

Choices and Expectations of Asia-born, New Zealand Trained Business Graduates

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Introduction

In August 2008 the Asia:NZ Foundation commissioned International Student Ministries of New Zealand to commence a nationwide longitudinal study of the experiences of Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates. This study ('Tracking study for Asian business graduates from New Zealand') was to commence when students were in the final phase of their course and contemplating their future. It was intended that the study would follow the new graduates through their post-academic transition as they endeavoured to find employment and adjusted to working in New Zealand or elsewhere. These areas were of specific interest, as was examining the role that Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates play in developing Asia-NZ business relationships.

This paper covers findings from the first phase of the study related to choices motivating the study of business in New Zealand, experiences of studying and living and expectations of life following course completion. Initially the paper covers background information, situating it in the New Zealand tertiary and business education contexts, and in relation to existing literature on Asian students in New Zealand. A brief outline of the research methods central to the study follows, then a description and examination of preliminary research findings related to choices, experiences and expectations with a specific focus on students' expectations of study and life after study. This also draws on students' retrospective reflections, providing a background for later reports (which will likely examine students' post-graduation transition pathways). A brief final note is made on how emerging questions will be examined in the remainder of the study.

Background

Students identifying as 'Asian' are the fastest growing minority group in New Zealand's tertiary education sector. According to the Ministry of Education's 'Education Counts' website,¹ they comprise almost one-fifth (17 percent) of the total student population, and are close behind Māori students (18 percent) as the largest minority group. One third of Asian students in tertiary education are enrolled as international students, the majority of these on a full-fee paying basis.² Asian students make up two-thirds of the total international student population, and twelve percent of domestic students in New Zealand tertiary education.³

¹ Ministry of Education. (2009a). Tertiary education statistics, provider-based enrolments. Downloaded May 26, 2009 from the Education Counts website:

http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/participation

² Ministry of Education (2009b). Personal communication, February 24.

The presence of Asian students in New Zealand is no new phenomenon. The earliest Chinese migrants came to New Zealand alongside British migrants in the early 1800s,⁴ and since the 1950s, the majority of international students in New Zealand have come from the Asian region.⁵ However, during the 1980s, major social and economic policy changes occurred in New Zealand (as in many other countries),⁶ which coincided with the rapid growth of many Asian economies, and an associated increase in Asian migration overseas for study purposes.⁷ Two outcomes were a rapid increase in New Zealand's Asia-born resident population, and the emergence and growth of New Zealand's 'export education industry'. The latter was driven largely by the enrolment of full-fee paying Asian students, in particular, from the People's Republic of China (hereafter, PRC).⁸ Lewis argues that although New Zealand has only a tiny proportion of the world's international student population, it stands out as a national economy for its reliance on revenue generated through education exports.⁹

Scholars have linked the global dominance of 'Western' capitalism and consumerism, and the emergence of the 'global marketplace' in the 1980s to the increased desirability on a global scale of a business education.¹⁰ Currently in New Zealand, business students constitute about 30 percent of the total bachelors-level student roll.¹¹ About 30 percent of bachelors-level

³ Ministry of Education (2009a)

⁴ Ip, M., & Pang, D. (2005). New Zealand Chinese identity: Sojourners, model minority and multiple identities. In J. H. Liu, T. McCreanor, T. McIntosh & T. Teaiwa (Eds.), *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations* (pp. 174-190). Wellington: Victoria University Press.

⁵ See Nicolas Tarling (2004). *International Students in New Zealand: The making of policy since 1950*. Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland.

⁶ Larner, W. (1998a). Hitching a ride on the tiger's back: Globalisation and spatial imaginaries in New Zealand. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16, 599-614.

Larner, W. (1998b). Sociologies of neo-liberalism: Theorising the 'New Zealand experiment'. *Sites*, 36, 5-21.

Rizvi, F. (2004). Globalisation and the dilemmas of Australian higher education. *ACCESS*, 23(2), 33-42.

⁷ Bedford, R., Ho, E., & Lidgard, J. (2001). Immigration policy and New Zealand's development into the 21st Century: Review and speculation. *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal*, 10 (3-4), 585-616.

Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

⁸ Butcher, A. (2004). Educate, consolidate, immigrate: Educational immigration in Auckland, New Zealand. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 45(2), 255-278.

⁹ Lewis, N. (2005). Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students: making a globalising industry in New Zealand. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 3(1), 5-47.

¹⁰ For example, see Rizvi (2004)

¹¹ This figure is calculated from aggregated statistics available on the Ministry of Education 'Education Counts' website:

Ministry of Education. (2009c). Tertiary education statistics, provider-based enrolments: field of study. Downloaded June 3, 2009 from the Education Counts website: http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/participation.

business students identify as ‘Asian’ (around 30, 700 students),¹² and of these, approximately 40 percent are enrolled as international students. The over-representation of Asian students and especially Asian international students in business courses is perhaps not surprising, given the increasing importance of Asian economies (in particular, the PRC and India) in international business. How the current global recession may shape business enrolments, subject choices, and Asian international students’ study preferences remains open to question. Scholars and policymakers alike have highlighted the significance of interpersonal relations between people in Asia and New Zealand to New Zealand business.¹³ ‘Friends and Allies’, an Asia:NZ Outlook paper, describes two principles fundamental to building positive interpersonal relationships, which have been highlighted by Asian graduates in New Zealand. These are ‘relationship or *guan xi*’ – long-lasting relationships built on mutual trust, and, ‘relevance or *guan lian*’ – relationships built on mutual relevance.¹⁴ Anecdotally, it appears that from the 1950s, ‘Colombo Plan graduates became a conduit for ongoing goodwill between Asia and New Zealand’.¹⁵ Fazal Rizvi credits the Colombo Plan with facilitating the education of a ‘powerful élite in Asia’ that were well-disposed towards the countries in which they received their training.¹⁶ Andrew Butcher notes that Colombo Plan graduates were likely instrumental in supporting the initial development of New Zealand’s ‘export education industry’ through their recommendation of New Zealand as an education destination.¹⁷

New Zealand policy recognises the strategic role of education as a site for fostering interpersonal and transnational connections.¹⁸ Research suggests that building connections with resident New Zealanders is often a primary aim for Asian international students and migrant community members.¹⁹ However, many Asian international students report a lack of social interaction with New Zealanders,²⁰ and Asian migrants in New Zealand have been

¹² This figure is calculated from figures provided by the Ministry of Education in response to a query to the ‘Education Counts’ website.

¹³ For example, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2001). *The Colombo Plan at 50: A New Zealand Perspective, 50th Anniversary of the Colombo Plan 1951-2001*. Wellington: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

¹⁴ From: McGrath, T., Stock, P., & Butcher, A. (2007). *Friends and allies: The impacts of returning Asian students on New Zealand-Asia relationships. Outlook paper 05*. Wellington: Asia:NZ Foundation (p. 16, emphasis original)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Rizvi (2004, p. 35)

¹⁷ Butcher, A., & McGrath, T. (2004). International students in New Zealand: Needs and responses. *International Education Journal*, 5(4), 540-551.

