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HOW STUDYING ABROAD IN MALAYSIA LEADS TO TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION: INTERVIEW RESULTS FROM FORMER INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This paper aims to reveal the characteristics of those who become transnational migrants by studying abroad in Malaysia. This study focuses on Malaysia, an emerging country that accepted more than 130,000 international students in 2017. The author of this study spent three weeks in Malaysia and Australia interviewing 21 former international students and two Malaysia-based professors responsible for education and research of international student.

Interview results provide evidence of transnational relationships beyond home and host countries, including mutual benefits between developing countries including region of origin, as well as relationships with Western countries chosen as destination for remigration. The transnational activities of former international students include business matching between African countries, Malaysia, and even Japan; involvement in technological development of Malaysia; and assistance for university marketing campaigns in the countries and regions of origin.

Most of the former students plan to move again in the future owing to the difficulty in obtaining permanent residency in Malaysia. Those who will go home may bring the outcomes of studying and working in Malaysia. Although some of them expect to move to Western countries, owing to the promise of employment stability and higher salaries, many intend to remain in Malaysia provided that they can pursue a satisfying career and maintain the current favorable environment for families.

According to previous research, transnational education had the effect of transforming Malaysia into a "transit point" to Western countries. This study finds that conventional education by public research universities also plays a role in this transformation, owing to improved facilities and overall quality of education.

Also, the fact that some students intend to return home after getting a master's degree in Malaysia and PhD in Australia shows that Malaysia as a transit point may indirectly contribute to human resource development in the student's home country. The intention of a former student to engage in future research collaboration between Malaysia and Australia shows the possibility of reimporting advanced research outcomes from developed countries to Malaysia through transnational former students, showing the new perspective of the transit point.

Key words: international student; study abroad; higher education; transnational migration; Malaysia

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1. Introduction

In this age of cross-border human mobility, various actors have begun to engage in the interrelation between migration and education toward the aim of realizing the United Nations' fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) ("Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"). Migration is a theme of UNESCO's 2019 *Global Education Monitoring Report* (*GEM Report*), and discussions of the relationship between education and migration began as its publication approached in late 2018.[1)]

Despite migration's positive aspects such as repatriation and investment, a majority of discussions up until the 1980s were pessimistic about its impact on the growth of developing countries, as evidenced by the "brain drain" concept (Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013). Recently, however, positive interpretations are gaining ground, based on migrants' transnational relationships.

Migrants exert positive influences on development in many ways. The first is through their transfer of money to family in their countries of origin: it is well-documented that remittances rival official development aid in many countries (IOM, 2005). Next are the "social remittances" (Levitt, 2001)—such as new ways of ideas, norms, values, and behaviors—transferred from destination countries to countries of origin and encouraging development. In addition, the two-way flow of knowledge, skills, and ideas, circulated and connected by people, contributes to economic innovation, and knowledge circulation is becoming a focus (Hugo, 2013; Saxenian, 2005).

As well as the main framework of brain circulation centering on migrants returning to their countries of origin, it is argued that transnational migrants and diaspora networks—who may contribute economically and socially to their countries of origin without geographical propinquity to their home—concurrently exert positive influences on development (Datta, 2009; Faist, 2008; Rizvi, 2005). "Transnational migrants" describes people who migrate not in one direction but continually and bidirectionally (Kajita, 2005, p.15), forging and sustaining multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994, p.7). Although the degree to which migrants must be involved in cross-border activities to be called "transnational" has not been fully established (Castles & Miller, 2011), transnational migrants form border-crossing epistemic networks and associations which sometimes extend into the countries of origin, and they are attracting attention for their role that can be used for the economic growth and development of their countries of origin (Faist, 2008).

While international migrants have many forms, student migrants (international students) are the only migrants who cross borders with education as their primary objective. However, migrating for the purposes of education or research does not preclude other goals. In recent

years, there has been a rapid increase in the number of former international students who remain and enter employment in the country where they completed their studies, with some becoming skilled permanent residents there (Robertson, 2013). Baas described how different types of Indian students came to uniformly long for permanent residency in Australia while studying there (2006, 2007). Robertson illustrated the process how the mobility of Chinese child "made" by parents for the purpose of education leads to migration (2013). Tsuboya (2008) studied Chinese former international students who, through prioritizing their careers, became "Japanified" and did not return home, despite strong intentions to do so; she cited them as cases of transnational social integration that involves assimilation into Japanese society but with maintained ties with China.

In other words, not all routes taken after studying abroad are in keeping with students' original hopes; even those for whom migration was not a goal from the outset sometimes consider permanent residency after forming networks with various people during their studies abroad. Or they might continue their migration due to factors related to their countries of origin. It is important for research to focus not only on migration or returning home—one-time effects—but also on the processes.

Hitherto, the relationships between international students and brain circulation have been discussed in accounts of migrants who started businesses in Silicon Valley after studying at American graduate schools (Saxenian, 2005). They used professional networks in their ethnic groups, cooperated with businesses in their geographically distant homelands, and then returned home, taking their specializations and business experiences with them to encourage development in their home countries. However, it is not assumed that cases of brain circulation are necessarily related to study abroad experience. It is perhaps because while there are many studies on the motivations behind choices of international study destination, research dealing with mobility *after* studying abroad has been limited to such issues as the previously mentioned permanent-residency outcomes and processes. Tsuboya (2008) has pointed out that international student is not regarded as immigrant labor in conventional international labor migration studies. Many studies about international education focus more on entry than on the process and outcomes of mobility, a situation considered problematic by Liu-Farrer (2014).

