Wanderlust:

Young Canadian Professionals' Movement and Lives Between Canada and Japan

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Abstract

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This M.A. anthropology thesis investigates the movement and transnational lives of young Canadian professionals who have worked and lived in Japan. I address the problem of linear notions of the life course and essentialist categorizations of mobile agents. This problem is largely in line with concepts such as the 'middle class' that are no longer tied solely to notions of wealth and associated forms of prestige. I approach this problem in engaging with particular moments in young people's lives that inspire and propel them to pursue opportunities beyond the confines of longstanding western notions of the life course. In this study, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork in organizational events pertaining to this movement. I also interviewed 15 young Canadian professionals who have or were intending to move between Canada and Japan to explore their aspirations, career goals, and future plans. I apply concepts of mobility, youth, and the life course to generate scholarly interest into the lives of young westerners and to demonstrate that we need not necessarily look far and beyond our borders to discover aspects of 'foreignness'. I furthermore attempt to convince readers that it is not solely the experiences of travel that changes sojourners, but the way and the means in which they internalize, process, and voice their travel experiences at different points in their lives.

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For M.

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Introduction

Thesis Statement

My study investigates the lives of young Canadian professionals who have experienced living and working in Japan. I am primarily focused on how different young professionals make choices regarding transnational work experiences and life course decisions in response to certain western conventional attitudes of leading a 'successful' life. Some of the participants in my study are just beginning their sojourn abroad, some are currently in Japan, and some have returned to Montreal, Canada. Many of the participants work as English teachers for a global English teaching agency, which I refer to in this thesis by the pseudonym of 'Live and Learn Japan' (LLJ). Other participants in my study who are not linked to LLJ have tended to work in a mix of English teaching and other professional fields. My research has found that as young western professionals experience transnational life and work, it often changes the way in which they approach their personal and professional lives and prospective career choices. Scholars involved in studies of mobility, youth, and the life course have all made contributions to our understanding of the fluctuating dynamics of transnational social life among young people on the move. A key concern of my study addresses the problem of identifying young travelers as representatives of one kind of transnational. The young travelers in my study experience various contexts of travel as they move through different life phases and explore new career opportunities. In a transnational context, my research has found that bilateral professional and personal relationships have changed the way in which young travelers think about their lives and thus the idea of belonging to a specific 'culture' or 'place'.

In my study, I problematize the privilege and access that certain young Canadians enjoy in their attempts to sort out their lives. Coming to terms with one's place in the world is a dilemma many people encounter, and in my study of young Canadian professionals, this experience spans transnational borders and includes extended periods of time and economic resources. The many interpretations of the 'middle class' have allowed a variety of government and private institutions to create opportunities for certain middle class groups, which may be packaged as training programs, internships, and short

or long-term jobs – often directed as preparation for an established lifestyle. The young Canadian professionals in my study are represented amongst a category of middle class individuals who are involved in transnational career and adventure seeking. Institutions and governments tend to capitalize on the intersection of career and adventure, positing their respective youth programs and job opportunities as 'taking chances' or 'opportunities for innovation' in one's life. I argue that this prescription of life opportunities is largely granted to a particular type of privileged Canadian youth: university educated, of relatively stable economic standing, and from a social history that propels the notion of career as a means to attain an enriched life.

Accordingly, my study is concerned with young professionals and their mobile occupational ventures over a segment of the life course. I describe their accounts of managing both their personal desires to travel as well as their general perceptions of the social pressures for them to 'succeed' in the decisions that they make. I ask how we might locate these young adults without obscuring the specificity of their circumstances and desires. Thus my study employs Jennifer Johnson-Hanks' (2002) notion of "vital conjunctures" to caution against linear notions of the life course and essentialist categorizations of mobile agents. Furthermore, my study argues that we must attend to the particular aspects of space, time, and circumstance involved in different mobile agents' lives. In doing so, we are able to note subtle differences in these accounts of everyday life that can help us better understand how the choices made by different mobile agents create new intersections that prompt useful questions regarding the sociality of transnational experiences.

Thesis Layout

I have organized this thesis into 4 main sections. In the Literature Review and Methodology section, I review literature and analyze key theoretical concerns regarding mobility, youth, and the life course. The most salient intention of the literature review is to make it evident that the study of transnational mobility is constantly undergoing critical re-evaluation and as such, my study describes some of the current trends in related literatures in an effort to think about which directions might be useful to consider for future studies. Next, I describe the methodology of my study including the goals I set

out to accomplish, the participants involved, a pertinent global job agency, and the limitations of my methods and study overall.

Chapter 1 introduces the participants in my study. In this chapter, I describe and situate my interlocutors in relationship to an ethnographic study of young Canadian professionals who work and live, or have worked and lived, in Japan. My intention in this chapter is to 'set the stage' so that we might understand some of the general and specific motivations for travel and work in Japan.

Chapter 2 describes two different ethnographic sites involving transnational communities in Canada and Japan. I describe how young Canadian professionals interact with others in cross-border contexts to impart a sense of what happens when one pursues a transnational lifestyle and/or career. This chapter explains how life abroad can follow one back 'home' thus problematizing the idea that foreign experiences are only found in 'far away places'. I argue that as young professionals take on a transnational life, their ideas of career, home, belonging, friendships, and identity are subject to reevaluation as they adopt different lifestyles, build new relationships (both personal and professional) and integrate particular cultural practices into their everyday lives.

Chapter 3 describes some of the decisions that these young western professionals encounter as they partake in a transnational life. I divide this chapter into four sections that reflect different points in time at which young professionals working in Japan tend to question their professional and personal positions. I argue that making certain decisions (for example, returning home or staying abroad) can be useful to help us understand how different western expatriates are attempting to shape their life course while reflecting on key points in their personal and professional lives. I further problematize these decisions as reflective of the general uncertainty of life while at the same time describing the benefits of partaking in transnational work experiences.

In the conclusion, I summarize and synthesize some of the central theories in relation to my study in order to give a sense of what young Canadians moving between Canada and Japan offer to the study of mobilities, youth, and the life course. I suggest some final thoughts on the openness of transnational experiences as a mutable form of social organization and what scholars might find useful in further studies of different kinds of transnational engagements.

Literature Review & Methodology

Mobility

The New Mobility Paradigm

The 'new mobility paradigm' is an attempt to redesign and reorient outmoded conceptualizations in the study of mobility. It invites us to think about the application of mobility to different theoretical concepts including landscapes, different modes of travel, dreams and aspirations, and people in various contexts of time and space. The idea of bringing together a wide variety of different concepts is not a show of needlessly inflating the importance of mobility studies. Rather, it is a necessary task in confronting the complex issues related, but not limited to the study of political economies, globalism, and transnationalism.

John Urry (2000) posits the ubiquitous notion of mobility as a powerful tool of inquiry. In his book, *Sociology Beyond Societies*, Urry postulates that "sociology has always regarded mobility as its 'core business'" and pushes to reconstruct the "'social as society' into the 'social as mobility'" (Urry, 2000: 2). It is worthwhile to note that any grand claim in the social sciences should generally be understood as a set of 'hazard lights' intent upon calling attention to significant oversights in particular fields. What I intend to call upon then is the possibilities that a framework of mobility can provide in considering the intersection of networks, flows, and boundaries. Within this paradigm, I am interested in the movement of shifting lifestyles and identities as they concern certain sets of youths in particular transnational contexts. For Urry, however, mobility is a ubiquitous concept and can thus be applied to many, if not all, aspects of social life. For Urry, since mobility intersects with all aspects of social life, then it would make sense to make mobility center stage for all forms of scholarly inquiry. If we apply Urry's view to social agents, then, we can see them (and ourselves, by happenstance) as continuously embodying, adapting, and engaging with notions of movement, space, and time. Movement, in this light, is linked to networks and flows.

Briefly, networks operate as a set of interconnected nodes and can be conceptualized as "dynamic open structures, so long as they are able to effect

communication with new nodes and to innovate" (Castells, 1996: 470-471). In my case, the metaphors of 'flows' and 'boundaries' largely refer to transnationals as they move through different locations. It is necessary to pay attention to the various conflicts that arise at the intersections of gender, national, and ethnic identities that social actors invoke in order to navigate through daily life. Thus Anne-Meike Fechter, whom I take up in more detail below, argues that the metaphors of 'flows' and 'boundaries' are best understood as working in conjunction with one another such that they can be analyzed in a comparative light as to determine how one may influence the other (Fechter, 2007: 19).

Returning, then, to the link between movement and networks and flows, Sheller and Urry (2006) argue that a car is both a symbolic and real entity that personifies the network and flows of contemporary movement. They argue that the interconnections of "information, petroleum oil, risks and disasters, images and dreams…[are]…flows [that] encounter each other in the petrol station" (209). They further assert that, "the mobilities paradigm indeed emphasizes that all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an [isolated site unto itself]" (*ibid.*), as exemplified in complex trading routes. The emphasis here is on the site as a consolidation of a network of flows, regulated by various stops and starts. They also posit that each new site is an opportunity to reconsider different possible options given that each circumstance carries its own set of variabilities.

Per Otnes argues that Urry's view is overly sweeping and has thus criticized Urry for putting too much stress on the economic "demand pull factors of increasing mobilities, and much too little on supply push factors" (Otnes, 2006: 154). Otnes sees researchers' committed work (i.e. as taking a stance/position, performing long-term projects, and/or repeated visits to a given site over time) as underrated when compared to the excitement involved in pursuing 'new' theoretical avenues when 'old' arguments or positions seemingly run their course in academic debates. Otnes argues that amongst the many different types of mobilities and positions of scholars, we are at risk of becoming too polemical in our views in order to be heard. Thus for Otnes the mobility paradigm is reaching a status of 'entropy', where "the fading of all difference" (149) is largely rooted in a lack of commitment to one's past research in an attempt to appear 'global' and/or 'progressive'. Otnes' approach appears to be more pragmatic and cautious: he sees the

value of challenging the complacency of certain theories. But he also contends that in the attempt to reach 'new' ground, analysts and scholars must not overextend the vision of their proposed ideas. In the processes of globalization, Otnes identifies with Gayatri Spivak who says, "globalization is an *instrument*" (Gayatri, 2003, as cited in Otnes, 2006: 148, italics in text). This means globalization is an instrument that enacts both processes of accumulation and of redistribution. As a result of these polar positions, Otnes echoes the question posed by Howard S. Becker: "which side are you on?" (Becker, 1967, as cited in Otnes, 2006: 148). Otnes' issue with Urry, then, is not a staunch criticism of his work as much as it is a question of: "how far do you intend to take us with this idea?" For Otnes, Urry relies too heavily on Granovetter's (1973) well-known idea, 'the strength of weak ties', "according to which we learn more from distant persons, as close ones tend to have no news for us anymore" (Otnes, 2006: 152). Still, the root of the idea that says we are compelled to move and interact with people in distant places, and to take advantage of opportunities to learn from others abroad does resonate with our understanding of the benefits of travel. But Otnes also invokes an Oxford-based survey, *A Social and Economic Study* (1983), which amongst its conclusions states, "mobility should be regarded as a cost, not as a benefit" (Otnes, 2006: 151). Thus Otnes' stance appears to be at a stalemate: on one hand, he sees the value in considering movement as being influenced by global processes while at the same time, social agents are profiting where they can from being in movement but with costs – of money or time – that may not always yield a satisfactory outcome.

What is paramount to understand here in relation to my research is the rate or speed at which these movements occur, and how they might influence young expatriates' lives. For example, if transnational mobility and work prove to be a fruitful experience that continues to show promise, it may inspire one to seek out and pursue other such ventures. There may be benefits in taking many short-term contracts that allow for more adventure and travel to different regions. Or, one may encounter through social networking a wide array of stories and experiences of a region that inspire a desire to spend more time to more fully explore the area. Investing one's time, money, and efforts into not only work but also personal experiences can begin to blend in such a way that one complements the other, which may further lead to one *depending* on the other.

Different Types of Mobility

Tim Cresswell (2010) offers three types of mobility to help orient us: physical, representational, and practice. Physical mobility is "the raw material for the production of mobility" (Cresswell, 2010: 19), involving people, ideas, and machines. For example, city planners engage in designing and implementing various forms of aids to enhance and regulate physical movement, such as elevators, escalators, moving walkways, and timed traffic signals. Consider how a busy office building with a constant flow of people taking the elevator consumes precious minutes in a day of productivity or during a lunch break. Here, we can begin to observe how and why certain rules might be implemented in order to regulate and capitalize on the use of time, for both employers and employees.

Representational mobility is how we situate people, by notions such as (but not limited to) class, gender, race/ethnicity, and geographic location, who are engaged in certain kinds of mobility (e.g. elites found on yachts versus disenfranchised people walking on the street). Tim Ingold (2004) takes the simple act of walking and invests it with profound notions of movement, and how we might perceive relations between body posture, distance, and travel as accessing representations of class-specific standards. For example, in our own country, we might find ourselves referring to locals who have access to cars as having the privilege of choosing when they decide to walk to a given destination. Cresswell complements this point in asking us to consider all the meanings encased in car advertisements and mobile phones (Cresswell, 2010: 19). These kinds of advertisements are specifically tailored to target upper-middle and upper classes in that they often depict lifestyle practices that complement the use of such items. Even if lower class individuals own and use devices such as cell phones, it does not effectively allow them to be seen as partaking in similar lifestyles of the upper-middle and upper classes. Thus, lower class lifestyles are rendered invisible and set outside the realm of a 'complex and hectic' daily life. Furthermore, when we think about advertisers' representations of the upper-middle and upper classes that can afford vacations, it is not hard to imagine the end of a travel advertisement bringing us to a beach in a tropical zone at sunset with a couple walking by the tide, text-messaging loved ones from across the sea: "wish you were here." Following this anecdote, when we see the couple walking on the beach, we can understand them as having invested time and money into a vacation, by which their

languid and happy movements embodies the type of walking that can be afforded by upper-middle and upper classes. Those in the middle class who cannot afford such a lifestyle are further reminded of what kind of life they should aspire towards, thus reinforcing the hierarchal social mobility structure.

Following Cresswell's explanations (Cresswell, 2010: 19), practice mobility attends to the actions of movement, such as skateboarding, driving, scuba diving, and dancing. It also includes the social in the sense of embodiment: technological, social, and imagined. Put into practice, engaging with the Internet and a plethora of social networks and forms of communication can invoke many kinds of conversations between people about the possibilities of travel and what such an experience might offer. Furthermore, the act of researching which places to visit or activities to do while taking necessary training courses (training for scuba diving requires a license attained through a course in order to dive to particular depths) can also serve as a bridge between practice mobility and travel.

Drawing these three types of mobility into my research involves young persons who aspire to live and work in overseas locations, away from the constraints of home, and empowered by transnational opportunities and expedient modes of travel. This means young professionals are finding trans-border education or labour markets that may also complement personal desires to experience certain lifestyles in foreign places, or to learn and enhance a skill (i.e. language), or to take short-term breaks away from their routine, or simply to take advantage of high salaries offered for a relatively light workload. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the reasons young professionals engage in professional forms of travel, but it does highlight the timing of this mobility, which is interesting in light of how this may translate into much lengthier stays or return trips at a later date. Thus, my research will consider whether these journeys are life-changing experiences that may result in alternate or unforeseen trajectories in their life course.

Globalized Spaces, Flow, and Boundaries

Unpacking mobility gives scholars of different disciplines a wide variety of analytical starting points. Tim Cresswell (2006) explains that some scholars have used airports as grand metaphors for mobility. He cites the geographer Mike Crang who writes, "Of all

the spaces of a globalized world, airports may be the most emblematic" (Crang, 2002, as cited in Cresswell, 2006: 220). Cresswell questions Crang's identification of airports as places. He turns to Marc Augé's discussion of 'non-place' to help us contextualize airports as the opposite of an authentic, rooted, or bounded place:

> The multiplication of what we may call empirical non-places is characteristic of the contemporary world. Spaces of circulation (freeways, airways), consumption (department stores, supermarkets), and communication (telephone, faxes, television, cable networks) are taking up more room all over the earth today. They are spaces where people coexist or cohabit without living together (Augé, 1995, as cited in Cresswell, 2006: 220).

Cresswell tells us that Augé's discussion of the "anthropology of super-modernity" situates the starting point of the traveler at an airport as a means to help anthropologists "come to terms with the reality of a mobile world" (Cresswell, 2006: 220-221). He lists other scholars who share a similar enthusiasm for airports – Hans Ibelings describes airports as, "an attractive model for the kind of existence that is nowadays associated with globalization, a world where 'jet lag' is built into everybody's biological clock and time and place have become utterly relative" (Ibelings, 1998, as cited in Cresswell, 2006: 221). Cresswell also notes Iain Chambers' characterization of airport lounges as, "shopping malls, restaurants, banks, post-offices, phones, bars, video games, television chairs and security guards…it is a miniaturized city" (Chambers, 1990, as cited in Cresswell, 2006: 221). In noting the observations of these scholars and others, Cresswell seems to poke fun at the "fetishization of speed and mobility [that] comes from male commentators, [which] has more than a touch of 'boys and their toys' about it" (Cresswell, 2006: 221).

The flow of different types of mobile agents coming in and out of airports also raises notions of power and control. Celebrities, business travelers, security guards, vendors, traffic controllers, pilots, vacationers, children, janitors, taxi drivers, and bus drivers – all of these social actors represent different types of mobile agents who bring their own set of particular activities to airports. In my view, it is problematic for scholars, such as Chambers, to compare airport lounges to cities while ignoring the power dynamics (i.e. state authority) and temporality affecting social agents at airports. People

do not live in airports (as opposed to cities), they pass through them, continuously entering and exiting, working, and going home. We are constantly directed as to where and when we should arrive at gates of departure or arrival, as well as how and when to line up in particular orders designated by our seating or special needs. Cities, by contrast, while state controlled, do not adequately match as a suitable comparison. Chambers' description of airport lounges is a cosmetic description when, in actuality, airports (including the lounges) are more easily comparable to delimited institutions such as a hospital or perhaps even a military complex. That is, any general attendant at an airport who fails to act in the appropriate manner would undoubtedly be subjected to the strong-arm tactics of state authority thus dispelling any notion of freedom that is more generally associated with western cities. But still, the notion of airports and the embedded and layered notions of mobility has become a primary site for musings about the world of 'flow'.

Barak Kalir notes that, "the aquatic metaphor of flows seems too often to wash away an important distinction between the many losers and few winners among those who exercise mobility" (2013: 314). He furthermore argues that the study of global flows undermines the underlying power grids that influence and create possibilities for movement to occur. Ignoring these channels of movement prevents us from understanding how international migration and the choices of migrant workers are largely managed by "big business and handmaid states" (Kalir, 2013: 314). The 'flow' of migrant workers would be better understood if we were to analyze current trends of movement juxtaposed with accounts by individual migrants who can give us insight into their reasoning. Simply explaining that migration occurs due to social, political, and economic hardships or opportunities does not account for the disparity of why some choose to stay and others leave.

Returning to the metaphor of airports (and airport lounges) for a moment – if we are to employ airports as a useful metaphor for certain "super-modern" mobile agents, then mobility scholars must be attentive to the power structures that are at play, and the limitations of particular metaphors or models in explaining ubiquitous concepts such as mobility. We must also be attentive to the social actors engaged with the site in question. For instance, in my research among young western expatriates, the choice to move

abroad is their own, and it is within this decision that we can begin to investigate if there are common reasons that explain why some young professionals are deciding to become migrant workers. There may be some benefits other than financial gain or adventure that propels them to such lengths of extended sojourns abroad. Pinpointing intersecting motivations for travel may help migrant theorists understand not only the variety of reasons for travel but also how notions such as class, wealth, gender, ethnicity, and education play into different forms of movement. As such, we cannot ignore the influential power dynamics of 'big business' and the state that Kalir brings to the fore. Thus as the young professionals in my study choose to become migrant workers there is a link worth exploring that involves the kind of opportunities that are presented to them and their pursuit of a particular lifestyle.

As migrants move across space, they may reassert rather than erode the boundaries between locals and visitors. Anne-Meike Fechter's (2007) study of expatriates in Indonesia reports that "many [expatriates] adopt a form of 'tunnel vision' whereby they ignore their peripheral fields of vision" (81) as a means to avoid incoming gazes that invade their private spaces. By avoiding public interaction, expatriates are keeping their private space intact but are also shielding themselves from what seems to be a vulnerable spot in their ability to live amongst locals. Even in one's own country, people look at each other, observe differences, and stare or gaze at what interests them. However, in the case of expatriates, having to repeatedly cope with one's foreign status in everyday settings can lead to a general feeling of discomfort and a preoccupation with alterity.

Fechter (2007) describes the relationship between foreign expatriate residents and Indonesian locals via the metaphor of the 'expatriate bubble'. Fechter's 'bubble' describes a multitude of uses, namely the construction of various boundaries that allow expatriates to live without interference from certain audiences and social environments that instill a perpetual sense of discomfort. Her list of examples include expatriates' expressions of fatigue at the constant presence of servants around the household (65), relying on email communication with friends from home as "indispensible to their survival" (61), spending exorbitant amounts of money on eating foods from home (26), and dining out at expensive restaurants that segregate them from locals (77). This combination of examples speaks of these expatriates' desire to go about their daily lives,

avoiding local residents, not out of distaste but, rather, as a set of practiced coping mechanisms to handle their constant dissatisfaction with their privileged, yet unsatisfactory or unfulfilling lifestyle in Indonesia. To this end, Fechter makes an astute observation: "wherever expatriates were, whatever they did, boundaries seemed the key to understanding their lives" (Fechter, 2007: 8).

Here, an old warning comes to the fore. In James Clifford's seminal piece, *Traveling Cultures* (1992), he tells us that in in historical examples of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by anthropologists, "'villages,' inhabited by 'natives,' often served as bounded sites particularly suitable for intensive visiting by anthropologists. Villages thus served as habitable, mappable centers for the community, and by extension, the 'culture' (Clifford, 1992: 98). Nowadays, anthropological inquiry has become wary of ethnographic representations as uncritically bounded by specific locations, especially in regards to the movement of people through different territories.

What is interesting in Fechter's study of the expatriate bubble is the emergence of young western expatriates as a category of 'segregated communities' that was traditionally more commonly associated with anthropological representations of non-western communities. My focus here is on drawing attention to the anthropologist's traditional task of describing a certain kind of cultural or communal activity as a bounded form. Seeing 'culture' or community as a bounded form makes it troublesome to accurately describe social actors as they effectively 'switch' between various social networks. As one example, in the case of my research, contemporary expatriates are never fully 'off the grid' or out of touch with their family and friends at home, owing to highly accessible forms of global communication via the Internet, international phone services, video-conferencing, and so on. Thus, the anthropologist's attempt to track and describe people's movements and their self-representations can become distorted as their subjects effectively 'switch' between their social networks back home and abroad. On the one hand, these people are attending to those who know their social history, and on the other hand, they are actively involved in creating experiences with new people in an unfamiliar and potentially influential cultural milieu. To adequately account for these kinds of situations anthropologists are (or should be) interested in describing how movement affects social agents and to what end social agents are able to successfully

communicate, represent, and assert themselves in the sites they occupy, as well as any limitations they might encounter.

Understanding Mobile Agents in Different Contexts of Movement

Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly (2009) are sociologists who are interested in exploring the dimension of lifestyle migration. They state that lifestyle migrants are "relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life" (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009: 609). They put forth the idea that lifestyle migration is more than simply a single act intent on changing one's life, but an ongoing project or plan, simultaneously encompassing destinations, desires, and dreams (610). They argue that as lifestyle migrants establish a new life, they are somehow rectifying their life or producing the "antithesis of life before migration" (610) and thus establishing a sense of living a life more 'true' to themselves. While this might hold true in the mind of the lifestyle migrant, this positioning or frame of mind is temporary – life is constantly changing and as social actors, we are constantly adapting to our circumstances. Thus as the lifestyle migrant settles into their new life, they will inevitably encounter both new opportunities and limitations. It is only at the moment of discovering or conceiving the idea of a 'better path' that the 'lifestyle' aspect of migration becomes relevant. One can never know how the pursuit of the better path will turn out and as such, the limitations of moving for the sake of a lifestyle are contingent on one experiencing the reality of how it affects one's everyday mood and overall happiness. That is, one may imagine life to be better in a "the grass is greener on the other side of the hill" sort of thinking or that "moving 'over there' will somehow change my life", but until one re-establishes a routine, strategizing how to balance work and leisure and so forth, the notion of a better quality of life remains hazy and even romantic. Benson and O'Reilly are aware of this to the extent that they acknowledge that once one catches their bearings after initially settling in a foreign site, there remains the task of establishing a balance between work and leisure time.

