Silent but Brewing

Reactive Ethnicity and Interculturality among Chinese Students in Singapore

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Abstract

The study takes an indirect approach towards the intercultural experience of migrants and explores how they perceive discrimination from host society and in turn stereotype it. Previous studies have highlighted how interculturality facilitates the adaptation of migrants in the host country. This study explores (i) how face-to-face (FTF) and mediated contact and perceived discrimination predict stereotyping, and (ii) how contact, perceived discrimination and stereotyping predict interculturality. A web-based survey was conducted among university students from the People's Republic of China (n = 585) in Singapore. FTF contact reduced stereotyping better than mediated contact. Perceived discrimination increased stereotyping of the host society by migrants, whereas stereotyping negatively affected interculturality. The study calls for better contact between locals and the migrant population.

Keywords: *China, contact, culture, intercultural, discrimination, immigrant, integration, Singapore, stereotype*

Introduction

Most studies on intercultural contact have taken a direct approach towards either the host society or towards migrants. Studies in the first category include those focusing on immigration policies and institutions of receiving countries and those evaluating civil society attitudes towards migrants (Arends-Tóth& Van De Vijver2003; Horenczyk&Munayer 2007; Luque, del Carmen GarcíaFernández & Tejada2006; Yeoh& Huang 2010). Similarly, studies in the second category focus on the acculturation attitudes of migrants directly, evaluating their adaptation in the host culture using indices of physical and mental well-being (Lindert et al. 2009; Riedel, Wiesmann & Hannich 2011).

In Singapore, the debate on immigration hasbeen framed along these two dimensions, viz. either in terms of host society's active measures to multiculturalize the social fabric (e.g. active promotion and support for ethnic cultures and languages) or as migrants' active efforts to integrate with the host society (Aricat & Chib 2014). However, by confining the migrant question within these two analogous frames, certain issues have remained underexplored. For instance, the silent but steady accumulation of negative feelings among migrants 'as a function of' hostilities they face in the host country has not been sufficiently explored. Rumbaut (2008) captures such feelings using the concept of 'reactive ethnicity,' which denotes "one mode of ethnic identity formation [among ethnic minorities] that highlights the role of a hostile context of reception in accounting for the rise rather than the erosion of ethnicity" (p. 110). Reactive ethnicity is conceptually different from ethnic cultural identity (e.g. Berry 1997; Tsai, Ying & Lee 2000). Unlike cultural identity, reactive ethnicity is not autonomous, but depends on how migrant groups are received by dominant host cultures. Reactive ethnicity develops as a result of hostilities and segregation experienced by an ethnic group over a period of time. Hence, this concept requires the adoption of a

historical perspective, in the wake of continual interaction between migrants and the host society. In this study, culture can be understood as the sum total of experiences of a community, which poses expectations on its members and provides them with a frame to understand the world. In this study, the use of 'culture' overlaps with the political category 'nation', a distinction we elaborate on subsequently.

Interculturality as an adaptive ability of humans is crucial in the social integration process (Vergunst 2008). Scholars acknowledge that the term 'interculturality' has been defined broadly, having parallels with intercultural sensitivity (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003), bi/multi-culturalism (Dennis 2008), and cultural hybridization (Hall, 1992), with derived models criticized for lacking "conceptual specificity" (Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, & DeJaeghere 2003:469). We orient this study on Bennett's (1993) definition of interculturality as posited in the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. According to this model, a mono-cultural mind-set develops into an intercultural mind-set after passing through different stages or orientation to other cultures, such as 'denial' of deeper cultural differences, to 'minimization,' denoting recognition and appreciation of cultural differences.

Adopting the framework of reactive ethnicity, we deviate from the direct evaluation approach and follow an 'as a function of' approach. Thus, the study evaluates the receiving country's migration situation as a function of migrants' perceptions (or perceived discrimination), and migrants' interculturality is understood as a function of the stereotypes they create about the host society.

