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# **Re-thinking Student Migration Trends, Trajectories and Rights**

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## **Re-thinking Student Migration Trends, Trajectories and Rights**

As a region, Asia is both a major source and destination for international students seeking higher education. Student migration, like most forms of population mobility, is a highly politicised issue, exerting economic, social and environmental effects in both source and destination countries. Student migrants are variously regarded as guests, strangers or interlopers. They are rarely perceived as future citizens in their everyday encounters with host nationals. Given this, state ideologies of multiculturalism and egalitarianism are not in themselves effective in safeguarding the human rights of student migrants, nor in promoting their inclusion in host societies. Student migration case studies from established destinations like the United States and Australia are potentially useful for revealing the opportunities and challenges facing regional education hubs in Asia. Of critical importance is the need for governments to work with research communities to develop policies with a strong evidence base to deal with the implications of human mobility and cultural diversity in the 21st century.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2008, 3.3 million tertiary students were enrolled in education institutions outside their country of citizenship. While the OECD countries of the ‘north/west’ remain the main study destinations, there are indicators that traditional patterns of student mobility are changing. Asia, a long-standing source of international students, is now emerging as a destination for many seeking higher education. This paper begins with a snapshot of international student mobility trends before proceeding to an overview of public policies in key source and destination countries. Special attention is given to the policy changes in Australia and the political, sociocultural and economic barriers faced by recent groups of student migrants. It is argued that although states are attempting to articulate their development agendas and labour market needs with migration regimes, the outcomes are generally less coordinated than anticipated by policymakers. While states are in search of the highly skilled migrant with reserves of cultural and financial capital (‘talent’), their lived realities would suggest that many student migrants have an existence that is far removed from that of a highly skilled labour migrant. It is suggested that if international students are to be welcomed as long(er) term migrants, and invited to contribute to social and economic developments, consideration must be given at the outset to their human security and their human rights by governments in both host and destination countries and by education institutions. Amartya Sen’s work on freedom and development is introduced to support the argument that a human rights approach in dealing with student migrants is compatible with Asian values.

### **Methodological Issues: Concepts, Terminology, ‘Sedentary Bias’**

It is difficult to obtain a comparative picture of international student mobility across countries and regions as there is considerable variation in how countries understand and account for student mobility (Lasanowski 2009). The current OECD definition regards “international students as those who have crossed borders specifically with the intention to study” (OECD 2010: 312). This definition was adopted after 2006 to capture the free mobility of EU citizens to study and live in the broader European Economic Area without a visa. At the same time, older ways of classifying student mobility have remained in place, based on their visa categories. Countries are allowed to count a student as ‘international’ if they are “not permanent residents in their country of study, or if they have received prior education in

another country (regardless of citizenship)". Individual countries decide on "which operational definition is more appropriate for their context" (p.312). In the past, Germany has counted some of its Turkish permanent residents as 'foreign students' even though they are domiciled in Germany. Some countries count students on short-term student mobility programmes like language programmes and Study Abroad initiatives while others limit counting to those completing degree and/or diploma level programmes.

In Australia international students are defined as those on Visa Sub-classes 570 to 575. This excludes students who are studying in Australia on an Australian government scholarship and those students who might be studying while in receipt of another kind of temporary visa, for example, a working holiday visa or a tourist visa.

National variations also exist in the terminology and accounting of migrant numbers. A broad and arguably simplistic definition for a migrant is 'a person who has been resident in a destination country for 12 months or more'. Up until 2006, Australia did not count international students as migrants as many returned home for holidays in the course of the year. The Bureau of Statistics subsequently altered its defining criteria for migrants to 'anyone resident in Australia for 12 months out of a 16 month period'. This changed terminology had a series of political effects – it resurrected long standing disquiet about migration. It also galvanised new spaces of resistance to migration on environmental grounds, with key political leaders casting doubts about Australia's ability to support a bigger population (Jakubowicz and Monani 2010). Aggregate numbers, put simply, give us a partial and incomplete picture of student related and indeed other forms of migration.

If numbers are controversial so too are policy framings and recommendations. Writing about 'sedentary bias' in migration scholarship and policy discourse, Castles (2010: 1568) observes that migration particularly in times of economic hardship is regarded as dysfunctional, not just by populist politicians, but increasingly by sections of the research community who are reliant on policy-driven research consultancies. Castles argues for a reconceptualisation of migration to recognise that it has been a normal part of social change throughout history. He also highlights the importance of engaging with the power relations – historical and contemporary – which have shaped migratory processes. These points are taken up later in the paper when the circumstances of recent Indian student-migrants in Australia are discussed.

## **GLOBALISATION, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND IMPACT ON STUDENT MOBILITY**

In the period 2000 to 2008, foreign tertiary students numbers grew by 85%, an average annual increase of about 11 percentage points (OECD 2010). The reasons for escalating demand are complex. Understanding them requires careful empirical analysis of social transformations associated with the economic, political and cultural dimensions of globalization in source and destination countries. Certainly, integration into the global capitalist economy has created wealth and disposable income amongst Asia's middle classes. Associated with greater wealth are the aspirations of young people to participate in a globalizing world of opportunity, work and youth culture. Asia's growing profile as a destination of international students should also be read as an expression of processes of economic re-invention towards knowledge driven forms of production in region in the wake of the 1997 Financial Crisis. Singapore, Korea and Japan are attracting international students as a means of building research capacity, and in the case of Japan, consolidating the

international profile of their universities. Singapore has marketed itself as a dynamic global city offering employment opportunities and permanent residency to attract desirable student migrants: namely the young and highly educated from the region. Also seeking to ride the knowledge economy wave are countries like Malaysia which, like Singapore, is capitalizing on the growing popularity of English as the international language of science and commerce. On the supply side, the global spread of neoliberal policies of marketisation and 'new public management' have steered universities particularly in countries like the UK, Australia, and New Zealand to recruit international students to supplement institutional income.