Sugimura has claimed that in Malaysia, foreign laborers (mainly less-skilled workers) and international students, both of whom are rapidly increasing in number, are further diversifying the country's "plural society"—originally composed of those of Malay, Chinese, or Indian—to shape a double "plural society"; she has argued that international students do not necessarily seek a link with Malaysia but that Malaysia as a study abroad destination is becoming a "transit point" in international mobility (Sugimura, 2017, p.77). However, laborers and international students are treated as separate entities in the study, and the processes by which the latter become the former have not been addressed. Thus, discussions of the relationships between studying abroad and brain circulation—especially transnational migrants who contribute to

their countries of origin without returning there—have remained incomplete.

Furthermore, discussions of brain circulation and transnational migrants have been limited to the mobility of people from developing to developed countries. However, attention should be paid to the fact that larger share of international population movement is between developing countries (Tan, Santhapparaj, & Ho., 2007). Malaysia accepts large numbers of international students and has developed a variety of resources for doing so. These include strategies to capture educational market share by highlighting the country's presence as a leader in the Islamic world and its position as a provider of educational opportunities for international students from the least-developed countries, and from the Commonwealth of Nations, in addition to its own mixture of ethnicities, composed of Malay, Chinese or Indian (Kaneko, 2017a). In contrast to the situation in developed countries, in Malaysia international students seeking to continue employment and obtain permanent residency after completing their studies face difficulties, as will be discussed below. Thus, those who become transnational migrants in Malaysia may differ from those who do so in developed countries.

This study, concentrating on the emerging country of Malaysia, revealed the distinguishing characteristics of those who become transnational migrants by studying abroad in Malaysia. Migration statistics by country of origin and level of education are mostly available only in OECD countries of destination (Fargues, 2017). Although the Malaysian government publishes statistics on international student admissions, details regarding foreign laborers are not easily accessible. This study, therefore, used qualitative data to identify features of transnational migrants who were formerly international students.

2. Acceptance of Human Resources in the Emerging Country of Malaysia

2.1. International Students

The number of international students admitted to Malaysia has increased almost 40-fold in the past two decades, from 3,500 students in 1999 to 133,860 in 2017. This study focused on the proportion of international students enrolling in graduate schools. Table 1 shows the total number of students enrolled in higher education institutions (not including polytechnic and community colleges, in which international students rarely enroll), the number of international students in that total, and the percentage of students in each degree course accounted for by international students. "Other" programs included diplomas, matriculation, foundation, professionals and certificates. As a former British colony, Malaysia based its higher education system on that of Britain; students do not enter university to begin their bachelor's degrees immediately after secondary education but take courses such as matriculation, foundation and diplomas to prepare for university entrance, so there were many students enrolling in "other" programs.

A comparison of public and private universities showed the proportion of international

students at private universities to be growing. The low proportion of international students studying for bachelor's degrees at public universities might have been due to the general rule that lectures must be conducted in Malay.

The proportion of international students in graduate schools was high even at public universities, particularly at the doctoral level, where it exceeded 40%. When all higher education institutions were taken together, international students accounted for 8.7% of the whole student body, a figure above the OECD average of 6.2% and well ahead of Japan's average of 2.5% (OECD, 2016).

Table 1.
Enrollment and International Student Numbers
in Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia (2013)

University Classification	Course	Total Number of Students	International Students	International Student Percentage
Public 20 Universities	bachelor's degree	274,690	7,170	2.6%
	master's degree	49,676	8,138	16.4%
	doctorate	17,718	7,548	42.6%
	other	120,696	1,358	1.1%
	public total	462,780	24,214	5.2%
Private 468 Institutions	bachelor's degree	220,299	28,350	12.9%
	master's degree	14,038	3,813	27.2%
	doctorate	3,804	677	17.8%
	other	303,488	29,865	9.8%
	private total	541,629	62,705	11.6%
Combined Total of Public and Private		1,004,409	86,919	8.7%

Notes: Data taken from Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education (2013)

Within this context, previous research has indicated the need for further study of the educational impacts of international graduate students and the transition of international doctoral recipients to the labor market (Akiba, 2015, p.6). The author therefore chose to focus this study primarily on former international students who obtained master's degrees and/or doctorates at Malaysian institutions of higher education.[2)]

2.2. Highly Skilled[3)] Foreign Talents

Malaysia actively recruits international students, but how are highly skilled foreign workers received? Malaysia has an extremely high number of foreign workers, accounting for a full 20% of the labor market in 2009 (Overseas Vocational Training Association, 2009). However, many were less-skilled workers; foreign workers in specialist and managerial positions accounted for no more than 2% of all foreign laborers (Regional Economic and Social Analysis Unit, 2008, p.68). This may be because strict criteria, such as a monthly salary of over RM5,000,[4)] must be met to obtain permission to work as a highly skilled foreign worker (called an "expatriate" in the Malaysian immigration system). Although there has been a

resultant bias toward observation of less-skilled and illegal workers in studies of foreign workers in Malaysia (Tan, 2010), various issues faced by highly skilled workers are also reported, such as the conditions of instability faced by this group (Kaur, 2008), unemployment problems among new graduates, and no preference given to international students in applications for permission to work (Ziguras & Law, 2006).