The evolving debates on immigration in Singapore provide a context for the present study to explore how hostility and discrimination towards migrants could in turn generate stereotyping of the host society. Civil society in Singapore vehemently opposed a White Paper on Population promulgated by the government in early 2013, which aimed at enhancing migration (Goh, Yong, &Sim2013).In the ensuing debate international migrants were often targets of online vitriol and host society condescension. We investigate whether the phenomenon of generated perceptions of discrimination by an apparently multicultural society about a group of migrants results in return negative stereotypes. Importantly, we further investigate whether contact between the two groups could mitigate the spiraling tensions of discrimination and reverse-stereotyping.

According to contact theory, inter-group prejudice, segregation and stereotyping can be alleviated if groups establish mutual contact among themselves (du Toit& Quayle 2011). Through mutual contact, negative beliefs and stereotypes are counter-acted using reason, and more positive inter-group attitudes developed (Emerson, Kimbro & Yancey 2002).

Contact, in its original conceptualization, represented face-to-face (FTF) inter-personal interaction between individuals within a group or across groups (Allport 1954). More recently, interaction mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs) has been demonstrated to overcome boundaries of nationality, race, language and ideology (Postmes, Spears & Lea 1998; Thomas 2008). In this particular case we examine how international students from the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Singapore perceive discrimination and in turn stereotype the host society. In addition, we examine how FTF and mediated contact can mitigate this group's stereotyping of Singaporeans.

Context

Singapore relies heavily on inward migration to fill labor shortfalls in a growing economy and to woo talent that can consequently naturalize. The population of 5.5 million consists of a resident population (3.84 million) which is predominantly Chinese (74.3%) (Sing Stat2015), a proportion that has remained relatively stable for over two decades (77.8% in 1990) (Sing Stat 2014).Among the 1.6million non-residents, 0.24 million were non-working, three-quarters of whom were international students, of whom 60% were PRC students (0.11 million).

We paid special attention to these PRC student-migrants in Singapore, who are quite likely to seek long-term migration. It is reported that 25,000 Chinese students go abroad every year for studies ("Singapore – New Mecca" 2002). Many PRC student-migrants choose to find jobs as professional immigrants and later gain permanent migration status in Singapore (Robertson 2013; Ruiz 2013). International trends mirror Singapore—of the 350,000 international students who departed China for two decades since 1982, only

120,000 returned. We therefore consider this group to comprise both sojourners, i.e. short-term migrants, and longer term migrants, with an emphasis on the latter.

Contact

There is a range of historical evidence supporting the significant effects of intergroup FTF contact. Amir (1969) finds greater impact of intimate contact in comparison to casual contact on developing harmony between ethnic groups. Other scholars suggest that the equal status of groups can produce positive results, such as a reduction in inter-group prejudice (Dixon 2006; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ 2011; Riordan 1978).

We note that this approach has been disputed, with historical criticisms ranging from lack of representativeness (Ford 1986), inability of individual effects to be extended to groups (Forbes 1987), and suggestions that the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice may not be a simple and direct causal effect (Stephan 1987). Further, such optimism is tempered in terms of the generalization of the effects of contact. Some find that the positive impact of contact is difficult to extrapolate beyond the actual context in which it takes place (Brown & Wade 1987; Hewstone & Brown 1986).More recently, however, a meta-review of 515 studies found general support for the claim that intergroup contact reduces prejudice (Pettigrew &Tropp2011). Given the advent of new forms of mediated interaction, such as online interactions and mobile phone communication, we believe the theory requires a reprise.

In the case of mediated contact, mixed results have been found regarding immigrant-host interactions. Online platforms mimic the interactions, relationships and tensions that play out in the real world (Cook 2004). However, unlike real world interactions, wherein people are exposed to visual scrutiny by the interlocutor, mediated interaction can be engaged in from one's own private space, at one's own leisure, editing and posting comments after careful re-reading (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna 2006).Hence, mediated interactions may disguise the actual state of relationships between the communicating individuals or groups. While some studies suggest the increased ghettoization of ethnic immigrant communities online (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, &Siara 2008; Weiss, Nincic, & Nolan 2005), others highlight the facilitative role of new media platforms in enhancing contact (Chen 2010). Sawyer (2011) found that international students used social media to engage with the American host society by talking with locals about cultural experiences. Given the lack of resolution, this study aims to contribute to the debate by investigating whether mediated contact would supplement traditional FTF contact in developing interculturality.

