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Learning to Cross Borders:

Everyday Urban Encounters between South Korea and Auckland

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines aspects of emergent transnational mobility within the experience of students advancing their education at tertiary institutions, private training establishments and language schools. In particular it focuses on the everyday practices and experiences of one group of international students from South Korea during their time in Auckland, New Zealand. The context for the research is that over the last decade the growth of international students and the institutions associated with their movement and education have begun to have significant economic, social and cultural implications in New Zealand, particularly in Auckland. Here, the rapid increase in the number and proportion of students from three East-Asian nations (China, South Korea and Japan) has contributed to profound changes in the socio-cultural geographies of Auckland’s central city.

The aim of this study is to interrogate the everyday urban encounters of South Korean international students as a means to more deeply understand the phenomenon of crossing borders to learn. I employ a multi-method and multi-sited research approach that draws on both orthodox and emergent techniques within human geography and related social sciences. Through these methods I focus on the individual and collective practices and experiences of these students as key actors in the developments associated with international education. At all times the focus is on ‘the everyday’ and the ways in which students negotiate their encounters between South Korea and Auckland.

In theoretical terms the thesis is situated at the border between the study of transnationalism and the study of cities. It identifies the ways that the transnational mobility and activity of students alongside others is involved in the changing spaces of Auckland’s urban landscape. These changed spaces include physical, economic, sensory and perceptual landscapes of the city. In addition the thesis also illustrates the concurrent production, maintenance and resistance of pre-existing and new identities; the often difficult, highly structured and uneven landscape that emerges as a result of the interaction between individuals and groups who consider each-other ‘foreign’; and the way that these types of interactions in contemporary cities are facilitated by but also maintain and produce increasing transnationalism. The thesis concludes by illustrating
the fundamental role that cities play in the practice of international education and the resulting importance of international education to the everyday realities of contemporary cities like Auckland.
For Seunghee
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