Encounters between East and West:
Intercultural Perspectives

Regis Machart
Fred Dervin
Minghui Gao *Editors*

Intercultural Masquerade

New Orientalism, New Occidentalism, Old Exoticism

Higher Education Press

Springer

Encounters between East and West

Intercultural Perspectives

Series editors

Fred Dervin, Helsinki, Finland
Regis Machart, Serdang, Malaysia

More information about this series at http://www.springer.com/series/13823

Regis Machart · Fred Dervin · Minghui Gao
Editors

Intercultural Masquerade

New Orientalism, New Occidentalism, Old Exoticism

Higher Education Press

Springer

Editors
Regis Machart
Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
Serdang
Malaysia

Minghui Gao
Department of Teacher Education
University of Helsinki
Helsinki
Finland

Fred Dervin
Department of Teacher Education
University of Helsinki
Helsinki
Finland

ISSN 2364-6721 ISSN 2364-673X (electronic)
Encounters between East and West
ISBN 978-3-662-47055-8 ISBN 978-3-662-47056-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-662-47056-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015953779

Springer Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer-Verlag GmbH Berlin Heidelberg is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Contents

Editors and Contributors

About the Editors

Regis Machart Ph.D. is a Senior Lecturer at Universiti Putra Malaysia. His research interests include academic mobilities and construction of identities.

Fred Dervin is Professor of multicultural education at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Dervin holds several professorships around the world. He specialises in intercultural pedagogy, the sociology of multiculturalism, student and academic mobility. http://blogs.helsinki.fi/dervin/.

Minghui Gao is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Helsinki (Finland).

Contributors

Lari Aaltonen is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tampere, Finland. His doctoral thesis explores the concepts of exoticism, othering and representations of ethnicity in world music. Yuko

Marion Decome Ph.D. 2014, Cultural Studies, University of Montpellier, France is an Associate Researcher at IRIEC. She currently serves as a cultural mediator in Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp, France.

Patricia Frederick is Professor of French and Chair of Global Languages at Northern Arizona University. She has published critical studies treating contemporary Francophone literature as well as mediaeval folklore and culture.

Jane Jackson is a Professor in the English Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her teaching and research center on education abroad, language, identity and intercultural communication.

Emilie Guillerez holds a Ph.D. in Chinese Studies from the University of Montpellier (France). Her research focuses on gender, identity and womanhood in modern and contemporary Chinese Women's literature.

Yuko Kawai Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of communication in the Department of Intercultural Communication, Rikkyo University, Japan. Her research focus is multiculturalism and racism in Japan.

Greg Mccarthy is a political science Professor and the incoming BHP Billiton Chair of Australian Studies at Peking University. He has done extensive research on Australian politics and critical theory.

Xianlin Song is now an Associate Professor at the University of Western Australia. Her research focuses on global higher education, transcultural theory and feminist studies in contemporary China.

Peidong Yang (DPhil, Oxford) is Postdoctoral Fellow in Sociology at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research interests include international student mobility and Internet/media culture, with a focus on China.

E-Lynn Yeow holds an MA (Discourse Studies) from Universiti Putra Malaysia. She is interested in social representations, construction of identity and media discourses.

Chapter 3
The PRC "Foreign Talent" Scholars and Their Singaporean "Other": Neo-Occidentalism Amidst Intercultural Contact in the Context of Higher Education Student Mobility

Peidong Yang

Abstract This chapter approaches interculturality and issues of Orientalism and Occidentalism from an empirical case of higher education student mobility. Specifically, it focuses on the experiences and discourses of a group of mainland Chinese undergraduate students funded to study at a Singaporean university by the Singapore government's "foreign talent" scholarship programmes. Through ethnographically showing the ways in which these "PRC scholars" develop certain stereotypical imaginations about their local Singaporean peers—arguably an act of neo-Occidentalisation—this chapter illustrates that intercultural prejudice, essentialisation and misunderstanding occur in more complex contexts and directionalities than the simplistic scenario of the West orientalising the East. This chapter further argues that, on the one hand, the Chinese students' Occidentalisation of their Singaporean "other" should be interpreted in view of the former' own educational and sociocultural backgrounds, and on the other hand, it should also be understood as a form of coping mechanism against the frustration and failure of their desires to develop meaningful contact and deeper communication with their local hosts.

Keywords Student migration · Stereotyping · "Foreign talent" · Singapore · China

3.1 Introduction

In a world of unprecedented inter-/transnational connections and human mobilities (Urry 2007), higher education, particularly in the developed world, has also become a multidimensional global playing field. In addition to the globalisation

P. Yang (✉)
School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University,
14 Nanyang Drive, Singapore, #4–43, 637332, Singapore
e-mail: y.peidong@gmail.com

R. Machart et al. (eds.), *Intercultural Masquerade*,
Encounters between East and West, DOI 10.1007/978-3-662-47056-5_3

of (higher) educational policy-making (Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Sidhu 2006), innovative border crossing institutional setups (Altbach 2007; Naidoo 2009), and various other related phenomena, the rise of international student mobilities constitutes one of the key features of today's world higher education landscape (Brooks and Waters 2011; Byram and Dervin 2008).