¹⁸ Ministry of Education (2007a).
Ministry of Education. (2007b). *The tertiary education strategy 2007-2012*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

¹⁹ Deloitte. (2008). *Experiences of International Students in New Zealand: Report 2007 on the Results of the National Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Ho, E. S., Li, W. W., Cooper, J., & Holmes, P. (2007). The experiences of Chinese international students in New Zealand. Retrieved August 31, 2007, from http://www.educationnz.org.nz/indust_researchreports.html

²⁰ Berno, T., & Ward, C. (2003). *Cross-cultural and Educational Adaptation of Asian Students in New Zealand*. Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation.

Ho et al. (2007)

shown to have high levels of unemployment.²¹ Research exploring 'host community' attitudes suggests that negative attitudes towards 'ethnically distinctive' migrant and international student populations are not uncommon.²²

However, research has also highlighted the ongoing significance of positive interpersonal connections that do occur. Asian international and domestic students in Vivienne Anderson's doctoral research described individuals whose warmth and friendship had facilitated their successful completion of academic courses in New Zealand, assisted them with the transition to work, and/or provided them with useful contacts and ongoing transnational connections.²³ This, and other research, highlights the importance of recognising students' agency as they negotiate transnational contexts, and attending closely to students' actual 'storylines'²⁴ in order to recognise the many complex factors that shape their living and study experiences.²⁵

Research has highlighted trans-nationality as characteristic of many tertiary education graduates' lives, particularly in the Asian region.²⁶ Ongoing movement across national

International Graduate Insight Group. (2007, August 8-10). 'Insights from the 2007 international student barometer for New Zealand: What brings international students to New Zealand and how does the experience compare?' Paper presented at the New Zealand International education Conference, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Ward, C. (2006). *International students: Interpersonal, institutional and community impacts. Update of the 2001 literature review*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Ward, C., & Masgoet, A. M. (2004). *The experiences of international students in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

²¹ Bedford et al. (2001)

²² Gendall, P., Spoonley, P., & Trlin, A. (2007). *The Attitudes of New Zealanders to immigrants and immigration: 2003 and 2006 compared. Occasional publication No. 17*. Palmerston North: New Settlers Programme, Massey University.

Ward, C., Masgoet, A.-M., Ho, E., Holmes, P., Cooper, J., Newton, J., & Crabbe, D. (2005). Interactions with International Students: Report Prepared for Education New Zealand. Retrieved 19 May 2006, from www.educationnz.org.nz/eeidf/reports/A6.pdf

²³ Anderson, V. (2008). *The experiences of international and New Zealand women in New Zealand higher education. Unpublished PhD thesis*. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago College of Education and Department of Anthropology.

²⁴ Kenway, J., & Bullen, E. (2003). Self-representations of international women postgraduate students in the global university 'contact zone'. *Gender and Education, 15*(1), 5-20. (p. 17)

²⁵ Also see:

Rhee, J. (2006). Re/membering (to) shifting alignments: Korean women's transnational narratives in US higher education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 19*(5), 595-615.

Rhee, J., & Subreenduth, S. (2006). De/colonising education: Examining transnational localities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 19*(5), 545-548.

²⁶ Waters, J. L. (2005). Transnational family strategies and education in the contemporary Chinese diaspora. *Global Networks, 5*(4), 359-377.

Yeoh, B. S. A., Huang, S., & Lam, T. (2005). Transnationalizing the 'Asian' family: Imaginaries, intimacies and strategic intents. *Global Networks Journal, 5*(4), 307-315.

borders requires multiple adjustments, (personal and relational) and presents multiple challenges as does re-entry.²⁷

The current study is aimed at examining an area of specific interest to the Asia:NZ Foundation; that is, Asian graduates' pathways post-graduation and their ongoing links with New Zealand and New Zealanders. It also addresses several gaps in New Zealand academic literature, including a lack of attention to graduate 're-entry' and/or trans-national movement post-graduation; and a lack of research that considers Asian international and New Zealanders' study and living experiences alongside each other.²⁸

Before outlining the study, it is necessary to explain our use of key terms in the remainder of this paper. We include as 'business programmes' courses relating to information technology, management and commerce (including aviation management), economics, and econometrics.²⁹ By 'Asia', we refer to the broad region of the world bordered by Pakistan in the west and Japan in the east; the PRC in the north and Indonesia in the south.³⁰ Our use of the term 'Asian' or 'Asia-born' student throughout the study is therefore relatively narrow, and we recognise it as problematic given that it falsely suggests a uniformity of identity, experience, and origin. The findings are not intended to be generalisable to all Asia-born students in tertiary education or to Asian students generally.³¹

Research methods

The study was commissioned in August 2008. Initially, most university business schools and some polytechnic business schools were provided with an outline of the proposed project and were invited to participate in, or facilitate, our recruitment of eligible students in their programmes.

The study employs two main methods of data-collection: surveys and in-depth interviews. Surveys are intended to provide an overview, or qualitative and descriptive 'snapshot', of students' and graduates' experiences. The interviews are intended to generate more in-depth qualitative data, and provide an opportunity to examine themes, issues, and anomalies that emerge in survey responses. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit survey and interview participants; specifically, criterion, snowball or chain, and opportunistic sampling.³² All Asia-born students in their final year of study at a New Zealand business school or, in their first year post-graduation are eligible for participation in the study. All participants are invited

²⁷ McGrath, T. (1998). *Homecoming: Reverse culture shock in graduate re-entry: New Zealand trained graduates returning home to Malaysia and Indonesia*. Unpublished Masters thesis. Palmerston North: Institute of Development Studies, Department of Geography, Massey University.

²⁸ The implications of this 'gap' for research, policy and tertiary teaching are discussed in Vivienne Anderson's doctoral thesis (2009).

²⁹ These areas of study are from the 'fields of study' listed on the Ministry of Education's 'Education Counts' website: http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/participation

³⁰ See Asia:NZ website: <http://www.asianz.org.nz/countries-asia>

³¹ For an insightful critique of writing that homogenises 'Asian students' in New Zealand, see: Collins, F. L. (2006). Making Asian students, making students Asian: The racialisation of export education in Auckland, New Zealand. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 47(2), 217-234.

³² Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.

to participate in both the survey and interview panel, but whether or not they do so is entirely voluntary. Informed consent was sought from each participant prior to data collection.

The survey examines students' reasons for studying business and studying in New Zealand, asks about their study and living experiences to date, and explores their expectations for the future. Currently, 131 students, who fit the study's eligibility criteria, have completed the initial survey. It is hoped that at least 300 participants will eventually join the survey panel, although numbers for the initial survey have exceeded the agreed 'target' minimum (120 students).

