FINDING ONE’S OWN PLACE IN TRANSNATIONAL LIVES: LIFE TRAJECTORIES, CAREERS, AND SELF-IDENTITIES OF JAPANESE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STUDIED ABROAD

BY

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DISsertation

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes how Japanese young people find their own places in their transnational lives. Based on in-depth interview research, their individual life trajectories are traced to explore how they have been struggling to establish their way of lives, work careers, and self-identities. The interviewees are 12 Japanese people including 3 males (roughly 18-40 years old), who are current or former students of ESL (English as a Second Language) schools or community colleges in several cities in the US, and have stayed or lived in the US for an extended period (minimum one year). People with a wider range of age than what people usually may expect to be as “young people” are included in this research, considering “precariousness” (Allison, 2013) widely shared by contemporary Japanese people, particularly those who are relatively young. They tend to have specific difficulties with their unsettled statuses, especially in their employment conditions. The concept of self-identities, which was indicated as one of the key aspects of late modern societies, are applied as a conceptual lens to understand how young people find their own places in the era of flexibilities and uncertainties (Giddens, 1991). Self-identities refers to personal and reflexive projects finding who they are, what they want to do, and what they prioritize. The dissertation pays particular attentions to how transnational experiences of Japanese young people are contextualized at the intersections between education, work, relationships, families, and Japanese communities.

Previous studies on study abroad and transnational migration explain motivations for study abroad predominantly by desires either for economic success in globalized labor markets or for international cultural-experiences. On the other hand, a couple of distinct trends have been identified to explain the purposes of transnational migration by the Japanese: 1) Escape from
undesirable work/social environment, and 2) Self-discovery. My pilot interview research particularly aimed for uncovering what “self-discovery” means in the life contexts of the Japanese young people. The research targeted Japanese students who have studied in the US for about a year on an average. The research revealed the term “self-discovery” means to them the processes where they try to find ways to live with more confidence in their life choices, including their future work career and relationships with their partners/families. They prioritized that they are psychologically ready for the future career to what they actually are going to do. It is also suggested that their perspectives on the Japanese society tend to change positively over time, whether or not they escaped from Japan. This dissertation attempts to further articulate how they find their own places and ways of living by focusing on longer-term processes and to know what makes them to continue to stay abroad. This attempt is also situated as a pursuit of answers to two broader questions raised based on the review of previous research. The first one is if and how study abroad or transnational migrations that started with study abroad function as beneficial “psychological moratoria” to deal with the questions of self-identities, which many people commonly have in late modern societies. The second question is regarding possibilities that any kind of personal statement/social critique by each transnational migrant/mover will lead to more collective social changes that mitigate/solve oppressions and difficulties that today’s Japanese, particularly young, people experience. The interview data was analyzed qualitatively, while individual stories were ethnographically described to deeply understand each life context.

The analysis of the interview research in this dissertation demonstrates that not many of them had a serious conflicts against their social environment in Japan or extremely strong dissatisfaction against “Japan” in a general sense to the extent to call their actions as “escape” or
“exodus,” although it is still critically important to focus on the serious conflicts some of them indeed had. Instead, they expressed that they had their own personal agenda in their processes of exploring self-identities and deciding who they are and what they do. Study abroad often functioned as a way to tackle the agenda. The Japanese young people who started their studies at an ESL school or community college find their own places and their ways of living at the intersections between 1) education, 2) work, 3) relationships and families, 4) certain communities that may or may not include the Japanese, and finally, 5) relations to Japan and people living there. Finding their own places does not mean they can choose whatever places and lives without any constraint. When they prioritize their education and work opportunities, staying in the US may be the only choice for them. When they have partners and families, they are usually essential part of their lives. Their life choices start to be largely influenced by the significant others and they often have to make a choice against their original career plans for the sake of benefits of families. Their relations to Japan and the Japanese people including both those living in Japan and those in the US are often complex and ambivalent. They do not necessarily consider that a Japanese community exist just because there are Japanese people around. Even so, the relative generosity and flexibility of the diverse US society is supporting their transnational lives in many ways. The Japanese people able to feel their different ways of living are accepted in the US. Such a flexibility of the society, including lack of the second chances, is the factor that Japan needs to learn. While people’s actual lives in Japan are already flexible and unstable especially in terms of their job statuses, it seems the socio-cultural norms/expectations do not follow them well.
To Ichiro Tanaka
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

How Are Education, Work, Transnational Lives, and “Finding Their Own Places to Live” All Linked Together?

Why don’t we have any second chances in the Japanese society? Why are our lives decided based on our ages? Why aren’t we allowed to take more time? Those questions against the inflexibilities within the Japanese society have always held on to me for the past two decades. Those questions became even more revealing after I experienced one-year study abroad as an exchange student and went on to a graduate school in the US later. Researching on the gap year in the UK for my Master’s thesis, I understood that gap year is regarded in the UK as an institutional support for the people to have a period of finding oneself while gaining new skills and experiences. I was interested in the gap year because I saw some possibilities to increase flexibility of the society through socially accepting the act of “wandering” to find oneself. I was, however, a little skeptical about what “finding oneself” or “self-discovery” really mean at this point.

This personal and academic history of mine led me to wonder how the other international students or temporary migrants spend their time in the US, how they give meanings to the experiences abroad, why they came to the US in the first place -- did they like their place in Japan or hate, like I did in the past? The majority of previous studies seemed to have only superficially understood international students as someone who decided to study abroad based on clear goals, interests, and plans, which are economically driven in most cases. None of their portraits was neither my experiences nor what I observed. Then I began to learn that some
research have indicated there are something different about young Japanese people who study/go abroad. There I came across the term “self-discovery” again.

“Self-discovery” or “self realization” in fact frequently appeared in the contexts of both study abroad and youth cultures in Japan. It was also often linked to another popular term “yaritai koto (what I really want to do)” to explain the situations and difficulties of young Japanese people today, which I directly experienced myself when I was in Japan. The combination of 1) education system that does not motivate students, and 2) the normative life course designed based on age, which does not give any second chances once we run off the rail, seem to have caused such difficulties to the Japanese, particularly to young people. While the problems have continued to be identified up to today, the economic stagnation since 90s has reduced their job openings and caused the following two mirroring effects: 1) corruption of the labor market that used to function to provide young people with decent jobs and 2) widespread questions against the normative life course set by the Japanese society--go to good college at age 18, graduate, start to work in a good company at 22, marry, and have kids by the age of 30. Such a life course began to be just impossible to realize for the majority of the young people even if they hoped for. The desires for discovering who they are and what they want to do have emerged in this socioeconomic contexts, representing both despair and some possibilities.

This also synched with the situations surrounding young people in other advanced countries. As Giddens famously argued in his book “ Modernity and self-identity” (1991), chronic revisions of self-identities have been a requirement for all ages of people in the late modern, which is full of uncertainty and multiple choices (ibid, p.3). The concept of self-identity
becomes a useful lens to analyze how the reflexive projects of creating self-identities are linked to socioeconomic backgrounds.

Self-discovery, self-identities, education, work, and temporary migration -- all connected inside me this way and became the starting point of my dissertation study. As a pilot study, while it was too important to call it a pilot study, I interviewed 16 ESL (English as a Second Language) school students including three males and one former student. Three of them planned to stay in the US permanently, one had stayed there for 5 years and planned to go back, three planned to study for 2-3 years. The other 9 interviewees planned to stay for about 6 months to one year.

This research suggested that the most important meaning of study abroad for them was to find and accept their own ways of livings after gaining a sense of confidence rather than the content of what they learned. They needed to be psychologically ready for the next phase of their lives and study abroad was their preparational and transitional period for them in that sense. That was their self-discovery. Education experiences in the US as the second chances and deliberations of their relationships to partners or families were the central part of the processes of finding their own ways of living.

My question then shifted from a) why they study abroad and how they are situated within their life trajectories to b) the processes of how they find their own places to live and ways of living when they continued to stay abroad for a longer term. The question was forged as I had been informed by the interviewees that there were people who kept extending their stay while maintaining their visa statuses by being students of ESL schools in the US. Here I finally reached my research question for dissertation. Furthermore, I realized the importance of the roles of partners, families, friends, and communities within the processes of finding their own place to
live throughout this pilot study. At the same time, I started to be conscious of the concept of the “transnational” because the interviewees were obviously closely connected to their home country while they got used to the lives in the US. This was also the case for those planning to stay permanently in the US.

**The Purpose of This Dissertation**

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe how Japanese young people find their own places in their transnational lives. Based on in-depth interview research, their individual life trajectories are traced to explore how they have been struggling to establish their way of lives, work careers, and self-identities. I pay particular attentions to how their transnational experiences are contextualized at the intersections between education, work, relationships, families, and Japanese communities. The interviewees are 12 Japanese people including 3 males (roughly 18-40 years old), who are current or former students of ESL schools or community colleges in several cities in the US, and have stayed or lived in the US for an extended period (minimum one year). I added community colleges because I learned both ESL schools and community colleges are the most accessible educational institutions for international students and ESL students often go on to community colleges even when they do not plan to further proceed to 4-year colleges.

**Background—Uniqueness of Japanese Study Abroad and Temporal Migration**

Previous studies on study abroad have explained the main motivations for study abroad predominantly by desires for either economic success as a global elite or for cultural-experiences. The economic driven motivations are rather emphasized for the global moves by the Asian. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that even the desire for cultural experiences are now swallowed up by economic drives because cultural experiences abroad
increase employability. International communication skills are highly evaluated as a proof of a globally cultivated and thus competitive person. Researchers argue this is an example of embodiment of neoliberal subjectivity, which prioritizes economic benefits over anything.

The cases of Japanese young people and their study abroad, however, indicate that they rather resist being driven by economic motivations. Instead, they often try to explain their experiences and motivations with different kinds of languages, which is often symbolized by the term “self-discovery.” On the other hand, statistical findings prove that, against the world-wide trend, the number of study abroad participants is decreasing (particularly the number of those studying in US). The facts that the number of participants in short-study abroad has been increasing despite the overall decrease is the uniqueness of the Japanese case.

Figure 1.1 Trends in the number of Japanese students studying abroad.

Japanese cases cannot be discussed in an over-generalized framework for these reasons. Japanese young people live in a unique situation, which contains variety of socio-economic issues.

Earlier research which focused on the trends of migrations from Japan to the US have argued Japanese women’s study/work abroad functions as an escape from gender-based discrimination in Japan’s labor market. This view is based on a common perspective that considers Japan as backward particularly in terms of gender equality, compared to the Western countries(Kelsky, 2001 and Ono & Piper, 2004). Some research also suggested Japanese people escape into overseas because of their undesirable and tiring work situations. On the other hand, recent studies have begun to find different types of motivations among Japanese young people going abroad. Minamikawa(2005), observing Japanese young people who have worked in a service industry illegally, suggests that Japanese young people in Los Angeles evaluate their staying abroad experiences based on individualized, subjective and ambiguous standards such as “how much am I true to myself?,” “how much should I do what I really want to do?” and “how much did I grow up personally?,” rather than as apparent resistance to Japanese society. In a similar vein, Kato(2011) argues many of the young people coming to Vancouver (Canada) are basically wandering and searching for a place to live, while trying to either find what they really want to do or spend their time on thinking if they should give up what they really want to do. For them, it seems study abroad may be defined as a moratorium period. Furthermore, Fujita(2009), focusing on Japanese young people coming to New York for with “artistic motivations,” radically points out that, for the informants, the most important meaning of going abroad is to have another chance in somewhere new but quite similar to Tokyo, where they almost lost their chances. These insights provide different ways to explore and understand motivations and
experiences of Japanese young people crossing the sea, although whether socioeconomic factors truly fade down is still in question.

Discourse centered on “True-self,” “True job (What I really want to do)” and “True place to be in” are indeed abundantly identified by research on Japanese young people since ‘90s, when Japan experienced deep economic recession while industrial structures had rapidly changed. The trend of prioritizing personal fulfillment over economic success seem to be strongly linked to this socio-economic background, since it is very likely that young people who cannot expect any economic success in the future would just turn their interests to other type of fulfillment. Recent statistics (Japan youth research institute, 2013) interestingly shows that only 9% of Japanese high school students hope to be “successful,” and the percentage is far lower compared to other countries’ students (30% US, 37% China, Korea 19%). Such uniqueness of Japanese young people’s values and philosophy is clearly worth investigating. Brinton (2010), an American researcher who conducted interview research for Japanese young people in Japan and comparative analysis between Japan and the US, argues that an attachment to specific places (workplace, school, community etc) characterizes Japanese society as a whole. Today’s Japanese people, however, have lost such places to attach to since ‘90s, as a result of the collapse of the educational systems and the labor market that previously seemed to have functioned well. The inward interests, de-prioritization of economic factors (at least on the surface), and search for places and “true self” (self-identity) are clearly important and distinct factors to understand the experiences of contemporary Japanese young people. And those factors are illuminated at study abroad for an extended time because many of the participants more consciously invest in their
“self-searching” period. They are more likely to become aware of what they were not able to fulfill in Japan as they have certain distance from its society.

Apart from the uniqueness of Japan, on one hand, a prolonged transitional and in-between period of young people as being “full of possibilities” has been recognized as a general trend found in most advanced countries. On the other hand, increasing economic instability, job insecurity followed by the rise of poverty ratio among young people have become serious problems in the same countries including Japan. Young people are not only socioeconomically but also often politically marginalized in those societies and have less impact on the policies that directly affect their lives. How study abroad experiences by Japanese young people are situated in these contexts also should be examined and such attempt linking young people’s voices and wider socio-economic contexts will yield practical suggestions to assist the struggling young people.

Observing their study abroad experiences and transnational lives is a useful way to illuminate how Japanese young people try to navigate and survive their lives while trying to explore and stabilize their self-identities within those life contexts. The pilot research suggested study abroad can be situated as a period of gaining a sense of confidence and getting psychologically ready for the next phase of life. The second chances in education and the relationships to partners and families were the keys there. This dissertation further investigates how the Japanese young people try to find their own places to live and ways of living during their long-term stay in the US. The longer the length of their stay become, the more salient the importance of finding and establishing their own place to live will be. How they decide to continue to stay in or leave the US will be examined while observing how such decision makings
are situated at the intersections of education, work, relationship, and possibly, Japanese communities.

Method

For this purpose--uncovering the processes of how Japanese young people find their own place to live -- I draw upon qualitative method in this dissertation. Qualitative inquiry enables me to deliberately explore how each individual give their own meanings to their experience by letting their voices show rather than how I want to tell about them. In reality, the interview scripts were still coded just like any other interview data usually is. Because coding and writing based on it are the acts of interpretation, it is impossible to completely just let the interviewees voices speak. I struggled as much as possible, however, to let them speak mainly by citing conversations between the interviewees and I verbatimly with enough length to see what they meant to say in the specific contexts. It also allows me to work through my positionality as a researcher throughout this research-- constantly reflecting how my positions affects the way this research was framed and how the relations between the interviewees and I have constructed the interview data.

Structure of this Dissertation

Chapter 2 reviews previous studies on youth, self-identities, and voluntary temporal migrations including study abroad. Following the trace of historical emergence and changes of the concept of “youth,” the uniqueness of the Japanese cases and what needs to be further investigated become clear at the end of the chapter. Chapter 3 explains methodology of this dissertation including interview research methods and justification of applying qualitative methodology. Chapter 4 analyzes pilot interview research data and main interview research data. Based on the
findings, validity of the arguments provided by previous studies is discussed at the end. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation by clarifying the contributions and further questions to be pursued in future research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2-1. Overview

In this chapter, I critically review previous studies, which consist of two sections: 1) Research on youth and 2) Research on study abroad. In the first section, I examine the studies that trace the historical emergence and changes of the concept of youth in modernized and industrialized society. It reveals the construction of the concept of youth is closely tied with how youth have been understood by psychologists and sociologists. Next, I turn to the writings of cultural studies scholars and more recent research illuminating the effects of globalization on youth lives, both of which have been influential on youth studies particularly because they situated and understood youth in relation to the existing structural constraints. Social changes in late modern societies that have affected young people’s lives are also focused based on the post-structural and late-modern theorists. Individualization, uncertainty (precariousness), and flexibility are the key concepts in the argument. Terminology around youth, what it means to be “young,” and why this research focuses on “young people” including people with a relatively wide range of ages are discussed at the end of this section.

The second section reviews previous study abroad research, including both the studies conducted mainly in the US and those particularly focusing on Japanese young people and their transnational migrations. It is followed by outlining what characterizes transnational moves by the Japanese based on statistical data. At the end of this section, what transnational experiences of Japanese young people are expected to illuminate is discussed, by linking the concept of self-identity, self-discovery, and the socioeconomic contexts surrounding contemporary Japanese
2-2. Youth Studies

2-2-1. Historical emergence of youth as a universal Category. Youth and adolescence are often conceived as something naturally existing because they have a distinct biological characteristic—puberty, and this developmental stage inevitably creates particular psychological status that is more likely to direct youth toward deviancy and delinquency compared to other stages of life. While the existence of youth and its given particular characteristics and images linked to their age (usually 13-19 or even older) tend to be naturalized and essentialized, a number of scholars influenced by poststructuralism and postmodernism have deconstructed the notion of youth, proving that youth is a social construct and the way they are conceptualized differs depending on particular socio-historical settings. I begin here with a discussion of the early conceptions of youth and adolescence.

According to Griffin (1993), “Biological determinism, social constructionism and structural theories clash and intersect in the contradictory context of academic stories about ‘youth’ as a universal age stage with certain groups of young people represented as particularly ‘deviant,’ ‘deficient,’ or ‘resistant’” (p. 1). As Griffin implies here, emergence and reification of the notion of youth and youth culture are indeed largely led by academic researchers—particularly psychologists, who have participated in modernist project and attempted to solve new social problems by controlling young people. Stanley Hall (1907) is well known as the founder of the universal concept of youth and its “storm-and-stress” model, which characterizes youth as a transitional, emotionally unstable stage because of their sexual, biological status. As Lesko (1996) argues, Hall’s reliance on recapitulation theory, which
perspectives youth as an underdeveloped savage, established a view of youth as incomplete existence. By combining the disciplines of medicine, psychology, sociology, and education, Hall professionalized the area of youth treatment and pathologized various forms of behaviors of youth as deviancy. While Hall has been criticized due to his representation of white middle-class young males as normal and to his biological determinism, the notion of youth as transitional, incomplete continue to be widely maintained in people’s conceptions.

Erikson (1968), the next key contributor in youth study in the field of psychology, opened possibilities to situate youth as not only biological but social category. Erikson, however, still saw youth as a distinct transitional stage to become mature independent adult. The stage of adolescence is characterized by their identity crisis, which will be eventually solved when they become fully adults. The dominant perspective among the following psychologists and educationalists in this period are positivistic and conservative, believing that social problems will be solved if the deviant youth adjust themselves to be “normal” by the intervention of the professionals.

In the late of nineteenth century, as industrialization changes people’s life and demographics, young people who fall in a category ‘youth,’ which was created by scholars began to be judged if they are normal or not, in response to the anxiety and fear against the large number of young people who flowed into urban areas, shaping a particular culture on the streets. This ‘moral panic’ was specifically directed toward the newcomers: young working-class, immigrant, African-American, particularly young men in street gangs. In the face of ‘unknown’ existences, scholars were determined to deal with those young people within criminology (Valentine et al., 1988) and classified them into the normal and the deviant, in order to maintain
social order.

It should be noted, at the same time, that youth became visible as a distinct status not only through the concerns about streets, but through larger structural changes that affected young people’s career path as a whole. On one hand, industrialization welcomed youth as an ideal workers. According to Ewen (1976), “...the endurance required by monotonous factory work had laid a severe economic and psychological burden on the lives of working people” and “despite the decline in child labor as a result of protective legislation and the decline of the apprenticeship system, mechanized production depended heavily on the endurance and reflexes of youth” (142). Furthermore, the demand of capitalism has changed and now, deindustrialization prefers “a cheap and youthful labour force,” that well responds to service economy (Griffin, 1993, p. 12).

On the other hand, expansion of education systematically forced young people not to work and stay in school. Accordingly, marriage and childbearing began to be postponed, while formal youth labor market shrunk in exchange for the increase in casual and informal jobs (Wallace & Kovatcheva, 1998). Considering these factors, youth began to appear everywhere indeed in the process of modernization and (de)industrialization, although the focus of the researchers has always tended to be directed toward the specific link between social problems and youth, such as violence, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy. At the same time, they were excluded from normal workplaces, while being imprisoned in school or incarcerated in corrective institutions. Whereas the increase of disposal incomes and prolongment of the period of education allowed youth to be easily linked to leisure, consumption, and “having fun,” these were indeed in exchange for the exclusions from adult world and deprivation of adult rights.
Even if they want to work, their work is not taken seriously and they can find only low wedge dead-end jobs.

Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998) clearly state that youth is a product of advanced industrial economies and a product of modernity. As they define, modernity is “… associated with the need to divide people into strongly distinguished groups and with the elaboration of theories to sustain and justify this division” (P. 6). The notion of youth has been indeed deeply embedded in various kinds of binary oppositions: adolescent/adult, feminine/masculine, savage/civilized, emotions/reason, body/mind, massed/individuated, and culture/practical reason. Based on these dichotomies, youth are perceived as incomplete savage, monitored, controlled, incarcerated, and excluded from workplaces.

2-2-2. Sociology of youth, (sub)culture. Following the establishment of youth study among psychologists and educationalists by the mid of 1920s, sociologists began to focus on youth in the late 1920s. Scholars including Margaret Mead (1928) and Frederick Thrasher (1927) were early leaders. They commonly sought to explain how the social environment affects the life of youth thorough ethnographic descriptions of particular type of youth culture. On one hand, the view of youth by structural functionalists such as Talcott Parsons, which was one of the influential sociological theories in this period, accorded with the conservative psychologists’ stance and saw youth deviance as a process of adaptation. On the other hand, various kinds of new theories that inherit the ethnographic approach emerged in the field of sociology since 1930s and introduced different perspectives to understand youth and youth culture. The works of the Chicago school, who established urban sociology and symbolic interactionist approach, and Critical theorists, who developed radical social critique and emancipatory theories, particularly
began to pay much attention to youth as a research object.

Among them, Becker (1963) made a prominent contribution to youth study by developing labeling theory. The view that understands deviancy as socially constructed through making arbitrary rules and labeling those who do not conform to the rules had an important impact on youth study as it indeed led to deconstructing the notion of youth, instead of naturalizing them as a source of social problem. While post-war youth cultures (Teddy boys, rock and roll, and various Civil Rights movements) were rising, Cultural studies centered at the CCCS (The Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies) incorporated the Chicago school ethnographic methodologies and Critical theory. Youth and youth (sub)culture then became one of their main focuses.

As described above, the notion of youth was created from a perspective that sees young people as problematic, unknown, and incomplete other, who should be socially monitored and controlled. Youth culture or youth subculture, commonly used terms, indeed reflect this specific political charge with which youth as a category is loaded. Whereas the researchers of the CCCS, particularly Hebdige (1979) used the term subculture to illuminate youth’s lived life, which had been largely ignored before, a number of scholars have pointed out the term ‘culture’ itself was invented by anthropologists to represent something incomprehensible by reason (of Western White middle-class male), and the prefix ‘sub’ further implies lower social status of the referred culture (Thornton, 1997). Lesko (1996) argues that “the application of the term culture to youth (e.g., youth subculture or peer culture) helps create conceptual distance between the activities and perspectives of those with a culture and those with” practical reason…” (p. 154). Thornton further articulates why youth is heavily linked to (sub)culture, instead of community or public as
follows:

‘Community’ tends to suggest a more permanent population, often aligned to a neighbourhood, of which the family is the key constituent part. By contrast, those groups identified as ‘subcultures’ have tended to be studied apart from their families and in states of relative transience. …The public has been conceived as a body of rational individuals, responsible citizens who are able to form their own opinion and express it through officially recognized democratic channels. Subcultures—tended to be envisaged as disenfranchised, disaffected and unofficial. (Thornton, 1997, p. 2)

The term youth subculture, therefore, itself represents its marginality in the societies dominated by White middle-class adult males. At the same time, Thornton continues, “it is also often assumed that there is something innately oppositional in the word ‘subculture,’” (p. 2) and that implication is linked to the notion of disorder, deviancy, or rather, resistance.

Despite these negative connotations, however, the main interests of the researchers in the CCCS were not to negatively describe youth cultures but rather to reveal existing regime of domination based on class relations and its reproduction as the most important aspect of youth culture. While they focused on and vividly described the resistance of youth against the dominant order, their analyses were static, where youth only ended up with accepting existing social order and their lower status no matter how they resisted during the reproduction processes. It is well exemplified by the work of Paul Willis (1977), who described how White working-class young ‘lads’ willingly accept their status while expressing their oppositions against middle-class, through celebrating their own masculine culture. Thornton (1997) argues this contradictory nature of the works by the CCCS is understandable considering its disciplinary
Influenced by both the Frankfurt School’s Marxist vision of a mass society and the Chicago School’s liberal-pluralist studies of subcultures, this work was ambivalent about the politics of subcultures, alternately seeing them as resistant and subordinate, politically hopeful and spectacularly impotent. (Thornton, 1997, p. 3)

In this sense, the studies by the CCCS carried over the drawback of Marxism, its overemphasis of economic determinism. Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) indicate assumed ‘false consciousness’ -- the core concept of Frankfurt critical theorists—behind their analysis:

….for all the symbolic creativity represented by post-war subcultures, resistance does not and cannot alter the fundamentally class-based order of society. Subcultures ‘solve,’ but in an imaginary way, problems which at the concrete material level remain unresolved… (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004, p. 6)

This powerlessness of youth subculture against dominant capitalist society is further articulated by focusing on the complicit relation between their styles and commercial industries. Relying on Hebdige (1979), Bennett and Kahn-Harris argues that “…the resistant qualities of any given subcultural style is ultimately compromised because of its incorporation and commodification by the fashion industry (p. 6).

Whereas the contributions of the CCCS toward understanding youth are undeniable in that they proved socio-historical embeddedness of youth culture through their focus on class and brought back youth out of the field of developmental psychology, who pathologizes oppositional qualities of youth, at the same time, the numerous criticisms against the CCCS also reveal limitations of their studies and what needs to be further discussed. First criticism was cast by
feminists, within the CCCS. McRobbie and Garber (1976) examined girls’ bedroom cultures as opposition against authoritarian culture and demonstrated that the CCCS had dismissed cultures within feminine, domestic domain, due to its implicit association with patriarchy. Second critique is also about the underestimation of other social categories: race and ethnicity. Not only does the CCCS assume working-class males as the main actors in youth culture, but they also exclude non-Western youth. McCarthy and Logue (2008) argues that the traditional British cultural studies implicitly have centered “Britishness” in their analysis, taking nation-bound representation of culture for granted, and that this assumption creates a tension against postcolonial perspectives. This point also relates to a question of geographical specificity—if their youth subculture theories are universally applicable or not. Lastly, its overemphasis on resistance and “spectacular” part of youth culture and consequent ignorance of “ordinary” youth have been criticized. Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) problematizes “unqualified equation of post-war patterns of youth consumerism with notions of working-class resistance” and the fact that “…the issue of passing through one’s youth without ever being a committed stylist, or belonging to a group or gang, is given only a cursory mention” (p. 7). Valentine et al. (1998) further articulates this point:

The emphasis on resistance and spectacular forms of youth cultures has led to a neglect of the young people who conform in many ways to social expectations. We have an inadequate understanding of young people who perform well at school, have good and positive relationships with their parents and other adults, who participate in a range of activities which do not cause harm or annoyance—who basically get on with their lives as young people, but who at the same time have to face an enormous range of social,
cultural educational and financial pressures. (p. 24)

On the other hand, as Wallace & Kovatcheva (1998) suggests, the CCCS unwittingly reified the concept of youth based on the rigid age categories and failed to notice or expect youth cultures and the “youthfulness” represented within them may be carried over by those who are getting too old to be called youth.

In sum, the CCCS, having been at the forefront of sociological youth studies in the past, failed to capture the diversities and complexities within and between various socio-cultural categories as they maintained modernist orientations—dichotomous static understanding—and such drawbacks have been radically criticized particularly under the influence of various post-theories (post structuralism, post modernism, post colonialism and etc.) and globalization. In the next section, I will further explore how globalization has affected the studies of youth our understanding of them.

2-2-3. Globalization, limits and possibilities of “youthful” flexibilities. According to McGrew (1996), globalization is defined as follows:

Globalization refers to the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation-states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system. It defines a process through which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe. (p. 13)

While linkages and interconnections between nation-states or different regions have always existed in world histories, scholars largely agree on that the great intensification in terms of its scope and intensity of mobility (people, goods, information, companies, institutions, capital) due
to technological advancement and changes in economic/financial structures are worth applying
the term globalization. Harvey (1990) termed this speeding up processes of interconnections
“time-space compression.” In this sense, globalization generally requires us to rethink the
previous frameworks and concepts that assumed autonomy and unity of nation-state and to
question roles of nation-states.

It has been also argued, however, that globalization is not an objective description about
inevitable outcomes of technological advancement, but rather a “highly contested political term”
(Rizvi & Lingard, 2006, p. 251). Rizvi and Lingard suggest two different ways of interpreting
globalization in addition to increasing interrelatedness. One is “a subjective or phenomenological
awareness by people and states of recent changes in global economy and culture,” where the
perception that “our collective consciousness of the world as a single” is emphasized (p. 251).
And the other one is that globalization is “a deliberate, ideological project of economic
liberalization that subjects states and individuals to more intense market forces” (p. 251-252). In
this view, globalization as an ideology operates to lead people to accepting neoliberal policies
and markets as Rizvi and Lingard articulates:

Such a perspective is based on a politics of meaning that seeks to accommodate people
to a certain taken-for-grantedness about the ways the global economy operates and the
manner in which culture, crises, resources, and power formations are filtered through its
universal logic. It thus ‘ontologizes‘ the global market mentality, creating global
subjects who view policy options through the conceptual prism within which it is
located. (p. 252)

Globalization is strongly tied to neoliberalism, which justifies the contradictory policy shifts of
nation-states governments—minimizing the responsibility of government through privatization larger parts of its services, deregulating any restrictions that hinder competitions, cutting social expenditure for social services while increasing its monitoring/controlling power to maintain social order. Through the seemingly objective and universal term globalization, people are increasingly persuaded into conceiving as if both accepting interconnections between different regions in the world and prioritizing of survival in globalized harsh competition are inevitable historical consequences.

Another critique against the universalized definition of globalization is that the processes and effects of globalization are contingent, uneven, and discontinuous. Massey (1993) criticizes the concept of time-space compression as it represents “very much a Western, colonizer’s view” (p. 59) and proposes, instead, examining “power geometry,” the workings of uneven power relations. Because, in the era of globalization, “… different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections,” then “at one level they have been tremendous contributors to what we call time-space compression; and at another level they are imprisoned in it.” Accordingly, “the way in which people are inserted into and placed within ‘time-space compression’ are highly complicated and extremely varied” (p. 62). At the intersections of local, national, transnational, and global, individuals are placed at distinct positions under the structural constraints where specific power relations operate. As Bauman (1998) articulates in his analogy of tourists vs. vagabond, one of the most acute consequences of globalization is polarization between those who have privileges to exercise their mobility at their will and those who do not. Some freely travel around the world for fun, while others cannot go anywhere but keep working as a cheap
labor force to produce commercial goods for the international market, or often may be forced to move against their wills. Globalization is discontinuous, fluid, full of attachments and detachments, as it is dialectical, being embedded in various binary oppositions (as well exemplified by the contradictory position of nation-states): universalization vs. particularization, homogenization vs. differentiation, integration vs. fragmentation, centralization vs. decentralization, juxtaposition vs. syncretization (McGrew, 1996). Some Asian youth may identify themselves with Hip hop cultures rather than their local music, while some may re-discover or re-invent local traditional cultures.

Based on these emerging conceptualizations of globalization and its consequences, how do we approach to youth experiences and youth cultures? Wulff (1995) suggest that “When it comes to globalization or transnational connections youth cultures are in the forefront of theoretical interest; youth, their ideas and commodities move easily across national borders, shaping and being shaped by all kinds of structure and meanings” (p. 10). A number of scholars have attempted to capture this fluidity and creativity of youth’s lives within the shifting dynamics of socio-economic, cultural, political structures through the new way of conceptualizing individual’s way of life, while distancing themselves from the term youth subculture or culture and their static implication. Emphasizing the fluidity and instability of individual’s life and identities, Maffesoli (1996) uses the term neo-tribe, where the tribe is “without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar, it refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind and is preferable to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form” (p. 98). Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) suggests the use of ‘lifestyle’ to focus on the issue of consumer creativity and defines lifestyle as it “attributes the reflexivity which informs individual
consumer creativity to a desire on the part of individuals to take an active part in the making and remaking of their image and identity” (p. 13). Straw (1991) applies the term ‘scenes’ to “actualize a particular state of relations between various populations and social groups, as these coalesce around specific coalitions of musical style” (p. 379).

