

“Communication and cultural identity change: case story of a Japanese returnee studying abroad”

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Background to the study

This paper presents a case story from a broader investigation into the communication patterns and cultural identity change of Japanese people who have lived abroad, including returnees and international students. As of 2011 there were about 67 000 Japanese children living abroad, and that year nearly 10 000 of them returned to Japan after being educated in non-Japanese schools for a year or more (Clavel, 2014). The circumstances of Japanese returnees have been described as unique due to the pressure to conform they experience upon their return, and the tendency of Japanese society to ostracise those who fail to conform (Yoshida et al, 2009). Studies on returnees reported how these culturally diverse individuals suffer after their return to Japan, particularly in the context of entering the ethno-centric and monoculturally-oriented Japanese education system (Shimomura, 2014). However, by the 1980s, prestigious Japanese universities took measures to allow special entry requirements for returnee students, thus causing them to be stereotyped as not only social misfits, but also as unfairly privileged English-speaking elite (Goodman, 1990). More recently, scholars such as Sueda (2014) point out the inaccuracy of such stereotypes due to the fact there are returnees who live in non-English speaking countries in Asia and attend Japanese schools while overseas. Therefore, returnee status is not a guarantee of English language proficiency. Furthermore, studies have tended to focus on returnees' difficulties in adjusting to the Japanese schooling environment. As more of these returnees of the 2000s and 2010s reach adulthood, research is needed to explore beyond the immediate impact of living abroad on returnees—how it influences their cultural identity and communication—and to investigate returnees' subsequent experiences in Japanese universities and workplaces.

The need for longitudinal research on returnees and the value of narrative inquiry approach

In order to explore in detail the returnee experience, qualitative case study approach has been used effectively in previous studies (Ford, 2009; Kanno, 2000, 2003). However, despite calls for more longitudinal research in related literature on cultural adaptation and bicultural identity (Tanaka et al, 1997; Lee, 2011; L. Brown, 2009; R. Brown et al., 2013; Feng, 2014; Fuligni, 2001, 2008; Jiang, 2010; Kashima & Abu-Rayya, 2014), studies that take a qualitative longitudinal approach remain in the minority. Similarly, the value of a narrative inquiry approach to investigating these phenomena is only recently becoming more recognised. Clandinin & Connelly's (2000) and Barkhuizen's pioneering work with narrative inquiry have mainly fo-

cused on teacher and student identity (Barkhuizen et al, 2013), but its transferability to examining cultural adaptation is readily apparent. If cultural identity is to be recognised as fluid, something that is socially constructed through communication and interaction, as Hall (1990) and others have proposed, then narrative inquiry, with its emphasis on co-constructed narratives between researcher and participant, is eminently suited to gaining insight into the underlying mechanisms. This paper presents a selected case story from a wider study investigating the cultural identity change and communication patterns of Japanese returnees, exemplifying the rich detail achieved by conducting a narrative inquiry wherein the analysis is embedded in the story constructed from the data collected.

Prior to Barkhuizen, Kanno's work on Japanese returnee youth (2000, 2003) employed detailed case studies to reveal the identity changes that occurred during their sojourn in Canada, and the further challenges they experienced upon their return to Japan. By conducting data collection multiple times, Kanno was able to record not only changes that occurred, but also to identify causal links between influential factors, and the outcomes. Studies on cross-cultural adaptation focus on identifying factors that affect the "success" of individuals' adaptation. As stated earlier, these studies tend to rely on single instances of data collection, which provide only a snapshot of the situation at a single point in time. This approach to data collection fails to reflect a constructivist view of cultural adaptation, whereby adaptation is a process with no fixed endpoint, that may take a seemingly meandering path towards psychological equilibrium, rather than a straightforward route towards cultural assimilation.

Method

Participant recruitment and gathering information

I met Maki when I attended a public seminar held at her university in 2017, and recruited her for the study, along with five other participants. The participants were provided with information explaining the research and I gained their written agreement to be involved. I interviewed Maki four times over the course of about six months, from November 2017–April 2018. I also interviewed the other participants, whose case stories are not included in this paper. The interviews, conducted mainly in English, with Japanese used occasionally, were semi-structured in order to allow participants the freedom to give detailed answers and speak about what seemed relevant to them.

The first interview with each participant was typically retrospective in content, establishing the participants' background and their past experiences of living overseas. Apart from general information about dates and locations of significant life experiences, I focused on inquiring about their communication networks and engagement with mass media in order to establish a baseline for factors that might influence their cultural identity. The participants also filled in a visual timeline (Figure 1) of significant dates and events up to the present. This served as a helpful memory aid to some participants, and also a prompt to stimulate further questions during the interview (Bagnoli, 2009). In follow-up interviews I asked them to explain to me any changes in their communication patterns, including mass media engagement and interpersonal communication.

The interviews were audio recorded and summarised, with key utterances being transcribed verbatim.

