

Educator as Researcher: A Reflection on Inter-Cultural Epistemology through an Immersion Experience in Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore

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Reflection on globalisation from personal experience

- Academic background: Comparative Education
- Experiential journey in comparative education
 - *IEA Civic Education Study 1995-2001; 2009*
 - *Hong Kong – Australia – Hong Kong – Singapore*

Global Commission on International Migration 2005

- 200 million international migrants = Brazil, the fifth most populous country in the world
- Doubled in 25 years
- Migrants are now in every part of the world: 60% in developed countries, 40% in less developed countries
- Asia has 49 million migrants, Africa: 16 million

Global Commission on International Migration 2005

- **Factors:** economic restructuring; global communication networks, global transportation, global social networks and diasporas.
- **Temporary migrants** vs permanent settlers
- The growth of **global cities:** diversities

Three generations of migrations

(Faist 2000)

- **First Generation:** push-pull; the age of industrialisation; emigration-immigration
- **Second Generation:** Centre-periphery, flowing from less developed states to more economically developed states
- **Third Generation:** migration in social spaces; not singular journeys; a part of life; blurring between origins and destinations

Migration in Social Spaces

- Not a linear direction, but **a concept of flow**
- Moving from gain-loss concept to **a win-win concept**
- Moving from brain drain to **brain circulation**
- Moving from singular journeys to **complex flows**
- *Education has become a significant reason for migration in this respect*

The emergence of 'migrant scholar' or 'academic migrants'

- Increase of overseas studies; exchange programmes
- Increase of academics working overseas as well

The Internationalisation of Education (Altbach, 1998)

- **Changes in the university students:** coming from more diverse backgrounds, increased females; rise in student consumerism; more vocational demands for higher education
- **Changes in the professoriate:** decline in funding; decline in tenure; increased diversities, e.g. gender, race and ethnicity
- **Internationalisation:** Knowledge becomes increasingly international; increased links between universities

The Emergence of Educational Expatriates (Aharonov, 2010)

- **Expatriation**: people who spend part of their life living and working in their life
- **Traditional concept**: Experts being sent to less developed regions to help and rule, especially during colonisation periods
- **Transient**: Not a sojourner, but a transient who comes for a defined mission and leaves after the mission – *Permanence in impermancy*
- Resembles the concept of *temporary migrants*

From Internationalisation to intercultural education in Australia

- **Altbach:** International higher education has become a significant 'industry' today – many universities have developed an internationalisation today.
- **Australia:** Many universities have 20-30% 'international students', and they constitute a significant proportion of the national income – well known as 'education export'.

From Internationalisation to intercultural education in Australia

- No lack of critique within Australia, e.g. Park 2009, about the economic purposes of internationalisation
- Increased concern about the cultural dimension of internationalisation – enhancing cultural understanding among the Australians, helping international students to have productive studies in Australia; and learning from the international students in knowledge construction.
- **Welch:** queries the western tradition as a base of knowledge; call for cultural base of epistemology

Intercultural Education

(Stier, 2009)

- Internationalisation of education is about intercultural communication and intercultural competence.
- **i-Characteristics:**
 - Intercultural themes and perspectives,
 - interdisciplinary,
 - investigative (curiosity and passion for new cultural experiences and knowledge),
 - integrated (national and international students),
 - interactive (teacher-student; student-student) and
 - integrative (theory-practice).

Localisation and globalisation: The Chinese Learner in Hong Kong

- Globalisation, localisation & glocalisation
- 1996: *The Chinese Learner: cultural, psychological and contextual influences*, ed. Biggs & Watkins, published by Comparative Education Research Centre, HKU.
- Biggs & Watkins: educational expatriates from Australia and Watkins

Paradox of the Chinese Learner

- Taught in conditions not conducive to good learning, e.g. large classes, rote learning, norm-referenced, but outperforming Western students
- Chinese students are passive rote learners, but they show high levels of understanding
- Teacher-centred teaching has allowed students to be active learners even in large classes
- Challenging Western assumptions about poor teaching in the Chinese context, e.g. large classes, strict, expository, passive.

Construction and Deconstruction of the Chinese Learners (Lee & Mok, 2008)

- **Wang & Lin:** Self-concept and learning achievements
- **Callingham:** HK students better in mechanical mathematics; Australian students better in mathematical reasoning
- **Mok:** Students do not ask questions in class, not because they have no questions, but because they do not want to interrupt the class – they ask a lot of questions after class
- **Harbon:** teacher-student relationship is a significant factor of learning among Chinese students
- **Chan:** Chinese learner is not a static concept, but is transformative, responding to the different needs in time, especially in responding to education reforms

Construction and Deconstruction of the Chinese Learners (Lee & Mok, 2008)

- **Grace Mak:** Chinese learner may only be meaningful interculturally, but intraculturally all learners across cultures face similar learning problems
- **The Case of HK:**
- Even after 150 years of British colonial rules, HK maintains significant characters of Chinese Learners.
- My study of comparing three Chinese cities (HK, Hangzhou & Guangzhou) found that HK teachers comparatively emphasise more on the Chinese traditions as compared to the other two cities
- My study of comparing HK & Shanghai on globalisation shows that Shanghai teachers are more concerned about global issues as compared to HK.

Internationalisation Influence over Plurality: Singapore

- **Internationalisation** as a means of harmonisation and globalisation
- External agenda over internal diversities and conflicts
- English as a bridge language in public life
- The emphasis on bilingual education to balance ethnicity concerns
- Cultural practices as a private agenda; meritocracy as a public agenda

Internationalisation Influence over Plurality: Singapore

Contextual considerations:

- Pragmatism: how things work in the Singapore context
- Koh: Metapragmatics of globalization
- Singapore 21: 'a culture of internationalisation'
- Researches are quite westernised/internationalised, with significant emphasis on context, but not necessarily cultural
- Rationalisation and empiricism

Uniqueness of the Singapore Education System

- A strong belief in the examination system
- Meritocracy as educational equality
- A strong belief in streaming and differentiated curriculum
- Flexible approaches emerging out of a centralised and rather rigid school system:
 - independent schools
 - specialised schools (e.g. art, physical education),
 - integrated programme
 - government supported IB programme
 - top 10% and bottom 10% students not to take O-Level examination.

Conclusion

- How a culture-based epistemology and intercultural education agenda could emerge in the internationalisation of education in Australia;
- How the search of cultural roots could lead to maintaining Chinese culture in a colonised city in HK;
- How globalisation and internationalisation emerge on top of nationalisation as a national goal

Conclusion

- How the internationalisation agenda has led to the intercultural agenda in Australia;
- How the search of cultural roots has led to localisation in the process of internationalisation;
- How globalisation and internationalisation has become an overarching goal to balance out ethnic diversities.

Conclusion

- The three countries have different approaches relevant to their own contexts;
- Universalism and particularism interact in their own ways to arrive at different emphases and solutions to problems;
- A culturalist agenda can be developed from an international agenda
- An internationalised agenda can also be developed to address cultural diversities