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**Cultural Capital and Distinction:
Malaysian Students and Recent Graduates
of UK International Tertiary Education**

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A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the PhD in Sociology

The University of Edinburgh

2013

Declaration of Original Authorship

I declare that the thesis has been composed by me and that the work is entirely my own. The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. A small section of the thesis was recently published in the special issue on Education and Social Mobility in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (Vol. 34, No. 5-6, pp. 848-867).

I Lin Sin

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of foreign cultural capital, that is, Western knowledge, skills, dispositions and qualifications obtained through various modes of UK international tertiary education in facilitating social reproduction and mobility. The focus is on Malaysian young adults from middle-class backgrounds. It offers a critical exploration of the intricacies and contradictions surrounding the applicability of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in explaining occupational and status distinction across different geographical and socio-relational contexts in Malaysia and the UK. Drawing on interviews with three samples of Malaysian students and recent graduates of UK tertiary education, I explored the anticipation and experiences of the rewards and disadvantages of undertaking international education in the UK and Malaysia. I investigated the planned and executed strategies to secure superior employment and status. I studied the intersection of class with age, ethnicity, gender, nationality and religion in structuring educational and occupational choices, practices and experiences. I explored perceptions and feelings of worth that surrounded planned and actual practices of translating cultural capital to economic and social privileges.

Studying overseas in an elite UK university was believed to offer the most privileged opportunities to gain better quality education, experience a higher valued culture, lifestyle, social mix and physical landscape in the West and independently embark on a journey of personal growth and self-discovery. Graduates who studied physically in the UK were generally confident of their labour market and status advantages and saw themselves as more knowledgeable and globally exposed than those pursuing UK education in Malaysia. The latter believed that their relative labour market strengths lay in their enhancement and appropriation of more common local cultural capital in the forms of local knowledge, interaction skills and cultural sensitivity. Flexible and moderate personalisation of foreign and local cultural capital embodied in the self, alongside appropriate deployment and adornment of the physical body, provided the

solution for the participants to overcome the relative limitations of the knowledge, skills and dispositions acquired through their respective modes of UK studies. Age, ethnicity and gender were perceived and experienced as significant factors shaping inclusion and exclusion in the Malaysian labour market. Nationality and ethnicity were the significant factors for labour market inclusion and exclusion in the UK. There was a general desire to convert enhanced cultural capital into occupational and status opportunities that allowed for work-life balance, personal contentment, religious fulfilment, emotional security and contribution to society.

The thesis contributes to problematising the taken-for-granted singularity of cultural capital practices, showing that their associated benefits and shortcomings do not transfer smoothly across different place, situational and interactional contexts. It challenges the assumption that the scarcity and exclusivity of foreign cultural capital bring labour market advantage in the home context and it highlights the functional value of more common local cultural capital. It accounts for instrumentality and deliberateness in capital accumulation strategies as well as casts light on the principles, values and preferences which set limits to strategies of maximising material gains. It pieces together the practices, relations and feelings occurring at different points of the academic and occupational trajectories for the diverse Malaysian foreign student and graduate middle-class. It essentially adds depth and complexity to the investigation of intersecting individual, socio-relational and structural factors that shape perceived possibilities and experienced actualities of middle-class social reproduction and mobility among Malaysian students and graduates of UK international education. The thesis has important policy implications for the development of an equitable opportunity system in Malaysia and the socially responsible marketing and provision of international tertiary education in Malaysia and the UK.

Glossary of Abbreviations

2MP	Second Malaysia Plan
9MP	Ninth Malaysia Plan
APIIT	Asia-Pacific University College of Technology and Innovation
ATC	Advance Tertiary College
BERNAMA	<i>Pertubuhan Berita Nasional Malaysia</i> (Malay: National News Agency of Malaysia)
CPPS	Centre of Public Policy Studies, Malaysia
EPU	Economic Planning Unit, Malaysia
F	Female
GBP	Great British Pound
ICOM	International College of Music
KDU	<i>Kolej Universiti Damansara Utama</i> (Malay: Damansara Utama University College)
LSE	London School of Economics
M	Male
MoE	Ministry of Education, Malaysia
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia
MoHR	Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia
NEAC	National Economic Advisory Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development
TARC	Tunku Abdul Rahman University College

UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UoL	University of London
UON	University of Nottingham
UWE	University of the West of England

Chapter 1 Exploring Cultural Capital and Distinction

This thesis investigates the role of cultural capital, acquired through various modes of UK international tertiary education, in facilitating the social reproduction and mobility of Malaysian students and recent graduates from middle-class backgrounds. The benefits of owning cultural capital, that is, exclusive competence, objects, dispositions and qualifications through participation in elite education have been widely argued in the literature. The argument, conceived by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and applied and extended by many states that access to privileged economic capital provides opportunities to accumulate cultural capital which can be converted into superior employment and status, thereby, maintaining and improving economic and social advantages for the individual. Much of the existing research, however, has analysed the rewards of cultural capital acquired through education in Western settings. The ways and extent to which cultural capital transfers and converts to occupational and status privileges across different geographical, interactional and situational contexts have not been explored in detail. My thesis addresses this gap through the presentation of findings from primary qualitative interviews with 36 Malaysian students and recent graduates of various modes of UK tertiary education programmes.

Addressing Gaps in the Study of Foreign Cultural Capital and Distinction

A prominent trend in the global education marketplace has been the strong rising demand from middle-class students in Asia for Western tertiary education. While this phenomenon traditionally involves the cross-border movement of international students from Asia to advanced, English-speaking Western countries (Ong 1999; Waters 2005; Andressen 1993), offshore and transnational modes of study allowing Western international education to be undertaken completely or mostly in the home country have become increasingly popular. An offshore study arrangement enables the international student to pursue a Western degree at the branch campus of the foreign university located in the home country. On the other hand, the transnational mode allows the

undertaking of Western international education at a Malaysian private higher learning institution for a degree jointly awarded by the institution and the foreign partner university. Widened access to Western tertiary education has important implications for how practices of distinction are understood and acted out by the middle-class from Asia. The few studies such as Waters (2010; 2009; 2006; 2005), Sin (2009) and Kim (2011) that have extended Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to the field of international education showed that the acquisition of foreign cultural capital onshore, that is, through studying physically in the Western host country, generally bolstered confidence in the Asian students and graduates interviewed in their chances of securing superior employment and status opportunities in the home country.

The focus in the limited literature has for the most part been on the positive exchange value of Western cultural capital in the Asian home context, thus neglecting that certain dimensions of Western cultural capital can have negative consequences on occupational and status reproduction and mobility across geographical locations. The focus on onshore international students in Western countries and returned onshore graduates in Asia reflects a common assumption in the literature that international students engage in cross-border mobility to undertake foreign education and will return to their home country upon graduation. This obscures the existence of a lower-middle class group of international education consumers physically rooted in the home country, specifically offshore and transnational students and their graduate counterparts. They face a different set of advantages and disadvantages in translating their foreign cultural capital to privileged economic and social outcomes in the local labour market. The neglect of another group, onshore students who remained to work in the host country after graduation, also masks the heterogeneity and status differentials of the foreign student and graduate middle class.

Recent works by Waters and Leung (2013a; 2013b; 2012) have begun to pay attention to the practices and experiences of foreign cultural capital accumulation and

activation among more modest middle-class students and graduates involved in UK international education outside of the UK, specifically, within the Hong Kong context. No study to date has pieced together the strategies and experiences that surround the pursuit of academic and occupational distinction linked to various acquisition modes for foreign cultural capital within UK international education and its utilisation across multiple place and socio-relational contexts. While class has received most attention in the literature on foreign cultural capital as a salient factor in influencing educational and occupational choices, experiences and outcomes, less is known about how it can intertwine with other social divisions such as gender, ethnicity and age. Another shortcoming in the literature is the tendency to treat students' projections and strategies for a graduate future as a definite reality that will unfold once they graduate. This ignores the difference between anticipations and experiences, perceptions and actualities. The study which this thesis is based on attempts to fill the numerous research gaps identified here.

My research aims were to investigate the strategies used and intended to be used by Malaysian students and recent graduates of different modes of UK tertiary education in securing superior employment and status across various place and socio-relational contexts. I explored, through qualitative methodology, the apparent intersection of class with ethnicity, gender, age, nationality and religion in framing opportunities and experiences of educational, occupational and status advantages in addition to disadvantages for individuals of various middle-class backgrounds and social divisions. Related to this was the aim of uncovering the perceptions and feelings that surround practices and relations of distinction in relation to foreign cultural capital accumulation and utilisation within international education and graduate work.

International Tertiary Education, Meritocracy and Social Exclusion

The involvement of mainly Anglophone universities in advanced Western countries in new modes and partnerships of educational delivery in Asia has opened up

opportunities for more individuals of middle-class backgrounds to obtain Western international education. Malaysia is at the centre of this growth in South-East Asia, representing a leading source of international students from the region who are based outside the UK. Malaysians also traditionally represent the largest group of onshore international students from South-East Asia in the UK with the percentage of students exceeding 45% in 2010 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2013). UK international education obtained onshore tends to occupy the highest position within a perceived hierarchy of prestige in Malaysia (Sin 2009). While education obtained physically in the UK can position an individual higher up in the status hierarchy, the exclusivity of having international education is eroding as more and more Malaysians from middle-class families are able to undertake it without having to leave the home country. In 2008/2009, approximately 40000 Malaysian students were engaged in UK offshore and transnational studies in their home country while some 12000 students studied onshore (Tan 2010; UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2013). The rapid growth of the graduate population and the attendant rising demand for tertiary-level jobs place pressure on the congested home labour market which is not able to provide commensurate expansion in highly skilled job opportunities (World Bank 2011). The complexity of the pursuit for superior employment and status is accentuated by persisting widespread formal and informal institutional and socio-relational practices in Malaysia which open up as well as close off life chance opportunities to Malaysians particularly along the divisive lines of class and ethnicity. Therefore, a positive and linear relationship between Western cultural capital accumulation through UK international education and occupational and status privileges is not as clear cut as commonly presented to be in works detailing the distinction practices of Asian foreign students. Malaysia offers a rich case study to explore the intricacies surrounding this relationship and their implications for the global explanatory power of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital.

Theoretical and Personal Influences

My position in relation to my research is both an insider and outsider. I am a fourth generation Malaysian female of Chinese immigrant descent. I come from a middle-class background and have parents who both attended English-medium schools in Malaysia during the leading and early years of Malaysia's independence from Britain in 1957. Having a Western orientation was and is still valued by my parents, although in recent years, with the economic rise of China, they see a previously unimaginable importance of having at least a passable conversational grasp of Mandarin to enhance labour marketability. Nevertheless, being immersed in the ways of the West, particularly that of the British, is seen as the surest way to preserve class prestige in Malaysia, a country which has experienced substantial nationalisation efforts by the state, but continues to admire the educational, cultural and technological standards and features of the former colonial power. So strong were my parents' beliefs in the positive use value of developing Western dispositions that the speaking of Hokkien, our habitual Chinese dialect, was sidelined by them in favour of conversing in the most proper English they knew at home. None of us in the family understand and speak Mandarin. Similar to many onshore graduates in this study who were in their teens in the 1990s, I and my brother did not consider undertaking tertiary studies in Malaysia as a serious option. This was partly due to the poor quality of education offered. It was a time when there were very few credible foreign transnational programmes available in the country and the foreign offshore education industry was just starting up.

In a way, our parents influenced us to think that more could be done with our lives if we were to pursue Western education overseas. There were occasional mentions of my father's colourful experiences of studies and later, employment in 1960s and 70's London. Observations were made of the perceived respectable and refined speech, manners, demeanour and attire of Western expatriates and holidaymakers in Malaysia. When it came to making a decision on where to pursue our first degrees, I chose Australia, a country closer to our home in Malaysia and perceived to have British

influences, and my brother chose England. I later joined my brother in England for my Masters. Financing two children's overseas education simultaneously I can only imagine was not easy for my then retired father and homemaker mother, but it was the cost they willingly took on to help us "become somebody in life", as I remember my mother put it. The emotional burden of having to take so much from non-working parents' savings was difficult to cope with, a heaviness which I still feel as I am partially reliant on my parents to fund my doctoral studies in Edinburgh. The mixed feelings of hope, ambition, anxiety and self-imposed pressure to make the most of my accumulated cultural capital have been a feature of various stages of my educational journey overseas. While I try to achieve some analytical distance from my interviewees, I feel a sense of closeness to particularly onshore international graduates in this study as I relate to some of their views, feelings and experiences. Therefore, my research is to some extent, personal.

My present study developed from my Honours research which explored international education as a potential tool for permanent migration for Malaysian students in Australia (Sin 2006) and my Masters project which looked into the middle-class practices of distinction of Malaysian students in a British university (Sin 2009). Both studies informed me that the material and social returns of investment in international education are an issue of preoccupation for Malaysians from middle-class families as they seek to better their life chances. As I experienced two brief points of entry into graduate employment between studies, I began to reflect more and more on the exchange value of foreign cultural capital obtained in one country and utilised in another. I began to think of how other students and recent graduates of various combinations of cultural and economic capital manage their life chance pathways. Bourdieu's writings on cultural capital and social reproduction (Bourdieu 1997; 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) and Brown's works on positional conflict theory (2003; 2000; 1995) explaining deliberate strategies to build competitive edge for elite jobs and status became staple readings. These key stages in my life and literature provide the theoretical and conceptual base on which I explored my present research topic.

Outline of Thesis

This chapter has specified the purpose, aims and objectives of the research which this thesis reports. It has provided an overview of the theoretical background and personal contexts which framed my motivations, directions and interpretations for my study. Chapter 2 reviews the theories, concepts and explanations in existing literature which provided the starting point for my investigation of the link between cultural capital acquired from UK international education and the social reproduction and mobility of Malaysian students and recent graduates. Chapter 3 provides background information on Malaysia to provide context for the reading of my thesis. Chapter 4 moves on to describe the interpretivist methodology and qualitative research design of my project. I reflect on the methodological strategies, issues and challenges faced in the data collection and analysis phases of my research. Chapter 5 begins discussion of my interview findings with the presentation of a key point in the thesis which is that the positive and negative exchange values of UK cultural capital are not static and fixed, but are contingent, depending on personal, familial, peer and institutional judgements within particular place and socio-relational contexts. Chapter 6 presents the argument that the anticipated and experienced privileges of accumulating and utilising exclusive foreign cultural capital are relative as there are also disadvantages involved which selective appropriation of more common local cultural capital can help overcome. Chapter 7 points to the perceived and experienced intersection of class with ethnicity, gender, age, nationality and religion as well as the workings of physical capital, that is, body physique and bodily dispositions, in assisting and limiting status differentiation among a heterogeneous foreign student and graduate middle-class. Chapter 8 argues that the pursuit for distinction through cultural capital accumulation and application has personal, familial, emotional, moral and religious boundaries which determine the extent to which positional rewards are desired alongside personal and social incentives. The final chapter concludes this thesis by reiterating the key findings, underlining the contributions, evaluating its implications and suggesting future developments and

directions to understanding foreign cultural capital and Malaysian social mobility and reproduction within a sociology of education framework.

Chapter 2 Cultural Capital, UK International Education and Distinction

Introduction

This chapter lays out the key theories, concepts and studies informing my research on the relationship between cultural capital, acquired through UK tertiary education, and the social reproduction and mobility of UK-educated young adult Malaysians from middle-class backgrounds. I will review literature which extends Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to include foreign cultural capital, obtained through different modes of international education, in explaining aspirations and experiences of occupational and status privileges in various spatial contexts. In addition, I refer to works in line with Brown's positional conflict theory and the related concept of positional advantage to review what has been researched about the use of elite education by the economically privileged to maximise opportunities for limited superior employment and exclusive status. I will also outline key approaches to studying the middle class in Western and Malaysian literature, bringing attention to a relatively new strand of cultural analysis which explores subtle relational practices of status differentiation which are a key focus of my study.

Review of Theories, Concepts and Studies

Cultural Capital and Personalised Capital

The concept of cultural capital associated with Bourdieu's works on educational inequality and social and cultural reproduction is central to my research. Bourdieu (1997) distinguished between three forms of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital consists of a set of acquired and socialised bodily and mental dispositions, such as knowledge, competence, preferences and practical actions, which constitute core properties of the self (Bourdieu 1997:47-50). It can be acquired from parents and the individual's immediate environment through the

gradual process of learning and adapting to particular cultures, rules and norms. The accumulation and ascription of embodied cultural capital provide the necessary foundation from which the individual can draw to appropriately consume cultural goods and aesthetic experiences known as objectified cultural capital. In relation to my research, an example of cultural capital in the objectified state is specialist texts which require prior knowledge to understand and appreciate. In the institutionalised form, cultural capital accords certified recognition of the embodied cultural capital possessed by the individual (Bourdieu 1997:50-51). Examples of institutionalised cultural capital include degree certificates and academic transcripts. Cultural capital in its various forms has an exchange value particularly in the labour market as it can be converted to economic capital, that is, to jobs and income, by serving as a general indicator of suitability for particular employment (Bourdieu 1984). Furthermore, it acts as a status marker, conferring owners of cultural capital with symbolic power to legitimate their values, tastes and practices as superior within a particular site and downplay those possessed by subordinated others (Bourdieu 1984). Exclusive access to superiorly valued cultural capital offers individuals and groups distinction which sets them apart from others who do not occupy the same position of privilege.

Legitimacy to impose certain forms of cultural capital as dominant is established through ongoing power relations within hierarchical social systems which Bourdieu (1984) termed as fields. Fields are where groups compete to maximise resources to monopolise positions of relative advantage. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) described how the field of schooling in France during the 1960s reinforced the legitimacy of the dominant collective by systematically rewarding the embodied cultural capital of middle-class students. The students' embodied cultural capital reflected their privileged personal habitus consisting of valued habitual schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977:40) which were shaped by the family and the immediate social environment since early childhood. As the students were familiar with the dominant cultural capital in school, they were able to perform

well in school examinations and proceed to higher levels of education. On the other hand, their working class counterparts were said to be disadvantaged in the school system as they were ill-prepared to absorb cultural capital different from their own. Bourdieu (1997) theorised that the cultural advantage that middle-class students have translates to economic and social advantages in the labour market as employers of elite jobs value the embodiment of privileged cultural capital.

A common critique of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is that it is vague and general, lacking details of how the individual can employ particular knowledge, skills, dispositions and credentials to achieve desirable employment and status outcomes in a certain context (Sullivan 2001; Lamont & Lareau 1988). Brown and Hesketh (2004:37-38) argued that Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is a rather blunt instrument when applied to explaining recruitment into knowledge jobs, that is, highly skilled and paid jobs requiring innovative and creative application and development of knowledge to produce work outputs. They argued that these jobs are relatively scarce and for which candidates undergo rigorous rounds of selection and elimination. This is because short-listed candidates often share similar hard cultural currencies in the form of advanced credentials and/or work experience on which they capitalise in the job market. Brown and Hesketh (2004:36) explained that personal soft currencies, that is, an individualised set of employer-valued qualities which includes good inter-personal communication skills, self-confidence, drive and a charismatic personality, are equally important. These, together with hard currencies, were said to constitute a unique combination of personal capital which provides finer distinctions between equally privileged holders of valued cultural capital. The key point made is that the conversion of privileged cultural capital to superior income, jobs and status is not a straightforward and deterministic process. It requires ability and choice to individualise strategies aimed at crafting an image of the complete employee which Brown and Hesketh described as having high technical competence, exclusive qualifications and excellent personal soft qualities. Brown and Hesketh (2004:3) also mentioned that graduates manage their personal capital in

different ways, based on their personal integrity, intrinsic interest and need for self-development. This was not qualified with hard evidence and hence it is difficult to evaluate their assertion on graduates' non-pecuniary motivations of enhancing personal capital.

Brown and Hesketh's critique of Bourdieu's cultural capital seems to be directed at the more concrete and tangible aspects of cultural capital to be found in the objectified and institutionalised state. They perhaps understate that the personal capital which they described as crucial to gain a competitive edge over other graduates is fairly similar to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural capital in the embodied form. For example, the art of performing well in a job interview can be attributed to personal embodiment such as valued interaction style, personality and impression management skills which are transmitted from the familial and learning environment and internalised into the self. The only difference seems to be Brown and Hesketh's emphasis on deliberate and rational personalisation of embodied cultural capital, as opposed to Bourdieu's focus on logical, taken-for-granted daily presentation of the embodied self. This reflects their opposing ontological view of the student and graduate. Brown and Hesketh conceptualised the agent as primarily rational with choices constantly weighed up in relation to their efficacy in maximising relative satisfaction while Bourdieu viewed the individual as predisposed to certain routine actions without much deliberate or conscious planning towards a certain instrumental end (Ball 2003:17).

Ball (2003) argued that cultural predispositions and rationalism are not mutually exclusive in shaping middle-class practices and strategies within the education arena. Actions derived from perceived common sense necessity are still made with some degree of practical and material considerations (Ball 2003:23). For example, the capacity to pursue life chance aspirations through participation in higher education is dependent on the availability of sufficient resources to mobilise (Devine 2004). Nevertheless, this does not dismiss the fact that graduates place different degrees of attention and

motivation to utilise and portray a certain combination of hard and soft cultural currencies which may help them outperform comparable others in pursuit of superior economic and symbolic capitals. By exploring the various strategies used by students and recent graduates in my study to obtain desired employment and status outcomes, the findings reveal the relative importance attached to objectified, institutionalised and embodied forms of cultural capital in facilitating the participants' social reproduction and mobility. This gives insights into the role of different dimensions of cultural capital and avoids the analysis of cultural capital as a catch-all concept.

Changing Forms of Exclusion in Tertiary Education and Graduate Employment

I drew on Brown's positional conflict theory (2003; 2000; 1995) to understand the more deliberate and strategic aspects of the accumulation and application of cultural capital in difficult labour market circumstances. The theory offers insights into how competitions for positions of labour market advantage tend to dominate social relations in advanced capitalist economies with the rise of mass higher education and associated overcrowding of graduates in the employment arena. Institutionalised cultural capital in the form of a university degree no longer guarantees a ticket to superior middle-class jobs. Brown (2003; 1995) argued that the inadequate supply of superior jobs in the UK inevitably leads contemporary graduates to compete harder against each other by pursuing exclusive higher level qualifications that would sharpen their positional advantage. Middle-class parents and students are caught in what Brown (2003) described as an opportunity trap where non-participation in the race for higher credentials is not a viable choice as it has dire consequences on economic and status maintenance and inter-generational mobility. This observation ties in with findings from Tomlinson's (2008) interviews with middle-class final year UK undergraduates. The students perceived entering university as an absolute and inevitable necessity as they feared the positional disadvantages of not having higher level academic credentials, knowledge and skills within an increasingly competitive labour market in the UK. Their anxieties were compounded by the concern that their eventual tertiary qualifications

would have a lower symbolic exchange value in the form of elite or honorific status that made them distinct as mass higher education has produced vast amounts of similarly qualified graduates contending for similar sought-after jobs (Tomlinson 2008:55). Therefore, the positional competition for labour market advantage gets increasingly stiffer and fiercer as Brown, with Lauder and Ashton reiterated in the recently published book, "The Global Auction" (2011), with reference to the mismatch of demand and supply of highly skilled and well paid jobs within the global knowledge economy. Expressions such as "war", "intense social conflict", "high stakes", "tournament" and "battle" depict the sheer intensity and deliberateness which were believed by Brown et al. (2011) to engulf middle-class students and graduates who were pressured to achieve status maintenance and mobility.

The line of thought associated with positional conflict theory developed from traditional works by social closure theorists such as Parkin (1979), Collins (1979) and Hirsch (1977) on the entrenchment of institutionalised inequalities in education and work. Parkin (1979:48) observed that apart from properties, academic and professional qualifications represent the other main device of social closure which elites use to legally restrict and monitor access to key positions in the labour market. In support of this view, Collins (1979) argued, with reference to American society in the 20th century, that higher level credentials are increasingly placed as entry requirements for relatively scarce, valued professions which produce and reproduce middle-class status. The democratisation of access to higher education without commensurate expansion in appropriate job positions stratifies American society around what Collins labelled a contest mobility credential system. Within this system, secondary schools and undergraduate colleges are formally made accessible to everyone with sufficient perseverance and there are no sharp divisions among the institutions (Collins 1979:92). This gives students a relatively equal chance to rise up the educational ladder, the progression of which only becomes more distinctive at postgraduate and specialist levels where those who remain studying can better craft their employability into coveted high-

status jobs. Collins argued that far from facilitating equality in life chance opportunities, the expansion of higher education elevates the monopoly of limited high quality professions to even higher levels of competition demanding ownership of more advanced qualifications. This describes the phenomenon of credential inflation (Collins 1979), which is also known as educational escalation (Dore 1997; 1976). Academic credentials were described by Hirsch (1977:21) as positional goods which give the owner satisfaction from knowledge of their relative social scarcity in the economy and the associated boost to the individual's income and status position relative to other job seekers. Satisfaction is optimal for as long as ownership of high status credentials remains exclusive to a minority of contestants in the labour market. Hence, Hirsch observed that access to elite occupational status was controlled and screened by privileged groups through institutionalised barriers such as bureaucratic job recruitment processes and the imposition of entrance requirements and tuition fees at universities.

The social closure theorists discussed here presented higher education and the labour market as highly guarded sites of elites without giving much detail as to how individuals and groups manage their different locations of power within academic and occupational hierarchies. Their explanatory power, while relevant, lacks strength when applied to understanding the strategies that individuals use, apart from the implementation and reliance on institutionalised barriers, to manage different combinations of hard and soft cultural currencies to their labour market advantage. For example, Tomlinson (2008:55) who drew on positional conflict theory, showed how certain final year UK students attempted to “add value” to their degrees by attending elite universities, aiming to secure excellent academic results and carving out a distinctive narrative of technical competence, extra-curricular involvement and ownership of personal soft currencies (Brown and Hesketh 2004:36). Positional conflict theory offers an improvement to social closure theory in that it gives insights into the personalisation of power struggles, bringing attention to how certain students and graduates succeed in preserving or developing their distinctive competitive edge in a crowded labour market while others

fail to do so despite being equally qualified in the terms of ownership of institutionalised cultural capital. However, the theory has shortcomings such as the neglect of age, gender and ethnic dimensions to positional competition which my interviews with students and graduates of various social divisions investigate.

A strand of thought, which Brown (2003) terms positional consensus theory, counters the argument in positional conflict theory that widening opportunities within higher education exacerbate an over-supply of similarly qualified job candidates in the labour market. Positional consensus theory draws from human capital theory which argues that private and public investment in advanced levels of education and training will yield higher wages, productivity and economic growth (Becker 1964; Myers 1972). It puts forth the argument that the burgeoning higher education sectors in technologically advancing Western societies are a response to greater demand for technical, managerial and professional knowledge workers (Brown 2003:145). The assumption is that there is an abundance of suitable jobs for graduates to fill as the shift towards a knowledge-based economy requires a large base of higher end human capital, that is, a pool of innovative and creative workers applying expert knowledge and skills to high value work (Brown & Hesketh 2004:45). Another assumption is that graduates have the necessary competence to effectively perform knowledge work and contribute to the creation of a knowledge-based economy which will open up opportunities for their economic and social gains. It is said that increased opportunities to upgrade knowledge and skills through higher education give individuals an equal chance to harness and express their innate talent and potential, leading to social justice and economic efficiency (Brown 2003:145-146; Brown et al. 2001).

The essence of human capital and positional consensus theories can also be found in the knowledge economy rhetoric of governments in middle-income countries in East and South-East Asia, all in some way, claiming that the economy is undergoing or has already undergone the shift towards a high skills, high waged labour market (Brown &

Hesketh 2004:20). Framing this in the context of Malaysia, it follows that individuals receiving Western higher education or training potentially represent valuable human capital as they have the productive capacity to contribute their enhanced skills and knowledge to the economy (OECD 2004). The transfer of Western ideas and technical know-how is considered crucial in Malaysia, which like other middle-income East and South East Asian countries, seeks to catch up on its international competitiveness through technological innovation and knowledge production (Postiglione 2005; Altbach 1981). With its stress on the abundance of knowledge work for all suitably qualified candidates, the knowledge economy rhetoric is popular for its meritocratic overtones and has been reproduced in key literature examining the relatively recent expansion of the private higher education market in Malaysia (Lee 2004; Tan 2002).

A major criticism levelled against overtones of positional consensus and human capital theories is their tendency to ignore the realities of skills mismatch caused by slow or absent growth of high value jobs (Brown & Hesketh 2004; Brown et al. 2001). They do not illustrate power relations and strategies among students and graduates in positioning themselves favourably within competitive and inequitable opportunity structures. In relation to Malaysia, its labour market is not able to efficiently absorb highly skilled graduates due to the slow creation of high end knowledge work and the over-dependence on low level labour intensive manufacturing (Fong 2010; *The Star* 2010a). This is likely to intensify positional strategies of highly skilled individuals to stay ahead of others in the competition for limited lucrative jobs commensurate with knowledge, skills and qualifications owned (Sin 2009).

A global market system of education has capitalised on the intensified demand for positional advantage by providing students and parents as educational consumers (Brown et al. 2003) a wide range of tertiary programmes, modes of study and study destinations to choose from. Brown et al. (2003) argued that the rapid expansion and commodification of tertiary education extend positional power struggles to the structural

level as institutions of higher learning compete with each other for higher reputational capital in the form of superior quality and prestige and economic capital in the form of revenue. Competition between these institutions relate to Bourdieu's polarity of the subfields of restricted and mass-audience production.

In modelling the field of cultural production, Bourdieu (1993) made a distinction between two opposing sub-fields: the sub-field of restricted production and the sub-field of mass-audience production. In the sub-field of restricted production, the principle of differentiation between groups is symbolic capital in the forms of dominant legitimacy and cultural status derived through production and consumption of scarce elite cultural goods. On the other hand, the principle of hierarchisation in the sub-field of mass-audience production is economic capital. This comes in the forms of market demand and profits through large-scale, commercially driven production of what producers and consumers in the sub-field of restricted production consider lower status cultural products. Extending Bourdieu's polarity of sub-fields of restricted and mass production to the field of higher education, Marginson (2008) argued that academic institutions operate on a spectrum of logic where building social power globally through research impact as opposed to maximising revenue and market share through commercialisation represent two opposite ends. Elite and selective research universities with a global reach led by American doctoral institutions and a few high prestige universities in the UK represent one end of the spectrum while for-profit vocational universities and non-profit universities that provide tertiary education on a commercial basis represent the other end (Marginson 2008:305-306). Between these sub-fields are institutions that attempt to combine both principles of developing research impact status and increasing market demand (Marginson 2008:305).

Although there are still entrance requirements to be met and financial assistance available, a huge determining factor in why foreign students get access to reputable and selective institutions situated in and adjacent to the sub-field of restricted production is

their ability to pay relatively high student fees. In Malaysia, individuals have to have access to privileged amounts of economic capital to be able to study for a degree in advanced Western countries (Sin 2009; 2006) where leading institutions with significant global research impact are concentrated. A lesser, but still large amount of economic capital is required for entry into foreign tertiary programmes offered at offshore campuses of Western universities in Malaysia and local private higher learning institutions with partnerships with foreign universities. UK offshore and transnational education are marketed in Malaysia as an ideal opportunity to obtain world-class, Western international education at a lower cost while being close to the comforts of one's home (British Council 2013). The marketing strategy seems to target a potentially more modest middle-class group with privileged but limited disposable economic capital. International education as a whole is the preserve of Malaysians with privileged economic capital ownership, although they vary in economic power in their ability to undertake different priced foreign education in different institutions.

Foreign Cultural Capital

Leading on from a discussion of changing forms of social closure despite espoused meritocracy in access to tertiary education and graduate employment, this raises the question of what can be meaningfully derived from Bourdieu's works on cultural capital to help understand the practices, experiences and self-understandings of distinction among international students and graduates. Bourdieu (1998) acknowledged that his use of the concept of cultural capital is mainly situated in the historical and cultural context of 1950s and 1960s France, but believed that the concept has universal applicability (Bourdieu 1998). Bourdieu therefore extended an open invitation to apply cultural capital to other contexts. Works such as Waters (2010; 2009; 2006; 2005), Sin (2009) and Kim (2011) have done this with regards to exploring the economic and symbolic capital accumulation strategies of mainly middle-class students and graduates from Asia within the context of a rapidly growing global academic field. These works show how crossing national borders for international education in an advanced Western country

provides valuable foreign cultural capital which facilitates the pursuit of superior employment, income and status among the economically privileged in Asia. The foreign cultural capital constitutes a range of exclusive qualifications, labour-power skills and competences and embodied dispositions characteristic of middle-class status such as a largely Westernised outlook, consumption lifestyles, tastes and manners (Ong 1999). Research conducted by Waters, done independently and with collaboration with others, is highly informative in understanding the transferability and convertibility of foreign cultural capital across national borders. Drawing on interviews with Hong Kong middle-class students, graduates and parents who engaged in household or student migration to Canada, Waters (2006:184; 2010; 2005) showed that their move overseas represented a household-based strategy to escape academic underperformance in a highly competitive schooling system in Hong Kong. Schooling in a more flexible and less competitive system in Canada provided an easier pathway into university education, enabling the accumulation of highly valued Western cultural capital which could then be converted to prestigious, high-paying jobs in Hong Kong, thus ensuring middle-class social reproduction. This was however seen by the participants as a choice inferior to enrolment in tough-entry top local universities in Hong Kong, but which offered them a “second chance at success” in almost the same way as some UK students in Brooks and Waters’ study (2009:1092) went overseas to obtain elite tertiary education, the entry to which was perceived as tougher in the home country.

Studying abroad in an advanced English-speaking Western country provided a different form of “escape” (Waters 2006:184) for my participants, one which involved an unhesitated, confident exit from local education. Perceptions towards acquiring tertiary education overseas differed for participants in my previous studies involving Malaysian students at a British university (Sin 2009) and in Australia (Sin 2006). The participants held poor regard for the quality of local tertiary education offered in Malaysia, especially at public universities where rote learning and teaching, academic repression and limited international exposure were thought to constrain opportunities for

private sector and global employment. Kim's (2011) interviews with Korean international postgraduate students in an American research university reflected an almost similar form of escape: one which involved leaving a perceived restrictive and insular learning environment in the home country for more globally oriented and liberal education in a Western host country. The exclusivity of Western qualifications, knowledge, skills, dispositions and experiences acquired during studies in the United States promised the participants better career and status prospects in Korea.

While for the most part, the scarcity of overseas-acquired Western cultural capital translates to superior employment and recognition in the home labour market for individuals in Asia, Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson (2012) showed that this was hardly the case for UK students and graduates in their study who were undertaking or have completed tertiary education overseas. Some participants believed that employers in the UK generally attached higher value to UK degrees obtained domestically than to elite qualifications obtained overseas which means that there were little positional rewards for them in the home labour market. The findings reiterated a point made earlier by Waters (2009:116) that the exchange value of foreign cultural capital in the home labour market depends on the recognition and validation given by social ties within particular localised social relations. The findings also showed that exclusive institutionalised cultural capital obtained through studies abroad does not smoothly convert to positive economic and symbolic capital rewards as the global field of higher education (Marginson 2008) features uneven valuing of different credentials, institutions and country providers of education across national borders. These arguments are examined in my thesis where I explore the exchangeability of foreign cultural capital derived from different modes of UK international education within various geographical, situational and interactional contexts. I expected to uncover different positive and negative anticipation and experiences of the viability of converting foreign cultural capital into occupational and status distinction across different contexts.

In furthering the investigation of the global transferability and convertibility of cultural capital, Waters and Leung (2013a; 2013b; 2012) studied the experiences of Hong Kong students and graduates who were pursuing or have completed UK transnational education in Hong Kong. Their participants felt a sense of failure and inferiority for not being able to enter domestic elite universities and universities based overseas. They perceived that their education offered less embodied cultural and social capital accumulation opportunities, reflected by a less personal, international and English-speaking learning environment and a relatively limited range of facilities, services and social activities at the UK higher education providers in Hong Kong. Theoretically, this meant to Waters and Leung (2013:155) that the overseas education facilitated little access to “institutional social capital”, that is, opportunities provided by the educational institution to establish and build lasting relations that facilitated job entry and advancement. It was explained that friendships and connections developed through day to day interaction on campus, alumni networking activities and informal socialising among graduates could ease the exchange of foreign cultural capital into economic and symbolic capitals in the home labour market. Participation in UK education while being physically, culturally and socially separated from the UK was therefore argued to bring “reduced privileges” (Waters & Leung 2012:2) to the students and graduates which had consequences on their chances of securing superior employment and status. Detailed evidence on how unequal access to the full range of characteristics, facilities and services offered within UK international tertiary education produced different lived experiences of labour market outcomes were not provided. This tells very little of the actual conversion value of education-related cultural capital as experienced post-graduation in specific places, situations and interactions within the employment arena. My research attempts to address this gap by examining graduates’ entry, integration and advancement in the labour market, providing details on experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the immediate contexts where the graduates were situated.

It has to be pointed out that not all cultural capital practices are made with superior economic and symbolic capital rewards primarily in mind as recreational and self-discovery goals can also be important motives for studying abroad. This was brought out in Brooks et al. (2012) and Waters et. al. (2011) where many participants made up of UK students and graduates involved in studies overseas put the spontaneous desire for adventure, excitement and personal reflection ahead of deliberate and immediate strategies to sharpen positional advantage in the labour market. This did not necessary bring them potential labour market disadvantages. While engaging in tertiary education overseas might not have involved an overly strategic enhancement of cultural capital for employment-related reasons, Waters and Brooks (2010) noted that the mostly economically privileged UK students overseas whom they interviewed tended to concentrate in prestigious elite universities overseas, particularly in the United States. They (2010:226) noted that the choices, practices and activities that the students immersed in reflect a rather “accidental” accumulation of cultural capital which still assisted in the reproduction of labour market advantage when presented to UK employers who appreciated overseas-acquired qualifications and experiences (Brooks, Waters & Pimlott-Wilson 2012). The findings show that practices towards spontaneous recreational and self-discovery goals were not separate from practices towards instrumental goals of material gains, although the students and graduates did not consciously make a link between the two. This relates back to Bourdieu’s (1984) point on cultural predispositions that aspirations and strategies that reinforce economic and symbolic distinction are internalised into the habitual routine of the middle-class, taken to be common sense and hence not consciously deliberated.

While recent studies have fleshed out more details of place and space-situated status differentiation among individuals and groups along class lines and the associated hierarchical distinction attached to different locations and institutions of study, not much has been said about the implications of other social divisions on social mobility and reproduction through and beyond international education. Kim’s (2011) mention of

economically privileged female Korean postgraduates seeking to tap into the symbolic power of US degrees to overcome gender barriers to elite employment in Korea represented one of the few exceptions. My previous studies explored this gap by illustrating the intersection of class with ethnicity (Sin 2009; 2006) and gender (Sin 2009) in facilitating Malaysian aspirations for well-paid and high status employment that supported the reproduction of a comfortable middle-class consumption lifestyle. I focused on the participants' general optimism in converting their enhanced knowledge, skills, dispositions and qualifications into privileged economic and symbolic capitals, but noted that ethnicity and gender interacted with class to limit, by choice or circumstance, the life chance opportunities of particularly ethnic minority and female students. This thesis expands on the intertwining of class with other divisions of social differentiation, specifically, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion and age in structuring opportunities and experiences of economic and social advantage, as well as disadvantage for my participants.

Intra-Class Stratification in Relation to Middle-Class Accumulation of Capitals

Interviews with doctors and teachers in Manchester (UK) and Boston in Devine's study (2004) on how middle-class parents help their children reproduce academic and occupational advantages showed that the middle-class was stratified by degrees of access to economic, cultural and social capital. Devine cautioned against assuming that all middle-class parents have appropriate amounts of economic capital to help their children secure positional privilege in education and employment. While they usually do, the burdens of financing the escalating costs of tertiary education for possibly more than one child and having to meet other financial commitments set practical limits as to how much economic capital can be utilised, as in the case of Devine's participants. Where dispensable economic capital was lacking, cultural and social capitals were usually drawn on. Parental involvement in education decision-making and local interpersonal relationships with people of similar status backgrounds provided many participants with valuable advice, information and assistance to secure recruitment into

select colleges, universities and medical or teaching jobs (Devine 2004:121). Their aspirations and expectations to succeed in their studies and careers were largely shaped by parental expectations and wider social pressures from peers, teachers and acquaintances who themselves were preoccupied with academic excellence and career advancement (Devine 2004:144). In a similar vein, Reay (2004) argued that close proximity to advantaged social networks was likely to encourage middle-class engagement with higher level cultural capital values and activities. This provides middle-class people with a strong sense of confidence and entitlement to obtain superior degrees and jobs, despite in some cases, having limited useable economic resources.

The different levels of middle-class access to economic, social and cultural capital were brought up in Brooks' (2003) study of the educational choices of lower middle-class 16-18 year olds in a college in South England. It was found that some participants were better informed about the value of higher education than middle-class friends and peers whose parents' work fell under almost similar occupational classifications. This was despite the participants' families having little first-hand experience of participating in higher education. The explanation for this was found in the work contexts of some parents or step parents of the participants which enabled better flow and exchange of knowledge about the status rankings of academic institutions and disciplines. While the family had an important influence on the decision to proceed to further studies, friends and peers had a larger impact on the participants' choice of institution and courses to enrol in. Choices were made based on where the participants positioned themselves relative to comparable others within a perceived hierarchy of ability or intelligence (Brooks 2003:293). Students who felt inferior to more academically successful friends and peers tended to choose an institution and courses perceived to be lower in status, regardless of their actual academic performance. The findings relate to Bourdieu-influenced observations by Ball et al. (2002:54) that self classificatory judgements about relative academic and social worth can work to drive or exclude different choices for different strata within the middle-class. My present study examines how Malaysians

from different middle-class backgrounds, as broadly indicated by their mode of UK studies, perceived their rightful academic and social place and what chances they thought they had in advancing certain educational and/or occupational pathways. I expected to find intersecting class and ethnic patterns in the participants' sense of confidence and discouragement in advancing certain life chance trajectories.

Sense of Place Belonging and Implications for Life Chance Pathways

Reay et al.'s research (2001) on the educational choices of non-traditional university applicants in the UK informed my study that class can intertwine with ethnicity to shape students' evaluations of their worth and suitability in certain universities and occupations. The participants in Reay et al.'s study revealed their fear of being out of place in elite traditional universities where relatively privileged and white students dominate. This steered many academically successful non-traditional applicants towards new and low risk universities with a majority of students from backgrounds similar to theirs. They perceived that post-1992 universities, that is, relatively new institutions in the UK which have gained university status since 1992, have the right social mix and environment that would better accept their social location and/or non-white ethnicity. Economic and geographical attractiveness in terms of close proximity to home and hence, affordable travel cost and the continuity of involvement in the local community reinforced these universities as the more viable choice for working-class participants. Middle-class private-school students in Ball et al.'s study (2002) did not consider new universities at all, reflecting just like the non-traditional university applicants in Reay et al.'s research (2001), a sense of their proper place (Bourdieu 1984:474) within the class and ethnic differentiated higher education field. In a study by Lehmann (2004), middle-class academic-track high school students in Canada and Germany did not think that youth apprenticeship was a viable alternative to entering university. In contrast, many of their working class counterparts felt uncomfortable and uncertain at the thought of entering university as it would mean departing from manual or physical work which was associated with their social class and which formed part of their identity. Therefore,

emotional, perceptual and spatial constraints (Ball et al. 2002:55) can combine to produce different “degrees of choice” (Reay et al. 2001:855) for individuals with differing amounts of economic, cultural and social capital. This set of limitations operates together with evaluations of academic abilities and achievements to frame educational decision-making.

Findings from Malaysia-specific studies shed light on different degrees of confidence among Malaysian students of different ethnicities in advancing life chance aspirations in ethnically segmented tertiary education and work arenas in their home country. A 1968/1969 nation-wide survey of high-achieving Malay and Chinese secondary school students in Malaysia revealed that the Malay students had greater expectations than others that they would be able to further their studies to tertiary level in local public universities. On the other hand, ethnic minority Chinese youths were less certain of being able to enter domestic universities. Middle-class Chinese male students whose fathers were in professional and technical jobs indicated almost similar aspirations to their Malay counterparts to reproduce their fathers’ occupational status (Takei et al. 1973). However, in terms of confidence in fulfilling their career aspirations, Malay males had greater expectations for success across all social classes. In Wang’s (1980) survey of Form Five (equivalent to O’ Levels) students in the northern state of Penang, participants of Malay origin were more optimistic than other ethnic groups of chances in furthering education and securing good jobs quickly, despite their lower examination scores. Although dated, Wang’s (1980) and Takei et al’s (1973) studies provide a useful snapshot of young Malaysians’ sense of place (Bourdieu 1984) and associated life chance destinies in the lead up to and during initial stages of state-endorsed affirmative action in favour of the ethnic majority *bumiputera* (Sanskrit: sons of the soil) citizens in Malaysia. The New Economic Policy (NEP), implemented from 1971 to 1990, and succeeding national development plans have for decades provided preferential treatment to the *bumiputeras*, consisting of the Malays, indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia and the natives of the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, in various positional fields.

