CHAPTER 7

Asian International Student Mobility:
The Issue of Identity amongst Overseas Chinese Students

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INTRODUCTION

Student’s mobility is still a minority phenomenon in the world’s student’s population. However, this phenomenon is experiencing a regular growth. The destinations remain located in the preferentially developed Anglophone countries. Student mobility thus remains primarily transcontinental. On the contrary, this tendency is simultaneously showing a regular growth of regional student’s mobility. East Asia and South East Asia for instance tendency are gradually developing a regional higher education market. This is by no means a recent phenomenon, since international student mobility can be tracked back to the Middle-Ages in Europe and in Asia, where a long tradition has put scholars on the road in search of the best universities or places of knowledge production. Nevertheless, still today, at the turn of the twenty-first century, studying abroad remains the characteristic of only a minority of students, since according to the latest figures released by the UN statistics bureau, less than 2% of the overall world student population are enrolled in foreign universities. This minority is only steadily but slowly increasing, which explains why there is so little research on the issue. Moreover, if it can be generalized from a survey carried out in France, most of these papers are PhD theses or investigations done carried out by Post doctoral researchers.

Numerous expert reports at national and international levels provide a reliable statistical data base that would permit us access to the nature, the volume, the composition, and the direction of the trends in international student mobility. The first part of this article is a short account of this panoramic view of the student mobility across the world.

However, because it is still a tiny phenomena, and also because it is not a social problem that attracts the public attention, we so far know little about the motives of the student’s departure, on the decision making process, the conditions of their move, their lifes abroad, their aspirations, ambitions and strategies. While student mobility knowledge is relatively well documented on its statistical dimension, the qualitative part of the phenomenon is still a territory to be explored. But it is not ‘only’ the scientific curiosity nor less the recognition that knowledge is underdeveloped in one given domain that is able to drive scientific research enquiries but only research question-scientific inquiry for the purpose of on the basis of empirical evidence.

Here, a set of two questions lay at the heart of this paper. The first one is related to the key factors that might explain the increase in international student mobility. As much as scholar mobility can be tracked back to the Middle Ages, globalization, that is to say interconnection and interdependency, is not at all a new phenomenon. And in the domains of knowledge, science, education, and the exchange of ideas, syncretism and communication between persons is the rule rather than the exception. Without expanding upon this point, it might be worth mentioning the principle of assimilation that is so characteristic of Chinese culture (2004). In the same vein, the analysis of Braudel (1993) concerning La Méditerranée is of relevance here. Braudel regards the exchanges and circulation of knowledge, expertise and ideas, as well as the people’s mobility as being the key factors that haves brought about a ‘region’, where the differences of the various neighbouring countries are melting in a common cultural platform, that sometimes has been termed civilization. In this respect it is very difficult to resist the temptation of reminding the reader of Max Weber’s call for a ‘scientific community’. What is different today is the fact that these exchanges, moves, borrowings and assimilation processes are being deeply inscribed in a fiercely competitive market i.e. the market of higher education - whose dynamics of attraction and rejection operate on a worldwide scale.

According to Fukuyama (1992, 2006), we have already entered the ‘reign of the market’ which is everywhere and manifests itself as a dominant force (1992). It is not necessary to support and defend the whole Fukuyama thesis especially when arguing that the reign of the market means
the end of history. At least it should be recognized and acknowledged that education and moreover, higher education is worked out, at least partially, by the requirements of the market, that is the connection and the tension between offer and demand; attraction of the demand to fulfil the needs of the offer and competition on the value of the offer, that is retroacting on the competition amongst the people in position of demand.

Contrary to Fukuyama's thesis, we will argue that not all can be reduced to the market economy and market rule, especially in the domains of education, knowledge production and knowledge use that are directly connected to the most important values, i.e. human rights, human achievement, citizenship, political order and democracy.

Having put that clearly, the point that lay at the basis of this research on international student mobility is that higher education is also a market and that this market is increasingly becoming international. However the internationalization of the higher education market is twofold. Identified by the statistics for quite a long time, the first level of this internationalization is trans-continental. Still, the majority of internationally mobile students are crossing the oceans to get what they think to be the best education for the best future. At this level, the London School of Economics and Political Science is compared to the Ecole Nationale de Sciences Politiques in Paris and Stanford University in the United States. The second level is more local or let say regional. Always in terms of comparative advantage it is asked, what can be expected from studying in another continent, compared to what the universities located within the region can deliver? And on the regional market which university to choose for the most promising future, either in terms of the pursuit of studies or in terms of a professional career?

