International Student Diversity Experiences in their Host Cities

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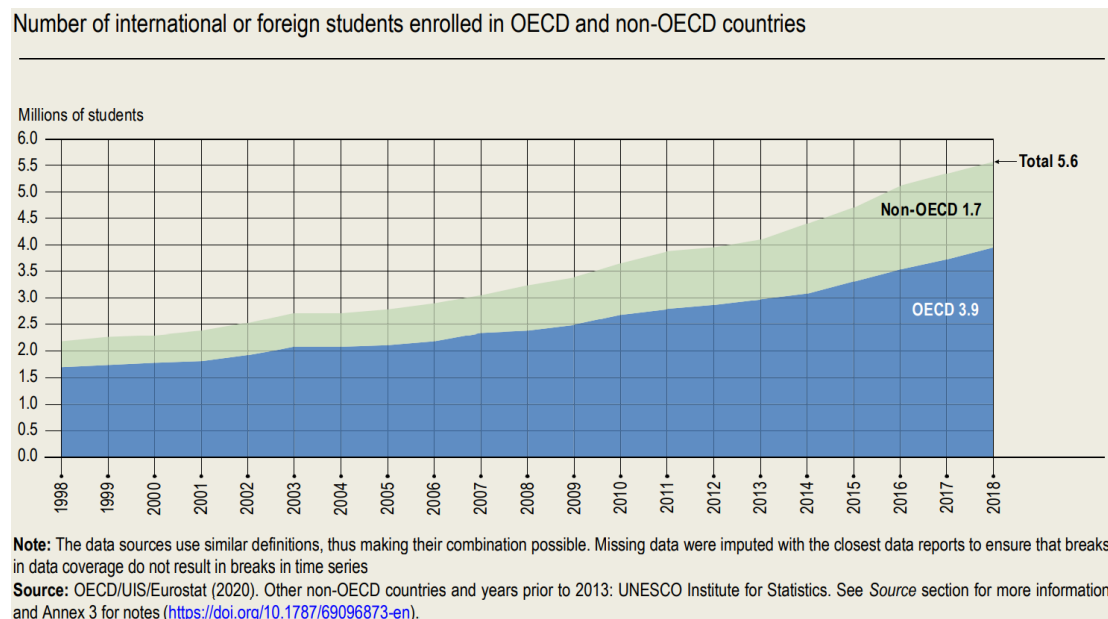
International Student Diversity Experiences in their Host Cities

Rochelle Yun Ge[1] and Kong Chong Ho[2]

1. Introduction: International Students as Educational Migrants

International students nowadays constitute an important component of the student body in many countries. Internationally mobile students typically hold a non-resident visa status to pursue a tertiary degree (or higher) in the destination country. The number of this group of educational migrants increased vastly during the past two decades. According to the statistics released by OECD, there were over 5.3 million international students in 2017 up from 2 million in 2000 (UNESCO, 2019).

Figure 1.1 Growth in International Enrollment in Tertiary Education (1998-2018)

Number of international or foreign students enrolled in OECD and non-OECD countries

Note: The data sources use similar definitions, thus making their combination possible. Missing data were imputed with the closest data reports to ensure that breaks in data coverage do not result in breaks in time series
Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2020). Other non-OECD countries and years prior to 2013: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. See *Source* section for more information and Annex 3 for notes (https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en).

International students' adaptation in host society has similarity with other groups of migrants. They encounter difficulties with housing, finances, cultural difference, social networks, homesickness and integration into a new university and an unfamiliar society (Lee & Rice, 2007; Calder et.al., 2016). Relocation and cultural difference cause insecurity for students. And they need to develop networks in the host society along their academic progress. The influences of culture and relocation affect security—together they present a combination of cultural elements that interact to shape understanding of what constitutes insecurity and who has responsibility for ensuring communities and individuals are secure.

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There are two obvious differences between international students and other types of migrants in diversity management: one is the characteristics of this group of minorities; the other is the location where they are hosted and settled. International students are a welcomed category in migration. Higher education institutions (HEIs) and host societies eager to diversify campuses by believing that international students can enrich education and social environments, benefit innovation therefore knowledge-based economy (Haapakoski & Pashby, 2017). HEIs often adopt progressive policy in diversity management with housing at the center of practice (Gaisch, Preymann & Aichinger, 2020). From this perspective, resident campuses play a key role in ethnic settlement and diversity management. Student housing potential provide opportunities to mix across nationality groups. This is especially the case not only because residential arrangements provide convenient access but also because campus dormitories typically come with them facilities for meals and sports and also a wide range of student organized interest groups and events. It is therefore important to understand university housing policies for their international students, the different types of residential arrangements and their availability.