Accompanying the increases in the presence of international students from the global south and/or the developing countries in higher education institutions located in the global north and/or the developed countries, there has been a steady growth of research into the educational sojourn experience, in which intercultural adjustment stands out as a prominent theme (Brown 2008, p. 76; Marginson 2014). This is because, as Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) helpfully summarise: international students experience added difficulties in terms of "culture shock, language difficulties, adjustment to unfamiliar social norms, eating habits, customs and values, differences in education systems, isolation and loneliness, homesickness, and a loss of established social networks" (p. 364). More specifically, many researchers in this area have examined the various overlapping sub-categories of difficulties and "shocks" that typically confront international student-sojourners, such as the "culture shock" (e.g. Adler 1975; Ward et al. 2001), "learning/education shock" (e.g. Gu and Maley 2008; Yamazaki 2005; Zhang and Brunton 2007), "language shock" (Agar 1996; Brown 2008; Ryan and Twibell 2000), "communication shock" (e.g. Aveni 2005; Holmes 2004, 2007), and so on. These "shocks" are usually understood as stemming from the vast gulf that separates the international students' home culture and their new host culture—a gulf which results in the international educational sojourn being described as "one of the most traumatic events in a person's life" (Brown 2008, p. 76) that "brings with it a considerable amount of accompanying stress" (Cushner and Karim 2004, p. 292). Although the metaphor of "culture shock" may now sound dated, the host of phenomena the term refers to, namely, the encounters with unfamiliar sociocultural norms and the experiences of disjuncture given rise to by border crossing relocation and mobility, only become more relevant, not less, especially for the sojourning students. The experiences of student-sojourners, in turn, provide a unique lens through which to examine questions about Orientalism/Occidentalism/exoticism.

This chapter focuses on an arguably rather unique type of student-sojourners: the Mainland Chinese youths receiving Singapore government scholarships to study for undergraduate degrees in Singaporean universities. Known in Singapore as the "PRC foreign talent" students or, more specifically, the "PRC scholars", these subjects are unique first in the sense that the destination of their educational sojourn, i.e. the highly developed Southeast Asian city-state Singapore, is what might be called a "Westernised" country nevertheless with an ethnic Chinese majority. Thus, in this case, the sociocultural gulf that the PRC scholars cross is apparently much narrower. In extant literature, there is a dearth of research on the experiences of internationally mobile students who move to study and live in cultures that are believed to be not drastically different from their own. A quick survey reveals an implicit bias in the literature, namely: most existing studies on international study-sojourn experiences typically deal with Asian/non-white

students in the Western or the global north contexts. The research literature concerning Chinese international students, for instance, still seems to originate predominantly from English-speaking countries where marketised internationalisation of higher education has been most advanced, such as the UK and the Oceania (Ryan and Carroll 2005). Empirical works that point to issues such as racism/Islamophobia (e.g. Brown 2009a) and Orientalism (e.g. Doherty and Singh 2005; Holmes 2007) further bear witness to this bias.

By looking into the case of the PRC "foreign talent" scholars in Singapore—an Asian city—and some aspects of their encounter with their Singaporean host, in this chapter I question the implicit assumption that crossing a narrower cultural gulf presents the sojourners with less problematic experiences. Speaking in relation to sociocultural identities, anthropologist Anton Blok (2001) suggests that "the fiercest struggles often take place between individuals, groups and communities that differ very little" (p. 115). And this is perhaps because, as Pierre Bourdieu (1979/1984) points out, "Social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat" (p. 479). This highlights the possibility that the supposed ethnocultural affinities between the Chinese scholar-sojourners and the majority of Singaporeans who are ethnic Chinese do not necessarily negate the occurrence of misrecognition and othering, but might in fact accentuate it.

The PRC scholars I look at in this chapter are unique in another sense: unlike the Chinese international students portrayed in most existing scholarship who are largely self-funded and academically non-elite (e.g. Coates 2013; Fong 2011), the "scholars" in the Singapore case are purposefully selected according to their academic aptitudes and subsequently granted full scholarships (Yang 2014a). Such academically elite students from China, I argue, tend to embody certain unique subjectivities, which in turn shape their encounters and interactions with their local host in specific ways. Thus, a second aim of this chapter is to explore how educational sojourners' sociocultural subjectivities may manifest in intercultural encounters and lead to their "neo-Occidentalist" othering of the local host.

Reversing Edward Said's (1978) influential notion of Orientalism, sociologist James Carrier (1995b) popularised the term Occidentalism to denote the ways in which the West/Western may be subject to similar kinds of stereotypification and essentialisation to that which Said argues the West imposes on the Orient. In the context of international educational mobility, the non-"white"—literally or metaphorically—student-sojourners typically take the place of the Oriental; and as I mentioned earlier, there has been academic research documenting how the host communities perceive these subjects in Orientalist ways. In the present account, my focus shall be on how the PRC scholars in Singapore view their Singaporean host in certain stereotypical and reductionist ways. I regard this as a kind of "neo-Occidentalism", not really because Singapore is a stand-in for the West/Western for the Chinese student-sojourners—though this is arguably the case to some extent—but because I use the term "Occidentalism" in a more abstract and structural sense to mean the less powerful party's essentialising discourse about the more powerful party—insofar as "Orientalism" has often been taken to mean the

more powerful party's essentialising gaze at the less powerful party. As I shall try to depict in the setting of a university campus, the PRC scholars' neo-Occidentalist othering seems to be closely intertwined with their frustration at not being able to establish interactions with their Singaporean peers beyond the superficial level.

James Carrier (1995a) usefully reminds us that the constructions of Occidentalist discourses and images in large historical formations and metanarratives must be examined "in the context of complex social, political, and economic conflicts and relationships" (p. 11, emphases added). In this chapter, I pay heed to Carrier by situating the PRC scholars' neo-Occidentalist discourses and perceptions in relation to micro-political contingencies such as discrimination, misunderstanding and frustration that arise betwixt the PRC scholars and their Singaporean host. Also, adhering to Dervin and colleagues' (Dervin et al. 2011) advice to pay attention to the micro-social processes and discourses in intercultural contact, in this chapter I examine seemingly mundane experiences and discourses that nonetheless speak to the complexity and hazard that inhere in educational mobility.

3.2 The PRC "Foreign Talent" Scholars in Singapore

3.2.1 The Context

Formerly a British colony, the Southeast Asian island-city-state Singapore gained independence in 1965, and had, in the four decades' time since, marched from the "third world to first" (Lee 2000). For historical reasons, about three quarters of Singapore's population are ethnic Chinese who can mostly trace their ancestry to China's southeast coastal regions. Today, despite English having long been made the language of government, business and education, Chinese (Mandarin) is widely spoken by Chinese Singaporeans, and Chinese culture is integral to the social fabric of the city-state.

