to come me back and she will (say) there is nothing to talk about, I will call back another day. I feel bad because she will call and ...

M: And then you are always caught up in something?

W: Yes, again the whole family life (thing). But then again, we can email. Like my dad, he will prefer to email and it's free. Like for important administrative stuff, like I'm going for my SCP, I'm going for my exchange. And any documents, I will (be like) 'Hi dad, can you help me do this?' He will be like sure but no, no, it will be too personal level.

M: Where are you going?

W: States.

M: Which part?

W: DC.

M: George Washington?

W: George Washington.

M: I went there.

W: Really? For?

M: Exchange.

W: Really?

M: When I was an undergraduate student here.

W: Seriously?

M: Let me just finish this and we can talk about other things. What other things are you in? Any club? Any group? Does that ASEAN group still meet up?

W: Yes, we do but less now. In our first year, we still met up; we went back to the hostel but gradually, you don't have that many connections anymore. Wonders of Facebook, we can post on each other's wall and all. What I join now are mainly hall activities. I took up block Head in the hall, going back to my point about taking care of other people. It comes almost like a second nature and so even in my hall, I'm responsible for my hundred and two D blockers.

M: And they are all over? I mean they are from different countries?

W: All over, mostly locals actually. KR yes. Mostly locals but there is a sizeable community of international students, particularly Malaysians. We have Indonesians, Vietnamese and exchange students.

M: So it's been interacting with different people?

W: Yes, very very fun. And again, and they said I'm someone who is very fatherly. I guess so and it's really something that I enjoy, so it's not something that came out of obligation. It's to serve people and in my own personal way, giving back to the Singapore education.

M: Wow, you feel that you have gained?

W: Yes, I feel that I have gained a lot. I mean it really changed me as a person.

M: For the better

W: Definitely. It's my way of giving back to this community. Apart from the block committee; the rock band.

M: Rock band?

W: Yes, again we don't get this kind of opportunity in Malaysia. We only have the ...

M: The usual kind of (CCA)?

W: The usual. I was the President of the Chinese Language Society, how boring can that be. And I was the secretary of the football club. Well, my only role was to do admin duties, I didn't even need to go for practices. Just comparing opportunities, I'm in the rock band, I'm in the song-writing group. Song-writing is unheard of in Malaysia and I'm in the drama group.

M: All these are in the hall?

W: In the hall.

M: So you get to perform?

W: Yes. For me, it was a new experience. For me, I was in a Performing Arts CCA in JC; I was in the guitar ensemble. Again, we don't get this kind of opportunity in Malaysia. The closest thing to a musical thing was Choir, at least in my school. In other schools, they had their own bands, marching bands and so on.

M: Yes, yes. Military and stuff right?

W: Yes, but we don't get that kind of opportunity to perform. Performing, again, was something I enjoyed. It was something that I discovered.

M: While you were here?

W: Yes. The main thing is opportunities here in Singapore. Definitely, it's one of the biggest draws because in Malaysia you can always find this minority group thing; opportunities to education, opportunities to work because they have the quota system and all. That aside, about social opportunities also such as, at most the thing we will go out and do is hang out at the mall for birthdays. Like 'Hey, where would like to go', like hanging out; it was always the same places. It was always the 'in' malls, but over here, there are some many places to go, like one of our favourite places is Timbre, where they play live music or Red Dot. I don't dream but the whole experience and atmosphere. In Malaysia, there are but they are not accessible.

M: Not accessible?

W: Yes, in KL, you have to drive at least half an hour, as long as you don't get up in jams. It's an hour's drive away whereas here, you just hop onto the bus or friends drive. My local friends drive. It's so convenient, you just hop into the car but again, this is based on my experience of not being able to drive in Malaysia. But then again, opportunities as a whole, Singapore are a small place but it's accessible. Malaysia is just a big place with a lot of natural beauty and we are so proud of that but in that sense, it is not so accessible. Even if they have these drama groups performing in Malaysia, they are not as accessible. Again, location and communication; how are you going to publicize? Websites are not a big thing in Malaysia, but whereas information here, even restaurants have their own websites right? In Malaysia, it's a rare thing and for those who relish a social life, clubbing in Singapore is a relatively safe activity. In Malaysia, drugs (and) the vices. And also, it's not safe to go out so late at night, especially in Malaysia and especially at those areas. Someone just drag you outside and rape you and that's it.

M: But do you think you also appreciate Malaysia a little more since you are here?

W: The food.

M: Malaysian food, really?

W: Malaysian food and the cost of living as a whole. It is very cheap in Malaysia and again food. You can afford to go to a mamak stall, that's a supper place and just order anything off the menu; you don't need to look at the price (repeats twice) because it's going to be so affordable. Whereas if now I hop over to supper places like Al-ah Min and Fong Seng, I look and one prata is seventy cents and I convert it to Malaysian (currency).

M: You do that too? Even now; it's been so long? Because your parents are earning an income?

W: You still have the tendency to do that because the amount you spend as one person; if I spend up to ten dollars at Fong Seng, it comes (up) to about twenty plus (ringgit) one to one; as in when you convert over, it's twenty plus. It can feed my whole family of four.

M: For a meal right?

W: Yes, for a meal. Really, the cost of it.

M: So you appreciate that more?

W: I appreciate that more.

M: The food is better?

W: Sure, it's infinitely more unhealthy but; especially coming from a Penang background.

M: Char kway teow?

W: Everything actually. In Penang, if the food is not tasty, then don't bother cooking it. MSG is not an issue, as long as it tastes good. It's that kind of mentality.

M: Live and let die?

W: Yes. Really, in my family, especially my grandmother. It's ironic because my paternal grandparents are medical people. My grandmother's a nurse, a Head nurse actually. My grandfather was a hospital assistant. Heck, they don't care about their health. But then again, this carefree attitude ...

M: Not so worried?

W: Not so worried about so many things. I took a summer programme over in NUS, just recently. A lot of them commented that Singapore is a very clean place and I don't see litter anywhere. Clean is a nice word; I rather say it's sterile and it shows in the Singaporean mentality, versus the Malaysian mentality like you are very afraid of rules such as getting a hall. They stayed in PGP, the first day I had an exchange with them and there was a whole list of rules (such as) males and females cannot stay in the same room; all these rules and well, the biggest unspoken rule is not to get caught, but that is the whole mentality in Malaysia. Fine, bribery and corruption are not an issue here but an issue in Malaysia. The whole mentality is that as long as you don't get caught. In Singapore, it is to the point of paranoia "Oh shit, what if I get caught?" So what if you get caught, you just wiggle your way out of it. As in risk-taking, in a sense. Over here, we don't even dare to litter.

M: You are definitely more spontaneous people right?

W: Yes, there is always this obsession to the point of paranoia, even like taking the water issue. Singapore is so caught up in the sustainability, we have our own Newater. I was like heck in Malaysia.

M: You just drink whatever.

W: Actually in Malaysia, contrary to what we know, we have water shortage as well. We have water rationing; they would just cut off water supply. (If) they don't have enough water, they will just inform you twenty four hours in advance and they are going to cut off water supplies in twenty four hours. It's water rationing again and here in Singapore, Singaporeans are complaining about not having enough water. In Malaysia ...

M: It's normal?

W: We are not so caught up in getting by.

M: Do you think then you have the best of both worlds, since you have experienced both?

W: In a sense, yes.

M: And you are conscious of both?

W: Yes, conscious of the difference.

M: The good and bad?

W: The good and bad. There is rationale behind Singapore's, the things that you do but no rationale behind Malaysian politicians' (actions). I guess I have been brought up in this best of both world thing all the way because even from the influence of my parents. My dad is English-speaking and my mum's side is like the city life and kampong. To this day, my maternal grandmother; they still live in a village and same kampong that my mum grew up in and the house is registered under her name! As in very simple living for my cousins and aunts. My grandmother and uncle are just noodle sellers and the sell noodles at our house.

M: The same (place)?

W: Yes, at our own house and it's a very kampong-like (environment) where everybody just pass by in a motorcycle. It was a very close-knitted community and on the other hand, I have my paternal side, who is a really well-to-do family. My grandparents have a bungalow in Penang. And my great grandfather was a well-to-do person at that time, in his time. They come from very different background, so I had the best of both worlds. Then again, going through the different education systems, the Chinese one (then) Malay one and now to English system. It's a multi-varied kind of ...