Discrimination perceived by immigrants

Discrimination in social life can be based on varied criteria like gender, physical attributes, race, majority-minority status and religion. Discrimination towards immigrants can range from government policies (Lei & Li 2012), employment entitlements (Aldashev, Gernandt & Thomsen 2012), to social exclusion (Wong, Li, & Song 2007). Leets' (2001) examination of Internet hate sites finds that, aside from vitriol against immigrant groups, psychological distancing and moral exclusion often occur. Subjected to discrimination and exclusion over time, immigrants internalize the host society's hegemony, negatively affecting their own health and well-being (Halim, Yoshikawa, & Amodio 2012). We therefore focus on immigrants' perception of discrimination by the host society.

Perceived discrimination is defined as "a belief that one has been treated unfairly because of one's origin" (Mesch, Turjeman & Fishman 2008:592). It pertains to salient aspects of life, including social, professional, religious and cultural domains (Giamo, Schmitt & Outten 2012). Immigrants who perceive discrimination at the hands of host society are reluctant to identify themselves with the latter and are less willing to see themselves as intercultural (Chen 2013). Further, these immigrant groups often fail to get access to the information channels of the host society (Spears & Lea 1994). Such muzzling of immigrant voices leads to isolation in co-ethnic forums (Wang & Sun 2009), possibly jeopardizing attempts towards attaining social harmony (Christiansen 2004; Kang 2009). Most relevant here is the fact that perceived discrimination is found to have a stronger negative impact on young people's well-being and academic achievements than on other age groups (Mesch, Turjeman & Fishman 2008).

Stereotyping by immigrants

Stereotypes are mental representations in which certain attributes are perceived to be related to members of a particular social group (Schneider 2004; Wigboldus, Dijksternhuis, & van Knippenberg 2003). The impact of culturally shared stereotypes is powerful, since these stereotypes often influence impressions about particular social groups (Fehr, Sassenberg, & Jonas 2012; Krieglmeyer & Sherman 2012).

Stereotypes are mirrored by the presence of both positively and negatively valenced beliefs about the individuals of a target group (Costarelli & Callà 2007). However, stereotypic information is more diagnostic when consisting of negative rather than positive valence (Leyens & Yzerbyt 1992). Unsurprisingly, negative stereotypes are psychologically important in influencing negative reactions towards certain groups (Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske 2005; Wong, Horn, & Chen 2013).People are confronted daily with various culturally shared stereotypes, making stereotype activation and associated prejudiced behavior difficult to escape from (Fehr, Sassenberg & Jonas 2012).

Some scholars argue that stereotypes should be viewed as dynamic constructs that can be changed (Diekman & Eagly 2000; Waroquier & Klein 2013). Previous research shows that increased contact, even imagined intergroup contact, between members of in-groups and out-groups could promote positive intergroup relationships and reduce intergroup stereotypes and prejudice (Brambilla, Ravenna & Hewstone 2012; Wong, Horn, & Chen 2013).

This subject has traditionally been studied from the perspective of dominant groups stereotyping vulnerable minority groups with the aim of discriminating against and subjugating them [e.g. Howard (2008) showed how Blacks were considered 'high risk' pupils in schools due to a "web of stereotypes" (p. 20) that acted against them, leading to marginalization and hindering the attainment of optimal education outcomes and life opportunities (James 2012)]. There are examples of how ethnic minorities react to discrimination, including separation (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik 2010) and self-consciousness (Rumbaut 2008). Diehl and Schnell (2006) considered 'reactive ethnicity' as the counterpart of assimilation. Their study puts to rest the growing anxieties of majority groups in Germany that new migrants and migrant-children integrate lesser than old migrants. Other studies have also failed to find evidence for the 'ethnic revival' of minorities in successive generations (Platt 2014).