In the past two decades, the Singapore government has increasingly used education as a channel to import "foreign talent", on which the government pins the hopes of enhancing the island-nation's economic competitiveness in the age of global knowledge economy and of making up for the persistent local population declines (Low 2002). For instance, in the early 2000s, an ambitious "Global Schoolhouse" project was officially launched with the objective of achieving the presence of 150,000 foreign students at all levels in Singapore by year 2015, thus making it a regional centre for education, knowledge creation and diffusion (Ng and Tan 2010). Since the 1990s, various kinds of government-sponsored scholarship schemes were put in place with a view of securing high-calibre students from the surrounding region to study in Singaporean secondary and tertiary institutions (Koh 2012; Yang 2014a). These scholarships often carry "bonds" that require recipients to work in Singapore for a number of years after graduation. "Scholars"

are recruited from many Asian nations, but most notably, from Mainland China; while no official explanation has been offered regarding this preference for Mainland Chinese "foreign talent", it has often been speculated that the Singapore government favours this group because they help replenish the Chinese Singaporeans—the ethnic group in Singapore with the lowest fertility rate—and that they would supposedly integrate more easily into Singapore.

In recent years, "foreign talent" has become an increasingly contentious topic in the Singapore society as the continuous influx of immigrants (both "foreign talents" and other categories) brought about issues such as public infrastructure overcrowding and fierce competitions in education and job markets (Koh 2003; Yang 2014b). With regard to education specifically, it has been reported that the Singapore government in recent years grants more than 1,000 full scholarships to foreign undergraduate students per year (Yeoh and Lin 2013, pp. 39–40)—a fact that upsets many Singaporeans because under Singapore's elitist higher education system, the age cohort higher education participation rate was still only 27 % as of 2012. Among the approximately 100,000 foreigners studying at all levels in Singapore (Davie 2010), it is not known exactly how many are from the PRC because the government seems reluctant to release such potentially sensitive figures; but there can be little doubt that this group is the largest, and constitutes the focus of most strident social contentions (Yeoh and Lin 2013).

3.2.2 The Research

It is against the background delineated above that this chapter ethnographically focuses on those PRC scholars as undergraduate students in a Singaporean university that I pseudonymously call "University Institute Singapore" ("UIS")—an English-medium, globally oriented comprehensive university ranked among the top 100 world universities according to the Times Higher Education league tables of recent years. My research is a broader ethnographic examination of the "foreign talent" issue in Singapore through the case of the Chinese scholars, involving fieldworks in China and Singapore stretching 16 months in total. For the Singapore part, I was based primarily at UIS. Adopting an anthropological mode of inquiry, I interacted with up to 200 PRC scholars at various life stages, ranging from those undergoing pre-university preparatory courses to those who were a few years into postgraduate professional life or further studies.

This chapter focuses on those PRC scholars at the undergraduate stage of their "foreign talent" career, and I draw primarily on in-depth interviews with 29 undergraduate research participants from a range of majors and years at UIS. The interviews were mostly one-to-one, but occasionally group-based. I carried out all interviews in Mandarin Chinese, with audio recording in about half of the cases. Recorded interviews were transcribed, initially in Chinese, within at most a few days after taking place, and then further translated into English during the data

analysis stage. When interviewees declined to be recorded or I did not want to spoil the casual atmosphere of the chat with the recorder, I took notes and reconstructed data based on fresh memory. Subsequently, thematic coding and analysis were carried out manually, in an iterative process that resembles what Glaser and Strauss (1968) described in their "grounded theory".

Two points warrant special mention here, one regarding my research participants, the other regarding myself as the researcher. All my informants insofar as this chapter is concerned were educated in China up to either senior middle school year two or the end of senior middle school; in other words, they aged between 17 and 20 when they came to Singapore as "scholars". Before being awarded the scholarships, they all underwent selection processes, consisting of written tests and an interview, conducted in China by the Singapore educational authority. Therefore, on the whole, they were the academic elite in their age cohort in China; and the majority of these scholars hailed from urban middle class socioeconomic backgrounds or above. Furthermore, it is a condition of their scholarship that they must specialise in science and/or engineering-related majors at university in Singapore, and the written tests used for selection also mainly measured their aptitudes in mathematics and science subjects. Given these factors, the PRC scholars in this chapter should be seen as a highly specific subgroup within Chinese international students, and therefore their experience may not be generalisable despite the heuristic insights it could offer.

Second, the fact that I was myself a former "PRC scholar" and UIS alumnus is one that must be reflected upon in terms of its ethical and methodological implications on the research. There can be no doubt that my personal biography and subjective experience motivated me to carry out the research project on "PRC scholars" in the first place. The rising social discontent regarding "foreign talent" in Singapore and the apparent communication breakdowns and misunderstanding between the "foreign talent" and their Singaporean host concerned me because I was in a way personally implicated in it, and therefore doing this project was both an intellectual and ethical project (see also Yang 2013a, b). In terms of research practice, my personal biography certainly brought various advantages in terms of access: for example, I had ready knowledge of the "field"; I established research contacts much more easily; and my positionality also seemed to allow my research participants to easily identify with me and be more forthcoming in sharing their experiences and views. On the other hand, I was also aware that my personal experience would possibly frame my interactions with my research participants and shape the data that would emerge from such interactions. Thus, in carrying out the fieldwork, I tried to bring in as few presumptions as possible, which involved, among other efforts, soliciting interviewees' narratives using general and broadly framed questions and letting them speak as freely as possible. Ultimately, however, I am of the view that in social research, truly "objective" or "neutral" research interaction is an illusion, and the researcher is always implicated in the production of the "data" in one way or another. Such deep implication of the researcher's subjectivity in the constitution of the "objective" social world

should not be seen in the positivistic light as a handicap, but ought to be viewed in the spirit of feminist research as a production of useful insights and knowledge from specific epistemological locations.