Among the most structurally ethnicised arenas where affirmative action has operated to benefit the *bumiputeras* are entry into local public universities and civil sector employment (Lee 2012).

In recent times, Aihara's study (2009; unpublished) highlighted the ethnic-differentiated experiences of higher education in Malaysia using official secondary data. Analysis of data from a two percent random representative sample of the 2000 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia pointed to sharp ethnic divisions in tertiary student enrolments. From 1970 to 1999, *bumiputera* students from the sample formed the vast majority studying in public universities, accounting for more than or close to 70% in any one year and therefore, surpassing a 55% quota reserved for them under affirmative action requirements. Between 1995 and 1999, enrolment of non-*bumiputeras* from the sample in merit-based private higher learning institutions reached 70%. Aihara (unpublished; 2009) believed that the ethnically segmented pattern of tertiary participation persisted after the introduction of a more merit-based admission system in most public universities in 2003, although official data was not available to confirm this. Ethnic division in life chance choices extended to graduate employment where the public sector attracted predominantly *bumiputera* job applicants while non-*bumiputeras* were concentrated in private sector employment (Aihara unpublished). My previous study (Sin 2009) revealed that employment in the private sector was particularly attractive for ethnic minority students where better salary and more meritocratic work conditions were anticipated. This suggests that deeply entrenched practices of social and ethnic distancing were at work as the students in Aihara's sample made and reproduced different choices based on perceptions of their proper place (Bourdieu 1984) within the public and private spheres of higher education and employment.

All together, research by Aihara (2009; unpublished), Wang (1980) and Takei et al. (1973) complicated the notion on the inclusion and exclusion of the self from a certain place by illustrating how a Malaysian developmental state can through affirmative action

shape academic and occupational aspirations and pathways along lines of ethnicity. The studies, however, did not have a qualitative component which could have offered more in-depth insights into young people's understandings of their positional chances within ethnically stratified opportunity structures in Malaysia and the implications for their patterns of cultural capital accumulation and activation. Joseph's (2006) use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews in exploring the negotiation of meanings of ethnicity for 16 year old students at an urban girls' secondary school in Malaysia addressed this methodological gap. The study revealed the frustrations of ethnic minority students over institutionalised ethnic bias in Malaysian society, causing them to feel the constant pressure to excel academically in the hope of getting around ethnic barriers to life chance opportunities. Relating all these to my present research, I will examine how self-judgements of one's class and ethnic place can lead to both the inclusion and omission of certain study-to-work choices and strategies which are expected to have an impact on my participants' chances and experiences of social mobility and reproduction.

The concept of place can also take on a more literal meaning within the Malaysian context, that is, geographical location which influences educational choices. Aihara's (2009; unpublished) study found that students living in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, which form the most developed region in Malaysia, were most likely to undertake higher education, particularly at a private institution, irrespective of ethnicity. Given that close to half of all private higher learning institutions are concentrated in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (MoHe 2013), this could be attributed to the institutions' close proximity to the homes of students of middle-class backgrounds.

Domestically acquired international education enables students to fulfil place-specific economic and emotional needs in the home country (Chapman & Pyvis 2006). Chapman and Pyvis (2006) observed in their study that offshore students of Australian universities in Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore tended to be tied to local familial and work

commitments which implicitly suggests that it would have been difficult for them to geographically distance themselves from social ties in the home country. This was spelled out more clearly in Pyvis and Chapman (2007) where it was explained that proximity to home and family was the reason motivating many Malaysian students in the research to study locally in the Malaysian branch campus of an Australian university. Where they faced challenges in adapting to a new habitus within Australian offshore education, the Malaysian students generally aimed criticisms at teaching practices, course materials and learning demands, citing them as too difficult and threatening their chances of academic success and superior employment (Pyvis & Chapman 2007:243-244). An Australian and therefore, Western tertiary qualification was perceived as the end goal to better their opportunities for jobs at Western corporations in Malaysia, regardless of whether the education they received offered them significant exposure to international and Western dispositions. In other words, ownership of Western institutionalised cultural capital was put ahead of the embodiment of Western cultural capital and personal development through adaptation to change. The students portrayed limited willingness to explore culture, values and dispositions that they were not habitually accustomed to.

On the other hand, it was the very exposure to difference and independent living which appealed to the Malaysian students in my previous research (2009; 2006) who went to the UK and Australia respectively for tertiary studies. There were explicit and implicit perceptions among the participants that education obtained onshore in the host country offered more relevant place-specific embodied as well as institutionalised cultural capital and social capital that were highly appreciated in the UK or at multinational companies in the home and other countries. In other contexts, studies such as Li et al. (1996), Nee and Sanders (2001) and Baas (2006) have shown that international education can be used by immigrants as a mode of incorporation into the host labour market. Waters and Brooks (2011) noted that the difference which UK students sought to experience through studying overseas was incorporation within a limit of familiarity.

The appeal of certain study destinations for the students was formed through consumption of frequently depicted images of the host countries in the media. The students were inclined to study in Anglophone countries, enrol in programmes where English was the medium of instruction and engage rather exclusively with the international student community made up of individuals of similar privileged backgrounds. As a result, the students experienced limited social diversity (Waters and Brooks 2011:574) and interaction with the larger local cultural community in the host countries. In a qualitative study of international students at two state schools in Queensland, Australia, Matthews and Sidhu (2005) found that the students experienced and practised distance from local students. Interaction with local students tended to be superficial as indifference, fear and ignorance shown by the locals towards their diversities and sensitivities heightened their awareness of national, cultural, ethnic and racial differences (Matthews & Sidhu 2005:59). This limited opportunities for cosmopolitan identification and global orientation (Matthews & Sidhu 2005:50), embodied cultural capital benefits which formed part of the “brand identities” (Sidhu & Dall’Alba 2011:1) of key destinations for international education such as the United States, Australia and the UK.

Kelly and Ha (1998:27) observed with the example of Asian international students studying Australian offshore programmes in their home countries that selective cultural and social mixing among these students may have been formed not so much out of deliberate choice as out of logical convenience. This was because the students were deeply embedded in their own language, family, work, peer and social groups in their home surroundings (Kelly and Ha 1998:27). While Malaysian and non-Malaysian students in the Australian offshore campus whom Chapman and Pyvis (2006:239) researched highly valued the experience of interacting with people from other cultural groups, they generally felt it was easier to build social relations with course mates of similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, they partly segregated themselves either intentionally or spontaneously on these lines, making it difficult to develop a

strong sense of communal belonging and international orientation on campus. Segregation by ethnicity and nationality among students in the offshore campus was mentioned only in passing in Chapman and Pyvis' work (2006; 2005). More attention given to demarcation along these other social divisions would have brought out richer depictions of the experiences of place (Bourdieu 1984) of students of various backgrounds that make up the diversity of foreign branch campuses, especially in Malaysia and Hong Kong. Middle-class international students and graduates are diverse and have different place-specific needs, priorities and goals. My thesis explores these needs, priorities and goals in relation to different modes and places of UK international tertiary education. It highlights the expressions, meanings and degree of significance attached to immersion in different dimensions of cultural capital and the wider institutional habitus specific to the mode and site of study. This will illustrate anticipation and experiences of the transnational transferability of education-related foreign cultural capital and its usability in specific contexts where students and graduates of diverse characteristics were located.

Culturalist and Neo-Weberian Interpretations of the Middle Class

As a whole, the literature reviewed in this chapter illustrate the rich diversity of the middle-class which raises a question on how the heterogeneity of Malaysian students and graduates involved in UK international tertiary education informs understanding of the concept of cultural capital. I am interested to explore the extent to which the concept of cultural capital can be applied to explain economic and status differentiation among diverse groups of middle-class Malaysians. My approach to the middle-class combines a Bourdieu-inspired culturalist approach with a neo-Weberian treatment of social closure found in Brown's positional conflict theory (2003; 2000; 1995). My focus is on the subtle relational views, practices, feelings and experiences of status differentiation among Malaysians from middle-class backgrounds, rather than on objective economic boundaries, historical locations in the production system, cultural schemas and collective class consciousness. An outline of Marxist class theory, Weberian class analysis and

new cultural class analyses (Savage 2000; Bottero 2004) within Western literature is necessary to explain what I mean by the Malaysian middle-class.

Class theory in the traditional Marxist sense explains unequal relations between two principal groups based on their place in economic production within the capitalist market (Parkin 1979:46): employers who are owners of the means of production (capitalist class) and non-owner employees (working class) who exchange their labour power in the market for economic capital. Marxist class theory and its modern variants face criticisms for their economically reductive tendencies which narrowly sum up a class as a collective group with the same structural economic location (Pakulski & Waters 1996). They do little to account for the intermediary middle-class group which comprises professionals, bureaucrats and service workers whose skills in the labour market serve to administer the manual labour of the working class. This middle class has grown rapidly in modern Britain due to factors such as the expansion of the service sector, technological shifts and deindustrialisation (Crompton 2008:103).

In contrast, Weberian class analysis focuses on the processes by which power relations in the market distribute differential life chances for various groups which cut across social divisions such as race, ethnicity, gender and age (Savage 2000; Crompton 2008). It is concerned with how property, skills, qualifications and occupational positions confer the individual economic power to consume scarce goods, services and lifestyles which through their exclusivity bring prestige and satisfaction. A class is then viewed as a community of individuals who share similar life chances through the utilisation and exchange of resources in the labour market. As resources can be accumulated, Weberian structures of stratification allow room for the possibility of upward social mobility of the middle-class. Positional conflict and social closure theories, as discussed earlier in this chapter, developed from this ontological framework.

I employed a new cultural analysis of class in my study. This follows an alternative and more recent strand of research on class which shifts attention away from abstract theorising of class conditions (Marxist class theory) and categorical boxes of social stratification (Weberian class analysis) to focus on how class is actually lived and acted out in everyday settings (Ball 2002:6). Bourdieu's (1984:467) culturalist approach explains that the mundane socio-economic and cultural routines of the middle-class function without self-consciousness or scrutiny, but nevertheless have a real structural impact on perpetuating the inequality experienced by subordinated orders. Drawing from Bourdieu, a new generation of cultural class analysts such as Savage (2000) and Bottero (2004) have shown interest in the subtle practices of the middle class in achieving differentiation from each other at a particular time, place and in a specific hierarchical position in the field. Reay (2005:911) brought attention to the emotional and psychic aspects of class practices and relations by illustrating feelings of inferiority and superiority, visceral aversions, defences, recognition and abjection that reflect how individuals view, experience and act out class within the field of education. Works such as these brought light to the complexity and heterogeneity of class which are useful to understand new and multiple relations of status differentiation in present-day society. They stressed that far from being redundant (Pakulski & Waters 1996), class is a relevant category of analysis to explore contemporary practices and relations within and beyond the labour market.

I would add that care has to be given when employing class, a Western derived concept, to describe varied historically shaped conditions in non-Western, developing societies. In relation to Malaysia, Embong (1999), Kahn (1996) and Torii (2003) made distinctions between the middle class and the middle classes. The term middle class was used to refer to the middle class historically, linking it to British colonial and Western classical conceptions of fixed occupational positions in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The middle class were small groups of petty property and business owners, administrative civil servants and intelligentsia. This was contrasted with the new and

mass middle classes which are the direct and indirect creation of the Malaysian developmental state through ethnic-based affirmative action since 1971. The ethnic majority *bumiputeras* form a significant proportion of the new middle classes. In terms of measurement, the old and new Malaysian middle classes have been operationalised in terms of occupational classifications (Jomo 1999; Crouch 1996), monthly household income (NEAC 2010), culture and lifestyle (Embong 2002; Kahn 1996; Chin 1998) and civil participation (Saravanamuttu, as cited in Kahn 1996). My use of the term middle class refers to the Malaysian middle class in plural and I am less concerned with making a distinction between the old and new groups. I do not wish to dismiss the usefulness of these other indicators of the middle-class(es). My approach derives from the intention of going beyond the construction of a singular and all-encompassing definition of the Malaysian middle class(es) to explore how the middle class is actually perceived, practised and experienced at the everyday level of higher education and graduate employment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, central to the themes and issues reviewed in this chapter is a question of the applicability of cultural capital associated with UK international education in explaining aspirations and experiences of social reproduction and mobility among middle-class students and recent graduates across place contexts. There is the question of how stable and transferable the exchange value of various dimensions of cultural capital are across different field and societal settings and what positional possibilities it represents to middle-class individuals occupying different places within interlinked hierarchies of class, ethnicity and other social divisions. Related to this is the question of how, and to what extent foreign cultural capital can be instrumentally and logically utilised to obtain desirable life chance opportunities and outcomes. Another question is the perceptions, emotions and experiences that surround middle-class practices and relations of distinction with regards to accumulating and activating cultural capital in international education and graduate work. My research was designed around these large

questions. The following chapter situates these questions within the structural and socio-relational context of Malaysia.

Chapter 3 Higher Education, Equity and Inequality in Malaysia

Introduction

This chapter provides context to my research topic. The focus is on the background to the structural and socio-relational environment in Malaysia which frames the fields and social spaces in which young adult Malaysians interpret, negotiate, contest and act out understandings of distinction.

Socio-Demographic, Cultural and Political Overview

Malaysia is a Commonwealth country in South East Asia, initially established as an independent federation of 11 states called Malaya in 1957. It was later known by its present name when it federated with Singapore, which has since been expelled from the federation, and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak in 1963. Malaysia is presently made up of 11 states and 2 federal territories in the peninsula on the mainland of South-East Asia and 2 states and a federal territory across the South China Sea on the island of Borneo. Its population of approximately 26.3 million citizens in 2010 is fairly young, as indicated by a median age of 26 years (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2013). The population is diverse, composed of individuals of different cultures, languages and religions intersecting primarily ethnic and class divisions.

State-constructed ethnic labels divide citizens into two basic groups: *bumiputera* (Sanskrit: ‘son of the soil’) and non-*bumiputera*. The term *bumiputera* is generally assigned to a person whom the government recognizes as having cultural affinities indigenous to the region and non-*bumiputera* to a person with immigrant ancestry and whose cultural affinities lie outside South-East Asia (Hwang 2003:4). The Malay “race” forms the majority of *bumiputeras*. Other *bumiputera* groups are the *orang asli*, the indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia, and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak. As a whole, the *bumiputera* category forms close to 68% of the Malaysian population

(Department of Statistics Malaysia 2013), making it the ethnic majority group in the country. Some of the Malay *bumiputeras* are of immigrant ancestry from Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and India¹, involved in mainly trade and commerce dating back several centuries before British colonialism from 1786 to 1957 (Nagata 1974). The majority of Malays during the British colonial area was involved in self-subsistent agriculture and fishing (Hirschman 1986). The non-*bumiputera* category consists of the Chinese, Indians and other groups who respectively make up approximately 24%, 7% and 1% of the population. Many Chinese and Indian minorities are descendants of migrants from China and India respectively who came to the peninsula in especially the early 19th century as merchants, traders and also labourers who worked in tin mines and rubber plantations, fuelling an export economy for the British colonial administration (Nagata 1974).

The national language of Malaysia is the Malay language, *Bahasa Malaysia*, the mother tongue of the Malay community. It is used for official purposes, particularly within public institutions and is the main medium of instruction in national schools and in most undergraduate courses in Malaysian public universities. However, everyday interactions involve a variety of languages and dialects which include Malay, English in its standard and colloquial form, Mandarin and Tamil. The dominant religion in Malaysia is Islam with about 61% of Malaysians in 2010 professing to the religion, followed by the other main religions which are Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism (Malaysian Department of Statistics 2010). The Malays are legally required to be Muslims and thereby, Islam and Malayness are fused to form the dominant core of a state invented Malaysian national identity (Barr & Govindasamy 2010). The culture, beliefs and practices of other ethnic and racial groups are celebrated for their contribution to an image of multiculturalism, but embraced with caution for their potential destabilising effects on Malay-Muslim nationalism which cements the pillar of political survival for the ruling government (Barr & Govindasamy 2010).

¹ This would be of Indian Muslim origin (Nagata 1974).

The structure of the Malaysian government is based on the Westminster parliamentary system and federalism with a constitutional monarchy. The federal government is the *Barisan Nasional* (Malay: National Front) coalition made up of three main race-based and ten smaller component parties, led by the Malay-based United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) represent the Chinese and Indian communities respectively. The *Barisan Nasional* government has held power since the Federation of Malaya's independence from the British in 1957, making it the longest serving elected parliamentary government in the world. However, it confronted setbacks in the 2008 general elections when it lost for the first time since 1969 two thirds supermajority vote in the House of Representatives to opposition parties. A two thirds majority of votes is usually required to pass bills in the Malaysian Parliament. *Pakatan Rakyat* (Malay: People's Pact/Alliance), a loose three-party opposition coalition, became a serious contender for electoral power at both federal and state levels. The *Barisan Nasional* government failed to recapture a two thirds parliamentary majority in the recent 2013 general elections and for the first time, lost the popular vote nationally to the *Pakatan Rakyat* opposition alliance, although still retaining its parliamentary majority.

Education System and Routes to Tertiary Education

Malaysian formal public education which falls under the control of the federal government consists of non-compulsory pre-school education, followed by six years of compulsory education at primary level and five or six years of secondary education. Primary education begins at the age of six. Lessons are predominantly taught in Malay in national schools since 1983 and in Mandarin or Tamil in national-type vernacular schools (Wong 2013). The medium of instruction in national schools until 1983 was English. Students in present times also have the choice of attending private, international, religious and Chinese independent schools. Lessons are taught predominantly in English in private and international schools while religious schools use Malay and Arabic and Mandarin is the main medium of instruction in Chinese

independent schools. Enrolment in these non-public schools is relatively low, with approximately 3% of some 145000 school-age going students in Malaysia enrolled in them (MoE Malaysia 2012). Upon graduating with the Malaysian Certificate of Education known as the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* in the final year of public secondary education, successful national school students have the choice of pursuing qualifications for entry into universities through post-secondary national or religious education² for up to two years, a one year government matriculation programme where 90% of places are reserved for *bumiputera* students, tertiary qualifying programmes in the Malaysian private education sector or education overseas. It usually takes a year to 18 months in the private sector or overseas to qualify for entry into universities. Students from private and international schools would usually enter university directly or pursue pre-university and foundation programmes in the private sector or overseas.

Tertiary education in Malaysia is made up of the public and private sectors, the former publicly funded and the latter privately funded. Lessons are taught in Malay for most undergraduate courses in the 20 Malaysian public universities while English is the medium of instruction for most postgraduate courses. The private sector which has approximately 485 institutions (MoHE 2013) including foreign offshore campuses, uses English for all courses. Approximately 900 000 Malaysian students are enrolled in tertiary education in the home country, about 45% of whom are in the private higher education sector (MoHE 2011). Data on the ethnicity breakdown of students in the public and private sectors are not readily made available to the public. It could be that close to 70% of Malaysian students in the public sector are *bumiputeras*, according to an estimate by Aihara (2009).

Structural reforms to the private higher education market since 1996 have significantly expanded the private sector. This has assisted the government in catering to

² This culminates in the award of the *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* (Malaysian Higher School Certificate) and the *Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia* (Malaysian Higher Islamic Religious Certificate) respectively.

a rising demand for tertiary education which public universities could not adequately meet and to reverse the flight of economic capital caused by the migration of particularly more well-to-do non-*bumiputera* Chinese for tertiary education overseas (Lee 2004a). The growth of the private academic sector in Malaysia is in line with governmental aspirations to develop Malaysia into a high-income knowledge economy and a lucrative regional and international hub of education (Lee 2004b). A significant feature of this expansion is the widened availability of mostly undergraduate-level Western foreign university programmes in Malaysia through transnational, offshore and distance or online modes of delivery. A typical transnational programme enables the completion of the entire duration of studies in Malaysia, culminating in the award of joint degrees from the Malaysian private institution and foreign partner university. The 3+0 study route is most common where the student studies for the entire three years of a foreign undergraduate programme in Malaysia. Almost half of 42535 students pursuing UK tertiary studies in Malaysia in 2008/2009 were enrolled in a study arrangement of this nature (Tan 2010). A further 31% of the students chose the twinning route which offers the opportunity to complete the programme in the UK after spending at least the first year of studies in Malaysia (Tan 2010).

An offshore programme, on the other hand, enables the student to study for an overseas degree entirely at the branch campus of the foreign university in Malaysia. This may come in the form of a 3+0 route or a 4+0 route, depending on the length of the specific programme. Subject to the student's academic performance, there is opportunity to go for study exchange to the main campus of the university overseas for usually up to two semesters. Eight offshore campuses of foreign academic institutions currently operate in Malaysia. They are the UK's University of Nottingham, Newcastle University, University of Southampton, Australia's Monash University, Curtin University and Swinburne University of Technology, the Netherlands' Maritime Institute of Technology and India's Manipal International University. UK offshore and transnational programmes are marketed as similar to programmes offered at the parent

or partner university in the UK, especially in terms of course content, academic standards and qualification awarded, while cheaper in tuition fees and associated living expenses (British Council 2010). One year in a BA Finance, Accounting and Management at Nottingham Malaysia, for example, costs about 6500 pounds, compared to approximately 12000 pounds if the same programme was to be taken at the UK campus (UON 2013a; 2013b). Annual tuition fees are significantly lower in Malaysian public universities. For an example, an undergraduate programme in business administration or accounting at Universiti Malaya, the oldest and leading public university in Malaysia, costs close to a thousand pounds a year (Universiti Malaya 2013). Tuition fees for UK transnational programmes are not openly provided by Malaysian private higher educational institutions. My interview with an undergraduate transnational student in Applied Accounting revealed that the fees can be above 5800 pounds annually.

Despite similarly offering UK qualifications, there are a few key differences between local private institutions and foreign branch campuses. UK offshore campuses are larger in size and being purpose-built and self-contained, mostly have a wider range of learning, support, recreational and accommodation facilities and services. The majority of the central administration and senior academic staff are appointed and transferred from the university's parent campus in the UK. On the contrary, transnational, particularly twinning programmes offered at the local private institutions are primarily taught by Malaysian staff and may incorporate a few guest lectures from visiting academics from the partner universities. These institutions vary in size, operating from single-site shop lot buildings, single or multi-site campuses to a purpose-built, self-contained campus. As a whole, local and foreign institutions in the private sector tend to offer high-in-demand programmes in select areas with profit in mind, typically in Commerce, Engineering and Information Technology (Wilkinson & Yussof 2005). A wider range of programmes is offered in public universities. With more than 48 000 students engaged in UK offshore and transnational education, Malaysia is the leading

source of external international students for the UK (Tan 2010). This figure is about four times larger than the Malaysian student population in the UK (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012).

Migration of the Highly Skilled

Despite the availability of many institutions of higher learning in the country, only one fifth of Malaysia's local labour force have tertiary qualifications (NEAC 2010). The increased provision of university places and production of graduates are not matched with commensurate increase in relevant highly skilled jobs (World Bank 2011). A recent example of this is the glut of trainee doctors in government hospitals whose numbers far exceed what is required for efficient supervision from specialists (Loh 2010). This has prompted the government to impose a five-year moratorium from 2011 on new medical programmes to address the oversupply of medical housemen (Lim 2011). The setting up of new private nursing colleges and diploma programmes in nursing was similarly frozen in 2010 (*BERNAMA* 2010a). From 1st February 2013, a two-year moratorium on new private higher learning institutions, not including highly ranked foreign universities, is in place to manage the increasing supply of graduates chasing highly skilled jobs which the labour market cannot adequately provide (Kulasagaran 2013).

The mismatch of graduates with qualifications, knowledge and skills required in the Malaysian labour market is one of the reasons fuelling ongoing brain drain in Malaysia where the cross-border outflow of highly skilled talents is occurring at a rate significantly higher and quicker than can be replaced by immigration into Malaysia. A crude estimation by the World Bank (2011) shows that one third of the one million Malaysian diaspora in 2010 were tertiary-educated, many of whom stayed on in their host country after tertiary education overseas. It observes that the out-migration of quality human capital has a geographical and ethnic dimension. Two out of every ten Malaysians with tertiary education migrated to Singapore and countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2010, a rate

double the world average (World Bank 2011). Singapore received 57% of the Malaysian labour migrants while Australia, 15%, the US, 10%, the UK, 6% while Brunei, Canada and New Zealand hosted most of the remainder. Chinese non-*bumiputera* migrants are disproportionately represented in Singapore, making up approximately 88% of Malaysian skilled migrants to the country. The high concentration of the Chinese, compared to other Malaysian racial and ethnic migrants, is similarly prevalent in the OECD countries. This trend is partly attributed to perceptions of long-standing ethnically inequitable opportunity structures in Malaysia (World Bank 2011).

Meritocracy and Social Exclusion

The Malaysian federal government practices affirmative action in favour of the politically dominant and economically inferior ethnic majority *bumiputeras*. During the infancy of the Malaysia nation-state, the Malays were mostly concentrated in low productivity jobs in agriculture while the Chinese in particular were disproportionately represented in high productivity occupations in manufacturing, mining and construction (2MP 1971). The income disparity ratio between the *bumiputeras* and Chinese in 1970 was 1:2.29 and improved to 1:1.38 in 2009 (NEAC 2010). Dissatisfaction of the Malays over the disproportionate wealth of the Chinese led to the worst inter-racial riots in national history on 13th May 1969. This prompted the Malaysian government to implement the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971 to achieve national unity through the elimination of poverty, regardless of race, and to redress inter-ethnic imbalances in economic ownership and control, especially between the Malays and Chinese (2MP 1971). Of the two main objectives, the government has from the beginning made inter-ethnic wealth redistribution, particularly the creation of an entrepreneurial Malay middle class and 30% *bumiputera* control of the corporate sector, a larger priority (Gomez & Jomo 1999:24). State-endorsed ethnic-based affirmative action policies and practices have since provided privileges to *bumiputeras* in areas such as corporate equity and home ownership, access to certain public institutions of higher learning, government funding for tertiary studies, receipt of government tenders and various rents, public

sector recruitment and professional and managerial employment in the public and to a lesser extent, private sectors (Lee, Gomez, and Yacob 2013).

An official ethnic-based quota system for entry into Malaysian public universities was in place from 1971 to 2001 where 55% of places were reserved for the *bumiputeras* and 45% for non-*bumiputeras* (Hwang 2003). Experiences and fear of rejection by the public universities fuelled the out-migration of many well-to-do Chinese Malaysians for tertiary education overseas (Boo 1998) before the mass expansion of the local private higher education market beginning in 1996 while the less economically privileged had little avenue to further their education. Entry into most public universities is now said to be based on academic merit and involvement in extra-curricular activities (*The Star* 2012). The extent to which meritocracy is practised, however, is questionable as critics claim that the admission process for especially high-in-demand courses such as medicine and engineering, still favours the *bumiputeras* (*The Star* 2013; *BERNAMA* 2009; *New Straits Times* 2009). The allocation of top scholarships from the government's Public Services Commission for overseas studies has traditionally been based on ethnic quotas which until recent years, reserved approximately 80% of awards for the *bumiputeras* (Wang 1980). The present quota formally allocates about 43% of awards to the *bumiputeras*, regardless of merit and need (Boo 2011). Government intervention in public university intake has led to a dualistic structure of higher education pathways where particularly Malay *bumiputera* students make up the majority at public institutions while ethnic minority students largely concentrate in private higher learning institutions (Aihara 2009). This pattern is reproduced in employment where the civil service is dominated by a single race and religion, that is, Malay and Islam, by as much as approximately 80%, although there have been recent government efforts to increase the intake of ethnic minorities and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak (Ling 2012).

The New Economic Policy officially ended in 1991, although subsequent national development plans (10MP 2010, NEAC 2010) have retained affirmative action for the

bumiputeras as a key focus. The prolonged implementation of pro-*bumiputera* affirmative action which has spanned more than four decades is a controversial topic as critics point out that a lack of management and transparency has caused cronyism, nepotism and corruption within the patronage network of politically well-connected Malays (Gomez & Jomo 1999). This is said to have widened intra- and inter-ethnic wealth disparities where the *bumiputera* indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, and Indians based in rural areas are most deprived (Kamal 2010). The practices and outcomes of affirmative action in economic development, education and social matters are regarded by the Malaysian government as sensitive issues which can strain inter-ethnic and religious relations and threaten national harmony (EPU 1999). Academic and public debates on these issues are largely contained and silenced by intimidation, warnings, penalties, assault, detention and self-censorship (Weiss 2011). For one, public university students and staff, as well as civil servants, are required to sign the *Aku Janji* (Malay: I Pledge), a pledge promising loyalty to the ruling government and good conduct which entails not expressing oppositional views on government policies and staying away from active participation in political and union activities (Weiss 2011:236). This requirement does not apply to students and employees in the private sector. Class and ethnic segmentation within the occupational and tertiary education fields in Malaysia essentially structures aspirations, strategies, experiences and feelings of Malaysian young adults as they make sense of their place within opportunity structures and the positional possibilities that come with it.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the structural and socio-relational context in Malaysia and has especially brought attention to the class and ethnic divides within opportunity structures in Malaysia. This provides essential background information to aid understanding of conflicting conditions of equity and inequality in Malaysia which opens and limits life chance opportunities for my participants. The following chapter

details my methodology and research design which will provide context for understanding my research findings.

Chapter 4 Methodology and Research Design

Introduction

This chapter discusses my methodology and research design aimed at exploring the relationship between cultural capital gained through UK education and the social reproduction and mobility of my participants. I will provide reflections on the methodological strategies, issues and challenges in my research.

Qualitative Interviewing Within an Interpretivist Framework

The ontological assumption, that is, the philosophical stance on the existence of social reality, underlying my research is subtle realism (Hammersley 1992). It reflects my belief that social reality can to some degree exist independently from individuals' immediate consciousness and representations of it (Snape & Spencer 2003:13). Ball (2003:23) explains that social actions are derived from a mixture of conscious and unconscious decision-making as they may simply be accepted as part of the self and everyday life and hence, not deeply reflected in a deliberate, instrumental manner. I take on the epistemological position, that is, the belief on what can be known about reality, that knowledge of these logical and practical actions can be derived through the researcher's in-depth interpretation of the meanings and experiences shared by the participants (Snape & Spencer 2003:16). Accordingly, my methodological approach is guided by interpretivism, which seeks rich understanding of a research topic through in-depth exploration of the personal accounts and experiences of the participants involved (Mason 2002).

Between August 2010 and August 2011, I interviewed three samples totalling 36 Malaysian students and recent graduates who were pursuing or have pursued a UK tertiary education either onshore, that is, physically in the UK, or in Malaysia through the offshore and transnational modes of study. I recruited my interviewees into three

samples: 1) Offshore and transnational students, 2) Offshore and transnational graduates and 3) Onshore graduates. I do not have a sample of onshore students in my study as they were researched in my previous work on the distinction practices of Malaysian students in a British university (Sin 2009). Although the focus in that research was on the perceived positive effects of onshore cultural capital accumulation, findings from a newer study of onshore students will likely be far too similar to the outcomes of my former research. Based on my previous work, I believe that Malaysian students in the UK are generally confident of having superior employment, income and status, although there are moments of anxiety and insecurity over issues such as age limits to reaching the top ranks of the occupational ladder, indecisiveness over career plans and the unpredictability of socio-economic and political conditions in Malaysia (Sin 2009:296). In my present work, I picked up the negative effects of onshore cultural capital accumulation through interviews with an onshore graduate sample. The following outlines the characteristics of my three samples:

Offshore and Transnational Students

My aim for this sample was to explore the anticipation of the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing UK education outside the UK, as held by young adults still engaged in tertiary studies. I sought to capture impressions and projections of a graduate future and the potential exchange value of competences, experiences, dispositions and credentials derived from UK offshore and transnational education. A student rather than a graduate sample best facilitates this goal as it reduces post-hoc rationalisation and distorted memory of aspirations and experiences leading up to and during tertiary participation. I confined my search of participants to full-time students of UK offshore and transnational programmes who progressed into tertiary education with no or little experience (not more than six months) of paid graduate employment. The eventual sample consists of 14 students, including the four twinning students from the focus group. They were aged between 19 and 24 years. All interviews took place in the state of Selangor which houses many institutions offering particularly transnational programmes

of foreign partner universities. The Malaysian campus of the University of Nottingham is located in Selangor. Appendix A shows the key characteristics of these students.

Offshore and Transnational Graduates

Interviewing a recent graduate cohort was useful to uncover the post-graduation experiences of young adults in relation to their success or failure in activating their cultural capital, obtained through UK offshore and transnational education, into desirable outcomes in the labour market. It provided findings which enabled the comparison of life chance experiences of graduates against aspirations held by students. It also provided insights into the global applicability and transferability of cultural capital gained through new and alternative modes of UK international education in advancing social reproduction and mobility. I recruited recent graduates (graduated two to five years before the interview) who studied for their UK degrees entirely or mostly in Malaysia and who were aged between 23 and 31 years. The time frame of two to five years after graduation meant that the individuals had well begun their study-to-work transition and experienced the actual rewards and shortcomings of cultural capital accumulation through tertiary participation. It presumably enabled them to reflect on and recall their occupational pathways and progression with more accuracy than graduates who finished their studies many years ago. One interview was conducted in the northern state of Penang while the rest took place in Selangor. The profiles of participants in this sample can be found in Appendix B. This sample is relatively small, having only seven participants, as views, experiences and strategies expressed were fairly similar within the sample and also to those generated from the student sample. Near theoretical saturation was reached and hence, there was no significant need to include as many participants as the other samples.

Onshore Graduates

Similar to the offshore and transnational graduate sample, the sample of onshore graduates was aimed at exploring experiences of the actual exchange value of cultural capital after graduation, in this case, from onshore studies. The sample was necessary to explore the cross-border stability of cultural capital gained through the traditional mode of UK international education in facilitating social reproduction and mobility. My sample consisted of 15 recent onshore graduates (graduated two to five years before the interview), aged between 23 and 31 years. It consisted of two main groups: individuals working in Malaysia and those working in the UK. Those who worked in the UK held work visas under the sponsored skilled worker category and the now closed Highly Skilled Migration Programme, postgraduate doctors and dentists category, International Graduates Scheme and the Science and Engineering Graduates Scheme. In Malaysia, interviews were carried out almost all in Selangor, the exception being an online interview in which the participant spoke over Skype from the northern state of Perak. Interviews in the UK were conducted mainly in Edinburgh and London where I knew from common knowledge that there were high concentrations of Malaysians, especially in the latter. A face-to-face interview was held in Manchester while three written interviews were conducted with a participant based in Aberdeen. Appendix C shows the profiles of the onshore graduates.

Method and Sampling Procedures and Techniques

I used qualitative semi-structured interviewing as the primary method for data collection. I had private face to face interviews with 30 participants, a focus group with four participants, an audio interview with a participant and written interviews with one other participant. My need to ensure a comfortable, free-flowing setting to encourage informants to reveal details about their personal backgrounds and distinction practices made qualitative, semi-structured interviewing an appropriate choice. It allowed a systematic exploration of themes and issues that interested me while allowing participants flexibility to introduce topics which were significant to them (Mason 2002).

While I would have hoped to use this method for interviews with all my participants, the limited availability of potential interviewees who fit my selection criteria, expectations from gatekeepers, coupled with time and resource constraints led me to use other forms of interviewing with six participants. A focus group interview was conducted with four twinning students who represented the entire intake of their BA(Hons) Economics programme at KDU University College in Selangor, Malaysia. My audio interview with a doctor (Eng Hock³) based in the northern Malaysian state of Perak took place over Skype. I had three written interviews over the course of a month with a well engineer (Noraini) based in Aberdeen. While a focus group discussion would have ideally encouraged participants to reflect on and refine their perspectives through interaction among the group members (Morgan 1998), the presence of others might have caused social desirability in my participants' responses, that is, the tendency to give answers in a way as to create a favourable impression of the self (Bryman 2004). I anticipated the challenge in getting my focus group interviewees to fully and truthfully reveal information and views on more personal matters such as their feelings of self worth in relation to comparable others and their opinions on the role of ethnicity in shaping life chances. This challenge was also present, but to a lesser extent, in the one-to-one interviews as certain responses from the participants reflect carefully managed disclosure, defence and justification. To address this, I assured all my participants that there were no socially and morally right and wrong answers to my questions and that truth and honesty were most appreciated. I probed and followed up on my participants' responses to encourage them to elaborate and share details, but was careful not to cause significant uneasiness and discomfort. Private, face-to-face interviews proved to be the most ideal for me to build rapport with my participants and encouraged openness from them. Having said that, my audio⁴ conversation with the doctor (Eng Hock) on Skype and written interviews with the well engineer (Noraini) in Aberdeen similarly brought out rich data. These techniques had the advantage of reaching out to the participants who

³ Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis.

⁴ The participant did not have a web camera, but was able to see me on the other end of the Skype session.

were busy and geographically located a distance away from where I was: Selangor and Edinburgh. The disadvantage, however, is the inability of these techniques in bringing out spontaneity and clarity in tone, meaning and intent in ways that were possible for the offline face-to-face and focus group interviews.

Theoretical sampling, involving the selection of participants with characteristics that could potentially contribute to developing analysis, theories and explanations (Mason 2002:138) was employed. As a starting point for participant selection, I made sure to have various modes of study and ethnicities in my sampling matrices. I refined and reshaped my selection criteria when I began to generate explanations and patterns with data emerging from the interviews. As certain themes and issues developed, I recruited subsequent interviewees whose views and experiences were assumed to be different from those of early participants (Ritchie et al. 2003). These interviewees represented the potential negative or contradictory cases which would reinforce or reshape the themes, issues and relationships that were emerging from the interviews (Mason 2002:136). Snowballing was also used as I tapped into the networks of my early participants and personal contacts to locate more interviewees. Furthermore, I sought assistance from lecturers, administration staff and student representatives from various private higher learning institutions in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, which form the central hub of private tertiary education in Malaysia, to circulate my research advertisement and establish contact with prospective interviewees. To widen my sampling frame further, I posted research advertisements on the Education in Malaysia blog, which is a popular blog delivering updates and analysis on education in Malaysia, the University of Nottingham Malaysia's official page on Facebook and on Reborn Community: The Worldwide Malaysian Students Network, an online networking platform connecting Malaysian students and young professionals in Malaysia and overseas. I also wrote to the United Kingdom and Eire Council for Malaysian Students (UKEC) which is the coalition of all Malaysian student associations in the UK and Ireland for assistance in linking me to graduates working in the UK. Furthermore, I requested assistance from the

UK Alumni Network (UKAN) in Malaysia, a web platform maintained by the British Council and the British High Commission in Malaysia to connect onshore graduates of UK universities. Sampling in my research was not intended to be statistically representative, although I tried to include students and recent graduates of different ethnicities and academic programmes to obtain a wide and comprehensive coverage of characteristics, experiences and views. This is important to capture the diversity and heterogeneity of members of Malaysian society of middle-class backgrounds.

While ideally sampling would stop when no new significant themes, issues and relationships emerged from the interviews, that is, when theoretical saturation is achieved (Mason 2002), constraints of time, costs, the availability of informants with relevant characteristics and non-response and rejection from institutions and networks⁵ approached limited the extent to which theoretical sampling could be carried out. Rejection of my request for assistance and research participation in most cases took the form of non-reply to my e-mails, phone calls and text messages. This challenge was faced only in Malaysia and every party I approached in the UK was willing to help out. While I acknowledged that not every institution, network and person contacted would be interested to assist me, especially when no monetary incentives were offered, the numerous non-responses I faced in Malaysia were disappointing as time for data collection was constrained and the absence of new leads and access to networks meant having interrupted phases to interviewing. The experience opened me up to the realities of doing fieldwork in Malaysia and beyond university grounds as I realised more of the challenges of reaching out to members of the wider society who perhaps lacked appreciation for the uses of academic and social research. Suspicion of my identity and purpose of research might have been involved as a few academic contacts in Malaysia questioned my need for *bumiputera* students and graduate participants in my samples and enquired whether politically sensitive issues surrounding ethnicity would be explored in my research. They proceeded to help me identify prospective participants

⁵ No response was given by UKAN.

once I affirmed that my research was academic in nature and explained that *bumiputera* participants were required to achieve a good mix that symbolically represented a rich and meaningful range of characteristics and circumstances (Ritchie et al. 2003:82) of Malaysians involved in UK tertiary education. I also explained that ethnicity would be discussed in detail if it was a factor considered by the participants to be significant in their chances and practices of distinction.

While snowballing can be an efficient way to gain quick access to the population of interest and expand the sample size to meet the research goals (Bryman 2004), not all my participants and personal contacts had peers and acquaintances who met my selection criteria. For those who did, their interest and willingness to take part in my research partly depended on the nature and dynamics of social ties and obligations between them and their contacts. Those with more persuasive influence and who had closer relations with their contacts, for instance, were more likely to encourage participation. This was still one of the more effective methods for me to recruit participants. I found that the most effective way to reach out to prospective student participants is to obtain names and contact details of lecturers, administration staff and student representatives who would act as intermediary contacts. This information was however not readily available on all websites of educational institutions. E-mailing and calling intermediary contacts directly, instead of going through their institutions' general enquiry telephone line and e-mail address, enabled me to add a personal touch to my request for assistance and to answer any questions and concerns they had in an instant. It was difficult to get in touch with transnational graduates in Malaysia as I learned that many graduates do not maintain close links with their institutions and there is very little the institutions can do to trace them due to the absence or weak presence of alumni associations. My post on the Education in Malaysia blog particularly helped me to gather expressions of interest from graduates based in Malaysia. I am aware, however, that recruiting participants through research advertisements might have caused some bias in the samples in that the interviewees seemed to reflect similarities such as stronger

interest in research-related activities and generally better awareness of economic and socio-political developments in Malaysia. However, I do not see how this compromised the quality of my data. Overall, a few groups of prospective participants were particularly difficult to come by. They are *bumiputera* students who are largely concentrated in the public higher education sector (Aihara 2009), students enrolled in less conventional subject areas, that is, other than Commerce, Engineering and Information Technology, and non-Chinese graduates working in the UK.

Setting, Transcription and Analysis

Data collection and preliminary analysis for my research took place between August 2010 and August 2011. Interviews in the UK were split into two time periods, that is, in August 2010 and from June to August 2011, to accommodate my fieldwork in Malaysia between September 2010 and April 2011. I interviewed students and graduates concurrently in Malaysia and the choice of which participant to interview first depended on their time availability and my location. The average length of interviews across the three samples is about an hour. To minimize distractions and encourage interviewees to talk openly, conversations with them were carried out at relatively quiet and neutral settings in locations convenient to them such as in study rooms of academic institutions and less crowded cafes or restaurants. Topic guides, as presented in Appendices D, E and F were used to provide some direction in the interviews (Arthur & Nazroo 2003). This outlined topics rather than specific questions in order to be responsive to participants and their individual experiences and context (Arthur & Nazroo 2003:109-110). The topics generally include personal and family background, educational and occupational history, reasons for choosing UK international tertiary education, the academic discipline, institution and the particular mode of study, expectations about the rewards and shortcomings of tertiary studies and life plans. The order and coverage of topics varied slightly in each interview as the participants expressed views, issues and experiences personally significant to them and I probed and followed up on individual responses. Probing and following up were useful techniques to encourage interviewees

to flesh out details on activities, practices, values, dispositions, knowledge and skills that they had or engaged in, but were not immediately aware of and hence, speak about them. These details reflect the often subtle and taken-for-granted components of embodied cultural capital, the possession of which is not likely known in entirety by the bearer, unlike visually obvious and tangible objectified and institutionalised cultural capital. The participants were encouraged to speak English naturally as they would in daily conversations and this tended to include usage of loan words, expressions and grammatical structures from the Malay language and the Cantonese and Hokkien Chinese dialects, as well as suffixes such as *lah*, all typical of colloquial Malaysian English, locally known as Manglish. Their verbal presentation, I believe, mostly reflected their habitual embodiment, but might have been encouraged by presumptions of my identity as Malaysian of Chinese descent, capable of understanding and deciphering colloquial codes within the Malaysian context. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder which I placed in a position which did not visually distract my interviewees. Recording the interviews assisted me to review interactions with the participants and this eased transcription for data analysis.

