

International students: Temporary migrants or permanent migrants “in-process”?

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ABSTRACT

International students are sojourners: migrants who voluntarily leave their home country on a time-limited basis in order to accomplish a specific academic, personal, or employment-related objective. Some students, however, may decide to transition from temporary to permanent residency, once their educational objectives have been met. Despite this potential for future immigration, little is known about what predicts international students' immigration intentions. Addressing this limitation, the present study explored the role of demographic, academic, adjustment, and acculturation variables on international students' permanent residency intentions. Results suggest that motivation to acculturate is what primarily distinguishes between students who wish to pursue permanent Canadian residency and those who do not.

INTRODUCTION

International Education Strategy (IES; 2014)

- International students = 94% increase since 2001 (CBIE, 2013)
- *International Education Strategy* (IES) launched in January 2014
- IES goals: (1) 450 000 international students by 2022; **AND** (2) increased international student permanent residency

Why Promote Permanent Residency? (Arthur & Flynn, 2014)

- 1) Stimulate economic growth, increasing # of skilled workers
- 2) Address aging working population and low birth rates
- 3) International students already have host country experience
- 4) The prospect of permanent migration = recruitment strategy for further international student enrollment

What Predicts Permanent International Student Migration?

- Studies have suggested age, gender, number of years in Canada, country of origin, English competence, and/or overall adjustment as potential predictors of international student immigration intentions (Lu & Schissel, 2009)
- However, findings have been mixed
- Still looking for a valid and reliable predictor

What about Motivation to Acculturate? (Chirkov et al., 2007)

- Willingness to integrate = biggest distinction between permanent and temporary migrants (temporary migrants = less willingness)
- Acculturation Motivation (AM) is the willingness to learn about the host culture and to develop friendships with host members

RESEARCH QUESTION

Does level of AM distinguish between international students who intend on pursuing permanent Canadian residency and those who do not, above and beyond what would be expected from socio-demographic and adjustment variables?

METHOD

Participants:

- 266 international students from York University

Future residency intent: (Wintre Lab, 2012)

- “After your education, do you intend to return home or stay in Canada?”
- Responses coded as either (1) intend to remain in Canada or (2) do not intend to remain in Canada ($\kappa = .82$)

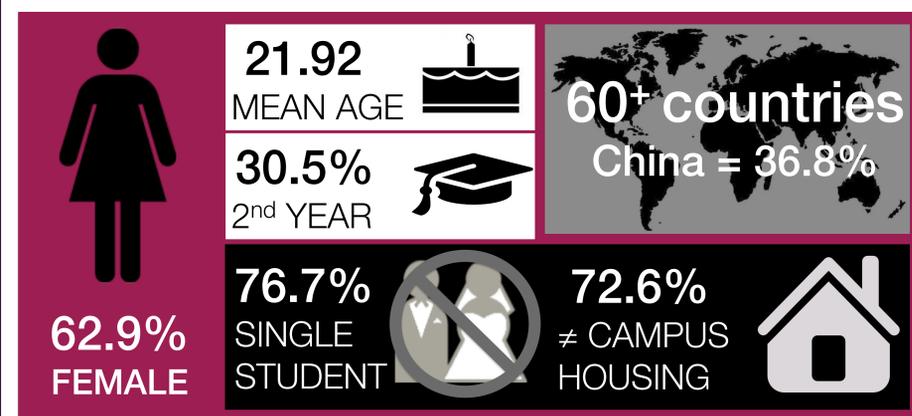
Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker, 1987)

- Assesses international students' overall adjustment across personal, social, academic, and institutional domains

Acculturation Motivation Scale (AMS; Chirkov et al., 2007, 2008)

- Assesses international students' willingness to interact with the Canadian context (e.g., “I am interested in learning more about Canada”)

RESULTS



Hierarchical Logistic Regression Predicting International Students' Permanent Residency Intentions

Block	Variables	Odds Ratio
1) Socio-demographic	Age Gender Academic Year Region of Origin	
2) Adjustment	SACQ	
3) Motivation to acculturate	AMS**	1.20**

*Nagelkerke*² = .413; ** = $p < .01$

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CONCLUSION

Hypothesis Confirmed!

- Model explained **41.3%** of the variance in students' permanent residency intentions
- AM was the **only** variable to significantly contribute to this prediction, such that for every one unit increase on the AMS, odds of staying in Canada also increased by **20%**

Bottom line

- AM is an effective way of distinguishing between students who envision a transition to permanent Canadian residency and those who envision a home country return

DISCUSSION

What does this say about international students' immigration intentions?

- For some international students, the primary goal may be to gain Canadian residency or citizenship, rather than simply acquiring a post-secondary education
- In such instances, education is not the primary migratory objective, but rather a means to obtain permanent residency
- Similar to permanent migrants, international student's who wish to pursue permanent residency are more likely to attribute value in acclimatizing to the host country culture
- International students with greater levels of AM may therefore represent a subset of students who are “permanent migrants in-process”, as opposed to typical, temporary migrants

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- 1) The distinction between permanent and temporary migrants can aid in tailoring future international student support efforts, given that each of these migrant groups have their own distinct needs and challenges and therefore require different types and levels of support

- 2) Future research should explore if motivation to acculturate is malleable and, if so, whether increasing students' willingness to familiarize themselves with the Canadian context can, in turn, support Canada's IES objective of increased international student permanent migration