

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF JAPANESE STUDENTS'
MOTIVATIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE

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ABSTRACT

HARTUNG, B. A. A qualitative study of Japanese students' motivations, expectations, and experiences at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Master of Science in Education, College Student Development and Administration, May 2002, 105 pp. (M. Miyamoto)

This case study was designed using interviews and a positioned subject approach to investigate the motivations, expectations, and experiences of Japanese students at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UW-La Crosse). The study explored the following questions: (1) What is the educational background of *Ryugakusei*, Japanese study abroad students, before attending university in the U.S.? (2) What motivates *Ryugakusei* to come to UW-La Crosse? (3) What are their expectations prior to arriving on campus? (4) What difficulties do they face during the process of acculturation? (5) Who do they go to for help? (6) Are they able to communicate their needs to faculty, academic staff, and peers? (7) Do cultural barriers prevent them from truly acclimatizing themselves to campus and the La Crosse community? Utilizing the qualitative posture of participant observation, a purposive sample was selected consisting of four male and five female *Ryugakusei*. The participants were tracked, observed, and interviewed during the fall of 2001. Throughout the data collection period, the investigator used the constant comparative method of data analysis to assist and discern emerging themes and phenomena. This emergent design enabled the investigator to pursue relevant themes, persons, or settings to help clarify the participants' perceptions. This design utilized participant observation, in-depth interviews, and collection of other relevant documents in the form of field notes, journal notes, and audio taped interviews. Because data were collected related to the intended focus of inquiry, the variables were not predetermined and thereby the themes emerged from the data. The investigator then identified units of meaning. The units of meaning used in this study were: educational background of participants, participants' motivations for study in the United States, participants' expectations of study in the United States, and the participants' experiences at UW-La Crosse. Findings supported that acculturation and acclimatization were related to expectations and cultural factors as well as language barriers and academic concerns. Overall, participants' academic experiences were positive with professionals. However, communication patterns within the classroom and while working in small groups proved to cause several adjustment issues with *Ryugakusei*. Social and personal support from other *Ryugakusei*, from other international students, from American students and from professionals on campus varied extensively. Recommendations were made for additional, longitudinal studies centered on these issues as well as the future experiences of the participants after they return to Japan. Continual assessment of the academic and social needs of *Ryugakusei*, and further research on the Asian identity development of *Ryugakusei*, with particular emphasis on their group communication and behavioral patterns was also suggested.

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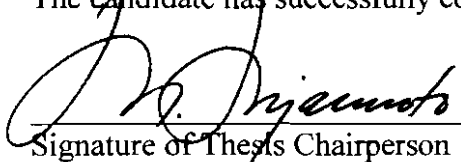

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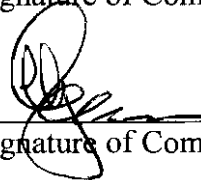
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“I am standing on the backs of giants.”

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Ryugakusei, Japanese study abroad students, is the second largest group of international students in higher education in the United States. In the 1999-2000 academic year, 46,872 *Ryugakusei* studied in the United States, surpassed only by China with 54,466 students. In fact, Asian students constituted over half (54%) of international enrollments (Open Doors, 1999/2000). In the last two decades the numbers have increased dramatically not only nationally, but locally. Yet, for most faculty and academic staff, little is known about these students or the Japanese educational system. In order to enhance the personal, social, and academic development of *Ryugakusei* and the environment that they live in, a better understanding is needed of why they enroll and what challenges they face while attending universities in the United States.

This chapter includes the description of the problem, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the limitations of the study, and a description of the terms used in the study.

Description of the Problem

The phenomenon of having a large number of *Ryugakusei* studying in the United States is mainly seen as a characteristic of post World War II. However, the history of *Ryugakusei* can be traced back to the *Asuka Jidai* (532-645). During this period, the students who traveled abroad were special people sent by the Japanese Government to

obtain advanced learning and knowledge to benefit the Japanese State. The concept of *Ryugaku*, study abroad, remained the same until the *Edo Jidai* (1600-1867) when the *Tokugawa Shogunate* (Government of the Shogun, the military leader under the emperor.) closed Japan off to foreign countries, with the exception of Holland and China. During this era, traveling overseas was illegal and prohibited by the *Tokugawa Shogunate*.

Towards the end of the *Edo Jidai*, the United States was eager to establish contact with Japan. First, their whaling vessels frequented the waters around Japan. The United States wanted permission to stop at Japanese ports to take on water and supplies. A second reason was that occasionally a ship was wrecked on the shores of Japan and any foreigner, including sailors that entered the country, were tortured or killed. A third reason was that Japan was seen as an economically logical stop for trading vessels bound for China. In 1853, Commodore Perry arrived in what is now called Tokyo Bay and delivered a letter from the President of the United States demanding the investiture of trade relations. Perry withdrew to Okinawa for the winter, promising to return one year later to receive the *Edo* government's reply. Fearing a battle when Commodore Perry returned if they didn't agree to the terms in the President's letter, Japan signed a treaty with the United States when Perry returned in 1854, forcing Japan to open its gates once again to foreigners (Reischauer, 1973). In 1862, the *Tokugawa Shogunate* began *Ryugaku* once again when it sent 15 students to Holland and later sent students to Russia, France, the United States, and England.

With the start of the *Meiji Jidai* (1868-1911), Japan embarked on an amazing social and political modernization, eliminating the feudal system and transforming itself into a modern, centralized nation. According to White, “a national educational system was seen as a crucial step to economic and social modernization, as well as a means for creating the coherence and consensus needed for a nation-state” (1987, p. 58). Therefore, Japanese educators traveled abroad and came back with German, Italian, French, and American pedagogical ideas and systems, which greatly influenced the education reform occurring within its borders (White, 1987). Some famous *Ryugakusei* educators from this period included: Ookuma Shigenobu, the founder of Waseda University; Fukuzawa Yukichi, the founder of Keiou University; and Tsuda Umeko, the founder of a small women’s college in Tokyo in 1900, which later became Tsuda College. Ms. Tsuda was sent to the United States at the age of seven years old and lived with an American family for ten years. As an adult she returned to the United States and graduated from Bryn Mawr College.

According to the Japanese Ministry of Education’s web page (For the sake of brevity and clarity, I will site information from this web page as MEXT, which stands for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and Technology.), the Japanese government established *Monbusho*, the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1871. One year later, the modern system of formal education began (MEXT, 2001). Prior to this time, generally only the upper class citizens were able to offer their children a formal education.

During the *Taisho Jidai* (1912-1926), the Ministry of Education sent Japanese teachers and scholars to western higher educational institutions for training under a

Researcher Abroad Program started by the ministry in 1917 (MEXT, 2001). This program continued until 1941 with the onset of World War II.

In the first half of the *Showa Jidai* (1926-1988), before World War II, studying abroad was still regarded as important for Japan in order to keep up with western countries. Mori Arinori, an early minister of education, expressed the goal of the modern education system:

“Our country must move from the third-class position to second class, and from second class to first; and ultimately to the leading position among all countries of the world. The best way to do this is by laying the foundations of elementary education” (Mori, quoted in Passin, *Society in Education*, p. 68).

Due to the wide influence of the Western educational systems the Japanese government took great care to preserve its Japanese educational identity. Education in the 1930s was closely tied to the mobilizing and uniting of the nation in preparation for World War II. Most foreign languages were eliminated from the curriculum (White, 1987).

During World War II, travel to the United States was prohibited, thus bringing *Ryugaku* to an end. Furthermore, by the end of the war, there was virtually no consistent school system in place within Japan. Thus, as in the *Meiji Jidai*, schools and the educating of children became the central focus in the rebuilding of Japan. In 1947, the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law were enacted. It was at this time that the six-three-three-four system of formal education was established (MEXT, 2001). The school system was divided into six years of elementary school, three years of junior high school, three years of high school and four years of university. The

purpose of these acts was to establish equal education opportunities for all Japanese children.

The United States was the first country after World War II to provide Japanese students with opportunities for studying abroad. The Fulbright Act of 1946 created funds and opened doors for the exchange of scholars from around the world in a creative way by selling surplus war goods and using renegotiations of outstanding war debts as fundraisers.

Even though Japan has had a long history of *Ryugaku*, it was not until post World War II that a large number of students started to go overseas. Two distinctive differences between the pre World War II *Ryugakusei* and the post World War II *Ryugakusei* are the goals of the student and the sources of financial support. *Ryugaku* became largely a privatized phenomenon. The purpose of *Ryugaku* was no longer to benefit the State, but rather for the personal benefit of the *Ryugakusei* (Tsukada, 1996).

The *Heisei Jidai* (1989 to present) also signifies a change in *Ryugakusei*. Since the mid-1980s, the Japanese yen's appreciation made the cost of a U.S. degree comparable or less expensive than a degree from Japan. More and more Japanese corporations also began to send promising employees to the U.S. for degrees, especially at business schools. I also believe that U.S. campuses began to see another type of student. It is my hunch that students from middle class families that failed entrance examinations in Japan or were not satisfied with the Japanese educational system began to realistically seek degrees outside of the Japanese system.

It is important to understand what was going on in the U.S. in order to understand the entire picture of *Ryugaku*. Prior to World War II, America saw itself as being isolated geographically. The U.S. government was more concerned about domestic affairs than international affairs. Yet with the onset of World War II, new doors were about to be opened for international education. Although all study abroad programs were suspended in the U.S. during this period, universities were being asked to develop centers for expertise in area studies and language programs. As Goodwin & Nacht (1991) pointed out, academics were suddenly involved in military decision making as well as in intelligence, logistical planning, and after the war, occupation and recovery. These scholars were also responsible for comprehending languages and cultures of allies and enemies. Their knowledge was first used to defeat enemies and later to rebuild them (Goodwin & Nacht, 1991). During World War II, understanding other nations became essential to our national defense. Yet this involvement generally did not make institutions more international (Johnston & Edelstein, 1993).

The United State's academic view of the world changed drastically during and after World War II. The governments' hands and the intellects' minds were busy rebuilding much of Europe and parts of Asia, including Japan. "The worldwide scholarly community came to be seen by the United State's scholars as needing help and deserving to be tended, both from a sense of *noblesse oblige* and because so doing would strengthen the Western Alliance" (Goodwin & Nacht, 1991, p. 8).

As more and more of the world began to use English in business, government, and academia, the idea in the minds of U.S. academics as being superior to the world

strengthened. It is out of this sense of superiority that brought about the notion: If the world is speaking and looking more like us, why learn other languages and cultural behaviors? This image has permeated into society in general.

International education has been recognized as a vital tool in promoting transnational cross-cultural competency. While an increasing number of American students are choosing to study abroad, their primary focus of study is in Europe; few are choosing Asian countries. During the 1997/1998 academic year, 63 percent of American students opted for Europe while only six percent chose to study in Asia. Only 2,285 American students studied in Japan compared to the 46,406 *Ryugakusei* on our campuses during the same academic year (Open Doors, 1999/2000). It therefore seems obvious that *Ryugakusei* on U.S. campuses are the best tool to expose U.S. and Japanese people to each other thereby facilitating some level of transnational cross-cultural competency between our nations.

Yet, from the initial conversations with the *Ryugakusei* at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (hereafter to be called UW-La Crosse), it appeared that there has not been significant interaction between U.S. students and *Ryugakusei*. I believe that both sides are “missing the boat” as Goodwin and Nacht so appropriately titled their book. Therefore, on a global level, increasing contact between the two groups is essential to achieving transnational cross-cultural competency; on a local level, it is essential to improving the educational experience of both U.S. students and *Ryugakusei* at UW-La Crosse.

Statement of the Problem

“Universities are laboratories for learning how to live and interrelate in a complex world” (Spees & Spees, 1986, p. 5). Perhaps there is not a more efficient or realistic way to challenge young adults on how to cope with life’s problems while providing an essential built-in support system. Adding diversity to the laboratory, while enhancing the experience, can further convolute it. This exposure to diversity can and often does create conflict for all parties involved.

Ryugakusei, like their U.S. counterparts, tend to experience a variety of adjustment and development concerns while attending colleges and universities. However, *Ryugakusei* are faced with additional challenges, such as language and cultural barriers. As with U.S. students, acclimatization to a new setting cannot occur when the personal, social, and academic needs are not being met, nor can acculturation (Schram & Lauver, 1988).

After spending nearly a decade of my adult life teaching Japanese students of all ages in Japan, it seemed only natural for me to try to befriend the Japanese students attending UW-La Crosse as undergraduate and graduate students. Facing return culture shock, I eagerly joined their group at the student union or invited them to my home to share a Japanese meal with my family. Initially the reaction of the *Ryugakusei* appeared to be one of surprise. “Who is this *Henna Amerikajin*, strange American, that is so interested in me?” Yet, with time, they began to welcome me, tell me their stories, and seek my help with their problems.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the motivations, expectations, and experiences of *Ryugakusei* at UW-La Crosse. Since 1991, *Ryugakusei* enrollment at UW-La Crosse has increased from eight students to 21 students in the fall semester of 2001. As this population grows, further understanding of the *Ryugakusei* experience is essential to assist UW-La Crosse educators in attending to the personal, social, and academic needs of these students.

The more I listened to *Ryugakusei* and their personal stories of why they enrolled and the language and cultural barriers they faced, the more fascinated I became with their lives at UW-La Crosse and realized their stories needed to be heard. In order to serve these students better, we as educators need to understand: What motivates *Ryugakusei* to come to the UW-La Crosse? What are their expectations prior to arriving on campus? What difficulties do they face during the process of acculturation? Who do they go to for help? Are they able to communicate their needs to faculty, academic staff, and peers? Do cultural barriers prevent them from truly acclimatizing themselves to campus and the La Crosse community?

In order to accomplish this, first we must understand: Why do Japanese people keep coming to the U.S. for an education, even though Japan has one of the best educational systems in the world? Chambers and Cummings (1990) compared the U.S. and Japanese higher educational systems. In drawing comparisons, several possible reasons why *Ryugakusei* may seek higher education in the U.S. were established. First, "the Japanese system offers students fewer opportunities, because students cannot get into their

preferred college” (p. 12). Second, “American college education is higher in quality, perhaps because the American colleges provide a better educational experience than the Japanese colleges” (p. 10). And third, “graduate education is more highly developed in the United States” (p. 11).

However, I wondered more specifically about the decision making process of *Ryugakusei* in coming to the UW–La Crosse. I believed that students were choosing this university based on recommendations from family, friends, or teachers and that a further deciding factor in the process was the safety provided at a university located in a small, midwestern city. Furthermore, I believed that many of the *Ryugakusei* were choosing to come to UW-La Crosse as a second choice after either failing the entrance examinations at Japanese colleges and universities or as an escape from the Japanese educational system.

Importance of the Study

International education has posed challenges for both *Ryugakusei* and the educational institutions involved. Although academic outcome has been cited as the main goal of international students (Aubrey, 1991; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986), this outcome is more likely when students experience a supportive campus environment. While universities attempt to provide a supportive environment, the reality is that many international students face high levels of stress, depression, isolation, frustration, and pessimism (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Without understanding the motivations, expectations, and experiences of the student, it is difficult for the institution to provide the necessary support to help the *Ryugakusei* through cross-cultural transitions.

Limitations of the Study

This study had the following limitations:

1. Subjects for this study were limited to *Ryugakusei* enrolled in the UW-La Crosse. Although the generalizability of these findings may extend to similar comprehensive universities in the Midwest, one should be cautious in generalizing these results with different populations, demographics, and geographical locations. This study is not meant to be generalizable to all international students.
2. The participants were volunteers; therefore, a positive or negative bias may have been present in the self-selection of the participants and may have affected the findings and conclusions.
3. Although I attempted to establish a trustworthy relationship with each participant, they may not have felt comfortable discussing private issues as a result of cultural differences and therefore a complete story may not have been heard.

Definition of Terms

Acculturation - The process of change that occurs when two cultures come into contact with each other. It also refers to the extent that a member of a non-dominant group adopts the beliefs, values, customs, and institutions of the dominant culture (Cooper, 2001).

Degree-seeking student - Student enrolled in university classes with the intent to continue with his/her studies until a degree is earned.

Indwelling - To exist as an interactive spirit, force, or principle, and to exist within as an activating spirit (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

Ryugaku - Study Abroad.

Ryugakusei - Japanese study abroad student. (This word first entered the Japanese language during the *Meiji Jidai* and referred to an individual who travels in search of knowledge).

Chapter Summary

As a result of more *Ryugakusei* at universities in the United States and at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, understanding the motivations, expectations and experiences of these students is essential. The purpose of this study was to investigate the *Ryugakusei* perceptions of these constructs and search for emerging phenomenon so that educators can better understand the social, personal, and academic needs of *Ryugakusei* at the UW-La Crosse.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to understand the unique needs and concerns of *Ryugakusei*, it is important to understand the educational system from which they came. This chapter gives an in-depth view of the Japanese educational system and the role it plays in being Japanese. It also explores what role the students' failure to succeed in the Japanese system plays in bringing *Ryugakusei* to our campuses. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of the basic adjustment needs of *Ryugakusei* as well as a review of past research specifically done on *Ryugakusei*.