From the available statistical data, it can be argued that while trans-continental student mobility remains predominant, we are witnessing a rise of a regional market for higher education. The world wide competition is increasingly operating between the various regions of the world, (Europe, North America, Asia), and therefore the competition increases between the universities and scientific bodies, within the regions for a regional leadership.

In view of these issues, it is argued here that the fraction of the Asian students willing to move away from their home country, would like to go either to North America or to Europe. However, more Asian students are now making the choice of moving to a university abroad, but located within the Asian region. In recognition of this reality, what follows is predicated upon the following questions: What are the reasons behind such a decision of moving away? How does it operate? What are the conditions of the departure and the conditions of settling down in the host country? And above all what are their motives, their strategies and their projects for the future. Last but not least, how do they handle this dramatic life experience, which may influence dramatically the course of their existence?

To answer this last question, reflections on identity building will be used, leading to coin the concept of identity posture, in order to define the way that the students position themselves towards their own life trajectories in a multicultural context.

**METHODOLOGY**

Empirical investigation has been carried out in two places viz. Beijing (with a sample of 105 students) and Taiwan (with a sample of 20 students across Chengchi University in Taipei, and Tunghai University in Taichung). (20 students have been interviewed in these universities. A supplementary investigation has been carried out in Paris on a sample of 40 students. This paper draws from a total of 165 interviews, most of which have been done in English, while the others either in Chinese or in Japanese. Students from Asia that have been interviewed are coming from 10 countries viz. Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The major contributors to this were from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. In Paris most of the interviewees were of Chinese origin. In both cases, the selection of the students did not take account their area of studies – since students following any discipline were eligible – although they ought to have stayed at least one year in the host country.

In terms of the quantitative approach, this research aims at supplying an updated and accurate mapping of the international student circulation from continent to continent but also within the Asian region. As far as the qualitative investigation is concerned, the first objective is to find out the actors’ rationale that lies behind
that student circulation. The second objective is to raise a part of the veil that recovers the modes of relations which the students in situation of mobility maintain with their country of origin, their host country but also with the international or cosmopolitan universe that they frequent as students and that they will undoubtedly be destined for in their future professional lives.

This paper is dealing only with the qualitative part of the investigation, that is to say, the search for the rationale and identity postures (see next section for definition). For these two last points the method that has been used is that of in-depth semi-directive interview. One question is asked at the beginning of the interview: “Why did you take the decision of moving away to study abroad far from your home country?” And then using the free association technique, the respondents are invited to express themselves on the motivation of his or her of their decision of moving abroad, the conditions of the departure, their personal objectives for the future, and as mentioned above, on their personal attitude regarding the place of origin, the host place and or his willingness or desire to be part of an international/cosmopolitan milieu.

The number of interviews for this part of the project provides sufficient information to detecting the different treads that make up the flux of students mobility, to look into similarities and differences between regional and trans-continental student mobility and to draw an outline typology of the identity postures that international students develop in the course of their studies.

Modalisa software has been used to proceed to the content analysis of the interviews.

FROM TRANS-NATIONAL MOBILITY TO REGIONAL MOBILITY

There are many ways of looking into the emergence of a regional market of higher education in East and South East Asia. It should be regarded by the characteristic of the offer, at the national level but also at the level of the university. For instance in China, not all universities are allowed to host foreign students.

As argued and demonstrated by Philippe d’Iribarne (1989), the market is not a pure economy; it is not straightforwardly regulated by the invisible hand that mysteriously adjusts supply and demand. It is cross cut by institutions, culture, traditions and policies of various kinds. In this respect, analysing national policies implemented by the universities, to encourage students to go abroad, to attract foreign students to come over and stay for sometime to take a degree or to facilitate or not their access to the high skilled labour market, is obviously one indispensable dimension of the analysis.