This study does not consider 'reactive ethnicity' or 'ethnic revival' in itself as a negative development, which forecloses the possibility of migrants to retain their ethnic identity. On the other hand, it takes a less deterministic stand by focusing on the implications of reactive ethnicity, as is expressed in 'reverse stereotyping' – migrants' stereotyping of host society. Thus, one unique contribution of the present investigation is the focus, guided by the notion of reactive ethnicity, on how an outgroup stereotypes the dominant groups in the host country in response to perceived discrimination. Based on the literature, the following research question was raised: RQ_1 *How do contact (both FTF and mediated) and perceived discrimination predict stereotyping?*

Interculturality

Newly arrived immigrants internalize existing rules and norms in order to 're-socialize' with the host community to achieve integration (Polek, Wöhrle & Pieter van Oudenhoven 2010; Vergunst 2008). To a certain extent social integration can blur the boundaries between 'them' and 'us' (Kaya 2005; Vergunst 2008). A debate exists on whether transient sojourners such as international students need to acculturate to the host culture in the same manner as long-term migrants. Berry (1997) argues that despite there being variations in voluntariness, permanence and mobility among acculturating groups, a "basic process of adaptation appears to be common to all these groups" (p. 9). However, he acknowledges that the level of difficulty and the eventual outcome of acculturation would vary based on group characteristics.

Acculturation is better explained by interculturality and acultural learning process which includes a shift from ethnocentricity. Although culture is often defined as a frame of expectations, values and custom shared by a group of people, it has overlaps with political categories like nation-state. Drawing intricate links between political nationalism and cultural nationalism, Hutchinson (1994) observes that the latter is an attributing organic life force into the tradition, history and culture of a nation. Sun (2002) observed that Chinese diaspora identify with two historical occurrences at the national level – the famine in the early

1960s and the Cultural Revolution – thereby suggesting an overlap of cultural imagination with national identity (Chan 2010).

In interculturality one's culture provides the lens to understand an outside reality in which diversity is acknowledged and an inclusionary approach adopted (Miglietta &Tartaglia 2009). Interculturality nonetheless involves a negotiation between one's cultural-national self and the experiences one encounters in a new culture. Emphasizing how an intercultural situation can provide a learning experience, Jackson (2006) observed how Chinese students who went for a short-term course to the United Kingdom gained intercultural experience, as "immersion in the host culture exposed them to different ways of living and interests that were new to them" (p. 90).

A study among American student sojourners in Mexico showed that those who stayed longer in the host country developed a deeper understanding of the subtleties of the host culture (Medina-Lopez-Portillo 2004). Other studies have confirmed how knowledge of the host society language helped students better adapt to the new culture (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen 2003). However, Jackson (2008) calls for an active effort on the part of international students to achieve an ethnorelative attitude, warning that "residence in the host culture does not automatically produce interculturality" (p. 357). This provides a valid case for evaluating the acculturation experience of PRC students and sojourners in Singapore: If interculturality is learned and not a given between groups that may or may not have cultural characteristics in common, how do PRC students acculturate to Singapore – a country with Chinese as a dominant ethnic group? We thus pose the second research question: RQ$_2$ *How do contact (both FTF and mediated), stereotyping, and perceived discrimination predict interculturality?*

Method

Data collection

This exploratory study adopted a web-based survey as the main method of data collection. First, the questionnaire was designed in English, and translated into Chinese. Reverse-translation was conducted to ensure accuracy. The data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire set up online at Survey Monkey with invitations sent out via a snowball-sampling method.

As the Ministry of Manpower and Immigration and Checkpoints Authority does not disaggregate data on the basis of ethnicities of international students, we decided to recruit participants from colleges and universities in Singapore. During the five-week data collection period, a link to the online survey was sent to international PRC students via E-mail, who were further requested to forward the survey invitation to their PRC network in Singapore. Participants thus included those who responded to the E-mail invitations. The invitations explicitly informed potential participants that the study was about PRC students in Singapore.