As migrants begin to re-establish their lives between work and leisure, they are likely to employ different methods to socially organize their lives. The spaces in which social identities are constantly negotiated through various forms of what Erving Goffman

(1959) termed “impression management” call upon distinct types of inquiry to accurately describe social actors as they are situated in different settings. Goffman contends that social actors put on performances in everyday interactions that are a presentation of the self, intending to create specific impressions in the minds of others. In the case of my study, employing the concept of impression management allows us to consider how young professionals desire to be seen and understood. As they make arrangements to move and work abroad, they are likely to adopt a set of everyday activities that will increase their chances to secure jobs abroad through networking and establishing contacts, acquiring necessary professional skills, and preparing for job interviews. Since there tends to be a level of competition involved in securing working opportunities abroad, it is important for these young professionals to focus their attention and efforts not only on preparation for the job, but also to consider what it means to commit to practices that will be quite different than their everyday lives in Canada. Applying complementary impression management skills to their new goal of working abroad can open up opportunities amongst others involved in the same network. Thus by linking young professionals’ decision to move and work abroad (which perhaps includes the desire to improve the quality of their lives) with the kinds of impression management that serve to secure a position outside Canada, we can begin to understand the types of people that ‘fit’ or are allowed into the realm of transnational working culture, and where this new form of self-presentation may lead them.

Another way of looking at lifestyle migration is by considering its intersection with tourism. Benson and O’Reilly note that “in terms of the lifestyle sought and the destination chosen, there is a partial overlap between lifestyle migration and tourism” (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 614). They agree with Dean MacCannell who emphasizes the connection between the tourist seeking an authentic experience and the lifestyle migrant who pursues and embodies it (MacCannell, 1976, in Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 614). They also see tourism, in part, as a successfully marketable construction that inspires lifestyle migration but are careful to note the distinction between the two as separate forms of movement involving different kinds of travelers. Yet they do state that lifestyle migration is intrinsically tied to “a reflexive project of the self” (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 615), which seems to draw a link to Julia Harrison’s (2003) study of

Canadian 'travel enthusiasts' (tourists). Harrison argues that "tourists, as I and many postmodernists argue, are active participants in determining the texture of their lives. It must be recognized that they can make their touristic adventures meaningful for themselves in ways that may bear no relationship to what the tourism industry suggests will generate 'treasured memories'" (Harrison, 2003: 27). By 'treasured memories', Harrison is interested in unpacking the social meaning of travel that many [Canadian] tourists are constructing and thus asks: "What of the emphasis that many tourists place on the people they meet along the way? What of those who repeatedly put themselves in situations while travelling that often take more concentration and energy than many aspects of their daily lives, such as the activities that fall under the contemporary rubric of adventure tourism?" (Harrison, 2003: 29). These are important questions owing to the influence that certain travel experiences can have on life course trajectories.

Vered Amit's (2011) study of youth travel provides yet another kind of overlap, parallel to the notions of 'self development projects' and collecting experiences/memories. In her study, she notes how the young Canadian adults participating in her study voiced concerns about making time to travel before having to cope with the prospect of "settling down" and taking up long-term commitments. She contests the idea that travel is only possible during one's youth through reference to a range of studies in which different "people actively seek out opportunities for travel and extended stays abroad at many ages and points in their life course" (Amit, 2011: 79-80). Amit identifies the perceived tensions regarding aging and experiencing travel felt amongst certain Canadian youths who hold a "persisting belief in a modern, linear life course" (Amit, 2011: 80). Thus Amit's study, in part, notes how certain Canadian youths believe they ought to partake in transnational experiences before their perceived notions of later phases in their life course (i.e. settling down with a family) place demands on their time and restrict their ability to travel. I take up the notion of youth in the "Youth and The Life Course" section below, but what is of particular importance here is the overlap that occurs with different types of mobile subjects at different points in the life course. For instance, Harrison's study includes adults in their later years of life while Amit's study concerns youths; and yet, both sets of travelers express similar kinds of desires regarding spatial mobility. Comparing Amit and Harrison's respective studies

reveals a disconnect between certain Canadian youths' perceptions of the time limits and/or the weight of commitments of later adult life versus older Canadian tourists' concerns regarding the ability (i.e. time and energy) to continue acquiring profound foreign cultural experiences. As such, both youths and adults in these respective studies seem to be interested in acquiring meaningful travel experiences, and both groups seem to have found the time (and resources) to travel, but what remains open is the question of how travelers at different points in the life course construct meaning in the foreign locales that they visit.

The notion of boundaries is another useful tool in the study of mobility (Fechter, 2007, Kalir, 2013; Mathers, 2010; Thieme, 2008). Still, the labels attached to mobile subjects as they move between various "scapes" (Appadurai, 1996) can lead us astray, or cause us to err on the side of essentialism, in our attempt to determine their actual function and representation and the places they inhabit. For example, while stark differences may be made between 'nomads' as perpetually moving and establishing different locales of 'home', and 'hobos' as perpetually 'homeless', it becomes difficult to understand the meaning of vague labels that are often simultaneously attached to different kinds of migrants (Basu and Coleman, 2008). Terms such as 'drifters' and 'wanderers' have evolved or come in and out of fashion throughout scholarly inquiry. As scholars of migration grapple with how best to represent different kinds of migrants situated and engaged in specific modes or lifestyles, the challenge rests in accurately describing how mobility interacts with space, time, and social relations. Furthermore, as new questions arise in the expanding paradigm of mobility studies, migrant theorists must find a way to continually renew their views without getting swept up in contemporary trends. That is, despite the fact that the effects of globalism have taken center stage in many studies of mobility, it does not mean that social actors *not* directly engaged with its benefits are exempt from its processes. In fact, those that do not have access to globalized social networks and economic markets remind us that the study of globalism (and mobility by association) can sometimes inadvertently marginalize those who do not have the required assets and privilege to engage directly in transnational social exchange and movement. Thus, the boundaries that mobility theorists attend to in the study of those involved in globalized networks and economies are inherently laden with hierarchies of privilege,

power, and class.

Susan Thieme (2008) is critical of migration scholars and geographers in their tendency to treat livelihood and place as separate lines of study (51-52). According to Thieme, de Haan and Zoomers claim that:

> decomposition of households, increased diversification of sources of income and the emergence of multi-local livelihoods and social networks particularly through migration have been identified as the three major consequences of globalization for local development and livelihoods …[thus]…the future agenda on local development in development geography should include the study of rooted and dispersed livelihoods (De Haan and Zoomers, 2003, as cited in Thieme, 2008: 51-52).

In this case, Thieme tells us that de Haan and Zoomers are focused on the locality of livelihoods. She asserts that the livelihood approach has been used in further studies linking migration and local subsistence needs. Thieme also notes that the analysis of multi-locality can be found in works related to transnational migration and transnational spaces. She says, "this perspective is mainly taken by scholars of migration studies and focuses on the process of migration and the interlinkages between sending and receiving areas" (Pries, 1999; Vertovec, 1999, in Thieme, 2008: 52). Where de Haan and Zoomers are focused on the local, Pries and Vertovec are focused on transnational space. Thieme argues that migration scholars and geographers have a tendency to treat the multi-locale approach as a separate domain of inquiry and thus rarely refer to the parallels between their works. According to Thieme, the result of this oversight means that migration scholars and geographers are not fully attending to the idea that "roles and power imbalances determine how much access and use of certain resources people have, the capacities and strategies of negotiation and decision-making they have, as well as who migrates and who does not" (Thieme, 2008: 52). Vered Amit has noted that "one of the most unfortunate aspects of the ubiquitous lists of contemporary travellers is that even as they enumerate many different types of journeys, they *avoid* considering them in relationship to each other" (Amit, 2012: 22, italics mine). Thus, taken together, Thieme and Amit tell us that people who can move between different bounded spaces have access to different kinds of lifestyles and power dynamics. Furthermore, access to and the choice of different types of travel entails unraveling the interaction (or its avoidance) amongst

various travelers as they encounter one another in foreign settings. The issue, then, becomes the very task of noting the differences in travelers' lifestyles and/or behaviours as they move along different routes or between sites.

Thus Anders Sørenson's (2003) study of backpackers along the Khao San Road in Bangkok provides us with a useful ethnographic account of a particular form of traveller's lifestyle. He notes that backpackers are often constructed as "self-organized pleasure tourists" (Sørenson, 2003: 851) and furthermore problematizes this in distinguishing how they operate through space and time. Regarding space, he tells us that in preparation for a backpacking trip, backpackers will often begin putting together a "starter kit", including "air-tickets, airport pick-up, transfer, and initial accommodation in a gateway city […] most backpackers purchase organized excursions, safaris, treks, and the like during the journey" (Sørenson, 2003: 851). Regarding time, Sørenson explains that amongst backpackers the length of sojourn in any one locale is highly varied and flexible, often depending on the workings of a multiple-itinerary based trip. The perpetual "on the go" characteristics of backpacking gives mobility theorists leverage to see backpackers as a social category rather than as simple participants in a defined activity. As such, Sørenson notes that many backpackers report being at a crossroad between certain points in life: recently graduated, married or divorced, or between jobs (853). He also notes that many backpackers' invoke 'road status' as a form of distinguishing different levels of prestige or even hierarchy between them, based on one's accrued travelling experiences. He explains that 'road status' can be obtained in many ways: "paying 'local prices', getting the best deal, traveling off the beaten track, long-term travel, diseases, dangerous experiences, and more. In total, it comprises hardship, experience, competence, cheap travel, along with the ability to communicate it properly" (Sørenson, 2003: 856). Furthermore, road status is "communicated [to other backpackers via] the worn equipment and clothes", often appearing as "shabby" or "worn" (*ibid.*) to others and may even be artificially created in dirtying one's backpack and purposefully damaging one's equipment to convey the appearance of hardship and experience. In conversation with backpackers, Sørenson reports how they often spoke of "one-upmanship" (see also: Teas, 1988, as cited in Sørenson, 2003: 857) in which case backpackers would lie or inflate stories about how much they paid for a service or a meal

in order to convey how "thrifty" they are or how experienced they might be at bartering with locals. Sørenson notes that this form of competition may also translate into other forms of hardship: for example, enduring bouts of hunger, diarrhea, and other ailments that speak to the challenges of daily life on the road (*ibid.*).

Transnational Fields, Institutions, and 'Middling Migration'

Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller's (2004) examination of transnational fields provides an in-depth analysis of some important dynamics regarding transnational migration studies and challenges us to reformulate our ideas about 'society'. They argue that "the nation-state container view of society does not capture, adequately or automatically, the complex interconnectedness of contemporary reality" (1006). They furthermore contend that multi-layered and multi-sited studies of transnational mobility processes can help us more clearly understand some of our basic and everyday assumptions about certain social institutions such as family, citizenship and the nation-state. Thus they propose "a view of society and social membership based on a concept of social field that distinguishes between ways of being and ways of belonging" (1008). Ways of being refers to "the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with their actions" (1010) and ways of belonging refers to "practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group" (*ibid.*). Ways of being and ways of belonging are also related to the concept of a "social field"; Levitt and Schiller's definition of a social field is "a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (1009). According to Levitt and Schiller, social fields as an analytical tool allows us to move beyond the direct experience of migration and into domains of communication where individuals interact through various modes of communication. They furthermore argue that analysts should then optimize the scope of their study to the networks embedded within, and empirically analyze the extent to which they may make their case (1009). The concept of a transnational social field is useful for my study since it gives us a way to think about how connections are forged between two different sites and how they can be maintained over time and space. As different transnationals negotiate their social

positions between different sites, they are simultaneously contributing to the remaking of social organization, networks, politics, the economics of different nation-states, international businesses, and their own lives. As individuals, their level of influence might not appear to have much effect on general social life, but *en masse*, as more and more individuals partake in certain trends, such as professional work opportunities in my study, we might begin to question to what extent younger generations are subverting conventional models of social life. Thus young professionals possess a certain kind of agency as we measure the effects of their influence on large-scale businesses and institutions (i.e. universities) that may seek to establish themselves as progressive global enterprises.

Vered Amit and Noel Dyck (2010) have explored universities in the context of student mobilities to some extent, although they say much more inquiry has yet to be done. In a series of separate articles they take on different aspects of transnational student movement, which they say in "crass" or short terms can be understood for some as "big business" for universities (Amit and Dyck, 2010: 1). Their series of articles (Amit and Dyck, 2010; Amit, 2010a) are largely concerned with the "institutional discourse of internationalization in the post-secondary sector of Canada" (Amit and Dyck, 2010: 2) that is linked to the swell of both longstanding and new academic and athletic programs, as a refashioning of academic entrepreneurialism.

Vered Amit (2010a) unpacks some important points in her article; she starts by questioning the fuzziness of the word 'internationalization', its usage, and the discourse around it. She notes that administrative sectors of universities tend to formalize the activity of 'internationalizing' their programs (8). Amit further notes the difficulty in pinpointing the meaning behind such institutional planning. She reports a cluster of motivations and intentions behind such promotions: empowering students who partake in certain 'valuable' transnational academic opportunities or experiences, universities building cultural capital (i.e. prestige), and the notion of competition tied up in certain neo-liberal approaches to university entrepreneurialism (Amit, 2010a). Perhaps this reflects and encompasses western views of progressiveness, capitalism, and more generally, competition, for relatively untapped markets in the university business of prestige and capital. Furthermore, the prestige associated in partaking in international

experiences or programmes is also reflective of the general notion that in order to succeed in life and one's career, certain risks and opportunities must be undertaken in order to enhance and distinguish oneself from the competition, or a "getting ahead of the pack" line of thinking. As such, upon entry to universities that push and market such 'internationalization' agendas, students may feel the pressure to take up a sojourn working abroad given the associated prestige with it. Whether or not sojourns abroad can be directly linked to higher or better career opportunities remains questionable. Of parallel interest to my research on young expatriates in Japan, Amit's study is interested in "the proliferation of an institutional discourse that also represents student and youth mobility as being desirable because it is viewed as helping to shape a new kind of contemporary citizen" (Amit, 2010b: 59). This work is crucial to my research since I am interested in how a government sponsored agency might affect the long-term plans of young professionals taking a work sojourn in Japan compared to those who move abroad independently. My study explores how young professionals may be influenced by general and individual pressures to 'succeed' or 'find their place', which they often cite in reference to the perceived limitations of their university programs or job choices.

My own proposed research involves a particular interest in young professional expatriate life. Scholarly work on expatriate life has largely focused on notions such as transcultural networks, flows, boundaries, space, time, and relationships (Beaverstock, 2002; Cohen, 1977; Fechter, 2007; Iredale, 2001; Norwicka, 2006). In the study of contemporary youth mobility, there tends to be a pervasive yet subtle pressure to evaluate their positions through a mix of socioeconomic, education, and career development views that effectively labels youths as "middling migrants" (Collins, 2013: 43), which is to denote their middle-class status as they attempt to migrate to new destinations. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that mobility is a crucial part of young people's "biographical construction" that is linked to individualized identity development. Conradson and Latham's (2005) study of young New Zealand entrepreneurs examines their travels to London as they experiment with career opportunities and create transnational friendship networks that change the manner in which they approach the global market of both work and life more generally.

Karen Fog Olwig's (2007) ethnographic account of Caribbean families' migration

is also of particular interest to my research because the regional and international migrations she describes are often catalyzed by the pursuit of opportunities for higher education. In other words, people moved initially in order to attend school and then in some cases stayed on. Together, these studies show that the link between youth mobility and work is strongly affected by the extent of access to a certain quality of education, work experiences, social networking, and a 'middle class' socioeconomic status. Young people who decide to become expatriates for extended periods of time are likely to believe that they will accrue benefits that may enhance their social mobility while also taking advantage of the opportunity of a carefree lifestyle. Thus, the study of transnational mobility in the context of youth is closely linked with studies of the life course.

Literature on 'middling' forms of transnational movement is not limited to the scope of youth. Brenda Yeoh (2005) argues in a special issue on middling migration that there exists the tendency to associate certain social agents with forms of social life on the "ground", thus fixing certain conceptions of "family", "identity", and "community" to a place (410). By contrast, social agents associated with the "nation" are often seen to "transgress" or "unmoor" and are linked to "migration" and "mobility" (*ibid.*). In doing so, the limitations scholars place on their ability to analyze the meaning of transnationalism and movement are evident in their descriptions of shared concepts and concerns of gender, ethnicity, wealth, and so on. In the same special issue Carmen Voigt-Graf (2005) tells us of the "transnational family" incorporating members who are Indian migrants in Australia as well as their respective families in India. Voigt-Graf explains that kinship solidarity is the primary reason behind Indian transnational movements and remittance economies. That is, remittance economies of cultural goods and products are motivated not for economic reasons but to uphold particular Indian social customs and norms (Voigt-Graf, 2005). Thus in our approach to understanding transnational movement in conjunction with socially imagining identities and sociality, social scientists should not attend only to those perceived to be in movement. They also need to equally consider also the social connections, relationships, and cultural norms that motivate and shape transnational movement in particular contexts.

Katie Walsh's (2009) study of British transnationals in Dubai tells us the site

determines the extent to which certain desires can be played out. While British nationals cannot get married and acquire citizenship in Dubai, they can live out the lifestyle of mobility that Dubai represents (428). Through extended sojourns in Dubai, Walsh posits that it is useful to see Britons through the lens of transnationalism, highlighting aspects of their intimate relationships. In this way, Walsh uses the phrase "'culture of intimacy' to draw attention to a set of shared meanings about intimacy that are potentially highlighted and/or reconfigured in processes of transnationalism" (428). Walsh's use of the concept of 'culture of intimacy' is relevant to my research in that it provides insight into some of the reasons why young expatriates decide to settle abroad when their initial plan might have been simply to work for a short period before returning home. Discovery is a part of travel and the resultant effect of significant experiences, such as meeting a significant other, may create new paths or opportunities to settle in other places that were unforeseen in the minds' of temporary sojourners.

Complementary to Walsh's case, and more pertinent to my research, David Conradson and Alan Latham's (2005) study describes New Zealander youths as they establish overseas connections and make arrangements to temporarily live in places that suit their desired lifestyle and pursuit of particular experiences not available at home. Furthermore, Conradson and Latham show how young professionals are establishing transnational friendships and 'bases of operation' through which cultural capital is created, thus planting the idea that given the right or suitable set of circumstances, a foreign site may be considered as a potential place to construct a new home. That is, while the specific foreign setting may not be 'in the cards' as a permanent place to settle, at the same time, the positive experiences and friendships forged in that setting can combine to create a powerful form of "self-fashioning". This transformation of the self can significantly affect what they might have taken for granted as 'home' in the sense of where one is born versus where one decides to settle (290).

Luke Desforges' (2000) study examines what young travellers gain from consuming tourism. In doing so, he identifies the effect of what *not* travelling has on the construction of identity. Desforges tells us that "youth is imagined as a period in life when new experiences are important" (937) and furthermore reports that "[the] participants felt that unless they experienced the world in their youth, they would feel a

sense of lack later in their lives having missed out on the opportunity to develop a youthful identity for themselves" (*ibid.*). Vered Amit (2010b) has also pursued this line of inquiry where the young people in her study expressed a measure of concern as to their perceived limited time they would have to travel and explore the world before they would have to face the apparent and inevitable task of "settling down". Here, though, Desforges argues that the youths in his study express a link between their personal development and travel as a unifying factor to their identity. This furthermore emphasizes one of Desforges' most salient points in that, "the experience of the world is produced rather than simply acquired, through the social development of personhood at specific geohistorical places and moments" (Desforges, 2000: 929). Thus, the desire to travel must be felt and nurtured in order for its intended benefits to be internalized and processed as an expression of youth identity. However, as young people travel and gain experiences they may choose different opportunities than their peers, which may reflect individual career aspirations or particular goals. Attaining their goals or having notable experiences can furthermore be useful to social scientists who are trying to understand the significance of certain life transitions, based on but not limited to travel experiences, successes/failures, relationships, time, and career opportunities.

Youth and The Life Course

In popular terms, western conceptions of time have traditionally been understood in a linear form. Thus as young professionals transition into a transnational life and work setting, it can be tempting to assign such change in their life course as a monumental shift away from their youth and into an 'adult' category. This is because the general tendency in western societies is to see youths as lacking many of the responsibilities that adult life can supposedly bring, such as parenthood, a focused career, and certain financial investments. As young professionals in my study move into a transnational life, they may be largely left on their own to make particular decisions, which may resonate with our preconceived idea of what it means to be an 'adult'. However, this view strips youth of its own sense of agency. Young people are in fact continuously thrust into life changing situations; the idea that adults face 'greater' or 'more' life challenges is worth contesting since people encounter a variety of life challenges throughout different points in their

respective lives – be they youths or adults. The way in which young people make decisions can speak to how their later adult lives are partially shaped and yet adulthood is not solely a means to conceptualize a person's overall life worth or set of accomplishments. This formulation has been largely cast in consideration of defining career and/or starting a family as normative and central frames of reference to the definition of one's life.

For example, when adults meet one another for the first time, it is not uncommon to exchange queries about what the other 'does' in their life in reference to career. For young up-and-coming professionals, this question is largely handled as a means to explain their intended goals, whether they are finishing a university degree or a training program towards a particular career. Thus, young professionals tend to be tied to the restraints and expectations of family, friends, peers, teachers, and other authoritative figures. Adults, on the other hand, are often seen as independents that are generally expected to make their own way in the world. However, certain mentorships and other long-lasting partnerships often continue throughout a person's adult life and as such, symbiotic relationships can speak more richly as to how one navigates through their life course, in both professional and personal contexts. If we begin from a frame of reference that looks at particular relationships or partnerships or mentorships as a way to understand the movement of people, then we are in a better position to understand some of the important dynamics that shape their lives.

Part of my study examines a corporate and government sponsored work-abroad agency (under the pseudonym 'Live and Learn Japan') that espouses certain values or encourages the exchange of certain cultural opportunities. International job agencies such as Live and Learn Japan often employ the term "youth programs" to recruit young employees. Young adults responding to these opportunities may face certain pressures from family and friends at home who find it difficult to let their loved ones leave. That is, in light of the family and friends left behind, young adults face the task of taking their life 'fully' into their own hands as they move abroad and learn to navigate work and life abroad, away from their support network at home. Thus my research, in part, attends to the way young western expatriates learn to cope with their lives abroad and what kinds of support networks and/or communities they may join in order to manage certain

difficulties. For the young professionals in my study, going abroad largely signifies a shift in their professional lives with the added benefit of experiencing a different culture and developing new social and professional skills in a foreign milieu. As such, many of my interlocutors expressed concern regarding their family and friends "left behind" and yet as they weighed the benefits of a transnational opportunity, the idea was that, in most cases, they would eventually return home in some capacity, which therefore allowed them to finalize their choice to go abroad as a worthwhile experience.

Framing Youth

'Classic' conceptualizations of the term 'youth' have largely positioned it as a useful way in thinking about the transition towards adulthood (Elder, 1998; Jones, 2009). In this treatment of youth as a life stage, attaining adulthood is set as the goal, which in turn strips any sense of agency from youth (Bucholtz, 2002: 540). From the anthropological perspective, youth is not simply a transitory or liminal stage. One part of Amit's study of transnational work experiences in the Cayman Islands shows us that a job may act as a catalyst for new opportunities that arise, thus extending lengths of stay (Amit, 2012: 23). While Amit's study here is not focused solely on youths in the Caymans Islands, it does demonstrate that transnational mobility allows these youths to experience job opportunities in places away from home which may influence the way they think about global concepts of work and life at a later age. Additionally, as youths in these positions begin to experience pressures to establish careers or attend to familial responsibilities, the prospect of taking up or leaving a transnational lifestyle may prove to be an important cross-road in the orientation of their life course.

In her review of anthropological research on youth, Mary Bucholtz (2002) notes the impact of growing interest in the global among anthropologists. She says, "Some of the richest avenues for the anthropological exploration of youth culture include the development of global youth cultures, the blending of traditional cultural forms into new youth-based styles and practices, and the possibilities for cultural production offered by new technologies" (Bucholtz, 2002: 544). Bucholtz tells us that the many technologically mediated modes of communication can shape young people's understanding of foreign geographic sites in different ways. For instance, young people who browse online may

communicate, or ‘chat’, with others around the globe, research foreign sites, engage in forum discussions, and learn about different cultural activities and perspectives via a plethora of Internet mediums. As young people engage with a continuous stream of information through various Internet mediums such as blogs, social networks, videos, and photographs that depict different representations of travel, they may make plans in conjunction with peers who share similar passions. Even if the plans do not materialize into an actual trip, the idea of travel can transform into a dream, or a long-term goal, which may further take form as a growing interest in studying foreign languages, or learning a new skill that reflects other cultures. While daydreaming or planning may attempt to compensate for a lack of travel, it does not mean it can replace the experience of it.