Japanese Education System

Kyoiku Mama is a common word for Japanese mothers that are deeply involved in their children's education. This noun encompasses more than a mother assisting her child with daily homework and attending PTA meetings. The term *Kyoiku Mama* refers to a mother that rigorously teaches her toddler in hopes that he/she will make it into a prestigious kindergarten. It includes a mother of a junior high school child that takes refresher courses so that she can tutor her child between the regular school day and the evening *Juku*, cram school classes, that most junior and senior high Japanese children attend. The same mother will work part-time to gain extra income to pay for the various classes. *Kyoiku Mama* is a direct result of the Japanese educational system. It may seem foreign to someone educated within the United States educational system; however, to varying degrees, it is very real to the families of Japan.

I have drawn extensively from my experiences as a teacher within the Japanese Education System in writing this first part of the literature review. I first went to Japan in 1989 as an Assistant English Teacher at an academic high school on the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program. The JET program, sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Education, employs foreign teachers from all over the world to teach in public junior and senior high schools. During my three years based at a public high school, I was also a visiting teacher at four area junior high schools, three other high schools, and a school for disabled children. I was also a guest *Gaijin*, foreigner, in several elementary schools.

In the mid-1990s, I worked at a private junior and senior high school and taught English classes at a private kindergarten. During my last three years in Japan I taught at a private nursing college. I feel very fortunate to have seen the inside of this system from various vantage points as a *Gaijin* educator. It is interesting to note that *Gaijin* is translated to foreigner, but the Chinese character actually means outsider.

For the most part, the world holds the Japanese Educational System in awe. Their students outscore the rest of the world year after year on standardized tests. Moreover, Japan boasts one of the most literate and well-educated populations in the world. Few nations, if any, have virtually eliminated illiteracy from its shores as this nation has in the last fifty years. However, Japanese society is changing. There is a dichotomous relationship between the old and new Japanese cultures. These observations are evident to anyone who spends time in Japan.

Japanese Language

Because language, culture, and institutions are so closely linked, I would be remiss to not mention the importance of Japan's *Kokugo*. Japan has achieved almost total literacy in *Kokugo*, which literally means national (*ko*) language (*go*). Unlike the United States, the Japanese people are almost entirely a homogeneous population. The largest minority group living in Japan is the Korean-Japanese, with numbers near half a million. The vast majority of Korean-Japanese have been assimilated language-wise into Japanese society through the educational system. As such, every first grader in every school throughout Japan will learn the same words at the same rate throughout their educational career. The centralized Ministry of Education has carefully plotted out 1,850 *Kanji*, Chinese characters, from easy to complex. Every student, teacher, and parent knows precisely when and what *Kanji* needs to be learned. Thus, Japanese education is able to produce a highly literate work force.

Japanese Educational Background

In 1871, the Japanese government established *Monbusho*, the Japanese Ministry of Education. One year later, the modern system of formal education began. Prior to this time, generally only the upper class citizens were able to offer their children a formal education. In 1947, the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law were enacted. It was at this time that the six-three-three-four system of formal education was established (MEXT, 2001). The purpose of these acts was to establish equal education opportunities for all Japanese children. Extensive effort was made to ensure standardized education as well as equal opportunity.

Upper secondary schools were first established in 1948, offering full-time and part-time courses. One year later a new system for universities began. The junior college system was established on a provisional basis in 1950 and on a permanent basis in 1964, following an amendment to the School Education Law (MEXT, 2001).

In January of 2001, the Ministry of Education formally became the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2001). With the name change came other changes as well. Some of these changes will be discussed in the following pages.

Organizational Structure

The Japanese school year consists of three terms: April through July; September through December; and January through March. Accordingly, Japanese children begin compulsory education beginning with first grade in April. Furthermore, any child that will turn seven between April first and March thirty-first must begin first grade, without exception.

Prior to first grade, Japanese children have the option of attending *Yoichen* or *Hoikuen*. *Yochien* can be translated as kindergarten although these schools are normally separate entities and are not attached to an elementary school. Children may attend the academic year that they turn four until they start first grade. The objective of kindergarten according to MEXT is to “nurture the children and provide them with a suitable environment for learning and support their physical and mental development” (2001). My daughter attended one year of *Yochien* at a private, Buddhist kindergarten. Based on my experience teaching at a *Yochien*, being a parent of a *Yochien* student, and

conversing with Japanese friends, I believe the main purpose of *Yochien* is to teach children how to belong to a group. White (1987) expanded this idea when she stated the important lessons of *Yochien* as “integrating oneself into the life of the group, emotional sensitivity to others, and learning the right way to do something” (p. 103).

Working and playing for the group was the common theme throughout each school day. For example, while doing an art project, each child completes one step at a time, waiting for all thirty children to finish the same step before continuing on to the next step. I watched as my daughter struggled with her individualist attitudes as she assimilated with the collectivist classroom. Eager to use a pencil at school as she did at home rather than crayons, we offered to donate pencils to the classroom. This was not allowed, as the children were supposed to be just drawing and not writing. And even though many of the children were quite capable of writing their own names on projects, this was also not permitted because some children were not yet capable of writing the Japanese alphabet. Thus, the teacher quietly went around the room and wrote each child’s name on the thirty individual projects.

Although the Japanese *Yochien* is housed under MEXT, it is not compulsory nor is it considered academic, and, therefore, parents must pay tuition. But this is convoluted by the fact that the birthrate in Japan has decreased to an astonishing low rate. Many foreigners make the false assumption that Japan, like many countries in Asia, is trying to decrease their population, and so they are surprised to hear that many local governments are going to great lengths to encourage families to have more children. One way to encourage people to have more children is by decreasing the financial burden for parents.

Therefore, the government has begun supplementing public and private kindergarten fees. This mix of public funds at private institutions at every level is normal in Japan. The government believes that it is less expensive to support established structures rather than build new ones.

For parents working outside of the home and do not have extended family to care for their toddlers, the only option is *Hoikuen*, public daycare. It is available through the Health and Welfare Department. The cost of daycare is based on the parents' income. Children can attend from age one. Many children of working parents never attend *Yochien* because of the convenience of public daycare. The *Yochien* schedule is based on the academic year, with summer, winter and spring breaks, while the *Hoikuen* only closes for national holidays and offers limited extended hours to meet the parents' needs.

Compulsory Education

Children between the ages of six and 12 must attend some type of school. Generally children will attend the public elementary and junior high school nearest to their home. For families that choose to send their children to private schools, the options are varied depending on the locality. One of the more interesting options is what the Japanese call "escalator schools." These schools can be public or private. If they are public they are usually funded through the prefecture or national governments, but as stated earlier, even the private institutions receive aid from the national government. Almost always these schools are affiliated with a prestigious university.

In my opening remarks, I discussed *Kyoiku Mama* and how I believe that the concept was a direct result of the educational organization. An example of how this would be

true is in the following story. Perhaps Yamamura-san lives near Keio University, one of the top universities in Japan. Keio University also runs a *Yochien* as well as an elementary, junior, and senior high school. Generally speaking, children who are able to enter the kindergarten can ride the “escalator” all the way through university; thereby exempting themselves from the “examination hell” other students must face at the end of junior and senior high school. For students in the third year of junior and senior high school this time period is called “examination hell.” Many mothers believe that the emotional and physical stress that children and families experience for a year prior to kindergarten (from age three to age four) would offset the accumulative amount of stress of attending a non-escalator school. Therefore, Yamamura-san will go to great lengths to ensure that her child passes the Keio University’s *Yochien* entrance exam. In order to pass some of these exams, the children must possess academic, social, and physical skills that most three-year olds do not possess naturally. The parents will also face intensive interviews before the *Yochien* will admit the child.

A tragic, albeit extreme, example of the emotional stress that these kindergarten entrance exams produce can be seen in the following true story. In 1999, a woman in Tokyo strangled her friend’s young daughter to death because she was so jealous that the child’s older sibling had passed the entrance exam and her own child had not passed. How could the failure of passing an entrance exam of one’s child create such stress that a normally sane woman would turn to murder? What would possess her to follow a small child into a restroom, strangle her with a winter scarf, stuff her into a duffle bag, carry the bag home on a long train ride to the murderer’s hometown and bury the dead child in the

murderer's parents' garden? Japan sat in shocked silence as the story unfolded and once again opened a dialogue regarding the problems of the educational structure itself.

Understanding how this concept of *Kyoiku Mama* can develop is inherent to understanding the entire Japanese educational organization.

Most Japanese children do not attend an escalator school; therefore, they are faced with an examination at the end of their compulsory education in order to attend senior high schools. The entire family will forgo family trips, holiday celebrations and lead a quiet lifestyle in order to provide an atmosphere conducive to studying for the child preparing for the entrance exam.

Again, students may choose from public and private schools. The courses in high schools include general educational courses and/or specialized subject courses. If a child hopes to attend a Japanese university, then the child will attempt to enter an academic high school. These high schools, public and private, are ranked according to the percentage of students they matriculate into high ranked universities. Therefore, the higher the ranking of the high school that one attends, the better chance to enter a high ranked university. As a result, they have a better chance to work at prestigious jobs in the students' chosen fields. For most Japanese, this in essence is the key to success.

A fictional but realistic story to illustrate this link between schools and careers would be the following: Misawa-san's father and grandfather were both powerful bureaucrats. Misawa-san would also like to be a powerful bureaucrat. It would be necessary for him to enter the number one ranked high school in his area of the prefecture in order for him to enter one of the top three Japanese universities, Todai, Kyodai, or Waseda. It is from

these three universities that most positions within the national government will be filled as a result of the extremely strong old-boy network. The strength of this factor again stems from group mentality. By attending a certain university, one becomes a member of that group. This would be true as well if Misawa-san aspired for a leadership position within Sony, Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, or some other prestigious company within Japan. It is fundamental to understand the strong connection between the Japanese educational organization and other organizations within the society before one can even begin to understand either structure.

On the other hand, if Misawa-san hoped to be a farmer or fisherman or work in some other specialized field, he could apply to a high school with a specialized course of study. There are senior high schools that offer courses in agriculture, industry, business, fisheries, home economics, nursing, science-mathematics, English language, and others. Because secondary education is not compulsory, it is not necessary for it to be equal in quality. This is the first time, with the exception of schools for the disabled, that one will encounter inequality in regards to quality within schools. While most of the funding still comes from prefecture or national funding, students are also charged tuition.

One extremely intelligent young man in my thesis research wants to be an astronomer. He sat for the entrance exam at the highest ranked university for astronomy in Japan. He failed, and, rather than attending the second highest university, he chose to attend school in the United States even though he knows that his science/astronomy undergraduate degree from an American university will not be recognized in Japan. His pride or loss of pride at not making it into the “best” Japanese school is a characteristic

that I believe is quite common with some Japanese students that attend our universities. This will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter.

Earlier I stated that schools for disabled children were an area where I felt there was inequality. Constitutionally, students with disabilities are provided with an education at schools for the blind, schools for the deaf, and schools for other disabled or in special classes at elementary and junior high schools. In my research, MEXT used the word “appropriate” education.

I was fortunate enough to teach at one of the special schools as a visiting English teacher once a month for one academic school year. The *Yogogako* was annexed to a hospital and schooled the children from the eastern area of the prefecture. Although the school was staffed with perhaps the most dedicated and friendly teachers I have ever met, I remember feeling appalled at the system. Clearly, parents of some of the severely mentally and physically disabled children were not able to provide necessary care. Therefore these children lived at the school/hospital. For these children I thought the facilities were outstanding. But this school/hospital was also responsible for educating children with severe asthma or children without the use of their legs. These latter children were mentally able to study, yet were not allowed to attend the mainstream schools because of the special care that they needed. Some of the children came from distant areas and were forced to board at the hospital/school and only went home during school holidays.

In recent years, parents and advocates of these children are demanding equal educational opportunities within the standardized school system. Some court cases are

siding with the parents and allowing children to attend regular schools if the parents are able to assist with the special care of these youngsters. As it currently stands, schools are not responsible for access for children with special needs, and therefore, if parents force the issue by taking it to the courts, the parents must attend school with the child or find someone else to do so. Placing any extra burden on the school is seen as selfish. Again, group mentality plays a huge role in this situation. A parent who makes special demands for his/her child is not thinking about the best interest of the group.

During the past two summers, a young man in a wheelchair has attended the ESL Institute at the UW-La Crosse. I had opportunities to speak with him regarding the freedom that was afforded him by attending school in the United States. During his second summer, he had trouble with his automatic door opener, fell, and cracked his head open and needed to be taken to the hospital for stitches. He was not upset over the incident at all. In fact, he told me he was impressed with the help that was given to him and was quite excited to ride in an ambulance. Although advocates for this student felt the hall was at blame for not fixing his door opener immediately, I do not believe that the young man placed fault with anyone but himself. His philosophy seemed quite clear when he stated to me, "Accidents will happen. I fall all the time."

While in Japan for nearly ten years, I rarely saw people in wheelchairs in public. On the other hand, I could see blind people on a daily basis. Consequently, for students with physical disabilities, the U.S. educational system is able to open many doors to them and for the first time in their lives they are able to experience equal educational opportunity.

Curriculum

Perhaps there is not another respected educational system in the world in which the curriculum is more controversial. There is not a year that goes by when other Asian countries do not complain about something in the Japanese textbooks. Some of the most horrific examples stem from the inaccurate portrayal of World War II. One example is that of “comfort women.” Korean women and other nationals were brought to Japan or to Japanese frontlines to meet the sexual needs of soldiers. These “comfort women” were stolen from their families and forced into atrocious lives. Yet, current textbooks describe them as paid professionals that chose to give comfort to the soldiers. This is one of the key issues that prevents Japan from being respected and valued within Asia.

The following paragraph from MEXT shows the extent that the Japanese government controls the curriculum.

MEXT determines the standards for educational curricula from kindergarten to upper secondary schools in order that standardized education can be provided in all schools in Japan. MEXT ordinances based on law as well as the School Education Law stipulate the educational objectives, goals, curricula, school week and subject types taught at different school levels. Furthermore, fundamental standards, such as the objectives and content of all subjects, are stipulated under Courses of Study based on this ordinance (MEXT, 2001).

Accordingly, the schools are required to choose textbooks from a list of suitable textbooks authorized by MEXT. Even though these textbooks are compiled and edited by the private sector, only ones that MEXT deems suitable are considered for use. Thus, no matter where one live in Japan, one can be assured that the basic text that is being used has been approved and the material is standardized. The concept of “academic freedom” is not permitted within the educational organization. Therefore, if a teacher

wanted to teach something about World War II that was not in the history textbook permitted by MEXT, he/she would risk job security. Likewise, unless the Japanese government changes its position regarding ‘comfort women’ as paid professionals, the truth will never make it into any approved textbook.

Role of Educational System

Ijime, bullying, has long existed among school-aged children in Japan. Indeed, many assume that bullying is a natural part of growing up in Japan. It is in the extreme cases that result in youth suicide that have made it the most publicly discussed educational problem (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999; Murakami, 1985; Schoolland, 1990). In 1994, over an 18-month period, eleven suicide cases were reported (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999). As a result MEXT is working to improve student guidance. Currently, there are few school guidance counselors working within the school system. Generally speaking, the school nurse’s room has been the place for children to go when they faced some type of physical or emotional illness. Realizing that the training behind a school nurse’s degree may not always be adequate enough to meet these students’ emotional and mental needs, MEXT stated that from FY2001 it would begin to implement various studies and research looking into the issue of using school counselors in prefectures and designated cities nationwide.

According to MEXT, “the sources of and background to such problematic behavior involve interrelated factors in the home, the school, and the community” (2001). From FY2001, measures to combat such problems will include:

- 1) realizing easy to understand classes, 2) enhancing emotional education, including by pressing home sociability and respect for social norms, 3) enhancing the system

for educational counseling by appointing school counselors, for example, and 4) support for measures involving the home, school, and community in the prevention of delinquency and other misdemeanors (MEXT, 2001).

There is a close link between the home and the school within the Japanese educational organization. "It is generally assumed that elementary and secondary schools should exercise supervisory power over students' behavior outside the school" (Fujita, 1991, p. 157). An example of this would be a parent coming to the school to ask the teachers to be stricter with their son because he is out of control at home. If the same son were caught shoplifting by the local police, it would not be unusual for his homeroom teacher to be called to the police station rather than the child's parents. Some of the duties I surprisingly found myself doing as a teacher at a public high school included but were not limited to, inspecting the length of fingernails, hair, and skirts. During these inspections, I found myself with a scissors in hand cutting bangs that were too long, according to school regulations. I also inspected the color of hair and umbrellas. I counted the number of buttons on jackets and the number of pleats on skirts and trousers. All of these were acceptable and expected behaviors of high school teachers and represent the strong custodial role of school in Japan.