A total of 585 valid responses were collected. All the participants resided in Singapore during the study. 48.4% of the participants were male, and 51.6% were female. The largest age group was between 20 and 25 years old (59.9%); 31.8% were 16-19, 5.0% were 26-29, and the rest were aged above 30 (3.2%). 68.5% had a university education. All the participants had stayed in Singapore for more than one year, with a mean length of 3.34 years (SD=1.12).

Measures

The data was divided into variables of interest based on the literature review: 1) contact (both FTF and mediated), 2) stereotyping, 3) perceived discrimination, 4) interculturality and 5) demographics. Items related to the first four variables of interest were measured via a five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Contact

FTF and mediated contact with locals were measured based on items drawn from previous studies on [6] intergroup contact (Islam & Hewstone, 1993).The FTF contact subscale was composed of eight items (e.g., 'I have FTF interactions with Singaporeans very often' and 'I make an effort to interact with Singaporeans'). The reliability alpha was .79. The mediated contact subscale was composed of three items. Participants were asked the following questions: (i) 'I interact with Singaporeans through online media very often'; (ii) 'I interact with Singaporeans using my mobile phone (e.g., calling and SMS) very often'; and (iii) 'In general, my interactions with Singaporeans have been very pleasant'. The reliability alpha was .79.

Stereotyping

Three focus groups were conducted, as a qualitative preparatory stage, with 16 PRC students who had been staying in Singapore from less than one year to more than three years. Participants were asked to list the negative stereotypes of Singaporeans. The results were combined with relevant items from previous research (Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ 2010). A total of eight items, including 'Singaporeans are obsessed with money' and 'Singaporeans are arrogant', were adopted. The reliability alpha was .88.

Perceived discrimination

Perceived discrimination was examined based on the mutual attitudes among immigrants scale (Berry 2006, 2010). Participants were asked to indicate agreement with seven statements such as: (a) 'I think that Singaporeans have behaved in an unfair or negative way towards me because of my PRC background'; (b) 'I don't feel accepted by Singaporeans'; and (c) 'I have been teased or insulted because of my PRC background'. The reliability alpha was .85.

Interculturality

As posited by DMIS (Bennett, 1993), interculturality involves a multi-stage process, wherein ethnocentric views are replaced with ethnorelative views, leading to appreciation and acceptance of other cultures. These orientations have been summarized in the Intercultural Development Inventory, and have been tested in different contexts (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard 2006; Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, & DeJaeghere 2003). This study focuses more on the orientation of 'acceptance' that "recognizes and appreciates patterns of cultural difference and commonality in one's own and other cultures." (Hammer 2009:4). Participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the statements: (a) 'I feel comfortable around Singaporeans'; (b) 'I could imagine being in a gathering made up mainly of Singaporeans'; (c) 'I could imagine being friends with Singaporeans'; (d) 'I could imagine taking on a job in Singapore'; (e) 'I could imagine myself marrying a Singaporean'; and (f) 'I could imagine staying in Singapore for a long term'. The reliability alpha was .84.

Demographics

Individual-related variables like period of residence, age, income and education level also affect migrants' integration decisions (Arends-Tóth& Van De Vijver 2003;Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker & Obdrzálek 2000). Demographic characteristics of the participants such as gender, age, education levels, and period of residence, were recorded.

Results

Correlations

Correlations were performed to examine possible relationships among FTF contact, mediated contact, stereotyping, perceived discrimination and interculturality. Results in Table 1 showed that (1) FTF contact was significantly and positively correlated with (a) mediated contact and (b) interculturality, $r(555) = .64$, $p<.001$ and $r(555) = .62, p<.001$, respectively. (2) Mediated contact was found to be significantly and positively correlated with interculturality, $r(570) = .54, p<.001$. (3) Stereotyping was significantly and positively correlated with perceived discrimination, $r(551) = .50, p<.001$.