The concept of youth has often been relegated to a fixed category of transience and/or liminality. In doing so, some of the shared social aspects of youths and adults can be overlooked in the attempt to neatly categorize and ignore the dialogue between those who supposedly sit in starkly different categories. However, Vered Amit (2015) tells us that “the relationship between youth and culture has come to be treated in more varied ways including attention to the role of young people as cultural producers as well as to the involvement of a broader range of agents in the construction of age and generational categories and distinctions” (1). She explains that the notion of agency has helped anthropologists cope with certain tendencies to encapsulate concepts such as youth into bounded cultural contexts. Agency has not only given youth a means to elicit its own kind of knowledge and cultural competence but also rendered the social category more useful to the studies of mobility, gerontology, globalization, and labour markets (Amit, 2015: 3-4). Studying youths, in the context of young transnational professionals, gains a sort of traction in comparison to adult phases of the life course in that social scientists may seek to magnify the importance of paving one’s career trajectory at a younger age, which can be argued as reflective of contemporary concerns regarding neo-liberal economic models of profit, consumerism, and institutional power. Thus the study of youth as headliners of the aforementioned ‘big business’ of certain transnational academic and corporate programs has given anthropologists a better footing with which

to treat the social category with its own sort of agency alongside their older adult cultural counterparts.

Conceptualizing The Life Course

In their book, *Social Identities Across The Life Course*, Jennifer Hockey and Allison James (2003) have detailed the flow of the aging process and social identities across the life course. Historically, the plotting of people's lives has entailed theories of 'life stages', in which individuals have been assigned respectively to categories such as 'infancy', 'childhood', 'adolescence', 'youth', 'adulthood', and 'old age'. In addition, Hockey and James list a number of binary concepts that have been employed in conceptualizing the life course including: "agency vs. structure; individual identity vs. social identity; the individual vs. the collectivity; group vs. category; self vs. other; internal classification vs. external classification; virtual identity vs. nominal identity; and change vs. continuity" (12). Hockey and James argue that these kinds of binaries treat the "[general] concept of 'structure' as a kind of snapshot or freeze-frame of something which is in fact in process or motion" (13). They assert that in order to properly understand social identity, it must be conceived not as a static entity, but as a process of "becoming as well as being" (13).

Hockey and James' call for a more dynamic and less linear understanding of the life course resonates with Ian Craib's (1998) notion of identity and age across the life course as a phenomenological experience. Thus, when we think about chronological age and age as a social identity, it is useful to view them as flowing at distinct or separate rates. Thus Cheryl Laz (1998) argues that "the age-as-accomplished framework enables us also to investigate the extent to which individuals accept, reject, or negotiate the meanings of age that come 'packaged' with state policy, national welfare systems, and labor markets" (Laz, 1998: 106). For Laz, age is a performance that is constructed through effort and action. Furthermore, age is constituted and given its meaning through interaction (Laz, 1998: 86). Hockey and James reiterate this point in distinguishing between the social and chronological frames through which age can be understood and experienced. To this end, they emphasize the importance of tracking experiences across the ageing process, which gives us the ability to analyze how social agents make certain

choices about their lives within such a frame (Hockey and James, 2003: 54).

The way life course structures are built into grand narratives or frameworks for understanding social agents in society is not easily set aside when we think about conventional social norms and every day conversations about the vicissitudes of life. Certain western social views regarding an appropriate and expected age to get married and start a family, or to graduate from an education program and establish a career, have remained stubbornly intact. For example, municipalities may reinforce such views in setting "student discounts" for reduced costs in daily transportation (e.g. subway/metro passes, car and bicycle rentals, etc.) so long as one is below or at a particular age. Simply being over the decreed age of a 'student status' (often limited at 25 years and younger) may act as a subtle (or jarring!) indication of what society recognizes as the normative or acceptable age to be a student. Those above the supposed perceived age limit of being a student in such contexts may face a penalty of paying 'adult' prices, meaning a higher cost, regardless of their every day life and work commitments as a student.

Still, as new ways of building and establishing a successful and stable life continue to change, there remain some key references to the supposed 'universality' of certain basic realities. For one, everyone ages. Thus our interpretation of aging as we experience living is, to invoke Craib again, a phenomenological one, and thus subject to interpretation of when and where it is time to make certain changes in our life. The link between conventional norms and our subjective interpretation of our own life is then rooted in our social ability to convincingly assert our position amongst those directly involved in our every day lives.

Pamela Brink (1999) says that the word 'transcultural' "as used in anthropology, refers to the beliefs in, and definitions of, concepts that transcend cultural boundaries…there are a number of concepts that are transcultural, such as healing, caring, family issues, incest, and child abuse" (Brink, 1999: 7). A transcultural perspective allows us to focus on a comparison of lifestyles at the intersection of young professionals' lines of work. In this way, we can analyze young professionals' decisions and how they measure the outcome in line with longer-term goals such as starting a family, pursuing a career, or taking out a mortgage. The degree to which their life course is affected will vary from case to case. We should not be focused solely on the outcome

of their decisions, but also why such certain decisions are taken, as a way to determine if young professionals are indeed making them based on specific and/or longer-term goals. In doing so, we are able to see how young professionals treat transnational life as either a 'serious' field related to their future careers or if the experience is made as a 'time out' from their every day lives. That is, young people at a certain age may desire to focus on their future careers, seeing their youth as a period that they must capitalize on and pursue. On the other hand, young people at the same age may see themselves in a position to experience life 'fully' before having to attend to the conventions of adulthood. Thus age in western views has often tended to be seen in a linear fashion. Young professionals in my study, however, seem to be multitasking: they treat their transnational jobs as a means to take a 'time out' from certain 'adult' conventional pressures at home while also capitalizing on the distance of being abroad as an opportunity for experimentation with potential careers and life more generally.

Aging, Time, and Liminality

Anthropologists who focus on the field of gerontology and the life course should also consider how social life is constructed and reconstructed at different moments or occurrences in life. For instance, as people age and their circumstances change they may find themselves in a position where they can reflect on their life rather than focus on pursuing their ambitions. In this way, the construction of life in linear time (i.e. focusing on building a career or a family) can shift to cyclical time (i.e. reflexive contemplation) in certain cases. Thus Caitrin Lynch and Jason Danely (2013) foreground in their edited book: "the authors in this volume build on this trend [of the social construction of life and time] but also emphasize the importance of placing age in the context of cultural and institutional structures, meanings, and processes by adopting life-course approaches and multigenerational frameworks" (11). Danely explains in his particular study how certain Japanese elders in care homes tend to cycle through repeated conversations in their days as a means to speak to the grand narrative of their lives, which allowed them to invoke memories of their ancestors; an important cultural activity amongst these older Japanese adults (Danely, 2013, in Lynch and Danely, 2013: 109). This perspective of time and social life is useful to my study since it allows us to attend to the particular agency (i.e.

making life course decisions) of young professionals' lives as strictly temporal and not as signifying a 'set' future. Speculation as to what certain career or travel opportunities might bring tend to be grounded in a perspective that revolves around training programs and work experiences that are supposed to lead one to a kind of progression in career and life more generally. However intact the future might appear, life is in fact always laden with a measure of uncertainty. Thus Lynch and Danely's volume of elders transitioning through different phases of the life course provide us with a way to keep in mind the importance of not overextending or getting overexcited at the possibilities associated with opportunities often granted to young professionals in pursuit of their careers. Young professionals often associate their goals and/or aspirations with idealistic representations of what life can or should be – however, Danely's study reveals that reality is continuously (re)-constructed as new events and circumstances unfold and social agents are, in a way, forced to react, improvise, and adapt to their particular situations as they present themselves.

Anthropological work on travel and tourism has found it useful to enlist Arnold van Gennep's (1960 [1908]) "rites of passage" in order to explain certain liminal transitions. Van Gennep's rites of passage identify particular socially recognized stages in the life cycle, such as puberty, marriage, parenthood, death and so on. Van Gennep tells us that "our interest lies not in the particular rites but in their essential significance and their relative positions within ceremonial wholes – that is, their order" (van Gennep, 1960: 191). These stages serve to separate one socially recognized stage from another, which in turn creates a liminal area of 'becoming' that is effectively guided by ritual processes. In the face of conventional thinking, anthropologists are further tasked with pointing out discrepancies between different social and cultural norms as a way to show that the application of rites of passage resonates differently between distinct cultures. Thus, we can understand how life phases are identified in different cultural contexts and to what extent van Gennep's rites of passage are applicable.

Victor Turner (1969) is also noteworthy for his emphasis on the ritual process as he distinguishes it as creating inverse structures to those social structures already in place. According to Turner, liminality was less a transitional event than a continuous oscillation between structure and anti-structure (Turner, 1969: 97). However, situating and tracking

the life course of youths has been a difficult task owing largely to analysts who treat youth as a liminal period. Seeing youth as merely a liminal period renders the complex experiences of youth as trivial or meaningless in comparison to other phases in the life course. Dispelling agency in this way posits that certain life phases should be or simply are more profound than others, which is no less than false.

Amit has also noted a lack of consensus between tourism scholarship and the concept of liminality in the study of ritual. In doing so, she identifies a contrast in perspectives between van Gennep and Victor Turner. She explains that van Gennep emphasizes the stabilizing capacity of the rites of passage, whereas Victor Turner and Edith Turner are interested in the "transformative capacity of liminality, as a domain beyond convention in which new possibilities of what 'may be', and not what is only 'going to be', can come to the fore, with potentially even revolutionary consequences" (Amit, 2010b: 56). For Amit, the models of van Gennep and Turner are quite distinct. On the one hand, van Gennep stresses ritual processes in their entirety as a means of repeating social norms and values, whereas on the other hand, Turner is concerned with particular transitions as catalysts for notable discontinuities or breaks in existing social structures. Thus the presumed or controlled results of ritual processes cannot necessarily be used to explain the outcome of certain events such as travel despite any 'ceremonial' aspects involved in, for example, a departure and a return.

Scholarly and general accounts of youth and/or travel also carry their own transitional and transformational particularities. Amit notes that:

> youth itself has been increasingly constructed as an extended phase of liminality, and that definition has variously been imbued with anxieties about the potential disruptions to the social order posed by the footlooseness of youth in Gennepian like terms, or excitement about their presumed greater capacity to assimilate innovation and change, an orientation more reminiscent of Turner's musings (Amit, 2010b: 57).

Bruner surmises that not much change occurs to the identity of tourists during their travels (Bruner, 1991 cited in Amit, 2010b: 57). Amit, however, points to the liminality of both youth *and* travel as creating a new space for social inquiry. For instance, at the intersection of youth and travel lies the possibility of adopting a new lifestyle. New lifestyles carry within them their own form of ritual process and liminality, which in the

'cocktail' of youthful experimentation and adventure seeking may produce some unforeseen trajectories in one's life course. It is of paramount importance to keep in mind the limitations of youthful experimentation and adventure. That is, while experimentation and adventure may occur, say, hand gliding through a desert, such experiences are not transformative in of themselves. Over the course of repeated or similar experiences, one may adopt new trends and even a new lifestyle, but I would argue this process would be less ritualistic and more involved in notions of time and place. Thus my research on youth expatriates seeks to determine how certain transnational lifestyles are created and how long they last or if they are 'permanently' adopted.

Understanding Notable Moments in Life and Time

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks' (2002) concept of 'vital conjunctures' "refers to a social structured zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives. It is a temporary configuration of possible change, a duration of uncertainty and potential" (871). Vital conjunctures, as an analytical tool, allows us to continually push a 'reset' button at particular moments in a person's life in order to see these moments as embodying the social imagination of possibility and change. Through the lens of Johnson-Hanks' vital conjunctures, we are able to avoid the oversight of seeing life as phases of liminality and thus slaves to the expected results of a given process. I therefore identify key decisions in the social lives and experiences of the participants in my study as vital conjunctures.

Michael Flaherty's (2012) notion of 'time work' is defined as: "one's effort to promote or suppress a particular form of temporal experience" (240) and further, "[as] a species of agency because it involves the intentional self-determination of temporal experience" (*ibid.*). Employing the concept of 'time work' can help us explore how and why social agents are making decisions to travel, as well as their experiences of mobility in different periods. In this way, young people who might initially decide to take short-term vacations or traveling work experiences that turn into extended sojourns or repeated experiences can be seen as experimenting with the perceived liminality of their youth as a means to express a number of perspectives. It is worthwhile to repeat my earlier caution regarding understanding youth as simply a liminal stage: experiences at any moment in

life can be transformative and social change in one's life should be framed in reference to one's capacity to attribute meaning and significance to particular experiences. Yet, Amit observes that how the young students who participated in her study associate their youth with travel as something that you do "'before you settle down' [versus] 'in order to settle down' [versus] 'how or whether you settle down'" (Amit, 2010b: 68). These three paradigms of the life course are socially constructed through a process of experiences and opportunities as well as personal senses of ambition and/or adventure. Young people, then, seem to be willing to accept the parameters of their status as 'youths' to the extent that they accept that there is much to life that they do not yet realize. Thus, the idea of pursuing certain experiences before settling down (something that is relegated to the life of 'adults') appears to be linked to a sort of expectation that life should somehow reveal some measure of clarity as to the contingencies of 'adult' life.

Caroline Bledsoe (2002) remarks upon contingencies as having significant impacts on the life course. She says:

> "A person ages as a result of the traumas encountered over the course of a personal history. The organizing idea of contingency is that of proximity or contiguity, usual both physical and social. The fact that one person is proximate to another implies that the acts of one will likely have repercussions for the other. These repercussions may be beneficial. A Gambian woman whose daughter marries a productive young man, for example, may find her material life improving. From her new son-in-law she may receive grain supplements, cash to start a small business, and medicine from a pharmacy. He may even send her on the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. But the repercussions of proximity also can be deleterious. A man who falls into debt threatens the well-being of his entire family, since they are expected to help him out of his predicament. Similarly, a man who cannot keep a wife threatens his family members in that the bride-wealth that they helped him pay may not be returned" (20).

Thus, our internalizations of our experiences coupled with the social relations and circumstances of our position shape our understanding of what is socially and personally acceptable and possible at different times. Our responsibilities may flare up in our faces, causing us to turn tail and run, or we may be trapped by particular social obligations, or we may step up to the challenge and embrace a new set of terms to live by. Travel promotes the idea of having other options with which to negotiate our position as a kind of personal agency. That is, travel allows us the option to socially adapt to a new setting

in a manner of our choosing. The prospect of travel may represent, in part, access to possibilities that do not exist elsewhere. In this way, it is not so much the amount of distance between certain sites that matters so much as how people on the move interpret the meaning of distance between different sites.

Methodology

Participants and Live and Learn Japan (LLJ)

My research focuses on young Canadian professionals and their working sojourns in Japan. These participants were analyzed from three positions: (i) those who were in Canada before embarking on a Japanese expatriate experience; (ii) expatriates currently working and residing in Japan; and (iii) returnees from Japan currently residing and working in Montreal, Canada. In total I enlisted 15 participants in my study, which included an almost even proportion of men and women and a diverse range of provincial origins. I have framed the participants in my study loosely into categories of LLJ teachers, freelancers, and careerists. Some of these participants have started out as LLJ teachers and became freelancers or careerists; others had started as freelancers and made a career for themselves out a mix of entrepreneurial ventures. Ten of the participants can be placed in the LLJ teacher category, two have started as LLJ teachers and moved to freelance work, and three started as freelancers and became careerists (see: Chapter 1 for details).

My research project involved events organized by a global language-teaching agency, which I refer to under the pseudonym Live and Learn Japan (LLJ) in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants in my study.[1] LLJ currently accepts applicants from 40 countries, including both the global North and South, with a particular interest in English-speaking zones. In Canada, French-speaking citizens may also apply and secure a position so long as their proficiency in English is deemed at a 'native level' during the interview process. LLJ is one of the many language-teaching agencies in

[1] I have chosen to not thoroughly investigate LLJ in order to protect the identities of certain participants in my study, some of which are closely associated to public LLJ events and activities. While there exists a set of useful literature that would have been useful to my research if I were to describe LLJs particular influence as a government agency in relation to expatriate work and lifestyles in Japan, I have framed my interlocutors' accounts in such a way that sheds light on how life might be perceived through a general understanding of western expatriate life and not solely through the lens of LLJ participants' experiences.

Japan, stationed in both urban and rural sites throughout Japan. It is primarily designed for English team-teaching involving a foreign teacher alongside a Japanese teacher, who in pairs, work together to provide cultural and language lessons for Japanese students of various ages and levels. In some cases, other languages are taught, such as French. Teachers are recruited from around the world and are offered subsidized travel, living accommodations, and other services such as language training, job training/orientation, counseling, and translation services. As such, LLJ possesses an attractive business partnership between their foreign enterprises and Japan, which further provides its foreign recruits a relatively smooth integration into Japanese society and culture.

My study focused on English teaching since this is the most common type of temporary work young expatriates find in Japan; many expatriates living in Japan have performed some kind of language-teaching as either a job or as a volunteer and thus LLJ serves as a useful reference as to how foreigners are able to make a living, and in some cases, establish long-term careers in Japan. I also involved LLJ and certain participants in further descriptions of transnational communities between Canada and Japan, although I do not make specific reference to notable roles or positions within the agency (see: Chapter 2 for details).

While English teaching is common in Japan, and many of the participants in my study have worked for LLJ, I have tried to qualify different lines of work and lifestyles separate from the English-teaching realm as other possible ways to live and work in Japanese society. That is, it is not uncommon to assume that most westerners who go to work in Japan will find work as an English teacher. But this can reify western life and work in Japan in ways that obscure other ways of seeing the possibilities for transcultural exchange. Thus where possible I also included expatriates and returnees that were involved in other forms of work in order to provide a sense of the range of opportunities or possibilities in Japan available to young western sojourners. Some of these expatriates have worked as language teachers privately or with other companies, but others have experienced roles that include business or corporate positions, university lecturers, restaurant managers, translators, and writers.

Additionally, some of the returnees who participated in my study may have worked as language teachers in Japan, but upon their return to Canada, some have taken

on different lines of work. Thus, the pool of participants in my study comprises some diversity in work experiences and positions. The variety among the participants in my study was useful in determining how job markets, personal and professional relationships, and individual ambitions and goals are negotiated between life in Canada and Japan.

Personal Background

I was inspired to write this thesis based on my professional experiences and observations in Japan as an LLJ teacher. I spent three years in Osaka City living and working amongst many LLJ teachers and other expatriates from a variety of countries. Over the course of my sojourn I realized that foreigners living in Japan intrigued me just as much, if not more, than Japanese people. I was curious at the fact that so many expatriates were living and working in Japan for so many different reasons, which influenced many aspects of their lifestyles and decisions about the future. I returned to Canada and moved to Montreal to eventually pursue a graduate degree in anthropology. Prior to the commencement of my graduate work, I joined the Montreal LLJ alumni community where I made a number of professional and personal contacts. My transnational experiences at home and abroad shape much of the content in this thesis. Thus many of my descriptions of expatriate life in Japan reflect a combination of the insights provided by my interlocutors as well as my own experiences.

Semi-structured Interviews and Questions

All of my interviews opened by collecting some basic information from each interviewee, such as age, birthplace, education, where they have lived, and previous travels. I conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews with all of my participants. H. Russel Bernard defines semi-structured interviews as "open-ended, but follows a general script and covers a list of topics" (Bernard, 2006: 210). He states that semi-structured interviews are useful for building one's own interview guide or topic list for one-time interviews with the possibility of a follow-up if need be. He says they allow one to follow up on leads that may pop up during the course of interviewing without creating a break in the flow of open-ended discussion (212).

Employing this method, I thus used a schedule of topics such as: “Why did you decide to travel to Japan?”; “When did you become interested in the idea of living and working overseas?”; “How long do/did you plan to stay?”; “Do/did you have any specific goals in mind before embarking on your expatriate experience?”; “Tell me about any reasons that keep you living abroad”; “Why did you decide to go back to/leave Japan?” – to elicit fairly extended travel narratives.

These types of open-ended questions were designed to get the conversation going as well as complement some of the general reasons people embark on a course of action, including a good salary, relationships, building skills, establishing networks, and so on. My aim was to allow my informants to give me information and their reasoning/rationalizations without being overly directive. Thus any follow-up questions during the interview process continuously built upon what information or reflections provided by the interviewee. My topic list included: determining new lifestyle trends, ranging from personal changes in diet, fashion, and style; covering any personal or professional skills and/or hobbies picked up while living overseas; increase/expansion of new social networks and how their social ties from home have changed since their move overseas; travel habits; and what living abroad means to them both personally and more generally in terms of career and family respectively.

There are three specific types of interrelated queries that I collected regarding the life course. Vered Amit (2010b) has framed some rationalizations of young transnationals’ views of the life course by juxtaposing the positions of: “‘before you settle down’ [versus] ‘in order to settle down’ [versus] ‘how or whether you settle down’” (68). These three frames are important to my research since they could potentially provide insight into my informants’ explanations and views about the importance of family, housing, standards of living, salary, and the notion of permanence. Thus I asked my interlocutors questions such as: “Do you have any specific goals or aspirations about overseas life?” and “Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?” These questions were intended to produce a projection into the future, and gather data related to their speculations about where they might see themselves or their more general life aims.

Karen Fog Olwig (2007) has problematized the definition and application of a notion of ‘middle class’ within different social and cultural contexts (89-90). Thus her

study of Caribbean families examines the notion of higher education as a passport to certain kinds of employment, which is in turn, a reflection of a particular hierarchy of social mobility. In relation to her study, I was interested in asking my interlocutors questions such as: "How has your level of education enabled or limited your career possibilities?" and "Does your career path match your education? Is this particularly important for you?" These questions were aimed at determining my interlocutors' social position from both an educational and a class standpoint, and what this meant to them. Olwig argues that education is important for her Caribbean informants' "middle-class" positions since they use post secondary credentials coupled with geographic mobility to enhance their social position (91). In this way, I was able to compare my informants' social position and their understanding of it to that of Olwig's interlocutors to determine if there was any correlation between her results and mine.

Luke Desforges' (2000) study of New Zealand youth travel and tourism is partially focused on interior and exterior aspects of personhood. Desforges is interested in questioning how social interaction is linked to the development of individual personhood. He contrasts two different lines of inquiry that focus on either wider social representations (i.e. education, class), including 'top-down' constructions of identity, versus how notions of youth identity are subjectively constructed based on travel experiences (or travel biographies). Desforges sides with the latter, and claims that determining what being a traveler means at an individual level rather than simply where one is situated can provide a reflexive account of what travel biographies produce in our understanding of transnational social life and interaction. From this vantage point, Desforges posits that young people are embarking on travels as a way to collect experiences that are important to their self-identity before other aspects of life come to the fore (937). Thus some of the questions that arise from Desforges' study are linked to my research in that I was able to ask: "How has traveling changed the way you think about yourself?" and "After having experienced an extended sojourn, how has this changed your view of home?" These questions were aimed at pinpointing any sort of personal assertions of a changed identity by my interlocutors, and/or to determine if they saw people from home in a different light in the course of their extended stay broad.

Interviews and Participant Observation

In Montreal, I conducted interviews with young professionals who were waiting for their departure to Japan. I interviewed them before they left for Japan and arranged for Skype interviews after they had settled in Japan for any follow-up queries. I conducted participant observation and interviews with returnee expatriates residing in Montreal. I met these interlocutors via my personal and professional networks at Japanese events in Montreal. I announced my intention to perform participant observation each time I was amongst the participants, which between note-taking, included helping out and volunteering for LLJ orientations and other general Japanese community events in Montreal. This allowed me to more easily build rapport and interact with faculty, staff, and other volunteers. I conducted all my interviews separately and privately.

Since I stayed in Montreal for the 4-month period of my fieldwork, I employed video-conferencing interviews via Skype and email in order to interact with participants who were (and still are) in Japan. The Skype interviews were recorded using a handheld recorder and I also took handwritten notes. Many of my interlocutors in Japan were peers and/or past colleagues that I had met in Japan although I was able to find new participants through a snowball method.

My previous acquaintance with some of the participants alleviated some of the issues around rapport building that is often associated with acquiring a suitable measure of trust and comfort. At the same time, I was aware that my personal history could bias my conceptions of them and them of me. I was aware that they might assume I already knew pieces of information about them, or that they might overlook mentioning a detail, assuming I was already aware of this information. My open-ended interview strategy and questions were designed to avoid this oversight in that as I got them talking and was able to bring up past experiences we had together, I asked them to clarify certain details that could have been potentially useful. In this way, my aim was to gather more data about daily life, to identify significant memories or life-changing instances, and to note particularities about travel that I then compared and contrasted to my compilation of interviews.

