Asian Students Abroad: Missing the Boat of Adaptation?

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Abstract Asian international students in the 'West' are often represented as deficient Others whose adaptation to the new environment is problematic. Framed within a Confucian heritage culture, some participants who are reported to lack interaction with locals become representatives of a whole community. On the other hand, institutional bodies and universities in the 'West' who rely heavily on Asian international students to maintain a wide range of courses reinforce notions of a difficult adaptation and insist on the imminence of a culture shock. They also spread the idea of the necessity to 'meet the [Western] locals' who, in turn, are framed within a stereotypical representation of 'diversity', openness and tolerance. An analysis of the narratives of a few Asian international students reveals that their expectations reiterate a widespread essentialising discourse in the field of academic mobility. Faced with representations of a solid culture in relation to the host population, the discourses of these students lack clarity in the meaning-making of their experience abroad, particularly when adaptation is concerned. They both maintain clear-cut boundaries and express the desire to become the idealised Others that only exist in their imagination. Even when the process can be deemed successful, participants express failure. The adaptation of mobile students to the 'West' is presented as an idealistic, utopian goal which can only lead to disillusionment. Thus, there is a need to relativise hegemonic discourses which insist on an encounter between two culturally opposed environments in order to integrate more individual fluidity.

Keywords Student mobility · Culture shock · Student adaptation · Essentialising discourses

On its website, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.) mentions the top five destinations for international students in 2012 which were all located in the 'West': USA attracted 21.1% of all outbound students worldwide, UK 12.2%, France 7.7%, Australia 7.1% and Germany 5.9%. If most inbound students in France come from

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Table 1 Rank of Asian countries in the general international intake of international students in the top five destinations in 2014 (adapted from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.)

	USA	UK	France	Australia	Germany
China	1	1	2	1	1
India	2	2		3	
Korea	3			8	
Japan	6				
Vietnam	7		9	4	
Nepal	10			9	
Singapore				7	
Malaysia		7		2	
China, Hong Kong				5	
Indonesia				6	

former French colonies (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal) and inbound students in Germany from Turkey and the rest of Europe, China alone represents in both cases a major provider of incoming students (9.8% of the international enrolment in France, 8.9% in Germany respectively). English-speaking countries attract an even larger number of Asian students, with six Asian countries listed in the top ten for the USA, three for the UK, and nine for Australia. Australia, which has included the internationalisation of its universities as a key factor of its balance of trade (Marginson 2009; Cadman and Song 2012), relies greatly on Asian countries. Not surprisingly, many academic research projects on Asian students have originated from this part of the world (e.g. Smith 2001; Wong 2004). Nevertheless, Asian student mobility has generated important scientific literature in other Western countries as well (see Henze and Zu 2012; Machart et al. 2014). Chinese students in particular have become the "reference group" for international students (Henze and Zu 2012, p. 91) (Table 1).

On the other hand, few articles deal with the adaptation of Asian students in a non-Western context (e.g. Jou and Fukada 1995; Lam 2006; Yang 2014; Machart et al. 2014), though their number in the region has always been important. Moreover, intra-Asian mobility is on the rise in the new Asian EduHubs, i.e. Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore (Knight 2011). Their adaptation in an Asian environment is expected to be 'more natural' or at least 'less problematic', and not emblematic of an expected "culture shock" (Oberg 1954, 1960) because of a supposed similarity between home and host cultures. Their presence in Asia does not stimulate the discourse on Otherness that the presence of Asian/Chinese students triggers in some other parts of the world.

By contrasting Asian students with local (white?) populations, researchers tend to demonstrate that Asian mobile students' adaptation in the West is particularly difficult, even out of reach. However, the top five destinations have witnessed numerous immigrations for many years. Hence, the population of the host country is never homogeneous. By analysing the discourse of official bodies, I will highlight how the concept of adaptation is ambiguously endorsed by educational and institutional bodies to generate a feeling of deficiency among international students.

I will then illustrate how the lack of clarity in the concept echoes Asian mobile students' own narratives on their adaptation during periods of sojourn abroad.

A Deficient Asian Student?

The seeming absence of studies on Asian students in Asia is emblematic of the desire to stage an Us/Them opposition which is widely spread in research and leads to discrimination. Lacassagne et al. (2001) have shown how the different biases associated with the identification of a particular ethnic group interfere with each other. For instance, the contrast bias (*Us*/*Them* opposition) is related to the assimilation bias (*They* appear more similar to each other), and leads to subsequent discrimination (one group appears as superior to another).