M: You have definitely gained from all these? Have you become more critical, do you think?

W: Oh yes!

M: Critical in what sense? More contented?

W: I think it's an inherent (thing) and infinitely important in Sociology. As in, from the background where I came, with this kind of mindset and it's perpetuated through the modules I'm learning, so I'm brought up in that kind of environment. But it's

something that I personally appreciate. Especially with the identity issue of whether am I Chinese Malaysian, as in right in Malaysia, the feeling is I am more Chinese than Malaysian but over here, I am more Malaysian than I am Chinese because there are policies and boundaries being drawn. What helped (me) to see things differently was that there was always the 'other', like perpetually.

M: Do you feel that a lot here?

W: Not on a personal level but on a more macro level.

M: Policy level?

W: Policy, like even for my exchange; I mean it's not an overt thing but I do see that my CAP is higher than them but why do they get their university but I don't get my choice of university. Also recently, policies like when you are applying for scholarship bursaries, only Singaporeans and PRs (are eligible) and I am like 'Oh'.

M: It's like you are out?

W: Yes. In a sense, I'm used to it because we have lived in that kind of environment and (so) don't make too much of a fuss. You just live and get back because ...

M: Because in Malaysia, it was like that?

W: It is like that and again, it is not outright. We know that there is a quota system.

M: So you are not too unhappy with stuff?

W: We have come to accept it. I mean we are not happy about it but we can't say we are unhappy because we have learnt to live with it and to get by, to survive in that kind of environment, so in that sense, just accept it. But with all these boundaries being drawn, we are used to being outside anyway. We are always being the 'others' and I don't think that's ever going to change.

M: Because no matter where you go, (it will be the same)?

W: Yes, but it's fine. I think it may have actually helped in me transiting and adapting to ...

M: Here?

W: Singapore. Not just Singapore ...

M: Anywhere?

W: But in an international community or just anywhere; something just outside. Like some people, they get homesick and all and they don't adapt to being here. (They asked) 'How come there are Singaporeans like them?' Get used to it and generally, you are more accepting of this kind of situation. You don't get so critical and you don't get so caught up in all these things. You just get by and learn to live on despite whatever the circumstances.

M: You said that you are Christian, do you go church?

W: Yes.

M: Regularly?

W: (Hesitant)

M: I mean do you have a community of church friends?

W: I was from ACJC, it was a Methodist institution.

M: So they had a chapel?

W: Yes, I was very ... I was surrounded by Christianity because Monday there is chapel and Monday there is Christian Fellowship (CF) in ACJC. In Malaysia, it would have been impossible trying to set up a CF in Malaysia. In my primary school, my vice principal just openly said 'As long as I am here, you are not going to set up your CF'. There is no freedom of expression in that sense although they have a Islamic Student Society. Okay but coming back to the point, Monday they have chapel, Tuesday there was morning prayer and Wednesday was morning worship. Thursday is I have a cell group back in my hostel followed by meeting with hall manager. Friday there is CF. Saturday is church and Sunday is rest day. In that sense, I was surrounded by this community, as in I was brought up in a very Christian community, so it was quite strong.

M: How about now?

W: And then back in hall, even now we have our own cell group.

M: In KR?

W: Yes, it's for our own KR CF. It's not an official group, it comes under VCF, Varsity Christian Fellowship so we have our own group back there. I have been going to church but maybe not as fervently.

M: Which one? Do you go back to the one in ACJC?

W: No, actually I have been attending Full Gospel Assembly.

M: Going with a group of friends?

W: We used to go, as in a few of us were Malaysian scholars back then and a few of us would just go to church but then, because they don't attend the church anymore, as in one went to NTU, another went to study in UK and one is in Australia, so the community is not there anymore but I still go back. But I go alone.

M: As in not like actively serving.

W: Not actually in church because one thing about hall is that there are a lot of hall activities that require me to stay back during the weekends, especially if I'm the one organizing it. So I skipped a few church services to go for my hall stuff. The problem is recently is the church moved because it used to be in Dhoby Ghaut in the central, so it's rather accessible. It's in Orchard so I can just hang out after that; typical weekend like just go to church and after that hangout. I could just walk around Orchard Road. But now the church has moved to the East, somewhere in Paya Lebar.

M: A bit far?

W: It's a bit far, I might look for another church to attend.

M: Okay, last thing; do you regret your decision to come to Singapore?

W: Nope.

M: I mean if you had been given a choice, will you still go overseas; I mean not NUS but maybe ANU or something. Would you think that you will have a better experience?

W: It's hard to say.

M: Yes of course.

W: It's not something I can regret. The biggest regret would have been if I had stayed back in Malaysia. As I have mentioned, it is a life-changing experience and I have benefitted a lot; as in I have grown so much as a person, intellectually and maturity level, so it's not a decision I will regret. It's something that I will encourage other people to take up. Actually, MOE roped me in to promote the ASEAN scholarship also.

M: To go back to Malaysia?

W: Go back to Malaysia, they did an education fair and they roped me in to share my experiences and to promote the ASEAN scholarship, and to promote Singapore education in general.

M: Did you take that up?

W: Yes, I took it up. It was a one off thing.

M: So you went?

W: Yes I did.

M: As in did presentation?

W: Presentation. They flew me off. It was something that I believed in. The opportunities are given to us. They even featured me in the Malaysian Reader's Digest. MOE did an advertorial with them because I genuinely believe that the Singapore education was a positive one and we Malaysians also want to take advantage of; genuinely believe in.

Appendix 1.5 Interview transcript with Hailey (French-Chinese, MA, Todai)

Date	:	2 June 2011
Duration	:	1 hr 34 min 6 sec
Location of interview	:	Tokyo, Japan (Hongo Campus)
Institution	:	University of Tokyo
Respondent	:	Female (H)
Country of origin	:	France
Department/ Year of study	:	Civil Engineering/ Masters

Note: M denotes interviewer

M: Could you tell me about the place you grew up in? What kind of a place is it?

H: I grew up in a not small but not so big city next to Paris. It's an urban area so we had subway, we had buses, it was pretty urban.

M: So you were born there?

H: I was born just next to Paris.

M: I'm just curious, where were your parents from?

H: My mother is from Hong Kong and my father is from China.

M: And they were there for many years?

H: They met in France actually.

M: Was it through studies?

H: My mother came with my grandparents while she was like ten.

M: Pretty young.

H: And my father came later, when he was in his twenties and I think they had some common people whom they knew.

M: Like in a community?

H: Yes, yes. And so that's how they met actually.

M: So from then, have you gone back to meet other relative from say Hong Kong?

H: Yes, yes. I was in Hong Kong for a year at least.

M: For Chinese New Year?

H: Yes, for example I was in Hong Kong last year for Christmas, usually December.

M: So can you speak Cantonese?

H: A little. I can manage.

M: And which part of China (is your dad from)?

H: It's Wenzhou. I can also speak the dialect from there but they don't speak it anymore.

M: So you speak French and English?

H: Yes and I am learning Chinese.

M: So (you are) quite a complex mix of identity?

H: Yes.

M: So what kind of education did you have when you were growing up? Were you in a public school or international school?

H: I was in a public school for my primary (education). And after that for junior high school, my mother said that the school wasn't that good, so I got into a private school; it was a Catholic one for junior and high school.

M: Was it like a girls' school?

H: No, I didn't go to a girls' school, so it was a mixed (school).

M: What programme are you doing now?

H: I'm in Civil Engineering. I read Master's 1.5.

M: So for your undergraduate (studies), where did you do it?

H: I was in French, in a school near to Paris.

M: So have you lived away from home?

H: Actually before coming to the University of Tokyo, I did a one year internship, also in Tokyo; in a French-Japanese company.

M: So that was the only time you (lived away from home)?

H: Pretty much and also before I was studying here, I was living in an apartment on my own even though it was not too far.

M: You just moved out?

H: Yes.

M: Is that a common practice in France?

H: Yes, usually.

M: Away from travelling to China or Hong Kong, did you go to any other place prior to Japan for travelling?

H: In the world?

M: Yes, international

H: Well, in Europe, pretty much it's a small country, so it's easy to go. In Asia, I have been to Taiwan; I have been to Malaysia, Thailand.

M: That was like kind of on the way when you come to ...?