I reviewed the information of the consent form with my local informants and got their written consent before beginning any interviews or research. I then gave them a

copy of the consent form for their own records. I reviewed the information of the consent forms with my overseas informants orally and subsequently obtained recorded oral consent. I also informed them that I would mail out hard copies per request.

Chapter 1: Participants and Work in Japan

Setting the Stage

This chapter introduces the young western professionals who have worked in Japan and who participated in my study. During my interviews I was interested in asking how my interlocutors dealt with a set of ongoing dilemmas faced by young expatriates who are living as temporary residents in Japan. Some of the questions I asked included: Where will they settle? What kind of career will they pursue? What kind of lifestyle or standard of life do they desire? These questions tend to revolve around pressures to 'succeed' that may come from a variety of sources such as, capitalist standards of life, ambition, family, and peers. At the same time, many of my interlocutors spoke about Japan as a special opportunity worth pursuing at a formative point in their life. For example, Anaïs spent one year in Japan as an English teacher before returning to her hometown, Montreal. I interviewed her in Montreal during the summer. Her decision to leave after just one year abroad did not end her relationship with Japan. Rather, taking the opportunity to explore what teaching life was like in Japan, as well as what she wanted to pursue as a career, led her to continue working as an administrator for the same agency upon her return. Part of Anaïs's current role involves mentoring new recruits for her agency and as she explains:

> "I think it is a wonderful opportunity for youth and young professionals and young graduates to experience Japan. And I say experience Japan, because we say "discover Japan, discover yourself", which is not a bad slogan, but to experience Japan, I think to make it part of who they are. When I say 'Japan' you want to put faces on it. It's not foreign, it's not a flag, a tea ceremony, or a giant robot. It's actually, you know, friends and family that are tied to Japan and you add that to your cultural identity."

Thus for Anaïs, one of the benefits of spending an extended period of time in Japan is the way in which this experience allows a person to explore their 'cultural identity'. Furthermore, she asserts that young people on LLJ are exposed to formative experiences that are likely to change the way one conceptualizes Japan. Thus she emphasizes that the different kinds of relationships a young person forms abroad can have a lasting impact that they might adopt as part of their social identity.

Some of my interlocutors also referred to the timing of their opportunity to work in Japan as intersecting with the chance to try out potential careers, experimenting with life as a foreigner, or aspiring to broaden their understanding of the world beyond the borders of 'home'. For example some of my interlocutors explained how at the start of their role as teachers, they were still sorting through their career goals, unsure of whether or not teaching suited them. Until they experienced the role firsthand for at least a year, they had not been able to come to a decision about teaching. Yet each of the participants in my study noted the value teaching has given them in their personal and professional lives, regardless of whether they subsequently made a career of it. Victoria largely worked as a freelancer in Montreal while completing her undergraduate university studies before taking a two-year post in Japan as an English teacher. I interviewed her during the summer in Montreal where part of our conversation brought up aspects of her work history. Victoria had worked up to seven jobs at once, many of them from home and she explained her reasons for going to Japan:

> "Ravi: Where did you work?
>
> Victoria: I had seven different jobs, most of which were from home.
>
> R: So, why did you want to go to Japan?
>
> V: I wanted to travel. I was interested in teaching so I wanted to try that out and I realized with work, I needed to try something to see if I'm gonna like it or not. I actually had to get the experience.
>
> R: For teaching?
>
> V: For anything, but yeah, for teaching. I wanted to go there to try it out to see if that's what I wanted to do as a career. I wanted to travel before settling down quote-unquote. I wanted to live abroad."

At the same time, my study has found that some of these young transnational professionals were also seeking with equal fervor a means to live 'free' from the bonds of a firm commitment to the ubiquitous mantra of: "get a job, get married, buy a house and car, and have kids". In a general sense, these bonds are often linked to the notion of adult responsibilities. This is not to say that these bonds are unwanted 'pieces' in their lives. Rather, it is that they wanted to seek out and find their own methods through which they

might attain such pieces of their lives, on their own terms and at their own rate. Accordingly, the prospect of exploring the world via transnational work is an enticing opportunity for some young professionals.

Gwen works as a public school teacher in Montreal. Growing up in Ottawa, she described her parents' household as an international homestay for foreign students from various countries, including Japan. She pursued a teaching degree in education with a specialization in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). The combination of growing up in her parents' international-friendly household and her longtime passion to become a teacher led her to pursue a teaching opportunity in Japan, which also complemented her desire for travel. I interviewed her in Montreal during the summer where she explained her process of going abroad:

> Ravi: Did you think of teaching as a means to go abroad?
>
> Gwen: I think when I decided as a teenager, I always envisioned teaching English Literature, but then when I came to university, I saw TESL and I speak French, and I thought this made sense. And I knew then that I wanted to go abroad afterwards to teach English because my parents had a couple of extra bedrooms in their house so they rented them out to foreign exchange students. So, I met a lot of Korean girls, Japanese girls, mostly Asians. There was an Argentinian and French girl but mostly Japanese. It made a big impression. I really liked those girls. They were cool, they showed me pictures of their country, and I just liked them as people. And it was just so foreign, too. I had total wanderlust my whole life. I traveled as soon as I was allowed to by myself. I wanted to go far away and just experience something completely different.
>
> R: So, why Japan?
>
> G: Part of it was what I said before about contact with the Japanese girls that I had an affinity for. And as Japanese people are so hospitable, you know, "come to Japan, come to Japan!" but then of course when I went to [university], I heard about [a sponsored teaching agency] and it appealed to me in so many ways. I knew I wanted to go to Asia. Part of it was the experience, part of it, I won't lie, was quick easy money. Not quick, but you know, good job to help pay off my student loan and at the same time get to be somewhere completely different before coming back. I always knew I was coming back. It was never a question in my mind that I would move to Japan and never return.
>
> R: So, what did that mean then?

G: It was a temporary thing. I always told myself, I would expect that I would like it, but if I don't, it's only a 1-year contract.

R: Home is here then?

G: Home is Canada. And I realized that more when I was gone. I guess when I was younger, I romanticized the expat thing a little bit. I imagined myself living in foreign countries and learning different languages and also, avoiding the boredom of becoming just, seeing people I went to high school with, that got married and moved to Ottawa in the suburbs, and to me, that was really, really boring. It's still boring to me now. But it was boring for me back then too. It's just not for me. I guess I went away with that.

Gwen and Victoria's accounts report a common sentiment amongst many of my interlocutors: of getting away in order to figure out how to make decisions related to work and life. For many of my interlocutors, the desire to explore and meet foreign people and try out work in a new field is often tied to their perception of how their youth should be experienced before settling down. In Victoria's case, since returning from Japan, she has largely picked up where she left off prior to leaving, but not without retaining some influential aspects of her life in Japan. That is, she currently works multiple jobs and part of her working life is also involved in the Montreal-based Japanese community. After her sojourn in Japan, she had expected to return with a clearer sense of what kind of career she would pursue but, owing to some unexpected delays, a death in her family, and a rough reintegration process back in Montreal (she told me that she had experienced a severe case of reverse culture shock), her life took a few, as she put it, "slight detours", before she was able to settle in comfortably. As a result of such detours, however, Victoria was eventually presented with some serendipitous work opportunities and has since adapted her former plans to fit her reestablished life in Montreal. In Gwen's case, her initial plan to stay for a year in Japan extended to 3 years; but she did eventually return to Montreal where she currently teaches English to Quebecois children at a public school and says she no longer carries the aforementioned wanderlust.

Participant Profiles

All of the 15 participants in my study are Canadian citizens, in their 20s-30s, university educated, and range between a working class to a middle socioeconomic class

background. In regards to living and working in Japan, all of these participants have at one time worked in the field of TESL or are on the cusp of starting to work in the field. Some have moved on to different occupations while others have established a career in TESL. After a sojourn in Japan, some of the participants in my study have returned to Canada and are now living and working in Montreal. I will focus on these returnees in a Chapter 2.

Six of the participants in my study are from Quebec, 1 from Nova Scotia, 3 from Ontario, 1 from Manitoba, 1 from Saskatchewan, 1 from Alberta, and 2 from British Columbia. Of these participants, 7 are from urban centres, 3 are from smaller metropolises, and 5 from rural centres. I conducted 11 interviews in-person for those in Montreal and 4 via videoconferencing for those already residing in Japan. Following my interviews, 6 of the 11 participants in Montreal have since departed and are now residing in different locations in Japan, including a newly married couple.

All of the participants in my study first went to Japan in their 20s; and 11 of them are now in their 30s. Out of the 15 participants, 4 had returned to Canada at some point in their lives for an extended period of time to work or study and then later decided to return to Japan where they now reside. Five of the participants in my study have been living in Japan for less than a year; 2 have lived in Japan for one year; 2 have lived in Japan for 2 years; and 6 are currently living or have lived in Japan for 3 or more years.

In many cases, English teaching agencies in Japan require foreign English teachers to hold a Bachelor's degree in any field or formal training in TESL. In order to obtain a working visa in Japan, one may generally submit a copy of their Bachelor's degree or TESL certification to their employer or sponsor prior to being considered for a position. Of the participants in my study, 3 have completed their Bachelor's degree in a math or natural sciences program and then moved onto graduate studies in an arts, humanities, or education field. Eight participants in my study that have pursued graduate studies hold Bachelor of Arts degrees in either the same field or a complementary one to their current or completed program. In these 8 cases, most have pursued fields related to language education, such as TESL or linguistics. Some of the participants in my study have explained that this shift from their original field is in response to finding and

pursuing a more fulfilling or lucrative career path owing to their general work experiences or the state of the job market.

LLJ Teachers, Freelancers, and Careerists

The participants in my study are loosely placed in three categories. Some of them have commenced their working sojourns as one and ending up in another:

1. Sponsored teachers who are working for a global English teaching agency called Live and Learn Japan (henceforth referred to as 'LLJ teachers'). LLJ teachers are government contract workers that are posted at a location for a minimum of one year. They are provided with a generous salary (including a retirement pension), living subsidies, and largely benefit from not needing to arrange housing, healthcare, and other fundamental living necessities on their own. They usually remain stationed in their prefectural ward for the entirety of their time in Japan. They are offered extensive paid holiday or sick-leave days per year, which enables them to take lengthy vacations and trips.

2. Freelancers who are often working on multiple short-term contracts, sometimes being paid under-the-table. They have unstable work schedules, often work odd hours and earn less than their counterpart 'sponsored workers' or 'careerists'. They typically work as English teachers at multiple schools as well as tutor privately, but it is also common that they find night work, for instance, moonlighting as bartenders or servers. Freelancers are largely responsible for building their own networks for jobs, housing, and healthcare needs. They can be highly mobile, moving to different prefectures or cities as they find new jobs or desire a change of scenery. Freelancers must often individually negotiate their paid holiday or sick-leave days. Since they often work short-term contracts, they may receive significantly less paid holiday and sick-leave days.

3. Careerists often start off as freelancers, but then move into more focused lines of work, in which case they may enroll in graduate studies (in my study this could mean online graduate studies or at universities in Japan or Canada) or commit to building a particular professional skillset to complement their longer term career goals. In doing so, careerists may secure posts in a field outside of teaching, that still allows them to use their English language skills (i.e. translation, interpretation, business, etc.) or in a more

prestigious teaching position (i.e. at a university). Conversely, they might also find themselves in the 'Japanese workforce' (as opposed to the 'foreigner workforce') where, unlike the above two foreigner workforce categories, they are often treated like other Japanese workers who are expected to work long hours with minimal overtime and little to no time off for vacation. Much of Japanese work culture views 8-hour workdays with a 1-hour paid lunch break as a typical western work model or schedule (a total of 35-40 working hours per week). As such, they tend to offer the same work schedule to their foreign employees. This is not to say that the Japanese workforce cannot accommodate the same structure as their western counterparts. Rather, those working in the Japanese workforce tend to operate under different 'rules', meaning that in order to be considered a 'hard worker', one must often endure long hours and forfeit breaks. Since everyone in a given work environment are under the same kind of pressure, those who decide to take breaks or to leave after 8 hours of work in a day may be considered as something other than a 'hard worker'. Depending on their motives regarding life in Japan, careerists (as far as my interlocutors go) often choose to focus on developing their skills or climbing the metaphorical 'career ladder' of their posts. As they are often found working in the resident Japanese rather than the temporary foreign workforce, part of developing their career may include adopting long hours and foregoing holidays in favour of enhancing their standing in the local Japanese company in which they are employed. However, since foreign careerists are not very commonly based in Japan, and their skillset (i.e. multiple languages, knowledge of western and non-western business culture, etc.) can be highly valued, their salaries may also afford them generous living standards that might include a large living space, healthcare benefits, retirement pension, and paid leave of absences.

Living and Working Circumstances

Most of the participants in my study have worked or are working for Live and Learn Japan (LLJ), a global English language agency with ties to the Japanese public education system. LLJ teachers apply for teaching positions, are interviewed, and are contracted in their home country. Their work contracts are eligible for annual renewal, to a maximum of 3 to 5 years, depending on the particular prefecture. Prior to leaving, they are required to attend a pre-departure orientation, which I will be describing in greater detail in a later

chapter. Once LLJ secures the working visas, they arrange grouped flights for their newly hired teachers to Japan. All LLJ teachers that are globally contracted for the year convene at another orientation in Tokyo. Each prefectural or municipal Government Office (GO) sends a Japanese administrator to welcome and take their designated foreign teachers to their new homes.

LLJ is designed, in part, to influence young professionals' views of what working life in Japan entails (mostly applicable to work settings) and to accommodate western standards as much as possible (i.e. providing a sufficiently sized living space, English-speaking doctors, etc.). The influence that LLJ, a well-respected and established agency, exerts on its hired teachers may include (but is not limited to) instructing them in how professional foreign-to-Japanese relations should be treated and respected, and how they are expected to uphold and value their unofficial roles as 'foreign ambassadors'. The meaning behind 'foreign ambassador' is rooted in the idea that each LLJ teacher is representing both their country and LLJ, and that they should therefore be committed to fostering and building good relations with their Japanese business counterparts[2]. The notion of being a 'foreign ambassador' comes from part of the pre-departure orientation that all LLJ teachers are required to attend. This role is illustrated through various activities and events that LLJ teachers are expected to encounter: networking with other LLJ participants and Japanese workers related to the public education system, Japanese work-related social events/parties, and work life at their designated Government Office (GO). These working and social situations are imbued with particular Japanese customs and expectations that, if well adhered to and respected, can enhance ones' relationship with co-workers and maintain good foreigner-to-Japanese relations, or at the least, keep poor impressions and relations at bay. While foreign teachers are not expected to be fully proficient in Japanese, LLJ orientations are designed to smooth the entry of the teachers it hires into Japanese working life. Thus, orientations include instructions about performing quotidian actions properly (i.e. bowing, gift-giving, knocking on doors, etc.) and employing specific phrases during the course of the day that keep pace with important Japanese expectations of politeness and maintaining public face.

[2] See "LLJ Alumni in Montreal: LLJ Weekend Orientation" on page 89 for further elaboration.

Standard subsidized housing is rotated between new LLJ teacher recruits and LLJ teachers who are leaving the agency. This method of rotating teachers is not only a cost-effective and efficient way of setting up living accommodations, but is also a way for both experienced and new LLJ teachers to build on pre-established or ongoing LLJ relations with Japanese landlords, neighbours, and other expatriates. In some cases, LLJ teachers find themselves living far from other expatriates and/or distant from their Japanese colleagues. In other cases, some might find themselves in an established community of expatriates and Japanese colleagues. In accordance with Japanese custom, some Japanese colleagues may take on the role of a host or hostess in an attempt to make foreigners feel at ease and more welcome in their new living circumstances. My research has found that some foreigners have benefited from certain pre-established arrangements that former LLJ teachers had negotiated, which serve as convenient sources of support. In other cases, some expatriates eventually moved away from these pre-established provisions and made their own independent arrangements to better suit their needs.

LLJ assigns its teachers to live in a city or town. The work contract stipulates that apart from an extreme circumstance or reason, LLJ teachers that desire to move to another city or town must first complete a full year of employment before submitting a request for relocation. For some expatriates, as the acclimatization process becomes more comfortable and they create their own routines, habits, and methods, the need to rely on the convenience of the initial LLJ arrangements may become hindrances to their desire to learn on their own how to acclimatize to Japan. Some expatriates thus made a concerted effort to avoid other foreigners with the intention of maximizing their cultural immersion into Japanese life. For example, when I asked Billy, a former LLJ teacher whom I interviewed in Montreal, about his aspirations regarding Japan and if he was happy with his placement, he answered:

> Billy: My main goal at the time was to raise my level of confidence in Japanese, to read it as much as possible, within the time that I was there so that I would then be able to pursue grad school when I came back. And of course, my second goal was just to experience Japanese culture first hand and try to expose myself and to find out what the culture and the world was really like.
>
> Ravi: Where were you placed?

B: I had asked for semi-urban and they basically sent me to what is called a city but is basically 40,000 people.

R: How did you feel about that?

B: Basically, when I applied, I knew that I wasn't probably going to get any of the major centres like Tokyo or Osaka. I also didn't want to have too much temptation to hang out with westerners, so I thought a semi-urban area would be the best of both worlds.

In other cases, my interlocutors explained that managing their lives in Japan was often related to the type of activities they wanted to do or simply making the most out of their circumstances. George was an LLJ teacher and lived in a rural town in the western Yamaguchi prefecture for 2 years. I interviewed him in Montreal about his life there:

Ravi: So, how was Japanese rural life?

George: Most of the time I stayed in my rural area because I was so tired once I got out of work. I also had a vegetable garden in my backyard to take care of. I really embraced the *inaka* [countryside] life.

R: Did you have other LLJ friends?

G: Yeah, from neighbouring towns. We visited sometimes. I would go to Shimazaki City once a week and I would usually be there, hanging out with the teachers there or I would pick someone up on the way. And otherwise, we would organize stuff on the weekends, like going to events poker night or movie night.

R: What about Japanese people outside of your school circle, did you meet people and make friends?

G: I made friends but they were much older than me. The age gap in my town was pretty big. Basically, it was either junior high, maybe senior high, and then a huge gap where it was 40 or 50 or retired because everyone in their 20s or 30s had moved to study or whatever else.

R: Did you mind that?

G: Sometimes. Otherwise, I didn't mind it that much. If I wanted to hang out with others my own age, there were always the neighbouring teachers that were available.

In even other cases, a mix of both Japanese and foreigner relations is

important to keep oneself balanced or having access to certain amenities afforded by larger metropolises. Leonard, formerly an LLJ teacher living in northern Hokkaido, completed a few years working for LLJ before deciding that his rural experience in Japan was sorely missing the amenities of a large urban center. I interviewed Leonard in Osaka City via videoconferencing. I had asked him about everyday life in rural Hokkaido and what drew him to the metropolitan area of Osaka:

> Ravi: Did you find that you were enjoying your life in Hokkaido?
>
> Leonard: It was really interesting. I had lived with my parents all through university [in Canada], so my school was close to my house. So, I commuted to school every day and going from that to living by myself in rural Japan was a huge change. It was interesting, challenging, but frustrating too. Like, this is self-diagnosis here but I had some extreme culture shock when I moved there. Like, my mood was so – I'd go through months, periods where I'd just be angry or irritated all the time. And I had no reason to be, like, I liked my job and I couldn't figure why the hell I was so irritated for this period and I looked into it and it was consistent with culture shock. Like I said, I studied a lot but I didn't learn much speaking when I lived in the small town because it was genuinely difficult to make friendships with the locals there.

Subsequently, Leonard's life significantly changed when he moved to Osaka City. He found many friends, both foreign and Japanese. He has even been able to organize and arrange regular social events where large gatherings of both foreign and Japanese people may network and socialize. I attend to a further explanation of these gatherings in Chapter 2. When Leonard speaks of Hokkaido in reference to his current life in Osaka, he often fondly refers to his good experiences there. He has visited Hokkaido and cherishes the friendships he was able to make there but is also happy with his decision to move on to the urban center of Osaka.

Some of the participants in my study explained that working for LLJ was, in part, a means for them to figure out if teaching could constitute a long-term prospective career. Victoria explained that one of her primary reasons for going to Japan was " to try it out to see if that's what I wanted to do as a career." Gwen, who currently works as a school

teacher had similar reasons for going to Japan but elaborates on the repeated uncertainties she experienced regarding the possibility of a long term career as a teacher.

Ravi: What about teaching – that's your dream, right?

Gwen: Yeah, well, I was team teaching. So, I taught 5-6 classes a week and there was the prep worked involved. So, I wasn't just studying Japanese. And they'd tell me, "this is the grammar point, so can you make a game to practice it?" so that's what I did. And, I worked at a very nice school. The kids were really nice and *genki* [active] and reacted well to me. So, that part was fun. I always enjoyed going into the classrooms when I was there, but of course, it wasn't *my* classroom. I didn't know all the kids' names. I know some of them that would come talk to me. In general it's 40 kids and I dunno, you know.

R: Sure.

G: That's one thing I like about having my own classroom.

R: You didn't know that before since this was your first time teaching.

G: It was my very first teaching experience, exactly.

R: Did you know as a teacher that you would develop your relationships with your students?

G: I dunno, well, with my stages, I developed a little bit but you're only there for a short time, 6 weeks or so. So, I don't know if it's something I knew before - that I could become attached to certain groups of students.

R: I'm curious about how you responded to that first experience as a teacher compared to your dream – is this what I imagined it to be?

G: I guess I should say what I did in my third year, also. Because when I came back, I wasn't sure if I wanted to teach anymore. So, that's why I'm saying that. My third year, I taught in a private school, I moved to Fukuoka. I was no longer working for LLJ because my contractual organization only wanted to keep contracts for 2 years and then they wanted a new teacher, which I think was quite illegal but I wasn't going to fight them on it. So, fine. I found a job in a private language school, teaching very young kids, babysitting basically. Teaching smaller lessons and I didn't like that as much, I didn't like young kids as much, I'm not suited for young kids. And then I came back and thought, I don't know if I want to be a teacher anymore. And I don't know why. I'm trying to remember why I felt that way: I just remember going on

> *Monster Jobs* or whatever and say, is there anything else that I know how to do? I had other skills that I developed in Japan but there's nothing here that, that really describes me. And so I kinda got over it, applied to a school and got it, and loved it right away. It was kinda a knee-jerk reaction to, I don't know what.

LLJ provides a particularly supportive introduction to working as a teacher. LLJ provides a generous salary, a stable full-time work contract with extensive vacation and sick leave, foreigner and/or bilingual Japanese-English aides in the case of required assistance (i.e. at a hospital, police station, bank, etc.), and relatively secure living and healthcare arrangements. This working situation allows LLJ teachers to commit more fully to their tasks and role.

Freelance teachers, by contrast, often have to cope with less pay, difficult work contracts, minimal vacation leave, little to no foreigner or Japanese English-speaking aides, and hostility towards foreigners when they attempt to negotiate and secure proper housing. For LLJ teachers, work is relatively secure and predictable as their contracts stipulate a fulltime salary and a set schedule with no overtime requirements. Furthermore, as per their visa, teaching at their assigned post is the only paid job they are allowed to hold. For freelancers, teaching often involves an ongoing search for a succession of short-term work contracts that can support their basic living needs. As I noted earlier, work schedules for freelance teachers are not always as accommodating as they are for LLJ teachers; they often teach a mix of day and night classes, moonlight as servers at bars/nightclubs, and weekends can be spent, in part, giving private lessons. Freelancers often have less time and a more hectic and/or unstable schedule than the security afforded government-contract LLJ teachers. This is not to say that LLJ workers and freelancers want less leisure time (i.e. an active social life, vacation travel plans, etc.) but, rather, that the time and resources available to them may differ, due to the differences in work schedules and salaries.