IDENTITY POSTURES

Instead of the word ‘migration’ that is sometimes used, we have preferred that of mobility, since ‘going abroad to study’ is most often a temporary experience, limited in time. However, this is not necessarily the case as for students with the aim of acquiring or improving their skills and competences in a foreign language, in the present case that is Mandarin; this period can last several years: 4 years for a BA and at least 2 years for a Masters. Therefore, that is a period limited in time but a relatively long period that is likely to modify the life trajectories by affecting the way people envisage their own future. Then, during this period of life abroad, in an academic context, it is the relation to oneself that is redefined. But this work of redefinition of the relation to themselves is operating in an intercultural context, which is to say under the other’s sight or more precisely through the relationship to the ‘other’. But in that case, from the international students’ viewpoint this ‘other’ is an ‘alien’, a stranger, or a foreigner. In this respect many interviewees refer to a certain ‘shock of cultures’, a cultural shock that leaves its mark on the international student’s life experience.

Several important questions were asked to capture this phenomenon: How to position themselves during this ‘temporary’ period of transition, in the eyes of the person at the place they are housed? But also how to position themselves, in this context, with regards to their origin, their ambitions, objectives and aspirations?

The identity issue might be summarized by this double relationship: a relation to the self that is operating through a relationship to the ‘other’ (s), the others being multiple and the relations that are built being differ widely, knowing that the students are from various and diversified origins and statuses. The thesis that is termed ‘Multi-layered Identity’ points out the multiplicity of the identity relationships that are built in the
relation to the others. For instance, in one conference, one person in the audience called me out to me in this way:

“My name is Van Huy Chen. That looks like a Vietnamese name. Look at the colour of my skin: black ebony. My father is Dutch, my mother is Brazilian. I am living in Guyana, that is a French department and then part of Europe. Who am I?”

Individuals see themselves attributed identities according to circumstances, stakes, structuration of the fields. That is all the dramaturgy of the stigma, as analyzed by Goffman (1963). However, individuals handle them and use them according to the organisation of context. Thus, in a previous research it was pointed out that the dialectical play of the marginalized young people who presented themselves like ‘rockers’ or ‘teddy boys’, when they were talking about life within the city, that is the life between the peer groups or the gangs, each of them distinguished by a specific cultural model, but a few moments later during the same interview, they presented themselves like ‘ordinary guys’, ‘normal’ (Lagree, 1985). Hall (1991) underlined this point quite accurately when questioning himself on the possibility of being at the same time: Black; Immigrant; West Indies; and British (1991). A relevant question remains about the Hong Kong students who alternatively introduce themselves as Chinese, persons from Hong Kong, or as British. Or also to those young Taiwanese who are at the same time, Chinese, Taiwanese and sometimes American with plenty of ties to Hong Kong.

The expression “multi-layered identity” is misleading as it results in thinking that identity is made up of different layers that are superimposed over one another in the course of a personal history. Rather one would prefer the expression: ‘identity constellation’ referring to multiple relationships in various domains that are themselves in interaction and, then, subjected to a permanent dynamic. In this respect, identity or as we have just noticed, the identity constellation is permanently on the move. Then, analysis should unveil its evolution - grasping the changes and covering the individual’s history.

Nevertheless, the necessary conditions to the achievement of that objective are rarely reunited. Quite often, the analysis is only a snapshot, a slide in an ongoing history, with no possibility to foresee what the future will be. At most, it will be possible to suggest that the present informs the future. In short, contemporary attitudes and the play of relations that individuals initiate with the ‘others’, bring about pre-dispositions for future developments – giving rise to what we refer to here as ‘identity posture’.

FROM A GIVEN TO A CHOSEN IDENTITY POSTURE: DRAMATURGY OF THE IDENTITY CONSTELLATION


It was not unusual for American Born Chinese (ABCs) to be holders of two passports: Taiwanese and American. This case though, is not specific to Taiwan. Numerous ABCs who were interviewed were from Hong Kong, Macau or Singapore. But in the Taiwanese case there is the specific status granted to the students with Taiwanese nationality, especially those who stayed 8 years abroad before returning to their home country. In the eyes of the university they have the benefit of a special status: ‘Taiwanese Overseas Chinese Students’ (TOCS). These cases provide us with a typical case of the tension which the international students are subjected to, being permanently from ‘here’ and from ‘elsewhere’.