It is important to point out that national policies and the actions of governments continue to play a big role in the mobility of student migrants. Contrary to the earlier predictions of globalization theorists (eg Ohmae, Appadurai) who argued that nation-states would become less important in a more globalised world, studies of student migration would suggest that states continue to play important roles in shaping the decisions of individuals and families about education related migration. Whether through their recognition of foreign credentials, their attitudes to outmigration of their nationals, the resources they allocate to improve access to tertiary education, or the regulation of international education markets, states continue to exercise considerable authority on student movements. What follows is a brief description of the national policy contexts of the 'major players' in the global terrain of international education and the context underpinning the rise of Asia as a destination for international students.

The US is considered the most successful recruiter of international students. In 2009/2010, there were 690,923 international students enrolled in US universities, contributing some USD\$20 billion to the national economy through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses (IIE 2011). Collectively three countries provide 44% of the total international enrollments in U.S. higher education: China, India and South Korea. Japanese and Taiwanese nationals are also well represented and comprise 4% of international students to the US. Seventy percent (70%) of all international students in the US are funded by non-US sources - either privately funded through family, private sector or home government sponsorship. The remaining 30% of international students receive financial support from US sources (IIE 2011).

Unlike the UK and Australia which have both developed marketing programmes to promote themselves as study destinations, the US lacks a country-wide branding strategy. Notably, its success in recruiting international students can be attributed to the reputation and global prestige of American research universities. Also a drawcard is the influence of US popular culture which enjoys global dissemination. Elite American universities are likely to continue to enjoy their high reputation at least in the medium term despite the country's declining superpower status. The reputational quotient of elite US universities is furthered by global league table rankings such as the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Academic Rankings of World Universities (ARWU) which in 2010 placed 54 American universities in the top 100. A virtuous cycle of excellence is thus perpetuated: rankings and a formidable endowment base help to attract bright students and scholars, and their work further increases the reputational profiles of universities, drawing in more grants, endowments and talented individuals (Marginson 2008).

While the US may be the world's biggest exporter of international education, it is also a key migration destination, 'a magnet for foreign talent' (Batalova 2007). International students are attracted by the offer of post-graduation opportunities which include well remunerated employment, research opportunities and the chance to secure permanent residency. A third of

American Nobel laureates have an immigrant origin and 62% of international PhD graduates in science and engineering programmes file a patent application (ibid).

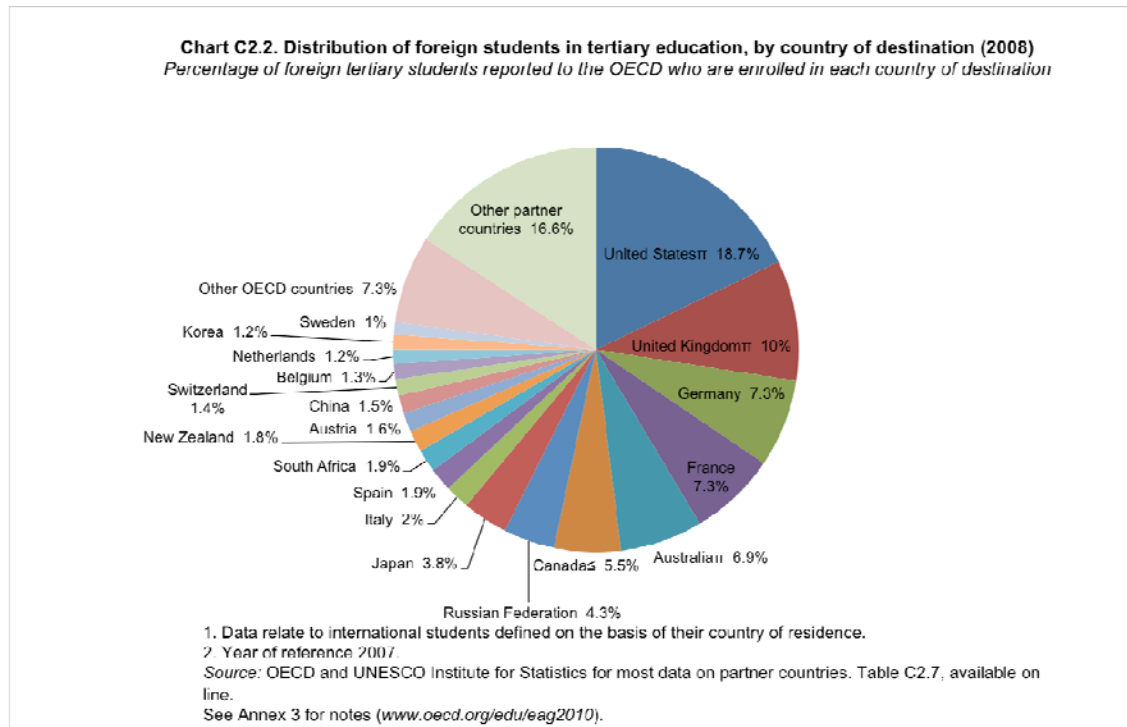
The UK is the second most popular destination for international students. In 2008/2009 it attracted some 248,000 international students, about 13% of the total international student population and 36% of postgraduate international student population. In addition, there are also 121,000 EU students enrolled in UK institutions. Students from China and India constitute the biggest groups of (non-EU) international students. It is estimated that higher education institutions contribute about £59 billion to the UK economy annually and are a major export earner (Universities UK 2010). International students in the UK pay double the fees paid by domestic and European Union (EU). The reasoning underlying this policy is that access to higher education is an entitlement for those members of the UK and, since the establishment of the EU, the European political community. Accordingly, the UK has no obligations to ensure rights to higher education for outsiders, such as (non-EU) international students (Enslin and Hedge 2008: 109-110).

