

Socio-cultural motivations for study abroad amongst a group of Japanese students in the UK

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Abstract

Despite global economic and security concerns, study abroad (or *ryugaku*) maintains widespread popularity amongst Japanese students. As well as language skills acquisition, research indicates students are motivated to participate in *ryugaku* from a desire to advance academic knowledge and gain locally unobtainable cultural information (McCornick, 1988). Crompton, (1979, p. 410) suggests motivations for *ryugaku* are considerable and that travelers are “pushed” and “pulled” to destinations. Based on ethnographic interview data from eight Japanese graduate and undergraduate students residing in the U.K. for 3 – 36 months, the results suggest that in addition to language and knowledge skills, a desire to escape Japanese society, and previous overseas experience influence students’ *ryugaku* decisions. *Ryugaku* can thus be viewed as a cultural and social construct.

Keywords: study abroad, *ryugaku*, Japanese overseas study, qualitative research, grounded theory research

概要

世界経済及び安全保障問題に対する懸念をよそに、ここ 15 年間で留学人口は増加の一途をたどっている。言語能力習得願望と同様、高い学術的知識に対する欲求や、現地で得難い文化知識を入手したいという願望が留学の動機付けになると研究者は説く (McCornick, 1988)。旅行者が自身の目的地に発動、誘因されるという発想 (Crompton, 1979) をさらに考え合わせると、留学動機が多種多様であるとの示唆に到る。民族誌学的インタビューデータは、言語能力及び知識力に加えて、さらに日本社会からの逃避願望や過去の海外旅行経験が、留学を決意する際に影響を及ぼすことを明らかにしている。留学動機は、ゆえに文化的且つ社会的に構築されているものとみなすことが可能である。

キーワード: 留学、日本人留学、質的調査、グラウンデッド・セオリー・アプローチ

Japan and *Ryugaku*

As the number of students embarking on overseas study trips (*ryugaku*) from Japan approaches 200,000 per year (Japanese MOFA, 2008), travel and education continue to have an enduring association, as recognized by Francis Bacon's 16th century adage, "travel in the younger sort is a part of education" (Oxford, 2004, p. 45).

Travel abroad for educational purposes, or *ryugaku*, has a broad definition; not only does it encompass students studying on degree, general language, and non-vocational courses, but it also includes educational professionals working outside their normal country of residence (Japanese MOFA, 2008). As a consequence we can expect individual motivations for *ryugaku* to be wide-ranging and varied.

Some believe that *ryugaku* has its roots in Europe, suggesting the 18th century Grand Tour undertaken by British well to do across central Europe attests to this (Towner, 1996). However, we can also argue *ryugaku* has deeper historical and socio-cultural roots. 1500 years ago when scholarly missions were sent to China to bring foreign expertise back to Japan. More recently, Japan has enthusiastically embraced *ryugaku* at both the individual and government levels (Bennet, Passin & McKnight, 1958) as the post war trend of scholars, researchers, students, and trainees to study mainly in the West attests. Seibert and Hoshiai (1989) have even called Japanese travelers "the most prodigious students of the world" (p. 21).

In addition to this historical background, it seems that many institutions in Japan encourage *ryugaku*. Not only does Japan boast high

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participation rates in tertiary education, but it also has a growing *shogai kyouiku* (life long education) ethic leading to a wider interest in overseas study tours. More recently the number of students taking standardized language tests such as the TOEFL[®] has surged (ETS, 2008) with *ryugaku* being one motivating cause. Globalization of the workplace has also given rise to increased *ryugaku* activity. The increase in the number of *furita* (temporary employees) has allowed individuals more freedom to embark on study trips and a genre known as *OL ryugaku* (study abroad by female office workers) has seen greater numbers of Japanese women leaving Japan for study purposes (Ono & Piper, 2004). As a result of these factors, a more diversified demographic of people — beyond the 18-24 age segment — are embarking on *ryugaku* excursions from Japan. The decisions leading students to undertake *ryugaku* (as well as avoiding studying in certain places) can thus inform us about society as much as they do about individual students' motivations.

