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

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Introduction

In 2003, the United Nation established the Global Commission on International Migration to study the phenomenon of international migration, in order to provide a framework for the formulation of a global response to the issue. The Commission Report was published in 2005, entitled *Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action* (GCIM, 2005). The report has provided many insights and new perspectives about the scale, impact and the interconnectedness of globalisation and migration. The Report points out that the world has been transformed by the process of globalisation. States, societies, economies and cultures in different regions of the world are increasingly integrated and interdependent, particularly referring to the development trends below:

- There are almost 200 million international migrants, a number equivalent to Brazil, the fifth most populous country in the world. It is more than double the figure recorded in 1980, only 25 ago.
- Migrants are now to be found in every part of the globe, some of them are moving within their own region and others travelling from one part of the world to another. Around 60 per cent of the recorded migrants are located in the world’s most prosperous countries, and the other 40 per cent in developing regions.
- Asia has some 49 million migrants, Africa 16 million and the Latin America and Caribbean region six million.
- Economic restructuring has been identified as a major factor for migration, but there are significant cultural factors affecting migration, such as gaining new experiences and encountering unfamiliar cultures.
- Other factors for increased migration include the growth of global communications networks, global transportation, and global social networks and diasporas that have made it easier for people to move to another country and to adapt to a new society.
- The pattern of migration has also changed. Whereas earlier migrants were ‘permanent settlers’ in the destination countries, there is a growing phenomenon of temporary migrants, such as international students and scholars.
- Increase in international migration has led to the emergence of ‘global cities’, characterised by a significant degree of diversities, that are described as socially dynamic, culturally innovative and economically successful.

Faist (2000) has identified three generation-typologies of migration. The first generation of migration was mainly characterised by the 'push-pull' factors, representing the age of industrialisation where migration was seen in the term of emigration and immigration. The second generation of migration was affected by the centre-periphery perception, with emigrants flowing from less developed states to states that are more economically developed. The third generation of migration deviates from the former two types, being regarded as 'migration in social spaces', which is transnational in nature, considering migration not as singular journeys, but as a part of life of the migrants that would blur the distinction between origins and destinations. Instead of seeing migration as a linear movement, the third generation is post-modern, seeing migration as an emergent and complex phenomenon, with circular flows of persons, ideas, goods and symbols across nation-state borders (see also Castles, 2002). Likewise, Pries (2008) describes transnational migration as a kind of movement towards the creation of 'social space' rather than 'geographical space'. In addition, Castells (2000) observes a shift towards 'space of flows' as compared to the conventional emphasis of 'spaces of places'.

The concept of circular flow in migration is important, as it changes the perception about people movement from a gain-loss perspective, which was based upon the notion of permanent settlement and also a linear concept, to a win-win perspective. As the Commission Report puts it, the notion of 'brain drain' is increasingly replaced by the notion of 'brain circulation', caused by the phenomenon of temporary migration, and with the possibilities of migrants returning to their own country on a regular or occasional basis, sharing the benefits of the skills and resources they have acquired while living and working abroad (GCIM, 2005).

Against this background of concept shifts in migration towards a non-linear complex phenomenon of circular talent flows, temporary migration, and social space, this paper aims to analyse how these concepts may be applied in understanding the role of education that may play a part in developing these concepts, and how the role of education may be understood in the context of globalisation. The paper will be analysed together with my personal trajectory – a PhD student trained in the field of comparative education in the United Kingdom, and having been engaged in academic appointments in Hong Kong and Australia, and now in Singapore. The analysis in this paper will be based upon the academic agenda that I have developed while working in these places – as a temporary migrant and an academic migrant using the concept of migration, or a 'global scholar' using the concept of globalisation. The paper is also developed from an insider-outsider perspective. I was educated and grown up in Hong Kong, and is absolutely an insider of Hong Kong, but the opportunity to study and work overseas allowed him to reflect upon and analyse Hong Kong from an outside perspective. As a comparativist, I have taken interests in educational policy and development in a broad range of countries, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Australia and Singapore. I started with learning to know about the two countries as an outsider, but the opportunity of working there, with a cultural immersion, has allowed me to understand more about the two countries as an insider. This interaction of insider and outside perspectives allows me to keep challenging my earlier perceptions about these three places, and identify commonalities

and differences, in the process of developing and analysing research agendas in each place.