Freelancers and careerists are not strictly bound to their posts in the way that LLJ teachers are to their own work contracts. That is, part of the contractual terms of accepting a position with LLJ, stipulates that the incumbent may not take on any additional paid work unrelated to LLJ, or outside LLJ jurisdiction, without written permission from their assigned government office. If an LLJ teacher wishes to receive

paid work in Japan in any other capacity, they must rescind their work contract, leave the country, and re-enter via a separate working visa they have arranged independently. By contrast, freelancers and careerists tend to possess a greater capacity of mobility in regards to working and living circumstances. Having a high level of job flexibility allows freelancers and careerists to move and change their working situation as it suits them, which is part of what some of my interlocutors have especially enjoyed about their transnational living experience. Leonard and Gwen, both former LLJ teachers turned to freelance work upon the completion of their work contracts. In Leonard's case, life in Hokkaido was too rural and not as exciting as he had imagined life in Japan to be, and so he left his LLJ position to move on his own to the southwestern region of Osaka. He sought out similar work, with a considerably smaller salary and more basic accommodations, but with a higher payoff of excitement and urban amenities. In Gwen's case, as her LLJ work contract period ended, she found herself at a crossroad of either leaving the Japanese lifestyle that she had grown to enjoy through a set of lengthy learning experiences, or returning home. Since she was in a romantic relationship with a Japanese man at the time and shared a strong friendship with a few fellow expatriates, she found that she was not yet ready to leave. Thus, she managed to secure new housing on her own (no easy feat for foreigners in Japan) and a new job at a private English teaching agency, while negotiating particular work benefits otherwise uncommon in the English teaching private sector but comparable to that of a typical LLJ teacher.

Freelancers and careerists, then, largely carry their own responsibilities and subsidize their lives, thus surviving based on their ability to secure stable work, housing, and build good rapport and relations within Japanese society. These differences may affect the viewpoints of young expatriate professionals as they live and work and come to decisions about whether or not transnational life and work is suitable to their career goals and life course plans. Notably, all of my interlocutors that have worked with LLJ have maintained their professional or social ties to the agency in some form, which speaks to the feeling of community (which I will expand on at a later point) that LLJ promulgates.

Motives for Travel

Amongst the participants in my study, the distinction between the majority who hailed from large eastern Canadian urban centers versus the smaller number who came from smaller metropolises or rural centers in Canada had an important impact on their respective motivations for travel. Some of the participants in my study come from urban centers, and their idea of travel is often supported by an open-ended pursuit of adventure, new experiences of residence or travel. Kirk comes from Halifax and grew up with an older sister who spent a considerable amount of time away from Canada. When he was able to travel abroad for a short trip, he took the first opportunity available, and has since made a lifestyle out of travel. I held an interview with him during the summer from Montreal at his home in Osaka via videoconferencing. He described to me one of his formative and inspirational traveling experiences:

> Kirk: So, through my dad's work at [a media broadcaster], he won a fellowship to work in Malaysia for a couple months. So, that's when I was 14, and that's when my sister was traveling too. But that one month in Malaysia when I was 14, that experience inspired me to work and travel over in Asia. At that age, especially...one memory, all the young ladies pointing and laughing at my feet, just at how big they were. Back then, there weren't a whole lot of foreigners in Malaysia and I was the same height I am now, over 6 feet, but I was a string bean and had these massive feet. And I remember them laughing and feeling kind of hurt about it. That was just one memory. I also remember just being in an exotic place and eating strange food and that gave me a taste for exotic cuisine. I'm always looking for new culinary experiences. I just had sheep brain on Sunday for the first time.

By contrast, for some of the participants who grew up in smaller metropolises or semi-rural centers, their ideas of travel were more commonly associated with specific personal or professional goals. Sebastien, a new LLJ teacher recruit from the Gatineau region of Quebec, explained that working for LLJ will allow him to travel and explore Japan while providing international professional experiences that will help him grow as a person. I interviewed him in Montreal before he departed for Japan:

> Ravi: Can you tell me about any specific aspirations you have about Japan, personal or professional?

> Sebastien: I just thought it would be a good opportunity to go to Japan and have a broad experience. But, as I was finishing my degree in film animation, I thought it would be possible to teach me something in life that I was not able to learn from academia, or just working in Canada. It's a completely new environment. It's a job I haven't done, teaching English in a classroom. Having to deal with all sorts of cultural differences, different language. So for me, I thought [of] it as a big opportunity for me to learn a ton of things that will make me grow as a person and hopefully make me grow as an artist as well. So, my aspiration, to be brief I guess, well, I'm not sure what I want to do as an artist right now. First of all, to make enough money with it, I don't have a specific goal, but if I do, it would be to pursue my *Quebecois 101* project. But at the same time, you have nothing to lose, so taking the time to go teach and have an abroad experience is definitely going to contribute to my artistic process and hopefully develop skills that will be necessary to be a good artist: discipline, organization, and maybe more maturity in general.

Asha, is also a new LLJ teacher from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, whom I interviewed in Montreal. She is an avid practitioner of yoga, interested in pursuing different venues that provide opportunities for self-reflection through meditation:

> Asha: I worked for the university as a research technician for about 5 years. And then I quit my job – actually I was given a leave of absence as a safety net but I only wanted to work at the university for 3-5 years to apply my degree. Then I went to the ashram and I quit my job while there.
>
> Ravi: What motivated that?
>
> A: It just didn't feel right any more. It was very stressful near the end. Research is very stressful.
>
> R: But, isn't an ashram a bit spectacular?
>
> A: Mmhmm. But, I had been practicing yoga and had always wanted to visit a monastery and I saw an ashram was kinda in between. Not quite a monastery, not quite as rigid, more flexible.

Further into our conversation, she explained that teaching English has become a complement of her desire to work in a relatively stress-free position. Coincidently, Asha's yoga instructor sparked the motivation to consider teaching English abroad:

Ravi: So, where does Japan fit in all this?

Asha: I initially wanted to go to a monastery in Thailand.

R: The same Theravada traditions?

A: Yes. But, then I heard Thailand doesn't pay very well and you'll just break even. And over 2 years of pretty much volunteering and intensely working without making any money, I needed to replenish, especially upon quitting the university position. So, my yoga instructor actually recommended Japan. And I had always wanted to teach in Asia, like after university. I actually considered doing it before...

R: So, your yoga instructor suggested teaching?

A: Yeah, just to go on a working holiday visa while I was under 30, but that passed. And I knew about Live and Learn Japan. I also know South Korea has a government program but I wasn't interested in South Korea. So, it was just a way to kinda go. I mean multiple reasons for Japan but one of the reasons was to connect with the temples and to learn about that tradition and to meditate and just to see what it's like from the eastern side versus the western side…so, after the ashram, I returned to Saskatoon and then 10 months in Saskatoon and then went to Trois-Rivieres, Quebec to be an English teaching assistant.

R: Right. And that's when you came here and where you solidified the idea that you could do teaching?

A: Right. I wanted to try it out in Canada and then found out about LLJ last minute and then applied, and it's been incredible, absolutely incredible.

It appears, then, that the motivation and inspiration for travel can be, in part, a response to what daily life in one's 'home' urban or semi-urban/rural settings does not offer. That is, for some of my interlocutors, the desire to travel, explore, live, and work in a foreign setting is due to the absence of particular kinds of opportunities and experiences afforded by their circumstances in Canada. As Luc, one of my interlocutors, puts it: "I never had the opportunity to make a Japanese friend, much less see Japanese people around until I got involved with LLJ". Or, as another of my interlocutors, Bruce, says: "I don't know, I just wanted to get away." This apparent lack of opportunities can thereby be remedied in leaving behind the comfortable routines of their lives at home in pursuit of a transnational experience and/or challenging their sense of personal and professional potential.

Some of my interlocutors conceptualized living abroad as a way to escape feelings of perpetual malaise and confinement at home. Luc is originally from Windsor, Ontario and was a newly hired LLJ teacher, preparing to depart for Japan. I interviewed him in Montreal where he explained his past situation:

> "Everyone that leaves Windsor comes back to negativity. I call it the black hole. There are no jobs, economy sucks and it's so bad, so sad. There's a lot of racism, people don't want to go outside their comfort zone at all. And people are generally sad and broke since there are no jobs, and with that comes anger and a feeling that's not great. But it is home and yet I kinda think it's nice to grow up there if you have some sort of foundation to keep you level headed and positive because you don't have it too good, and I think it builds a lot of character, you know? But, at the same time, if you don't have a source of positivity it's gonna turn you into one of those racist angry people. That's why I think it's important to get out."

Thus, for Luc, leaving Windsor was a kind of emancipation from the tethers of what he describes as "negative thinking". His move to Montreal, to university, and finally to Japan were, according to him, "a positive shift" towards empowering himself and striving towards a better future.

Leia was also a newly hired LLJ teacher whom I interviewed in Montreal. She grew up in Olds, Alberta, and described a similar desire for escape:

> "Growing up in this small town in Alberta, 6000 people, I assumed that I was gonna go to school not even in, not for sure in Alberta, probably not in Canada. I was picturing as getting as far away as possible. So, it's weird to me that I went to school in Edmonton. That was not how I envisioned my future. It wasn't disappointing; it was just something I never would have imagined."

Leia, thus far, has constantly made use of educational and job opportunities that have taken her ever farther away from the small town confinements of her community of origin. She refers to Japan as "the dream", meaning a place where many extraordinary influences and possibilities of her childhood could come true. She had never thought that living in Japan was unattainable; but neither did she actively seek out the possibility of moving there until she reached a practical point of transition in her otherwise comfortable life in Montreal. For Leia, graduating from university marked such a point of departure allowing her to make a fresh start and revisit the forgotten dream of living in Japan. In

both these cases, I am not saying that urban or semi-urban/rural origins necessarily produces a specific kind of mentality but they can influence the degree to which a move to Japan is desired as a more or less drastic change in one's life circumstances.

Visas as 'Time Stamps'

All foreigners living and working in Japan are issued an alien registration card that acts as a visa, often referred to as a *gaijin* or *gaikokujin* card, meaning foreigner or foreign-country person card. Alien cards carry basic information, such as age, height, weight, along with one's designated living/visiting/working title in Japan. LLJ participants are required to apply for a visa and they are typically issued a three-year working visa as an "Instructor". Also, LLJ participants who are married to, or are foreign-born children of a Japanese national may obtain a family visa carrying the title of "Spouse or Child of Japanese National". Some of the participants in my study who worked as freelancers and careerists have held various types of visas over the course of their time in Japan. These have included working-holiday visas, working visas (with varied time limits), and student visas. According to some of my interlocutors, applying for a working-holiday visa is a useful way to test out what life in Japan is like as compared to the greater commitment required for a long-term work sojourn. For others, who had already experienced working in other foreign countries, obtaining a working visa for Japan represented a show of moving on to the next adventure or pursuing a new opportunity. Kirk, a long-term expatriate and careerist, secured his first job as an English instructor in Japan at a private English teaching agency before moving on to a university as a professor. When I asked him if he could tell me about applying for visas, he reported:

> "I think your first visa can only be one year. After that first year I remember being surprised that they gave me a three-year extension. It's not something I specifically requested. In my most recent application, I did request five years and was given it; however, I know some teachers at my university who have requested five and got fewer. I guess all the visas I've received have been 'workers' visas, but my first ones identified me as a 'Humanities Specialist' while the more recent ones have said 'Professor'. The whole visa system just changed a year or so ago, so there's no longer a visa stamp in our passports. It's now linked to our *gaijin* [foreigner] cards."

Patrick is a careerist and has been living as an expatriate in Japan for 10 years. Acting on an invitation from a Japanese friend he had met in Canada, he first came to Japan on a working-holiday visa. After returning to Canada from this working holiday, he decided to return to Japan via a worker's visa with a strong interest in mastering the language as well as experiencing life in Japan more fully. I interviewed him at his home in Osaka via videoconferencing. When I asked him what kind of jobs he was interested in pursuing in regards to his goal of mastering Japanese, he explained:

> "I had a specialist in 'Humanities or International Services' visa. The title of your job is not on the visa as far as I know. You can do other jobs as long as they fit under the category 'Humanities or International Services'. I got that visa when I was doing editing and translation. It definitely gives you more flexibility than an Instructor visa. But, you aren't allowed to work at bars and etcetera with it."

For careerists with similar arrangements to Kirk and Patrick, seeking out jobs in Japan is often a process of change and growth, which signifies an ongoing set of possibilities as new opportunities arise or as visa periods end. As Kirk explained, the Japanese government may grant expatriates visas allowing for different lengths of stay. These differences in time allocations can work as subtle yet influential markers shaping how long one might consider staying in Japan. For example, Patrick now lives in Japan under a student visa, having decided to pursue graduate school in Japan upon the completion of his last worker's visa that coincided with a rather risky venture (considering the types of work foreigners generally tend to pursue in Japan) of co-managing a restaurant.

In a later section I will elaborate on the discourse of risk as it was presented by some of the participants in my study but for the moment, it is important to understand that I am qualifying Patrick's decision to co-manage a restaurant as risky since it is a relatively uncommon decision for young western expatriates in Japan to choose an entrepreneurial line of work over a more lucrative and predictable field such as English teaching. Patrick's decision to take on a challenging managerial role reflects his view of what is possible for him in Japan. For Patrick, endeavoring to succeed and accomplish at a particular goal is largely tied to his general relationship with life in Japan: taking on challenges and seeing how far he might go with them. Thus, for long-term expatriates

with no set return date in mind, the combination of time, work, and experiences seem to contribute to formulating and supporting the idea that work and life in Japan can shift over time just as it might at home. Furthermore for the long-term sojourners amongst the participants in my study, the idea of 'home' has largely become a fluid concept. While they are aware of how 'home' is often conceptualized, as generally reflecting one's natal place of birth or formative childhood or adolescent years; their life experiences and history have given them the opportunity to understand the concept in a malleable or dynamic way. Seeing 'home' as a malleable construct has allowed them to comfortably live away from their families for extended periods, without an overwhelming sense of guilt. This does not mean that they are not concerned about family and close friends back home but, rather, that they are mindful of respecting both their family needs and their personal and professional goals.

By contrast, LLJ workers are forced per their work contracts to live and work by a fixed schedule; whereupon the completion of their work contract (a maximum of 3 or 5 years, depending on the prefectural GO) demarcates the time that they must leave Japan and return to their original point of departure in Canada. While it is possible for LLJ workers to return to Japan immediately after going back to their home country, the end of their work contracts are often ritualized by farewell ceremonies with colleagues, students, and friends, as well as selling household items and shipping packages home, all of which can instill a sense of completing a particular phase in one's life.

Summary

This chapter has provided a general overview of the most common working situations of Canadian foreign expatriates in Japan. As English teachers, young expatriates in Japan are often juggling their efforts to acquire and engage in employment, develop their personal and professional selves, and pursue general adventure through travel. Working for LLJ, or as freelancers, or as careerists can significantly shape the course of their experience and options in Japan. All of my interlocutors have an interest in taking the time to experience and partake in a variety of cultural activities and events as well as to visit different parts of Japan. In many cases, my interlocutors explained that they spent much of their first year in Japan setting up and organizing their new lives. This might

include adjusting to heavy work schedules and responsibilities, creating new routines, and constantly rearranging their everyday lives as they become more comfortable in taking on new activities. Many of my interlocutors have explained that one year abroad was simply not enough time to experience life 'fully' in Japan, and the possibility of extending one's sojourn to two years or more can be an unexpected but very welcome opportunity. In many cases, my interlocutors referred to the end of their work contracts and the prospect of renewing them as a way of marking time spent abroad. My research suggests that deciding whether or not to extend one's stay in Japan or to return home or to live elsewhere is contingent on a number of factors. My interlocutors have enumerated some of these factors that I will explore as important themes in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Young Professional Communities at Home and Away

Navigating Young Professional Expatriate Life

In this chapter I describe two cases of expatriate and former expatriate social groups to illustrate different forms of young expatriate professional communities. My research suggests that young professionals who are interested in living in Japan, or currently living there, or who have had the experience, may find themselves sharing common ground. That is, having a connection and interest in Japan can serve as ample reason to form friendships, network, and participate in social activities together. Such connections may also continue back in Canada. Forming friendships and networks are important for foreigners in Japan since it can be difficult for them to navigate daily life and maintain a healthy lifestyle if certain social needs are not met. In one sense, making friends and networking allows expatriates to establish their social life amongst others who share similar interests. New friends may make plans to travel together, explore new culinary interests, participate in a Japanese cultural activity/festival, or simply pass time together. Networking with others is useful to help plan a trip, find a foreigner-friendly gym, where to take Japanese language classes, or how to secure new contract work. One such expatriate community is found in Osaka City, Japan. In the section below "BBQs at Osaka Castle" I detail how an expatriate community congregates at periodically scheduled barbeque (BBQ) events and how these congregations speak to expatriate life in Osaka City, Japan.

The second form of expatriate community I describe takes on a less conventional or literal form. Amongst the LLJ participants in my study, some former expatriates who have returned to Canada continue to network and socialize in groups with ties to Japan. These former LLJ employees call themselves 'LLJ alumni', referring to their former lives and past experiences working for LLJ in Japan. They are still considered part of LLJ and represent the agency via volunteer work and group activities. While these people are technically no longer expatriates as they are predominantly living and working in Canada, many of the activities and social events they participate in revolve around continuing to mark out a connection with Japan. This largely involves being around like-minded people who are interested in participating in Japan-related activities and events.

LLJ alumni also meet and socialize at private functions where they can feel comfortable to act in ways or display mannerisms befitting Japanese custom or style, such as bowing, performing loud parting chants (*teijime*)[3], and making formalized speeches.

LLJ alumni do not only socialize with former expatriates and LLJ officials. LLJ often provides partial subsidies for LLJ alumni events as a show of continued support of its former employees, who in turn may feel obligated to volunteer or participate in recruitment procedures and social activities with new LLJ employees or potential LLJ candidates. Thus, the general entourage at LLJ events may include anyone directly associated with LLJ or those from affiliated agencies or programs. I will detail some of these activities and various kinds of behaviour and mannerisms later on in this chapter. However, my most salient point here is to emphasize that 'expatriate community' is a fluid concept; these communities can be formed by like-minded or interested individuals and arranged to create a space through which certain kinds of sociality or community activity may take place.

In the section "LLJ Alumni in Montreal" I show that the titles 'expatriate' and 'LLJ alumni' are not mutually exclusive positions. LLJ alumni are a specific kind of community that consists of former expatriates of Japan; and yet, as I explain later, some of the activities that go on within the Montreal-based LLJ community carve out a social space similar to the BBQ events in Osaka City. That is, while expatriate motives for socializing with each other in Japan and LLJ alumni motivations for socializing with each other in Canada can be quite different, there are some striking similarities that the two types of 'expatriate communities' share.

In the section "Expatriates in Osaka City: BBQs at Osaka Castle" I show how the expatriates who organize the BBQs at Osaka Castle are creating a dynamic space that promotes socializing in ways that are different from conventional Japanese styles of socializing. Furthermore, some expatriates discover that these BBQs meet certain social needs they have or discover while living in Japan. I describe what some of these social needs consist of in the following section.

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[3] *Teijime* is a Japanese custom of ceremonial hand clapping, typically accompanied by loud chants or exclamations to end a special event on a lively note.

Socializing in Japan: Understanding the Social Needs of Expatriates

Before examining the utility of expatriate communities, it is helpful to first explore how some expatriates socialize via other means in Japan. Transnational life can be dynamic, involving many unforeseen events and occurrences. Shedding light on the particular situations that may occur as one takes up a post in Japan can give us knowledge of the social needs that young transnationals may carry with them or discover.

Feeling Lonely and Needy

Gwen explained to me that her first year in Japan as an LLJ teacher had proven to be quite challenging. She reported that her initial lack of ability and willingness to adapt to her living circumstances were in response to her loneliness. However, she eventually stepped up to her situation and made a point to make the best of things, namely through establishing a friendship with a hospitable Japanese woman, from the town where Gwen was based, who enjoyed organizing small dinner parties amongst foreigners and Japanese locals:

> Ravi: Where did you meet your, as you say, Japanese family?
>
> Gwen: Well, it's one woman, actually. Her name is [Maiko-san]. She lived in Yanagawa, a big-ish kind of town, but still a town. And what she did was she got all the neighbouring LLJ teachers to come once a week to kinda speak English to their children and give a little English lesson in exchange for dinner. So, it was an opportunity to kinda get together with the other foreigners but I didn't connect very well with those foreigners and she was very generous and she invited me on little road trips with the family. She had a daughter that was 8 years younger than me, so she was 12 years old at the time. And she invited me to come along and I was like, "Ok, sure." I don't know why she did it, but she was just like that, generous in that way. So, I started to feel a little bit: Ok, there are people here in this foreign country that know me and care about me enough to invite me out with their family. Also, in that year, a Japanese colleague, she invited me to her kids' *shigosan* [coming of age event]. And it was a big thing, the grandparents were there and everything, they got dressed up, they took photographs and they invited me into the photos and I was like, "holy moly!" So, all of those things started happening when I came back from my visit to Canada starting in January.

In another case, Billy explains how a romantic relationship with a Japanese colleague became a source of stress. Since he was living in a small town, he was worried about the spread of rumours, leaving bad impressions, and comments about his lack of professionalism that could arise from such a circumstance. He explains how living in a small town in such close proximity to others forced him to distance himself from other Japanese colleagues and find alternative means to cope with certain difficulties of Japanese life.

> Ravi: So, you mentioned, for your part of this relationship, being 'needy' – how did this affect your life there?
>
> Billy: Well, it really complicated things because in Japan, relationships between work colleagues are usually very frowned upon and secret. And I don't think I was ready to handle the amount of tiptoeing around. I didn't really expect it would reach 'that' level of secrecy. I realized my private and professional life had to be as separate as possible but I was having this relationship in this small town where everybody knew everybody. What I remember the most is the constant stress. The constant feeling we might get caught, etc. Plus, I don't think I was really conscious of this at the time, but it limited my social life a lot because if I wanted to hang out with her, we'd have to hang out outside of town or at my apartment or her apartment. We really didn't want the word to get out. So, basically that curtailed my social life for a few months.

Both of these cases show us that upon arriving in Japan, a person may feel overwhelmed by their loneliness and other emotional needs. In Gwen's case, she had visited Canada briefly for her sister's wedding. Upon arriving home, she told her family that she was thinking about quitting her job. They convinced her to return to Japan, reminding her of her contractual obligation. She took her family's advice and was able to return to Japan with a renewed intent of making the best of her situation. For Gwen, making friends with Maiko-san back in Yanagawa was a fortuitous opportunity to finally feel welcome and at ease via her new Japanese friends. In Billy's case, his romantic relationship with his Japanese colleague emerged out of a mutual neediness to feel comfortable in a new and remote small town. While their initial circumstances placed both of them as new teachers in an unfamiliar setting, Billy eventually realized that he no longer wanted to continue the relationship. This would cause further complications that

he found increasingly stressful, especially in consideration of his workplace and maintaining privacy in a small town.

Gwen and Billy started their respective lives in Japan with the best intentions of discovering as much as possible about the country and what life abroad entailed. As we saw in Gwen's case, though, it can be difficult to meet and make Japanese friends without being introduced by a third party. Without a proper excuse to introduce oneself (i.e. as a new work colleague), Japanese people often avoid intruding into another person's space. However, for those who are curious and interested in social and cultural exchange with foreigners, Japanese work parties are useful and acceptable events for lively social interaction.

Socializing at Japanese Work Parties

Many of my interlocutors described how everyday interaction around the workplace with Japanese colleagues might not amount to more than brief polite exchanges and that it was often difficult to broach the subject of after-work socializing. Foreigners might be tempted to claim that language barriers act as an obstacle to meaningful or even basic social interaction, but this is not always the only reason that relationships with colleagues outside of the workday are difficult to establish.

In Japanese working culture, there are certain work parties, *enkai*, at different points of the work year that mark specific times for socialization amongst co-workers for both foreigners and Japanese colleagues alike. At these parties the rules of interaction and engagement in Japanese working culture are loosened. This means the normally stratified social positions of senior, *senpai*, and junior, *kohai*, within the office are set aside momentarily in favour of enjoying each other's company along with food and alcoholic drinks. *Enkai* operate as a form of social lubrication intended to relieve stress and promote good relations amongst co-workers who must normally adhere to stratified social positions common to many Japanese workplaces. Yet, a general rule of thumb of these parties is that: "what goes on and is said at the party stays in the party." On the following workday, it is customary that Japanese workers will not mention the outing or exchange pleasantries about the previous evening. In other words, there is a clear demarcation of work life and social life even when these include the same people. Most

expatriates eventually learn and become accustomed to this social practice, but this does not mean that their social needs are satisfied by these limited social encounters.