3.3 The Desire for Contact and Its Frustration

Extant research found that among international students there is usually a strong desire to achieve contact, friendship and social engagement with the host nationals (Brown 2009a, b; Holmes 2007; Lewthwaite 1996; Marginson 2014). Friendship in general has been noted as an important factor contributing to emotional well-being and successful adjustment in international sojourn (Wiseman 1997). Among three broad categories of friendly connections in the context of international educational sojourn, namely, those with the host nationals, with co-nationals, and with people from other nationalities (Bochner et al. 1977; Dyal and Dyal 1981), meaningful contact and friendly engagement with the host nationals is believed to be uniquely important because of the actual or perceived benefits it brings to the international students (Brown 2009a).

In this context, "meaningful contact" may be taken to mean the opposite of those superficial contacts that do not create some form of positive impacts on the student-sojourners. Lorraine Brown (2009a) suggests that meaningful contact between local hosts and international students should ideally bring to the latter "improved language capability, increased satisfaction with the total student experience and greater host communicative competence" (p. 184). However, as I show in the ethnographic sections later, meaningfulness is in fact a notion actively contemplated and constructed by the PRC scholars in their narratives about their contact with the Singaporeans, and it actually plays a key role in the former's neo-Occidentalist discourses about the latter.

In extant scholarship, there is also a widely documented lack of interaction among different student groups in the multicultural campuses of higher education institutions located in the global north (see Brown 2009a, p. 185 for a review). In specific, researchers point out that international students typically fail to establish meaningful connection with host nationals due to a variety of reasons, including the host nationals' lack of interest in engaging with the former (Brown 2009a; Brown and Holloway 2008; Kashima and Loh 2006; Marginson et al. 2010, Chapters 13–15). This oftentimes leads to a sense of "deep disillusionment" (Brown 2009b, p. 439) in international students who expect highly from such contact, and cause them to fall back onto social networks which involve mostly their co-nationals (Brown 2009a; Brown and Holloway 2008), effectively resulting in a phenomenon of "ghettoisation" (Kim 1988) that defeats the many proclaimed advantages and benefits associated with higher education internationalisation and global student mobility (Dall'Alba and Sidhu 2013; De Vita 2005). More worryingly, as I now turn to show, the lack of interaction also seems to be dialectically intertwined with the development of stereotypes and essentialising discourses.

3.4 PRC Scholars' Neo-Occidentalist Images of Their Singaporean Host: Ethnographic Snapshots

In as far as the PRC scholars in UIS are also international student-sojourners, they were not always exempted from the issues reported in the wider scholarly literature, but there are unique features specific to their case. While Singapore's relative geographical and cultural proximity to China arguably renders it a less alienating place for the PRC scholars and undoubtedly makes the latter's sojourn adjustment process less difficult, there could be other pitfalls. The significant presence of PRC "foreign talent" students in UIS offers them the tempting option to stay cooped up in their own comfort zones, while Singaporean students' campus culture further contributes to the lack of meaningful engagement and the mutual misunderstanding between the Chinese students and their hosts, amidst which, neo-Occidentalist stereotyping becomes a real hazard.

3.4.1 On not Getting "High"

Although not all my informants made equally strong assertions, they generally agreed that as foreign students they should aim to establish interaction and connection with their Singaporean host, regardless how they currently evaluated their degree of success at doing so. In an interview, I probed my interlocutor Gao Mei (pseudonym, F, 19, mathematics major) by asking her: As a Chinese "foreign talent" scholar in Singapore, even without such interactions and connections you would have virtually no problem, so why is interaction important? Her answer piqued my interest: "Interaction [*jiaoliu*] perhaps is not very important [*zhongyao de*]. But I think it's a must [*bixu de*]! Or I should say it's an obligation [*yiwu*]". I then further pursued by asking what in her opinion constituted meaningful interaction with the locals, and there came her even more interesting reply: "Perhaps meaningful interaction with them is being able to get "high" together with them [*gen tamen yiqi* high]. But we can't seem to…"

What is the meaning of this getting "high", which in Gao Mei's opinion seemed to be an obstacle to PRC scholars' achievement of meaningful connection with local Singaporeans in UIS?

Previous research (Bochner et al. 1977; Kuh 1995; Toyokawa and Toyokawa 2002) has noted the importance of Extra-Curricular Activities (ECA) as a valuable opportunity for international students to meet and interact with host nationals, and to possibly establish meaningful connections. When Gao Mei mentioned "getting high", it turned out she was exactly referring to her observation of the Singaporean university students in the context of ECAs and the PRC scholars' difficulties of connecting with them.

In regard to ECAs, the university campus culture in Singapore seems to bear the imprints of Anglo-American university campus cultural forms (see Nathan 2005):

"orientation camps" with outrageous pranks; (Resident) Hall Junior Common Room Committees (JCRCs) and their social events; myriad kinds of university-wide sociocultural societies; and sports-related student clubs with dedicated members who train to the neglect of study… Whether these were manifestations of Singapore's colonial hangover in the realm of education or the effects of more recent institutional osmosis in the process of higher education globalisation, such colourful campus ECA cultures inevitably come across as somewhat alien to the PRC scholars, whose previous schooling experiences consisted primarily of the highly disciplined life in the Chinese senior middle schools (Yang 2016).

In sharing living and learning spaces in the UIS campus, the PRC scholars' more studious disposition and sedentary lifestyles bring into relief the generally more physically and socially active characteristics of the Singaporean students. Some of my informants self-stereotypically characterised the PRC scholars as being somewhat *zhai*, or antisocial in the sense of preferring to stay mostly in dorm rooms to study or to consume Internet-based entertainments such as watching movies or playing computer games. Thus, although living amidst Singaporeans and other international students in more than a dozen resident halls in UIS, PRC scholars are typically not well knit into the hall communities, and the hall JCRCs and their activities tend to be the exclusive domain of the local students. The local students' greater enthusiasm for ECA activities such as orientation camps, sports competitions and so forth, thus stands out in the Chinese scholars' observation and perception.