Belonging to Taiwan is a ‘de facto’ reality that imposes several conditionalities upon its citizens, especially males. It is materialized by the passport, by the citizenship, and military obligations that lasts for between 14 and 16 months for all young males. Being Taiwanese is also being distinctive from, the other Chinese, in their day to day lives, - manifesting within the extended family - but who never crossed the frontiers of the island except sometimes for a short trip abroad. They are separated by eight years of life abroad at an age where the socialisation process is deeper and more active. They have been abroad at the ‘age of choices,’ choices that are not only related to study, careers or life orientation but are also choices of norms, ethical references, values, and behavioural patterns. These eight years turn them into ‘mobile individuals in the same place’, into foreigners in their own homeland and strangers to their home culture. Similarity is strong between the people who experienced upward or even downward social mobility: those promoted leave their class of origin to join people who belong to
the class that ‘is supposed to be’ superior, and
the downgraded cannot stay in the class that
they were deemed to join due to their origin;
following the title of the excellent Annie Ernaux
(1986) book: ‘They are never at their place’; or
more exactly, following the expression of one young
Taiwanese girl that was interviewed: ‘I have not
my place’. Dual passports and ‘Overseas Student
Status’ add to their separate identities from others
who may also be regarded as Chinese. There are a
number of words that are used in the interviews to
qualify their feeling of being at a distance from
home. Sometimes, it was: ‘They are different’, while
at other times it was ‘I am different’. They use the
expression ‘real foreigners’ just as they will evoke
‘the real Taiwanese’. And that will be to position
themselves in between. However, it is not only a
question of words but also of attitudes and
practices. One will choose a university far away, 2
hours by bus, in order to stay away from the family
circle. Another tells us that all her boyfriends are
just like her; ‘persons in between’, having been
abroad and having experienced two cultures. The
micro world that they build around them is situated
at the margin of the Taiwanese society.

How to evoke the term of ‘roots’ for these
‘overseas students’ who position themselves
and are positioned, by the status they are granted,
between two positions, two identities, wavering
from one to another without finding their proper
place? If the concept of identity refers to some
kind of stability, here it is much more a question
of ‘flexibility, of plasticity, and of identity dynamic
viz, ‘Identity Posture’.

The case of the ABC and TOCS is exemplary
and heuristic to the extent it makes explicit what
exists for most of the students in mobility, that is
to say the dialectic tension between the country
where one comes from and the place where one
is, where one is studying, and where one might
eventually stay. However there may also be
tension between the country where one comes
from and any other place in the world where one
can settle down for a moment or for a short while.

Nevertheless, a meaningful difference
separates these particular mobile students, ABC
or TOCS, from the other mobile students. Mobiles
in the same place, strangers in their own homeland,
the former find themselves de facto at distance
from the norms and hallmarks, which the members
of what should be their community, refer to. On
the other hand, for the latter that distance and
that tension, both proceed from a demarche and
a choice, that is to say, moving abroad, leaving
the country of origin, the family, the network of
friends all that which shapes the micro universes
in which people live and build up their experiences.

CHINESE…FROM…?

Another basic dimension of the positioning
of these students in mobility is related to their
‘belonging’ to the Chinese world’. This point goes
far beyond the political differences that may exist
between places, cities, provinces, countries where
Chinese populations of the Diaspora are living.
In a context of regional mobility, being Chinese
means one is necessarily operating a subtle
dialectic between difference and similarity. In that
play, the political issue cannot be put aside,
especially when referring to Hong Kong, Macau
or Taiwan. However, this political component
does not exhaust the whole issue. One illustration
of that is given by the dividing lines existing on
the campus between students, in mainland China
as well as in Taiwan. On one side, one will find
the Western students, either Americans or
Europeans, on the other side the Asian Chinese.
Between these two networks, there exist only
polite contacts that will not succeed in filling the
gap that separates them.

Such an observable divide, puts into bold the
existing gap between the cultural Chinese
universes. Whatever the nationality, a common
cultural background is shared. However, what
emerges here are the more subtle
fragmentations that follow the lines of the
frontiers. In Beida, for instance, Overseas Chinese
students have only a few contacts with the
Mainland Chinese students, the ‘locals’ 1.
Students from these places distinguish
themselves from other Chinese students from
Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia. However,
through geographical proximity and cultural
similarities Braudel’s (1993) idiom that “they are
situated on both sides of the same sea” has
meaning in a situation where there is ambiguity
of identities brought about through geographical
separations. Situated not in the Mediterranean
but the Strait, they fall within the same zone of
political influence, with Mainland China exerting
a hegemonic influence over them all of the
neighboring territories. The map of the student’s
sociability reflects these divides and sub-divides.