What, then, are these social needs of expatriates? One could argue that cases such as Gwen's and Billy's could have taken place back in Canada. A person may feel isolated and lonely in many circumstances – Gwen and Billy's respective methods of dealing with their particular situations might also be argued as denoting a lack of work experience and maturity, or a plethora of other reasons. *Enkai* can be fun and some memorable moments shared with co-workers may take place at these events. Despite these enjoyable party functions, expatriate communities can fill a feeling of loneliness or a desire for belonging that can exist for many expatriates in regards to their social needs or lives. I mean to emphasize certain missing social elements largely provided by intimate relationships, such as with family, partners, close friends, and pets. For some, these relationships left behind, even temporarily, cannot be easily replaced by the prospect of adventure and fun and partying. Yet, the drive for new experiences in Japan is compelling. I will show in my ethnographic case of the BBQs in Osaka City how loneliness and/or a desire for belonging can, for some, be alleviated or filled for those inexperienced or new to life in Japan as well as long-term sojourners. Conversely, for many LLJ alumni who have returned to their families and close friends in Montreal, the feelings of loneliness or a desire for belonging undergoes a sort of metamorphosis; it becomes representative of nostalgic times spent in Japan. Subsequently, many LLJ alumni partaking in the Montreal-based Japanese community attempt to maintain a bond with Japan via cultural events/activities and interaction with fellow counterparts.

Leaving Familiarity Behind

I interviewed some of my interlocutors in Montreal before they went to Japan for the first time as potential long-term sojourners. They explained to me that despite their romantic images of Japan as a generally grand and wondrous place for adventure, the prospect of leaving their old life behind was quite intimidating when they speculated about the future. Sophia is a new LLJ teacher whom I interviewed in Montreal before she left for Japan. She is also newly married to Luc. During our interview, she explained to me that much of her 'adventurous side' lay dormant until she had met Luc. This segment of Sophia's

interview is particularly insightful in that she repeatedly compares her current station with that of her impending one in Japan by noting the people, pets, and things she will be leaving behind:

> Ravi: Why did you decide to travel to Japan?
>
> Sophia: It's really funny because it's not something we really planned. We applied to LLJ about 4 weeks before the deadline.
>
> R: You decided together?
>
> S: Yeah, and he had a professor that did LLJ and really enjoyed it so he had a really good experience and suggested to students that were interested in going and Luc was interested and he was studying East Asian history and pop culture. He brought it up to me and we thought it'd be cool one day. I don't know what happened, we were on the metro one day on the way to dinner and it just popped into my head that I remembered he said we could totally do this, and I just thought: "Why don't we go live in Japan?" It just kind of like, came to me.
>
> R: Have you guys talked about how long you want to stay?
>
> S: I think probably about 2-3 years. Obviously it'll depend on how the first year goes but it seems kind of crazy that we'd just go for a short time and that we gave up our cats.
>
> R: Your cats?
>
> S: My cats! We have 2 cats, we've had one for 6 years and the other for 3 years and that's probably the toughest thing about moving, finding a place for the cats. My family lives in Ontario and it takes 10 hours to get to them, and so we're kind of used to not seeing each other all the time. So, here, we gave up our apartment, I quit my job, selling stuff, only keeping books and our dining room table. Luc's dad is keeping them for us. He lives in the Laurentians, not very far.
>
> R: What about friends?
>
> S: It was really weird when we first moved here, and I didn't have a job for the first 3 months. And it's really hard to meet people out of school but as an adult it's hard. I guess when you're in school or uni, you're in the same class or whatever and making friends works because you're in the same environment. As an adult, I found it really weird when I first moved here. It wasn't until I started working that I found really good friends. Luc found really good friends, too. So, they come over and play board games and

stuff like that. It's kind of sad because we don't know if we'll come back to Montreal.

R: So, how do you feel about starting over in Japan?

S: I think it's a really interesting process. I think it'll probably be easy to make friends with the foreigners because they're in the same boat a little bit and I said earlier about our apartment, there's already some LLJ teachers that we've been in contact with so they are super awesome, saying they'll help us, take us out for dinner.

R: How did you make contact?

S: I was on the east Kita-Kyushu Facebook group and one of them had mentioned something about my predecessor and I said I recognized the name and so I we added each other and found out we are in the same building and then he had a friend who visits often.

R: So it's been helpful?

S: It's been awesome. It's nice to know we'll have at least 2 people when we get there who will talk to us!

In another case, Leia explained that she had vacationed in Japan once before with her longtime boyfriend. This time around, however, she mused about how life might be different now that she was finally pursuing her childhood dream of living in Japan:

Ravi: So, you're doing time apart from your boyfriend on LLJ. How long do you plan to stay?

Leia: I was originally, like: "let's see if I can do a year." If I had done this 10 years ago, there would be no worry – well, not 'worry' – but I feel like I would be a little bit more flexible and be less, like here I'm very comfortable and have habits and 2 cats, a boyfriend, friends, life is good. I've lived here for 10 years; I've been in my apartment for 7 years with my boyfriend. So, the idea of leaving for more than a year is just kinda inconvenient. It would be a lot easier in terms of paperwork and getting back into things, but if I did this when I was 20, I wouldn't have a life that I was leaving. Mainly I would go back to the same place or maybe not. I dunno, or maybe not. So, that is one thing, I wouldn't hesitate if I was younger or if I wasn't in this particular situation where it would be like 2 or 3 years, whatever, let's go with it. But to do 2 years I would have to really consider it and work it through with my partner because he's super supportive already. But, he has a job that he's very happy with and you know pays really well and like while he'd love to live in Japan, and we

considered the spousal visa thing, but he has a life here and so...

R: So, that life in the apartment and everything is all with him.

L: Yeah, he's my partner; he's my common-law partner. I see his parents more than my parents and I mean, obviously, anything could happen and I'm pretty sure our relationship can handle me living in Japan over a year, I'm not concerned about that. But, we just don't know about what will happen in life, so that's the reason we're not married because we don't know what will happen in life.

R: What does it mean to you that you're going to Japan?

L: Since going through the application process, I've realized there's a lot of ways to teach English without doing LLJ and having a Bachelor's and those opportunities never entered into my consciousness before that. I learned about Japan in school, consumed all sorts of media about Japan but it seems like this contrived stereotype and that only certain parts can be repeated or described, so I really wanted to live there to see what it's really like. Japan is really the only place I've wanted to go in life.

R: So, when you get to Japan this time, what kind of lifestyle do you imagine you'll be living?

L: When I was there [the first time], I didn't speak any Japanese. In cities, you really don't need to speak to anyone. If you want to buy something, the process is exactly the same. We bought *onigiri* [rice balls] every single day at the *konbini* [convenience store] and no human exchange, more or less. Our entire experience was me going by tour guide books and that's basically how we understood how the place was or whatever. One of the biggest things I'm expecting to be different now is speaking and having relationships with Japanese people, working in a school. Working with the Japanese teachers will change my lifestyle quite a bit.

R: How?

L: Well, I don't really work professionally with anyone here in Montreal let alone people from a completely different culture speaking most of their lives with their own language. I guess I should consider if that's really true or not. But, you know, I've been a student of the last 4 years and mostly I do what I'm told and there's not a lot of negotiation and it's like, you have an assignment, read this, write that, but there's not a lot of interpersonal relationship and exchange.

R: And you imagine Japan being different?

> L: I imagine it to be different. That I'll be apparently be talking and co-teaching. I'm not saying we're on the same level but there's something to be built together. It's not just my assignment. In school the plan is made, and then you follow the schedule. I guess this is a skill I haven't really used a lot. I'm really scared of doing the interpersonal thing. I used to think I was a really nice person but now I'm not so sure. But, it's a skill I really want to work on but I'm really seriously afraid that I'm going to fuck it up but I'm really concerned about making sure I'm not an asshole, to especially, well, now that I'm an "ambassador of Canada" or whatever. I've really adopted being blunt and telling people what I think. And apparently, in Japan, that's the opposite of what you're supposed to do. But I don't feel I'll be that or say that in Japan but it's really the anticipation of culture shock. Oh yeah, at the LLJ Weekend Orientation, they keep talking about how we'll be surveyed because people are curious about us being westerners and being the only one in town and watching you at the grocery store and hanging your laundry and whatnot. Ah, so this is something. When I was in Japan, it felt like I was on a holodeck.[4] Because I'm the real person here and everything else is sort of, not an illusion, but outside of me. Here, I feel like I'm part of this place. This is the geographer talking now but I feel like all the layers of the past, of relations, I remember things, I know how to get places, landmarks, places, all those layers of experiences make this place different even if I was here for the first time. Especially when I don't know anyone in this place, I don't know where they've been, what they do, I don't know any of these people around me, I can't even guess what they're thinking or what they do. So, the fact that I can't even interact makes it a holodeck.

These two cases reflect what can be at stake for expatriates as they embark on a new life in Japan. I interviewed Sophia and Leia shortly before they left for Japan. They each expressed a mix of caution and excitement as they weighed their choice to leave Canada. Further into my interview with Leia, she confessed that she expected to "cry for 2 whole weeks" upon arriving. Yet, it was out of the question to let her childhood dream of living in Japan pass her by. Sophia told me, "Initially, going to Japan could have well been Sweden" before realizing how special a place Japan is. Sophia, in some ways, may have been influenced by her husband Luc's infectious enthusiasm for Japan. Further into the LLJ hiring and orientation process[5], however, she came to the conclusion that going to Japan was reflective of her desire to take her life into her own hands and do something

[4] A holodeck is a holographic environment simulator from the popular science-fiction television program, *Star Trek*.

[5] I elaborate on the LLJ orientation process in the section "LLJ Alumni in Montreal: LLJ Weekend Orientation."

"grander" than what her life had so far offered in Canada. Leia and Sophia were not expressing unhappiness about life in Canada. Rather, the prospect of living in Japan must offer them something worth the discomfort and pain of leaving loved ones behind for a period of time.

Young Professional Communities: Discovering, Building, and Contributing to a Collection of Different Lifestyles

Young Professionals in Osaka City: BBQs at Osaka Castle

A large group of expatriates living in Osaka City have been gathering at periodic BBQ events held at the public Osaka Castle park grounds for many years. I attended these BBQs for 3 years when I lived in Osaka City. These events usually start in March or April, at the cusp of spring when the cherry blossom trees are coming into bloom. Cherry blossom viewing (*hanami*) and picnics/BBQs are common activities in Japan. Drinking alcohol in public is legally permitted in Japan, and after the winter-blues and heavy coats come off, the right mix of *hanami*, alcohol, and picnics/BBQs are a powerful way of banishing the dreary winter spell. The Osaka City park grounds offer large spaces for picnics where people may set down tarps and claim a spot for a period of time. Thousands of people flock to the popular site near the majestic and historic Osaka Castle, fortified inside the confines of a moat. The river runs all around the castle and the cherry blossom trees line many pathways and provide a magical and serene sort of ambience, the stuff of Disney films made real. At the BBQs, portable grills are set up along with necessary condiments, dishware, and cutlery. Attendees stream in periodically throughout the day, bringing a mix of items: sausages, burgers, vegetables, alcohol, Frisbees, hacky sacks, mini stereos, cameras, and acoustic guitars.

Leonard is the current chief organizer of these BBQs. He is highly proficient in Japanese and has been successful in using this skill for event planning and socializing. Leonard is well over 6 feet tall and has been bestowed with 'giant' status in Japan, giving him a unique sort of popularity amongst many Japanese people. He has an infectious smile that rarely fails to befriend people and many expatriates and Japanese people often refer to him as: "the guy that knows everyone." It was imperative that I get his insight on the BBQs as its founder and chief promoter. He has a broad understanding of the BBQs'

effect on the expatriate community in Osaka City. I asked him about the origins of the event and what it meant to him:

> Leonard: These barbecues started in April 2009, when a Japanese friend asked me to organize a cross-cultural BBQ together. The first year we had a good crowd of 40-50 people. Most of his Japanese friends didn't speak English and weren't very internationally oriented, and while it was fun; it was the last time most of them would attend. This year will be the seventh year I've organized it and every year it's gotten bigger. What was really amazing was that while I was back in Canada for a year, my friends continued to organize it. They also teamed-up with a Columbian bar manager and this will now be the second year I've done it together with him. Because we joined up, the BBQs I organized which peaked at 120 people have grown to 150.
>
> Ravi: What is it like attending the BBQs?
>
> L: It's a great opportunity for people from different backgrounds, Japanese, Western and otherwise, to gather together and enjoy a central piece of Japanese culture. It's a great chance for me to get to know people and allows us to enjoy a traditional Japanese custom we aren't often included in. Our group aside, I'd say we are one of the only non-Japanese groups that practice this custom at Osaka Castle and probably one of the largest groups overall. There's alcohol involved, so it allows the chance for people to relax and interact in a fun atmosphere. This is especially important in Japan where people are notoriously shy and intimidated by speaking to foreigners. It gives them the chance to do so. On a personal side note, it's also been a great chance to connect my adult students and less internationally inclined friends with the international community. A BBQ is somewhere everyone can go. So regardless of age or period in life, I can get friends, young and adult, foreign and Japanese, single and married, with or without children together to relax and catch up about old times.
>
> R: Can you tell me in detail about how you set up for a BBQ?
>
> L: We've refined our BBQ setup over the years. Getting a spot at Osaka Castle is notoriously difficult during BBQ season because of the popularity of the event. In previous years, I would go to the BBQ spot at 5 a.m. and grab a spot, but more recently we've just started going the night before to save ourselves a few hours sleep. Someone will drive in all the BBQs and other necessities (coolers, tables, tents, etc.) and a few volunteers will help us get setup. Invitations get sent out on Facebook more than a month in advance mostly in order to ensure that we are the first ones to get people out. Then people start trickling in around 11 a.m. and by 2 p.m. we're

usually packed. I'll say that we probably have the largest group of people gathered in one place at the castle, but our group also shows up the latest.

R: I know you have some anecdotes…

L: A few funny stories from over the years: one year, as you know, I was on the grill when a Japanese camera crew rolled in and started asking me questions about the nature of the BBQ and what I thought of *hanami* in Japan. I still have the video somewhere that a friend took on their phone. That same year, after getting setup at 5:30 a.m., I was relieved of my duties around 9 a.m. and went home to shower. As I came back in, I heard a group of young girls scream "[Lenaaado]", my name in Japanese, and sure enough it was some old high school students of mine who had just graduated. They ended up joining our BBQ and it was great seeing they still remembered me and I had had enough of an impact on them that they were excited to see me two years after the fact.

R: What do the BBQs mean to you?

L: I take a lot of pleasure in bringing people together. So being the organizer to me is about making those connections between different people. I'm an extreme extrovert and love meeting people myself. It's rewarding years later when I see these groups of people who maybe I don't even see very often but who are still in contact with one another. I recently was invited to a wedding of an Australian and a Japanese friend I introduced five years ago at a similar event. I guess I also like to be someone who's a 'mover' [i.e. someone who moves between many different social circles] in the community. Whatever the context, I'm often the one organizing things. This extends to my work life as well. I organized a party last year to give my foreign colleagues and myself a chance to meet our Japanese coworkers. I don't like us being segregated like that. Even yesterday, I attended a party in my neighbourhood and went out of my way to invite another three neighbours I had just met recently. Anyway, I like being the nucleus in that web of connections and interacting with different people. I think this is important for personal and professional growth, and I suppose that's the biggest motivation for me to do these BBQs and other events.

Kirk told me his thoughts on the BBQs during our interview. He is a long-time friend of Leonard and they often socialize together. Unlike Leonard, Kirk is not proficient in Japanese. However, his lack of Japanese proficiency has neither impeded his career in Japan nor his ability to befriend Japanese people, particularly women. I have known him for a number of years; he has established a prestigious career and is regarded by many of our mutual friends as an intelligent and charming person. Despite his candor

in regards to the relationships he has formed with Japanese women, Kirk is not entirely dedicated to casual intimate relationships. Rather, he described an important aspect of foreigner-Japanese relations that many others will often avoid mentioning due to its taboo association with certain male western stereotypes in Japan. These stereotypes tend to cast western white men, in particular, as oppressive or manipulative social actors who prey on Japanese women. Japanese women, by contrast, are often stereotyped as naïve and unsuspecting victims. Yet, I would argue that the romantic and sexual relationships that emerge from these open gatherings tend to, in part, invite the prospect of foreigner-Japanese intimate relationships in comparison to the more formalistic work-based intimate relationships (as we saw in Billy's case above). That is, the BBQs create a social space that tends to openly welcome Japanese people who are curious about engaging and learning about many types of relationships with foreigners as opposed to, for example, *enkai*, which are in many ways strategically organized for work related stress-relief and maintaining smooth relations amongst co-workers.

> Ravi: Did you participate in organizing the BBQs?
>
> Kirk: I never organized these events, but one of my close friends, Leonard, would put them together so I was compelled to attend for various reasons: 1) Leonard's a good friend so I wanted to support his event – I can be socially lazy/introverted if I don't have a good reason to be social, 2) he has a large and diverse social network, so being relatively single and new to the city at the time, I thought it would be a good chance to make friends and to meet girls who I might be able to hook up with, 3) I didn't have much better going on during the day on Saturdays and Sundays, 4) it was a way to engage in Japanese culture (*hanami*, Japanese BBQ, etc.). In hindsight, these were fun events that helped me meet others in the foreign community and also Japanese people who might be more 'foreign friendly', as I find most Japanese people to be very hesitant and uncomfortable in letting outsiders into their social circles. I think most *gaijin* [foreigner] attendees shared this sentiment and we were also encouraged to bring our Japanese – often female – friends who might enjoy the social dynamic. At the time of the BBQs, I had several student-friends from my university and I extended the invite to them and they were keen to attend. I know at least one of my foreign friends hooked up with one of the female students from my uni, so this reflects the reciprocal benefits of people extending the invitation to others. Aside from this, I think the events helped foreigners forge and enhance friendships with each

other. Because of the *honne*/*tatemae*[6] relationship between Japanese and foreigners, I think the BBQs provided a good opportunity to for foreigners to form meaningful bonds with each other resulting in friendship, support networks, etc.

I also interviewed Bruce, a long-time friend and co-worker of Kirk's about his thoughts on the BBQs. Bruce was born in Vernon, British Columbia but has spent much of his life growing up in different countries. Since he has had a significant transnational upbringing and maintains a highly mobile lifestyle, he tends to describe himself as unattached to a specific place. For Bruce, the concept of 'home' is quizzical at best and he is largely focused on "the next adventure or place to discover." He enjoys the changes that travel and movement brings to his life, which is also reflective of his general social relations with people. He tends to be remiss in keeping his social life active but still enjoys select outings that provide him the opportunity to meet new and interesting people. We held our interview via videoconferencing from his home in Osaka City:

Ravi: Can you tell me about your experiences at the BBQs?

Bruce: I don't actually attend too many BBQ events. The only one I think I have been to is the *hanami* BBQ party and last year was the first time! But there are other parties I attend, which I think serve the same function. A lot of the time I can't attend because I'm also out of Japan for most of the summer. So I guess it's a chance to stay in touch with people. I see people on an individual basis but the community events like these are good to see everyone at one time. I believe Leonard is the ringleader for most of these parties.

R: Why do you think he organizes them?

B: What motivates Leonard to promote these parties is a good question. I've always thought it would be a ton of work. One of the distinguishing features of the Osaka expat community – from say, Tokyo – is that there is actually quite a well-defined expat community, where everyone knows each other. Foreigners here are proud of this close-knit group. Quite a few people have mentioned this is why they prefer Osaka over Tokyo. For me, having a close expat community is not that important. Maybe this is why I don't attend as many events. I was visiting Tokyo last month and I was reminded of the diversity of expats, the different neighborhoods, and the feeling of anonymity. I prefer that. So to come back to why these events

[6] *Honne* (real intention) and *tatemae* (public face) are Japanese words that describe the contrast between a person's true feelings and desires and the behavior and opinions one displays in public.

> are organized and well attended, it's probably because foreigners in Osaka enjoy feeling part of a group. I actually look forward to meeting new people. When I do go out and socialize, I want to meet someone new – girl or guy – and if I only end up socializing with people I already know, I'm, in a way, a little disappointed. In this way, I suspect I'm a little different from others.

These 3 cases show us that the organizers of BBQs in Osaka City have capitalized on the popular activity of picnicking and barbequing in Japan and adapted them to suit the socializing styles of western expatriates. Creating an open and welcoming social space is important for expatriates such as Leonard for many reasons, but most especially for the opportunity it provides to further the integration of personal and professional lives. As Kirk remarks, the BBQs are useful events for creating and promoting close and intimate friendships between different people. Bruce, by contrast, tells us he prefers the anonymity of the Tokyo expatriate community over the close-knit circles of the Osaka expatriate community, but still finds the BBQs useful for catching up with many friends since his schedule is often filled with travel and work. Social life amongst Osaka City based expatriates is dynamic and despite varied interests and individual idiosyncrasies, it appears that most expatriates understand that the main intent behind the BBQs is the creation of a comfortable western-style social space, where the tone of social engagements reflect western liberal concepts of openness to other cultures and building close-knit friendships.

LLJ Alumni in Montreal: Japan Festival (Field notes: August 9, 2014)

It was really hot. I questioned whether or not it was a good idea that I told everyone that I'd be in costume. It was August, the sun was out, and the air couldn't decide if it wanted to be dry or humid so it settled for something punishing between the two. Still, it was perfect weather for *Matsuri Japon* (Japan Festival). This Montreal-based festival is a one-day event, running from early morning to mid-evening. Various local and international organizations that are involved respectively with Japanese cultural, political, and/or business affairs collaboratively organize and arrange an event called *Matsuri Japon* to celebrate and promote Japan's cultural presence in Montreal. The name curiously sports the Japanese word for festival (*matsuri*) and the French way of saying Japan (*Japon*),

subtly alluding to a meeting point of the two cultures. However, there was nothing on display on the festival grounds reflecting French culture. This day was for Japan.

I hopped off the nearest subway and queued for the bus to the festival. Some of the people in line were Japanese, chattering away in standard Japanese – I caught myself thinking how I missed speaking *kansai-ben* (the western Japanese dialect) as I eavesdropped a little. A number of Quebecers in the line were speaking French, dressed in what seemed to me, a random mix of cosplay outfits. I could only pick out the character Goku from the TV series, *Dragon Ball Z*, and the infamous Pikachu from *Pokemon*. I was carrying my own ridiculous costume in my backpack – solely for the purpose of my volunteer work, I reminded myself – that's why I was attending. I arrived at the gates where two volunteers in bright yellow shirts cheerfully welcomed me in a common Japanese manner: "*Irasshaimase*!"

I was attending the festival as a LLJ alumni volunteer at a LLJ booth promoting their English teaching program to potential candidates. I was scheduled to work with other LLJ alumni there as well. The festival was held on an expansive clearing, boasting a variety of outdoor booths and tents lining the borders. A stage was erected in the center where a number of dance and *taiko* (drum) performances would take place throughout the day. Decorative *chousan* (paper lanterns) were strung along a clothesline running above the perimeter of the stage, swaying gently in the breeze. Some booths sported touristy Japanese trinkets including colourful *sensu* (folded fans), *uchiwa* (rounded fans), stationary, paper crafts, and so on. Across from the trinket booth, another vendor was selling a variety of pop culture items such as wallets, key chains, purses, and decorative wall art with a predictable mix of Hello Kitty, Hokusai's *Tsunami*, and *sakura* (cherry blossoms) designs peppering the displays. At another tent, people were renting traditional Japanese outfits and ornamental accessories to be worn around the grounds. The outfits included, *yukata* (a simplified kimono), *happi* (a straight-sleeved coat), *geta* (wooden sandals), and various ornamental swords (for portraiture only!).

My shift was scheduled from noon until 4 p.m. but I decided to arrive early to beat traffic and to catch some of the festivities before committing to my booth shift. The festival was already in full swing and over 300 people were in attendance. There was a children's section where parents could let their children run free amongst the festivities

and games. The volunteer's building was next to the children's section, buzzing with people flying in and out of the door with supplies. I walked back to the center stage and went further into the back area where the food and drink booths were stationed. A strong and familiar aroma of festival food wafted through the thick and dusty-but-humid air. I smiled to myself as I wove my way through the hordes of people, noting various food booths selling flavoured ice, *udon* (wheat noodles), ramen, *karage* (fried chicken), *kushi* (skewers), J-dogs (Japanese style hot dogs), and Japanese beer, sake, and soda. Teams of vendors beckoned customers to try their food and drinks: "*Irasshaimase*!" The calls rose above the chatter of the crowd as they carried a distinct nasal tonality, a nostalgic sound to anyone familiar with life in Japan. My shift was about to start and I didn't have time to wait in the queue for my order, so I hurried over to the LLJ booth, located closer to the festival grounds entrance.