Results also showed that (1)FTF contact was significantly correlated with (a) stereotyping and (b) perceived discrimination, $r(545) = -.34$, $p<.001$ and $r(547) = -.33$, $p<.001$, respectively. (2) Mediated contact was found to have a significant negative correlation with (a) stereotyping and (b) perceived discrimination, $r(560) = -.21$, $p<.001$ and $r(561) = -.20$, $p<.001$, respectively. (3) Stereotyping was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with interculturality, $r(560) = -.37$, $p<.001$. (4) Perceived discrimination was significantly and negatively correlated with interculturality, $r(561) = -.27$, $p<.001$.

Therefore, as one aspect of interaction with local people, more FTF and mediated contact led to less stereotyping, less perceived discrimination, and higher degree of interculturality. Those who felt a greater degree of perceived discrimination exhibited a greater degree of stereotyping as evidence of reactive ethnicity. Moreover, those who stereotyped less tended to show greater degree of interculturality. Similarly, participants who perceived less discrimination showed a greater degree of interculturality. Summary of the correlation results among FTF contact, mediated contact, stereotyping, perceived discrimination and interculturality is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Zero-order Pearson correlations among FTF contact, mediated contact, stereotyping, perceived discrimination and interculturality*

	2	3	4	5
1. FTF contact	.64***	-.34***	-.33***	.62***
2. Mediated contact		-.21***	-.20***	.54***
3. Stereotyping			.50***	-.37***
4. Perceived discrimination				-.27***
5. Interculturality				

Notes: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p<.001$; N =585

Predicting stereotyping

To answer RQ_1, a hierarchical regression was run (See Table 2). Demographics, entered as the first block, were not significant predictors. Contact, the second block, explained 13% of the variance, with FTF contact ($b = -.22$, $p<.001$) as a significant predictor. The results indicate that participants holding stronger stereotypes about Singaporeans had less FTF contact with locals. Perceived discrimination, the third block, was the strongest predictor ($b = .40$, $p<.001$), explaining 14% of the variance. The hierarchical regression explained 27% of the variance in total.

Table 2: *Hierarchical regression analysis of the impact of FTF contact, mediated contact, and perceived discrimination on stereotyping*

Predictors	Stereotyping, β	ΔR^2
Block 1: Demographics		
Gender (male=1)	.01	
Age	.07	
Education level	-.03	.00

Period of residence	-.03	.00
Block 2: Contact		
FTF contact	**-.22***	
Mediated contact	-.02	.13
Block 3: Perceived discrimination	**.40***	.14
R Square		**.27**
Adjusted R Square		**.27**

Notes: ***$p<.001$; N =585

Predicting interculturality

To examine the relative influence of contact (both FTF and mediated), stereotyping, and perceived discrimination on interculturality as proposed in RQ$_2$, a hierarchical regression was conducted. Demographics, constituting the first block, were not significant predictors. FTF contact ($b = .41$, $p<.001$) and mediated contact ($b = .23$, $p<.001$), the second block, were significant predictors, explaining 43% of the variance. Stereotyping, the third block in the analysis, ($b = -.21$, $p<.001$) was a significant predictor, explaining 4% of the variance. Perceived discrimination, the last block, was not a significant predictor for interculturality. The hierarchical regression explained 47% of the variance in total, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *Hierarchical regression analysis of the impact of FTF contact, mediated contact, stereotyping, and perceived discrimination on interculturality*

Predictors	Interculturality, β	ΔR^2
Block 1: Demographics		
Gender (male=1)	.04	
Age	-.01	
Education level	-.02	.00
Period of residence	.01	.00
Block 2: Contact		
FTF contact	**.41***	
Mediated contact	**.23***	.43
Block 3: Stereotyping	**-.21***	.04
Block 4: Perceived discrimination	-.02	.00
R Square		**.47**

Adjusted R Square	**.47**

Discussion

The discussion encompasses theoretical and policy implications of the research, but first engages with the socio-political ramifications, a domain that has witnessed heightened tensions since the research study began. The study was premised on an emergent social situation in Singapore – an otherwise multicultural society in which multiple ethnicities reportedly live in harmony – wherein migrants, ranging from long-term expatriate professionals to sojourners such as guest workers and international students, are increasingly becoming target for host society's negative sentiments, antipathy and even resentment. In particular, media reports and online exchanges suggest a (growing) discriminatory attitude towards PRC immigrants (Jacobs 2012). We are concerned that these negative attitudes of the host society foster negative attitudes in migrants, which in turn reinforce the former, and so on. Reactive ethnicity then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, with negative attitudes of migrants used as a rationale for xenophobia. We reiterate that the current sample is a mixed group, likely consisting of a majority of long-term migrants and a minority of sojourners. Thus the implications of the research extend to a broader definition of migrants. We urge further analysis that distinguishes between these two immigrant groups.