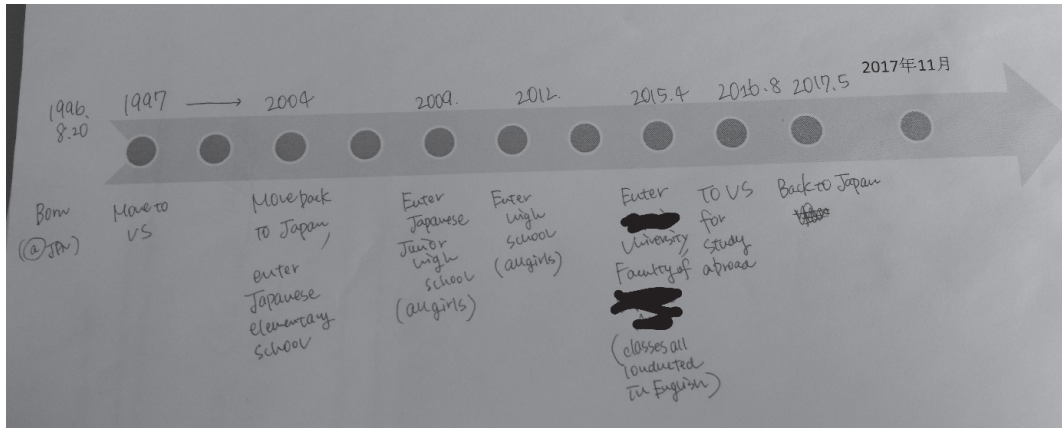


Figure 1: Maki's visual timeline

They are reproduced here as direct quotes.

Constructing the case stories

I listened to the interview audio recordings multiple times, creating written summaries of each one and partially transcribing verbatim relevant portions that I felt were particularly relevant or significant to the research aims. I focused on identifying content regarding the following:

- Important life events (for example, leaving home country, returning to home country, entering school, graduating school, moving house)
- Changes in communication patterns (making a new friend, reducing use of social media, starting to watch a new TV series)
- The causes of those changes
- The effect of those changes
- References to culture and identity

Having identified these elements in the interview data, I began to construct the information into chronological narratives for each participant. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) acknowledge that in interviews, research participants often relate information out of order, add information not related to the research aims, or omit details, which they may then recall in subsequent interviews. Therefore, identifying and selecting information that meets the research aims, and condensing the meaning of the stories constitutes an important part of the data analysis (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In addition, sometimes research participants had multiple changes occurring almost simultaneously, so it was necessary to evaluate the relationship between changes and the relative significance of changes when constructing the case stories.

Conducting multiple interviews over a period of time enabled me to ask follow-up questions, clarify information from previous interviews, and develop rapport and familiarity with the participants. This added further reliability to the interpretation and analysis (embedded in the case story) of the ideas and assumptions underlying the participants' accounts of their experiences (Bell, 2002). This process of making

meaning from the raw interview data has been called “narrative knowledging” (Barkhuizen, 2011), which includes cooperating with participants to co-construct narratives with a specific focus that answers the aims of the research.

The next section presents the case story of Maki⁽¹⁾. The story covers her childhood years spent in the United States, her return to Japan and her middle and high school years there, followed by the start of her university life in Tokyo, her semester abroad in Washington D.C., and her experience returning to Tokyo to continue her tertiary studies. These experiences are narrated with a focus on analysing Maki’s communication experiences, including interpersonal communication and consumption of mass media, and the relationship of these experiences with changes in her cultural identity.

Maki’s story

Born in Japan in 1996, Maki was 20 years old when I first interviewed her in November 2017. When she was about one year old, her father’s employer transferred him to New York, and Maki and her mother accompanied him. In New York, Maki attended a kindergarten that she described as “totally American”. In an effort to give Maki exposure to Japanese people and language her mother had her take dance lessons and piano lessons from Japanese instructors.

Maki recalled that her parents chose not to send her to a Japanese language school. This was likely due to distance and inconvenience as they did not own a car, and the school was located far from their home in Manhattan. She completed elementary second grade in the United States, then repeated the same year of schooling in Japan after their return in 2004. Maki’s school teachers in the United States told her mother that Maki was “gifted”. The principal of the school offered to allow her to skip a grade, and her 2nd grade teacher took time to give Maki advanced writing lessons separate to her classmates. This would inspire Maki’s mother to make every effort to continue to nurture her daughter’s language skills after their return to Japan.

When describing the linguistic capabilities of her family, Maki explained that she spoke English “the most”, with her mother speaking some “but not well”, while her father was able to speak “business English”.

Upon their return to Japan Maki enrolled in Japanese elementary school second grade. The suburb where they lived in Tokyo was known as an “international” area, but when Maki’s mother asked for her preference as to which school she wished to attend, Maki stated that she wanted to go to Japanese school rather than an international school, “because I’m Japanese”.

She recalled that at her school it was not necessary to remove outside shoes and wear slippers inside, which prompted her to describe her school as “kind of unique”, and “more American”. The student body included some non-Japanese, mixed Japanese heritage students. The school also held events in cooperation with international schools in the area, so Maki felt that her elementary school experience was not completely “Japanese-immersed”.