Whereas these emerging attempts to avoid and replace the term subculture/culture by alternative concepts illuminate temporality, flexibility, and creativity of youth lives particularly in their consumptions, they seem to deemphasize existing structural constraints and embeddedness of individual’s lives in various power relations. In contrast, Maira and Soep (2005) invented term youthscape building upon the idea of a ‘scape’ by Appadurai (2008), in order to “conceptualize local youth practices as embedded, in both obvious and unexpected ways, within the shifts in national and global forces making the late twenties and early twenty-first centuries” (Maira & Soep, 2005, p. xv). Maira and Soep summarize the significance of the idea of a “scape” as an analytical framework as follows:

…Arjun Appadurai (1996) used the idea of a “scape” to account for the deeply perspectival and uneven character of the forces behind globalization. Ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finacescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes were the terms he introduced to describe dimensions of global cultural flows that are fluid and irregular, rather than fixed and finite. (Maira & Soep, 2005, p. xvi)

Maira and Soep use youthscape not only to capture its disjunctive nature but “…to suggest a site that is not just geographic or temporal, but social and political as well, a “place” that is bound up with questions of power and materiality” (p. xv) By focusing on both discontinuities and embeddedness, “youth culture helps shift, sometime even distort, an easy mapping of
local/national/global “(p. xxviii-xxix).

Youth is a construct of the modernity and categorized as a group of people who possess immaturity, instability and in-betweenness. While the studies on youth began and established by psychologists, who attempted to examine and intervene the instability of youth and their identity, sociological research primarily led by cultural studies, which were centered on the CCCS, sought to explain how the experiences of youth are embedded within and constrained by socio-economic, cultural, and political structures. As opposed to the studies by the CCCS, who shed light on youth culture but tended to reify the notion of youth and youth culture and assume its static, potent nature, youth studies wedded to globalization theories have attempted to illuminate youth’s everyday experiences and cultures not as products of ‘false consciousness’ but as something lived, struggled, where creativity and hope are found even within certain limitations. Maira and Soep (2005) points out that globalization theorists has not taken youth seriously because they are incomplete social actors (p. xxii). Yet Maira and Soep argue that the depth and subtlety of social critique or expressions of disappointments by youth, which we may be missing, can be instructive as they may unsettle “the binaries of resistance and cooptation, and in a sense resonates with the disappointment of academics longing for theories to reinvigorate our own sense of political efficacy” (p. xxxi). In this sense, globalization and globalization theories opened possibilities to examine youth lived experiences as site to uncover oppressive, normative structures and explore possible practices to challenge them.

2-2-4. Young people in late-modern societies. Apart from the studies influenced by the cultural studies, scholars who can be categorized as “post-structuralist” or “late-modernist” have discussed changing situations surrounding young people in post-industrial and late-modern
societies. One of the biggest statement is provided by Beck (1992), who argues individualization and risk as salient characteristics of late modernity. In late modern societies, according to Beck, people are forced to take risks and responsibilities that are caused by tremendous uncertainties and seemingly countless options on individual basis, which is a result of the shift from welfare states to neoliberal regimes in many developed societies. While the hold of the traditional orders looses, people are required to negotiate their lifestyles and identities by managing through normative constraints and complex decision-makings.

Applying Beck and other post-structural and late-modern theories including Giddens (1991), Sennett (1998), and Bauman (2001) specifically to young people, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) insists that subjective perceptions of risk and uncertainty--the pressures that individuals are required to solve their problems on an individual level--characterizes the lives of contemporary youth. They well summarize the acute changes in the social conditions surrounding young people as follows:

Many of these changes are a direct result of the re-structuring of labour markets, of an increased demand for educated workers, of flexible employment practices and of social policies which have extended the period in which young people remain dependent on their families. As a consequence of these changes, young people today have to negotiate a set of risks which were largely unknown to their parents: this is true irrespective of social background or gender. Moreover, as many of these changes have come about within a relatively short period of time, points of reference which, by serving as clear route maps previously helped smooth processes of social reproduction, have become obscure. In
turn, increased uncertainty can be seen as a source of stress and vulnerability. (p. 1)

Young people are shut out of full-time employment and become a flexible labor force because they are labeled as the immature based on their age and their dependent status. Individualism orders them to take responsibility for inevitable failures as a result of their own decision. Unlike Fordist societies, significant others cannot guide them simply because they also do not know how to navigate lives in these societies with full of uncertainties (p. 8).

Similarly to the scholars focused on the effects of globalization on youth, however, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) find both desperation and hope. Pointing out the sequencing of the three transitions (school to work transitions, domestic transitions and housing transitions) within an individual’s life trajectory have been diversified, which led to changing family dynamics, they argue that “For some, this new space is characterized by a freedom that is unencumbered by the responsibilities of adulthood while for others it is best seen as a frustrating limbo characterized by powerlessness and a lack of resources” (pp. 10-11). The central statement of Furlong and Cartmel is that people’s life in later modern societies “revolve around an epistemological fallacy” (p. 144). People follows individualism while they “blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency” (p. 144). Furlong and Cartmel emphasize social structures, particularly class and gender relations, still strongly influence individual lives but became only obscure. At the same time, however, they seem to imply positive possibilities for collectivities to survive this precarious world.

Wallace & Kovatcheva (1998) is also concerned with both the limits and possibilities of “youthfulness.” By deconstructing the concept of “youth” based on the analysis of the changes in Western and Eastern Europe and young people living there, Wallace and Kovatcheva
demonstrate that the diversification of lifestyles such as changing family relationships and transitions in and out of life-stages led to bi-polarization of youth’s life—privileged travelers and prisoners in the criminal justice system. They argue that those changes were brought by the increasing privatization, individualization, and punitive state legislation targeting immigrants and youth. They point out, however, even the marginalized groups may “find their own way of forging a life-style which offers autonomy and some cultural freedom which may be preferable to institutional ‘help’ and control” (p. 25). As a whole, Wallace and Kovatcheva hope and expect that the diversification of youth life styles will lead to “the possibility of challenging normative standards such as the institution of heterosexuality, or conventional gender relations” (p. 16). Diversities and flexibilities of lives never mean people are free from any bounds and can choose to do and become anything. The actual ranges of their life choices depend on their access to resources. Still diversities and flexibilities may increase the chances of changing oppressive societies by creating new ways and/or communities to make it happen.

2-2-5. Terms, concepts and definitions over “who is young?” While the concept of youth had been historically constructed and established along with modernization and industrialization, defining who is “young” in contemporary industrialized societies has become extremely difficult. This is because the sociocultural environment surrounding them has dramatically changed, such as the extension of schooling periods and the delay/diversified timings of job entries, marriage and childbearing. Erikson (1959), who focused on identity and the specificities of young people in terms of their identity confusion and crisis, roughly defined young adulthood as those between 18 and 40 years old, and adolescence as 12 and 18 years old. More recently, however, many researchers have begun to urge the necessity of a new definition
for the period between adolescence and adulthood to reflect the significant changes in the situations surrounding the people from late teens to twenties and to understand them for better interventions. Erikson was indeed aware of the fact that the length and characteristics of each stage in a life cycle of his psychological developmental model may appear differently depending on social contexts.

Among such new directions in the study of young people, Arnett (2000) proposes a new way of conceptualization with a new term *emerging adulthood*, which indicates those between 18 and 25 years old. His arguments are worth closer attentions not only because they sort out the existing terms and conceptions on youth but because they reflect distinct characteristics of youth in contemporary societies. By extensive theoretical examination and analysis of survey data focusing people of this age group, Arnett insists that emerging adulthood is theoretically and empirically a distinct developmental period of a life course in industrialized societies, and should be distinguished from young adults or adolescents. One of the important factors in characterizing emerging adulthood is that they mostly disagree that they have reached adulthood. For them, taking their own responsibility and being financially independent, rather than the shifts of their social roles, are the main markers of becoming an adult. It is a period for exploration before reaching such statuses. According to Arnett, “The explorations of emerging adulthood are in part explorations for their own sake, part of obtaining a broad range of life experiences before taking on enduring—and limiting—adult responsibilities” (p. 474). He describes socio-economic backgrounds which enabled this distinct period to emerge in people’s life course: “As societies become more affluent, they are more likely to grant young people the opportunity for the extended moratorium of emerging adulthood, because they have no urgent
need for young people’s labor” (p. 478). While Arnett emphasizes contextuality and diversity of emerging adulthood, he insists that emerging adulthood exist in many industrialized societies and he predicts that it will become more pervasive. The rise of median age of marriage, median age at first childbirth and participation rate in higher education are the markers of the condition where emerging adulthood is likely to appear.

Arnett (2004) presents a list of characteristics of emerging adulthood and articulates how they are differentiated from other similar concepts. According to the five features on the list, emerging adulthood should be distinguished from any other periods because it is the age of identity exploration—especially in the areas of love and work— the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities—when optimism is high and people have unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. Arnett justifies this invention of the new term by examining four terms that already exist and seem to overlap with emerging adulthood in terms of the age period each term covers: late adolescence, young adulthood, transition to adulthood, and youth.

First, *late adolescence* is not suitable because it implies that they are still a part of adolescence. The lives of the adolescents aged 10-18 are considerably different from the lives of those aged 18-25 in terms of physical conditions, legal status, and the relationship with their parents. Also, their life paths start to be significantly diverse after leaving secondary schools. *Young adulthood* is also insufficient for similar reasons as it implies that they have reached adulthood rather than that they are in-between. It has been used in too many ways, sometimes indicating preteens or college students and sometimes including those in their 30s. Arnett suggests that young adulthood fits better for those in their 30s because the majority of this age
period begins to be settled or married.

For the term *transition to adulthood*, he criticizes its use as “thinking of the years from the late teens through the twenties as merely the transition to adulthood leads to a focus on what young people in the age period are *becoming*, at the cost of neglecting what they *are*” (p.19). According to his argument, the word “transition” implies that it is a brief period linking two longer periods. But seven years (age 18-25) is not brief. “Emerging adulthood is a transitional period, yes—and so is every other period of life—but it is not merely a transition, and it should be studied as a separate period of life” (p. 20).

Finally, as for *youth*, Arnett recalls the huge impact of the study of Kenneth Keniston (1971). Arnett judges Keniston’s contribution as not enough to articulate the developmental distinctiveness of this period because Keniston largely focused on the youth movement against society, which was a historical but not an enduring characteristic of young people. Furthermore, this term is ambiguous in that it has a long history in the English language and has been used to mean childhood or adolescent. Arnett points out the fact that the youth studies, which are prevalent in Europe, span an age range from the mid-teens through the mid-20s, which lead them to failing to make distinctions between adolescence and emerging adulthood. He is critical of the way the researchers who apply either *transition to adulthood* or *youth*, tend to heavily focus only on transitional events especially from school to work, and suggests that applying the emerging adulthood paradigm may open up new horizons of research such as identity issues, cognitive development, mental health, resilience, family relationships, romantic relationships, media use and so on.

While Arnett carefully attempts to sort out existing terms and propose a new one, other
scholars also justify their own use of terms and conceptions. For example, Bocknek (1980), based on her extensive review of psychological studies of young people, insists upon the importance of the concept of young adults, which should be differentiated from adolescents because of significant qualitative differences between them in terms of psychological and developmental aspects. She criticizes the use of youth as it obscures such subtle but important differences (p.3). Young adulthood, according to Bockneck, is a “time when idealism encounters painful conflict with routine self-interests” (p.194). Young adults struggle with the pressures to meet social expectations and dissonance between self as perceived and self as socially recognized. She associates this situation to their great needs of psychological interventions.

Similarly, the European Group for Integrated Social Research (2001), reviewing scholarly literature and national policies on young people, chooses to use the term “young adults,” and explains that “in order to reflect the increased ‘originality,’ complexity and ambiguity of transitions, it is suggested that young women and men are ‘somewhere’ between youth and adulthood, therefore they are referred to as young adults“(p. 101). Claiming the need for recognition of the changes in young people’s transitions, they problematize the fact that institutions have focused only on school-to-work transitions, which press “normal biography” on young adults. They warn that a gap between young people’s actual conditions and the way research and national policies deal with young people leads the researchers and practitioners to failure to see the real needs of young people. Considering this situation, they suggested a holistic approach including both structural and subjective perspectives and social integration focusing on strengthening the potential of young people to take different careers, proposing that “…transitions should be seen as continued biographic processes that involve formal and informal
learning and agency across many separate areas” (p.112).

Several researchers have directly criticized or tried to modify the conceptualization of emerging adulthood invented by Arnett. Shanahan, Porfeli, Mortimer and Erickson (2005) point out that the previous works of Arnett and his followers have problems in terms of their research techniques, where convenient samplings seem to be predominant, consequently failed to capture a whole image of young people in the age period indicated by emerging adulthood. They argue that the demographic transition markers, which tend to be excluded in favor of subjective and individualistic criteria of becoming adults in the Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood, are still important. The way Arnett emphasizes the historical emergence of the individualistic aspect is impressionistic, according to them, because only little is known about how earlier Americans ranked criteria of becoming adults. In fact, individualistic criteria are not likely new, although important, since the combinations of individual characteristics and transition markers have repeatedly defined adult status according to historical observations (p.228).

Côté (2006) critically argues against Arnett, insisting while adolescence is a normative period which everyone in Western societies experiences, emerging adulthood or youthhood is still only optional, characterological and “not inevitable if the person elects to move into what would be considered traditional adulthood” (p111). Hamilton and Hamilton (2006) are also skeptical against the universality of the concept of emerging adulthood and argued that, while they accept the portrayal of emerging adulthood for the young people in or graduated from four-year-colleges, they argue, it must be examined whether it can be applied to someone in the same age period without a bachelor degree. This point, the validity of the categories related to youth will be further discussed in the next section.
2-2-6. Is the category of “young people” still needed? Since Erikson (1959) introduced the term “young adult” to define people in a certain age period, researchers have strived to reflect the contemporary specific situations surrounding young people on their understanding of young people, by sophisticating a concept or creating new terms. Yet, whereas Arnett invented “emerging adulthood” to indicate people aged 18-25 in industrialized societies, most other researchers keep using the terms such as “young adults,” “late adolescence,” “transition to adulthood” and “youth.” Although they have argued over the terms, definitions and concepts of the young people from late teens to 20s or even 30s, many researchers do not seem to be even concerned with establishing any consistent way of definition. Nevertheless most researchers agree on the essential points to capture the contemporary young people. Besides the basic understanding that the criteria over who are the young or adults depend on cultural contexts in each society, their focuses are centered on exploratory, unsettled and in-between situations of young people after leaving secondary schools in contemporary industrialized societies.

Recognizing such agreements among researchers, one question should be carefully considered: Do we really need a new term such as “emerging adulthood” while researchers discuss similar points using the old terms? Or, after all, do we even need a category of “young people” when each individual young people’s life is so flexible and diversified? Côté (2006) proposes a new concept, youthhood, as one of the possible long-term consequences of the trends represented in the theories of emerging adulthood. By introducing this term, Côté indicates what characterizes “emerging adulthood” can be carried beyond the maximum age limit of “young people” and can even become a permanent lifestyle, whether it is forced or a choice. (p. 95). “Youthful” social status, which is marked by precariousness, may function to define who is
young, instead of age. In a similar vein, Furuichi (2011), an influential young sociologist in Japan, argues that if young people will never be able to become full-time employees or housewives that Japanese society has assumed as models of “adults” as a result of diversification of people’s lives, that means they will have to stay as “young people” regardless of their age. He also points out that group cultures and consciousness specific to each generation have lost their shapes and boundaries as what used to be called as youth cultures such as pop music or comic are now widely shared across different generations. This makes it even harder to identify what is shared only among the specified range of age group. Furuichi asserts that problems discussed within the frame of youth studies merely represents the problems of the society as a whole.

Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998) made a similar point, arguing youth is “no longer as strongly constructed or controlled as a group” particularly because the official youth organizations who had regulated standardized age transitions of youth have disappeared in post-communist Europe (p. 217). Wallace and Kovatcheva, however, strongly claims the political importance of maintaining the category of youth as follows:

However, we do not wish to argue that youth has disappeared. Rather, young people face new problems of identity and social support in this more chaotic situation. Changes in education and the labor market mean that they are more than ever a marginalized and vulnerable group, having to depend increasingly upon families or state institutional structures. The universal inclusiveness which is implied by the ubiquity of mass media and subcultural communications conceals the fact that young people are very differently located in terms of access to leisure facilities, jobs, and independent incomes. Their
inclusion or exclusion from social goods depends upon their gender, their ethnicity, their
religion, their social origin and educational advantages and these are in turn exaggerated
by the different regions of Europe. Increasing problems of homelessness, crime and
unemployment affect young people more than other groups. What is needed is a
conception of 'youth' which does not allow it to disappear but rather considers the
significance of age in determining exclusion or inclusion in different regions. In this way
more humane forms of intervention can be devised to tackle the real and growing
problems of the new generations. (P.217)

While defining who is young people based on age is extremely difficult, it seems that focusing
on young people as a target of research and policy still has a certain significance. Lives of young
people tend to (if not all of them) be tied to its precariousness (flexible but unstable with risks),
(semi-) dependant status, and public perception of seeing them as developmentally immature and
inexperienced. Often at the intersection of family, school, peers, partners, and work, young
people struggle to negotiate their status as “young people” because others define them as young
and may judge their ability based on it. This dissertation applies the term “young people” and
consider them as roughly 18 to 35 years old. This is firstly because, as other the previous
research suggested, it is possible that “youthfulness” status tied to precariousness that may need
attentions and supports may be extended into mid-late 30s or even later. Second, as an important
case, Department of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan defines NEET( Not in education,
employment, and training) and Freeter (young temporary workers), both of which are the main
targets age for youth employment support policies, as 15-34 years old. Japan’s specific situations
will be discussed later in this chapter, but this at least indicates such a wide range of age group is
defined as “young people” in Japan, which is a focus of this dissertation. Considering that more
than 97% of secondary school graduates proceed to high school, which means the majority of
15-18 years old are financially dependent on their parents/guardians largely, this dissertation
focuses on 18-35 years old. The definition, however, has to be loose, as their “youthfulness”
status depends on their situations rather than on age themselves especially in their 20s and 30s,
when individual’s life stages are varied.

2-3. Study Abroad by Japanese Young People and their Self-identities

In this section, I review study abroad research, including examinations of study
abroad/temporary transnational migration by the Japanese and the discussions on how the
concept of self-identities is useful to understand contemporary Japanese young people and their
study abroad/temporary transnational migration. As the previous section has revealed, youth
studies with developmental perspectives particularly have insisted the saliency of their
explanatory/experimental characteristics in youth. Based on this understanding, the affinity of
identity exploration and traveling/studying abroad has long been suggested. Arnett (2006) refers
to the traveling customs in Europe during the 19th century, such as “Wanderscheft” (in German)
and “grand tour” (in Britain), where the people in their late teens or early 20s travel around as a
time of exploration (p. 4). Although it was only for the elite and young men at that period, Arnett
pays attention to these traditions as the origins of self-exploration that are publicly
acknowledged. Côté (2006) also quotes Erikson’s ideas on the various forms of role
experimentation, which include “…travel (the Wanderschaft), military service (or other programs
such as the Peace Corps), schooling, or even just “dropping out” for a while (cf. Erikson, 1968,
Throughout this section, why and how the cases of study abroad by the Japanese provide important implications toward the contemporary Japanese society and young people.

2-3-1. Previous research on study abroad. Study abroad has long been discussed mainly in the psychological field, which situate study abroad as one kind of individual’s developmental aid. They focus on either 1) how study experiences can help young people to acquire cultural awareness by contacting different cultures and how such learning process should be assisted or, 2) how it is useful for enhancing future job careers, particularly in the context of globalizing societies. This is largely driven by urgent practical concerns, especially of administrators or staffs who try to assist study abroaders. Sociological approach, on the other hand, is relatively new. Influenced by cultural studies and global/transnational studies, study abroad began to be understood as a practice of global mobility by middle to upper class elites.

While the previous studies in both fields have provided important views to understand study abroad experiences, they have been missing different and essential ways of contextualizing study abroad against wider educational and social contexts. Landis and Wasilewski (1999) offers significant critique to look at the limits and possibilities of the research in this area as a whole. They reflect on the studies in 22 years of the International Journal of Intercultural Relations, which is one of the few journals dealing with study abroad issues. According to their argument, what the majority of research fail to consider in this area is macro level understanding. Those studies overlook the fact that the effects of contacting different cultures are largely influenced by institutional support such as law, custom, or local atmosphere. They attribute this situation to the fact that the researchers in this area are most influenced by psychology, and proposes incorporation of more sociological and political analysis.
The other critical aspect that has been missed in the previous psychological studies on study abroad is broader life context of each study abroad participant. The majority of researchers look at changes only during study abroad, which leads to isolate the experiences from any preceding or following life contexts of participants. Motivations, experiences, and aftereffects of study abroad, however, greatly vary depending on the specific situations of the participants. This point becomes clearer by focusing on an affinity between study abroad experiences and identity exploration processes. Shulman, Blatt and Walsh (2006), for example, interviewed returnees of an extended travel and found that overseas experiences are defined as periods for identity explorations or rite of passage for young people. Going through experiences abroad is situated here as a strategy to cope with transitions to adulthood. Arnett (2006), who invented a term “emerging adulthood” (18 to 25 years old) to understand the increasingly blurred border between youth and adults, points out traveling is one of examples that illustrate exploratory/experimental characteristics of young people.

On the other hand, the emerging global/transnational studies has understood study abroad as an exercise of global mobility for youth to search for better lives abroad or/and survive harsh globalized competition. This line of research has been steadily growing in the rise of globalization and neoliberalism. A number of scholars are particularly concerned about commodification of educational experiences abroad, which is led by the educators emphasizing upskilling to increase employability. They afraid of consequent loss of other possible educational benefits beyond economic interests. Rizvi (2005), based on interview research of Chinese and Indian students who returned from their study in Australian universities, argues that those students tend to “…be concerned more with their strategic positioning within the global labor
market than with building a moral sense of global solidarity” (p. 1). He calls this trend consumerist cosmopolitanism and insists on the need of critical cosmopolitanism to realize “building a moral sense of global solidarity.” According to Rizvi, this requires reforms of the current market-oriented climate of universities.

The growing stress on not only foreign language skills but on the so-called “soft-skill” within the framework of employability have been widely argued in the context of the change in economy and industrial structure. Brown (1995) develops a theory to understand increasingly intensified positional conflicts within middle class. He unpacks the process how something that seems only like recreation including travel/study abroad would have to be recognized as a part of development of “soft skill,” which become an advantage in the harsh competitions in globalized labor markets. According to Brown,

…whereas a range of broader interests and hobbies which offered time-out from academic study was seen as a form of cultural consumption which was enjoyed for its own sake, it has increasingly become a form of investment as part of the construction of a value-added curriculum vitae. It involves an increasing ‘commodification’ of the socio-emotional embodiment of culture, incorporating drive, ambition, social confidence, tastes and interpersonal skills… (Brown, 1995, p.42)

Heath (2007), drawing upon Brown’s theory, examines the popularity of pre-university gap years among British students. He insists that pre-university gap years, which normally include traveling, learning, volunteering, and work experiences, are used by students to gain advantages in the harsh competitions for the elite institutions. In a similar vein, Simpson (2004) has also criticized the rise of gap year as a symbolic event that represents commercialization and
excessive institutionalization of travel/study abroad.

It is indeed understandable that study abroad as an exercise of transnational/global mobility has affinity with neoliberalism. As Rizvi and Lingard (2006) asserts, globalization is not only about the increase of interconnections through “time-space compression” (Harvey, 1990), but “a deliberate, ideological project of economic liberalization that subjects states and individuals to more intense market forces” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006. pp. 251-252). In this view, globalization as an ideology operates to lead people to accepting neoliberal policies and market economy as if they were inevitable.

Some research such as Anagnost (2006) and Ong (2006) insist Asian youth particularly possess or strive to possess strong neo-liberal subjectivities. Anagnost describes how neoliberalism penetrates even the family sphere in China so much that Chinese parents have become managers who invest on their only child both economically and emotionally. Ong argues that American universities become increasingly multinational sites particularly attracting Asian students who seek for the edges to survive harsh global competitions. Against the backdrop, universities have been directed toward the borderless professional/technical training institutions that produce “neoliberal” citizenship, instead of national citizenship which is available through moral training based on Western humanist beliefs. Furthermore, “there is a tendency among Asian immigrants to focus narrowly on the vocational aspects of American education, a trend that is further exacerbated by fears that the globalization of the university has resulted in an overall decline of the humanities” (p. 153). So, the question is, do these situations apply to the cases with the Japanese young people?
2-3-2. Japanese young people and study abroad/ temporary migration. Gainey and Andressen (2002), based on a survey of the views of educators and related practitioners about international education in Japan, summarizes the results as 1) study abroad is often situated as second chances for those who could not compete effectively within the Japanese school and employment systems and 2) compared to other East Asian students, “their motivation is often described as a change of lifestyle or a ‘search for meaning’ rather than economic interests” (p. 154). Japan’s education system is well known for its tournament-like structure that rarely provides any second chances to losers and deviants from the normalized education/career path. This characteristic is coupled with strict ageism and sexism in the Japanese society.

For the first issue Gainey and Andressen point out, scholars have paid particular attentions to how gender inequality within the Japanese society has driven many Japanese women to escape abroad. Ono and Piper (2004), based on the several existing statistical data on the patterns of out-migration of Japanese women, analyzes the motivations of the Japanese women who study in higher education abroad. Ono and Piper explain that those Japanese women are trying to escape from undesirable conditions, primarily the limited career opportunities and reward structure in the Japanese labour market, in order to achieve self-realization in the Western countries. Kelsky (2001), who conducted a field work in Japan, focuses on particularly ambitious “internationalist” Japanese women, who study or work in the specific places that own international characteristics. According to Kelsky, these women seek a liberatory space in the West because of their dissatisfactions against the Japanese male-dominant corporate culture. They try to find a “new self,” by escaping from “insular and outdated Japanese values to what they characterize as an expansive, liberating international space of free and unfettered self-expression, personal
discovery, and romantic freedom” (p.87). The internationalist women idealize the West based on the supremacy of White males and instead, exclude Japanese men from their cosmopolitan utopia as they are backward.

While these studies problematize only the escape of Japanese women based on the situations in 90s, there are some indications for an escape of men. A report by a Japanese journalist Shimokawa (2007) traces the experiences of Japanese young people who periodically visit Thailand and stay as long as possible with the money they saved through intensive temporary works (typically manual works in factories) and/or some illegal works in Thailand. Shimokawa calls this group of young adults Soto-komori (withdrawal abroad) since they do not actively socialize with others in Thailand but find comfortable places for their own there. According to his analysis, they are tired of and dissatisfied with Japanese society—particularly work environments, and they are contrasted to those who legally gained decent jobs in Thailand, with clearer career goals.

Regarding the second point made by Gainey and Andresseen (ibid.) — the prioritization of “a change of lifestyle or a ‘search for meaning’” (p. 154) over economic interests—several research have confirmed this trend based on the case studies. Minamikawa (2005) observes 18 Japanese young people who have worked in a service industry illegally. His analysis describes that Japanese young people in Los Angeles evaluate their staying abroad experiences based on individualized, subjective, and ambiguous standards such as “how much am I true to myself?” “how much do I do what I really want to do?” and “how much did I grow up personally?” Minamikawa argues that the interviewees are never free from economic structures that marginalize them in job markets both in Japan and the U.S. They end up accepting their unstable
status as illegal workers because they see only the individualistic aesthetic values.

In a similar vein, Kato (2011), based on her interview research of 96 young Japanese people staying in Vancouver, Canada, contends many of the young people coming to Vancouver (Canada) are basically wandering and searching for a place to live. They try either to find what they really want to do or to spend their time on thinking if they should give up what they really want to do. As the case with the interview research by Minamikawa, many of the interviewees have kept the same status as temporary workers and the same search for the real self since they lived in Japan. For them, it seems study abroad is defined as a moratorium period. Due to the fact that most of Kato’s interviews were a part of her counselling service for the Japanese temporary migrants, the interviewees tended to have problems and serious difficulties such as troubles in relationships and unclear future career. Kato proposes that a remedy to solve their problems is to “end” their journey of self discovery. This can be achieved by stabilizing their lives through having more active connections and commitments to the local communities including Japanese communities, instead of being obsessed with a search for self and living only individually.

On the other hand, Fujita (2009) interviewed 22 Japanese young people coming to New York and London for a purpose of “cultural productions,” such as becoming a designer, artist, and a performer. She radically points out that, for the interviewees, the most important meaning of going abroad is to have another chance in somewhere new but quite similar to Tokyo after they lost their chances there. Fujita insists that, unlike Kelsky pointed out, a desire for “Western modernity” cannot explain the main motivation of young Japanese cultural migration. According to Fujita,

Indeed, Japan has long since developed its own sense of a “modern” lifestyle. These
young Japanese come from the middle class in the country, and could enjoy the same economic standard of living at home as middle-class young people do in New York City or London. It is not likely that they migrate to the West in search of something “modern” like young Albanians and Moroccans (p. 5).

She denies an escape searching for the modern as a motivation for the migrations of Japanese young people. Their ideas of “the West” as somewhere very similar to Tokyo attract them. What “pushed” them abroad is, however, undesirable work situations, just like Minamikawa and Kato implies. Fujita well summarizes the situations surrounding young Japanese people as follows:

As seen in these narratives, many of the young Japanese interviewed feel they have reached “a dead end” in Japanese society, as they cannot see a bright future for their careers and marriage prospects. They can enjoy a relatively affluent lifestyle by depending on their parents, but they are dissatisfied with their life, in which they find it difficult to take on interesting full-time jobs or start an independent life with a partner. They therefore have begun to search for a way to escape from their environment and to find a new place there they can lead a more fulfilling life. (p. 27)

These insights provides vivid examples to articulate how Japanese young people give the individualistic meanings to their experiences abroad. They strongly prove that motivations of Japanese temporary migration cannot be explained only by economic interests or the desire for success as a global elite. An aspect of escape from undesirable conditions and motivations of “self-discovery” are both confirmed. The act of escape and “self-discovery” are, however, rather negatively situated by these studies. It seems the researchers understand the Japanese young people crossing the ocean and keep finding self as weak victims of the employment structure of
the Japanese society, considering the fact that most of them were engaged in part-time or temporary jobs both in Japan and overseas. At the same time, they respectively focus on a group of Japanese young people with a distinct characteristics—illegal workers, clients of counselling service, and “cultural migrants” with artistic purposes. The experiences of rather “ordinary” types of study abroad students and what self-discovery means to them are not clarified here. It is possible that more positive ways of situating temporary migrations and “self-discovery” of Japanese young people will be demonstrated, whether they were temporary workers in Japan or not. Furthermore, while Kato insisted her interviewees have not found their own places to attach, the ways Japanese young people find or try to find their own places over time should be more deeply examined. Finally, those case studies have not investigated how educational experiences are situated by the interviewees. This dissertation research aims at building knowledge in this area, upon the previous studies.

2-3-3. Statistical data of Japanese study abroad. Statistical data also support the uniqueness of study abroad by Japanese, particularly proving its distinct characteristics compared to other Asian countries. First of all, as already mentioned, the number of the Japanese who study abroad with student visas has been steadily falling since 2003 (Figure 2.1). This might be explained by the decreasing size of the population of younger generations along the lowered birth rate. Nevertheless, the steadily low number of study abroad compared to other Asian countries indicate their differences in motivations toward study abroad. Secondly, a survey targeted on Japanese college students who studied abroad also shows that the majority of the students chose to study abroad only for less than a year (Table 2.1) Thirdly, as the same survey and other research have pointed out, the ratio of women study abroad is much higher than that of
men. (Table 2.2)

Finally, the major part of abroad is study abroad during college. The ratio of graduate level study is significantly low compared to other Asian countries (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.1 International students in the US from Asia.

(Cited from “Global Place” by University of Jyosai http://www2.ttcn.ne.jp/honkawa/6150.html
(Created based on Institute of International Education, Open doors (HP).)

Table 2.1 Japanese Study Abroad: Length of Stay (2013).

(Cited from JASSO, Study Abroad by Japanese college students http://www.jasso.go.jp/statistics/intl_student/data14_s.html)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&lt; 1 month</th>
<th>1 month - 3 months</th>
<th>3 months - 6 months</th>
<th>6 months - 1 year</th>
<th>&lt; 1 year</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>9,901</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>1,021</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.1 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>3,197</td>
<td>1,736</td>
<td>4,933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>7,103</td>
<td>1,622</td>
<td>8,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central &amp; South America</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>5,090</td>
<td>1,286</td>
<td>6,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25,526</td>
<td>5,288</td>
<td>30,814</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Japanese Study Abroad: Gender (2013).

(Cited from JASSO, Study Abroad by Japanese college students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Male (Number of Students)</th>
<th>Male (% of Total)</th>
<th>Female (Number of Students)</th>
<th>Female (% of Total)</th>
<th>Total (Number of Students)</th>
<th>Total (% of Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>5,481</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>8,011</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>13,492</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Undergraduate Students</th>
<th>Graduate Students</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>OPT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>1,880</td>
<td>4,102</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>5,982</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>5,371</td>
<td>9,843</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>15,214</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central &amp; South America</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>3,479</td>
<td>6,374</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>9,853</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16,446</td>
<td>28,636</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>45,082</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.2 Academic Level of International Students (2013/2014)
(Cited from “Global Place” by University of Jyosai [http://www2.ttcn.ne.jp/honkawa/6150.html](http://www2.ttcn.ne.jp/honkawa/6150.html) (created based on Institute of International Education, *Open doors* (HP).)