The interviews were manually transcribed by me soon after they ended to allow preliminary analysis and a sense of who next to recruit into the samples and what questions to ask to develop a wide range of theories, patterns and explanations. I retained in the transcripts the colloquialism present in the participants' English to maintain the authenticity of their voices. As a result, there are traces of grammatical error and choice of words and expressions that deviate from standard Malaysian and UK English. I began analysis with the NVivo 7 software and later upgraded to NVivo 9. Usage of the software encouraged me to be more organised and efficient in the storing, analysis and reporting of data. The search function especially provided the convenience of retrieving particular data segments without having to open multiple file documents on the computer as well as manually going through stacks of papers to locate them. The software facilitated a systematic search of themes, issues and relationships across cases,

thus enabling a rigorous analysis. However, retrieving snippets of texts may de-contextualize the data, making implied meanings based on a sequence of background events less visible (Denscombe 2007:304). I addressed this by reading the transcripts thoroughly several times to familiarise myself with the context of each interview. Data analysis started early in the data collection stage as I imported completed transcripts of interviews into NVivo. I began by giving initial labels to interesting words and sections from the transcripts, sticking to the participants' own terms (Spencer et al. 2003:203) as much as I could to develop sensitivity towards their routine and common sense meanings (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Through a series of coding and re-coding, I gradually moved up from the participant's terms to finer categories containing analytical, definitive concepts to describe them (Spencer et al. 2003:203). Throughout the process, I applied analytical coding where I coded relevant segments of the texts at new or existing categories based on my interpretation of emerging concepts and relationships (Richards 2005:95) and prior knowledge of them.

My approach to data was inductive and to a lesser extent, deductive. It was inductive as I observed themes, issues and patterns as they emerged from the data before developing theoretical explanations and relationships. It was also deductive as I have established in a previous study (Sin 2009) the relevance of concepts such as cultural capital and positional competition (Sin 2009) in explaining the distinction practices of UK-educated Malaysian students. In my present study, I read the transcripts line by line and looked out for segments which could be explained by concepts I knew beforehand were relevant for my research. I tried to be careful, however, not to impose any analytical category on the data in the early stages of data collection. The danger of using a deductive approach to data analysis is bias in interpretation and while I do not think it is possible for research to be value-free, I was conscious not to commit to concepts which did not tie in neatly with the data. I made a mental reminder to be mindful of the values, experiences and pre-conceptions that I brought into this research (Richards 2005) and to be open to generating new concepts from the interviews. In the final stages of

analysis, I organised categories of data around larger themes for presentation of findings in the next few chapters of this thesis.

Ethical Issues

Participation in my research was voluntary and interviewees were free to withdraw at any time. No monetary incentives were given for participation. The purpose and likely benefits of the research, as well as measures taken to maintain confidentiality of the research data were explained during initial contact with the participants and just before and after the interviews. This information was provided in the consent form (Appendix H) which I kept and the information sheet (Appendix G) which the participants retained for their reference. Signed consent forms and hard copies of field notes and interview transcripts were kept in separate locked cabinets which only I had access to. Data and interview recordings were stored in a password protected personal laptop which was accessible to no one but myself. The names of the participants were anonymised in the field notes, transcripts and my presentation of the findings to safeguard their privacy and confidentiality. However, participants and contacts who introduced prospective interviewees inevitably knew of the participants' involvement in the project. As I have memory of the interviews, I am still able to link responses to individual participants. In my reporting of data and daily interactions with people, I have been conscious not to disclose information that can be traced back to any interviewee. I believe no overly private or sensitive issues were discussed in the interviews that would cause any significant psychological stress or discomfort to my participants.

I obtained a researcher pass from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Malaysian government to undertake fieldwork legally in Malaysia. The Malaysian government seeks to monitor research conducted by foreigners and Malaysians affiliated with foreign universities and organisations to ensure that research does not touch on sensitive issues that may strain inter-ethnic and religious relations and place the integrity of the government in question (EPU 1999). While I have no intentions to stir up

sensitive and controversial issues that “can cause prejudice, hatred, enmity or contempt between or towards any ethnic or religious group and...affect the integrity” (EPU 1999) of the Malaysian government, there is a professional and personal need for me not to compromise research independence and objectivity. I believe that any sociological qualitative investigation of the aspirations and experiences of distinction among Malaysians is likely to generate data pertaining to government policies, ethnicity and inequality in life chance opportunities which my study has done. Avoiding and filtering analysis and report on certain themes, issues and associations would do injustice to the voices and experiences of interviewees and violate the imperatives of professional, rigorous and truthful research. Hence, what I strive to offer in my research is honest and balanced interpretation and presentation of contextual information and empirical data.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the philosophical stances underlying my use of qualitative interviewing as the method to explore the role of cultural capital, gained through UK education, in facilitating the social reproduction and mobility of my participants. I detailed the strengths and shortcomings of my research design, as well as reviewed the data collection and analysis stages. In the next four chapters, I will present my findings, using excerpts and quotes from the interviews for illustration purposes. The findings highlight the strategies used and intended to be used by the students and graduates of various middle-class backgrounds and social divisions in securing superior employment and status across geographical, interactional and situational contexts in Malaysia and the UK. They illuminate the complex interweaving of class with ethnicity, gender, age, nationality and religion in structuring the participants’ anticipation and experiences of positional advantages and disadvantages in the arenas of international education and graduate work. Furthermore, the findings reveal the perceptions and feelings that the participants had of their self-worth in relation to their chances and experiences of success and failure in converting cultural capital into economic and social distinction.

Chapter 5 Gradations of Value, and Legitimacy, of Cultural Capital

Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between what appears to be different hierarchies of value attached to tertiary education and the degrees of acceptability in pursuing certain academic and occupational choices as anticipated and experienced by the participants. I argue that cultural capital linked to UK international education does not have a fixed exchange value but different perceived and actual values of conversion which are dependent on personal, familial and peer judgements. Studying onshore particularly in an elite UK university occupied the highest position in the perceived hierarchies of status as it offered better quality education, experiences of a higher valued culture, lifestyle, social mix and physical landscape in the West and opportunities to independently embark on a journey of personal growth and self-discovery.

I begin by providing context on the significance of education-related cultural capital to the interviewees and their families, showing that ownership of a Western degree qualification was perceived as the bare minimum to improve chances of superior graduate employment and the reproduction of middle-class status. I show that cultural capital, although serving instrumental goals, also has rewards of a more intrinsic nature. I detail the participants' different grading of academic and social worth involving objective and impressionistic evaluations of study destinations, modes of study, academic institutions and subject areas. The chapter concludes by bringing discussion back to a central theme of this research, which is that the value of UK cultural capital is contingent on geographical and socio-relational contexts.

Cultural Capital Activities before Tertiary Education

The participants came from homes where the importance of education as the means for economic and social advancement was impressed on them since childhood. Participating in formal and further education was largely communicated and understood

by them as a necessary practice towards inter-generational mobility, to carry on the pursuit of better life chance opportunities from where the last generation left off. This could mean aiming to have higher academic attainments than one's parents or having to keep up with family members to reinforce academic traditions in the family. I draw on three excerpts from the onshore graduate sample which most clearly illustrate the positive habitus (Bourdieu 1990), that is, the daily receptive culture, values and dispositions, for education within the participants' families:

My dad never had tertiary education and mum never had secondary education, so they place an importance on giving us what they didn't have. So, they worked really hard to make sure they had the money to let us study abroad...education is obviously what everyone say will get you a good job and a good job will get you money and money will get you a comfortable life [laughs].
(Julie, Project Co-ordinator, MSc Political Sociology, LSE⁶)

Well, look at my dad's side of the family, my grandparents came from China and they were both teachers back in China. Headmaster and headmistress of the school in the village or whatever it was and when they got to Malaysia, my granddad would translate letters for other immigrants who couldn't read or couldn't write. So, if we go back 2 generations, it [importance of education] was already there, it was important. My dad and all the siblings have been teachers at some point in their lives. My mum's side of the family...10 of them and I don't think all of them went to university, but all the[ir] kids have gone to university.
(Jia Wen, Multiple jobs, BA (Hons) Politics & IR, Manchester)

My parents, they are middle class, not rich but I'll be honest, my parents went into debt to put us through education. My dad's rule is, "I can't do anything else. Not going to buy you a house, not going to buy you a car, not going to pay for your wedding, but I'll put you through as much education as you want, as long as I can handle it", which is what he did...They (parents) used to say, "People can take anything away from you, but they can't take what's in your head".
(Francis, Student, 3+0 Law, UoL)

It is no surprise then that constant parental reminders to perform well academically, such as the following, echoed throughout the schooling years of students and graduates in this study:

My mum, she has always been saying, "You must study really hard. You must get this amount of marks in this class. Make sure you study really hard".
(Wah Seong, Student, MSc Civil Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia)

⁶ For ease of reading, basic information of the participants, specifically, the pseudonym, occupation, programme of UK tertiary studies and the awarding UK university will be presented in the findings chapters. More information of the participants can be found in Appendices A, B and C.

My mum always stress me to score as much as I can in my studies. I guess it's normal for all parents to do that. They say, "If you don't want to study, next time you sweep the floor, clean the toilets", something like that la. They use that to threaten me la. So in a way, we don't want to do that la. We want to sit in the office, wear nice clothes.

(Teik Lee, Executive, 2.75+0.25 BSc (Hons) Computing & Information Systems, Liverpool John Moores)

When I was young, I was supposed to score As and excel in my studies, just so that I could go to uni and if I fail, then chances are, I won't get into uni and that would be terrible coz I wouldn't be able to get a decent job. You know, the typical parent.

(Mei Sien, Doctor, Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Edinburgh)

The interview transcripts were scattered with references to tuition and extra-curricular activities during schooling years, the participation in which was in part by choice and in part by imposition from parents. For many of the participants, formal schooling took place in the Malaysian public education sector where they attended national schools. Attending tuition outside of school hours was common practice, as participants believed the classes offered essential guidance in areas that the national school could not sufficiently provide and gave additional push and motivation to excel in studies:

I have to because the school explained half and expect you to read more. That time, I was a bit lazy. I was like, "Why should I learn this for?" That's why I went to tuition. And somehow the tuition teachers are more encouraging compared to normal school.

(Hisham, Student, 3+0 Business Management & Finance, Keele)

In school, we only have one, two periods for each subject, 45 minutes to an hour. So, I do not know whether the time is not enough for the teachers to teach the right thing or just that the teachers are not qualified enough. But in tuition classes, you can get everything. You can get to learn more new things, compared to school. Even though it's scary to go to my tuition centre. Every one month, they will conduct an exam and after the exam, everyone's marks will be put on the table. So during that age, we have to take care of our reputation also la.

(Teik Lee, Executive, 2.75 + 0.25 BSc (Hons) Computing & Information Systems, Liverpool John Moores)

Participants took lessons in enrichment areas such as music, drama, public speaking, art, tennis, swimming and Mandarin. Here are examples which show varying levels of choice and parental involvement in their early engagement in academically and culturally enhancing activities:

When I was younger, she [mother] used to teach me...my dad is very good in speech, presentation and all that and he emcees a lot of functions. They both encouraged me when I took part in all these competitions.

(Francis, Student, 3+0 Law, UoL)

She [mother] sort of conned me into saying that I want to learn that, learn piano. Rather than she imposing it on me, she got me to say, I want to learn that.

(Brian, Researcher, PhD Engineering, Cambridge)

My mum used to force me to read a lot [laughs]. She used to bring me to book store and asked me to pick some of the story books and go back and read, so I used to remember reading a lot of Malay story books, um, some English short story books.

(Wah Seong, Student, MSc Civil Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia)

Whether through encouragement, manipulation or pressure from their parents, the vast majority of participants were exposed very early on to cultural capital in the forms of knowledge, skills, dispositions and experiences that went beyond what educational institutions could offer. The accumulation of cultural capital, which occurred beyond the schooling site and years before tertiary education, reflects the long-held significance of distinctive cultural capital to the participants and their families.

A Degree as an Enabler and Indicator of Middle Class Status

The need to enhance cultural capital carried on from school to subsequent stages of the participants' educational trajectory as they continued to build competences and dispositions that would help them assert status distinction. Many participants anticipated increasing credential inflation (Collins 1979), where the competitive value of academic credentials decline due to overcrowding of similarly qualified graduates in the labour market. A tertiary degree represented the basic indicator of middle-class status to them and a bare minimum to have to stand a chance for better earning skilled jobs. An undergraduate education was what Brian, a researcher (PhD Electrical Engineering, Cambridge), aptly called, a "social enabler":

It opens doors basically...wherever you want to go. Whatever you want to do. Erm, education would be a minimum requirement. So they (parents) always told me, "You must minimum get a degree. Why? Because if you don't get a degree, you can't get a good job. Because by the time you grow up, everybody has a degree. So if you don't have a degree, you sure lose out to...

...everyone”.

The following excerpts are expressions on the commonality of first degrees in the job market and how that brought a need to undertake at least an undergraduate education to achieve or reproduce middle-class distinction:

Probably influenced by my father: “You have to do a degree to work, to compete with theirs”...I think it’s true because everyone now holds a degree or else you can’t get a good paid job.

(Sze Theng, Student, 3+0 Music, Wolverhampton)

Well, got to be done with it anyway...Ok, from what I hear, Diploma, you can’t go far that much. Degree, you can become like middle class.

(Hisham, Student, 3+0 Business Management & Finance, Keele)

Everyone has a degree now. So if you don’t have one, you’re left behind. So, education is very important.

(Wah Seong, Student, MSc Civil Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia)

These examples reflect the opportunity trap, a situation which Brown (2003) described as the non-negotiable choice to enter the race for positional advantage in order to stay afloat in the congested sea of graduates looking for superior employment.

There were many instances where the participants stressed the need for economic security and stability in their lives, to which a degree was thought to be the best guarantee. A degree was the “safety net” (Mushamir) to depend on for paid full-time employment. It was the “security blanket” (Elaine) to absorb any setbacks or failures in freelancing and self-employment ventures which several participants were either involved in or considering:

It’s not harmful to have, so if anything happens, at least you have this to fall back on. You have this education and you can depend on it, compared to if you just drop out, free lance and if that doesn’t work out for you, what else can you do?

(Elaine, Student, 3+0 Business, Economics and Management, Nottingham Malaysia)

One thing is important if everything fails, well, it’s a big safety net. A very big safety net...Safety net in the sense that I can jobs that I want lah.

(Grace, Self-employed, 3+0 BSc (Hons) Applied Accounting, Oxford Brookes)

The risks of not participating in tertiary education to middle-class status maintenance appeared potentially severe to the participants and hence, it was priority to them and their parents that they obtain at least a good quality degree through a time-efficient and secure academic route.

For the vast majority of participants, the desire for a safe and stable middle-class life chance trajectory meant undergoing a straightforward and uninterrupted progression from secondary school to pre-university and then direct to degree programmes. Pursuing post-secondary education for usually a year to 18 months in the Malaysian private higher education sector or overseas offered the quickest and most secure pathway towards entering university. The optional two-year post-secondary national education within the public system, the usual pre-requisite for entry into Malaysian public universities, was considered by and large to be a “long” (Shamsul), “tedious” (Wah Seong) and “difficult path” (Mei Sien). Almost all participants saw this route as a “waste of time” (Shamsul, Teik Lee, Grace), a perception compounded by distrust over the general quality of education in the public sector, a point which I will discuss in the following section. Fear of failing more than actual experience of failure to secure a limited place in highly demanded programmes steered a few participants who first considered studying at top Malaysian public universities towards private or foreign institutions in Malaysia and/or universities in the UK. For example, Kor Ming (Student, 3+0 Accounting & Finance, UWE), was preparing to enter Form 6 with the intention of applying for a place in an Accounting programme in a top-ranking Malaysian public university when he received “precaution” from his high school teacher who related the difficulties of his academically excellent seniors in securing entry. The joint decision between him and his parents was to manoeuvre towards an Accounting and Finance programme at a leading private university where places for highly demanded subject areas such as his were not restricted. Therefore, studying towards a UK programme was in most cases an escape from a longer and uncertain route towards the first degree, the timely and quality completion of which was paramount in order to advance social ambitions.

Intrinsic and Instrumental Valuation of Quality Education

A UK education was for almost all participants their first preferred choice due to their belief in its better quality education which offered intrinsic and instrumental benefits. The participants made a conscious attempt to move away from a rigid culture of rote learning and teaching which characterised the Malaysian public education system. Having studied at national schools, many participants were familiar with this learning habitus. They therefore had doubts over the quality of education at Malaysian public universities, in many instances, questioning the relevance of “spoon feeding” (Nadia) to facilitating long-term learning and independent and critical thinking. The teaching and learning culture which emphasised the educator as the authoritative information giver and the student as the passive, unquestioning recipient was criticised as producing “not very rounded” (Elaine), “very narrow minded” (Mushamir) and “very very shy” (Rosli) graduates. A harsher criticism of public universities is that the habitus within them, regulated by the Universities and Universities Colleges Act, a legislation which restricts freedom of speech, expression and association, “brainwash[ed] people” (Mushamir) into accepting propaganda imposed by the government. Furthermore, the usual emphasis on measurable academic performance where “it’s about tests, tests, tests, tests” (Mushamir) was believed to hinder intrinsic learning where motivation to acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions rested on interest and satisfaction in self growth. This is not to suggest that my participants did not value extrinsic rewards from cultural capital investment. In fact, for many, achieving and reproducing academic, economic and social privileges were key incentives of participating in UK tertiary education. The participants expressed aspirations and expectations that the exclusive knowledge, skills, dispositions and qualifications obtained from their international education would generate both instrumental and intrinsic rewards. For them, cultural capital accumulation had intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions which offered both material and non-pecuniary exchange values. This will be developed later in this chapter and also in chapter 8. The findings so far show that the participants’ educational choices were structured by familial habitus which places high value on education and cultural capital enhancement through tertiary

participation. This value is uneven as the participants in interaction with socio-relational ties had different perceptions and justifications of the academic, labour market and status worth of different forms of education-related cultural capital.

Hierarchies of Country Providers, Institutions and Modes of Study

Cultural capital within international education does not have a fixed conversion value as different academic institutions and modes of study offer varying levels of transferability to economic and social privileges. The participants were aware of this as they assigned gradations to the exchange worth of foreign cultural capital based on a perceived status hierarchy of study destinations and by extension, their educational systems and learning institutions. Within this hierarchy, UK education obtained directly in the UK was placed right at the top. Onshore education in the US and Australia typically occupied the second or third spot, followed by education in a few other advanced countries such as Japan, New Zealand and Singapore. UK offshore and transnational studies were usually placed at the middle layer of this hierarchy where different country providers of international education in Malaysia were clustered. The participants generally rated UK offshore education higher than education of other modes and source countries at this level, although the distinction was not as huge as made for onshore education. Malaysian public education was almost always positioned at the lower end of the hierarchy, which resonates with why the thought of studying in local public universities never occurred to many participants. In the same rank or at the bottom of the hierarchy was education in or from developing and less developed countries located in the periphery of the world economic system. The following comments give a sense of the participants' subscribed hierarchy of academic worth:

I don't know exactly but somehow, you have this perception that the standard of the other universities here [Malaysia] are not as good...So, the UK is like up there, the best. The rankings would be UK and then Monash and then the local universities. Somehow or rather, we do get this impression. Ya, I'm having a UK-based education and it's a lot better than other people are getting...I don't know whether it's because of influence coz not many Malaysian children grew up like, "Oh, I want to get into a Malaysian university" [laughs], to be honest.

(Elaine, Student, 3+0 Business, Economics and Management, Nottingham Malaysia)

Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, all the top-notch...Oxford Brookes, nowhere near these top-notch. It'll be second or third level...Monash University, my university, all the other university, Stamford⁷, bla bla bla. All these fall on the second level. That I don't see a difference between one or another...And then third level, of course it's the government colleges la [laughs].

(Grace, Self-employed, 3+0 BSc (Hons) Applied Accounting, Oxford Brookes)

UK, people will think, more reliable. US. If you get a degree from Indonesia, people will then, "Argh" [makes sound to suggest disgust and distrust]. People will think the better one is from the West. I think people look at economy lah. If that country, economy ok, the university has create a name in the world. Harvard University, Purdue University, Staffordshire University.

(Rosli, Student, 3+0 Business Computing, Staffordshire)

UK universities were not always placed higher than American institutions in the hierarchy as Grace's comments for an example illustrate the evaluation of academic worth based on the intersection between the perceived status of the country provider of tertiary education and the perceived prestige of the academic institution. This is a point which will be developed later in the chapter. However, the educational hierarchy generally assumed by the participants was largely based on subjective impressions of the relative prestige of enhancing cultural capital related to certain country providers and modes of study. It was common that the ordering in the hierarchy did not reflect the position of the academic institution within the global education field as participants such as Rosli, as evident in his above narrative, made ambiguous distinction between elite research universities in the subfield of restricted production and modern, less exclusive universities located closer to the subfield of mass production (Marginson 2008). He placed Staffordshire, the foreign partner university of his transnational programme, in the same league as Harvard and Purdue. This is one example which suggests the practice of talking up one's awarding institution to be seen in a positive light. Transnational students and graduates particularly did not pay much attention to how well the UK partner universities of their programmes fared in world rankings, their knowledge of which, at best, was vague. Prestige, that is, symbolic capital, was derived from associating their programmes with the UK, a region projected as and regarded to be the epitome of superior education, culture and lifestyle. Regardless of the individual performance of universities in world league tables, which onshore graduates were more

⁷ This is a private college in Selangor.

attuned to, participants across the three samples tended to hold the UK in the highest regard.

The placing of the UK at the top of the hierarchy stemmed from an ingrained and usually unquestioned assumption of the superiority of British knowledge, given that Malaysia, a former British colony, has its education system historically structured around British models and concepts. I have argued in my previous work (Sin 2009) that the ready acceptance of British standards as best is evidence of the continuing legacy of colonialism in Malaysia. Shamsul and Julie touched on the prevalence of colonial influence in Malaysia, on which their preference for some form of UK education lay:

Perceptions wise...It's not a written law. If you ask me why UK, maybe because Malaysia is Commonwealth country, so in that sense, we were colonised by the British. Most of our education is technically British system...British education has a very big presence in Malaysia...Then British Council is also very famous if you want to learn English.

(Shamsul, Business Coach, 2+1 BSc (Hons) Information Technology, Hertfordshire)

We're so far behind in terms of awareness, in terms of policy making, so I started looking at schools in the UK because a lot of what we inherit in terms of our policies, our law, the structure of the way the country is run, we inherited from the British, so that's what really made me look at coming here [UK].

(Julie, Project Co-ordinator, MSc Political Sociology, LSE)

It was common for especially onshore graduates to regard the former imperial power as the core of excellence in various fields of study and work, as the following examples show:

The UK is in the forefront of that field [mechanical engineering], so I can choose whether to go to aerospace automotive, whatever I want.

(Alex, Engineer, MEng Mechanical Engineering, Sheffield)

If you think about the business field, London is a financial centre for the world or at least, it used to be [laughs], so erm, if you have a British education, for the business or financial world, it counts as a plus. Also in the field of, you know, arts. It's very strong in its arts culture, erm, whether it's performance arts, visual arts, so there's lots of different sectors where it is very strong in lah.

(Peng Suan, BSc (Hons) Sales & Operation Manager, Government & Economics, LSE)

The usual favouring of the UK over other sources of education suggests a deep seated sense of affiliation with the centre of the British Empire more than half a century on since Malaysian Independence.

Long-standing fascination with the UK was evident in all samples, but appeared strongest among the onshore graduates who previously as students, decided to study overseas to live out imaginings and memories of the UK. The onshore graduates grew up in an environment where it was normal and very natural to study overseas, as illustrated here:

I think it was just the norms for people who...I don't know. For people like my peers, it was quite normal. Maybe because we are all middle class like all the seniors in our high schools go abroad. My circle of friends, like my little world right, it was very normal for people to go abroad. Even the teachers expect it. The teachers talked about ex-students who are in London and all that.

(Jia Wen, Multiple jobs, BA (Hons) Politics & IR, Manchester)

I supposed I know people who have gone overseas. Like my cousins, they have all gone overseas. They really enjoyed it. I suppose it was something I really wanted. I can't remember specifically what triggered it.

(Mei Sien, Doctor, Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Edinburgh)

Family was important in the creation of a positive habitus towards the UK as many participants who studied onshore had parents, who previously studied or worked in the UK, shaped their favourable impressions of it. Knowledge of the study destination was accumulated from a young age for Manchester-born Noraini who often heard her parents describe their time abroad, an experience which she longed to reconnect with, having just spent the first two years of her life in the UK:

I guess for myself, studying abroad was just an emotional thing rather than a carefully researched one. I grew up listening to my parents telling stories of their UK days and I see their photos and all the snow, I mean get real, of course I want to go! I failed to notice that my parents always mentioned snow with contempt.

(Noraini, Well-engineer, MSc Oil and Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon)

For Hussain (University Tutor, MPhil Engineering, Cambridge) who was born in North

Wales, choosing a twinning programme which allowed him to spend the final year of his studies in the UK was an opportunity to relive nostalgia of the four years he spent as a child overseas while his father studied for a doctorate. Sentimentality in educational decision-making is evident, suggesting the desirability of onshore education as a must-have experience for those who grew up with a feeling of closeness and belonging to the UK.

Early immersion in enrichment activities which predisposed participants to the UK also generated interest and longing to experience its wider socio-cultural and physical landscape by studying onshore. Examples of these activities include travelling to the UK for holidays and the consumption of objectified cultural capital in the form of British story books. Several references were made to British children's author Enid Blyton whose works were staple reading for the participants at home while growing up. These stories offered a version of childhood steeped in tradition and values of colonial Britain, which while did not reflect much of contemporary UK, formed imaginings which the onshore graduates aspired to experience. As a child, Peng Suan, a sales and operation manager based in London, read about English boarding schools, an experience she later on in life received when she boarded in Hertfordshire before furthering her studies at the London School of Economics. Studying onshore was a natural choice for her:

I used to love Enid Blyton books, urm, so there were lots of stories coz Enid Blyton is British and there are lots of stories about boarding schools erm education in the UK and all that, so erm, yeah, I've always had an affinity for this country and education in this country.

After a holiday in the UK when she was eight, studying onshore became a "childhood ambition" for Tricia, a charities officer in Petaling Jaya who read law at the University of Sheffield. Sheffield's proximity to the Peak District was ideal for her to recreate the "English dream" where Enid Blyton's idyllic "English countryside" was brought to life:

The story book setting would have to be in an English countryside and have to be in the UK. It's just one of those wild childhood fantasies that I have been having. In a way, yes, coz Sheffield is just a 45 minutes bus ride to the Peak District, so that and the hostel that I was staying in my...

...first year, I could actually just see the edges of the Peak District...I actually fulfilled my childhood ambition of going to the UK and living in the English countryside, so I can die happy now [laughs].

While unable to be onshore due to cost and familial reasons, it continued to be Nadia's (Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia) dream to one day study in Durham to absorb its architecture and quaint surroundings: "Durham, to be really honest, it's because of the campus. They have a world heritage site, the cathedral, in the campus. Ever since I was a kid, I always knew I wanted to study in the UK because of the gorgeous building".

Other features of the wider environment in the UK which interested participants were the wider mix of nationalities to interact with, the opportunity to live independently by "staying in dorms" (Sue Ern), the proximity to Europe which enabled cheaper and more convenient travels and amusingly, the "gloomy weather" (Salehah). Given the opportunity, almost all the students and graduates from the offshore and transnational groups would have wanted to study physically and entirely in the UK. An onshore study experience, even just for a short duration, promised the adventure and excitement of experiencing the UK as participants imagined or recalled it to be. A good example is that of Teik Lee (Executive, BSc (Hons) Computing & Information Systems) who completed the last three months of his transnational programme at Liverpool John Moores University:

Our thinking was, why not we go travelling? [laughs] Actually, our plan was not to study. It's actually to travel [laughs]. But we need to keep the ultimate goal la. We need to be sure to pass and get the cert. That's the ultimate goal. But at the same time, why are we going to UTAR in KL? Might as well go to Liverpool, try new things, try new environment, try new education system, try the new lifestyle there...Although 3 months is short la, but you'll actually be exposed yourself to other people, cultures and so on.

This suggests the prevalence of educational tourism where academic pursuits are inextricably tied to the quest for overseas travel and living exposure (Ritchie 2003). The aspired or actual accumulation of foreign cultural capital was not confined to the grounds of the respective universities, but included wider socio-cultural and physical

spaces within the UK and the surrounding region. Onshore international education provided the platform to physically branch out to other sites and means of cultural capital accumulation in the host country and beyond.

Australia, in many instances, was seen as a second-rate source of education, especially when compared to education in or from the UK. Tricia (Charities Officer, 1+2 Law, Sheffield) justified her choice of study destination on the grounds that the UK represented the core and direct source of British cultural capital, thus, having unrivalled authenticity: “I felt it [Australian education] wasn’t original in the sense that Australia was basically an Aboriginal land which the British founded, so I might just as well go to where the English came from which is the UK”. Kelvin (Business Consultant, BSc Business Mathematics & Statistics, LSE) disliked the perceived commonality of Australian programmes and their looser entry standards which diluted the symbolic capital which could be derived from them:

I didn’t really like the bunch of people that were going to Australia. I thought too many were there...From school, from college, I mean, too many people seem to be going to Australia. It seemed to be too easy, so I wanted to, I guess, differentiate myself slightly, try something a little more difficult.

His narrative pointed to another hierarchy of educational worth subscribed by some participants, one based on institutional entry requirements and implied academic abilities needed to satisfy the selection criteria. To be higher in status was to secure entry in a UK university which was perceived to have tougher admission barriers. Making similar observations as Kelvin is Sue Ern, an Economics twinning student with Manchester who attempted to distance herself from what was imagined to be a less academically serious culture and student community in Australia:

There are mainly rich people who go there and party and so, I changed my mind...Well, I have a few friends studying in Australia and they tell me it’s like Malaysia also because there are a lot of Asians there. The weather is definitely nicer than UK [everyone in focus group laughs]. So actually, Australia is a really nice place to live but the education is not as strict as UK because they are more laid back.

The mention of a large population of Asians in Australia suggested her avoidance of social mixing patterns and opportunities which bore too much familiarity to her home country. Grace, an Applied Accounting graduate of a transnational Oxford Brookes programme, would have preferred the UK over Australia if she had the opportunity to study overseas. Similarly, her narrative revealed a desire to experience cultural, social and geographical differences through incorporation of elements of travel and play into studies:

Because if I go to Australia, I'll feel it's like second Malaysia with colder weather because there's a lot of Malaysians there, so it's just another Malaysia. What I actually want to experience is something totally different. I am an adventurous type of person lah and I don't want to have a life just like that, so I believe if I go to UK, I'm forced to mingle with other nations, I mean foreigner lah. I want to be a foreigner, you see [laughs]... I think if you go to Australia, you're more confined. You can only stay in Australia and you can't travel far. If you study in Sydney, you go to Melbourne. You can't go to Europe. It's beautiful [Europe], you know. Everyone wants to go there.

The link made between international education in the UK and opportunity to experience “something totally different” through travel reflects the place-specific recreational and self-discovery aspects of UK studies (Brooks, Waters & Pimlott-Wilson 2012; 2011) which the offshore and transnational samples could not adequately and spontaneously experience in the home country. The UK represented the perfect base to immerse in higher valued culture, lifestyle and social mix which while not said explicitly, carried symbolic weight. It offered status distinction.

A UK education in Malaysia was the “next best thing” (Nadia) for participants who for financial, familial, personal and emotional reasons, could not pursue their studies overseas, although this often came with a feeling of embarrassment and inadequateness. Wah Seong had just returned from his one year study exchange in the UK campus when he agreed to the interview. He had an apologetic tone to his voice as he related to me his experiences during the exchange, as if sorry for not being able to relate rich and interesting stories due to his limited time there. A sense of unfulfilment that he was unable to have a full education in the UK was expressed: “I have sense of regret in me

that I can't have the opportunity to graduate in the UK. Ya, coz as much as I want to do the full programme there, it's too costly. It's out of my control". In another example, I recalled the focus group conversation I had with four twinning students who would depart for Manchester the following year. When I asked them whether any thought was given while growing up to furthering their studies in Malaysia, their response was an instant no. This was followed by laughter across the room which suggested irony that they were still in the home country. While access to sufficient economic capital enabling their eventual studies overseas could be read as privilege, the students saw it as disadvantage. They expressed impatience in getting over with the first year of their studies in Malaysia and moving on to the UK where many of their friends already were:

Chloe: It's more of like all my friends are overseas. I have to go overseas [everyone laughed]. It's not like they will envy me. If I don't go, I will be left out.

Do you feel that way? Do you feel left out?
[Unanimous yes]

Hui Ching: All my friends are overseas. Even like if they're still in Malaysia, it's because they are doing a twinning programme also. So, they intend to be in the UK eventually.

Salehah: Just that we're going there one year later than them [everyone else laughed].

Studying a twinning or offshore programme was the back door route into the UK for those determined to still experience studies and life overseas:

Okay, I did consider Nottingham but because if I go to Nottingham, it's going to be mainly a 3+0 unless I make the top 5 of my class and get a transfer there whereas this Manchester programme guarantees me a transfer.

(Hui Ching, Student, 1+2 Economics, Manchester)

Oh, actually, that's one of the reasons why I want to join this university as well because of the exchange programme. But I wanted to go because it's the UK and you do want to see it. You wanna go on holiday sometimes [laughs]. You wanna see what it is like.

(Nadia, Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia)

The eventual move to the UK, even for just a semester or two, assured them that they would not be missing out completely on what they imagined the UK could offer.

An offshore or transnational education was the consolation prize for those unable at all to study anywhere abroad. These participants were of the opinion that UK cultural capital received in the home country still gave relative exclusivity which distinguished them from other locally based students and graduates in Malaysia. Students and graduates of Nottingham Malaysia especially made finer distinctions between offshore and transnational study arrangements. They claimed more authenticity to their education on the grounds that it came direct from the source, that is, from a UK branch campus in Malaysia. As Nadia stressed, her awarding institution was “not just the affiliate, it’s the University of Nottingham in Malaysia”. However, the inability to undergo the same educational pathway as their onshore counterparts, that is, one which involved entering university in the UK directly after or even before the pre-university programme, left a lingering sense of incompleteness in them. The sequences involved in going abroad, from being dropped off at the airport by the family to physically departing from the home country could be likened to a rite of passage, a transition which had to be experienced to get what Simrit (Self-employed, 3+0 Law, UoL) described as the “whole feeling”, the feeling of having a foreign education in the very sense of the word: in a foreign country. Unable to study overseas for financial reasons, Simrit felt unaccomplished, as suggested in the following:

You don’t have a university experience where you are away from family, you know, they drop you at the airport and you know, the whole scene...I probably wanted that a little bit because seeing my other cousins going off, that whole feeling, you know, I’m going away to study.

She believed that the opportunity to graduate at her foreign partner university would have brought more authenticity to her study experience:

I think that would have been a good perk if they could have thrown in that. The university could have negotiated because there are so many students here, hundreds and hundreds of students, thousands. So, if they could just have worked out a package or something where they could fly us in, attend the ceremony there and then fly back, that would have been really, you know, instead of attending your ceremony where the Principal of your school gives you the certificate and not the University of London’s Chancellor or something. That would really have made the difference.

Her reference to a “package” culminating in a flight to the graduation ceremony in the UK reflects a perceived necessity of overseas travel as part of international education. Simrit hoped to save up enough to be able to afford an onshore education in the UK for her daughter when the time came. A thought occurred to her that she could study with her daughter in the UK or at least reside with her. To personally experience what the UK offered in terms of education, culture, lifestyle and travel was a journey which Simrit and some other participants aspired to make to obtain a sense of “whole” and completeness to their education and adulthood.

In Noraini’s (Well Engineer, MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon) case, failure to secure funding in the late 1990s to pursue her first degree in the UK was looked back on with some bitterness. She remained in Malaysia and completed a degree in Electronics Engineering. Despite her being in a better economic position to study onshore for her Masters, she vividly recalled how her previous lack of means to study overseas disorientated her understandings of the self. Unfavourable economic and personal circumstances robbed her of what she considered as her rightful entitlement to an onshore undergraduate education:

I always did well in school and if anybody could get a scholarship, it would easily be me. In my mind, that scholarship was my right! Until that scholarship didn’t happen and it completely made me lose my self-confidence, my bearings. I have no idea where to go from there. I have never imagined myself going to uni other than one in UK. Local unis never ever entered my mind for as long as I have lived and it was so very painful that I had to look at it as my only direction to go next. I spent the next few years loathing George Soros who Mahathir⁸ accused of speculating and causing our *ringgit* to devalue, in turn depriving myself and my fellow friends of our rightful UK education.

This brings back the point that UK onshore studies typically occupied the highest rank in the participants’ perceived status hierarchy of tertiary education. Cultural capital obtained through international education had different exchange values in their minds, depending on the study destination, mode of study and academic institution.

⁸ Former Prime Minister of Malaysia who held the post from 1981 to 2003.

Hierarchies based on Institutional and Subject Rankings

While there was tendency across the three samples to associate with the symbolic elitism of the UK, some interviewees were particularly discerning about the actual quality of education received. They tried as much as they could to attend institutions which were highly ranked overall or in their subject area. Brian, a PhD graduate in Engineering from the University of Cambridge, believed that strategic accumulation of cultural capital at a specific institution of elite prestige offered greater symbolic capital than merely studying in the UK or other countries:

It's rather you go to a good place or you go to a lousy place. If you were to go to a third rate university overseas, it's better you go to UM or UKM or USM [leading Malaysian public universities]. The quality of education would actually be better...To me, unless you come from a really really good place, I'll put you all in the same tier...let's say you come from any other university overseas, whether it is UK, US, Malaysia, wherever you come from Japan, Singapore, China, whatever, I'll just classify same.

Studying in “any other university overseas” positioned below the highest layer of top tiered institutions was considered futile as it offered no clear distinction in the labour market. When asked whether he had benefited in any way from his tertiary education in the UK, Brian was quick to point out that it was the university and not the study destination which opened up economic and social opportunities for him: “I would say I benefited from my Cambridge education, not from my UK education”. The unmistakable prestige of membership in a globally known institution with excellent reputational capital (Brown et al. 2003) prompted him to decline his offer of study from Imperial College London. The name “College” behind Imperial was feared to raise doubts among less informed Malaysian peers about its credibility and authenticity as a tertiary institution: “They're like, “Har...college only ar? How come not university... ..one? Then have to explain to them the whole concept of University of London, bla bla bla”. College in the Malaysian context refers to a higher learning institution which typically offers diploma-level programmes, given the absence of power to confer its own undergraduate degrees. Graduating from an elite institution entitles holders of exclusive institutionalised cultural capital to a badge of distinction to be pinned on the curriculum

vitae. The desire to acquire the most coveted badge prompted Wooi Kiat, a PhD Engineering graduate from Imperial to try for a place at Cambridge. Failure to enter the institution was looked back on with a feeling of unfulfilled desire, expressed ironically and humorously: “There is a joke lah that Imperial is all for Cambridge rejects”. This is an example of how status differentiation occurred even within the highest layer of the academic hierarchy as participants sought entry into the best of the best institutions in the sub-field of restricted production within the global education field (Marginson 2008).

There were participants who graded the worth of institutions based on rankings for their respective subject areas. Many of them did not remember or know specifically which rankings they referred to other than they were rankings of some sort from perceived credible sources. With the help of an education counsellor, Jia Wen (Multiple jobs, BA (Hons) Politics & International Relations, Manchester) narrowed down her choices of UK institutions based on rankings for Politics and eventually decided on Manchester: “I just look at the 6 (universities) and see which one was more popular for Politics”. Lian Hui (SAP Consultant, 3+0 BSc (Hons) Computing Studies, Northumbria) explained the finer aspects of rankings which she considered while choosing a local institution and its foreign partner university: “It has to do with the quality of the university and based on the ranking of the university in that country as well. I think we have to look at the university and also the course. Not even the ranking of the university, but the course specifically”. The ranking of the local private institution in the chosen discipline was also important for Rosli, a 3+0 Business Computing student who explained that the choice of his local institution was based on the fact that “it is the best IT university in Malaysia” and is “well known”. Once institutional or subject rankings were taken into account, the UK did not necessarily feature as the best country provider of superior education in the participants’ minds. Teik Lee would have forgone the opportunity to do a twinning programme with Liverpool Moores University if he was able to study in Japan which he regarded as a world leading institution for his subject

area: “To be an engineer, the cert would be more valuable if you enrol yourself in better ranking universities...If I were free to choose, I’ll apply for the best ranking university: University of Tokyo in Japan”. In sum, some participants paid more attention to various hierarchies of academic worth in assessing and developing their potential and actual economic and status worth while others were less thorough. UK cultural capital gained through tertiary education offered different grades of distinction, depending on the aspect and detail on which it was judged. Some of these aspects and details were the mode of study, ranking and prestige of the university and subject area, perceived quality of the institutional habitus and the symbolic elitism attached to the wider environment of the study destination.

Academic Worth based on Institutional Habitus

Reay et al. (2001b) differentiated between personal habitus (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) and what they termed, institutional habitus, to illustrate the interaction between the individual and educational institution shaping higher education choices. They argued that the institutional habitus of the school, that is, the particular culture, characteristics and practices of the institution, structured the ways in which the high school students in their study weighed and narrowed choices of universities to attend. At the same time, the students exercised agency in their choice making by drawing on their personal habitus consisting of internalised principles, values, perceptions, tastes and preferences shaped through relations with family and peers. In assessing the value of their educational choices, some participants in my study judged the worth of UK education in terms of the fit of their personal habitus with the institutional habitus at the site of learning. A key aspect of the institutional habitus being assessed was the availability of excellent teaching. These participants attached greater value to the teaching style of UK lecturers which they believed to be advocating rigorous individual work and practical application of theories, concepts and equations.

The same participants imagined or experienced a huge disjuncture between their

learning preferences and the rote teaching of Malaysian and in some cases, Asian foreign lecturers in the home country. They believed these lecturers were inferior due to the tendency to follow standard notes and text-book examples and offered little understanding of how theory could relate to real life. Offshore students and graduates were particularly critical of the gap in teaching standards between Malaysian and UK or other foreign lecturers within UK education. As offshore students and graduates in particular had some contact with an international mix of lecturers on campus in Malaysia, they were able to make informed comparisons of the academic dispositions and styles between Malaysian and foreign lecturers:

The thing with Malaysian lecturers, they are very Asian I have to say. You know how, as I was saying, the local Asian students will just think of education as reading and all they want to do in uni is study. I think it's the same with the lecturers. They feed that to the students, basically like a Malaysian school. But as for the foreign lecturers, the English lecturers and the Filipino lecturers, they use different styles of teaching where they challenge your thinking. You know, you think out of the box.

(Nadia, Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia)

The UK lecturers, they seem to be more established. They're actually older lecturers. The Malaysian campus, the lecturers are young, like 30s, maybe late 30s. In the UK, they are more experienced because they have been in the university for a long time. So, when they teach their course, they're very familiar with it. If you ask them any questions, they can answer right on the spot with confidence.

(Wah Seong, Student, MSc Civil Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia)

The interest in cultivating independent, critical thinking and learning for application illuminate the participants' desires to build up valued work skills through UK education. Overall, these aspirations were less achievable for offshore students and graduates as they pointed to a lack or absence of contact with lecturers who promoted these valued embodied cultural capital characteristics.

Being geographically distant from the source country of international education to some extent cut students and graduates of offshore and transnational programmes off from direct experience of valued knowledge transfer from leading academic experts in the subject area. Kor Ming (Student, 3+0 Accounting & Finance, UWE) noticed that a

lack of academic staff with extensive and relevant portfolios at his Malaysian private institution meant that “one teacher is like able to teach two different subjects but they’re not really specialised in those particular fields”. Having recently experienced online lectures from the partner university in Bristol, he was impressed with the higher academic accomplishments of lecturers there:

We actually have videos from overseas and we were like, “Wow, all these people are like write their own books”. And then when my friend came back [from the UK], I actually asked. That’s when I actually take notice, they [lecturers in the UK] actually do more research and they are actually more specialised in the field, rather than general.