The "orientation" activities may serve here as an example to illustrate how judgmental perceptions and stereotypical images could take shape. My PRC scholar informants expressed a spectrum of views regarding the orientation activities that they either went through or observed with cold eyes at the beginning of their university lives; while some suggested they had fun, most informants seemed to hold more ambivalent attitudes. What Zhou Peng (pseudonym, M, 23, final year engineering major) said in our interview was representative of the views at the negative end of the spectrum:

> The orientations were just silly: running around the campus, crawling in muddy grounds, blind-folding you and pressing your head into toilet bowls…all that kind of stuff. […] I wish they could do something more meaningful, more cultural, more sophisticated [*you shendu*], you know. But the locals seem to enjoy it so much, they get so *high* [sic, in English] on it! I can't fathom what get them so high on these activities…

Zhou Peng's judgmental tone was not shared to the same extent by most other PRC scholars I talked to, but even for those informants who told me they did participate in their "Hall Orientation Camp" and so on and thought them fun, they also often expressed amazement at how energetic, how "crazy" [*feng*], and how "high" the local Singaporean students could get. As they told me, to take part in the orientation camps often involved staying awake for long hours to play physically demanding sports or prankish and embarrassing "ice-breaking" games, which are topped up by "lame" joke-telling, collective singing, cheering and all sorts of compulsory jovial rowdiness. Although by self-selection those PRC

scholars who took part in such events tended to have extroverted personalities, even they found keeping up with Singaporeans' "high" spirit during these activities somewhat taxing. From several informants' detailed descriptions of their experiences in these orientation camps, I figured that they tended to remain at the margins of these events, and their not being able to get as "high" might have come across as a bit of a spoiler or put off for the Singaporeans. Viewing these orientation camps and similar events from an anthropological perspective, it may be posited that their core function is to reinforce social bonding and feelings of camaraderie through the deliberate use of embarrassing and "silly" activities to tear up people's masked social performance and staged personas (Goffman 1969). Yet, because the PRC scholars are little acquainted with the rules, codes and scripts in such ritualised bond-building activity—after all a lot of these are rooted in Singaporean English and specific local cultural idioms—to them, these events have the reverse effect of alienation. As a result, even for those PRC scholars who tried to get "high" together with the Singaporeans, they mostly end up regarding getting "high" this way somewhat "silly" [*sha*] and "pointless" [*meiyisi*]. Consequently, a stereotypical image of the Singaporean students as a people prone to getting "high" on pointless ECA activities begin to form in the minds of some.

The failure for jokes or humour to effectively translate across sociocultural and linguistic boundaries was another issue mentioned by a handful of my informants on separate occasions—jokes that seemed to set Singaporean students on a "high" laughing trip often seemed to them rather "lame" or anticlimactic, resulting in puzzlement and social awkwardness. A female informant once remarked, in what came across to me as a genuine tone of bewilderment:

> The locals like to "auto-high" [*zi*-high]: they get together, in classroom, or in the hall common room…and suddenly they burst out laughing and excited among themselves. Sometimes even when I heard their jokes or whatever, I wonder: is it really that funny? How can they get so high?

Intrigued by this image of Singaporean students being "high" among some PRC scholars, I asked other informants to see if they held a similar impression; it turned out not a small number echoed in one way or another, "Oh ya, locals are very high [*low-co hen* high]!" For the majority, this tended to be a casual remark they made with a smile as a small point of curiosity, but a small handful of interlocutors would connect Singaporeans' being "high" in various manners to more pejorative notions of being "silly" [*sha*] or "shallow" [*qianbo*], thus revealing the hazardous potential of social stereotyping.

One informant, Yuntao (pseudonym, M, 21), who agreed with the impression of Singaporeans being "high" like other PRC scholars nevertheless offered what seemed to me a valuable insight that did not come out of most other informants. The semester before, Yuntao had a Chinese Singaporean as roommate, and during this time he heard many interesting tales from his "roomie" about the experiences of serving as a soldier in Singapore's armed forces—a two-year National Service (NS) compulsory for all male Singaporean citizens upon completing secondary education. Yuntao believed that the army culture which—though he was not using any sociological jargon—seemed to imbue the NS men with certain kinds

of macho styles and comradely ethos helped explain the "high" behaviours of the (male) Singaporean students that apparently puzzled some PRC scholars, including himself initially. In a psychological research study, Kurman and Ronen-Eilon (2004) identify a positive correlation between the lack of knowledge of the host culture's social axioms and the adaptation difficulties among immigrants; in this light, the Nation Service which virtually all local male university students have undergone seems a good example of the axiomatic experiences in Singaporean culture that many PRC scholars lacked knowledge of.

Furthermore, in contrast to the more conventional notions of masculinity—based on physical prowess and homosociality—that underpin the perceived "high" behaviours of the (male) Singaporeans, researchers of Chinese society and education have found the notion "literary masculinity" (Kipnis 2011; Louie 2002) useful in describing an alternative concept of the masculine in China which associates literary finesse, bookishness, learnedness, intellectual accomplishment with social worthiness of the male gender. For the small number of my informants—virtually all male—who interpreted Singaporeans' stereotypical "high" behaviours as signs of their being "stupid", "brawn over brain" and "intellectually inferior", it seems the concept of literary masculinity, ingrained in the Chinese "foreign talents" through their Chinese educational history, offers a plausible explanation.

In any case, as "foreign talent" in receipt of Singapore government's scholarships, the PRC scholars continue to attach high importance to academic excellence, which attitude further inflects their observation and interpretations of the Singaporean students. Thus, despite their awareness that their connection and integration with their Singaporean peers in the university campus would require their acceptance of or even participation in the "high" student culture, most PRC scholars still seemed somewhat instinctively resistant. Gao Mei, the girl who first brought to my attention the image of Singaporeans being "high" by defining meaningful connection as getting "high" together with them, nevertheless confessed:

> I guess I don't really like their way of getting high. They are like…for example, the JCRC people gather at 2 am, and sing songs loud (as part of some group games or party), but I want to sleep, have to go to lectures early tomorrow morning! And the problem is their way of getting high seems so silly: singing, jumping around… Don't get me wrong, I think they are all nice people, but I don't see how I can join them and get high in their way…I'd be thinking to myself "What am I doing?!"

