

## **EDITORIAL**

### **PERSPECTIVES ON MOBILITY, MIGRATION AND WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC**

*Peter Kell and Gillian Vogl*

This edition of the *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* explores issues relating to global student mobility in the Asia Pacific. The contributions to this edition from Australia and Malaysia emerged from a forum held in Australia in February where academics and researchers from Malaysia, China, Singapore and Australia presented papers and discussed ways of interpreting the character and the implication of global student mobility. The forum entitled *International Students in the Asia Pacific: Mobility, Migration, Well-being and Security* held from 13–15<sup>th</sup> February 2008 attracted over 40 presenters. The forum was hosted by the Centre for Asian Pacific Social Transformation Studies at the University of Wollongong and was part of a continuing research partnership between the Universiti Sains Malaysia, the University of Wollongong and a growing number of Australian and Malaysian researchers.

With the same objectives as the forum, this special edition of *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* on global student mobility in the Asia Pacific has the aims to:

- Explore the nature of mobility associated with the internationalisation of higher education in the Asia Pacific.
- Explore aspects of the experience of international students in the Asia Pacific concerning study, employment, migration and integration in their host communities.
- Explore aspects of the physical and mental well-being, sense of security and belonging experienced by international students in the Asia Pacific.
- Develop strategies to improve the health and welfare outcomes of international students.

Global student mobility now involves over 2.7 mil students who study higher education in a country other than their own (OECD 2006: 283). This figure represents an 8% growth from the previous year and this growth has been steady from a starting position of 0.6 mil in 1975. The growth has been accelerated in the last decade from 1.9 mil in 2000 (OECD 2006).

The issue of global student mobility is an important question for the Asia Pacific region because the region provides the largest number of international students. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), China and India make up the largest numbers of international students from outside the OECD. Chinese students represent 15.2% of all international students enrolled in the OECD and India has 5.7%. Other Asian nations with high levels of student mobility include Japan and Korea that make up 2.8% and 4.3%, respectively (OECD 2006: 294). In Australian universities, the Asia Pacific provides the largest group of students arriving in Australia with eight of the top ten countries being from either South East or North Asia and this represents 59% of arrivals. Of the 164,000 international students in Australia during 2005, one in four was from China (24%) followed by India (14%) and Malaysia (9%). Fifty nine per cent of enrolments were in undergraduate degrees with masters by course work making up 33%. More than half of the enrolments (55%) was in the broad field of business administration and management, computer science and information systems (ABS 2007: 4).

The Asia Pacific is also one of the regions where higher education providers and universities are most active as participants in global student mobility. France, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) are the largest providers who receive more than 50% of international students world wide. In the Asia Pacific, Australia and New Zealand are seen as growing participants with Australia having the highest proportion of international students of any country with 17% of students in Australian universities being international students. The accelerated internationalisation of Australian universities has come from a need for universities to make up for diminished government support and to compensate for the failure of the Australian government to provide support for academic salary rises since 1996 (Marginson 2004; Kell & Vogl 2007a). Moreover, lately the push for internationalisation has seen the presence of international students be utilised as a benchmark for determining the international prestige and esteem of universities (Altbach 2004). While some nations such as Singapore, Malaysia and Japan send large numbers of international students abroad, they are also starting to be new entrants in international education. Offering lower fees, lower cost of living and more generous visa conditions many of these countries have increased their international student numbers

rapidly. This has seen some countries such as Malaysia capitalise on its Pan Islamic links to source students from Muslim countries in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. Japan, also has growing numbers of students particularly in arts, linguistics and business courses, and is one of the few nations in the world which is both a large scale sender and receiver of international students.