Instead of analysing the 'real' interaction between two individuals who come from different backgrounds, international students are often assigned a cultural identity (they become *Them*) which frames them into a box. This identity will serve as a guideline for interpreting their actions. Therefore, the members of the group are expected to behave in a similar manner, and their behaviour will be analysed using "cultural lenses" (Bayart 2005), even when collected data obviously conflict with cultural assumptions.

In an article which analyses discourses on Asian students in four academic contributions, Dervin (2011) notes that most articles are "emblematic of the current interests in 'otherness' but also of the (over)emphasis on difference and culture in education" (p. 42). Chinese students are perceived as the radically different Other, and authors explicitly or implicitly insist on the Confucius Heritage Culture (CHC) of the students in opposition to the host country culture. Earlier, Clark and Gieve (2006) had reached the same conclusion, stating that a "shared Confucian cultural heritage" is used to explain "consistent Chinese behaviours in Western classrooms" (p. 54). This may explain why Asians in Asia are not so popular in research.

The use of the characteristics of this CHC is derogatory. Confucianism is presented as generating passivity, lacking critical thinking, mere memorisation strategies and an unwillingness to participate in classroom talk, etc. Outside the classroom, the Confucian student is perceived as collectivist, remaining within her/his community/ethnic group and has few interactions with 'other groups' (i.e. Chinese don't mix with non-Chinese individuals), etc. The only positive aspect seems to be a thrust to preserve harmony (Wei and Li 2013) which seems rather condescending as it reiterates the lack of active engagement of so-called Confucian students.

However, Anne Cheng and Lijing Shi question this interpretation of *The Annalects*. Shi (2006) asserts that certain researchers' "understanding of Confucianism may be partial or inaccurate" (p. 124). Cheng (1999) insists on the need to exchange with others, i.e. to discuss and not being passive in order to become a human being, a *ren* (p. 68). Finally, in 1949, China adopted a Western ideology even if Mao Zedong claimed that he adapted it. As China has discarded

the traditional way of thinking (pp. 643–644), we begin to wonder how Chinese students nowadays can still be considered as the product of a Confucian education.

To see Asian students as Confucian is basically to essentialise them by assigning cultural traits to them because of their supposed community membership (Spencer 2006, pp. 239–240). This 'cultural baggage' contributes to the perpetuating of a sheer opposition between a collective East and an individualistic West. A cultural assignment finally leads to an imbalance in power relations whereby Asia/China appears as the loser, as "[…] this perception of difference is a Centre, Western, chauvinistic ideology of superiority" (Holliday 2011).

Consequently, the 'West' endorses a position of superiority and claims a desire to give these students the 'better' (i.e. 'Western') education 'they are looking for.' As Cadman and Song (2012) note in the case of Australia, "'We' are the good people who research and teach in a typical research-intensive Australian university, 'they' are the diverse, multi-ethnic students we are now, literally, in the business of educating" (p. 3). Regardless of whether or not the "centre of the world [is] shift [ing] towards Asia" (Gao 2012), Australian, European and American universities are perpetuating the myth of the 'Civilising Mission" of the West during colonial times, e.g. by France (Chafer 2001) or the UK (Fischer-Tiné and Mann 2004).

This discourse may have been tempered, but university websites rarely highlight another reason as to why international students have become so crucial for them: their presence improves on the ranking of the university, a goal which has become central in university policies (Marginson and Van der Wende 2007). This enables the continuation of certain cursus which would otherwise be closed due to a lack of local students (Mahroum 2007, p. 224), and/or the re-channelling of subsidies to less lucrative programmes through a redistribution of tuition fees (Hartmann 2014, p. 3). Student mobility attracts a younger generation of migrants in countries with a declining birth rate such as Germany, Austria but also Singapore (Yang 2014) and Japan (Shao 2008). Finally, an increasing number of full-paying students can counterbalance the deficit of trade of the country. Australia, for instance, has assumed this stand (Marginson 2009, p. 9). These practices demonstrate that institutional bodies develop a *Let's-Help-Them* discourse, rather than a recognition of the actual needs of international students.