Abundant research has indicated that housing is at the center for settlement, sense of security and adaptation of international students (Forbes-Mawett & Nyland, 2007; Obeng-Odoom, 2012). Most research shows positive effects of accommodating international students on campus. Students living on campus reported higher satisfaction towards sense of environmental and financial security (Long, 2014). Furthermore, living on campus helps students' academic performance, encourages meaningful interactions among students from different backgrounds (Pike & Kuh, 2006). Mixed ethnic resident policy help students to have more positive attitude towards minorities and this influence last even after their graduation. For instance, individuals who live in more racially diverse neighborhoods have been found to be more prosocial in general than those who live in less diverse neighborhoods, due to the former's identification with all humanity (Nai et al., 2018).

On-campus accommodation arrangement for international students can often be seen in two types: mixing and enclaves. In a mixing arrangement, international students are randomly arranged as the locals to on-campus halls or dormitories. As for enclave situation, host universities arrange all international students to stay in specific building that are separate from local students' on-campus accommodation. Research has shown contradictory results for enclave housing arrangement. Some indicated that international students feel such housing arrangement does not help them in integrating into local society while some other students reported that having reserved spaces on campus for ethnic minorities makes them feel more welcomed and supported (Kirby, et.al., 2020; See & Wide, 2021).

Diversity management is a research area increasing get attention along the development of internationalization (Morrison, Lumby and Sood, 2006). Research in higher education studies often take an inclusive education perspective in looking at the curricular and pedagogical perspective for multicultural education (Taras & Rowney, 2007). Not enough attention has been paid to the requirements of student population or how to manage diversified student

group, in particular considers student group to being part of a social minority (Gaisch, Preymann & Aichinger, 2020). Diversity management for student migrants needs to take account of characteristics of student group and host institutions, as well as the implications for students' social interactions, future plan therefore socio-economic effects of educational migration. Therefore, we want to further explore what does international students' close network look like and how they mix with others on campus and outside the university. We want to understand: what are the effects of different resident arrangement on students' diversity experience and future plan after graduation?

2 Research Data

The research data is from a multinational research project entitled "Globalizing Universities and International Student Mobilities in East Asia". We surveyed and interviewed over 4500 international students hosted by 9 universities in 5 countries between 2009 and 2012. The project looked at international students' pre-arrival decision-making, adaptation in studying and living at host countries and their future plan after graduation. Both survey and interview data are used to illustrate the housing arrangement and effects of diversity experience in respective cases.

To serve the research purpose of current paper, we selected 3 universities in East and Southeast Asia as cases: National University of Singapore (NUS), Renmin University of China (RUC) and Seoul National University (SNU). We chose these universities based on the considerations of city effects, housing arrangement type and diversity of international students. All three universities are public universities locate in the capital city of respective host countries: Singapore, Beijing for China and Seoul for South Korea. The international students hosted by the three universities are quite diverse (see Table 1). We have NUS represents a regional hub with large majority of Asian students, while SNU and RUC have one large group of international students from neighboring country and quite diverse background for rest of the group.

To a large extent, the students profile reflects the reality of the host city's attractions for student migrants (see Table 2.1). Singapore is a global city state hosting a critical mass of transnational companies with regional headquarters and sales offices for Southeast Asia. An important attractive feature for international students is its use of English among its educational institutes and as a working language. Seoul, as the capital of South Korea is the center of the Korean Wave. In 2016, the capital region accounted for a staggering 87% of total sales from Korean culture and creative industries and 76% of the employees (Huh and Lee, 2020). For young persons around the world, the power of Korea in movies and music is a powerful impetus to study in Korea. Beijing represents a country that has the second largest economy in the world and is growing in international influence, with Chinese as a rapidly growing regional and international language.