However, in light of the difficulties faced by international students in finding employment as highly skilled workers, the Ministry of Higher Education included support for talented international students' entry to the labor market in its Internationalisation Policy for Higher Education (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2011). The "Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education)" detailed reforms to immigration law that would allow international students and their dependents to receive work permits after completing their studies (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2015). In fact, a Residence Pass (hereafter, RP) system was adopted in 2011; this system gives precedence to highly skilled workers in the economic areas[5)] prioritized by the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP)—a program designed to make Malaysia a developed country by 2020—and grants ten years' pass to remain in the country.[6)] This was accompanied by various benefits, including the right to work granted to passholders' spouses and continued residency after any change of employer.

The emerging country of Malaysia clearly differs from the developed countries that are the traditional destinations for studying abroad in that it was originally not active in making international students remain in the country after study as highly skilled foreign workers. The government's policy on the admission of highly skilled workers has been gradually changing as the country sees a rapid increase in international students, but its strategies remain in their infancy.

In developed countries that work to attract international students with the admission of highly skilled workers in mind, international students are clearly studying with an eye to future employment and permanent residence. In contrast, in the emerging countries where it is hard to find employment after completing studies abroad, what are international students' reasons for continuing their residency? In addition to exploring this question, this study applied the concept of transnational migration as observed in those migrating to developed countries and shed light on its distinguishing characteristics in this scenario.

3. Summary of Field Surveys

Field surveys were conducted for a total of two weeks from late August to mid-September 2017 in Kuala Lumpur and the surrounding area, Malaysia, as well as in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia. Additional surveys were conducted in Malaysia for one week in March 2018. In Malaysia, semi-structured interviews were held with 16 former international students who had remained in the country and found employment after completing their studies and

with two supervisors of international students. In Australia, interviews were held with five individuals who earned master's degrees at Malaysian universities before entering Australian graduate schools to pursue doctorates.

Malaysia offers transnational education that allows students to obtain degrees from Western countries through programs such as twinning and branch campuses. The country has therefore been a research focus for its resultant role as a transit point on the way to other countries conferring these degrees (Robertson, 2013; Sugimura, 2010; Yoshino, 2014; and others). Links through transnational education are most frequently formed with Britain and Australia, with the latter such a highly likely destination after acquisition of a degree in Malaysia that it was selected as a survey site.

While surveys of current international students can easily gather participants through higher education institutions, former international students in both Malaysia and Australia were scattered and difficult to be reached in one location. Before this study, the author conducted surveys in 2015–2016 that asked a total of 60 international students then studying at four universities in Malaysia about their motivations to study abroad and the transition to employment. For this time, a follow-up study was conducted with participants in this first study who had since graduated, some entering employment or moving to Australia (A, D, G, I, N, and Q in Table 2). In addition, further participants were recruited through the snowball sampling method, using networks formed through the 2015–2016 survey.

Table 2 shows the details of survey participants of former international students in Malaysia. Participants were divided according to survey site and ordered by the length of their residency in Malaysia. International student supervisors are stated in Table 3. Interviews were conducted after former international students had finished work or during intervals. Interviews focused on such questions as students' status before their studies abroad, how and why they had chosen Malaysia and their universities, their experiences during their studies abroad, details of current employment and its relevancy to their studies, and how they had found employment. While the average interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, some participants were interviewed for almost two and a half hours.

The following summary outlines the principal universities from which the former international students surveyed graduated or by whom they were employed. Five Malaysian universities have been designated as public research universities and receive the bulk of funding, with the aim of increasing the international ranking. The University of Malaya (Universiti Malaya; hereafter, UM) is Malaysia's foremost university, established in 1949, its precursor having been founded in Singapore in 1905. The National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia; hereafter, UKM) was founded in 1970 and is known for being the first Malaysian university to adopt Malay language rather than English as its teaching language (Sōda, 2005); styled as the "Guardian of the Nation," it delivers education in Malay at the bachelor's level. University Putra Malaysia (Universiti Putra Malaysia;

hereafter, UPM) focuses on agricultural subjects, as suggested by its former name, University of Agriculture Malaysia (Universiti Pertanian Malaysia). The remaining two research universities are the University of Science, Malaysia (Universiti Sains Malaysia) and the University of Technology, Malaysia (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia).

Table 2.
Details of Former International Student Participants (at Time of Survey)