The Emergence of ‘Migrant Scholar’ in the Internationalisation of Education

In his analysis of the development of higher education in the 21st century, Altbach (1998) has identified trends quite close to the globalisation literature, as follows:

- *Changes in the university students.* They come from much more diverse social class backgrounds, and the proportion of women in the student population has dramatically increased. Although student activism declined over the last few decades, there is a rise in student consumerism in higher education. Students worldwide have become more concerned with the usefulness of higher education in the employment market, and they have demanded more vocationally useful course of study.
- *Changes in the professoriate.* The decline in government funding to universities has led to increased vulnerability of the professoriate – decrease in full-time permanent positions; increased in part-time and non-permanent positions; and consequentially the professoriate in general “the best and brightest” are less frequently attracted to academic careers. On the other hand, the academic profession becomes more diverse in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity.
- *Internationalisation.* Knowledge has become increasingly international, and links among academic institutions worldwide continue to expand. The number of foreign students and scholars continue to grow. This is a positive aspect of contemporary higher education, although it at the same time increases demands for financing.

In sum, there is an increased flow of international students, and also of the professoriate in the internationalisation process of higher education. It is interesting to note that education has become a significant reason for migration, especially temporary migration, creating a kind of ‘academic migration’. There are obvious reasons for students who wish to study overseas. Some would study overseas because of wider opportunities available elsewhere as compared to their own localities. Others would want to go overseas simply for exposure reasons. And in the globalised world, employers also look for human resources that would have global exposure, and this encourages many students to aspire for overseas experience, and gap year experiences as well, as this would enhance their job opportunities in the global job markets.

In respect to the professoriate, the decline of the traditional professoriate, as described by Altbach, has given opportunities to people from outside of the localities to teach in higher education institutions. This is also related to globalisation and the trend of migration shifts. Aharonov (2010) has particularly identified the growth of education expatriates in his study on the implications of migration for education. According to Aharonov, expatriation refers to people who spend part of their life living and working in other countries. But an expatriate is characterised as the person ‘who comes today and leaves tomorrow’. He/she is not a sojourner, but rather a transient who comes for a defined

mission or purpose and leaves after it is done. Even if he/she stays, he/she can indeed leave any time. He/she is characterised as ‘permanent in his impermanency’.

Aharonov (2010) further argues that from a global perspective, the mobility of more educated people is significant. The largest corporations today are multi-national corporations and they hire millions of employees from all over the world, and it is highly significant for the economic development to be able to facilitate their mobility. In this context, a special attention should be to the reasons why temporary migrants migrate, especially those who are ‘expatriates’.

With the growth of education expatriates working in higher education institutions, and with the growth of temporary migration, this group of scholars may well be termed as ‘migrant scholars’, a terminology that Mason and Rawlings-Sanaei has adopted in editing this book, that examines the role of education expatriates in globalisation and internationalisation.

From Internationalisation to Intercultural Education: The Experience in Australia

The last decade has seen increased internationalisation in higher education policies worldwide. As Altbach (1998, p. xiv) remarks, universities throughout the world understand the need for an international viewpoint, and international higher education has also become a significant “industry”. With many universities setting internationalisation as a significant development agenda, Australia has become particularly known for her recent expansion in overseas enrolment and export of educational services. In 2002, Australian public higher institutions enrolled 185,000 international students as compared to 29,000 12 years ago, leading to 21% of the total student enrolment in higher education, and one third of these international students were studying in offshore programmes. For example, the international students contributed A\$2 billion for Australian universities. In addition, further substantial amounts were spent by these students and their families in living expenses when residing in Australia (Harmon, 2005).