The Importance of *Ryugaku*

Travel for educational purposes can provide “obvious” economic benefits (Love & McNicoll, 1977, p. 12) to the host nation, but what advantages are there for individuals who undertake such trips? Language skills are a widely claimed benefit with Smith and Jenner (1997) describing language acquisition as the “motor” of *ryugaku* (p. 66). In Japan, where foreign language skills are often seen as a way to garner prestige or “internationalization” (McCornick, 1988), this can add more than just monetary benefit. *Ryugaku* is thought to also give students specialist knowledge (McCornick, 1988; Ono & Piper, 2004) and, under the right socio-cultural circumstances, promote understanding and social networks (Schumann, 1976; Williams, 2003). Thus although “problems” (Mori, 1994) can arise from *ryugaku* sojourns many Japanese student travelers can return with useful language skills, specific knowledge, and attributes that can impact positively on Japan.

Recognition of these benefits has led to a significant growth in *ryugaku* from Japan in recent years. As Figure 1 shows, there has been a steady increase in the global number of Japanese students abroad (*ryugakusei*) rising from 118,000 in 1996 to 172,000 in 2007 (+44%) - comparing favourably to the modest 4% growth for pleasure travel from Japan over the same period (Japanese MLIT, 2008). *Ryugaku* growth has been particularly strong to North America where, despite concerns over terrorism, *ryugakusei* numbers have increased 50% in the 1996 – 2007 timespan. By contrast, in the UK, despite a 10% growth in the number of Japanese enrolled full-time at UK universities, the overall trend in *ryugaku* appears stagnant (Inegbedion & Mackie, 2006). This may reflect Japanese concerns for food and health issues (Heung, Qu & Chu, 2001) which affected the UK in the 2000-2005 period. At the same time, *ryugaku* to countries outside North America and Western Europe has grown rapidly with total numbers rising from 16,700 to 35,000 from 1996 to 2007. In 1996, just 14% of Japanese *ryugakusei* studied in such countries; by 2007 a growing awareness of *ryugaku* opportunities has helped raise this figure to 20% of all trips from Japan. English language study is thus not the only motivation for students to undertake *ryugaku*.

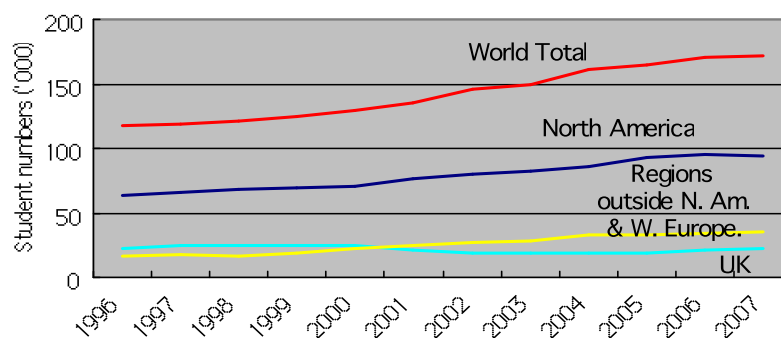


Figure 1. Japanese study abroad trends 1996-2007 (Japanese MOFA, 2008)

Connecting Travel and *Ryugaku* Motivation

Since *ryugaku* can be interpreted as a form of travel, travel motivation research may help us understand the motivations behind students' decisions to study abroad. Travel motivation studies point to two distinct motivational paradigms. The first paradigm regards travel as an escape from routine, familiarity, and known social environments (Williams, 1998). According to (Graburn, 1993), travelers seek opportunities that contrast with their daily lives. Such experiences can, according to Pearce (1993), act as motivations in themselves to encourage future travel — including *ryugaku*.

The second paradigm views travel motivation as behaviourally controlled. Plog (1974), for example, identifies travelers as occupying space on a “personality spectrum” (p. 57) with travel motivation based on a search for either familiarity or difference. More specifically to *ryugaku*, Heung, Qu, & Chu (2001), show that travel for an educational purpose is motivated by needs such as personal development or self-esteem and clearly distinguishes *ryugaku* from travel for pleasure. Knowles, Diamantes & El-Mourhabi (2001), on the other hand, suggest travel is a behaviour guided by emotion. Meanwhile, Crompton (1979) claims travel motivation is a function of “push” and “pull” factors (p. 410). The former is a result of perceived deficiencies in the traveler's home environment (e. g. a perception of poor education facilities in the home country), while the latter are beneficial factors related to the destination (e. g. language and cultural learning opportunities), and unobtainable at home. To this extent, we can see that travel — and by extension *ryugaku* — motivation will vary between different nations and cultures (Kim, Guo, Wang & Agrusa, 2007).