Linkages with higher education and migration is also seen to be a growing trend with concentrations of Portuguese students in France, students from Turkey in Germany and Mexicans in the US. Favourable conditions which enable international students to qualify for migration has also seen a popularity in Anglophone countries such as Australia, the UK, the US, New Zealand, as well as, non-English speaking countries such as Germany and France. This means that Indian students tend to favour Australia, the US and UK attracting 5 out of every 6 Indian students who are abroad. Similarly, Chinese students are attracted to these destinations by academic reputation and migration opportunities. The nexus with migration is also evident by a growth in postgraduate mobility. While global movement predominantly involves mostly students in undergraduate programmes leading to local degree level qualifications, but when compared to the patterns of domestic enrolments, international students are more likely to enrol in postgraduate and research programmes (Hatakenaka 2004: 11). The growth in postgraduate research is related to the growth of advanced research in some countries, particularly in Europe (OECD 2006: 293).

However, some countries such as Australia and Sweden have broadly the same proportions of students in tertiary type A courses and advanced research programmes suggesting that the success of these countries is based on recruiting students as undergraduates and then enabling them to undertake postgraduate research studies in the same country. In countries such as Belgium, Canada, Hungary, Spain, the UK, Switzerland, Iceland and France, there is growth in advanced research programmes that is linked to the growth of innovation industries in these countries as well as providing option for high-level skilled immigration. Postgraduate and advanced research programmes are growing as a proportion of student mobility in Australia because they offer opportunities for high level employment in their home countries as well as providing advantages in remaining in the host country through skills migration or as permanent residents.

The contributions in this special edition, the *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* on global student mobility proposes an alternative approach to research and respond to some of the inadequacies, and the gaps in existing theoretical approaches that are used to explore this growing phenomena. These contributions explore some of the gaps that typify

existing research into global student mobility. Most of the existing and current research into global student mobility falls into two broad categories.

The first, is research that explores the international trends and flows of global student mobility and this research generally emerges from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the OECD and at the national level the government collections of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) (OECD 2006; ABS 2007; Marginson 2004). At present there is a reliance on statistical material that is based on a range of narrow criteria such as countries of origin as this research is most often used to analyse market trends. The comparability of this data is hampered by different definitions of mobility and international student by various nations and organisations. This large-scale data also lacks an ability to explore the experience of global student mobility through such criteria as class, gender, ethnicity, locality and tends to concentrate on the students in isolation from other external factors, such as the tensions in the post September 11<sup>th</sup> environment. This has also created some metaphors around "flows" and "movements" which are aligned with analogies to market trends and these tend to obscure the motivations and aspirations of individuals and also present the international market as uniform and benign. Some of the contributions in this edition suggest that this instrumental approach that is reliant on system theory inadequately captures the full complexity and discursive nature of the phenomena of global student mobility.

The second trend in global student mobility research uses a combination of phenomenology, ethnography and narrative to explore the experiences of individual international students. While these research projects make useful starting points for research, much of this research sees students as isolated individuals and as passive participants in a global market setting, and does not assign students any capacity for agency. The research concentrates on adjustment issues and poor services of host institutes. Much research is inclined to stereotype Asian students and sees the principle question as being how students adapt to their new environment and "assimilate" to the cultural values of their host nation, institute and the protocols associated with academic learning. The research is often instrumental and concentrates on methods of how to develop more effective methods at "managing" the needs for international students. The research is limited as it does not have a long-term perspective beyond the "instant" and also does not attempt to explore transnational links between families, nation, communities, work, migration and citizenship. The existing research often fails to explore the global connections that arise as a consequence of global student mobility and how these connections influence a sense of belonging,

well-being and security as well as a developing notion of global citizenship (Kell et al. 2005).

Global student mobility is also framed by contradictory claims about the risk that international students pose to the perceived integrity of the nation state. The claims, usually made by conservative sources argue that international students pose a series threat to domestic labour markets and are responsible for eroding or evading legitimate processes of immigration. International students are often seen as using their student status as a "cover" for what is seen as illegal work and eventual permanent residence. In the media, public debate is characterised by hysteria over students using education "back door" to immigration. Since September 11<sup>th</sup> the link between terrorism and threats to the nation state and the presence of international students has triggered anxieties that have seen increasing preoccupations with the state monitoring of those mandated as being the "other". This has led to increasing state regulation of not only the conditions of entry of students to countries but also many aspects of their private lives and study. This increased surveillance and scrutiny of students has also resulted in a changed relationship between the state and universities where there is intervention and micro-management of the internal operations and programmes of universities.