She acknowledged her mother's effort in finding and sending her to a school that provided such diverse cultural opportunities, stating,

*I think my mom did a pretty hard job to find that kind of environment for me.
(Interview 1, December 9, 2018)*

Maki spent six years at the school, completing her junior high school years there as well. When asked about her friendships and social networks at the time, she said that she did not have particularly close friends during elementary school, and spent most of her time studying, both at school and at a "juku" or cram school, in order to take the entrance exams for junior high school. Her mother also sent her to take extra English lessons at a cram school staffed with teachers from English-speaking countries including Canada and Australia.

In contrast to the "international-friendly" atmosphere of her elementary school, Maki claimed that the junior high school section was very "old-fashioned" and "the teachers weren't really international-minded". She remembered that their English classes were not very interactive, focusing rather on grammar and reading to prepare students for their entrance exams.

There were few other students who had lived overseas or had any international experiences, which made Maki "kind of special", as she put it. In reaction to this staid environment, a new side of Maki's personality began to emerge during her third year of junior high and first year of high school, which she described as "sassy" or "savage". She said,

... towards the [English] teachers I would say 'Your pronunciation sucks,' I was really savage ... (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

This phenomenon of reacting in opposition to an all-Japanese environment was also observed by Kanno in her 2000 study of Japanese returnee youth who had lived in Canada. Kanno noted that some returnees experienced conflict between a side of themselves that wished to be accepted and reintegrated into their Japanese environment, and a side that wished to retain and emphasize their difference from their peers. In Kanno's study, she observed this among her participants a short period after returning to Japan, while here Maki displayed this behavior as long as eight to nine years after returning to Japan.

Wondering if her "savage" attitude was prompted by mistreatment from those around her, I asked if anyone at school was "mean" to her, which Maki denied.

... the teachers weren't mean to me, but they definitely knew that I was better, in terms of speaking ... and like the students as well were like, 'Oh Maki speaks well ...' they would be like 'Ooooh' ... (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

According to her, her peers and teachers accepted and admired her English proficiency. Maki's experience in this regard is anomalous with findings of previous studies on Japanese returnees, which reported that

returnees suffered bullying and ostracism from their peers due to their differences, including their English proficiency (Kidder, 1992; Kanno, 2003; Yoshida et al., 2009).

It was also around this time in 2011 that she gained access to the LINE app and made a chat group with her school friends.

Although Maki had left the United States at the age of 7, with occasional holidays back to New York over the years, her experiences had clearly left a deep impression on her. This also eventually influenced her choice of university. She explained,

I always had that kind of identity that I had, advantage in English, or international things, and that's why I entered [university name] which had like an English education ... and that's why I chose to use like a different style of entrance exams as well ... (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

She said,

I think because I was in this Japanese-oriented environment, I had this will to be in a more international area ... to prepare for my future ... (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

Maki credited her mother with providing the means to pursue her international ambitions. Throughout junior high and high school, her mother sent her to weekly lessons at a cram school that specialized in English communication. She also had a private tutor, a female Japanese university student who had grown up in California and spoke English fluently. Maki realized that her mother wanted her to attend an international university, so from first- or second-year high school, Maki was already committed to the goal of attending a top university with an immersive English department.

During the first year of junior high school, Maki's family moved to a suburb further from her school. This made it difficult to maintain close contact with her school friends. She compared it with the relative ease of maintaining relationships across distance by using social media in the present.

Maki: ... I couldn't keep in touch with a lot of them, because there weren't [sic] like Facebook and stuff ... now I can finally contact with people around the world, but at that time no, we only had ... mobile phone that like

Researcher: Flip phone?

Maki: exactly, so yeah, I sometimes meet them, but like collectively, you know ... (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

Her elementary school classmates still organised informal reunions and social events, but Maki said that these days either she chose not to attend, or she was not invited, only seeing evidence of the occasions via social media afterward.

Although she did not meet with these former classmates in person, they did maintain weak ties via social media including Instagram and Facebook. In the first year of high school Maki made a Facebook account, and an Instagram account, although few of her peers used social media, so she rarely used them.

However, maintenance of relationships did not depend entirely on the availability of social media. Maki explained that she had spent a lot of time and experienced important events with her junior high and high school friends, which had formed strong social bonds that lasted beyond graduation.

She contrasted this with the university environment, saying that

... you only have like this really weak relationship being in class together ... you really don't get to know a lot of people you just know how their study habits ... I really am not a big fan of that. (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

Maki also characterised herself as

... more like narrow deep relationship people person ... I don't have a lot of friends that I keep in touch, but like I definitely have like really strong relationship. (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

I asked Maki about the transition from high school to university and how it affected her social networks. She explained that before entering university, she had “two communities”—her Japanese friends at school, and her cram school classmates. She described the cram school classmates as being “really good at English” and was pleased to have an environment where she could comfortably speak English, in contrast to her high school environment where she described her classmates as “Japanese-minded”.