However, how to define and position ones
self in relation to the ‘other’ - so culturally close
yet with whom there persist such a tangible
difference, remains a challenge. Once more, it is a
question of tension. While they are Chinese
indeed, their places of origin in terms of locality,
region and country remain equally important. For
instance, they are ‘Chinese from Macao’,
‘Chinese from Hong Kong’, or ‘Chinese from
Taiwan.’ The difference is emphasized in
expression, and with it the refusal of assimilation.
That expression ‘Chinese from…’ is frequently
used in mainland China by the Overseas Chinese
in their relations to the ‘locals’. It is also with the
same expression that the ‘locals’ express their
refusal to integrate with ‘foreigners’, even though
they are of Chinese origin. Thus, in search of
assimilation, a Taiwanese student who used to
introduce herself as ‘Chinese’, quite often
received the remark: ‘Chinese yes, but from a
special province’. After 18 months of such
treatment she decided she was before all else
‘Taiwanese’.

Evidently, identity posture is built in relation
to the ‘other’, and in relation to the Mainland
Chinese, one cannot escape the political context.
But let’s view some symmetrical evidence. When
they are among themselves, the Hong Kong, or
Macau or Taiwanese Chinese introduce them-

AND WHAT ABOUT TAIWAN?

In Taiwan we did not meet mainland Chinese
students. Students who were interviewed were
from Malaysia, Hong Kong, Macau or Singapore.
Besides the fact that they are of Chinese origin,
they are all ‘Overseas Chinese’ or Chinese from
the Diaspora. The political factor of differentiation
does not interact anymore. The first factor of
divide is, then, between the ‘them’ and the ‘us,’
between the ‘foreigners’ and the locals – the
locals being, in that case, the Taiwanese. At this
level the mechanisms are identical in Beida,
Chengchi, Tshinghua and in Tunghai. The same
occurs with regards to the split between the
‘westerners’ and the Overseas Chinese. The
relations do not go further than in exchanges of
signs of politeness and occasional exchanges of
services. Extremely seldom are those who
penetrate into the narrow circle of close friends.

At first glance, the mapping of the relations
between students is similar in mainland China and
in Taiwan. However, a significant difference comes
into display. It concerns the grouping of the
Chinese Asians, from the neighbouring countries:
Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. For them,
the organisation of their relations is built up on a
national identity basis. Alike the students from
Hong Kong, from Taiwan and from Macau who
elude the ‘Chinese’ dimension when they are
among themselves, the Chinese students from
these countries develop their relations on a
national identity basis. It is the nationality that is
prior in the building of the ‘Identity Posture’,
in the network building and in the peer grouping.

In short, the mechanisms are similar but the
contexts are different. When the political dimen-
sion is a key factor of the building up of the ident-
ity posture of the overseas Chinese studying in
mainland China, this factor is almost non-
operational amongst those who are living and
studying in Taiwan.

CHosen identity posture

Being ABC in Taiwan, benefiting from the
Overseas Chinese Status and being regarded as
such, being from Chinese culture, being part of
the Chinese Diaspora - are objective character-
istics and factual data. Experiences that these
students are drawing from their stay abroad, the
identity posture they are building up regarding
their own trajectory as well as their relation to the
other, necessarily takes into account these
dimensions.

However, it is precisely in the construction of
this relationship that the widest parts of the actors’
singularity and reflexivity are displayed. The
students in mobility define themselves in a
context of intercultural relations/confrontations,
in which remoteness (from the home town) and
disorientation (with regards to the host country)
are the two main facets of the experience they are
living. But once more, this experience is to some
extent in the individuals’ hands, the relation to
the context and to the elements and events that
impinge upon their personal life is a matter to be
monitored. Remoteness may be deep, acting as a
break, a turning point, or it can bring about a
nostalgia that is likely to regenerate the link to
the family and the home country. The change of
scenery may be a painful surprise, a shock of
cultures; of civilisation. It may as well be looked
for as a source of enrichment, an investment for the future or more straightforwardly a means to improve oneself.

How is this link between the origin and the host location, between the past and the future, and between the nation and the foreign country built? That is a key question in the study of international student mobility since, beyond the questions related to the acquisition of knowledge, the gain of new competencies and their validation on the labour market, it is this question of international experience, of the socialisation to various cultural universes, of the detachment, of the learning of life - in weightlessness - that lies at the heart of this research on international student mobility.

Another formulation of the same point might be done by two symmetrical questions: What do the international experiences do for the students who have chosen to follow their studies abroad? and What do the students do with the resultant opportunities they confront?