For Simrit (Self-employed, 3+0 Bachelor of Laws (Hons), London), there was a challenge of connecting reading material in her programme with overseas-based academic authorities who wrote them. She spoke of the difficulty in not having “face to face” contact with these academics: “Here [Malaysia], you’re just reading, Ok, professor this and this. You’re not associating with the professor who is speaking to us in front of the lecture hall”. These narratives reflect experiences of unequal access to contact with well established and intellectually engaging lecturers within UK international education, despite the receipt of the same degree qualification at the end of studies.

Other challenges encountered by offshore and transnational students and graduates include having to face some Malaysian lecturers who took issues personally and asserted authority and seniority in lecturer-student relations:

Like here [Malaysia], the teachers make you feel as if you need to earn their respect...let’s say you come for a lecture and they will make it a point to say that, “Oh, for those who don’t come to lecture, I won’t put the notes up because you don’t come to lecture. Things don’t come easy”...But maybe I’m generalising. But the lecturers I met in the UK, they were really really good as in if I missed a class or tutorial, they would be like, “Don’t worry. Come for the next one. It’s not a problem”.

Lecturers from the UK were more professional and approachable, as experienced first-hand by Tricia, a twinning law graduate of Sheffield. She enjoyed having “cool” lecturers in the UK who seemed able to relax hierarchy and be readily available to

students:

My lecturers were cool. I had one lecturer who looked like Hugh Grant [laughs]. The other lecturers, you could go into their offices. We were just undergrads, but we could [knocks table], “Hi, can we come in and chat?” That’s cool. I don’t think we’ll able to do something like that with our lecturers here [Malaysia].

I found her mention of a Hugh Grant look-alike lecturer interesting as it relates to the fascination of many participants across the samples in acquiring a foreign and unique experience from overseas education, almost as if taken out from a movie. The presence of lecturers of different levels and types of embodied cultural capital ownership set different ways of experiencing academic values, dispositions and styles within the same degree awarding institution and even within a single programme. This had implications on the extent to which the participants believed they were able to accumulate valuable embodied cultural capital through their education that could be converted to superior job, status and personal development opportunities.

The contextual environment framed the degree of possibility and motivation to optimize the enhancement of valued foreign embodied cultural, social and linguistic capital for the participants. The onshore graduate sample portrayed a strong sense of belonging and pride towards their respective awarding universities which was not significantly noticeable in the offshore and transnational graduate and student groups. Continuing identification with the university was most evident in the narratives of onshore graduates who completed their education at elite, old UK universities. Brian’s (Researcher, PhD Engineering, Cambridge) deep sense of affiliation with his institution five years on after graduation stemmed from positive global receptivity of the University of Cambridge, its prestige in the UK, he believed, was rivalled only by Oxford. He explained that Cambridge is widely known for its “800 year old history” of producing “good people” such as:

“Nobel Prize winners, bla bla bla, these kind of people, you know. World leaders, in that sense. Look around, this prime minister, that politician, that industrialist...And of course, there’s the...

...old boys' club as well. These Oxbridge people, they usually end up somewhere”.

The name, Cambridge, brought up in social conversations and inscribed on the degree certificate, carried exclusive symbolic value for him. Similarly, Wooi Kiat (Technology Consultant, PhD Electronic & Electrical Engineering, Imperial) believed that Imperial College communicated a brand of elitism and was the preserve of the economically privileged with high-status social connections:

What you get out of Imperial is a brand. You have the right to put the name “Imperial College” on your CV.

Do you feel proud of that brand?

Oh yeah, I am. Currently, it's way too expensive to study in Imperial because the fees is quite exorbitant. Then erm, a similar education can be obtained anywhere. It's just that you don't have the brand. Erm, you don't necessarily gain a knowledge disadvantage by not being in Imperial, but certain things, you do gain an advantage by being in Imperial because of the exposure, the kind of people there are. Even for the kind of people who go to Imperial are either, one, filthy rich, want to network with people.

The opportunity to mingle and associate with elite social networks made the study experience at a tough-entry institution uniquely rewarding and membership in the alumni community a privileged honour.

Reinforcing the theme of elitism and access to a valuable social mix is Kelvin, a graduate of the London School of Economics (LSE). What made his study experience unique was the opportunity to socialize with “very very brilliant people” in an institution brilliant in its own right for a history of making social and political impact such as “stag[ing] protests against certain government policies”. He took pride in the boldness of his institution and its campus community to take critical stands on issues that mattered:

[It] made me a part of something more than an education, something of an institution. Erm, how can I put it, it was a university with personality lah. I think I would not have got that in many other places...It's not so much of what we learn or how it was to get through, but just the whole prestige of university, the branding, the exclusiveness of it.

The distinction made between “education” and “institution” echoes the sentiments of

Brian and Wooi Kiat that technical knowledge and skills were usually common currencies available across various universities, countries and modes of study. What stood out was the specific cultural and social make-up of the campus, in other words, the institutional habitus signified by the university's name. The exclusivity of the institutional name of his university is something Kelvin would prefer to guard against excessive commodification and internationalisation, despite his support for widening access to tertiary education:

If I were to read in the papers tomorrow that LSE or Oxbridge is going to open a campus in say, Malaysia or Singapore, I'll probably be quite disappointed, rather than happy. But you know, it's funny how people think that way. I think in some ways, it doesn't make sense in the future that education could be this exclusive. Ya, education is becoming more democratised.

The increased production and consumption of institutionalised cultural capital in the expanding global academic field was permitted, only to the extent that it did not threaten the exclusive symbolic power of the self. The preference was clear that social distance be established between onshore graduates of elite institutions and graduates of less exclusive UK universities. This further illustrates the gradations of exchange value attached to cultural capital obtained from different institutions and through different modes of study. It is difficult to say however whether the interviewees were clear in their minds as to which institutions were considered elite and which were not.

Academic Worth based on Campus Features and Social Mix

Although students and graduates of offshore and transnational studies did not strongly associate their campuses in Malaysia with elitism, some certainly thought that the features of their learning sites were excellent. These were especially felt by those who studied at UK offshore campuses which provided a self-contained site for learning, social, recreational and living needs. Offshore students and graduates chose their campus as it was purpose-built and “on its own”, giving it a “very proper” feel where:

We have activities...compared to some of my friends who are studying in Taylor's⁹, they don't exactly interact with a lot of the students. They have their own group of friends and they just go out to town, have fun and come back and studying is like, "Oh, I just go here to study". Whereas here, you get to know everyone. You're really part of the university.

(Nadia, Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia)

A self-sufficient campus, equipped with catering, sports, recreational and accommodation facilities, laid the foundations for belonging and connectedness for students and graduates of Nottingham's Malaysia campus, especially for those who lived on campus. Set against the backdrop of hills and nearby oil palm plantations, the campus occupies a "secluded location" (Wah Seong) in a small town some 30 kilometres or about 45 minutes' drive from Kuala Lumpur where leisure and entertainment sites and activities are centred. While distance from the city limited sites and circles of interaction during term time, it brought Elaine, a Business, Economics and Management undergraduate, closer to members of the campus community. She believed that the relatively small-sized student community at her offshore campus eased interaction with individuals of other cultures, ethnicities and nationalities, helping her to build close social ties, widen friendship circles and enrich her world view. She shared that this was more difficult to do during her study exchange to Nottingham, UK, due to the campus' larger student population which was more than six times larger than the one in Malaysia. Embodied cultural capital and social capital, specifically, outlook, personality and lifestyle formed through regular social exchanges within a more inclusive setting at her offshore campus added to her confidence in graduate employability. They served as good demonstration of social and team work skills to the future employer, she imagined.

A smaller campus space and student community in the offshore or local institution in Malaysia, however, raised issues of privacy and restricted exploration of values, lifestyles and relations. Simrit's and Elaine's ability to experience and lead their personal and student lives in an independent, spontaneous way was constrained by the presence of watchful, nosy and occasionally, interfering local social ties on campus:

⁹ This refers to a popular private college in Selangor.

I didn't like it [campus] because there were a lot of Punjabis and I am a Punjabi myself and I didn't quite like mixing with them because you know, you meet them in college, you meet them in the temple and your mother knows their mothers. And they'll be telling, "Oh, you know, your daughter didn't go to class". It's very typical. I didn't like that because I was dating an Indian guy and it was a no no in Punjabi community, so I had a lot of problems in that sense.

(Simrit, Self-employed, 3+0 Bachelor of Laws (Hons), UoL)

This campus is so small that you tend to know everyone. You can't walk anywhere without bumping into someone you know whereas UK campus, since it is so huge, you can walk around, no one knows you and pretty much you can go for classes, focus on that and then meet them later on. But here, it's not the case, really. And pretty much the way people socialize here is different from there. I don't know whether it's the Western thing but over there [UK], there is a lot of privacy...Here, it's very difficult because everyone knows everything and they do care. They'll talk, they'll ask. But over there, no one cares what you do...Here, it gets stifling, seriously.

(Elaine, Student, 3+0 Business, Economics and Management, Nottingham Malaysia)

Studying in the home country did not offer a clear physical break from socio-relational forces demanding local conformity for the offshore and transnational students and graduates. This, several participants believed, restricted their potential to learn, experience and grow freely.

A lack of student diversity particularly in smaller Malaysian private institutions without a self-contained campus limited some students and graduates' exposure to a truly international experience which they associated with a world-class UK education. With only 15 students in his intake, most of whom were locals, there was a lack of opportunity and initiative on Hisham's (Student, 3+0 Business Management & Finance, Keele) part to build social capital: "I can meet the same type of people outside...Wherever I talk to them, it's always the same things. It's like a tape recorder, so, I don't want to talk again". For Sze Theng, a transnational music student with Wolverhampton, a small student population at her college in Malaysia led to the mundane routine of "meeting the same few people" which did not inspire a stronger drive for technical excellence:

If there are more people, you will be more motivated because you see other people practising a lot, studying a lot. It's like my college has so little people, so the best students, maybe 1 or 2. But those people overseas, maybe there are a number of them, so you have to practise harder to reach that level.

Her narrative pointed to a downside of studying UK programmes in Malaysia which is that the local environment, campus and social networks may not place significant pressure or motivation to quickly absorb and be open to valuable foreign influences and experiences. With the comfort of familiarity with the home surroundings came a tendency to subscribe to a culture of complacency where the local and known were accepted and reproduced while the new and foreign, although welcomed, were not actively sought after. Lian Hui (SAP consultant, 3+0 BSc (Hons) Computing Studies, Northumbria) talked about the insular and narrow-minded worldview which came with being too rooted in one's local "comfort zone":

The environment and the surroundings we have are still local, so the culture that we see is still very local. I think we're still very closed. We're still in our own comfort zone. We have not exposed to something outside our comfort zone whereas someone who has been overseas, maybe they have their [Malaysian] friends there, maybe they still mix around with their friends, but you can't deny that they have lived in other people's country. They have to adapt to people's culture and this process would have changed their mentality.

Where opportunities arose to interact with foreigners on campus, Grace (Self-employed, 3+0 BSc (Hons) Applied Accounting, Oxford Brookes) found a lack of motivation on her part, preferring to stay closely within Malaysian social circles. She questioned the need to learn and adjust to the foreign and different in the home country when it would be more convenient to stay within the comforts of local mainstream culture and networks. She believed the urge to internationalise networks and worldview would come if she was in a foreign country where adaptation was likely necessary to cope with strangeness and unfamiliarity:

Why do you want to mix with someone where you must adapt to their culture and everything when there are already so many people out there just like you? So you have the tendency not to break yourself from the comfort zone. But if let's say you throw yourself overseas lah...you are forced to adapt to others and you're forced to see the world differently... Malaysian universities, the private Us do not have so much of a campus life, despite them trying to. It's still like a tuition life. It's just like taking a private tuition.

There was regret for not being able to experience a fuller "campus life" overseas which in her mind, involved having "longer holidays" and living within a self-contained "big

university”.

Studying outside the UK also posed challenges to developing knowledge of correct use of standard English as written and spoken by native speakers in the UK. Kor Ming (Student, 3+0 Accounting & Finance, UWE) talked about the orientation towards colloquial Malaysian English in his home country: “If you’re in Malaysia, you tend to accept the Malaysian way of speaking. But if you’re in UK, you’ll tend to adapt very fast”. A local private campus environment typically made up of Malaysian lecturers and students from Chinese-speaking backgrounds normalised the use of grammatically incorrect English, much to the amusement of Francis (Student, 3+0 Law, UoL) who is Indian Malaysian and who spoke only English at home:

The lecturer comes in and she dictates to us and we were supposed to copy down what she is saying and it would be ok, mostly legible but the standard of language is not there. And also there are errors being made: grammatical, language errors, sentence construction errors and a lot of uhm my course mates would not know that being from Chinese-educated backgrounds and I suppose the lecturer simplifies it ar which I think it’s fine, but when it comes to making errors then it’s not so good, yah? Uhm and I would detect it and I make the relevant corrections, so I think that is the disadvantage.

The student’s more advanced cultural-linguistic capital in English, inherited from the family, helped him “detect” the incongruence between his UK-educated local lecturers’ paper qualifications and their actual language competence. Concern over a predominantly local Mandarin-speaking student community at a particular institution led Sze Theng (Student, 3+0 Music, Wolverhampton) to forgo it for another college with a more international mix of students who would normally converse in English. Although she is of Chinese ethnicity, Sze Theng had very limited knowledge of Mandarin. While not explicitly expressed, her preference to study in a campus with an anticipated huge English-speaking student population reflects a rejection of Chinese proficiency as an equally important and relevant aspect of her ethnic identity. This illustrates the primary construction of language as capital, rather than language as identity, a finding also found in Francis et al.’s (2009:519) study on British-Chinese pupils’ understandings of

language benefits. Language was viewed instrumentally by Sze Theng, that is, in terms of its relative usefulness in facilitating her learning of Western theories and concepts of music and the possibility of studying and networking in Europe in future. Exposure on campus to valued linguistic cultural capital comprising knowledge of the rules and nuances of standard English, as used in the UK, was limited for especially transnational students and graduates as they had very little contact, if at all, with foreign lecturers and students well-versed in English. This again shows that cultural capital obtainable through UK education is not uniform across geographical locations and institutions.

Living with the parents in Malaysia or having them close by placed further limits on the acquisition of a UK study experience where character building and identity formation could take place spontaneously. Elaine (Student, 3+0 Business, Economics and Management, Nottingham Malaysia) rationalised that:

When you go overseas, you're basically in new territory. You have to be independent. You're forced to be independent...When there is a problem, you have to fix it whereas if you're staying here, compared to someone who had the education here, you know, you still have your parents with you.

Many offshore and transnational students and graduates lived with their parents out of financial and obligatory reasons and were aware that the family home provided comfort and convenience that did not nurture them to think and act independently. This was especially so for those who had protective parents and family members who kept a close watch on their activities and attended in detail to their day to day living needs. The centrality of the family in her student life constrained Nadia's (Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia) ability to experience a UK education in the way she would have hoped for, which is, away from the watchful guidance of her family members. Although reluctant, she remained in the home country and in the family home, in accordance with the wishes of her single parent and grandparents who wanted to take care of her while she studied: "I'm still in the comforts of my home. I still live with my family. They don't exactly allow me to stay on campus. I'm the only

grandchild, so the family is very protective”. The routine or obligation to engage in family activities meant spending less time on campus where socialisation into valued cultural capital could take place.

As I arranged for interviews with offshore and transnational students, I learned that meeting on campus was usually not convenient for them. The participants would usually leave the campus immediately after lessons and tutorials, only staying back if they really had to. They did not usually enter the campus on free days. This seems to suggest some separation between the campus and personal worlds, a practice which essentially revolved around managing studies and in some cases, part-time work, with familial obligations, expectations and commitments which often took priority. Similarly, the juggling of roles and activities as full-time student and active member of the family was routine for offshore students of Australian tertiary programmes in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia (Chapman & Pyvis 2006:241). On the whole, offshore and transnational students and graduates were tied down to local circumstances, norms and obligations that did not significantly encourage and enable them to seek out a more global experience in their UK education. Onshore graduates, on the other hand, had a more private and independent space to explore academic, social and personal development needs.

It has to be pointed out that not all of the participants involved in UK offshore and transnational education appreciated a fuller immersion into a Western and international setting on campus. The example of Imran, (Student, 3+0 Business Information Technology, Staffordshire) a Malay Muslim, deserves attention. Coming from the predominantly rural, Muslim and Malay-speaking state of Terengganu, he entered his private academic institution in Kuala Lumpur with expectations to improve his interaction skills in English, to develop confidence and “open”, “independent thinking” and to socialize with a wider mix of students. However, the pursuit of embodied cultural capital and social capital was hardly “open” and “independent” as it was limited to the

family's ethnically and religiously prescribed boundaries of cultural and social immersion which suggested ethno-religious conservatism. His father expected him to reproduce his socialised traditional Malay Muslim way of life in a cosmopolitan, urbanised Kuala Lumpur. This was to be achieved by avoiding close contact with implied pervasive Western and local Westernised influences that could compromise Malay Muslim values and identity. A natural choice for Imran when selecting student accommodation was to opt for a Muslim-designated residence, run by the university college:

[laughs] Because I am from Terengganu and I am scared that my dad is scared. My dad will think that if I stay with the other fellas [non-Muslims], I will get influenced. About the religion, I don't want to talk here lah¹⁰.

Institutional provision of Muslim-only residences by his institution served the practical purpose of meeting the specific religious and lifestyle needs of a minority of Muslim students in the Malaysian private education sector. An all Muslim accommodation community could provide a network of resources in the form of support and validation of Islamic identity practices such as attending to prayers and the preparation and consumption of *halal* food. However, this inevitably reinforced structures of ethnic segregation which cut across various realms of Malaysian society. This ethnically and by extension, religiously shaped Imran's experiences of a UK international education.

I found Imran's English proficiency lacking compared to other participants. Interview questions often had to be repeated and spoken slowly to ease his understanding. His responses were short and he paused at various times as he tried to find the right words in English to articulate himself. The friends he socialised with most at campus were Malays with whom he spoke in the Malay language, as he did with local friends of other

¹⁰ This suggests awareness of the sensitiveness of the topic in Malaysia.

ethnicities. English was only utilised in his interaction with non-Malay local peers “if they do not understand what I’m talking”. I am reminded here of Waters and Brooks’ (2011) findings on the limits of UK students’ pursuit of different cultural and social experiences while studying abroad. Their engagement in “acceptable difference” (Waters & Brooks 2011:572) through interaction with students of relatively similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds to some extent reflects what Imran attempted to do in another international education setting. This also relates to Chapman and Pyvis’ (2006) findings on the tendency of students in the Malaysian campus of an Australian university to interact with course mates of similar culture and habitual language. How ethnicity had a bearing on the students’ friendship and interaction patterns on campus was however, not elaborated. The surface dabbling in unfamiliar social and embodied cultural (and linguistic) capital accumulation at campus perhaps suffice for Imran’s intended employment in government-linked companies in Malaysia which are known to have a predominantly Malay *bumiputera* workforce. The role that Imran’s father played in framing his experiences of embodied cultural and social capital accumulation ties in with the following section on parental involvement in educational decision-making.

Parental Expectations and Peer Acceptability

Regardless of the mode of study, all students and graduates experienced some form of parental involvement in their academic decision-making. Their parents shaped their understandings of what would count as appropriate institutions, disciplines or careers to pursue and which to avoid. Participants’ freedom to choose their programmes or institutions varied from receiving support from their parents to select what they desired, to being encouraged to select a certain institution or field of study, through to not having a say at all in the decision-making process. These examples best illustrate the varying degrees of autonomy held by the participants:

Actually, they left it very much up to me. They said that they wouldn’t make a decision for me. Anything you decide is up to you. So yeah, I pretty much made the decision myself.

(Wah Seong, Student, MSc Civil Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia)

I really don't know where to go. I suddenly got sucked in because my family is very straightforward, go straight in. And when I'm in the middle of doing it, my father is a remisier...So slowly, my father influenced me. That's why what I'm doing right now is finance management.

(Hisham, Student, 3+0 Business Management & Finance, Keele)

So your dad played a huge role in helping you decide where to study at?

Not a huge role. He actually made the choice [laughs].

(Mushamir, Student, PhD Electronic & Communication Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia)

Dad really wanted this profession in this particular sector for me. I was not sure what I wanted at the time, I was just coming to terms with how things have turned out for me and adjusting myself but ultimately I am not one to disappoint my parents and I see how important this is for Dad. You see as if he's doing this for me, but actually he is doing this for himself.

(Noraini, Well Engineer, MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon)

When asked whether they were happy with their parents' selection of study destination, programme and suitable professions for them, my focus group interviewees who were heading to Manchester gave a unanimous laugh. While they desired to study in the UK, the laughter indicated a shared understanding of the commonness of having parents decide on a future for their children and the typical passive choice was to follow through with those plans. The upper hand of parents in the decision-making process also lay in the fact that they provided all or partial funding to finance their children's studies and living expenses. At the time of the interviews, most of the offshore and transnational students still lived with their parents. As authority figures in the family, Malaysian parents typically command a certain level of filial reverence and obedience from their children which framed the ways in which my participants understood what were acceptable as well as unacceptable academic and career pathways to pursue.

Francis (Student, 3+0 Law, UoL), whose father is a doctor and his mother, a lawyer, related to me how he went against the norm of more privileged Malaysian Indian families by choosing a discipline other than medicine. At first trying to oblige his parents' wishes for him to take up medicine, he chose to study natural science subjects in the Science stream in his final two years of formal education. This was despite him knowing very early on that his flair was in Arts-based subjects such as language and

history. Having found the natural sciences “a real struggle”, he eventually gave up the idea of pursuing medicine for tertiary studies. He felt he had let down his parents’ ethnicised expectations of him, explaining that “Indian families in Malaysia, generally, you must have a kid who is doing medicine or is a doctor”. He anticipated that his younger brother would have to fulfil his parents’ expectations in order to preserve the family’s social status. Here he explained the higher value attached to the medical profession among privileged Indian Malaysian families:

Why is it common for Indian Malaysian families to have at least a child who is doing Medicine?

Well, I supposed it’s prevalent among the middle class, the upper middle class...Um, I once attended a wedding and I was sitting maybe in the third row with my mum and behind us were about 5 Indian ladies and it was erm a really nice wedding in a big hotel, so this were well-to-do Indian ladies and they started talking. The first thing they started about was where their kids were studying Medicine. Every single one had a kid who was in Ireland or Russia, India or somewhere. You know, so I guess my mum was disappointed as I deprived her [laughs] of that opportunity to you know, go up and talk to people about where her kid was doing Medicine...My mum has this erm, her argument is that if you’re a doctor, you’re wanted everywhere in the world and you’ll never go out of demand. So basically, she thinks that if you’re a doctor, you’ve basically got it made.

So, do you feel that you’re able to bring the middle class status to your family by doing Law?

Well, I suppose, I suppose because erm, maybe not as much as a doctor. I suppose a doctor, you will be, you will be kind of safely in the upper middle class range, right?

Francis chose to study law as he felt “naturally inclined” towards it and believed that he could “play to [his] strengths”, although I suspect his decision was still heavily framed by his parents’ ethnicised views on the acceptability and respectability of certain study and work trajectories. Law is after all, a “very typical” desired profession among Malaysians of South Asian descent, as Simrit, a recent law graduate of Punjabi origin, revealed to me. This resonates with my own understanding that apart from medicine, law is the other key profession where there is a huge concentration of Indian Malaysians.

Ethnicised parental expectations also played out in the household for Sze Theng (Student, 3+0 Music, Wolverhampton), whose case presents a paradox: cultural capital in the form of knowledge, competence and appreciation for music simultaneously offered positive and negative exchange values. While learning music for leisure was

encouraged and viewed by her parents as high cultural capital activity, learning it as an academic discipline for future employment was not. Her decision to pursue music performance in the piano and electronic organ at tertiary level was the pride and shame of especially her father who, while he valued some Western cultural refinement in his children such as the playing of Western musical instruments, also valued adherence to Chinese conceptions of conventional cultural practices and credentials. Her “traditional”, patriarchal family defined desirable academic areas as those offering respectability to the family, that is, contributing to high-status employment. Again, medicine was regarded in the family as the best academic and career choice:

I'm interested to know more why your parents objected to the idea of you doing a music programme?

Because my parents are in the Education Department, so I guess he never know anyone studying music before. He keep asking like, “What are you going to do after you graduate”? And things like that and “how stable is it?” And you compare it with medicine, very honourable.

So, he doesn't think that doing a music programme is honourable?

Um, because usually if you study music, if you're not that good in the end, you'll probably end up as a maybe a music teacher, so maybe it's not what he's looking forward to. And you'll end up um being in the music industry, so it's another tough decision [laughs] and that the music industry is not so stable in Malaysia yet.

Music, especially in the Western form, empowered middle-class status in the private, leisurely sphere, but threatened status maintenance and mobility in the public, economic arena. Sze Theng was expected to follow her “sister's footsteps” to become a doctor which she initially obliged by spending a year in Form 6, a post-secondary year in a national school in preparation for entry into a medical programme. She remembered that “there was a lot of talking, a lot of convincing” to her father when she eventually decided to put interest ahead of economic practicality. She believed that her position in the family as the fourth child, the youngest and the “last daughter” to enter tertiary education helped provide leniency as she believed that her doctor sister had in a way satisfied her parents' wish to have a doctor in the family.

Traditional beliefs in a gendered division of labour can equally narrow down what

academic and career destinies were deemed possible by parents for their children. In Sze Theng's family, a daughter's role is one of the future wife and caretaker:

Actually, it's very traditional Chinese thinking which is maybe it's influenced from my grandfather, that's why my father picks it up. Girl should like study something you can work just for a living, take care of the family and then later like just settle down with your husband.

Although the expected bottom line was to just work to sustain day to day living until marriage, it was still important for her parents that she chose a profession that would guarantee a steady and decent salary. Performing music for a living did not offer that possibility and she too was advised by her female music teacher to only play "music as a second profession". Influenced by these gendered views, the participant planned to build a primary career in music production which was seen as more "stable" and would perform only for "side income". Therefore, ethnicity and gender can interact with class to shape understandings of the boundaries of respectable and permissible cultural capital acquisition and display. I will discuss this more in chapter 7.

Familial as well as peer receptivity towards certain degrees and their associated professions, can influence evaluations of the relative worth of academic disciplines. Choices in tertiary programmes tended to be confined to a few conventional areas which conjured up images of occupational prestige and respectability. Sze Theng observed that these areas were "those few if you hear your friends talking about": medicine, law, pharmacy and engineering. In Mei Sien's (Doctor, Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Edinburgh) case, her mother related to her the superior economic and symbolic capital opportunities that doctors enjoyed which subsequently convinced her to take up medicine:

I supposed she knows a few people who have done Medicine...Yeah, just kind of talked me into it. Saying how good their life are, how happy they are in their job...She said working in the hospital, you know, you're not out and you'll definitely have a job and you earn more money in general...every now and then, she'll drop hints.

Noraini (Well Engineer, MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon), whose father

worked in oil and gas engineering, “shove [her] in the right direction” by providing her first-hand knowledge of the lucrative income offered in the industry. This, she explained, made studies in oil and gas engineering a superior investment as the positive economic exchange value of her acquired knowledge and skills typically surpassed those of other engineering specialisations:

The subject I chose has to be oil and gas related because Dad sees it as the only line that can bring money. I obliged, after all, I'll need the money to pay Dad back his money for this MSc... It's really the only sector that I know and from what I see, the people in oil and gas are easily the best paid across their profession. It's all about doing the same engineering kind of job but making more money really.

In the following two examples, the perceived credibility of law as an academic discipline was influenced by advice from family members. In the first example, we see Simrit (Self-employed, 3+0 Bachelor of Laws (Hons), UoL) describing the prevalence of law as a vocation in her extended family, making it a natural choice for her to study the discipline: “To be honest, why I went to do law is because my whole family. My uncle is a lawyer, my auntie is a lawyer, my cousin is a lawyer, so, you know, career advice, is always to do law, you know, you can come and practise with us and things like that”. The second example shows the instrumental rationale informing the decision of Tricia's (Charities Officer, 1+2 Bachelor of Laws (Hons), Sheffield)'s parents to advocate the studying of law instead of Sociology and Psychology:

I wanted to study either Sociology or Psychology but my parents didn't allow that. So something similar to that would be Law. Law is really a mixture of Sociology and Psychology, History and also Literature...For them, it's a more substantial degree. Even if I did not want to practise, I could still find a job elsewhere because a Law degree would be like, “Woh, it's a glamorous degree”, you know, that kind of thing.

Brought up in an environment where he was told that “you need to be a doctor, engineer”, Teik Lee (Executive, 2.75 + 0.25 Computing & Information Systems, John Moores) consulted his close network of friends before deciding on Engineering:

Because we're making decision, definitely we'll check with best friends: "Where are you heading to?"...First thing, a lot of my friends, we do not like Biology...So to become a doctor or to become a pharmacist is no longer a topic la. The second best thing, I would think [laughs] during that time is Engineering loh. So most of my friends, I can say, 90 percent is Engineering-base, but maybe a different Engineering division.

This example shows that personal interest was taken into account in the education decision-making process, despite choices being framed around peer conformity.

In terms of the valuing of subject modules within the programme, peers especially had influence on several participants' selection of courses. Tricia chose her specialisation based on its popularity among peers: "Many of my Malaysian friends are company law because that's the thing here anyway in Malaysia, so I took it just to follow them". The strategy to perform well in individual assignments got Wah Seong (MSc Civil Engineering student, Nottingham Malaysia) enrolling in modules where there would be no shortage of peers to discuss coursework with:

If we have optional modules to take, I would say that I'm more encouraged to follow the crowd to take the modules which are more popular...Because when it comes to assignments, all of us want to discuss with friends lah. You don't want to be in a small group and all because it'll be difficult to do assignments.

All in all, social relations involving parents and peers shaped parameters of value and legitimacy within which the participants assessed the appropriateness and viability to take on certain academic and occupational pathways. The participants' parents seem to have played a more active and instructive role in this, their approval or rejection of the participants' educational choices in some cases, reflect strong gendered and ethnicised expectations. The participants' peers seem to have given indirect, passive influence about the marketability of certain degrees and associated professions. The role of social relations illustrates that the chosen academic programme culminating in the award of a certain institutionalised cultural capital and the opening of a career pathway has a conversion value judged by the self in interaction with inter-personal networks.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced some of the potential and actual positive and negative conversion values of cultural capital obtained from UK international education, as anticipated or experienced by the students and graduates. By doing this, I introduced a more comprehensive evaluation of the convertibility of cultural capital, highlighting that certain dimensions of cultural capital can bring negative consequences to occupational and status reproduction and mobility. The chapter showed that the material and non-pecuniary exchange values of cultural capital vary across geographical and social-relational contexts. This showed the non-uniform nature of the convertibility of knowledge, skills, dispositions and credentials into economic and social advantages. The translation of cultural capital into distinction is not straightforward and guaranteed. The chapter therefore questioned Bourdieu's rather deterministic position on the positive link between cultural capital ownership and middle-class privilege. I also introduced the complex interplay of personal, familial, peer and institutional factors operating through forces of class, ethnicity, gender and religion in grading perceived and actual academic, economic and social worth. This provided detailed insights into the exact processes and patterns of educational decision-making which Bourdieu was rather vague about (Sullivan 2001; Lamont & Lareau 1988).

The reported findings show that there are gradations of value and legitimacy attached to different modes of international education, subject disciplines, academic institutions and study destinations. Foreign cultural capital linked to international education does not have a fixed exchange value transferrable across national, institutional and socio-relational borders. Although the onshore mode of UK international education, particularly obtained at an elite UK university, was perceived by the participants to offer the most privileged cultural capital, I argue in the next chapter that the merits and shortcomings of exclusive foreign cultural capital ownership and utilisation were relative. The following chapter will look more into the actual conversion value of exclusive foreign cultural capital.

Chapter 6 Status Privilege, and Disadvantage

Introduction

The last chapter dealt more with the anticipation for returns from UK cultural capital accumulation at the time of studying, as experienced or recalled by the participants. This chapter in turn focuses on actual experiences of the positive and negative outcomes of UK cultural capital enhancement and utilisation upon completion of studies. It does this by paying attention to the participants' perceptions, expectations and experiences of their own academic, economic and social worth relative to those held by comparable others. It explores some of the strategies that have worked and not worked for graduates in converting foreign knowledge, skills, dispositions and credentials into superior job entry, integration and advancement opportunities. I argue that ownership of exclusive foreign cultural capital is not instantly superior or inferior as it has relative strengths and disadvantages in facilitating occupational and status reproduction and mobility, depending on contexts of place, situation and time. Selective appropriation of more common local cultural capital, which had its own advantages and disadvantages, could help overcome the limitations of Western cultural capital, especially in the home context.

Symbolic Worth of Study Destinations and Institutions

The degree awarding institution and study destination carried symbolic worth for the participants. They set the degree of opportunities for the graduates to have their academic and work-related abilities taken seriously in inter-personal and work encounters. The onshore graduates believed that institutionalised foreign cultural capital obtained overseas opened a wider door to employment opportunities in the graduate labour market as it attracted attention, trust and recognition that was not as readily available to graduates who remained in the home country. One group of onshore graduates, made up of participants from older, tough-entry elite institutions, drew positional strength from the high reputational capital of their universities, while another

group consisting of graduates from newer and lower-tiered universities played on the elitism associated with the UK as a strategy to secure employment. Brian's narrative represents the former group's experience of finding work after the end of their studies, while comments from Shamsul depict the latter group's experience:

If they [employers] see, "Ok, this guy from Cambridge", so when he says something ar, maybe got something there. Maybe. They're not going to automatically give you respect because you come from Cambridge, no, but at least they will give you that benefit of the doubt: "Maybe there's something there. Let him say what he wants to say" and we'll decide whether it is right or wrong.

(Brian, Researcher, PhD Engineering, Cambridge)

In Malaysia...most of the employers..."Ok, Hertfordshire University, it exists, it's more than good enough". They don't have to see, "Oh, you went to Oxford University or things like that"... I think people will look, again, perception wise, anytime you're a UK graduate, people will look a bit more highly of you.

(Shamsul, Business Coach, 2+1 BSc (Hons) Information Technology, Hertfordshire)

Brian's exclusive ownership of a high level of institutionalised cultural capital from Cambridge raised instant interest and recognition from formal and informal ties. The credibility he enjoyed affirmed his view of his academic ability and capacity to apply his enhanced embodied knowledge, skills and dispositions in the labour market:

For me, it's a recognition that eh, I'm actually not that dumb. Actually, ok one ar. *Boleh pakai* [Malay: Can use, referring to ability to contribute to the workforce], you know. Can use one. And then, people around me. That's the biggest change...Once I got that offer from Cambridge, everyone started to see me differently especially my relatives. Previously, they would say, "Aiyah, this fella. What the hell ah". They know lah, study smart la, but what else can do?

It helped him, just as it did a few other onshore graduates from a small network of single-site elite UK universities within the academic sub-field of restricted production (Marginson 2008), to "really, really stand out" (Kelvin) in the labour market from a perceived indistinguishable mass of graduates from other universities.

For Shamsul, owning a degree from any UK university, in his case, Hertfordshire, was "more than good enough" to give him an edge in the recruitment into jobs in Malaysia he has held since graduation: business coach, events manager, business

development manager, media consultant and customer relationship executive. However, the name, Hertfordshire, did not resonate in the everyday lives of his locally educated Malaysian peers who had limited knowledge of UK universities and locations. Shamsul acknowledged that positive distinctive characteristics of a city where a university was located could help raise recognition for the institutionalised cultural capital owned. However, the absence of any significant features in Hertfordshire which Shamsul's friends in Malaysia could relate to meant that the symbolic worth of his degree was inferior to one from the "University of Manchester, University of Nottingham...something which has name": "One of my friends actually asked me, "Which university did you go to?" I said, "Hertfordshire". "Hah? Never heard of it"...because Hertfordshire did not have a football club". When asked whether the absence of instant societal recognition of his university brand name was a concern to him, he replied, "I don't care. I mean, I know it is a good degree". His experiences of finding work in Malaysia gave him undoubted confidence that employers would generally be impressed by him simply for having studied in the UK. Although UK institutionalised cultural capital obtained onshore was not successfully converted into symbolic capital in the informal, socio-relational field, it did work for Shamsul in the formal and structural arena of employment in Malaysia. The failure of conversion into symbolic capital within one social circle and success within another relates to Waters' (2009) argument that institutionalised cultural capital gains worth only when it is recognised and validated by social relations. Returning to a point I raised in the previous chapter, the individual is immersed in social relations who shape gradations of value and acceptability to the cultural capital pursued and owned.

Having studied physically in the UK alone was enough in many other cases involving onshore graduates to command attention and recognition. Take the example of Tricia (Charities Officer, 1+2 Bachelor of Laws (Honours), Sheffield). Her UK education, obtained mostly in the host country, helped generate interest and curiosity from interviewers for the two jobs that she had held since graduating and returning to her

home country. She was a legal advisor before becoming a charities officer. “It impressed them” [the interviewers], Tricia related to me, although her comments in relation to her interview for her first job suggest the lower global reach of Sheffield, the university and the city. She was of the opinion that only employers in Malaysia who were globally oriented would have the appropriate cultural knowledge and resources to fully recognize and value her academic credentials and study experiences in the UK:

I think it helped create a topic to chat about. “Oh, you’re in the UK? So how long were you there for?” “3 years”. “Oh wow”.

Do you think that the fact that your qualification came from the UK gave you perhaps an advantage?

Um, then again, I remember one of them asking, “So, where’s Sheffield?” [laughs]. But another one knew because she is a jet setter. She travels around the world. So she pretty much knows that Sheffield is outside of London, but just how far it is from London, she’s not so sure.

The transferability of UK institutionalised cultural capital acquired onshore to economic and social advantages beyond UK shores perhaps achieves the best effect when the university and its geographical location conjure an image of immediate identification in the perceiver. For Canadian-educated Hong Kong graduates in Waters’ (2009:114) study, the valorisation of Canadian tertiary credentials in Hong Kong’s financial centre was facilitated by knowledge and experiences of Canadian tertiary education among alumni networks and certain employers and personal ties. Through these connections, the graduates easily obtained information about job opportunities, introductions and referrals and preference in recruitment (Waters 2009:124). Similarly, the translation of onshore-acquired UK qualifications into occupational entry and status opportunities in Malaysia is embedded within social relations that subtly grade the graduate according to the perceived worth of the institution, location, city and country of study.

Comparison against Others and Implications for Self Worth and Self-Presentation

The generally positive initial reception from interviewers and employers convinced relevant onshore graduates of their positional edge in the Malaysian labour market. It was not uncommon to listen to the participants speak favourably of their embodied

cultural capital. They saw themselves as more knowledgeable, globally exposed, confident and competent in higher-level standard English than graduates educated publicly or privately in Malaysia. The perceived higher grade of cultural capital embodied in them was attributed to direct experience of the UK environment where the day to day activity of studying, living and in some cases, working in the UK added to the development of the self, to some extent, in unreflected ways. Although having spent only the last year of his programme in the UK, Shamsul (Business Coach, 2+1 Information Technology, Hertfordshire) believed that the one year brought about some positive changes in him which set him apart from peers who remained at his university college in Malaysia:

Life, social, experience, things like that. I think comparing myself to friends who were in APIIT [Asia-Pacific University College of Technology and Institution] for the entire degree and compared to me who went to UK, uhm there is a bit of difference in terms of exposure, confidence, how you speak.

Can you give me examples of what makes you different from your friends who studied here?

[laughs] Confidence is one. How you carry yourself. My friends are shy, not knowing what is what in terms of general knowledge, in terms of [pause], don't know [laughs]. I mean if you ask me to pinpoint what exactly, it's hard to tell as I've never thought about it before but overall exposure, I think there is a difference.

While Shamsul struggled to articulate what exactly was the difference in embodied cultural capital ownership between onshore and offshore and transnational graduates, participants who were undertaking or have completed their UK education in Malaysia were ready to elaborate the distinction. It seems to be an issue which they had thought more deeply about, perhaps out of much fascination, admiration and envy for their onshore counterparts. The offshore and transnational students and graduates generally expressed a sense of economic and social inferiority. They described onshore graduates as what the self in many ways was not: more articulate, expressive, convincing, proactive, confident, endowed in superior culture from birth and internationally oriented. The comments that follow indicate acknowledgment of the privileged competences and dispositions of onshore graduates and the positional advantage these graduates had with regards to employment in Malaysia:

Oh, they have an upper hand coz they are very articulate. That's why I always say ar those people who go overseas, that's what I actually envy in them. They can really speak so well. Despite the facts are not there right, they can really convince you.

(Grace, Self-employed, 3+0 Applied Accounting, Oxford Brookes)

I notice from the cousins that had come back [from the UK], I think they are more the go-getters. They are more vocal, they are more expressive with their thoughts, they are not shy at how I'll offend the next person...The fact that they're gone overseas means they come from a well-to-do family and there is a certain benchmark as well, so the exposure at home and in the family is already different and the fact that they have gone overseas, who they mix with over there.

(Simrit, Self-employed, 3+0 Law, UoL)

The reason why they [employers] choose overseas is because they [onshore graduates] tend to talk more about themselves. If let's say, you say, "You look pretty" to a girl in Malaysia, they would say, "No lah, no lah", they would reject. But in overseas, they would just accept and say, "Thank you". You know, these kind of things. The self-esteem is higher lah...let's say your company is dealing in the international market, it's easier for you to adapt to cultures. If let's say it's UK, it'll be an advantage straightaway. You know how to adapt quickly.

(Kor Ming, Student, 3+0 Accounting & Finance, UWE)

These perceptions match what the onshore graduates thought they would be viewed as and generally believed themselves to be, reflecting an almost mutual understanding of the relative positional rewards associated with studying physically in the UK.

Although institutionalised cultural capital obtained in Malaysia still represents certified recognition of one's successful acquisition of assessed knowledge and skills competence, it may fall short of social recognition outside the academic arena. Kelvin (Business Consultant, BSc Business, Mathematics and Statistics, LSE) did not consider the status and marketability of students and graduates from institutions other than "Oxbridge or Imperial or LSE or one of the Ivy Leagues in the States" to be equal to his. While certain students and graduates chose to study foreign programmes in the home country to escape what was generally perceived as inferior education in the Malaysian public sector, Kelvin did not think there was much of a differentiation among students and graduates of any institution in Malaysia. With regards to the status and marketability of offshore and transnational students and graduates relative to their onshore counterparts, he clarified defensively that "there's nothing against them. It's just that, you know, I'll probably set them as the same level as some of our local universities here

[in Malaysia]...Nothing that really sets it apart from anywhere else”. This was a notion which Mushamir, even as an offshore student (PhD Electronic & Communication Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia), found hard to resist, as much as he wanted to believe that he was as academically and occupationally competent as Malaysians based onshore:

Deep inside, I know that I’m studying in Malaysia. I don’t know. The degree is the same, but there is something different. There is something amiss here. I don’t know. It’s hard to describe it. There is something missing.

The “something missing” which the participant found hard to articulate is equal status and respectability which was brought out clearer in his subsequent comments:

People ask you where you study. You answer, “University of Nottingham”. Then they’re like excited and then they say, “Nottingham, UK?” Then you say, “Oh no, Nottingham, Malaysia.” They’ll go like [gave disappointed look, lowered shoulders and looked downward], “Oh...”.

How do you feel when people give you that reaction?

It’s quite depressing actually. Because like they don’t see you as a Nottingham graduate. They don’t see you as a UK degree holder. They see you as a local graduate, you know, something like that.

To be socially positioned into the same group as the “local graduate”, implicitly meaning one from a public university, was demeaning as it overlooked the better quality education and tougher standards for entry and completion which he associated with a UK offshore programme.

Sidhu (2006) argued that marketed brand images and messages of the UK which communicate international excellence in academic and cultural standards reflect a new form of colonial agenda enabled by neo-liberal global capitalism and accepted rather unquestionably by educational consumers. Indeed, the success of the UK education brand in Malaysia lies partly in the continued and internalised post-colonial perceptions of the superiority of standards set by the former imperial power (Sin 2009). The legacy

of colonialism in Malaysia (Sin 2009) thrives as the older generation hold on to standards and impressions of a past where UK education could only be obtained in the UK and was beyond the financial means of all but a small group of top national scholars and aristocratic and bureaucratic elites. Mushamir felt that it was quite futile to challenge the “narrow-minded” perceptions of especially the “local *pak cik* [and] *mak cik*” [Malay: uncle and auntie, terms of respect to anyone older, not necessarily related by blood], the specific and generalised older members of society who continued to see prestige and authenticity only in a UK education received onshore. Just like him, Nadia (Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia) anticipated a lack of appreciation for offshore education. Her narrative suggests the invisible but pervasive workings of neo-colonialism (Sidhu 2006) in perpetuating and normalising the superiority of direct study experiences in the West:

This is the scenario that we were made to feel. Everybody says, “The degree is the same” and then they are like, “ No”...the employer would ask you which campus you studied at...The thing is, you can’t really explain that mentality. It’s pretty much urm the whole anything from the West is a lot better than here kind of mentality, even though you can’t justify it coz it is the same degree, you know.