Planning for the "Culture Shock"

University websites and institutions that promote Higher Education often resort to an apocalyptic rhetoric. With no mention of their origin, international students are portrayed as facing 'extremely difficult challenges' for which they need to 'be prepared' in order to overcome 'the crisis'. The representations of these difficulties, in words or in graphs, have borrowed greatly from the idea of "culture shock" (Oberg 1954, 1960), a concept which has been criticised in the tourism industry (Hottola 2004) or in cases of academic mobility (e.g. Machart and Lim 2014). I do not pretend that culture shock does not exist, but I agree with Hottola (2004) that the use of the concept has to be limited to certain extreme cases. A systematic

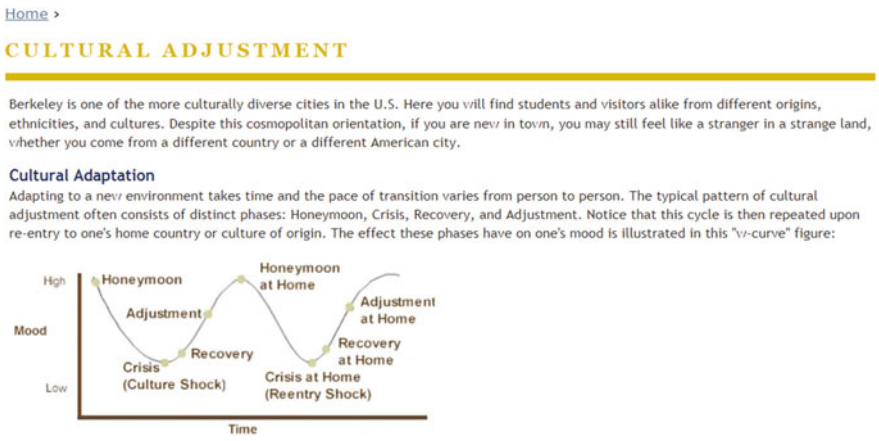

Fig. 1 Print-screen of the webpage of the International Office, University of California-Berkeley, USA

reference to culture shock to explain local adjustments is an evidence of culture-shock-speak, which masks the diversity of individual experiences in very different contexts. Hannerz (1992) coined the term "culture speak" to highlight the fact that culture is omnipresent and used to explain almost anything, an idea that Breidenbach and Nyiri (2009) synthetise as "seeing culture everywhere".

To illustrate my point, I have chosen the website of three USA universities and one Canadian body in charge of the promotion of internationalisation of Higher Education. The USA attracts the highest number of students in the world: 740,482 in 2014 representing 21.1% of all international students globally. I argue that this represents the point of view of only one country in the world, but an on-going research I am currently conducting with Ee Wen Chin on German and Austrian university websites tends to show that cultural essentialism and differentialism is the norm when promoting student mobility.

The first example is taken from the website of the University of California-Berkeley, USA. The prestigious University of California-Berkeley is ranked 4th in the 2014 Shanghai university ranking. In 2014, the first three countries of origin of international students were China (31.92%), Korea (13.53%) and India (8.95%).[1] These three nations accounted for more than half of all inbound students with an increase of Chinese nationals registering for the different programmes. Note that Hong Kong (2.86%) and Taiwan (2.92%) appear at the 5th and 6th position respectively. East Asia and the Pacific represent 61% of the total international enrolment, including 79 Australians and 38 New Zealanders out of a total of 3612. Even if the disclaimer posted on their website (Fig. 1) does not

[1] http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/shared/docs/student-stats-fall14.pdf.

mention the particular origins of international students, it is reasonable to surmise that the university also addresses its main clients: Asians.[2]

Berkeley is first presented as "cosmopolitan" and "diverse." Here, diversity obviously means different "origins, ethnicities and cultures," as if these were homogeneous entities. The website of the City of Berkeley in the page *Who we are*[3] confirms this racial diversity by giving the breakdown of the local population. It then provides a link to a broader description of the population[4] in which diversity goes beyond racial categories and includes age distribution, type of households, ethnicity, education, employment, housing and community engagement (as of political affiliation). Interestingly, from this vast array of categories, the University only picked ethnic/cultural differences.