From the interviews that have been carried out, three kinds of responses, can be observed, that is three types of identity posture.

a) A national posture, when the link to the country of origin is clearly and strongly claimed: 'I am Korean;' 'I am Malaysian…' This affirmation frequently leads to them envisaging the return back to the home country, since 'after all that is my home land'. But the search of professional opportunity might as well lead to contemplating the idea of staying for a while in the country where they are studying. Then, confinement in a national ghetto might be a solution. For instance, that is the case for the Korean students of Beida who shelter in the so-called village of Wudako, called also the Korean village. But that may also be the case of the Malaysian students in Taiwan, who, four years after their arrival onto the island, keep networking with only Chinese Malaysian compatriots. Characteristics of the Malaysian students’ behaviour are to be found amongst other groups of foreign students as well.

b) An international posture: one asserts a sense of national belonging in relation to other countries, other cultures, other milieus. In this respect to introduce oneself by their ‘nationality can appear as a compromise, more or less negotiated, to reduce this permanent tension between ‘here’ and ‘elsewhere’ between the ‘I am where I come from’ and ‘I am where I am living’.

c) A cosmopolitan posture. This term refers to a double process. First of all, it is a process of detachment from the country of origin. Secondarily it is a process of integration, not at all in the host country, but instead into a milieu made up of persons detached from their country of origin, people who are losing their roots and individuals who accept living and working anywhere as long as the job offer is satisfactory. This third option, as radical as the first one, consists of detaching oneself from the origins to enter another universe, a floating world without an anchor. ‘What does matter for me is to make money. Anywhere! Where there is a satisfactory offer’, declared a young Chinese person for whom the future looks promising.

Considering the entirety of the interviews carried out in China and in Taiwan, one out of ten students in mobility can be slotted into this category.

**DECISION OF MOVING: THE CHOICE OF TAIWAN**

In more ways than one the point of cleavage between these various trajectories is less in the arrival location than at the place of origin. Above all else, the key issue is to take the decision of departing. Undoubtedly, that can explain why this decision is prepared long in advance. Sometimes the decision taking process could last up to five years. The interviews we have carried out indicate that the decision is rarely taken alone. Never against the parents’ will, but just the opposite quite often with their active support, their advice, and the mobilization of their networks. In some cases, it is even the parents who persuasively suggest that studying abroad might be a good strategy. Macao is too small… the quality of education is not as good as required, entry into Hong Kong university requires one year more than to enter another university abroad… when the push factors are put forward, parents are frequently the instigators of the argumentation and sometimes the instigators of the decision of departing. Then, the choice of the country of destination is a matter of assessment in terms of ‘cost and benefit’. Concerning the Asian students of the region, Taiwan is directly in competition with mainland China.
Its comparative advantages are firstly and above all a prior knowledge - parents studied in Taiwan and as a result got Taiwanese citizenship. Their familiarity with the universities remains an important source and is crucial in facilitating linkages with long time friends. These create networks that bridge Taiwan to the home country and sustains support bases when they are most needed.

In short, one of the major advantages of Taiwan over China consists of the prior existence of a tight linkage between the island and the country of origin of the students in mobility. In this respect it is worth noticing the role of the ‘seniors system’, a totally spontaneous and voluntary initiative that consists of delivering support and guidance to newcomers (freshmen) into a Taiwanese university, by those that come from the same locality or even from the same high school. When there is no convenient service of information, the system of seniors or the networks of ‘Alumni’ - that are also called ‘old Boys’ – have a tremendous impact upon the choice of country that the candidate for mobility makes and in the present case, upon the choice of Taiwan as a place to study. Then, as mentioned by one student: ‘without the network of acquaintances it would have been impossible to come here’.

Quality of teaching is also a strong argument, especially when in viewed comparison with their respective countries. Taiwan is chosen as one of the possible countries of destination to pursue one’s studies, because the teaching is renowned for being better than in the country of origin. However, the dramatic improvement of the quality of universities in Mainland China and their increasing international reputation has surged to limit the strength of Taiwanese universities. However, Mainland China’s disfavour of Taiwan has also led to the non-recognition of the diploma obtained in Taiwanese universities. Although this is not decisively damning, it does limit the extent of possibilities for employment that may be offered at the end of the curriculum when one’s studies are completed. The lack of recognition of the diploma and of validation means that they cannot enter the public sector in the Mainland, and therefore there remains only the private sector as an option. Alternatively, there is also the possibility of making a detour through an American or European university in order to get a higher diploma that would validate the initial tuition. On the contrary, the fellowships; the teaching - delivered in English for some major universities; and the possibility of having a student job are some of the factors that encourage the young candidates to mobility to choose Taiwan rather than Mainland China.