H: Yes. I went to Hong Kong and my family there wanted to go for a holiday, so they would bring me.

M: Is this quite an extended family?

H: No, actually it's my uncle.

M: So you are very well-travelled, like having both sides of the world. How about your parents; their educational background and their jobs, what do they do?

H: My mother came to France when she was very young and she went to school there and she dropped out at sixteen. And she started working with my grandparents.

M: They have like a shop?

H: In the beginning, my grandfather did furniture.

M: As in he made ...

H: Yes, he made tables and my grandmother was sewing leather stuff like belts and wallets.

M: It must be really tough.

H: I think so and after a few years, they moved to the suburbs and then they opened a restaurant; the usual Chinese.

M: So your mother helped?

H: Yes, my mum helped and then after that she bought her own restaurant.

M: So she is running her own restaurant?

H: She is running her own restaurant. My father came later and I think he educated in China. I never asked him the details. But I knew that he was a teacher in China.

M: And what does he do now?

H: Now, he works in the restaurant with my mum. My parents each have their own restaurant.

M: But it's Chinese food right?

H: One is Chinese and there is like fusion.

M: Do you have any siblings?

H: I have a little brother.

M: And he is ...?

H: He is working with my parents now.

M: Oh, so he has already started work?

H: Yes, yes.

M: So, in your family, you are kind of like the highest educated one?

H: In my close family, yes. I have some other cousins who also study engineering.

M: So as the big sister and the one who is studying, do your parents have any expectations on you?

H: I guess they have. I guess they want their children to be well educated, so that they can have a good job, not so complicated and exhausting as working in a restaurant. But overall, they let me do whatever I want to. Like I chose almost everything, except at one point where my parents said; where my father said "What are you doing studying? You are not even bringing any money home". And I was like yeah sure.

M: That was when you decided to do your Master's?

H: Yes. That's why I decided to do engineering because I studied it in undergraduate, in France and it was tough, like forty five hours of class per week. And so I spent my time studying and I think my father didn't like that.

M: That you didn't help in the shop?

H: Anyway I told him that "You know, I'm studying this and after that I'm going to get a job and the minimum salary is that" and he was like okay.

M: So they don't expect that you will come back and take over the shop from them?

H: No, that I think they put it down already but they tried to push me not to come back to France.

M: Why?

H: Because I think in France, it's pretty difficult if you want to be an entrepreneur or this kind of job is really tough. Administrative stuff or taxes, maybe it's better if I go abroad for a few years and maybe after that come back.

M: So they are not worried about you?

H: No, no. Especially when my brother started in other schools; they understood that maybe it wasn't too good to have too many expectations.

M: I'm just curious. I mean as a second generation immigrant, that kind of pressure about Asian families ...

H: I was reading a lot of books about it and I think it's really interesting and at the same time, it's so difficult to classify because our ways are so different. I don't know; maybe when I was in elementary or junior high school, maybe I did feel the pressure but it wasn't like it was spoken. They have not spoken to me but I feel that there's something behind. But I was always good in school.

M: How about class? I mean you were with other French kids, did they look at you (differently)? Did they expect you to do better?

H: Yeah, maybe they did when they saw that I am an Asian; that Asia cliché. But in France, I wasn't expected. In my elementary school, maybe more than half the kids in class were from immigrant families, like African or Asian, so it was okay.

M: So it was quite cosmopolitan even young?

H: Yes.

M: How about university?

H: Back in France, we have a difficult educational system, we have universities on the one hand and on the other, we have what we call gonzaga, which is like an intensive federation of big and famous schools; what they call elite schools where you can study engineering or business. Usually, to enter the schools will require two years of undergraduate studies, about forty five hours of studying per week.

M: So that was what you were doing?

H: Yes and then I went on to do competitive national examinations, where you get ranked and according to rank, you go to the school wherever you want.

M: So after high school, you have to spend another two years to prepare for the entrance?

H: Yes, but it's equivalent to undergraduate. But in France it's recognised as an undergraduate.

M: Right, but the programme itself is four years or three years?

H: The preparation is two years and three years of studies.

M: So it's five?

H: Yes, so it's equivalent to Master's at the end. And in this kind of schools, you will mostly find non-immigrants and also very few Chinese. But there is a big debate about it now in France because it is said that the system is not open enough and it prevents people from poor families or immigrant families who cannot reach this level because of the common reasons even though there is an examination, it's not like they are not prepared. They say maybe it's because they don't have the opportunity to study now; they have to work or not have enough money or something. So yes, there is a big debate about that. Another way is that universities are classic universities, everyone knows about it, which is a bit more...

M: So you are kind of the black sheep that came out of the system?

H: I think yes. I managed to get my way through the system. And most are wondering about that because of this kind of debate. Even though I come from a rich family or I didn't go to museum every week ...

M: Go to museum every week?

H: Culture is very important. Yes because in the examinations, we have French Philosophy Art and for this exam, they say this is really difficult for people who are from (overseas).

M: Because the background is not the same.

H: Yes and therefore it is difficult and I don't know.

M: And you went to museum to ...?

H: I have friends who love art and I just followed the normal curriculum in school and I managed to go through the exams.

M: So when you first consider the possibility that you would want to study overseas?

H: Very young, maybe after junior high; I already knew I wanted to go overseas for whatever reason.

M: What are the 'whatever reasons'?

H: Like working or studying or just spending a year abroad to discover the world. I really wanted to go abroad.

M: Why? Did you feel like the world was very (big)?

H: I don't know. From a very young age, I was like; for example learning English, in France we learn English up to junior high, already in elementary school, I wanted to learn English. I thought it was so important; in that way I can understand so many things.

M: You were thinking about that when you were young?

H: Really. So in my last year in elementary, I asked my mother to buy some English books. At that time, I already like to go to England, which was like just across the sea but it was already there.

M: But I mean your whole environment, like elementary school, was already quite cosmopolitan.

H: Yes but I don't know. In recent years, I feel that even though it's cosmopolitan because of the people, society as a whole is quite closed. I'm not really considered as part of the French people. They will still criticize like maybe you know French but your family is not. So I feel it was important. I wanted to go to China to learn Chinese really hard.

M: Intensive?

H: Intensive so that I could maybe kind of find my roots and just say “Now I kind of know everything and now I can really say that’s who I am”. So that was a big issue in my high school years.

M: So Japan is like out of the whole (picture)?

H: Yes, so actually when I was in engineering school, I had this opportunity. First, it was the internship. It’s usually like to do one year internship in the middle of your studies, so I wanted to go abroad for all the reasons I mentioned before. I tried to find a job in Asia and I just couldn’t find a job in Hong Kong or China.

M: Seriously?

H: Yes, in Hong Kong I was paid not enough even for me to pay my rent, so I don’t want to pay for it.

M: But you could stay with relatives?

H: I could but it will be really hard because their apartments were really small, so we will be sleeping in the kitchen or something. That wasn’t an option, so in the end, I was already interested in Japan. I like Japanese culture, Japanese food, the anime I like it; things like that.

M: Is it common in France that people are exposed to Japanese (culture)?

H: Yes. I remember that when I was small, every morning, there was anime to tune in; so this affection for Japanese pop culture is really really popular in France.

M: So from young, you were already ...

H: I was already exposed.

M: So you weren’t learning Japanese?

H: No, maybe I tried but I quickly dropped (it), so complicated. I had my period where I wanted to learn a lot of things but forgot about it, so I was ready to go to Japan. And I had this opportunity that was offered to me out of the blue and I said yes.

M: And you said this is like a French-Japanese?

H: It’s a French-Japanese company. The boss is from my school actually. That’s how I got the offer. So they sent the offer to the school and I was like great; that was close to what I wanted. And I was close enough if I wanted to travel to China; that was good enough and it was well-paid.

M: How long ago was that?

H: I entered in October, so just before that.

M: Do you have to go back and finish up what you were doing?

H: I have an agreement between my school and the University of Tokyo and I still have one year to finish entering into Master’s here, and so I will get a double degree in the end.

M: So your school and Todai has a collaboration?

H: Yes. It started in my year actually and I knew that I was going to Japan for the internship and they said “Well, we just signed this agreement with Todai; so if you want to apply, you can go for it now; you could go for a scholarship or something.” Even before I came to Japan for an interview, I had to fill all my application forms for Todai.

M: Right, did you know about Todai?

