

University-To-Work Transitions: Experiences of Chinese and South Asian International Students

**BMRC Webinar: Mapping the Journeys of International Students’
Resilience**

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Social Sciences and
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Overview

- Setting the Context
- Research Objectives
- Theoretical Framework: 3 Stage
University to Work Transition Model
- Methods
- Major Findings
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

Setting the Context

- ❑ Enrolment of IS **tripled** over the decade (2008 to 2018) (Statistics Canada, 2021)
- ❑ Top Source Countries include: Mainland China, India, Hong Kong, Pakistan
- ❑ International students from 225 countries now represent **17.1% of all enrollment in post-secondary institutions** (Statistics Canada, 2021)
- ❑ IS are **temporary migrants**: a path to permanent residency (PR)
- ❑ **72.5%** of IS plan to apply for a post-graduate work permit; **60%** of IS plan to apply for permanent residency (CBIE, 2021).
- ❑ **8 in 10** IS remain in their province of study one year after graduation (Statistics Canada, 2021)
- ❑ **7 in 10** IS remain in their province of study five years after graduation (Statistics Canada, 2021)
- ❑ **What factors shape their decision to “study and stay”?**

Research Objectives

- To examine the process international students undergo as they transition from university into employment
- To document the coping strategies used by international students during the transition

3 Stage Transition Model

Ng, W. H., Menzies, J., & Zutshi, A. (2019). Facilitators and inhibitors of international postgraduate students' university-to-work transition. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 28(3), 186-196.

Stage One: Prior to Finishing the Degree

- captures the decisions and actions taken by international students as they begin to contemplate remaining in Canada to work and obtain permanent residency following graduation

Stage Two: Looking for a Job

- includes all the steps taken by students as they search to secure employment

Stage Three: Finding and Working in a Job

- refers to students' successful transition out of university into employment

The Transition Process

- Transitions begin when students are still in university through to when they secure their first employment post-graduation
- **Successful transition** from school to work is defined as “a state in which individuals are employed after leaving university, perform at levels satisfactory to their employers, and have positive attitudes towards their work and job requirements” (Ng and Feldman, 2007, 116).
- In each stage, IS encounter challenges and deploy specific strategies to overcome challenges they face
- Different supports are deemed significant for movement from one stage to the next

Data and Methods



- ❑ 73 in-depth interviews with South Asians and Chinese newcomers from May 2019 to May 2020
 - ❑ 19 seniors (65+)
 - ❑ 18 adult (25 to 64)
 - ❑ 36 Youth (18 to 24)

- **23** were selected and interviewed based on their reported immigrant status as student visa holders on arrival in Canada



- Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA
- Transcripts were coded using grounded theory

Stage One: Prior to Finishing the Degree

Overcoming academic challenges

- ❑ *“The system was different. I come from a British education system and then coming to the more Canadian or the American system... For the good first two, three years I didn't know there were academic counselors who could actually help me. If I had known that before, maybe some things would have been different in terms of me not losing out money, picking the wrong courses (Alina, Pakistani, age 29, arrived in 2010).”*

Building social networks

- ❑ *“...Once you get over this little cultural shock and you learn how the society works and you know their system and what the norms are and things like that and the weather too. Even though you know, the families, they want you to come back...But you know, I absolutely love this country. I love the people here. I love society in general (Saima, Pakistani, age 35, arrived in 2006).”*

Friendships as sources of information and support

- ❑ *Peik Lin's (Chinese, 20, arrived 2015) language insufficiency led her to be “more inclined to communicate with Asian people”, due to a greater “sense of familiarity towards them”.*

Stage One: Prior to Finishing the Degree

Managing financial and employment challenges

- ❑ *“My parents were paying for my tuition. But I still needed money to pay for my daily expenses. So, I even worked jobs that were in Chinatown. But I think at the time I was just too young...people just thought I’m very useless...I was only able to work for a few months, and then out of nowhere they’ll tell me, “Oh, you don’t need to come in tomorrow (Amber, Hong Konger, age 30, arrived in 2006).”*

Deciding to remain

- ❑ *“In fact, in terms of opportunity, there’s more in China... But if you are here, it may be more stable. That is, as long as you are willing to work hard, you won’t get to starve, but you do not make a lot of money...[but] life is probably a little less stressful than in China (Eric, Chinese, age 31, arrived in 2009 and 2011).”*