Diagram:
- China: 42.1%
- India: 40.3%
- Korea: 12.3%
- Taiwan: 12.2%
- Japan: 5.4%
- OPT: 26.7%
- Graduates: 7.8%
- Undergraduate: 13.4%

China  India  Korea  Taiwan  Japan
The ministry of education, culture, sports, science and technology in Japan has been concerned with the lower number of study abroad compared to other countries and researched the reasons that keep Japanese young people from study abroad. Based on the results of several surveys, they concluded that the main obstacles are 1) possible disadvantages to job hunting activities, 2) financial restrictions, and 3) Insufficient support system of universities (Figure 2.2)

Figure 2.2 Obstacles for Japanese Students to Study Abroad.


Japan has kept its traditional uniformed employment system. There is a fixed period of job-search for most of the full-time permanent jobs. New graduates are hired en masse after
graduating from high school or university. Under this hiring practice, it is difficult to find employment with a permanent contract if this opportunity is missed. Those who failed to be hired at this point usually have few options, other than keeping working as part-time or temporary workers. The analysis of the surveys suggest the causal relations between the traditional employment system and the trends in Japanese study abroad. It is plausible that many Japanese young people hesitate from study abroad for an extended time, a year or longer, because they do not want to take risks of missing the opportunity to be securely employed in Japan and run off the rail.

2-3-4. Self-Discovery, self-identity, and young people in contemporary Japanese young societies. Before closely examining the process of self-discovery by Japanese young people in the US, I articulate self-identities as a useful conceptual lense to analyze motivations of migrations by Japanese young people and its relation to the socioeconomic, cultural, and political contexts where the life experiences of contemporary Japanese young people are embedded.

As people’s lives have been deeply individualized in late modern societies, people find more possibilities to be free from traditional beliefs and constraints while keep-recreating their individual biography--self identities-- in a reflexive way (Giddens, 1991). According to Giddens, in the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a
particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyles choices among a diversity of options. (p. 5)

Giddens further uncovers what it means to create biography by negotiating lifestyle choices as follows:

Each of us not only 'has', but *lives* a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, "How shall I live?" has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat -- and many other things -- as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity.(p.14)

As Stuart Hall (1996) proposes, an inherently unified identity cannot be assumed any longer in the postcolonial era by arguing, "In essence, the argument is that the old identities which stabilized the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject (p. 596)." The identities Hall refers to are cultural identities, and their core parts are “our ‘belonging’ to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and, above all, national cultures (p. 596). For Giddens, however, the notion of individual self-identities is centralized, where he argues that people still struggle to pursue coherent self-identities even if it may be achieved only with constant revisions. Their conceptions of identities are different this way and the “self-discovery” of Japanese young people is easily linked to the concept of reflexive self-identities by Giddens. Yet the following description by Hall on the differences between “place” and “space” facilitates understanding identities as bounded to individual own “places.”
"Place" is specific, concrete, known, familiar, bounded: the site of specific social practices which have shaped and formed us, and with which our identities are closely bound up. Places remain fixed; they are where we have "roots." Yet space can be "crossed" in the twinkling of an eye -- by jet, fax, or satellite. (Hall, 1996, p. 620)

People are forced to constantly revise their self-identities in order to make it stable and coherent, but such processes are bounded to their places rather than free from any constraint. In the transnational situations, which this dissertation deals with, the reflexive revision processes will be foregrounded because people have to juggle their self-identities while being bounded to more than one place.

Discourse centered on “true-self” and “true place to be in” are indeed abundantly identified by research on Japanese young people since ‘90s, when Japan experienced deep economic recession while industrial structures had rapidly changed. The trend of prioritizing personal fulfillment over economic success seem to be strongly linked to this socio-economic background, since it is very likely that young people who cannot see validity of traditional mode of economic success would just turn their interests to other ways of living.

Self-identities of Japanese young people are often characterized through their employment/career status and communication manners. Compared to other Western societies, differences based on the social categories such as race, ethnicity, and class are less visible and more subtle in the Japanese society. It never means that the differences do not exist. Furthermore, differences in class, seem to be articulated through the education/employment status and communication/relationships with others. Reflecting this situation, discourses on identities are associated much more with these factors than with race, ethnicity and class, which are common
aspects of identity in the Western scholarship on young people.

The emergence of *Freeters* (a coined term indicating the people between the age of 15 and 34 who are not in full time employment or are unemployed, excluding homemakers and students), NEET (Not currently engaged in Employment, Education, or Training) and *Hikikomori* (a Japanese term referring to individuals who have chosen to withdraw from social life, usually contacting no one but family) symbolizes the situations of young people and how they are perceived by the Japanese society. Discourses related to these categorized young people largely refer to the aspects of work and communication in their lives.

*Freeters* have emerged in 90s and now it is very common in the Japanese society. While freeters have been defined in different ways by Japanese government, researchers, and journalists, freeters are basically those who are not engaged in full-time jobs but keep switching between part-time and/or temporary jobs. An aspect that attracted particular attentions is that they are not belonging to traditional styles of employment in postwar Japan, namely full-time and permanent employment in a company. While flexibility and self-responsibility are the keywords to illustrate their ways of working and lifestyles, freeters have been accepted both positively and negatively. Genda (2005) points out that freeters had been criticized because they were thought to be voluntarily choosing to be freeters to enjoy luxurious life by depending on their parents, without taking any responsibilities. What was hidden behind this “choice” discourse was, however, structural forces that had many young people choose to be freeters. Genda confirms this fact based on the statistical data. According to his analysis, the rise of freeters is explained by a combination of specific demographic factors (baby-boomers vs. their children’s’ generation) and “displacement” strategies that protect vested interests of older
generations at the expense of younger generations’ stable employment.

Much of the current research on freeters has proved that the changes in the economic and demographic structure are the main factors that created unstable situations of the young people (e.g., Honda, 2004). Researchers, however, used to more optimistically argue that the huge trend of self-discovery and a desire for a more flexible life course explain the rise of freeters. This perspective still remains. Freeters were expected to have resistantive possibilities against the Japanese tournament-like education system, where the losers in the school entrance exams and in job search rarely find second chances. Strict ageism imposes age-based norms on individuals. A study by the Japan institute for labor policy and training (2000), which greatly influenced how Freeters are understood in policy and research, categorizes freeters into three groups: moratorium type, dreamer type, and unwilling type. Honda (2005) criticizes this way of categorization because it exaggerates the aspect of moratorium and often overlooks more complex contexts, which often inevitably lead the young people to become freeters. Honda, nevertheless, admits that there are some voluntary or moratorium-like components in the motivations for freeters. Yaritaikoto ("what I really want to do"), a phrase extracted from freeters’ voices when they talk about what they are seeking for, has been a common key term to describe their views. Hikikomori and NEET, which began to be recognized a few years later following freeters, are often narrated as extreme examples of the young people who lost their yaritaikoto. Research trends, however, have been directed to victimizing these young people (e.g., Miyamoto, 2002). What the young people are voluntarily pursuing or struggling to gain through the transitional periods to adulthood, or how such aspects are related to structural constraints have been left unexamined in the studies of this area.
It is easy to say that they are engaged in “self-discovery” or “they are finding yaritaikoto,” but what do such words actually indicate? Araya (2004) offers an important insight by partly revealing what is behind the convenient term yaritaikoto. In his interview analysis, he found that the most important thing for many freeters is to live and work close to their significant peers even if choosing such a path means to accept an economically unstable life. Araya concludes that the freeters refer to yaritaikoto in order to mask their real desires and justify their decisions to others. At the same time, the importance of peers for their identity is revealing here. On the other hand, as Kukimoto (2003) also conducts interview research on Japanese young people and points out, some young people cannot find a suitable job because they are so hedged in with their fantasies for yaritaikoto. According to Kukimoto, because excessively idealized yaritaikoto became a norm among them, this could deprive the young people of realistic perceptions. The norm that individuals must find and choose what they really want to do for their jobs can pose a significant pressure on Japanese young people because work is such a significant aspect of their identities.

NEET and hikikomori are often considered as they have emerged against the same backdrop as the freeters have, but with more negative implications because they are more distanced from both jobs and communications. In a similar way how the number of Freeters are structurally rose was explained (Genda (2005), Honda (2008)), Furlong (2008) criticizes the simplification of hikikomori phenomena as malaise or a failure of parents and, instead, points out the structural changes since mid of 1980s that has made hikikomori more salient as follows:

I argue that the tendency to think of hikikomori as a homogeneous group characterised by psychological malaise is misleading and that withdrawal and disengagement can also be
linked to changing opportunity structures. The collapse of the primary labour market for young people and the growing prevalence of a precarious secondary sector has led to a situation in which traditional and deep-rooted norms are undermined and young people forced to find new ways of navigating transitions within a highly pressured and rigid System. Under these circumstances, acute withdrawal often represents an anomic Response to a situation where tradition no longer provides adequate clues to appropriate behaviour rather than as a malaise reducible to individual psychologies. (p. 309)

Furlong argues the importance of situating the rise of *hikikomori* as a result of conflicts between 1) individualization, flexibility in late modernity and 2) the modern, inflexible, and highly regimented Japanese society. It is an inevitable consequence that the ontological questions that brought by many people, particularly those who became *hikikomori* later, have not been solved by the society that prepared only one kind of answer with a single track of life without any second chance. Furlong further analytically explains that the similar structural change occurred in other western countries but the rapidness of the change in a relatively short time and some specific combinations among labor market (casualization of the labor rather than the decrease of the number of jobs) and family relationships (less emphasis on independence especially in terms of housing) characterises Japan’s unique situation, which has witnessed the rise of *hikikomori*.

Ishikawa (2007), based on the interview research of *hikikomori*, describes how *hikikomori* are oppressed with both the pressure to work and the social norm to have relationships with others. Therefore, according to Ishikawa, starting to work and having communications with others, which are assumed to be “normal” and “healthy” human statuses, may not be the final goal for *hikikomori*. The key to their identity negotiation is to accept to live
their lives anyway. For Japanese young people, their jobs and relationships with others hold so much importance within their self-identities that they can be closely connected to the ontological question. Doi (2009), by examining the contemporary discourses on self, contends discovering “self” means to believe as if “real self “exists somewhere inside each individual inherently. Doi argues the popularity of “self-discovery” functions rather obsessively against contemporary youth. Here, identity of Japanese young adults seem to be further complicated because the idea of coherent self-identity itself can be disturbing to them.

Whereas those Japanese researchers deeply examined the relations between self-identities, work, and relationships to others, Brinton (2010), an American researcher who conducted interview research for Japanese young people in Japan, argues that an attachment to specific places (workplace, school, community etc) characterizes Japanese society as a whole. The Japanese people, however, have lost such places to attach since ‘90s, as a result of the collapse of the educational systems and the labor market that previously seemed to function well. Allison (2013) also mentions: “ And Japanese, I was told, were losing-- for better or worse-- that sticky relationality of human ties that had been the earmark of not only traditional culture but the country's own brand of Toyota-ist capitalism once deemed so successful to be called a " miracle economy" (p. 17). It is interesting that Allison suggests both positive and negative implications of this change. As the various theorists have explored, Japanese young people seem to struggle with their lives and questions of self-identities in their world which is a mix of hope and uncertainty.

2-4. Concluding Discussion of Chapter 2: Hope or Desperation, Agency or Victim in Precarious Japan
A search for places and “true self” (self-identity) are clearly important and distinct factors to understand the experiences of contemporary Japanese young people. Their importance are widely shared by the young people and distinctly highlighted for the cases of young people who have specific difficulties with their work and relationships to people. Those factors seem to be reflected on or even more illuminated at study abroad for an extended time. That is because many of the participants more consciously invest in their “self-searching” period and they seem to be more likely to be aware of what they were not able to fulfill in Japan as they have certain distance from its society.

It may sound a little surprising but it is already pointed out, indeed, that hikikomori (social withdrawal) and study abroad have a common aspect in relation to the exploration of self-identities. As Furlong (2008) mentions, Erikson (1968) recognises that “there are situations in which people (of any age) can lose a sense of direction and for young people this confusion frequently arises during transitional periods” (Furlong, pp. 315-316). However, “…modern transitions, in which the outcomes of various routes are not immediately clear, are particularly conducive to forms of withdrawal in which young people take time out in order to try and re-establish a sense of direction while struggling to re-construct identities as young adults” (ibid.). Furlong sees an aspect of Japanese hikikomori to “facilitate the completion of the identity building tasks associated with adolescence” (ibid.). In this sense, both hikikomori and study abroad can be situated as examples of “psychological moratoria” that may be necessary and beneficial for some young people to solve their questions of self-identities.
Possible negative consequences of this “psychological moratoria” are, however, that the stop-out period may not be able to solve the identity problems. Côté and Allahar (1994), on which Furlong (2008) relies on, indicates such consequences, arguing ‘individuals often stagnate or drift; they may develop mechanisms that shut the world out and occlude possibilities for self-growth” (p. 74). As Furlong suggests, the act of “shutting the world out” overlaps with the Japanese hikikomori. Furthermore, Côté and Allahar mark the importance of access to resources to use the moratoria constructively. Considering the possible negative consequences, Furlong insists that “it is necessary to have an appropriate, socially sanctioned retreat” (p. 316). Whereas both Furlong and Côté and Allahar assume the custom of time-out/ gap year in western societies as the examples of possibly beneficial “psychological moratoria,” Furlong identifies the critical difference between other western societies and Japan as follows:

Essentially, in many western societies, ‘false-starts’ are not considered problematic as there are frequently second chances and alternative routes. A process of drift is socially acceptable and can occur without long-term damage, whereas in Japan it is a process that is often viewed with suspicion. Moreover, in Japan the stakes are higher and it is much more important to make direct transitions. As young people and their families are aware, it is important to ‘get it right’ first time; those who fail to do so may be sentenced to a life in the secondary labour market. (p.316)

If Japanese hikikomori is a negative consequences of “psychological moratoria” that attempts to solve problems of self-identities without enough social sanctions, how study abroad/temporary migration are situated in this context? That will be one of the important questions this dissertation will explore.
Previous research on study abroad and temporal migration of the Japanese indicated the main motivations for the Japanese young people to move abroad is 1) escape from undesirable situations in the Japanese society and/or 2) “self-discovery,” which refers to management of self-identities. The two types of motivations are deeply synched with the situations surrounding Japanese young people including their emerging possibilities and specific difficulties, both of which are caused by the structural changes in the Japanese society since late 80s-early 90s when the industrial structure began to change. The period of the transitional “pre-adulthood” has began to be prolonged at the same time, not only because of occupation stability but also because what it means to becoming an adult itself has become ambiguous. While the age-based expectations remain, in reality, actual ages of leaving parental home, getting married and bearing children have been delayed and also varied depending on individuals’ life courses. Having a family itself has also become a matter of choice rather than a requirement. The order of these life events also has become more complex, not necessarily linear, and people may act back and forth between these kinds of life events while often changing their places.

The reviews of the previous research on youth demonstrate how young people have historically been situated as socially and/or psychologically immature. This perspective would often lead to criticism against youth cultures while it also would call for interventions to support them to successfully become “adults.” On the other hand, many researchers have tried to find positive agencies of young people to change the society rather than victimizing them as passive dependents. It seems most of the researchers struggle somewhere between this binary opposition. Here is a representative contrasting two exemplary arguments. Allison (2013) thoroughly
describes recent Japan’s devastating situation, which is symbolized by the second highest level of poverty among the OECD member countries, following the United States. Allison calls contemporary Japan as “precarious Japan” where about one third of all workers are only irregularly employed. Allison illuminates what Amamiya and Kayano (2008) calls *ikizurasa* (hardship of life) that refers to “insecurity that is not only material but also ontological“ (Allison, p.65). Because, in the Japanese society, work is so much prioritized, “when so much (of the self and soul) gets absorbed into work, the loss of not having that work (and longing for it) can be all-absorbing as well (Allison, p. 16).

In contrast, Furuichi (2011), who is often remarked as a represent of the contemporary young generation, attracted great attentions when he asserted that young people in Japan was not so unhappy as adults had argued. While his interpretation of the statistics data, which was the base of his argument, has been controversial as Fruichi himself admitted, his firm stance against victimization of young people has been influential. According to Fruichi, even if many young people are categorized as being in poverty, they do not feel it realistically because it is about relative poverty and many of them still could survive anyway. With the widen access to the internet and social network services, young people have gained numerous sites to fulfill their desires for recognition outside of their workplaces. They are happy enough as long as they can provide recognition with each others within their small peer networks. Because they do not expect to be economically successful as their parents’ generation, they do not express clear dissatisfaction against the Japanese society or government. Furuichi evaluates this way of living as a smart survival strategy to live happily in a given environment with limited opportunities. While his argument is rather speculative, his current popularity in Japan partly proves his
stance--taking a distance from victimization of youth-- attracts certain sympathy among the people in Japan.

Even Allison (2008), who attempts to describe tragedy of contemporary Japan as much as possible, still hopes to find positive agencies in “precarious Japan,” as follows:

But in trying to survive a condition of precarity that is increasingly shared, one can see a glimmer in these attempts of something new: different alliances and attachments, new forms of togetherness, DIY ways of (social) living and revaluing life. One can sense, if one senses optimistically, an emergent potential in attempts to humanely and collectively survive precarity: a new form of commonwealth (commonly remaking the wealth of sociality), a biopolitics from below. This social and political possibility I call the soul on strike in precarious Japan. (p. 18)

Again, uncertainty and flexibilities of lives can have both positive and negative consequences. The access to various opportunities/choices depends on the access to resources. Still the situation where “anything could happen” may increase the chances of changing oppressive societies by creating new ways and/or communities to make it happen. While Furuichi (2011) suggests such changes occurs only within narrow peer networks thus do not lead to drastic social changes, it may be still possible that each subtle change may accumulate and create gradual social changes. Whereas study abroad/temporal migration is largely an option that only middle or upper class can access to, the cases will demonstrate certain factors that are extensively observed in “precarious Japan” and, therefore, provide a site to examine specific difficulties surrounding contemporary Japanese “precarious” young people and seek for positive benefits of their “moratoria,” if the term applies their experiences. This may, then, lead to discussions on how we
should face the questions of self-identities with “an appropriate, social sanctioned retreat” (Furlong, 2008, p. 316). At the same time, this dissertation aims to explore possibilities of any kind of personal statement/social critique by each transnational migrant/mover will lead to more collective social changes that mitigate oppressions and difficulties that today’s Japanese, particularly young, people experience.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation focuses on the processes where Japanese young people find their own places. Analysis is based on in-depth interviews and brief questionnaires which ask their demographic information and purposes of study abroad in a format of multiple choice questions. The research design, analysis, and writing all draw on qualitative methodology.

3-1. Target

The recruitment flyer describes the eligibility of the interview participants as follows:

You are eligible to participate in this research if you are 1) a Japanese (born and grew up in Japan. Green-card holders and citizens are also acceptable if obtained after reaching adulthood), 2) 18 years old or older (up to roughly 35 years old), 3) a student or a former student of ESL (English as a Second Language school) or community college, and if you 4) have been staying or planning to stay in the US for a year or longer.

First, I limited the target within the Japanese who was born and grew up in Japan because I need to observe how they experienced and reflects on the lives in Japan with a transnational perspective. The second generation of the Japanese are likely to have significantly different experiences from them. Secondly, I defined the age range of “young” only roughly. I accepted some interviewees out of this range as long as they thought they were close to the range and might be eligible. As I discussed in Chapter 2, defining the “young people” based only on age has been increasingly difficult because the border between the young and adults has been blurred. Again, this research focuses “youthfulness” which is tied to “precariousness” shared by certain people rather than a group of people who belong to a certain age group. Third, I focused
on students or former students, but excluded those who directly started in 4-year colleges or graduate schools. I purposely included former students because former students would be able to reflect on their experiences and on changes in their thoughts over time, better than the current students would do. I targeted only on those who have stayed/ planned to stay for a year or longer for the same reason I included the former students.

It would be safe to state all of the interviewees belonged to middle to upper class when they lived in Japan. Whereas some of them experienced economically challenged lives during their stay in the US, it seemed that they commonly maintained economically stable lives in Japan. I did not ask about class or economic situations directly to the interviewees. Based on the stories about how they end up with studying abroad, however, it was very evident they did not have a serious economic issues. They were either financially supported by their parents or saved money by themselves through working for several years. Still, as I discussed in Chapter 2, they share, regardless of the wide range of ages, certain characteristics of “youthfulness” with other “youthful” people (= whom I call young people here) in Japan, which is represented by the term” precariously.” Few of them were at full-time employment before coming to the US and they often had only vague ideas about how they live and where to work (or not) when they began their life abroad. While their study abroad is considered largely as behaviors by the middle to upper class, certain ways of thinking they tend to have may be shared with others with more severe economic issues.

3-2. Recruitment Process

The investigator, I, was responsible for recruiting and contacting the interviewees. The interviewees are recruited through posting advertisement on internet BBS within website for
Japanese people living in the research area (city X and Y). A summary of research, a summary of voluntary consent form, and my contact information (e-mail) are included in the advertisement so that those who are interested in participating the study are able to contact the investigator voluntarily. This website is widely recognized by Japanese people in the research area, since they provide useful information about the lives in the area (buy and sell, health, education, cultural events etc.), particularly for those who seeks for connections with Japanese people and cultures. Unlike choosing students from several specific schools, this way of recruiting process allowed me to find interviewees with more variety of backgrounds. The online flyer also attracts only those who matches the recruiting criteria and give possible interviewees ample time to consider participation. I planned to collect approximately 20 interviews in total, ideally 10 women and 10 men. I ended up interviewing 10 women and 2 men, due to the accessibility and the time restriction. The imbalance in gender may be explained either by the larger number of eligible women and/or by the relatively higher interests in research or conversations with me, a Japanese woman researcher living in the US. As I realized the difficulty to collect enough interviewees from the online recruitment only, I asked several interviewees to recommend someone interested in participating in the research. This attempt brought some, not many, additional interviewees. Interview candidates who contacted me and considered matching the recruiting criteria were contacted either through email or phone and invited to participate in an interview at a time and location convenient and secure to them, such as nearby cafe, shopping mall, or school lounge (with a permission of the school). Whenever SKYPE was the most convenient method for the interviewees, interview was conducted through SKYPE. A half of the interviews were conducted through SKYPE.
The design of the pilot research was slightly different from the main research in several points. The pilot research focused only on the students registered for ESL schools at the point of recruitment. I visited two ESL schools in city P (a large city on the west coast of the US) and recruited candidates by walking around inside each school and talking to the Japanese students, by permission of the schools. I interviewed 16 Japanese students in total including 13 women and 3 men. Each interviewee, including those in the pilot research, is given pseudonyms throughout this dissertation.

**3-3. Research Procedure**

After each interviewee and I mutually agreed to meet in a convenient and secure place for them, I provided a consent form and explain about its content. At each interview location, the interviewee and I carefully sit in an area where others are not around to listen in. After the interviewee signing on the form, a brief questionnaire was provided. When all the procedure was proceeded through email communications and SKYPE calls, I sent the consent form and the questionnaire to the interviewees by email. They either electronically signed or manually signed, scanned, and sent the consent form along the filled questionnaire to me.

The questionnaire (Appendix) asks their demographic information, educational backgrounds, planned length of stay and a multiple-choice question about the reasons why they decided to study abroad. In off-line interviews, the interviewee fills the questionnaire out first, and I began an interview. Each interview typically took 60-90 minutes. The interview was conducted in Japanese and recorded by an electronic recorder upon the interviewee’s consent. Consents for recording the interview, including SKYPE calls, were also obtained either orally or through email.
Starting from confirming the information filled out on the questionnaire, I gradually developed the conversation rather freely so that the interviewees were able to talk comfortably. During the interviews, I asked what motivated them to study abroad, the decision making process before studying abroad, actual experiences abroad, future plans, and how their relations to people including partners, families, friends and others surrounding them, influenced their life abroad. However, when an interviewee was particularly interested or enthusiastic about any part of their experiences and/or feelings and thoughts, I carefully listened to their stories without trying to interrupt and redirect the conversation. Rather than trying to be an observer of what they were talking, I actively engaged in the conversations because I believed that encourage them to comfortably keep talking. I expressed my honest agreement whenever I could and my opinions when asked by the interviewees. On the other hand, however, I tried not to show my disagreement because I did not want to discourage their willingness to talk.

For the participants who agreed with additional follow-up questions over the phone or an email, I sent emails and ask some questions to clarify what I missed in the interviews. Regarding the pilot research, I had a long-follow up interview with Lisa, one of the interviewees, after a year of the initial interview. Also, I was able to have opportunities to be connected with three the interviewees after 8 years, including an email exchange with one of them and SKYPE calls with the other two respectively. The pilot study was conducted in the summer of 2006. The main interview research was conducted in 2014-2015.

3-4. Why ESL/Community College Students?

I focused on current or former students of ESL schools or community colleges in the US in order to increases possibilities of encountering varied motivations for study abroad. ESL schools are
most accessible for those hoping to study abroad only if they overcome financial barriers. There are no exams to be enrolled, except for a screening test to determine their class based on their proficiency. They need, therefore, much less investment and preparation before study abroad compared to 4-year colleges. ESL schools are often considered as easier starts of temporary (or sometimes permanent) immigration with easier processes of obtaining visas. Community college is a popular destination to choose after people studied at ESL schools for a certain period, ranging from several weeks to several years. Due to the characteristics of these two kinds of schools, I assumed motivations of those who aimed at these schools are not necessarily linked to their future work career plans. It may be rather vague. On the other hand, studying in 4-year colleges in the US or traveling around are likely to be tied to clearer purposes such as pursuing degrees or mere enjoyment. It should be noted, however, this way of categorization only facilitates clarifying relatively strong connections between their status and motivations. There are also diversities among English language schools. For example, students in English language schools with higher tuitions tend to have more aspirations to go on to 4-year colleges in the US compared to those in the schools with lower tuition. This tendency was confirmed through the pilot study. The interviewees taught me that each ESL schools have different characteristics. Total number of students, ethnic/racial compositions including the ratio of Japanese students, and tuitions are all different depending on the management and location of each school. The schools with lower tuition tend to be invisible because they do not invest in advertising themselves, so it is hard to search information about such schools on the internet. But several interviewees informed me that the tuition of ESL schools ranges from 200 to 2000 dollars per month. The two schools I chose for the pilot research (school A and school B) were both located in downtown of
city P and were not attached to any colleges. School A was relatively large and school B was relatively small. Reflecting the sizes, the tuition of school A was much higher (approx. $1200) than school B (approx. $500). I also learned that students in ESL schools with lower tuition are often transferred from other schools to save money for extending their stay. The differences in characteristic may be linked to certain patterns of student compositions along their learning/social environment.

3-5. Location Setting-- the US, City P, City X, and City Y.

The US is the country where the largest number of Japanese people stay (besides Japan) and the largest number of Japanese people choose as a destination of study abroad.

Table 3.1 Destination of Study Abroad by the Japanese College Students.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/Area</th>
<th>Number of study abroad</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>11,005</td>
<td>(10,355)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4,443</td>
<td>(3,946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>4,209</td>
<td>(4,087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>4,040</td>
<td>(4,365)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>3,993</td>
<td>(3,709)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>2,859</td>
<td>(4,414)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>1,601</td>
<td>(1,499)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1,598</td>
<td>(1,443)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1,534</td>
<td>(1,265)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The numbers in parenthesis are data of 2012.
The ESL schools I chose for the pilot research were located in city P. It is one of the cities that are known for its large population of the Japanese in the U.S. and very popular destination among both tourists and international students. The websites I asked to post the recruitment advertisement were targeted on those living in city X and city Y respectively. X is a large city on the west coast in the US while city Y, is also large but situated in the east coast. Both have a large populations of Japanese people like city P. Since, several interviewees were introduced by other interviewees, they stayed in different cities from city X and Y. I call them just “some city” in a certain area of the US when they appear in the analysis. Among those cities, another large city on the west coast was called city Z as it appears frequently throughout the analysis. I used the pseudonyms for the names of the cities because I assume the analysis contains many information that may lead to easy identification of each interviewee.

Despite the high ratio of the Japanese people staying in city P, X, Y, and Z, the way each interviewee felt how many Japanese people are around them were different. Some interviewees said they had a Japanese community while others said they rarely encountered other Japanese people even within a same city. How they perceive their environment, therefore, depends on areas of living and their lifestyles. There are also different types of Japanese people coming from Japan. The majority of the Japanese in the US are indeed those sent by the Japanese companies and their families. Their life styles may be very different from the ones of students. Even when
the statistics indicate the existence of a large number of Japanese, it does not necessarily mean that the interviewees live their lives surrounded by many Japanese people.

3-6. Qualitative Inquiry

According to Schwandt (2000), qualitative inquiry is a site for those “who share a general rejection of the blend of scientism, foundationalist epistemology, instrumental reasoning, and the philosophical anthropology of disengagement that has marked ‘mainstream’ social science,” “...where a particular set of laudable virtues for social research are championed, such as fidelity to phenomena, respect for the life world, and attention to the fine-grained details of daily life” (p. 190). Throughout this dissertation, I draw upon qualitative methodology. That is mainly because I am interested in how each individual give their own meanings to their experience rather than what the reality looks like. I also want to be conscious of the relations and interactions between the interviewees and I. Therefore, I construct the research and my positionality as a researcher affect those relations. My hope here is to let the interviewees’ voices speak rather than to let me tell about them. Another hope is to keep visible the relations between the interviewees and I, while the reader follow the interview analysis. In reality, however, the interview scripts were still coded just like any other interview data usually is. Because coding and writing are the acts of interpretation, it is impossible to completely just let the interviewees voices speak. I was thinking numerous times about putting all the interview scripts as they are in the dissertation to show the whole the conversations to the readers. Still, however, I am aware of the importance of analyzing and discussing how their experiences are related to my research questions. For the purpose, I still needed to separate the scripts into pieces and analyze them thematically. I struggled as much as possible, however, to let them speak by verbatimly citing conversations
between the interviewees and I with enough length to see what they meant to say in the specific contexts. As I confessed in Chapter 1, this research started with my personal experiences and personal questions. My positionality consists of a variety of aspects. To the interviewees, I am a Japanese woman graduate student who came from Japan and someone who can share many experiences with them as a student, a mother, a non-elite wanderer staying too long in school, a Japanese having an ambivalent feelings toward Japan. My interview data and analysis was constructed only based on the relations between the interviewees and I, which are inevitably influenced by my positionality. I often felt undeniable sympathies when I found so much similarities between the interviewees and I. For other times, I found so much disagreement with their experiences and thoughts. The interpretations of the interview data, therefore, were always mediated by strong “I.” Even so, I still keep struggling to constantly reflect those processes. I do not believe I can research better because I can share many experiences with them -- there are always what they want to say because they are taking to me while there are also what they do not want to say for the same reason. A vivid example was an interview with Shu. The direction of the interview was completely determined by the initial conversation between Shu and I about the purpose of my research and what I am really trying to focus on. I could have pretended to be more “neutral” instead of confessing my stance. But I believed at this moment and I still do I had to be honest with the interviewees whenever they asked me questions and wanted to know about the research deeply. Shu could have talked about very different stories or in different tones if I had answered differently or the interviewer had been different. In this sense, the interview data, not only for Shu’s case but for others, was created through the interactions between the interviewees and I. Indeed I had known that would happen based on the past interview research
experiences. That was the very reason I thought I wanted to be honest with interviewees as much as possible because they are partly co-creators of my research in a sense. While this may be criticized as “confessing too much to the interviewees beforehand and this would lead to adding definite controls the result” and I partially agree. I would respond against this criticism, however, as ethics that should exist within relationships between the interviews were the priority for me and I believe honesty with the interviewees are the core part of the ethics.

Following many of researchers engaged in qualitative inquiry, I argue that there is no objective and neutral position that best observes and analyzes a phenomena. My positionality, nevertheless, cannot be gone anywhere. I have to face how they are and show what interactions created my data. What I need to do is to keep engaged in “uncomfortable reflexivity” (Pillow, 2003) which interrupts the use of reflexivity as a methodological tool to get a better data while foregrounding the complexities of qualitative research.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4-1. Introduction to Chapter 4

As I have reviewed in Chapter 2, research on study abroad has argued that the main motivations for study abroad is acquiring abilities to be a global elite in competitive labor markets or gaining cultural experiences within international settings. On the other hand, previous studies indicated the following trends of the reasons for study abroad among Japanese people: 1) Escape from undesirable work/social environment and 2) Self-discovery-- finding what they really want to do. These types of motivations were particularly identified for those study abroad by themselves for an extended time rather than a short period such as several weeks. I will investigate if the above reasons of initiating study abroad are applicable and appropriate enough to describe the interview participants in my research. Furthermore, I will explore if there are any factors that are not focused or argued in the previous studies.