Table 2.1 Student Diversity of on-Campus Housing

	NUS	SNU	RUC

	n=219	n=258	n=235
Number of Nationalities of Int'l Students	13	43	55
Percentage of Asian Students	99.5%	80.6%	55.8%
Top 3 Largest Groups	Malaysian 30.0% Chinese 29.5% Indian ·15.0%	Chinese 46.9% Malaysian 4.7% Japanese 4.7%	Korean 34.9% American 7.6% Vietnamese 6.1%

The selected cases represent three typical types of on-campus housing arrangement in Asia:

a) Mixed-housing for NUS: in which on-campus residential arrangement is mixed for both local and international students. NUS is a regional education hub in Asia. International students consist a significant part of its student population. To facilitate the interactions between local and international students, they university randomly mixed students in dormitories and halls.

b) Enclaves for RUC: where international students are arrangement to stay in on-campus dormitory by themselves. Most of the university dormitories in China are designed to accommodate large number of local students (i.e., each room accommodates four or more students). Concerning international students' expectation on housing conditions, universities like RUC often arrange them in specific building(s) with better facilities (i.e., double rooms and single rooms) and loose regulations in comparison with local students' dormitory.

c) Free-choice Housing for SNU: where international students can choose to stay in international enclave dormitory or mixed dormitory with the local students. There are two types of dormitory buildings in SNU for international students: mixed dorm of which local and international students stay in the same building or room; enclave dormitory where international students live by themselves.

3 Research Findings: Housing Arrangements, Social Mixing and Students' Future Plan

For this paper, we argue that international students are excellent ambassadors of cultural diversity, and resident campuses are leaders in promoting social mixing. Our research findings show three effects of mixing based on the difference of on-campus housing arrangement for international students: on-campus mixing, off-campus mixing and impact of diversity experience on students' plan after graduation.

Heggins and Jackson (2003) found Asian students often place great importance on informal networks as opposed to utilizing the host country's formal structural procedures when in need. Therefore, when looking at the effects of on-campus mixing, we analyze the profile of international students' top 7 close friends. Research results show that housing arrangement has a clear impact on international students' friendship formation. We found that students from all three universities indicated that most of their close friends were met on-campus (see Table 3.1). This indicates that university resident campus is the major location where international students form their social network in the host country.

Table 3.1 Location where the Close Friendship Formed

	NUS Mean	SNU Mean	RUC Mean	F	Sig.
Friends made On-campus	5.47 a	4.69 b	4.27 c	20.40	<.001
Friends made Outside	1.25 b	1.93 a	1.45 b	10.50	<.001

It is not surprising that students tend to make friends with those who comes from their home country. In all three types of housing arrangement, students reported that their home country friends are most close friends that they would study together, go out for meals and activities (see Table 3.2). This effect is most significant in the case of NUS. The top 3 ethnic groups of international students living on campus were Malaysian, Chinese and Indian. While living in a mixed dormitory, it was easier for them to find friends from home country. This to certain extent might affect their intention of making friends with 3rd country[3] friends or to explore opportunities of social mixing outside campus as they were quite comfortable mixing within the university. Statistics in Table 3.3 shows international students in NUS attended various on-campus actives and have highest number of home country friends in comparison with their fellow international students hosted by other two universities.

Table 3.2 ANOVA Result of Top-7 Close Friends' Nationality of Int'l Students

	NUS Mean	SNU Mean	RUC Mean	F	Sig.
Number of Home Country Friends	3.64 a	3.13 b	2.42 c	32.56	<.001
Number of Host Country Friends	1.65 b	2.08 a	1.26 c	17.69	<.001
Number of 3rd Country Friends	1.17 c	1.51 b	2.05 a	17.47	<.001

As international students in RUC lived by themselves in specific halls, they made friends among themselves. The 3rd country network is most significant: among the 7 top close friends, there were at least 2 friends on average come from 3rd countries (see Table 3.2). While the average number of host country friends were higher than 3rd country friends in the other two universities, international students in RUC in general had more 3rd country friends than host country friends. It could also because of the effect of enclaves in which international students had less opportunities to mingle with local students. In one of the interviews, a Vietnamese undergraduate student mentioned that she had stayed with 4 different roommates along the years studying at RUC: one Japanese, one Korean, one American and the other was Italian. She had this to say:

> Before coming, the university will ask about preference of special requirement, such as the location, preference of roommates. Some people do not want to stay with someone from their own country, because they want to learn Chinese, some people do not like to stay with the students from western countries. ⋯⋯ We are foreign students in China, but if you want to find a good local friend, it may not be easy. ⋯⋯

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[3] We define 3rd country friends as a residual category after co-national friends from the home country and host country friends from the country that the international student is studying in.