The Asian community represents 21,690 persons out of a total 112,580 inhabitants of Berkeley. We can reasonably assume that with 1 out of 5 inhabitants of Berkeley being ethnically Asian, an Asian international student who wishes to maintain some Asian connection would have no difficulty in doing so. I am deliberately using the conditional here, as I did not interview any Asian student in Berkeley. Moreover, I am not assuming that they would like to maintain such connections because of their national or ethnic identification. As I will demonstrate later, mobile students sometimes prefer to avoid this kind of ethnic categorisation and behavioural essentialism.

However, despite the "cosmopolitan orientation", one is expected to face a necessary adjustment whether one comes from a different country or a different American city (but the disclaimer was posted on the webpage of the International Office). The idea is not that of a "confusion" (Hottola 2004) whereby an individual faces an evident lack of familiarity with the appropriation of a new environment (Calinon 2014), but that of "culture shock" (Oberg 1960) which leads to a "crisis" and a "recovery". This implies that a newcomer is unable to appreciate the surrounding diversity, a concept that would be foreign to him/her for which he/she would need a necessary "adjustment" because he/she is inscribed in a particular monocultural background. The message is here: *We*, people from Berkeley, enjoy living with *all* cultures around *us* whereas *you*, as a foreigner, will have to learn to deal with it. Inhabitants of Berkeley are presented as 'open' and 'diverse', a quality which is denied to guest students who are statically framed in *their* 'cultural identity of origin', and who will have to learn to be 'open'. Of course, this is an "idealistic" and "utopian" statement which essentilise local inhabitants, and both terms can be found on the website of the City of Berkeley.[5]

The components of identity, such as origin, ethnicity, culture, national or regional belonging, are seen as static components of a solid anthropological culture

[2]http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/cultural_adjustment.

[3]http://www.cityofberkeley.info/City_Manager/Home/AB__Who_We_Are.aspx.

[4]http://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/City_Manager/Level_3_-_General/2011%20Community%20Profile%20FINAL.pdf.

[5]http://www.cityofberkeley.info/City_Manager/Home/AB__Character_Sketch.aspx.

(Dervin 2012). The emphasis is placed on differences between cultures which are seen as clear-cut entities in the Herderian tradition of the 18th Century, tracing boundaries around ethnic groups (Wimmer 2013, pp. 20–43). The obvious reference to 'culture shock' and 'reverse culture shock' (W-Shaped process, "Reentry Shock") aims at warning students. Individual experiences are silenced and it is only one's cultural/ethnic/regional belonging which seems to make sense in one's adaptation process. The international trajectory of mobile students is perceived as a conflicting encounter between cultures which is in direct line with the "clash of civilisations" (Huttington 1996), and which leaves no space for individual experiences.

The rhetoric of expected culture shock is explicitly or implicitly present on many university websites. The following example of 'warning' which provides advice to international students on how to overcome culture shock is particularly popular. I first discovered an example on the website of the University of Illinois (Machart and Lim 2014, p. 158) which disappeared soon after. The exact same wording can now be spotted on the website of at least two different institutions: the Northwest Arkansas Community College[6] and Concordia University Irvine (USA)[7]:

> The various phases that you may experience include:
>
> Being fascinated with all the new things you are experiencing.
>
> Feeling uncomfortable because you feel as if you don't belong.
>
> Rejecting and labeling **the foreign culture** and people as being strange.
>
> Learning to decipher **foreign behavior and customs**.
>
> Accepting and enjoying **the foreign culture**.

Instead of opting for the W-Shaped line, these universities prefer to formulate the different stages of 'culture shock' in plain English: "being fascinated", "rejecting", "learning to decipher", etc. Interestingly, the singular is used to speak of "the foreign culture" and no mention is made of a diverse environment including multiple forms of diversities (age, gender, social class, etc.) (Dervin et al. 2013). American campuses are even more diverse, even if we only take into consideration the students' nationality. These campuses host 21.1% on all international students who come from more than 150 countries (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, n.d.). The leitmotiv of the international office websites seems to be 'Come and meet the foreigner' (i.e. the American), an imagined individual who is impossible to be concretely described.

Finally, the last line of the excerpt seems somehow problematic. The use of two appreciative verbs ('accept' and 'enjoy')—which would be difficult to quantify—appears as a sermon: as a foreigner, *You* have to like *Us*. The same feelings which are not expected from locals, and which admonish mobile students in this regard set an unrealistic goal in which realisation is left entirely to the international student.

[6] http://www.nwacc.edu/web/studyabroad/culture-shock.