While teachers, especially homeroom teachers, are given a great amount of responsibility over their students, they are also given a great amount of respect. Traditionally, teachers or *Sensei* are the most respected members of the society. One is respectfully called *Sensei* in whatever teaching role one assumes. All students from first grade through high school stand erect, greet, and bow when the teacher enters and leaves the classroom. A student never enters the teachers' room without first bowing and

respectfully greeting the entire room of teachers and will exit backwards again bowing and thanking the room.

Organizational Culture and Symbols

At the entrance of most public elementary schools in Japan, you will find a small statue of a young boy. This historical boy, Ninomiya Kinjiro, is the symbol of what it means to be a good student. Parents and teachers will tell children that they should be like Ninomiya Kinjiro. Every school throughout Japan begins on the same day in April with a vision of children walking to school under cherry blossoms. It is on this date that the schools at every level welcome their first year students. The first year students in elementary, junior, and senior high school students arrive in their brand new school uniforms. Their mothers, rarely fathers, come in either their finest kimono or a formal suit to attend the long, formal opening ceremony. The principal wears a formal tuxedo. The teachers are all dressed in black or navy suits. The PTA buys formal boxed lunches for all of the teachers.

The symbolism goes beyond the school grounds as stores sell the necessary items that each student must have in order to be a good student like Ninomiya Kinjiro. First graders will get their very own desk, and, no matter how crowded the Japanese homes are, a space will be made for the child's desk. Besides wearing the uniform, the first grader will come to school wearing a red or black *Randosal*, backpack, (red for girls, black for boys). And even though they are not required to purchase a certain *Randosal*, most first graders will carry the traditional box shaped one. Inside the *Randosal* every child will carry a certain style pencil case, with a certain style of pencils, along with the

required free textbooks and notebooks. These symbols/tools of being a student will go back and forth between home and school each day. The desk at school will remain empty of books and will contain other learning tools. Each child will wear a name-tag that includes his/her school's name and homeroom number. These tags are supposed to be worn not only in school, but also on weekends when the child is out playing or in public to emphasize that a child not only belongs to his/her family, but also to his/her school and homeroom.

The school year is also packed with other formal and informal events and ceremonies. Each term begins and ends with a ceremony. All schools have an *Undokai* or field day in October. All sixth, eighth, and eleventh graders go on a three to five day class trip. Every school hosts an annual *Bunkasai*, school festival, or *Happyo kai*. On May 1, all schools will change from winter to summer clothing, and on October 1 they will change back into the winter clothing. This happens no matter what the weather is like. Even though teachers did not wear uniforms, they usually changed their seasonal clothing on these dates. I was often considered the *Henna Gaijin*, strange foreigner, when I would wear short sleeves in late October on what I considered to be a hot day.

Yobiko or Juku

So great are the demands of the senior high school and university entrance exams, that many Japanese students enroll in *Yobiko* or *Juku*. *Yobiko* is a system of commercially operated, profit-making preparatory schools. *Juku* is a locally owned scaled down version, which offer the same type of preparatory classes. In order for most children to pass the difficult entrance exams, they must attend either *Yobiko* or *Juku*.

Duke claims that the “proliferation of this profitable industry has become one of the most bewildering developments of postwar Japanese education” (1986, p. 90).

For most Japanese children, after-school lessons begin in *Yochien*. Their late afternoons will be filled with English conversation, swimming, karate, piano, calligraphy, dance, or soccer. It is quite common for children to participate in four or five after school classes throughout their elementary years. In fifth or sixth grade, the focus of these classes will shift to academic-based cramming. Students will study math, science, Japanese, English, and social studies for three to four hours, up to seven days a week. Students are subjected to constant barrage of practice exams. As with the regular school system, students are ranked accordingly.

Ronin or Masterless Samarai

Ronin, which literally means Masterless Samarai, are students that having failed the university entrance exams or perhaps passed a lower ranked university exam, decide to spend another year studying at a *Yobiko* in order to gain entrance the following year. Some *Yobiko* have gained a national reputation and charge nearly as much as attending a university. Often times, these schools offer rooms with house mothers who cook meals and provide care for the *Ronin* so that the student can devote his/her time to studying for the university entrance examination. In this study, three participants were considered *Ronin* before entering a university in the United States.

The Adjustment Needs of *Ryugakusei*

When a university accepts international students to their campus it invariably accepts the responsibility to meet the special needs of *Ryugakusei*. In many respects,

international students face the same problems as their American counterparts. Concerns about whether they can succeed academically and develop a good relationship with classmates and professors are quite common. But international students have additional concerns. Storey (1982) discussed the inadequate and culturally bound nature of contemporary student development theories as they relate to international students. He believed that five of the most common concerns of international students were related to language difficulties, financial problems, adjustment to a new educational system, social and cultural adjustment, and relevance of academic programs (Storey, 1982, p. 66-70).

Language Difficulties

Inability to speak the English language is by far the most prevailing concern for *Ryugakusei*. While most Japanese young people take English each year of their junior and senior high school days, their ability to speak English is often weak. Most of the emphasis in their English studies has been placed on memorizing an extensive vocabulary and understanding grammatical rules. Many Japanese students come to the United States under the assumption that if they try hard enough, they can master the English language in a year or two. This may seem like a reasonable assumption, but it is important to point out that many of the *Ryugakusei* are from the bottom half of their Japanese high school classes (Chambers & Cummings, 1990). Further more, because of the Japanese system of teaching and testing English, many of these students have low self-confidence in their ability to master the English language.

The lack of language proficiency will affect students' ability to comprehend reading assignments, express opinions in class, understand lectures and instructions, and answer

essay questions on exams. Lack of English proficiency will further inhibit the student in building relationships with professors and classmates in and out of the classroom.

Financial Problems

Many Americans assume that because Japan is a wealthy country, most Japanese are financially well-off. While this may be true in some cases, the average *Ryugakusei* is probably no better off than the average U.S. student. The big difference between the two countries is the importance that Japanese parents place on education. Education is often thought to be a good investment in the family's future and parents will often pay 100% of the costs involved in getting a degree. However, there are exceptions and some students are supporting themselves, which may result in heavier academic loads in order to graduate as soon as possible.

Adjustment to a New Culture

In U.S. classrooms, students are expected to synthesize the material and form their own opinion. There is a common belief that the Japanese education fails to develop critical or creative thinking. For many *Ryugakusei* this will be the first time that they have been asked to state their own opinion in class or on an exam and the results may prove very stressful.

Social and Cultural Adjustment

Generally *Ryugakusei* come from an environment where the professors, academic staff, and upper-classmates are spoken to and treated formally. It is therefore a cultural adjustment to treat these people as equals. It is also quite clear that Japanese culture and U.S. culture are built on very different cultural building blocks. This will be discussed in

greater detail in the next section. One method Japanese students use in coping with social and cultural adjustments is to interact primarily with other students from their home countries. Although these interactions may reduce the stress of living in a foreign country, they may also limit the contact with U.S. students and further increase the feelings of isolation and homesickness (Marion, 1986).

Relevance of Academic Programs

Partly due to the prestige hierarchy of Japanese universities, a degree from a U.S. university may not be valid upon returning to Japan. Obviously this fact must weigh heavily on the students' mind as they work towards obtaining a degree and should also be considered when advising *Ryugakusei*.

Nature of Intercultural Experiences

Cross-cultural competency is reached only after a person is able to live and work effectively within a culture other than his/her own. Interacting and communicating with a different culture is physically and emotionally very demanding. The process that one goes through in adapting to a new culture requires sojourners to develop skills that are not natural. Milton Bennett describes intercultural sensitivity as "not part of our primate past, nor has it characterized most of human history. Cross-cultural contact usually has been accompanied by bloodshed, oppression, or genocide" (Bennett, 1993 in Paige, 1993, p. 21).

Cultural Differences

Interculturalists hypothesize that it is not the cultural similarities that challenge a sojourner, rather the cultural differences. Although this may seem obvious, it cannot be

stressed enough. In essence the greater the difference in value orientations, beliefs, behaviors, and patterns of thinking and communicating, the more challenging and stressful the cross-cultural experience will be. Storti (1989) defined culture as the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group, which result in characteristic behaviors. He describes the different dimensions of culture along continuums. Often, U.S. and Japanese cultures are plotted on opposite ends of these continuums. These very real differences in the two cultures make it clear that *Ryugakusei* attending university in the United States will face personal, social, and academic adjustment problems and will need the support of professors, academic staff, and peers.

Concept of Self

One's concept of self is a very basic building block of culture. It is accepted that the majority of Americans are individualistic. Americans value independence and self-reliance. Children are taught at an early age to be themselves and make their own decisions. On the other hand, most Japanese people would fall on the collectivist end of the continuum. They primarily identify with the group (family, school, or company). Group harmony is of key importance when viewing the world (Storti, 1989).

Personal vs. Societal Responsibility

Most Americans fall on the universalist side of this continuum vs. the particularist side. For universalists, fair means treating everyone the same and there are no exceptions to the rule. My particularist international friends laugh when they see me drive up to a stop sign in the middle of the night on a dark country road and stop. "Why do you stop? It is clear that there is not another car within miles! Oh, you Americans are always so by

the book!” For Japanese, who fall somewhere in the middle, American universalist behavior may not seem quite so foreign (Storti, 1989).

Concept of Time

Americans are categorized as being monochronic. Time is seen as in limited supply; deadlines and plans are often viewed as impossible to change. To be late or kept waiting is considered rude. Polychronic cultures on the other hand perceive time as never-ending. Deadlines and plans are fluid; people come first. Again, the Japanese are placed in the middle, therefore, this area of U.S. culture may not cause as much conflict as other areas (Storti, 1989).

Locus of Control

American culture has an internal locus of control. Generally speaking, fate is given little or no attention. Children are taught that if there is a will, there is a way. We are responsible for our own happiness in life. Other cultures view the locus of control as being external to themselves. Destiny and fate play a major role in life. Good or bad fortune is responsible for much of what happens in life. Japanese fall near the center, therefore, this is another area that may not cause a lot of stress for *Ryugakusei* studying in the U.S. (Storti, 1989).

Communication - Degree of Directness

This is an area that will cause a great deal of culture shock for Japanese in the United States. Generally, Americans are very direct and say what they mean and mean what they say. Yes means yes and no means no. Japanese communication patterns fall on the exact opposite end of the continuum. “Yes” may mean different things in Japanese. It

may mean: “Yes, I hear you, but I don’t agree with you,” or “Yes, I understand you and I may or may not agree with you,” or “Yes, I agree with you.” Because Japanese culture and language promote people to not always say what they mean, it is necessary to learn how to read between the lines (Storti, 1989).

Communication - Importance of Face

For most Americans, face is less important than truth. We believe that telling the truth or constructive criticism is very important. We are taught from a young age that honesty is the best policy. There is not a strict hierarchy for getting or giving information; it is more important that the information is given or gotten efficiently. On the other hand, for Japanese, face is very important. Preserving harmony in the group and saving face are constant concerns. It is less important to be honest and more important to safeguard relationships (Storti, 1989). Therefore, this is another cultural building block that *Ryugakusei* may stumble on as they experience life in the United States.

Past Studies of *Ryugakusei*

Contrary to my expectations, limited research on degree seeking *Ryugakusei* in the U.S. was found. McCornic (1988) conducted the first study titled, *Japanese Students Abroad As Agents of Internationalization*. This study investigated how *Ryugakusei* perceived *Ryugaku* experiences. The data were collected from thirty-two students at Stanford University and were reported as four case studies. It concluded that *Ryugakusei* saw “American university experience as a mechanism for furthering career development,

personal growth, and ultimately the internationalization of Japan” (Abstract from dissertation).

A second study, *Reentry Transition: A Study of Returning Japanese Who Have Studied In American Higher Education* (Tsukada, 1996) studied the adjustment problems of *Ryugakusei* upon returning to their native home. Tsukada concluded that a series of personal and social adjustment problems faced these students and that the reverse culture shock these returnees faced correlated to the returnee’s experience in the United States. Meaning those with bad experiences in the U.S. were better able to adjust to life at home. The reverse affect occurred with the students that had assimilated into U.S. culture. This group had a more difficult time adjusting to life in Japan.

In *International Students From Japan and Their Lives In The United States* (1997), Hashimoto studied the motivations for *Ryugaku* and what influenced the decision to come to the United States. She also looked at whether or not their expectations were met while trying to find out the characteristics of the Japanese students at Washington State University. Her study revealed that some students felt left out of the Japanese educational system. Therefore, rather than staying in Japan and trying to get into their university of choice, they would prefer to come for study in the United States. Students stated that although they wanted a degree, they were also seeking a new experience. Listed as high importance was the desire to build relationships with not only students from the U.S., but with other international students as well.

In 1998, Ogawa’s study, *A Study of Japanese Female Ryugakusei in American Universities as Agents of Japan’s Globalization in the 21st Century*, at the University of

Cincinnati looked at the differences in female and male *Ryugakusei* motivations for *Ryugaku*. Her study also found that to improve English and get a degree were the top reasons for attending university in the United States.

Chapter Summary

In summary, *Ryugakusei* are a unique population of students on today's college and university campuses in the U.S. This chapter examined the Japanese educational system in great detail in order to provide the reader with a better understanding of the educational background of *Ryugakusei*. In doing so, it provided some explanations as to why *Ryugakusei* may be seeking degrees from universities and colleges in the United States. Research on international students suggests that they have a variety of language, financial, academic, social, and personal adjustment needs. Many of these needs stem from cultural differences such as concept of time, communication patterns, and concept of self. In addition, this literature review looked at past research in the areas of *Ryugakusei* in order to provide a foundation for a better understanding of these students at UW-La Crosse. When educators have a better understanding of this unique population, they can better meet the academic, social, and personal needs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the motivations, expectations, and experiences of *Ryugakusei* at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. This chapter describes the research design, delimitations, provisions for trustworthiness and validity, description of the sample, the data collection methods, the data analysis procedures, and provisions for confidentiality. It also includes a description of my perspective and approach.

Research Design

Go forth now. Go forth and question. Ask and listen. The world is just beginning to open up to you. Each person you question can take you into a new part of the world. For the person who is willing to ask and listen, the world will always be new. The skilled questioner and the attentive listener know how to enter into another's experience (Patton, 1990, p. 278 taken from Halcom's Epistemological Parables).

The theme of this research was best suited for a qualitative design. As such, this research was designed following Maykut & Morehouse (1994) developed eight descriptions of the characteristics of qualitative studies. The first characteristic is an "exploratory and descriptive focus" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 43). In general, qualitative researchers develop a general "focus of inquiry" that leads them through the entire study, assisting and discerning emerging themes and phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, the focus of inquiry in this research was the motivations, expectations, and experiences of *Ryugakusei*.

The second characteristic is that of an “emergent design” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 44), which allows the researcher to pursue emerging themes as they arise through the interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this case, I was able to delve into topics that emerged during interviews or through observations.

The third characteristic is that of a “purposive sample” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 45). This research purposive sample was composed entirely of degree-seeking *Ryugakusei* attending UW-La Crosse during the fall semester of 2001. Students who were enrolled only in the ESL Institute were not considered as participants although the investigator did hear some of their stories secondhand through the participants of the research. In order to gain the maximum variation in the homogeneous group of *Ryugakusei*, I carefully selected a variety of participants. Patton describes the value of this strategy in that “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts” (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

The fourth characteristic is “data collection in the natural setting” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 45). In order to understand the *Ryugakusei* experience in the context of UW-La Crosse, I went into the classroom, student union, and residence hall, to indwell. Maykut and Morehouse stated that to indwell “means to exist as an interactive spirit, force or principle, and to exist within as an activating spirit. It literally means to live between, and within” (1994, p. 25). This characteristic was easy for me to adopt due to the fact that I had lived in Japan for nearly ten years and was feeling very “between” the Japanese and U.S. cultures.

The fifth characteristic is that of emphasis on “human-as-instrument” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 46). This concept, coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), explains and builds upon Polanyi’s concept of indwelling. In essence, it means that the human qualitative researcher carries all of his or her life and educational experiences and biases into the research. As such, the researcher or “human-as-instrument” will be the main source of data collection and analysis. This is not seen as a shortcoming. Maykut and Morehouse believe that “the human instrument is the only data collection instrument which is multifaceted enough and complex enough to capture the important elements of a human person” (1994, p. 27).