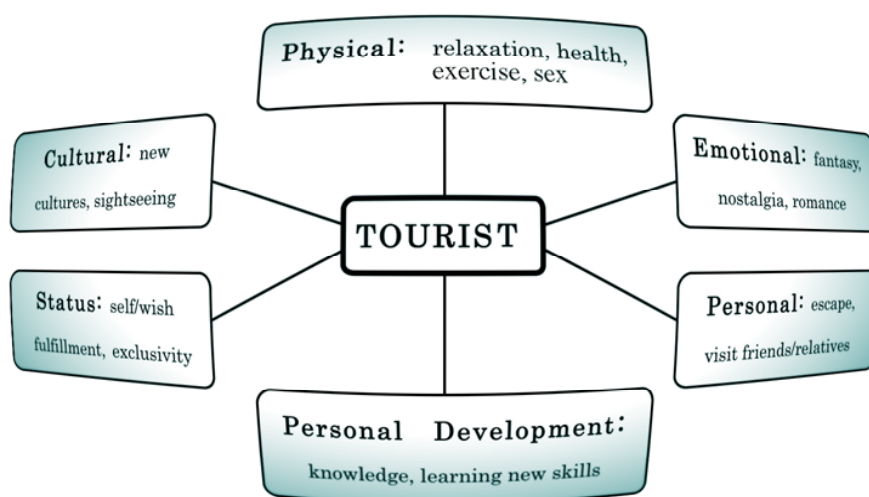


Figure 2. A typology of tourist motivators according to Swarbrooke and Horner (1999, p. 54)

The typology of travel motivations by Swarbrooke and Horner (1999) shown in Figure 2 suggests travel motivations arise from social, personal, and cultural circumstances, or that tourist motivations come from a “sum of factors” (Pearce, 1993, p.130). If we substitute the word tourist for *ryugakusei*, it may even be possible to use such a typology to better comprehend students’ motivations for *ryugaku*.

Method

In light of these theories, the current study aimed to better understand, through empirical evidence, some of the motivations Japanese university students have to study in the UK. To do this, face-to-face interviews were carried out with a convenience sample of eight students (two males and six females) at the University of East Anglia, England over a two-week period in summer 2006.

Student informants were all members of the Japanese Students Association at the University of East Anglia and had — at the time of interview — been in full-time tertiary education in the UK at least three months. Brief descriptions of each informant, including details of any previous overseas residency are given in Table 1.

The instrument for data collection was an unstructured interview that focused on informants’ motivations to study abroad. Initially, the study also intended to examine informants’ views of the UK and interviews also covered this area (see Appendix A for a full transcript of one interview).

Access to student informers was made, at first, through a family relative who had close personal acquaintances with Japanese students at the university and he secured an initial three interviewees. A further five informants were — thanks to the close ties within the Japanese student body at the university — gathered through a snow balling technique.

It was hoped to include more male interviewees in this study in order to reflect the overall Japanese students population, which informants suggested was around 40% male, but unfortunately this was not possible. Prior to all interviews, email contact was made with each interview volunteer. I clarified the main purpose of my research, and after receiving permission an interview time was set up by phone or email (in some cases this required two or three calls to prompt interview volunteers).

One-to-one interviews, conducted in English, lasted 45 - 60 minutes and took place on the university campus. One interview was however conducted with two informants simultaneously. With permission granted from each informant, interviews were recorded and transcribed. Although informants had advanced English language abilities, and had little trouble in expressing themselves during the interviews, their responses were made clearer during the transcription process to assist readability. Interviewees were aware that, I, the researcher, was unconnected to their UK university but was well acquainted with Japan.

To draw out principal motivations for *ryugaku*, interview transcripts were sorted and coded according to the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Table 1. Profiles of the 2006 Interviewees

Name (sex), student status; age	Length of stay (at time of interview)	Previous overseas experience abroad?	Profile
Yuri (f) ug; early 20s	3 months	Yes (USA, 3 months)	studying language bridging course
Yoko (f) pg; mid 20s	18 months	No	a single child escaping Japan
Kuni (m) pg; 30s	3 years	Yes (UK, 4 months)	a teacher on sabbatical leave
Harumi (f) pg; late 20s	9 months	No	former company employee in Japan
Sayuri (f) pg; late 20s	2 years	Yes (Argentina, 5 years as child)	studying South American sociology
Machiko (f) ug; early 20s	6 months	Yes (Jordan, 3 years; Egypt, 1 year)	studying Middle Eastern history
Takeshi (m) pg; mid 30s	1 year	No	a teacher on sabbatical leave
Kaoru (f) pg; early 30s	1 year	Yes (UK, 3 months)	<i>ryugaku</i> thanks to UK-based friends

ug = undergraduate; pg = postgraduate.