International students are also placed in a contradictory and subordinate position where they are expected to accept and conform to local cultural, and academic conventions and behaviours. International students are also expected to accept political conditions and social arrangements in which they find themselves without question. Involvement in domestic politics issues is dissuaded and active agency is not encouraged. Passivity and compliance to local customs and practice are assumptions that position international students as subordinate to the social norms of the communities in which they live and study. In a one-way relationship international students are seen as largely the beneficiaries of their presence in their host community. Expectations are that international students should be the "same" but they are subject to differential and discriminatory practices that identify them as different. This imbalance amplified by the fact that international students possess few legal provisions and entitlements that preserve their rights. Codes of practice, consumer rights and the codification of international educational practices rarely mention or specify the needs of international students. The rights of the state, and providers and the protection of their interests is favoured rather than any protection of international students who are increasingly seen as the other, and treated as aliens and foreigners.

The vulnerability of international students is evident in research that identifies the high levels of risk undertaken by students. Often owing to unfamiliarity to local conditions and norms, they are subject to exploitation and poverty as well as death and injury by misadventure. Vulnerability extends to housing, transport and employment where many students are exploited and have little formal protection (Kell & Vogl 2007b; Novera 2004; Marginson & Sawir 2005; Scheyvens et al. 2003). The mental and physical health of international students is a cause of rising concern as alienation, loneliness and anomie often exacerbated by difficulties in developing meaningful relationships in their new settings. Many international students encounter an ambiguity about their presence that sees them welcome for their financial contribution but often finding acceptance and meaningful affiliations difficult to attain. A sense of alienation and vulnerability is compounded by difficulties in mastering the local language. In the case of Australia many international students have great difficulty in understanding the local variations of Australian English that is distinctly different to common encountered standard English and American English. Their preparation in English has often been through text-based-academic-readers and many students are unprepared for the colloquial and informal qualities of English in both local interactions and the discourse of the academic institutions (Kell & Vogl 2006). Many struggle with the difference between and responding to the ambiguous cultural context of Australia and Australians to Asians (Kell & Vogl 2007a; Kell & Vogl 2007c; Marginson 2004). The long periods of study also facilitate a reshaping and transformation of attitudes, and behaviours of international students and this make reintegration into their home communities a difficult and tenuous challenge. The experience of life abroad changes attitudes, behaviours, expectations and relationships with those who have not experienced some of the life changing opportunities that international studies create. Many students make a conscious decision to stay in their host communities and shift status from international student to migrant to citizen.

Increasingly in a globalised and interdependent world, international education is used as a conduit for eventual immigration. The differential between impressions of better employment and economic opportunities in host countries as well as limited opportunities in their developing and less developed home nations pushes students to migration options. In some nations such as the US, this pathway to citizenship is encouraged and seen as legitimate in building a highly skilled workforce and a citizenry who is familiar with the ethos and norms of the nation. Other countries such as Australia are more ambiguous and resistant to this new global movement yet are also increasingly using this avenue to replenish an aging population with

a new generation of workers. The demographic difference between the aging nations of Europe, North America and countries such as Australia and New Zealand with the younger Asia Pacific nations suggests that this link between student mobility and immigration will continue long into the future. These population movements create challenges in many nations of the Asia Pacific who see the threat of a "brain drain" of highly specialist skills. On the other hand, in an increasingly interdependent globe, these new patterns of diaspora are the foundation for new transnational associations and links. These links promote family, business, cultural and political connections that are evidence of new forms of a growing global cosmopolitanism (Beck 2006).