The separation between these two communities was such that Maki found herself going to extremes to avoid being different to her high school classmates. She said,

I actually had to fake that I was taking like the normal [university] entrance exam because this was like early admission so it was like earlier than other students and I didn't want to like, you know, stress them out being like 'I got early admission', because ... it's not taboo but it's kind of weird to get early admissions in Japan, so I had a fake self, saying, 'Oh I'm also doing like the normal studying stuff', and I had to do that at school because that was ... the traditional way of sending students to university so I took like a really really unique route to university ... I didn't feel comfortable at one point talking with a lot of my friends at Japanese school ... but ... at cram school, my other community, in that sense ... I could talk about what I wanted to talk about ... when I was speaking Japanese school I had to think before I could say something, but in the other community ... there wasn't any kind of reserve, I could just say what I wanted to say ... (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

A number of her cram school classmates entered the same university as Maki, but she intended to meet new people rather than continue to socialize with familiar faces. The transition from going to a Japanese school and enjoying her regular contact with an English-speaking community on the side, to entering an

English-dominant university environment was a “big change.” Maki recalled that the 1st year students attended a compulsory one-day orientation camp where only English was spoken, and it made such an impact on her that when she returned, she told her mother, “I want to speak English right now… I can’t speak in Japanese.”

Maki’s goal to meet and befriend new people at university was only partly achieved. She encountered many of her cram school classmates in her classes, but through those connections she was able to meet friends of friends, and even other students outside her department. Most of these university connections were Japanese people who had overseas experience.

When asked if she had befriended non-Japanese students, Maki explained that she had not because they were relatively few in number, and she “wasn’t really feeling comfortable going out of [her] comfort zone” by approaching them.

Maki studied abroad in Washington D.C. for nine months from September 2016 until May 2017. She found it difficult to make friends aside from other Japanese exchange students, until she joined the university’s acapella club and formed close friendships there, mostly with students of Asian heritage. Maki found that with these friends she shared common likes and dislikes such as food preferences, that made her feel comfortable spending time with them. The club was relatively small, composed of about 15 students, which also made it easy to talk and socialize.

The club was a multicultural group, including Chinese students who had come to the United States during high school, a Chinese heritage student who had come from New Zealand, a female student with Brazilian heritage, an Anglo-American female student, and a Korean American student. Maki enjoyed her activities with the group, which included performances at local venues, such as Christmas events at churches and public libraries.

Other than the acapella club, Maki mentioned that she also joined a Japanese club. This club was for students who were Japanese, or students who liked Japan and had an interest in Japanese culture or language. It seemed that she had joined partly out of a sense of obligation, saying that she was there “because they wanted some members…to help out”. She also got to know other students who she met in her dormitory.

Maki summarized her study abroad friendships by saying,

I can’t say that my friendship [network] was really wide, but I know people, and I know them well, and I still keep in touch. (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

During her study abroad, Maki also had an internship at the Washington branch of a Japanese TV channel. It was low commitment, only requiring her presence on Friday afternoons, but she described it as “really fun”, and mentioned how when guests came from Japan, she was always invited to join them for meals out. All the staff at the internship were Japanese, either newly from Japan, or United States-based Japanese.

Maki was also influenced by one of the classes she took during study abroad, which was a women and gender studies class. For this class she chose to do a research assignment on the Japanese workplace policies regarding female employees and maternity leave. Through the assignment she found accounts of women suffering harassment and unfair treatment for taking maternity leave. Maki concluded that this was a violation of human rights and felt discouraged by the impression she gained that such conditions were embedded in Japanese culture and historical treatment of women. It also made her contemplate her own future career in Japan, and the difficulty of balancing both work commitments and family commitments.

When asked about how she kept in touch with friends and family in Japan during her study abroad, Maki admitted that at first, she often called one close friend whenever she had “trouble”. However, as she became involved with more activities, the contact soon diminished to occasional messages using the LINE app.

After her return from study abroad, Maki had little contact with overseas friends except for tagging each other on social media such as Facebook. An exception to this was a friend from the acapella group, a Korean American female student named Yuna. Maki often voice-called Yuna using the Facebook Messenger app. The advantage of Messenger was that she could use it to stay in touch even though she could no longer use the phone number she had used in the United States. She also claimed that she emailed occasionally with her professors and used Instagram and WeChat with Chinese students she had befriended during her study abroad.

At the time of our first interview however, Maki was preparing for exams, and so confessed that she was too tired from studying to contact many people. The only people she mentioned talking to regularly were Yuna, and another Japanese friend who was studying in the United States who she called via LINE, and the Japanese friend from university who Maki had kept in touch with during her study abroad.

I also asked Maki to describe for me what forms of mass media she engaged with and with what frequency. In addition to the social media apps she had already mentioned, she disliked Twitter, rarely used Snapchat, and used Viber with one American friend, Hannah, from New York. Maki referred to Hannah as her best friend and said that they had to use Viber because Hannah’s mother was very strict and prohibited her daughter from using Facebook.

As a result of her overseas experiences, Maki had begun to seek out interactions with older mentor figures, including her professors and people who she had met through her internship. This tendency could be attributed to the fact that she was an only child, with no older siblings to talk to.