Internationalisation of higher education is a means to many ends, and thus represents broad interests and varied perceptions in Australia. First, internationalisation is a means of raising revenue for the higher educational institutions. Internationalisation is in this sense a commercial export of higher education services, reflecting Australia’s policy shift from aid to trade since the mid-1980s. The commercial basis of internationalisation leads to the expansion of international students in the higher education system. Second, internationalisation of higher education functions as a means of enhancing the international outlook of the exporting country, international impact and international relations. The second function is closely related to the first one. On the one hand, the commercialisation of education is established as a means of sensitising the nation to global competition. On the other hand, the expansion of higher education exports is also a means of enhancing the international impact of Australia. Third, internationalisation is also a means of enriching cultural understanding. This leads to the awareness among Australian academics to internationalise the higher education curricular (Lee, 2008).

From a cultural perspective, the investigation of the different natures of the internationalisation of higher education in Asia has been regarded as significant for the understanding of localisation and contextual impacts in globalisation, and advancing cultural understanding across cultures. In the context of contemporary taxonomies of globalisation, (for example that of Sklair 1999, which distinguishes between the World Systems model, Global Society, Global Culture, and Global Capitalism), it is the latter two that stand out. Economic and cultural globalisation form key elements of the changing context for international relations in education.

In the process of teaching at the University of Sydney during 2005-2007, I have experienced intense discussion among the academics in Australia. Within Australia, there was no lack of criticism towards the Australian government that they attracted international students for economic reasons, but without paying attention to the learning benefits of the international students during their studies. As alleged by Park (2009), taking an internationalisation perspective, there is far more demand of integration with Australian students and international students, the internationalising learning content and context. There have not been much discussion and effort of understanding and practising of internationalising the learning context in respect to international students' cultural background and internationalised learning environment. There are many factors which interfere with internationalisation in the learning context such as English proficiency, culture difference and the lack of awareness of these issues both in the wider public and among the academics. This kind of question is important to address, as this will have significant epistemological implications. For example, Welch (2004) challenged the basis of knowledge that is based upon western traditions, and called for the need to examine the development of knowledge from various cultural perspectives.

Shortly after joining the University of Sydney, my colleagues (D. O'Connor and L. Napier) and I were funded by the University to work on a project entitled 'Transformation towards internationalisation: The individual and the classroom', and the project led to a publication edited by Waugh and Napier (2009). We surveyed and interviewed the students in the Faculty of Education and Social Work, and we invited students to come together to share their learning experience. The process enhanced our understanding that there were times students found it difficult to understand our teaching, not because of their language proficiency or their academic abilities but because of their cultural backgrounds. University of Sydney academics benefited a lot in the process in realising that we needed to reconstruct epistemologies that take into account of students' cultural backgrounds, and that the international students are cultural assets for us to achieve these goals. We also realised that teaching to the international students is a process of learning for ourselves, at least to understand how students from different cultural backgrounds would react to an academic issue differently.

In this way, the discussion on internationalisation becomes shifted towards inter-cultural education. This echoes Stier's (2009) assertion that internationalisation is about intercultural communication and intercultural competence. He concedes that internationalisation requires the teaching of six 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).

Thus, internationalisation is not ‘complete’ without getting across cultural boundaries, and leading towards intercultural learning. The base of knowledge will be re-defined, and there will be cultural appreciation in the process of learning, and this will eventually enhance the intercultural perspectives of globalisation. In this way, internationalisation, intercultural education and globalisation will have an integral effect upon one another.

Adopting a Transformational Approach in Teaching Strategy Development: The Experience in Hong Kong

It is well established in the globalisation literature that localisation occurs in the process of globalisation that will balance out the dominance of globalisation effects. The dichotomy implies conflicts and polemic tensions between what is supposed to be global and what is supposed to be local. However, my experience of working in Hong Kong and observation from there suggests that localisation and globalisation may not necessarily be in conflict with, but on the contrary can be complementary to, each other.