Yet these institutional responses fail to recognise the increasing complexity and global student mobility. Some critics argue that the approach of some host universities operates residual and compensatory programmes are offered in fragmented and often disconnected ways but there is little attempt to develop an integrated programme of assistance to international students. Marginson (2004) argues that Australian universities "laizze faire" regime and Kell, Pandian and Vogl (2005) have argued that a more programmed and systematic approach to language and cultural needs is required. Voluntarist approaches and ad hoc paternalistic welfarist approaches to the needs of international students are inadequate in the context of a more diversified student population. Such programmes often see students as passive and dependent but research conducted with international students suggest that they are interested in actively making a contribution to improve the environment for international students and to the communities in which they live (Vogl & Kell in progress).

International students, particularly those from Asia are subject to a range of stereotype and myths. One of these myths is the perception that international students are passive compliant and disengaged from the communities in which they live. This stereotype also positions as unreflective learners who are more familiar and comfortable as "rote" learners who are used to memory-based-learning for an examination-based-assessment. Positioned as uncritical and dependent learners often with poor language skills, many international students are as seen as poorly prepared for the challenges of tertiary study. These views see international students as a high risk of breaching the academic protocol concerning working with sources and plagiarism when confronted with assessment and academic work which is different to assessment which involves repetitious learning. Suspicions about the competence of some international students has been heightened by concerns about allegations for poor English language standards, fraudulent language testing, soft marking of work and a general

concern that academic standards have been compromised by a poorer quality of international students (Devros 2003; Kell & Vogl 2007b). These tensions also have heightened a sense of crisis around global student mobility over standards but there are also concerns from a student perspective about high fees, poor services and variable quality in some programmes, and a perception of being treated as "cash cows" who are wanted only for their tuition fees (Kell & Vogl 2007b; Kell & Vogl 2006).

These tensions and challenges suggest that global student mobility and transnational education should not be seen as simply the workings of a benign and value free global market in education. On the contrary, the transnational education exhibits the differential and iniquitous relationships that typify a post-colonial rearrangement of global power relationships. Post colonialism is evident through several features of global student mobility that perpetuates colonial legacies and inequalities between the developing world (the North) and the less developed world (the South). Former colonial powers have used their connections to source international students and preserve a hegemonic and new dependency of former colonies. Many of the students who select France as their study destination come from the Francophone nations of the former French colonies in Africa. In the Asian context, this sees the British, through its recruiting agent of the British Council, active in promoting the UK as a study destination in its former colonies of Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and most recently, India (Singh et al. 2002). The US has been active in building its alliances and presence in the Asia Pacific in North Asia and has seen American universities develop strong links in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan as well as China.

Critics such as Badat (2007) argue that the arrangements of global student mobility are skewed to advantage the needs and demands of the developed nations in the North. Badat (2007) argues that the revenues from global student mobility and the income from international students dwarf the aid programmes to developing nations. More particularly Badat (2007) critiques the aid programmes because they do not fund local capacity building in higher education and that the continued movement of students to the developed world frustrates and impedes the development of local capacity in higher education. This post-colonial perspective on transnational education also results on a continued presence and reliance on educational practices, processes and products that originate within the north and developed nations. The knowledge products of higher education are also skewed to the reproduction of the dominance of European and western perspectives of higher education, and this means that any opportunities for a more inclusive and universal perspective on international education is a

difficult challenge. Indigenous and local perspectives are lost, or at best pushed to the margins, and the advent of new technologies and new entrepreneurs in higher education has not stemmed a continued western dominance. The tensions around developing high multicultural content responses rather than low multicultural content discussed by Kell et al. (2005) remain a challenge in developing a broader notion of a global citizen. This edition of the *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* explores some of these challenges and tensions that explore the experience of international students and their shifting relationship with their host community, nation of origin and sense of belonging. Many of the contributions in this edition explore the shift in identity where student see their loyalties and identity shift to incorporate a more complicated and multi dimensional perspective of themselves and their affiliations and friendships. These relationships and the nature of the student experience facilitate profound change for students some of which creates profound dilemmas about their future and their sense of who they are and where they belong.