ID	Country of Origin	Age	Status Before Studying Abroad	Malaysia University Attended (Degree Conferred)	Sciences/ Humanities	Years Resident in Malaysia	Career/Current Position After Completing Studies Abroad in Malaysia
Resident in Malaysia							
A	Indonesia	20s	private enterprise employee	UNIM (master's)	humanities	2	self-employment, currently seeking employment (plans to return home)
B	Bangladesh	30s	lawyer	UM (doctorate)	humanities	6	UM Lecturer
C	Iran	30s	R&D enterprise employee	UKM (master's, doctorate)	sciences	8	UKM postdoctoral researcher
D	Pakistan	30s	lecturer at a Malaysian university	UKM (master's, doctorate)	sciences	8	self-employment (educational agent), currently seeking employment
E	India	20s	high school student	IIUM (bachelor's, doctorate)	sciences	9	R&D enterprise in Malaysia
F	Bangladesh	30s	private enterprise employee	MMU (master's), UKM (doctorate)	sciences	11	R&D enterprise in Malaysia, then MMU Lecturer
G	Bangladesh	30s	private enterprise employee	UKM (master's, doctorate)	sciences	11	currently seeking employment
H	Bangladesh	40s	community development worker	UPM (master's)	sciences	13	lecturer at the INTI International University (while enrolled in doctoral program at UKM)
I	Sudan	30s	university student	UKM (master's, doctorate)	sciences	13	currently seeking employment (plans to return home)
J	Guinea	30s	high school student	IIUM (bachelor's), UM (master's)	sciences	15	foreign-affiliated enterprise in Malaysia
K	Ghana	30s	university student	MMU (master's)	humanities	15	foreign-affiliated enterprise in Malaysia
L	Bangladesh	40s	high school student	IIUM (bachelor's)	humanities	16	master's and doctorate in Japan, then associate professor at IIUM
M	Bangladesh	40s	university student	UPM (master's, doctorate)	sciences	16	UPM lecturer
N	Pakistan	20s	high school student	UNIM (bachelor's)	humanities	20	education counselor at the INTI international university
O	Bangladesh	50s	university student	IIUM (master's, doctorate)	humanities	25	associate professor at IIUM
P	Bangladesh	40s	high school student	IIUM (bachelor's, master's)	humanities	26	public speaking instructor in Malaysia

Resident in Australia							
Q	Bangladesh	20s	university student	UKM (master's)	sciences	2	doctoral candidate at the University of Sydney
R	Bangladesh	30s	private enterprise employee	UM (master's)	sciences	2	doctoral candidate at the University of Monash
S	Zambia	30s	private enterprise employee, then university teaching staff	Binary University [private] (master's)	sciences	2	doctoral candidate at La Trobe University (while employed by home country university)
T	Bangladesh	30s	private enterprise employee, then university teaching staff	UM (master's)	humanities	2	doctoral candidate at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (while employed by home country university)
U	Bangladesh	20s	part-time lecturer	UKM (master's)	sciences	3	doctoral candidate at the University of New South Wales

Note: E does not have a master's degree.

Table 3.
Participating International Student Supervisors

ID	Affiliate University	Position	Field of Expertise	Background	Remarks
V	UM	professor	mechanical engineering	Malaysian. Took post at UM after completing a doctorate in Britain. Actively recruited international students in Indonesia and Bangladesh.	R's former supervisor
W	UKM	professor	electrical and electronic engineering	Bangladeshi. Completed a doctorate in Japan and took post at UKM following experience at private Malaysian university. Permanent resident of Malaysia.	Former supervisor of C, D, G, Q, U

The International Islamic University Malaysia (hereafter, IIUM) was founded in 1983 through the joint investments of the Malaysian government, Islamic governments, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The international university offers bachelor's degrees taught in English and Arabic, in contrast to the other public universities, which teach bachelor's courses in Malay; IIUM is further set apart by its high number of international students, even at the bachelor's level.

Private universities were not originally approved in Malaysia, but the passage of the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 recognized private universities chiefly teaching in English. While there are currently nearly 500 private higher education institutions, many large-scale, historic, private universities are subsidiaries of state-owned enterprises: for example, Multimedia University (hereafter, MMU), established by telecommunications company Telekom Malaysia Berhad; University Technology PETRONAS (Universiti

Teknologi PETRONAS), founded by petroleum giant PETRONAS; and Universiti Tenaga Nasional, founded by electricity company Tenaga Nasional.

In addition to these company-affiliated private universities, there are former colleges now granted the status of universities and university colleges. There are also branch campuses where students can study in Malaysia and obtain degrees from foreign universities. Twelve universities[7)] operate Malaysian branch campuses, including Australia's Monash University and Britain's University of Nottingham (University of Nottingham Malaysia; hereafter, UNIM).

4. Survey Results

4.1. Work Experience and Career Development in Malaysia

No former student had permanent residency, despite one having lived in Malaysia for 26 years (this being the longest stay). One participant (F) held an RP (allowing ten years' residency), while another (M) was undergoing the RP application process. Even N, whose parents had originally migrated from Pakistan and whose father had Malaysian citizenship, reported having so far made two applications for permanent residency without success—evidence of the difficulty of obtaining permanent residency for foreign citizens in Malaysia. Many former international students are likely considering returning to their country of origin or migrating to another country at some point in the future.

After obtaining a master's in international marketing at MMU, K worked at a foreign-affiliated enterprise in Kuala Lumpur for 12 years. Satisfied with her studies at MMU, K stated that the study program resulted in personal growth both intellectually and mentally. This 12-year residence in Malaysia appeared to have been a positive experience overall, with K's job also facilitating enhancement of skills, expansion of horizons, and career advances. This was supported by K's statement: "If my friends or relatives asked me about universities in Malaysia, I will recommend them." However, as K's stay in Malaysia lengthened and prospects for growth seemed limited, she described plans to leave the current job, return home to Ghana, and establish a small-scale training and consulting firm within the year (2017).

Having won several speech contests, P made full use of those talents to take a position as an instructor at the IIUM's debate center (unrelated to his law background) and had been working there for over 20 years. IIUM is a leading school that wins top prizes in various international debate tournaments. However, with hopes of securing an academic research position and making the job as debate instructor a side business in the long-term, P planned to progress to a doctoral program and reads research papers constantly. P hoped to return to Bangladesh after obtaining a doctorate and join the faculty at a university there. P felt close to the Bangladesh homeland, likely because of having many relatives still there. While it appeared unlikely that any plans to return would be realized quickly, P was an example of an expected return home

long after the completion of studies abroad.