Hong Kong had been a British colony for over 150 years, during which Hong Kong was totally subjected to British and international influence both culturally and politically, and being autonomous in international trade as an independent polity. The British influence notwithstanding, Hong Kong during the period of colonisation has gone through significant waves of Sinicisation in politics, culture and language. The 1973 Chinese language movement was a political moment to force the British-Hong Kong government to recognise Chinese as an official language in parallel with English. The movement signifies Hong Kongers’ strives to maintain the official status of local language vis-a-vis the value of English as an international language that has already been ingrained in the territory. The university student movement taking place in the mid-seventies was a record of the enthusiasm of the university students in identifying the political and cultural root of the people, and obviously the political root was grounded in the Chinese cultural root. Leung Yan Wing (2003) in his PhD thesis has identified a variety of types of patriotism, and cultural patriotism is one of them. I have conducted an inter-city comparative study on teachers’ perception of citizenship education in three Chinese cities, viz. Huangzhou, Guangzhou and Hong Kong. It was found that Hong Kong teachers placed higher significance on Chinese traditional values than their counterparts in the Mainland Chinese cities. To my surprise, Hong Kong teachers placed more emphasis on the Chinese traditions than the other two Chinese cities in the Mainland (Lee, 2005). The Hong Kong case further shows that cultural traditions may not be easily eroded by globalisation and internationalisation, but could on the contrary be reinforced instead. In an Oxfam study about globalisation and citizenship education in Shanghai and Hong Kong, it was also found that Shanghai teachers are more concerned about globalisation and more enthusiastic to know more about the international world than the Hong Kong

teachers, except that the former's major interests are focused on knowledge and skills, and the latter's in values (Lee and Leung, 2006).

In 1996, as Director of the Comparative Education Research Centre, I made a decision to publish a manuscript produced by John Biggs and David Watkins, entitled *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences* (Biggs and Watkins, 1996). The book, now regarded as a seminal work in the field, was based upon observations from two educational expatriates, coming from Australia and New Zealand respectively, about the process of learning among Chinese students in Hong Kong. Biggs and Watkins highlighted two aspects of the so-called "paradox of the Chinese learner": (1) Chinese learners are often taught in conditions not conducive to good learning according to Western standards, such as large classes, expository methods, relentless norm-referenced assessment and harsh classroom climate, yet they out-perform Western students, at least in science and mathematics and have deeper, meaning-oriented, approaches to learning; (2) Chinese learners are generally perceived as passive rote learners, yet they show high levels of understanding. Five years later, the paradox of the Chinese learner was extended to the Chinese teachers in a follow-up volume entitled *Teaching the Chinese Learners: Psychological and Pedagogical Perspectives* (Watkins and Biggs, 2001). Here the authors found that the tightly orchestrated teacher-centred teaching allowed students to be active, even in large classes. Moreover, Western teaching innovations such as constructivist teaching methods and problem-based learning were found to work well with the Chinese learners if carefully implemented by the Chinese teachers concerned (Watkins and Biggs, 2001, p. 18). This led to the conclusion that Western assumptions about poor teaching in a Chinese context with large classes, strict, expository teaching and passive learners can be challenged. The two volumes of Biggs and Watkins established that there were features specific to the Chinese learners that need to be addressed in pedagogical examination.

Following up on these observations, Mok and I published a special journal issue, entitled *Construction and Deconstruction of the Chinese Learner: Implications for Learning Theories* (Lee and Mok, 2008). Analysing the articles contributed for this study, we found diverse approaches in the study of pedagogies for the Chinese learners. Some authors adopted the notion of paradoxes of the Chinese learners in further understanding the East-West divide in teaching and learning, such as the different approaches to mathematics teaching and learning (Wang and Lin, 2008; Callingham, 2008). Others extended the investigation of the Chinese learners beyond the cognitive aspects to uncover the emotive and social aspects of learning. For example, Mok et al. (2008) described the social reasons underlying the help-seeking behaviour of the Chinese learners that might make outsiders mistakenly regard the Chinese learners as passive learners. Harbon (2008) depicted how the deepening of teacher/student relationship could enhance learning (Harbon, 2008). Mak moved further to demystify the concepts of the Chinese learners, arguing that the Chinese learners, even though they may be different from learners of other cultures, still needed to resolve problems common to all learners (Mak, 2008). Moreover, Chinese pedagogies were not easily stereotyped. Rather they emerged in response to changing educational contexts and to changing demands on teaching and learning (Chan, 2008). In sum, the articles solicited for the special journal issue argued