Authors such as Badat (2007) who comes from the South argue that there is a need to transcend the market and commercialism as the prime objective of internationalisation to seek an internationalism that has a bold vision of internationalism where mobility, exchange, collaboration and connectivity are highly valued and promote and sustain empowering knowledge networks. This edition seeks to explore these opportunities through a series of contributions from authors in Malaysia, Australia and China. The authors' offer, through a combination of theoretical analysis and empirical research, new ways of exploring global student mobility using methodologies and theoretical positions which challenge the orthodoxies of systems based approaches to researching global student mobility. This group of researchers has a blend of experienced researchers as well as new emerging researchers who bring new vitality and perspectives on the issue. Some of the contributors have experienced directly the phenomena of being an international student in a new country and the complexities and interactions.

Much of the literature and exploration of global student mobility is centred on documenting and observing the big five providers of the US, the UK, France, Germany and Australia. As mentioned earlier there are also other entrants in what is seen as global competition. Malaysia has directly benefited from the shift in preference away from the US and UK in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on New York. The combined effect of visa restrictions and increased scrutiny of applicants as well as anxieties about the spread of "Islamophobia" and the harassment of Muslims has enabled alternative destination to emerge. As a nation with a large Muslim

population and a reputation as a safe destination, Malaysia has become active in attracting international students. The paper by Morshidi Sirat *September 11 and international student flows to Malaysia: Lesson learned*, explores these changes and the way in which Malaysia, once a sending country, has now shifted to being a country that sends students to others and has also become a country receiving students to the extent that it can now be considered a "medium level" competitor. The author argues that while the growth has been rapid, its sustainability is dependent on a range of factors that include growing competition from new competitors in the Middle Eastern nations such as Bahrain, United Emirates, Oman and Qatar as well as incentives to students in such countries as Japan. Morshidi Sirat also argues that the success of Malaysia related to streamlining bureaucracy and providing autonomy that can enable providers to respond to rapidly changing market conditions more effectively.

The experience of Middle East students is the subject of Ambigapathy Pandian's contribution. As mentioned by Morshidi Sirat, Malaysia has an influx of students from the Middle East and central Asia including the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The contribution identifies the tensions and dilemmas for students in adopting to a different cultural, linguistic and social context, and the difficulties in meeting the challenges of a new and different academic culture. Many of the findings are strikingly similar to those of the experience of international students in Australia documented by Marginson (2004), and Kell and Vogl (2007b) and suggest that language, conventions and social interaction present huge challenges to students in any location. The research also identifies the difficulties for staff working with students who are struggling to respond to foreign language, as well as academic and work conventions which are vastly different from their own cultural norms.

The tensions and dilemmas for individual students from Asia in adjusting to the conventions and the norms of western academic culture are the source of great tension. As mentioned earlier, stereotypes about how Asian students learn characterise much of the institutional and individual responses to international students. Asian students are often unfairly perceived as uncritical, unreflective and passive learners, and there is a paternalism towards them in learning relationships which is distorted and unbalanced. The contribution by Michael Singh and Dongqing Fu in *Flowery rhetoric meets creative deductive arguments: Becoming transnational research writers*, explores postgraduate supervision and argue for a more collaborative approach that is aimed at producing a transnational research writer. This concept of a transnational research writer is based on the notion of an argumentative approach where students critique and explore

stereotypes about Asian students and then seek to explore aspects of traditions in academic writing. This contribution explores the nature of writing and how Chinese writing uses metaphor and hyperbole as important ways of forming argument as opposed to western traditions which use deductive approaches. The authors, in identifying these Chinese academic traditions, challenge academics to look more closely at how argument is structured in different cultures and to incorporate these traditions to facilitate cross cultural and multilingual approaches to learning as well as a broader engagement with the notion of argument.