Mushamir believed that “all the good good people” would be studying or working in the UK. UK-based Malaysians were seen as elite talents, who by virtue of having more internationally valued knowledge, experience and qualifications, held higher status and bargaining power in the global labour market. This perception was reinforced by official discourse. The Public Service Commission annually sponsors approximately 1500 academically excellent students to study overseas, the majority of whom in 2010 chose to study medicine and engineering in the United Kingdom, Australia or New Zealand (*BERNAMA* 2010b). This has fortified the impression that top performing Malaysians studying in-demand subjects are typically based in advanced Western countries, an issue acknowledged by the Malaysian government (Kamal 2010). Furthermore, the state agency Talent Corporation or Talent Corp, for short, was established in January 2011 to attract particularly highly skilled Malaysian professionals based overseas to return to

Malaysia. As incentive for resettlement, it offers a flat income tax rate¹¹ of 15 percent for the first five years of return (*Talent Corp Malaysia* 2011), a move which further devalues the perceived worth of locally based talents (Yow 2011). While perhaps not reflecting a poverty of educational and occupational aspirations (Bourdieu 1984), Mushamir and several other external students showed a somewhat embedded poverty in confidence, a shaky sense of relative social worth in a society known to evaluate local graduates harshly. While the degree certificate, the institutionalised cultural capital can in some cases, carry a singular brand name across geographical and socio-relational contexts, it is clear that it held divergent meanings and exchange values for participants, based on the mode through which UK education was obtained.

UK institutionalised cultural capital signals the ownership of embodied foreign cultural capital by which students and graduates in this study set expectations or were expected to portray. The higher exchange value of a degree assigned to onshore graduates came with a higher set of expectations being placed on them in Malaysia to substantiate their labour market and social worth by acting out stereotypes and characteristics linked to UK cultural capital holders from abroad. Foreign cultural capital obtained through studies onshore does not mould any individual to display a standard set of associated exclusive characteristics, although graduates such as Shamsul (Business Coach, 2+1 Information Technology, Hertfordshire) faced the pressure to do so. He felt anxious over the demanding expectations being placed on him to outshine offshore and transnational, as well as local graduates in Malaysia:

I think people expect a lot more from you when you graduated from UK compared to locals coz I think people think, “Ok, you go to UK. You should be able to do more and everything”.

How do you feel about these expectations?

Pressure. Um you’re pressured to do more, to excel in everything.

¹¹ The assumption of the Talent Corporation seems to be that overseas-based highly skilled Malaysians will have an annual work salary of more than 50000 *ringgit* (about GBP 10000) upon return to Malaysia, an amount significantly higher than the gross national income per capita of approximately 30 000 *ringgit* (about GBP 6000) (The Star 2013). The progressive tax rate for income above 50000 *ringgit* ranges from 19 to 26 percent (Income Revenue Board Malaysia 2012).

Noraini and Kelvin described the typical perceptions Malaysians had of onshore graduates of UK programmes:

Possibly they [onshore graduates] are regarded as being more exposed and knowledgeable. Also they are presumed to be proficient in English...I'd say in most case they are more knowledgeable and experienced but probably not so much the case with proficiency in the language, but still an overseas graduate is a better bet than local.

(Noraini, Well Engineer, MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon)

There are so many other things you have to look at. You have to sort of not just have a university education, overseas university education but overseas experience, overseas life experience, overseas mindset. You might have an overseas education qualification but you might not have gained that mindset yet...really exposed to how global the world is, just differences in politics, in social events, history of the rest of the world. All that really really er, it's expected of someone who studied overseas but it's not always there.

(Kelvin, Business Consultant, BSc Business, Mathematics and Statistics, LSE)

Institutionalised cultural capital acquired onshore is only indicative but not definitive of the cultural make-up of the graduate. The spectrum of embodied cultural capital characteristics expected of onshore graduates was unlikely to be incorporated and presented uniformly and in entirety.

Before resettling in Malaysia in the same month that our interview was held, Wooi Kiat (Technology Consultant, PhD Electronic & Electrical Engineering, Imperial) feared the likely expectations that awaited him to perform an idealised range of competences and dispositions indicative of his decade-long stay in the UK. He completed his undergraduate and postgraduate studies in the UK and stayed on to work a few years overseas, first, as a business developer and subsequently, a technology consultant. The expectations imposed on him include the demand to produce evidence of practical competence in his trained discipline and success in reaping higher economic returns from the investment in higher priced and longer-length tertiary education. Throughout the years overseas, he tried to keep familial expectations of him realistic by constantly reminding them of his modest economic capital prospects:

Urm, I suppose for myself, at least because we have been constantly feeding them information about what it is like over there in the UK, what to expect from me where I come back type of thing. So at least, the transition wasn't too bad. They know roughly what's going on, what a PhD entails, or of doing that, what you get to do, what you don't get to do. So, it wasn't so bad, at least immediately among my family. But definitely there are some expectations at the start...Some people ask, "Oh, what do you want to do? Become a banker?" I was like, "Urm, no". They expect you to get paid, especially PhD people. Because when I first told my dad how much I'll be getting, my salary there in UK, he wasn't too, how should I say, wasn't too pleased, until he really researched about it, then he realised that's exactly how much you're actually meant to get paid. I suppose my dad has mellowed down a bit and maybe he sets his expectations about right already.

Satisfaction of having better economic and symbolic capital opportunities came with the burden of having to meet high expectations set for the onshore UK graduate, realistic or otherwise.

Accounts from several onshore graduates debunk the ready assumption the offshore and transnational students and graduates had of onshore graduates as globally oriented and well exposed to culture, activities and mainstream social circles in the UK. Tricia (Charities Officer, 1+2 Law, Sheffield) recalled facing difficulties in approaching and entering local social circles in her host country: "I did try to approach them but it wasn't that kind of response that I was looking for. It wasn't as warm and I didn't want to spend that time to get them to warm up to me". Failure to initiate close inter-personal relations with British students quickly led her to establish and remain within her comfort social networks made up predominantly of fellow Malaysian students on campus. While interacting with students from her home country helped with "homesickness", Tricia regretted not trying harder to socialize with British students which would have made her overseas study experience more "meaningful":

I think I should have mixed with more locals, more British students which was also a regret my Malaysian friends had too. It was just during the last few months of our studies and we would be going back, "You know, we should have mixed with more locals"...Yeah, you know, you're in another country. You might as well mix with the locals, isn't it?

This revelation stands in contrast to the impression transnational and offshore students and graduates had that studying overseas would provide the essential push to embrace all

aspects of the UK. The reality was that Tricia and many onshore graduates had limited close inter-personal contact with local members of mainstream host society and their interaction patterns, in that they involved mainly Malaysians, closely mirrored that of their peers educated in Malaysia. Looking into their socialising patterns in more detail revealed their preference to interact with Malaysians of the same ethnicity as them. Tricia, whose ethnicity is Chinese, talked about ethnic segregation among Malaysians at her university where Malay and non-Malay students kept social and physical distance from each other:

Because in Sheffield, the most amount of MARA¹² and JPA¹³ scholars are actually sent for their Engineering degrees and somehow, the Malay students wanted their own association, so they have their own association [SMSA – Sheffield Malaysian Students Association] but we don't join them. We joined the MASSOC, the Malaysian Singaporean Society. You know, it's sad. At that point already, you can see this spilt between and in my halls of residence during my first year...they [Malays] were pretty much in their own group. So the Malays were like having their own society, doing their own thing. We do our own thing.

Hussain (University Tutor, MPhil Engineering, Cambridge), a Malay Muslim, observed the same pattern of interaction at Cambridge which broadly divided Malaysians into two ethnic pockets which limited exposure to diversity on campus: “Actually, I hoping that I can hang out with everyone. It turns out that [laughs] mostly most of the times only Malays la...I think the race get segregated. I can hardly see people of different race mingle with each other”. He had “some but not really close” British friends at university, a few close friends from China but was closest to mainly Malay Muslims from Malaysia for ease in having *halal* food together. An ethnicised pattern of interaction with Malaysians broadly similar to social mixing in the home country seems to have been transplanted and replicated in the host environment. The key point here is that social relations with the host society beyond formal academic interactions with locals can be limited for onshore graduates if they stay closely within their comfort zones with other

¹² *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (Indigenous People's Trust Council), a Malaysian government agency which provides business and industrial training, education and entrepreneurial and study loans to *bumiputeras*.

¹³ *Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam* (JPA) is the Public Service Department of the federal administration. It offers the most coveted scholarships for overseas studies to excellent national scholars across ethnicities, although this loosely follows an ethnic-based quota which favours *bumiputera* students (Sin 2009).

Malaysians abroad. This mirrors findings by Matthews and Sidhu (2005) of the experiences and practice of distance that international students established with local students in Australia. Their lack of close interactions with local students, partly due to negative host reception towards their diversities, limited opportunities to immerse in a more international study experience. For my participants, exposure to UK-related embodied cultural capital such as experiences of formal and casual interaction in English, developing knowledge of the UK and cultivating an open mind towards social mixing across ethnicities and nationalities is relative. It is dependent on the initiative of individuals of any mode of study to expand their boundaries of comfort to develop a truly international study experience.

Some offshore and transnational students and graduates made additional effort to seek out a more international experience in their studies which could match those accessible to their onshore counterparts. The desire to acquire a more international experience, confidence, linguistic eloquence in English and open-mindedness led Mushamir, a Malay doctoral student in Engineering at Nottingham Malaysia, to consciously distance himself from a closely knit Malay student community on campus: "I'm actually not very close to the Malays because they tend to flock together and most of them from Kelantan and Terengganu¹⁴. They have different accents, so I cannot mix with them". He described himself as having a culturally disadvantaged childhood as he grew up in Shah Alam, a predominantly Malay populated city, west of Kuala Lumpur. He spoke solely in Malay at the national primary school he attended, a less valuable cultural-linguistic capital to have for private tertiary studies and employment, as far as he was concerned. A strategy to correct what he saw was a handicapped cultural start was to play down his Malay identity and to adopt a more cosmopolitan identity centred on social relationships with many ethnicities and nationalities on campus. English was used as the sole medium of interaction. This case shows desire to fully engage in cultural and social-linguistic differences within a new and relatively unfamiliar habitus within

¹⁴ These are predominantly Malay Muslim populated rural states in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

international education, an aspiration lacking in UK students studying overseas in Waters and Brooks' study (2011).

Recognising their assigned inferior place in Malaysian society had some offshore and transnational students and graduates working doubly hard to build a portfolio of internationally-related experiences in order to gain a more equal footing in the job market. This was done through active participation in activities in and out of campus that opened up opportunities for work-based learning with a global focus, leadership and team work building and communication in more formal standard English. Examples of these activities include taking part in student representation, internships, part-time work, mock interviews, industry seminars and workshops and meetings in clubs such as Toastmasters and the *Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales* (AIESEC). Stronger initiative was deemed necessary as unlike onshore students who benefitted from a somewhat routine and unplanned direct exposure to an English-speaking international environment, locally-based students had to, for the most part, consciously seek out and incorporate elements of the Western (global) into their ways of knowing, being and speaking. As Kor Ming (Student, 3+0 Accounting & Finance, UWE) acknowledged, "To really compete, local, you got to do a little more work. You got to join instead of being asked to join...you really have to take the initiative or else you won't have the same experience lah". However, many offshore and transnational students and graduates were quick to stress that their acquired technical knowledge and institutionalised cultural capital were no different from those obtained overseas:

What is the difference study in overseas and study in Malaysia? Ok, I study here, I still get a degree from overseas. I can show my degree to the interviewer: "This is my degree from Staffordshire University". There is no difference.

(Rosli, Student, 3+0 Business Computing, Staffordshire)

I think in terms of the sheer knowledge of the law, urm, I think that in terms of being in Queen Mary or here in KDU, it makes no difference whatsoever because the same materials are...

...available to both people.

(Francis, Student, 3+0 Law, UoL)

Um, I would say, academic education wise, I think it's just the same because our exams, our assignments, the course that we did, is exactly the same with someone in the UK.

(Lian Hui, SAP Consultant, 3+0 BSc (Hons) Computing Studies, Northumbria)

The emphasis on similarities in hard currencies such as the syllabus, assessments and the degree awarded reflected a ready defence that they were no less intellectually capable and technically competent than onshore-educated Malaysians. Soft currencies, involving socio-linguistic competences gained through interactions in international English-speaking settings may be something they lacked but which could be enhanced through strategic initiatives to internationalise the study experience.

With anticipation placed on the participants to portray certain competences and dispositions characteristic of their mode of study came expectations of their own to conform to these impressions and where possible, to challenge them. Talk of “same standards” (Elaine) among various modes of UK study changed instantaneously to those which emphasised differences as soon as offshore and transnational students and graduates felt challenged to defend their relative academic worth against their onshore counterparts. The participants mostly believed that impressive academic results would provide a competitive edge for entry into job interviews in a performance-obsessed home society. Comments from Wah Seong and Lian Hui illustrate this view:

In Malaysia, people want to ask you, “How many As have you got?”, “What is your CGPA?”...if I get good results, there's no reason for them [employers] not to accept me.

(Wah Seong, Student, MSc Civil Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia)

I realize that people here, the education system here, what they emphasize on is the results, academic results. So, the local people here they strive for better results. So, I think this is the advantage that they have. So, the results is generally better than overseas grad.

(Lian Hui, SAP Consultant, 3+0 BSc (Hons) Computing Studies, Northumbria)

Lian Hui suggested that external students and graduates were willing to put in more hard work in getting the best academic results, a point which Elaine (Student, BA(Hons)

Business, Economics & Management, Nottingham Malaysia) agreed to as she planned to capitalize on good academic performance as an indicator of her better technical competence. She strategised to turn an anticipated labour market disadvantage into advantage by pointing attention to the stricter marking criteria in Malaysia for technical, quantitative-based courses which she took in her programme:

I'll be there [at the interview] saying, "Yes, I didn't study in Nottingham, UK", but then you go on and tell them about the marking schemes are a bit different and coming from an Asian background, our marking scheme is a lot more difficult. In that sense, we're actually smarter than people over there [in the UK].

Her wish was that her future employers would evaluate her cultural capital endowment objectively based on a hierarchy of academic abilities rather than on a subjective status hierarchy of modes of study in which the onshore arrangement was typically favoured. A few other participants involved in the offshore and transnational modes of study expected of themselves to supplement institutionalised cultural capital in the form of a UK award of completion with another form of cultural capital in the institutionalised state: an academic transcript with high grades and a top degree classification. All in all, they paid attention to personalising cultural capital (Brown & Hesketh 2004) summarised in a unique resume of academic achievements and extra-curricular and work experiences that would tell a story of diligence, initiative and ability.

Managing expectations by working towards gradual income increments was a strategy to beat onshore graduates to desirable jobs. External students and graduates showed willingness to begin graduate employment by asking much less as a starting pay than what they imagined their onshore counterparts would demand. A realistic assessment of the potential exchange value of a lower status UK education prepared Hisham (Student, 3+0 Business Management & Finance, Keele) to face the following scenario at job interviews:

Mostly in an interview, they'll ask something like, "So, how much do you think we should pay you?". When that question comes in mind, your confidence tells you you want more. But local university, I know you want to be cheap, "Pay me 3k a month". But for other people, they want 5 or 6k. They want to be straightway at the top.

Charmaine (Sound Engineer, 3+0 Bachelor of Music (Hons), Wolverhampton) experienced this situation first hand while looking for sound recording work. She spoke of how the hard currencies of her embodied cultural capital, that is, her accumulated knowledge and skills had to be proven before being able to convert it to an economic value: "What I'll do is maybe give me a month, you don't have to pay me. I'll prove to you, I'll show you what I can do and from there you judge me lah". Aziati (Engineer, MSc Electrical & Electronics Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia) understanding of her limit as a fresh graduate, fairly raw in experience in cultural capital accumulation and activation beyond the academic arena, made her accept any level of economic capital that was offered to her in the labour market: "Right now, [salary] is okay [laughs]. Because my experience is so-so. Next is the salary review, so that time, you're going to ask for more. Right now, you need to accept what you got". Starting employment with low expectations of the economic rewards of their UK cultural capital was a strategy which these participants were willing to take to be more competitive in the Malaysian labour market. For lack of employer recognition of the form of their certified cultural capital which was considered inferior to onshore-acquired institutionalised cultural capital, they relied on the hard substance of embodied cultural capital, that is, work-related knowledge and skills to prove their worth for employment and remuneration.

The onshore graduates generally had higher expectations of the unfolding economic outcomes of their participation in UK education. High income and social recognition were often pre-requisites in the consideration of jobs within any context. Failure to optimize these outcomes relative to groups of lesser cultural capital investment, specifically, offshore and transnational graduates, was met with frustration and bitterness in the case of Kelvin, a Business Mathematics and Statistics graduate from the LSE. Inability to obtain work in audit and advertising companies in the UK after

graduating in 2006, which he blamed on restrictive nationality requirements, led him to return to Malaysia where he worked as a business consultant. Evidence-based display of higher priced and enhanced cultural capital ownership was to him quite meaningless if it did not lead to substantially higher material rewards and global job opportunities:

How satisfied are you with the salary you're getting now in relation to your peers?
Urm, extremely dissatisfied.

And why so?

Well, I feel that firstly, what was invested into my education, I would have wanted to getting more out of it by now. That's the first level. On another level, I know that people around the world are getting a lot more and probably doing a lot less.

Kelvin disclosed that his return to Malaysia right after graduation was seen as a “waste” by his parents as the destination outcome of his participation in onshore education was the same as graduates who did not study overseas at all: spatially rooted in the Malaysian labour arena. There was therefore, an unmet expectation for substantially better social mobility chances through onshore investment in UK cultural capital.

The sense of entitlement to superior economic rewards in most onshore graduates meant a quick rejection of work deemed socially and economically demeaning by their standards. Hisham (Student, 3+0 Business Management & Finance, Keele) described onshore graduates as having towering demands to begin work at the top of the labour hierarchy, to “reach the sky straightaway” without first cementing a ground base of practical skills, knowledge and dispositions. Shamsul (Business Coach, 2+1 BSc (Hons) Information Technology, Hertfordshire) himself an onshore graduate, believed that not many overseas graduates would be able to go past the psychological barrier of accepting less in immediate cultural investment returns than they expected entitlement to. Lowly skilled manual work in a non-office setting was out of the question for almost all the onshore graduates I interviewed. This makes the case of Shamsul interesting as he was proud to profess that he did door to door selling and traded in a night market in Malaysia at one point after graduation. He shared the following:

I'm quite impressed that an IT graduate from UK can go to *pasar malam* [Malay: night market, equivalent to a Farmers' Market] and sell stuff there...if you ask most Malaysians, if they have a degree and everything, if the job requires them to go to *pasar malam* to work, some of them might be reluctant to do it... Malaysians do have the egoistic like I am certain level, I do not do low level work.

From the perspectives of Shamsul and many offshore and transnational graduates, it is the difficulty and in some cases, outright refusal of onshore graduates to manage or lower their expectations that gave them labels such as arrogant, inflexible and unrealistic. Onshore graduates were well aware of such criticisms of them, although they did little to dispel them. Cultural capital attributes linked to overseas studies, therefore, can be judged negatively as well, despite the usually positive connotations attached to them by Malaysians who studied in the home country.

Relative Advantages of Local Cultural Capital Ownership

As much as there was envy and looking up to the confidence exuding from imaginary and actual Malaysians in the UK, there was realisation among participants based in Malaysia that local cultural capital which was best developed in the home country held more functional relevance in Malaysia. The offshore and transnational programmes provided continuity to the participants in the home surroundings, helping them to be more in touch with local ways of knowing, being and speaking. This could be constructed as a comparative strength against their Western-oriented onshore counterparts:

Studying in the Malaysian campus, a lot of the studies are focused more on Asian business environment...I know how to speak, what to say in an interview, as compared to someone educated overseas...you kind of know the culture, you know the person, you know what people are looking for, you know what kind of products can cater for the Malaysian market.

(Elaine, Student, 3+0 Business, Economics & Management, Nottingham Malaysia)

Like from the very start, would you be able to know how things are run here? Because you've been studying overseas. If you can't function on that basic level, your new ideas won't really help, would they?

(Nadia, Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia)

By being rooted in the home country, they had time and opportunity to gain access to

and develop local knowledge and social networks that offered practical insights of the rules and conditions of the occupational field in Malaysia:

It's an advantage because of me not going overseas when I was 18, 19. I get to meet a lot of business people and those are people who are now very close. And because it's local, it's easier to run around, follow them, learn technical skills from them.

(Kor Ming, Student, 3+0 Accounting & Finance, UWE)

Local graduates do have an advantage...they would be more well versed with the law here, as compared to someone who graduated from the UK or Australia...the local aspect of it, you know, they'll be more familiar with and they'll be in touch with perhaps, the local judges here or relevant, you know, big time players in the law field.

(Francis, Student, 3+0 Law, UoL)

Offshore students in particular believed that in this sense, they were receiving a distinct form of education which enabled them to experience “the best of both worlds” (Nadia). “Rather than having [a] Malaysian education or a UK education, you have a UK education in Malaysia’, Nadia emphasised, suggesting the relative strength of offshore and transnational students in situating foreign cultural capital into the local context. Remaining in the home country offered a head start in learning how local cultural capital can be combined with Western cultural capital to sharpen a positional edge in the home labour market.

The offshore and transnational students and graduates hardly subscribed to an either/or strategy where only one consistent dimension, the local or the foreign, constituted the image they intended to present to the Malaysian workforce and society as a whole. Rather, instant sensitivity and adaptability to different individuals and contexts which necessitated different presentations of the self were seen as useful skills to have to gain wider labour market and social acceptability. “You have to feel on the spot”, Elaine (Student, 3+0 Business, Economics & Management, Nottingham Malaysia) said, pointing to the importance in assessing and displaying on a case by case basis the skills, attributes and dispositions that would provide a good fit with a certain interviewer and organisational culture:

You have to understand their management style because your future boss is a domineering person, you can't come in and be all aggressive yourself...You have to be flexible, be able to notice how things are run and sort of sell yourself and make yourself fit into that situation.

A softer, more submissive approach in interaction, a style associated more with traditional Asian values of respect for authority and seniority, was thought to be more useful in managing the interview situation in her example. She imagined that she would present a “very formal and rigid” composure if she were to attend an interview for a corporate job which required seriousness and discipline. A “casual” and “outgoing” personality, on the other hand, would be required to effectively get along with young manager interviewers within the food and entertainment industry. All these go down to the “it depends” factor which the offshore and transnational students and graduates pointed to. The choice of strategies to obtain and advance in a job would depend on the contexts in which they find themselves. They believed that the ability to employ the right strategies on the spot depended for the most part on natural flair and self-learning than on specific training from their UK education. Whether acquired in or out of the academic arena, cultural capital should not be viewed as fixed and static and neither should its successful activation require the bearer to loyally portray a single set of traits, preferences and competences.

The key for the offshore and transnational students and graduates was flexibility, drawing on local knowledge to assess and display on a case by case basis the skills, attributes and dispositions that would provide a good fit with different segments of Malaysian society. This involved picking up cues from the personality, speech, body language and other personal embodiment of individuals they would come into interaction with and to adjust accordingly. In this sense, the participants planned to personalise their cultural capital by portraying an individualised, context-dependent set of technical competences and inter-personal qualities (Brown & Hesketh 2004:36) that would provide finer distinctions between the self and similarly qualified bearers of tertiary credentials. As much as UK-related cultural capital was likely to give a positive

impression of a candidate's technical and social competence, the interviewees were aware that it had to be sensibly utilised for a display of excesses could backfire in the conversion to economic and symbolic capital. Francis (Student, 3+0 Law, UoL) believed that it was important to put local gatekeepers and evaluators "at ease" to excel in any chosen career. This was because individuals of different or less exposure to Western-related cultural capital in Malaysia tended to judge heavy usage of UK embodied cultural capital as plain acts of snobbery and pretension. Western dispositions had to be balanced off with the presentation of more localised embodied cultural capital to show humility and ability to accept expectations the home society had of job candidates:

Especially in the Malaysian context, a lot of that is present in the minds of employers that they want someone who is humble and who is pretty down to earth and who is willing to learn, is teachable, as opposed to someone you come from [puts on posh Londoner accent], "Oh, you know, I have a degree from Cambridge and therefore, I can tell you a thing or two about the law".

Willingness to adopt a softer, more submissive interaction style and spontaneity in using colloquial Malaysian English constituted the essential local cultural capital that could overcome the shortcomings of the confident and outspoken approach typically linked to UK cultural capital. The ability to converse fluently in Malay, the national language, was perceived to be particularly important when conversing in official public functions such as proceedings in court. What this means theoretically is that cultural capital of the local and the masses which is less scarce and exclusive can offer wider economic capital opportunities, if not always higher social recognition. The potential positional rewards of owning common cultural capital is an area which culturalist (Bourdieu 1997; 1984), positional conflict and social closure (Brown & Hesketh 2004; Collins 1979; Hirsch 1977) approaches to education and social mobility have not given attention to. In evaluating the concept of cultural capital within the global education field, studies such as Waters (2009; 2006; 2005), Kim (2011) and Sin (2009) argued that scarcity and exclusivity contributed to the higher positive conversion value of Western embodied cultural capital in Asia. The offshore and transnational students and graduates in this study would disagree with this as they saw the functional relevance of more common

local cultural capital in the Malaysian labour market.

The offshore and transnational students and graduates believed that care had to be taken to personalise and employ local and foreign embodied cultural capital in appropriate amounts and combinations to build stronger inter-personal relations of trust and inclusiveness across different economic and social divides. A case in point is versatility in shifting linguistic codes and styles upwards to the standard version and downwards to the colloquial variant (Rajadurai 2004:210) to suit different levels of English speakers and purposes. The idea was to present a confident but still friendly, non-threatening disposition that would strike the “middle ground” (Hisham, Student, 3+0 Business Management & Finance, Keele) of gaining acceptance from economically and socially privileged circles and at once positive judgments from less advantaged groups:

Got to check who you meet. Because if you meet a person who is always lower class, if you show that you're too confident too much, they'll call it arrogant. If you go to a higher person from a higher class and go to him, to them, you're a friend. It means, you know what you are doing, I give you some trust and let's see what you can do...If I see that the person is from lower, have to go a bit more *pasar* [Malay: market, refers in this context to colloquial, pidgin speech typically used by the lower and modest middle class], so have to talk in a more friendly way.

Rajadurai (2004) argues that colloquial Malaysian English, when used in casual and semi-formal interactions, conjures a sense of solidarity and camaraderie among Malaysians, even among those fluent in higher level standard English (2004:54-55). The offshore and transnational students and graduates understood this well and were prepared to play down a confident, outspoken approach and their English proficiency when interacting with individuals of presumably local or less inferior forms of cultural capital ownership and to only shift upwards to assertive, “formal correct English” (Francis) in high-level interactions. It is striking that none of the onshore graduates thought this strategy was necessary which perhaps showed something about their pride and belief in the symbolic and economic power resting in UK linguistic cultural capital.

The positional competition for labour market advantage is no doubt intense, but to describe it with words such as “war”, “tournament” and “battle”, as Brown et al. (2011) did, obscures aspects of self-regulation and humility in cultural capital accumulation and activation. Securing positional advantage may require not so much a maximisation of foreign cultural capital but a careful moderation of its appropriation, use and display to suit the specificities of the local context. Framing this in the context of Malaysian middle-class distinction, there is a need to account for how individuals attempt to balance Western cultural capital with local awareness and sensitivity to achieve status differentiation without overly flaunting difference at others.

Relative Disadvantages of Foreign Cultural Capital Ownership

As much as Western credentials, competences and dispositions generally offer better economic and symbolic capital opportunities, not having cultural capital which is entirely applicable and recognised in the home context poses limits to their convertibility. These limitations, taking the form of practical job-prescribed requirements which demanded in-depth knowledge of local society, had the heaviest impact on onshore graduates. Eng Hock, a Sheffield-trained doctor serving in a Malaysian public hospital, explained to me that the medical sector in Malaysia was moving towards localisation of training, as opposed to other registered professions, particularly, accounting, where continued ease in global employment was enjoyed by those with accredited qualifications:

You see, it used to be that before, if you have registration from the Royal College of Surgeon, you can work in the UK, Malaysia, you can work in Bangladesh, India and all these places. But ten years from now...even though you have an MRCS [Member of the Royal College of Surgeons] qualification which is a very highly respected qualification, you can't work in Malaysia...Because they have their own training programme...It's not about if you have one qualification, you can travel around the world. Which is a different case for accounting as far as I know coz all my cousins are accountants. If you have ACCA, a CIMA qualification, a CPA from Australia, you can work anywhere in the world.

The diminishing global relevance of UK institutionalised cultural capital for full licensed entry into the medical field in countries outside the UK suggests rising institutional

recognition for localised “hands-on” medical-related knowledge, skills and experiences in communicating and treating patients local to the specific country. This, according to Eng Hock, served the practical purpose of protecting the interests of local patients, although he was frustrated that it imposed constraints on the global job mobility of medical practitioners.

Lye Hoon, a pharmacist in London and a graduate of the UK campus of the University of Nottingham, explained that the transfer of her UK institutionalised cultural capital to her home country would be constricted by the Pharmacy Board of Malaysia which required re-training to qualify for full professional registration. However, in the UK, credentials from her university and the General Pharmaceutical Council, the regulatory body of pharmacists in England, Scotland and Wales, were enough to legitimate entry into an independent, fully registered profession, equal in status to a doctor. She sought solace in the better recognition of pharmacists in the host country. Although coming to realize after graduation that a pharmacist’s pay in the UK was low and the working hours disproportionately long, she anticipated that the salary and working conditions in Malaysia would be worse if she were to return. She expected her job scope and autonomy to be constrained in Malaysia:

I wouldn’t be doing as well if I were to go home...The salary, the tough job, couldn’t be as rewarding coz the role of pharmacists back home is not that significant compared to a doctor...The role of a pharmacist in Malaysia is similar to just the role of a pharmacy technician in this country...Like what I am currently doing, we get to screen the prescription and if we think it’s too high or the patient shouldn’t take this medicine, we can speak to a doctor and even sometimes, we can just change things without talking to them if it’s for the patient’s best interest.

A devalued occupational status in Malaysia, coupled with poor pay and working conditions, was the fear driving her to break her bond with the Malaysian government who sponsored her studies. The condition of her bond required her to work with the government in Malaysia for eight years after graduation. Her parents had paid more than 600 000 *ringgit* (about GBP 130000), the cost of her four-year studies in the UK, to free her from the bond and essentially, the setbacks of uneven recognition of institutionalised

cultural capital within Malaysian borders. Institutional regulations operating at national level can limit the global symbolic power of foreign-derived credentials, experience and dispositions, thus, posing positional disadvantages to certain graduate workers.

On the other hand, the lack or absence of direct knowledge and experience of studies, work and life overseas impedes the global convertibility of foreign cultural capital, obtained offshore or transnationally, into highly skilled employment outside the home country. Degrees obtained outside the UK are subjected to tighter political-legal conditions and rules in the UK as strict immigration policies offered little opportunity for offshore and transnational graduates to enter and work in the UK. Yet, working in the UK or elsewhere overseas was an aspiration for many offshore and transnational students, a decision which they would not hesitate to make if personal, familial and institutional conditions were favourable. Work-based migratory aspirations were centred on a few destinations: the UK, Singapore, Australia and the US. These destinations represent top countries where the estimated 784 900 skilled Malaysians working abroad in 2010 were commonly found (*The Star* 2010). Higher income as the result of a stronger currency overseas, lower cost of living, opportunities to gain overseas work experience and better working conditions were common incentives luring them to consider employment overseas. Requirements under the previously available post-study worker visa category in the UK would not have awarded visa eligibility points for the ownership of UK offshore and transnational qualifications. Chances of offshore and transnational graduates in securing job offers from licensed employer sponsors under the sponsored skilled worker category were low as offers were given only for jobs on the shortage occupation list or those which could not be filled by suitable settled workers or nationals from the UK, the European Economic Area and Switzerland (UK Border Agency 2013a). Hence, institutionalised cultural capital in the form of a UK certificate of award, when obtained through studies outside the UK, lacked institutional recognition of legitimacy to enter the UK labour market.

Until April 2012, onshore international students intending to work in the UK after completion of any undergraduate or postgraduate programme were eligible to claim points for their qualifications under the post-study visa category. This category has been replaced by the Doctoral Extension Scheme which from April 2013, extends opportunities only to doctoral students to find skilled work or set up as an entrepreneur in the UK after the completion of their studies (Home Border Agency 2013b). This goes to show that the various acquisition modes and certified levels of UK institutionalised cultural capital ownership have different degrees of applicability and convertibility in the UK labour market governed by political-legal rules and requirements.

Negative Convertibility of Cultural Capital in Malaysia

A clear downside of employing foreign cultural capital in the home country is the risk of having to face prejudice from locally educated graduates with different cultural capital ownership and appreciation. This was experienced by a few onshore graduates who returned to work in Malaysia. They figured that prejudice against them stemmed from feelings of envy and threat in their workplaces which featured or valued local cultural capital backgrounds such as in the case of the government research agency which Brian (Researcher, PhD Electrical Engineering, Cambridge) worked for. His PhD from Cambridge, while an impressive addition to the agency's profile, had little recognition value in the day to day operations of work as local cultural capital such as Asian reverence for authority and seniority was valued over outspokenness and confidence which Brian identified in himself as an onshore graduate. In the following, Brian referred to his superiors' dislike of him. These were superiors from lower-tiered public learning institutions in Malaysia:

If they are from say, some random local, say UiTM, MARA¹⁵ one lah. They only have this inferiority complex because they know they are not that good. If they are that good ar, the government would have sent them overseas. If not ar, they would have sent them to UM, UKM,...

¹⁵ UiTM (Universiti Teknologi Mara) is the largest public institution of higher learning in Malaysia set up to expand the tertiary level participation of *bumiputeras*. It reserves 90% of university places for *bumiputera* students.

...USM.¹⁶ Then you come in as someone from overseas ar, they feel threatened. Die die also they are going to kill you. If not ar, their seats not very secure...Overseas trained one want to play gentleman, don't want to kill the locally trained one, that's it lah, out lah.

Higher professionalism and civility, the suggested embodied cultural capital of the onshore graduate, was believed to bring fatal consequences for survival in the local positional field as the mass of non-overseas educated individuals viciously and unsympathetically protect their turf. Brian's observations of cultural capital conflicts were not exclusive to his workplace and he acknowledged could apply to Malaysian-owned companies in the private sector. In this sense, UK onshore cultural capital has symbolic power, power which can impress, just as well threaten its subordinated evaluators who in turn seek to suppress it.

Onshore graduates occasionally faced negative labelling in the home economic arena which they interpreted as attempts by individuals of lesser cultural capital endowments to downplay their competences and experiences. Shamsul (Business Coach, 2+1 Information Technology, Hertfordshire) related an example of how he was being ignored and silenced: "Every time you say more than you're supposed to, they'll say "Aih, UK graduate". You get them from local graduates, especially the locals who think that you're trying to be more than you are". The lack of concern and initiative to acclimatize to local ways of being which Hisham noticed in his onshore graduate friend and among returned onshore graduates in general shaped his impression of them as arrogant, inflexible and disrespectful. Hisham disliked his friend's overseas-acquired direct and confrontational style in casual interactions as he believed this created tense relations with local members of the home society who were generally more passive and agreeable in their speech:

He doesn't get it. Even if he get it, it's like *tak apa* [Malay: never mind] lah. The problem is obviously if you do that, they lose faith on you...if we too confront right, people will be like, "What are trying to do? We come to this table to have a drink. Just chill.

¹⁶ UM (Universiti Malaya), UKM (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) and USM (Universiti Sains Malaysia) are the top three public universities in Malaysia.

The ease of cross-border educational and labour mobility in recent times brought in “outside” cultures which far from complementing the inadequacies of local cultural capital, Hisham believed, antagonistically challenged its accepted dominance. He noted the likely difficulty of returned onshore graduates in adjusting to life in “the jungle”, “the village”, as they had got accustomed to the “high life” overseas. Onshore graduates were thus seen as cultural and national misfits as they spelt “trouble” to an existing but fragile ethnicised order of positional relations in Malaysia:

It’s like you come from outside, even though you’re local, you bring back something that are alien. It’s like we have our own problems, the racial thing, Malay, Chinese, Indian, and some more you bring back 3 others, the Malay, Chinese, Indian outside. So you get these 6 groups, fighting one another in the same country...It’s like you ask them to go outside to save our problems and then you bring in more. So, the 1Malaysia¹⁷ thing is like can’t bring back people from outside. The problem is that we’re not used to it because the last person who came in from outside always creates trouble. He wants things to change but the problem is that many have already chilled out.

The excerpts capture the tension in interaction among individuals of different and potentially conflicting ethnic and cultural capital reserves in a society which historically and continually struggles to work out a sense of a unified nation. In the home context where the local and mass cultural capital is dominantly sustained, trading solely on exclusive overseas-acquired cultural capital is likely to deprive graduates of career advancement opportunities and widespread acceptability across class and ethnic divides.

The negative labels attached to onshore graduates perhaps had some truth in them as I noticed that the group was most unprepared and in the cases of some participants, unwilling to accept socio-relational and structural realities in the home country. Many onshore graduates particularly felt that they were or would be deprived of their better quality of life as enjoyed in the UK. Noraini (Well Engineer, MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon) contemplated re-settling in Malaysia some time in future, but feared that she and particularly her Russian husband would face difficulties adjusting

¹⁷ This refers to a government campaign targeted at promoting inter-ethnic harmony and national unity. It can also refer to social situations where multiculturalism is portrayed.

to the faster-paced and stressful life in Malaysia. Work was anticipated to be all consuming, becoming the only reason for being. The lack of an efficient road system and integrated public transportation services to complement this lifestyle would cause idle hours being spent driving to and back from work:

Going back to KL [Kuala Lumpur] is somewhere in my list of viable things to do but I do worry that my husband won't fit in well. I think it's better to just go there once in a while and really enjoy ourselves rather than stay there all the time and be too caught up in everything to even enjoy anything. Malaysia can have that effect on you...Leaving your house at 6 a.m. so you can avoid 7a.m. rush hour just to reach office at 6.30 a.m. for work that starts at 8 a.m. Leave the office at 6 p.m. to avoid 5 p.m. rush hour to reach home at 7 p.m. and all the while driving, dreading tomorrow where the cycle starts all over again.

The routine of rush and wait would likely offset the work-life equilibrium that Noraini and in fact, participants from all the three samples so valued. The home country had become more of a tourist stop for Noraini, rather than a home, suggesting her fading identification with Malaysia the more she and her husband felt comfortable with the "stress free living" in the UK, more specifically, in Aberdeen. Returning to Malaysia would then be a leap backwards to an infrastructurally and socially inferior setting. This was confirmed by Kelvin (Business Consultant, BSc(Hons) Business Mathematics & Statistics, LSE) who faced challenges in coming to terms with harsher working conditions in Malaysia:

I had to settle knowing that a lot of Malaysian companies don't really put employee welfare in a very high priority. Not just things like work-life balance, even simple things like leave, working conditions whether things were sufficiently safe in the workplace. You know, employees they work late, but they sometimes do not have transport to go back or safe transport to go back, you know. Over here [Malaysia], it's not a very big deal.

Having to "settle" indicates a sense of disadvantage in working in Malaysia, an experience which some onshore graduates avoided by not returning to Malaysia while those who did, commonly expressed disappointment and frustration over the incompatibility of local Malaysian culture with the global person that they were.

While Noraini took issue with the fast and stressful work pace in Malaysia, Brian

(Researcher, PhD Electrical Engineering, Cambridge) experienced the opposite in the government agency he worked for. He likened the work culture in the Malaysian public sector and companies and agencies linked to it to practising Tai Chi, the Chinese martial art involving slow, gentle movements and meditative breathing, usually aimed at achieving calmness and relaxation. One of the main sequences requires pushing the hands forward with palms facing out, as if passing an invisible ball. This analogy fits in well with Brian's observations of a slow and relaxed work pace at the agency. An excess of employees without properly designated work roles and duties caused the ball of responsibility to be passed around:

I'm wasting my time there basically. Everyday go to work is surf Internet. *Gaji buta* [Malay: Blind salary – salary earned without doing much work] lah basically...Because number 1, this is government company. There is a lot of people around. So even if work does come along, you can spread it out lah and then it gets done easy. And number 2, it is government lah. So you learn very quickly to *tai ji* [Cantonese dialect: Tai chi] ah. Everything don't do. Don't do.

The description of his workplace seems to resemble the culture in the Malaysian public sector, known to recruit mostly *bumiputera* graduates from local public universities to curb mass local graduate unemployment (Sujata 2006). Interestingly, Brian stumbled upon my online invitation for research participation while surfing the Internet during work hours. The ease of taking leave from work to meet me in the same week further reflects the idle and relaxed nature of his occupational environment which bored and frustrated him.

Brian believed he was going through an "identity crisis", a state of confusion caused by negotiating and managing varied local, transnational and global elements that constitute the foreign cultural capital holder's sense of identity and place belonging. He questioned whether identity could be tied to a home country as he did not "feel accepted in my own home", knowing that "someone like me don't fit in very well" in a restrictive, insular village that was Malaysia to him:

The place is stifling...After coming back from overseas and being exposed to all things that happened there, come back is like aiyoh, *balik kampung* [Malay: return to the village], you know, that kind of thing. Everything is at a slightly lower level. Ur, in terms of people...It's just that the mentality is not quite there... I have this problem: identity crisis [laughs]...I don't know what I am. The only thing Chinese about me is my name and that is about it.

Pursuing foreign cultural capital overseas may weaken identification with the ethnic and national habitus and add to an unsettled understanding of one's identity. The sense of rootlessness and disorientation made several onshore graduates unprepared and in a few cases, unwilling to immerse into life in the home country.

Disassociation with Malaysia took an extreme form in the case of Ashwin (Film Director/Writer, BA(Hons) Time Based Media, UWE) who chose not to return to his home country after his studies finished. Describing himself as “a self-hating Malaysian”, Ashwin expressed strong dissatisfaction with what seems to be every aspect of living in Malaysia. He struggled to understand why he felt intensely angry whenever he was in Malaysia, acknowledging that the anger would appear misplaced and unjustified to many:

My friends er, I know they have been quite angry about that. My parents don't fully understand it. Erm, there are just a lot of things that I can't really reconcile myself with and erm, it's tough. I have to learn when I go back home these days not to complain about everything...Erm, I get angry with the way people put up with things. I get angry about bad customer service. I get angry about the weather [laughs] which is out of my control. I get angry about yeah, everything.

He was critical of the nonchalant “why worry, why bother” attitude of Malaysians who tended to show disinterest in political and civil participation, so long as their economic well-being was safeguarded. Furthermore, he disliked the general lack of urgency and assertiveness in local workers in Malaysia: “Leaving it [work] to the last minute or being sort of *tidak apa* [Malay: nonchalant] about it. I can't really handle it anymore...I think this idea of *lemah lembut* [Malay: soft and gentle] is not good. I think it is counter productive”. He also took issue with the lack of initiative in customer service and the sharp inflation in food prices, despite salary being constant. Although the economic capital earned through exchange of cultural capital in the UK labour market was not

much, Ashwin had access to better customer service treatment in the UK and was sure that he had higher purchasing power as far as daily commodities were concerned. Not knowing how to drive, he appreciated the ease of mobility made possible by the integrated London public transportation system. Familiarity and comfort living in the host country had got him considering switching to British citizenship which he was eligible for. This had been an issue of contention for many of his friends who believed that he had lost touch with the Malaysian identity that should form the permanent core of his self: “A lot of my friends argue that I’ve forgotten who I am. That I am the one with the identity crisis. I haven’t figured out what I am, who I am”. It is unclear whether the agitation towards “everything” about the perceived inferior home country was developed as a consequence of cultural capital immersion in the UK. What is perhaps more certain is that living in the UK for an extended time had presented Ashwin with an alternate set of life chance possibilities, one which involved residing in a place where the culture, values, infrastructure, economy and the environment were more in line with his preferences. Holding the home country to the same standards as the UK was the cause for much fear, disappointment and frustration among onshore graduates over any less than expected positive outcome of cultural capital conversion in Malaysia.