[7] http://www.cui.edu/AcademicPrograms/Global-Programs/Study-Abroad/index.aspx?id=21209.

Similarly, governmental bodies in charge of the promotion of Higher Education appear as inclined towards advising foreign students on how to avoid culture shock. *Education au/in Canada* is one of these institutional bodies whose role is to promote local education and to attract international students to Canadian shores:

> Education au/in Canada[8]:
>
> Tips for Managing **Culture Shock**:
>
> Learn about **Canadian culture** prior to leaving home.
>
> Pack some mementos from home that will comfort you when you're missing your family and friends.
>
> Ask questions if you are unsure of something.
>
> Get involved and participate **in group events**.
>
> **Be open to new experiences and ideas.**
>
> Talk to other international students about their experiences in Canada.
>
> Use the **professional support services available to you at your institution**.
>
> Try to relax and not take everything too seriously or worry unnecessarily.

This posting from a multicultural and officially bilingual country is very ambiguous as culture is once again used in the singular form. Multiculturalism implies the recognition of different cultural backgrounds. What is thus meant by "Canadian culture"? How far does it include minorities? Is "being open to new experiences and ideas" a requirement among local Canadian citizens? In her work on the widely spread reference to multiculturalism in the Canadian province of Quebec, Eliantana Razafimandimbimanana has shown that references to multiculturalism was a mere façade to mask a monolingual and monocultural ideology. National bodies seem to be uncomfortable in moving from a methodological nationalism to 'fluid interculturality' (Dervin 2013) where culture is endorsed within the boundaries of a state and often forgets to integrate a real diversity beyond cultural membership. Such bodies include EduHub Malaysia (Machart and Dervin 2014, p. 63) or CampusFrance[9] which promotes "the vibrancy of contemporary French culture", in which the term "culture" once again appears in the singular form.

International students are seen as representatives of their country of origin and consigned to cultural boxes, independent of their motivation to study abroad. One such example lies in the case of a Malaysian student who, prior his departure to the UK, was reminded by a staff of his future university to join the Malaysian Association of the host university. In reality, the man had simply wanted to be reunited with his British partner.

[8] http://www.educationau-incanada.ca/educationau-incanada/canada/leave-partir.aspx?lang=eng.

[9] http://www.campusfrance.org/en/page/vibrancy-contemporary-french-culture.

Meet the Locals: Revisiting Students' Expectations

This cultural essentialism of mobile students is accompanied by an idealisation of the culture of the host country, wherein the 'locals' become the essentialised Other for the newcomers. In analysing the motivation letters of Finnish prospective mobile students, Härkönen and Dervin (2015) note that participants were largely referring to "meeting another culture" without always being clear with what they meant by that. 'Meet the locals' is more than a motto. For example, the University of Stockholm dedicates an entire page on its website to the theme.[10] The theme appears as an imperative to study abroad,[11] something which is absolutely desirable (Skinner 2010). I chanced upon a website on the promotion of student mobility which even suggests that you could potentially meet your future wife while studying abroad.[12] The following excerpts, in which international students refer to 'locals' as cultural Others are taken from focus group discussions (FGD) involving Asian students who were studying in Malaysia and interviews conducted with Malaysians who studied abroad.

Meng and Emily are two PRC Chinese students who are registered in a Malaysian university. They did not qualify for Tier A universities in China due to unsatisfactory results. Instead of joining a Tier B university, they decided that having a 'foreign degree' would provide them with better opportunities in the job market once they returned home, a fact which was echoed by PRC Chinese students who participated in other FGD. For these students, studying abroad is not a goal in itself, and it appears as largely unplanned. We have to bear in mind that we are dealing with undergraduate students who are quite young (19–20 years old), and some of whom may not have clear ideas about their future as yet.

Previously, Meng mentioned that he only applied to Malaysia because studying in that country was quite cheap, although he did not know anything about the country before going there.

Excerpt 1

Interviewer: So how did you feel about going to a place of you didn't know anything at all?

Meng: Try to know it, **try to know the culture**, try to… **deep in the culture**… is life, and everything for you… for us and you, totally new. Then, everything you have to learn it, start it just like you like… **new begin**, it is really different from China, a lot of different.

Emily: Yes, I think I try **to fit**, fit in and make, mix… self, comfortable to start a new life here. It is ok.