H: Yes because I had to opportunity to study Indonesia and I looked up all the big universities, so ...

M: So you looked at rankings and stuff?

H: Yes.

M: How about your friends? Do they know about Todai?

H: I think many who are familiar may know about this.

M: Because it always comes up in ...?

H: But other than that, if you asked about the University of Tokyo, they would say no.

M: Tell me about your internship, your one year here. Was it the first time you are living abroad?

H: Yes, that was the first time, especially in a country where I didn't speak the language and everyone thought I did.

M: Yes, because you look Asian right?

H: Yes. I think that was the first time I had to question my identity actually, so it was pretty weird but overall, it was a pretty good experience. And also the work.

M: How is work??

H: It is really interesting. It's my first real experience working at this level, so at the beginning, I wasn't very confident. I don't know what to do and I was lucky because my boss was really helpful. He was really willing to teach me.

M: He is Japanese?

H: No, the boss is French. And the Japanese colleagues were, at first like, they couldn't speak to me and after a few months, they started inviting me to lunch. We started talking and in the end, it was really nice.

M: Were you the only intern?

H: No, they already had a lot of interns before. During my internship, they had another intern for three months, who was also a French guy and it's a pretty international company because they work with Jaguar, so they travel in Africa; some of them even speak French. It was pretty good.

M: So it was kind of like a culture shock in the beginning?

H: Yes, the work culture was maybe; really different from what I expected. Other than that; of course I have to discover the tiny details of Japanese culture in everyday life. In the end, it was not so difficult to adapt.

M: So there weren't times where you wished you were home?

H: Sometimes I do because of food, because of lots of reasons like I want to see my family or I want to eat my grandmother's cooking.

M: But you know how to cook?

H: Yes, roughly (but) not as good as my grandmother though. Sometimes just comfort food or a break from this foreign land where people are so, so nice and at the same time so different.

M: But during that one year, you had already signed a contract with Todai; so you knew that you were going to stay?

H: I wasn't sure because at that time, the answer was in December and I was an intern. I wasn't sure but after that, I knew I was sure because it was easier after that. Knowing that I would stay, I was like maybe it's worth it to know the language; to try to integrate into the culture and society.

M: Was your internship also in Tokyo?

H: Yes. It was in Shinjuku.

M: Then you became more familiar?

H: With the things here.

M: So how did your parents feel when you told them you were coming to Tokyo, Japan? Did they say anything?

H: It was funny at first. My father was saying "Be careful of the guys there, they are all perverts". I was like sure.

M: It's kind of like a stereotype right?

H: Yes. I guess my mother was a little worried that I would go too far away but at the same time, they knew that I have families living abroad in China, Hong Kong and they were like "if you have a problem, don't hesitate to call them". Because they are so close then it's okay, you can ask more money or if you have a problem, you can ask them to come and see you. I think she tried to reassure herself. With that kind of idea that "if she has a problem, my family here can just go. They are so close, so it's okay". I am always doing this kind of decision alone, you know. Sometimes I feel like I just decided something and at some time, I just remember that I haven't tell my parents. Oops, maybe I should tell them.

M: Right, now that you are here, you have to make many tiny decisions?

H: Yes.

M: Before you came into Todai, did you know anyone who was already studying here?

H: Yes, one of my seniors in my French university, who was already here in the same lab.

M: So you communicated with him?

H: Yes

M: On how life was going to be here or?

H: Actually, she arrived at the same time as I did, except that she entered Todai when I was in Year two. She already told me a lot about the university,

M: Was it common for people from your university to further their studies abroad?

H: Yes, especially the third year; instead of doing it in France, we have many options because the school has many agreements with a lot of universities.

M: Is that mostly in a year?

H: What do you mean?

M: As in like do people usually or where do people usually go when they go abroad?

H: A lot of countries.

M: All over?

H: Yes, we have people in America, Brazil, China, Australia, New Zealand or Europe.

M: But you didn't think about all these other places because you wanted to come to Asia?

H: Asia is a nice place and in the US, it's a bit more expensive and a bit more difficult to go into.

M: So right now, who pays for your education?

H: I have a scholarship from the Japanese government.

M: That's a Monbushuo?

H: Yes.

M: And it came together with the whole agreement thing?

H: No. The agreement is that we can enter Todai but for scholarship, we have to apply. That's why I had to do everything before my internship because the deadline was two months before my internship.

M: And there are lots of interviews and stuff?

H: Yes, yes. We had a huge file to give them in like six parts. And you have the language exam, conversational Japanese. I didn't know about Japanese, so I was trying to understand Kanji with my little knowledge of Chinese. But it was okay.

M: So in a short time, you have to prepare for (all these)?

H: But we didn't really prepare because we were only informed one week before the deadline. So we had one week to do everything, from the forms to the medical health check, so we didn't have time to think. You also have to write the plan for your research. That was also done in a rush; you know like just invent something. We just invented something and put things in.

M: Did you need to find a supervisor?

H: Not at this time, maybe later on when we have a bit more time. And after the language test, there was an oral motivation (talk) with six people and they were like "What's your plan?" Well, I just invented it last week ...

M: So you just made story with them. So it was quite a breeze to go through that whole thing?

H: Yes.

M: That's quite rare, everyone told me they were very stressed about the application.

H: Well, yes but we didn't have to be stressed about it. And also, the French way is just to do work at the last minute.

M: Is the scholarship enough for your daily needs? Or do you still need to get some money from home?

H: Yes. Really no, I can do anything with my Monbusho.

M: And you are not doing any part time work?

H: Actually, I am giving some tuition to French students. There's a French school in Tokyo and so there are students who are like stressing out over their end of term exams.

M: So they are doing the French syllabus?

H: Yes.

M: That's really nice. How did you find this? You actively went to search for this?

H: Yes, there is a network of French people in Tokyo and they have a list of job offers and I just responded to one for the money.

M: Does it pay quite well as a private tutor?

H: Quite well, nearly ... (long pause while recalling) two thousand to three thousand an hour.

M: That's quite good.

H: That's pretty good.

M: Tell me about your first few days in Japan, when you came for the internship right? Was it what you expected?

H: ((Slight pause)) I am not sure if I expected anything. I'm not sure of my expectations actually. Maybe it was pretty close to what I expected.

M: So there wasn't any huge (disappointment)?

H: There were some surprises that I had but mostly, it was about things that I never ever thought about before, like administrative thing such as the alien registration process. And also I had a problem when I wanted to open a bank account and at the same time, I had a contract for my cell phone and the cell phone company wanted me to have a bank account. But the bank ...

M: The bank wanted you to have a cell phone?

H: And I was like okay right. So in the end, someone lent me her cell phone number and I put that into my bank account and in the end, I got my cell phone.

M: That was from the company?

H: Yes. She was helping me do everything.

M: How about your first few days on campus, when you started your programme?

H: It was ... After my internship, I went back to France first for a few weeks, so when I came back, it felt like I was coming back to somewhere I was familiar with; like "I have already been there" and when I came to the campus, I also had already visited the campus. So when I came here, it was like okay, I'm familiar with it and I was pretty comfortable with it.

M: How different is this campus from your French university?

H: We don't usually have such a campus in France ... We have something like that but much smaller and usually not in the city but other than that; like in my school, we have what we call a campus but it was actually a few schools in university scattered around the area. We didn't have a common (facility) like a shokodo or cafeteria. Every school had their own building and offices and it was all separate even though it was in the same area. Maybe there are some other campuses, maybe if further away from Paris ...

M: That is more like a school?

H: That is a bit more like here. But usually it's smaller and usually there is less cohesion. It's only like departments.

M: You mean there are like separate departments in different parts of the area?

H: Yes.

M: So you think there is a school community spirit here?

H: We have like a school community but since it is just a small school, like in my year, there are maybe one hundred and fifty students, so you can add that up over three years plus some foreign students; plus some researchers ...

M: That's like maybe one thousand?

H: That's maybe one thousand. So when I saw the May festival, it was a huge organisation and I was impressed because there were so many people and everything went so well, so that was really impressive.

M: That's the first time you hear of the May festival right?

H: Yes.

M: Do you think that international students feel welcomed here?

H: (Long pause) Hmm, so then I have to think about other things because I felt okay, because I was used to the way Japanese are before. They don't always tell what they think at the first time, you have to regularly talk to them; it can be difficult to communicate at the beginning. So here now, I'm used to it and I know, I think I know how to manage that and I managed to make some Japanese friends, maybe not close friends.