Two further surveys will be initiated in November 2009 and 2010, and a third survey or short email questionnaire may also be conducted prior to March 2011 to clarify questions raised as the result of earlier research findings. Repeat surveys will examine participants' employment and personal trajectories post-graduation in relation to their earlier hopes and expectations. All surveys use a five-point likert scale to elicit participants' responses to a range of statements covering each area of interest. Where appropriate, spaces are also provided for participants' 'further comments'.

In-depth qualitative data is elicited through the use of semi-structured interviews. Interviewees are offered the option of an interview in their first language or in English. Initial interviews preceded the construction of the online survey, and began in October 2008. By May 2009, 40 students had been interviewed and indicated a willingness to remain on the project's interview panel. As with the survey panel, this exceeded our minimum 'target' (30 students). Initial interviews explored similar areas to the initial survey, and in addition, participants' reasons for choosing their particular educational institution, their expectations of the extent to which they would maintain links with New Zealand, and (other) New Zealanders,³³ and elicited information about students' educational backgrounds prior to engaging in tertiary study in New Zealand. Several PRC-born students chose to be interviewed in Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese). Like the surveys, interviews will be repeated a further two times, beginning in December 2009 and December 2010.

From mid-2009, focus-group interviews may also be conducted in some centres to pilot/consult on future survey and interview questions, and to allow clarification or discussion around emerging issues. Focus groups for consultation or piloting purposes will likely include Asia-born business graduates ahead of our study group. Focus groups for clarification will likely include a sub-group (or groups) of interview participants.

This study does not use 'triangulation' in the sense of attending to multiple data sources (surveys, individual interviews, and later, focus group interviews) to look for unity or neat coherence; but as attending to resonating themes, and inconsistencies and contradictions between and across these sources of data.³⁴ The remainder of the report considers the study's preliminary findings, based on initial survey and interview data.

Preliminary findings and Discussion

This is a longitudinal study that tracks Asia-born business students from their final year of study through the two years immediately following graduation. Its findings are likely to be of interest to policy-makers, export education marketing bodies, tertiary education institutions,

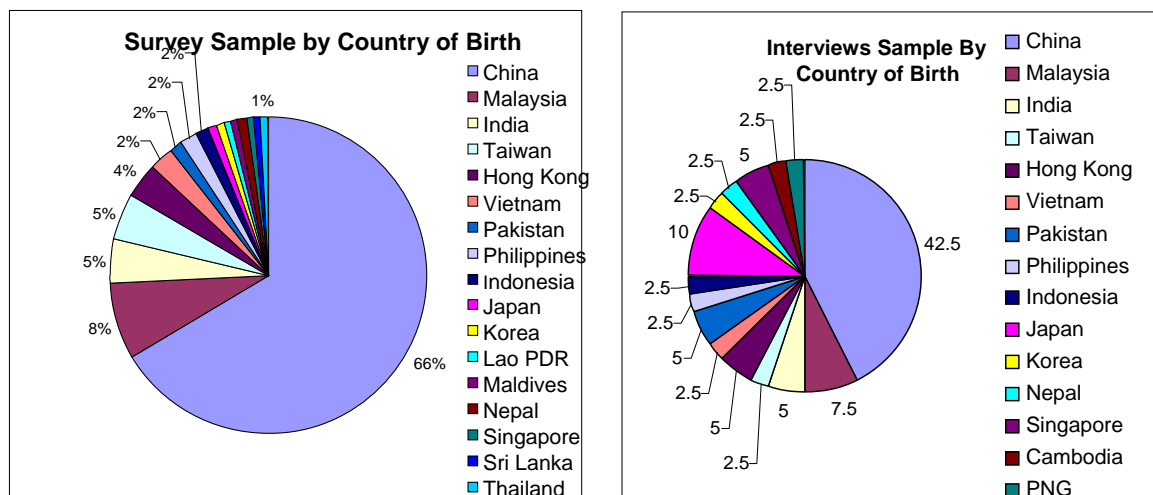
³³ We include the word 'other' here in recognition that some of our participants may identify as New Zealanders.

³⁴ Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? *Educational Researcher*, 17(2), 13-17.

and New Zealand business schools. Although the study's findings to date are preliminary, they nevertheless shed some light on why Asia-born business students choose to study business; what factors attract them to study business in New Zealand; how they reflect on their experiences in New Zealand; and what their hopes and expectations for the future are.

To date, 131 participants have completed the initial survey and 40 students or recent graduates have been interviewed. They represent all levels of tertiary study, from certificate to doctoral level. Currently most interview participants are based in North Island centres. However, South Island centres are well represented amongst survey participants. It is hoped that by the end of 2009, all major centres will be well-represented in both the study's survey and interview panels. Proportionately, participants' countries of birth broadly parallel those evident in available statistics on Asian international students. Almost two-thirds of survey panel participants identify the People's Republic of China as their country of birth, and 43 percent of participants in the interview panel (figure 1).

Figure 1



The median age of participants was 24 years, and three-quarters were engaged in undergraduate study. Of the remaining survey participants, 12 percent were engaged in Masters-level study, six percent in postgraduate diploma programmes, and five percent in doctoral study. Two percent indicated that they were studying for a diploma, but did not specify either undergraduate or postgraduate levels. In terms of gender, slightly more survey participants were male (58 percent) than female (42 percent). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 41 years, but over half were aged between 22 and 26 years. The majority of participants identified themselves as single (85 percent). Notably, almost a third of married participants had children.

In terms of enrolment status, 90 percent of survey participants were international students. Of the remaining 10 percent (New Zealand students or former New Zealand students),³⁵ some had come to New Zealand when their families migrated and some had done so independently. The average length of time survey participants had been living in New Zealand was just over four and half years. Survey participants appeared to be relatively academically successful. The majority (79 percent) reported a B-grade average or higher in tertiary studies leading to course completion, and 15 percent reporting an A-grade average.

³⁵ These participants had obtained either permanent residency or citizenship status.

Although interview questions did not elicit interview participants' demographic characteristics in as much detail or as explicitly as survey questions, the 40 interview participants appear to represent a similar range of demographic characteristics as survey participants. Of the 40 students interviewed 11 had permanent residence, 25 were in undergraduate degree programmes and 15 in postgraduate programmes, 3 of whom were doing PhDs. All but one indicated they were happy with their study progress

Why study business?