Both of them feel the urge to 'meet the locals,' but the difference between Meng and Emily resides in the goal of 'exploring the new culture'. While Meng has an external approach ("try to know"), Emily would like to "fit" in the host society and

[10] http://www.ling.su.se/english/international-summer-school-in-language-documentation-and-linguistic-diversity/meet-the-locals.

[11] http://www.globalinksabroad.org/Featured_Student_Carolyn_Goebel/.

[12] http://www.studentuniverse.com/student-blog/study-abroad/reasons-to-study-abroad.

become part of it ("to fit", "mix", "start a new life here"). Her representation of adaptation is more extreme. Meng is at the stage of "learning to decipher foreign behavior and customs," while Emily's goal is to be "accepting and enjoying the foreign culture" as mentioned on American websites and cited earlier.

This desire to be part of the host culture is even stronger in the following excerpt. Wan is a Malaysian who studied for three years in France. He had just returned from his studies when he was interviewed by a French researcher:

Excerpt 2

Wan: I really wanted to integrate the French society, to feel one of them…

Interviewer: What does it mean integrate for you?

Wan: Hum… it mean do like they do, talk like them, get used to do like them, try to forget for a while where we come from, who we are, etc.

For Wan, the adaptation process implies that one ought to "do like" the local population. Wan's articulation of a stereotype that French people behave in a particular way calls to mind the three biases highlighted by Lacassagne and colleagues. First, individuals are put in contrast with national boundaries (France vs. Malaysia). Second, the behaviours of French people appear in Wan's discourse as homogeneous ("do like **they do**, talk **like them**, get used to do **like them**…"). Third, discrimination appears as a disfavouring of his own national identity, which he wishes to forget ("**forget** for a while *where we come from*, *who we are*…").

The interviewer is never included in Wan's discourse, although other participants in this particular research systematically identified the interviewer as a Frenchman, as related in Machart and Lim (2014). Wan's representation of the French culture is situated in an environment that is different from the context of the interaction (including a French interlocutor), a place where *they* live and where *they* behave in a particular way. This *art de vivre* represents an idealised "French society" which Wan strives to be a part of. This echoes another recurring idea found in the Finnish motivation letters as postulated by Härkönen and Dervin (2015): the desire to become another Self. Wan studies French and he expresses a strong desire to identify with the 'culture' of the language he learns. Unlike Kordes (1991) who analysed this kind of identification with the culture of the target language as a desirable asset, I prefer to contextualise this expression in terms of becoming the Other.

In Wan's discourse, there are expressions of Othering ("they", "them") but also of Self-identification: a "I want to be like this" or idealised representation of *Them*. The fact that he does not include the interviewer in this representation may mean that this represented *Them* is not the French, but rather a group of individuals he feels closer to. Wan created an imagined community with which he could identify during his sojourn abroad, at least during certain moments. This imagined community represents one of the cocoon communities (Korpela and Dervin 2013) in which Wan could participate for a certain time, before switching over to another one (Malaysian students), and to yet another (he participated in an artistic group), and so on. Wan was constantly redefining his own identification in a fluid process that is characteristic of liquid identities (Baumann 2001).

The next excerpt has been analysed in detail in a book chapter in French which is dedicated to Malaysian students' French experience (Machart and Lim 2014). I decided to translate it into English and integrate it into this chapter because it perfectly illustrates the ambiguity of the concept of adaptation. June is a Chinese Malaysian who studied for three years in France. For approximately half an hour during my interview with her, she expressed how difficult it was to interact with French people (a problem that researchers often mention in relation to Asian students in Western countries). However, when June narrates her activities during her holidays in France, individuals from various backgrounds come forth:

Excerpt 3

June: The group was large, we were not close to the French people…

Interviewer: Any particular reason why you were not close?

June: I am shy… I need time to get close to someone… maybe also the language – with Taiwanese – I can speak in Chinese, Japanese, and a little bit of French… […]

Interviewer: And how did you spend your free time, for example during holidays?