M: Why like that?

H: Because I think I don't know as much about them as much as I know about other friends. These are people I like to chat with or people I like to invite to parties. But for my other friends, I think it was much more difficult. We often have some discussions when we eat and have lunch together, it often comes up as like guys in my lab, they don't talk to me; they are so boring and they are not nice to me. So people kind of complain about that, the fact that they cannot integrate or communicate easily with people here and so they don't feel welcomed. Because in my department, we have a big international student community, but in other departments, like my boyfriend who is in IST and he is only here for a while.

M: What is IST?

H: Information Science and Technology.

M: And he is the only one in the department?

H: Yes or maybe there's like two of them, that's all. And I have other French friends who are in the same situation. And they really felt like nothing is done for them because their emails are all in Japanese and they don't do other types of translation. They don't know anything and they really feel left out of anything that's happening in the lab. So in that way, maybe it's not so good, they don't feel really welcomed.

M: So it depends on the department that you get?

H: Yes.

M: Because in engineering, the international student centre kind of thing is really strong.

H: Yes, really strong. And in my classes maybe two thirds of the students are foreigners. I didn't realise but it's true that it's pretty impressive.

M: So the course is in English?

H: Yes.

M: Classes all in English?

H: Yes.

M: So there is no need to learn Japanese?

H: Not in my department. They really have a good range of courses.

M: And so far, you have just kept to the English ones?

H: Yes.

M: Right. Tell me about the boyfriend thing, it's quite interesting. How did you know him?

H: We were university friends.

M: So you already knew him then?

H: Yes. We were already together during my internship. He was in Hong Kong, I was in Tokyo for one year and after that ...

M: So you didn't want to go to Hong Kong even though he was there.

H: I just couldn't because the offer was way too low.

M: So he had a better deal?

H: Yes, he had a really good deal with a French bank, so he could manage. It was okay because in the beginning, I wanted to go to Hong Kong and he wanted to go to Tokyo and we ended up the other way round. So it was a good opportunity to travel a lot.

M: To meet each other?

H: Yes.

M: Let's talk about classes here; the way lessons are taught, the way teachers interact with students and the student-to-student interaction. How is it like here?

H: I feel that teachers here are really sensitive to students' remarks or questions. But maybe between the students, then it depends. Maybe because there is a big mix of Japanese students in my department and my classes. It took some time before I really managed to communicate with my class partners. Last semester, like only towards the end of the semester, we started really to communicate about the class and how we felt about lessons.

M: That is quite a long time to warm up?

H: Maybe that's just me, I don't know. There's also the fact that classes here are really a bit slower than in France. Maybe because of the two year intensive preparation in France, usually when you go to the school, the teacher expects you to work a lot by yourself and they would just go through a lot of ideas in one hour and you just need to work by yourself because you cannot understand otherwise. And here, it's the complete opposite. Teachers will really go slowly and they will care

about the fact that you really understand what they are trying to explain and they don't expect you to work that much on the side. In France, it's so different. So when I arrived here at the classes, there are some classes that I did in France, so ...

M: Felt bored?

H: I was just re-doing something and I wanted to do it well. I was really listening to the class and in the end, I felt that I didn't really need to study that much. So usually, I went to the class and in my lab, I didn't really discuss with other students.

M: Because you already knew these?

H: Yes. I had nothing more to say. I understand everything the teacher said, I already reviewed that one.

M: That was for social purposes, you need not talk about the lesson.

H: Yes, sometimes I did with the guys in my lab. In the classes, we would chat and maybe organise some lunch party. Basically, that's it. But for purely class purposes, there weren't that much communication. And also, I feel that the class was not made for you to work in groups. We don't have a lot of projects, like four people project.

M: Teamwork?

H: Yes, teamwork. That's a bit lacking.

M: You wished you had more of that?

H: Maybe. That would be interesting especially when you have many many cultures here. That would be really interesting.

M: So how about asking questions in class? Are people forthcoming?

H: Yes, but usually more foreign students.

M: More foreign students ask and Japanese students just (listen)?

H: I don't know but I think they do. At the end of the class, they would go and see the teacher but not during the class.

M: That's how I was thinking. I mean they are Japanese but they take English classes, it's a bit hard for them right? I mean if they have a choice, they would take it in their mother tongue?

H: Maybe. Actually I never ask them ...

M: What's their motivation of doing so?

H: Yes, but some of them I know it's because their senseis are doing the class, so ...

M: They just follow?

H: Yes, they just feel like they have to take this class or something. But other than that, I don't know.

M: Have you taken the Japanese class they have offered?

H: Yes.

M: So that's for engineering?

H: In the civil engineering department, there's a Japanese class. I took the level two in this class last semester. Now, I'm in the loading aids, which is the school of engineering Japanese class.

M: How do you feel about these language classes?

H: The professors are really nice and they really make the effort not to frighten the students of how difficult Japanese is. They try to make it fun, they try to make it nice; they don't try to give you too much homework. And for that reason, maybe it's good for people who are willing to learn Japanese or want to learn but may be afraid of that. But on the other hand, I feel like I need to learn up Japanese by myself because I don't feel this is enough for me. It's like too funny and entertaining but not so serious about Japanese. We do learn, we do practise but may be more and more intense will be appreciated.

M: So in your one year here doing the internship, was there any chance to learn Japanese or you were just learning informally.

H: I learnt it formally and also I went to the volunteer Japanese class given in the ...

M: Neighbourhood?

H: Yes, neighbourhood. I went there and I liked it. It was once a week and I made friends with some teachers there. I could get invited to parties to basically only Japanese speaking people.

M: Are you still keeping in touch with that?

H: Yes.

M: So you are still going for these volunteer (lessons)?

H: No. I don't go anymore but I still meet the teachers.

M: Tell me about the place you are staying in now.

H: I live in an apartment, about three stations from here.

M: Was that your accommodation in the very beginning? Did you take up the school's offer of the dorms?

H: No, no. I had the dorms maybe about one and a half hour from here. And also I wanted to live with my boyfriend, so I decided that we wouldn't take this offer, which was quite difficult in the beginning also because they really wanted me to get the dorm. I was like "Give it to someone who really needs it". I can find my own apartment because I already lived here. I had to go up to my supervisor who said to the office "Don't worry about her, I know that she already lives in Japan, she probably knows" and in the end they said "Okay".

M: Leave you alone?

H: Leave me alone.

M: Was it hard to find your own apartment?

H: It was okay. I found an English-speaking real estate agent on the Internet and after that, it was pretty easy.

M: Do you think you are paying a fair deal?

H: Yes.

M: It's a good deal?

H: Yes, I think so. It's pretty expensive but it's also pretty big. Overall, it's good.

M: How about your environment? Do you know your neighbours?

H: I say 'hello' in the morning and that's all.

M: They are Japanese?

H: Yes. There is one foreign family but I never really saw them.

M: Which station is this?

H: Machiya, the Chiyoda line. I think it's a fairly Japanese style neighbourhood.

M: So you have been there for a year?

H: Almost, six to ten months I guess.

M: Take through a typical weekday for you? How's your schedule like?

H: On average, I have to wake up around 7.30am.

M: That's really early?

H: Because I want to go to the library to work or sometimes I have class at 8.30am. When I can, I sleep a bit more but so then after that, I usually go to the campus, either to the class or the lab. I leave all my stuff in the lab, so I usually go to and fro my lab to get some stuff. After morning class and all that, lunch with friends or the lab people.

M: How big is your lab? How many people?

H: Maybe twenty.

M: And out of these twenty, how many are Japanese?

H: I would count the number of foreigners as many. So there are about two or three Chinese.

M: Mainland Chinese?

H: Yes, one from Philippines, one from Korea, one from Pakistan, oh four Chinese actually and one from Iran and myself. I think that's all. Other than that, the rest are all ...

M: Japanese? Do you speak mandarin to the Chinese?

H: No, I cannot. My mandarin is really really (bad), my Cantonese is better. But sometimes I can understand what they are talking about.

M: So it's not like you feel an affinity with Chinese people?

H: Not really. And also, they love to mix with other Chinese people, so sometimes it's a bit difficult. But one of them is really open and outspoken. He likes to talk to other people and so he often talks to me about a lot of subjects, about society, about the world. It's so funny.