The UK's commercial approach to international education can be traced in 1980 when the Thatcher Conservative government removed tuition subsidies for students from Commonwealth countries and instituted a policy of full cost recovery for tuition fees. The Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) introduced in 1999 and 2006 intensified the push to increase competitiveness of Britain's education export sector (Sidhu and Dall'Alba 2011), however more recent regulations are anticipated to make the UK less attractive to student migrants hoping to combine study and work. In the first instance, the quality of British higher education is likely to be affected in the long term by large scale funding cuts introduced by the Conservative government. Second, English language requirements have been tightened making it harder for students to undertake foundation/pathway programmes. Third, from 2012, students will no longer have the automatic right to stay and work for 2 years after graduation. Only those with employment offers in positions paying at least £20,000 will be able to apply for a working visa. This initiative has been introduced in the face of high unemployment among British graduates, suggesting that student migration is now a politically charged issue in the UK (OBHE 2011).

In 2011, Australia enrolled some 201,994 international students in its tertiary education institutions. The education export industry is said to contribute A\$18 billion to the nation (Australian 2010). Thirty-nine percent (39%) of international students came from China. Australia's international students are drawn primarily from undergraduates, and not research postgraduates as is the case in the US and the UK. In Australia international student recruitment by universities and vocational education providers is driven largely by the need to secure income in the face of declining government support for higher education. This policy can be traced to 1988 when the government accepted the recommendations of the Jackson Report and introduced full fees for international students. Writing about the international student market in Australia, Marginson (2010:47) observes that the policy position of increasing the fee paying international student population has allowed governments of all political persuasions to maximize fiscal savings in the education budget. Educational quality, he argues, has declined, evident in the increasing student-staff ratios, now approaching 25:1 or higher in some disciplines and institutions, a significant rise from 18:1 a decade ago (Australian, 2010). Higher education commentators are unanimous in the view that any links between the international student recruitment programme and Australian aspirations to become a knowledge economy are necessarily tenuous. New Zealand, which has weathered declining demand for its education services after a promising start, also

regards the international student market as a source of revenue. Figure One shows the distribution of international students across countries. It confirms the dominance of the OECD countries as providers of international education, however, it should be noted that this data is now 4 years old. The profile of Asia has grown since data was collected in 2007.

**Figure One: Distribution of foreign students by country of destination**  
(from 'Education at a Glance, OECD, 2010).



Different rationales inform the recruitment of international students by Asian countries. Revenue raising from fee paying international students is not the primary consideration of public sector higher education institutions in Singapore, Korea nor Japan. These countries regard the recruitment of international students as an important part of development policies aimed at remaking themselves into knowledge-based economies, by building research capacity and service industries. Singapore and Japan are also recruiting student migrants to deal with the problem of an ageing demography. Singapore's Global Schoolhouse project for example has a three pronged approach: it is concerned with increasing the presence of world class universities in the city-state. Second, it has set a recruitment target of 150, 000 international students to be achieved by 2015, studying in both private and state-run education institutions. Third, in accordance of a broader policy platform aimed at remodeling Singapore into a knowledge economy, domestic education institutions are being reconfigured to educate citizens for 'new economy' attributes such as creativity and entrepreneurial capacity (see Sidhu, Yeoh & Ho 2011).

It is significant that international students do not pay significantly higher fees in Singapore unlike the UK and Australia. A substantial tuition subsidy, the Tuition Grant (TG), is available to all international students admitted to Singapore's universities students on application to the Ministry of Education. International students who take up a Tuition Grant

agree to abide by the Tuition Grant Agreement and work for Singapore-based companies for 3 years upon graduation. A range of financial aid schemes are also provided to international students through many of Singapore's government linked companies, eg Singapore Airlines and the Temasek Foundation. Some form of financial aid is also provided to postgraduates by various public service departments eg the AStar Youth Scholarships, ASEAN Scholarships and so forth (MoE 2011).

Japan, a notable innovation driven powerhouse also sees student migrant recruitment as an important policy strategy to maintain and improve its position in the face of a changing economic climate and demographic decline. Two key policy initiatives are underway which target student migrants: *Plan of 300,000 foreign students* and the *Global 30* project. As implied by its title, the *Plan* announced in 2008 by the Fukuda government, seeks to recruit 300,000 international students by 2020. The *Global 30* project is premised on identifying and funding a group of 'core universities' with impressive research and education profiles, so as to make them attractive to graduate students. Like Singapore, Japan is looking at student migrants to help arrest its demographic decline and within this mandate the government intends to address the problem of excess higher education capacity. Kuwamura (2009: 192) reports that the university age populations in Japan declined from 1.41 million in 2004 to 1.29 million in 2007, however, the number of Japanese higher education institutions increased from 709 to 756 in the same period.

The Malaysian government estimates that there are 70,000 international students enrolled in the country's education institutions (MoHE 2011). In 2007, Indonesia and China were the main sending countries, providing 23% of Malaysia's international students (Lasanowski 2009: 28). The private higher education sector has the predominant role in international student recruitment, role that commenced following the introduction of the Private Higher Educational Institutions (PHEI) Act in 1996. The Act allowed the establishment of degree granting private universities, instruction in languages other than Bahasa Malaysia, and joint ventures between local institutions and foreign universities. Public higher education institutions are also targeting international students, in particular those from the Middle East and North Africa, which now account for 25% of the country's total overseas student population (ibid). Malaysia is lauded for its capacity – in 2009 it had 20 public universities, 33 private universities including five foreign branch campuses and 600 private higher education institutions (Lasanowski 2009). However, issues of quality may militate against Malaysia's ambitions to become an education hub.