In the existing literature, the impact of stereotyping, relative to cultural and economic anxieties, may have been underestimated (Lu & Nicholson-Crotty 2010). Previous research conducted to study xenophobic attitudes amongst local populations fails to assign dimensions of agency and autonomy to the out-group, i.e., immigrants, who are often portrayed as victims (e.g, Lu & Nicholson-Crotty 2010; Phung 2011). We found that immigrants' perceived discrimination from locals influenced negative stereotypes, which in turn significantly predicted (negatively) interculturality. Thus, it is not the perceived discrimination per se that directly and solely hindered social cohesion and integration (interculturality), but the reverse stereotyping that it caused. It would be good to parse the two relationships stated above, and discuss their implications.

Firstly, the results showed that perceived discrimination significantly predicted student-migrants' stereotyping of the host society. This supports the notion of reactive ethnicity, which maintains that under hostile conditions, outgroups would perceive threat, and become aware of their distinctiveness from other groups (Rumbaut 2008; Schwartz et al. 2010). Several instances reported in the press attest to the validity of this concept — e.g. the incident of a PRC family complaining about an Indian Singaporean neighbor's routine of curry cooking, and incidents of PRC students cursing Singaporean friends online with hatred and prejudice, etc. This study, thus, attempted to view brewing social disharmony from the viewpoint of mainly silent, but occasionally erupting, migrant experiences.

The notion of reactive ethnicity can claim a tradition in the spiral of silence theory, wherein an opinion or prejudice remains silent in the public sphere just because it does not have overt approval from dominant communities (Noelle-Neumann 1974). In the migrant situation, prejudice and stereotyping might be widespread but behaviorally dormant, partly because this group lacks socio-political and economic power. However, occasional volatile eruptions reveal that negative feelings, dormant but brewing, find pent-up release given an appropriate trigger. The recent rioting by a 400-strong mob of South Asian migrants in December 2013 may be viewed within this theoretical lens ("Singapore's angry" 2013). This approach suggests deeper underlying motivations to the phenomenon of migrant flashpoints, in contrast to existing viewpoints attributing these incendiary events to particular circumstantial factors (Mei Hua Raman 2014).

Secondly, the results showed that reverse stereotyping, not perceived discrimination, significantly predicted (negatively) interculturality. The research question then begets a response rather than mere identification of mechanisms, in terms of moving from why the situation arose to how to deal with the situation. Taken in combination, the theoretical frames of reactive ethnicity and interculturality suggest that migrants have a role to play in realizing the goal of social harmony, instead of being passive observers. The immigration debate in Singapore has primarily been conducted amongst Singaporean

society, with locals debating the merits and demerits of immigration. The decision-making power thus is concentrated in local hands, with immigrants variously playing the roles of 'villains' or 'victims', yet powerless to influence the debate.

We argue that society as a whole, including both Singaporeans and immigrants, need to take responsibility in order to deal with immigration issues. On one hand, discrimination against immigrants should be reduced, a common refrain, while on the other, the duty also falls equally on immigrants to rethink their attitudes towards host society, regardless of the position of the former. Thus, reactive ethnicity should not be the justification for sojourners and migrants to retain or foster stereotypes held about host society. By gaining an understanding how each stage in the spiral of social disharmony begets the other, immigrants should do what they can to improve the situation. Understanding the impact of their own negative attitudes upon interculturality allows immigrants to realize their own agency to address the situation, rather than be labeled as 'victims'. As immigrants realize that their integration hopes also rely on their own stereotypes of locals, attitudes which are within their own power to change, rather than the discrimination heaped upon them, their agency to influence the immigration debate increases. Opening up communication channels and contact with the host society could be one obvious step in improving the situation.

