


# Chapter 4

## International Student Narratives in the United Kingdom Higher Education: Psychology and Structure

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### ABSTRACT

*There is an Indonesian proverb saying “dimana bumi dipijak, disitu langit dijunjung” which means people should follow and respect the norms where they live. This proverb has universal meaning. People do transmigration, they move and live in different places for many reasons, including to pursue higher education. This article will discuss about the narrative of international students and their psychology related to their experience in different settings and system. By the end of the discussion, it is concluded that there are many layered factors contributing to one’s psychology, including the geographical aspects, the challenging norms and customs, and the different setting and structures that maintain the narratives identity as international students in the United Kingdom higher education. The international students narrative is not only about the academic adjustment and the climate survival stories, but it is also about the psychology adaptation to not only to the geographical aspect, but also to the whole system.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Let me begin this writing by telling you a story that makes me realize that I am not the same person before my a-year-and-half experience doing Master degree in Leeds, United Kingdom.

It was in a middle of the noon, the sun was a little bit over my head, I was stung by the heat as I was no longer accustomed to 30ish plus degree Celsius. My friends and I were visiting an old coffee house in a heritage village in Malang, Indonesia. It was told that the coffee house was once a humble house of the owner's great-great grandparents in 90s. It was one of the oldest buildings survived in the neighbourhood. The owner does not change the main building, most of the areas were preserved as it was. Some part are left rotten to give the "heritage" experience. They also decorated the entire house with old stuffs, from magazines, cd tapes, bikes, to electronics items like radio and typing machine. I was impressed by how the store was carefully displayed and arranged to be as close as how it was used to be to transport us, the visitors, back to the era and to experience the ambience of the old times.

What impressed me most, apart from the house and everything, was actually the waitress. She dressed unlike most of us in the room, she was not trying to make an impression of a 90s *Kartini*<sup>1</sup> girl either, but pretty much she was giving me the retro and vintage vibes that was somehow matching to her small station in the corner of the house. She sat there at the cashier machine waiting for us to make an order. She did not act like a subject, yet as part of the decoration syncing in to the created atmosphere. After we made some order, later she served us hot coffee and hot tea<sup>2</sup> to our table. Some of us were whispering about her nice outfit while having our beverages and small talks. Before we left the coffee house and paid the experience, I told the cashier lady that I really like her outfit and asked if I can have a picture of her in her station. The lady thanked me shyly and agreed to be taken a picture. From her reaction I could tell that no one was giving her any compliment before me that day. To my surprise, my friends were interested to my "strange behaviour", as they said. Suddenly I remember that I used to be like them, too scared to address a compliments to people we barely know. Now I do not find it strange at all to directly give my compliments for them because I believe they need to hear it as they deserve it, instead of saying nice thing about them behind their back. It was my woke up moment when I started to look back to the Indonesian narrative that has long shaped me and how I turned to acquire another narrative psychologically.

How did I go from there to here? How did my perception change? This writing would like to unravel from the aspect of geography and its relation in shaping one's psychology, including self-perception, to the impact of the structure in systemic higher education to one's identity as self-reflection. This writing will take the example of the life and the experience as an international student in the United Kingdom,

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