China is both a source of international students and increasingly a destination country. Since the end of the Maoist era, some 1.62 million Chinese have undertaken overseas study, either under government sponsorship or through private finance. Currently 823,000 of Chinese nationals are studying in overseas institutions. China's Ministry of Education estimates that it hosts 240,000 international students from 190 nations (Jiang and Ma 2011). However, it is not clear whether all of these are tertiary level students on full degree programmes. In 2008, the OECD estimated that China hosted 1.5 % of the world's international students compared to the US's 18.7% the UK's 10%, Japan's 3.8% and Australia's 6.9%.

Seventeen percent (17%) of all international students enrolled in the OECD countries are from China. The first destination of choice for Chinese students is the US - 21.6% of all international Chinese students go to the US (OECD 2010). China's formidable profile as a source of international students means that its government can and does exercise a form of 'market power'. In the recent past, the Chinese government has discouraged its nationals



from choosing New Zealand as a study destination because of concerns about the quality of pastoral care and teaching (Butcher & McGrath 2004; Li et al 2002).

After the US, Chinese students are most likely to choose Japan as study destination. Over 15% of China's outbound students in 2008 chose Japan. The Chinese –Japanese education connection goes back to the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Chinese students and scholars travelled to Japan to explore ways of modernizing China as a means of keeping western imperialism at bay. By 1906, there were an estimated 13,000 Chinese students studying in Japan (Yang 2002: 31). It is significant that these early Japanese study sojourns created the conditions for the emergence of Chinese modernization and nationalism.

All indicators are that China will also continue to grow as a destination country for international students. Currently, international students in China are drawn mainly from South Korea, the United States, Japan, India, and Vietnam; most are at the undergraduate level and the majority are enrolled in the humanities (Jiang and Ma 2011). A key domestic policy platform the *National Outline for Medium and Long Term Education Reform and Development 2010–2020* has highlighted China's plans to continue to increase access to higher education (massification) and to use education to improve the quality of its human resources (*suzhi*). China has also declared its intention to become a knowledge-based economy, and is striving to improve the research capacity of its universities (Jiang & Ma 2011). Two government funded programmes: *Project 211* and *Project 985* have been implemented to achieve these ends. If these initiatives succeed, we can anticipate a bigger role for China in the global higher education terrain. Present signs are that China's growing international profile and world power aspirations may encourage the study of Mandarin, opening up a new market for Chinese education providers. Last but not least, China's entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has opened up market access for foreign education providers including branch campuses of American and British universities. This is creating lower cost options for students from other parts of Asia, in particular, the countries of South Asia: Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.

## THE EDUCATION-MIGRATION NEXUS: POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Writing in 2009, Lasanowski observed that “visa schemes and immigration procedures are playing an increasingly important role in the overseas student decision-making process” (p. 32). Referred to as ‘two step migration’ countries such as Australia, New Zealand, to some extent, the UK and more recently Canada introduced policies making it easier for international students who had studied in their universities to obtain permanent residency (Hawthorne 2010; Lasanowski 2009; OECD 2010). The origins of two-step migration policies can be traced to the immigration practices of the US which has allowed highly skilled graduates often those with doctoral degrees to remain in the US to work and secure Green Cards. In this context, the student-migrant is regarded as highly valued human capital with potential to contribute to the America's efforts to strengthen its knowledge economy. OECD reports on the international student market are also notable for highlighting the human capital merits of international students, suggesting that student-migrants have come to be identified with the discourse of ‘the global race for talent’. However, a careful analysis of Australia's two step migration programme reveals that social policies often have unintended consequences. Not only were the functionalist intentions of Australian policymakers subverted, two step migration in the context of a deregulated, heavily marketised higher education terrain created new spaces for international students to negotiate, manipulate and

resist the state's imaginary of 'talent migration' albeit at significant personal and familial costs for some.

### **Diplomatic Allies, Cash Cows, 'Talent' or Marginal Workers?**

Australia's first substantive engagement with international students was through the Colombo Plan, an aid programme formulated against the backdrop of the Cold War and the end of formal empire in Asia. The Plan was informed by a mix of rationales- enlightened self-interest, and concern for the development of the region amidst the ideological battles of the Cold War (Jakubowicz and Monani 2010: 5). It involved the provision of technical and educational assistance from the more affluent countries of the Commonwealth, to developing countries. For strategic foreign policy reasons Thailand, Indonesia and the countries of Indochina, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were also included in the Plan (Williams 1989). Education aid was seen as a tool of soft power to cultivate sufficient goodwill with former colonies to enable trade and political alliances with the 'free world'. Private students were also permitted to study in Australia, their tuition partially subsidized by the government. Typically they paid 25% of the real cost of their courses (Shu and Hawthorne 1989: 68). The abolition of tertiary fees in 1973 and the official end of the White Australia policy which saw the removal of racial preferences from the Migration Act saw an increase in student numbers to Australian universities. These changes prompted concern in officialdom that study in Australia was no longer a form of aid but increasingly a 'defacto route' to migration (Shu and Hawthorne 1989: 68).

It is important to acknowledge that the education-migration nexus as it unfolded in Australia was also shaped by a series of social transformations in postcolonial societies in Pacific Asia. These changes prompted streams of skilled professionals to migrate to Australia. Their rationales for migration were often related to the education of their children. The introduction of preferential policies in Malaysia which favoured ethnic Malays, the imposition of *Bahasa Malaysia* as the medium of instruction in schools and universities, along with concerns of racial discord drove increasing numbers of Malaysians, particular those of Chinese ethnicity to move to Australia for better educational opportunities for their children (Shu and Hawthorne 1989). Migrant families from other parts of Asia were also attracted to Australia, prompted by desire for a less competitive lifestyle along with concerns about 'pressure cooker schooling' and perceptions of declining access to, and quality of higher education facilities, brought about by massification (Ho, 2004; Shu and Hawthorne 1989; see also Waters 2005). These early expressions of education-related migration were characterized by the permanent settlement of families who arrived while children were in primary or early secondary phases of schooling to allow for sufficient time to acculturate to local learning norms. Later groups of student migrants were associated with more diverse family constellations – some were accompanied by their mothers, an extended family member or an older sibling. More recent forms of education-related migration in Australia have involved young adults, primarily those in their 20s whose choice of Australia as a study destination for higher education has been shaped by more recent policy developments linking the migration and education industries.