M: In English?

H: Yes.

M: And the gender ratio is quite even?

H: No.

M: A lot of boys?

H: Yes. There are three girls.

M: Three girls out of twenty?

H: Out of this twenty-something of us.

M: But you still find that it's okay? You are used to it?

H: I'm kind of used to that ratio.

M: So that's your morning, have lunch and then go back?

H: Go back to lab and then sometimes I go to the gym on campus.

M: Oh there is a gym here?

H: Yes. I go to the swimming pool.

M: It's an indoor pool?

H: Yes.

M: Where is it?

H: It's a bit further this way. No, it's next to the Yasuda laboratory. It's very nice.

M: So you use the gym and then?

H: Maybe study a little more back home.

M: So dinner is not in campus?

H: Generally not. These few weeks, I did eat a lot on campus because of the May festival but usually I prefer to go home.

M: And then cook?

H: Cook.

M: Your boyfriend? Is he also from an immigrant family or pure French?

H: Pure French, for a long time ago.

M: Many generations?

H: Yes.

M: So he is okay with Asian food?

H: He is an Asian fan, try new things and he especially likes Asia, so it's okay.

M: So the food that you cook ...

H: It's kind of a mix of Asian, European, Japanese. Usually, we don't make like good cooking. We just mix around and fry something as a side dish. But sometimes, when we feel we just go to the Internet to find some recipes and we try to do something that is closer.

M: So sometimes he does the cooking also?

H: Yes, but I don't like. When he cooks, there are no vegetables and I have to stand behind him and say put some more vegetables. So in the end, I rather do the cooking myself.

M: Were you already living together when you were university friends?

H: Yes, actually it was kind of like a dorm, so we weren't exactly together but we saw each other like every day.

M: Tell me something about your weekend then. Is there any difference in your schedule? Do you come to school?

H: No, not yet.

M: That's good.

H: I tried to go out and visit some places, do some shopping and visit the museum with friends. And usually Saturday evening, we try to go out at least once a month.

M: Is there any place that you feel that you really like and when you have time, you would ...

H: I would go ... I think I'm quite familiar with Shinjuku. The only problem is that it's now pretty far from my home. But if I have a choice, I rather go to Shinjuku or maybe Shibuya. I prefer the vibrancy in Shibuya.

M: So just to do some shopping?

H: Some shopping or just going out.

M: Tell me about your social networks, the friends that you keep. If I'm talking about the top five closest friends, where are they found and where do you know them? Your boyfriend aside.

H: Actually it's difficult to formulate that five. I usually have like groups of friends who are really close together and I am really close to them as a whole group. Like I have some groups of friends at university, I have some friends at high school.

M: So there are quite a number of people from your university who came to Todai?

H: This year, we have two in Todai and three in Tokyo University of Technology. There was one guy in internship but afterwards, he came here also.

M: So that's like one core group of friends?

H: Yes. One pretty close group who maybe sees each other like once or twice in a week. There's also the people in France. I try to communicate with them quite often via Facebook or email. I try to keep in touch.

M: Any other groups of people here?

H: I have my friends from my job last year but it's more difficult to see them because they are working. So I'm trying to meet them maybe next week. But it's like once every three months, so it's pretty hard to keep in touch.

M: Are they Japanese?

H: They are mixed, like some Europeans and Japanese but the Japanese speak either French or English. It makes it easier. Other than that, there are some people from Todai. Maybe there are not close friends, as I said before but these are people whom I am quite comfortable with.

M: And they are from?

H: They are Japanese.

M: Lab or? How did you know them?

H: There was my tutor from my lab. She was really helpful and really nice. There is her and then her network.

M: So she introduced you to her friends?

H: Yes. And some of the Japanese girls that I met.

M: That's quite a big pool of people?

H: Yes, but the level of closeness is not always that great.

M: Do you find it the case with Japanese people that it may be hard to penetrate into their (group), to go further?

H: Sometimes I don't know how far I can go to ask questions. It's really difficult to know that because there is a difference in culture like French and German. With

Japanese, it's more difficult. Sometimes I say something and I think about it and say "I don't know if I can ask it" and then I know it's too late, so it's quite difficult.

M: Tell me more about this European Students Association. When was it formed? Was it a long time ago?

H: I have no idea when it was founded first. I only know that in 2009, it was pretty active. But last year, the guy who was organizing it was pretty much alone, so it was difficult for him to keep up with the events. So I think last year, they already had few events –Hanami, hiking trip and a year-end party. At first, I wasn't interested in this because I feel kind of too old for this kind of a job. I was in a lot of clubs and associations in France but it was two years ago already. I feel like I already did this and I don't feel the need to get involved in this association. But then one of my French friends again, he was designed like "You would be the next president". It was just here and he would also kind of lonely in his position and he asked for help.

M: I think it's quite interesting because when you think about Europeans coming to Asia to study. I mean usually it's like Asians want to go to Europe to study right, what are some of the motivations of this group of people who come?

H: There are many motivations. I hear a lot of voice who came here that most who come here, they like Asian girls. I know some of them in Hong Kong, who came to Japan to work and who are new to Hong Kong, they like to go to Japan maybe like once a month at least. They go to Roppongi and they hang out with Japanese girls. Sometimes for not very good reasons.

M: Yes but coming to Todai?

H: Yes, that's another issue. Those who came to study here are mostly interested in Japanese culture. So French people who are exposed to that, some of them were just taking the opportunity to study abroad and they wanted to experience the culture shock. And they know Japan would be different and then they decided to come here. I talk to the Pakistani guy who also decided to come here because he went from US to Japan because he got a scholarship in Japan and not from the US. He came here and that's another reason.

M: How about the quality of education (here), unlike French, German or British?

H: I don't know. I told you the education I had in France is very different from here. But then I'm not sure which one is better.

M: Yes, but do you feel that you are actually learning something?

H: Maybe not the pure theoretical things but I'm learning to deal with Japanese people like other Kyoto people, be it Japanese or Pakistanis; people from Nepal, there are also a lot of South Asian students here. In this way, I think I learned a lot.

M: So the non-curriculum learning?

H: Also, besides here, we have a lot of research-oriented education that we don't have at home. Fortunately, I worked one year before, I was independent enough to carry out my research alone. I find it really interesting, I found it really challenging so I think it's interesting. This is the positive point about studying here.

M: So this European Student Association, I mean Europe is huge and there are like people from all over, how are the dynamics in this group?

H: Right now, it's difficult. Like I said, I went to the association a month ago, we have a lot of plans. We have a lot of plans to make it more customer-oriented and more mixed because right now, it's more like the Board member directs things. If the Board member is German, I don't know but he may plan more beer festivals. If the Board members are French, then they are going to make wine. When I assist my friend, he is French and he will ask his French friends to help him but now, we have a lot of French people and I think we should be (more mixed). We are having a meeting soon about that but we want to make it more open to a variety of Europeans but it's really difficult.

M: But members-wise, on paper, you have a lot of people?

H: We have a lot of people from a lot of different countries but people are not always involved when they don't know if the Board members are only French and if French people would feel more involved but maybe German people may feel left out, so that's the difficult part.

M: So why not just have a French one then?

H: We have actually. There is a Todai French Association. It's more like an alumni association actually. I went to the meeting and maybe two-thirds of the people who were like CEOs ...

M: It was like a business network?

H: Yes, yes. It was like a business network. So we already have this kind of thing so we were thinking maybe we should try to make the European Association an association where ...

M: It's like EU?

H: Yes exactly. I think that's the best way. We have common points but at the same time ...

M: You are so different.

H: Yes. And also like if you only do the French Association, then you don't have enough students. There are only a couple of us here.

M: So what do you see the role of the association to help students to adjust?

H: I think that should be the role of the association, to help students like to offer some services or goods for the newcomers.

M: So it's doing that now?

H: That's in the project.

M: Like orientation programmer?

H: Yes. One-year-plan of the association. Other than that, what is working out is helping other people meet other people. Newcomers usually come to the association to try and meet other people and to form a network of friends.

M: Do you think it will make people stick more to their own community?

H: I'm afraid that it might be one risk and that's why we have a few Japanese members who contacted us through email and Facebook, and we try to keep them involved in the association because I feel that it's very important that it's not only the European students, but it's also Today, it's also Japanese students in Japan.