The sixth characteristic of qualitative research is the method of data collection. This design utilized participant observation, in-depth interviews, and collection of other relevant documents. The data were collected in the form of field notes, journal notes, and audiotaped interviews. The field notes were typed up immediately following the interviews or observations. The audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

The seventh characteristic is “early and ongoing inductive data analysis” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 46). This allows the researcher to pursue relevant themes, persons, or settings that will help clarify the participants’ perspectives. For example, after hearing several participants’ perspectives on working in small groups with U.S. students, I decided to observe the interactions of the *Ryugakusei* with U.S. students in small group settings.

The eighth and final characteristic of a qualitative research design is that it is a “case study approach to reporting research outcomes” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 47). In meeting this characteristic, the researcher has the opportunity to provide rich accounts of the participants’ stories, allowing the reader to hear the full story and make the decision as to whether or not the findings can be generalizable to other people or places.

Delimitations

This study had the following delimitations:

1. The *Ryugakusei* population was composed of Japanese degree-seeking students who were enrolled at the UW-La Crosse during the 2001 fall semester.
2. The focus of questions asked by the investigator. The questions were somewhat limited to the *Ryugakusei* perceived motivations, expectations, and experiences of attending the UW- La Crosse.

Provisions for Validity and Trustworthiness

Triangulation was built into the research methodology in two ways. First, some questions were asked more than one time so that I was able to check for consistency of what the *Ryugakusei* said about the same topic over the course of the semester. Next, I was able to compare observational data with the interview data. (Patton, 1990). This webbing of emerging themes or patterns through observations and interviews increases credibility of the outcomes. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with important people in the *Ryugakusei* lives in order to collect data across multiple data sources. But due to difficulties securing cooperation with other sources, this data set is limited. As suggested by Maykut & Morehouse (1994) and Lincoln & Guba (1985), I planned to further develop trustworthiness by allowing each participant to read the transcripts (member checks) and ask them if I had accurately described their experiences. In

January, I asked all nine participants if they would read the transcripts and they responded, “We trust you. It is too long.” I believe that this signifies the trusting relationship that was established between the investigator and participants.

Sample

In this case study approach, the Office of International Education at the UW-L identified twenty-one *Ryugakusei* enrolled as ESL students and/or degree-seeking students. Of this group, approximately 12 were considered to be degree-seeking students. Letters requesting participation were sent to each of the degree-seeking students (Appendix A). Six students agreed to participate by returning the enclosed reply form without a secondary request. This investigator contacted three additional individuals a second time to represent various stakeholder positions. Of these three, one was a woman about to graduate and the other two were males. This selection method might have had a positive or negative bias if not for the fact that nine of the twelve possible degree-seeking students participated in the study. Of these nine *Ryugakusei*, five were females and four were males. Maximum variation within the sample was further reached by choosing students at various stages in their studies. In order for the reader to gain a better understanding of who these students are, a short descriptive introduction will follow.

Introductions of Participants

Ai, a student seeking a second degree, represents the first stakeholder in this research. Twenty-seven year old Ai has been in the United States for three semesters. She received a degree in English Literature from a private women’s college in Japan. This is her third time studying in the U.S. The first time was when she was a high school

student and spent around two months in California studying English and American culture. She returned for another two months during her Japanese university career and lived with a family in the Boston area. After graduating from a Japanese university, Ai worked for several years to save money to enter a university in the United States. She plans to graduate in May of 2002 with a degree in Communications. An important observation of Ai is that she usually wears skirts. She talks freely of enjoying the feminine side of herself while maintaining that she is a very modern, independent woman.

Twenty-two year old Chiho is the second stakeholder in this case study. Chiho came to the United States for the first time when she was fourteen and stayed with a family in Idaho for two weeks. She entered a university in Delaware after failing to pass the entrance exam at the university of her choice in Japan about three years ago. She is majoring in Marketing. At the time of the research, Chiho was the only participant that was dating a U.S. student, who happened to be Japanese-American.

Eiko, a twenty-five year old graduate student, came to UW-L following the advice of her undergraduate professor in Japan. She is seeking a master's degree in Therapeutic Recreation. Prior to entering the graduate program here, while still a student in Japan, she studied at the ESL Institute at UW-L for one semester. Eiko plans to graduate in August or December of 2003. As an only child, Eiko faced an important decision during her high school days. Her father, the eldest son of an eldest son, made and sold jewelry at the family shop in Tokyo. This business had been in the family for nearly one hundred years. If she had been a son, it would have been expected that she continue the family

jewelry business. Because she is a daughter, her father gave her an option. After much deliberation, she decided to pursue her dream and attend a university for physical education. A few years ago, her father was dying of cancer and they spoke of her decision. She expressed guilt for not carrying on her family's legacy. Her father voiced that he had always dreamed about studying in the United States, and that he was proud of her for living out his dream.

Katsumi, twenty-one, is one of the participants that volunteered to join after a second request was extended to him. Katsumi plans to get a Computer Science degree in 2004. When he arrived in the United States for the first time, he enrolled in a small private school in Wisconsin to study ESL. After one semester there, he entered UW-La Crosse and has been here for two semesters. Katsumi's younger sister is attending a university in California.

Mariko spent two years at a university in Japan before deciding to take a break for a semester and study English in Madison, Wisconsin. While at Madison, she decided to transfer to UW-L and get a degree in Sociology. Mariko, age twenty-four, graduated in December 2001. She is the woman stakeholder who was requested to join this research two times before agreeing to participate.

Masayuki, the youngest participant, followed the same path to UW-La Crosse as Katsumi. Masayuki is majoring in physics and hopes to be an astronomer someday. His decision to enter a university in the United States was not an easy one. His dream was to enter a prestigious university in Japan to study astronomy. Unfortunately, he failed the entrance exam and, after much deliberation, decided to enter UW-La Crosse.

Nobu, twenty-three, first came to the United States as a high school student on a two week exchange program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was at this point that he decided to try to attend a university in Wisconsin after graduating from high school in Japan. He first entered an ESL school in Madison, Wisconsin about five years ago. He has been at UW-La Crosse about four years and is majoring in geography. Nobu has bleached golden hair and has several body piercings.

Twenty-eight year old Taro will graduate in May 2002 with a degree in Archaeology. Taro graduated from a public art high school and studied English at a two-year technical college in Tokyo. He then went to England for six months to study English conversation. After returning to Japan, he worked at several unsatisfactory jobs before deciding to get a degree from the United States. He first studied in Michigan before transferring to UW-La Crosse. Taro has done extensive traveling around the world and never wants to live in Japan again.

Tokiko, the eldest stakeholder at age thirty, is a graduate student seeking a Master's Degree in Therapeutic Recreation. She is perhaps the student that the investigator knows best. Countless hours have been spent together over the past three semesters. Tokiko received her undergraduate degree in physical education and school nursing from a Japanese institution of higher education. She then taught for several years at a private junior and senior high school. Her vast experience and willingness to share were invaluable to the research.

Data Collection Methods

The data were collected through various channels. First a letter was sent to all 12 UW-La Crosse degree seeking *Ryugakusei* requesting participation. The interested students were asked to fill out a contact information form (Appendix B.) involving demographic information. Within one week, six *Ryugakusei* returned the completed questionnaire. I then contacted three non-respondent individuals that substantively represented the contextual characteristics of Japanese students through maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990). Although it was impossible to represent every conceivable variable, I attempted to include a male/female representation of the *Ryugakusei* population at UW-La Crosse as well as students from varied geographic/academic backgrounds.

Once the participants had been selected, I met individually with each to discuss the research. This initial meeting provided a time to answer any questions regarding the research and the rights of the participants. Each participant signed the informed consent form (Appendix C) and was given an anonymous name that was used on all future documentation in order to maintain the strictest confidentiality.

I then adapted the qualitative posture of participant observation (Patton, 1990) to carry out the second component of the research in October and November of 2001. I asked the students to allow me to be a passive participant in their lives. The initial research was set up so that I could track, observe, eavesdrop, and ask questions throughout the fall semester. Initially, meeting times were set up to allow us to get to know each other better. These meetings were set up through a variety of methods.

Sometimes I telephoned the participant or they would telephone me to arrange a meeting. At other times meetings would be set up via email or arrangements would be made through chance meetings on campus. Approximately eight to ten hours were spent with each participant. Field notes were recorded on paper during the participant observation sessions and later typed in detail on computer. Usually I was able to complete the notes immediately following the observations to further increase the validity.

During the data collecting process, if the participants did not understand a question or could not explain a thought, Japanese was occasionally used to ease the process. More often, the question or thought was simplified and a great deal of time was spent to make sure the intended meaning was understood by both the participant and the investigator. At the end of every observation or interview, I asked the participants if they had any questions about the research or campus life. At this point I often answered questions about where to go for help on campus, edited a paper, or discussed roommate problems in greater detail. In addition, questions that arose from the sessions were sometimes followed up by e-mail correspondence. I believe there is great significance in this. Not only does it show the trust that the participants felt in me, but it also shows that they had needs not being met somewhere else on campus.

During the third and final stage, in-depth audio-recorded interviews were conducted in December 2001 with each participant. These one to two hour interviews enabled me to obtain insight or data related to the nature of the students' experiences in an attempt to uncover and understand any phenomenon that was still not known. The audio-recorded data was transcribed verbatim in January 2002.

Data Analysis Procedures

This investigator adopted the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1976; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the following way. First, an inductive approach vs. a deductive approach was utilized. Because data were collected related to the intended focus of inquiry, the variables were not predetermined and thereby the themes emerged from the data. At the beginning of the research, the investigator set up a three ring binder for each participant. All the field notes, in-depth interview transcriptions, investigator notes and related documents were filed accordingly in these binders. All the pages were coded according to date, type of notes, location of observation or interview, and the participants' names (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Then I began the process of unitizing the data by carefully reading through the field notes, transcripts, and related documents and identifying units of meaning (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Next, two photocopies were made of every page, leaving the original documentation in true form to be referred to throughout the analyzing process.

Twenty-five pocket folders were labeled to represent the units of meaning using the Cut-Up and Put in Folders Approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I then carefully cut out phrases and paragraphs from the data and placed the slips of papers into the corresponding folders. Using the units of meanings, I made outcome statements that related to the research questions and used quotes from the interviews to support these outcome statements.

Confidentiality

I believe that participants in interviews told me things that they never intended to tell, therefore creating the essential task of keeping the utmost confidentiality. Because UW-La Crosse has only twenty-one *Ryugakusei* and only twelve of them were eligible to participate in this research, it would be quite simple for anyone to figure out the identity of the participants, even with the name changes made at the beginning of the research process. Therefore, participants were asked whether they minded if other people knew about their participation in the research. Every participant said that they did not care if others knew about their participation. Whenever possible I will use descriptive accounts of the people behind the stories, but in some cases, when the story being told could be of detriment to the participant, no description will be made in order to allow for the protection of the identity of the participant.

CHAPTER IV

OUTCOMES

This chapter describes the educational background of the nine participants in this study and their motivations for coming to UW-La Crosse. The analysis of their educational experiences in Japan and their motivations for *Ryugaku* gives greater insight into the *Ryugakusei* as individuals. This chapter also analyzes the expectations of *Ryugakusei* prior to entering UW-La Crosse and explores whether or not their expectations were met through their academic, personal, and social experiences. In the verbatim quotations, I have tried to clarify the students' intended meaning for the reader by placing a translation in parenthesis.

Ryugakusei Educational Backgrounds

Without understanding the educational background of *Ryugakusei* as individuals, it is difficult to understand their motivations for coming to UW-La Crosse and their academic, personal, and social cross-cultural adjustments. Of the nine participants, five attended public schools from elementary school through senior high school. Two participants attended private escalator schools from elementary school through high school. Both of these students went on to private universities in Japan before enrolling in graduate school in the United States. One participant attended a public elementary school and then went to private junior and senior high schools while the remaining participant attended public elementary and junior high school and then enrolled in a private high school.

For the most part, the participants spoke about their school life in Japan positively, however, two of the male participants described their experiences differently. During one conversation, Nobu described his high school as being very strict. He told me he didn't like to study and that he hated high school. Although he went to school from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. every day, he didn't study. He went on to say how he spent all of his free time skateboarding. At night he would go with friends walking or skateboarding around the streets.

Taro had this to say about his junior and senior high experience.

“Since I was in kind of small region, ... (where) the rules were kind of strict and I didn't like (the rules) at all and then (at my) school and junior high school it was kind of hierarchical system. We have to follow what the older people says [sic] and I didn't like it at all. It's not open-minded, it's very conservative, and then after I graduated from junior high school things were much better. My high school was kind of (an) art school, like a learning design, like a drawing stuff. And then I enjoyed the high school a lot. (It was) pretty open-minded and it's not conservative at all compared to (the) other high school in my hometown.” (Taro)

Ryugakusei Motivations for Study in the U.S.

Ryugakusei first began to think about studying in the U.S. at different stages of their lives and for different reasons. For many, prior experience in a foreign country planted the thought or provided the confidence to make the final decision. The individual experiences within the Japanese educational system had the greatest impact on the final decision as well as the participants' families' reactions to the decision.

Prior Experience in Foreign Countries

Sojourners with previous cross-cultural experience will, in general, experience less stress in the target culture. According to Paige (1993), they will already have developed coping strategies and be familiar with what culture shock feels like. Their expectations

for the experience will also be more realistic. The range of cross-cultural experiences for these participants was extensive. Three participants had never traveled outside of Japan before enrolling in a university in the United States. The other six students experiences ranged between having gone on vacations to Guam to three-week home stay experiences as high school students to a semester at an ESL school.

“When I was a university student in Japan, I came over here just for studying English only one semester and I just traveled a couple of times to Guam, two or three times I went to Guam.” (Eiko)

“When I was 17, when I was a high school student I came to visit my relative in Los Angeles. I stayed there, like ten days maybe. That was my first time and then I was in England for five months.” (Taro)

“First time I came was when I was a high school student. I... I went to California to live with an American family. I think it was around two months. And I lived with them and I learned English and also I learned American culture during summer vacation. The second time was when I was a college student I came to the U.S. again and I lived with an American family for two months to study in an ESL school. It was my second visit.” (Ai)

Decision-making Process Regarding *Ryugaku*

Finding out when the students first began to think about studying in the United States and what the decision making process was like seemed imperative to understanding their motivations for coming. Only one student simply decided to come here without first attempting to enroll in some type of school in Japan. For three students, two men and one woman, the decision was made after failing the Japanese university entrance exams.

“I thought that when I was...actually I wanted to come here to study...but when I was a high school student I didn’t have confidence to spend time in the United States because of languages or culture differences. Yeah. I thought that life in the United States is so hard. I didn’t study at all (in high school), so I didn’t think I could achieve my goal. Actually, I studied so hard (after high school) to enter the university (but failed ten Japanese university entrance exams)...so I thought that I can do it (I can study in U.S.). And I came here.” (Katsumi)

“It was probably in my third year of high school, but I had some feeling about like, I was really attracted to the U.S. since like, maybe junior high school. (But) I took two of them (entrance exams for Japanese universities). I had interview and also exam and one (exam) I failed and one I got accepted.” (Chiho)

“After I failed the examination. But actually at that time it wasn’t realistic at all, because we have financial problems to come here. So I just thought it was nice. But...that is why I decided to go to *Juku* to study for the entrance exam (for the following year), but after that my parents said you may can go to America to study.” (Masayuki)

Five of the participants attended higher education for some length of time in Japan before deciding to come to the U.S. Three of these five students completed undergraduate degrees from Japanese universities. Ai, an English literature major attended an ESL program in Boston during summer vacation while still a university student in Japan. It was at this point that she knew she wanted to learn more than English. She explained that she wanted to learn a different subject in English. After returning to Japan, Ai finished her degree and worked for three years to save money so that she could become financially independent in order to *Ryugaku* in the U.S.

The other two women graduated from the same Japanese university and held degrees in physical education. For Tokiko and Eiko, graduate school in the U.S. offered an area of study not found in Japan -- Therapeutic Recreation.

“When I was a school nurse (I began to think about it), because I really enjoy to talk with children. The students come to my nursing room and they talk about their problem and then I wanted to help them, but I couldn’t because I don’t have the skills, so and then I decided to get, get skills. So I tried to ask my professor..., he said about therapeutic recreation and then I, I learn about therapeutic recreation by myself by books and article, I don’t know. And then I come here.” (Tokiko)

One of the five was a man. Taro studied English at a technical college and spent five months in England studying English conversation. Taro then worked at several jobs that

he found to be dissatisfying and voiced his frustration at realizing he would never move up without attaining a four-year degree. He continued to study English on his own and finally earned a high enough score on the TOFEL exam to realize his high school dream of attending college in the United States.

In fact, many of the students voiced that attending school in the U.S. was a dream come true for them. Like Taro, as a high school student, Mariko dreamed about attending university in the United States. After high school, she enrolled in a university in Japan. However, she never gave up thinking about coming to the United States. Slowly she gained the confidence to come to the United States. At first she planned to just take a break from her Japanese university and study English for only one semester at an ESL program in Madison, Wisconsin. After living in Madison for a few months she decided to quit her Japanese university and enroll at UW-La Crosse.