The emergence of Australia's education export industry at the tail end of the 1980s following the Jackson Report was part of a broader policy to internationalise Australia's economy and to steer its public institutions including its universities to embrace market-like identities and practices (marketisation). Universities were offered export assistance development grants to establish marketing plans; quotas were removed on international student numbers, and

universities were allowed to retain income obtained from international student fees (Williams 1989). Initially students were expected to return to their home countries for 3 years after completing their education. In 2001, Australian policies were changed to allow students to apply for Permanent Residency onshore.

The Australian government's embrace of two-step migration joined up the migration and education export industries and led to a phenomenal growth in the education industry. The possibility of gaining permanent residency following study in Australia led to a mushrooming of demand first for university education and, after 2005 when trade skills were added to the list of 'occupations in demand', for vocational courses, many run by private providers. Students typically applied for a *Visa Subclasses 572* for Vocational Education and Training or *573* for Higher education (Undergraduate and Masters coursework). The policy had a series of unintended consequences (see Birrell, Hawthorne and Richardson 2006), including poorer than expected labour market outcomes which we discuss further in the paper. It is also significant that many Australian education providers including some lower ranking universities lowered their required English language competency for entry. An IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score of 5.5 was deemed sufficient to gain entry into these institutions and to obtain a visa.

Writing about the policy which formalized the links between education and migration, Birrell et al (2006), Koeth (2010) and Hawthorne (2010) note that policymakers were seeking to meet several objectives: first, recruit work ready migrants and hence provide a better fit with Australia's labour market needs. Second, reduce the demands on the public purse associated with the need to deliver government-funded programmes to re-skill migrants and provide them with English language training and income support. Third, increase the profitability and competitiveness of Australia's education export industry. International students were also desired as they were seen as contributing significantly to the Australian economy through demand for goods and services. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the international education industry contributed \$15.8 billion to the Australian economy in 2008–09, and up to \$17.7 billion in the four quarters to December 2009.

What this brief synopsis shows is that governments play a critical role in how international students are imagined in social policies and institutional practices. The Colombo Plan regarded the international student as a westernized subject, the recipient of the gift of aid, and a potential ally in a decolonizing and bipolar world order. Within the paternalistic context of education aid, the international student was also regarded as a welfare and pastoral subject requiring the tutelage of a more 'advanced'(western) civilization represented in the settler state of Australia. With the development of the education export industry a new identity was conferred onto the international student – that of a choice-exercising consumer, driven by considerations of value and opportunity in selecting Australia as a study destination. However, in the face of rising costs of studying in Australia, and concerns about the quality of the educational experience, international students have argued that they are simply perceived as 'cash cows', by institutions and the Australian governments (ABC 2009). By the start of the new millennium, the consumer-subject was conflated with another trope - that of highly skilled labour migrant.

However, recent research on student migrants (Marginson et al 2010; Robertson 2011; Baas 2006, 2007) has demonstrated that their everyday lived experiences are sharply at odds with official imaginaries of highly skilled migrants (see also ABC 2009). Growing numbers of students reported feelings of stress and disempowerment in financing their study in Australia

and in communicating with immigration bureaucracies and education providers. There are increasing concerns that a market-driven approach to education has compromised the human security of student migrants, a topic discussed in detail further in the paper.

Although less significantly affected by the 2008 global financial crisis compared to the US and Europe, Australian policymakers introduced changes to skilled migrant numbers to offset anticipated loss of local jobs. A review of the skilled migration programme was undertaken in 2008 amidst concerns that international students were enrolling in courses, particularly in the vocational field, for the primary purpose of securing permanent residency (DIAC 2009). These changes took place in a volatile context amidst several fatal attacks on Indian students, incidents which propagated accusations of racist violence against international students. Concerns were also raised about the deregulation of the vocational training sector, which had attracted unscrupulous providers who provided poor or non-existent training for students.

In 2009, the Baird Review of the Education Services for Overseas Students Act concluded that migration driven enrolments had had a negative impact on the international education sector (Koleth 2010). The Review recommended more support for international students, improved consumer protection, increased *regulation* of the international education sector and accessible information of which authorities students could approach when faced with problems (DEEWR 2010). Mr Baird, a former cabinet Minister and well regarded politician was reported as shocked at “the level of shonky activity” and criticised the preoccupation with revenue above all else, “We have all been fixated on the money rather than anything else” (Trounson 2010).

In response to the Baird Review a series of changes were made to the student visa and migration regime:

- Stronger student visa integrity checks were introduced to stamp out visa fraud.
- Students had to prove access to allowances of A\$18000 per annum, up from A\$12,000.
- Tightening of the list of occupations in high demand so only highly skilled migrants will be eligible to apply for independent skilled migration visas. Here the intention was to encourage applications from employers. This new rule is anticipated to decrease migrant applications from Asia if present trends continue.
- A new Skills Occupations List (SOL) is to be issued to be renewed annually.

Keen to contain fall out from bad publicity about student security, the government announced an *International Students Strategy for Australia 2010-2014*. The strategy’s espoused objective is to support a high-quality experience for international students but it is unclear what practical steps are being proposed towards this end. Without further debate and resourcing, the Strategy runs the risk of simply becoming a ‘stigma management strategy’ (see Nyland et al 2010).