This data analysis chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is a summary of the pilot interview research I conducted in city P( a large city on the west coast in the US) in 2006 and its follow up research I conducted in 2014. Most of the interviewees were planning to stay there and study in ESL schools for about 1 year. Due to this characteristics, the analysis is mostly focused on how the participants situated their studying abroad experiences in their entire life career. Two aspects of their study abroad experiences are highlighted. First, studying in the US often provides second chances in education and its following career. How the interviewees experience education in the US as the second chance is examined. Secondly, many of the interviewees situate their study abroad as a self-discovery. What this vague concept means to the
interviewees is uncovered based on their feedbacks at the end of their study abroad and their future career visions. Among the 16 interviewees, three participants responded to the follow-up research. They vividly shows two types of effects of study abroad on their lives: a) dramatic changes in her career that led her to work in a foreign country eventually, b) mild effects that constantly influence her way of thinking, living and working throughout her life.

The second section is based on the interview research conducted primarily for young people living in a big city on the west coast of the US. I call the city here as city X. Some of the interviewee live in other areas in the US and I called them as city Y and Z respectively, as they appear repeatedly. Unlike the interviews in the pilot study, most of the interviewees have stayed in the US for a long time period and many of them are planning to stay in the US permanently. These characteristics enable me to examine processes where the interviewees are finding their own places over time, trying to establish their own ways of living and self-identities through experiencing many life events.

4-2. Pilot Study in City P and Follow-up Research

4-2-1. Overview of the Interview Data

As a pilot study, I interviewed 16 ESL (English as a Second Language) school students including three males and one former student. Three of them planned to stay in the US permanently, one had stayed there for 5 years and planned to go back, three planned to study for 2-3 years. The other 9 interviewees planned to stay about 6 months to one year. The following table summarizes basic background information of each interview.
Table 4.1 Basic background information of the interviewees (Pilot study).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Expected Length of Stay</th>
<th>Stay Length so far</th>
<th>Previous Occupation</th>
<th>Self-Discovery?</th>
<th>For better job?</th>
<th>For English?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aya</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1y4m</td>
<td>1y4m</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emi</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3y</td>
<td>5m</td>
<td>Vocational college</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hana</td>
<td>NA</td>
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</table>

Among the interviewees, Hana and Yoko were officially enrolled in colleges in the U.S. Hana attended language schools only for the summer, Suzuki did not attend any longer. Their statuses, therefore, were different from other interviewees, but I included them to my analysis because I found important similarities between them and the other informants.

The left three columns indicate results of one of the questions in questionnaire: “What are your purposes of this study abroad (Check all that apply)?” The choices are: a) To get better job, b) To be promoted, c) To keep your current job position, d) To improve English skill, e) To
improve general communication skill, f) To meet new people, g) To have different experiences, h) To discover self, i) To have time reflecting on your life, j) Others. Those who checked a), b), or c) are given check marks in the column of “for better job?”, b) for “for English?” and h) for “self-discovery?”

4-2-2. Summarized Analysis

Because this is a pilot research, the following analysis is structured with highlighted voices of the interviewees that are categorized into relevant themes. Summarized short analysis follows at the end of this section.

Study Abroad is Not for English.

Although I see many other people who vigorously pursue MBA or try to improve their English to enter colleges in the U.S., I am not so serious. I thought like I wanted to widen my horizon and that was my first goal. English is important but experiences mean more to me. (Rika)

Study Abroad is...huge. It affected my way of thinking. I realized there are good things about Japan and became independent, away from parents. It’s not just about English. English is important, but it is just the second thing. (Umi)

For the Second Chance.

In Japan, people would say I am a fool if I say I go to college at the age of 30. But nobody cares such things here. They never ask my age. Everyone is so relaxed here. It would be hard to go to college at my age, for this reason. (Hiro)

You have another chance even if you failed. In Japan, I would not be hired properly, except for part-time, with my such a bad grade at junior high school. In the US, I can get a decent job if I have a degree. I might have become NEET, if I had been in Japan. (Hana)
I did not hate English but I was not smart. I thought I would become able to speak English if I was majored in English literature, but that was a big mistake. Japanese education system is so wrong. ..When I started to become motivated to learn English and study abroad, my parents told me to do whatever I wanted to. (Lisa)

For an Escape from Japan.

I hated the Japanese company, its detailed organization. I chose to study abroad rather than changing my job in Japan… I didn’t have a particular problem with anyone but my boss. It was a nice place to work but I had too much responsibility as I was promoted. I could not do when I wanted to change something. I thought I was selfish and wrong, but I did not see any future there. I didn’t like Japan as a whole--school teachers, how they taught, their partiality. I always resisted. I didn’t want to lose. I read a book about the baseball in the US and they said people praise in the US and they won’t change players’ styles. In Japan, the style was the same with everyone and I didn’t like it. (Hiro)

Sometimes I feel there is a language barrier and wish I were in Japan. But I think I cannot work in Japan because of my education background and I don’t care much about where I live. I just do not have any other options other than living here. Grades and the name of school will be important in Japan. I got a grade like 2 out 5 in Japanese and the rest of them were all 1. They would not hire such a person even if she had a special ability. I enjoyed my school life with friends but my relationship with mom was bad, so I was not happy. (Hana)

I did not like the way of thinking of the Japanese and Japan, so always wanted to go somewhere different… When you stand out, the America cherishes the difference but it is criticized in Japan. That was strange. Many of the school teachers were like that. Parents too. The superior people ruled and everyone had to follow. It was so wrong that different opinions are shut out. I had that feeling when I saw how teachers do in elementary school. I began to learn what was all about after I went out to the World. (Izumi)
When I was at high school in Japan, it was like, everyone was the same, and people were happy with it. I felt a distance from that. It was OK that people were together and nice to each other. (Umi)

I hated everything about Japan before coming here. I liked everything about overseas, like music. I felt ashamed of the Japanese behaviors and cultures...Everyone goes to the same direction without thinking in Japan. They do not accept minorities. I had good friends to share my feeling in highschool, but the junior high was not good as I felt something was wrong. People were quiet in class. I thought people should have answered when teachers asked questions. I didn’t confront. I thought the reality never changes in Japan but I could go to somewhere else instead. (Yoko)

My personality fits better here than Japan. I am rough around edges and act without thinking. My parents always care about our appearance and have stereotypical views. So, I feel easier to be with the Americans. My parents were very strict, so I wanted to leave home as soon as possible. (Mao)

**What Does Self-discovery Really Mean?**

Self-discovery means...I can easily see who I am and what is good and bad about myself, when I am away from home. That includes my weak points and flaws of the Japanese, it is hard to change them although. The Japanese are bad at expressing themselves. They are good at receiving other’s kindness but bad at giving. It is just good that I realized about these at least. (Kayo)

Self-discovery for me means I was able to find what I want to do, while I could not find it before. I did not know I could professionally work as an illustrator and it was my mother who decided my major in the first place. I was not very sure and I had a feeling against my parents. But when my work was exhibited and prised last spring, I started to feel confident. (Hana)
You don’t have to stick to going abroad for self-discovery, but new environment is important. I was in the same environment all the time, so doing different things in the same place would not have changed me that much. It would be good just to change the city to live, but study abroad changes everything so I can learn something new and find something new about myself. (Ken)

Self-discovery means...that I was able to decide finally to succeed my parents work, although not sure yet when. I have decided just recently. I had not thought about finding a job using English even before coming here. Anywhere abroad was OK for me. I wanted to go somewhere different, change my way of thinking, and see many different things. (Takeshi)

Self discovery means...I didn’t know anything about myself and came here, away from where I was. I was able to see myself objectively -- who I am, what I like, and what I am interested in. I think I was able to know those things. (Yoko)

Reflections and the Meaning of Study Abroad.

I am a student here, with less responsibility. It is like a vacation for me. I’m free. I have many friends here. People come and go so quickly in the ESL schools, so I was able to meet so many good people, which would not have been possible if I had continued to work for a company in Japan. I will miss the lives here, but I also feel it is not right to continue to stay here. If I continue to live here, I will have to find a job, and things will be very different. I may have lots of troubles. I want to study abroad again, but probably won’t do any more. (Aya)

I may want to study abroad again. I may not be able to be satisfied only with 10 months. I may come again for three months or a month. But it may be hard to quit jobs every time. Unless I get married and my husband is sent abroad by a company, I probably won’t live
here. (Junko)

I won’t do go back to where I was. I feel I did enough there, so want to work in a different place. It can be a similar job but in a different place. (Kayo)

I will work anyway when I go back to Japan. I will be independent from my parents, as I always have depended on them. I will earn what I need by myself and don’t want depend on them any longer. I will do something like returning the money my parents spent for me. I’ve got a sense of independence as I have lived here and seen the people around me. (Lisa)

I will go back to Japan after one more semester. I am excited. I am a little worried about my Japanese as I may have become unable to command keigo (honorific words). I will work in Japan, so (keigo is important in Japanese workplaces). I was planning to work here in the beginning, but I realized Asian films are better than the Americans. I want to live abroad again if I have an opportunity, but not to live permanently...maybe after the retirement? It was good that I came here. I used to hate everything about Japan, but started to see different things after I came here. I like Japanese cultures now. People make it very clear, what is right or wrong. I like the Asian way better. (Yoko)

I became very positive after study abroad. I would not feel scared of anything when I go back to Japan. I am doing internship now, standing at the front desk only with one more people. I was not taught what to do at all. I don’t understand what they say and don’t know what to do. It is hard, but I could say whatever in Japanese if I were in Japan. So...I feel I can do anything now. (Junko)

I found a joy when I realized I was able to communicate even if my English was still not good enough. When I worked at a trade show (as a volunteer), there were no other Japanese on the seller side, so I attracted their attentions. I feel happy rather than
confident. I am not confident if I can speak with any native English speakers. I never understand slang. I feel nervous, thinking if I can speak properly and what if they say “what?” But I cannot live if I feel scary. So I just take my chances. 

...I was invited to visit them by my Spanish and French friends. It is just great but when I think about how we communicate, it is English. I realized I was very fortunate to have learned English only after a year of stay here, knowing English is such a common language. I also realized that I have to learn more, there are something I wanted to say, and something I am still missing. (Lisa)

I got a very good job offer as I hoped for (before coming to the US, but declined it) The point is...I could work in a good place and accept to do so, but I just did not know that was what I really wanted to do...Study abroad is my turning point. I always concentrated on the sport since I was small and my dream had just ended. After that, for 9 months, I did not know what to do before coming here. After I came here, everything is new, and I have to do everything by myself, although I financially depend on my parents. I hope this will be my turning point and it has to be. (Ken)

I switched my jobs frequently and worked as a part-time, after I graduated from the vocational college. I sometimes worked as a full-time. But I did not know what I wanted to do so, just tried many different things. My parents owns an auto company, so I went to a college to learn the field and worked sometimes as an auto seller. I also worked in food and drink services, delivery services, like anything. I thought food industry fitted me. ...I did not like English, I liked social studies and history. When I went to a college, I thought about 4-year college too but I talked to my parents and they wanted me to succeed to their company. So I thought I could think about it during the two years of study in the college. I was not particularly interested in auto. It is natural desire of human that they want to do what they really like for a job. I just had thought about earning and secured my professional career when I studied at the college… My parents were against my study abroad. They were worried about my future. I think that means they were not

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able to trust in myself enough. But they ended up accepting and I appreciate that. I have
told them that I had decided to succeed to their company in the future. They said “we got
it. It is just a start.” I think so too. I will first train myself by working in a different auto
company for several years. (Takeshi)

Study abroad makes me learn about myself I did not know before. I could not have
noticed if I had been in Japan. I have been able to learn English at my own pace, feeling
true to my honest feeling that I really want to learn. Nobody pushes me here. I would
have been urged unnecessary if I were in Japan. I can face myself and feel true to myself
here, and that’s the best thing. (Emi)

**Relationships and Families**

I was in a relationship to my partner for 4 years but it ended recently. I lied to her I was
going to stay her for only two years. She was against my decision study abroad. She
visited me here and said she would wait for me even after she knew the actual length I
would be here for. But I did not want her to wait because she was already 28 years old.
(Hiro)

I always wanted to study so my friends were happy for me. My parents accepted my
decision because I saved money for 4 years to study abroad. I had a long relationship
with my boyfriend. He knew that I wanted to study abroad, but we broke up, and that led
me to finally decide to study abroad. (Rika)

I left my boyfriend, so I called or emailed when I had a hard time here...He did not want
me to study abroad. When I said I wanted to go for a year, he told me to make it a half
year. Then it ended up to be 10 months...About a year stay is fine for me. It might be
different I did not have my partner in Japan. I feel bad about I left him. It might be
different if I had a partner here. (Junko)
We planned to get married after we graduate, but moved it forward (because I was suffered from serious illness with the stress). By doing so, I became able to live without straining myself too much...I think that, coming here was well worth already just because I met my husband. It was such a big thing for me...I tell all the happy and sad things to my husband, and he was the best person who supported me. I could not have continued to stay here without him.

...After I got married, the relationship to my parents was improved. It is good to have this distance for my mother and myself. They were happy with my marriage. My mother used to say she abandoned her children overseas, so I felt very alone here. They were old-fashioned so did not say anything about my relationship before, but their attitude changed after we got married...I was not satisfied with my life before because the relationship to my mother was very bad...My family relationships turned out to be so much better after I came here. (Hana)

I want to work and be independent from my parent...I was an only child and my parents indulged so much, giving everything to me. But I felt it was not good for me, as they will get older. I don’t want them to spend too much money on me. They always said I was not smart and hopeless, so I am very happy if I can something they cannot do (like English). Then they will be proud of me. I felt like I came here to please them. (Lisa)

**Summarized Analysis.**

Whereas improving English skills is almost a common goal for the interviewees, the majority of them did not regard learning English as their first priority. Even for those who envisioned using English for their next career, English was not the most important factor. They de-emphasize the importance of academic/career enhancement and stressed instead that study abroad experiences
give them a time to think and know about themselves through having different experiences, which they could not have in Japan.

Referring to Table 4.1, the two last columns to the right indicate if they circled “self-discovery” or “to find better jobs” as their purposes of study abroad in the brief questionnaire before interviewing. It is evident that there is some tendency that the interests choose either “self-discovery” or “to find better jobs” as purpose of study abroad, not both at a time. The interview analysis demonstrated work and their future career plans are central of their concerns. Many of them, however, consider the concept of “self-discovery” is not compatible with an instrumentalistic and economically driven purpose. What they pursue is not a future work vision itself but rather the sense of confidence with their ability and futures. How they are ready for the next phase of their lives seem to be more important for them than what they actually do. Study abroad was their preparational and transitional period for them in that sense. That was their self-discovery.

4-2-3. Follow-up Research

Among the 16 interviewees, three participants responded to the follow-up research. They vividly shows two types of effects of study abroad on their lives: a) dramatic changes in her career that led her to work in a foreign country eventually, b) mild effects that constantly influence her way of thinking, living and working throughout her life.

Lisa studied in ESL schools in city P for two years after she graduated from 4-year college in Japan. After she went back to Japan, she worked for a trading company for several years. She was always interested in working abroad but thought needed to train herself in Japan
first to build up her career. She recently started to work in Singapore after deliberately considering several countries as her options.

Me: About how your study abroad 8 years ago affected your life afterwards, you talked about *en* (a Japanese concept similar to luck in English, but indicates fateful encountering to someone), but is there anything else?

Lisa: Well, city P was my starting point. I learned English and realized the importance of learning English, and the joy of being able to communicate with people from different countries. It widened my perspectives. I cannot think of myself today without the experiences in city P. I always wanted to go back to city P but ended up deciding to work in Singapore considering my work career. I began to like English in city P. My TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) score was 400 back then and people told me “do you really study abroad with that low score? But I found I could do it. I went back to Japan once, set my next goal, working abroad. I was such bad at studying but could make it. So the experiences in city P gave me a confidence. After I started to work, I could talk to my clients about experiences abroad and share as many of them were in trading industries and had experiences abroad too. So, they would evaluate me because I studied abroad and have turned to overseas.

Junko worked for a Japanese company before she studied abroad. She went back to Japan after 10 months of study in an ESL school in city P. Back in Japan, she worked first for a company to create manuals for household appliances. She was a coordinator to communicate with the branch offices overseas. After that, she worked hard as a coordinator of international exchange programs for kids at a NPO. She then changed her job to an office support of a company running an antique shop on the internet. She feels settled now and thinks her current job enables her to work at her own space while making use of what she has learned from all of her past experiences.
Me: So, what is the connection between your current job and the past experiences, more specifically? Is that something about communicating with people?
Junko: Yes. After I studied abroad, what left with me was the feeling that I wanted to be connected to the world. And it was along my careers. My current job is largely related to France. So I want to introduce those things made overseas to the Japanese...Japan is a great company but after I went abroad, I learned what is good about both Japan and abroad. So, I want to tell about the world to the Japanese. It was same with the previous work. I wanted to give opportunities the kids to learn there are those people out in the world. By doing so, they could meet someone they could not have met forever otherwise. When I went to city P, I met people, and that was a miracle, although it may sound exaggerating. I am a type of person who can act easily, but not everyone does so. So I wanted them to feel close to the world. That was something in my mind all the time.
Me: So do you feel that you want to support someone to be connected to the world rather than you go abroad?
Junko: Yes. But I want to go abroad of course, though.
Me: You do? Again?
Junko: Yes, I do, but it may be difficult, considering marriage in the near future.
Me: I see.
Junko: But whenever if there is a chance.

Me: Before you finally went back to Japan from city P, how did you feel, remember?
Junko: I do remember. First of all, I talked about it before, but I left my boyfriend, so I wanted to go back. I also did not enough money to extend my stay. I felt it did not worth doing a illegal part time job. Although my English had not improved that much, but I felt like I wanted to try the next work with my English. So I was ready.
Me: So, you felt your English had been improved to a certain level and ready for working with the language ability.
Junko: That’s right.
Me: I felt like...people who studied abroad typically stick to careers with English and experiences abroad. Or they tend to say they want to go abroad again. But sounds like you prioritize working comfortable lives rather than those kind of things?
Junko: Well, English is just a communication tool for me now. I used to think I had to make use of my English ability, but now I feel it is just OK and happy if I can communicate. I don’t care about it.
Me: Is that something you realized at your second work?
Junko: Yes, I truly felt like that there.
Me: After using English at work to the maximum extent, you reached that conclusion?
Yes: Yes. Now I meet a lot of tourists from overseas in Japan. But it is just like, I am glad to have been able to communicate with them because I can speak English. But that was it.
Me: So, you don’t stick to such things any more?
Junko: No, never. Whatever it is. I will continue to study English to be able to communicate, but it is nothing like I want to do something with English other than that.
Me: So, study abroad was a phase of your life and English is your part of skills?
Junko: At first, study abroad was for learning English. But looking back it now, it was for widening my perspectives. So it was just good in itself, it is my asset.
Me: Widening your perspectives means… meeting people with different backgrounds?
Junko: Right, and the America too. I went there, saw many different things, talked to different people. And then I feel I won’t afraid anything wherever I go. I feel I could do anything and life goes in whatever situations. Such an optimistic and positive view. So it did not have to be city P, could be Europe or South America. But I want to make use of what I learned from those experiences abroad.
Me: Is that the best part of how study abroad influenced your life?
Junko: Exactly. That is the one.
Me: It’s very interesting that you had some pressure to use your experiences abroad and it’s gone.
Junko: Right. It’s like “I just don’t care!”
Me: Is that something you can say only after 8 years?
Junko: I think so.
Me: So, your answer could have been different if I had asked two or three years after your study abroad?
Junko: Yes, it could have. It may be about how people would think of myself, having studied abroad. I might have cared what people would think and tried to meet those expectations.
Me: I see. People say like “oh, you did study abroad?”, particularly right after you came back.
Junko: Right.
Me: So, now you are free from such a pressure?
Junko: Yes, I don’t care. Well, I actually did not stay abroad long enough to say I studied abroad.
...It was just like a little break in my life.
Me: Looking back now?
Junko: Yes.

Emi studied in a vocational college while working at an airport and a hotel before she studied abroad. She did not like the Japanese society and did not know what she wanted to do. But she enjoyed the short-term exchange program in her school, which led her to study abroad again, thinking she would probably stay about three years in the US at least. After studying at ESL schools in city P for 8 months in total, she went on to college to learn marketing. She worked for a travel company for two years and finally came back to Japan, 5 years after she started her study in city P. She worked as a secretary in a foreign company in Japan for a year and half, then moved to a branch office of Hong Kong company in Japan, working as an investment advisor. She got married to the partner she met during her short-study abroad and lived together after she started her study in city P.
Me: How have study abroad experiences influenced your life? (Question I sent by email)
Emi (Written answer in email): Meeting with people from different cultures is certainly a part of myself now. I learned that I could open my possibilities by myself. It is hard to learn in Japan, but meeting with different people overseas taught me that. I feel I want to do something in return, something to create a linking bridge between Japan and overseas, throughout my life. I go back and forth between Japan and Hong Kong. I host a study group to learn about the world and support a sharehouse business targeting on foreign people. I am enjoying my life and my parents told me I looked happier after study abroad. I became able to believe in myself without caring how others see me.
Me: What is your future plan? Do you have any place to live in your mind?
Emi: I don’t care about which country I will be in. I am ready to go wherever I can touch with overseas as much as possible. I am planning to move to New Zealand with my husband in two and a half years. I want to experience the nature and meet warm people. Then I want to bring that experiences back to Japan and proceed to next phase with them.

These interviewees were able to build up their work careers with their English ability and experiences overseas. Nevertheless, they emphasize the importance of how their ways of thinking have changed with studying abroad, rather than English ability and the following successful work career. A sense of confidence they gained through study abroad is truly illuminated here.

4-3. Interview Research in City X

4-3-1. Overview of the Interview Data

The following table summarizes basic background information of each interview.
Table 4.2 Basic background information of the interviewees (Main research).

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<td>F</td>
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<td>8y</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>7y</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mei</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>8y</td>
<td>4y college</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>3y</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>8y</td>
<td>4y college (senior)</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>about</td>
<td>2y</td>
<td>4y college (sophomore)</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>8y</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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4-3-2. Summarized Stories from Each Interview

The following summary of each interview are created by re-structuring each interview’s complete transcript in order to highlight timeline of each life trajectory and characteristics of each interview. Readers should be noted, therefore, that the stories are created to look like chronological stories and may not based only on the direct citations from each interview. I will

\(^2\) This is a part of results of one of the questions in questionnaire: “What are your purposes of this study abroad? (Check all that apply)” The choices are: a) To get better job, b) To be promoted, c) To keep your current job position, d) To improve English skill, e) To improve general communication skill, f) To meet new people, g) To have different experiences, h) To discover self, i) To have time reflecting on your life, j) Others. Those who circled a), b), or c) are given check marks in the column of “for better job?”, and those who circled h) are given check marks in the column of “self-discovery?”
rely on direct citations to show what they actually said and how I analyzed them in the later section of analysis by theme.

1. **Ai: Despite strong opposition against Japanese society and great efforts in the US, she plans to go back to Japan eventually to become special.**

Ai had a feeling of hopelessness and being suffocated when she was in Japan, because she thought there was a normalized rail of life course in Japan where many people study to enter college and still keep studying college without knowing why. After getting a full-time job, she kept saving for study abroad while she did not like the job, then finally went on to study abroad with enough saving. Her parents were against this decision but let her do whatever if she did it with her own money. Her parents were also against that she would choose professional piano player as her life career although she and her sister had loved playing the piano since she was small. She started her study at an ESL (English as a second language) school in the south of the US, planning to study there for a year, but soon decided to go on to university after finishing the program at the ESL school. The feeling of hopelessness and resentment she had in Japan soon disappeared. She obtained a bachelor degree in psychology, only finding out it did not fit her, and obtained another degree in piano. She worked as a office clerk over her OPT period, but ended up entering a graduate school to study piano with a scholarship. She married during her study in the graduate school. She transferred to a different graduate school in the midwest. Her husband, who used to be a teacher, also started his study in computer science at a graduate school at the same time. When he found a job in another city, she decided to quit her study while she was pursuing for a performance diploma after completing three years program of the initial study. The Great East Japan Earthquake also affected her decision significantly. Since both her and her
husband did not like the job and living environment in the city they moved to, they moved to city X after her husband found a job there. Although they are excited with the new life there, they are thinking about moving to Japan in the near future. She enjoyed the life in the US first, but she became feeling tired, being irritated with how things do not work properly as they do in Japanese society. For another thing, she feels she cannot become someone special who does something special in the US but may do in Japan. After experiencing jobs as an office clerk, recently, she has finally realized she cannot keep doing such a job that does not require to show her personality and determined to commit to something related to piano. She strongly insists that Japanese college education needs drastic reform so that it motivates students more and encourages them to think why they study.

2. **Erika: Life-long career as a psychology counselor and life with family gave her sense of her own place in the US.**

Erika started her study at an ESL school in city X in the US after graduating from high school in Japan. Her parents allowed her to enter only public universities in Japan, which are very competitive, and she was not ready for the entrance exams. They, however, encouraged her to study abroad instead. Her stay in an ESL school in city X extended from 6 months to one year as her learning motivation had grown, and then she decided to continue her study at a college that shares a campus with her ESL school. Majoring in Psychology, she enjoyed studying and strived to compete against her local classmates. While she was planning to find a job as a psychology counselor in Japan after obtaining a master's degree, marriage with her partner from the same college led her to staying in the US. After hard trainings as a counselor and working at a NPO institution, she started to work as a full-time college counselor. She used to miss the life in Japan
until several years ago because food and elementary education looked better there. Recently, however, she feels her life has been established in the US after she found her own place at her workplace and her family purchased a house. She is planning to live in the US permanently and her parents in Japan will be taken care of by her sister’s family, although she will probably support them financially. She highly evaluates college education in the US and thinks high school education in Japan should be reformed to motivate students more to learn. Even so, she does not necessarily evaluate American people positively. She thinks American people is not as responsible as the Japanese especially in workplaces and they are not so friendly as it is said to be. So she has needed to carefully choose people to get close to.

3. Fumi: College education in the US as her second chance changed her life and personality.

Fumi went on to a college in Japan but she soon found out the environment did not fit her and was unable to build good relationships with friends there. After a short study program in Australia, she decided to study in the US, planning to start at an ESL school and go on to 4-year college eventually. Her parents were against her decision, but finally supported her as a result of Fumi’s persistent persuasion. Since she started her study in city X, she has been strongly determined to succeed because she quit her study in Japanese college. After finishing her programs in an ESL school and a community college, she transferred to a university as planned, majoring in accounting. She is expected to graduate soon and plans to get a job in a large Japanese accounting firm on the west coast. While she still finds positive parts about Japan, she feels more free in the US, easier to say what she thinks, and she was told by others that she looked more cheerful and bright now. She found many of Japanese students studying in the US
are coming just for fun while her Japanese old friends living in Japan have only narrow perspectives into the world. That led her to keep some distance from both of the groups. She is hoping to stay and work in the US as long as possible although she is a little worried about her parents in Japan. Her partner she met in the US has supported her throughout her study and that also affected her decision on staying in the US.

4. Hikari: “Self-Analysis” during the period of job search made her realize she did not learn anything and decide to study abroad to study English intensively. Hikari became interested in English as she started to study it as a new subject in junior high school, and majored in cognitive linguistics in English in a college in Japan. As the season of job search was approaching and she started “self-analysis,” she realized she had not learned anything and recalled she wanted to learn English. That was when she decided to study abroad. She studied for a short-term in Phillipine before, but the program did not provide enough opportunity to speak English, so she went on to study at an ESL school in city X for 9 months. She evaluates her education in Japan negatively because they kept telling to students as if entering prestigious universities in Japan were the only option that was provided to them. She thinks her education path might have been different if other options were shown. Hikari became already interested in the area of manpower dispatch, influenced by her group activity in Japanese college that plans career related event. The interest has even more grown after she came to the US because she is now hoping to work toward strengthening ties between Japan and abroad through manpower dispatch because she believes that promotes Japanese society. She is still interested in her study in cognitive linguistics and hopes to further study sometime in the future, but she thinks it is hard to get a job in this area.
5. **Kana: After many experiences abroad, she discovered a strong bond with her partner and content life with family.**

Kana has always been interested in painting, so she went on to a school for graphic design after graduating from high school and worked for a graphic design company for several years. Meanwhile, since she experienced her first trip alone to Thailand before starting to work and that led her to hoping to become able to communicate with people from different countries with English. After quitting her job as she felt exhausted by working long hours and she saved enough money to study abroad at the same time, she went on to study and work in Australia with a working holiday visa. Kana then experienced another working holiday stay in Germany, as her partner she met in Australia was from German. Although she worked so hard to master German at a language school and she really liked the language and people in Germany, the relationship did not work and she ended up coming back to Japan. She then worked as an English language teacher for children and youth, which she truly enjoyed. She had already met her husband-to-be before going to Australia. While they experienced some separation period, Kana always felt he was the one and she might meet him again, and they finally got married. As her new life with the partner started in the US, she entered a community college in a city on the west coast. She grew her interest in psychology there. She, however, hoped to have a baby instead of further education at the moment. She now have two children, very busy and content with the life with her family in city X. She would like to pursue further education in psychology some day although she does not necessarily feel she wants to find a job with it. She feels, however, some pressure that she has to find a job once she went through further education and thinks it is overwhelming to face those challenges. She had a negative feeling against the city life in Japan, as it was very crowded and
she always had to pay attention to what other think and need. Still she loves Japan as her home country and appreciates the Japanese community surrounding her. Rather than work career, bonds with people, especially her partner, have led her to choose her life path. Kana thinks her husband has supported her life so that she could solve her problem in anger-control and live much more positively together.

6. **Lynn: Following what attracted her over the world, now she is finally settled with family in the US and adores Japanese traditional cultures.**

Lynn has been interested in English and foreign countries as her family used to take her trip abroad often and her father liked foreign movies and music. She was selected as a member of exchange program in high school and joined one-year study program in a city on the west coast in the US. She analyzes herself as a follower of the majority when she was in Japan, but became used to the individualistic culture in the US after some period of transition. She felt she became stronger after that. Her stay was extended as she decided to go on to a community college. She was not able to find any major to pursue, she did not go on to 4 year college and started to work as a assistant in marketing. After returning to a school to study web design and completing the program while she realized the area did not fit her, she went back to Japan as her mother was suffering from serious disease. She spent her last time with her mother for six months and determined to stay in Japan, living and working at a city near from where her grandmother lived. She worked as a technical translator in an auto company. She enjoyed the job because she had many opportunities to meet and talk to people through working. She thinks that was the best fitted job for her in her life. Lynn, however, met a man from Germany, engaged and went to Germany with him. While she learned German very intensively to be at a business level and also
enjoyed learning confectionery at a school, the relationship did not step up to marriage. When she came back to Japan and visited a friend in the US just as a trip, she met her current husband. Now she lives in city X with her husband and a child. She is learning Japanese confectionary and Japanese tea ceremony, hoping to learn more different things like English, Spanish, and something that may lead her to a profession in the future. While she did not have any negative feeling against Japanese society and rather is attracted with its traditional cultures, she feels she can live more comfortably in the US because she does not have to care about what people think about her unique life trajectory as she may have to in Japan. A distinction between who is American and Japanese has almost disappeared inside her, but still sometimes she identifies herself as Japanese.

7. Mei: Being disappointed with English Education in Japan, she went on to college in the US, yet she misses close neighborhood relationships in a rural area of Japan.

Mei was in an intensive English language course in her high school as she liked English since she started to study it in junior high school. Her short study abroad at Hawaii during high school as a reward she won at a speech contest gave her a strong impression. While she had a good time there, meeting people from different countries, there were simply too many Japanese people, which was not an ideal situation to practice English. Furthermore, the insufficient English language skill of a group of English major college students who came from Japan disappointed her. What she observed in Hawaii led her to realize the importance of location for studying abroad. That was why she decided to enter a college in a city in the midwest in the US after studying in an ESL school for several months. Her major was TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) and she felt she was able to learn much more deeply in the college education,
compared to high school in Japan, where she had to memorize everything without knowing why. She felt she was discriminated by the local American people, but also kept a distance from Japanese. She became good friends with those from Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria because they are more open-hearted and easier to go with compared to others. Mei made a plan in the very beginning of her study of going back to Japan after graduation and obtaining a job offer from a company in Japan. She, however, accepted a marriage proposal by her partner and suddenly decided to stay in the US. She and her partner moved to a city on the west coast first, due to her partner’s job, then moved into city X. After working as a translator at a company and a volunteer tutor to teach English for immigrant parents, she is currently staying at home with her child. She has few friends in this new place to live and misses a neighborhood relationship she had when she lived in a rural area of Japan. She feels they were sometimes too close and bothersome yet warm. She did not expect her life career as a stay-at-home mom and is worried about her work life in the future. But she will keep staying at home for a while because the time with a child is very precious and the cost of daycare is too high to cover with a job that might be available for her currently.

8. Nao: Everything started with Hawaii, came back to Hawaii, but she is now settled in a different part of the US with her family.