M: Does the school meet up with all these associations?

H: There are some events like last year, I heard about the International Student meeting with the university chair, but I can't talk much about it because I wasn't involved.

M: Tell me about the May festival since you participated a great deal in it, in deciding what kind of things?

H: Yes. I didn't decide about what kind of things because that was decided before. When I read about it, maybe every field was decided, like deadlines were in March and April, so we took what we had. The guy decided alone because he didn't have anyone to rely on, so he had to manage with his poor Japanese and some Google translate. I think it was really tough for him. In the end we arrived and we took everything he gave us. It was like "This is the piece of information you have". And at some point, we just took it back to the organisation, the Japanese organisation and said that "We didn't understand this and that. Can you explain?"

M: So you had to go back and ask them again?

H: Yes and it was quite difficult I think. I think there's another thing; the President and the Vice-president's decisions were reluctant to try things that were Japanese. His first remark was when he went there, he was like "Do you speak English?" and they were like "Of course not". And he was like "I would come back later". It kind of delayed everything like between three to four weeks and in the end, it was like two weeks from May festival and we were not even sure of that. You really should go and confirm and so I went there and we had to try with our poor Japanese to make them understand that maybe we had a problem. This way worked better. I think the problem is we didn't speak Japanese.

M: Right, maybe if you could just try in your poor Japanese, they would entertain you.

H: Actually, it worked. If we tried with our poor Japanese and our Iphone dictionary. So that was one of the main difficulties doing the May festival.

M: So how did you feel about the entire event?

H: Exhausting but at the same time, we had fun.

M: Do you find that it is a meaningful thing to do? Do you have this kind of thing in university?

H: We had some events but not this kind of festival. We usually do more of parties and things like that, but we did have events like that where we had to organize things for a thousand people. I had this kind of experience, so I knew it was exhausting. And when I was in the May festival, I agreed to be involved and it was just one week before the May festival and I couldn't think about anything else. At that point, all I did was to take a step back and thought what the hell am I doing here?

M: Was your boyfriend involved as well?

H: Yes and at some point, I thought "Let's just not think about it". We will go through it and see.

M: See how it goes?

H: Yes and it was worth it for the association. It was exhausting for us and we did drain a lot of energy at the end. But the other people, people who were not as involved, those who just came for two hours to man the booth, they really enjoyed it and I think if it can help the community, the European Association, to be more close and united, then it's a good thing. I don't regret that.

M: Do you think it was useful to get people to know more about the culture and stuff? These people came around and talked right?

H: Not that much actually.

M: Really?

H: It was good advertising to get European students. I heard a lot of Japanese students go saying "Ah Euro buddy". But there weren't that much success.

M: So it's not very in-depth? It's just good for the group. Apart from this European Student Association, are you involved in any other clubs?

H: Not really.

M: No time for any others?

H: Yes.

M: Keeping in contact with family now, how often is that?

H: Once a week maybe. I try to but sometimes I forget to Skype.

M: So your parents use Skype too?

H: Yes. Sometimes when I don't call for two weeks, then my mother would call me on my cellphone. Just to ... you know shout at me.

M: You skype with friends quite often?

H: Yes. My friends usually email me.

M: You have been here for quite a while, have you gone back to France? I mean you have been here for a year.

H: Actually, during my internship, I went back to France for Christmas and this year I went back to France in March.

M: Because of the earthquake?

H: Before the earthquake. I left Japan one week before the earthquake.

M: When you went back, did your family or your friends say that “Helene, you have kind of changed?” Is there something about you that’s different?

H: I don’t think they really said that. My family don’t say anything. My friends maybe. There are some remarks about “Oh, you are too Japanese now”.

M: What do they mean by you are too Japanese?

H: I don’t know, the way I dress maybe. And here is so clean, when you go to Paris, it’s so dirty. This kind of remarks is because “you are too used to Japan and this kind of thing.

M: How about yourself? Do you think you have changed?

H: Maybe, I do think I have changed especially during my one year internship because that was my first experience of living abroad. I think maybe not life-changing but a little.

M: In what ways do you think you have changed?

H: First, I really question my identity because here, when I say I’m French, they would say “Oh really, are you mixed? No, my parents are from China and Hong Kong”. And at the same, in France, they have a big debate about identity, you knew about it?

M: Yes. Lots of immigrant issue.

H: Yes. And I feel like in Japan, where I didn’t feel like my country. And in France, they will say “You are an immigrant, you are not really French”. They have so many cultures and it’s so different and I was like what the hell, am I the nerd? This period, I had to reflect and find my identity, so that was really interesting.

M: Was that really hard on you?

H: It was hard because I was alone here.

M: Yes, so like in that period, did you look back at a lot of friends or your family?

H: Not my family, I didn’t talk to them about that. But I talk to my boyfriend and I talk to some of my friends through the Internet. I wrote a lot about this on Facebook that this is the development of this debate and this kind of stuff. I was discussing that a lot on Facebook.

M: How did you feel that the situation between France and Japan is, towards immigrants?

H: Well, in Japan, they don’t have that much of a problem. They don’t have that many immigrants. I’m not sure about the numbers. And also, immigrants in Japan, you

cannot see either because they all look Asian. If you are not really careful or take care, you cannot really notice.

M: So you would have already been struggling with these issues even in France?

H: No, no. In France, I never felt like a stranger. That's one thing I realized when I went to Japan. The social groups I was in, I really never felt like a stranger, never even though there were some jokes about eating rice or noodles, I was okay. I really felt okay and then I was in Japan and they were talking about people not being integrated and I was like what the hell is that. There was a debate about this and it was a little strange. I was feeling troubled inside.

M: So it was only here when people looked at you, you find that when people look at you and think if you are really French, that you felt you have to ask if you are really French?

H: Yes, like hey, am I really French? Yes (repeats three times). I remember in junior high when my close friends asked me if I feel more French or Chinese, at that time I couldn't answer and I kept the question somewhere in my mind. When I was in Japan, it just came back again. And I'm not sure of the answer yet.

M: Of course you are not sure because it is a continuous discovery.

H: Yes, yes. I think really it's a mix of everything. I feel French because I like cheese but they don't have. I like to complain, I like to speak loudly, insult people; these are really French signs. And at the same time, I have this background, my family and everything; this I cannot reject.

M: How do you feel about your upbringing then? Was it really Asian like your parents?

H: Not so, it's difficult because I think my parents have changed a lot.

M: I think it's hard for them.

H: I don't think they realize it. When I was very little, I was mostly brought up by my grandmother because my parents were really working hard and my grandmother was in the kitchen of the restaurant. She was the owner and I mostly lived with her. That was how I learnt speaking Chinese and everything. At that point of my life, I feel like my father had the expectation that I would marry a Chinese guy or a Chinese immigrant. I remembered that I was not even ten and my father said "This is maybe your future husband".

M: Oh dear, that's match-making?

H: I was like "what". I was so shocked, I remembered that. At this moment, I felt this was really Chinese style upbringing. And at the same time, it is funny because my brother and me; we had two different upbringings. Because I was brought up with my mother's side, my grandmother and he was with my father's side grandparents.

M: Oh, who came later?

H: Who came later and actually my father's side, my grandparents came to France when I was born and they wanted to take care of me but I didn't want to.

M: Because you were quite old already?

H: I was maybe two and I was already used to my ...

M: Grandmother?

H: I was told of stories that I was crying because I wanted to go back to my mother's side grandmother

M: So two different upbringings?

H: Two different upbringings and also two different outcomes. So this part of my life is pretty Chinese and then when I went to junior high, this time my mother had to make the decision to put me in a private school. In this private school, the fact that it's private, it's a totally different social circle.

M: It's like more upper middle class?

H: Yes, upper middle class and a lot less immigrant level. I was the only Asian girl in my year.

M: So they had to try hard to put you in because school fees were quite high?

H: Yes, school fees were quite high but it was okay?

M: It was manageable

H: Yes, around one thousand euro a year, which is much cheaper than our education anyway, so they were ready to pay for that. I went to that school and at that point, I was in a social network that was so different, that I had to kind of turn more French maybe, just to integrate into that social circle. And also my parents weren't too involved in what I was doing because I could take care of myself. At that point, maybe they didn't realize it but I evolved to only have French friends and felt like I really wanted to integrate into my French friends. I started refusing to speak Chinese also.