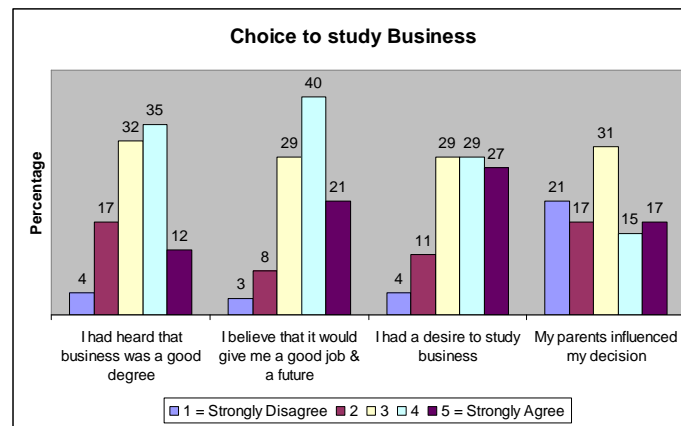
This report highlights several factors motivating Asia-born students to study business subjects. These can be loosely grouped as personal, familial and educational factors. Personal factors include career aspirations: for example, a good job, an international career, and wealth. They also include a personal (and sometimes longstanding) interest in business as a subject area, and as complementary to other academic areas. Familial factors include parental business involvement, parents' desires, and the encouragement of family and close friends to pursue business as a career. Educational factors include experiences in secondary and earlier tertiary education that spark an ongoing interest in business; including the input of inspirational teachers.

The study's findings to date suggest that it may be strategic for educational institutions and marketing bodies to think at three levels for attracting Asia-born students to business. Firstly, connecting with and promoting students' personal aspirations and interest in business as a subject area. Secondly, targeting a parent audience, communicating clearly the positive opportunities business study offers young people. Thirdly, seeking to support and connect with students' earlier educational experiences; for example, by developing links with business teachers in secondary schools, and communicating to prospective students how a business education in New Zealand might complement business studies completed elsewhere.

Marketing and advertising techniques employed by Education New Zealand, Universities, Tourism NZ and Immigration NZ, all emphasise the power of business in the global landscape. The marketing of business as a degree subject has centred around two main factors: career opportunities, and associated links to travel and international business³⁶. Survey results indicated that existing marketing techniques may effectively promote a positive image of career prospects in business (figure 2). Almost half of the students surveyed indicated that they had heard a business was a good degree; and about 60 percent indicated that they believed a business degree would offer them a good job and future career prospects. Obtaining a business degree through a New Zealand educational institution has become a popular option for Asian students.

Figure 2

³⁶ See www.newzealandeducated.com for examples of such marketing.



Interestingly, about 60 percent of survey participants indicated that they had a personal interest in studying business, and only 40 percent, that they studied business because of parental influence. Only six of the forty interviewees identified parents as a key influence in their decision to study business, although slightly more students (9) attributed their decision to study in New Zealand either partially or wholly to parental influence. Our study suggests that although parents may significantly influence their children’s decision to study abroad, they may have much less influence over what subjects their children decide to study.

Interview material provided insight into just what is meant by ‘a good job’, and was summarised by an Indian international student, who remarked:

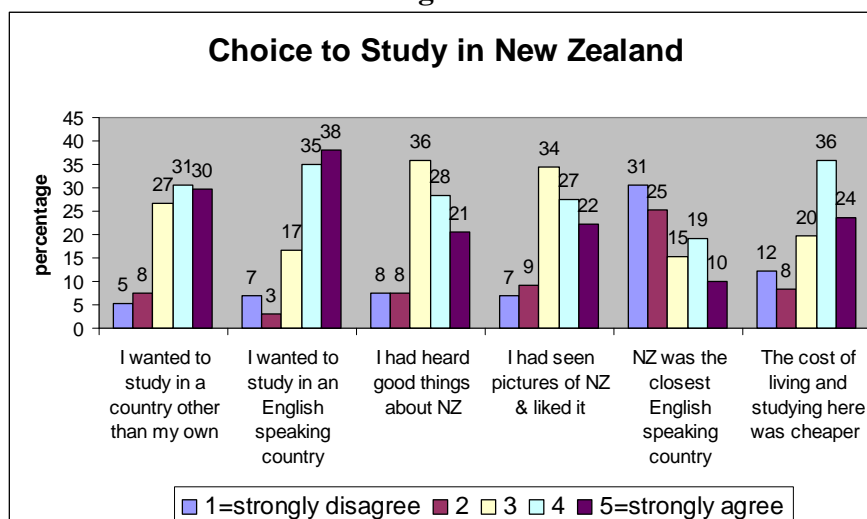
My goal is to get a demanding job that will keep me busy and reward [me] financially as well as giving me the opportunity to travel and explore my own capabilities. (021008Int2).

However, other kinds of motivations also emerged. Fourteen students interviewed indicated that the choice to study business related to their earlier studies at secondary or tertiary level, in New Zealand or elsewhere. Some students highlighted the role of ‘inspirational’ secondary school teachers in promoting business as an academic subject and career choice. While only three students indicated that the choice to study business was a case of ‘following in my parents’ [business] footsteps’, about a quarter highlighted friends or family as encouraging them to study business. It seems that the proactive promotion of business subjects at secondary level may assist with attracting students to business-related tertiary study.

Why study in New Zealand?

Preliminary project findings suggest that Asia-born business students are motivated to study in New Zealand for several reasons including: its English-language based business courses; its perceived affordability; its unique natural and human environment; and its ‘difference’ as a study destination away from ‘home’ (figure 3). However, it is notable that participants in this study also indicated widely varied reasons for studying in New Zealand, highlighting the diversity of Asia-born business students and the danger of generalising too broadly. For some participants, studying in New Zealand was affordable since they could enrol as ‘domestic’ students and study without leaving ‘home’. For others, New Zealand was seen as affordable due to favourable exchange rates and relatively ‘cheap’ course fees and living costs, in comparison to the U.K, U.S.A, Canada and Australia. Jeopardising this perception may risk causing students to study elsewhere. From the interviews, seven students had permanent residency status, and indicated that staying in New Zealand made economic sense since they could enrol as domestic students. For four international students, New Zealand was an affordable study destination because they had received scholarships to study here.

Figure 3



While students revealed a widely-held perception of New Zealand as safe and beautiful, ‘safety’ was not only referred to in relation to civil society but also in regard to the presence of family members and friends. Marketing bodies, educational institutions and business schools would do well to promote personal connection with prospective students, their families and friends; and to see existing Asia-born students (both domestic and international) as strategic connections likely to recommend them to others (or not).

While current international education marketing associates New Zealand’s beautiful and ‘pure’ natural environment with adventure opportunities,³⁷ some students revealed that their parents associated the country’s environment with a lack of distraction for academic study. Almost a quarter of interviewees highlighted a perception of New Zealand’s environment as ‘beautiful’ or ‘natural’ as drawing them to study here, and a quarter, a perception of New Zealand as ‘less distracting’, ‘safer’, or having less discrimination than other English speaking countries. Also, several students spoke in interviews about New Zealand as a ‘quiet’ place to live. However, finances spent projecting a particular ‘brand’ or marketing image are likely to be wasted if those attracted to come have negative experiences or experiences that contradict their expectations. This issue will be further examined in subsequent interviews and surveys.