Restrictive ethnic-based affirmative action and government mismanagement of talent and the economy posed positional barriers to participants across the three samples, causing much insecurity to particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Lye Hoon (MSc Pharmacy, Nottingham), the pharmacist based in London, believed that “there are a lot of things that can be improved in Malaysia”. One such area was having “a more open government” committed to dismantling ethnic-based affirmative action in various arenas of society and replacing it with equitable opportunities for all regardless of ethnicity. “I don’t think it’ll get any better”, she lamented on the state of institutionalised ethnic segmentation in access to positional opportunities: “Like they are overly protective of, you know...They set too many rules to protect the Malays and it’s just not a fair system”. For Chinese ethnic minority Tricia (1+2 Law, Sheffield), a

charities officer in Petaling Jaya, an ethnically inequitable opportunity system, coupled with long standing politicised ethnic, cultural and religious issues, led to a sense of uncertainty over the long-term suitability of the home turf as a field for life chance improvement:

I think it was quite frustrating for the non-Malays in Malaysia to actually make our voices heard about certain subjects or when you read the news, you actually read comments that sound so idiotic from our politicians...you have our politicians saying non-Malays are *pendatangs* [Malay: immigrants] and they would want to make Malaysia a more Islamic nation and the fact that there is one special race that has been given prominence in everything they do. So, everyday, reading the newspapers here is oh gosh, a series of soap operas again. When will this ever end? So if you ask me, if I'm thinking of migration, I have never stopped thinking of it ever since I came back.

With the additional issue of crime and lack of efficient law enforcement in mind, she believed that the answer to a more secure life chance and quality of life lay in migration. Singapore, which she was considering moving to, was perceived to be a safer, transparent and meritocratic country, offering competitive economic rewards commensurate with her onshore-acquired UK cultural capital.

For Mushamir (Student, PhD Electronic & Communication Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia) who is Malay, the answer to enjoying higher economic capital and a more fiscally and morally responsible political system lay in future work migration, especially to the UK. State discourses and debates on the ongoing brain drain in Malaysia place blame on the migrant individual for not being patriotic and committed to the development of a high income, knowledge-based national economy (Kaur & Amin 2010; Choi & Ng 2006). Mushamir exercised caution in articulating himself with respect to what was essentially a politically sensitive issue, making sure I knew that his migratory aspirations were formed out of practical economic necessity and not detachment from the home country:

Malaysia is a good country. Very peaceful and all that. I love Malaysia. Don't misunderstand me. But right now, there is a lot of corruption and discrimination. I mean there is a lot of wrong thing happening now. I don't know. I feel that the government is like pushing and pressing us. That's why a lot of people go to Singapore to work, go to overseas....We have the brain drain. All the...

...good good people, students, they stay in UK. All the doctor, they stay in UK. Because all the doctor, they come back to Malaysia, they work like 24/7 for 3 days, 4 days, but they earn like 4k, 5k. But if they work in Singapore, they earn like 10k. So, it's not like we don't love our country. Our country doesn't love us. Not our country, the government doesn't appreciate the people.

So certain was his belief of better life chances and quality of life in the UK that it did not matter much to him what job offer he would get, leaving it at “whatever I can do”, as long as there was a chance to work and live in the UK. This overrode any practical assessments he might have made on the viability of getting a highly-paid skilled job and better working and living conditions at a time of prolonged economic recession in the UK, more so, of him securing work entry, given that he did not study physically in the UK. Mushamir had not travelled to the UK before and thus, did not have any first-hand experiences of the destination to base his migratory aspirations. The onshore graduates, on the other hand, had direct knowledge of life in the UK and knew better of the life chance possibilities it offered. When seen optimistically, institutionalised cultural capital obtained onshore permitted entry into extended indulgence in socially envied activities and lifestyles in the UK, if not always superior economic capital opportunities. It generally offered escape from a sense of disadvantage arising from perceived inferior socio-relational and structural conditions in the home country. Onshore graduates as a whole were most critical of the disadvantages of starting a livelihood in the home country while the lack of comments from their offshore and transnational counterparts seems to suggest a certain acceptance of their lot in Malaysia.

Negative Convertibility of Cultural Capital in the UK

Positioning the self in the UK also comes with disadvantages which onshore graduates working in the UK knew about most. Noraini, the well engineer in Aberdeen, was extremely satisfied with her lucrative salary in the UK, but was well aware that such economic capital opportunities might not be present for onshore graduates of other occupational fields in the UK. She believed that return migration to Malaysia was not necessarily a disadvantage, observing that “many UK graduates go on home to work in Malaysia and make comfortable income. Those educated here [UK] and stay to work

may not even be earning all that well”. Ashwin’s (Film Director/Writer, BA(Hons) Time Based Media, UWE) case attested to this. Although the arts and entertainment industry in the UK, particularly in London, was larger and hence, provided more freelance project opportunities for him, he noted the economic hardship of working and living in the UK:

I think it’s less of a struggle in some sense that if you work in Deloitte [in Malaysia] at an entry level job, you can buy a house. I assume you’ll get a pretty decent apartment, you know. You can get your car. You got your lifestyle. Here, even if you’re working in an entry level whatever finance, mostly, you’ll still be renting. You can hardly buy property in London. Um, you know, most people don’t buy. That’s why most of my friends who went back wanted more than the kind of struggle we still kind of have in London.

The more expensive prices of properties and relatively low pay of recent graduates in the UK made the reproduction of a comfortable Malaysian middle-class “lifestyle” in the host country a tough feat.

There was a somewhat unsettling question in Ashwin as to whether it was worth persisting with a less conventional career which “didn’t have a great trajectory”, as he struggled over time to build his name in the arts and entertainment industry. He shared that more than two thirds of his course mates had given up on their dream of a media career and had moved on to accept any employment they could find in the UK. At 27 years old and five years on since graduating from a time-based media¹⁸ programme, a programme which his parents took a loan to finance, “guilt” had mounted in him for not generating steady economic returns to the heavy financial investment in onshore UK education:

Sometimes there’s work, sometimes there isn’t. I started to rely on my parents on and off. And I’m lucky that they are happy to do that. And we have a deal that they’ll be happy to help me off and on until I am 30. Coz they know how long it takes in this business to get somewhere. But it’s tough because you’re guilty all the time because you see all your friends in regular jobs who are going to...I think the biggest guilt I got is still having to take money out from my folks once in a while. Um, whereas, you know, other friends are sort of taking care of their parents [laughs]. It’s gone the other way.

¹⁸ This refers to streaming media.

As he remained unsure of whether to continue film directing, there was restless realisation that “if someone [in Malaysia] hasn’t figured out what they want to do by the time they are 29, people kind of look at you as a slightly odd ball”. Even though physically separated from the home country by more than 10 000 kilometres, embarrassment for not having a clear, financially rewarding trajectory by Malaysian standards several years after graduation was very real. Unfulfilled transformation of onshore international education to prestigious jobs, income and status in the host society reflects the negative convertibility of UK cultural capital which can occur even within the UK context.

Anxiety and self-doubt marked the post-graduation story of a few other onshore graduates who remained in the UK. Jia Wen, a Politics and International Relations graduate I interviewed in 2007 in a different study (Sin 2009), then, a student at the University of Manchester, was hopeful of a bright career in journalism in the UK upon graduation. The transition from university to work had been all but smooth for her as she struggled to have her institutionalised cultural capital converted to full-time, permanent graduate-level employment. In the two years since graduation, she had held many part-time and voluntary jobs, far more than she could remember off-hand to list verbally. There was a close to 50 seconds pause in the interview as she resorted to writing on paper the chronological order of her many work experiences, all 13 of them. She held four positions at the time of interview: part-time food kiosk worker at a stadium, part-time team member at a bakery, voluntary runner at a news corporation and voluntary radio presenter. It did not occur to her before as a student that finding paid work relevant to journalism in the UK would be so difficult, armed with a “good degree”.

The longer it took for her to activate her institutionalised cultural capital into positive exchange value, the more “pressured” and disillusioned the 23 year old became of her own aspirations. The following interview excerpts document her fear of being “left out”

from enjoying better economic capital rewards, commensurate with time since graduation:

Ya, definitely difficult in terms of job hunting and also it can be a question of self esteem. You start questioning yourself, “Am I not good enough?” and not just that, you start thinking about, “Is this what I want?” or “I don’t know what I want now” [laughs]...And the fact that I spent so long looking for a job and you know, my time is running out and my age, you know, I’m getting older and seeing what my peers are doing in Malaysia and in other countries...One was already a manager¹⁹, you know. And so you feel pressured because you feel that your career has not even started yet...One studies in Australia and as soon as she graduated, she got a job with an oil company in Australia and she is like, you know, flying off everywhere, looking at oil rigs and all that and you feel er, left out. And another one graduated from the US and has got a job with an insurance company in the US and everything is going well for you. She has a green card, you know.

The perceived relative success of her peers educated outside the UK had made her question the distinctive marketable value of onshore UK education, the origin and mode of cultural capital diffusion that she once undoubtedly believed to sit at the top of the prestige hierarchy in Malaysia and the rest of the world. Mobility in the forms of a quick ascent up the occupational ladder, opportunity to travel widely for work and the right to permanent migration to the host country was a marker of success that remained elusive.

The prolonged difficulty in activating her UK cultural capital to secure this mobility had brought doubts on the use value of a university education. Realising that employers in journalism valued work experience more than academic performance and university ranking, she was resolute never to “go back to education as it’s going to add zero value”. Jia Wen was to begin her first paid, full-time employment a week after my conversation with her. Although a temporary job for 3 months without any promise of extension, she was elated to finally begin a “proper job” consistent with her journalistic aspirations. She would be writing for a travel website. The following captures her excitement, a feeling perhaps better associated in the past with a more stable and permanent form of

¹⁹ Her friend studied in a Malaysian public university.

paid employment:

I am ecstatic. Sometimes I feel like I'm dreaming. I wake up some days and like think [laughs], "Did I really just get the job? Maybe it was a hoax, you know, why hasn't the employment contract arrived yet in my mail box? Like, did I dream it?" [laughs] Ya, I'm ecstatic, very happy, ya.

Goals and expectations were revised as the actual demands and circumstances of the UK graduate labour market were experienced.

The fear of not being able to convert UK cultural capital to steady economic capital in the host country, especially during the start of global recession in 2008, prompted Julie, a Masters graduate in Political Sociology from the LSE, to seize the first paid job opportunity that came along. This was a month after graduation. She had since worked as a coordinator in a welfare project in London, a position which had little relevance to the cultural capital obtained at university. In fact, she felt that her prior work experience in Malaysia in the fields of advocacy, counselling and fund raising for charity projects helped her more in securing her present job, rather than the knowledge and skills gained at university. She related the urgency of obtaining any employment with a "decent salary" after graduation in the following:

So it was when the summer of 2008 was when Lehmann Brothers collapsed, so everyone was like, "Oh my God. I have no job. Everything is going". So it [obtaining present job] was quite fortuitous, I guess, yeah...I applied, I came back and then they say, "We're interested. Would you like to come for an interview?" and I said, "What the hell, yes, I would". Urm, left the interview, got a phone call half an hour later saying, "Would you like the job?". You know, called home, everyone was like, "Oh my God. You got a job? Take it" [laughs], so took it.

Two years on, she was unsure whether there was a significant exchange value in her UK education, given that the acquired cultural capital was never fully activated in a relevant job which tapped into her specific area of study. Just like Ashwin who was conscious of being labelled "odd ball", the perceived oddity of being uncertain of one's life directions at the upper end of the 20s was increasingly felt by Julie: "It's really funny. I'm almost 28. I still don't know what I want to do". The sense of excitement and ambition over the

positional possibilities that UK education presented had waned as Julie grappled to make sense of “whether it’s [Masters education in the UK] worth it or not”:

I’m not sure. You know, will it all be worth it? We’ll see [laughs]...in 2007 when I thought about what I wanted to do in my life, it seemed like it [UK education] was a key. Now that I have done it, gone past it, it’s not that big of a deal anymore [laughs]...I’m finding myself, well, I have this degree. I’m not really using it [laughs], you know.

She had given herself another three years to work out a plan for more relevant and better paid employment in the host country. Realities of the outcomes of UK cultural capital investment had begun to kick in as the certainty of superior employment which included work relevancy, a condition typically presumed by students, turned to mere possibility. “Getting older” (Jia Wen) was indeed a worrying issue for several UK-based onshore graduates as they became more conscious of the roles, responsibilities and goals they initially set to arrive at in the host country by a certain age and time. Their job realities were far from what the offshore and transnational students and graduates, and even the onshore graduates themselves, would have imagined for people who held perceived superior cultural capital much admired and envied in the home country. Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that symbolic capital rewards will manifest alongside superior economic rewards and in a short and set time upon graduation.

Advantages of Living in the Home Environment

The home country can in certain instances, offer quicker material as well as non-pecuniary rewards for UK cultural capital holders. One example is the wider availability of career advancement opportunities in certain infant and thriving areas within health, engineering and financial industries. The Malaysian government’s non-recognition of overseas postgraduate training compelled Eng Hock (Doctor, Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Sheffield) to return to his home country to specialise in orthopaedic surgery. He believed that in hindsight, it was the best decision made as limited numbers of experienced specialists in Malaysian public hospitals, resulting in looser supervision, allowed opportunities for junior medical officers to engage immediately and fully in

hands-on surgery. It helped him build up practical embodied cultural capital which he believed medical specialists working in the UK lacked:

I have been doing a lot of internal fixation for fractures which I hardly see any. I didn't get an opportunity to get involved in it when I was a houseman there [UK]...what I think is if you're going to be a surgeon, if the surgeon can't cut, you don't call them a surgeon...there are certain procedures which can only be done by consultants in UK which is routinely done by trainee surgeons in Malaysia. I've got friends who got back from UK, got straight in there [UK] in orthopaedic surgery, got back here [Malaysia], got a job in a government hospital, couldn't take it because of the stress. You get what I mean? The junior doctors can handle it better than the paper qualified surgeons.

The potential to learn and advance quickly in the medical career by relocating to Malaysia was therefore, "vast" for Eng Hock, although "salary wise, it's not to the level yet in this country". This reflects the relative nature of the outcomes of UK cultural capital investment where in one context, it can yield higher immediate income (economic capital) but lower utilisation and recognition of skills potential (symbolic capital) while in another, the opposite: higher symbolic capital but lower economic capital.

It may just be a matter of time for positive returns to mature in the home country. Alex (Engineer, MEng Mechanical Engineering, Sheffield), an engineer working in Edinburgh, believed that he would be well-received in Malaysia, but only when he had acquired extensive "know-how" in his area of specialisation: building safety assessment. He explained that advanced technical competence of this nature could only be accumulated over an extended period of time in countries with many complex, modern buildings being built yearly such as in the UK. Therefore, the plan was to work in the "UK and across the world" for many years to gain authority and seniority in his specialisation before returning to Malaysia:

I intend to work in Malaysia but, I would like to work with contributions as opposed to work for just pay rolls. I want to work and make an impact to society, so which means I have to be very experienced to start off with and then, come to Malaysia, I want to make some, well, at least create some jobs back home or if not, contribute to the field I am working in at the moment.

Only then could he reap optimal symbolic capital, the positional power to “impact” his occupational field and society.

Returning to Malaysia offered an opportunity to be close to family and to relive fond memories of the home environment. While a few onshore graduates struggled to make sense of their identity, others were certain that being Asian and Malaysian formed the base of their self understanding. Speaking in an unfaltering Scottish accent, Mei Sien (Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Edinburgh), a doctor in Dundee who had lived in the UK for nine years, believed that she was “still very Malaysian at heart”. “I know the culture [in Malaysia] very well. I know people very well”, she believed, suggesting a continued familiarity with the casual socio-relational sphere of the home society that would ease resettlement. She imagined returning to Malaysia eventually. Continued identification with regional and home national spaces while overseas is noticeable in the narrative of Eng Hock, a doctor who worked in Sheffield for two years before returning to practice in Malaysia. Asia and Malaysia provided him the convenience of immediate, longer duration access to familial ties, place-specific food and implied cultural activities: “I’m still Asian. So, I prefer somewhere nearby when you have things available 24 hours. For example, here in Malaysia, things are available for almost 24 hours. Yeah, I want to be closer to my family as well, of course. Urm, I want to have better food as well [laughs]”. Such features of the home environment are difficult to transplant and are for the most part, non-transferable to the host society. The longing to recapture or retain experiences of a home tied to Malaysia can play a part in determining the geographical and occupational destinations of onshore graduates as well as that of their offshore and transnational counterparts.

Nostalgic memories of a cultural past spent with familial ties in the home country can be a reason motivating return migration for onshore graduates, regardless of the transferable value of the owned foreign cultural capital. Such was the case for Wooi Kiat (Technology Consultant, PhD Electronic & Electrical Engineering, Imperial). Ten years

in London and away from family had caused a strong longing to re-live a “home” tied to Malaysia, prompting his resettlement to his home country the very month that our interview was held:

There were occasions when we [he and his girlfriend] wished we have family next to you, especially during holiday seasons, Chinese New Year. I’ve never had Chinese New Year at home for 10 years already, so those kinds of thoughts lah. But generally, if I don’t have family members here [Malaysia], there’s no reason to come back here. I would have been perfectly happy anywhere.

He wanted to play a more active filial role in the family as he realised that “I’m not getting any younger, neither are my parents”. Family migration to the UK would had been difficult as he did not think that his parents would be able to acclimatize to the colder weather and an environment physically cut off from their stable network of friends. Resettlement in Malaysia was also for Wooi Kiat, an exit from a closed culture of high personal privacy and professional distance at work, higher income tax payment and more expensive private medical treatment in the UK. Decisions on life chance trajectories can therefore, go beyond economic considerations to include evaluations of the personal, socio-relational and emotional exchange values of utilising UK cultural capital in specific place and time contexts.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the participants’ assessments of their academic, economic and social worth based on perceptions and expectations of the self and others. A focus on graduates’ views, feelings and experiences brought attention to the realities of enhancing and activating cultural capital associated with UK international tertiary education in different socio-relational and structural spheres in Malaysia and the UK. It revealed emotional and psychic aspects of class practices and relations which Reay (2005:911) encouraged sociologists to explore to understand at a closer level how class is lived and experienced by individuals in their specific context. Findings which described the perceptions, feelings and experiences of graduates working in the UK gave visibility to onshore graduates who just like their offshore and transnational counterparts

have not been given adequate attention in literature on international education. This chapter showed that anticipation of the exchangeability and applicability of UK-derived competences and dispositions do not always match actual experienced outcomes of cultural capital investment and utilisation. There is therefore a need in any study involving both students and graduates to differentiate between students' projections and strategies for a graduate future with graduates' actual lived experiences of the "future". Treating students and graduates as a single collective group would do injustice to data by obscuring the richness of ways in which individuals make sense of and navigate their lives along different stages of the study to work trajectory.

This chapter revealed that exclusive foreign cultural capital can pose positional disadvantages as well as advantages. Its limitations just as its strengths are relative depending on place, situation and time. I highlighted that more common local cultural capital, an aspect of cultural capital sidelined in the literature, can be privileged currency as it can have more functional relevance that evens out the negative aspects of foreign cultural capital deployment. This challenged the assumed certainty (Bourdieu 1984; Brown & Hesketh 2004; Hirsch 1977) that scarcity and exclusivity determine the positive positional value of cultural capital. Piecing the findings together is the central argument that the link between cultural capital obtained through UK international tertiary education and occupational and status reproduction and mobility is not straightforward. It can be positive and negative simultaneously depending on the complexities of factors within the context in question. The relationship between cultural capital and economic and social distinction can even be weak in circumstances where social divisions, particularly age, ethnicity, gender and nationality have larger influence on the anticipation and experiences of labour market inclusion and exclusion. This represents a key point in the following chapter.

Chapter 7 Life Chance Factors Operating Beyond Cultural Capital

Introduction

This chapter discusses the impact of factors intertwined with class on anticipated and actually experienced occupational trajectories after graduation. I will show how class intersects with social divisions such as age, ethnicity, gender, nationality and religion in shaping understandings and practices of distinction in pursuit of entry, integration and advancement in desired employment. I will also bring attention to how the body physique and bodily dispositions, acting as embodied physical capital, can generate economic and symbolic capital opportunities. In doing this, I bring out the central argument in this chapter which is that the link between UK cultural capital and Malaysian middle-class occupational and status advancement can be positive and strong, or weak and inverse, depending on how the bodily, mental and verbal dispositions of the self interact with socio-relational and structural contexts.

Labour Market Inclusion and Exclusion by Age

The previous chapter showed the operation of age as a factor which influences labour market inclusion or exclusion. Age has particular significance in the Malaysian context where the traditional practice of giving respect and deference to elders, while gradually breaking down, remains prevalent. This practice, when carried to the workplace, is in tension with more individualistic modern work practices encouraging exchange of opinions, open criticism and the laying of trust in abilities rather than in age seniority (Hegemann 2008:78). Institutionalised and embodied cultural capital associated with Western international education lack relevance to economic integration and advancement particularly in work settings where the typical habitus prioritises and rewards the chronological age of the cultural capital bearer. Participants were divided in their views about whether their relative youth would be an advantage to them in the job market. One group of opinion is that seniority based on age signified higher ability while youth was a sign of inadequacy. 23 year old Imran (Student, 3+0 Business Information

Technology, Staffordshire) acknowledged that a young age inevitably reflected limited or no actual work experience which would be a disadvantage as “nowadays, organisations need a lot of experience” in managing the nature and content of work. “Experience is gained over the years”, 31 year old Eng Hock (Doctor, Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Sheffield) believed, as it would take him time to be institutionally certified to lead orthopaedic surgeries, the area in which he was studying for specialisation. This implies that cultural capital had to be continually enhanced upon graduation to progress along different stages of the career (Brooks & Everett 2008).

A relatively young age signified Eng Hock’s lack of time-tested hands-on knowledge and competence and with that came resistance and scepticism from seniors towards new ideas and solutions proposed by him and other surgeon trainees:

The challenge I am facing is currently, I am still a trainee, so what we tend to do is, we suggest a lot of new ways of doing certain things. For example, surgery, something new pops up in the market in this one or two years’ time, probably not being heard of by other people. Ah, we often have this challenge where it is hard to get through to more senior surgeons or more senior consultants in the sense that they believe most of the time, they are more experienced than us. Of course, they are. Urm they believe the way they do things are the gold standard. Well, most of the cases, it’s still true...I do find a certain group of senior consultants very reluctant to open up to new ways of doing things.

Similarly, 23 year old Hee Seng (Factory Manager, BEng(Hons) Mechanical Engineering) believed that his age gave the assumption of inexperience. Having to manage staff who were mostly in the 40-50 year old age range, he found it a tricky balance between asserting his technical capabilities and managerial views and yet, still politely accommodating the ways of doing and thinking of older subordinates which was at times, incongruent with his:

All the workers there are much older than me and sometimes, they think I’m still very young and that I don’t know that much. When I’m dealing with machines, I’ll try to show that I’m capable of dealing with them...I’ll try to talk like normal but I have to show some respect because they’re older than me.

A young age, therefore, can be a disadvantage as it opens up situations where the substance of embodied cultural capital in the form of technical competence is scrutinised and any knowledge and skills contribution resisted within an organisational hierarchy of age-based seniority. It is uncertain whether the cultural capital obtained from international education offers any practical knowledge and skills on how to effectively manage this tension.

The privileging of position-based seniority which is closely tied to age in the Malaysian labour market can work further to the disadvantage of young graduates. 24 year old Mushamir (PhD Electronic & Communication Engineering student, Nottingham Malaysia) imagined that career advancement opportunities in especially the public sector tended to favour older employees who had been serving longer at the workplace. This could override employer evaluations of actual work performance and potential of the UK cultural capital holder: “It’s very hard to get to the top because they don’t care how good you are, how *rajin* [Malay: hard working] you are. They don’t care about it. They say you’re junior. Let the senior to go [for promotion]”. 30 year old Brian (Researcher, PhD Electrical Engineering, Cambridge) witnessed first-hand a direct, positive relationship between age and symbolic capital in the government agency he worked for which he was resolute to challenge. There was an unapologetic pride in him for not bending to age norms governing social interactions at his workplace:

Malaysian style of working, you know, your boss is your boss. He says A, you A. Says B, you B...People who are like 10 years older than you, 20 years older than you. Listen to what they say. Give advice, you go, “Oh, ok, ok”, like that. It doesn’t happen with me...I’m the only one, the only executive-level staff. Executive level, you know, very low level staff who has made 3 directors shut up by just telling them they’re wrong and pom pom pom pom. So, everybody from director level all the way down are afraid of me in the whole organisation. There’s a thousand people in the organisation. I am now infamous. Everyone knows me there. They don’t know how I look like but they know my name, you know. Dr. [first name] [laughs]. Don’t mess with him [laughs]...To me, if you’re wrong, you’re wrong. And when you’re wrong, I’ll tell you you’re wrong...And these people lose face, they basically say, you know, they’ve got their pants stripped down, you know, that kind of thing. I don’t subscribe to that. I don’t subscribe to the face, give face kind of thingy, so I don’t fit in very well.

The concept of “giv[ing] face” is not exclusive and specific to Malaysian society, but

forms a larger Confucian-derived way of life prevalent in East and South-East Asian societies where respect and obedience to authority are given primacy for the maintenance of social harmony (Lee & Teh 2009; Ting-Toomey 1988). Direct and open expression of disagreement and displeasure with seniors, which onshore graduates in this study were less hesitant to engage in, would be a breach of social etiquette for the shame and embarrassment they could cause to the higher hierarchy (Lee & Teh 2009:64). It is also a breach of bureaucratic rules governing workplaces such as Brian's where employees were expected to "toe the line", rather than to exert personal views and principles. This upset Brian who if not bounded by a scholarship bond with the Malaysian government, would have chosen a work setting where "right is right, wrong is wrong and you're appreciated for what you can give, rather than how much ass you can kiss".

23 year old Jia Wen (Multiple jobs, BA(Hons) Politics & International Relations, Manchester) chose to remain in the UK after graduation to escape a culture of "very high reverence for hierarchy" in Malaysian society which stifled free expression of opinions and views from younger and junior level employees. "We [Malaysians] tend to put people on pedestals like oh we think, the partner, he is up there, he is unreachable...people are scared of their bosses and people are not so opened", she explained. She preferred a more equal power relationship in the UK where people were able to interact freely without being pre-judged by age and experience. Moreover, they would be able to address each other by the given name, as opposed to honorific and surname. Noraini (MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon), the 30 year old well engineer in Aberdeen, echoed the observation that the use of honorifics was widely insisted in Malaysia: "You don't address people by their last name...in Malaysia, they are very particular about their title. You need to call them, *Encik* [Malay: Mister], *Tuan* [Malay:Master], *Datuk* [Malay, a federal title, equivalent to 'Sir']". She suggested that it served as a linguistic reminder of one's location in the hierarchical social structure, compelling one "to be careful of what you say and who you say it to" at work. In other

words, knowing and behaving in one's place based on the location of axis between one's seniority and cultural capital competence in the labour market.

The penalty for not conforming to this hierarchy of seniority could result in the termination of the means to economic capital accumulation. Based in London and periodically travelling to Malaysia for work, 27 year old film director and writer Ashwin (BA(Hons) Time Based Media, UWE) related how his lack of adherence to an Asian culture requiring respect and unquestioned agreement with one's elders was a stumbling block to closing any business deals in Malaysia:

One of the biggest problem I have is that when people [in Malaysia] talk to me, they still treat me like a child. And the reason for that is because there's this notion we have in Asian culture like if I'm older than you, you're still younger than me, so I'll talk to you as such...I find it hard to take now when I go back, but perhaps it doesn't help in certain meetings because I'm quite in your face. I won't sort of take shit from someone just because you're older than me...You got to proof to me that there's a reason for it, you know. If you're a pain in the ass, you're a pain the ass, no matter what your age.

Brian (Researcher, PhD Electrical Engineering, Cambridge) had been asked to leave his job at the Malaysian government agency and was training his replacement at the time of interview. Refusal to "give face" to seniority in age and position reflects a risky rejection of local cultural capital, the exact local dispositions which the offshore and transnational students and graduates were more willing to develop to gain a positional edge in the Malaysian labour market.

The need to be spoken to, heard and seen as nothing less than an advanced cultural capital holder despite their youth was fulfilled for Noraini and Mei Sien who were both working in the UK. The former commented that "it is okay here [in the UK] to have better ideas than your boss" while the latter believed that "you get more respect when you speak up", even if those views were not agreed to. A law of equal access and treatment in employment for all age groups does not exist in Malaysia and hence, it is not illegal for a job seeker to be asked to disclose his or her age. While finishing the first degree quickly was the plan for many transnational and offshore students, the acquisition

of UK institutionalised cultural capital at a relatively young age exposed them to the risk of age discrimination faced by young graduates working in Malaysia.

Young age, however, can be an advantage in occupational fields where age-related attributes such as physical strength, endurance and youthful dispositions are required to effectively perform at work. Examples of such fields include orthopaedic surgery as in Eng Hock's (Doctor, Medicine/Surgery, Sheffield) case and entertainment in Elaine's (Student, 3+0 Business, Economics & Management, Nottingham Malaysia) projection of a graduate future in food and entertainment. Eng Hock's narrative shows that the body, suggestively, the young, able and strong male physique, represents physical embodied capital which is required to facilitate the demonstration of technical competence:

In order to do the surgeries that we are doing, you're not only talking about the knowledge and the skills, you're talking about the stamina as well. One has to have good stamina at least to stand long hours during surgeries. And that's not something anyone can do really. So, we always welcome young, fit lads to join us...certain surgeries are more highly successful compared to being done by a more senior age group. For example, trauma cases, which are, fixations for road traffic accidents, bones and stuff. Because you need strength and the skills. You need a younger surgeon compared to a veteran surgeon.

Without the right physical capital, it would have been a challenge for him to translate the knowledge owned into high suitability and relevance for certain tasks in his profession. 22 year old Elaine believed that "a young age would help a lot" in the food and entertainment sector as it was likely to expose the individual to images, identities and practices of youths: "Because you have to be on top of things, to know what's new because that is what the entertainment industry is about, everything that is current...Personality as well because you can be physically young, but if you're not into new things, it won't help as well". The differentiation made between being "physically young" and being young in personality shows belief that age has to be fully embraced to enable the projection of appropriate characteristics rewarded in the occupational field. There was no evidence to suggest that cultural capital from international education directly equipped her with knowledge, skills and dispositions to manage her age

performativity. To recapitulate, age, which forms an aspect of physical embodied capital, has influence on objective as well as subjective judgements of an individual's labour market value, leading to better job entry and integration prospects and experiences for some while not so for some others.

Labour Market Inclusion and Exclusion by Ethnicity in Malaysia

While age can be masked to some extent, which will be discussed later in this chapter, other physical characteristics such as gender and to some extent, ethnicity are more obvious visual markers of difference which cannot be conveniently disguised; these have inclusionary and exclusionary effects on entry, integration and advancement in the employment arena. In this section, I will look at the perceived and actual impact of ethnicity on the convertibility of UK cultural capital to labour market advantage and disadvantage in Malaysia. I will highlight the public-private employment divide among participants based on their intended or actual choice of occupational pathways. Malay *bumiputera* representation is known to be disproportionately high in the civil service (*BERNAMA* 2010c), both numerically and hierarchically (CPPS 2005). Statistics in June 2010 show that 77% of 1.29 million civil servants were Malays (*BERNAMA* 2010c). The second largest ethnic group were *bumiputeras* from the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak (9%), followed by the Chinese (6%), Indians (4%) and other groups (4%). The overall *bumiputera* participation in the public sector exceeded 85% which was relatively disproportionate to non-*bumiputera* participation, given that the percentage of *bumiputeras* in Malaysia is just below 68% (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2013). While the Malaysian government actively encourages non-*bumiputera* citizens to enter the public service, the sector struggles to shed its traditional image as the exclusive domain of Malay *bumiputeras*. Perceptions of ethnic preference for *bumiputeras* in recruitment and promotions persist, which my interviewees subscribed to, despite refutations from the government that it does not practise ethnic bias (Chooi 2011). The long-standing identification of the public sector with a dominant single race, namely, Malay, shaped the participants' sense of place (Bourdieu 1984) and positional chances in

the sector.

The viability of carving out a career with the civil service was assessed in relation to the sector's receptivity towards the inter-linkage between the ethnic body and the cultural capital possessed by the bearer. Wah Seong (MSc Civil Engineering student, Nottingham Malaysia), a Chinese student, was attracted to the generous leave provisions and lighter workload in the public sector, but was concerned that his ethnic classification and source of tertiary education would lower his chances of getting in. Ethnicity as a criterion for job recruitment is an open fact to him, as much as he did not like to reduce everything about Malaysia down to it: "In fact, I hate to say that [laughs], but it does. Especially, if you're applying for the public sector...Everyone knows it [laughs]. They're more inclined to employ the local people". "Local" carried two meanings. It referred to *bumiputera* citizens and to local graduates from Malaysian public universities. These two groups are favoured by the public sector (Lee 2012), as the participant rationalised that the government took on responsibility to absorb the masses of graduates that the public higher education system produced. Unemployment of public university graduates which is most prevalent among *bumiputeras* (Sujata 2006) is an ongoing issue of concern for the Malaysian government. This is known to be addressed by recruiting graduates into an already overstuffed public sector which features the largest civil servants to population ratio in the Asia and Pacific region at about 4.68% (Chooi 2011; Sujata 2006). The public sector has been harshly critiqued by Tony Pua, an opposition figure in Malaysian politics as a "bloated", "dumping ground for the politically sensitive constituency of unemployed Malay graduates" (*The Star* 2007). The implication that the civil service is the last and probably first resort for unemployed public university graduates was shared by Wah Seong (MSc Civil Engineering student, Nottingham Malaysia), although with less overt political overtones:

Do you think your UK qualification would help you in your job search?
If I were to apply to the public sector, not really.

Because?

Because the public sector, they really have to support the local universities. If I were to apply for the public sector, it'll be, like I said, it'll be everyone at the same level. My degree would probably help me if I were to apply to multi-national companies and overseas, ya.

Why do you think that the public sector would want to support local universities?

Well, if they don't [laughs], I think the local graduates would find it hard to get a job elsewhere. Because if I were to give them a local degree and apply for a job in another country, they [employers overseas] might not recognize your degree, you see.

Wah Seong hoped that an outstanding academic performance would compensate for his less favoured ethnicity if he went on to pursue a career in the civil service.

On the other hand, Teik Lee (Executive, 2.75+0.25 BSc(Hons) Computing & Information Systems, Liverpool John Moores), a Chinese, doubted that educational achievements would make a significant difference to employment and career advancement chances in the public sector, given official and implicit norms within the system which prefer employees of Malay *bumiputera* and public education backgrounds. He was socialised into this idea, having heard of his civil servant father's experiences of ethnic disadvantage in promotion opportunities:

I was brought up in the sense that government sector is only for the Malays. My dad is in one of the government sector la, so he knows this well. Even though you can work, even though you can excel, no matter what, somebody else, the Malays, will always go up higher than you.

He believed that Malays were constructed and communicated in state-backed ethno-nationalist discourses as more native to the homeland and hence, by default, more deserving of affirmative action benefits. This was evidenced here:

In the public sector, they'll be looking for a different colour of skin, even our results are just as good or maybe even better, but they'll have some quotas to them. The locals la, the locals la. Some politician say we're immigrants from China. So, I think the Malays will have better priority la compared to Chinese.

Hussain (MPhil Engineering, Cambridge), a Malay tutor in a public university in Malaysia, observed that the high concentration of Malays at his workplace and across other public institutions of higher learning was at once a result of preferential ethnic

treatment and the self-exclusion of non-*bumiputeras* who tended to distance themselves from a sector of implied limited and restricted productivity:

There are a lot of Malay academics there [laughs], so maybe that will influence. And one thing is non-Malays are not willing to work in public universities...Maybe, you know la right, public universities in Malaysia, they have quota right? And one thing the bad perceptions they have of the Malay, the research culture in Malaysia.

While not expressed explicitly, “the bad perceptions”, to use Hussain’s words, of a predominantly Malay composition and habitus within the public employment domain clearly discouraged Lye Hoon (MSc Pharmacy, Nottingham), the Chinese pharmacist in London, to work with the Malaysian government, her education sponsor. Her statement said it all: “I wouldn’t want to go to a place where there is only Malays. Ya, I would just scream”. This brings up the issue of ethno-cultural incompatibility of individuals who were exposed to and appreciated higher foreign cultural capital with public sector work which valued particularly the local cultural capital of Malay public graduates.

Similar themes of perceived institutionalised ethnic and credential-based preferences in public sector recruitment were brought up in the interview with Mushamir (PhD Electronic & Communication Engineering student, Nottingham Malaysia). He believed that these recruitment preferences effectively served to ease daily operations and maintain a good cultural and linguistic “fit” between entrants and existing employees in the public sector:

I think for Malaysia, we all know. For government, of course, they prefer Malay. That is a fact. If a Chinese or Indian come for an interview, of course they prefer Chinese or Indian from public university because they can speak Malay better. Very easy for them to communicate...They want to help the people. And they feel the UK student, overseas student, they feel like this people like, cannot fit.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it can be a challenge for a UK degree holder, especially one who studied entirely overseas, to gain positive reception from interviewers of local institutionalised and embodied cultural capital backgrounds.

Mushamir believed that what the UK graduate exhibits as confidence could be read as arrogance by a “narrow-minded” interviewer in the public work arena who does not share the same codes of interpretation: “The interviewer is from local university and somehow feel inferior to the candidate, feel that the candidate is *sombong* [Malay: proud]”. The public economic sphere is where cultural capital of a more common and local possession, obtained through Malaysian public education, is typically prized over others of a more private and exclusive nature. Foreign cultural capital does not convert smoothly into superior job entry, integration and advancement prospects and experiences across the Malaysian public-private employment sectors. It may not confer positional advantage over owners of certified local cultural capital, especially when held with a traditionally subordinated ethnic membership in Malaysia.

The participants believed that better entry, integration and advancement opportunities were to be found in the private sector, although they noted that ethnicity still had relevance in determining inclusion and exclusion. I found in my previous study (Sin 2009) that employment in the Malaysian private sector was particularly attractive for ethnic minority students where better salary and more meritocratic work conditions were anticipated. Similarly, in this study, non-*bumiputera* participants believed that the rules, practices and norms in the public employment sector tended to work to the disadvantage of members of their ethnic group while the reverse situation usually occurred in the private economic arena. It is for this reason that Grace (Self-employed, BSc(Hons) Applied Accounting, Oxford Brookes), a Chinese, intended to stay in employment in the private sector:

In the companies that I work in right, they are a majority Chinese, so we don't see the discrimination lah... I've always worked in the private sector. I'm not really a government pro lah. Because they're too slow. I don't like them. In the private sector, the feeling is less lah. Because even in the projects that are being run right, normally they'll try to get the Malays all in one project and the Chinese will all be in one project, so I rarely work with Malays.

It is interesting to note that team members for projects at her workplace were clustered

by ethnicity, reproducing an ethnically divided pattern of social interaction that resembled majority-minority relations in the wider Malaysian society. It suggests that the understanding and practice of association by cultural and linguistic “fit” (Mushamir) linked closely to ethnicity operates just as well in the private employment field, although in a more subtle manner.

Inherited embodied cultural capital linked to one’s familial ethnic socialisation can habituate an individual to be compatible with the ethnic composition and culture at the workplace. Although English is the dominant language of communication in the Malaysian private sector, it is not uncommon for daily workplace communication to be localised by influences from languages and dialects usually indicative of ethnicity (Venugopal 2000). Kor Ming (3+0 Accounting & Finance student, UWE), a Chinese, reasoned that preference for especially local Chinese employees in the Chinese dominated corporate sector in Malaysia was likely due to practical cultural and linguistic requirements. Mandarin, the language spoken habitually in his home, and Cantonese, his spoken dialect, equipped him with linguistic capital that eased his interactions with the many Chinese Malaysian clients he worked with during his internship at an international auditing company in Petaling Jaya:

It’s just that sometimes it’s communication. Let’s say your client only knows how to speak Mandarin. You cannot send someone who doesn’t speak Chinese at all. It’ll be very tough for him.

What language did you speak during your internship?

Ok, to some, I speak English. To some, I speak Mandarin and to clients, I speak Cantonese. How I communicate with them is how they first communicate with me. If they start with English, then I’ll speak English.

It has to be noted that the equation of Chinese ethnicity with proficiency in Mandarin and Chinese dialects is not always applicable, although usually true among the Chinese Malaysian population. The percentage of Chinese Malaysians who are raised in primarily or solely Chinese speaking families is about 85% to 90% (Azizan 2012). They are referred to in everyday discourse as the Chinese-educated while the remaining 10%

to 15% who habitually speak English as the dominant or only language at home are termed the English-educated Chinese (Yap 2007). Where the inherited ethnic membership might denote habitual predisposition to less marketable linguistic capital in most private companies, such as heavy or sole usage of the Malay mother tongue in a Malay family, a few Malay participants had their parents counteracting that by making sure English was equally if not predominantly spoken at home. For instance, Hisham (3+0 Business Management & Finance student, Keele), a Malay student, spoke a mixture of English and Malay with his family. He was certain this would help him develop linguistic spontaneity in English-speaking work contexts compared to many Malays who approached English as a foreign language situated “outside” of familial norms, practice and identity. It is interesting to note, although not surprising, that none of my non-Malay participants across the three samples were encouraged to speak Malay at home and they themselves did not see the need to improve their proficiency in a language they saw as beneficial mostly for employment in the Malaysian public sector which many of them steered away from.

Being Malay, however, can bring some positional benefits such as having the required better linguistic and cultural knowledge to liaise with the Malay dominant public sector, meeting a non-*bumiputera* controlled company’s criteria of ethnic diversity and having access to reserved job openings and economic opportunities in *bumiputera*-owned companies. Good knowledge of the Malay language and culture can give Malay job applicants “a free point”, Kelvin (Business Consultant, BSc(Hons) Business Mathematics & Statistics, LSE), a Chinese, observed. This is because of “the ability to deal with the Malays in the public sector” whenever interactions with government officials were required. Having said that, Kelvin believed that he was not in any way disadvantaged on the basis of ethnicity during his job search in the private sector as his Chinese ethnicity commanded more instant trust and recognition of his work potential: “I guess I am lucky because I think in terms of seeking employment and all that, being Chinese in Malaysia, you automatically score a point in terms of how you

are viewed as, in terms of capability”. He however noted a pattern of recruiting Malay candidates to increase ethnic diversity in the workplace, although the relatively few Malays who entered the private sector did not pose significant competition to him:

I don't feel like I was disadvantaged. I think in my line of work, if I was a Malay, applying for the same position, the bar would be set a lot lower coz the demand for good Malay employees in my line of work. That's the only sort of racial trend that I can see, but other than that, it doesn't play that much of a role...Fewer Malays make the requirements to get into the private sector. That's why if they make the minimum requirement, maybe the fact that they are Malay, will get them in...you know, for diversity in the workplace. I think it's recognised that having that kind of diversity is good, just in general.

The general practice in the private sector of employing Malays to increase diversity was confirmed by Hussain (University Tutor, MPhil Engineering, Cambridge), a Malay, who was told by his previous employer, a Chinese, at an international technology company in Penang that his ethnicity was a welcomed characteristic to the company's profile: “In Malaysia, yes, I think it helps being Malay... at first, I believed they don't care about it. But once I talked to my boss, they say they still encourage Malays to join. Maybe because they want to balance [the ethnic composition]”. Lye Hoon (MSc Pharmacy, Nottingham), the pharmacist in London, believed that preferential treatment for Malays was practised also in Malaysian private companies where professional and managerial positions and company contracts were allocated to *bumiputeras* in compliance with state-sanctioned affirmative action guidelines: “Like if you're Malay, then you get to go further [laughs]...Like, you know, you get the top positions in a company...It's not easy for a non-Malay to set up a company unless you have one of those Malays to share”. Elaine (Student, 3+0 Business, Economics & Management, Nottingham Malaysia), a Sino-Kadazan (mix of Chinese and Kadazan²⁰ ethnicities), believed that ethnic-based rules governing career advancement was in place in *bumiputera*-controlled companies where ethnic minority members experienced positional disadvantage: “I would be honest, say if you were to work for a Malay company and you're Chinese, I doubt you'll get very far unless you're exceptional, so

²⁰ A *bumiputera* ethnic group indigenous to the state of Sabah.

it's not that fair". Simrit (Trainer, 3+0 Bachelor of Laws (Hons), UoL), an Indian, believed that possible preference for Malays in job entry interviews in the private sector was situational as "it depends because if you're a Malay boss, you tend to favour your Malay employees. If there is an interview, you'll hire your own people". She felt "lucky enough", having not experienced any explicit ethnic prejudice and discrimination in the fields of law and personal training which she worked in since graduating. All in all, receptivity in the labour arena towards a candidate's inherited and internalised ethnic-linked characteristics, dispositions and traits can affect one's perceived and actual chances of entry, integration and advancement in occupational sectors, sites and relations.