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

Results

The unstructured interviews gave rise to rich ethnographic data. However in order to give a sharper focus to this research it was decided to only consider informants' responses to motivation for embarking on *ryugaku*. The other responses, though, did assist in "revealing processes and perspective" (Brymon & Burgess, 1994, p.222) about respondents and to understand their motivations better.

Several informants expressed a strong affinity for the research and freely expressed themselves during the interview, and I felt that they had overcome any social pressure they might have felt had the interviews taken place in Japan (Bestor, Steinhoff & Bestor, 2003).

After coding and sorting the transcribed data based on Mason's "analytical categories" approach (Mason, 1994, p. 91) four broad themes (language, knowledge, escape, and emotion) were extracted as being the principal motivations for *ryugaku*. Each of these themes is highlighted here through extracts from transcribed interviews.

Language motivation

All interviewees mentioned the importance of learning the English language as a motivation for *ryugaku*. Typical of this view, Yuri — a female undergraduate student — stated, “I wanted to improve my English and studying abroad is the best way to achieve that.” This student believed that improving English language skills was not only an academic benefit but also a means to facilitate cultural contact with English people. Concerning her motives, Yoko asserted:

In order to study English I thought it was best to immerse myself in an environment and culture where the mother tongue was English. Also as English is a must for researchers I thought that living in Britain would give me new insights into British life.

Language study motivations were also seen as a way to satisfy higher order motivations relating to “status” in Swarbrooke and Horner’s typology (Figure 2). Commenting on this, Kuni — a postgraduate male in his mid-30s — saw language study during *ryugaku* as a means to acquire a new identity:

I wanted to establish a new identity and I thought that learning a foreign language would help me to become another person. [In this way] I would be able to come out of myself and change my identity. I think this was the basic motive for choosing to study a foreign language and come abroad.

Knowledge motivation

In addition to language, a strong motivation to study in the UK among interviewees was the desire to learn more about their respective fields of study. Yuri typified this by stating, “I wanted to improve my English ability and study my own subject from a different point of view.” Garnering more erudition was seen as a means to improve post-*ryugaku* employment prospects as Harumi, a female postgraduate, said:

I have been studying English literature for a long time and I want to become a teacher at university and to continue my study. In order to do this I need to experience living in this country for at least a year.

For Kuni, *ryugaku* was a means not to find employment but to acquire the necessary knowledge required to improve his current teaching position in Japan from which he was on sabbatical:

I really wanted to have the experience of living in this country because I have studied about this culture for so long. Also an awkward situation arises in the classroom because there are many students in my classes who have the experience of living in Britain but when I draw a map and explain about something, sometimes there are students who know more than me as they have the experience of living here [in the UK] for many years [laughs]. It was very awkward.

In this latter case we can see *ryugaku* was motivated by dual purpose: a push from an “awkward situation” in Japan and a means to acquire greater esteem upon return to Japan. Thus, *ryugaku* was viewed as providing language and knowledge skills that have value in Japan. Return to Japan should not therefore necessarily be viewed as a problem as previous studies may lead us to conclude (Mori, 1994; Tsukada, 1996).

Escape motivation

“ryugaku motivation was not only a benign search for improved language or knowledge skills — there were also personal motives that played a role in shaping the decision to undertake study abroad”

As Kuni’s example intimates *ryugaku* motivation was not only a benign search for improved language or knowledge skills — there were also personal motives that played a role in shaping the decision to undertake study abroad. In the current study, this was manifest in two forms: escape from Japanese society, or wish to avoid the Japanese

educational system.

(1) Escape from Japanese society.

Commenting on gender roles in a typical Japanese household, Yoko recalled her motivation to study in the UK in the following way:

I wanted to come to the UK because I wanted to escape from my parents. As an only child I was forced to stay at home. And as an only daughter I was discouraged from having a job. Only academic success would please my parents, so I decided studying abroad was a good excuse to be away from home.

A second postgraduate female, Sayuri, also noted that socially constructed gender roles and parental pressures had pushed her from Japan. She reasoned:

I came to learn English and I wanted to escape from Japan. I don't know why, but I felt I was surrounded by a big wall in Japan. There is a lot of behaviour we are expected to follow in Japan, like a woman at a certain age should do certain things, sometimes it makes me feel very uncomfortable and uneasy. I just want to be myself. Also, from a personal point of view, I wanted to get some distance from my family, maybe this is my *tatema* reason [i.e. a reason that is stated by the speaker to cover embarrassment or shame. It may not necessarily be the speaker's actual reason], I suppose you can say my hidden purpose was I wanted to escape my parents.