Additionally, her perspective on interacting with international students at her university had shifted. After she returned to Japan, seeing international students on campus “look lonely” reminded her of her own study abroad experience, when

... no one came up to me and I had to reach out myself, and I feel really sorry, I feel sad ... so I try to be more, open ... I try to be as open as possible. (Interview 1, December 9, 2018)

I held a second interview with Maki around the end of January 2018, shortly after one of her grandparents had passed away. This event occurred during her university exams, leaving her no time to grieve and reflect. Her friends in the United States were a great source of support and comfort to her at this time. She told me that she had voice- and video-called her friend Yuna via Facebook messenger several times, and also spoken via WeChat with her friend Mei who had returned home to China.

Maki felt unable to discuss her stress about exams and future job prospects with friends and classmates in Japan. Not only did she lack as a close relationship with them, but because they were currently going through the same circumstances, she said that they could not provide her with fresh insight or comfort. I suggested that perhaps she felt reluctant to show vulnerability to her friends in Japan as it might shatter their conception of her as a confident high achiever. Maki agreed that this was another factor preventing her from sharing her problems with friends in Japan. She also claimed that she turned to her friends overseas for support because

... Japanese people get selfish when they are stressed ... they can't think of others or help others. (Interview 2, January 23, 2018)

Yuna, who was also experiencing problems with getting low grades at university and failing to achieve her goal of entering law school, sympathised with Maki. A conversation with her friend Mei also had an impact on Maki's thoughts about her future career path. Although Mei had dreamed of becoming a professional singer, she studied Math and Economics and then found work at an education consulting agency. This seemed like a strange career trajectory to Maki. However, when she talked to Mei, telling her how stressed she was and how she could not decide on her future path during the two-week break from tests, Mei reassured her, saying, "of course, nobody can work out who they are in two weeks". Mei instead advised Maki to tackle her immediate tasks and to be open to take opportunities as they come, as Mei had done.

Maki found this conversation extremely helpful. In contrast, she felt unable to discuss her concerns about the future with her parents, saying that her father rarely spoke at home. He claimed not to understand her future goals, and expressed doubts about her ability to achieve her goals. From Maki's perspective her parents' support came in the form of pressure to succeed rather than praise or encouragement. She compared this unfavourably to an American family she had observed during her study abroad, who praised and encouraged their child "all the time".

However, her parents provided practical support in helping her prepare for a job interview she had at a television station the week before our interview. Her parents frankly told her that she was unlikely to be successful, but they helped her prepare beforehand. Despite lacking confidence in her ability to progress through the hiring process, Maki had so far made it to the second round.

The job interview was held in Japanese. When asked if she preferred to find a job that required using English, Maki said she did not. She admitted that she and her parents always assumed she would work for an international company or in some other position that required English proficiency. However, she stated that she now intended to learn more about Japan saying

... because I live in Japan, I am Japanese ... (Interview 2, January 23, 2018)

These echoed the words she had spoken to her mother upon returning to Japan as a child, when she chose to enter a Japanese elementary school. It seemed that Maki had in a sense come full circle in her identity after returning from study abroad. She now had the goal of working in Japan in order to promote positive social change. This goal was inspired by her experiences during study abroad, including occasions when she was embarrassed by her inability to answer her classmates' questions about Japanese politics and social issues. Even though she dreamed of someday working for the United Nations to "make the world a better place, work for world peace", Maki decided that first she needed to learn more about her home country and make a positive contribution there. Maki felt that her study abroad provided her with an outsider's perspective on Japan and helped her to realise the importance of learning more about the country and ways to improve Japanese society.

When asked about her social media use, Maki reported that she no longer used Facebook much except to keep in touch with older acquaintances in the United States. These included people she met through her internship, and Facebook was her only point of contact with them. She did not post her own content but read and responded to her acquaintances' posts.

In contrast, Instagram was used by younger people her own age. It enabled her to connect with old friends from the past. For example, the week before our interview Maki had met in person with a friend from elementary school who was visiting from the United States. Maki had happened to see his Instagram post about visiting Japan and contacted him. On her phone she showed me an old photo of the two of them taken during elementary school, compared to them now as adults.

The LINE app was such a common part of Maki's everyday life that at first, she did not think to mention it when asked about social media. She used it multiple times each day, for mundane functional interaction such as informing her mother of when she would be home and asking classmates where an exam would be held.

Maki was engaging with a mix of Japanese and English language mass media. She occasionally read the news in Japanese and enjoyed watching videos on YouTube of her favourite J-pop band's TV appearances. She also sometimes watched an American TV series on Netflix and enjoyed discussing it with friends.

I interviewed Maki again almost exactly a month later, on February 25th. By this stage she had finished her exams and was less stressed than at our previous interview. During February, Maki had been occupied with preparing for job-hunting season, which would begin on March 1st. As part of her preparations, she had contacted an alumnus of her university and received some advice from him about navigating the process. Maki was concerned that she had fallen behind her peers' progress due to the time she had taken off to recover from her stress in the previous month.

Her stress and exhaustion had prompted her to take a break from social media. Her friends from high school and university had been posting about their successful job-hunting activities on Instagram, which

had made her feel stressed and pressured. Maki recalled scrolling through her Instagram one day and encountering a photo of a friend celebrating her success at finding a job. Seeing the photo prompted Maki to deactivate her Instagram account. Since taking that action, her mood had improved, and she felt “lighter and better”, although at the same time, she worried that she was over-reacting, and said she felt “pathetic” for taking a break from social media.