Stage Two: Looking for a Job

Work hard to get a full-time job but employment challenges exist

- ❑ **Express Entry Profile now prioritizes candidates with Canadian job experience**
- ❑ **Temporary status leads to employment discrimination**
 - ❑ *“I just went to like a desi place and I told them my situation...I wasn't doing anything, and I still had bills to pay... So, I had to work illegally (Maryam, Pakistani, 22, arrived 2017).”*
- ❑ **Experience discrimination and racial exclusion in interviews**
 - ❑ *“When I went for my placement interviews, I know for a fact that I was passed over for a white person and I know that my skills were better than theirs. I've seen their work in class.... Because there was no reason for them to not chose me and chose them. Because it was mostly locals working there. Not immigrants. Like it wasn't a diverse company (Maryam, Pakistani, age 22, arrived in 2017).”*
- ❑ **Lack of Canadian work experience**
 - ❑ *“I am a fresh graduate and it's tough to get a job anyway without any work experience. I don't have that. I did not build any volunteering or internship experience (Chaya, Indian, age 23, arrived in 2018).”*

Stage Two: Looking for a Job

Building networks through volunteer activities or placements

- ❑ *“One [strategy] is to really socialize with people and to get out of your comfort zone and socialize with people you have never talked to or not in the same background...It really helps you to get to know people, network, and...to start working as soon as you can, and just develop your skills to be really helpful (Zeeshan, Pakistani, age 22, arrived in 2015).”*

Use university and community resources

- ❑ *“The very first source [of help] was my dad's network here. He has friends...Other than that... the school had seminars about how to get your permits, how to get your visas...And even if you reach out to anyone, your professors, or people, maybe from the rental where you live, they all seem to help you out (Chaaya, Indian, 23, arrived 2018).”*

Use social connections to find full-time employment

- ❑ *“In Canada, I feel the most important aspect of finding a job is the networking and knowing people (Amber, Hong Konger, age 30, arrived in 2006).”*

Use employment agencies

Stage Three: Finding and Working in a Job

Difficulty finding work

- ❑ *“Because entry level is such a simple job, there is no need for so many years of experience...The reason why it is so difficult for many fresh graduates to find a job is that many requirements are completely unrealistic (Hui, Chinese, 32, arrived 2009 and 2011).”*

Many jobs are not in their field of study

- ❑ *“I feel like there should be more fresh grad programs...to really help them with the top skills that they really need. I feel like that break between graduating and getting into the work field in terms of finding the job that's relevant to your field is very important. It's very hard struggle with it. And once they struggle with it, they start looking for other jobs in other fields and they get off-track... (Zeeshan, Pakistani, age 22, arrived in 2015).”*

But financial pressures and visa criteria forces many to accept whatever full-time employment they are offered

- ❑ *“I never felt a sense of belonging here... [After graduation], I was forced to stay. If I had a choice, I would probably choose to return to China...Maybe it's because I still have a yearning heart for China. Yeah, after all, my root is there (Eric, Chinese, 31, arrived 2009 and 2011).”*

Stage Three: Finding and Working in a Job

Some become self-employed, as insurance brokers, real estate or mortgage agents, bubble tea owners or restaurant owners

High cost of living continues to drain most of their earnings thus do not save much money

- ❑ *“In my first job, I got it through an acquaintance...It [his salary] was a little bit higher than the minimum wage...about 9 dollars...Certainly, it was difficult because I didn't have work experience (Eric, Chinese, age 31, arrived in 2009 and 2011).”*

Constantly worry they will lose their jobs and jeopardize their migrant status

- ❑ *“There are times when I can't sleep properly because I'm thinking so much about the future, or the next day, or how the money's going to come (Alina, Pakistani, age 29, arrived in 2010).”*

Conclusion

- ❑ Temporary migrant status results in impermanent and liminal status within the immigration hierarchy
- ❑ IS receive limited and inadequate university support
- ❑ IS are denied access to health and formal settlement services
- ❑ IS experience discrimination and exclusion in the universities and in the larger society
- ❑ IS experience physical, psychological, economic and social distress
- ❑ There is no coordinated national strategy to ameliorate their vulnerabilities (they fall between the cracks)
- ❑ Unresolved settlement challenges complicates IS transition out of university into the labour market

Recommendations

- ❑ Settlement and integration is a lengthy, uneven and complicated process
- ❑ From pre-arrival to employment, international students require more university support (settlement, career, job, and immigration services)
- ❑ Our research mainly focuses on Stage One and Stage Two so future research needs to examine Stage Three in more depth in order to understand the degree to which IS secure permanent employment commensurate with their educational training and credentials post-graduation
- ❑ Future research should also examine how post-graduation employment differs by occupational sector
- ❑ We need to itemize policy changes and employer practices and communal support systems that need to be implemented in order to mitigate against possible deskilling challenges faced by IS in the workplace.