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**Blurring the boundaries: Japanese
students negotiating their
experiences in a New Zealand tertiary
institution with international
characteristics**

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Douglas James Rapley

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Abstract

This research uses a sociocultural perspective to explore the experiences of a group of Japanese study abroad students living and studying in a private, Japanese-owned tertiary institution in New Zealand. The data collection included a questionnaire investigating pre-arrival expectations and a longitudinal phase of semi-structured interviews.

The Japanese characteristics of the college, in spite of its location in New Zealand, constructed the students' experience in a way that blurred the boundaries between study in Japan and study abroad. For example, the number of Japanese students present and numerous physical aspects reminiscent of Japan combined with factors, such as the college's Japanese focused support and continued support from home via the internet, to limit the students' ability to have a truly international experience. In examining this, the thesis draws an analogy with the Dejima situation, referring to a famous artificial island in Nagasaki, which accommodated Dutch merchants during Japan's isolationist period and was linked to the mainland by a narrow bridge. In this environment, the Dutch were not permitted entry into Japan proper, thus never gained a real sense of Japanese life nor membership to its society.

While the students often resented elements of college policy, which kept them embedded in Japanese ways of doing things and seeing the world, they also often came to value some of these for the affordances they gave for personal growth and unique experiences while remaining in a 'safe' environment. The experience also allowed the students to form close relationships with co-national peers, which became highly valued. Ultimately, the experience seemed to lead them to an appreciative re-examination of their own identities, as Japanese young people, and forge new identities to fit their situation in New Zealand. The other major affordance provided by the college was access to a tertiary qualification, something that appeared beyond their reach in Japan.

Although the participants' study abroad experience could generally be considered an affordance overall, it is suggested that the restricted opportunities for access to the community beyond the campus reduced some of the possibilities for the development of an international identity.

Acknowledgements

This thesis examines the life-changing journey of a group of Japanese students on a study abroad experience in New Zealand. They undertook this journey for adventure, but also to improve their position in the world. This is similar to my reasons to take this research journey, and like the participants in this study, I could not have completed my journey without the assistance and selflessness of others.

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