This meant that she had limited her communication over the past month to trusted people and friends not undertaking the same job-hunting activities as her. One friend from high school, Ami, was taking the national government employee examination, and so had a completely different schedule to those around her. This made it easy for Maki to talk with her about topics other than job-hunting.

As she lived with her parents, Maki also spoke to her mother daily, although the content of their communication was generally limited to functional daily life topics.

Despite her efforts to avoid it, Maki eventually had to confront the topic of job-hunting when she met with a friend who had just returned from spending a year in Malaysia. Her friend Risa shared with Maki that she was stressed about falling behind her peers in job hunting progress. Maki was in no mood to be sympathetic, as she herself was in the midst of the process, while Risa still had a year to prepare. To make matters worse, during their conversation Risa let slip that a mutual friend had successfully found a job. The meeting left Maki frustrated and upset, reflecting the levels of stress she was experiencing.

The job-hunting process also made her think more about the difficulties for women in balancing the demands of a career with raising children, particularly in Japan. She had begun thinking about this issue during her first year at university and had completed a research project about it for a gender studies class she took during study abroad. This motivated her to work towards improving gender equality in Japan.

According to Maki, there were two typical career pathways available to female employees in Japan—the demanding career track similar to male workers with long hours and overtime or supporting roles with less work. Maki’s mother told her that she was more suited to the latter pathway. Unconvinced, Maki discussed it with her friend Aya when they met together a few days before our interview. Aya was two years older and had attended high school in the United States for three years. Maki had met her at cram school in Japan and credited Aya with guiding and advising her when she was stressed about her exams. It was Aya who had advised Maki as to which university to attend in Tokyo. Aya advised Maki to think carefully about the importance of work-life balance before choosing a job. Her conversation with Aya helped Maki decide to search for a company that would try to provide that balance for female employees.

Maki’s interest in this issue was reinforced by a book given her by an Afghan woman she met and befriended during study abroad. The book, authored by Cheryl Sandberg the CEO of Facebook, described the struggles of women attempting to pursue a career and raise children. Maki found the book to be “very powerful” and declared that female employees in Japan with families needed more understanding and support from their co-workers. This, she said, would require a change in the public mindset, not just changes in company policies.

After that, I was unable to meet Maki until the end of April 2018 due to her becoming ill. When we met, she related to me her experiences of job-hunting during March, which involved attending information sessions held by different companies in order to advertise to potential new employees. By the end of March, she was tired and had developed a fever. Her doctor recommended that she be hospitalised, but she refused in order to attend information sessions and carry out other such job-hunting activities. It took her about three weeks to fully recover.

Compared to what she had seen of job-hunting during her study abroad, Maki described Japan's job-hunting system as "a really weird culture [sic] in Japan." Many of her university classmates were returnees or had study abroad experience and shared her opinion. She mentioned talking with a classmate who had returned from studying in Australia, who told her that they were "tired and pissed off" at the Japanese system of job-hunting.

I reminded Maki how at our last interview she had mentioned deactivating her Instagram account and reducing her social media usage due to stress and asked if anything had changed since then. She said that she now sometimes used social media,

... but I know it would hurt me, so I have my own responsibility ... (Interview 4, 29 April, 2018)

and she limited her usage accordingly. Since February, she told me that LINE was her most-used social media.

Her friend Mei with whom she used WeChat had been busy, reducing their contact. Maki still briefly scrolled through her Facebook and Instagram feed, not paying attention unless something specific caught her eye. Facebook felt "more official" to her and functioned as a space where her friends in the United States discussed their final theses and older acquaintances posted updates and announcements about life events. She found this Facebook content more interesting and "sophisticated" than her peers' Instagram posts about their job-hunting activities.

She had also used Facebook Messenger with Yuna but mentioned that Yuna had also been stressed to the point where, like Maki, she had de-activated her Facebook account, then her Messenger account for a period, before returning to both. Maki surmised that the return had been prompted by Yuna's successful attainment of an internship, resulting in a reduction in her stress levels. Although they had not been in contact recently, Maki hoped that they would be able to meet in person if Yuna returned to Korea.

As well as mass communication, Maki was also being consciously selective in terms of interpersonal communication. She told me,

... it's not really healthy or good, but sometimes when you talk to other people especially students going through the same process, you could get a negative effect, you might get worried or you might get hurt and you might get really anxious ... (Interview 4, April 29, 2018)

For this reason, she limited her interpersonal communication with university peers who were experiencing the same process. On the other hand, she felt more able to discuss these experiences with high school friends who she coincidentally met at some of the information sessions she had attended. She mentioned a close friend at another university, who was applying for a completely different industry to Maki but felt similarly about withdrawing from her peers due to the stress of hearing about job-hunting all the time, which enabled them to relate well to each other.