June: And for Hari Raya [festivities at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan], I celebrated with Malaysians. Thanks to Cynthia's contact from the church, we spent the first Christmas with 2 French families and on Sundays, I went to church with Liz and we met French people… a family we met through Joanne [a French girl]…

June's social life is incredibly rich, although she claims that it is the opposite. Her experiences involve fellow Malaysians of other faiths, showing some national connections (for Hari Raya, although she is not a Muslim), members of the same linguistic community (Liz who is Chinese Malaysian), and locals (from the church, although June is not a Christian). June was interacting with many different individuals and moving between different groups and communities. Yet, she felt that her social life was deficient (she was lacking interactions with the French with whom "they [Malaysians] were not close"). Being invited by locals for her first Christmas in France (approximately three months after her arrival) seems to indicate an advanced adaptation process. An observation of June's life in Malaysia reveals that she has the same rich, diverse, transient and ever changing forms of social networking. It would be difficult to say that June's adaptation is a failure. However, she perceives it as one, blaming it on her shyness. It seems that June's aims were of another dimension, in that she had higher expectations. Although she weaves in and out of different communities, she expects more without expressing at any time where these expectations come from. The *vox populi* that pushes mobile students to 'meet the locals' without being clear about what it means leads June to some kind of disillusionment, when many international students would be more than happy in her situation. More than a lack of adaptation, international students seem to lack clarity about their goals and how to achieve them. Wedged between a hegemonic discourse that pushes them to meet the locals and a context where they are accommodated in hostels with fellow nationals (Korpela and Dervin 2013; Calinon 2014) for the most part, student mobility generates high hopes which are difficultly met or are disconnected from reality.

Conclusion

Song and Cadman (2012) entitled the first part of their book as "Another pedagogy is possible". Dervin (2011) pleaded for "for change in research on intercultural discourses." Both titles express the discomfort educators face when they deal with trans-cultural (Song and Cadman 2012) or inter-cultural (Dervin 2011, 2012) approaches. Even when using different terms, these researchers express the need to move away from stereotyping discourses, and to be more respectful of diversities (Dervin et al. 2013). The various discourses on adaptation of Asian students definitely need to take that turn.

Asian international students are depicted as deficient, even if they are obviously not. The systematic association of individuals with a cultural identity forces them into boxes (Machart and Lim 2013) and serves as a grid to interpret their behaviour. The discourses of institutional bodies reproduce these kinds of differentialising, culture-opposing discourses. University websites, Embassies or organisations in charge of the promotion of student mobility give a great emphasis on the difficulties that prospective students would encounter, and furnish them with complete 'sets' of advice on how to overcome such difficulties. This provides them with a sense of comfort in their role as better-education-providers and reinforces the impression that 'we' [the 'west'] can educate 'them' [Asians], and that the 'West' will add value to the education of these Others. Not only are these discourses discriminatory, they also are based on the pre-requisite that international students are absolutely different based on an essentialising approach.

In line with Morawska (1994) and Conzen (1996), Wimmer (2013) warns us in *Ethnic Boundaries Making* against the tendency in research to ignore individuals who are "lost to the group" (p. 42), i.e. individuals whose main socialisations do not occur within an ethnic framework. These people do not join clubs or associations, or mingle primarily with other individuals from the same ethnic background, etc. (p. 42) because they have chosen a successful adaptive path. In other words, they have become invisible for researchers, for journalists or for other outsiders as they cannot be easily contacted through 'ethnic snowball sampling' or by word of mouth between peers of the same ethnic origin.

Even if I agree with this major omission, I would also add these individuals become invisible because of a stand which has more to do with a research positioning. They are no longer perceived as a representative from the ethnicity/culture which is under scrutiny because they have adopted 'cultural traits' which do not match commonly spread representations about their group of origin (if they ever matched these imagined representations in the first place), and have become bilingual (Machart, forth.) at a time when bilingualism is often considered as "seditious", including in academia.

Studies on academic mobility are no exception to this trend. In a desire to be able to generalise collected data, researchers focus on national groups which are significant in number, e.g. Erasmus students in Europe, Northern Africans in France, or more recently, Chinese student (Henze and Zhu 2012) who have become an

"euphemism for Asian" students abroad (Machart et al. 2014). When analysing the answers given by participants, researchers sometimes force them to play the cultural card. For example, Xie (2008) was questioning an individual of Chinese origin living in France who explained that he used both negotiation and fighting to get promoted, to which she added: "[But] Chinese people are quite resigned [*résignés*], aren't they?" Her participants could not but agree with her and say: "Exactly, but with French people, we have to explain them the reasons. We cannot abandon all the time, any time. We have to say No when needed" (pp. 138–139). There is a real need to be more open to what our participants have to say.

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