“It was my dream. In high school I came here for one month. Of course I couldn’t get used to the system if I stay such a short time, so I wanted to come here again. I went to a Japanese university for two years. Then I quit. I knew that if I don’t come now (to the U.S.), I can’t go cause after you graduate in Japan, you find a job and work. (If I stay in Japan) I must follow the system.” (Mariko)

Families’ Reactions to Study in the U.S.

In 1994, a Japanese high school exchange student, Yoshihiro Hattori, was fatally shot in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Japanese news provided extensive coverage of this fatal shooting along with other such shootings, leaving the image of the United States as being a very dangerous place on the minds of many Japanese. Only one student stated that “fear” or “danger” was a response from his family, yet this theme emerged later

when students talked about their motivations for choosing UW-La Crosse and their expectations of what life would be like in the United States.

“The very first time was when I was in high school. I wanted to come to the United States right after I graduated from high school, but my parents believed that America is very dangerous and everyone has a gun...” (Taro)

Other participants met with resistance from their families when they first began to talk about *Ryugaku*. For these students, it was a matter of convincing one or both parents that *Ryugaku* was the right choice. Two of the young women expressed that at first their fathers were not happy with their decision, but later, the fathers talked about their own lost chance to follow their dreams as young men. Consequently, they finally agreed to let their daughters follow their dreams and study in the United States.

“They were not happy and they tried to quit, tried me to quit (tried to convince me not to study abroad). So, but my decision is very strict (strong) and then I tried to explain to my family, especially to my father, but he couldn’t understand what yeah...and then I tried to explain to my mother and she, she understands, yeah, and then she explains to my father.” (Tokiko)

“My mom she expected probably, maybe I will say that I want to go to the U.S. again. So she somehow regret to allow me to study in Boston because if didn’t go to Boston maybe I didn’t think about it so that the experience in Boston made me realize that I really wanted to go to an American college so she said, ‘I should not have let you go to Boston.’ But somehow she expected (my decision because) my sister likes English very much and she likes America very much so it was natural for me...” (Ai)

“At first they disagree because I’m a girl and (an) only child, all the time I was with my parents so they just worried about me because they thought the United States is so far away and also [pause] I don’t have my self-confidence, like I can do...can I study? I just worry about too much but I just want to try it so I ask my mom and dad and then my dad say if you really want to you should do (it) and then I be a support for you.” (Eiko)

Two families encouraged their sons to enroll in a university in the United States. Both of these men described their high school days as “never studying.” Katsumi spent one year as a *Ronin*, trying diligently to pass a Japanese university entrance exam. However, without having studied during his high school days, his chances of entering a Japanese university were not likely. Likewise, Nobu “hated” Japanese high school and never

studied. Perhaps for these parents, they saw the United States as being the only chance for their sons to earn a degree.

“Both of my parents agreed that I come to the United States. They just said like ahhh [pause] they pay for everything but ahh, I had to decisions by myself.” (Nobu)

“They wanted me to go here...to like change myself...or my mind. And we agree with each other.” (Katsumi)

Ryugakusei Motivations for Study in U.S.

The United States is overwhelmingly the choice for Japanese students who study abroad. More than 84% of all Japanese students enrolling in foreign universities choose the United States (MEXT, 2001). Learning English and experiencing American life were common motivations for choosing the United States. The ability to choose from a variety of majors also played a role in the decision making process for some of the *Ryugakusei*.

“I really wanted to learn English. My mom said that if you want to master English than I had better go to an English speaking country. I thought about the United States because it is multi-cultural. Also I wanted to learn about marketing here in the United States.” (Chiho)

“In the United States, I like the system of education in the university because people get into university quite easily compared to Japan. Ahh, even though you ah don’t decide what to major ahhh still you can get into university. In Japan it is impossible to do. And we have to decide major before we enter in a school. And then if we want to change the major after we get in, we have to switch the college and then we have to start from freshman again. We cannot transfer. We do not have a transfer system. It is kind of closed-minded. So we... cannot decide what to do which is very important to the future. And then some people want to change the field but they just get through it until they graduate and so you know after they spend two years they think they should major in something else, but it is not easy to do. It is just a waste of time and money. Yeah, in the United States the schools offer anything you want. That is kind of a wonderful thing... So that is also one of the reasons I chose a university in the United States...” (Taro)

“It is kind of difficult to explain. The reason I came was because I needed to experience different cultures, English, and be away from my family. I don’t care if my English is perfect. I don’t want to focus on study. My degree is not so important to me. I like to travel, so that is why I am studying geography. I feel I want to travel in the world.” (Nobu)

Ryugakusei Motivations for Choosing the Midwest/Wisconsin/ UW-L.

Most of the students found their first U.S. institution with the help of a study abroad agency or study abroad magazine. One man talked about going to an agency in Tokyo to get advice about where to study. After a brief interview, he was introduced to an ESL program at a private college in Wisconsin. The advisor recommended to him to attend the private institution for one semester to improve his language skills and then transfer to UW-La Crosse. She told him that the ESL program was good at the private institution and that UW-La Crosse offered the physics degree at a price his family could afford.

Transferring from one institution to another was a common theme. Six of the nine students attended a different institution somewhere in the United States before transferring to UW-La Crosse. Chiho was one of the students who transferred to UW-La Crosse from a private college. When I asked her why she transferred she said that one reason was because it was the "American way." Of course, for this woman and others, UW-La Crosse also offered a course of study of interest to them as well as affordable tuition costs.

"Actually I wanted (to go to) the West Coast or East Coast...close to the big cities, but it is very expensive to spend time...apartment is very expensive and all of the things is [sic] very expensive. Everything is very expensive. I read a lot of books about study abroad and the articles said that rural cities are better than big cities because the people in rural cities or country people are warm hearted... and they have interest in us so it is easy, more easier [sic] than a big city. And here is not so expensive. And not so small city." (Katsumi)

"The most important thing I was looking for was the money, no not money the tuitions and this school has a lower tuition than most other states. Also the room and board was cheaper too." (Chiho)

"Because it was good and cheap." (Mariko)

“The tuition is pretty cheap, that is pretty important for me or for my family” (Masauyki)

“When I was in Madison (studying at ESL school), I had a friend who was a student in La Crosse. And he often told me like ah...he often spoke about La Crosse. He said that La Crosse is good and that I should go to La Crosse to study.” (Nobu)

“I wanted to study archeology. This is one of the only universities in the United States. To be honest, I wanted to attend NYU, but I wasn't accepted and I did not want to move south.” (Taro)

Only two of the students came without the help of an agency. Both of these students followed the advice of their Japanese university professor who had attended UW-La Crosse and remained in contact with faculty in the Therapeutic Recreation Department.

It was also at this point that several students talked about the Midwest providing not only a safe and friendly environment, but also a small town atmosphere conducive to study.

“Cows [laughs] I just figured there are a lot of cows. So (therefore) the people of Wisconsin are very good.” (Nobu)

“Small towns is [sic] pretty good for me...I don't like big cities.” (Masayuki)

“I don't want to go to a small college. I like the size of this school. It is not too big and it is not too small. The teachers know or take care of each student.” (Taro)

“Here is very safe.” (Katsumi)

“Because I wanted to go to the middle west and also I did not want to go to a big city and also public school because I cannot afford tuition for a private school. And I have heard from people that the University of Wisconsin is [sic] very good university. And UW-L, this tuition was not really expensive compared to UW-Madison or UW-Milwaukee and it is a very small town. I expected there are not so many Japanese students in a small college or a small town compared to New York, Boston or California. And I wanted to speak English all the time. So it I believe is the best way to improve my English. ...if I go to a big city there is so much fun. I think maybe I don't, I am not going to study so much. So I think UW-L is a very good place to study.” (Ai)

Ryugakusei Expectations of Academic, Social, and Personal Life

Brislin, Cushner, Craig, & Yong (1986) addressed the importance of having realistic expectations of what the *Ryugaku* experience will be like in the United States.

Ryugakusei that have unrealistic expectations will experience “disconfirmed expectancies” resulting in feeling disappointment in themselves and the target culture.

Generally, the *Ryugakusei* had some expectations or perceptions of what university would be like in the United States. However, most of the students did not have specific images or expectations of what Wisconsin, La Crosse, or UW-La Crosse would be like.

Ryugakusei Expectations of the U.S.

Most of the images or expectations that the participants had of the United States and the people were drawn from the mass media’s portrayal of the United States in Japan.

The most common positive words used to describe the image of American people were “kind, friendly, outgoing, and diverse.” The most negative words described the U.S. as being “dangerous” and having “a lot of drugs.”

“I expected that the United States is very open to people from different cultures and that American people are very kind and friendly and very opened minded.” (Ai)

“Friendly, ahh...I didn’t think about it very much... I had that image (dangerous) but I didn’t worry about it because I am going to come to Wisconsin. Oh and that of food. I expected American food is not so good.” (Masayuki)

“Everything must be fun. And nothing is hard or tough...like easy lifestyle.” (Mariko)

“It is a gun and drug society and a lot of crime. I thought the United States is very dangerous.” (Katsumi)

“I really haven’t broad expectation, like not in specific, but I was thinking U.S. will be...U.S. maybe a little dangerous for take a walk or something. Also I was a little bit afraid of the discrimination against race cause I’m not white, or I’m not majority. I was a little concerned about that.” (Chiho)

“Like if I shoot...[laughs] that is my image...if I get killed there. I think that everybody eat hamburger every day like sandwiches [laughs]. And I think everyone wear jeans. And what else...[pause]...everyone carries a snack for lunch. And danger and friendly.”
(Eiko)

“...like the drug situation and guns and stuff. I really thought everyone has a gun.”
(Taro)

Ryugakusei Expectations or Images of Wisconsin/La Crosse/UW-L

The participants had few images or expectations regarding Wisconsin beyond that it would be “very countryside” and “very cold.” For many of them, they looked forward to participating in winter activities that the Wisconsin climate would provide to them such as skiing, snowboarding, and playing in the snow. A few students expressed that they expected life in Wisconsin to be “boring.” Overall, the participants had even fewer images or expectations of La Crosse or UW-La Crosse. One student told this humorous story about his arrival in La Crosse:

“When I checked the university catalog it said that the UW-La Crosse is in a city. That kind of attracted me the first time, but when I got to the airport the airport was kind of small. [laughs] I am like it is not a big city at all, the catalog kind of lies. This is a city? There are only bars downtown. What is going on? I was kind of scared at first because Michigan was too small and that was kind of boring. I was really fed up with it. That size. Ahh, when I was in the air, I was looking around the town of La Crosse and there was no buildings at all. Where is the big city? [laughs]. (Taro)

Ryugakusei Expectations or Images of Academic Life

The belief that academic life in the United States would require a lot of hard work was a common expectation. Each participant was worried about having to use English for academic work. Their expectations of English will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

“I thought probably that college American college would be very hard to study for me. And maybe there are so many a lot of variety [sic] of class and I can choose from many classes. Maybe the class is very, how can I say, maybe the professor in college ask us to say our opinion or discuss openly and so I expected probably I can improve or change my personality if I go to the USA. I can be more open or I can be more active person.” (Ai)

“Very study hard. I read some book about study abroad and everyone said that everyone study hard and they don’t have time to sleep or something like that.” (Masayuki)

“I thought I would have a lot of trouble for studying.” (Chiho)

“I thought that in the United States, I thought there are a lot of opportunities to have discussion or express my opinion in class and that I would have to study a lot.” (Katsumi)

When the participants talked about their expectations of professors, two themes emerged. The first theme was that some of the participants expected that professors would be very friendly and helpful. The second theme was that they expected professors to be very strict and hierarchical.

“I thought they must be friendly.” (Mariko)

“Basically I would say friendly because when I watched a movie the professor all the time sat at a table like that’s comfortable and they all the time smile so that’s my imagining for the professor.” (Eiko)

“I imagined like professors like how can I say [laughs] like a higher class person.” (Taro)

“I thought they would be very strict. And I will never accept if you are late.” (Katsumi)

Ryugakusei Expectations or Images of Friends

The most common expectation regarding friendships was that of not expecting there to be many Japanese at UW-La Crosse, thereby allowing them to make deep friendships with only American and other international students.

“I wanted to make a lot of friends. And then to have fun with a lot of friends, American or international friends.” (Ai)

“(My friends would be), mmm...American friends or international friends and of course some Japanese friends.” (Masayuki)

“I don’t think there would be any Japanese students. I thought my friend going to be all American. [laughs] Or international students.” (Katsumi)

“I was hoping to have a lot of friends or very close friends.” (Chiho)

Two students did have the expectation that it would be difficult to make friends in the United States. When I asked them how they developed this expectation, they explained that in Japan they had read study abroad magazines. In these magazines, former *Ryugakusei* discussed their experiences in the United States. Moreover, most of these discussions described making friendships in the U.S. as being difficult because American students were not interested in Japanese students.

“Like whenever Japanese people go to university here in the United States and after they come back (to Japan) they go (say), ‘Oh it is really hard to find American friends.’ I had such a superstition because if I pick up any book that talks about study abroad, the comments of the students like it is hard to find friends. I used to have those kinds of images.” (Taro)

Ryugakusei Expectations or Images of Roommates/Residence Halls

Like American students, moving to college may be the first time to live in a small room with a stranger. Adding the fear of cross-cultural differences as well as language barriers is bound to create reservations for *Ryugaku* while still in Japan. The most common expectation was that they would become good friends with their roommates.

“I expected my roommate would be very kind, very open and very friendly. So I can make a good friendship with my roommate or on the hand I was so worried about if my roommate is a so bad or unfriendly person it is going to be really hard to live with her. So I was so worried about it.” (Ai)

“I just worried about how she looks like or ...if I can contact (connect) with her or not. I just worried about my English.” (Mariko)

“Roommate...not like now...(I thought we’d be) very good friends” (Masayuki)

“Actually I never had that kind of experience in Japan, so I was kind of afraid or I was worried about people or myself.” (Nobu)

One student expected to have an American roommate and was disappointed when she was placed with an international student. Her expectation was that an American roommate would be able to teach her about U.S. culture and assist her with language acquisition.

“I ...just thought I will have an American roommate but I didn’t. So that was kind of ...why like I came to the United States and why I can’t get an American roommate for my English?” (Eiko)

Academic, Social, and Personal Experiences of *Ryugakusei*

Listening to the daily experiences of *Ryugakusei* was the most intriguing part of this research. Before beginning the research, I felt that I understood *Ryugakusei* and did not expect to be surprised by emerging themes or phenomena. Contrary to my expectations, I found myself surprised after each hour I spent observing, interacting, or interviewing the participants. In many ways, I found myself gaining more insight into my own experiences in Japan. Moreover, I was able to sort through my experiences and utilize them to gain a better understanding into why the particular themes were emerging.

Language

English is the foreign language of choice in Japan. Yet, the overwhelming method of teaching English in Japan is the translation method, which consists primarily of the teacher providing written passages of English to the students and the students translating them into Japanese. As such, most of the emphasis in Japanese English studies is placed on rote memorization of an extensive vocabulary and complex grammatical rules.

Therefore, it is possible for students to spend six years studying English in school without being able to understand or answer a simply constructed question such as “How did you come to school today?”

All of the participants in this research studied English for six years in the Japanese school system and many of them attended *Juku* or *Eikawa*, English conversation schools, in addition to their compulsory English education. However, each participant discussed at length his/her personal struggle with the English language. When I discussed their English struggles with them in greater detail, the first theme that emerged was their lack of confidence in their own ability. I often heard the phrase “fear of making a mistake” when they gave reasons for not speaking. Some of the students also discussed how being an introvert prevented them from speaking not only in class but also with their roommates and peers.

I soon discovered that there was a clear divide between the students’ feelings regarding the English language. For three of the participants, English was their favorite subject while attending Japanese school. Although these three students still had problems with the English language in the U.S., they appeared confident and seemed to have developed a strong network of native English speaking friends to practice their English or seek assistance. The other six participants did not like to study English as a student in Japan. Consequently, they appeared to use more Japanese in their daily lives and relied on other *Ryugakusei* for support. The participant that I believe had the best command of English and American culture was one of the three that liked English as a student in

Japan. Taro stated that generally Japanese students lack confidence in using English. He went on to describe his own feelings as:

“Oh since I was in Japan, I didn’t have any confidence about my English. I couldn’t speak in a group. And then I was really upset in discussion in class here. You know, I was kind of scared to be looked by other people, Americans and stuff. Yeah, and also since my English is not good [laughs] I was kind of speak, ashamed to speak English. Right? In front of Americans even in small groups so I was kind of upset. Yeah, sometimes, yeah sometimes, it is still hard for me to listen to others in groups, like others’ opinions. It is quite fast to share the ideas and stuff. It is really hard for me to pick up.” (Taro)

Ryugakusei Expectations or Images of English

As reported by Brislin et al. (1986), students with unrealistic expectations may feel disappointed in themselves and their experience. All of the students recognized before coming to the United States that learning English would be difficult, but many of the students believed that they could achieve English proficiency after one or two years of hard work.