Examining this discourse of the PRC scholars regarding their initial perceptions of their Singaporean hosts reveals the intercultural university campus as a potentially hazardous terrain with many hidden traps for stereotypical images of the "other" to develop. The confidence (or hubris) that some PRC scholars in UIS derive from their superior academic abilities comparative to their Singaporean peers reinforces certain stereotypical image of the latter.

However, negatively stereotyping the "other" could also be seen as a strategy to cope with the senses of frustration arising from the failure to forge connections with the "other"—this failure arises in the first place out of the Chinese students' lack of local knowledge, but it subsequently gets re-entrenched in further processes

of stereotyping. On the other hand, those campus ECA activities in which many Singaporeans get "high" amongst themselves can easily marginalise or exclude other international students such as the PRC scholars; thus, those among my interlocutors who adopted overtly judgmental views on local students on these matters may be seen as exercising an offensive defence against perceived marginalisation and exclusion—even though they seldom consciously admitted as such.

3.4.2 The Fault of Scholarly Subjectivity?

Other than motivated by a semi-conscious process of social psychological defence, the moral–ideological subjectivities embodied by the Chinese scholars also seem to play a role in shaping their perceptions of their Singaporean peers. Among a handful of my informants, I noticed a discourse that extended the pejorative judgments of Singaporean students in the settings of ECA or university campus culture to a wider sociocultural context. In relation to this, the most trenchant remark I came across during the fieldwork probably came from Yushu (pseudonym, M, 23), a final year engineering major.

Although Yushu studied engineering like virtually all other PRC scholars, he had a broad range of intellectual interests in the social sciences and humanities. When I visited his dorm room, I noticed the shelves above his desk were filled up with Chinese books on topics ranging from history to literature to popular sociology. Yushu joked to me that based on his self-motived learning, the UIS registrar should add "Minor in History" on his degree certificate. While chatting casually before we started our interview, he pulled out the Chinese version of Lee Kuan Yew's memoir *The Singapore Story* from the shelf and told me he had finished reading that not long ago; he then added: "I don't think any of the Singaporeans in UIS has even read this!" In the subsequent interview, I was somewhat struck by Yushu's directness when he commented on Singaporeans:

> Well, most of them don't have enough "cultivation" [*xiuyang bugou*]. I'm not talking about all Singaporeans, I'm talking about those I found around me in the first two years of uni. When we [PRC scholars] talk we talk about politics, international affairs and so on… But what do Singaporeans care about? They just care about which restaurant is good, which celebrity is releasing a new album, when the new iPhone is to be released or what bag looks nice, and things like that. Intellectually we are not at the same level, so, normal interaction is ok, but you can't have deep interaction with them.

Yushu accepted my request of interview with an earnest and serious attitude, and I did not detect in his tone or mannerism any trace of levity or sarcasm. This excerpt was Yushu's reply to my question asking him to self-evaluate his success in establishing meaningful connections with local Singaporeans at UIS, and his implicit position was that his lack of success in this regard—which he admitted—was not due to a lack of initiative, will or ability, but because he did not find the local students his intellectual equals. Therefore, there was perhaps still a justificatory or defensive character to his statement. But importantly, more than

a dismissive Occidentalist caricature of the Singaporean "Other" per se, Yushu's critique seemed to me to be targeted rather at what he saw as the vulgar consumerism and lack of cultural depth of the Singapore society in general. In other words, for PRC scholars like Yushu who otherise their Singaporean hosts in apparently uncharitable ways, it was possible to read their interpretations as infused, or perhaps confused, with a kind of critical commentary that is in fact sociological.

But oftentimes, the critiques of Singapore can unfortunately slip into sounding like critiques aimed at Singaporeans. Wen Shu's (pseudonym, F, 20, Maritime Studies major) following comment—amidst our wide-ranging interview in which I asked her to reflect on the implication of her Chinese education background for studying in Singapore—seems to illustrate this point:

> I'm very grateful to the education back in China because it laid down for me a very strong foundation in language/literature [*yuwen de jichu*]. It was only after coming to Singapore I realise that if you ask a Singaporean to speak for an uninterrupted hour in one language they won't be able to do it! And I don't think that's good. Education back in China also opened my mind to the world of literature and ideas. It has positive influences on me, so that after coming to Singapore I'm at least not so totally overwhelmed by the materialism [*wuzhi de dongxi*] here. Life here is very stressful, and when I get nervous, I will recite some classic Chinese poetry or prose, that makes my mind peaceful.

Wen Shu's comment about the Singaporean not being able to speak in one language for an hour captures a view that tends to occur to some Chinese students which regards Singaporeans' linguistic hybridity (Deterding 2007) as evidence of the speaker's lack of articulacy and depth of knowledge. The mix-and-match linguistic practice of the Singaporeans invokes the Chinese idiom "wide but not deep" [*bo'er bujin*], which met Wen Shu's disapproval. But she then turned to speaking about how having a deep and rich literary tradition—reciting classic Chinese poetry or prose—enabled her to cope with the overwhelmingly stressful materialism of the Singapore society, which was basically a sociological rumination.