**CONCLUSIVE REMARKS**

**1. The Nature of Student Mobility in Taiwan**

International student mobility is usually connected to success, academic success first of all, professional achievement, thereafter. That is also what the students report in the interviews when evoking the motives of their decision of moving away and studying abroad. For them, international experience is seen as a meaningful asset to find a good job. However, whatever the value of these arguments, for a large part of these students in mobility, moving away, going abroad, and studying in a foreign university, is above all a ‘catching up strategy’. Catching up as a response to a personal failure in the schooling trajectory: ‘I had no choice; I had not enough good marks to enter the university’. Catching up, with regards to the family’s resources often brought about such responses: ‘I had no choice. It was impossible for me or my family to carry on with my study in my country’. Catching up in relation to the socio-political context insofar that when regulating access to the university with ethnic quotas, it limits the opportunities of pursuing one’s study in the home country. Catching up is also with regards to a system of education that is judged as being deficient and that does not meet the perceived international standards. In all of these instances push factors appeared to take precedence over the pull factors.

To some extent the regional student mobility would be a mobility of second choice, even of second rank. Taiwan in that sense would not differ from what we have observed in China. Strengthening this idea is the comparison that can be made with the Taiwanese students in France as well as other parts of Europe.

A pilot investigation has been launched between May and July 2006, in Paris focusing on the Asians studying there. 40 interviews were carried out, of which one out of four are Taiwanese and almost one out of two are Mainland Chinese. Strict comparison though is out of reach. However it is always possible to bring the trajectory profiles of these regional mobile students and the trans-continental one closer. If we had to summarize in one word the dominant profile of the students
interviewed in Paris, one would use the term: 'success trajectory', being understood, indeed that the most extreme diversity exists and that not all the trajectories are crowned with success either in terms of studying or in terms of access to employment. Nevertheless, the contrast is striking between with the regional student mobility and with mobility towards Europe.

Three factors may account for this contrast:

Firstly, there is a significant difference as far as social origin is concerned. Students studying in France are often from families that are of the 'Upper Middle Class' and who have some financial assets at their disposal. Indeed, some of the interviewed students' parents are musicians, teachers, or priests, but most of them come from families whose parents are entrepreneurs, businessmen-people who have built up their own company or yet who have high positions either in public administration, as top level civil servants or in the private sector, such as captains, liberal professionals, architects etc. Having a minimum amount of financial resources at one's disposal is a prerequisite to study in France. So, one of the students I interviewed declared: ‘To get by in Paris, 600 € per month is needed, then I need my parents’ support even if I have a few part time jobs here and there...’;

Secondly, a large majority of the students have already graduated in their country of origin. Frequently they have got a BA or a MA or even a diploma in architecture or in medical studies... And in a few cases, studies are completed by a professional experience of several years that gave them the opportunity to accumulate some small savings.

Thirdly, either personally when touring around for leisure and cultural activities, or through the experience of their family members, they have gained some kind of international experience: a father who is travelling or used to travel abroad for his business, or a sister who studied in London, among other things.

There should be a more personal factor that might be related to a sort of ‘class habitus’. That is, numerous students showed an initiative spirit that drove them to proceed to a spectacular U turn in their own trajectory in order to achieve their objectives, either professional or concerning their personal achievements (international experience, intercultural life...). One has managed a family enterprise for 5 years before giving up everything to start studying French, taking the exam of ESSEC, (Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Economiques et de Commerce) coming to France to follow Financial Studies and then becoming an expert in Financial Consultancy. Another took a diploma in French Literature and French Civilisation in Beijing, before then entering ESSEC in France. Another studied for 4 years in China, worked for three and a half years in an international company and then decided to move to France to retake her studies in the domain of international affairs, firstly, and then management studies with marketing at the HEC, (Hautes Etudes de Commerce).

Such examples may be multiplied at length. They suggest that we are here in the presence of trajectories that are quite different from the trajectories that characterize the students’ regional mobility.