“I didn’t imagine that I ... how can I say? I knew that English was not so easy, but someone told me that if we stay in the U.S. for a couple of years almost everyone can understand English. So I thought I have to stay only a couple of years.” (Mariko)

“Before I come here, I thought that one or two years are enough to speak English well.” (Masayuki)

“I was thinking by like maybe after two or three years my English would be perfect- nothing to fix- but that didn’t happen. [laughs]” (Chiho)

Ryugakusei Communication in English

Surprisingly, this research unveiled that for some of the *Ryugakusei*, especially the males, spoken English was rarely used. Taro was the exception in the study. He rarely communicated or socialized with the other Japanese students. Therefore, his entire day

was in English. But for the other males, outside of listening to lectures or doing group projects, English was rarely used.

“...somedays none and other days only a few minutes...less than one hour (I use English). Outside of class I don’t listen to English very much. I try to understand but you know it’s kind of difficult to understand if they (Americans) don’t speak to me.” (Masayuki)

“Usually I meet my Japanese friends after 8 p.m. and I talk to them in Japanese. In class or between classes I sometimes meet my American friends and then I speak English. Most of my speaking in one day is probably Japanese.” (Nobu)

“(I use English for) one hour a day.” (Katsumi)

For the female *Ryugakusei*, English seemed to be used more often in their daily lives than that of the male *Ryugakusei*, albeit not to the extent that they wished to use it.

Moreover, most of the women talked about friendships or support systems in which they used English. Only one woman said that she usually communicated in Japanese.

“Maybe lots of time. But recently in night time I am talking with my Japanese friends in English...no, no, no, in Japanese and send e-mail in Japanese.” (Tokiko)

“I think half and half...English and Japanese.” (Eiko)

“Mostly speak Japanese.” (Mariko)

“I speak most of the time in English and sometime in Japanese. Right now its probably a little more than before because (Japanese friend) is getting more close (to me).” (Chiho)

“Typical day. In the class I speak English and at home I speak English and then [pause] and if I meet my friend in Cartwright or in the library or on campus I speak Japanese, and otherwise if I don’t see any Japanese friend I don’t speak Japanese at all. I think speaking, mostly I speak English because I am mostly with my (Korean) roommate at home and on campus I’m with my classmate or have speak- having conversation or meeting or discussion, so... I mostly – especially weekday I speak mostly English and weekend sometimes I have fun with my Japanese friend so at that time I speak Japanese very much.” (Ai)

Not having a chance to speak English, especially with Americans, was a common theme expressed by the students of both genders. During a conversation one day with Taro, I asked him to describe the type of person that was easy for him to speak with in English. He said that people that appreciated his culture were more patient with his English and therefore were able to make him feel comfortable using English as well as help him improve his English ability. Other *Ryugakusei* expressed that they found other international students “easy” to talk to because they understood the difficulty of communicating in English and were patient during conversations. During one observation session, Masayuki was ecstatic as he told me about what had happened to him the week before in Baird Hall. Apparently, while studying there, an American man had approached him and spoke to him. The conversation was related to the physics homework that both men were completing. Unbelievably, this was the first time in one year that an American student had initiated a conversation with him. For Masayuki, his English experience can be illustrated in the following way.

“I don’t understand what they (American students) say. They speak too fast and use so much slang. And they are not clear. I cannot respond more than yes, no or something. And they are not patient with my English. Of course some are...Cory (American woman dating Japanese man) last semester (was patient). I spoke with her and Cho (Korean exchange student) last semester. But they are not here now. This is my problem. I know that I should speak to American students, but I can’t. I want to learn English from them, but I can’t.” (Masayuki)

The phenomenon’s importance was reinforced at the close of every observation or interview session. Following Japanese culture, I would apologize to each participant. I would say something like, “I am sorry for taking so much of your time. I know you are very busy. I am so thankful to you for helping me with my research.” Every time that I

said this, each participant, even Taro, would respond back with the expected response that it was “not a problem.” They would then add an unexpected comment to me. They would say that they enjoyed talking about their lives in the United States and that this was a good, and for some, the only, opportunity to practice their English skills, discuss their daily experiences and talk about their native land. They would thank me for being interested in their stories. For two or three of the students, I believe I was the only American that they spoke to on a regular basis during the fall semester.

On being Japanese/Asian in the U.S.

Paige believes that “being physically different from members of the host culture and feeling highly visible to them can increase the psychological intensity of the experience” (1993, p. 10). For *Ryugakusei*, living in the United States may be the first time that they identified themselves as being Asian or a minority.

“When I was traveling like in Washington D.C. I was so surprised that some people would try to speak Chinese or Indonesian with me. Asia is very broad. Americans don’t understand the difference between Thai, Indonesian, Chinese, etc. We have very different cultures. There is some confusion. For example, my American friend knows I am Japanese, but she asks me if I cook Chinese food. This doesn’t bother me because I am Asian.” (Chiho)

“Actually, I felt ashamed. I (am) different from them (whites). And I think in big cities we can see a lot of minority people, like black, Hispanic, Asian, but when I reached to Green Bay they were all white people. [Laughs.] Only three Asians. All of the people were white people. I think I am different from other people and I am in a different culture.” (Katsumi)

“I was kind of shocked when I went to the class, somebody—no, no, everybody was looking at me and I was only International student in the class and they were very curious I think, but nobody talked to me—just they were looking at me, so I was shocked about it and also surprised. I felt like minority in the class. I don’t know whether they changed or I changed, just I don’t feel like this now because I was familiar with their attitude about me or most, I, I know most of my classmate because I already took the same class with them last semester and most student move from same class to same class because we

are in the same major so they knew- they know my me and I know them and also I have, I made some friends in my class in my department and I met them everyday so kind of familiar with each other so I don't feel like this now." (Ai)

During a conversation one day, Ai described herself as changing somehow. She explained that during her first and second semester she didn't like group projects because she felt isolated. She felt that American students didn't like her and that they didn't want to work with her. She said that she lacked confidence and was only very quiet. At the time of this research, she was in her third semester and said that most students in her classes are communications majors like her.

"So they know me now. It is more comfortable. Before I really did care about how they felt about me, but now I don't care. I am very proud of my country, my identity and being Japanese. I don't think American students are better or smarter than me. Now I don't hesitate. I ask questions and give my opinion." (Ai)

This identity development extended to their feelings regarding being Asian. From my experience in Japan, I knew that Japanese people generally did not identify with being Asian, yet I was surprised by the degree to which three students denied being Asian. In one conversation, Mariko stated emphatically, "I don't like to be called Asian. I am Japanese! I don't like the sound of the word Asian." When I asked her what adjectives came to mind when she heard the word Asian she stated,

"Small, minor, dark. We, Japanese, don't see ourselves as being like the other countries in Asia. Of course we are Asian, but we see ourselves as only being Japanese. I am Japanese. Some Americans don't recognize who is Chinese, Korean, or Japanese. They can't see where we are from, just that we are Asian." When I asked her where do people think you are from she stated, "Asia! And I say, I am Japanese! Some people also think I am from Brazil, but I say I am Japanese!"

Nobu described going to class, "When I go to class students see me by strange eyes (look at me strangely). I am Asian. I think most U.S. students think...[pause] they have image that Asians are poor. They feel superior to Asians. I think Japan is kind of different from other Asian countries. We are a rich country. We can get everything we want if we have

money in Japan. But they don't see us as different people. Japanese are not like other Asians." Finally, Katsumi said, "I am Japanese and (now) I feel more strongly that I am Japanese (not Asian)."

Other *Ryugakusei* were not as upset at being identified as Asian. Ai took about two minutes to describe Asians as being "closed minded, collectivistic, not independent, kind, smart, hard working, serious, conservative." I then asked her what does being Japanese mean to you and she said, "The same, except not smart. My image is that Chinese and Koreans are more smart." She went on to talk about how this image had developed since coming to the U.S. from watching Chinese and Korean students at UW-La Crosse. She felt that they worked very hard compared to Japanese students and felt that this may be because, "Japanese students can come here so easily. But Chinese students it is more difficult. They work hard because they know they are lucky to be here."

At one point, I noticed that Chiho's friends were all ethnically either Asian or Hispanic. When I pointed this out to her she said, "Maybe I am more comfortable. At first I wasn't so comfortable with Hispanic, but I met Hispanic friend, and I think she is nice so I am not afraid. Maybe I don't feel inferior to Asians and Hispanics. Maybe Japanese feel inferior to European or European Americans." For the most part, I found her situation to be the norm. I observed that the *Ryugakusei* at UW-La Crosse often made friends with other Japanese people, other Asian international students or Asian Americans.

Keeping Their Japanese Identity within the UW-L Japanese Community

Before my research began, my family invited the Japanese community in La Crosse to our home to celebrate *Kodomo No Hi* (Children's Day). One of the students arrived

early to my home to help with the food preparations. He had seemed very eager to enjoy a Japanese meal, but once the food was served, he disappeared outside with my young son. I encouraged him to join the group and eat before the food was gone, but he would not enter the kitchen. Confused, I took food to him and continued hosting the party without giving further thought to the situation. However, during this party, I overheard bits of conversation that alerted me to the discomfort felt between the young man and some of the other *Ryugakusei*.

Early on in this research, this phenomenon emerged again and made me look back at the incident and question further what had actually taken place at the party. I began to understand that although the *Ryugakusei* were living in the United States, the social rules and norms of Japanese society continued to control the Japanese community at UW-La Crosse.

Japan is a hierarchical society and this rank consciousness extends into the communication and behavioral patterns of the society. Rank consciousness has a powerful affect on all interpersonal relationships within the Japanese families, communities, schools, and companies. *Senpai – Kohai* (senior - junior) relationships are just one example of the complexity of interpersonal relationships within Japanese society. These *Senpai – Kohai* relationships are acknowledged throughout one's life and are sometimes relied upon for getting jobs, building business relationships, and even finding marriage partners. All Japanese clearly understand the importance of placing themselves and others in one of three categories: *Senpai* (seniors), *Kohai* (juniors), *Dokyusei* (classmates in school) at the onset of all interpersonal relationships. Generally, but not

always, age is the determining factor in establishing the ranking of individuals.

Accordingly, how one speaks and behaves will be regulated by one's rank.

I found that this ability to rank became blurred on U.S. soil. For example, if a 25-year-old student meets a 19-year-old student in Japan, it would be clear who is the *Senpai* and who is the *Kohai*. At UW-La Crosse, it may be possible for a 22-year-old to be the most experienced *Ryugakusei* on campus while a 27-year-old may arrive confused and frightened and be forced to rely on the younger person for assistance. Another situation that I heard about dealt with an Americanized *Ryugakusei* that believed it was not necessary to be rank conscious in America. Therefore she refused to speak to her *Senpai* using honorific language. She appeared disrespectful, rude, and selfish to all of the other *Ryugakusei* abiding by Japanese cultural norms. This phenomenon slowly emerged as I listened to the stories of the *Ryugakusei* community. Unfortunately, I feel as if I saw only a glimpse into the complex nature of this phenomenon.

Another theme that caught me by surprise as it emerged was that many of the students discussed their surprise at finding 21 Japanese students at UW-La Crosse. Because of the large number of *Ryugakusei*, many of the students felt a duty to build relationships within the Japanese community. As a result, they often found themselves spending time with other *Ryugakusei*, making it difficult to use English due to their uneasiness of using English with or in front of other *Ryugakusei*.

Culturally this makes sense. In Japanese culture, one must always consider the group. If each member of the group has the same English ability, it would not be a problem to speak English in front of each other because no one would be better at or

worse at communicating in English. Therefore no one would lose face or show too much pride.

When I first began to teach in Japan, the head English teacher suggested to the other Japanese teachers of English that our weekly staff meetings be held in English. She felt that this would be a good opportunity for everyone to improve their English communicative skills and help me feel included in the conversations until my Japanese skills improved. This proposal met resistance from some of the teachers. A young, female teacher who happened to be fluent in English was pleased with the ultimate decision not to hold the meetings in English. She confidentially explained to me that if she had to use English during the meetings, she would be very uncomfortable. She did not want the older, less fluent teachers, to view her as arrogant or selfish.

One week, after listening to some of the *Ryugakusei* describe that there were too many Japanese in Baird Hall and at UW-La Crosse and furthermore, how it prevented them from using as much English as they would like to use, I suggested that they try to use English with each other. Chiho then told me the following story:

“(In Delaware, my first university) for like one semester I and two, three, other (Japanese) friends...we made an agreement not to speak Japanese in the dorm because one guy from Japan, he was there for only exchange student so he had only one year so he wanted to improve his language and other people wanted to improve their English too, so (we) just spoke English together. It was strange at first, for like a month maybe...but I got used to it and I started speaking to them in English as if they were foreign students. I think it was really, really good idea. The one thing is that someone don't agree then I and the other guy force her to speak English. When she speak to us (in Japanese we would say) “Could you tell me in English?” and we don't understand (that she does not want to speak to us in English) and she got upset (and finally she said that) she didn't want to talk in English to Japanese (people). So that was a little hard.” (Chiho)

Other students' reactions to my suggestions echoed the young Japanese teacher's words. Speaking English in front of their Japanese peers would be comfortable only if they were at the same proficiency level and only if they were peers, not *Senpai* or *Kohai*.

Adjustment to a New Culture: The Classroom Experience

Language difficulties and adjustment to different communication and behavioral patterns caused the biggest struggles within the classroom. Feeling isolated from the American students in the classroom was another common theme that emerged from most of the participants' stories in this study. Ai described how her speech class professor asked her to give speeches about the Japanese government and educational system. She said, "I wish more students would want to know about Japan. I mean, I don't know if they are interested or not. They look bored and like they don't care about the Japanese system." Most *Ryugakusei* agreed that students in the 300 and 400 level classes within their majors were more receptive to and interested in international students.

"They (older students) respect different cultures. When students are 18 or 19 they don't care." (Ai)

"Mmmm...[pause] I think there are some American students who can talk to foreign students without thinking anything...just as a student. But there are also some students who don't care about us at all. It was the hardest. Yeah. I think there were more students who don't care about foreign students." (Mariko)

"Right now I am taking five regular classes. And they don't have any international students so I am the only international student in these classes. And some students speak to me, but most don't talk to me." (Nobu)

"I don't talk to American students in class. (I usually sit)...in front alone." (Masayuki)

"(My classmates and I) don't go to dinner, but just go to Cartwright and drink something." (Tokiko)

"In major classes, like we took some same classes for a couple of semesters, so we could know each other, but in general courses...it was not happened." (Mariko)

“I know some geography major students. They know me and I know them. So we can talk, but I don’t know some students even if they are geography major and they don’t talk to me.” (Nobu)

A common theme was that most *Ryugakusei* had positive experiences with their professors. They found professors helpful, flexible, and kind. The participants especially appreciated professors that took any steps to assist them with their English struggles (i.e. copies of lecture notes or extra time on essay exams). Although most *Ryugakusei* were uncomfortable calling professors by their first names, they seemed to appreciate the informality of the student/instructor relationships in the United States.

“They are flexible. Like I forgot my homework and you can hand it in the next day or next week.” (Katsumi)

“Mostly every day (I talk to my professors). After class or office hour or sometimes I e-mail and I can make appointment. I mean if they are busy during the office hour cause I want to have a long time and if during the office hour they might have different student.” (Ai)

“One instructor is very friendly and I know her because last semester I took her class, her other class and she understand my English problem and after class she tried to explain and she helps me a lot. During the class she gave me the study guide, not study guide, but nobody has, only me. Because it’s a sheet she has overhead and then the other student try to write her overhead, but when I try to write them I couldn’t listen, just writing, and so she understand and she gave me this sheet. And I read and she explain and I write down her explain. So it’s very, very helpful.” (Tokiko)

“They really understand International student’s who don’t speak English well or actually I was surprised at it.” (Masayuki)

“In the geography department there are three or four international professors so for me it is more comfortable.” (Nobu)

Class dynamics

Although *Ryugakusei* struggled to adjust to most communication and behavioral patterns of U.S. culture, there were some aspects of U.S. culture that *Ryugakusei* refused

to adopt. For example, they refused to adopt the drinking and eating habits as well as the informal body language of U.S. students in the classroom. Other aspects of U.S. culture, such as the open discussion and debate within the classroom continued to puzzle some students and impress others.