F received a master's degree in electrical and electronic engineering at MMU, then obtained a doctorate at UKM while working at a research and development institute partially managed by Malaysia's Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. After working at the company for five years, F took a position as a lecturer at MMU. F seemed to play an important role in Malaysia's scientific and technological development—being involved, for example, in national policy planning related to his area of specialization, nanotechnology. F had developed valuable skills in funding applications through the involvement in government-related work, and reported being headhunted by MMU. All seemed to progress smoothly, from finding work with a Malaysian enterprise, obtaining a doctorate while working there, and to later being employed by the university from which he graduated.

Meanwhile, E had been a researcher at an R&D enterprise that was a subsidiary of a government-run telecommunications firm for two years, after obtaining a doctorate at IIUM in the Internet of Things (hereafter, IoT), which explores the fundamental changes to lifestyle and business enabled by the connection of everyday objects to the Internet. E reported being able to advance to the doctoral course after completing a master's degree in one year due to the timeliness of the IoT as a research theme. Other researchers at the company specialized in such areas as electrical engineering and were not as well-versed in the IoT, so E transferred knowledge and skills relating to the IoT to the workplace.

Although few of the participants were in stable situations, those who were able to stay on after finishing their studies could advance their careers by using their specializations and coming to be appreciated in their workplaces in Malaysia.

4.2. Ties with Countries and Regions of Origin

Among those who had begun work and remained in Malaysia after their studies, several were developing transnational activities in conjunction with various countries. J, originally from Guinea, had been working in a foreign-affiliated company in Kuala Lumpur for 11 years since graduating from IIUM's engineering department. Separately from that work, J was an important member in an organization that sought to promote business exchange between Malaysia and African countries. The organization collaborated with the Africa Section of the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE), which governs trade and foreign direct investment, to conduct business-matching between Malaysian and African businesses; graduates who had once studied in Malaysia and later returned to their African home countries partnered with the organization. The organization was also introducing African partners to Japanese companies which were gaining ground in Malaysia and also looking for inroads into Africa; reportedly, Japanese companies making advances in Malaysia could take advantage of the positive ties between Malaysia and Africa to enter more easily into African markets. J, who maintained ties with Guinea and the region, said emphatically, "Later on,

obviously I want to go back home to help my country. They really need help. Diaspora… you know."

It is widely documented that word of mouth is the most effective means of recruiting international students (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Cheng, Mahmood, & Yeap, 2013; and others). As a result, Malaysian universities use currently enrolled international students and graduates to conduct energetic advertising campaigns in their countries of origin. Private universities recruit international students more passionately than public universities, actively carrying out marketing and branding (Tham, 2013). While studying at IIUM, J provided backup support at international education fairs held by several universities (excepting IIUM, all the others were private universities), not only in his home country (Guinea) but also in Mali, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire. This supporting activity was carried out under individual contract with the universities, in the footsteps of the international students who had been engaged in the work before.

After obtaining a British bachelor's degree through transnational education in Malaysia, D had received frequent inquiries from students and their families from back home in Pakistan, so he set up an independent educational agent about ten years ago. D also had partners in the rest of South Asia, the Middle East, and Western countries, and managed the sending of international students to and from Malaysia. D stated that his agent had dealings with approximately 80% of Malaysia's private universities, and that one private university's Pakistani international students had actually increased in number from zero to several hundred, owing to his promotion.

N, also originally from Pakistan, specialized in business administration at UNIM before taking a position as an education counselor at the private INTI International University. N reported that the university, which was making serious efforts to attract international students from Pakistan, advertised for talented personnel who could communicate in Urdu. While it can be difficult to find work in Malaysia as an international student newly graduated from a bachelor's course, this was one example of a student finding employment by making use of specific linguistic abilities.[8)]

Whether in their principal occupations or otherwise, it was clear that former international students maintained ties with their countries and regions of origin in a variety of ways.

4.3. Newly Mapped Position as Transit Point

As discussed above, transnational education positions Malaysia as a transit point on the way to Western countries. However, as four of the five survey participants who moved to Australia studied at research universities, this study revealed that these public research universities which did not offer transnational education also functioned as transit points. Q, aiming to become a researcher, had received a Research Training Program Scholarship from the Australian Department of Education and Training, and was a doctoral candidate in materials

science at the University of Sydney. According to Q, tuition fees for international students in doctoral programs were extremely high,[9] so few international students studied at their own expense. Q said, "Malaysia gave me a fundamental experience of how to do research…. [Malaysia] played an important role for why I am in Australia." He reported being able to win the highly competitive scholarship, thanks to having accumulated experience in conducting experiments and writing papers in Malaysia. Q was still in contact with his previous supervisor in Malaysia (survey participant Professor W, also originally from Bangladesh) and hoped to conduct collaborative research with UKM, the Malaysian university from which he had graduated. Q emphasized that collaboration, such as complementing research facilities, was vital for the promotion of research in the engineering field.