Most of the literature on global student mobility investigates onshore students but Maureen Bell's chapter, *Beyond the supermarket: Lost opportunities in summer study abroad for Singapore sojourners in Australia*, explores transnational exchange and offshore science programmes. The programmes emerge as innovations that are designed to respond to the globalisation of higher education. The rationale of such programmes is claimed around a perceived need for students to have an international experience where questions of science are explored in a transnational contexts. The contribution identifies the distance between the rhetoric of internationalisation and the experience of participants which is typified by poor preparation for the new cultural context and has a fragmented and often contradictory approach that sees little interaction and meaningful engagement with the host community. This contribution suggests that responses to internationalisation framed around market based notions of internationalisation need to be more fully theorised and committed to inter-cultural connections.

The relationship between international education and migration has been described in this introduction and the contribution by Shanti Robertson documents the journey from student to migrant. Robertson's contribution entitled *Residency, citizenship and belonging: Choice and uncertainty for students turned migrants in Australia* explores and examines the choices and strategies of students who become migrants in Australia. The decisions and choices about citizenship are documented as being complex and featured a desire to maintain links and affiliations between an "old" and "new" identities. The author argues that the resolution of tensions about identities is framed by a combination of strategic and emotional compromise.

These complexities about belonging and identity are further explored by Aramiha Harwood in his contribution entitled *Life transitions: Overseas study, work and career for young Singaporeans*. In this contribution the life stories of 24 Singaporeans are documented throughout their period as international students. As a consequence of their period as international

students, Harwood identifies a shift in identity, aspirations as their values and attitudes change. Harwood's analysis identifies the nature of the experience as being characterised by negotiating risk as the participants seek to negotiate new identities and priorities away from the conditioning of their own communities. Harwood sees this as a process of achieving adulthood and suggests that this process sees interplay between agency and structure. This contribution also introduces the work of Ulrike Beck as a methodological framework to approach the issue of global student mobility.

Ulrike Beck's notion of the risk society is also explored by Peter Kell and Gillian Vogl in their contribution entitled *Transnational education: The politics of mobility, migration and the well-being of international students*. This contribution argues that new theoretical approaches are needed to appreciate and incorporate the vulnerability of the international students in manner that incorporates the structural and political inequalities that international students are subject to. Using Beck, they argue that there is a reflexive quality around global student mobility that sees a grown distribution of what Beck calls "bad". These are some of the alienating and exploitative experiences endured by international students that are described by earlier contributions and Kell and Vogl (2007b) in other work. They argue using Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) that there is a fragmenting and isolating quality in the commodified lives that students lead and this makes affiliation and sense of belonging difficult to achieve. Using the Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001), they argue for the development of new sets of friendships and affiliations that engage people differently and enable a collective approach to resolving issues and dilemmas for students (Pahl 1998). This proposes an active global citizenship with a new sense of global cosmopolitanisms.

This edition, like the forum, has also sought to develop a more critical perspective of the topic of global student mobility than orthodox points of analysis. As mentioned earlier, the experience of students and the context in which this experience developed is explored in a limited and benign way. An orthodox analysis sees global student mobility in instrumental and immutable terms and does not recognise the agency of students and academics. The contributions in this volume recognise the tensions and dilemmas, and the way in which international students, academic staff and university administrators are seeking to work at the interstices to change attitudes and practices. The contributions argue for a more collaborative and inclusive approach where reciprocity, exchange and collective efforts towards mutual goals are attained. They challenge the assumptions that the market will deliver outcomes and resolve the tensions described in these contributions. This notion of agency is an important starting point in

attempts to reinterpret and reshape global student mobility and propose new ways of responding to global student mobility. These contributions seek to scan the terrain of internationalisation reinterpret, challenge assumptions and propose future opportunities. These contributions have set the groundwork for this and a future volume of the Asia Pacific Research Unit-USM editions will continue this work with international contributions on how research and practice can be linked towards transformative improvements in global student mobility.

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