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**Negotiating the In-Between:
How Two Foreigners Living in Rural Japan
Narrated Changes in their Identities**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

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Abstract

This thesis used narrative inquiry to find out how two foreigners, who had resided in rural Japan for a long period of time, narrated reflectively how they had changed as a result of their cross-cultural transitions. This thesis came about through my own transition experiences in Japan leading to a hybrid, bicultural notion of myself, and my subsequent curiosity as to how others underwent changes in identity, possibly leading also to hybrid selves. Each participant was interviewed twice. Their changes were contextualised within dominant themes arising from their life stories. In addition, they were analysed using a modified version of Herbert Hermans' personal position repertoire (2001), which was able to identify key identity positions and underlying beliefs that aided or hindered their transitions. This research found that the participants' respective dominant life themes of estrangement and communion had major impacts on their cross cultural transitions, local relationships, and life satisfaction. The first participant followed a theme of estrangement and evoked identity positions and imagined audiences to justify his stance. The second participant took on a learning model to enhance her relationships with the local Japanese, resulting in alterity, the incorporation of a Japanese identity position in her own personal position repertoire and subsequently a hybrid self. In both participants some identity positions were aligned to Japanese ways of being, consequently coming to the fore in their psyches, whereas others were subjugated. Also new positions were incorporated, while others were lost, with affective outcomes. The participants' transitions were impacted on by their environments. The first participant initially worked within a foreign enclave and had no close personal Japanese friends. The second participant was immersed in local public schools and enjoyed high recognition in her small, rural town. Motivating factors for being in Japan were also found to be of consequence for the participants' cross-cultural transitions. This thesis was able to capture the complexity of the participants' cross-cultural transitions through considering them as having multiple selves that were revealed through reflective life stories and collated within a personal position repertoire.

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Introduction

Our search for identity and understanding often includes trying on many different stories. Here are two.

adapted from Otasuke et al. (2004, p. 194)

This report aims to present its findings in light of the moment in time Japan finds itself in; as a society on the verge of cultural upheaval, as it contemplates dramatic increases in its foreign population (Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008). Academia can aid policy and understanding of immigrant experience by giving voice to these immigrants. This research aimed to add to this knowledge by presenting two members of a particular minority group, the Western expatriate, living within a rural setting, where it was assumed they were more likely to be interacting and involved in daily Japanese life. It sought to discover how they positioned themselves, with their own personal histories, against the task of settling in and adapting to life in rural Japan. As such, this research sought to explore how they negotiated the complexities of their daily lives in the metaphorical space that was somewhere 'in-between' their home and Japan. This 'in-between-ness' is symbolised by '*ma*', the Chinese character on the title page. In narrating changes in their identities throughout their life stories, this small scale project aimed to explore the motivations and self/world beliefs that led them each to certain identifications and how these identifications affected their lives, acculturation and relationships. Its aim was also to expose multiple identity positions within each participant's psyche that were pertinent to their transitions, and to identify those positions that aided or hindered them.

Identity was chosen as a key concept for understanding self and changes in self. This research approached the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data by using a liberating theory of identity called the dialogical self (Hermans, 2001, 2004), that rejects a proprietary concept (identity as something we own) for a concept of identities as being *identifications* and therefore situational (Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008) and relational. In the cross-cultural transitions of the two participants explored within this study, the identifications that they spoke to in private, and performed in public through the interviews, were viewed as fluid, relational and teleological.

In dialogical thinking (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, 1998; Hermans, 2001, 2004, 2008; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007) the key concepts of hybridization and transnationalism were highlighted, suggesting the complexity of migrants making transitions. Hybridization and transnationalism challenge the oversimplified binaries expressed in hyphenated selves; Asian-American, Canadian-Japanese; New Zealander-Japanese (It should be noted that in Japan, the hyphenated labelling of foreigners is not in practice). Hybridization and

transnationalism refer to cultural and social identities shifting within and between home and host nations, and even multiple sites (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Glick Schiller 1997 *cited in* Liu-Farrer, 2008 (unpublished)), hence the metaphor of an 'in-between' space. These identities are sustained through cheaper international travel, promoting more frequent trips home; dual citizenship practices sustaining voting rights and political investments in the countries of origin (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1994; Laguerre, 1999; Guarnizo, 1998, 2003; Kearney, 1991, 1995, Kyle, 2000 *cited in* Liu-Farrer, G., 2008 (unpublished)); through international networks sustained through internet communities such as Facebook and Bebo; and through cheaper international telecommunications. So the possibility of sustaining dual (or multiple) identities is increased through globalization. Transnationalism challenges older models of assimilation which rely on the concept of a unidirectional transition from the home culture to the host culture. Transnational identities are situated within the complex, multi-voiced, multi-positioned globalized world.

It is within this environment that this study's two participants have sought to create, sustain, and sacralize their own multi-vocal identities in rural Japan (rural, in this study, refers to an area outside of the main centres of Japan, not necessarily a small town). The sacralizing of self is a concept taken from Satre's work (1950, 1963, 1964, 1981 *cited in* McAdams, 1991) whereby individuals are viewed as facing the dilemma of how to sacralize their selves through narrative answers to psychological, sociological, metaphysical and cosmological concerns (p.142) in a society where religious institutions' answers to these concerns have lost their saliency. In this study, sacralizing the self is viewed as performing oneself through narrative techniques and major thematic lines as a project that is special and unique in relation to both others and in relation to oneself as a coherent project over the lifespan. In addition to the notion of a sacralized self, a defining aspect of this study was that through Hermans' (2001) notion of a dialogical self, a metaphorical image of their identities was created and their changes were tracked throughout their life stories as opposed to just throughout their transition. Therefore, the investments the participants made and why were uncovered.

Central to this thesis is the transparency of the author. Therefore, it begins with a reflexivity statement that tracks my journeying and motivations for undertaking this thesis. Followed by this, pertinent literature is reviewed. From this literature gaps are identified leading to the

posing of the research question. Special interest is given to theories of the narrative and dialogical self (Hermans, 2001, 2004), to position this research amongst this field. The methodology is then addressed outlining the reasons why a narrative approach was taken to answer the research question. Next, data from the two participants is presented and analysed followed by a discussion on how they have been shown to have changed. This thesis then addresses the repercussions and potentialities of the knowledge that is uncovered and produced.

The findings of this study come at a pertinent time when the Japanese government is contemplating the potential influx of immigrants and at a time where the stability of national identities, globalization and localization (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007) are having both positive and negative effects for people and communities in transition (Schaffer, 2004). This research's approach and produced knowledge is hoped to be of interest to researchers and those working with issues to do with identity, migrants and cross-cultural transitions within Japan and other sites.