Professor V of UM, who actively recruited international students from Bangladesh and Indonesia, among other countries, spoke frankly of Malaysia's role as a transit point while revealing frustration with Malaysian students:

> Because their [international students'] mission is clear, [they publish] average 7–8 papers during master's course….They come here for transit, you know….So students coming here to study, from Bangladesh, have a clear goal. They come here, quickly study, graduate and go there. I always compare with Malaysian students. At that time, here was full with Bangladesh students. I told Malaysian students, "You learn from them: how they work, how committed they are, how they enrich themselves." —V, professor at UM

Professor W, originally from Bangladesh and teaching at UKM after having obtained a doctorate in Japan, proudly recounted this:

> I understand that, in comparison with Japanese laboratories, the facilities [in Malaysia] are inferior. However, even in this environment, we are publishing in high-quality journals.… [So far] we have had five students who received scholarships and went on to Australian universities.—W, professor at UKM

Universities like UM and UKM, under pressure from the Ministry of Higher Education to improve their international rankings, received large-scale research funding and scholarships; they endeavored to increase the percentage of teaching staff with doctorates and the rate of international student enrollment. Teaching staff frequently recruited master's and doctoral students from overseas using scholarships. While these measures attracted people from overseas, the universities were also becoming transit points where students could have research experiences on the way to Western countries, precisely because the universities' research capacities had been upgraded. In response to international students passing through Malaysia's master's programs on the way to such destinations as Australia, Professor V lamented, "We are losing PhD candidates." At the same time, Professor V also described a win–win relationship regarding the strict minimum publication requirements linked to the certain amount of grants; results generated by international students benefitted not only students themselves but also their laboratories and universities.

Meanwhile, those with guaranteed positions in their home countries were highly likely to return there, even if they were temporarily resident in a third country. S and T obtained master's degrees in Malaysia before enrolling in doctoral programs in Australian graduate schools, but both retained positions at universities in their home countries. As the Zambian university where S held a position did not have a field of study perfectly corresponding to his specialty in bioinformatics, S planned to establish a new department there with a colleague who would return from studying abroad in Japan. Although it was assumed that T would return to Bangladesh, that was not a certainty:

> It's not easy, but it's not impossible. Many of my friends already got residency here [in Australia]. So I will try, but residency is not an issue. Issue is to get a job. Even if you get a residency, residency will not help you to live that much. —T, doctoral candidate at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

If able to find employment in Australia, T considered extending his leave of absence from a university post back home in Bangladesh.

4.4. Dissatisfaction in Malaysia

This study also identified former international students who had remained in Malaysia despite various complaints. M had postdoctoral and teaching experience, the latter at a private university, and had spent six years as a lecturer at UPM, of which he was an alumnus. M's two daughters attended a British international school in Kuala Lumpur, and M stated that "the international standard is for universities to pay the school fees of the children of their foreign teaching staff." As UPM did not provide such support, M lamented his complete lack of savings despite having worked for six years. His children's education were a top priority, so M applied for an RP, which would grant ten years' permit to remain and allow his family to stay in Malaysia until the children had completed their A Levels (the qualifications necessary for university entry in Britain). With an RP, M could remain in Malaysia for ten years if his current employment contract was not renewed; M spoke of the advantage of being able to transfer to a private university or enterprise without visa concerns.

Despite being the youngest person (late 20s) working at a particular R&D enterprise, E, originally from India, had been selected to lead a large-scale research project and head a team of 20. E expressed dissatisfaction with his salary which was not commensurate with the heavy responsibility and his doctoral degree, and professed a desire to move to a developed country in the future. E originally chose Malaysia in the belief that various aspects of daily life, such as meals, would be easier there for a Muslim than in a Western country. However, now older and with more experience, E believed that living in another culture would not be a problem.

C, originally from Iran, said that life in Malaysia became difficult during the transition from a master's to a doctoral program at UKM, when Iran came under economic sanctions and its national currency crashed against the US dollar. C reported being unable to obtain a

scholarship for a research project for one year, after university regulations changed suddenly to allow only Malaysian students to receive scholarships. Although international students were not allowed to take on part-time work, C reported taking a company job related to R&D to make ends meet. In addition, unable to find employment after obtaining a doctorate, C continued to conduct research in a "hidden postdoc," thanks to the unofficial aid of his supervisor. At the time of the survey, working in official postdoctoral research, C openly showed anger with Malaysia:

> There is up and down in my CV. That's a challenge in Malaysia. Their strategy is that they just want to push all of the foreigners out of the country. They want to absorb rich foreigners. Rich foreigners who are spending money for this country, not those foreigners who want to gain money from this country. They don't look at caring people, frankly speaking. Everywhere we can find some caring people. Care about the job. Help your community, help your university to increase the prospect. But they don't look at caring people. They are just looking for rich people to absorb. That's my belief. They don't encourage any foreigners who work here in Malaysia. They encourage those foreigners who can create jobs here. Creating job means that they need to have high level of capital. For me, it's not possible…. Your future is not clear. I've been here for around eight years. I haven't got anything. Still I'm struggling for my visa. Let me concentrate on my work, my research, instead of thinking about visa. So that's the thing I don't like about Malaysia…. My next step is a developed country. If I leave here, I will leave forever. —C, postdoctoral researcher at UKM

However, there was talk of C being given a position on a project at another university after completion of his current postdoctoral research. Nevertheless, as there were restrictions on foreign citizens, this possibility would only be officially opened to C if there were no Malaysians eligible for the post. If the position were offered, C admittedly would be "still patient enough to stay" in Malaysia only for the duration of the project.