Wen Shu's comment exemplifies the moral–ideological dimension of the Chinese schooling subjectification regime at its most successful; she drew from traditional Chinese literature as a moral–ideological resource to tame unruly desires that manifest in her anxiety and nervousness in response to Singapore's seductive and engulfing materialism—an act that may verily be described in Foucauldian terms as a "technology of the self" (Foucault 1988). As I argue elsewhere (Yang 2014c, Chap. 3), the normalisation of desire visited upon the students by Chinese middle schooling inculcates in them certain characteristic sets of ideological rhetoric, of which both Yushu's and Wen Shu's interview comments quoted above may be regarded as examples. The search for worth in life; the quest for intellectual profundity; the pursuit of high moral ideals; the personal assuming of national and historical responsibilities… all such highbrow rhetoric are valued tropes and imaginaries in Chinese students' literary, moral and sociopolitical education, which induct them into certain ideologised and sentimentalised discursive habits, despite its apparent contradiction with the ethos of pragmatism and utilitarianism that Chinese schooling also engenders. I argue that it is these

moral–ideological discursive habits that got activated when my PRC scholar informants encounter the Singaporean "other" amidst failures to achieve meaningful communication and connection, and led them to develop a discourse that castigates their Singaporean peers as "shallow". The more deeply ingrained such moral–ideological discursive habits in the Chinese student, the more likely their perceptions of the Singaporeans and the Singapore society are to be inflected in such ways. In other words, the more successful and "good" students they were back in China, perhaps the more the PRC scholars are likely to Occidentalise their Singaporean peers in patronising ways. Yushu and Wen Shu exhibited these subjectivities perhaps more than most other scholars, but I found many PRC scholars in my study showed more or less such characteristics.

Junheng, a somewhat sentimental young man who was already in his 3rd year as a physics major at the mere age of 19 (having accelerated his progress because of outstanding academic abilities), also instantiates the moral–ideological subjectivity when he spoke about his perceived inability to connect with Singaporean peers in the university:

> Here [Singapore] human connection is not deep. We can only talk to other PRC students. Together we can talk about life [*shengcun*], philosophy [*zhexue*], ideals [*lixiang*]… But we can't talk about these things with Singaporeans, even if we want to. They just don't seem to talk about these things. So you can only talk about very superficial stuff.

In fact, Yushu, the informant who strikingly characterised the Singaporeans he observed in the context of UIS as lacking in "cultivation", also demonstrated certain latent awareness of how his own educational subjectivities and his being a subject of the broader Chinese sociocultural and political milieu subtly conditioned his views of the Singaporeans. Upon hearing his striking comment, I put to him the follow-up question "Why do you think Singaporeans have less 'cultivation'?" to which he replied:

> In an advanced country (like Singapore), when the people are generally well-to-do and content, they don't need to care about too much, they just need to enjoy life. […] In China, we live in an atmosphere saturated which political economy…that's why we Chinese think so much. We are always thinking about our own future, as well as our nation's. […] Perhaps also has to do with education—from very young, the school and teachers always told us to care about public affairs, the nation… to read poetry, to read world classics, to make ourselves sophisticated.

Arguably, there is a logical fallacy in both Junheng's and Yushu's discourses as I quoted above: having failed to deeply engage with or to be engaged by their Singaporean peers in the university context—whoever's "fault" that might be—the only subjects that they have deep thoughtful connections with are in fact themselves and other PRC scholars, hence leading to the inevitable conclusion that they "think so much". The Singaporean students in UIS as an Occidentalised figure, whose deeper thoughts the PRC scholars do not get to know because of the failure to connect, becomes flattened into the stereotypical image based on the Chinese students' superficial observation of the locals amidst limited contacts.

In the final analysis, I argue nevertheless, underlying some PRC scholars' apparently dismissive or belittling Occidentalisation of their local host is a demonstrable

desire for deep connection and the frustration of this very desire. The stereotypical imaginations held by the small number of PRC scholars in UIS ought to be interpreted not as intentional ill will but as a self-protective retrospective rationalisation and justification of the failure of engagement in a multicultural university campus.

3.5 Conclusion

To briefly conclude, in this chapter I have examined the development of neo-Occidentalist stereotypes among Mainland Chinese scholarship receiving undergraduate students in Singapore who fail to achieve understanding of and meaningful connection with their local Singaporean peers in the setting of a university campus. I have reported on some rather controversial discourses emerging from the "PRC scholars" about their local peers that were not only essentialising but also occasionally offensive to show the potential hazards that attend international educational mobility and intercultural contact. In critically describing these neo-Occidentalist discourses and their emergence, my hope has been to render clearer how misunderstanding and stereotyping occur, which insight may aid us in better navigating a social world characterised by more but not fewer pitfalls of Orientalism, Occidentalism and exoticism due to the deepening of globalisation and mobility.

References

Adler, P. S. (1975). The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 15*(4), 13–23.

Agar, M. (1996). *Language shock: Understanding the culture of conversation*. New York, NY: Harper Paperbacks.

Altbach, P. G. (2007). Twinning and branch campuses: The professorial obstacle. *International Higher Education, 48*(summer), 2–3.

Aveni, V. A. P. (2005). *Study abroad and second language use: Constructing the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blok, A. (2001). *Narcissism of small differences*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bochner, S., McLeod, B. M., & Lin, A. (1977). Friendship patterns of overseas students. *International Journal of Psychology, 12*(4), 277–294.

Bourdieu, P. (1979/1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). London: Routledge.

Brooks, R., & Waters, J. (2011). *Student mobilities, migration and the internationalization of higher education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brown, L. (2008). Language and anxiety: an ethnographic study of international postgraduate students. *Evaluation & Research in Education, 21*(2), 75–95.

Brown, L. (2009a). An ethnographic study of the friendship patterns of international students in England: An attempt to recreate home through conational interaction. *International Journal of Educational Research, 48*, 184–193.

Brown, L. (2009b). A failure of communication on the cross-cultural campus. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 13*(4), 439–454.

Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008). The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university. *Journal of Research in International Education, 7*(2), 232–249.