Escape was also found as a reaction to the workplace in Japan. Harumi, for example, highlighted how *ryugaku* motivation could come from unequal gender roles in the Japanese office:

I am always frustrated about [Japanese employment practices]. Japan is still a very male dominated society and sometimes it is very hard to say something or oppose your boss even if it is logical [the right thing to do]. Sometimes, just because we are women it is a problem. So we are forced to behave in a certain way but in the UK I don't feel that kind of pressure. [In Japan] gender stereotyping is still a big obstacle, Japanese men are so reluctant to make society more equal. At the same time I really needed some fresh air away from Japan [that is why I came to the UK].

In mentioning escape from Japanese social structure and its corporate world as a motive for *ryugaku* interviewees showed that the decision to study abroad was the result of more than the psychological profile of the individual; it necessarily included the socio-cultural environment of Japan as well.

(2) A wish to avoid the Japanese educational system.

As well as a desire to escape Japanese society, the wish to break free of the shackles of the Japanese education system was also cited as a motivation for *ryugaku*. The relative inflexibility of Japanese tertiary education, a lack of opportunity to study particular specialist fields of study, and the severe university entrance examination system were highlighted as keys to this escape motive. As Machiko said:

The problem in Japan is that there are very few places to study Mesopotamian history [her field of study] and they are very strict about the entrance procedure. The exam is much more competitive and especially if you change your subject during your academic career, it is even more difficult. I found the UK system much more flexible.

A flexible education system was a particularly important feature for mature students who welcomed the opportunity to study in the UK without age prejudice. Remarking on the contrasts between the Japanese and British university systems, Takeshi indicated:

I wanted to go back to University to study but Japanese universities don't freely accept mature students. In the UK there is a much better environment for mature students. Being a student again at my age is revitalizing and stimulating.

Adding to this flexibility, Harumi highlighted how *ryugaku* had enabled her to shake off the “failure” status she felt after “only” graduating from a 2-year college. Finally, although Japan-based education was seen as largely inflexible, respondents did acknowledge that the Japanese education system provided much of the necessary encouragement and support leading up to *ryugaku* via the close relationships students had with Japan-based academics and the global links connecting academic institutions.

Other factors

In contrast to *ryugaku* motivation based on a perceived dysfunction in Japan's society or its education system, some interviewees also reported that their supportive family backgrounds in Japan motivated them to study abroad. Such support ranged from previous overseas trips taken with families to extended periods overseas in childhood. These experiences, as Pearce (1993) tells us, can be important emotional stimuli in *ryugaku* decision making. Yuri said:

My parents really like to take trips abroad so they took me and my sister to Hawaii or other places when I was younger. I think those trips were a kind of influence as it made me more familiar with other culture. When I went to other countries I could see the people were different. Another reason is that I have relatives abroad. My great-grandfather and great-uncle live in Los Angeles and my mother took me there when I was 13. [These experiences] really influenced me and together they added up.

As well as frequency and intensity of previous overseas experience as a determining factor in *ryugaku* motivation, Machiko suggested that *ryugaku* was motivated by nostalgia:

When I was 12, I came to the UK for a week for the first time because my uncle married an English woman and was living here. My cousins were British and although I couldn't understand them I managed to play with them. After I went back to Japan I started to study English because the trip had got me really interested in it. As that experience was a good memory for me I really wanted to come back to England.

Finally, friends – both Japanese and British – were an informal but important pull on Japanese students to embark on *ryugaku*. This was expressed by Kaoru who revealed:

While I was here before as a tourist, a guy I met in a pub became a close friend and he was a motivation for me coming here this time as a student. I also knew people at university in Japan who had studied abroad and had received good reports from them. Studying abroad was a very natural thing for me to do.

Discussion and Conclusion

Current *ryugaku* trends may seem like a recent phenomenon, but the range of motivations expressed by interviewees in this study may reflect some of *ryugaku*'s deep cultural significance. Using Swarbrooke and Horner's typology as a template, eight interviewees described their *ryugaku* motivations based on three themes. These included: "personal development", (the acquisition of English language skills or expert knowledge), "avoidance factors" (a desire to get away from familial dysfunctions or a dissatisfaction with Japanese society) or, other factors such as nostalgia and/or a supportive home environment. *Ryugaku* motivations thus appear to be complex and multifaceted.