In 2011, the Australian government commissioned a review of the international student visa programme. The Knight Review was announced in response to criticisms that the tightened visa requirements following the Baird Review have discouraged genuine applicants and made the education export industry less competitive. A preliminary discussion paper issued by the Review distinguishes between ‘genuine students’, described as “those who travel to Australia on a temporary basis for the purpose of studying full-time to complete a registered course at an Australian education provider” and those who are ‘not genuine students’. The latter group are described as “undertaking an education in order to gain permanent residence without any

intention of undertaking employment related to their course of study” (p.6). The discussion paper gives much space to the matter of assessing ‘migration risk’ as it relates to international students, suggesting that the discourse which claimed a ‘global race for talent’ has had its day at least in the Australian context. Notably, the Knight Review has used as a discursive technique apportioning blame and responsibility onto the individual student-migrant. Scant attention has been given to the poor and generally lax regulatory regime, nor on the calculative rationality of an export industry described by Mr Baird as revenue driven to the exclusion of all else.

In education exporting countries like Australia and the UK universities routinely engage in commission based recruitment of international students. This is a force in consolidating the migration-education nexus particularly given that in some source countries – India and Korea are cases in point - education agents often double up as migration agents. Given this context, it is probably impossible to be sure that agents are providing accurate information to potential students and their families.

### **MOBILITY: (IN)SECURITY, ASPIRATIONS, EXPECTATIONS**

Migration is a double edged sword – it has the potential for hugely positive consequences for migrants and their communities of origin. Whether through the flow of ideas, remittances or technology transfer, migration is positive for enhancing human capabilities (Castles 2010: 1568). At the same time it is also important to acknowledge that migration can destabilize the security of individuals who are confronted with significant changes in language, culture, food, climate, often without the supportive networks of family and friends. A sense of security is critical to enable individuals to make the necessary academic adjustments, to build new relationships and adjust to a different sociocultural milieu.

In examining the research literature on international student experiences, what is clear is the similarity of concerns for students often across different destination countries. Marginson et al (2010:35) have summarized the following concerns as potentially destabilizing of students’ sense of well being and security:

- Lack of equal respect
- Problems of intercultural mixing
- Language barriers
- financial difficulties
- Work
- Housing
- Health care
- Safety
- Immigration
- University bureaucracies
- Loneliness

Periodic student satisfaction surveys by Australian Education International (AEI), the government body that regulates and markets international education, have shown that international students report relatively positive experiences while studying and working in Australia. However, research has also consistently shown that ‘a significant minority’ of

students experience difficulties which compromise their security both in the formal (public) and informal domains (Marginson et al 2010). These difficulties are now discussed with particular reference to the grievances expressed by a newly galvanized international student movement of Indian students in Australia in 2008/2009.

### **Borders: Urban, Social, Racial, Class, Gender**

One of the biggest changes in Australian metropolitan areas in recent years has been the unaffordability of housing for low income groups – to which most students, including many international students belong. On-campus accommodation in Australia's larger cities is often scarce, and when available expensive. Universities have not expanded their stock of student residences partly due to escalating real estate costs in many cities. This hands-off approach to engaging with accommodation issues can also be attributed to neoliberal rationalities of individualization and responsabilization which have taken hold in the imagination of governments and education authorities. Accommodation is seen as the responsibility of individual students. Growing numbers of students, including international students are unable to afford suitable housing. While some succeed in securing accommodation (often poorly maintained) closer to their institution of study, increasing numbers share accommodation often in overcrowded conditions in unsafe neighbourhoods far from public transport and working opportunities (D'Costa 2010; Neilson 2009). Students and international students in particular can find themselves relegated to work in the informal economy or service sector, driving taxis and staffing all night convenience stores (Baas 2007). It is not unusual for students to spend significant time commuting to and from work on public transport often during unsocial hours where their visible difference has the potential to mark them out for petty theft, assault and harassment.

There have been a number of serious cases involving assault, grievous bodily harm and homicide of international students in Australia. A number of these serious incidents which affected Indian students living in the state of Victoria received extensive media coverage globally and in India. In their attempts to adopt an advocacy role, the Indian media resorted to tabloid journalism, claiming deep-seated racism within Australian society and apathy by the Australian police towards the protection of Indian students. Police reports on the other hand described the assaults as instances of urban violence. The apprehended assailants were often teenagers, and included those from non-white indigenous and immigrant backgrounds, for example, young Lebanese. In a few cases, the perpetrators were themselves of Indian background (Johnson, 2010; Kennedy 2010: see also ABC 2009).

Given the historical legacies of colonization, indigenous dispossession, and the infamous White Australia immigration policy, it must be acknowledged that sections of the Australian public are deeply ambivalent about multiculturalism. Policies to embed multicultural practices into Australian institutions have been incomplete and mired in controversy in particular following the arrival of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party on the political spectrum. However, using race as a broad analytical lens to understand the issues confronting student migrants is insufficient and problematic.

A more nuanced analysis of the grievances of the Australia based Indian student-migrants is offered by D'Costa (2010) and Neilson (2009) who argue for more theoretical attention to issues of class and the effects of differential inclusion in understanding the grievances of the student-migrants. D'Costa notes: "Race may not be the primary motivation but frustration is targeted in a racial manner at people perceived to be the unwanted other". The outpouring of

media attention in India galvanized the Australian government and the broader education industry into a public diplomacy initiative to protect Australia's market reputation in South Asia (AEI 2009). It remains unclear whether substantive changes have been made to address the issue of student security (Nyland, Forbes-Mewitt and Marginson 2010).

The issue of intercultural friendships and equal respect is another area which has been the source of much research and commentary in Australia, New Zealand, the US and Britain (Collins 2006; 2010; Brown 2009; Sovic 2009; Bullen and Kenway 2003; Marginson et al 2010). While university Presidents and Vice Chancellors routinely laud the cultural diversity in their institutions, student migrants often find themselves isolated from host country students. This is a problem not restricted to the main English speaking destinations like Australia or the UK but one that is also present in emerging education hubs.