New Zealand’s ‘difference’ offered some students an opportunity to follow the trend to study overseas, but for some it also offered an opportunity to escape parental influence and follow new life pathways. New Zealand’s close geographical proximity to Asia was apparently much less important in influencing students’ choice to study here.

Another reason indicated in surveys (figure 3) for choosing to study in New Zealand was the ease of applying for a student visa or permit. Eighty percent of respondents found it relatively easy to apply for a visa, and commented favourably on the process for renewing visas via the University/Immigration New Zealand online system. The opportunity New Zealand offered for an English-speaking education was of secondary importance to interviewees. In contrast, other interviewees remarked favourably on New Zealanders’ diversity citing opportunities to communicate with others of diverse culture and country origins.

³⁷ See <http://www.newzealandeducated.com/>

One-fifth of the students interviewed stated that the prior knowing of someone, who currently or previously lived, visited, or studied in New Zealand was a reason for their choice to study here. Such contacts included family, friends, previous teachers, and relatives. The significance of prior contact with New Zealand highlights that sojourners' or newcomers' positive experiences in New Zealand are crucial as a form of 'marketing'.

Just over one-fifth of interview participants also cited parental influence as causing them to come to New Zealand, either as a migrant or international student. Other reasons for studying in New Zealand included; that New Zealand qualifications are internationally recognised; New Zealand educational institutions compare favourably with those in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands; New Zealand has a low profile in international controversies; IELTS is not a prerequisite for entering the country; and there is no age restriction on undergraduate entry.

Experiences in New Zealand

Most participants indicated that their experiences in New Zealand to date have been positive and most want to remain in New Zealand post-graduation, at least for a while. Participants revealed a good level of confidence engaging in academic study in an English-speaking environment, and in negotiating New Zealand visa regulations and requirements. Notably, their relative confidence and positive reflections on living and studying in New Zealand may reflect the kinds of students likely to volunteer for a study such as this. However, participants' reflections offer useful insights into the kinds of factors that may facilitate (or preclude) Asia-born business students' positive experiences in New Zealand. Ramsey, Jones and Barker suggest that international students tend to experience a 'magnification of common student problems'.³⁸ This study's preliminary findings suggest that the same is true of recently-arrived Asia-born business students. At a business school or institutional level, small class sizes are likely to foster connection and interaction between staff and students; and targeted study supports (such as coaching in academic writing) are likely to assist when written assessment tasks seem overwhelming.³⁹ Almost a quarter of survey participants commented on their teaching and learning environments as enriching and collegial. The benefit of work experience offered through courses was also commented on.

Participants in voluntary studies are more likely to report positive than negative experiences, therefore, special note should be made of their negative reporting. Many participants identified difficulties in developing connections with (other/non-Asian) New Zealanders. In social settings, (other) New Zealanders' discrimination and/or 'shyness' towards 'Asians' or 'foreigners' apparently precluded the development of friendship for some Asia-born business students. This finding echoes numerous other studies,⁴⁰ and reiterates again the importance of promoting New Zealanders' openness to others.⁴¹ A more modest focus might be on developing 'strategic allies' within educational institutions, business schools and in workplaces: 'local' people who can act as mentors to newcomers, modelling acceptance. It may also be important to include frank discussion about such issues in international student orientation programmes.

³⁸ Ramsey, S., Jones, E., & Barker, M. (2007). Relationship between adjustment and support types: Young and mature-aged local and international first year university students. *Higher Education*, 54, 247-265 (p. 250).

³⁹ See Baik, C., & Grieg, J. (2009). Improving the academic outcomes of undergraduate ESL students: the case for discipline-based academic skills programs. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28(4), 401-416.

⁴⁰ Collins (2006); Deloitte (2008); Ward & Masgoret (2004); Ward et al. (2005).

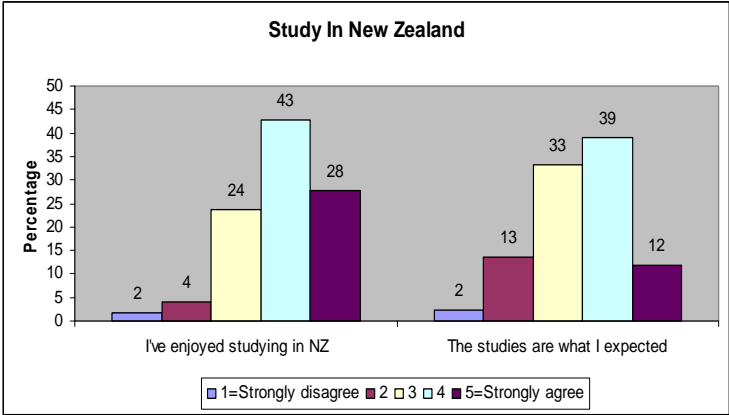
⁴¹ Also see Ho et al. (2007).

Many participants expressed concerns about employment pathways in New Zealand, given the importance of trust and acceptance for gaining employment. Some students identified experiences that helped them learn to ‘play the game’ here: for example, volunteer and community sector roles, and work experience opportunities that opened doors to employment. Students who spoke warmly about their interactions with ‘Kiwis’ emphasised that developing trust takes time and opportunities to prove one’s trustworthiness. Business schools could promote such opportunities through including work experience or company partnership arrangements in their programmes where appropriate. Also, given their expertise in human resource management and team-building, business schools are strategically-placed sites in which to address issues relating to culture, prejudice, and workplace environments with New Zealand’s future business leaders.

On average, survey and interview participants had been living in New Zealand for just over four and half years; long enough to have made significant settlement adjustments. Around three quarters of participants noted positive experiences of living and studying in New Zealand and positive relationships with (other) New Zealanders, and just over half (of survey participants), that their studies matched their expectations (figure 4). In contrast, about a quarter of survey and interview participants indicated that they felt lonely, missed ‘home’ (elsewhere), and experienced difficulty relating to other (non-Asian) New Zealanders.

However, only 15 percent suggested that their studies did not match expectations. These statistics indicate better than adequate performance on the part of business schools.

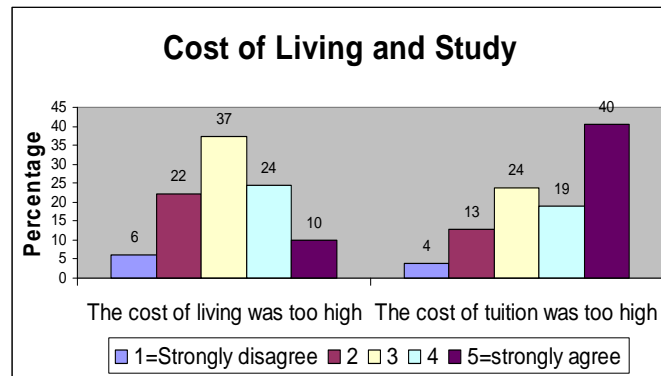
Figure 4



Negatively, interview participants commented on having difficulty with study-related tasks; the apparent lack of applicability or non-practical focus of some courses; uncertainty around employment post-graduation; some repeated content in bridging programmes and degree-level courses; disparate work approaches between ‘Kiwi’ and ‘Asian’ students; mediocre campus services; and difficulties with some staff members. Three international students identified as especially difficult the negotiating of study in a ‘different’ language; in particular, courses that rely heavily on written assessment tasks.