Nao’s parents have long loved Hawaii and took a family trip frequently since Nao was small. It was very natural for her to become interested in Hawaii, the US, and English. She studied at a big city on the west coast (which is different from city X) for a month when she was a high school student in Japan, but she could not learn as she expected because of too many Japanese around her and her passive attitude toward speaking English. She had a second chance to study
in the US for a year, when she was a sophomore in a university in Japan. She learned English at two different ESL schools in two different areas on the west coast. She was strongly determined to focus on her study this time and to communicate with people in English much more actively, and her great efforts resulted in significant improvement in her English. Although she wanted stay longer, she did not find any area to major, she chose to go back to Japan, graduate, and started to work at a publishing house and then at a marketing company. While she worked very hard and she was learning well through the jobs, she always had a feeling that she wanted to live in Hawaii not only for herself but for her parents. When unfortunate life events happened to her--separation from her partner and her pet--, she finally decided to move to Hawaii after finding a job in a Japanese company there. She soon realized Japanese workplace cultures and a job in a sales department did not fit her, and she changed her job to be a office clerk at a local company. Despite that she liked this job and the work/life balance then, she had to leave Hawaii because her partner, whom she met and got married to in Hawaii, had to take care of his sick family in the US mainland. After all the things were settled, she now lives in city X, expecting a baby and staying at home. Since she started to live in city X, Nao began to think she needs more connections to Japanese people as there are much less opportunity to meet them in city X compared to the places she lived previously. She hopes to find a way to manage both work and child-rearing.

9. Tomo: Study abroad was the only way to make her dream since childhood possible. Tomo decided to be an athletic trainer as her athletic trainer supported her as she had played basketball since she was at an elementary school. Her parents allowed her to study only in 4-years college but there was not any 4-year college that offers a program for an athletic trainer.
That was why Tomo decided to study in a 4-year college in the US. She chose a college in a southern state because the tuition was the cheapest among the college catalog. A Japanese study abroad service company had supported Tomo from the preparation period throughout her study in the college. The company stations at least one resident program supporter in each state university in the US. She was very satisfied with her life there with the support by the company and senior Japanese students in her college. She went on to a graduate school in a different city in the south to obtain a licence of a physical therapist and worked in a clinic with OPT visa for a year. She will re-start her work once H1B visa will be issued. Tomo has a partner and is thinking about marriage with him in the future. She likes food, friends, and family in Japan but has never got homesick because she always knew the US is the only place where she can study the area she wanted to learn. She feels people in Japan tend to make excuses for not doing something they want to try while there is a positive environment in the US that provides opportunities to challenge and she feels free here. As her older brother got married and lives near her parents, Tomo does no not worry about her parents and hopes to stay in the US permanently. It is also difficult to transfer her qualifications in Japan and work condition is better in the US in terms of work hours, salary, and opportunities for upskilling through further studying and attending conferences.

10. Yuri: city Y was her place of dream, but she is finding ways to demonstrate the strength of Japan and Japanese people.

Yuri started to learn English with a private tutor when she was at elementary school. Since then, she always had a strong interest in foreign countries, traveled abroad a lot, joined an international exchange group, and stayed for two weeks in the UK when she was in college in
Japan. Among those experiences, a trip to city Y (a big city on the east coast) was by far the most attractive city for her and she was strongly determined to live there someday. She wanted to find that chance during the time she was in college, but she was studying to become an accountant, which required her intensive study in a cram school. After she successfully became an accountant, started to work at an accounting firm, and passed an exam to be promoted into an officially licensed accountant, she finally decided to go to city Y. Yuri wanted to find a job, but only found out it was very difficult to find a job while staying in Japan. She was not ready for applying for a graduate school as well. So she decided to start her life in New York as a student in an ESL school and planned to find a job while studying there. She found a job at a small Japanese company after one year of stay, then changed her workplace into a large local company where she learned American workplace cultures. Although she enjoyed the work environment, she began to think that focusing on Japanese clients might be the best way to demonstrate her unique strength as a Japanese in the US society. That was when she changed her workplace again to a large Japanese company. She realized that she was very fortunate in that her profession as an accountant can be relatively easily transferred to the US society when she actually started to prepare for moving to the US. When she was in Japan, Yuri was satisfied with her workplace and life overall. After she started to work in the US, however, she realized the importance of work-life balance because people typically work for much shorter hours and seem to enjoy the life more in the US. She felt she could not understand about many people coming from Japan, who seemed to keep staying in the US with unclear purposes. She was able to build good relationships only with those who had a clear purpose and strong motivation. Besides work as an accountant, she is supporting an activity of an NPO, which publishes a free paper for Japanese
people living in the city. She interviews and write articles about Japanese people who have committed to link Japan and the US. She is hoping to continue this activity to send and spread more messages about the good quality of Japan to both Japanese and American people. She wants to stay in city Y as long as possible and to keep learning with high motivation.

11. Ryo: No interest in English or study abroad, but his interest in IT led him to the US and to start-up there.

Ryo was not interested in study abroad before his parents recommended him to join an exchange program of his high school for a month. Since English was his weakest subject, he had a hard time to communicate with his host family in a city on the west coast of the US, but still had a good experience. He began to have a little interest in the US, along his growing interest in IT (information Technology) industry. When he did not find an expected result in his entrance exams for public universities in Japan, he went on to a school that supports transfer into college both in Japan and the US. Ryo successfully transferred into a community college in city X after he completed an ESL program at a language school at the college’s campus for three months. While he gradually got used to the life in the US, he found a lot of inconvenience in the new life and realized the information he gained from websites created by study abroad service companies did not provide truly useful information for international students. This experience led him to deciding to start up a company that organizes and provides information to those coming from Japan to foreign countries. Ryo’s classmates from his school in Japan supported his startup as most of them were studying in foreign countries all over the world. Encounters with Japanese people working in companies in the US through volunteering activity also gave him an incentive to start-up. While he studied hard enough to transfer into 4-year college in a different city on the
west coast, his current priority is in the start-up business. Ryo is planning to go back to Japan after graduation as he likes the lives and food there, but he may come back to the US in the future. That is because the US seems very successful in new areas and provides him with more opportunities to challenge. He may or may not do job search, depending on how his company goes. Ryo thinks the belief among Japanese people that entering prestigious colleges in Japan is the most successful life course that promises futures is going to disappear because everyone can start-up with internet now. He does not think there is such a thing that should be categorized as “American culture” or “Japanese culture.” Although he respects traditional cultures, other things— the way of lives, manners, and personalities— are really matters of individual differences.

12. Shu: He liked Japan but as he lived in the US for a long time in two different cities, he began to have an ambivalent feelings to Japanese people.

Shu decided to go on to a graduate school in the US, when he was a junior at his college in Japan. He was not able to pass the exam in financial planning at that moment and began to think he wanted to study more in a graduate school but in more challenging environment than in a graduate school in Japan. He moved to city Z (a big city on the west coast in the US) in the middle of his senior year to start learning at an ESL school before entering a graduate school. As he started his study there, he realized it was already late to start preparing applications to graduate schools in the US and had to wait another year. He loved the city and the people there as he felt they were easy-going, and found many good friends. On the other hand, such a joyful environment caused a delay in his study toward applying for graduate schools. After three years of study in several ESL schools, he finally got an admission letter from a college in city Y. He
was motivated by the fact that his partner was already starting her study in the same area in city Y, but the relationship ended soon after he was admitted by the graduate school. Nevertheless, he worked very hard in the graduate school and found a job as a financial planner at a local company. He does not have many Japanese friends in city Y but spends instead much of time with his Chinese friends and a partner who is also a Chinese. People in city Y is too busy and he was surprised to see and disappointed with the rudeness of Japanese people, especially in the internet BBS in the websites for the Japanese people living in city Y. He did not have any negative feelings against Japanese society when he lived in Japan, but now feels Japanese people tend to care individual’s personal background too much and find fault with others. The Japanese people he met in city Z on the west coast, however, did not have that tendency probably because each had complicated life history and did not ask each other so deeply. City Z is the place he wants to come back, but he also thinks it may be a good idea to go back to Japan in the future after building up his career in the US. He does not feel like he wants to live his retired life in a place that provides very poor customer service and is lack of enough gun control. Ryo does not recommend study abroad so positively, because he has seen many people from Japan, who seemed to have lost traditional good value of Japanese, such as following rules and respecting benefit of everyone, not just yourself. He, on the other hand, found international students from China is very smart and hardworking, and thinks study abroad by Japanese people may lead to develop such human resources that change society.

4-3-3. Analysis by Theme

1. Motivation.

   Parents’ suggestions.
For Erica and Ryo, it was rather their parents than themselves, who came up with the idea of study abroad and pushed it.

Erika: When I had to think about which college to apply, my parents allowed me to go on only to public universities. But I was not ready at all for the competitive entrance exams. Then my parents recommended me to study abroad…I have traveled abroad several times before, so I thought that sounded like a fun idea.
Me: So, your parents would approve only public universities in Japan, but did not care which kind of schools to go in the US?
Erika: I think so.
Me: They didn’t care about the high tuition?
Erika: Not particularly…
Me: So, your parents, rather than you, wanted you to have experiences abroad?
Erika: Right. They wanted me to able to speak English, not necessarily to do something with English. It seemed like they just thought it would be good for me to able to do something different from what others do.
For Erika’s case, her parents did not necessarily encourage her to have successful work career as a “global elite” like they often do in other Asian countries. Erika’s parents just hoped, instead, of having Erika have some different experiences. They did not anticipate Erika eventually went on to a graduate school and live in the US permanently.

Here is how Ryo experienced his first short-term study abroad against his will, pushed by his parent.

Ryo: When I first went to the US for a short-term, it was not that I wanted to go, but my parents told me to go.
Me: I see.
Ryo: That was like that at the beginning. But then, I graduate from high school, I was a little interested in IT area, and there are companies like Google and Facebook in the US. When I thought about that, I started to be interested in going on to college in the US.
Ryo once took entrance exams for national universities in Japan, but he could not receive good results.

Ryo: I failed because I wasn’t good at English.
Me: Was it English?
Ryo: Yes, English wasn’t good enough. I really wanted to enter national universities, not private ones, so I was lost. I didn’t like study that much. Then, I went on to a school that support transfer to 4 year private college in Japan or to college in the US.
Ryo’s parents seemed to have suggested him to study abroad to open more future possibilities to him.

Ryo: It was not that my parents wanted to study abroad when they were younger. but well, my dad was a type of person who thinks English is necessary, and when he thought about what was the best and efficient way for me to learn, he suggested me to go to the US. It might be a tough way, but getting it over might strengthen my mind. I thought that was what my parents thought.
Me: So, did you parents supported you a lot?
Ryo: Right. I realized that there were many Japanese in the US, after I came here. There are at least some Japanese everywhere if you try to find. But back then, when I was in Japan, I thought study abroad is not an easy thing to achieve. So if I put that way...with that my selfish image, I think my parents expected me to succeed.
Me: I see. Did your parents also have a hope that you would go on to a Japanese college?
Ryo: No, they did not. They said it would be OK as long as I made a right choice and did right things. They rather told me to do whatever I liked.
Me: So, as long as you are going for a way that opens your possibilities?
Ryo: That is right.

For further study of the current area-- Official reasons vs. Real reasons.
Some of them choose to study abroad simply to continue their current studies further in the US. But such a reason that looked simple may not be that simple, when listening to their detailed processes of decision-making.

Hikari: (Before the season of job search started in Japan,) I considered going on to a grad school too, looked back my past and realized I hadn’t learned anything. Then I felt I wanted to achieve something before the job search. When I thought about what I liked and what I had wanted to achieve, that was linguistics. So I decided to study abroad.

Me: Does it mean you looked back what you did when you began to think about job search?

Hikari: I did “self-analysis” as a preparation for job search. But not just for job, job search was just a good chance to …

Me: To think about yourself with broader perspective?

For Hikari, study abroad for one year at an ESL school means more than just the study of English. She did not necessarily think English might strengthen people’s CV generally. But looking back her own life trajectory, she needed something she had devoted herself to and achieved.

Shu’s following honest confession about motivations for study abroad including his own reason and the reasons of other people he met was intriguing.

Me: When did you become interested in study abroad or foreign countries?
Shu: I think it was when I was junior...and around October.
Me: What made you do?
Shu: I have a different answer I prepared for job interviews...but to be honest, I had taken several qualifying exams outside of college but I failed in one exam in financial planning. Then I thought I wanted to study more. I couldn’t pass such an exam and didn’t want to start to work with that result.

Me: I see. Then did you begin to think you wanted to study in the US?
Shu: Well...I just wanted to simply study, then thought about going on to a grad
school. But then, if other people graduate and get jobs and only I don’t, I felt I needed something extra to catch up with them later...extra efforts or extra skills. Learning English and studying my area with English looked like a “plus” for me. Then I began to think about study abroad.

Me: I see. So You wanted to compete with others by skilling-up?
Shu: If it is put in a good-looking way, it would be true.

... 

Me: How did you decide the city you were going to?
Shu: Well...Is this interview a part of research in college or something, right?
Me: Yes it is. I will write a dissertation based on this, but if there is anything you do not want to talk about…
Shu: No no, that is not about what I cannot talk about...I just wondered if my naively honest answers would be suitable to be put on your dissertation...I am wondering if I should answer more academically.
Me: Oh no, OK, let me talk a little about my research…
Shu: Yes.
Me: I have been interviewing those who came here from Japan. Academic research said international students came here for up-skilling, work career, and personal development through cultural exchange, they laid out the possible reasons in such a neat way. But from my own experience and what I saw and heard from people around me, I think people study abroad for more complicated, or rather simpler...whatever the motivations are, they are based on more personal life experiences with different backgrounds and an accumulation of various life timings. I wanted to hear such detailed life experiences and lived voices. I want to be against what previous academic research said by putting all things together.
Shu: Well, I agree. The people I have seen, except for those sent by companies in Japan or the smartest people who directly went on to grad schools in the US, ...what to say...they had similarly strange backgrounds. The strangest one was, the person was in a grad school in Japan, had to stay there for one more year because of his poor attendance,
then s/he decided to study abroad because s/he wanted to make the situation look like that s/he would stay in a grad school for another year just because of the study abroad. People sometimes study abroad to make such an official reason.

Me: I wanted hear something like that.

Shu: I see.

Me: I think that those who studied abroad tend to feel some pressure that they have to build successful work career, mastering English and with high motivation.

Shu: Right.

Me: I wanted to hear something outside of that frame.

Shu: I understand. I am probably in that area (what you wanted to hear). Well, once running off the rail, you have nothing to lose and can act fearlessly. Going back to the answer for your question…(He explained how he chose his destination)

Me: I see, so city Z remained after deleting other choices.

Shu: I did not have any particular place I really liked and wanted to go.

Me: I see. But did you start your study abroad with positive expectation and joyful feeling?

Shu: Well...yes. Joy, positive expectation….to be honest, I think there was some aspect of escape from reality such as job search. Putting off what I did not want to see yet.

Me: I see. So, you felt like you would feel easier after going abroad?

Shu: Well, the biggest motivation was, like I said at the beginning, that I wanted to study more.

Shu said he needed a reason that looked good when he had to talk about why he decided to study abroad, especially in job interviews. He taught me the “reality” of his study abroad, only after he confirmed the purpose of my research. He admitted his resume as a financial planner working in the US looked very good to Japanese people but his life trajectory was not so simple and straight into his successful career.

For their dream--It was just impossible to achieve in Japan.

A dream job.
Me: So, you said you were always interested in English. How did you become interested in?
Mei: We (in Japan) start to learn English in junior high school, right? Then, I began to like English. There were no any specific reason other than that.
Me: So, was it interesting for you as a new subject of study?
Mei: Right.
Me: Did you have any opportunity to speak with native English speakers?
Mei: About once in a month. There were people like ALT (Assistant language teacher).
Me: Did you like it?
Mei: Yeah, but I was very shocked when I could not communicate with them well, despite that I spoke with English that I learned from English language teachers. Then how to say...I thought I had to learn more.
Me: ...So did you think English education in Japanese school was not good enough?
Mei: Yes, I did.
Before applying for college in the US, she still had an option to go on to study English in Japanese colleges. But the following incident led her to make up her mind.

Mei: When I went to Hawaii in my senior year, I still haven’t decided. I had another option, going on to study English in Japanese college. In Hawaii, I saw a group of college students from Japanese college, majoring in English. They were at lower level in English compared to me, a highschool student. Their English sounded like junior high school level. So, I thought English major in Japanese college was like this. Then I decided to drop that option.

Studying in college in the US was the best option for Mei to study English, which She was always interested in. She very carefully chose the ways to achieve her dream, after observing the weakness of English education in Japan.

For Tomo, studying in the US directly motivated by her dream career.

Me: When did you decide to apply for colleges in the US?
Tomo: My senior year in high school. I had never thought about going to the US before that. I wanted to become an athletic trainer, but my parents were strict and allowed me to study only in a 4-year college. There was no place to study athletic training in 4-year colleges. I searched and realized there were such programs in the US colleges. I asked my parents and they said OK...I began to be interested in athletic training because I had played basketball since elementary school, got injured a lot, then an athletic trainer saw me and taught me about training. That was how I became interested in the job.

Me: So, did you play basketball from childhood so seriously?

Tomo: Well, I played in a very competitive team.

Different from most of the other interviewees, Tomo was not interested in foreign countries themselves. Her career goal made her turn to the US college education. While there are schools for athletic trainers in Japan, but there are no such programs in 4-year college. As Tomo mentioned elsewhere, the profession of athletic trainers are not well evaluated in Japan yet.

**Place itself was the dream.** In contrast to Tomo, Nao’s dream seemed to have been in the place, rather than jobs. Nao was interested in English and foreign countries, influenced by repeated family trips to Hawaii and other places since her childhood. After she experienced short-term study in the US, she decided to study for a year during college. Here is how she chose her place of study then.

Nao: I had a chance to visit Hawaii when I was a freshman at college. I almost decided to study abroad then, so I had a tour of college in Hawaii and talked to the local people. They suggested me to study not in Hawaii if I wanted to study English.

Me: Did the local people say that?

Nao: Yes, they did. Well, they said Hawaii was countryside and their English had strong accents. I was convinced as even the local people said so. Beside, there were too many Japanese people there. Then I might escape into easier environment like I did in the short-term study abroad. So I decided not to go to Hawaii, but to the same city I went for the short-term study abroad before, because I liked the city.
Me: I see. So, while you had a bitter memory there along good memory, you decided to return there because you knew the place?

Nao: Right. I felt secured to choose a place I had already know rather than the places I did not know at all.

Although she did not choose Hawaii at that moment for the above reason, she still always had a dream of living in Hawaii some day. She eventually moved to Hawaii after graduating from Japanese college and worked in Japanese companies for several years. She described her feeling when she made this decision.

Nao: I always had a desire of going to Hawaii, but I did not know how to, so I was in distress. But my feeling that I didn’t want to keep staying in Tokyo forever had gotten bigger and bigger. So there was no particular incident that pushed my decision.

Me: I see. So you always thought you had to go to Hawaii, just did not know when.

Nao: Right...about six months before I quit the job, I broke up with my partner, and after I lost my pet. Such sad things happened, and I began to think about myself. And, about parents...they like Hawaii and want to go, so if I move to Hawaii, I may be able to let them experience more, that was my vague idea. Then I felt like that was the time I had to start to move.

Me: So you started to feel you wanted to change environment?

Nao: Yes.

Me: So, Hawaii was such attractive for you because of your experiences from childhood.

Nao: That’s right. I felt there were still many things I did not know about Hawaii and wanted to learn them. Also, I thought, if I live in Hawaii, my parents can visit Hawaii much easily.

Hawaii was a place of dream for Nao and her parents, and that was a strong motivation for Nao to keep interested in living abroad and eventually moving to Hawaii.

As with Nao, Yuri decided to move to city Y because that city itself was her place of dream. Yuri had been broadly interested in foreign countries and international cultural
experiences from her childhood, influenced by her parents who were also interested in foreign countries. City Y was, however, far more special for Yuri than other cities abroad she had visited and the strongest motivation for her to leave Japan.

Me: ...I see. So you have stayed in the UK for a short-term, but which part of city Y was such attractive for you?

Yuri: I traveled abroad a lot when I was at college, visited Asian countries too. But for city Y, people from all over the world gather there and its level of completion as a city was very different from other cities. Compared to Tokyo, there are people from different cultures. When I visited there and walked by a famous park, I happened to encounter a huge breast cancer campaign. The road was blocked because of the event. Also, people often talked to me when I was walking around the city. It does not happen in Tokyo, doesn’t it? People from a variety of backgrounds live in a variety of lives, that was very interesting to me.

Me: I see. So didn’t you think about going to other cities in the US?

Yuri: Never. There was a program to send employees overseas in the company I worked for. But we never knew where to be sent to and it was only for two years. Two years were too short to really see the lives in a foreign country. Also, if I go sponsored by a company, I cannot easily leave the company.

Me: I see.

Yuri: Considering those things, I thought it would work better for me to just go by myself and find a job.

It took a while to achieve this dream because of her job career in a specialized field. She had to concentrate on studying to be an accountant and establishing her career first.

Yuri: As a big change...I became an official accountant from an assistant accountant in 2007 or 2008. I came to the US in 2009, and it was just 10 years after I visited city Y for the first time. Also, it was just before I turned 30 years old. So, many timings just met at that moment.

Me: So, you planned to work in city Y from the beginning?
Yuri: Yeah, but it is very difficult to find a job in the US while staying in Japan. Lack of information, and there are not many people doing such a thing. People usually study in graduate schools or study abroad before working abroad. So I decided to just go. Also, I had not really studied abroad, the short-stay in the UK was just two-weeks experiences in an ESL school. So I wanted to study English seriously.

Me: So, did you plan to study in an ESL schools only for three months?

Yuri: Yes, and planned to quit as soon as I found a job. There were three-month programs in ESL schools. I did not have enough energy and money to go to grad school. I hoped some company would hire me, so I was sending my resume to different companies but they just slammed the door. After one year, a small Japanese company, although they had a large office in Tokyo, had a branch office for the employees sent from Japan, contacted to me and I joined there to support accounting.

While it took longer time than she expected until she started to work in city Y, as she mentioned, it was fortunate for her that her skills and experiences as accountant in Japan can be transferred into the work in the US. Nevertheless, city Y itself was her motivation rather than her work career abroad despite her prestigious profession and successful career in Japan. That was why she took a way that looked shorter but with risks to achieve her goal. She did not had any complaint against her work environment in Japan, but just she really wanted to come to city Y.

Marriage.

For Kana and Lynn, marriage with their American partners made them settled in the lives in the US eventually. Before that, however, they similarly had lives that included several years of studying/working abroad and were full of drama.

Kana initially began to be interested in English and life abroad when she traveled Thailand and had a group tour with people from different countries..
Kana: Before starting to work, I went to Thailand by myself for 4 days and realized I was too bad at English. But a foreign country was interesting. And I thought I could have talked to people here (Thailand) from foreign countries if I could speak English better.

Me: ...Did you like English before the trip?

Kana: No, I never did. I’ve never studied seriously.

Me: So how did you decide to quit your job and begin your life close to foreign countries?

Kana: I thought about going abroad some day, after the trip to Thailand. But when I talked about it to my mom, she said that it would not work if I go there without any clear purpose now. My family could not afford to let me go anyway, so she told me to save money by myself if I really want to go. So I worked for several years, saved, and said I quit.

Me: I see. Was working there very tough?

Kana: Yeah. It was fun but...working overnight and no offs for a month...It was fun but my body could not bear. I became sick eventually. So I wanted to quit anyway.

After a year of study and work in Australia, she spent a year on studying in Germany, with her partner. Since the relationship did not work, she came back to Japan and worked as an ELS teacher for children. While she truly loved the job, she decided to get married to her partner—“love of life”— and left Japan. She then studied in a community college for about two years.

Kana: I did not have to go to community college particularly, but I went to an ESL class first and other younger people told me about community college. I did not know about it before. I’ve heard entering 4-year college was hard, but it was easy to get in a community college, so.

Me: ...How long were you at the ESL school?

Kana: One and a half month, or two months. I think I did the program of that length twice...I had to obtain enough TOEFL score to get in a community college.

Me: That went so fast.
Kana: Yeah, I think community schools best fitted for me. English language only was not interesting enough for me, but I wasn’t confident with going on to a 4-year college, so.

Lynn was interested in English and foreign countries from her childhood, that naturally led her to applying for an exchange program to study in the US for a year in her high school.

Lynn: I always loved English. I was always good at English only. Then I was very lucky (That she was selected to join the exchange program).

Me: You loved English and wanted to go abroad?
Lynn: Yeah, I wanted to live abroad, just anywhere abroad.

Me: How did you become interested in overseas?
Lynn: I traveled a lot with my family and..maybe...my dad used to listen to foreign music and...watched videos and movies. Then it looked different world, but wanted to live there.

After extending her stay in the US by going on to a community college, working, and going back to school, then she went back to Japan to take care of her mother with a terminal cancer. She worked for a while as a technical translator in a company in Japan and she truly enjoyed her job.

Lynn, however, decided to study in Germany accompanying her German partner. On finding out the relationship did not work, she came back to Japan again, met her husband-to-be during her short trip to the US, then got married.

_The second chance and escape from Japan._

Ai had an strong opposition against Japanese society, and that motivated her to go abroad, coupled with an influence by her best friend, who were studying in the US.

Ai: I had a vague idea when I was in Japan...You probably know the situations in Japan, people go to good college, graduate, find a job, permanently work there if possible,,, I almost ran off the rail, but probably wouldn’t have been satisfied If I had been on the
rail...Running off the rail was even worse, so no matter what situation it was, I felt stressed and could not clear my mind.

...  
Me: So, that was such a big decision for you.
Ai: Right. I was stressed so much that I couldn’t see my future.
Me: You didn’t enjoy your life?
Ai: No. I was going to find a job if I kept studying there, but I didn’t know where to work for, I didn’t know what I like. I just didn’t know what to do.
Me: When did you start to feel like that?
Ai: Maybe since high school.
Me: Any doubt against the college entrance exam system as well?
Ai: I hated that too.
Me: But you went through the exams… You didn’t know why you do it?
Ai: I just did because others did. I just followed. But deep inside my heart, I felt like I could do something different and more that fits me….My best friend from high school went to Oregon after she graduated…When I met other friends in college and thought about the best friend, I felt they were just different.
Me: You could not understand each other?
Ai: I just rather wanted to go on the way my best friend took.
Me: So, did she influence you pretty much?
Ai: Yes...She stayed at Oregon for 7 years. I visited her twice and had great memories. I don’t remember what they were, but I just remember they were just great.
...
Ai: My sister went to Europe to study for a short period and my best friend went to Oregon… So I talked to my parents one day, but they didn’t allow me to go unless I went with my own money...I was vaguely thinking about going to either the US or the UK for several years and I saw I was able to save money fast since I started to work. So I became very serious about saving money then. I did not bring my wallet to the workplace, only bringing a lunch box my mom made for me and a milk I had bought at a
supermarket beforehand. I did not use any money, planned my study abroad, knew what day, what month of what year how much I would save. Then I reached my goal, quit the job, then decided to go (on to study abroad).

Ai, therefore, “escaped” from Japanese society after her great efforts to financially prepare for studying in the US. Unlike much of previous research indicated, however, the reason why she wanted to leave Japan was not necessarily based on discrimination based on gender. Ai was rather distressed with the strongly normalized life course-- going to good college without really learning and to good company without knowing why-- which apparently take her nowhere.

Fumi was not so strongly opposed to Japanese society as Ai did. When she decided to quit a college in Japan and study in the US, she just felt like the college environment she entered did not fit for her.

Fumi: I wanted to go on to study nursing since I was a freshman at highschool. But When I actually started in college, I felt it did not fit me somehow...
Me: ...How your major was different from what you had expected?
Fumi: Well, what it was about...It was the college itself rather than the study of nursing that did not fit me.
Me: For example?
Fumi: Well, I was in all girls school all the time before going on to college. The college was co-ed. That was one thing first. Then, how to say...the people in college was different from my friends from highschool...There was many people like gyaru there. I thought they were different from me so it became hard for me to go to school everyday.
Me: So you didn’t have good friends you could talk to, around yourself.
Fumi: Right.

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3 “Gyaru is a Japanese transliteration of the English word 'girl' and is applied to fashion- and peer-conscious girls in their teens and early twenties...Gyaru fashion and style varies greatly dependent on the subcategory. Although in general the term describes the fashion and glamour reminiscent of Brigitte Bardot with tanned skin and blonde hair. The term is also often applied to those imitating the bihaku glamour style created by Ayumi Hamasaki and the street style started by Namie Amuro. Styles derived from gyaru are often referred to by their subcategory name.” (Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gyaru)
She experienced a short-term study abroad at the end of the Freshman year and she really had a good time there. That led her to decide studying abroad for a longer term. At that moment, Fumi was already planning to go on to college in the US after studying in an ESL school.

Me: So, you planned to learn something connected to job, not English itself?
Fumi: Yes, I left college in Japan, so I thought I had to graduate from college in the US anyway. In that sense, yes that is true.
Me: Something specialized? You wanted to learn something that would replace what you missed in the Japanese college?
Fumi: That’s right.
Me: ...So, you kept persuading your parents? How long did it take?
Fumi: My dad said yes soon, but it took about a month for my mom.
Me: Did they worry about going to the US itself rather than financial aspects?
Fumi: They worried about my future after that.

In Japan, studying in a 4-year college in the US instead of in Japan is not as common as it is in other Asian countries such as Korea and China. Fumi’s parents worried probably because Fumi’s choice was out of the standard life course in Japan and were not sure if the education in the US would lead Fumi to a solid life career.

2. Positive/Negative feelings against Japan and the US

Positive feelings about Japan.

Here are the factors many interviewees listed as positive aspects of Japan.

- Customer service with high quality (i, Erika, Fumi, Mei, Sho, Tomo, Yuri, Shu)
- Better health insurance system and service at hospitals (Ai, Mei)
- Public transportation (Ai)
- Food including school lunch (Ai, Erika, Fumi, Kana, Lynn, Mei): They are better tasting and nutritious. Erika mentioned it is unthinkable for the Japanese people to bring cookies as school lunch.
- TV programs (Ai) : They usually watch them in the US on the internet. Not many of the interviewees watched them in the US.

- Strong gun-control (Erika)

- Safety (Shu)

- Better education in elementary schools (Erika)

- Lower cost for daycare (Erika)

- People care about others, guessing what others think without talking (Fumi)

- Punctuality (Fumi)

- Traditional cultures e.g. Tea ceremony, seasonal events, temples, kimono: (Lynn)

- Close relationships with the neighborhood (in countryside) (Mei)

- Politeness: (Ai)

Customer service with high quality was emphasized by many of the interviewees. They anyway would start with apologizing in Japan. People at customer service here start with “but…,””again?”without any respect for customers. The Japanese service is detailed and respects customers. It is just good. (Mei)

I think everyone feels that customers could receive every kind of service you want, feeling like being in heaven. I would want to give tips every time (even if there are no tip culture in Japan).(Shu)

**Negative feelings about Japan.**

It should be noted that some of the factors listed as positive above can be negative depending on persons.
Nao: I wonder if there are other ethnic groups like Japanese--thinking about others so much in different ways. For example...eating something that does not taste good with a smile...They deeply care about others.

Me: Do you have that part?

Nao: Well...My father-in-law cooked a meal for me and I ate up the whole meal while I did not like it. I feel like I am very Japanese in that part.

Me: Do you feel it is a good part?

Nao: Well….Maybe good...70%...80% good. But it may not be good in a sense that I am hiding my honest expressions.

Kana, on the other hand, clearly said that she did not like such a customer service in Japan. She felt the service looked superficial and just too much.

Similarly, a tendency among Japanese people to “care about others by guessing what other think” can be a stress in many cases.

Kana: I really didn’t like Tokyo. People are not nice, and it is crowded.

Me: Too busy? Did you feel you wanted to relax more?

Kana: Yeah.

Me: Did you feel easier after going abroad

Kana: I did. I didn’t have to care about people much.

Me: So, when you were in Tokyo, did you feel tired with caring about others?

Kana: Right. I had to pay attention to others even during just walking on the road. I cared about others and there were always people around me, so I had to be careful while I walked.

Me: Care about what others think about you?

Kana: Can’t you walk humming? Yeah it was about how they think about me but I actually might bump into others. So I should be careful. Had to say “Suimasen”(Excuse me). Like in a station. People are always very close to me physically.

Me: Did you feel tired with just that?

Kana: I got stressed gradually.
Me: Did you feel that since a long time ago?
Kana: Yeah, I did before going to Australia.
Me: And how did you feel there? Did you feel relaxed?
Kana: Yes, it was relaxing.
Me: Were both Australia and Germany better than Tokyo for you, feeling easier?
Kana: Right.
Me: Is Tokyo hard to live in?
Kana: Yeah, big cities. So even in the US, I don’t like New York city.
While Kana pointed out the physical distance that forced her to care about others, Nao and Lynn specifically described that people care about not only how they actually look physically but how their ways of lives look.