Previous research has shown *ryugaku* motivation is significantly associated with a propensity towards cultural interaction (Fisher and Price, 1991). While the interviewees in this research did suggest some cultural motives or interest in UK lifestyles prompted their study abroad, it did not appear to be their prime motivation for overseas study. Instead the informants in this study had more specific motivations for *ryugaku* and had carefully considered how their overseas studies would impact, and possibly improve, their lives from both a material and personal perspective. The desire by some informants to transfer these improvements to their working lives in Japan attests to this. The "status" component in Swarbrooke & Horner's typology thus seems a more appropriate motivation to attach to some of the students interviewed in the current research, particularly where language or knowledge skills were important.

These observations contrast with McCornick's, who in 1988 suggested that culture was a principal driver for *ryugaku*. Part of the difference between McCornick's study and this one may be explained by the wider availability of *ryugaku* information and the greater ease of travel from Japan over the last twenty years. *Ryugaku* is now open to a wider cross section of Japanese society. In 1988 Japanese students abroad were often from elite backgrounds, and being more economically privileged than many today, such students the late 1980s were under less pressure to get something tangible from their study experiences abroad. A second possible explanation may lay in the more diverse roles women now have in Japanese society. Many females today expect to play a larger role in the corporate world and have more independent private lives; interviewees in this study intimated that *ryugaku* was a way to facilitate this. Study abroad is no longer simply a cultural experience for females to be revisited or remembered later in life (McCornick, 1988). It appears to impact social standing and employment prospects upon return to Japan (Ono & Piper, 2004). In this way, dissatisfaction with education in Japan may be reducing culture's importance as a motivating factor for *ryugaku*. Finally, with the growth of IT and wider access to information, students can more easily satisfy their curiosity about foreign cultures. Students can now know more about *ryugaku* destinations without going there in a way that would have been unimaginable to their counterparts 20 years ago. Some aspects of foreign culture through *ryugaku* — and hence culture as a motivation — have changed.

This research suggests that *ryugaku* decisions were made in response to societal conditions in Japan, as well as circumstances at the destination, combined with

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the personal demands of the individual students. *Ryugaku* is thus — like tourism — the result of more than one motivation that both pushes and pulls students to their destinations. And although culture itself may not be as important as a motivation for study abroad, *ryugaku* itself is a socially and culturally specific (Kim et al, 2007) activity answering to different stimuli in the society and culture of the student and the nation where they study. In order for us to comprehend *ryugaku* motivations better, we thus need a culturally specific approach that takes the elements of society, education, and individuals into account. Only by looking beyond the circumstances that pull Japanese students to the foreign destinations where they study will we become better equipped to understand *ryugaku* and address its needs more effectively.

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Appendix A: Transcript of a Sample Interview

Informant: Kuni
Interviewer: Author (DW)
Date: August 15th 2006
Place: UEA Coffee Bar

DW: *I'd like to start by asking you about the background to your decision to undertake overseas study. Is there anything in your background that you think might explain your reason to study abroad and in the UK?*

Kuni: In general Japanese kids start to learn English at about 11 or 12 years old, but I myself started when I was about 8 years old, my mother who was just a housewife was interested in language. At that time [the early 1970s] the EFL language schools were beginning to be popular in Japan. I was going to a kind of *juku* at that time in the evening but what we learned there was a little different from what was taught at the other *juku*. So from quite an early age I had some English language skill probably because of the influence of my mother. Also at that time, not now [laughs], according to my mother and father I was a little bit quicker to learn especially phonologically, so I was good at mimicking things related to sounds and speech and also I felt very comfortable in that language lab. That, I think, is the first incident that motivated me.

Then in JHS, English was the best score I got in comparison to other subjects, but I was also interested in mathematics. In senior high school until maybe the second year, I was in the science course, because in Japanese high schools, students are separated into science or arts. So, until I was a second year student I was in the science course and I wanted to work in the medical field. There was a kind of expectation by my parents but I felt comfortable with it so they weren't really pushing me into it. When I became a third year student I suddenly changed my mind and I decided I wanted to do something related to language and cross cultural things and dealing with people, maybe to become a journalist. Also at that time I thought that I would like to go abroad and study and meet different kinds of people through English language.