Byram, M., & Dervin, F. (Eds.). (2008). *Students, staff and academic mobility in higher education*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
Carrier, J. G. (1995a). Introduction. In J. G. Carrier (Ed.), *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (pp. 1–32). Oxford: Clarendon.
Carrier, J. G. (Ed.). (1995b). *Occidentalism: Images of the West*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Coates, J. (2013). Everyday mobility: The normalization of China-Japan migratory flows and their 'everyday practice'. *International Review of Social Research, 3*(1), 7–26.
Cushner, K., & Karim, A. U. (2004). Study abroad at the university level. In D. Landis, J. Bennett, & M. Bennet (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (3rd ed., pp. 289–308). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Dall'Alba, G., & Sidhu, R. (2013). Australian undergraduate students on the move: Experiencing outbound mobility. *Studies in Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/03075079.2013.842212.
Davie, S. (2010, 11 November). Singapore attracting fewer foreign students. *The Straits Times*.
De Vita, G. (2005). Fostering intercultural learning through multicultural group work. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all* (pp. 75–83). London: Routledge.
Dervin, F., Gajardo, A., & Lavanchy, A. (Eds.). (2011). *Politics of interculturality*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
Deterding, D. (2007). *Singapore English*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Doherty, C., & Singh, P. (2005). *International student subjectivities: Biographical investments for liquid times*. Paper presented at the AARE education research conference 'Creative Dissent: Constructive Solutions'. University of Western Sydney, Parramatta Campus, Australia.
Dyal, J. A., & Dyal, R. Y. (1981). Acculturation stress and coping: Some implications for research and education. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 5*(4), 301–328.
Fong, V. (2011). *Paradise redefined: Transnational Chinese students and the quest for flexible citizenship in the developed world*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self. In L. H. Martin, H. Gutman, & P. H. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of the self* (pp. 16–49). London: Tavistock.
Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1968). *The discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
Goffman, E. (1969). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Allen Lane.
Gu, Q., & Maley, A. (2008). Changing places: A study of Chinese students in the UK. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 8*(4), 224–245.
Holmes, P. (2004). Negotiating differences in learning and intercultural communication: Ethnic Chinese students in a New Zealand university. *Business Communication Quarterly, 67*(3), 294–307.
Holmes, P. (2007). Ethnic Chinese students' communication with cultural others in a New Zealand university. *Communication Education, 54*(4), 289–311.
Kashima, E., & Loh, E. L. P. (2006). International students' acculturation: Effects of international, conational, and local ties and need for closure. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 30*(4), 471–485.
Kim, Y. Y. (1988). *Communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
Kipnis, A. (2011). *Governing educational desire: Culture, politics and schooling in China*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
Koh, A. (2003). Global flows of foreign talent: Identity anxieties in Singapore's ethnoscape. *Sojourn, 18*(2), 230–256.
Koh, A. (2012). Tactics of interventions: Student mobility and human capital building in Singapore. *Higher Education Policy, 25*, 191–206.
Kuh, G. D. (1995). The other curriculum: Out-of-class experiences associated with student learning and personal development. *Journal of Higher Education, 66*(2), 123–155.
Kurman, J., & Ronen-Eilon, C. (2004). Lack of knowledge of a culture's social axioms and adaptation difficulties among immigrants. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 35*(2), 192–208.
Lee, K. Y. (2000). *From Third World to First: The Singapore story, 1965-2000*. Singapore: Harper Collins Publishers.
Lewthwaite, M. (1996). A study of international students' perspectives on cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 19*(2), 167–185.

Louie, K. (2002). *Theorising Chinese masculinity: Society and gender in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Low, L. (2002). The political economy of migrant worker policy in Singapore. *Asia Pacific Business Review, 8*(4), 95–118.
Marginson, S. (2014). Student self-formation in international education. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 18*(1), 6–22.
Marginson, S., Nyland, C., Sawir, E., & Forbes-Mewett, H. (2010). *International student security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Naidoo, V. (2009). Transnational higher education: A stock take of current activity. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 13*(3), 310–330.
Nathan, R. (2005). *My freshman year: What a professor learned by becoming a student*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Ng, P. T., & Tan, C. (2010). The Singapore Global Schoolhouse: An analysis of the development of the tertiary education landscape in Singapore. *International Journal of Educational Management, 24*(3), 178–188.
Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
Ryan, J., & Carroll, J. (2005). 'Canaries in the Coalmine': International students in western universities. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all*. Abingdon: Routledge.
Ryan, M. E., & Twibell, R. S. (2000). Concerns, values, stress, coping, health and educational outcomes of college students who studied abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24*, 409–435.
Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
Sidhu, R. (2006). *Universities and globalisation: To market, to market*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Toyokawa, T., & Toyokawa, N. (2002). Extracurricular activities and the adjustment of Asian international students: A study of Japanese students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 26*(4), 363–379.
Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity.
Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.). Hove: Routledge.
Wiseman, H. (1997). Far away from home: The loneliness experience of overseas students. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 16*(3), 277–298.
Yamazaki, Y. (2005). Learning styles and typologies of cultural differences: A theoretical and empirical comparison. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(5), 521–548.
Yang, P. (2013a). Pt II: Why Chinese nationals and S'poreans don't always get along. Retrieved December 11, 2013, from http://www.singapolitics.sg/news/pt-iiwhy-chinese-nationals-and-sporeans-dont-always-get-along.
Yang, P. (2013b). Why Chinese nationals and S'poreans don't always get along. Retrieved December 11, 2013, from http://www.singapolitics.sg/views/why-chinese-nationals-and-sporeans-dont-always-get-along.
Yang, P. (2014a). Privilege, prejudice, predicament: The 'PRC scholars' in Singapore—An overview. *Frontiers of Education in China, 9*(3), 350–376.
Yang, P. (2014b). "Authenticity" and "Foreign Talent" in Singapore: The relative and negative logic of national identity. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia, 29*(2), 402–437.
Yang, P. (2014c). "Foreign Talent": Desire and Singapore's China scholars. (Doctor of Philosophy), University of Oxford, Oxford.
Yang, P. (2016). 'Eliteness' in Chinese schooling: towards an ethnographic approach. In C. Maxwell & P. Aggleton (Eds.), *Elite Education. International Perspectives* (pp. 135–147). Abingdon: Routledge.
Yeoh, B. S. A., & Lin, W. (2013). Chinese migration to Singapore: Discourses and discontents in a globalizing nation-state. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal, 22*(1), 31–53.
Zhang, Z., & Brunton, M. (2007). Differences in living and learning: Chinese International students in New Zealand. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 11*(2), 124–140.