It has to be pointed out, however, that opinions on the existence of ethnic inequality in the Malaysian labour market may not necessarily reflect actual experiences of exclusion. Several participants disclosed that although they knew that practices of ethnic prejudice and discrimination occurred in the employment arena in Malaysia, they were not sure how ethnicity could affect them on a personal level. This could be because they had personally not experienced it or they had been working in the UK and had little to no first-hand experience of labour market rules, conditions and norms in the home country. Lian Hui's narrative reflects the former while Alex's illustrates the latter:

Actually ok, from my own, ok, from my own experience, I don't think it affects me. It doesn't affect me at all actually because the company that I work for is MNC [multi-national company]. Of course, I know there is this ethnic constraints but when they look for the best people for the company, I don't think they um, I don't think I have disadvantage. So I can tell you that from my experience, I don't have this ethnic constraint. But of course I've heard a lot in Malaysia, you know, to get into especially government corporations, the ethnic is actually an issue in Malaysia but I can't tell you much because those are only what I read and what I heard and what I saw but I didn't experience it myself.

(Lian Hui, SAP Consultant, 3+0 BSc (Hons) Computing Studies, Northumbria)

I think ethnicity plays probably some sort of consideration. I'm not sure of that to be honest coz I've not applied for a job back home. I'm not sure how...I personally do not know how far it'll affect how the employer will employ me...To be honest, I have not been in touch with Malaysian news a lot and my conversations with my parents, we don't involve talk about politics, so I don't know what the present government do and how that will affect me.

(Alex, Engineer, MEng Mechanical Engineering, Sheffield)

This does not take away the perception and reality that ethnicity can influence inclusion and exclusion in the Malaysian labour market, interacting dynamically with cultural capital accumulated through and beyond UK education.

Labour Market Inclusion and Exclusion by Ethnicity in the UK

The participants believed that ethnicity was less significant in influencing labour market inclusion and exclusion in the UK as labour market policies, on the surface, encouraged equal opportunities for employment on the basis of merit, ability and qualifications. This view was held particularly by onshore graduates who were working or had experience of working in the UK. Noraini (MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon), the well engineer in Aberdeen, spoke of how it was unlawful in the UK for employers to discriminate ethnic minority applicants by personal characteristics. Equality of employment based on perceived quality and worth of cultural capital ownership was at least practised in the first stage of candidate screening. Noraini noted that “you can gauge how marketable you are by the number of calls you get which presumably will be without prejudice”. Negative bias and discrimination, if suspected or experienced, was believed to be more common in later stages of application where the ethnicity of the candidate was known with more certainty in face-to-face interviews. Yet, being presumably judged by one’s institutionalised cultural capital and being short-listed for an interview “is better than not being called at all”, according to Noraini. Brian (PhD Electrical Engineering, Cambridge), the researcher at a government agency in Kuala Lumpur, made a distinction between meritocracy as policy and meritocracy as practice in the UK. He noticed that a policy encouraging ethnically equitable employment opportunities could differ from practice in that recruitment in the UK tended to be positively biased towards candidates from affluent white backgrounds:

Ar, in fact, I used to argue with my British friends, right, discrimination in the UK is worst than discrimination in Malaysia...over here [Malaysia], it is transparent. We discriminate people but according to the law. Our constitution says discriminate, so we discriminate. Ok? Over there, on paper, everybody is equal. But some people are more equal than others. WASPs, the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants will be more advantaged than other guys...so, it still happens. But over there, on paper, you know, everyone there is equal.

It is uncertain whether he experienced any real ethnic discrimination in the UK as he returned to Malaysia right after graduation to serve his bond with the Malaysian government. Nevertheless, the unwritten rules of employment and advancement in the host country can be, to use Brian's words, less "transparent", given that it may be more difficult to identify when an individual is unfairly treated due to ethnicity. Ethnicity may still influence chances of employment and advancement in the UK, although how it works to do so is less clear cut and identifiable.

Labour Market Inclusion and Exclusion by Nationality

Nationality emerged as a more significant factor in determining labour market inclusion and exclusion in the UK than in Malaysia. Most onshore graduates found it difficult to obtain work in the UK after graduation due to their nationality status as non-citizens of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland. Political-legal lack of preference for labour migrants originating from outside the EEA and Switzerland constrained the conversion of UK institutionalised cultural capital to institutionalised right to work and live indefinitely in the host country for the onshore graduates. This essentially "shut down...almost all the opportunities" for Eng Hock after his 2-year foundation training as trainee doctor in Sheffield. It was difficult for him to obtain specialist training positions in the UK as his nationality status did not satisfy immigration rules favouring the allocation of vacancies to local and European candidates. Nationality of the UK cultural capital holder could be a barrier to smooth, long-term career progression in the host country, as he noted:

I think there has to be some sort of continuity there [UK] which is lacking for international medical graduates like us. Well, basically, we have been left out in the system...when the immigration policies changed, they've actually turned the table around and became disadvantages for people like me and I thought there was really no point for me to stay anymore because the main reason I was in UK was for the training.

The ever changing and tightening immigration rules in the UK heightens the volatility of the marketability of graduates originating from outside the EEA and Switzerland in the

UK labour market. Peng Suan (BSc(Hons) Government & Economics, LSE), the sales and operation manager with an international oil company in London, was periodically reminded of her temporality in the UK, having had her work visa changed three times in four years to comply with stricter work immigration rules. Her message to Malaysian students in the UK was to carefully evaluate the viability of remaining in the host country after graduation as “there are certain [positive] biases towards British nationals” that make competition for economic capital all the more tougher. Both Shamsul (Business Coach, 2+1 BSc(Hons) Information Technology, Hertfordshire) and Kelvin (Business Consultant, BSc(Hons) Business Mathematics & Statistics, LSE) experienced failure in this pursuit which they mainly attributed to having a less desired nationality within the UK labour market. They returned to Malaysia upon graduation where their ascribed national status did not pose a barrier to the utilisation of their UK cultural capital. Similarly, nationality was not a factor to be concerned with for transnational and offshore students and graduates in their search for work in Malaysia.

While nationality limited the range of job opportunities available in the UK for the onshore graduates, a few participants had found a way to use their nationality to their advantage. Jia Wen (Multiple Jobs, BA(Hons) Politics & IR, Manchester) believed that her nationality and the fact that she grew up in Asia helped her secure her upcoming employment as writer for a travel website which specialised in Asian destinations. She was required to prepare a short written commentary on travelling in Thailand in her job interview, which she did with ease, having spent a few school holidays in Thailand which is situated north of Malaysia. Her insider knowledge of Asia, what can be considered as habitually acquired local and regional cultural capital linked to her nationality, was believed to have given her a competitive advantage which was not fully attainable through education in UK universities. Coming from a different cultural and national background could also be constructed as a “story” which speaks of ability to work well with people of different cultural backgrounds. This was useful for Peng Suan (BSc(Hons) Government & Economics, LSE), the sales and operation manager in

London: “It counts for me the story that I tell, so uhm, you know, coming from different culture, uhm, adapting to a new culture and then performing well, it tells a very good story”. Furthermore, she believed her national origin complemented her company’s internationalisation strategy to expand to Asia. Similarly, Alex (MEng Mechanical Engineering, Sheffield), the engineer in Edinburgh, believed that he was a valuable asset to his company which had the long-term plan of reaching the client market in Asia. Therefore, nationality could act as an indicator of ease of access to knowledge of the home country and the surrounding region, as well as be utilised to construct a story of success in embracing cosmopolitanism in the host country. This seems to have worked to improve the labour marketability of a few onshore graduates in the UK, although their employment would be subject to satisfying restrictive immigration rules for as long as they were non-permanent residents or naturalised citizens of the host country.

Although having lived in the host country for some years, onshore graduates working in the UK were conscious of their difference as the ‘other’: a foreigner and an ethnic minority resident and worker whose nationality and ethnicity could not be fully accepted in the host labour market. They were mindful of their work and interaction practices, reflecting a certain caution not to overstep a perceived boundary of welcome in the UK. For Noraini (MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon), the well engineer, awareness of her place as guest and outsider in the host society meant working as the silent, disciplined ‘other’, ever courteous and well-behaved and never voicing a strong, active stance on issues. This seems to reflect a different kind of deference but one which is quite similar to age and seniority issues in Malaysia. She was careful not to enter into closer inter-personal relationships with host nationals until being invited to:

I don’t get involved in office politics, I don’t take sides if there’s any to take...I try to blend in as much as possible. I’m friendly to people who first showed me signs of friendliness and I keep to my own with people that doesn’t seem to want to say anything more than “Good Morning”.

This image construction is a huge contrast to the vocal, highly confident presentation that onshore graduates are typically associated with in Malaysia. It reinforces my

argument in the previous chapter that the utilisation of UK cultural capital does not necessitate the exhibition of a single set of dispositions and traits as choice of self presentation is situational in accordance with the individual's sense of place (Bourdieu 1984) and worth within socio-relational and geographical contexts.

Other onshore graduates with working experience in the UK tried to manage their difference from host nationals by aligning their usual Malaysian-influenced communicative practices to that of mainstream host society. This meant shifting upwards (Rajadurai 2004) to more standard UK English particularly while interacting in the formal work realm. Lye Hoon (MSc Pharmacy, Nottingham), the pharmacist in London, made sure to speak fluently in job interviews by avoiding colloquialism and omitting words and fillers that did not exist in the host vocabulary: "You try to avoid the pause or you try to avoid the word, "ya", for example, you know, "no lah", that kind of thing, without your local fillers". Wooi Kiat (Technology Consultant, PhD Electronic & Electrical Engineering, Imperial) orientated his accent, word choice, pronunciation and tone of voice towards standard UK English during his employment as financial consultant in an international company in London. His narrative shows a selective activation of UK linguistic cultural capital, the presentation of which was technically executed to be better understood and accepted at work, but essentially not embodied in the spontaneous and informal expressions of the self:

In the UK, it was just me trying to make what I say sound more clear to the English people, the British...I cut out all my lahs. I switch my accent slightly to not too Malaysian like "Aiyah, like this lah, like that lah"...just more clear, just a clearer tone. I don't put up an English accent. I never pretend to have an English accent. All I do is try to make what I say sound a little bit clearer, reduce the Malaysian accent just by a tinge but not trying to be English lah. Then everything else is me lah, myself. I feel it is a lot easier that way rather than be someone I'm not.

The spontaneous switching and mixing of linguistic codes within colloquial Malaysian English can be said to form a central part of Malaysian national identity (Nair-Venugopal 2000:209). It conjures a sense of solidarity and camaraderie among Malaysians and tends to be the preferred choice in casual and semi-formal interactions,

even among those fluent in more standard English (Rajadurai 2004:54-55). The onshore graduates presently or previously working in the UK were conscious of their nationality-related habitual linguistic differences from host members that no amount of cultural capital training in the UK could completely erase.

An onshore education may not offer adequate inter-personal dispositions to help onshore graduates establish primary close relationships with host nationals outside the official work realm. Onshore graduates with work experience in the UK revealed a lack of confidence and ease in communicating and being heard at least equally “on the social level” (Mei Sien) outside the work context. This may dampen the chance and choice to build informal symbolic power that promises integration and advancement opportunities in the formal, work setting. Oh, Chung and Labianca (2004) argue that closer bonds built during informal spontaneous interactions outside the workplace may bring social capital benefits that loosen hierarchical relations at work. More support from senior colleagues can then be obtained as “you know them as your friend”, Mei Sien (Doctor, Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Edinburgh) believed. Expanding the comfort zone to include attending gatherings at the pub outside working hours was something Mei Sien was still getting used to in the hope of strengthening office friendship ties. She did not like drinking due to personal preferences, but would do so “just because they [locals] are my friends and colleagues...I suppose it’s no different like when you’re with your group of friends, you do give in to the things your friends do”. While more than proficient to interact with host country nationals on the technicalities of work, she still struggled to interact with them on a casual, non-work related basis.

Her status as the ‘other’ from a distant cultural, social, linguistic and national origin made it difficult for her to find common grounds with local circles, despite having had her entire tertiary education in the UK:

I think it's more of the fact that I don't share the same childhood. I don't share the same way of conversing. You don't have the same background, so you have less to talk about and it's harder for them [local colleagues] if they want to speak to you on a normal basis.

She did not think it served any purpose to introduce her ethnic and national backgrounds into conversations with locals, submitting to a one-sided process of adaptation that was thought to be expected of her: "There isn't a place in time where I can sit down with them and tell them more about myself. Unless someone asks you, I won't be sitting down there and lecturing them on what I do, how I think at home". Her cultural and linguistic differences posed inconvenience and setbacks to her integration within and beyond her workplace. However, these differences were preferred to be retained to some degree to preserve personal identity anchored on nationality. Therefore, nationality and to a lesser extent, ethnicity, can intervene to determine the degree of opportunities and choice to activate UK cultural capital in the host country, just as they can in the home environment.

Labour Market Inclusion and Exclusion by Gender and the Gendered Body

Although gender was seen as less a barrier to equal work opportunities than ethnicity, some participants believed that traditional notions of the female as the marginal other were still prevalent in the labour market. Being male accords the bearer of the body immediate symbolic power which commands societal recognition of supposed embodied, gender exclusive traits and qualities. "People think men are more reliable, men can motivate more than girl lah", Rosli (3+0 Business Computing student, Staffordshire), a male student, said in reference to career opportunities in management in Malaysia. Women, the female equivalent word for men, was not used. While it is uncertain whether the words were said deliberately or spontaneously, the choice of "girl" aptly expressed a gender status gap within the economic opportunity structure. Reliability and leadership were presented from the perspective of players within the management field as masculine and mature dispositions embedded in male adults. "Men" in this sense have gender-labelled cultural capital symbolised by the physical body which may not require any real activation to yield its exchange value benefits in

the economic sphere. For example, the following captures the gender status gap in the field of sound engineering:

In life engineering, because there are not many well-known female sound engineers yet. There are some seniors who have graduated and they get comments like, "You're female. You can't do as well as the males". And they did not get the job.

(Charmaine, Sound Engineer, 3+0 Bachelor of Music(Hons), Wolverhampton)

The symbolic power attained by possessing the right gender was associated with numeric and hierarchical domination in her occupational field, Charmaine believed. This is an aspect of social status which is ascribed biologically and is independent of, although complementary to, the cultural capital acquired through UK tertiary participation.

A gendered sense of what is the rightful social place for the self can lead to preferences for work which complements those notions, thus, reinforcing gender domination in certain fields. Mushamir, a male student, (PhD Electronic & Communication Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia) believed that structural gender inequality affecting females was not significant in the Malaysian public service as the workplace culture suited female-related priorities and requirements. He cited the slower and more routine pace of bureaucratic work, coupled with the provision of attractive allowances and benefits which took into account the dual roles of the female as worker and mother:

In government office, I think there are a lot of ladies. Gender is not a problem. I think because guys, they aim for something bigger. So they aim to get into the private because they can climb very far, but ladies, sorry to say but the Malay ladies, they want a very relaxing environment. A company that gives 3 months of holiday when they get pregnant and all that. Private don't offer you that right? So, plus if you go into government and all that, you get all the benefits. It's easy for the ladies to stay in the public sector.

Female representation in decision-making and management positions in the public sector is historically low (10th Malaysia Plan 2010). Although gender would not significantly affect the entry and advancement opportunities for men, the participant's association of

junior-level public sector work with less ambitious women who preferred stability over mobility steered him away from it. Mushamir, a government scholarship holder, would be bonded to work with the Malaysian government for five years upon graduation, subject to the availability of jobs. He hoped to be released from the bond and enter private employment. The private sector was anticipated to offer a competitive and challenging environment where he, as a male, belonged. It was a site where masculine-labelled cultural capital such as the social climbing ambition to achieve “something bigger” in life could be better expressed and suitably rewarded. Conversely, it is the steady and relaxed nature of public sector work which appealed to Aziati (MSc Electrical & Electronics Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia), a 24 year old Malay female oil and gas engineer. She planned to work with the government in a less challenging role in future:

Security. For me, when you're young, you must grab any chance, knowledge you can get. But later on, when you want to settle down, at one time you have to settle down...rest, not so much work to do. I think the government is the best choice. Actually in private sector, you will keep on working. In government, I think you reach one point, it's resting point, so you do work but it's not so much. That's what I learned from my mum [who was a government employee].

Choice of occupational sectors for some female participants were regulated by internalised notions of what constituted gender appropriate work, even though gender in actuality might have been an insignificant barrier to recruitment and progress. Even when presented with seemingly free choice, individuals may just follow traditional and normative pathways (Reay et al. 2001) which fortify structures of labour market segmentation.

Mei Sien (Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Edinburgh), the doctor in Dundee, chose to specialise in ophthalmology as it was a field that allowed more flexibility in working hours and the opportunity to switch to part-time consultancy. These work conditions were increasingly important for her as she approached a new stage in the life course which featured marriage, wifehood and possibly motherhood. Yet, there was fear that if her plan to move towards part-time employment was prematurely exposed, it would feed

into unfavourable assessments of her potential as a female worker, typically, one lacking ambition and time commitment:

A lot of female consultants are part-timers...Don't tell my boss (laughs). It would be something that I want to do, but it's not so easy to get it done. There's still an inherent [gender] discrimination, I think. It's hard to say but it's harder for the organisation to work if you're a part-timer because they can't rely on you, they'll view you as not so good, although that's not necessarily the case.

From a male medical practitioner's perspective, although in the field of orthopaedics, Eng Hock believed that workplaces were becoming more attentive to women's work-home needs in a bid to increase female participation in the profession. Despite women having gender-specific work benefits in place for them, Eng Hock noted that male orthopaedic surgeons continued to enjoy the advantage of being judged positively, partly due to their physical build:

There are certain advantages of being male. For example, in my field, you tend to have more athlete-like body shape, people will think, "Yeah, you're good for this job"...females do have the disadvantage in the sense that "Probably she can't handle this. It's massive – bone structures. How is she going to manage?" But they do have advantages in the sense that there are more opportunities. We don't have enough female orthopaedic surgeons in any country in the world. So, for example in UK, they do encourage females to become surgeons, so they do subsidize, give them maternity leave benefits.

The traditional conception of the male as the physically stronger gender which can withstand more intensive and longer period physical work persisted to dismiss the capability of female surgeons to perform effectively in the orthopaedic domain. However, the higher valuing of male surgeons may serve a practical purpose as Eng Hock explained that massive physical strength was required, especially to operate on larger patients in trauma cases. In this sense, the structural make-up of the physical body and the gendered meanings it gives out have exchange value which can either strengthen or obscure the value of a graduate's actual technical competence.

In challenging boundaries of work associated with the gendered body, two female graduates faced prejudice and discrimination at work. Having good grades and a more

exclusive qualification do not automatically confer respect from academic subordinates as 23 year old Charmaine (3+0 Bachelor of Music(Hons), Wolverhampton) found out the hard way in her job in Kuala Lumpur as freelance sound engineer. She explained to me that the sound engineering industry in Malaysia required more manual labour than highly skilled human capital, “really cheap labour” which was readily supplied by “uneducated” men, that is, those with at most, a high school qualification. Much to her surprise, physical capital had better currency than institutionalised cultural capital of tertiary level in this industry:

Surprisingly, yeah [laughs]...They don't care whether you have a cert or you don't...They will rather hire a male engineer because male engineer can work and carry stuff. Flight cases, monitors, speakers. For us [females], we carry cables. Yah, I can't carry heavy stuff.

She had never been asked to show her degree certificate in any free-lance work she applied for. For being female, young and a university graduate, she faced sarcasm and bullying which belittled her worth in the field:

My [male] colleagues asked me, “Oh, how old are you? So, you studied? How many years? Engineer ah?”...Then throughout the whole day when we start recording, “Hey, you studied before right? Why don't you do this?” They start bullying because they carry flight cases...they are like, “Oh, you're a girl. Lifestyle engineer right? I don't know how to do this”. Very sarcastic. “You studied before, 4 years, aiyoh”...They are sexist.

She described the negative treatment as “awful”, but chose to ignore it and get on with work. In a month's time after our interview, she would leave for Australia with her partner on a student dependent visa, where she hoped that her transnational UK qualification would finally yield the recognition she deserved. She anticipated that employers in Australia would be stricter in their entry requirements and that a UK qualification, albeit obtained in Malaysia, would be certified proof that “at least, I'm not stupid”. Charmaine's case reveals how it can be difficult to gain recognition in the labour market when the institutionalised cultural capital interacts with less valued attributes stereotypically linked with one's gender. This is one of the several instances where higher level and more exclusive Western institutionalised cultural capital worked

in the opposite direction, shutting rather than opening doors to job opportunities and well-regarded status in Malaysia.

Being the only female in her department challenged 24 year old Aziati (MSc Electrical & Electronics Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia), the oil and gas engineer in Kuala Lumpur, in proving her competence to male engineers. A small and petite body frame, coupled with a young appearance, worked further to her disadvantage. She described going against gendered stereotypes of work as exciting in a way that made her stand out in a masculine domain, although trust and confidence from men in the field could not be instantly gained:

Fun [laughs]. It's quite fun actually because my role is oil and gas engineer. When you go to site, usually, you're the only girl there...actually, I have problem before. Shell and Petronas engineer, they are like, "Ok, that's the new girl. She doesn't know anything". Basically, the first impression I get is they underestimate me...Because of age, because I'm small, because I'm woman.

Echoing Aziati's opinion that work in the oil and gas industry favours males is Noraini (MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon), the well engineer in Aberdeen. She believed that her work suited men better as it involved spending extensive time at offshore platforms, engaging in physically dirty work and living in cramped, invasive conditions uncharacteristic of life as a "lady":

It requires trips offshore where everything is just covered in slick and you're forced to share a bunk with strangers...Bed space is a commodity out there. They try to bunk you with a lady but what are the chances of having another lady engineer onboard? Close to none.

Having said that, she had never experienced negative treatment based on her gender which was made more visible by her wearing of a *tudung* (Malay: female headscarf signifying Islamic faith). She believed she was one of the "lucky few" who escaped outright gender discrimination. Despite this, there was acceptance that to survive in masculine work, the "lady" would have to toughen up to work realities that lack provisions for female interests and needs. Gender and the gendered body essentially add and detract economic and social worth in a way that challenges the stability of UK

cultural capital in securing desired employment, trust and recognition across gendered work domains.

The Body and Impression Management

While the participants had little control over the impressions that identifiable physical characteristics such as gender and ethnicity give out, they had more space to influence external impressions of them in aspects such as body image presentation, body language, clothing and use of accessories which can provide symbolic power. The body represents physical capital (Bourdieu 1984) which when managed and presented appropriately to the target audience (Goffman 1959), conveys favourable symbolic meanings which lead to social acceptance and credibility. Shamsul, a 28 year old business coach, grew a moustache and occasionally, a beard as he believed that a youthful facial disposition did not help him to be taken seriously in a profession which required motivating business leaders. An “older face look” was deliberately presented through display of facial hair and also the use of props (Goffman 1959) such as glasses to perform to clients’ expected image of maturity:

Some people think I’m too young. Even now, when I do business, the reason I keep my moustache, actually you see me sometimes with my *janggut* [Malay: beard]. I have to keep a more matured, older face because my face look more like the baby face. I have to have a matured face because if not businessmen tend not to hire me because I look too young...I do wear glasses because it makes me look older. I would love to wear contacts but the last time I went to a trade fair with a client... he said I was too young to be a business consultant. So starting from that point in time, I stopped wearing contacts, I wear glasses.

27 year old Ashwin, the film director and writer in London, believed that stylish hair in line with “a bit arty or a bit trendy” image was expected in “show business” to command attention. “If you kind of look a bit too simple, then they [players in the film industry] don’t really trust that you’ve got that flair”, he explained. Furthermore, a physically fit body was important to him so as to sustain long hours of manual work at film locations. All together, his disciplining and styling of bodily characteristics were practices of physical capital enhancement that facilitated the accumulation of symbolic and

economic capital:

My hair [points to gelled up hair]...It did give make a difference. People did say I look a lot better. That's one thing. Urm, I'm quite particular of working out, what I eat. This is a treat for today [chocolate mud cake with ginger stem ice cream] [laughs]. Ya, I train about 5 days in a week...I often argue that there is a reason for it, especially in film and especially when you're working with crews, it's long hours and it's a lot of manual work...You need to be of a certain physique to do it.

Altogether, his self-presentation strategies were intended to visually communicate efficiency and orderliness, qualities that he anticipated would have saleability in the labour market. Hisham (3+0 Business Management & Finance, Keele) who appeared physically overweight, believed that owning a body within a more socially approved size range would carry better acceptance value in the labour market. However, he prioritised institutionalised cultural capital in the form of the first degree ahead of embodied physical capital, believing that the most fundamental rule of entry into the labour market was to have the required minimum academic credentials. Regulating and reconstructing the body through exercise would be something he wished to embark on in future:

To me, I don't think too much of the future because I want to get this thing [degree] done [laughs]. At the moment, I don't think so much about my size. Actually, in the future, I really want to get fit. But at the moment, I don't see much because I want to get something first. My self improvement is not there yet. I need to get other stuff first before I can do something with myself.

Nevertheless, the physical body is not an empty space, devoid of meanings and implications on societal impressions of the individual's ability, status and competence (Shilling 2005). This is why many participants made deliberate attempts to transform the body into valued representations in accordance with perceived codes of acceptability embedded in the habitus of a certain organisation and profession.

Good impression management (Goffman 1959) using the body as a site of capital was perceived as crucial by many participants to convey visual information about valued labour power attributes. The body, clothed and adorned with the right objectified

cultural capital, and which together forms cultural capital in the embodied state, can help the individual project an appropriate image, deserving of economic and symbolic capital rewards. Thus, striking a good first physical impression was fundamentally important to most interviewees as they generally sought to construct an image of professionalism in the labour market. It appeared to be logical and common sense as to what the appropriate attire or costume, as Goffman (1959) would call it, was for a job interview as several participants seemed puzzled and taken aback when asked what they would wear for an interview. Hui Ching (Student, 1+2 Economics, Manchester) very simply put it: “Formal. Don’t turn up in flip flops and shorts”. Rosli (Student, 3+0 Business Computing, Staffordshire) would pay particular attention to having the right attire and style of hair: “Of course, formal attire with short hair...If you come with messy hair, you can’t convince with your first impression”. He would use accessories such as “a watch or simple file” for interviews to symbolise good organisation, fitting of a professional. Jia Wen (Multiple jobs, BA(Hons) Politics & International Relations, Manchester) believed that it was her formal styling of her long hair, matched with appropriate formal clothing, shoes and accessories that helped her project professionalism which led to success in obtaining an editor position with an online travel website:

I dressed in dark colours which I’ve noticed is really looks more professional and I tied up my hair as well, so I think I wanted to come across as being neat and clean and sleek and I think that really worked...I had earrings which look more formal and traditional. I had high heels. I wore a skirt because it was a hot day and a long sleeve, dark blue top.

For Mei Sien (Doctor, Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Edinburgh), dressing which conveyed professionalism, formality and confidence was expected of her in the medical profession, the successful presentation of which helped her gain more trust and credibility:

I suppose being a doctor, you have to dress up the way the patient expects you to dress up, so it’s quite formal. The bottom line is you have to dress professionally and formally...If you dress slightly better, you maybe get more confidence from the people around you, so it does help a bit...Nothing that is too revealing. Not a skirt which is too short, nothing see-through.

This again shows how the body, when presented in an expected dress code, holds physical capital (Bourdieu 1984) which complements the translation of technical knowledge and skills into symbolic and economic capital advancement opportunities.

Several participants spoke of how attention had to be given to requirements in specific situations and occasions as they prepared to adjust the degree of formality in their dressing styles to achieve favourable impressions. While it was clear for Sze Theng (Student, 3+0 Music, Wolverhampton), an aspiring professional pianist, not to appear at a job interview and sites of performance “wearing T-shirt and shorts”, she believed that the appropriate range of attire for someone in the music profession should be “pretty versatile” to “suit the venue”. This required dressing more formally in high-level functions and less so in public “gigs”. Elaine (Student, 3+0 Business, Economics & Management, Nottingham Malaysia) would exercise caution not to go “the whole way” for a job interview in the food and entertainment industry as overdoing it could give out a solemn and overly serious disposition which contradicted the professional but yet “casual”, “outgoing” identity which she wished to embody: “I would dress formally, but not very formally like I’m going to go for a hearing [laughs] or something”. Her style of dressing for a job would be “like chic” and “not like super corporate” to suit the trendy and creative work environment. Hussain (Tutor, MPhil Engineering, Cambridge) made reference to Malaysian understandings of respectable attire:

It makes people feel comfortable...Dress appropriately so that people won't think like, “Oh, this is some kind of beggar or some kind of low class people” or something...Dirty or they have a *koyak sana, koyak sini* [Malay: torn here, torn there]...As long as it is proper lah. It is not dirty and *com pang-camping* [Malay: in tatters, rags]. Coz in Malaysia, if you see these kind of dressing, you might start to feel that he might be a criminal or something [laughs].

The bottom line for most participants was to be presentable in their dressing, so as to set people at ease, wherever they were.

What counts as acceptable and appropriate attire, however, may vary between the Malaysian and UK context. While wearing a formal business suit could be seen as

excessive in the general Malaysian work context, this was Wooi Kiat's (Technology Consultant, PhD Electronic & Electrical Engineering, Imperial) daily attire while working in the consulting field in London: "Wear tie, wear a suit. Everyone there wears a suit. Even the guards wear a suit. So UK, it's very normal you wear suit everywhere". It seems that the knowledge of what constitutes "normal" in Wooi Kiat's case was developed through spontaneous daily observations of the general work attire of others in London. Clothing and accessories worn on the body carry social meanings and have varying exchange values in the labour market, determined by standards socially defined as appropriate for each setting, situation and occasion. It is not clear that any of the onshore graduates formally learned the standards and meanings attached to bodily dispositions in their international education.

Knowledge of what bodily dispositions are appropriate was established and reinforced through institutional regulation (Haynes 2008; Shilling 2005) for a few students and graduates of transnational programmes. Institutional governance of attire was particularly prevalent at the Asia Pacific Institute of Information Technology (APIIT) where a strict dress code for students applies. The institutional belief is that to build labour market advantage, the acquisition of hard currencies in the form of technical competences has to be rounded off with the internalisation of soft currencies, particularly, ways of looking and behaving the part of a professional. Sections from the student handbook specify this (APIIT 2011:32):

APIIT is a professional establishment and from the moment of entry to the Institute, you will be treated a professional. Education in itself cannot guarantee a job...APIIT therefore seeks to instil, in addition to the development of skills and knowledge, the strong sense of professionalism that will stand you in good stead in your future career.

Both Rosli and Imran whom I interviewed at APIIT adhered to an enforced smart formal dress code. They both turned up at campus in neatly tucked-in long-sleeved collared shirts and formal work trousers and shoes. Understanding of the appropriate presentation of the body was hence, socialised upon them through UK transnational education within

an institutional habitus which emphasised images of formality and professionalism. The participants in turn planned to reproduce these images in job interviews for professional positions, just as Shamsul (Business Coach, 2+1 BSc(Hons) Information Technology, Hertfordshire), who spent the first two years of his twinning programme at APIIT, did. APIIT instilled in Shamsul the practice of donning appropriate “work attire” whereas Hertfordshire, the UK partner university where he completed his twinning degree, did not:

UK was jeans, T-shirts, everything. But APIIT did give me basic discipline in terms of every time when you enter APIIT, you must be in shirts, slacks, leather shoes. You're not allowed to go into class with T-shirts and everything.

In fact, no onshore graduate mentioned being actively taught in the UK university how to manage bodily dispositions to their advantage in the labour market. This suggests a point made in previous chapters that experiences of UK education may vary according to the specific features, norms and rules that make up the habitus of the respective institutional site. What is specific to Kor Ming's (3+0 Accounting & Finance, UWE) transnational programme at Selangor-based Taylor's University is the teaching of body language in business. Through formal learning in his programme and personal observation, Kor Ming learned how the body can be utilised in a less visible and subtle way to reflect embodied dispositions of interest and attentiveness. In the event of job interviews, he would position his body in the following manner: “It's the way we sit...The leg of course down and we have to lean forward 20 degrees...To show that you're paying attention”. It is difficult to ascertain whether other participants had formal training within their UK programmes to present their best marketable self in the work arena, although there were mentions of using career advisory services in the respective institution to prepare for job search and interviews. Whether learned formally in the programme or otherwise, the presentation of the body in appropriate ways was a practice which many participants were prepared to do. Physical physique, bodily positions, hair styling, attire and accessories held currency for the participants in that they could signal attention to the authenticity and credibility of knowledge, skills and qualifications

owned.

Belief in Individual Choice and Will as a Means to Securing Economic Advantage

While it can be argued that the drive to succeed academically and occupationally can be influenced by the learning environment and this was acknowledged by several interviewees, as discussed in this and previous chapters, participants from particularly the offshore and transnational student sample suggested that ultimately, it depended on individual choice and will. Offshore and transnational students particularly believed that even when resources could be lacking, such as having a socially inferior academic background, a persistent and unwavering self could be relied on to challenge and overcome less than favourable destinies structurally assigned to them. Hard work and ambition to optimize use of one's inherited and acquired cultural capital would distinguish between the "excellent" and the "run of the mill" worker (Francis) helping one to build a competitive edge in the labour market. However, the offshore and transnational students also believed that cultural capital gained onshore from a highly ranked university promised a better head start, a "fighting chance" (Nadia) in the sea of young credentialed candidates, vying for limited high status employment. The participants' opinions which on one hand, indicated taking personal responsibility over study to work outcomes and on the other, relying on institutional preferences and requirements to regulate positional competition to their advantage, indicate the tension between agency and structure in shaping perceptions of life chance possibilities. Two examples best illustrate this tension:

I think it really does not matter at the end of the day. I think where you study does not play that big a role in terms of how good you'll come out to be. I think anywhere is good. Of course if you get into a really good university which has a name, why not right? But I think that when it comes down to it, when you're out there in the job market and when it comes down to doing what you need to do as a lawyer, then I think a lot of it depends on how much time and effort you put in to develop yourself to equipping yourself with the requisite skills and I think you can do it anywhere, being an external student here in Malaysia or an internal student in the UK.

(Francis, Student, 3+0 Law, UoL)

I think you can have very good education, you can study in very Ivy League universities and all that, but it still depends on you. If you want to be successful, you can be successful. You can do a lot of things without education. Start selling burger Ramly²¹ and all that. They have what you call that, *kesedaran* [Malay: realisation]. They know they want to change their life. You can give everything in the world to people but it still depends on them whether they want to be successful or not.

(Mushamir, PhD Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia)

Although institutionalised cultural capital was not perceived by many participants as a means to an end, it was believed to be a structurally endorsed pre-requisite to ease arrival at the interview door. Agency would then feature more in the choices and actions of short-listed and employed candidates as they navigate their pathways through varied deployment of cultural capital to suit different audiences, as the many examples of working participants in this and the previous chapter show. A UK institutionalised cultural capital was but only a bare minimum to have and skilful personalisation (Brown & Hesketh 2004) of embodied cultural capital was perceived necessary to carve out an image and life of superiority and respectability. However, there is an extent to which competences and inter-personal characteristics can be personalised. The social divisions in which individuals are located are for the most part, visible markers of physical difference which cannot be conveniently disguised and altered to generate favourable impressions in all contexts. This essentially presented further complexities to my participants' perceived and actual chances of gaining economic and social advantages.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the participants' pursuit of distinction can be further enhanced as well as complicated by the intersecting influences of age, ethnicity, gender, nationality and religion. I argue that these social categories are significant and although interacting with class, they can overshadow its role in structuring perceptions and

²¹ The Ramly burger is a Malaysian burger franchise brand which started off as a small family business processing *halal* burger patties in the 1970s and has since become a multi-million *ringgit* incorporated company. Burgers are typically sold by street vendors.

experiences of labour market and life chance possibilities in Malaysia and the UK. Age, ethnicity and gender were perceived and experienced by the participants as significant factors shaping labour market inclusion and exclusion in Malaysia while the significant factors in the UK were nationality and ethnicity. I argue that the utilisation of the body as physical capital (Bourdieu 1984), consumption of attire and accessories as objectified cultural capital and hard work and individual will as personalised embodied cultural capital (Brown & Hesketh 2004) can complement the pursuit of favourable economic and symbolic capital outcomes. Essentially, an in-depth exploration of the link between cultural capital and distinction has to pay attention to the specificities of the individual, structural and socio-relational contexts in question.

Descriptions of capital accumulation aspirations and strategies throughout this and the last two chapters may suggest that economic rationality and maximum utility were key principles governing how participants made sense of their purpose and place in life within an entanglement of social relations marked by positional struggles. The next and final chapter of my findings will cast another light on the seemingly instrumental motives of the interviewees by exploring the values and boundaries which they prescribed for themselves or have been prescribed for them in relation to the pursuit of social reproduction and mobility.

Chapter 8 Limits to the Significance of Cultural Capital in Life

Introduction

While discussions so far point heavily to aspirations and strategies in enhancing occupational and status advantages, I argue in this chapter that, economic and social distinction, while important to the interviewees, did not involve a single-track maximisation of income. It required a negotiation and management of other pursuits such as work-life balance, personal contentment, religious fulfilment, emotional security and contribution to society which represented some of the personal and social benefits of cultural capital deployment. Success in translating cultural capital into distinction was understood in different ways, necessitating different degrees of utilisation of knowledge, skills and dispositions to advance desired aspirations. I will support these points by illustrating the personal, familial, emotional, moral, and religious boundaries which governed the ways and extent to which the participants engaged in occupational and status reproduction and mobility aspirations and practices.

Beyond Direct Utilisation of Cultural Capital

While cultural capital in particularly the institutionalised form was deemed useful for entry into paid graduate employment, the participants believed that the bulk of economic capital could be earned quicker through property and business investments. This was perhaps inspired by the availability of easy credit and the boom in property prices in Malaysia in recent years. Nothing seems to suggest that the strategy of property and business investments were shaped by values encountered in international education, although by virtue of pursuing or having pursued certain academic programmes, some participants would likely have better knowledge and skills to guide their investment plans. Sufficient and easy access to economic capital formed the fundamental idea of what occupational and life success were to my participants as they sought to establish comfortable, middle-class lifestyles for themselves.

Very few of the offshore and transnational students had an immediate monthly income target in mind and the majority expressed long-term, open-ended income aspirations similar to the majority of the graduates across samples. There was the ideal to some extent that increasing income ownership and power to purchase high-status symbolic goods were considered signs of having “made it” (Elaine), as illustrated here:

When do you know you'll be successful?

Chloe: When I'm rich [everyone in the focus group laughed].

How rich?

Chloe: Probably when I earn my first million. Maybe, in a few years' time, one million would be little, so for now, it's a million.

(Chloe, Student, 1+2 Economics, Manchester)

Actually, I'm thinking too far. I will be successful if I am the one is the richest man in Malaysia [laughs]...If I have a BMW car, I will assume I am a successful guy... Successful image, people will be wearing an expensive watch, leather shoes, use the latest phone.

(Rosli, Student, 3+0 Business Computing, Staffordshire)

Similarly, many graduates worked to generate a “large income” (Brian) in order to facilitate an “easy life” (Hee Seng) symbolised materially by the owning of luxuries such as a big house, investment properties, expensive foreign cars, technological gadgets and engaging in overseas travel. Aspirations to become a millionaire and retiring early, in one case, as early as 30 (Mushamir), were mentioned by several participants. Among interviewees who did not have wealth accumulation as priority, superior income was still important for them to “be able to afford things without having to think twice about it” (Wooi Kiat). However, direct application of the knowledge and skills learned during tertiary studies was hardly what the participants had in mind to advance aspirations for superior income and privileged living over time.

Distinction Relative to Different Reference Groups

The participants developed cultural capital to gain relative distinction, although who they had as a reference group in their minds differed. Two students in particular felt that success was achieved only when they could outperform peers in terms of income and position. Elaine (Student, 3+0 Business, Economics & Management, Nottingham

Malaysia) admittedly revealed that she would feel a sense of pride if she could stand out from “friends who are in the same business as her” by reaching the top ranks of hierarchy at any future workplace within the food and entertainment industry in Malaysia. With reference to possible employment in a restaurant, she expressed that status differentiation meant having not just superior income but also symbolic power in the form of recognition:

The limelight a little bit. Because in the end, money is not the only thing that will make me happy. Like I'll be much prouder to say that I am the General Manager of this restaurant, that restaurant, compared to if I work at a desk job in some obscure company.

While income comparison would be made like with like in Elaine's case, that is, against comparable others in the same industry, Imran (Student, 3+0 Business Information Technology, Staffordshire) seems to suggest that higher symbolic power was achievable only if one is able to obtain a significantly higher level of economic capital than friends across all occupational fields. There were different standards to which the participants judged their performance in translating cultural capital into economic and social privileges.

In a previous study (Sin 2009), I suggested that toning down expressions of economic and social ambitions could be an attempt to avoid accusations of snobbery and social pretensions. Imran who dreamed of having “much more” economic capital than his friends and in the same statement, contradictorily expressed that higher income and recognition were not important to him illustrates my point well: “We don't have to show other people what we do. Maybe a little proud of ourselves. I'll be happy if I get much more higher salary than my friends, but I think it doesn't matter”. Detracting attention from the desire to assert distinction from others is not too surprising as it may reflect social desirability bias where the participant seeks to strike a good first impression by giving what is imagined to be responses approved by the researcher (Bryman 2004). It could be that some of my participants hid their tendencies to compare and display their worth against others to avoid negative judgments from me.

My interviewees were somewhat more direct when relating the extent to which social reproduction and mobility between familial generations mattered to them. Outdoing their parents in academic, occupational and status achievements was irrelevant to one group of participants whose parents were supportive of them pursuing any interest and passion as an occupation. Nadia (Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia), whose single mother was an onshore Masters graduate and the country managing director of a global company, was not “pressured to meet [the] standards” set by her parent. Fulfilment, self-subsistence and financial independence were higher priorities:

It [future job] doesn't have to be high ranking...Obviously, they [family members] don't want me to live on the streets but whatever my choice is, as long as I am able to support myself financially and I am able to have a good life for myself and that I'm happy.

Another group of participants, illustrated by Kor Ming's (Student, 3+0 Accounting & Finance, UWE) narrative, believed it was important to equal the level of institutionalised cultural capital held by their university qualified parents: “[Academic success is achieved when] I'm able to have at least an equal qualification as my parents because both my parents are graduates”. One other group of interviewees saw participation in higher level education as a way to elevate above their family members' academic, status and economic accomplishments, as depicted here:

I want to do my PhD. I'm always proud that I am first in the family to do a lot of things. I'm the first one in the family to graduate when I was 21. I was the first one in my family to do my Masters and I'll be the first one in my family to do my PhD...I think you'll always want to have a better life than your parents can afford for you...I want to have the Dr. I want to be called Dr. [name]...I think in Malaysia, does play the perception that people are bigger. The respect comes from that.

(Hisham, Business Coach, 2+1 BSc (Hons) Information Technology, Hertfordshire)

The various forms of distinction expressed by the participants reflected different ways in which social reproduction and mobility were understood and to this end, the degree to which the ownership of particularly UK institutionalised cultural capital was perceived as instrumental.

While my participants as a whole desired marketable and respectable educational and occupational achievements, the wish to match up to or outperform their parents is not in all cases evidently strong or even possible to fulfil. Upward inter-generational mobility was perceived by some to be difficult and likely impossible to achieve, especially when much cultural and economic capital have already been accumulated by their parents. Francis' (Student, 3+0 Law, UoL) parents are both Masters graduates with substantial experience in their respective fields of work: veterinary practice and law. He would like to gain more knowledge and experiences in life than his parents, but was uncertain that higher levels of education would be enough to become more accomplished than his parents:

Even when I'm done with my Masters degree, my parents would still be more educated than I am [laughs]...I don't know if I can do better than what my parents have done because they have done quite a lot...I would like to make them proud and I think they would be proud if, you know, they're able to say, "Oh, my son, he has picked up where we left off", so that would be a good thing.