Interestingly, although New Zealand’s perceived affordability was a key motivation in students choosing to study here, almost 70 percent of survey participants expressed a level of disquiet at the cost of studying in New Zealand (figure 5).

Figure 5



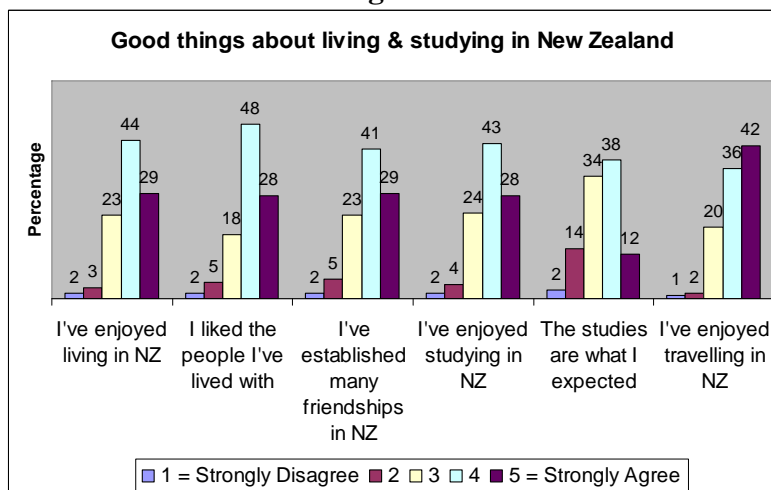
Students' responses can be seen as not surprising given the likelihood that all students would prefer *not* to pay for their studies. However, it is possible that they also reflect the period of study which coincides with rising exchange rates and increased student fees in many educational institutions.

One international student from the People's Republic of China commented that educational institutions in New Zealand should practise good business principles; that is, ensure that the welcome, students receive, is commensurate with the cost of their studies. He said:

We should welcome Chinese students and make them feel a part of New Zealand society as this will help the education industry in the longer term.... We need to let them join the wider society (240209Int33).

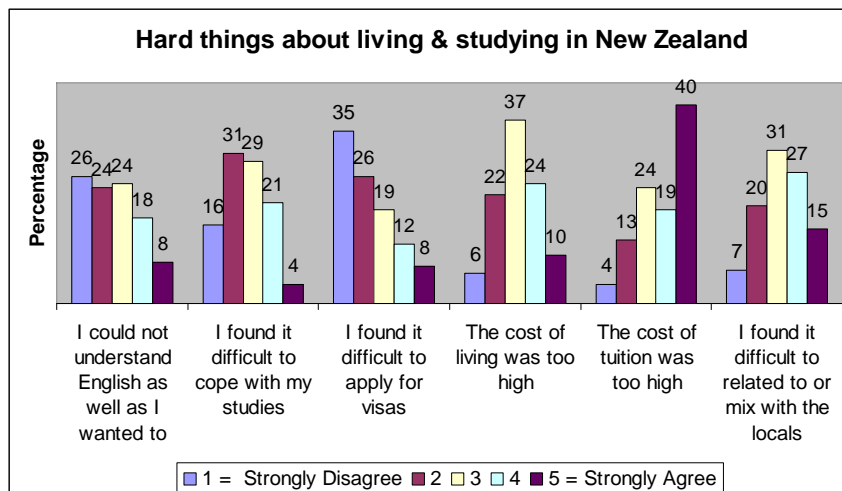
Overall, the majority of survey participants indicated a high level of satisfaction with their experiences in New Zealand (figure 6).

Figure 6



Notably, over half of survey participants indicated a considerable degree of confidence studying and living in an English-speaking environment, coping with academic demands, and applying for visas (figure 7). Of secondary concern to the high cost of tuition (59 percent) was the difficulty participants experienced relating to, or mixing with, 'locals' (42 percent).

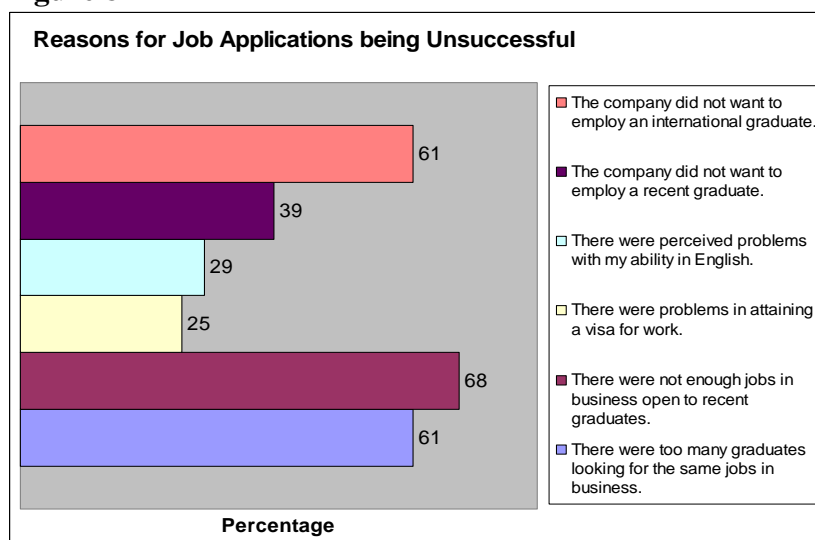
Figure 7



Interviews revealed more clearly who many students perceived as ‘locals’ (or ‘Kiwis’). Almost 40 percent of interviews described having experienced, observed or encountered ‘non-Asian’ or ‘white’ New Zealanders’ discriminatory or unfriendly attitudes or behaviour towards people of Asian descent, in New Zealand. Four interviewees spoke about such behaviour as covert discrimination; for example, a sense of not being included in workplace environments or being refused employment. Some interviewees also noted overt acts of violence or abuse that seemed to be racially motivated; for example, verbal harassment and ‘egging’.

Some students indicated a concern that being Asian or ‘foreign’ might be a barrier to employment in New Zealand. Twenty percent of those surveyed had already obtained jobs, mostly prior to completion of their course. When asked how many jobs they had applied for, answers ranged from one to an improbable 600, although three quarters of students answered that they had made about five job applications. When asked to speculate why some applications were unsuccessful, key reasons given were their relative inexperience as new or near-graduates, the large number of graduates compared with the number of available positions in business, and their status as an ‘international graduate’ (figure 8).