“I was surprised that all the time Americans sit like this (demonstrates slouching in chair). Yes, like even in front of the professors, we never do. We sit like this in front of them (demonstrates sitting up straight). So I was surprised. Some classes have class in looks like a theater. They don’t have a table here so everybody goes like this (demonstrates writing on her lap).” (Eiko)

“During the class...lots of students and before my seat she always has bad attitude like this one [Demonstrates putting her feet up on the table and slouching back with her head back.] Yeah, during the classes she eat and drink every class and maybe she is busy to take lunch. So I am so surprised.” (Tokiko)

“At first I was uncomfortable. Professors used my first name and it was ok for me to use their first name. In Japan, a professor/teacher never calls me by my first name. It was like we were friends or something. I still use Dr.____. I am not comfortable to call my professor by the first name. And eating! And drinking. One day I saw a girl eating carrots and I was so surprised. Some students eat sandwich or snacks. And they put their feet on the chairs. Or they [demonstrates slouching] do like this. I want to do this too, but I can’t. I am afraid. I mean I know I can do it, but I have to show respect to my professors. They are teaching me something. I have to show them that I am learning. Students have to [demonstrates sitting up straight] be like this.” (Mariko)

“I can understand drinking, perhaps people get thirsty, but eating chips in class is so shocking! It is so impolite to teachers in Japan. But here, teachers don’t seem to mind. Also, students sit like this [demonstrate crossing her legs and slouches.] And sometimes I see students put their feet up on the chair in front of them. And they talk a lot. This is a good way and a bad way that Japan and US are different. The teacher asks, ‘So how do you think about this?’ And the students respond with super random stuff. Sometimes what they say is not important to the discussion. But yet this makes it easy to say anything. I think American students react better than Japanese students.” (Chiho)

“I was really surprised that everyone just asked a question, if they wonder something, just raise their hand and speak out. And it is not only between teacher and students who sharing the idea, but also if anybody has an idea or opinion to others so they share ideas among the students. This is a good thing actually. Sometimes people kind of get mad. [laughs] Yeah, they want to debate. Yeah...that is kind of interesting. I have never seen such like that in Japan.” (Taro)

“American student. Say you’re... [pause] They talk too much because they don’t – if I – cause I know everybody want to talk, want to speak so, but they don’t care and they just want to talk whenever they want and whatever they want so, of course there are some student who want to speak, but [pause] but they, they please themselves but they don’t consider other student. And then, they, I mean, [pause] in the end of class, even though the professor, professor is still is speaking they just prepared to get out of the class. It is very rude behavior in my country because somebody is still talking. It doesn’t matter if it professor or student, if somebody is still talking we should listen, but if they sometimes leave, they left while the professor is still talking cause the time is over, that’s why, but I was surprised by it. How can they do that cause our professor is still talking? This student is prepared and put the book note inside the backpack and they almost leaving. It is very rude for me.” (Ai)

“I get nervous. If I understand I of course can speak up and say my opinion, but ahhh, sometimes I don’t understand some professors’ English. Some professors just speak so quick and sometimes so...how can I say? Mumble? Yeah, not clear. ‘What did you say’ ‘I beg your pardon.’ But after I say that twice I cannot say it anymore. You know [laughs] and then I just make up an answer. I just guess. Sometimes I say the totally wrong answer. One time it was kind of funny. My professor asked me one question, kind of a simple question, I was in a class of sociology. And there was [sic] more than forty students in the class and my professor was talking about Japan like economic situation. And then he asked me a question like twice. I go like, ‘What did you say?’ twice and after twice I just guessed and I go like, ‘maybe twenty bucks’. I just picked up the word price from his question and I just say twenty dollars. [laughs] And then he goes, ‘Really? Are you serious?’ And I said, ‘I think so.’ And I didn’t know what his question really was and then after the class I asked the professor. ‘What was the question again?’ and he goes, ‘Oh, I asked you how much was an apple?’ [laughs] It is not twenty bucks at all! [laughs] It is less than a dollar. I told the class twenty bucks for an apple. He was so surprised! And I wondered why he was so surprised!” (Taro)

Small Group Experience

There were two themes that emerged during discussions and observations regarding small group experiences. The first theme was that Ryugakusei disliked forming a small group in class and having only a short time to complete an activity. Chiho described it like this:

“I am so stressed. I look around and try to figure out what group to join. I tend to sit by myself and I usually don’t talk first. If someone talks to me, I will talk to him/her. So at

first I don't know the classmates. I just look for a group that looks like they need one more person and then I ask if I may join their group." (Chiho)

The second theme that emerged dealt with working in small groups on projects or assignments. For *Ryugakusei*, these experiences ran the gamut from terrible to positive. As this theme emerged, I spent time observing *Ryugakusei* interacting with their small groups on class projects. My observations of the small group sessions also ran the gamut from positive to negative interactions. Perhaps what impressed me the most was that I observed that the *Ryugakusei* came thoroughly prepared to the small group meetings. It seemed to me as if they had prepared twice as much as their American counterparts. I observed that some of the American classmates were patient with and interested in the *Ryugakusei*. Unfortunately, I also observed impatient behavior such as interrupting or ignoring the *Ryugakusei* as they tried to make their point. Some of the American peers did not know the names of the *Ryugakusei* although they had been working on projects together for two months. My observations seemed to coincide with the experiences described by the participants in this research.

"This semester I was taking a sociology class and in the class we are divided into ten groups and my group has four students including me and ahh...we [pause] yeah, we had to give a presentation in class. And one day we met in the library and we talked about...we brought the stuff and we talked about who was going to speak in part or who was going to make the overhead or who was going to find the sources. And [pause] my job in the group was to find sources so I found some sources and I tried to give the sources to my members but they didn't see my stuff (pick it up or look at it). I didn't know why. Actually I talked to my professor and I said that I tried to make some effort in the group, but I couldn't because of my English. " (Nobu)

"This Monday we had a presentation and we are three people including me and we had to get information and try to make a handout and explain so they are so nice. They understand my English problem too and they said, 'ok, you should explain about Japan.' About Japan? 'Yeah, it is good.' And so they give me my, my time and I try to explain about Japan. It was their suggestion." (Tokiko)

“(In one of my classes we are getting ready for the Trade Show.) We are trying to make a brochure and poster and still discussing how we will set it up. There are four people in the group including me. They are getting so friendly. So I am happy. We meet one or two times a week. I would like to see them for social reasons. Some of them are my type of person. Maybe someday I will meet them for personal reasons.” (Chiho)

“This semester I have two classes with group experience. One class is good experience and one is not so good. My history is good. I think I have good relationship with the (history) group. My art appreciation class is not so good. Two weeks ago, my group had a project. I was assigned two articles/images to present my ideas with the group. I prepared and brought some paper/information to present with me to the class. The group was assigned 14/15 images from the book. One person had two images. I got two. I wrote what I would say because each person would say something. I was waiting and waiting during the presentation for my images to come out of the projector. My images didn't come up. I wanted to present. I prepared. I don't understand why everyone else presented, but I didn't. I just endured the situation. After class, one group member followed me and said 'don't worry.' He tried to talk to me. He was kind. I still don't understand why they didn't put my images in the projector. And I also experienced good point (of working) in group work. [pause] We assigned some group work in world history class. We separated the work between the five people. I did my work. In the next class we came together and discuss it, but I misunderstand the project and I did other work. I didn't understand what I should do. My work is not good. But one guy said, 'never mind. Take it easy.' And they take care of me. They don't discriminate me. They assign me writing and they treat me politely. They listen. I thought they understand me. I feel lucky. Happy.” (Katsumi)

“Usually it is pretty good to work in group. Sometimes it is difficult. I cannot say what I want to say so clearly and maybe they cannot understand me so they just move on in the conversation. They are not so patient with me. But when I work with a group of students that are in the same major, they know about me and are generally very kind. When the course is an elective, then they don't know anything about me and I have more trouble.” (Mariko)

Ryugakusei Learn Critical Thinking

Chiho talked about an assignment to look at thirteen Internet sites and review them.

She said, “It is difficult for me. I have to write a reaction paper. It is very difficult for me to give my opinion.” I asked her about her Japanese educational experience and whether or not she had to give her opinion on exams or in papers. She said, “Basically never. It

was always short answer or fill in the blank or multiple choice. Rarely would a teacher would give us the space to write 30 characters and say 'write at least twenty Kanji but not more than thirty Kanji, tell me your opinion about...' So critical thinking is something I have had to learn since coming to the United States." Tokiko talked about how her first short answer exam was difficult for her. She tried to explain to me the extent of her confusion. "I didn't understand what does short answer mean? Does it mean...[pause as she looks around the room and points to her tea cup.] Does it mean 'cup' or does it mean 'the blue cup' or 'the blue cup sitting on the table or 'I think the blue cup is sitting on the table."

Social and Cultural Adjustment

In a growing number of studies, social concern has been identified as one of the biggest problems for international students (Day & Hajj, 1986; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Pedersen, 1991). Educators are challenged to help these students work through their loss of social support and develop new social networks necessary to support them personally as well as academically.

Friends

All of the *Ryugakusei* discussed a desire to have more interpersonal relationships with their U.S. peers. Having a positive relationship with at least one person, whether this was their roommate, a neighbor, or a classmate seemed to be the most common way for *Ryugakusei* to develop friendships with other people. They relied on this initial friend to invite them out and introduce them to others. Most of the participants expressed that

their shyness or their being introverted inhibited them from making friends. Language barriers and busy schedules were sometimes cited as reasons for not having many friends.

“I am not very good at making a lot of friends. Once I find good friend I usually stick with her. Two of my friends are really friendly- they’re good at meeting people so I learn some...still I don’t know. I can depend on the situation though. If he or she is being alone and if the person looks very open, then I can go quite easily and if not, that’s really hard.” (Chiho)

“Mostly I have Japanese friends this semester. Last semester I had a good American friend, Johanna. My ESL teacher introduced us. Then I was always studying in Cartwright and she was always studying in Cartwright, so we began to talk with each other. She was so kind and helpful. I would sometimes ask her a question about my homework. She would sometimes ask me to take a break and go for a walk or go and get something to eat together. And sometimes we would go downtown together. She left in July because she graduated. After she left I was so sad. I like La Crosse students. They are so kind and friendly. They sometimes ask me, ‘Are you Japanese?’ and then we talk. Then when they see me on campus they say hello. But now I don’t have any free time. As you know I am taking two ESL courses and two graduate courses. I must study all the time. I cannot just talk with someone. I have no free time to make good friends.” (Tokiko)

“I don’t have many International students or International friends or American friends. Maybe language (is barrier) and maybe I am busy, yeah, yeah, I’m busy so it’s hard to have time to have fun with American students but they don’t have to study as hard as me because they know English. Yeah, but that’s not the reason because I have (had) American friends at St. Norbert’s College although I was very busy. I was busier than here. A roommate is very important (because he introduce you to other people).” (Masayuki)

Living Arrangements

Several themes emerged relating to where *Ryugakusei* make their homes. Perhaps the most important theme involved the relationship between their roommates. As Masayuki stated, “a roommate is very important.” For some of the Japanese students, their roommate was the person that introduced them to friends, helped them with their homework, and taught them about American culture. For others, their roommate was a source of stress.

“He is not a terrible person. He is just not friendly. I am not comfortable with him. Like if I say hi to him, he doesn’t greet me. I don’t think he is shy. He is very friendly and talks a lot with his friends. The first week we played pool together. But since then he never talks with me.” (Masayuki)

“... my ex-roommate was really nice person but not really friendly. My image about American people was friendly or very nice so I realize that it was just my stereotypical image about American people. So she was just a quiet person she was not bad or unfriendly. I noticed she is just quiet or she was very shy at the beginning of the semester so I thought I cannot judge or I learned that I cannot judge people based on one image that I already had. So I think my expectation was somehow wrong it was just a stereotype or stereotypical image. So it, she taught me a very important thing about what is American people.” (Ai)

“I lived in the halls with a woman for three semesters. I was very lucky. I was so happy. She was a really good person.” (Mariko)

“My roommate was so messy person [laughs]. Actually when I entered the room there was a lot of garbages, decayed foods [laughs]. And it was and it smelled strange. I was so stinky. At that time I had to change. I told the man who picked me up at the airport...and he told my RA. But I have to stay three or four days until I change room. And I talked to him (my roommate) and his personality was very nice and I changed my mind.” (Katsumi)

“(My roommate) got me to do something that maybe I don’t do otherwise. I like that about people who tell me what to do. She motivates me to hang out. For example, she says, ‘you should watch movie!’ So, we watch movie or drink together. We do this about one time a week. (My roommate in Delaware) we didn’t really very get along. She used to bring boys and she sleep with him and the boy always changes daily. I was so surprised. I told her not to bring boys back to my room at 1:00 in the morning or don’t let them sleep in my room, but she did it again and she finally found some other room.” (Chiho)

“I had problems with her (my first roommate’s) boyfriend. He made me so angry. Sometimes I couldn’t get into my room even though I had key. Do you know what I mean? (Her roommate was having sex.) My friend Mark would tell me to tell them my feelings. At first this was so difficult for me. My roommate understood me. Her boyfriend was controlling. I sometimes had to sleep in my friend’s room. (My second roommate) was so nice. She was from Minnesota. I never had problem with her. She asked me to continue live with her, but I really wanted to live off campus.” (Eiko)

“In Baird Hall, my roommate was kind of friendly guy, but he liked to play the music kind of loud even like when I am typing writing paper he sometimes loud and sometimes drunk and keeps disturbing me that was kind of one of the gripe.” (Taro)

Eight of the nine participants have lived in Baird Hall for at least one semester during their enrollment at UW-La Crosse. Three common themes emerged while discussing life in Baird Hall. First, the students were amazed by the diversity that this community provided to them. They were able to meet people from all over the world and learn about many different cultures. One student stated, “At UW-L there are a lot of international students from all of countries. I never imagine so many countries. And I talk (to) them a lot. More than Americans.” Especially while enrolled in ESL courses, *Ryugakusei* had many opportunities to form friendships with other international students from around the world. The second theme was that although they appreciated this diversity, they sometimes felt that it inhibited them from getting to know U.S. students. Yet the option to live in a different hall was not seen as good solution. They expressed concern with having to move out of other halls during breaks. The third theme, which I addressed earlier, dealt with the Japanese community within Baird Hall. Feeling an obligation to spend time with other *Ryugakusei* and not feeling comfortable using English when other *Ryugakusei* were near were frustrations voiced by all of the students except one.

For some participants in this study, testing out of ESL courses and moving off campus often brought about changes in friendships as well. These students began to spend more time with other off campus *Ryugakusei*. They voiced their decision to move off campus offered them privacy and more food options.

“I like Baird Hall, but I wanted to live by myself. I need privacy. So I got my own apartment.” (Nobu)

“I wanted a pet. I am a night person. I wanted my own space.” (Eiko)

“I wanted to get my own space and time.” (Mariko)

“I wanted privacy. My roommate had a girlfriend. She slept with him every night. He told me that if I was uncomfortable with it I should let him know. I told him I was ok, but I was not comfortable. I just put up with it and move out.” (Katsumi)

Drugs

The use of illegal and legal drugs was a phenomenon that emerged during the final days of the research. In order to further protect the identities of these individuals, I will not refer to their name or gender in the following discussion. Two of the participants discussed with me their use of alcohol and how it relaxed them and allowed them to speak English freely with Americans. They went on to express concerns that they sometimes drank too much and as a result, missed classes. Two other *Ryugakusei* discussed their experiences using illegal drugs at UW-La Crosse. For one student, the drug scene appeared to be just a way of fitting in with American peers. For the other student, drugs were a curiosity as well as an escape mechanism. I believe that their stories are important to hear in the students' own words.

“The drugs (in the U.S.), that is amazing. When I was in Japan, I watched a television show like a news show kind of stuff and they are talking about the drug situation in the United States. And they said more than eighty percent of the high school students have tried marijuana and drug stuff. I didn't believe it because eighty percent is a really majority. When I first got here, I asked my roommates whether that was true or not and it was really true. Everyone around me tries marijuana. Whenever I meet friends or students here, pretty a lot of students try drugs. I have never seen marijuana or any other type of drug in Tokyo or whatever. I don't know people around me are doing it. Maybe it is hard to get in Japan. It is much easier here. One of the reasons is because American students get drugs is maybe because of the strict prohibition of the alcohol until 21. The drinking age you have to show the I.D. That is also one of the things that I didn't expect. It is really hard to get alcohol (in the U.S.). In Japan, we can get it easily in the vending machines. Easily we can go buy...no matter what the age.”

The second story is more poignant.