5. Discussion

5.1. Transnational Relationships beyond Two Countries

A demonstration of the solidarity among developing countries was provided by the former international student who was originally from Africa. Even while working in a foreign firm, he supported business-matching between Malaysian and African companies and collaborated with others who had studied abroad in Malaysia and had since returned to their African home countries. These activities showed a broadening in scope, including introductions between partner companies and Japanese-affiliated businesses, which found it particularly hard to establish footholds in Africa. The range of these activities, encompassing African countries other than those native to the participants as well as other third countries, went beyond the

scope of conventional discussions of transnationalism that assume "multi-stranded social relations that link together [migrants'] societies of origin and settlement" (Basch et al., 1994, p.7). Led by Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad (in office 1981-2003, 2018-present), Malaysia strengthened South–South cooperation (Hamid, 2003), prioritizing dialogue approaches to surmount, as a group, the issues faced by developing countries. The activities of former international students, meanwhile, promoted solidarity among developing countries at an individual level.

This could also be seen among the former international students originally from South Asian countries who were involved in Malaysia's technological development. While Malaysia's acquisition of highly skilled foreign talents had been considered to be passive, former international students were hired in fields in which local talent did not meet demand.

Various efforts to motivate such highly skilled migrants to return home were under way in the world in response to concerns about brain drain (Faist et al., 2013), but when host countries were also in the stage of developing, the remaining talented international students rather promoted development in the destination countries. While this might have been seen as brain drain by the countries of origin, many of the former international students who were currently remaining in Malaysia were considering eventual returns to their home countries, so their work experiences would be transferred back to their homelands along with their study-abroad experiences. This applied equally to those who had found other types of employment and planned to use their experiences to someday start businesses or work at universities in their home countries.

In addition, a trend of international student involvement in the promotion of Malaysian education, whether as a side or a main job, was identified. Malaysian universities—particularly the private universities that funded their teaching purely through tuition fees, without government funding—relied on international students who had already studied in Malaysia to help them market their educational programs in faraway countries. On the student side, benefitted from those activities in the form of both main and side jobs, former international students contributed to the provision of valuable educational access not only at home but also in wider region of origin. J mentioned that "in Africa, people want to study and they have money, but going to Europe is very expensive. Also to get visa is very difficult. Malaysia made it easy."

5.2. New Perspectives: Further Migration to a Third Country

This study also identified participants who were dissatisfied with factors such as pay level and insecurity of employment and residency and were searching for a way to move to a third country. Their remaining in Malaysia, despite hopes of moving to a developed country, cast Malaysia as a place where they could currently find fulfilling employment, consideration of their families, or recognition that Malaysia's environment and lifestyle were generally better

than those in their home countries. Faist et al. argued that expansion of dual citizenship for the highly skilled, will facilitate the temporary return of settled migrants, rather than permitting migrants to stay only on a temporary basis and then return permanently; this would support migrants to engage in the development of their country of origin (2013, p.84). Faist et al. also posited that dual citizenship could also be a means to foster South-South cooperation through collaboration between migrants from various South countries residing in developed countries of the North. (Faist et al., 2013).

Even though Malaysia appeared to be far from granting citizenship to highly skilled migrants, if former international students could have long-term prospects in their work or research, it seemed likely that both Malaysia and their countries of origin would see significant benefits. In this respect, the introduction of the RP system, which confers ten years' pass to remain, can be considered significant progress.

It was observed that previous studies positioning Malaysia as a transit point on the way to developed countries did not fully discuss what follows that transit. No matter the country, there are few scholarships for international master's students, so international students paying their own expenses tend to choose master's programs in countries like Malaysia, where fees and living expenses are comparatively low and research facilities are more fully equipped than in their home countries. There they build up research expertise and experience, after which they join the mobility of students toward more fully equipped research environments (primarily in developed countries) at the doctoral level; they receive scholarships from governments and universities in these destination countries. In this study, however, participants did not merely migrate to Western countries via Malaysia. Some participants intended to return, after obtaining their doctorates, to positions kept open for them in their home countries, meaning that their studies abroad in Malaysia contributed significantly to human resource development in the students' countries of origin.

In addition, this study found an example of an international student who had progressed to a doctoral program in Australia maintained contact with a previous Malaysian university supervisor in the hopes of future research collaboration. Malaysian laboratories may receive advanced research outcomes through transnational former students. This suggests that Malaysia is not simply a transit point or stepping-stone; international students' mobility to third countries bring new developments to both their countries of origin and their study abroad destination.

Malaysia's role as a transit point on the way to Western countries has been discussed since the popularization of such transnational education initiatives as twinning programs or branch campuses (such options are all provided by private universities). However, this study showed that this role is not a result of the transnational education alone. Also contributing are the ample resources and qualifications now available to graduates of Malaysian universities due to a policy shift toward research enhancement having prompted Malaysia's universities—

including public research universities—to enrich their facilities and improve the quality of education on offer. A probable further contributing factor is that Malaysian degrees are readily recognized in Britain and Australia as they are based on the British system.

6. Conclusion

By observing the processes of international students' extended residences and their moves to third countries, this study identified the transnational activities of former international students carried out between more than two countries and the new possibilities faced by Malaysia as a transit point. The relationships observed were not limited to those between a country of origin and a study destination, such as solidarity between developing countries and relationships with the regions surrounding students' home countries; there were also connections with Japan, which has long held economic relations with Malaysia, and with third destinations like Western countries. Indirect contributions to human resource development in international students' countries of origin through Malaysia's low-cost, high-quality education and research environment, and the "reimport" of findings from transit destinations via transnational former students, exist as new prospects in the role of transit point.