Figure 8



Interviewees emphasised the value of gaining New Zealand work experience, noting that ‘New Zealand companies are wary about hiring people without’ this (191008Int7, Cambodian PR). Some students suggested that barriers to employment are sometimes a matter of

discrimination against ‘Asians’, ‘immigrants’ or ‘foreigners’. Some students gave examples of discriminatory treatment in workplace environments, including ‘rude comments’ from ‘locals’ in the workplace.

An international student from the People’s Republic of China insisted that barriers are not necessarily due to discrimination, but also disparate linguistic and cultural backgrounds (210209Int32). He argued that: ‘Kiwis face the same problem in China’ and ‘it is no doubt that the local businesses prefer to hire someone who knows how to play the game’.

Interviewees revealed factors that may help overcome barriers, discrimination or distance between themselves and (other) New Zealanders. For example, small class sizes and positive classroom environments featured as promoting constructive interaction. Some interviewees spoke about volunteering, part-time employment, and involvement in community organisations and student associations as allowing them to feel more ‘integrated’ and to prove their trustworthiness.

Despite some students’ negative experiences in New Zealand, more survey participants indicated that their liking for New Zealanders had grown (37 percent) rather than diminished (14 percent) through studying here (figure 9), as had their liking for business as a career pathway (figure 10).

Figure 9

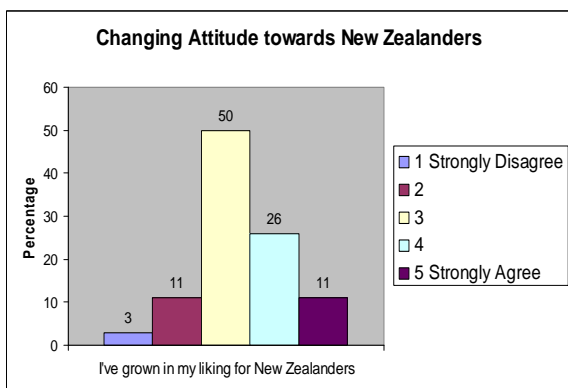
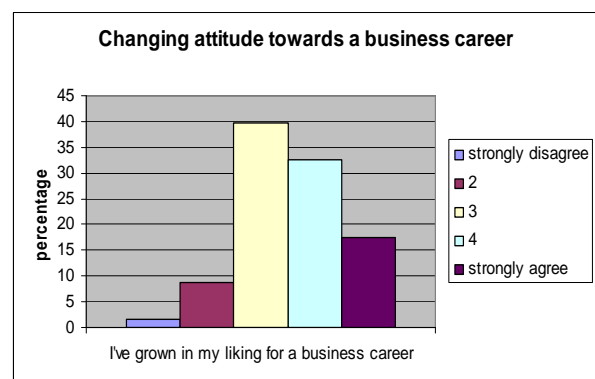


Figure 10



Students’ changing perceptions of New Zealanders will be examined further in subsequent surveys and interviews.

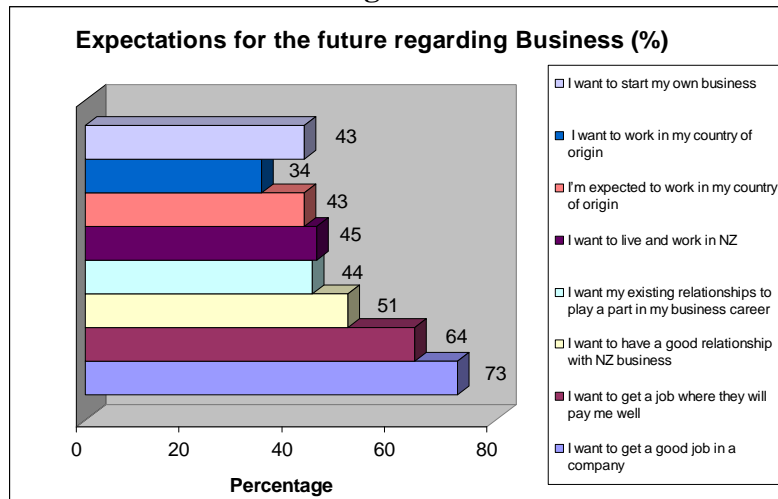
Expectations for the future

Participants’ aspirations and expectations were marked by confidence and uncertainty, independence and obligations. For example, the pull to fulfil familial obligations clearly shaped many participants’ expectations of eventually returning ‘home’, a finding that is likely to encourage Asian governments concerned with future skilled labour shortages.⁴² About half

⁴² For a fuller discussion, see:

wanted to obtain permanent residency in New Zealand (if not permanent residents already), but many had transnational long-term plans: Forty percent (15) of interviewees indicated that they hoped to live or work in their ‘home’ countries (four after first working for a time in New Zealand or elsewhere). Almost 20 percent indicated that they wanted to live and work elsewhere (neither in New Zealand nor in their birth country). Possible destinations included the US, Singapore, Australia, and China). Survey data reflected a similar pattern, although getting a ‘good’ and well-paid job was apparently more important than location (figure 11).

Figure 11

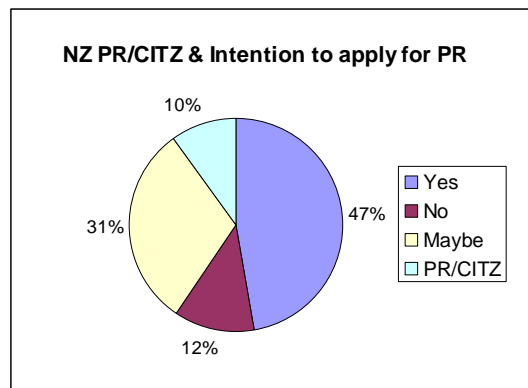


Study findings to date indicate that Asia-born business students should not be taken for granted as a source of skilled labour in New Zealand. Many participants alluded to multiple living and employment options, suggesting that if career pathways did not unfold easily in New Zealand, possibilities would likely open up elsewhere. In relation to this, uncertainties were expressed about the current economic downturn. Many also highlighted inexperience and Asian-ness as possible employment obstacles in the New Zealand business sector.

Given the importance to New Zealand of its business links with Asia it is encouraging that most participants in the study anticipated maintaining connections with contacts in New Zealand. Such contacts included friends, lecturers, former employers, and workmates. Some interviewees spoke directly about how their contacts may shape future business activities, for example, by facilitating the development of import/export companies, or joint NZ-Asia business ventures.

Forty-five percent of respondents wanted to live and work in New Zealand (noting that 10 percent were already permanent residents), while just over a third wanted to work in their birth country. Forty-three percent of survey participants either already had PR or intended to apply for PR in New Zealand, and a further 31 percent indicated that they were thinking about applying for PR (figure 12).