I spotted George and Anaïs as I approached the LLJ booth; I figured the two of them would be there at the busiest time of the day since they are some of the chief organizers for LLJ. Anaïs was busy at a neighbouring booth to the LLJ one. LLJ represents one program amongst a larger network of Japanese cultural and business organizations. Anaïs works between the lines of different programs, often accommodating visiting Japanese officials and representing 'the face' of many events. She seemed particularly occupied with some people at her station so I didn't greet her. I approached George instead, assuming my version of a Japanese persona with a greeting, "*Konnichiwa*, George-san!" to which he replied in kind. We mock bowed to each other and exchanged grins, both of us excited to be working at the festival. Another two friends of ours were there, which gave us a total of 4 volunteers at our booth.

Thankfully our tent provided ample shade and as I set my backpack down I noted the various pamphlets and handouts that were neatly arranged on the table. George is, what we in our LLJ alumni circle often term as "very good at being Japanese" – meaning, he has a strong mastery of Japanese mannerisms, language, and etiquette. I jokingly asked him if he had made all the neatly squared piles. I couldn't tell by his face if he registered my joke or ignored it – again, a very 'Japanese way' of reacting.

Someone mentioned last year's event and how windy it had been. Those of us who had volunteered the previous year laughed since the backdrop display was a disaster

– in the face of the wind, nothing had been able to stay in place. This year was different: we had a simple LLJ banner and a few hanging ornaments. The pamphlets and handouts on the table were the main focus of our booth. Our task was to invite interested people to consider partaking in LLJ, explain some of our work and life experiences in Japan, and inform them of key dates and periods for registration, information sessions, website references, and answer questions. Despite LLJ's status as primarily an English-based program, we were encouraged to inform French speakers that their candidacy was also welcome to the program as long as their English skills could meet the requirements of teaching. LLJ asserts itself as a cultural exchange program over and above its role as an English language-teaching agency – this is important since much of LLJ's Atlantic Canada recruitment draws from the concentrated population of those in Montreal. Only one of the LLJ alumni volunteers was unable to speak French fluently, and so much of the explanations would switch between English and French. Occasionally, when we had a Japanese visitor come to the booth, someone would invite them to explore our display in Japanese and even converse at length.

After 20 minutes of working, there was a lull in our traffic of visitors and George asked me if I had brought my costume. I gave a wry smile and told him it was in my bag – deciding I may as well go into my 'full Japanese mode'. I excused myself and went to the washroom to change, coming back in full red spandex regalia: a Power Ranger. Everyone laughed, including myself. Someone asked if I could breathe in the heat; I nodded in response but should have shaken my head 'no'. The costume was engaging in itself, and it immediately took effect, drawing in bemused and curious people, including children and their parents asking for pictures. I struck poses befitting the character, thinking how one could really do anything they wanted with a mask on. Other young people approached the booth and we continued to work. Oddly enough, after a brief laugh with new visitors, I continued to sell the program to them as if I was not wearing a costume. In a way, I thought, the festival attendees accepted and perhaps even to a point, were not surprised to encounter a person in a festive popular costume selling a 'serious' teaching program. Japan, to many people, is a curious culture with its own style of presentation, often partnering cute and animated characters alongside formal business programs. So long as I seemed comfortable with being in costume (and I was), none of

the professional aspects of the gathering seemed lost upon people. In the end, I managed to secure 5 seriously interested candidates.

After a few hours, some volunteers ended their shift and went on to enjoy the festivities. Another LLJ alumni friend of mine showed up for her volunteer shift and was not able to discern who was behind my mask. I finally broke the silence and once she heard my voice, she laughed and went about preparing for her shift. I found it interesting that everyone working alongside me did not find it strange that I was in costume. It was fitting in many ways. Other cosplayers around the grounds may have also contributed to the idea that wearing a costume was a normal thing to do at this event. Yet, what I found striking as I interacted and worked with my fellow LLJ alumni is how wearing a costume elicited stories about their own "weird" or "cool" or "fun" Japanese experiences that mirrored the moment in Canada.

By dressing up, I was able to elicit a playful side from my co-workers, allowing many of us to trade stories of how work in Japan often did not feel like work back in Canada. Since many of us had spent more than a year in Japan, and had lived there in a variety of circumstances, reminiscing about past times amongst one another could elicit nuanced or idiosyncratic details of what life in Japan entailed. But, curiously, when these details are voiced in a group larger than 4 or so people, I have noted time and again that unless someone is trying to make a point about a particular nuance of Japan, experiences that express an incredible amount of fun, or having access to a constant source of amusement can sometimes come across as being competitive and even antagonistic if one is not too careful in respecting others' different (and perhaps what might be less 'exciting') experiences in Japan.

For example, LLJ stationed me in Osaka City during my tenure. Since such placements in major cities are known amongst expatriates as "impossible to get" – I am often self-conscious about appearing to brag about what I consider a lucky placement. Of course, many prefer a rural placement and were quite happy with their experiences. However, as we traded stories during our downtime, a co-worker mentioned having "never gotten to experience the amenities of an urban lifestyle for more than a few days at a time" since they were stationed in such a remote location and their school had kept them especially busy. There are many activities to do and places to go in Japan, and it is

common to hear a LLJ alumni say things like, “time went so quickly that I didn’t get to do all the things I wanted!” Inversely, one might think the plethora of entertainment options in an urban center is not the most important aspect of life in Japan, despite its popularity. As a result, voicing one’s good fortune might not seem the most tactful or popular thing to say in a group, where the assumption is generally assumed to be in favour of urban lifestyles despite one’s placement. I realized this in full as I interviewed Victoria, originally from Montreal, who told me, “I had always wanted a rural placement in Japan since I am from a big city. Being placed in an urban center might have made me miss out on all the wonderful things I never would have discovered having lived in a rural town. Living there really taught me a lot about myself.” The safest types of conversations related to Japan in groups, then, usually revolve around Japanese language, funny catchphrases, playful stereotypes, food, and work stories. These are topics that everyone can generally chime in on during conversations without any competitive ‘threat’ in comparing one’s overall Japanese experience with someone else’s.

Near the end of my shift, I had simply become too hot and uncomfortable in my costume. I changed out of it and came back to see that another LLJ alumni friend had come by our station. I did not know she was scheduled to work, and she told me she was working, but with another affiliated private language school based in Montreal whose booth was selling J-dogs. This private school and LLJ are not explicitly linked, but the staff and volunteers are part of the Montreal network of former expatriates who have worked in Japan[7], who participate in the same events, and oftentimes work interchangeably between different enterprises; hence my confusion. I told my friend that I would come visit her and the others at her booth once I had finished my shift. She left and I turned around to see a colleague talking to a man who introduced himself as a LLJ alumni member from Ottawa. He was explaining to my colleague that he was thankful she had posted an update on Twitter about the event since he was new to Montreal and he had been planning to make contact with the Montreal LLJ alumni group at the festival in hopes to “continue being around like-minded people who have been to Japan.” This

[7] The community of former expatriates consists of many individuals who have experienced living and working in Japan in a variety of different ways. Since the community is relatively small, the various Japanese associations in Montreal tend to be quite accommodating in accepting interested members onto their mailing lists, invites, and volunteer programs. Thus this expatriate community not only consists of Canadians who are former expatriates, but also includes those from other countries.

remark, along with the general camaraderie between LLJ alumni members volunteering/working at different agencies in Montreal, is reflective of a certain spirit that runs through many Japan-related returnee communities. That is, the desire to reach out and connect with others who have experienced living in Japan, even where experiences can widely vary, speaks to the difficulty of moving on with one's life after a sojourn has been completed. For some, returning to Canada can mean storing one's Japanese experiences in scrapbooks and proceeding with life in Canada differently than life was in Japan. For others it may be important to commemorate a meaningful experience abroad, as a way of revisiting the past and fulfilling a nostalgic desire. LLJ alumni events, then, provides an alternative to letting go: it promotes a sort of continuation of 'the Japanese experience' in celebrating how life abroad can affect a person, and how one may integrate and share aspects of Japanese culture with Japan-enthusiasts in Canada.

LLJ Alumni in Montreal: LLJ Weekend Orientation (Field notes: June 14-15, 2014)

LLJ Weekend Orientation (WO) serves as a formal welcome and orientation program for new LLJ teacher recruits. LLJ recruits its participants throughout Canada; the LLJ administrators arranged this particular WO for teachers that would be leaving from Montreal. The WO was scheduled for a Saturday and Sunday, running from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. each day. All attendees of the WO were asked to dress in formal business attire. Prior to the WO, some LLJ administrators contacted a number of LLJ alumni, seeking volunteers who would attend the orientation to sit and chat with the new recruits, offering bits of friendly advice and anything else that could contribute to a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere. Some LLJ alumni were also invited to prepare short presentations on culture shock, teaching in Japan, office life and expectations amongst Japanese co-workers, transportation in rural and urban settings, lessons on etiquette, different kinds of personal relationships with Japanese people, and building community ties. LLJ officials gave presentations on salary and taxes, visas, some notable Japanese laws, and certain expectations that LLJ holds for its employees such as, "being an 'ambassador' of one's country and of LLJ." George, one of the administrators at LLJ, had asked another LLJ alumni member and I to present transportation tips for getting around in urban Japanese settings.

Day 1

It was a sunny day and the sky was clear. I arrived at the WO function early, one of the first attendees: it is always a good idea to be punctual to these sort of Japanese events. I had decided that I would wear a business suit for Saturday and then probably something more classy and fashionable on Sunday. I entered the quaint old building where the function was held and climbed the well-kept old wooden stairs, admiring the polished ornate handrail in the somber lighting. I reached the second floor and was greeted by two LLJ alumni colleagues and friends. One of them was passing out pre-printed name tags, designating us as either a LLJ alumni, LLJ staff, or new LLJ teacher. I exchanged quiet hellos, trying to get a sense of the atmosphere of the WO. George was the main M.C. and organizer of this WO. He was dressed in a dark pinstriped suit, a blue tie, and sported a dark leather folder with various papers. He stood at the entrance, greeting attendees as they arrived with a slight bow and a small tight-lipped half-smile: ever so formal and business-like, I thought, the perfect M.C. and guide for this event.

I attended my first WO years ago in another city as a new LLJ teacher about to embark on a sojourn in Japan. I remember feeling a mess of anxious and excited feelings at that time. This time, as a LLJ alumni, I had nothing to worry about save for getting a fresh coffee. I picked out my nametag and entered the main conference room. There were ten round tables draped in white tablecloths each encircled by six chairs in the room. I wondered to myself how many new teachers were hired this year. A Canadian and a Japanese flag stood at the front near a podium and a projector, set up in the middle of the room. LLJ's logo was projected against the white screen, front and center of the room. At the back there was an open and unused space of hardwood floor. There were windows along the left side of the room with an attractive French design, the glass crisscrossed with a wooden frame. I took a seat at one of the tables near a window with sunlight and waited for others to arrive.

As the LLJ attendees started to arrive, I got up and strolled around, trying to get a sense of the new faces, reading their excited and anxious looks, and smiling to myself a little as well. I could already feel the nostalgia hitting me, which I imagined was part of the benefit that many LLJ alumni felt as they agreed to volunteer for this orientation. As I watched different LLJ participants converse with one another, I realized that many of the

new LLJ recruits had met at previous events and some even appeared to know each other quite well or at least seemed comfortable with each other. I introduced myself to a few new LLJ teachers and exchanged brief pleasantries including our mutual admiration for Japan, where we were from, and where our placements had been or were going to be. We were soon ushered into the main conference room and asked to take a seat. The LLJ officials asked that two LLJ alumni sit at each table with the new recruits.

George stood at the podium and announced into the microphone that the orientation was about to begin and the attendees quieted down their conversations. He introduced a notable Japanese official of the LLJ committee, who greeted us formally with an: "*Ohaiyou gozaimasu*!" (good morning) to which everyone responded in chorus. The official proceeded with a brief welcome speech, particularly to those new to LLJ, and wished them success in their upcoming experience. From my vantage point near the back, I could scan the room well, and noted that all of the new recruits were sitting upright with bright and eager smiles on their faces, as if anticipating and expecting something exciting to happen at any moment. After all, they were going to Japan!

The Japanese official concluded his speech and left. George and another LLJ official took the microphone and introduced the weekend's plan to us. They addressed preliminary concerns regarding an upcoming scheduled event on "Cultural Representation in Japan", some deadlines for documents including passports and doctor's health reports, visas, placements, how to address one's Japanese supervisor, how to contact certain LLJ coordinators in Montreal and Japan (including a plug to join the LLJ alumni/community group via email and Facebook), and reminding everyone to register their status with the Canadian embassy upon arrival in Japan. He explained that various LLJ officials and LLJ alumni would highlight different aspects of Japanese daily life and work via their varied experiences and that questions and discussion would ensue throughout the day.

Next, each of us were asked to introduce ourselves, give a brief history of our background, our upcoming or past placement, and an interesting anecdote (if any) about Japan. When everyone had taken their turn, the LLJ alumni were asked to engage in various discussion topics with their tablemates: what to pack, Canadian *omiyage* (gifts) for Japanese supervisors, teachers, and students, *enkai* (Japanese work parties), Japanese

bank accounts, language classes, office work, preparing self-introduction lessons, getting to know one's school, and so on. We then opened the discussion to the entire room and shared notable thoughts and impressions. Different LLJ alumni would exchange their experiences and thoughts with one another across the room, often emphasizing personal impressions but also reminding the new LLJ teachers about how the details of their experiences (good or bad) should not build any "illusions" or "expectations" or "leave you horrified." For example, one story included living arrangements, where in Japan, apartments are almost always smaller in every aspect than in Canada. We discussed at length how to manage and cope with "acculturating to the new cultural climate."

We then moved on to a presentation segment on Japanese etiquette. Two LLJ alumni, one French and one Japanese-Canadian, gave humorous demonstrations and explanations of etiquette regarding: *jikoshôkai* (self-introduction), *meishikôkan* (business card exchange), *shoukuba de* (at work), *hômonsakide* (visiting a new residence), *kutsu to surippa* (shoes and slippers), *tabemono to nomimono* (food and drink), *ofuro/onsen* (bath and hot springs), *otearai* (toilets), *hikkishi* (moving in), *norimono* (transportation), *tabako* (smoking), and *chiisana echiketto* (minor etiquette). The two LLJ alumni would do short skits of various situations that could occur in a Japanese setting, at work or in one's private life. For example, in the business card exchange skit, one would approach the other and improperly hand over a business card with one hand and a curt bow. Someone would sound a handheld buzzer that flashed an electronic red "X" (something you might see on a Japanese TV game show). The audience would laugh and then wait for them to perform the business card exchange in the proper manner. The proper way to present oneself was to give a bow at 15-degrees, a two-handed offering of one's card, and the first person offering should attempt to place their hand lower than the other's. This execution of proper etiquette got a resounding "ding!" from the hand held buzzer with a green circle flashing approval.

The last presentation of the day was on money and taxes, largely consisting of dry facts and 'need to know' information. An interesting part of this presentation included the idea of arranging a will or a living will; not something that I had experienced in my own WO years before. The new LLJ teachers took in the information without any visible emotion as it was much more factual material than what we had gone through earlier in

the day. After the presentation was over, I asked some of the new LLJ teachers what their impressions were of the day's events. Sebastien told me that he found the entire day "very full of interesting and well presented material" and that he was "impressed" by the professional conduct and demeanor of officials like George who gave off a powerful indication (in his mind) of what life in Japan might be like. Sophia and Luc (the married couple) were also nearby and I asked them what they thought. Sophia told me, "I hadn't expected the day to be so full of great information. I really enjoyed everyone's stories and it made me feel a lot more excited about going – I just hope most of us can stay in touch!" Leia told me she enjoyed "all the stories of the LLJ alumni since many of them were so varied from one another" which gave her the impression that "life in Japan could end up being everything you imagined or nothing like you expected."

Day 2

The second day started off more casually than the first. Everyone was still dressed in their finest business dress apparel, except for a few LLJ alumni (myself included), who played on the boundaries of more casual business attire. The first presentation was on team teaching with Japanese teachers. We broke into even groups and had to come up with responses to various problematic teaching situations. The exercise went smoothly and was relatively uneventful. We then resumed our seats and Gwen closed the segment with a presentation on classroom dynamics: on managing energy in a room and how to keep uninterested students interested in a lesson. She was engaging and full of energy and even tossed around a plush sumo doll that acted as a question/answer ball.

The next segment was a "Reality Check" which consisted of 5 main lessons: 1) "Managing one's expectations and disappointments about Japan." The presenter told the new LLJ teachers that it was healthy to reevaluate one's position as they settled into their new lives and to keep communication open with Japanese supervisors, family, and friends back home; 2) "Why are you working for LLJ?" This question was intended to remind new LLJ teachers that they were hired for a job and that they are considered professionals by the Japanese employers and that they should act accordingly; 3) "LLJ is what you make of it." This lesson meant that the onus of having fun in Japan was on oneself and that learning to live in Japan meant learning to adapt to a new and unfamiliar

social and cultural environment; 4) “You have to make the first move in Japan.” This lesson encouraged new LLJ teachers to be brave and break the ice with Japanese colleagues, to take chances and to learn from one’s mistakes; 5) “Don’t do drugs.” This lesson emphasized the strict drug laws and the ‘zero tolerance’ policy that Japan enforces.

After this segment we broke for lunch. When we returned, we were greeted by a Japanese woman at the front of the room dressed in a colourful *yukata* (casual kimono). She presented herself as a traditional Japanese dancer and said that she would show us how to perform a popular communal “circle dance.” We enthusiastically mimicked her movements and then we were ushered to the back of the room where George was ready with a portable CD player. He clicked it on and some traditional Japanese music filled the air. Everyone formed a circle and we all slowly and awkwardly (at first) stepped in line to the music, trying to remember the pattern of the hand movements. Eventually, most of us got the hang of it, and by the end of it, we were laughing and enjoying the rhythm. The song ended and we all turned inward to the circle, bowed, and thanked the instructor for her lesson.

The last segment of the day focused on relationships in Japan. Curiously, the men and women were separated. I was able to find out later that the women also discussed aspects of hygiene and health maintenance in Japan and some of the difficulties one might encounter: mysterious stuff. I went upstairs to a room with the other men and we discussed different kinds of romantic relationships that revolved around dating and what one might expect or not expect in Japan. Our discussion included heterosexual and same sex relationships, which illuminated some of the particular social sanctions of public indecency (i.e. public displays of affection) and how to maintain privacy in Japan: quite a challenging task as a foreigner in a rural town!

Finally, we returned downstairs and went through a brief concluding ritual of thanking all the participants and contributors to the weekend orientation. Everyone was invited to an Asian-style karaoke bar later in the evening and some others made dinner plans. I thought to myself how the ‘after work’ plans of dinner, drinking, and karaoke were customary of a Japanese style – I shared this observation with Gwen who laughed and agreed. We ended the orientation event with a group photo; many people sparked the “Asian peace” sign with their fingers. I thought that for the new LLJ teachers, this was a

classic yet fitting way of commemorating many Japanese experiences to come.

Summary

Living and working in Japan can create a kind of affinity amongst western expatriates who share similar experiences. Expatriates in Japan often participate in communal events in order to network, socialize, and cope with certain difficult aspects of daily life abroad. Back in one's country, networking and socializing often continue, but venting about the difficulties of expatriate life tend to be inverted; young professionals might instead seek out and participate in local events and former expatriate social groups where they often reflect fondly on their former lives in Japan. This form of inversion from venting about everyday life in Japan to commemorative celebration of Japan back in Canada is exemplary of how many expatriates carry their experiences forward as they move on with their lives. That is, transnational work and life experiences tend to leave an impact on young people and yet social congregations involving different kinds of expatriates (or former expatriates) largely mediate the way or manner in which experiences are shared and voiced. In other words, social events provide a frame and thus limitations through which young professionals are able to interact with others.

Chapter 3 – Decisions: Weighing the Costs of Transnational Life

The Future and Speculation

In this chapter I present and analyze certain key words and common issues that have emerged in different conversations amongst the participants in my study. These key words and issues raise questions regarding decisions about transnational life, most saliently: whether or not work and life in Japan remains fulfilling for my interlocutors and what prospective plans might they have for the future. As I was reviewing my interview transcripts, I came across a series of markers that seemed to serve as a set of 'signposts' denoting certain moments when a young expatriate may reflect on their position or status in Japan. These signposts are largely framed by concerns and decisions related to: 1) the risks associated with the uncertainty of a transnational experience; 2) life abroad with a limited skill set (i.e. dealing with language barriers); 3) how a sojourn in Japan affects future plans and; 4) what it means to return to Canada. In general, these signposts revolve around questions such as: "What happens after my Japanese experience?", "Do I want to go back to Canada to live and work?", "Am I enjoying my life in Japan?", "What career do I want?", "Where should I settle?", "Do I want to start a family?", and so on.

These broad questions are not necessarily linked to what my interlocutors are actively pursuing next. Rather, they are often considerations of the future in regards to making refined choices about how they want to shape their lives; in a way, they are pursuing and building their version of an ideal life. It can be tempting to regard these considerations as a view of the future in terms of settling into conventions of adult life (i.e. starting a family/having children, taking out a mortgage on a house, pursuing a career, etc.), but this would be misleading for some of the people who participated in my study. Some of my interlocutors have invested over a decade of their lives living abroad and continue to do so without a 'solid' plan – instead, they have accrued a set of transferrable skills that allow them to consider moving on to other lines of work in different countries or cities. Thus, for some of my interlocutors, living transnationally acts as both an ongoing learning process and a chance to repeatedly re-evaluate one's position in work and life. Maneuvering the trials and errors of their decisions as they take

on different jobs and live in different places are investments of time that they seem to be willing to make as long as the challenges remain fulfilling. For those who decide to return to Canada, life is not always as simple as picking up the pieces of the past; rather, it is often the case that in their absence, the dynamics of friendships have changed (i.e. friends getting married, starting a family, pursuing a career, etc.), old job positions have been filled, and one's family has adapted to maintaining relationships at a distance, or in some cases, have moved on to their own pursuits (e.g. the parents of one of my interlocutors became travel writers and are often not in Canada).

In short, life changes for everyone, but in my study, for young professionals who have spent an extended period of time in Japan, a particular set of concerns have crept into their lives regarding 'the next phase in life'. Furthermore, these concerns are often weighed against certain conventional understandings of what it means to be an 'adult' – the young professionals in my study often referred to the idea of a 'conventional adult life' as linked to settling down, whereas finding a means to stay abroad was associated with maintaining a youthful lifestyle. For example, during our interview, Kirk told me that while his current doctoral studies do not permit him the time to frequent night clubs as he often did in the recent past, he still enjoys the fact that when he is able to go, he does not face what he calls "the common stigma [that one would face back in Canada] of being too old for that sort of thing." For Kirk (and others), the idea of what it means to socialize can change based on where one lives and the cultural sanctions that may be in play there. Therefore, Kirk's lifestyle in Japan allows him to escape some of the cumbersome expectations and pressures he might face in Canada.

I have arranged this chapter into four sections that act as the aforementioned 'signposts'. Each section will explore the decisions that some of the participants in my study have faced in regards to work and life in Japan: its sustainability, its merits, benefits or faults, and what a transnational experience means to them in their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, my aim is to show how many young professionals' experiences inform their choice of whether to remain in Japan or to return to Canada, and how this in turn reflects upon what they have referred to as 'conventional adult life' in Canada.

Comfort Zones Be Damned: Risks of Traveling and Experiencing

Many of the participants in my study have explained that their decision to live and work abroad is due to a culmination of factors. As young professionals, they have all completed a university degree and are ready to seek employment geared towards their career. Their considerations of employment often include managing debts/student loans, being able to live independently, and pursuing their career. However, when I asked my interlocutors about the personal and/or professional meaning that travel holds for them, they often recounted stories about their childhood or formative years. For many of them, the influence, inspiration, and mystique of travel instilled a sense of wonder and idealism about the world at a young age, but at the same time upon graduating from university, the pragmatic decision that confronted them, as 'adults', was first and foremost to find a job to sustain oneself.