We do not have many chances to contact with each other. ...... And we also live separately, we really do not have too much commutation. ...... Some local students welcome foreign students, while some of the local students do not really like to go out with foreign students. The places the local students usually go, maybe we find them boring. And the places we go to, they also do not like them. And some of the foreign students, their learning ability, including language ability may not be that strong. (Interview from a Vietnamese student majoring international relations at RUC)

International students in SNU reported highest number of host country friends among the three selected cases (see Table 3.2). As students can apply for different types of housing, it is likely that they would choose taking their intension of network formation into consideration. Students who wanted to make more host country friends were likely to live in mixed housing condition while the others may prefer to stay in enclaves with other international students.

The social mixing of international students not only happens in dormitories but also during regular activities they participated. In our research, 82.7% international indicated that they regularly participated in different groups and/or activities, among which 64.5% students participated in those activities on campus and 40.6% of them attend regular groups outside university (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Activities On- and Outside Campus

	On-campus			Outside campus		
	NUS	SNU	RUC	NUS	SNU	RUC
Clubs and associations	71.6%	32.3%	26.3%	10.6%	21.0%	21.8%
Religious organization	12.4%	13.2%	3.4%	13.8%	21.8%	20.9%
Hobby and sports group	74.8%	49.4%	39.9%	15.1%	25.3%	24.0%

Combining the statistics in Table 3.2 and 3.3, we can see that international students hosted by NUS tended to attend activities and make friends on campus. And the component of ethnic groups of local students were similar as international students. This could be one of the reasons that made international students found it easy to mix in host society and have positive experience regarding diversity. At the same time, international students are seen as foreign talent by Singapore and therefore a welcomed group of migrants. Although there are social media posts to this effect, they are not seen as competing with locals for jobs. This idea of "foreign talent" is promoted by the government and this positive image is widely used in everyday conversations and in the media. This image has meant general acceptance and an increase their positive experience of international students for mixing outside campus.

Table 3.4 shows students' satisfaction towards mixing at host society. There is no statistical difference regarding how international students perceived local people's attitude towards them. In general, they found local people were friendly to them. Students in Singapore and Beijing found it easier to find a social group for interest sharing and to mix in host society than those who stayed in Seoul. Regarding the ethnicity and religious tolerance, students studied in Singapore were most satisfied, followed with students in Beijing and then Seoul.

Table 3.4 International Students' Satisfaction towards Mixing at Host Society (ANOVA Test)

		NUS Mean	SNU Mean	RUC Mean	F	Sig.
a	Local people are friendly	2.75 a	2.84 a	2.75 a	0.42	.661
b	Easy to find a social group to share interest	2.72 a	2.51 b	2.74 a	6.39	<.005
c	Easy to mix in host society	2.69 a	2.47 b	2.66 a	5.54	<.005
d	Tolerance towards ethnic/religious differences in host society	3.09 a	2.59 c	2.72 b	26.53	<.001

Note: 1=least satisfied and 4=most satisfied.

Students hosted by RUC reported high satisfaction about social mixing and tolerance towards diversity. They attended a lot of outside campus activities with 3rd country friends and sensed that Beijing welcomes foreigners like them. One American student who studied at RUC shared an episode about his involvement with two police cases. He worked at a school teaching English and then another service company without work permit. However, because he was an international student then, he was helped by the local police and even became a friend with the policeman (Interview from an American student who studied International Relations at RUC).

> I was working and I got called to the police station a couple of times yea, got a lot of experiences here. I was teaching English here in a primary school. ⋯⋯ I told them I was working since I got here. ⋯⋯ And actually the employment visa was the main reason⋯ they held me with some other stuff afterwards. I'm still friends with the police officer. (Interview from an American student who studied International Relations at RUC)

The social networks and diversity experience students had during their stay in the host universities are likely to have impact on their plans after graduation. Both our survey and alumni interview data suggested the effects. The number of home country friends does not have significant correlation pattern with intention of work location in the future. But the social networks and diversity experience are likely to increase their intention in working at host and 3rd countries: students with more 3rd country friends have higher intention in working in another country (p<.05); and students who have more host country friends also have higher intention in working at host country (p<.001).They build up cultural skills along studying in the host country, form networks with other international students, and gain information about opportunities and develop confidence in adaption.