that studying pedagogies for Chinese learners made a special contribution to a more general understanding of teaching and learning theories. In particular, cross-cultural studies can show how self-concept theories can be revisited or reconstructed, as Wang and Lin (2008) found that students of some high performing countries in mathematics could have relatively low self-concepts, and vice versa, whereas within country, i.e. intra-culturally, students' self concepts and learning achievements are positively correlated (cf. Lee and Mak, 2008). Moreover, Chan (2008) argues that there might not be such thing as 'Chinese learners'. Teaching strategy considerations among her sample teachers required adaptation and integration of various learning strategies. Even within a Chinese cultural context teachers need to adopt a transformational approach in teacher development and/or teaching strategy development that integrates a cultural orientation with the changing educational demands and expectation that a society like Hong Kong undergoes.

Internationalisation as an Overarching Influence over Plurality: The Experience in Singapore

The adoption of globalisation or internationalisation¹ as an anecdotal development direction in Singapore is a two-edged sword: enhancing both internal harmonisation and international outlook. This is the observation I can make during the short period of living and working in Singapore. The experience in Singapore has given me surprise after surprise, especially in terms of how an Asian city deliberately adopts an 'external agenda', such as globalisation and the institutionalisation of English as a language in public life (Tham, 1989). These external agendas were acting as an overarching framework that supersedes internal diversities, potential conflicts and issues, such as ethnic and language differences. Building a nation upon a plurality of racial backgrounds, with 75% of the population being Chinese, and the rest comprised of Malay, Tamil and the others, multiracialism, multilingualism and multiculturalism have been propounded as the main tenets of integrative strategy since the founding of the nation (Chan, 1989), with the externality of the English language being adopted in public life not only as a precondition for survival, but paradoxically also as a justification for multilingualism and multiculturalism (Tham, 1989). English is regarded as a bridge language that can break down ethno-linguistic communal barriers, and as a neutral language acceptable to all ethnic groups (Gopinathan, 2011; Shotam, 1989). Because of the need to balance a diversity of interest, the government attempts to give equal attention towards the diverse ethnic/cultural groups residing in Singapore, but at the end, no specific cultural agenda prevails. When elaborating upon Singapore's meritocracy, Tan points out that ethnic cultural practices are encouraged in Singapore in the private sphere, but in the public realm, the government has made it deliberate that no racial community is disadvantaged in decisions and selections:

'Multiracialism' celebrates a harmonious society made up of distinct 'racial' groups..., These ethnic identities and their respective practices encouraged to flourish in the private sphere. In the public realm, decisions, selections, and promotions are made in ways that officially do not disadvantage any particular racial community (K. Tan, 2010, p. 275).

¹The terms globalisation and internationalisation are used interchangeably in the context of this paper.

In Singapore, the transcending factors become more prominent. For example, the nation building agenda calls for shared values in terms of tolerance, cooperation, mutual understanding and common endeavour among Singaporean citizens. The government's stress on achieving economic goals through education and the ideology of meritocracy have provided the public with common social goals in societal terms and the sense of fairness and justice in individual terms that would transcend ethnic differences (Tham, 1989). Moreover, the pursuit of an internationalisation agenda in equipping the country to meet 21st century needs also provides future-oriented goals for the whole populace to focus on establishing a more promising future for the nation (Singapore 21 Committee, 1999).