2. What is The Role/Impact of the Education Offer upon This Cleavage?

First of all, in an anecdotal but nevertheless meaningful way, let’s notice the role of the various university league tables, such as the Shanghai classification or the league tables released by specialized news papers: Good Universities Guide (Australia), The MacLean’s Guide to Canadian Universities, the Times Good Universities Guide (UK), US News and World Report, American Best Colleges. Indeed they are not used as support to take a decision, while that is their first objective. (Dill, 2003). However, for these young students, they are used to comfort a pre-established opinion; that is to say, the best universities are in the USA and in Europe, without any consideration for the ongoing re-evaluation. In this respect the Paris universities will always be valued more than the universities located in the Parisian suburbs or than some provincial universities. The frame, being built by the expertise published in the specialized newspapers on one hand and by a rampant renown on the other, means that studying in France, in Europe or in the US, is considered as being ultra competitive, in such a way that the students with average marks are tempted to give up before having tried. ‘The Chinese students who come to Paris are the best’, one of the happy few who succeeded to find a place in one of the Parisian universities told us.

Considering that the university offer of tuition is a worldwide market, one should consider also that this market is segmented with on one side an expensive offer, which is renowned for being of a high quality standard, and on the other side an
offer that is affordable by the majority of the candidates to mobility. Between the two, a selection process that operates mainly on the basis of two dimensions: the available financial resources that are quite often the family resources, and an auto-limitation - a self restriction that drives the potential candidate not to consider universities located on other continents and to be content only with the regional offer.

Once more it is worth pointing out that this observation is similar to a snapshot that neglects the ongoing evolution. For instance, according to the Shangai League, 16 universities of the Asian region are ranked amongst the first 100 in the world, of which 4 from Taiwan (National Taiwan University, 17th rank, National Sun Yat-sen University 62nd, Tamkang University, 65th and National Cheng Kung University 83rd rank). Hong Kong has 5; China - 4; Japan - 2 and Singapore - 1. In contrast, the UK has 4 four universities in the top 100 and France none.

This ranking is highly disputed, especially by the French. However, it remains one indicator amongst several others, and it sheds light upon the improvement of the regional universities in Asia. From this we note the striking gap between an offer of tuition that is continuously improving, and the most better-off portion of demand that neglects it in order to take a position on the segment of the university market that is supposed to be the most enhanced and the most enhancing.

3. How Long Can Such a Gap Last?

This may be up to the very moment when, the value of the tuition that is offered by the regional universities is recognized and accepted by the potential students; that is to say the demanders of tuition, and their family. However, not later than today, four domains can be identified that reveal the dynamism of this university in the international competition:
- Chinese teaching as a foreign language
- The ‘local’ disciplines: traditional Chinese medicine, calligraphy, Chinese philosophy and traditional arts;
- The ‘indigenisation’ of the social sciences, especially psychology, anthropology, sociology, history – but regarding the latter; it is the rediscovery of a multi- secular trend; and
- The increased use of English, in teaching, doing research and in scientific publication.

In short, the paradox of the dialectic of the global and the local, at this moment, is that the assets of the Asian universities, and especially those in Taiwan, consist of enhancing the local specificities; the ‘nest of knowledge and know-how’ present in the national cultures of the Asian region. However, it is obvious that this period will be very short-lived and that the leveling-up of the Asian universities in terms of accepted international standards is already on its way.

NOTES

1. Second cut off, more subtle, the regions directly in the turmoil brought about by the development of mainland China, namely Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan. i
2. More over, just as in the case of the national Chengchi University - that was mentioned earlier – the rank and the renown of the university get better of the major.

REFERENCES

Official website of International Education Directory of colleges and universities http://www.4icu.org/top20
KEYWORDS Higher education; youth, Asian; identity; university students; socialization

ABSTRACT This paper is based upon a sample of 165 interviews of Asian university Asian students: 105 in Beijing, 20 in Taiwan and, complementarily, 40 in Paris. The method that has been used is that of in-depth semi-directive interview has been used. This article is focusing focuses on the motivations and the objectives of the Asian students who study in regional universities located in the neighbourhood of their home country. The objective is to unveil the rationale of the actors that will become international students. In the second part, it will be asked what can be the impact of such an experience of international mobility can have for the way in which the students can handle their current situation and envisage their future. This question is encapsulated under the term 'Identity Posture', that has been preferred to that of identity in order to underline the role of the actor in the regulation of one's own trajectory.

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