DW: *Was that the first time you had thought to go abroad?*

Kuni: Probably I had thought about it unconsciously before that but I think there were not so many opportunities to go abroad before that. Also towards the end of the second year of high school mathematics and science got rather difficult for me, like algebra and that sort of thing. So I went to university and decided to go to linguistics department, it was a bit difficult because I had concentrated on sciences, so in the 3rd year of high school I had to adjust my knowledge. So, it took a bit more time to prepare for the entrance examination. When I was in the 4th year of university I had thought that journalism would be a good thing to do but it was difficult because I was in the countryside in Niigata where there are not many chances to get work.

So I finally found it would be difficult to get a job in Niigata so I had to make a compromise, there were two choices: one was to take a postgraduate course at Niigata University and the other was to take the public exam in order to become a high school teacher. It is pretty tough only about one in 20 applicants pass in English related subjects. Fortunately, I passed the exam and I became a teacher. Actually I enjoyed teaching in public high school but I was always thought I would like to quit the job and study language itself further. And time passed and I found I had been in that job for 12 years [laughs] and I was thinking about leaving the job throughout that time.

But also I got married when I was 26, 3 years after graduating university, we didn't have any kids but it is difficult to quit your job isn't it if you are married? But we got divorced after 6 or 7 years so then I decided I would go back to study as I had a clean break and now I am here. I wanted to establish a new identity and I thought that learning a foreign language would help me to become another person. So I would be able to come out of myself and change my identity. I think this was the basic motive for choosing to study a foreign language and come abroad.

DW: *Obviously Britain is important to your field of study [linguistics]. You mentioned in an email that you came to Britain 5 years ago, what was the story behind that?*

Kuni: In 1993 I applied for a programme, internally subsidized by the Ministry of Education for junior high and high school teachers and every year one or two teachers are selected from each prefecture for this programme. Two groups of about 45 teachers are divided into two groups one of which goes to America and the other comes to Britain, each of the participants goes to a different university. So I came here with them. The selection process is based on merit but you have to be a member of a research group. I was a member of a research committee so I could come here then because of that, so I guess selection was based on career. I stayed for 4 months at that time, it was not a holiday [laughs], but I felt like I wasn't really living here. I enjoyed it very much. I stayed in the West Country for the first 2 months and then I went to Essex for 2 months.

DW: *Is that the reason you chose to come here again this time, because you had knowledge of the academic environment and also nostalgic memories?*

Kuni: Well, yes both. I noticed that the staff in my department here are really good, and there are professors who are studying in the field I am interested in, so I was aware of the situation and circumstances of the university. But also I really wanted to have the experience of living in this country because I have studied about this culture for so long. Also often an awkward situation arises in the classroom because there are many students in my classes who have the experience of living in Britain but when I draw a map and explain about something, sometimes there are students who know more than me as they have the experience of living here [in the UK] for many years [laughs]. It was very awkward.

DW: *Did you feel it was unprofessional?*

Kuni: It was very awkward! [laughs]. Often in teaching you have to talk about something that you don't really know.... I had been here before but that was recent experience, before that I had never been here. So I was interested in the ordinary life and many aspects of long time experience rather than just the academic environment itself.

DW: *What about your expectations before you came 4 years ago and also this time?*

Kuni: I don't think there is a very big difference between 4 years ago and this time. Before I came here 4 years ago I had experienced the JET programme so I had met many young native speakers they are about 22 or 23 although some of them are older. And I had experience of team teaching with AETs, once a week, it began in 1988. I worked with 4 or 5 people from the UK, some of who I still know. I also met people from other countries such as America or other English speaking countries, but most of the time I found myself more comfortable with people from the UK than Americans or Australians. They say that people from the UK are a little shy, not exactly shy but are reserved and do not express themselves so easily.

DW: *Awkward maybe?*

Kuni: Probably yes. Also they don't like people to interfere with what they are doing, I felt comfortable with those things actually. I am not very outgoing myself and I felt in rhythm with the United Kingdom.

DW: *Why do you feel you are in rhythm with Britain, do you feel there is some similarity between Britain and Japan?*

Kuni: Culturally, yes and geographically as well. We are opposite sides of the continent but both are island countries and also Japan was also isolated from the outside world for a long time. The UK as well [is isolated] you feel it is not a part of Europe [laughs]! I'm joking slightly but I think the geographical factors have an influence on the nature of the people often. Also the level of culture, I think British culture is much more advanced or mature than Japanese culture, in a good sense and a bad sense.