“Actually, my roommate sold drugs [laughs] to the dorm members. He separated the marijuana in our room. [laughs]. ...actually I tried with my roommate in my roommate’s car. And we did a lot. Like one time...no...two times a week whole semester. In spring break we smoked every day. But the roommate said it is better than cigarettes. And there is no addiction. Physically or mentally. No, no, mentally my roommate said there is some addiction, like I want to smoke but he/she said no physical addiction like cigarettes. If I smoke cigarettes after one or two hours I want to smoke one more cigarette. It is like physical addiction. ...it was so fun time during I smoke and after I smoke marijuana. Like three hours or so I feel so like so good. After that I feel so depressed. And after one semester, I couldn’t feel happy without weed. ...(after smoking marijuana) I just lie down and I enjoyed my imagination. Or I just listen to music. I didn’t break something. Actually it is my fault. I understand, but [pause] I [pause] I made me dirty by myself because of drugs. I could say no, and I should say no. I still have curiosity for the drugs. I did by myself. And I felt so depressed after I smoke marijuana and I didn’t know why. Then I checked Internet about drugs and I read a lot of articles about marijuana and the problem is the same thing as me. Depression after smoking. I think in April. I tried to patient. Let it be or just study. I thought that I don’t need friends. And I thought that I just have to study. I thought, I continued to marijuana and no talking and bad American foods and no playing and I continued such kind of life for three months. And I felt so sick in my mind and I thought that [pause] I called everyday to my mom and dad and I never went to school. [crying] [Tape stopped for several minutes by participant.] I lied to my mother and father because they worry about me. I couldn’t tell them the truth. But that makes me ...that makes me like bad, but I couldn’t continue to tell a lie to my parents. I called my mother and I tell her I studied very hard every day. I am so busy. But it is not true. And I couldn’t continue to tell a lie. And my life was so ...so bad. No friends. And I told them the whole thing about the semester...including marijuana. I told everything. And I couldn’t sleep for three days and the last day I told them. I called them. (I told them) Actually I can’t sleep for three days and I can’t stop thinking and I have disease on the skin and I have no friends and I smoke marijuana and I never go to class. [crying continues] And I told them the whole truth. And they said “come back to home tomorrow! You can take a rest.” I cried. They also cried. I felt that in my mind was clear. I said I never go back to Japan. I will make up. I will stay here until the end of the year and I will go back. And they said, “Ok, but if you want to go back you can go back anytime.” Before that call they always say to me, “don’t come back. You should stay in US.” [crying continues]

Assistance

It is only natural for *Ryugakusei* to face problems in their academic, social, and personal life. I was curious to find out where they went for help. Most of the

Ryugakusei seemed comfortable to seek their professors' help and did so to varying degrees. A couple of them utilized the writing center for assistance with papers, while a few others relied on friends or classmates to proof their papers.

"For this semester I've been to the writing center to make sure my grammar is ok for most of the writing I had." (Chiho)

"...I ask my friends to correct my paper always. But if I didn't have help from my friends, my paper would be messed up. Sometimes I really don't have time to ask for corrections, so just I turn in the paper without corrections. Sometimes I get comments like maybe you should go to the writing center." (Taro)

"I have one friend her major is Therapeutic Recreation and we have, I have, not we have two same classes. She is so nice to me and she says, 'If you have a problem or question ask me.' And if I or when I have a problem I went to her and I go to her very often." (Tokiko)

"One time last semester. I was really struggling with the class. My notes were a mess before the first test. I made eye contact with a girl and she smiled. So I asked to see her notes. She said sure. I wondered what she would think of me. In Japan, I would only ask for notes from my best friends. Sometimes people go to the smartest person just for their notes, but I don't like that. Actually, for my dance class right now, my Korean classmate asked our professor for the notes." (Chiho)

"Sometimes I asked some students in the class." (Mariko)

For social or personal problems, *Ryugakusei* overwhelmingly depended on each other for help or simply endured the situation they were involved in without seeking help from anyone. Both of these patterns concerned me for obvious reasons. When I discussed this phenomenon with the participants, Tokiko explained it best to me. She described how she believed that there were probably many helpful people around campus, but that she needed to build a relationship with the person before asking that person for help or advice. She went on to explain how she felt most professionals were "too busy" for her to try to build a relationship. She went on to explain that because she now knew me, she

would be able to come to me with any problem. This seemed true for the other participants as well. As my relationship with them developed, they would often seek help from me. Even after the gathering of data ended, they continued to call, e-mail, or visit me.

Relevance of Academic Programs

Upon graduation, *Ryugakusei* will return to an environment that has very different educational and cultural systems. When they return to Japan, they will be expected to apply what they have learned in the U.S. to their careers in Japan. Many of the *Ryugakusei* expressed concern as to whether or not their knowledge or degrees would be relevant in their home country.

“...if I want to get a degree in therapeutic recreation and go back to Japan and try to get a job, such as (in a) hospital, [laughs]...it’s so difficult, but my goal is [pause] to become teacher again.” (Tokiko)

“My parents worried about whether or not my degree from an American university would be useful or not. I think that the science programs in Japan are stronger. I think my astronomy or physics degree from American university will not get me job in Japan. My parents worried about this problem. But it is ok. I want to go to graduate school.” (Masayuki)

“Because still Japanese companies look at the name of the university you graduate from so it will be difficult for me to get a job since I graduated from an American university.” (Mariko)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes the conclusions, and the discussion and recommendations for further research based on the results and research questions of this case study. The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations, expectations and experiences of *Ryugakusei*.

Motivation-Related Conclusions

Based on the results and findings of the study, the researcher concluded that although the *Ryugakusei* motivation for coming to the U.S. is individualized, the motivations could be categorized into three different groups. The first motivation factor was to get a degree from the U.S. without entering or trying to enter a Japanese institution. There was only one student in this situation. He said that he wanted to learn about himself in another culture. Failure to gain entrance to a Japanese university motivated the second group of *Ryugakusei*. These three students attempted to enter Japanese universities before making the decision to study in the U.S. The third group of students was motivated specifically to seek a degree outside of Japan. Two of these five students graduated from Japanese universities and then enrolled in UW-La Crosse to earn a specific graduate degree not offered in Japan. The other three students attended higher education in Japan for some length of time before deciding to come to the U.S.

Most of the students met with resistance from their parents when they first began to talk about *Ryugaku*. In fact, only two families encouraged their sons to enroll in a university in the United States. For the other *Ryugakusei*, months, or, in one case, years were spent convincing their parents to support their decision for *Ryugaku*. None of the participants came without the approval of their family.

Safety and friendliness were seen as positive characteristics of Wisconsin and the Midwest and were thereby reasons for choosing UW-La Crosse. Likewise, the relatively low tuition and living costs were also seen as a draw to UW-La Crosse.

Motivation-Related Recommendations

Because safety was considered an issue to students and families, national studies ranking La Crosse, Wisconsin as one of the safest small cities in the United States would be useful to use when recruiting *Ryugakusei*. It is also important that tuition and living costs be kept as low as possible.

Expectation-Related Conclusions

Ryugakusei expectations could be categorized into three areas: Academic, Social, and Personal. Brislin et al. (1986) addressed the importance of having realistic expectations of what the *Ryugaku* experience would be like in the U.S. This study found that the gap between the *Ryugakusei* expectations and their reality was often wide, leaving them feeling frustrated and isolated.

Perhaps the widest gap was in their ability to master the English language. All of the participants expected that English would be difficult, however they believed that after one or two years of hard work, they would be able to reach a high level of proficiency.

For most of the *Ryugakusei*, language barriers affected their academic, social, and personal experiences.

The second widest gap could be found in their expectation of what American people would be like. The most common positive words used to describe American people were “kind, friendly, outgoing, and diverse.” Along with these images, they believed that their friends would consist mainly of U.S. students and that the Japanese population at UW-La Crosse would not be large. Most of them believed that they would never have a chance to use the Japanese language while living and studying in the La Crosse community. The *Ryugakusei* also expected that there would be a lot of drugs in the U.S. and that it would be a dangerous place to live. Some of them felt that they would at least see guns and two worried that they may even get shot at while living here.

Expectation-Related Recommendations

To narrow the gap between expectation and reality, I believe it would be useful to have current students correspond with potential students during the application process. This correspondence would assist in not only the recruiting process, it would also alleviate some of the concerns and worries felt by the students and their families.

I also believe that utilizing the alumni network in Japan would be an invaluable tool. This connecting of alumni to potential students would not only assist in the recruitment of Japanese students to UW-La Crosse, it would also encourage alumni living in Japan to stay connected to their alma mater.

Experience-Related Conclusions

As stated earlier, the language barriers proved to be an important phenomenon in the *Ryugakusei* experience. Surprisingly, this research found that for some *Ryugakusei*, especially the males, spoken English was rarely used outside of the classroom experience. As such, many of the *Ryugakusei* perceived that they were not successful at developing interpersonal relationships with their U.S. peers. The *Ryugakusei* gave several explanations for this phenomenon. First, they felt that U.S. students were not interested in or patient with them as individuals. Second, they talked about their own lack of confidence and inability to express their thoughts and feelings in English, therefore making it difficult to develop friendships.

As a result of being physically different from the majority population at UW-La Crosse, many of the *Ryugakusei* went through some form of identity development. For most of them, living in the U.S. was the first time that they identified themselves as a minority or as being Asian. Interacting with people who did not have a clear idea of the distinctions between Japan and other Asian countries was a new experience for the participants. Some of the participants discussed their own feelings of inferiority towards Americans in general. Another theme that emerged was the surprising degree in which three participants denied being Asian. For these three, being called "Asian" was offensive and demeaning.

The significance of adhering to the Japanese cultural norms within the Japanese campus community turned out to be another surprising theme. While most of the participants did not expect to find a large *Ryugakusei* population, many of them chose to

or felt obligated to follow Japanese cultural, language, and behavioral patterns with each other. The *Senpai* and *Kohai*, junior and senior, relationships were just one example of the complexity of interpersonal relationships within the Japanese community.

The overwhelming perspective was that the faculty and staff at UW-La Crosse were "kind and helpful." The participants especially appreciated faculty that offered them lecture notes or extra time on exams to assist in breaking down the language barrier. The participants also appreciated the open relationship between faculty and students although they continued to feel uncomfortable addressing faculty by their first names. In discussing classroom dynamics, several themes emerged. First, all of the participants were shocked by the informal classroom behavioral patterns of their U.S. peers. Such behaviors as eating and drinking during lectures, resting feet up on chairs, slouching, and speaking without being called on were the most frequently discussed impolite behaviors that the participants felt uncomfortable seeing in the U.S. classroom.

Working in small groups on class projects was another frequently discussed theme. This experience ran the gamut from being viewed as extremely positive and useful to negative and stressful for the *Ryugakusei*. The most common factor in determining the outcome of this experience seemed to depend on whether or not the U.S. peers were patient and understanding of the cultural and language barriers faced by the *Ryugakusei*.

As discussed earlier, many of the *Ryugakusei* found themselves socializing frequently with other *Ryugakusei*. All of the *Ryugakusei* discussed their desire to have more interpersonal relationships with U.S. peers. Having a positive roommate experience seemed to increase the likelihood of developing other friendships with U.S. peers. One

transfer *Ryugakusei* discussed in great detail how his roommate at his first institution was “kind, understanding, and patient.” This roommate introduced him to other friends and encouraged him to be involved in many campus activities. While this same *Ryugakusei* remains involved at UW-La Crosse, he has not made friends with his U.S. peers. He perceives the difference in his two experiences to stem from his relationship with his current roommate. He describes this relationship as being “poor” and that his roommate has no interest in or patience with him.

A secondary problem that most of the participants talked about was their inability to confront their roommates when conflicts occurred. An example often used was rather than asking a roommate to turn down the music, the *Ryugakusei* would simply avoid the conflict by studying elsewhere for the remainder of the semester or year. Although most of the *Ryugakusei* described the resident assistants in the Baird Hall as being kind and friendly, most did not feel comfortable seeking help from them beyond getting information regarding the hall policies or closings during vacations.

Most of the *Ryugakusei* relied on other *Ryugakusei* for problem solving. Unfortunately, I believe that the information given may not have always been the most accurate. It also appeared that *Ryugakusei* are not utilizing many of the outstanding resources available to students on campus.

Experience-Related Recommendations

Further development of peer mentoring programs such as the L.I.F.E. (La Crosse International Friends Exchange) Program and/or development of Asian peer mentors within the residence halls would assist in enhancing the *Ryugaku* experience. Currently

the L.I.F.E. Program has about 67 members, but few of the U.S. students remain active, leaving the group consisting of mainly international students.

All of the *Ryugakusei* living on campus have chosen to live in Baird Hall. This residence hall consists mainly of upper-classmen and international students. Because there are many *Ryugakusei* living in this hall, the participants expressed concern for lack of opportunity to use English and a desire to live in a different setting. However, Baird Hall is the only hall that remains open during academic breaks, thus they would be forced to move out of their rooms during breaks if they chose a different residence hall. I believe that this problem could be solved if the university assisted in finding families within the community or encouraged U.S. peers to invite *Ryugakusei* to their homes during breaks. Not only would this provide *Ryugakusei* with an opportunity to further understand American culture, but would eliminate some of their concerns about living in a different residence hall.

Ryugakusei often told me that I was an approachable person for them because I had an understanding of their culture. Therefore, I recommend that the university identify and utilize individuals within the UW-La Crosse community with country specific cross-cultural experience. Having a list of faculty and staff willing to befriend international students or give cultural information to other faculty and staff would be of great benefit to all involved in making the study abroad experience valuable.

I also believe that it is essential for residence life staff to receive some type of training on cross-cultural conflict resolution. Learning how to intervene when two

cultures are colliding is an essential component to promoting internationalism in the international hall.

Implications for Future Research

It is recommended that additional, longitudinal studies centered on these participants and their current issues as well as their future experiences be done. It is also recommended that further assessment of academic and social needs be done in order to grasp a better understanding of how to serve them better.

It is clear that this research only saw a glimpse into the identity development of *Ryugakusei* in regards to what it means for them to be Japanese, a minority, and an Asian. Further research in this area is recommended. Likewise, comparable research on other Asian international students' motivations, expectations, and experiences is recommended so that professionals can understand the differences and commonalities of the various Asian populations at UW-La Crosse.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Request

September 26, 2001

Dear *Ryugakusei*,

My name is Beth Hartung and I am a graduate student seeking a Master's degree in College Student Development and Administration in the College of HPERTE here at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. I am studying the motivations, expectations, and experiences of Japanese students who are seeking a degree at UW-L. One component of this study includes how to best improve the college environment for those who are here from abroad. The conclusion of this study will help not only the future students from Japan, but it may aid you as an international student in the near future.

I am looking for six to ten student volunteers from Japan to participate in this research. The first part of the research consists of allowing me to observe your daily life over the next three months. This can be in one or two of the following ways. For example, perhaps I could attend one of your lectures with you, join you and your friends for a meal at Whitney, sit with you and your roommate in your room, or accompany you around campus as you register for your next semester classes. I will simply follow you, observe, and take notes. I hope to spend two to ten hours with each volunteer. The second part of the study consists of a one to two hour interview. This will be done in December 2001.

If you would like to be a part of this research, please take a moment and fill out the attached contact form. I will telephone you and set up a time to meet.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely yours,

Beth A. Hartung

APPENDIX B

Contact Information Form

Contact Information Form

Confidential Information:

If you agree to participate in this research, please take a few minutes to fill out the following questionnaire:

What is your name? _____ Phone: _____

What is your address in La Crosse? _____

Where are you from in Japan? _____

Age: _____ Are you an undergraduate or graduate student? _____

Male or Female
(Please circle.)

Are you seeking a degree at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse? Yes or No

If yes, what is your major? _____

As a child, did you live as an expatriate? Yes or No (Please circle.)

Please return it in the enclosed envelope to: Beth Hartung
Office of Student Life
149 Graff Main Hall
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
La Crosse, WI 54601
Phone: (608) 785-8065

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: A Qualitative Study of Japanese Students' Motivations, Expectations, and Experiences at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

I, _____, agree to participate in the project named above.
(Please print your name.)

I am aware that my role in participating in the research project named above is to help faculty and academic staff at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse better understand the motivations, expectations, and experiences of students from Japan. I have been informed that this research involves two components. First, I agree to allow the investigator to accompany me for two to ten hours around UW-La Crosse campus. During this time she will observe and take notes regarding my interactions with the campus community. Second, during an in-depth interview, I have been informed that I can talk about what motivated me to come and study at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse as well as my expectations prior to arriving on campus and about my experiences here thus far.

The investigator may publish the interview results as my personal story but anonymously after I have examined the draft. Interviews will be audio taped for transcription by the investigator and later destroyed. I will have no further obligation toward this study or the investigator. I also understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Furthermore, I am free to withdraw from the study at anytime without embarrassment, difficulty or penalty.

I have been informed that the anticipated risks and/or inconveniences in this study are minimal. By participating, I have been informed that I will help professionals at the UW-La Crosse better understand students from Japan.

The investigator has informed me that I have the right to ask questions at any time during the project and have them answered to my satisfaction. I have been informed that the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse has approved this project and that I may direct further questions regarding the protection of human subjects to Dr. Dan Duquette, Chair, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Institutional Review (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at (608) 785-8161.

Signature of the Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of the Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Investigator:

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