Her main sources of face-to-face interpersonal communication since our last interview were her mother, and Hilde, a university classmate one year younger than Maki. Hilde had grown up in Japan, but was of mixed heritage, with one German parent and one Japanese parent. She had also attended an international school, and was “more international-minded”, as Maki put it. Hilde did not intend to participate in typical job-hunting activities when the time came, but instead planned to undertake post-graduate studies and work for an NPO. The marked differences in their situations made it easy for Maki to interact with her, as Hilde had no interest in discussing job-hunting, but instead quizzed Maki on her study abroad experience, and asked for advice about her own plan to study abroad.

Before Maki’s illness in March, she had met in person with her friend Ami who was studying for the government employee test, and they were able to talk “without feeling stressed” thanks to the difference in their situations. They also saw each other once a week in a class they shared and occasionally checked on each other’s well-being, which Maki said helped her greatly. Since then, as Ami’s test date approached, she also had begun to retreat from socialising, so Maki had not had much contact with her.

I noted a common theme that Maki had articulated in a previous interview: she preferred to maintain a small number of close meaningful connections rather than a wider network of weaker connections. She also found relief in interaction with people with whom she was not in competition, either directly or indirectly.

When asked if she had been reading any other influential books recently, Maki replied that she had, being inspired by the thought that she “needed to understand more about what was going on in the world”. The book she chose was written by a famous Japanese journalist-turned-professor that presented simple explanations of various global issues. The book was part of a series by the same author and dealt specifically with events and issues surrounding Barack Obama’s 2nd election to the United States presidency. Maki claimed she had only superficial knowledge about a range of topics and wished to broaden her “narrow perspective”. She found it easier to read in Japanese, but when she wanted to learn more details about international events, she always checked American news sources in English. At this time, she did not use English often in day-to-day life, as she was not at university very much. This motivated her to seek out news in English in an effort to balance her English and Japanese usage.

Her smartphone also provided entertainment in the form of YouTube videos and Netflix content. On YouTube she mainly watched videos of interviews and performances by the J-POP band “Arashi”, calling it her “guilty pleasure”. She had first used Netflix in the United States during her study abroad and kept up an account when she returned to Japan. Most nights when she felt tired or anxious, she would turn to

these media. At the time of our interview, she was watching a Korean reality show called “Terrace House”. She claimed to enjoy the commentary of the comedians watching the show participants, finding it to be interesting and insightful.

Maki mentioned that she was currently taking a class on United States politics. She had received special permission to take the class, as it was taught in a different department. In her department she was taking a Japanese politics class that covered pre-war Japanese history, then discussion of post-war political parties. That class was taught in English by the dean of her department. In contrast, the class on United States politics was taught in Japanese by a professor who Maki described as left-leaning and critical of then-Prime Minister Abe. Maki felt particularly sensitive to this professor’s bias in comparison to her classmates who she said either did not notice it, or else enjoyed the professor’s perspective.

In one specific example, the professor had condemned Japan’s treatment of Korean comfort women during the war, and the subsequent actions of the Japanese government regarding the issue. Maki protested to me that it was possible that the issue had been represented in an overly harsh light, or even misinterpreted, and that her professor’s comments were “really biased”. In response, I remarked that Maki seemed to be more critical of her professor’s approach than her classmates. When her friend Hilde asked her about the professor, Maki limited her reply to saying that he was “very liberal”. In Maki’s opinion, being politically liberal could be a “very positive thing” in the United States, but in Japan, she saw it as “negative.”

She justified her attitude towards this professor by saying that she felt that there was not enough critical thinking happening in the class, and that students were instead simply accepting everything he said. She commented,

... maybe, it's hard to be critical. I try to be critical ... (Interview 4, April 29, 2018)

She asserted that unlike her classmates, she had developed critical thinking skills because of her study abroad in the United States.

However, she stated that it was

... easy to be critical of Japanese politics because it's your country. (Interview 4, April 29, 2018)

This contrasted with a class she had taken during her study abroad, which had included some content about Japanese politics. The professor had apparently been right-wing and conservative, in that he had spoken favourably of then-Prime Minister Abe. This contrast led Maki to reiterate that her professor in Japan was biased.

As the interview came to a close, Maki commented that,

... in general, critical thinking is very hard, but I need that. It's very important when you start working. 'Is this info correct, is this plan going to work out' ... (Interview 4, April 29, 2018)

Concluding thoughts on Maki's story

The case story presented here demonstrates the different and lasting impacts of sojourning overseas on a Japanese returnee in areas including communication, values, attitudes, and cultural identity. The longitudinal narrative inquiry approach utilized for the research enabled construction of a detailed chronological account that covered not only changes over time, but the causes of those changes. This is an advantage of such an approach, in contrast with many previous studies on adaptation which took a short-term or cross-sectional approach.

It was found that Maki's childhood years in the United States gave her a high level of English proficiency and familiarity with the host culture. However, she may not have retained this language proficiency without the substantial efforts her parents made towards maintaining her English skills after returning to Japan. Her classmates' positive attitude regarding her English language ability also would have contributed to her confidence in her identity as a returnee, and contrasts with the findings of previous research, in which returnees suffered bullying and ostracism by their peers (Kidder, 1992; Kanno, 2003; Yoshida et al., 2009).