Me: Did you have any chance to find any difficulty in your life in Japan?
Nao: It wasn’t like a difficulty...But people in Japan have to care how people see you, such as your shape and fashion… There was some trend and it was uncool to wear a sweatshirt. I often felt that was a little bothersome.
Me:...So do you feel free when you are in the US?
Nao: Well, right. I don’t have to research about fashion by watching fashion magazines every month.

Lynn:...Everyone cares about your looks, in detail. They are in good order. I cannot do it.
Me: You cannot do it now? Maybe you did it before?
Lynn: Yes, maybe I did it in the past, but…
Me: If you go back to Japan now?
Lynn: If I go back to Japan, I cannot fit there. Even if I can make a mom friend, I cannot tell them that I had a German boyfriend but we broke up and did not marry. Could I live hiding all those things and caring about them? That is bothersome for me.
There are many people like myself in the US. So, they accept me as I am.
Me: Do you feel easier here?
Lynn: It is easier to live in the US.
Me: Caring about what people other think…
Lynn: Yeah, when I am in Japan, I care what people think before I say something. I can say without thinking in the US.
Me: Just let it go?
Lynn. Yeah yeah. They accept me and don’t change. If I were in Japan, would think if it is really OK to say that, so I think the life here fits better for me
What Lynn said here implies that the culture of thinking about what people think may cause Japanese people to be reserved--not saying what they honestly think. It is even criticized as passiveness.

Passiveness of the Japanese is identified especially in the context of education and work. While passiveness in Japanese education will be examined in a later section, Ai and Tomo refer to passiveness of the society as a whole.

Ai: (In the context of global competitiveness of Japan and the smaller number of study abroad participants compared to other Asian countries) It is unfortunate...Japanese people are such a wonderful people. Well...it may be about how to appeal or the matter of language barrier or…
Me: The Japanese personality too?
Ai: Personality of an island country. They are introverted and never stand out. If they do, they will be pushed back. And maybe they are bad at marketing.
Me: True.
Ai: I think Japanese companies should go abroad more, but I wonder what are the obstacles…
Me: Well, a language barrier may be a big one. No matter how you did good research, it is just worthless to the world unless it is presented in English.
Ai: That is true.

Tomo: I had some chances to talk with people in Japan, they tended to be passive and made excuses that they wanted to do something but there were no opportunities for it. I couldn’t enjoy the conversations--They could do it if they wanted. It maybe the place of Japan, where those opportunities are not provided. I like US because there are many opportunities to try with.
Me: Did you meet those Japanese people in Japan?
Tomo: Yes, I met them in Japan and they worked in Japan for a long time.
Me: Are the Japanese people who live in the US different from them?
Tomo: Yeah, they may run some risks but always challenge to do something. So I respect them and enjoy being with them.

**Positive feelings about the US.**

In contrast to the factors of “you always have to care about what others think” and passiveness of the people, positive aspects of the US society are described centering on the freedom, living without restraint—without caring what other people say and how they judge their lives.

- Can live/work without constraint and feel more relaxing (Fumi, Kana, Lynn, Nao, Tomo, Shu)
- Can say what they want to say (Fumi, Lynn)
- Friendly (Fumi)
- Provide opportunities to try with (Tomo, Ryo)

Kana well summarized the positive aspect of the US, a diverse society.

Me: Did you have a sense that any one country is best fitted for you after living in different countries?
Kana: Against my expectation, the US fits me well. Rather than the fit...maybe...it is just easy for me to live here. Nobody cares anything. I feel I am a Japanese whichever country I go to. Always. I do too in the US of course, but there are people from different countries and they stay there, not for a trip. Some people cannot speak English. They are just diverse, including how they look. Nobody cares because there are people from all over the world.

What Kana described implies not only the personality of the Japanese but the social environment itself—less diversity in the Japanese society in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, cultures, and how to live— affects how people feel about others.
Tomo further asserts the positive aspect of the US society as it is the place she can act
without caring what other people think.

Tomo: You can try whatever you want, they give you chances, and accept you. You can
say your opinions without caring much about hierarchical relationships. That’s why I like
this society.

**Negative feelings about the US.**

The list of factors that are indicated as positive aspects of Japan exactly mirrors negative aspects
of the US., such as qualities of food, customer service, medical service, public transportation and
lower level of security.

*Poor quality of service everywhere.* Ai’s description below shows how the low quality of
services everywhere in the US society gradually distressed her to the extent that she felt tired
with the lives in the US.

Ai: Well, it may not be suitable for your research...I honestly am getting tired with the life
in the US.

Me: Oh, but I can understand.

Ai: Can you?...It was fun in the beginning. But I started to see what I could not see while
I was in college...When did it start...Maybe when I started to work for a company and to
communicate with others...They don’t pay rightly, they don’t finish things on time. They
don’t respond. Nothing moves. They make mistakes. I was beginning to be involved in
troubles a lot.

Me: Ah, troubles.

Ai: Customer service is terrible here. In this country, money trouble may get so serious.
They have our social security number and can sue us…(I talked about my own
experiences of big troubles involving a large amount of money). When I ask something
and tell them how to, it just doesn’t reach to the responsible person. Even if it does, they
just don’t do it. Even if they do, it takes weeks. It takes a half year for them to finish such
a small task. So I feel like if a very serious trouble happens, I would be almost dying
when the problem is solved. Or maybe after I died. I had lots of troubles when moving this time, when our car was transported and when we had a contract to rent an apartment. They damaged our car so badly. I could not reach and talk to the transport company. When I complained to the moving company, they talked back with the triple times of our complaint. They told me to pay us for renting a car but they did not. Each thing...What they said yesterday can change today.

_Cold American._ In addition to the list of factors above, there is another aspect that some interviewees related as disappointing experiences for them. It is about personalities of American people.

Erika: Well, I thought American people would be friendly and warm, but it turned out they were rather cold. It may be because of their individualism, but they don’t talk so deeply. I was able to easily become good friends with other international students and talk about personal things, but I could not with American students. There were always superficial greetings but we could not become good friends.

Me: Hasn’t the impression been changed overtime up to now?

Erika: Well… it is fine if I choose people.

Me: So, you became able to choose people that you can be good friend with?

Erika: I think so.

Kana: I first thought German was cold because they did not smile, but they were actually nicer than Americans. They were very affectionate… Americans are often cold even if they smile. I liked German a lot, they were blunt but actually worried about me.

Lynn also said that the people with mexican origins they met in her high school in the US were nicer than American people. Lynn, Erika and Mei further talked about their experiences of being discriminated. I will analyze this aspect in more detail in the later section.

_The dependance of Evaluation on each specific place where they live._
When thinking about how they find positive and negative aspects, it should be noted that it may, at least partially, be a matter of differences between city vs. countryside rather than the differences between Japan vs. the US. Lynn and Shu specifically mentioned that they liked a particular city in the US because they were not too busy as it is in New York city. Kana also did not like Tokyo because they are too busy, but did not mention about other areas in Japan. Mei and Yuri had a special feeling about just one area in the US. The stories by the interviewees should be, therefore, understood by carefully considering where they were specifically situated at.

*No categories such as “Japan” vs. “The US.”*

It is revealing that some of the interviewees considered the categorization and distinction between “the Japanese society/people” vs. “the American society/people” might not be appropriate because the differences among people may depend on each individual rather than on characteristics of any so-called “culture.”

Nao: I didn’t know what American people thought at all and just was heard from others that American people are casual and friendly. So I had those images. But after I started to live here and talked to different people, I had an impression that they were not so different from me.

Me: Not so different from the Japanese? Not so much as it is said to be?

Nao: Well, when I really communicated with people, they are just the same persons as myself and what they thought was not so different from mine. As for opinions...apart from that the Japanese people care about others, American tend to insist opinions clearly. But still, there are people who talk in a way caring about others among them, so. I thought they might not be so different.

Me: So, there are many different people and some of them care about others and others don’t?
Nao: That’s what I thought.

Ryo: Talking about “the American culture”...I don’t remember anything I learned from America.
Me: I see.
Ryo: I wonder what is “the American culture.” I cannot say what it is.
Me: So, living in the US, don’t you feel like that the American are like this while the Japanese are like that?
Ryo: I don’t think in that way. It is a matter of individual difference.
Me: Has your thought remained the same from the time you started to study in the US?
Ryo: Yes. Well...I thought like why people talked to me on the bus, but even for that, not all American talk to me on the bus. Even among the Japanese, some people talk to me and others don’t. It just depends on a person after all. I had that feeling somehow. Maybe individual backgrounds make differences. It is not about “the American culture” and “the Japanese culture.” It may be a different story when talking about Japanese traditional cultures. But I just don’t think that way in my daily life.
Me: You don’t like thinking in that way?
Ryo: It is not that I don’t like it, but...
Me: It is just out of your conscious?
Ryo: I am just not interested in that.

These ways of thinking, that are not observed that often, seem to have an importance in terms of how they identify themselves by situating themselves in social-cultural contexts they are at and how they choose/find a place to live in.

3. Education in Japan vs. the US.

Many of the interviewees highly evaluate the college education in the US. A weakness of Japanese education is pointed out at the same time. Some interviewees considers it is rather a matter of self-motivation than how they are taught. Overall, interviewees do not uncritically
accept the US education as a superior, but analyze how it is good and fit for them or not, compared to the Japanese. Another important aspect of the US higher education is, as it was focused in the pilot study, it gives the second chance to those who did not have enough opportunity to learn in Japan. They could not have or imagine to have the second chance in Japan because of the social norm.

**Better teaching methods/systems to motivate students.**

Erika: ...in the US, it is very important what you think. You have to be able to say what you think and memorization does not mean anything in itself. I saw it as a big difference in education between Japan and the US. Also, how you present what you think is important. When writing a paper and do a presentation...unless you present well there, it does not mean anything no matter how good opinions you have. Standing out is not good in Japan but it is opposite in the US. Being quiet in a classroom does not mean anything, and you have to raise your hand and ask questions or say what you think, that is very different.

…

Me: Did you have any complaint against your education at high school?

Erika: The classes were just not interesting.

Me: You didn’t know why you have to study?

Erika: Right. It is very important for me why I do it. But I didn’t know it then. This may be a good example, but I memorized a term “corn belt” in a geography class, and thought how does this mean to my life? They just told me to memorize. In the college in the US., my geography teacher explained to me how this geography was related to the politics at that moment. He was a very good teacher and I enjoyed the class better than any other classes. I was amazed to understand the study of geography can be applied that way.

According to Erika, students do not know why they study the subjects and the teaching methods are also poor as it does not show how what they are learning is related to your life. Mei described similar experiences below.
Mei: I was very surprised at an exam of history class. When I took an American history class and the exam sheet looked almost full of blank with a very short question. It was an essay exam with about 70 points and told us to describe something like...how Kennedy was killed based on the political backgrounds at that time, for example. I was very shocked as I only memorized the facts.

Me: Was the expectation different?

Mei: Yes.

... Mei: They always asked our opinions. When I was in Japan, the teacher went on without stopping, sometimes asked if students had questions, but they were quiet. But the teachers here have...always try to invoke students. I was very surprised with it. I could not say anything at the beginning. I used to be just listening and had not thought about my thinking against what I was listening to.

Me: Did you begin to participate gradually?

Mei: Yes I did, since around the time I was sophomore.

Me: Did you feel it was better to speak up?

Mei: Yes. I was learning to think what I should say and when.

Me: Which education environment fitted better for you, do you think?

Mei: Here (the US).

Me: Although you were surprised at first?

Mei: I became able to see the meaning of study.

Me: I see.

Mei: I used to do a lot of memorization and study for college entrance exam in a Japanese cram school, but my grade depended on such things and my life did too. I wondered what was all about. I often thought memorizing a year number of each incident did not mean anything. But I am made to think here, I can really understand the meanings of what I am learning.

The way teachers motivate students through making them understand the meanings of what they are learning affects interviewees’ personalities and lives deeply.
Lynn: The classes are different. I had to memorize in Japan. But I had to research and present what I thought. That was very different.

Me: Which one fitted better for you?

Lynn: I easily forgot after just memorizing. So I asserted my opinion there and that led to my future. I somehow became stronger. I got a stronger mind. When I was in Japan, I just followed a group and kept saying yes.

Me: You used to be quiet?

Lynn: I wasn’t quiet but I was a type of person easily influenced by others.

Me: Felt OK as everyone was together?

Lynn: Yeah yeah. It was the culture. I didn’t think about it back then but after I came here, I felt it was very fun to speak up.

Me: So you think the education here fitter you better?

Lynn: I think so, looking back it now...I had a very hard time at first but I eventually felt I could do it.

Ai and Fumi also made similar arguments on the teaching method. They, however, criticizes the education in Japan within a broader education system in Japan.

Ai: It (education in Japan) was not interesting at all. Everything was boring. They did not motivate me, it was not challenging, and it was very clear that what we learned at college was not related to the real society.

Me: They didn’t motivate you? Does it mean you saw the structure where many of the college major fields were not directly related to the real jobs?

Ai: Yes I did...People are at college just because they want a degree.

Me: That is why they are not motivated?

Ai: Right. It is just the place to stay until they graduate and get a job...I strongly hope the Japanese education will change to be like the education here.

…

Ai: And about the college tuition, parents should not pay it.

Me: Right, it is just paid by them without letting kids think about it.
Ai: Yeah yeah, it would be better if students pay by themselves with scholarship or student loan.

Fumi: When I want to a Japanese college, people attended class but only watched their cell phones and put on a make-up, so I felt like I didn’t learn anything. Students here study more seriously, so I do too. Not many people watch cell phones. And the class, it may be because of my major, is like the place to study specialized areas and get ready to work. In Japan, you can easily graduate if you just keep attending, and those who haven’t learned anything go on to the society. When I think about it, it would be better to make the school stricter.
Me: So, is it about changing the schools stricter so that students have study harder to get good grades.
Fumi: I think so.

Relevance of education and limited options for life career in Japan.

Ai argued that there was an excessively normalized life course in the Japanese society, where people believe that the goal of high school education is to go on to a good college and the goal of college education is to work for a good company. Hikari, looking back the time when she decided on a college and a major, she felt that she was not fully shown possible life course and opportunities to learn other than going on to a college in Japan.

Me: There is interesting data. Many people in Japan go to the ESL schools in the US, but very few go to 4-year colleges or graduate schools for a degree, compared to, for example, Korea or China. Do you feel that is true?
Hikari: Yes I do. When we decided to the ways we would take after graduating from high school, there was no such an option like going abroad and obtaining a degree at colleges abroad. Graduating from college had been already a kind of prestigious status and the goal since we were at junior high school. It is the goal so we did not think about study
abroad during high school. When we went on to college and finally reached a time for job-search, we started to think about our careers. That is the cycle.

Me: So there was no space to think about other ways of life?
Hikari: No...My friend took a survey of how high school students think about English and they tended to think learning English was just for college entrance exams.

Me: So they hadn’t realized how it is connected to the world.
Hikari: No, they hadn’t. Few of them think about the possibilities of going abroad with English.

…

Me: Were you able to decide on colleges to apply and majors to declare easily?
Hikari: No, it took a long time for me to decide...It was easy to focus on English or literature, but hard to choose a specialized area of study, since each college had a different program. There was a program to be a translator, for example, and I was wondering if I could reach that level.

Me: So you decided your major in connection to your future jobs?
Hikari: Yes, but it started with very narrow range of options. When I started to think about my future, it was already narrowed down and I thought only about Japan. I wish I had been suggested that there were many other field of studies than English, such as art, and other options like going abroad.

Me: You wished you could have considered that option?
Hikari: Yes, it would have been better.

Me: So now you think you actually had an option to go abroad at that point?
Hikari: I realized I had. When I had considered the option to go abroad, my decision could have been different if a little.

Me: Even if you actually did not go abroad, your decision on your life path might have been different?
Hikari: I think so.
Me: You told me you didn’t enjoy learning in college and high school in Japan, but were you happy with your life there over all? Or did you think there was anything that should be changed?

Hikari: Yes, I was happy when I was at high school. But now I think my high school did not look enjoyable. They are just for college entrance exam and it was like they asked us “Are you going to So-Kei (Abbreviation of the two most prestigious private colleges)? To-dai (University of Tokyo, one of the most prestigious national college)? Or National/Public colleges?” The school itself was divided based on the choice of college.

This is also related to one of the factor argued above—the importance of demonstrating how the subjects of study are related to the real life. Students learn English all the time since junior high school or even before that. But they often do not know how learning English opens opportunities of life.

**US higher education as the second chance.**

As demonstrated in the pilot study, learning in higher education in the US is situated as the second chance of education for some of the interviewees.

Fumi narrated how she considered her education in the US to be the second chance after she quit college in Japan.

Me: How did you think about the US?
Fumi: The biggest image was that the US is a scary place.
Me: Because of guns?
Fumi: Yes, gun society…
Me: It is scary but good in the area of education?
Fumi: Yes it is scary but...how to say…
Me: You can learn English?
Fumi: Yes, I can learn English and, well, I thought it was the place to come from behind and win, considering I quit college in Japan.

…
Me: Have you felt like you wanted to quit (the college in the US) and go back to Japan?
Fumi: Not to the extent… Because I really had to graduate from college.
Me: Is that about you quit college in Japan?
Fumi: Yes, if I quit now…
Me: You want to make an achievement?
Fumi: Right.

Her strong determination and commitment to her study in the US college led her to change her personality and views of the old friends in Japan

Me: So, it was truly good that you studied abroad?
Fumi: Yes, I think so. I was shy before studying abroad...
Me: You were?
Fumi: I became more cheerful and bright after I began to study abroad.
Me: You became able to say what you want to say more?
Fumi: Yes I did and …well, I didn’t have many good relationships with people in Japan, but I feel free now.
Me: Now you are able to be with only the people you like?
Fumi: That’s right.
Me: Were you really shy, since your childhood?
Fumi: I began to have troubles with my friends about something related with entrance exams, the gradually…
Me: So, you had some good time, but also there was a time you could not express yourself well.
Fumi: Right.
Me: Now you can always do it?
Fumi: I think so.

As she found more comfortable place to live with her friends and partner in the US, at the same time, relationships with her friends changed.
Fumi: I am not sure if it was maybe because my perspective had been broaden after coming to the US, but I was surprised to find my friends (in Japan) and I were such different in our values.

Me: Do you realize that now?

Fumi: Yes.

Me: What do you mean by a “narrow” perspective?

Fumi: Well...their range of relationships is very narrow.

Me: I see, does it mean that only those who share similar values are gathering?

Fumi: I think so...It is very hard to explain, though.

...  

Fumi: They asked me what I would do in the future.

Me: They didn’t give you so positive feedback (about Fumi’s experiences)? They talked like they were worried about you?

Fumi: That’s right.

Me: And you thought “what? why?”

Fumi: I wondered why.

Me: So, you had been good friends with them but you began to feel there was something wrong with such conversations?

Fumi: Yes I did. I had never been told such a thing. After I came here, I began to think that everyone should mind their own business and I don’t care what others do, so I didn’t want them to mind how I lived. I don’t care if they complain about my way. So, I don’t want to be so close to them anymore.

Me: So...if I put it clearly, do you feel you have less people to see even when you go back to Japan now?

Fumi: Many of them have gone. You are right.

Me: So, the US has become your own place to live more and more, in that sense too?

Fumi: That’s true.

As Fumi put particular importance on her study in the US as her second chance of education and life itself, her experiences in the US dramatically changed her way of lives including how she
relates to others. It is harder to transfer from one college to another in Japanese higher education system. The US college education, therefore, well functioned as the second chance for Fumi and fit what she needed for.

While they did not specifically define it as their second chances, the education in the US seems to have had a similar meaning for Erika and Ryo. It is almost impossible to have the second chance once you failed in the one-time entrance exams for college in Japan. Erika was not ready for the exams for the public/national colleges that her parents would allow her to apply for. Ryo was not successful in the exams for the national colleges. When those incident occurred, they thought there was no good alternative career path for them to take in Japan, but there was in the US. Because people in Japan tend to find extra values in education in the US, as the parents of Erika and Ryo did, the option is considered a reasonable opportunity to try with as their second chance.

*The US education is not necessarily the best in all the areas and to all the people.* Although many of the interviewees highly evaluated college education in the US, it does not mean the US education works best for anyone in any situation.

Fumi mentioned that, while the college education system itself might motivate students, but her motivation was much higher from the beginning compared to when she was in Japan. Kana also narrated her motivation for study was much higher than other younger students when she studied in a community college in the US when she was around 30 years old. While she did not necessarily highly evaluate the education she had there, she learned well and found the study of psychology particularly interesting.

Me: Did you experience anything like a culture shock when you started there?
Kana: Yeah I had a lot. First of all, everyone asks many questions, but I thought like “is the question really important?”

Me: They asked anything?
Kana: I was distracted by that rather than caring if the question was good or not… I thought I would search by myself without asking.

Me: I see. How did you feel about that compared to the education you had in Japan?
Kana: I haven’t experienced that much school education here...but being active may be...

(good)

Me: Which one fit you better?
Kana: Of course…(Japanese education) But I wanted to study seriously then as I was almost 30 years old.

Me: I see.
Kana: My attitude was different.

Me: Different from younger people?
Kana: Well, I felt like younger classmates studied less seriously. As for the teachers, although some of them scolded students harshly, there were teachers who looked less serious and let students chat. I thought that was the way community colleges were.

Kana did not like the active learning style in the US that much. Tomo also mentioned it depended on individuals which styles-- passive or active--fit them better. Kana indicates it is a matter of self-motivation rather than the learning environment. Nao similarly explained about the role of her motivation.

Nao: (Compared to the education experiences before), well, my attitude of seriously studying was the most different part.

Me: So, was it about your motivation rather than the teacher and the curriculum?
Nao: That’s right. I didn’t want to end up learning nothing after a year of study, because I was supported by parents. Also I would look so bad then. It would be like “what did I do for the entire year?” I really didn’t want that kind of situation, and that motivated me a lot.
While Kana was at community college and Nao was at an ESL school, Ryo, who was experiencing 4-years college beside those two, felt there was not anything very special about his education experiences in the US. He simply evaluated the speaking practices at an ESL school was useful. He liked to study efficiently so that he could spent more time on his startup company business. For Ryo, college education in the US is just something he could manage.

It also should be noted that none of the interviewees had experiences in the US education below high school level. So how they evaluate education in the US and Japan might become different when they consider education for lower grades and how each level of education is connected to each other. Mei was, for example, surprised to find that her friends in Japanese colleges did not study much. But she accepted the fact because those friends did study very hard for the college entrance exams and maybe OK to have a break now. Erika, on the other hand, talked about the differences in elementary level education between Japan and the US. She said they tend to be more strict to control behaviors of children in the US than in Japan and felt elementary education might be better in Japan for that reason, considering the personality of her own child.

Finally, Yuri insisted, based on her experiences in two different ESL schools, that the quality of school depend on the characteristics of each school, which may be represented well by differences in tuition. This is a factor that might be less clearly identified in college. Yuri said both teachers and students were less serious in the ESL school with lower tuition and it was not worth even the lower tuition. At another ESL school with very high tuition, in contrast, students were highly motivated and the class was very interesting.

4. Working in Japan vs. the US
Workplace cultures.

Erika pointed out that a big difference between the Japanese and American in their attitudes toward work.

Erika: They are irresponsible from my viewpoint. Many people do up to a certain point and don’t do after that. The Japanese do everything from 1 to 10 because that is their responsibility. It may depend on generations though. So my way of working have been evaluated well.

Me: People basically chat here during work, right?
Erika: Yeah yeah. They chat even when a customer is there. That is how our attitudes toward work are completely different.

Me: So, did you have troubles or feel annoyed while working with them?
Erika: Oh, I have already passed that phase.

Me: You just got used to that?
Erika: I see that’s how it is here. I am like, I do my job but I don’t care about others.

Me: So the range of your responsibility is fairly clear?
Erika: Yes it is.

Me: So you do just your job.
Erika: I do my job and I don’t care how much others are irresponsible and it doesn’t mean anything if I feel annoyed with them.

While Erika observed workplace cultures in the US in this way, Yuri found just interesting to see such differences in an American company. That was because the differences were exactly what she wanted to learn about and experience. She also saw the workplace cultures in American companies rather positively. Being casual and friendly, less attentions to too much details, and less hierarchical relationships were all considered as positive aspects of the American workplace cultures by Yuri.

Yuri: I feel working in the US is far easier. In Japan, there are always boss and and all the relationships are hierarchical. But in the US, people call by first names even
bosses and the relationships are much less hierarchical. There is a hierarchy, but much less strict. Working there (American companies) is easier in that sense too (in addition to the shorter work hours). When I discuss with my clients and ask them questions, I don’t have to think too much about how they would think if I ask the question and be afraid if they would think I don’t have enough knowledge. So It is very easy for me to work in that sense too.

The “relaxing” working environment Yuri liked may have an aspect of being less seriously responsible toward work as Erika indicated. Workplace environments, however, may vary between companies and fields in workplaces in The US.

Nao and Yuri had experiences of working in three different types of workplaces: Japanese companies in Japan, Japanese companies in the US, and American companies in the US. Nao and Yuri said workplace cultures were quite similar between Japanese companies in Japan and the US. They commonly emphasized the fact that people typically work overtime in Japan while the people in the US usually leave on time, 5 or 6 pm. Nao also described the culture of the frequent “drinking party” (get-together of employees after work) exists in Japanese companies in Hawaii too. Ai, who worked both in Japan and in the US, said such a culture of working over time should change.

Ai: When I went back to Japan and met my junior high school teacher, I told him that I was working in the US and was able to leave on time there. Then he said it would make him feel a little lonely. I thought it was ridiculous to stay late in a workplace just because feeling lonely. But I also thought the workplace cultures won’t change as long as those kind of people are at the top tier of companies.

Me: It is like you cannot leave before your boss does.
Ai: Old customs should be removed.
Me: Could that be changed only when a person from overseas with different perspectives came in?
Ai: When I thought about it, for example, don’t you think I would be hated if I join a company in Japan?

Me: Well, I have never worked for a company in Japan really, so hard to tell…

Ai: I am sure they will hate me.

Tomo: ...American people work from 8 to 5. They are such simple. The Japanese people work overtime, like 10 pm, 11 pm, 12 am...That is so late.

Me: Is it good (to work overtime?)

Like Ai, Tomo who worked in the US for a while with an OPT visa, thinks the Japanese workstyle make it difficult for her to think about possibilities to work in Japan.

Tomo: I don’t think so. They are inefficient. I wonder if they really have to do that much.

Me: So, is it good that 8-5 work hours is firmly established?

Tomo: Yes, it is good to have a clear distinction between on and off. Even when I cannot finish my work, I don’t have to stay two more hours. Only one and a half or one hour is enough to complete the paperworks. So…

Me: Inefficient?

Tomo: It may be because of staff shortage.

Me: There maybe a certain cultural thing that people work late because everyone does.

Tomo: Well..people work that late and they surely have lots of complaints but they never say that and keep working quietly. I feel that is pretty much the Japanese. I am very happy with that I can leave work on time. I wonder if I would work late if I go back to Japan and work there. I am a responsible person so I do what I have to do, but I am not sure if I could continue to do that. Maybe not.

Work/life balance.

Besides Ai and Tomo, Nao and Yuri also welcome the shorter working hours especially in terms of work/life balance. It is closely related to the shorter workings hours in the American workplaces they have mentioned above.
Nao: ...I could have continued to work there (a Japanese company in Hawaii) by renewing my visa. But I got married and my lifestyle changed. I used to leave my work around 9 pm there but I began to think I could not continue such kind of work/life styles, then I changed my job.

Me:...So, was the American company easier for you to work?
Nao: Yes. I became able to manage my lifestyle after marriage better.
Me: I see. They let you go back home on time at 6 pm, for example?
Nao: Right, and there were no “drinking party” that I had to attend.
Me: Ah, Japanese social thing.
Nao: Yes.

Yuri particularly emphasized the perspective of work/life balance. She started to realize its importance only after she began to work in the US and it was an eye-opening experience for her to change her view of the way of lives.

Me: Did you start to think about the work/life balance after you came here, or you felt something like, you got tired with life that put much more weight on work?
Yuri: When I was in Japan, I was like a trainee for the first three years so I just wanted to pass the final qualification exam (to be an official accountant) and establish my career. The company I worked for had a homelike atmosphere and the employee were close to each other like friends. I used to take a trip with my colleague who joined the company in the same year with me, so I didn’t have any complaint against my workplace and it was not that I wanted to go somewhere else because I didn’t like there. I just wanted to go to city Y so badly. But after I came here and started to work in an American company, I had realized the typical Japanese work styles and the American style were very different. It was not about my previous workplace in Japan, but in a general sense.
Me: So, you’ve discovered a different way of living?
Yuri: Yeah yeah.

…
Me: So, even considering those things (higher food quality in Japan and low level of Japanese grocery and restaurant in city Y), do you still feel you want to continue to live in the US?
Yuri: Yes, I do.
Me: Is that because you are happy with your job and relationships?
Yuri: Right, and work/life balance. Maybe the way of lives... in Japan, my life may be focused only on work... how to say… There are few people who truly enjoy their lives in Japan. They maybe just keep working, so. I feel people seem to live in more natural ways.

*Where are good opportunities to work?*

While interviewees talked about both positive and negative aspects of workplaces in Japan and the US, it does not mean they can freely choose where to work as they wish. Ai hopes to work as a piano teacher in Japan, without any normative restriction she had in the Japanese companies. She, however, still expects many obstacles before actually realizing the career goal. Erika thought about going back to Japan and working there before deciding on marriage, but she works in the US because her life with family is there. Mei also was planning to go back to Japan and getting a job offer but had to refuse it as she decided to marry and stay in the US. Now she feels her education background might not be enough to get a job with a good salary in the US. Pursuing career as an athletic trainer and a physical therapist led Tomo to decide on continuing to work in the US. That is because the area is not established well as a profession in Japan. While Yuri found a better place to work to fully demonstrate her ability, she needed some compromise at the same time because the company is a Japanese one and has the Japanese workplace cultures where over-time work is common.
For the cases of Kana and Lynn, each of them had the best experiences of work when they worked in Japan (an ESL teacher for Kana and a technical translator for Lynn). They truly enjoyed working but it seems that there are few opportunities to work in similar areas in the US because English skill has its extra values for the Japanese only outside of the English speaking countries.

Kana: I really liked the job and I want to do that if I have to live in Japan.
Me: Did you want to continue that?
Kana: Yeah.
Me: I see. But maybe you can do the similar thing here?
Kana: (teaching) English?
Me: Maybe a bilingual education?
Kana: Well… it is hard to do everything by myself...to create an original curriculum.
Me: Too hard?
Kana: Yeah...if I teach, it would be much easier to belong to some place.
Me: I see.
Kana: The extent of responsibility would be very different.
Me: Hard to take responsibilities?
Kana: Yeah..

Shu thought about working in Japanese companies in the US or in Japan. But according to Shu, the way the Japanese people evaluate and judge job applicants has kept him from actually working in the Japanese companies at this moment.

Shu: ...They tend to see only a status and a background. So if I had come back to Japan after graduation, they would not given me a chance because they would have cared my age and judged my ability based on my few work experiences for my age. That was my image...That is why I thought it would be better to build up my career in the US first so that my CV--something the Japanese people love-- look not bad compared to others.
Shu:...The Japanese people asked me only those kind of thing (personal backgrounds) in the job interviews, which was very different from the interviews at American companies.

Me: Did they ask your work history and personal backgrounds?

Shu: And, they asked something that was not very important. They probably just wanted to ask. Like why I studied abroad.

Me: So, did they ask out of curiosity?

Shu: Yeah...how to say… it wasn’t an appropriate question to ask me, who may work for there. When I had job interviews in American companies, they never asked me why I studied abroad. Rather, they asked me if I worked on a finance modeling in the class or something related to the job I was applying for.

Me: I see. So, you had those experiences and that made you feel that working for a Japanese company would be daunting.

Shu: Yes, I do feel that pretty much.

Overall, the interviewees try to find a better opportunity within available options, while considering merits and demerits with working in different types of workplaces. Being already in the US does not mean they can choose which country to work and live in without any constraint. Cultural differences in the workplaces in Japan and the US often complicate how they decide on their work careers.

5. How they found their ways of lives and established their self-identities-- How their partners/families affect the processes?

The previous sections revealed how the interviewees evaluate lives in the US and Japan, particularly through their experiences in education and workplaces. This section shows how the interviewees have found or tried to find their ways of lives and their own places to live. This means to establish their self-identities-- who they are and how they live, as a whole. In addition
to the aspects that were explored in the previous sections, how the partners and families affect their way of lives are highlighted here.

**Work plus a partner/family**

Erika did not plan to stay that long in the US first, but she began to enjoy studying and ended up going on to a graduate college to be a psychological counselor. While she was thinking about going back to Japan and working there, her marriage led her to continue to stay in the US. Even after she became a psychological counselor after she went through hardship during the training period, she still missed the life in Japan until several years ago particularly because the foods and the elementary education looked better there. She does not necessarily see American people and workplaces so positively. Recently, however, she feels her life has been settled in the US as she had established her work career at her current workplace and her family purchased a house. She is planning to live in the US permanently and her parents in Japan will be taken care of her sister’s family, although she will probably support them financially.