DW: *Can you explain what you mean by "UK culture is more mature than Japanese culture"?*

Kuni: Japanese culture has just been influenced mainly by the culture of the United States in recent times. But also at the same time throughout the *Meiji* and *Taisho* eras we have been thinking unconsciously of the culture of the UK that lies behind the culture of the USA, because we know the United States is quite a young country and it is a descendent of the United Kingdom we tend to think that you speak the same language, although American and British English are quite different and we tend to group the countries together and think they are not that different. I guess Japanese tend to think that US and UK are similar..... Maturity, if I give a concrete example, appreciation of Art for example, The National Gallery is free of charge and also sometimes when you go there you can see a group of sixth form kids sitting in front of a Van Gogh or Monet and they ask whatever questions they want to the security staff about the painting. It is very mature, we don't do those kind of things [in Japan].

And also the way you can listen to music here, jazz, rock, classical. If you want to listen to classical music in Japan you have to pay a lot of money, it is outrageous, if you want to see the Vienna or Berlin Orchestra 20 or 30,000 Yen is normal. But here you can see it for £25 or £30 easily even for famous orchestras and that's not including student discounts.

DW: *I see, what about your goal in the future?*

Kuni: I will hope that I can complete my PhD here because if I try to complete the PhD in Japan it will be very difficult. I would like to get a job in a college or university connected with ELT, I think that is my goal. My final goal, it is a bit bold maybe, but I would like to continue this thesis to help solve the problems of language education. There are a huge number of problems in language education. When I was a teacher I could see many of those problems and if we continue like that we cannot develop the education so I would like to change.

DW: *So you have a kind of mission?*

Kuni: [laughs] Yeah! Well, why not? [laughs]

DW: *What are some of the things that you like and dislike about Britain and British people?*

Kuni: I live in a very special situation. In this university it is really international here. The people I meet everyday are not only British but also from other countries, we have a big Greek population here [laughs]. One thing is that things or products are very fragile [break easily], the quality of production is not so good, that is my main complaint. And also if you buy something...for example last Christmas I bought a soccer goal set for kids of a friend to play in the garden but the net they had was too small for the goal. So I went back to the shop and complained and they looked for the correct size in other boxes. But the other boxes also had the wrong size nets. This kind of thing often happens in other cases too, you can't get the right thing. Always and you have to go back more than once to sort something out. It happens when you have to work with agencies or banks. I booked a holiday at a travel agency and once the contract was made I *thought* [his emphasis] it was all finished, but they called back and told me that the accommodation had suddenly decided to do refurbishing so the room was not available. So you need more patience here to deal with this kind of thing. And also I found the regulations for parking are very strict. I have had two parking tickets already of £20 each. The first time I got one I had paid and displayed for one hour and I thought that I would be able to pay the excess if I went over the time limit but when I came back one hour over the time limit I found it wasn't possible. So I didn't know the rule.... Some regulations, or the attitude of officialdom is sometimes really authoritarian, it is also the case in Japan, but I haven't had such an experience in Japan. I know foreigners in Japan have a bad experience with officials so probably these kind of troubles are part of living in a foreign country. Also Home Office officials can be very rude.

DW: *Are you saying there is some kind of racism or...?*

Kuni: Sometimes I suspect there is but I don't know.... sometimes I feel there is some kind of racism, they don't really think of themselves as having any prejudice but sometimes I think it appears. But then sometimes the officials themselves are not white so I'm not sure. The first time I came here, 4 or 5 years ago, the most surprising thing for me was that this country is no longer a white country, it is multi-cultural. In all the large cities you can find multiculturalism.

DW: *I see, are there any other things you like about being here?*

Kuni: Even though I am living here with I can improve my English language ability which is important since half of my job is to teach English in Japan. It is also very convenient for me here because I have easy access to my resources and I like English newspapers, they are really informative, although I don't have enough time to read them as they are too thick! [laughs]. In these respects I really enjoy living here. Another thing is, it may be paradoxical or contradictory but on the one hand people are really open but at other times they can be really racist. I admire the British policy that accepted many people from the Commonwealth and refugees, that has made the country as it is now - a multicultural society - we haven't done that kind of thing in Japan. We can learn a lot from this country in culture and society, not only education as I said before.

DW: *I think what you say is very true. Unfortunately we are running short of time so I think we'll have to stop there. Thank you very much for your comments. They are really helpful for my research.*

End of recorded interview