Table 3.5 Correlation between Number of Friends and Intention of Work Location

	Intention of working at Home	Intention of working at	Intention of working at 3rd

	Country	Host Country	Country
Number of Close Home Country Friends	.05	.03	-.06
Number of Close Host Country Friends	-.05	+.12** P <.001	+.05
Number of Close 3rd country friends	-.004	-.06 p <.005	.08* P<.05

Even for those graduates who went back to work at home countries, they are likely to keep visiting host cities and maintain relations with their local friends. These social networks could also benefit work (see interview extraction from a Japanese alumnus who studied MBA at NUS and now working at Japan). Furthermore, graduates from NUS are likely to have higher internationally mobility. For instance, one Indonesian graduate told in the interview that he worked first at Singapore and then moved to Hong Kong and travels frequently to visit his friends made during university time and relocated to other countries (see from an Indonesian alumnus who studied Civil Engineering at NUS and working at Hong Kong).

> Two years in Singapore. I made a lot of good friends, Singaporeans, or some other people from mainland China, basically the students, they are from Asian countries. There are three students from Japan, including me. One person from Nomura Security, Securities, and one person from NTT, it's a communication company. ⋯⋯ I'm still you know, keeping in touch with some of my classmates, friends. When I do business, how can I utilize such – because we have the⋯ Hay Group Singapore in Singapore, and I have colleagues there, and they can do business, and they can help me. (Interview from a Japanese alumnus who studied MBA at NUS and working at Japan)

> I did sales job in Singapore, actually, before I came to Cathay. ⋯⋯ Because I recently just moved to Hong Kong. But my hangout friends in Singapore were normally Indonesian. ⋯⋯ I keep in touch with two good Singaporean friends. One very good Mauritius friend, and the other one is obviously Indonesian. Surabaya. So still keep in touch until now, very very close. Even the Mauritius, move to London, and every time I visited London, I would definitely look for her. (Interview from an Indonesian alumnus who studied Civil Engineering at NUS and working at Hong Kong)

4 Concluding Remarks

With the data, we want to argue that being youths and young adults, international students can play a positive informal role in facilitating a better understanding between hosts and guests. Their role as international students in their host society is a label which finds wide acceptance among residents of the city. And being youths, they presence add to the vibrancy of the city. Within the framework of everyday cosmopolitan practices, these students, through their multicultural attitudes developed on campus and their involvements in host societies,

they contribute informally to urban lifestyles and practices.

In closing, we make three points with regard to international students and their diversity experiences in their host cities.

Firstly, the three cities we choose for the analysis are capital cities. These cities have some of the largest urban populations in Pacific Asia, having dynamic city regions with large shares by manufacturing and trade with the rest of the world and home to innovation and creative companies (Ho, 2014). Besides a vibrant urban economy, these cities also have a wide range of leisure and recreational amenities and nightlife. As capital cities, they host a large foreign population working there or studying in a number of large and reputable metropolitan universities. This multinational residential mix create an openness to foreigners and increased opportunities for diversity encounters (see Table 3.4). Thus the combination of economic, social and multicultural opportunities creates an irresistible pull for students looking to Asia for their study.

Within this urban context, student housing arrangements are critical as social spaces for mixing, blending co-living arrangements with dormitory led social and recreational events. In this regard, we note from Table 3.2 that when housing arrangements are planned to have wide choices (as in the case of SNU), relations with home country students are high. When choice is restricted to only international student dormitories (as in the case of RUC), international students look to outside their campus to make friends. Within a mixed housing arrangements with large numbers of international students are co-residing with local students (the NUS case), the highest home country friends are found. The RUC model of finding friends outside the campus is particularly significant for diversity management efforts. Because of the large number of universities in Beijing, the presence of a significant number of young international students and their friendship networks mean that such students are visible and important bridges to intercultural understanding and awareness of the other, giving traction to Iris Marion Young's (1990) notion of city life affirming social difference.

Lastly, we need to recognize that diversity experiences work differently for different migrant groups. Indeed, we have argued that international students are generally welcomed by city residents. Although there are university differences, Table 3.4 reported high mean scores from international students of the three universities when they reported that local people are friendly. We cannot say the same for other migrant groups. Indeed, writing about Singapore, Aihwa Ong highlighted the differences in reception between the welcome extended to "nomadic professionals" see as the foreign talent, and the "laboring classes" who have more restrictive residency rights. As Ong (2007: 92), this is a global city problem. By their employment policies, they generate inequality "sharpening and concentrating divisions between the highly educated and the less so, between global managers and migrant maids, professors and janitors, human capital and manual labour". Diversity management indeed has to be a critical strategy involving not only the state, but NGOs as advocates, and employers in opening up the space for appreciating differences in the city.

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