An international student from Sri Lanka studying in Malaysia makes this observation about racial stereotyping in a country that espouses multiculturalism at the official level:

“[When] it comes to South Asians, if you have that skin colour, then it is something that is looked down upon. Because the Tamil population in [Malaysia] have been discriminated against from the time they were brought here by the British. Even though they have more rights now, they tend to be looked down by the Chinese and Malays” (female student, Sri Lankan, Business and International Relations major).

While prejudice and insularity can be factors in deterring intercultural mixing across student nationalities, it is often the more mundane factors which get in the way of social interaction:

Singaporean students are just insane..they just feel like they have to work 100% of the time even if they are not really working...(British exchange student at NUS, studying Design).

It is so difficult to get local students at Monash University Malaysia to be involved in student activities. People will leave as soon as they finish classes, as soon as they do their assignments they will go home. For Malaysians, university life is all about studying. (Student, Engineering at Monash Malaysia, from Sudan).

In the Australian context, circulation of largely deficit discourses about the rote-learning, language-challenged Asian Other serves to increase the cultural distance between international students from Asia, and the host student body. Nor is intercultural mingling amongst students furthered by the advent of new style university 'campuses'. Located in the central business districts of cities in office style accommodation, they lack space for student activities.

A growing minority of student-migrants are thought to work in the informal economy where rates of pay are often significantly lower, thus depriving them of economic rights enjoyed by host country nationals (Marginson et al 2010; Baas 2007). Being a linguistic and racial other can close off opportunities for better paying work. Student migrants who have completed their degrees compete with domestic graduates for jobs, and find themselves associated with cultural and linguistic deficits, a finding supported by a number of recent studies in Australia and overseas (Robertson et al 2011; Ho 2011). The chance to work for employers of the same

ethnic backgrounds allows individuals to find work more rapidly. It also reduces the cultural distance commonly experienced by student migrants working in a new and unfamiliar sociocultural milieu. However, groups of international students can also face exploitation at the hands of co-nationals often receiving poorer salaries and working long hours in breach of the legal 20 hours per week permitted by their Australian student visas (Baas 2006; 2007).

The ambivalent relationships between Indian students and the Indian (heritage) community resident in Australia has added to the insecurity and isolation of incoming student-migrants. The newcomers were regarded as less educated, and generally lacking in cosmopolitan sensibilities compared to earlier Indian heritage migrants, many of whom were professionals or business people. Some long term residents were discomfited by public displays of protest and civil disobedience by the recent arrivals. Tensions were further exacerbated when student migrants attempted to participate in community-based organizations for example in elections for community leaders and temple committees (personal communication, Chamkaur Gill 2009). At the same time, Indian heritage communities have also been engaged in providing practical and in some cases financial support for a group recognized for their vulnerability.

Baas' (2006, 2007) study is instructive in revealing the class stratifications prevalent within the broader group of Indian international students studying in Australia. Two-step migration policies opened doors for a broader class spectrum of Indians to contemplate study and migration to Australia. Their families took out loans, sometimes through multiple mortgages on family property, to meet the financial liquidity requirement associated with their visa application. A range of strategies were employed to manage and simultaneously resist this condition of visa eligibility. Properties were routinely overvalued to secure bigger loans; dowry arrangements were also manipulated to acquire the additional resources to finance overseas study. In a small number of cases, the families of female Indian students used their greater academic capabilities and the potential to secure a higher English proficiency (IELTS) score, a university degree and permanent residency as leverage for significantly reduced dowries. These arrangements were enacted in situations where the male spouse-to-be lacked the requisite educational capital to obtain a student visa and the chance to acquire permanent residency in his own right (personal communication, Manjit Kaur 2009). A very small number students were implicated in fraudulent acts to inflate their IELTS scores and secure student visas (ABC 2011). In other cases, Indian students were reported as using fake qualifications in order to obtain Australian permanent residency (D'Costa 2010). On the whole, the large numbers of students who succeed in obtaining PR status would suggest that individuals learn to adapt and navigate the policy and institutional parameters of the migration-education nexus albeit at tremendous personal cost. The emotional demands of keeping up with the changing immigration policy terrain and communicating with a bureaucracy which is concerned with 'border control' should not be underestimated as this account shows:

"My husband first came here (Australia) to do a Masters degree in chemistry. His father was a retired AO (Agricultural Officer) and he borrowed money to pay for the fees. The other Indians we met [in Brisbane] told us to seek help from an Indian migration agent. He advised my husband to enroll for a Cookery course as it would be easier to obtain PR. So, my husband then went to TAFE[Technical & Further Education] to do Cookery. But the rules have changed so we don't know if we will get PR. My husband works 6 days a week in a restaurant. He earns very little. He returns at 1 AM every day. Because my English isn't good, I stay home a lot with my son. We cannot



afford to send him to kindergarten. I feel anxious all the time about our future. We have spent a lot of money to get PR. It is our only hope and yet our situation feels hopeless” (personal communication, spouse of Punjabi applicant).

In summing up, the introduction of 2 step migration policies and the ‘competitive’ practices of Australia’s international education industry created the conditions for a broader class of Indian student-migrants to seek education and permanent residency in Australia. A significant minority were driven by financial stresses arising from currency volatility and insufficient funds to seek and obtain employment as quickly as possible to re-pay loans. These students often lived in unsafe areas within cities in overcrowded housing, and few had meaningful contact with the host community. These conditions have led Neilson (2009) to conclude that students ‘confront a proliferation of borders when they come to Australia: international borders, urban borders, and social borders’.