M: Was that during the teenage period?

H: Yes. Just before and during my teenage period, I refused to speak Chinese, which is also why I can't speak very well.

M: So you also spoke French to them at home?

H: Yes. They would talk to me in Chinese and I would reply in French. I still do that actually. I guess that's the way it is. And when I was in high school, I had to make some decisions in my studies and future studies and at that point, my parents didn't have a grip on me anymore. They couldn't lead my life, I had my own life and I would make my own decisions. And at that same time, I was getting independent and my brother was starting to have trouble in school and I think that was really the moment where everything changed in my family. My parents that the way they did with me didn't work with my brother, like I was independent enough to take care of myself and my brother wasn't and they weren't ready for that. Maybe they were in denial before at that time, they had to admit that it didn't work for my brother and that was really a life-changing experience.

M: How much younger is your brother?

H: He is four years younger.

M: That's quite a big gap?

H: Yes.

M: So they identity crisis that you had, how was it? Right now, what do you see yourself as?

H: French-born Chinese who lives in Japan.

M: Do you see yourself as having more of a regional identity?

H: Like?

M: I mean when people go abroad, they either have a stronger sense of national identity or it becomes weaker and then they see themselves as being a more international person.

H: I'm not sure. I like to feel like I'm an international kind of person and but at the same time, I feel international because I feel related to every country I'm related to. Like I feel it's important for me to make friends but at the same time, after the earthquake, I feel strongly to come back to Japan and be part of the recovery of Japan.

M: You feel that a part of you ...

H: Maybe I owe something to the country.

M: Because you got something from it?

H: Yes, yes. And also about China. I feel like I'm not really Chinese; I don't know that much about Chinese culture but I feel like if I could do something then I would try to do it.

M: That's so different from not wanting to speak Chinese at home

H: Yes.

M: So you felt that it was like a growing up process for you? The change in your attitude?

H: Yes, yes. I usually reflect on that.

M: Right, I think it's the same case for Singaporeans as well. But now that it's more for economic purposes, like if you really want to get something from them, you should really study Chinese.

H: That's also the point of view for French people but I don't think that's a good idea or that should be the way.

M: That should not be the only reason?

H: And people need to understand that doing business in China is really, really hard.

M: It's a different ball game?

H: My uncle in Hong Kong has some business in China and he said "I don't want a lot of business in China because it's too difficult and too dangerous. You really need a lot of connections, you have to work really hard and you never know what you are getting into". And he hinted that he didn't want that kind of risk. He has only minimal involvement in China.

M: So you think it's better if you purely want to know about the culture.

H: Yes. At the moment, I'm not ready to plunge into China.

M: Or to work in China next time?

H: Maybe but not for a Chinese company.

M: To still have that kind of familiarity?

H: Familiarity and benefits, I don't know.

M: Of course, western salary in China.

H: Yes and holidays and everything.

M: Let's talk a bit about the earthquake. You weren't here for the entire episode?

H: I came back beginning of April.

M: How did you feel about this thing that could have happened to you?

H: I was not worried about what could have happened to people in Tokyo. I have friends in Tokyo who said it was quite shocking but in the end, everything went well except for the nuclear leak. Overall, it was okay. I felt the need to keep informed about what happened in Japan in the whole month. I really felt sorry for Japan. I really want to go back and help.

M: Were your parents worried that you were coming back?

H: Yes. As usual Chinese parents, they didn't say it but ...

M: No, usual Chinese parents will say no.

H: That's true but my parents have changed. Also, I think my parents are kind of afraid of my decisions because when I take a decision, I usually don't change so I think they know that there's no need to try and keep me. I just would go away anyway. So my mother was like "Are you sure you want to go back? Do you want to delay your return? You want to postpone your flight?" So I postponed my flight for one week and I went home later than planned. I told her not to worry when I'm back in Tokyo, I will try to call you often. I had to reassure a lot of people in my family but in the end, it was okay.

M: Maybe because we have always thought of Japan as being one of the safest place you can be but this totally changed everybody's (thought)?

H: Yes, especially the media. They were saying like it's a horror story, like all parts of Japan are devastated, which is completely not true. And I told them that even with this disaster, Tokyo is still one of the safest place to be.

M: Did you think that Todai did a good job in trying to address; I mean during the whole event, people didn't really know what was happening. International students didn't know if they should stay or go.

H: I don't know other labs or departments, but I know that one Assistant Professor from my lab kept sending emails about new ...

M: Updates?

H: Updates and all.

M: In English?

H: Yes. Like English first, Japanese second, so it was really nice. Every two days, I had an update of what was happening here.

M: And he did it out of his own accord or somebody told him to?

H: I'm not sure. Actually, my supervisor is also the chair of the department so maybe there was something more than that. I don't know. But also, the student affair office in my department, they wanted to know if you were safe; if you went back to your country and overall, in my case, it was really nicely done.

M: Do you think it's a good idea for people to live outside the country that they grew up in?

H: Yes.

M: I'm sure you will say yes. How did it change you?

H: It opened my mind to other cultures and maybe gave me a better vision of the world, I don't know. Maybe I, how to say ... (long pause) now I care about what is the truth; not just a cliché, not just the sayings and the rumours. I think I care more about going deeper in the knowledge I have, of the cultures and facts of some events especially after earthquake where we really need to know the truth. It was really difficult to sort out the media information and mostly this is what I learnt.

M: Lastly, what are your plans for the future?

H: I don't know.

M: So you don't have to go back to your university to finish right?

H: Yes.

M: So you are here. What do your boyfriend and you have planned?

H: We discussed that quite often. Should we stay in Japan or we should try to move back to Hong Kong? Because I have a job opportunity here with my internship.

M: To go back to work?

H: Yes, to go back to the company. I think for him, it's quite the same or at least he would have a recommendation from his boss. We will try to apply in a lot of places and see what happens.

M: So where is the inclination towards now? Are you going to stay here?

H: At the beginning, I don't want to stay here. I felt like it wasn't a good country or have room for opportunities. Now I don't know. Now I really think it's between Japan, Hong Kong, China, United States, England also, to London maybe. I really want to go to a lot of places.

M: London will be really close.

H: Yes, London will be really close to France. I think it will be a nice compromise but I'm not sure about the London lifestyle, the weather especially.

M: That's an important consideration.

H: As of now, I really don't know.

M: Do you think that studying here in Todai has given you more opportunities?

H: Like in career?

M: Yes

H: Hmm... maybe. Really, I don't know. I think that maybe for going back, it won't change a thing. But if I want to stay in the country, it would matter. Because I lived here so long in this country, a foreign country, maybe it can be in this sense. Although I think that knowing Japanese is so important but I get used to it. I have no doubts.

M: How about doing PHD?

H: No, I think after having a one year internship and two years of Master's instead of one year in France, I need to work.

M: You need to bring some money home?

H: Yes. And also, I don't feel that PHD will be interesting or interactive. For career opportunities, I don't think it's that important.

M: If you were to make this decision all over again, would you have chosen to come to Japan?

H: Hmm ... (pause) if it wasn't for my boyfriend, maybe I wouldn't have applied for it. Or maybe I would but I would also have applied to other universities.

M: And you got it?

H: Yes. If I have gotten it, I may have chosen other universities. That's maybe the only one point. I would have differed.

M: But your boyfriend was very sure that he was going to come here?

H: He really wanted to be in Japan for at least a few years, especially after that one year where he was in Hong Kong.

Appendix 1.6 Photographs of In-Fusion event at NUS, February 2010



Publicity poster for In-Fusion 2010 (Source: NUS German Language Society blog, <http://die-deutsche-sphaere.blogspot.com.es/>)



Interactions among students at the German booth



Fashion parade: NUS students in traditional costumes worldwide

(Source: <http://newshub.nus.edu.sg/ke/0804/articles/pg08.php>)

Appendix 1.7 Photographs of Hongo May Festival at Todai, May 2011



A crowded campus attesting to the popularity of the May Festival



A line forming at the Egyptian booth



Indonesian students attracting an audience with angklung music (Above photographs courtesy of http://chux-ian.blogspot.sg/2012_05_30_archive.html)



A cheerful Taiwanese team selling bittergourd tea and 'taiwanese-style' *yakisoba* (fried noodles)

(Source: Photo taken by Pin-Chih
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/51452876@N03/5775531491/>)