Erika: I used to think Japan was good after all and wanted to go back there, but somehow… my life started to be better balanced since several years ago.

Me: Inside your mind?

Erika: My work career had been developed and I found my own place in my job. We also purchased a house, so a basis of life had been established here. Well…yeah, it changed somehow around those things.

As for her child, while Erika thinks the Japanese elementary education might better fit him as they are less strict about child’s behaviors, her son enjoys the school in the US anyway. She would let him study in Japan when he grows up and wishes in the future. Her plan is that her sister in Japan will take care of Erika’s son while he studies there and Erika will host her sister’s child in the US.
Fumi’s choice to quit the college in Japan and re-start at the US college dramatically changed how she relates to the world. While she still finds positive parts about Japan, she feels more free in the US, easier to say what she thinks, and she was told by others that she looked more cheerful and bright now. On one hand, therefore, she found a place to live comfortably. Her partner she met in the US has supported her throughout her study and that also affected her decision on continuing to stay and work in the US.

Me: Does the relationship with your partner affect your life here a lot?
Fumi: Yes it does. Well, he is not an American but has lived here since his childhood, so his English is good. I am hoping I will be able to speak the way he does.

Me: So, he motivates you?
Fumi: Right.
Me: Has the relationship with him led you to feel you want to continue to stay here?
Fumi: Yes, it certainly has.
Me:...How long have you been with him?
Fumi: Four years.
Me: That is long. So you two shared both good times and bad a lot.
Fumi: Yes. I have been supported by him so much.

On the other hand, she began to keep some distance from her Japanese old friends living in Japan as she felt their perspectives were narrow and too different from hers. She is hoping to stay and work in the US as long as possible although she worried a little about her parents in Japan.

Tomo’s life trajectory was strongly led by her work career as an athletic trainer and a physical therapist. She decided to study in the US college because it was the only option for her to study the area. She will continue to stay in the US primarily because she knows the US work environment is by far the best for her work career.
Me: Do you have an option to go back to Japan?
Tomo: No, never. I have a licence as a physical therapist, it is not valid in Japan. I would have to pass an exam.
Me: You have to study for the exam?
Tomo: Yes. I will be exempted from taking classes at school, but the medical terminology is all Japanese, which might be hard for me.
Me: Is the status of a physical therapist as a profession also higher in the US?
Tomo: Yes, it is much higher. It is a doctor’s degree here so the salary is much higher. The range of what I can do is also wider. There are more opportunities to learn through conferences and to extend my professional field. There are some conferences but not many. The field of the physical therapy is divided into many areas here, so it would be better to work here to develop my career in a specified area.

Even with the consistently strong will, her family and partner had significant influences to her life. Her parents have financially supported her but did not allow her to study in the Japanese schools for athletic trainers that were not in 4-year colleges. Her partner is another motivation for her to imagine her future life in the US. She does not worry about her parents’ future because her brother’s family is ready to take care of them.

For Yuri, living and working in city Y was her dream for a decade. She was attracted by the diversity of people’s lives in the city, so she really enjoyed working with them when she finally had an opportunity to work in an American company. That was when she learned the importance of work/life balance in her life and began to think there might be more natural way of living in the US. She wanted to follow the way. Several year later, however, she changed her workplace to a Japanese company in the US. Her goal there is to fully demonstrate her strong and unique skills as a Japanese accountant. She has also been committed to an activity in a NPO.
to introduce Japanese cultures and the Japanese people who have played active roles in linking Japan and the US.

Yuri has built a good relationship with her partner in the US because they share similar values on the way of living.

Me: Does the relationship with him also make you think you want to continue to live here as long as possible?
Yuri: Well...I had planned to continue to stay here before I met him. There are many Japanese people with different backgrounds here. Some people could not see what she wanted to do, had a hard time living here, and ended up going back to Japan. Others began to set their goals at their marriage, met Japanese partners who were representatives of Japanese companies, and ended up going back to Japan with the partners. I saw those kind of cases a lot. So, in my case, I really like the American lifestyle and I want to stay here regardless of my partner. He left a company in Japan, like myself, went to a grad school here, and works in the area of accountant. He likes his life here and wants to continue to stay here. So, that’s the way he does and our lives look fit with each other, sharing the values. I think I might have not agreed with someone who keep turning to Japan from the beginning.

Me: So you can stay with your partner because you two share the ways of living?
Yuri: Exactly.

Her life was led by her strong passion to pursue her dream and her own way of living without much compromise. She said she decided to be an accountant in the first place because she thought working for a Japanese company without any qualification might not fit her way of living. She imagined that she might not to be able to work in a company and an area she really wanted to work for if she searches jobs in a general area among Japanese companies.
Shu decided to further study his major area in graduate school in the US, but what actually motivated him most to study hard enough to be admitted by graduate school was his partner back then.

Me: How did you choose graduate schools to apply for?
Shu: This may be an odd answer but I had a partner when I was in city Z. She went on to a grad school one year ahead of me, and her school was in city Y. So, from that point, I started to study seriously, took TOEFL exam repeatedly, and picked a list of graduate schools that were located within 20 miles of her school because I wanted live close to her. Then I finally applied based on my exam scores.
Me: I see. So, you were able to focus on study because of her?
Shu: Exactly.

It seems that, for Shu, relationships with people, including a partner, friends and other peoples surrounding his life often have equal or more meanings rather than his work career. Although he is building a successful career in the US, he does not hope to continue to live there permanently.

Me: So you have a relationships with your partner from China, and where do you plan to live in the future? Is that the US?
Shu: Well...it may be the US. If our relationship continues, we may have to talk about it and decide. But I don’t think I want to grow old and live my retired life in the US.
Me: Do you want to live in Japan then?
Shu: Japan...maybe, that might be an option. Well, I just don’t want to hear the news like that there was another shooting incident nearby, when I becomes old.
Me: So, you want to spend you life in more peaceful place?
Shu: Yeah...I also don’t want to respond to those store clerks with very bad manners in Rite Aid.
Me:... I see. So which place best fit for you, do you think?
Shu: City Z.
Me: So, not city Y but city Z in the US.
Shu: Right.
Me: So do you want to go back and live there if possible?
Shu: Yeah...but well, it may not be a bad idea to live in Japan after all. But if I do so, I will have to look more successful, although I might be thinking about it too much. Otherwise, people would try to find a fault with me.

*Partner/family plus possibilities in the future*

In contrast to the interviewees who managed to keep developing their work careers while maintaining relationships with partners and families, some interviewees prioritize relationships over work career or rather inevitably had to choose either one of them in their life trajectories.

Mei made a deliberate decision to study in the US college, in order to study English in the best environment for her. She was planning to work in Japan after obtaining a degree in TESOL and she actually had obtained a job offer from a Japanese company. Her unexpected marriage, changed her plan completely. While she has prioritized the life with her partner and child, she struggled to have some work experiences whenever she found a chance. Now she is a stay-at-home mom and has an anxiety about her future work career.

Me: Do you hope to teach English when you go back to work?
Mei: That is an option too but I want to do something related to international students in colleges.
Me: Supporting and teaching them? Do you also hope to go back to school sometime?
Mei: Yes I do. It is not a solid idea though...After I moved here, I realized that the cost of daycare was very high. So I wonder what kind of job will cover that cost and I am searching for them.
Me: I see. But if that had been much less expensive, would you have sent your child to daycare?
Mei: I might have. But I really feel it was good that I did not send my child to daycare.
Me: Because you were able to spend more time with your child?
Mei: Yes.
Me: So, you are not planning to use daycare at this moment?
Mei: No. I think it is about the time to think about having the second (child), so.
Me: I see. So will you think about work after those things got settled? It should be OK as you are still young.
Mei: But I worried…
Me: About work?
Mei: Right. I always have prioritized my family and neglected my work career...We moved a lot for my husband’s job transfers, so I have only some work experiences and I worry about it.
Me: Had you imagined you would be a stay-at-home mom before?
Mei: No, never...I became a stay-at-home mom before I knew.
Me: … Do you feel somehow alone or insecure?
Mei: Yes I do. I feel really insecure. I am making a blank in my work career.
Me: But you also want to stay with your kids?
Mei: My mother told me that I could work and earn income as much as you like later in my life, but I could stay with and raise my kids only for a limited period.
Me: That’s right. They will grow up so fast.
Mei: Do they?

Mei still struggles to find her way of lives while she accepts to prioritize her life with her kids at this point. She also worries about the future of her parents back in Japan. She thinks she will have to either go back to Japan or have her parents live in the US in the future though it is not soon.

Nao also chose to prioritize her life with her partner over continuing a job she really liked. Living in Hawaii was her dream since her childhood, and she finally started to live in Hawaii after building up work experiences in Japan, which were later connected to her work in
Hawaii. Nao, however, had to decide to leave Hawaii with her husband when he suggested to move to city X to spend the last time with his mother, who suffered from a serious disease.

Me: How did you feel about leaving the place you dreamed of and moving to city X?

Nao: I had a mixed feeling...Well...I did not know about city X at all and could not imagine, and also thought about the plan I wanted to invite my parents to Hawaii...So there were many things to consider. But I met him and got married...If I had been in the same situation as he was in, I would have done the same thing. So, I could not reject that.

Her strong interest in foreign countries and English have constantly impacted on her life. She gained a sense of achievement and confidence after her study abroad experiences for a year. That led her to change her motivations toward study and future work career.

Nao: Well, I did not like studying before I studied abroad, but after coming back to Japan I began to enjoy studying. It was not only about English, but I felt it was fun to learn something I did not know.

Me: Was it because that you gained a sense of achievement and confidence after learning English and cultures during study abroad?

Nao: I think so.

Me: So, did you start to become interested in other things too?

Nao: Right.

Me: You said you were not interested in job search before. Did it mean you didn’t have any work career plan when you started your study in college, like what kind of job you want to do in the future?

Nao: No, I didn’t have anything. It was not that I didn’t want to work, but if I was asked what I wanted to do, I just did not have any answer.

After she returned to her study in college in Japan and obtained a degree, she found a job in the area she was truly interested in. While she experienced personal growth and career development,
her partner and family always have influenced particularly when she made important decisions on her life. Inviting her parents to Hawaii was always a part of her dream to live in Hawaii. Relationships to her partner also had huge impacts on her life trajectory--when she broke up with the partner in the past and decided to move to Hawaii and when she got married and decided to leave Hawaii.

Lynn have work experiences both in the US and Japan. She liked both workplaces and she feels that her job as a technical translator in a Japanese auto company was the best fitted job for her. It was because she was able to fully demonstrate her skills and personality as her job needed English and the communication with many people. While her relationship with a German partner led her to go to Germany, Lynn, who is full of curiosity, actively learned German and confectionery. After she got married, moved to the US, and had a child there, she is learning tea ceremony and the Japanese confectionery, which she has kept learning for the longest period among the many she had learned before. She also plans to learn something different, which would lead to her future profession. She hopes to work after she will have another child. Lynn looks very positive both to the fact that her life is settled at this point with her family and to the work career possibilities she would find in the future.

Lynn: I finally got settled after having a kid. People told me it was good for me to have been settled.
Me: So you have never been at a one place before..
Lynn: Probably, no. I started to rush from place to place since high school. I would have gone to somewhere else if I had not been married. It is me, my personality. Like now too, I feel like I want to work or do something.
Me: In your mind?
Lynn: In my mind. I am a kind of person who cannot sit quietly...It would be good to go to college to study something I like. I want to make use of my English...not to the extent to be a translator, but there are such kind of schools, right? Something like a licence for a translator? Maybe something I can do throughout my life, such as a nurse, all over the world? Profession. Yes, a profession rather than a college...I am just thinking about what it is now.

While she likes Japanese cultures, misses her family there, and has some hope to live in Japan, she believes it would not happen because of her American partner.

Lynn: When I rushed from place to place, I didn’t feel like I wanted to live in Japan again… Now I feel like I want to live there, maybe in my old ages.

Me: Before dying?

Lynn: Right, before dying, in my old ages. There are many good things about Japan. But it depends on my husband’s job so, it probably won’t happen. So I just will end up living here forever.

Her life with her husband is very important enough to have made her decide to be settled in one place.

Me: Were you somehow about to find a place to be settled?

Lynn: Maybe I was. I felt I wanted to be settled.

Me: So you thought it was the time?

Lynn: I think so. Family and kids...I always wanted to have kids but thought I was still too young although I was not so young…Now I think it was just I had not met someone I meant to be with.

Child-rearing is another reason why Lynn positively accepts to continue living in the US.

Lynn: I wonder if I could take my daughter to such a countryside area in Japan (where her family in Japan lives) and she could adapt herself there (particularly because her father is an American). When I think about it, it looks better for her to be grown up in the US, as there is an international environment and she would feel more relaxing.

Me: Do you feel education for kids is better here?
Lynn: Yeah, but I want her to master Japanese properly. I am thinking about sending her to the Japanese language school in city X although I’ve heard the entrance exam was so hard.

As the case with Lynn, Kana really liked the job as an ESL teacher in Japan before she got married and came to the US. Unlike some of the other interviewees who narrated anxiety about their future work careers, she found a joy in raising her children. She feels her husband is someone she meant to be with and has guided her life to a positive side.

Me: How did you think he was the one?
Kana: Well, I thought...I had had many negative aspects inside myself. I also had a problem with “anger control?” and used to be upset so badly or break some stuff… But he evaded it very naturally.

Me: Is it different from accepting such you?
Kana: Rather than accepting it, he does not stop there and guides her instead to the next level of positive world. That is him.

Me: Is he cheerful and bright? Generous?
Kana: Of course he is fun and positive, but also...he has a serious side, making a plan toward his goals. So he can realize something that might have remained just as a dream otherwise, because he can realistically think about things and plans to make it happen.

Kana, however, has a somewhat complex feeling about her future life trajectory between her deep love and commitment to her family. She also has been obsessed with some normative pressure that relates to her personal work career.

Me: You told me you would want to go to a college someday, do you still feel the same?
Kana: Yeah, I do...Psychology is the field I am interested in the most, but like I said before, it doesn’t necessarily mean that I want to work in that field after that...I don’t have an actual plan yet though, just my hope. But if I want to do that, I really have to get serious and make a great effort right? I don’t have that motivation now.

Me: I know you are just too busy with raising kids.
Kana: And...I want to do that but it looks so hard to achieve and I am scared. It is not that I don’t want to do that, but it would be so bad if I fail and I am scared, thinking I might have to face embarrassing situations a lot.

…

Me: So, you have something you want to do in your mind. But on the other hand, maybe you feel like you are pretty much satisfied with your family with kids and don’t need anything more than that?

Kana: Of course I do.

Me: Do you feel like you can just stay as the way you are?

Kana: Absolutely. Like I said, I am interested in psychology but I don’t have to work with it… Study or even just reading about it might be enough for me. I am interested in, but I don’t need to work with it, to be honest.

Me: So, a possibility to develop your career with the psychology degree, is that rather a social pressure, rather than your own hope?

Kana: Yeah yeah, that’s right.

Me: ...So you are not interested in something like work career?

Kana: No, never.

Me: So you feel like, if you have an opportunity for something interesting, you might try?

Kana: Well, but if I say so, there are many people who would say “what?”

Me: Is that true?

Kana: My family thinks like that.

Me: They do?

…

Me: I actually have not achieved anything yet as a result of great efforts and commitments.

Kana: Yeah yeah, I always have been bothered by that too, guessing my parents probably would think about me that way.

Me: You feel inferior to others, like I do, if you haven’t done something others have done.
Kana: Of course I do too, because other people are working so hard.
Me: I feel inferior to others in that I did not work for a company as a full-time while many of the people did.
Kana: I think that’s OK as you went on to a grad school.
Me: A grad school...but I haven’t achieved anything yet. I can study because my husband works and supports me.
Kana: Same for me.
Me: But it is about a relationship, a result of prioritizing a relationship over anything else.
There are people who prioritize work.
Kana: I certainly have made a great commitment to my husband. I had been waiting for him (to come back to her) persistently… I actually started to wait at the moment we broke up with before… I felt like I could see you again and get married then.

For kana, a personal achievement through building up a work career is a haunting pressure that often disturbs how she identifies her way of thinking and living, while she is mostly satisfied with her life with her family. Kana has already positively accepted to live in the US permanently, especially considering her child rearing.

   Me: So you don’t have any hesitation against living here permanently?
   Kana: No, I think it is rather better to do so. It is good for kids too.
   Me: Ideal place to raise kids?
   Kana: When I see kids around here, although not all of them are good kids and there are many good kids in Japan, kids here are polite but relaxing at the same time, which is good.

   *Establishing self-identities*

The analysis throughout this chapter proves that all of the interviewees have searched for their own place to live and their way of livings in their transnational lives. While influences of
partners on their life trajectories were not narrated in the interviews for Hikari and Ryo (probably because they were still too young to consider relationships with partners and family within their lives), they were exactly amid the processes of locating their future work careers. Hikari needed a sense of achievement before she starts job search, and that motivated her to study abroad for a year. Her experiences in the US led her to more confidently pursue her initial plan about her work career. Instead of extending her stay or returning to the US later, she plans to work in Japan. Her goal is to strengthen ties between Japan and abroad through manpower dispatch because she believes that such an approach promotes Japanese society. Ryo has explored paths that open his possibilities and ended up going on to a college in the US while committing himself to his startup business. It depends on how the business goes if he searches a job, he is positive about that option too because working for a company will enable him to learn about the structure of society. He needs to learn it because he would have to know why his business could not develop its service successfully in case his business will not go well.

Tracing How Ai looks back her personal history distinctly describes her struggles throughout her life to establish her self-identity--who she is, what she wants to do, and how she lives. After she successfully escaped from the US as she had planned, Ai decided to extend her stay in the US and go on to college. It was not only because she was satisfied with the environment that gave her challenges in a positive way, but also because she didn’t have any places to go back in Japan.

Me: You said you had an extremely hard time in terms of language at the beginning of your study abroad. What made you to think you wanted to stay longer?
Ai: Well, I basically didn’t have a place to go back. That was huge. I couldn’t imagine what to do even if I had gone back to Japan. If I had gone back being halfway done, I
would have been able to do something only by halves. I liked to challenge and wanted to speak English better, so.

Me: So you felt like you wanted to achieve more. Had the feeling of “being suffocated” you had in Japan been gone by the time around?
A: Yes, I rarely thought about Japan after I came to the US. The feeling of resentment had gone and I became able to start to use money properly.

She shifted her major from psychology to piano because “I couldn’t get a feel of achievement unless I chose something I could sympathize with the best” (A). A, however, quit her piano study before obtaining a performance degree as the Great East Japan Earthquake impacted on her views and led her to think about the meaning of her study.

Me: Did the earthquake disaster in Japan make you think anything?
A: Yes I did, I did. I stopped playing the piano for that period.
Me: You thought you should not play the piano?
A: I think it was that moment when I thought it was time to quit piano and study.. Everyone practiced for a long long time, 7 or 8 hours a day, starting from 8am and going back home at 10 pm. That is OK itself but they kept doing that despite such a disaster happened… It was when I started to think about quitting piano.

Me: That was about the performance diploma you didn’t obtain?
A: My husband happened to get a job offer around that time.

Me: So, many things happened at the same time?
A: I felt I finished up.

Me: Finished up with piano as a study?
A: Right..I had studied piano for years and faced deeply against my personality. And when I thought about if I could keep doing it at the level, I didn’t think I could. I wanted to do that in my mind but my body became unable to come along. So I quit.
She had a sense of achievement this time and quit her piano study. Ai, nevertheless, began to work as a piano player and a piano teacher after she had work experiences as an office clerk because piano is the place where she can demonstrate her personality.

Ai: I worked as an office clerk for fairly a long time. But I started to feel something wrong with it. When playing the piano, an individual’s originality is added into what the composer wrote and became the person’s work. But when I do office jobs, it is opposite and they don’t need any personalities...Anyone can do the job, I am not needed, and it does not have to be me...And I could be fired anytime.

Me: And you came back to piano considering those things?
Ai: Yes, after all.

As she thought about doing something only she could do, she began to think about going back to Japan in the future--an option she never had before. Her parents in Japan, whom she thinks she would have to take care of in the future, was another reason why she has turned to Japan again.

Me: You said you felt tired with the US. You used to like the US better than Japan and now, although your family situation matters too, would you feel easier to live in Japan?
Ai: Yes, well, I visited Japan with my husband only three times. But I think it is obvious that I’ve had much more special experiences compared to ordinary Japanese people. So, I want to make use of the advantage somehow and thought Japan may be a good place. We can never become special here. There are many immigrants here and their levels are too high to compete with. Also, the quality of the medical system is so poor here. Housing situation is bad and the huge gap between the rich and the poor. You cannot live without a car.

Me: So, well, you feel living in Japan would be better when you think about your old age.
Ai: Right, I will be at ease. I will be able to go to a dentist without thinking about the cost.
Me: Better insurance in Japan?
Ai: Right. I can go to any clinics when you are sick and you don’t have to have a primary doctor. Also, I can make use of my experiences after all. Even if it’s not music, I can teach English, for kids.

Me: So do you want to proceed toward that direction?

Ai: Probably. It looks like there is a great demand for English.

Me: So, is that like you want to bring what you experienced in the US into Japan and have an impact on the Japanese society, rather than that your feelings against the Japanese society have changed?

Ai: Yes, I think so.

Me: Are you satisfied with the way you are now? Do you feel you found your way of living?

Ai: Yeah, I finally do at this age.

Me: So you have now a clear direction to aim for.

Ai: Until very recently, I had believed that I could work for a company and do a clerical job.

Me: Did you stop thinking that way at last?

Ai: I realized I could not do it.

Me: Did you accept that you could not do it?

…

Me: So you chose a way that was against your parents’ hope (as they did not want her to live by piano)

Ai: Completely opposite. Everything was against what they hoped for.

Me: But I think that is interesting, in a way.

Ai: But I wished my life had been ordinary.

Me: You did? You thought it would be better if your life had been something like a standard one or about the same as others and if you had been able to be happy with the life?

Ai: Don’t you think so?

Me: I probably do too.
Ai: Without any stress and complaint.
Me: Without thinking too much about unnecessary things.
Ai: I wish I could have lived that way. Without thinking like who I am, what I want to do, and if it would be OK to proceed that way.
Me: When you make a different choice from others do, you would spend extra time on thinking those kind of things.
Ai: I always felt I was different and in a wrong place.
Me: But if you have made a detour in your life, you will feel like you want to share your experiences with those who have done the same and been haunted by the similar thoughts.
Ai: That is true.

For Ai, the process of exploring her self-identity is not something she can enjoy. She always had faced the questions of who she was going to be and what she was going to do very seriously, to the extent where she became obsessed with those questions. On one hand, she wished her life was ordinary and happy with it. On the other hand, she truly wants to do something special that makes her feel she is someone special. Ai now hopes to have a more comfortable and secured life in Japan rather than continuing to live in the US with many risks in the future. At the same time, however, going back to the Japanese society is a new challenge for her because her oppositional feelings against Japan have not necessarily changed. Ai said there were still obstacles before she would be able to work as a piano teacher in Japan, such as the issues of location and her age. It is hard to have an appropriate place for teaching piano if she wants to manage a piano school by herself. She asked her parents if they allow her to remodel their house so that she could have a specialized room for teaching piano, but they turned down the suggestion. When she searched for possibilities as a hired teacher, she found out that age restrictions, which tend to be part of hiring requirement in Japan, may limit her options.
6. What types of community support their transnational lives? Is there such a thing as “Japanese community” for them?

The previous section uncovered how the interviewees found or have tried to find their own places to live and their ways of lives at the intersections between their education, work, and partner/family. This section further explores how their relations to others surrounding their lives influence their ways of living. Their connections to other international students/residents in the US and to the Japanese people both in the US and Japan are particularly focused.

What Shu described about his relations to the people surrounding him is a good sketch to overview the complexity of the social connections on which their transnational lives are based.

Me: You said you had many friends in the ESL schools. Were they from a variety of countries? Were there many Japanese among them?
Shu: Japanese and Korean students were the biggest part of them and there were some Taiwanese too. As for the other countries, it depended on each school’s characteristic. Some school had a large number of Europeans while others had more from different areas. In our school, there were students from Brazil and Turkey, besides the Japanese and Korean. There were a few people from other areas.
Me: Did you hang out with your classmates altogether?
Shu: Right.
Me: Did you extend your social connections after you got in a grad school, although you were busy?
Shu: Yes I did. I made many friends in school, not so much outside the school.
Me: Were you close to those in your study program?
Shu: Yes, well, I am a type of person who can be friends with almost anyone, but I tended to become close friends particularly with international students.
Me: Because you were able to share the same hardship with them?
Shu: I think probably it is the case with your school too, but there are not many Japanese in graduate schools.

Me: Yes.

Shu: It is hard to live alone, so we need some kind of community to help with each other. When I saw around me, there were many Chinese students. So I have a lot of Chinese friends from my grad school.

Me: You didn’t have many Japanese in your school. I had imagined that there would be more Japanese students in city Y. Was it the case only with graduate schools?

Shu: Very few. There are many Japanese in ESL schools both in city Y and city X. But if you try to find Japanese, most of them are either ESL students or those sent by companies in Japan and their families.

Me: So, it is hard to find someone in a similar status to yours?

Shu: It is. I had one classmate from Japan, but he quit and went back to Japan because he could not keep up with the program.

Me: So, did you feel like it was easier for you to be with international students than with the local American students?

Shu: I think so...well, I am not sure if I can call them characteristics, but Chinese people are all only child, provided gifted education and indulged by their parents, and came to graduate school in the US right after they graduated from Chinese 4-year college. So they are childish and good friends for me to hang out with. In contrast, the American students tend to be part-time and have jobs already.

Me: So, different in terms of the pace of lives?

Shu: Right.

The following is a list of typical factors in social relations that are mostly shared among the interviewees.

- Close connections to international students/residents other than the Japanese.
- Certain distance from the Americans: It, in some cases, relates to the experiences of discrimination.
● Complex relations among the Japanese: Relations among them can be varied-- close or not/ positive or negative -- depending on different situations. It also depends on how much they can share similar experiences and values with each other. Also how they want to be connected to other Japanese may change over time.

Each factor will be further articulated below.

Close connections to international students/residents other than the Japanese.
Me: So, you had a hard time because of English at the beginning?
Erika: Yes, problems with English and also, people were cold.
Me: They were? Is that about your classmates?
Erika: I didn’t have many opportunities to meet the Americans, but being with international students was much more comfortable for me. I had an language conversation partner, but it did not work that well.
Me: So you were not very comfortable when you talked to the local people.
Erika: Right.

Ai: There were many students from Malaysia and I happened to became good friends with them first. I began to learn from their truly “broken English” and then I became able to increase my vocabulary, understand grammars, and started to actually talk. I had an American roommate but we never talked. I could not talk to her because I could not understand what she said at all.

Ryo: When I was at an ESL school, we were forced to communicate. And we went on with the same backgrounds (learning at ESL schools). When I think about it, my best friends now are still those friends from the ESL school.
It is very natural that all of the interviewees positively talked about their international friends because intercultural experiences via English are or at least expected to be part of the goals of study abroad. Secondly, there tend to be less psychological barrier to communicate with international students/residents. When a Japanese meets those from non-English speaking countries, not only hardships to live abroad but a language anxiety can be easily shared. It is not easy especially for ESL school students to get to know with American people except for their teachers, which is a challenge that ESL school students typically find during study abroad. With the pressure that they have to have opportunities to speak English as much as possible, it is the second and the best choice to grow a good relationship with international friends. Regardless of how much they actually feel such a pressure, connections to international friends are essential part of studying and living abroad as they can often receive great supports from them. Even for the case with those from English speaking countries, experiences as international students in common help ESL learners to feel psychological closeness to them. International students/residents also tend to be ready to communicate with people from different countries compared to the local people. Additionally, some characteristics, like Shu mentioned about his Chinese friends, of certain cultures may happen to fit some people from Japan. Kana said that she liked German people because of their sincere kindness, for instance.

**Certain distance from the Americans and the experiences of discrimination.**

Like Shu and Kana, Lynn and Mei also narrated that they became good friends with people from a specific country respectively. For their cases, however, there had a certain sense of being excluded and discriminated by the Americans, behind such friendships with international students.
Me: Did you have any bad experiences, maybe a little discriminatory ones?

Lynn: There might be something like that at first. But I did not understand what people said, so it might be just delusion inside me, thinking like “this person does not include me.” Maybe because I could not communicate with them, I just believed so without knowing what they actually thought.

Lynn: There were many Mexicans in that area, they have Spanish accents, and the Mexicans are very nice, nicer than the Americans. People tell me my English has Spanish accents because I learned from them when I was young.

Me: So, you became good friends with them?

Lynn: Yes, that was the first time I had friends there. They told me to join them. I have a black hair, so maybe, though I am not sure, it was OK that I joined them because I had a black hair.

Me: Fitted?

Lynn: I fitted there. Back then, I became friends with the Mexicans, they taught me English, many of my friends were Mexican.

Mei: I was very close with the students from Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria...I am not so close to them now as all of us got married respectively.

Lynn: What do you like about them?

Mei: They are not sticky...They never say bad things about others, say things straight, and let things go even when there was something bad.

Lynn: So, did you get close to other Japanese just because they are Japanese?

Mei: Not particularly.

Me: How about the local Americans?

Mei: I lived in a share house with roommates. Among them, two were Americans, one was from Panama, and the other one was Japanese.

Me: So, you were not so close to each other but just shared a house?

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4 It was not clear if her word “Mexican” meant the Mexican Americans or international students from Mexico.
Mei: Well, American people in the midwest really believe that America is the number one. And for the people in the area I lived in, Chicago was the furthest place they ever been to. They were those kind of people, so their attitudes was something like, “you are foreign people and came to the US to get something and get a green card.

Me: I see.

Mei: There were obvious discriminations a lot.

Ai similarly talked about the American people living in countryside areas and their tendency for discrimination.

Me: Have you experienced any discrimination against the Asian and the Japanese?

Ai: Yes I have. It was usual thing.

Me: You got used to do it? You don’t care?

Ai: It could not be helped. It was a countryside.

Me: Did you just let it go?

Ai: Yes, there were other people who did not discriminate me, so I just talked to them. Oh, I remember one person corrected my pronunciation every time…

Erika also experienced exclusion because of her English ability and a difference in religion in her college and such experiences in fact led her to become psychology counselor for college students.

Me: When you were a college student, what would you talk about with a school counselor?

Erika: When I was a student…back then…well, peer relations. I was discriminated, so I wanted to talk about something to do with that.

Me: Because you were a Japanese and Asian?

Erika: Because I could not speak English well and, my school was strongly religious…When I said I was not a believer of the religion, then they did not accept me at all.
Complex relations among the Japanese.

It depends on people and situations if something like “the Japanese community” that may support their lives exist. ESL school students typically have to face the issue of how much they get closer to other Japanese students, because being with the Japanese reduces opportunities to practice English. Hikari and Ryo did not want a learning environment where the ration of Japanese students are high for this reason. While both of their work career paths are directed to the benefits of Japanese people, they just needed to focus on studying English. In contrast, Tomo, started her college study after a short period of study in an ESL school, had good relationship with other senior Japanese students. She was supported by them throughout her study there.

Fumi kept some distance from most of the Japanese people around her. That was because she felt many of Japanese people in ESL schools or community colleges looked less serious about English and study. On the other hand, she hopes to work in an area where many Japanese live because she wants to fully demonstrate her knowledge.

Me: You said you wanted to work in city Z. But was that important for you if there are many Japanese people or not in the place of your choice?
Fumi: No. But when I think about professionally working, my English ability is not enough yet and I wonder if I can work for an American company. I want to work at a post in company that is specifically for the Japanese and to make use of my knowledge. So I wanted to go to an area where many Japanese live, like city Z.
Me: So, it is about choosing the best place to demonstrate your abilities rather than your personal feelings about Japanese?
Fumi: That is right.

As the case with Yuri, Fumi also clearly differentiate some Japanese with high motivations from others and wants to get closer only to the former. On the other hand, Kana recalled the past when
she could not speak English well yet and there were differentiated groups based on if they can speak English or not.

Kana: If you cannot speak English, people think you are annoying. Even among same international student, it is like “you sucks.”

Me: They don’t treat you equally?

Kana: Uncool people, those who cannot speak English get together with the kind of people.

Me: You didn’t like that?

Kana: The Japanese gather within the Japanese...I was very embarrassed as I could not speak at first. It was embarrassing and humiliating that I could not join the group of people who can speak.

Nao also had realized she needed to make a great effort on her own without playing around to keep up with the group of people who could speak English very well.

Furthermore, as Shu indicated, not only the level of motivations toward study but differences in social statues divide the Japanese people in the US into different groups, which may or may not be called communities. Yuri proceeded to articulate certain kind of Japanese people in city Y, whose values and way of living were completely different from Yuri’s.

Me: Are there many people who came to city Y for something like “self-discovery?”