This study investigated beyond the time period immediately after Maki's return to Japan and captured more of her developing identity as she reached adulthood and entered university in Japan. Maki's study abroad experience in the United States impacted her significantly, allowing her to develop international awareness and sensibilities regarding topics such as gender equality and Japanese politics. Her university professors and the content of her classes were influential both in cases where she agreed and disagreed with the views they presented. Her experiences and interactions during her study abroad simultaneously produced an overall positive impression of the United States while arousing a protective, even defensive attitude regarding Japan and its international image. For example, while she freely criticised Japan's job-hunting system, which was causing her considerable stress, she was reluctant to believe condemnatory accounts of Japan's past actions involving other East Asian countries. This attitude resonates with Kanno's observation of returnees in her research (2000) some of whom became protective of their Japanese identity and were inspired to become more knowledgeable about Japanese culture and history.

From her childhood experiences there, Maki retained a positive impression of the United States which her study abroad experience did nothing to dispel. However, in contrast to accounts of Japanese returnees who long to leave Japan again (French, 2000), the case story shows that Maki did not think of the United States as a place to escape to when life in Japan was difficult or frustrating. Instead, her study abroad experiences had the effect of inspiring her to work toward making positive changes in Japanese society. Fielding the questions of American students about Japan also motivated her to learn more about her own country.

Before spending a semester abroad, Maki felt unable to approach and socialise with international students at her university, despite her childhood years in the United States and her high level of English proficiency. This shows that in the long-term returnees may not feel confident in claiming international experience or a returnee identity. More investigation is needed into returnees' self-perceptions and the effect of the expectations or stereotypes about returnees perpetuated by Japanese media. It was not until after Maki

spent a semester abroad that she was able to empathise with international students and be open to befriending them, bolstered by her recent experience overseas.

Finally, the case story provides insight into the ways in which Maki's different social networks provided her with the support she needed to navigate the stress of university and job-hunting. It also shows the vital role played by internet-based communication in maintaining meaningful transnational social networks. Thanks to these technologies Maki was easily able to contact her friends of various ethnic heritages in the United States, who proved to be an important source of support, and an escape from the pressures of her life in Japan. While her United States-based friends were a comfort due to their fresh insights and the difference in their situations, Maki's returnee friends in Japan who had similar experiences to her were helpful in providing information about job-hunting and influenced her immediate decisions and activities.

As an increasing number of returnees in Japan navigate university and enter the workforce, it is vital to gain insight into how their overseas experiences continue to influence them in the long-term. Further research is needed so as to determine how Japanese universities and workplaces can make the most of these individuals' linguistic skills and cultural competencies. In this way, Japanese returnees need not be labelled as "social misfits" or "privileged elite" but seen holistically as a diverse group who have valuable contributions to make in Japanese society.

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- (1) Maki is a pseudonym used in order to protect the participant's privacy.

“Communication and cultural identity change: case story of a Japanese returnee studying abroad”

Esther Lovely

Keywords: study abroad, Japanese returnees, communication, cultural identity, social media

Abstract:

This paper takes a narrative inquiry approach to examine the communication and cultural identity change experiences of a Japanese returnee who studied abroad in the United States. for a semester. Many studies on Japanese returnees have identified the challenges and difficulties returnees face upon their return to Japan. However more investigation is needed into the long-term impact of returnee experiences, especially as they reach adulthood, navigate university and Japanese work culture. Visual timelines and semi-structured interviews held over a period of several months during 2018 were used in this study to elicit detailed accounts of the research participant's experiences. Following narrative inquiry methods, the data were constructed into a detailed case story. The case story focuses on the returnee's communication habits among her social networks, and the impact of these networks on her cultural identity change over time. The participant's childhood years spent abroad gave her English language skills and a positive image of the U.S. while her study abroad experience, while affirming her positive attitude towards the U.S., motivated her to aim for a career in Japan, where she felt she could make a valuable contribution to Japanese society.

「コミュニケーションと文化的な順応性： 留学している帰国子女のケースストーリー」

ラブリーエスター

キーワード：留学，帰国子女，コミュニケーション，カルチュラル・アイデンティティー，ソーシャルメディア

本稿はナラティブ・アプローチを使用して半年アメリカで留学した帰国子女のカルチュラル・アイデンティティーの順応とコミュニケーションの経験を考察する。先行研究は帰国してからの帰国子女の直面する困難について示したことが多い。しかし，帰国子女の経験からの長期的な影響についての調査が必要である。それは，帰国子女が成人すると，日本の大学と職場の環境を継続的に接していくからである。帰国子女である本研究の参加者の経験を調査するために2018年に数か月間インタビューを行った。ナラティブ分析の方法を使用し，ケースストーリーを書きだした。ケースストーリーは参加者のコミュニケーションのパターンとカルチュラル・アイデンティティーに与える影響についてだ。アメリカで過ごした子供時代を過ごしたことは，参加者の高い英語運用能力と，アメリカについてのポジティブな印象を持つことに寄与している。大人になってからのアメリカでの留学の経験は，参加者が日本の社会を改善するために日本で就職することを目指すようになった。