Thirdly, FTF contact was found to be more influential than mediated contact, with more FTF contact leading to less stereotyping and a higher degree of interculturality. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., du Toit & Quayle 2011; Pettigrew, Wagner & Christ 2010), contact plays an important role in the life of immigrants. Previous studies have shown that higher interculturality is an optimum condition for students' educational achievement and better performance in the host country (Jackson, 2006; Holmes 2014). In this study, PRC students' heightened understanding of the local people and culture through contact helped enhance interculturality, which probably had both societal and personal benefits.

Virtual mediated contact, especially online communication and social media, has been found to forge community relationships among the youth (Postmes, Spears & Lea 1998; Thomas 2008) and increase intercultural understanding between students in educational spaces (e.g. Jaidev 2014). However, we found that the impact of mediated communication was not as high as that of FTF contact. Mediated contact, although found to facilitate interculturality, did not show any effect on stereotyping. We thus caution against unduly privileging mediated communication to achieve interculturality amongst migrants and sojourners. It is possible that, bereft of authentic cultural and personality cues, like skin color and physical features, and in the absence of supervision, online interlocutors can take their communication to extreme levels, which can become emotional and tendentious at the time of heightened socio-political tensions. The results also suggest that the positive effect of mediated contact on intergroup affinity, which has been observed in small-group scenarios, needs to be differentiated from the situations that involve international students and resident national population. In this particular case, mediated contact did not seem to improve the stereotyping behavior.

The findings of the study have implications for policymakers. If stereotyping by migrants is identified as a reaction to the discriminatory attitudes migrants face in the host country, the government can seek to break the vicious circle by focusing on both groups. Such an exercise systematically reduces the chances of sudden and potentially harmful outburst, thus ensuring long-term harmony of a society within which both locals and immigrants seek well-being. Moreover, the government should take active efforts to improve interactions, both direct and mediated, between residents and immigrants in the country. In addition to efforts enhancing multiculturalism amongst the resident population (e.g. schemes like ethnic quota-based housing allotment, reservation for ethnicities in electoral constituencies, etc.), the government should also actively engage in bridging the socio-cultural and economic divides between locals and immigrants. In the first instance, the ghettoization and associated localized laws (Mei Hua Raman 2014) need to be re-examined. In the second instance, the disparity in the salary and perks for resident and non-resident workforce, which has resulted in agitations and strikes in recent years (Siddique 2012), needs a revamp. These policy initiatives are necessary to concurrently address these inequalities, along with establishing better channels of communication between these two sections of the population.

Limitations and suggestions for future studies

While this study has significant implications for debates surrounding immigration policy in Singapore and elsewhere, some limitations to the generalizability of the findings exist. Although the results of this study generally support the contact hypothesis that increased intergroup contact will reduce tensions between them, an evaluation of the quality and sustainability of such rapprochement is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore we advise caution in interpreting the results, as the positive outcome of enhanced contact might be minor and short-lived. We note that young PRC students were probably more educated and media-savvy than the average blue-collar immigrant, and shared a common language and historical culture with the dominant ethnic community in Singapore. Future research should be conducted amongst other age groups within PRC immigrants, and among immigrants of other ethnic groups, who may have different linguistic and ethnic characteristics, and are at different socio-economic strata. We further note that the Singaporean Population White Paper released during the period of data collection, accompanied by widespread protests, might have affected the results.

Nonetheless, there are important conclusions related to immigrant responsibility and agency, and the role of FTF and mediated contact that can inform the immigration debate and resultant policies. In countries with a high proportion of migrants within the populations, misunderstandings between local people and immigrants can be complicated and multifarious. This research contributed to a greater understanding of the underlying dynamics related to the generation of negative feelings and stereotyping among migrants in the host country. It also helped delineate the key mitigating factors in the phenomenon, which can be focused on by policymakers in order to ensure social harmony.

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