The Singapore city-state has chosen to be a visible part of the global world. The feeling of living and working in both Sydney and Hong Kong could be quite different than that in Singapore. Sydney and Hong Kong are a city in the country, although they are one of the most important cosmopolitan cities in their countries. However, the situation is not quite the same when referring to Singapore. Singapore is not a city in a country, it is a city-state, with a deliberate internationalisation agenda that aims to learn from elsewhere worldwide, but at the same time attracting attention from elsewhere worldwide – being a city-state itself, its internationalisation agenda has created Singapore to be the Capital of the world. As Lim and Lee (2010, p. 141) put it, “[Singapore’s] integration into world markets and the global production networks of multinational corporations was deliberately shaped by an increasingly powerful and nationally oriented state.”

While Singapore’s education agenda is always without doubt national, the development tactic or strategy is by and large ‘global’. As Koh (2007, p. 186) puts it, “The Singapore way of participating in global capitalism is tactical because it uses a range of social, economic and education policies and translate them into national imperatives or into discourses of crisis.” In the area of citizenship education, the agenda of civic, moral and national education has been balanced by personal development, such as ‘being and becoming’, social-emotional learning and character education. Moreover, the notion of ‘consumer citizenship’ has also evolved, which reflects the significance of marketisation in the midst of globalisation among Singapore citizenry (Baildon and Sim, 2010). Tan remarks that “Globalisation is recognised as a double-edged sword that is seen as being beneficial to the well-educated and mobile Singaporeans. They were labelled the “cosmopolitans” for their relative adaptability and receptivity to globalisation and their English language proficiency (E. Tan, 2010, p. 85). According to Koh (2007), this is the ‘metapragmatics of globalisation in Singapore.’ Part of the features of the cosmopolitan Singaporeans depicted in the *Singapore 21 Report* is the possession of a ‘culture of internationalisation’ (Singapore 21 Committee, 1999). In school, Singapore’s citizenship pedagogies are diversified, well informed by the international literature, with the national focus being mixed with choices of various teaching approaches by teachers. Sim’s (2010) study of social studies teachers in Singapore has identified four pedagogical typologies among the teachers, namely expository and highly controlled, rationalistic and persuasive, interactive and participative and constructive and experiential. In my study of Asian citizenship pedagogies, I have argued that the Asian educators are by and large conversed with the international literature on pedagogies, but making informed choices of

their own in its application and implementation (Lee, 2010). This seems to fit the situation of Singapore quite well.

What I have experienced within a year, as a participant observer, led me to observe some stark contrasts between Hong Kong and Singapore in terms of research agenda. While the cultural agenda of the 'Chinese Learner' has grown to be a significant agenda, with a dominantly Chinese population, this cannot be applied to the Singapore context, as this is obviously one racial agenda within the ethnically mixed populace. Being Dean of Education Research at the National Institute of Education, I am in charge of managing research projects in the Institute. Looking into many of the projects, I have found that the academic dialogue and policy discussions in Singapore reflect a clear demand for empirical evidence base in both academic and pedagogical research and policymaking, and both in the Institute and Ministry of Education. There is repeated mention that Singapore is a small state, and it must live up to international standards in order to survive, and achieve and sustains its competitiveness internationally. This seems to resonate with the bigger picture of the Singapore society, a somewhat de-emphasis of the cultural differences to minimise cultural conflicts and maximise social harmony. Likewise research on schools and the classrooms in Singapore, despite having addressed the significance of context, there is an underplay of cultural specificities in relation to particular ethnic groups, and the schools and classrooms are treated contextually, but this does not necessarily mean 'culturally'.

While the Chinese Learner is a deliberate research perspective in Hong Kong, and the study on citizenship identity has a focus on cultural identity (versus political identity), there is relatively little exploration of the Singapore Learner or Asian Learner that would appeal to the cultural roots of the educational features in the society, compatible to the Chinese Learner. This does not mean that the education system in Singapore is a direct knowledge transfer from the West. The Singapore education system has indeed outstanding uniqueness – a strong belief in the examination system that would function as a meritocracy, which is essential for achieving educational equality; a strong belief in streaming but working hard to bring the best for the students in different streams; a flexible approach emerging out of a centralised and rather rigid school system (such as the introduction of independent schools, specialised schools (e.g. art, physical education), integrated programme, government supported IB programme, and the allowance for the top 10% and bottom 10% students not to take O-Level examination, etc. However, the research in education and the development of these unique systems are regarded as the outcome of rationalised analyses, and thus empirically oriented, rather than an option based upon the cultural features, given the existence of diverse cultures within the nation.