Yuri: Yes. City Y attracts many people and some people want to come here after learning about the city on Japanese magazines. I was very surprised to find that there were not so many people who have clear goals to come here. Quitting a job and studying abroad was such a big deal to me, as I had to use up all of my savings. So I thought people come here with certain goals. But when I was in the second ESL schools, although it was not the case with the first school, I met people who had worked for a fairly large company but they were tired and quit. They were not searching for the next job but stayed here only for the transitional period. I also saw some girls who came to city Y just because they always wanted to come. They really didn’t have money and didn’t have much motivations to
study, so they go to an ESL school that requires only an extremely low tuition. There were no homeworks and the school didn’t record attendance. They shared a room with 10 Japanese people. They illegally worked at a Japanese bar at night. There were many people like that, just dallied away the time. It might be different with the Japanese people in other cities and they might have purposes, but I think city Y is the city you could enjoy just being there. That is why there are different types of people here. Those who I happened to become friends with are like...one of them worked in Japan went on to a grad school with her savings and plans to pursue her work career here. Another friend is a researcher, studied at a grad school here and now studies as a postdoc. I can talk to them the same language naturally. My life has been established as I have been able to find such good friends over time.

Yuri sees those Japanese people in city Y with less clear goals to achieve are too different from her to be good friends. On the other hand, these types of people Yuri mentioned may overlap with the Japanese ESL students in city Z. In contrast to Yuri, Shu became very good friends with them.

Shu: I had a lot of Japanese friends when I was at city Z. They were all at an ESL school and they were a type of people like “When everybody's crossing on a red, it's not so scary.” That means they all had complex personal backgrounds in Japan, such as, one used to be a hostess and other guy was a freeter and touted. They all had some hidden backgrounds so they didn’t poke into others personal histories. They never looked down at each other.

In contrast to Yuri, Shu felt he was a part of that Japanese community where people care about each other without poking each other’s business deeply and judging each other’s background.

Unlike the ambivalent feelings some interviewees had about the Japanese people, Kana narrated straightforwardly the importance of a Japanese community for her.

Kana: For me, Japan will always be important, including a Japanese community and the food. I need my Japanese friends.
Me: You can understand each other well?
Kana: They are part of me even if I live in the US.
Me: Do you feel like there are specific things about something like “Japaneseness?”
Kana: Well, of course there are. It is hard to say because we cannot understand how the other people in different races feel and don’t know about their personalities, but I do understand the feelings of the Japanese because I am a Japanese. That’s just about it.
Me: Feeling closer to each other?
Kana: An Indian would understand other Indians with each other, for example.
Me: Do you feel the Japanese people you meet abroad are different from those you met in Japan?
Kana: I do, but it depends on each individual. There are people who I feel are really Japanese, but some are kind of international…
Me: They have international awareness? They have wider perspectives?
Kana: Well maybe... If I say so, it would sound sarcastic though... Well rather, my way of thinking has changed.
Me: Do the Japanese people in Japan tend to focus only on Japan?
Kana: That is also true. But I just haven’t seen what they see everyday so I began to feel different.
Me: So, how about the Japanese here?
Kana: As for the Japanese people who have lived here for a long time like me, I can understand how they feel the most. We have the same senses. So, if I see someone who was brought up here, that would be a different case since I didn’t see what they have seen. So it is not about what is the best but just about whose experiences are the closest to me.
Me: That is the most important?
Kana: I think people would find it the same. Some people would feel my sense is different from theirs.

The importance of Japanese communities to share similar experiences and feelings are often realized after they created a family with kids, as Erika points out.
Me: Do you have close relationships to other Japanese people around you?
Erika: Yes I do. As I am raising a child, I got to know more people. My son’s Japanese friends and from his Japanese daycare and their mothers are still our close friends. I also have several Japanese friends in my workplace.
Me: Are the relationships to them different from the ones with the local people?
Erika: Yes they are. Those Japanese people have similar experiences to mine...They lived in Japan, came abroad, had a hard time, and have raised kids. There are many things to share among us.

Me: Your husband is an American and how is the social relations around you? Is that centered on the group of Japanese mothers?
Lynn: In my social world...I have American friends, but now, after I had my daughter, I stepped into a Japanese community.
Me: Did you have more American friends than the Japanese before that?
Lynn: Yes I did. I just thought I needed mom friends and stepped in. Then I am now deeply immersed in there. Now 90 percents of my friends are Japanese. I just sometimes have a coffee with my old American friends.
Me: Which do you feel easier to be with?
Lynn: Well, there are some Japanese friends I really agree well with...But I have fun when I am with the Americans. A little different.
Me: Different feelings?
Lynn: Yea, a very different mood.
Me: Energetic?
Lynn: Right, they would start with hugs and “hi!” But Japanese people just say “long time no see.”
Me: Different expressions?
Lynn: Yes, so, very different. What I talk with you is also different.

Me: Do you find your own “Japaneseess” while living here?
Lynn: ...Well, rather, I often think “Where was I from”...For example, when my husband and I brush teeth and I see us in the mirror. Then I notice we look different and realize we are different.

Me: ...So you talk with your husband in English and did you have any experiences that you could not communicate with him?

Lynn: Well, we had many conflicts over child-rearing.

Me: I see.

Lynn: He wants to have a separate bedroom for the kid and let her cry... something like that.

Me: So, a little cultural differences in your ways of thinking?

Lynn: Even if I tell what I think, he just cannot understand my way of thinking.

Lynn began to miss the life in a countryside in Japan where she spent her childhood because she thinks it would be a better place for child-rearing as the neighborhood relationships are so close. She doesn’t have many Japanese around her now and hopes to have some mom community to join. Nao shares the same hope with Lynn.

Nao: My English is still my second language and far from perfect. I don’t understand many things. I don’t understand TV news and I still face many situations where I cannot communicate well. I think I maybe had some gloomy feelings about it without realising it. And when I talked with Japanese people in Japanese without thinking about language barriers, I was free from the gloomy feelings then. I realized about this only after I came to city X and lost any relationships with the Japanese people.

Me: So, you miss them?

Nao: Yes. It is strange but it was opposite when I studied at ESL schools. I didn’t want to speak Japanese and wanted to live in an environment where I can use only English. But I began to live here without any fixed dates to go back to Japan and now I will probably live here permanently. Then I started to think I want to be closely connected with Japan instead of losing more and more connections.

Me: So you realized that only after you came to city X?

Nao: I didn’t realize that when I was in Hawaii.
Me: Do you want to get your child to be connected with Japan?
Nao: Yes I do. S/he is a Japanese too, so I want to teach Japanese language and cultures to her/him.
Me: So you want to have a Japanese community considering that too?
Nao: Right.
Child-rearing away from their home countries is a hard task itself. And it is strongly influenced by cultural differences. That is why the interviewees realized the importance of Japanese community, especially mom community, to share their specific experiences as a transnational mother.

Finally, there is another aspect of differentiated relations among the Japanese people. As already observed repeatedly throughout the analysis, some of the interviewees have begun to find a distance from the Japanese living in Japan including their friends. Their perspectives often seem to be too different to share by those interviewees. Kana thought that was because of the differences in their experiences rather than the matter of which perspective is the best. Nao also described she has lost something she can share with her old friends in Japan. According to Nao, they did not evaluate her experiences in the US positively as their values are shaped only within Japan. Shu also realized that the Japanese tended to judge his experiences normatively and superficially while always trying to find fault with him.

Me: Did you think about going back to Japan after graduating from a grad school?
Shu: Well...Before studying abroad, I was planning to go back to Japan around at the age of 25 after two years’ study at a grad school. But it took longer for some reasons and I got older by the time I actually graduated. And, although I don’t want to talk about them so badly but the Japanese people, including my friends, tend to find fault with me.
Me: You mean your friends in Japan?
Shu: At the beginning of my study abroad, they told me “you must be playing around, your English must be poor.” After I became confident with my English, they said, “you are at a grad school and not working.”
Me: Did it bother you?
Shu: It did and it is very annoying that those people poke into my life only superficially. Shu seems to feel those Japanese people tend to judge his experiences without knowing what each experience really meant to him, unlike his Japanese classmates in ESL schools who did not judge others because they knew each individual has a complex background. That was the time he really had a Japanese community that supported him.

7. Gender-- Why do more women study abroad than men?
Few mentioned discriminatory environment based on gender in the Japanese society. Some of them just briefly indicated it is rather a common sense that it is still very challenging for women to build a successful work carrier in Japan, especially when they have children.

While being a distinct trend in study abroad by the Japanese, reasons for the relatively low ratio of male studying abroad are not very clear even for the interviewees.

Me: Did you find more girls tend to study abroad than guys?
Hikari: Well....not particularly.
Me:...Do the students in your college take a year leave or not?
Hikari: Maybe about half and half.
Me: Does taking a leave negatively affect job search?
Hikari: Well… I think, in Japanese colleges, many people think that doing something different such as taking a leave would affect their social status among the peers. There may be people who do not want to study abroad for that reason.
Me: So the extra year in a college would affect yourself rather than job search.
Hikari: Right.

Me: The data shows that less Japanese men study abroad and they tend to stay for a shorter period compared to Japanese women.
Yuri: I think that is true. Well, girls act bold and quit their jobs. I find many girls around me and many of them study at ESL schools until they reach the required TOEFL score and go on to college. Men would probably feel more comfortable when they live in Japan. They have to care about the” ladies-first rule” (that show respects to women) here and it looks harder for them to live here.

Me: Do you feel there is a specific situation that keeps men away from study abroad?
Ryo: Well...I have an interesting story. When I participated in the short-term exchange program in the US, I was the only guy among the participants. I thought about why and maybe, guys are just childish, so they feel scared. Women tend to be mentally stronger. That was how I thought about the reason.

When I asked Ryo if he thinks one of the reasons might be some risks involved in running off the rail in the Japanese society by studying abroad, he insisted people should not consider it risk.

That was because obtaining a degree at a prestigious college does not have a significant meaning in the era of internet where anyone can startup a company regardless of their education backgrounds like he does.

Shu: Well, women tend to have stronger desires to go to Europe or the US. And there are many women who like English. I was a student of an English language school outside of my college when I was in Japan. There were a variety of students there. I ended up studying abroad, but not all the people studied abroad and some people studied English as a hobby. There were more women than men there. As for the reasons...it may sound discriminatory if put this way, but women have more advantages in speaking English. Not so much in workplaces as in daily lives.

Me: I see...Could you provide more specific examples?
Shu: More specifically, for example, based on my observations, when comparing Japanese men to women...if there are a man and a woman and both of them cannot speak English, the woman would not be troubled that much because a kind gentleman or a man
with a secret intention would come to help her. The man who cannot speak English would be miserable. They would be left behind and treated like air.

Me: I see.

Shu: I saw those kind of things many times. If I put this in an odd way, we, foreign people do not know many things in the beginning. Simply because we are not Americans, we don’t know the local rules and don’t have any recommendations to do. But if you are a woman, not in all of the cases though, you will be helped by others generally compared to men. So women can take some advantages in that sense.

Me: So, women can go abroad feeling a little easier than men can?

Shu: Right. If guys want to pick girls, whether they are American or international girls, it will be hard to do that without enough English ability. They won’t wait while you are faltering.

What Shu vividly described matches what Yuri mentioned while how much this factor actually influences on the decisions to study abroad is still not clear and hard to estimate.

8. Conclusion of the analysis.

11 out of 12 interviewees in this research have stayed in the US for extended periods of time, two years or longer. 8 of them plan to live in the US permanently. The simplest story to explain what made them continue to stay in the US would be like “I will continue to stay in the US because I like the the US better than Japan. There are so many problems in the Japanese society but the society and the people are much nicer in the US. I also have a family here, so I am very happy to live there!” The reality is, however, far more complex. Most of the interviewees are not trying to gain edges to compete in globalized labor markets while they are aware that studying the US may be considered by the Japanese people as a strategic project that aims for a successful career with a high level of English proficiency.

They choose to come to the US even when they did not have clear complaint against the Japanese society. They do not accept the US society uncritically as being superior to and more
advanced than Japanese society. Rather, they keep observing both societies in different aspects and identify both the positive and the negative in each society. Those evaluations are based on their everyday lives and may depend on the places they actually live at. It is notable that some of the interviewees question the cultural framework based on the dichotomy of Japan vs. US. They consider that the differences of the values and behaviours among people as a matter of individual differences or that such differences are not so distinct enough to care about.

Some of the interviewees have stronger motivations to achieve their goals in the US. The US education and work environment provide better opportunities for them to pursue their work career goals. Linked to an aspect of the cultural experiences of study abroad, some of the interviewees were attracted to a specific city in the US respectively because of its distinct cultural characteristics. The US education are often situated as the second chances particularly because it is difficult to have the second chance in Japanese education system once they fail.

For many, however, just a little stronger interest in English and overseas led them to start their study in ESL schools in the US. Some are pushed by parents rather than their own will. Some needed to take a little more time to focus on what they wanted to achieve. Whether they planned or not, those starts brought them into “lives” rather than temporary “stay” in a foreign country far from Japan. Their lives in the US continue at the intersections among their 1) education, 2) work including future work career plans, and 3) people supporting them including partners/families and Japanese communities for some cases. As the lives of the interviewees are weaved into the intersection, they are finding their own places to live and trying to establish their way of lives. This means, in other words, to work through their self-identities--knowing who they are, what they like and want to do, and what to prioritize. Finding their own places does not
mean they can choose whatever places and lives without any constraint. When they prioritize
their education and work opportunities, staying in the US may be the only choice for them
regardless of their will to live in Japan or other places. Some of them have experienced
discrimination based on their English abilities and ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, they
continued to stay in the US to achieve their goals. When they have partners and families with
kids, they become essential part of their lives. Their life choices start to be largely influenced by
the significant others to them and they often have to make a choice that is against their original
career plans for the sake of benefits of families.

Most of the interviewees evaluate the US higher education and workplace cultures
positively compared to those in Japan. The US college education motivates students with
effective teaching methods and strict systems to control the progress of students. People typically
work for shorter hours in American workplaces, except for the companies run by the Japanese
and they do not have many social gathering outside of the workplace. The interviewees consider
that is one of the best part of working in the US because it enables them to enjoy their own
personal lives more. On the other hand, for those without already established work career in the
US, it is often difficult to envision their future when they want to pursue work career. English
language abilities may have extra values to expand job opportunities in Japan. It may not
necessarily be the case in the US however. That is why one of the interviewees, Ai began to think
about going to back to Japan to be someone “special” in the society. Beside such an ambition, the
US society is not well designed yet to support the lives of the financially insecure people. The
medical system particularly may be one of the biggest factors that would affect the decision of
the Japanese people to live in the US permanently or invite their families in Japan to live with them in the US.

Finally, the transnational lives of the Japanese people are often supported by certain communities, or a group of people at least. When they define them as “a community,” it means they can support each others’ lives through sharing common experiences and thoughts among them. All of the interviewees found a community among international students in the US helpful for them because they can share the experiences of living abroad while practicing speaking English when communicating with them. In this sense, they do not consider they have a Japanese community just because many Japanese people live nearby or somewhere in a city they live at. Rather, they tend to categorize and differentiate the Japanese people in the US based on the differences of their statuses, values, and ways of livings. It includes not only the Japanese living in the US but often the Japanese people living in Japan, particularly the interviewees’ old friends. In most cases, this results in either not having any specific Japanese communities or having a small Japanese community that shares common experiences such as a Japanese mothers’ group. Furthermore, it should be noted that even if each community is small or does not even exist, many of the interviewees do not feel unfit and excluded in the US society just because being different from other groups of people. Such diversities in individual lives in the US society create invisibility of minority group in a positive sense. The relative generosity and flexibility of the diverse US society to accept different ways of living may be one of the best factors supporting their lives in the US. At the same time, however, some interviewees suggested some aspects of the US society, such as the ladies-first cultures, may make the Japanese men find
it a little harder to live comfortably, compared to when they are in the Japan’s male-centered society.

Their transnational lives have an aspect of privileged experiences that need financial resource. Even so, they have to go through numerous challenges as international students/residents who are not familiar with the local cultures, while trying to overcome language barriers. They do not simply choose lives in one place over another but decide how to live and what to prioritize first. These processes include countless conflicts and compromises, probably just like any other lives would be.

4-4. Discussion and Conclusion of Chapter 4

Previous studies on study abroad and transnational migration explain motivations for study abroad predominantly by either desire for economic success in globalized labor markets or for international cultural-experiences. On the other hand, a couple of distinct trends have been suggested to explain the purposes of transnational migration by the Japanese: 1) Escape from undesirable work/social environment and 2) Self-discovery.

My pilot interview research was particularly aimed for uncovering what “self-discovery” means in their life contexts of the Japanese young people. The research revealed the Japanese people studying in the ESL schools in the US for about a year used the term “self-discovery” to indicate the processes where they try to find ways to live with more confidence in their life choices, including their future work career and relationships with their partners/familie. How they are ready for the future career psychologically was prioritized to what they actually are going to do here. Education experiences in the US as their second chances or new challenges also helped the processes where they gained a sense of accomplishment and confidence.
Economic interests and desires for becoming a global elite were clearly not their central focus. It is also suggested that their perspectives on the Japanese society tend to change positively over time, whether or not they escaped from Japan. While some of them had a strong opposition against the Japanese society, they re-worked with their feelings through observing both the US and the Japanese societies. They often ended up reevaluating and appreciating some aspects of the Japanese society. The follow up research also illuminated that the interviewees found the confidence and wider perspectives were the most valuable assets they attained through study abroad. They emphasized these aspects rather than their improved English abilities and their work careers after study abroad.

Based on this result, this main interview research attempted to further articulate the ways they find their own places and ways of living by focusing on longer-term processes. The question shifted from why they came and what they obtained into why and how they continued to stay. Unlike the pilot interview research, most of the interviewees, except for one, did not check “self-discovery” as their motivations for study abroad. They started at ESL schools just like those in the pilot study did. They, however, came to the US to pursue certain purposes--language study, major study, living in a place of dream, or life with partners. Still their motivations are not economically driven. What they are engaged in is finding their own places to live and own ways of living. Studying, working, and living abroad is not easy. Even when they feel more comfortable in the US, living transnationally provide specific challenges they have to face. They juggle different aspects of their life--education, work career, relationships and families, and relations to friends, communities, and people surrounding them. They cannot simply choose a place they like best, because they have different experiences and evaluations for the each aspect.
Prioritizing work career may mean to sacrifice other aspect as prioritizing families may do too. Each component constructs their lives and the interviewees constantly decide what to prioritize and try to establish their personal identities in their transnational lives. After going through these repeated processes, they may end up going back to Japan to find their own places.

Finally, the analysis did not clearly indicate that the interviewees escaped from Japan because of the discrimination against women. It does not mean there are no salient sexism in Japan of course. Sexism exists but it seems that they just did not focus on the part as a target of confrontation. Rather, however, many of them expressed their dissatisfaction against the Japanese education system that does not motivate students nor does give any second chances once they fail. They frequently referred to inflexibility and intolerance of the Japanese society, which does not easily accept a way of living different from the life course model normatively designed based on age. It seemed that relative flexibility and generosity in the US society was the best reason to make them feel comfortable and continue to stay in the US. A “place” for them means somewhere they can live their lives comfortably without any restraint that denies their ways of livings, after all.

Based on the review of previous research in Chapter 2, two problems to approach in this dissertation were identified. The first one is to examine how study abroad or transnational migrations that started with study abroad function as beneficial “psychological moratoria” to deal with the questions of self-identities, which many people commonly have in late modern societies. The second is to explore possibilities of any kind of personal statement/social critique by each transnational migrant/mover will lead to more collective social changes that mitigate/solve oppressions and difficulties that today’s Japanese, particularly young, people
experience. The analysis of the interview research in this dissertation demonstrates that not many of them had a serious conflicts against their social environment in Japan or extremely strong dissatisfaction against “Japan” in a general sense to the extent to call their actions as “escape” or “exodus”, although it is still critically important to focus on the serious conflicts some of them indeed had. Instead, they expressed that they had their own personal agenda in their processes of exploring self-identities and deciding who they are and what they do. Study abroad was often situated as a way to tackle the agenda. These tendencies, where some part agree with the findings of previous research while others do not, is highly likely to be linked to class/socio-economic status.

Estimating based on their life contexts, especially their relationships with families, the interviewees in the main interview research tended to come from affluent family, who were willing to support the cost of studying in the US. On the other hand, in the pilot research, more than a half of the interviewees financially prepared themselves. This is very natural contrast, in fact, considering the differences in the averaged length of stay of the interviewees between the two research. In the pilot research, the majority of them had stayed/planned to stay up to only one year while those in the main research stayed longer. Staying longer than one year in the US usually require other financial resources in addition to own savings, such as supports from parents, job in the US, or marriage to those living in the US. The class disposition indicates most of the interviewees did not have an economic difficulties in their lives in Japan and rather had more social and educational opportunities with their parents’ supports. Even without much support by parents, they at least had jobs to save money to prepare for study abroad. It will be plausible that many of them did not have serious confrontation against their social environment
in Japan because of their economically secured status relatively. It should be highlighted that some of the interviewees who had serious conflicts/problems in their environment in Japan and said indeed “I hate(d) Japan,” often had to go through financially difficult situations during their stay in the US because of lack of parental support or less opportunities for jobs with stable income. They still did not go back to Japan and rather chose to struggle with the difficulties, probably very because of their confrontations with Japan.

Another important aspect that may be covered under the seemingly affluent interviewees’ status is that, in reality, many of them share “precariousness” of their lives regardless of their socio-economic status. First of all, the relative economic security of contemporary Japanese young people often depends on their parents’ financial support. Parents’ higher socioeconomic status, however, does not necessarily guarantee their children’s’ secured status. They may still assume parents’ backup support even when they have difficulties of finding stable income source, but they cannot assume it would last forever simply because parents are getting old. Secondly, many of the interviewees did not have clear plans or ideas about their future careers. Some of them were in fact at “freeter” status with part-time and/or temporary jobs before coming to the US. Even in their lives in the US. some had access only to precarious jobs with lower and unstable income while other several interviewees became stay-at-home mothers and often have vague anxieties about their future job careers. Regardless of their different individual situation, what is common about their situation is, flexible but uncertain- thus precarious- nature of their lives. They still, however, commonly believed they could survive anyway by finding some kind of jobs. This precariousness is, as reviewed in Chapter 2, now extensively observed in the current Japanese society where the job market is highly casualised.
Those who “hated” Japan had negative opinions against many aspects of “Japanese society”-- which would be represented by socioeconomic and cultural systems operating in schools, workplaces, public spaces, family/partners, and peer, community relationships. What is remarkable is, however, that even among those with the relatively “peaceful” relationships with Japan often state their dissatisfactions against their education experiences and the Japanese education system. Most of the interviewees more or less expressed some criticism against education in Japan. Again, it refers to the single-track, tournament-like, and highly regimented education system that does not motivate students nor does give any second chances once they fail. This system is tightly connected not only to school and workplace cultures but to the inflexibility observed everywhere in contemporary Japanese society except for the labor market. The interviewees began to recognize and feel uncomfortable with such inflexibility that limits their choices in ways of lives before or after they came to the US. Gender-based discrimination was not distinctly mentioned by the interviewees but it probably because of their relatively fewer work experiences in Japan. Their images toward such discrimination that apparently exists in contemporary Japan, however, may be a part of their perceptions of inflexible “Japanese society” which limits life opportunities of women. Previous research pointed out the Japanese women’s life is more flexible and open to “foreign-ness” compared to men very because women are not assumed as the main and permanent actors on the regimented field of work. Japanese women also tend to have relative flexibilities in terms of their partnership. Due to the uneven relationship among different races, ethnic groups and gender, which are further complicated with the factor of language ability, marriage between Japanese women and American men are far more likely to occur than the one between Japanese men and American women. This would, at least partly,
explain why the predominance of women who voluntarily came to the US on their own and continue to stay. Men, on the other hand, may feel pressured and choked very because of the expectations toward them to continue to stay right on the rail, and they probably tend to do so more than women do while many of women now share the same pressures once they chose to work-career oriented lives.

So, going back to the questions raised above, do their study abroad/transnational migration function as beneficial “psychological moratoria” to deal with the questions of self-identities? The answer is yes, as far as the cases of this research, based on the observations of the ways they find comfortable places to live and their own ways of living. But the positive answers come out maybe because the two set of interview research in this dissertation attracted those who were willing to talk and relatively satisfied with their lives at the point of interviews. Negative experiences such as psychological breakdown were reported in other research (Fujita, 2008). As Furlong (2008) and Côté and Allahar (1994) pointed out, the extended period of “psychological moratoria” has risks to turn out as unbeneﬁcial and devastating experiences especially if an individual lacks of resources to make the period constructive or the act of taking time out is not socially well sanctioned. It is still possible to argue any kind of seemingly negative experiences can be situated as a process of their lives, so the judgement of “success or failure” should be carefully argued. The need of social support on the act of taking time out is, however, essential. When those who spent extended time outside Japan consider options to come back and resume their lives in Japan, whether they positively choose to live in Japan or simply could not find a way to continue to live in the US., how their experiences is going to be evaluated and perceived will be critical-- not only to facilitate their transitions but to make wider
range of people in Japan recognize possibilities of life off the rail with expected positive outcomes after that. Taking time out can have different types of forms and is not limited to going outside of the home country. Whereas Japanese hikikomori (social withdrawal) may be an extreme case of taking time out, if the acts of taking time out is socially accepted, they may not need to keep withdrawing, being afraid of the judgement others would throw against them when they actually get ready to resume their social lives. While social withdrawal and study abroad may look like being at the two extreme ends, they are certainly linked via precariousness and ontological questions that are commonly shared by Japanese young people.

The answer to the second problem -- possibilities of any kind of personal statement/social critique by each transnational migrant will lead to more collective social changes that mitigate/solve oppressions and difficulties -- may not go beyond speculation, but it is possible that wider social acceptance of the act of taking time out or getting off the rail will open possibilities to socially accept different ways of lives, which may eventually lead Japanese society to becoming more flexible where individuals will be able to have more choices to live comfortably. As Furuichi (2011) suggests, today’s Japanese young people, or those living their youthful, precarious lives may not be strongly interested in radical social movements against societies. The interviewees do not blindly believe in the superiority of the West or the US any longer. They, instead, carefully observe and evaluate their social environment in each place in Japan and the US. The seemingly happy young people who went across the sea and kept struggling to find their own places, however, have already have demonstrated and communicated the possibilities of different way of lives, and therefore, have certain influences, if not huge, on others’ perceptions on the possibilities of lives of the Japanese people. Gradual accumulations of
such subtle influences and consequent changes over time, I believe, will lead to changing the society eventually.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

This dissertation started with my personal interest in the inflexibility and intolerance of the Japanese society, which I felt myself when I lived in Japan. As I have lived in the US for a decade, I am still constantly thinking and trying to figure out where is the best place to live for me and my family, what is my own way of living I should and want to pursue. It is undeniable that these personal interests and history influenced how this research was designed and analyzed. The voices of the interviewees, nevertheless, demonstrated their everyday struggles over their places to live comfortably and/or satisfactorily. Previous studies have described as if transnational movers were 1) competitive global elites who are strongly determined to success in globalized markets or 2) someone fully enjoys experiences abroad that led them to be internationally cultivated persons. These portraits fail to capture the detailed struggles of people and conflicts within different aspects of their lives in their transnational lives. Economic drives and instrumental motivations cannot fully explain the complexity of the lives of people who urged to or somehow ended up moving abroad.

The uniqueness of the study abroad/transnational migration by Japanese young people is identified in relation to the questions of self-identities that has become salient in late modern societies including Japan. The dissertation identified two set of tasks to pursue, based on the reviews of previous research: 1) to examine how study abroad or transnational migrations that started with study abroad function as beneficial “psychological moratoria” to deal with the questions of self-identities, which many people commonly have in late modern societies, and 2) to explore possibilities of any kind of personal statement/social critique by each transnational
migrant/mover will lead to more collective social changes that mitigate/solve oppressions and difficulties that today’s Japanese, particularly young, people experience. Through tackling with these problems, this dissertation contributes to offering perspectives to understand the lives, the struggles, and the difficulties specific to Japanese young people today, and to shed lights on the problems of the Japanese society that causes such difficulties. It was most represented by the inflexible education systems and inflexible Japanese society as a whole that provide only single track life choice without any second chance. Most of interviewees certainly used their time outside of Japan to deal with the questions of their self-identities. While the lives in a foreign country is not necessarily full of hopes and ideals, they struggle to find their own places and ways of living and re-negotiate their relationships to Japan. Relative tolerance of the US society to accept diversities compared to the Japanese society often support their decisions so continue to stay in the US and find a place there. While some of them had strong confrontation against Japanese society as a whole, many of them did not necessarily refuse Japan as their place of living. Their relatively mild claims against education systems and inflexibility of the Japanese society may, still, have possibilities to change the oppressive structures via their demonstrations and communications of their way of lives.

Before ending the journey, based on the findings and discussions of the dissertation, I suggest the following recommendations to the Japanese society. First of all, the education system needs to be reformed by learning from the US college education. Education in Japan should motivate students more effectively both with the pedagogy and the system itself. Rather than compelling students to study for exams, meanings and purposes of learning in relation to the real life should be emphasized more. Secondly, the Japanese workplace cultures that take long hours
of working for granted should be reconsidered. It deprives people of their time to commit something besides work in their lives, including families. This is one of the factor that makes it difficult for people to have kids while pursuing work career. Thirdly, the Japanese society should have more flexibilities and generosity to accept different ways of living. Normative expectations toward a model life course based on age should be abandoned. This will also lead to creating second chances of life, where people will be able to have chances regardless of their age. It should be widely recognized that studying, working, and living abroad is not only about learning English and increasing employability. It should be socially accepted that people often need to face themselves, gain a sense of confidence for their lives, and figure out their places to live and how to live. Transnational migration may be a way of realizing one or more of these. The Japanese government recently launched “gap term” system in colleges, following the gap year in the UK. Although it seems to have started to promote Japanese college and their students to be globally competitive, I hope these kinds of new attempts will yield unexpected outcomes, which shift people’ frameworks of thinking by starting to recognize and eventually accept diverse ways of living with “gaps” --extra times and opportunities added whenever needed.

This dissertation has several limitations that require further research in the future. First of all, the interview research drew only on the people who were willing to talk to me. They typically looked ready to talk about their experiences because they accepted their lives positively. There may be people who do not want to talk to because they have serious difficulties in their lives. Secondly, financial aspects and economic situations surrounding young people abroad were not deeply explored. Some of the interviewees were financially not stable while others were engaged in part-time jobs illegally. Still more research is needed, focusing on their
socioeconomic status and relating it to the socioeconomic situations surrounding Japanese young people. Thirdly, roles and effects of social media including internet and the development of social network tools, were not fully explored. I asked about the importance of these factors in the interviews and they felt it was convenient for both them and their families/friends in Japan to be able to communicate instantly. I, however, could not deeply explore how more frequent and easier communications through the internet between Japan and overseas have significantly changed their perception of their transnational lives and relations to Japan over time. More detailed investigation should follow. Lastly, the experiences of Japanese young people in the US is likely to be comparable with those in other countries. Any difference and specificity of each place should be worth investigating. The interviewees had complex feelings and relations both to Japanese communities and the Japanese society. The processes and conditions where Japanese communities are shaped, however, should be more closely examined while referring to other transnational studies.
APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARTICIPANTS OF THE INTERVIEW RESEARCH

Thank you for your participation in this research. Please answer to each question by writing your answers or choosing most applicable answers to your experiences. If you feel uncomfortable with any questions, you can skip it anytime.

1 When did you arrive in the U.S.?

2 How long are you planning to stay here?

3 What are your purposes of this study abroad? (Check all that apply)
   a) To get better job       b) To be promoted in your company
   c) To keep your current job position  d) To improve English skill
   e) To improve general communication skill  f) To meet new people
   g) To have different experiences  h) To discover self
   i) To have time thinking about your life
   j) Others—please write freely

4 What is your plan after completing the current curriculum in your school?
   a) Go back to where I was before coming to the U.S. (school or workplace)
   b) Find a new job in home country      c) Find a new job in the U.S.
   d) Go to new school in home country    e) Go to new school in the U.S.
   f) Others ( )

If you chose d), what type of school are you planning to go?
   a) Different ESL school   b) Community college  c) Vocational school
   d) University / Liberal Arts College
   e) Others ( )

5 What was your occupation just before coming to the U.S. (circle one)
   a) Student  → (circle one) Two year college    Four year college  Vocational college
                  Graduate school    Junior high school    High school
   b) Employed      c) Self-employed     d) Part time worker
   e) Unemployed
   f) Others ( )
6 What is the highest level of schooling you have achieved? (circle one)
   a) Junior high school / high school   b) Two year college   c) Four year college
   d) Vocational college               e) Graduate school
   f) Others (                         )

7 What is (was) your major if you have any?

8 Where are you from?

9 How old are you?

10 What level is your English proficiency (Circle closest one)?
   a) Business level       b) Almost no problem at daily conversations
   c) Sometimes have difficulties at daily conversations but mostly OK
   d) Often have difficulties at daily conversation
   e) Always have difficulties at daily conversations

That is all of our questions. Thank you very much for your participation.
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