Noraini (Well Engineer, MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon) was certain that upward inter-generational mobility in terms of career progression would not be achieved in her generation as it was not realistically feasible to outperform her father's economic achievements:

No chance I can top my dad...He is so at the top of his game that he can't even move up anymore unless he accepts a job outside Malaysia...Sometimes it demotivates me a bit, especially at times when he tells me his annual bonus is twice my annual salary. I don't think I'll ever get to the same stage that he's at in my career.

The perceived uncertainty or impossibility of making generational advancements in educational and occupational achievements shows that the transformation of cultural capital accumulation into social mobility is not straightforward. It may not necessarily be priority for individuals with intersecting personal, familial, emotional, moral and religious commitments to perpetuate or improve inter-generational ownerships of economic and status privileges.

Personal and Social Dimensions to Cultural Capital Utilisation

The social benefits of cultural capital deployment among international students and graduates have not received as much attention in the literature as the positional benefits of income and status pursuits (Waters 2010; 2006; 2005; Sin 2009). I argue here that international education not only represented a positional good (Hirsch 1976) to the participants, but also a personal and social good (Marginson 2011). It was a personal good in the sense that it could offer a non-market exchange value to the participants in the form of individual non-pecuniary benefits that positively affect their lives (Marginson 2011:9). It was a social good in that it had potential to bring non-exclusive social benefits to members of the public that improve their quality of life, regardless of whether they participated in international education.

Examples of the personal and social dimensions of benefits attached to utilising education-related cultural capital are discussed in this section. Nadia (Student, 3+0 Applied Psychology & Management, Nottingham Malaysia) believed that one of her ambitions which is to be a travel journalist would satisfy and fulfil her desire to make a social contribution through her work. Her ambition seems to go beyond personal monetary gratification as she explained that the embodied cultural capital gained for her overseas studies could be used to do “something that [could] change what people do, change their outlooks, help them out”. Tricia (Charities Officer, 1+2 Bachelor of Laws (Hons), Sheffield) the law graduate and charities officer in Petaling Jaya, related how meaningful it felt to be able to contribute to the local community in her job which involved managing and raising funds to help underprivileged children in Malaysia:

It's rewarding to see families receiving help and they show their gratitude, say, "Thank you" or "Oh, you changed my child's life... I like what I am doing and even though I'm not paid much for it, but I am satisfied, somehow. It's just the kind of satisfaction that I can't get from monetary gains.

She had no regrets for not practising law as she argued that lawyer friends who were “earning twice the amount” of her salary had to deal with enormous stress from work

and the drudgery of doing work which they did not enjoy for the sake of lucrative income.

In a similar echo, Alex (MEng Mechanical Engineering, Sheffield), the engineer in Edinburgh told me, “I would like to work with contributions as opposed to work for just pay rolls...I want to work and make an impact to society...contribute to the field I am working in”. These examples show that the measure of economic advantage went beyond a simple calculation of whether knowledge, skills and dispositions obtained through and beyond UK international education contributed to income maximisation. Distinction to the discussed participants involved occupying economic positions and roles that could make a meaningful difference towards personal development and the betterment of society. The utilisation of cultural capital in the labour market, whether directly or indirectly linked to the knowledge, skills and dispositions enhanced through international education, needs to be understood beyond income-related economic and symbolic exchange values.

Regulating Distinction based on Intersecting Principles and Values

The participants’ strategies for occupational and status distinction were informed by considerations of the feasibility of advancing many other interests alongside high income. The extent and ways in which positional strategies were pursued and practised were regulated by the participants’ economic and non-economic principles and values (Ball 2003). In Wah Seong’s (Student, MSc Civil Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia) case, his self-imposed obligation to accompany his aging retired parents in Malaysia and not place unnecessary financial burden on them held him back from studying completely in the UK which he believed had better economic and status opportunities. With personal, familial and emotional considerations factored in, an offshore education in Malaysia with study exchange to the UK, followed by possible job search in a better paying neighbouring country, offered a life chance trajectory that was more geographically and morally suited for him:

I do not want to be overseas for that long. So I guess the one year exchange programme was perfect...Coz my brother is already working there [UK]. He has been away from home for the 6th year now. So, if I'm in the UK as well, my parents, they'll be home alone because there's only me and my brother...My parents are retirees already. They're approaching 60. They're not that young anymore. So if I get a job in Singapore, it's not that far away.

There were limits to his utilisation of knowledge, skills and dispositions for social reproduction and mobility purposes as he had to negotiate and manage intersecting personal, familial and emotional needs.

Cultural capital utilisation and economic capital enhancement have an emotional dimension linked to one's relations with the family, friends and loved ones which can shape understandings of appropriate occupational pathways to pursue. Once close emotional bonds to the family were considered, certain economic capital accumulation pathways appeared unbearably self-interested and inconsiderate, while others seemed more family-friendly and approving. Hee Seng (Factory Manager, BEng(Hons) Mechanical Engineering, Nottingham Malaysia) for example, was willing to forgo his desire to experience the real "pressure" from working in a less forgiving, non-familial environment as he entered his family business in printing right after graduation. Working with and for the family is the destiny which he assumed he had to fulfil from youth, although his parents never explicitly told him to: "Not forced on me, but it's a family business. At the end of the day, I still have to go inside. It's just a matter of time...I had to go in and work because they really lack of people there". Reflecting back on his engineering education, he had this to say: "Sometimes, I do think that what you studied, may not be so useful for you in the future...I didn't study printing, so I have to start over from scratch". As a whole, graduates especially were regulating economic decisions around what they perceived to be in the best interest of close socio-emotional ties, even if it meant breaking the link between education-derived cultural capital and superior employment in a field related to their studies. While this is likely applicable to individuals in any national context who have strong socio-emotional links with the family, friends and loved ones, traditional Asian and especially Chinese values of

loyalty and gratitude towards particularly the parents (Cheah et al. 2012), socialised within the family and local formal education, perhaps shape a stronger sense of commitment, duty and obligations to put family needs above more personal interests.

Balancing positional pursuits with practices of maintaining and forging emotional security with close social ties was increasingly important especially for older participants. These are mostly graduates who have been working for a few years and already have, or were anticipating having, a family of their own in the near future. Simrit (Trainer, 3+0 Bachelor of Laws (Hons), UoL), a mother, switched from a demanding, full-time paid editing job to home-based self-employment in business training as it allowed, in her words, “the flexibility of being with my daughter. I don’t want to leave her with my maid because that is the only option I have”. The definition of success for Eng Hock (Doctor, Bachelor of Medicine/Surgery, Sheffield) changed over the course of his study to work transition from being outstanding in his career, presumably in commanding recognition and salary, to being able to have good emotional support and connection with family members and close friends:

Before, I used to think that being very successful in career is very important for me. Now, the thing is that I already have a family. I would think that even though one day, if I do not make it, too bad but I won’t think I am a loser or someone who is not successful because success doesn’t mean that you have a good career...It actually involve your family life, your social life. You have good friends, family support.

Noraini (Well Engineer, MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon) believed that inter-generational success should be measured by quality of life derived from relationships with social ties: “I define my success by contentment, all that and I’m quite happy. I’ve got a lot of friends...I would like to be better than my parents. I would like to have a good social circle”. This suggests that social mobility can also be understood as better access to socio-emotional capital than the previous generation, although it does not take away the fact that certain cultural capital leading to privileged employment would enable a better social quality of life.

Self-policing of positional strategies can also be influenced by religious and personal principles which value seeking and maintaining contentment in life. Religious fulfilment was of utmost importance to Francis (Student, 3+0 Law, UoL), a Christian. Monetary accumulation was still important to him, but only to the extent that it gave him reasonable financial subsistence and respectability:

I think that it's important that people don't see me as a liability as in they don't look at you as something to be pitied...I tend to be a rather religious person. I define my happiness more in that area I think. I'll service the God that I serve and being at peace with myself in terms of the tenets and teachings that I hold to.

Su Ern (Student, 1+2 Economics, Manchester) was prepared to accept any economic outcomes from her UK education, as long as her religious needs were fulfilled: "Ultimately, I don't really care what I am doing as long as I am happy...coz I'm a Christian lah, so I actually wanted something to do with God, impact on people's lives". Similarly, the narrative of Noraini (Well Engineer, MSc Oil & Gas Engineering, Robert Gordon), a Muslim, suggests that religion kept the pursuit for material accumulation in check:

Education is vital but it can only take you so far, but who you are as a person and how you obey God is what's important...Among the earliest thing you learn is how to count. Now you count your money, your cars, your holidays, your houses, your loans, your interests. Have you stopped to count your blessings?..When I achieve something and it makes me feel happy and content, that is success. There's no benchmark, no yardstick...*Alhamdulillah* [Arabic: Praise to God], I feel content with what I have now so that to me in a sense is what success really is about.

Religious and personal contentment can therefore moderate the quantifying of distinction in terms of material wealth. This challenges assumptions aligned to positional conflict theory (Brown et al. 2011; Brown & Hesketh 2004) that the sole purpose of the individual within the opportunity trap is to survive stiff competitions for superior jobs, income and status. Exploring the various personal, familial, emotional, moral and religious boundaries within which students and graduates framed their distinction practices sheds light on a wider range of choices, aspirations and experiences that surround cultural capital accumulation and activation.

Conclusion

This chapter has brought insights into the personal, familial, emotional, moral and religious boundaries which marked the scope and degree to which the participants pursued their respective positional aims. It brought attention to the personal and social purposes of cultural capital accumulation and application. It showed that distinction varied in meaning and that it should be understood beyond income-related economic and symbolic exchange values and the certainty of the desirability for social reproduction and mobility through deployment of cultural capital linked to international education. This broader understanding is essential to fully explicate the complexities of perceived and actual distinction among the diverse foreign students and graduate middle class within the rapidly expanding global education field.

Chapter 9 Cultural Capital and Distinction: A Context Dependent Relationship

This chapter concludes the thesis by reviewing the purpose, aims and key findings of my research. It highlights the contributions and limitations of my research as well as suggesting ways forward for the study of the relationship between cultural capital obtained through Western international tertiary education and middle-class social reproduction and mobility of Asian foreign students and graduates. This relationship is context dependent and I reiterate that attention needs to be given to geographical, situational and interactional specificities to uncover the complexities of translating enhanced cultural capital into superior economic and symbolic capital. This chapter also identifies new developments in the global tertiary education field and the resulting issues of importance which institutions and individuals have to confront.

Summary of Research Purpose, Aims and Findings

The purpose of my thesis is to explore what role cultural capital, gained through UK international tertiary education in its various modes, play in shaping the anticipated and actual occupational and status reproduction and mobility of Malaysian students and recent graduates from middle-class backgrounds. I explored the anticipation and experiences of the rewards and disadvantages of undertaking UK education through onshore, offshore and transnational modes of study. I investigated strategies used and intended to be used to achieve and reproduce high status, as well as entry, integration and advancement in superior jobs. I studied the experiential intersection of class with social divisions of age, ethnicity, gender and nationality in structuring educational and occupational choices, practices and experiences for the participants. I explored the interviewees' perceptions and feelings that surrounded their intended and actual practices of translating cultural capital to economic and social privileges.

Chapter 5 introduced and explored some of the perceived and experienced positive and negative exchange values of UK cultural capital in the labour market. The findings reflect the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions to the students' and graduates' motivations for cultural capital accumulation within and beyond UK tertiary participation. Institutionalised cultural capital in the form of a UK degree qualification generally represented to the participants a distinctive marker that was anticipated or experienced to aid the reproduction and achievement of superior employment and status opportunities particularly in the home context. I brought attention to the long-lasting admiration in Malaysia of Western standards and dispositions linked especially to the former British colonial power. There were perceived gradations to the exchange worth of foreign cultural capital obtained through different educational pathways and choices; the participants made finer judgments based on the rankings and prestige of educational institutions, quality of the institutional habitus and their suitability within it, the symbolic elitism of the study destination, academic ability, career prospects linked to academic programmes and familial, peer and institutional recognition. The onshore mode of study, particularly in an elite UK university, was believed to offer the most privileged opportunities to gain better quality education, experience a higher valued culture, lifestyle, social mix and physical landscape in the West and independently embark on a journey of personal growth and self-discovery.

On closer inspection, I found that the perceived and experienced merits and shortcomings of foreign cultural capital accumulation and utilisation were relative to place and socio-relational contexts. My exploration of the participants' perceptions and feelings about their own academic, economic and social worth in Chapter 6 uncovered a contrast between the sense of place (Bourdieu 1984) expressed by individuals involved in onshore UK education and those who were not. Onshore graduates were generally confident of their labour market and status advantages and saw themselves as more knowledgeable and globally experienced than their local counterparts in Malaysia. These perceptions were reinforced by the offshore and transnational students and graduates

who felt inferior for their lack of Western and international exposure that was especially valued in the Malaysian private employment sector. However, they believed that their relative labour market strengths lay in their enhancement and appropriation of more common local cultural capital such as local knowledge and interaction styles which reflected cultural sensitivity and adaptability to various demands and expectations across place, situational and interactional contexts in Malaysia. I argued that flexible and moderate employment of foreign and local embodied cultural capital, as opposed to maximum utilisation of either one, provided the solution for participants across samples to overcome the relative limitations of their cultural capital acquired through their respective modes of UK studies. The personalisation (Brown & Hesketh 2004) of the hard and soft currencies of foreign and local cultural capital, as well as the deployment and adornment of the physical body was perceived as necessary by the participants to present the self (Goffman 1959) advantageously in different settings and situations.

Findings in Chapter 7 on the intersection of class with other social divisions showed that age, ethnicity and gender were perceived and experienced as significant factors shaping inclusion and exclusion in the highly stratified Malaysian labour market. In the UK, nationality and ethnicity were most significant, although how they worked to do so was less clear cut and identifiable in the participants' minds. The personal, familial, emotional, moral and religious boundaries to cultural capital accumulation and activation, as explored in Chapter 8, illustrated the intersecting principles and values which the participants attempted to manage alongside income-related interests. The desire for work-life balance, personal contentment, religious fulfilment, emotional security and contribution to society through direct and indirect application of enhanced knowledge, skills and dispositions in the economic arena, showed that cultural capital derived from international education also represented personal and social goods (Marginson 2011) to the participants. Essentially, the link between cultural capital, acquired through UK international tertiary education, and the participants' anticipation and experiences of social reproduction and mobility was positive, inverse, strong and

weak, depending on the interweaving of individual, socio-relational and structural factors within place, situational and interactional contexts in question.

Contributions to the Understanding of Cultural Capital

This thesis contributes to a relatively new and growing area of research which evaluates the global applicability of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in explaining the distinction practices and trajectories of the Asian middle-class in the fields of Western international education and post-graduation work. My thesis offers a critical appropriation of the concept of foreign cultural capital, highlighting the intricacies and contradictions surrounding the transferability of Western cultural capital to the home and host contexts. It accounts for instrumentality and deliberateness sidelined in Bourdieu's (1984) culturalist conceptions of capital accumulation strategies which centred on the logical and common sense distinction practices of the middle-class. In addition, it casts light on some of the non-economic principles and values which set limits to calculated and deliberate strategies of maximising positional labour market advantage, an aspect which Brown and Hesketh (2004) acknowledged, but did little to expand on, in their use of positional conflict theory. My study illuminated the positive and under-researched negative exchange values of foreign cultural capital across a variety of place and socio-relational contexts where the participants were or anticipated themselves to be located.

I problematised the taken-for-granted singularity of cultural capital practices and outcomes by showing that they did not constitute presentation of a fixed set of competences and dispositions which guaranteed superior economic and symbolic capital rewards for my participants. There is value in treating cultural capital as a relational process rather than an object with fixed properties. Locating cultural capital in the perceptions, emotions and experiences of individuals in interaction with socio-relational ties shows that the convertibility of cultural capital is complex and structured around opportunities and constraints in the anticipated and encountered context. My research further complicated understandings of education-derived cultural capital and distinction

by showing that although the institutionalised and embodied dimensions of cultural capital are inter-related, they have an exchange value of their own which may contradict each other in terms of usability in delivering occupational and status distinction. I showed that economic and symbolic capital benefits do not necessarily come together and that they do not come within a fixed time. Furthermore, the exchange benefits of cultural capital investment are not constant over time, with some rewards maturing immediately, some others in the longer term while others risk depletion.

I expanded the scope of analysis of foreign cultural capital in existing literature such as Waters (2010; 2009; 2006; 2005), Sin (2009) and Kim (2011) by exploring it relative to the often ignored contributory strengths of local cultural capital to middle-class social reproduction and mobility in Asia. My study offered detailed insights into the processes in which numerous configurations of foreign and local cultural capital assisted as well as impeded the entry, integration and advancement prospects and experiences of Malaysians in the home and host labour arenas. I refuted the ready assumption in Bourdieu's culturalist and Brown's positional conflict frameworks and works that have drawn on them that scarcity and exclusivity raise the positive exchange value of cultural capital. I stressed that no one mode of cultural capital accumulation linked to UK tertiary studies is instantly superior or inferior as each offers relative strengths and disadvantages, depending on the context in which the enhanced knowledge, skills, dispositions and qualifications are utilised. I highlighted the practical relevance of more common local embodied cultural capital in facilitating economic incorporation, showing that a less exclusive ownership of local knowledge of being, doing and thinking can be privileged currency, especially when assessed by individuals of similar embodiments in the home labour market. Therefore, rather than limiting the scope of discussion to the sole pursuit and use of foreign cultural capital by international students and graduates, I cast attention on how distinction practices may involve a flexible and moderate employment of foreign cultural capital alongside local cultural capital.

By incorporating into the research individuals involved in offshore and transnational modes of UK international education, and onshore employment, I gave more visibility to other middle-class Asian foreign student and graduate groups which to date have not received as much attention in the literature as onshore international students and returned foreign graduates in their home country. I provided a comprehensive exploration of the heterogeneity of the Asian foreign student and graduate middle-class by piecing together the strategies and experiences that surround distinction practices linked to various acquisition modes of education-related cultural capital and the different contexts of utilisation. My separation of students and graduates into different samples to interview allowed for an important differentiation between anticipation and actual experiences of the outcomes of cultural capital accumulation and display in the labour market. The research design enabled a more accurate and closer interpretation of practices, relations and feelings at different points of academic and occupational trajectories. I further unpacked the complexity of status differentiation within international education and graduate employment by illustrating how class intertwined with a range of social divisions such as ethnicity, age, gender, nationality and religion in structuring outcomes of cultural capital enhancement. I stressed that cultural capital cannot be read independently of issues of economic inclusion and exclusion linked to these social divisions.

The choice of Malaysians as research subjects, while fulfilling my personal interest in reflecting on my own identity and experiences relative to comparable others, practically situates the concept of cultural capital within the context specificities of an important but under investigated country: Malaysia, the leading market of UK transnational and offshore students and the traditional prime source of international students to the UK from South-East Asia. In sum, my study shed light on the complex of factors operating at the individual, socio-relational and structural levels in structuring life chance directions and destinies across place, situational and interactional settings in Malaysia and the UK. My thesis essentially adds depth and specificity to the understanding of

social reproduction and mobility among the diverse Malaysian student and graduate middle-class involved in cultural capital enhancement through and beyond UK international tertiary education.

Limitations and Future Directions

My research has limitations which presents opportunities for future development and expansion. With little to no work experience, students in my study often gave impressionable and hypothetical references to a graduate future. On the other hand, graduates occasionally gave hesitant and vague accounts of a past which they had lost touch with the further they moved into working adulthood. If resources allow, a longitudinal design, following the same participants along various intervals of the university to work trajectory is optimal in providing smooth continuity and fuller precision to life stories. A quantitative, survey-based component involving larger samples stratified by variables such as ethnicity, age, gender and academic programmes or occupations would provide findings which have some generalisability to a wider Malaysian student and graduate population engaged in UK education. A sole emphasis on young adults means that my study can only provide a one-sided account of the processes in which familial relations condition dispositions and strategies for inter-generational transfer and acquisition of capital. The inclusion of participants' parents could be informative in casting another perspective on this important theme.

The findings have highlighted the functional relevance of local cultural capital in facilitating job integration and advancement particularly in the Malaysian labour market. This is an aspect which I paid little attention to in the initial stages of analysis as I was caught up in privileging the symbolic form and value of foreign cultural capital over the functional substance and use of local cultural capital. Efforts of offshore and transnational participants to claim a bigger slice of positional worth through assertions of localisation stirs curiosity in me as to whether and by how much local cultural capital holds similar meanings for students and graduates from Malaysian public universities

who were not addressed in this study. An investigation into this is likely to cut across class lines, but can potentially offer fresh perspectives on the less exclusive forms of cultural capital as a mobilising and all too assumed demobilising force for economic and social advancement. It also poses the question of what the value of Western cultural capital is relative to local and regional cultural capital in the Malaysian public education sector. This question has growing relevance as leading public institutions in Malaysia explore infant collaborative arrangements with universities from advanced countries of the West in areas such as educational delivery and course designs. A case in point is the Malaysia Imperial Doctoral programme which offers a spilt-degree arrangement where selected Malaysian students spend time between the Malaysian public university (any of the five leading public universities) and Imperial College to study for a single award conferred by the latter (Imperial College London 2013). Another example is the joint partnership between Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, a Malaysian public university, and a consortium of Japanese universities in establishing the Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology in Kuala Lumpur in 2010 (Embassy of Japan in Malaysia 2011).

Given resource limitations and the practical need to compare different groups of the Malaysian middle class on a common ground, I regret not being more extensive in my coverage of institutions and modes of international education. I did not interview students and graduates of UK distance learning programmes, but am aware that virtual education can provide another take on how non-physical and less direct forms of UK cultural capital contact are experienced and managed to advance life chance aspirations. My omission of Australian universities particularly surprised a few contact persons and otherwise would-be participants. This is understandable as Australia traditionally commands the largest share of onshore Malaysian students and with the setting up of Monash University Malaysia in 1998, is first to have arrived in the offshore education market scene in the country. Worthy of attention is also the strong US-Malaysia educational ties and the associated marketing of a distinctive American-style education in Malaysia. Johns Hopkins University, which collaborated with Malaysian private-

public owned Perdana University to launch the first graduate medical school in Malaysia in 2010, envisages challenging the predominance of the British model of medical education in the country (Perdana University 2012). Meanwhile, the US-based Smith College is in the early stages of negotiation with the Malaysian government to set up Malaysia's first women's university in 2015 where a unique American model of liberal arts education will be featured (Smith College 2012). There is also the emerging trend of universities from Asia setting up branch campuses in Malaysia. Singapore-headquartered education conglomerate Raffles Education Corporation, which began operating its independent degree granting Raffles University Iskandar in 2011, will have its permanent Johore-based campus ready in 2014 (Raffles University Iskandar 2013). India's Manipal University opened its offshore campus in the state of Seremban in 2013 and South Korea's Hanyang University will follow suit in 2014 (Hanyang University 2011). Jaipur National University and Prist International University, both from India, plan to establish their offshoots in the state of Perak in 2014 (Kyra 2011). Furthermore, Xiamen University will set up China's first offshore campus in Malaysia in 2015 (*The Star* 2013). It was reported in 2012 that 25 or so foreign universities from both the global North and South were bidding for approval to set up branch campuses in Malaysia (*New Straits Times* 2012). In light of these developments, there is much opportunity to evaluate critically the global applicability of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in explicating status differentiation within other key and emerging source markets of international education in Malaysia. Research in this direction holds the promise of piecing together a rich story of lived experiences of the many intricate layers and relations of hierarchical distinction in international higher education and post-graduation work.

Expanding Global Education Field and Positional Possibilities

The growth of the market in global education in the last decade or so has been phenomenal, a huge portion of which has been spurred by the diversification of Anglophone universities in the global North into new modes and partnerships of

educational delivery in Asia. Globally, there are now about 200 offshore campuses of predominantly universities from the West, with an additional 37 or more arriving by 2013 (Katsomitros 2012). The global educational landscape, particularly sites of offshore and transnational education, will continue to expand with the widening of the middle class in rising developing countries seeking tertiary education as the means to affluent life chance opportunities. The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (Katsomitros 2012) reveals that between 2009 and 2011, the number of UK universities with foreign branch campuses has nearly doubled to 25. With near market saturation in the Middle East, strategies of UK universities to set up base offshore are shifting to South East Asia (Katsomitros 2012), Malaysia being the focal point of this growth, as numbers of new and upcoming arrivals of UK offshore campuses suggest. Newcastle University and Southampton University inaugurated their Malaysian branch campuses in 2011 and 2012 respectively and those confirmed to have the construction of their campuses ready in 2014 and 2015 are Heriot-Watt University and the University of Reading (Heriot-Watt University 2013; University of Reading 2013).

Malaysia is fast on track to becoming a significant regional hub of international education, although ironically, a hub providing not so much of its own education but that of other country providers. The profit-based nature of this widened provision, especially when spearheaded by the private sector, promotes social equity to some extent, but for the most part, preserves benefits for those who are economically privileged enough to afford entry. It does not take away issues of inequality in educational access, only masks it with the proliferation of institutions and programmes conveying the myth of a large platter of educational choices freely served to all. Comparing the private education sector against the public sector, however, conditions of entry are more meritocratic in that ethnicity and limited capacity in highly sought after programmes has little, if any, relevance as places are offered based on ability and demand. As more and more foreign universities take interest in setting up overseas outposts and partnerships in the Malaysian private education market, the contrast between the more liberal,

internationalised private sector and the relatively restrictive, nationalised public sector will be even more striking. While private higher learning institutions are relatively free to nurture independent, critical knowledge and design their programmes and syllabus, the same liberties are remote within the public sector which is subjected to state control and censorship. The big question is how the private-public divide in academic freedom and institutional autonomy which impacts on different experiences and appreciations of cultural capital can be reconciled to provide better integration among students and graduates of the two sectors. Another question is how parent UK universities can help prepare onshore international students for a smooth transition into the home country after their studies have finished. Bridging the gap between individuals of different education sources and cultural capital reserves offers the hope of reducing prejudice and discrimination in both private and public arenas of higher education and employment. This can assist individuals in having their enhanced cultural capital valued more constructively on the basis of merit and potential, leading to more equitable access to life chance opportunities across various social fields. In practice, narrowing the gap in provision of cultural capital between the Malaysian private and public higher education sectors is challenging in an expanding stratified education marketplace. Competitions among various institutions and nation-states for especially income revenue from student tuition fees overshadow and contradict possibilities of collaboration and co-operation for a wider social good.

The influx of foreign campuses and programmes into Malaysia signals increasing competition between countries, markets, institutions and educational sectors for Malaysian students and international students from third countries. Care has to be taken that the drive to diversify income revenues and increase international presence does not compromise the quality of the education offered. A simple message about the benefits of offshore and transnational study which speaks about sameness with the parent institution and affordability provides an incomplete and glossy perspective of the exchangeability of UK cultural capital across geographical, interactional and situational contexts.

Limitations to the cultural capital offered by institutions, modes of study and place contexts have to be openly acknowledged. As programmes on offer by various institutions and country providers can overlap, such as in the popular subject areas of commerce, engineering and medicine, the exclusivity of having foreign institutionalised cultural capital is likely to lessen in Malaysia. Academic institutions, in their competition for offshore and transnational students, will have to shift from relying on the symbolic elitism of the source country of education to building up niche teaching and research strengths that can substantially contribute to intellectual, economic and social growth in the country of operation.

More importantly, the expansion of tertiary education has to go hand in hand with the dismantling of state-imposed ethnic barriers to equality of access to opportunity structures in Malaysian society. A pressing issue of concern is to match availability of educational opportunities with availability of appropriate entry and advancement opportunities in the labour market. Genuine systemic changes have to take place in Malaysia to ensure a commensurate expansion of a labour market inclusive to all. Until that can happen, Malaysia risks having an expanding young middle-class generation of migrant hopefuls, ready to move from an opportunity system which does not provide to a system of more promising life chance opportunities abroad. Whether life chances are better in the UK is debatable as the process of translating cultural capital into economic and symbolic capital in the host country is mired with its own complexities. For one, the ever shifting immigration rules in the UK cause uncertainties to onshore international students and graduates originating from outside the EEA and Switzerland as to whether, when and for how long their nationality status would enable opportunities to acquire practical work experience and enhance their knowledge and skills in the host country. The recent abolition of the post-study visa has implications for the UK's competitiveness in attracting onshore international students relative to Australia particularly, which, since 2011, has provided temporary graduate visas allowing international graduates of different levels and fields of study to put their cultural capital

to use in the Australian labour market (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2013). The link between cultural capital obtained through international education and middle-class social reproduction and mobility essentially varies in strength and direction across countries, places, groups and situations.

As the global education field continues to expand, it brings with it new rules, aspirations and experiences of status differentiation which I, just like my participants and many others engaged in international education, try to make sense of. Writing this thesis has helped me tremendously in this process. For that, research has been personally meaningful and worthwhile, whether or not the enhanced cultural capital from my education holds promising life chance outcomes. I would like to hope it does.

Appendix A: Profile of the Offshore and Transnational Student Sample

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Institution	Programme
Wah Seong	22	Chinese	M	Nottingham Malaysia	MSc Civil Engineering
Mushamir	24	Malay	M	Nottingham Malaysia	PhD Electronic & Communication Engineering
Hisham	23	Malay	M	KDU (3+0) with Keele	BA (Hons) Business Management & Finance
Hui Ching	19	Chinese	F	KDU (1+2) with Manchester	BA (Hons) Economics
Chloe	19	Chinese	F	KDU (1+2) with Manchester	BA (Hons) Economics
Sue Ern	19	Chinese	F	KDU (1+2) with Manchester	BA (Hons) Economics
Salehah	19	Malay	F	KDU (1+2) with Manchester	BA (Hons) Economics
Francis	23	Indian	M	KDU (3+0) with UoL	Bachelor of Laws (Hons)
Nadia	19	Malay (mixed)	M	Nottingham Malaysia	BSc (Hons) Applied Psychology & Management
Elaine	22	Sino-Kadazan	F	Nottingham Malaysia	BA (Hons) Business, Economics & Management
Rosli	21	Malay	M	APIIT (3+0) with Staffordshire	BSc (Hons) Business Computing
Imran	23	Malay	M	APIIT (3+0) with Staffordshire	BSc (Hons) Business Information Technology
Sze Theng	20	Chinese	F	ICOM (3+0) with Wolverhampton	Bachelor of Music (Hons) in Professional Music
Kor Ming	20	Chinese	M	Taylor's (3+0) with UWE	BA (Hons) Accounting & Finance

Note: English names were given to participants who introduced themselves by an English given or adopted name

Appendix B: Profile of the Offshore and Transnational Graduate Sample

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Occupation	Institution	Programme
Lian Hui	26	Chinese	F	SAP Consultant	KDU (3+0 with Northumbria)	BSc (Hons) Computing Studies
Teik Lee	26	Chinese	M	Sales & Customer Support Executive	TARC (3 months twinning with Liverpool John Moores)	BSc (Hons) Computing & Information Systems
Grace	25	Chinese	F	Self-employed (education business)	Sunway (3+0 with Oxford Brookes)	BSc (Hons) Applied Accounting
Aziati	24	Malay	F	Engineer	Nottingham Malaysia	MSc Electrical & Electronics Engineering
Hee Seng	25	Chinese	M	Factory Manager (family business)	Nottingham Malaysia	BEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering
Simrit	31	Punjabi	F	Self-employed (training business)	ATC Kemayan (3+0) with UoL	Bachelor of Laws (Hons)
Charmaine	23	Chinese	F	Sound Engineer (free-lance)	ICOM (3+0) with Wolverhampton	Bachelor of Music (Hons) in Professional Music

Appendix C: Profile of the Onshore Graduate Sample

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Occupation	University	Programme
Jia Wen	23	Chinese	F	Multiple Jobs	Manchester	BA(Hons) Politics & International Relations
Alex	27	Chinese	M	Engineer	Sheffield	MEng Chemical Engineering
Peng Suan	26	Chinese	F	Sales & Operation Manager	LSE	BSc (Hons) Government & Economics
Julie	28	Chinese	F	Project Co-ordinator	LSE	MSc Political Sociology
Ashwin	27	Indian	M	Film Director/Writer	UWE	BA(Hons) Time Based Media
Lye Hoon	28	Chinese	F	Pharmacist	Nottingham	MSc Pharmacy
Brian	30	Chinese	M	Researcher	Cambridge	PhD Electrical Engineering
Kelvin	27	Chinese	M	Business Consultant	LSE	BSc (Hons) Business Mathematics & Statistics
Hussain	25	Malay	M	University Tutor	Cambridge	MPhil Engineering
Tricia	28	Chinese	F	Charities Officer	Sheffield (1+2 at Taylor's)	Bachelor of Laws (Hons)
Wooi Kiat	30	Chinese	M	Technology Consultant	Imperial	PhD Electronic & Electrical Engineering
Shamsul	28	Malay	M	Business Coach	Hertfordshire (2+1 at APIIT)	BSc (Hons) Information Technology
Eng Hock	31	Chinese	M	Doctor	Sheffield	Bachelor of Medicine / Bachelor of Surgery
Noraini	30	Malay	F	Well Engineer	Robert Gordon	MSc Oil & Gas Engineering
Mei Sien	29	Chinese	F	Doctor	Edinburgh	Bachelor of Medicine / Bachelor of Surgery

Appendix D: Interview Guide for the Offshore and Transnational Student Sample

OBJECTIVES

- to explore the perceived advantages and disadvantages of a UK education in advancing occupational and status reproduction and mobility
- to investigate planned and executed strategies to increase chances of entry into high status, well-paid employment
- to uncover participants' sense of relative worth and feelings surrounding the translation of cultural capital into occupational and status advantages

INTRODUCTION

- introduce nature and purpose of study; efforts to protect privacy and confidentiality; free to withdraw

1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANT

- age, ethnicity
- institution and awarding university
- academic programme, level and year of study
- main source of financial support for studies

2 LIFE HISTORY

- personal and family background
 - where born and permanently reside
 - number of brothers, sisters
 - family background (economic, subjective status location, geographical mobility)
 - parents' occupations
 - type and highest level of education received by parents, brothers, sisters
- prior education / employment
 - whether worked and when → if yes, what job and feelings about job
 - when and where received highest educational qualification
 - whether education is very important to family → if yes, why?
→ if no, why?
 - any private tuition or special classes attended during primary/secondary school → if yes, experiences of them

3 EXCHANGE VALUE OF A UK EDUCATION

Use this section to explore the perceived convertibility of UK cultural capital to income, jobs and status. Also use section to investigate feelings and sense of relative worth attached to this.

- decision to study through offshore/transnational mode
 - why a UK education in Malaysia/ why not others
 - most preferred study destination → If not Malaysia, why
 - why choose particular programme/institution/subject area
 - whether decision made with influence/advice/help/support from parents/family members/peers → If yes, how?
- specific expectations about education
 - what hopes to achieve from a UK education
 - ideas of a good job (salary, status, work conditions, geographical mobility)
 - whether expect to get a good job through UK education → If yes, how?
→ If no, why?
 - whether expect to have more marketable knowledge and skills than others (within and beyond UK offshore and transnational group) → why yes/no
 - whether expect to be more distinct than others (values/preferences/speech/dressing/manners/consumption/lifestyle)
→ why yes/no
 - whether expect to have prestige/admiration/recognition → why yes/no
 - any disadvantages of having a UK education
- sense of place
 - whether deserve/confident to have better income, jobs and status than others → why yes/no

4 LIFE PLANS

Use this section to explore the intersection of class with other social divisions in structuring aspirations or lack of towards social reproduction and mobility.

- plans after graduation (work, further studies, personal, geographical mobility)
 - why particular plan
 - chances of achieving plan → why high/low
 - strategies to work towards plan
- views about success in Malaysia
 - whether likely to be successful → why yes/no

- ideas of a successful life
- best ways to be successful in Malaysia
- does ethnicity matter for success → why yes/no
- whether UK education is the key to superior life chances

CONCLUSION

- Give assurances about confidentiality; thank participant; answer any questions

Appendix E: Interview Guide for the Offshore and Transnational Graduate

Sample

OBJECTIVES

- to explore the actual advantages and disadvantages of an offshore and transnational UK education in improving occupational and status reproduction and mobility after graduation
- to investigate strategies used to obtain high status, well-paid employment
- to study how class interacts with other social divisions to shape choices of employment
- to uncover participants' sense of worth and level of satisfaction (or lack of) with their educational outcomes

INTRODUCTION

- introduce nature and purpose of study; efforts to protect privacy and confidentiality; free to withdraw

1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANT

- age, ethnicity
- current and previous job after graduation
- institution and awarding university
- academic programme, level and year of award
- main source of financial support for studies

2 LIFE HISTORY

- personal and family background
 - where born and permanently reside
 - number of brothers, sisters
 - family background (economic, subjective status location, geographical mobility)
 - parents' occupations
 - type and highest level of education received by parents, brothers, sisters
- prior education / employment
 - whether education is very important to family → if yes, why?
→ if no, why?
 - any private tuition or special classes attended during primary/secondary school → if yes, experiences of them

- employment history before commencing academic programme and after graduation
- if any, feelings and experiences of working

3 EXCHANGE VALUE OF A UK EDUCATION

Use this section to explore the convertibility of UK offshore and transnational education to income, jobs and status. Also use section to investigate feelings and sense of relative worth attached to outcomes of education, paying attention to the intersection of class with other social divisions.

- choice of UK education
 - why choose particular mode/subject/awarding institution(s)
 - why not others?
 - whether decision made with influence/advice/help/support from parents/family members/peers → If yes, how?
 - whether ethnicity has to do with choice → If yes, why?
 - feelings and experiences of job (salary, status, work conditions)
 - most preferred work location → If not Malaysia, why
- Choice of work
 - why choose particular job/sector / why not others
 - whether decision made with influence/advice/help/support from parents/family members/peers → If yes, how?
 - whether ethnicity has to do with choice → If yes, why?
 - feelings and experiences of job (salary, status, work conditions)
 - most preferred work location → If not Malaysia, why
- study-to-work transition
 - strategies used to secure current job
 - whether feel a UK education gives added advantage in job search/advancement → If yes, how?
 - If no, why?
 - which is a more important resource: hard currencies (competence, qualifications) or soft currencies (interaction style, dressing, confidence) → why?
 - any disadvantages of having a UK education
 - issues and challenges faced in the transition from university to work
 - whether think ethnicity shapes chances of high status employment in Malaysia → why yes/no
- sense of place and satisfaction
 - whether deserve to have better income, jobs and status than others (particularly

- onshore UK graduates) → why yes/no
- whether feel to have better income, jobs and status than others → why yes/no
- whether satisfied with outcomes of education → why yes/no

4 LIFE PLANS

Use this section to explore current aspirations and strategies.

- current goals and future plans (work, further studies, personal, geographical mobility)
- strategies for further advancement of goals
- whether UK education is the key to superior life chances

CONCLUSION

- give assurances about confidentiality; thank participant; answer any questions

Appendix F: Interview Guide for the Onshore Graduate Sample

OBJECTIVES

- to explore the actual advantages and disadvantages of an onshore UK education in improving occupational and status mobility after graduation
- to investigate strategies used to obtain high status, well-paid employment
- to study how class interacts with other social divisions to shape choices of employment
- to uncover participants' sense of worth and level of satisfaction (or lack of) with their educational outcomes

INTRODUCTION

- introduce nature and purpose of study; efforts to protect privacy and confidentiality; free to withdraw

1 GENERAL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANT

- age, ethnicity
- current and previous job after graduation
- institution and awarding university
- academic programme, level and year of award
- main source of financial support for studies

2 LIFE HISTORY

- personal and family background
 - where born and permanently reside
 - number of brothers, sisters
 - family background (economic, subjective status location, geographical mobility)
 - parents' occupations
 - type and highest level of education received by parents, brothers, sisters
- prior education / employment
 - whether education is very important to family → if yes, why?
→ if no, why?
 - any private tuition or special classes attended during primary/secondary school → if yes, experiences of them
 - employment history before commencing academic programme and after graduation → if any, feelings and experiences of working

3 EXCHANGE VALUE OF A UK EDUCATION

Use this section to explore the convertibility of UK offshore and transnational education to income, jobs and status. Also use section to investigate feelings and sense of relative worth attached to outcomes of education, paying attention to the intersection of class with other social divisions.

- choice of UK education
 - why choose particular mode/subject/awarding institution(s)
 - why not others?
 - whether decision made with influence/advice/help/support from parents/family members/peers → If yes, how?
 - whether ethnicity has to do with choice → If yes, why?
 - feelings and experiences of job (salary, status, work conditions)
 - most preferred work location → If not Malaysia, why

- choice of work
 - why choose particular job/sector / why not others
 - whether decision made with influence/advice/help/support from parents/family members/peers → If yes, how?
 - whether ethnicity in Malaysia has to do with choice → If yes, why?
 - feelings and experiences of job (salary, status, work conditions)
 - most preferred work location → why?

- study-to-work transition
 - strategies used to secure current job
 - whether feel a UK education gives added advantage in job search/advancement
→ If yes, how?
→ If no, why?
 - which is a more important resource: hard currencies (competence, qualifications) or soft currencies (interaction style, dressing, confidence)
→ why?
 - any disadvantages of having a UK education
 - issues and challenges faced in the transition from university to work
 - whether think ethnicity shapes chances of high status employment in Malaysia
→ why yes/no

- sense of place and satisfaction
 - whether deserve to have better income, jobs and status than others (particularly graduates working in Malaysia) → why yes/no
 - whether feel to have better income, jobs and status than others → why yes/no
 - whether satisfied with outcomes of education → why yes/no

4 LIFE PLANS

Use this section to explore current/further aspirations and strategies.

- current goals and future plans (work, further studies, personal, geographical mobility)
- strategies for further advancement of goals
- if working in the UK, whether intend to work in Malaysia in future → Why yes/no
- whether UK education is the key to superior life chances

CONCLUSION

- give assurances about confidentiality; thank participant; answer any questions

Appendix G: Information Sheet



School of Social and Political Science
University of Edinburgh
Chrystal Macmillan Building
15A George Square
EH8 9LD

INFORMATION SHEET

1. This interview will inform a PhD thesis by I Lin Sin about the role of various modes of UK international education in the occupational and status advancement of middle-class young adult Malaysians. The research findings may be presented in journal articles and at conferences and seminars.
2. The research will involve interviews with an estimated total of 40 Malaysian students and recent graduates of UK tertiary programmes. Each interview will take the form of a casual face-to-face conversation, led by the researcher who will ask a series of questions from an interview guide. Key themes include views about the advantages and disadvantages of having a UK qualification, strategies used to improve chances of obtaining desired jobs and feelings and aspirations in relation to studies/work and the outcomes of a UK education.
3. No overly private, personal or sensitive information will be asked. The researcher does not anticipate that the project will have any significant health, economic or political impacts on the participants and the wider Malaysian student and graduate community in Malaysia and the UK.
4. The interviews will be recorded in audio to enable the researcher to conduct a more detailed examination of the data. You will not be identified in published form as a pseudonym will be used instead.
5. The audio recording of this interview will be saved in a password-protected personal laptop and flash drive, which only the researcher has access to, as far as national laws and administrative regulations allow.
6. Full records of the interviewee's participation in this research will be kept securely in a locked cabinet which is only accessible to the researcher.
7. Participation is voluntary and the interviewee is free to withdraw at any time without giving any reasons. The decision to withdraw will be fully respected and no follow-ups will be made. In the event that the participant withdraws consent after the interview, the audio recording and any transcripts of the interview will be destroyed immediately.

Appendix H: Consent Form



School of Social and Political Science
University of Edinburgh
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CONSENT FORM

Proposed title of project: **Cultural Capital and Distinction: Malaysian Students and Recent Graduates of UK International Tertiary Education**

I consent to take part as an interviewee in this research and I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without detriment to myself.

I am aware that the interview will be recorded in audio to facilitate a more thorough examination of the collected data. The researcher has explained to me the purpose and nature of the study, efforts to protect my confidentiality and any expected risks involved from participating in the research. I have also been given a copy of the participant information sheet, which I have read and understood.

Signed: Date:

Name (BLOCK LETTERS):

I confirm that I have fully explained the purpose and nature of the investigation, measures to preserve confidentiality and any anticipated risks involved.

Signed: Date:

Name: I LIN SIN

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