The features of transnational migration provided specifically through the act of studying abroad were significant. These included supports for educational promotion by former international students, the business-matching activities of the network of former international students originally from Africa, and research findings furnished by international students who moved on to developed countries via Malaysia. These contributions, differing from those arising from company transfers, family migrations, and other mobility patterns, characterized the migratory behavior of former international students. Former international students who continued to work in Malaysia despite their complaints may have been prolonging their stays precisely because they had obtained their degrees there and were accustomed to the country after their comparatively long residences.

Most of the international students who participated in this study were graduates of public research universities, other public universities, or the branch campuses of Western universities—which enjoy the status equivalent to the research universities—and this may have biased the study's findings. Considering that, as shown in Table 1, many international students studied at private universities (72% of all international students) and most private universities were originally colleges that did not have the right to confer degrees, there is a need for further study of graduates of this kind of private university promoted from college status. However, as most international students at these universities are studying at the bachelor's level or below (such as diplomas, matriculation or foundation), they are young when they graduate and are considered to have a low degree of specialization, and most are thus unlikely to secure employment in Malaysia as new graduates. For this reason, although

this study sought participants at such private universities, no former international students meeting the criteria were found.[10)]

Nonetheless, a full picture of the transnational-migratory behavior of those who completed studies abroad in Malaysia cannot be understood without exploring such questions as what kinds of careers graduates of private universities enter and whether they demonstrate characteristics derived specifically from studies abroad in Malaysia, assuming that most return to their countries of origin.

This study, reliant on the snowball sampling method, was also limited by an imbalance in participant nationality.[11)] Separating international students studying in Malaysia by nationality reveals that individuals originally from South Asia, the Middle East, and African countries form the majority, as they did in this survey. Nevertheless, the author hopes in future studies to more scrupulously track trends in each country and the situation of individuals originally from Southeast Asia and East Asia (areas not well-represented by this study), together with the attributes of the universities from which they graduate.

Notes

1) Overviews on the theme of migration and discussions by Fargues (2017) and others can be found on the UNESCO website at https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2019 /migration (accessed January 31, 2018).
2) Survey participants included those who completed only a bachelor's degree in Malaysia (L and N; L later obtained a doctorate in Japan). As holding a bachelor's degree fulfils the OECD definition of "highly skilled worker," they were included in this study.
3) This study refers to those who have completed university education as "highly skilled (foreign) talents/workers," following the OECD (2005) definition.
4) Approximately 140,000yen. RM1=¥27.89, as of January 31, 2018, according to the OANDA currency converter, available online at https://www1.oanda.com/currency/converter/. At the time of this study, starting salaries for university graduates in Malaysia were around RM2,000–3,000, meaning that the types of jobs and positions that could fulfil this visa requirement were limited.
5) As stated in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011–2015), the following 12 economic areas were prioritized in the ETP: a greater Kuala Lumpur/Klang Valley; oil, gas and energy; palm oil and rubber; wholesale and retail; financial services; tourism; electronics and electrical; business services; communications content and infrastructure; education; agriculture; and healthcare (PEMANDU, 2014).
6) Details of Malaysia's RP system can be found on the TalentCorp website at https://www.talentcorp.com.my/initiatives/residence-pass-talent (accessed January 31, 2018). TalentCorp was established in 2011 within the Prime Minister's Department to attract, nurture, and retain highly skilled foreign talent.

7) This is according to the Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT) website, http://cbert.org/?page_id=34 (accessed January 31, 2018).
8) International students who find it difficult to secure employment in Malaysia may increase their chances of success by aiming at job types that use linguistic capabilities gained in their countries of origin, regardless of their specializations (Kaneko, 2017b). N's case, however, is an example of finding employment by using both language abilities and specialization.
9) For example, annual international student tuition fees for the doctoral program in engineering and information technology at the University of Sydney, where Q was enrolled, cost up to 44,500 AUD (approximately 4 million yen) in 2018.
10) HELP University is a former college granted university status and was one of the universities in the 2015–2016 study of then- current international students.
11) There is a marked imbalance in 12 of the 21 former international students surveyed being originally from Bangladesh. Likely contributing factors include the snowball sampling method (the only feasible selection method to choose participants); very strong cohesion and firm community among individual from Bangladesh; and their shared national characteristics that allowed them to readily respond to such a survey (e.g., participants telephoning friends on the spot without hesitation and explaining the details and making appointments on behalf of the author). In addition, international students originally from Bangladesh were by far the largest group in 2017 (30,525), accounting for 23% of the total (133,860), with Chinese students in second place (14,854), and Nigerian students in third (13,529), according to the Ministry of Higher Education; see http://mohe.gov.my/en/download/awam/statistik/2017-3/469-statistik-pendidikan-tinggi-2017-bab-1-makro-institusi-pendidikan-tinggi/file (accessed April 30, 2018). Also, while the Malaysian government does not release the countries of origin of highly skilled foreign workers, a newspaper article claimed that Bangladeshis formed the majority: see Chin, C. (2016, January 31). Malaysia's workplace is still hiring. The Star Online, retrieved from https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/01/31/malaysias-workplace-is-still-hiring/. In an effort to partially redress this nationality imbalance, the author conducted Skype interviews between December 19 and 25, 2017, after sending questionnaires in advance, with five individuals who studied abroad in Malaysia. They were originally from Southeast Asia, and were resident in their countries of origin or a third country at the time of interview. However, with only the Skype surveys—conducted with whom the author never met in person—these participants' limited contributions could not be used in this paper.

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