Given these difficulties why would so many Indian international students choose to come to Australia to study and to seek permanent residency? Much has been written about ‘rising India’; its new superpower status, a robust middle class with new levels of consumption and material desires. India is portrayed as ‘the world’s largest democracy’ and a high tech aspirant. The country’s ‘demographic dividend’ - its large population of English literate young people - has also been celebrated. These narratives are indeed a welcome change from portrayals of a poverty stricken, caste striated country. However India continues to face tremendous development challenges. 600 million Indians are aged 25 years and below, and it is estimated that some one million Indians will enter the workforce every month over the next 20 years (Wade 2011). India’s economy grew at a rate of 8% in 2010 but this impressive growth rate is not in itself sufficient to accommodate the numbers entering the workforce. India’s per capita income is USD\$1264, about a third of China’s and 2.7% of America’s. India is ranked 119 out of 169 on the UN’s World Development Index. China is 30 places higher. Economic liberalisation has opened up opportunities for many Indians, but the paradox of ‘rising India’ has also seen an escalation of class anxieties, intensifying the desire for emigration for many.

It is also important to factor in environmental stresses as another significant set of transformations contributing to interest in migration. Submissions to the Knight Review and other documentation have noted the high proportion of Indian student migrants from the State of Punjab, where falling water tables, soil depletion and growing debt are driving increasing numbers of farmers to plan alternative futures for their sons.

### **Rights and Entitlements: Ensuring Human Security For International Students**

While it is true that international students are not a population we generally regard as vulnerable to human rights abuses, recent changes in the dynamics of the international student market suggest the need to consider their human security. This paper has used the Australian context to discuss how neoliberal logics and practices of human capital theory allied with marketisation have created the conditions whereby the human security of student migrants is compromised. ‘Human security’ is a term which has assumed a greater profile in recent times, hopefully as a counterbalance to preoccupations with state security. How can we understand human security in relation to student migrants? Security to do what? Security against which adverse risks? As Marginson et al (2010) observe definitions and practices of human security are invariably shaped by one’s situatedness or positionality including one’s

identity and sociocultural values and membership of political community. Some states place a higher expectation on individuals and family units to secure human security, prioritizing resources to national security ahead of human security (Marginson et al 2010: 57). Understandings of human security also vary according to the disciplinary and institutional discourses. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, adopts a working definition which is couched largely in defensive terms as freedom from material want and freedom from fear.

What kinds of social, economic and political rights should student migrants have to enable them to achieve human security? Which rights can be claimed from the state and how are these claims situated with respect to the rights of citizens? Employment rights – the right to equal pay for equal work as with a country's citizens? The right to affordable housing and adequate health care? Put differently, which of the rights that settled populations currently enjoy should we subtract from student migrants because of their 'temporary' status? And what is the right balance of responsibilities to be exercised by the state, by education institutions (eg universities) and individual students in ensuring human security given Marginson et al's observation (2010) their everyday experiences will be largely "lived outside of state regulation and market contracts".

There are no easy answers to these questions but it is imperative that sending and receiving governments, university bureaucracies, international student associations and research communities start engaging with the issues of security and protections of international students. It is clear that while government policies globally are premised on attracting an elite subject ('talent') namely the highly skilled labour migrant with substantial reserves of financial, intellectual and cultural capital, the reality is that international students are now drawn from a broader spectrum of social classes and abilities. For a significant minority, their lived experiences are far removed from the imaginary of a highly skilled labour migrant who is feted the world over by employers.

There can be no doubt that the issue of human rights remains highly contentious. The question of whether there can be a universally agreed definition of human rights has been dismissed by political leaders through out Asia and the postcolonial South. Countries like Singapore, Malaysia and China have been forceful in voicing their concerns that a universal human rights agenda is incongruent with 'Asian values'. Singapore's Minister Mentor Lee has asserted the importance of a Confucian ethic of order and discipline in securing economic growth and national wealth.

The liberal philosopher and Indian economist Amartya Sen disputes this viewpoint, observing instead that "what is needed to generate faster economic growth is a friendlier economic climate, rather than a harsher political system" (p. 3). Arguing against a 'grand dichotomy' between western and Asian values, he interrogates the proposition that Asians are united in their skepticism of freedom and liberty, preferring instead order and discipline. Sen also goes on to problematise the monolithic authoritarian image of Confucius, drawing attention instead to a more complex, non-hegemonic reading of Confucianism:

Confucius did not recommend blind allegiance to the state. When Zilu asks him "how to serve a prince," Confucius replies, "Tell him the truth even if it offends him." (Leys quoted by Sen 1997: p. 17-18).

For Sen human rights;

...builds on our shared humanity. These rights are not derived from the citizenship of any country, or the membership of any nation, but taken as entitlements of every human being. They differ, thus, from constitutionally created rights guaranteed for specified people (p.29).

Sen's Capability Approach is a radical framework for re-imagining human security and human rights. It offers a broad and essentially proactive definition of human security, incorporating both positive and negative freedoms (Sen 1999). The Capability Approach recognizes five broad categories of instrumental freedoms: political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. While there have been concerns about the difficulties in translating some of Sen's proposed freedoms into concrete policies and practices, it nonetheless provides a good starting point to consider how human security for mobile populations might be enacted.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper has problematized the education-migration nexus which in its current form is premised on the idea of a highly skilled subject, feted by national governments and global labour markets, and able to seamlessly navigate all kinds of borders. Instead, the argument was made that student migrants encounter a range of social, language and economic and cultural borders. Student migrants can and do experience communication difficulties, financial and housing insecurity and unemployment. They are often confronted with low levels of engagement with host country nationals and they may not be accorded equal respect. In countries like Australia there is a concern that a culture of marketisation has weakened universities and hollowed out their ethical sensibilities. Collectively, all of these forces have the potential to put students at greater risk of social exclusion and to compromise their capacity to achieve human security. There is a need now to engage with the security and rights of student migrants. Rather than brushing off the issue of rights as a western import which is incompatible with Asian Values, we need to begin the dialogue on how we might work with the idea of rights to incorporate different critical traditions from the plural civilizations that make up Asia.

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