Singapore has positioned itself as the education hub of Asia, and the internationalisation of education has been an explicit policy agenda of the country. However, the kind of education hub that Singapore positions itself is a 'secondary hub', rather than 'primary hub', according to Cribbin (2008), meaning that the country facilitates overseas students 'coming through' Singapore for higher studies, rather than 'coming to' Singapore as an end destination. The way Singapore 'internationalises' education is also quite unique – by inviting major and prestigious universities from the United States and Australia to

establish branch campuses, rather than expanding its own education system. Thus while there are increasing discussions in Australia about intercultural education that comes out of internationalisation, the ‘cultural’ talks in Singapore, in terms of indigenous cultural background as foundation of generalisable knowledge, are relatively insignificant or perhaps as mentioned above mainly appearing in the private sphere. Rather, Singapore students and teachers would demonstrate themselves to be masters of the international knowledge and skills (that is regarded and challenged by my Australian colleagues as Western-based).

Conclusion: The Role of Migrant Scholars in Enriching Scholarship and Teaching

The above discussion was generated by the insights of Felicity Rawlings and Colina Mason, who specifically requested me to offer an analysis of migrant scholars from personal experience, knowing that I have lived and worked in three places. And their suggestion of this particular approach triggers me to combine my training in comparative education, the research works I have conducted while living and working in the three places, and recall seriously how the interplay of insider-outsider perspectives would provide me understandings of the interplay of globalisation and localisation, as well as internationalisation and nationalisation. Moreover, my interest in studying migration started when I first moved to work in Australia at the University of Sydney. This paper cannot be achieved also, without the honour and privilege of living and working in these places.

The thinking process in shaping this paper also makes me think about how a culture-based epistemology and intercultural education agenda could emerge in the process of internationalisation of education in Australia; how the search for cultural root and the Chinese Learner agenda emerge during the 150 years of British colonisation in Hong Kong; and how the globalisation and internationalisation agenda, on top of nation-building, gradually becomes an overarching national goal that is pragmatically seen as an advantage for Singapore to enhance its immersion in the global arena on the one hand, and an indirect way to achieve harmonisation in an ethnically diverse population on the other. Further, what I have learned when working in the three cultural settings has provided invaluable insights as a migrant scholar to note how the emphasis on internationalisation in Australia has led to growing awareness of intercultural education; how the search of cultural roots in Hong Kong as a British colony has led to the reinforcement of the localisation and cultural agenda in an international city; and as a city state, how Singapore has chosen to adopt globalisation and internationalisation agendas that would balance out ethnic diversities.

A few decades ago, the economic miracles of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan have caught the world’s attention as East Asia’s Four Little Dragons. Tremendous amounts of research and analyses appeared over the years, trying to understand the common success factors of the four economies. Interestingly, the findings were mixed, and no commonly accepted growth formulae have been developed. The general conclusion was that these successful economies were able to make use of the opportunities available in the world

market, and develop economic strategies that particularly fit their own social, cultural, political settings and economies, and they all achieved their own successes.

The observation about the development of scholarship and teaching in Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore has arrived at similar findings – the three places all have different their own approaches in developing epistemology and pedagogies that are relevant to their own contexts. However, the interesting observation is that universalism and particularism in the three places interact in their own ways to arrive at different emphases, but all the three places have a bit of the different combinations of the two. Namely, a culturalist agenda is developed from an international agenda in Australia; a cultural approach to learning is developed in an international city, Hong Kong; and an internationalised agenda is developed because of the existence of cultural diversities in Singapore. Having said that, this observation by no means implies that internationalisation is not important in Australia and Hong Kong, nor that culturalism is not important in Singapore.

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