Figure 12



Interestingly, a higher number of participants than wanted to work in their birth countries indicated that they were expected to do so (43 percent). While the survey did not ask whose expectations were referred to, in interviews, familial expectations were clearly associated with a sense of obligation and sometimes conflict in relation to participants' location. For example, a Chinese international student remarked, 'I decided to stay here for work to gain some local experience before returning to China one day for my parents' (110209Int30). In contrast an Indian international student from South India described having studied in New Zealand as a welcome break from direct parental influence.

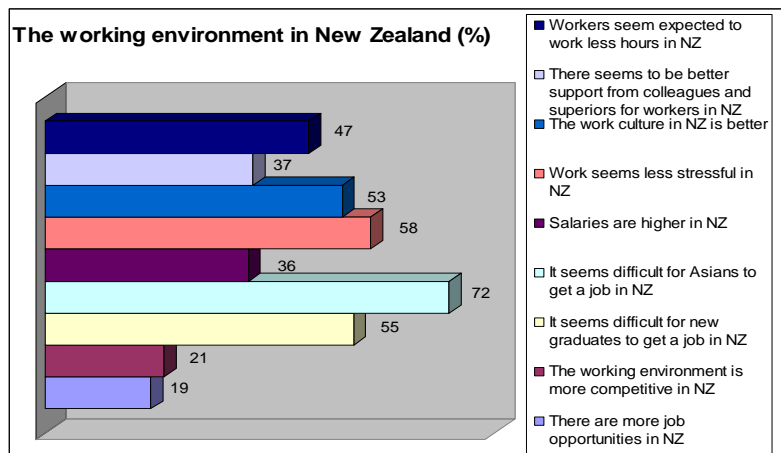
Interviewees revealed a range of work and/or study aspirations. Five hoped to complete postgraduate study in business, two to gain academic positions, two to conduct research, and two to teach business at a secondary school level. The remaining participants hoped to work in a wide variety of areas including; taxation law, multinational companies, trade and tourism, human resources, computing or software engineering, marketing, agriculture, the not-for-profit sector, or to start their own businesses. Career motivations ranged from the desire for a fast-paced life and well-paid corporate job, to more humanitarian aspirations.

After completing my studies, I have a better opportunity to work and serve my country. (241108Int16).

However, corporate and monetary aspirations were apparent primary considerations for survey participants. Seventy-three percent of respondents stated that they hoped to get a good job in a good company, and 64 percent indicating that they wanted a well-paid job (figure 11).

However, five interviewees indicated a concern that the current economic downturn would negatively affect their job prospects, and eight, that being Asian or 'foreign' in the New Zealand business environment would be a disadvantage. Over seventy percent of survey participants similarly indicated that being Asian may make it difficult to obtain work here, and 55 percent, that transitioning into employment post-graduation may be difficult as a new graduate (figure 13).

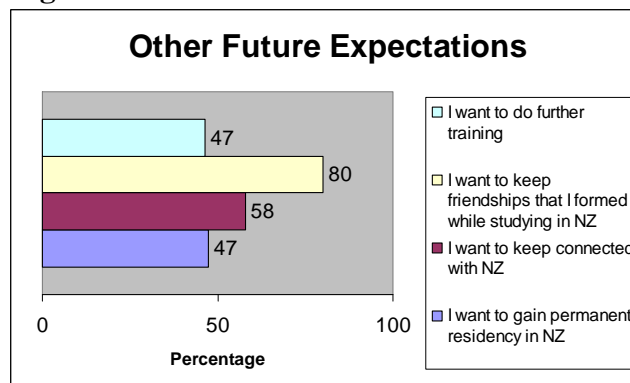
Figure 13



Despite this, participants revealed positive perceptions of the New Zealand working environment. Over half agreed that the work culture in New Zealand is better than elsewhere; almost 60 percent, that work seems less stressful; and almost half, that workers seem expected to work fewer hours in New Zealand. The current shortage of employment opportunities in New Zealand is perhaps reflected in expectations of further study. Conversely, some students saw PR status as opening doors to further study in New Zealand

Maintaining links developed while in New Zealand was a clear priority for survey participants (figure 14). Ninety five percent of those surveyed said they would maintain contact. Interview participants indicated that many of these contacts were with other international students and recent migrants, although others included business lecturers or academic mentors, workmates from part-time jobs, and previous employers.

Figure 14



The survey asked how participants planned to keep in contact. ‘Via the internet’ was the universal response. The intention to maintain friendships is an important indicator of possible future business relationships shaping future business pathways. Indeed, some interviewees discussed entering business with friends: ‘My friends (in China) have asked me to identify any business that they can set up between New Zealand and China’ (251108Int17). Forty four percent of survey participants indicated an expectation that existing relationships would play a role in their future business career. Some interviewees also identified their distinct advantage in business as people with transnational study and living experiences and an appreciation of multiple worldviews.

The extent to which participants’ transnational experiences and skills shape their future career pathways will be examined through repeat interviews and surveys, as will the role of existing

relationships in maintaining ongoing connections with New Zealand, and in business situations.⁴³

Survey participants were asked to state their intentions in relation to their ongoing association with business professional associations.⁴⁴ Fifty six percent of participants expressed an intention to develop or maintain such links, although only 40 percent of these indicated a clear understanding of what professional associations can offer business people. A larger number of survey participants indicated an awareness of the value of professional development and/or further training. Almost half of those surveyed indicated that they wanted to do further training in future (figure 14, above), suggesting the strategic value of business schools proactively maintaining links with alumni and offering courses likely to meet the needs of graduates as their careers unfold.

Concluding thoughts

The first phase of this study has given indications as to why Asia-born business students chose business as their field of study and why they chose New Zealand as a place of study. Additionally something of their experiences of living and studying in New Zealand has been described along with their expectations of the future. This information will be used as a platform for the on going longitudinal study which will look at their subsequent experiences and realisation of their expectations (or not).

The central question that this study addresses concerns the role that Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates play in the development of New Zealand-Asia business relationships. This question is not answered by this initial report, but there are promising indications that these graduates could play a future role in developing and facilitating New Zealand-Asia business relationships. This is through:

- continuing connections with New Zealand and New Zealanders;
- working and living in New Zealand (for a period of time);
- bringing their knowledge of Asian and New Zealand business contexts to bear on future business developments; and
- developing New Zealand-Asia related business ventures.

The remainder of the study will look at each of these indicative categories in-depth in relation to graduates' work and living experiences as they unfold.

⁴³ For a philosophical discussion of the 'necessary skilfulness' inherent in being a 'world'-traveller, or someone who can shift between and across social, cultural and behavioural worlds, see: Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, 'world'-travelling, and loving perception. *Hypatia*, 2(2), 3-19.

⁴⁴ Examples of professional associations known to participants were NZICA, ACCA, REINZ, CFA, CPA.