For many of my interlocutors, the idea of going abroad provided an escape from the conventional practices of 'adulthood' (i.e. finding secure work, starting a family, building equity, etc.) by remaining in one's home country. In Gwen's case, she described her early youth as heavily influenced by foreign homestay guests (from various countries, but many were from Japan), which instilled in her a strong feeling of wanderlust. In Leia's case, Japan was the only place she had ever considered going to – as the type of person who says she "hates all the physical aspects of traveling" (i.e. packing, waiting at airports, boarding airplanes, being on airplanes, etc.), she overcame these unsavoury aspects of travel for her "dream." Anaïs and George respectively reported their childhood as laden with subliminal Japanese influences via morning cartoon shows, karate, and comics that contributed to their formative years and general interest in Japanese culture later on in life; as exemplified when they decided to take Japanese lessons or study Asian cultures at a university level. Luc describes growing up in his hometown, Windsor, as a "black hole, [where] people are generally sad and broke since there are no jobs and with that comes anger and a feeling that's not great." Despite the apparent faults of Windsor, Luc describes himself as trying to be a "positive person" and eventually finding a way to escape to Montreal for university, and later on, to Japan. Patrick, Bruce, and Kirk all had parents who traveled extensively as they grew up, imbuing their early formative years with the sense that international travel was a normal part of life, which in turn, influenced

each of them in different ways to integrate some form of travel into their lives. Each of these young professionals have spent different lengths of time in Japan; some have just begun their sojourn, some have come back to settle, some came back to Canada with the intention to stay and then return later on to Japan, and finally some are still living there. For those who have spent a considerable amount of time living in Japan, or for those working in Canada for Japan-related companies (i.e. LLJ), the effect of a transnational experience, of taking the risk to go beyond the borders of their Canada-based life, has affected the manner in which they understand and approach their lives.

Risk, in the context of my study, applies to the idea that young professionals have a choice between seeking employment in Canada or Japan. Some of my interlocutors have explained that upon graduating, they were unable to find gainful employment in their respective field. Others noted that they had found work in their field, but were worn out or unsatisfied with their position. The risk to go abroad, then, is closely tied to a sort of gambling with one's position, in that the opportunity and potential benefits, even if uncertain, will hopefully result in bettering oneself personally and/or professionally. But it is also a way of expressing a sort of dissatisfaction with one's options at home.

Some of the participants in my study are currently in their mid-20s, others in their early-30s. For the ones currently in their early-30s, their first long-term experience abroad took place in their mid-20s. Thus for all of my interlocutors, the decision to embark for the first time on an extended sojourn in Japan occurred in their mid-20s. As young professionals and fresh university graduates, new to the prospective world of 'career and bills and mortgages and retirement plans', the opportunity of a sojourn abroad can often be a way of momentarily deferring or avoiding such aspects of life. At the same time, going abroad is an opportunity to create a new set of options in their lives, where they might explore alternate ways of leading a successful and fulfilling life beyond the confines of their position in Canada. Thus the discourse of risk amongst the participants in my study presents us with some interesting lines of inquiry that I will explore throughout this chapter: 1) How can partaking in transnational work be deemed risky in juxtaposition with conventional modes of adult life? 2) How does the risk of going abroad change for young expatriates once life in Japan develops its own set of routines –

do new risks emerge? 3) What is at stake for those who decide to spend many years abroad?[8]

To answer these questions, we need to first understand the situation facing some of my interlocutors before they embarked on their journey to Japan. Sophia's case presents an apt starting point: newly married to Luc, highly sensitive to change, and yet ready to experiment with a sort of urgency to explore her potential beyond the borders of her hometown in Windsor, she moved to Montreal, and then via LLJ, she and Luc moved to Japan where they now live. Of all my interlocutors, Sophia expressed the most apprehension about going to Japan. I was curious to know why she was willing to break out of her comfort zone with the 'dramatic' decision of moving across the globe. We conversed in Montreal:

> Ravi: I need to ask, would you have gone with LLJ if Luc weren't in the picture?
>
> Sophia: Probably not, actually. Well, I don't know. I like to think of myself as…well, when I decided to move to Quebec – originally Luc was going to move to Ontario. I just decided to come spontaneously here and sometimes I make decisions like that but I don't think I'm brave enough to go to Japan on my own but I guess I am impressed that we are going because it's nice to have that security blanket I guess...
>
> R: What do you mean by you're impressed?
>
> S: Well, there are people who are going, who are leaving their girlfriends or boyfriends here, and they're just going on their own [I believe she was referring to Leia, also in the same LLJ cohort]. It's really cool that they're so brave to take on this great adventure but it's also this huge move, right? So, going to the country, not knowing anybody, not really speaking the language, I don't know if I would have been brave enough to do it on my own.
>
> R: If not Japan, would you have gone somewhere else, like Sweden as you mentioned?

[8] For this question, see section: "Should I Stay or Should I Go: Considering Lifestyles and Making a Choice."

S: I'd like to say that I would but I know myself pretty well and I'm kind of a creature of habit so, I'd probably miss it, but I don't know if I would go...

R: Just to speculate, where do you imagine you'd have gone?

S: Honestly, if Luc and I weren't together, I'd probably move to Toronto or something. To move outside of Canada, I don't know. I would probably find work and pursue my field [English literature and library sciences] otherwise.

From Luc's point of view, the prospect of going to Japan was loaded with a set of "positive forces" in his life. Thus Luc and Sophia's joint decision to go appears to have been heavily influenced by Luc's enthusiasm:

Luc: Nowadays, I'm trying to see the best in stuff and being a force for positivity in the world. It's one of those things you don't think about. It's just who you are now. It's one of things I said in the LLJ interview: "you have to be a force for positivity." And that's the whole point, where you wanna be...because I saw what racism can do in Windsor. Not just racism, xenophobia, all that stuff. That's why it's important in Japan where you have this baseline culture[9], although it can be more accepting although sometimes isn't – why you wanna be – you wanna go there as a foreigner and be *genki* [energetic], and you know, be something where they can say "This is a good thing! This guy from Canada is great!" You want them to have that opinion of Canadians and being from Windsor influenced my decision to do this: to be the 'LLJ ambassador'...!

For some of the study participants, the risks associated with going abroad hinged on one's unsatisfying work positions in Canada coupled with international businesses offering well remunerated jobs in an attractive and interesting country or the opportunity for adventure (or a well-paid and extended honeymoon in the case of Luc and Sophia). At first glance, going abroad may appear to be simply a matter of taking the best opportunity in response to the unappealing (or lack of) job choices in one's home locale. However, for many of my interlocutors, the notion of risk can be linked to travel as a form of experimentation with one's options in both personal and professional matters. For example, years before Kirk went to Japan, he had gone backpacking through various

[9] I believe Luc may have meant 'homogeneous' or 'mono' culture, implying that Japan is densely populated with Japanese people, which often gives way to the essentialist notion that its people can be stereotyped as single-minded or rigid in their way of thinking. I do not believe Luc holds this view of Japanese people but, rather, he is referring to the notion in comparison to Windsor.

countries for a year. He returned to Halifax in mid-October, past most deadlines for university and job applications. Kirk's friends who were working in Seoul, South Korea suggested that he should give English teaching a try. Seeing as he had "nothing else to do" and that he had already "gotten his feet wet with some international experience", he opted to go abroad for another year. He then returned to Halifax but found himself in a monotonous position working in remote sensing – while the pay was good and the work was theoretically interesting, in practice, neither his daily work routines nor his social life were as satisfying as his experiences abroad had been. His contract ended, and finding himself again out of a job, he turned his gaze back across the sea. I asked Kirk about the general working climate in Halifax at the time:

> Ravi: What is it about Halifax that everyone just wants to get out?
>
> Kirk: There were no jobs. One of my friends in Taipei that I grew up with, he did something similar to what I did in remote sensing. Then he did a one-year course to become an accountant, completed the course, and then did job hunting for a year. Then, couldn't even get a sniff at a decent job even though his grades were pretty good. He had lived in Banff and Calgary before and just couldn't find anything, not sure if the market wasn't too saturated, I'm not sure...
>
> R: Let's go back to what you said about logical steps. When you went back to East Asia, you said it felt like it was a way to go back to something engaging, more stimulating. Did it feel logical to make this decision?
>
> K: I would say it felt like a natural progression in a way. I guess that when you're that young, you're just trying to figure out what you like and don't like. I don't regret doing the advanced diploma in remote sensing to give it a try. Like, I gave it an honest try and I think that's what's important and I found out I didn't like that. I was happy that I was able to realize at such a young age, because I know a lot of people that go to [South] Korea or East Asia and get stuck there for a really long time. And it's somewhere in the back of their mind that: "I haven't made the right choice" or maybe, "I need to go back to Canada" – that they haven't made the right choice to give the 'real world'[10] or a life back in Canada a chance. And then they do that when they're 30 and then they can't find what they're looking for.

[10] By 'real world', Kirk is referring to a common view expressed amongst many expatriates that life in East Asia can be a perpetual escape from the obligations one generally faces as an adult in Canada such as finding a career (remote sensing in his case). Since he is now pursuing a doctoral degree in Teaching English as a Second Language, I do not believe he holds the view that teaching English abroad should always be understood as a temporary job.

> And then they have to make a decision in their mid 30s: "Are they gonna go back to Asia and continue teaching?" So, I consider myself kind of fortunate that I figured out what I didn't want to do in my early 20s. So, back to your original question: it's a bit of both. It felt logical to go back to Asia since that was all I could think about. But, at that point I didn't realize that I was really into Teaching English as a Second Language [TESL] because my experiences were all with kids and not overwhelmingly great. So, it was a risk, you could say. But, overall I knew I would be happier.

For some of these young professionals, another aspect of trying out new jobs may also include a desire to broaden one's options. Sebastien took a teaching post with LLJ as a means to invest in his self-development, both personally and professionally, which he hopes will eventually give him the necessary skills to become a successful animation artist. He offered some insights on the topic as I interviewed him in Montreal prior to his departure for Japan:

> Ravi: So, you wanted to get into LLJ since CEGEP?[11]
>
> Sebastien: Yeah. But, at first, I got in contact with Japanese culture through *manga* [Japanese comic books] and *anime* [Japanese cartoon shows] as a kid and liked it when I was a teenager but had no idea that it would be accessible to go there and knew that if I was to do comics in Japan, it would be impossible because those people have impossible 72-hour working weeks, and more. So, that's kind of, well, I didn't keep that dream because I thought it would be too unrealistic. But when I saw that you could teach in Japan, I was a bit afraid because working with kids at the time was something I had a hard time with because it can be stressful. But, you can't be blocked by what you fear, you have to embrace it and take a risk, and I'm sure you can get through it.
>
> R: So, you're happy to be on with LLJ?
>
> S: Oh, definitely. In a way, it represents more than my degree. Because my degree was kind of a continuation of going to school and finding something that you like. And even if I like animation, I don't see myself there necessarily – it's something to learn as a skill and maybe find something else with it. And, after my degree, I was a bit disappointed because in the end, I kind of screwed up a bit. It was just a hard process. I'm not that proud of my projects even though I should be – so I'm just happy that it's over and now I'm getting into what I was really looking for. Even though animation and arts are really great, I just didn't know what I

[11] CEGEP is a publicly funded pre-university college in Quebec's education system.

was doing, and what I was going to do with it. And LLJ just seemed like a good avenue to see what comes next. And I mean, I might do animation later. And if you've done animation, you'd see how labour intensive it is and you're working alone for hours on end and it takes a kind of discipline and personality to do it. And I might be able to develop into a person that can do it, but for now, it feels like I can't. And I'm a really sociable person: I like to do art but I like the idea of teaching it, too. I like to teach what I learn and it's one of the most fulfilling things for me in my life to teach things to others. What you learn, you're really proud of it, and you like what it is and you want to teach it, and you want to improve on it, too. You don't just want to just teach anything, you also want to teach the best of yourself.

Patrick, who has lived in Japan for 9 years as an independent careerist, offered some insight into what can occur when one takes a position at a Japanese company not related to the field of English teaching. He used to work under Japanese standards at one of his jobs that did not give him the kind of 'special' treatment, which by contrast, is often granted to foreigners working at English teaching agencies as a courtesy:

Ravi: You mentioned earlier that you'd never try Japanese companies again. What is it about foreigners working at a Japanese company that makes it so difficult?

Patrick: I think it's a risk to do as a foreigner. It's not all companies, right. It's just a high proportion of companies. You'll be expected to do all the Japanese things, perform, and be all meek, and not wear cool clothes, get rid of all your piercings, wear clothes that are too hot in the summer, arrive for work 10 minutes early and stay super late and not get paid overtime. Go drinking with your boss even though you hate him and stuff. So, everybody has to do that. I don't have a problem with that as long as you get the benefits. The benefits in theory are: you work your ass off for your company and then over time you become more senior, you get your promotions, the equivalent of that increases your pay. The company refrains from laying you off because you're so loyal and all this stuff. I almost feel racist saying it but, as a foreigner, I feel like you don't really fit the system. But you have to conform, but they have the right to kind of not give you the benefits. But, I think it's too much a risk. In particular for promotion: I could imagine working for a Japanese company for 40 years not getting a promotion once. Maybe they'll give you one token promotion, something like that. I think it's too dangerous, based on my observations.

Obviously, Patrick and Sebastien are at quite different points in their life courses.

However, what is telling, as we compare their two positions, is the notion of risk for Patrick has since turned into a practical concern as he pursues new ventures, most notably because of his perception of a lack of fairness and opportunity (i.e. promotions) for foreign workers in the strict Japanese workplace. For Sebastien, going to Japan constitutes a leap forward in his personal development, both personally and professionally. In my conversation with Sebastien, he outlined his intentions to master the Japanese language and to develop his social and professional skills, referencing George as a role model of the type of "demeanor and formalism" one should pay attention to regarding Japanese business etiquette. Sebastien was cautious when he spoke of the unfamiliar territory of teaching English and yet gave a strong impression of his determination to succeed in this new employment despite his feelings of apprehension and self-doubt. According to Sebastien, LLJ represents a professional enterprise, which provides a support network when it comes to having confidence about going abroad for an extended period of time:

> "The balance is your confidence level. If you're comfortable with your confidence level, if you're feeling that you're able to do the "right" thing, then being abroad can be comfortable. Not destabilizing. And, you know, it's just my perception that things are bound to change, so to live abroad, you have to find a zone of comfort all over again."

Language as a 'Key' to Japan: Unlocking and Accessing Japanese Society

The idea of establishing a comfort zone while living abroad can have many permutations amongst different individuals. As young professionals spend more and more time abroad, they are likely to try developing new routines and making new and different friends as a way to integrate more into Japanese life. Once they establish the basics of their living and working arrangements (a process that can be particularly time consuming in Japan), they might then have the energy and time to make a concerted effort to fit into or engage more deeply with Japanese society in both personal and professional contexts. Having competent Japanese language skills acts as a 'key' to certain aspects of living in Japanese society. Some of my interlocutors listed a few of the benefits of possessing a high level of proficiency in Japanese; one can build Japanese-speaking relationships outside of

English-speaking foreigner circles, live and act autonomously as opposed to constantly seeking out translators, and have access to jobs other than English teaching.

What is particularly interesting, in relation to the central foci of my own study (mobility, youth, and the life course), is how opportunities provided by possessing a high level of language proficiency can allow young expatriates to consider how they might want to approach the idea of settling down or spending upwards to 5 years or more in Japan in ways that are different than general lengths of stay.[12] That is, some expatriates lacking a high level of proficiency in Japanese, who nonetheless decide to stay on in Japan are often tied to their friendships with other expatriates (i.e. staying may be contingent on one's fellow foreigner friends who decide to stay). In other cases, they might be unwilling to move home (back to Canada) where job prospects and salaries can be low. For example, when Gwen returned to Japan after a short visit to Canada[13], she began establishing close friendships with a small group of expatriates, whom she fondly refers to as her "family in Japan." In the ensuing two years of her sojourn, she maintains that these friends and the experiences they shared together as foreigners in Japan constituted her most important tie to Japan. But when her fellow expatriate friends decided to pack it in and return to their respective home countries or move on elsewhere, she too found herself making the same decision to move home and to get on with the next phase of her life.

Some of those who made the decision to move back to Canada after only a year in Japan have often expressed the need to get on with their careers. For instance, Anaïs, who is quite skilled in all aspects of Japanese communication, only stayed in Japan for a year. She returned to Canada after teaching English for LLJ and subsequently became an official at the agency, explaining that she felt "better suited as a mentor for future LLJ teacher candidates" rather than working as an English teacher herself. Since returning to Canada, however, Anaïs has made a number of return visits to Japan and has maintained close ties to a few Japanese "lifelong friends." Thus a mastery of Japanese language does not expressly mean one will decide to stay in Japan, nor is staying in Japan necessarily

[12] Regarding general lengths of stay in Japan: LLJ officials often tell new recruits a joke at LLJ orientations that anyone who decides to stay longer than 3 years in Japan is considered a "unicorn", referring to their rare status as "*really* long-term expatriates."
[13] See page 70 in Chapter 2.

contingent on mastering the language. Rather, learning Japanese is, for many, a way of making a decision to invest one's time and energy into better navigating daily life in Japan.

While teaching English is a lucrative field and a common job for reasonably well educated English-speaking foreigners in Japan, it is not necessarily a career that many expatriates intend on pursuing for the long term. For many, the option of teaching English in Japan might be better understood in terms of the relatively light demands of a job (although, of course, one situation may vary from another) that provides a high salary with the added benefit of living at a prestigious level or status in Japan.[14] This combination of work and social status benefits provides many of the young professionals in my study who work or have worked primarily as English teachers with an advantageous 'entry level' position that might not have been available to them had they opted to remain in Canada. For some, it provides a means to live in Japan until they have built up their professional skillset (i.e. Japanese language skills) in order to move on to other types of work. For example, Patrick told me that his main goal in Japan was to master the language, of which he has done an exemplary job, having passed the highest level (N1) – no easy feat – of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT).[15] Patrick started off working at an English teaching agency, but as his language proficiency grew, he began looking into other fields of work. I wanted to know more about how being a highly proficient Japanese speaker might affect one's life in Japan:

Ravi: You must have an incredible aptitude for language acquisition.

Patrick: I don't think so. I just think I work really hard.

R: Studying the language must have really consumed your time…

P: Yeah, remember, I came to learn Japanese.

R: So, you really meant it…

P: As opposed to people that talk crap.

[14] In Japan, being a teacher, *sensei*, is a respected title and is treated and regarded with praise.
[15] The JLPT is a standardized language test for non-native speakers, largely serving as a professional accreditation for some fields of employment and entrance into some Japanese universities.

R: Right, right. See, for me communicating with Japanese people was interesting because of the social aspects, but I wasn't into *kanji* [Japanese characters] the way a diligent and studious person might be.

P: Well, what happened with me, I thought if I go for N1, then I'd be fluent, so I had this bar I wanted to achieve. So, here's an interesting story: I studied and went to go take the N2 test, and I failed by 1 percent. So, I said screw it, and I realized that if I'm not this level, I'm still not fluent. So, even if I didn't pass, I decided to go take the N1 anyways. And then I failed the N1 two times and got it the third try. So, when I took this job, this job was in Kyoto. So, I moved to Kyoto to do this and so I took the N1 when I was doing this job and then I quit the job and moved back to Osaka and got my form that said I passed a few weeks later. So, what I did was, I wanted to become a freelance translator. I just read the 4-hour workweek and be all, you know, efficient with my time, be all, the new-age worker thing. So, teaching a little English on the side, and then become a freelance translator. So, I did that for two or two and a half years. So, I had clients but I wasn't making enough money so I got this job at a semi-famous fairly prestigious Japanese company, doing proofreading and translation with them. So, I worked with them and it was a dispatch job so I could finish work at 6 p.m. every night. So, I did that and taught English at nights, and this was about the time I started doing weddings.[16] Or, no, I was doing weddings before that.

R: Can you talk about that process a bit?

P: It's so easy; it's too easy. It's a joke. Well, you have to learn, obviously, what to do, where to go, and when to say what. The ceremony starts, you have to walk in, you have to greet everybody, when it starts you have to say your lines, say certain things. You are kind of guiding the wedding.

R: Do you have to take etiquette lessons or anything like that?

P: I didn't but my Japanese is pretty good and my formal Japanese is pretty good. I didn't take lessons per se but I was given a fair amount of pointers by my employers. So, I also did the translation thing for about a year and I could see the writing on the wall that I was just the foreign translator guy and it wasn't going to go anywhere. And at the same time, the wedding company I was working with offered me a job as a manager for the company, and not only a manager, a regional manager. So, it's really rare for a foreigner to get a job in a position like that in a Japanese company so I thought it would be a much better experience compared to what I had at the time, so I went with that.

[16] Patrick is referring to his job as a marriage officiant. In Japan, some young Japanese couples desire to be married by (predominantly) white western foreigners with a high level of Japanese proficiency as this is associated with a type of romanticism of the west.

Patrick has shown us what may occur if one commits to mastering Japanese while pursuing other work opportunities in Japan. Not only do other job opportunities present themselves, but also as a young professional with a mastery of Japanese, he was able to acquire a kind of work autonomy and pursue non-English teaching job prospects that others lacking high Japanese language proficiency could not consider. As the years abroad add up, young expatriates who do not intend to pursue teaching English as a career may start considering what their next endeavor might be, and expanding one's skillset can strongly influence the decision to continue living in Japan while working in a different field. However, work is not the sole consideration in making long term plans regarding life in Japan. In the next section, I explore some cases where my interlocutors have explained how they made a choice to leave or stay in Japan.

Should I Stay or Should I Go: Considering Lifestyles and Making a Choice

After some time, Patrick decided to venture into the restaurant and management field, taking an opportunity to co-own and manage a small Canadian-Japanese fusion restaurant. I wondered if owning a business meant Patrick might be considering settling down in Japan and I asked him about what such an investment meant to him:

> Patrick: Owning businesses and investments had been interesting for me since I came to Japan. I wasn't just studying Japanese language; I was studying a lot of other things in my spare time. Everything seemed right; it seemed like a good idea. I also thought the place was managed very poorly and I thought I could do a lot better job, so it just seemed like an opportunity for various reasons. I didn't want to work my job any more, I wanted to try having a bar at some point, so...the pieces fit.
>
> Ravi: Did this mean something as in setting down roots?
>
> P: Not really.
>
> R: It just sounds like an investment that would take years and years...
>
> P: Yeah, that makes sense. But, I wasn't exactly sure what I was going to do with it, if I was going to stay a long time, or sell it.
>
> R: So, it's just something you wanted to do?

P: Yeah, basically. So, I did that for a year. But, I wanted to do many things and didn't want to be there all the time, so I took on a foreigner partner. And it went, really, really poorly. About a year later, I got rid of the store.
R: Was it business relations or otherwise?

P: Business was the biggest thing. So, what happened is that we put in a manager and I could have stepped back in and, well, I don't want to say, saved it, or salvaged it, but my mind wasn't there and I had already decided to start school. And it just didn't make sense to try to do that. Do an MBA and work and run a bar, it was just not going to happen.

R: So, how did you take the whole experience?

P: Well, there's two ways to look at it: it really sucked. But, when I was doing it by myself it was a lot of fun, very tiring, but fun. Met a lot of people, was really great. I could have been a bit better off financially if I didn't do that. But I would say the business experience I gained, the experience of dealing with other people was invaluable. I'm doing an MBA right now and sure it's related in a way but it's just a totally different degree in business that I've attained in that experience.

R: After you gave up on the restaurant, what happened?

P: Well, it's kind of funny in a way. So, we put in the manager and I was like, well, I should get a job. And it was kinda like Osaka was just saturated with English teachers, economy wasn't good, and for the life of me, I couldn't find a reasonable job. I couldn't believe it. I had originally showed up with a tourist visa and I could get a job like that, like nothing. And then, here I am with all this experience and I couldn't get a job. And so, I was doing a few things here and there and I just thought, "This isn't working, what do I do?" Then I found, I stumbled on his advertisement for the MBA program, saying that they're offering scholarships, so I decided to give it a try and they said ok.

R: And that's what you're doing now.

P: I just finished my first year. Ironically, now that I'm up to my neck in studies, I can find all sorts of jobs. Maybe it was kind of a blessing in disguise.

R: So, when you're done, you have an idea of what you want to do. Have you found options for that?

P: There are a million consultancy firms that are active in Japan and elsewhere so I don't have to be in Japan to do that. I'd be happy to work in

Canada to do that. I've done the Japan thing, right?

R: What does that mean?

P: Like, I came here to learn Japanese and I would say one of the main reasons I keep staying here is because I keep getting jobs, one job in translation, another as a manager, so I actually had professional reasons to stay. I've done a fair amount of English teaching but what I've done, ratio-wise, English teaching compared to other jobs, is really small compared to most people. So, I've actually had a professional reason to stay. So, if I have a professional reason to leave, then that's just as compelling in many ways. I mean, I have business relationships and networks and contacts here, and maybe I'm making it sound easier than it really would be but...

Patrick's work history in Japan has evidently given him valuable experience with which to navigate Japanese work culture and the job market. While he remains open to the possibility of staying in Japan for many years to come, he nonetheless declared: "I've done the Japan thing" – inferring to me, as a once fellow expatriate, that after a while, the idea of living in Japan can lose some of its exotic charm in light of more pressing concerns of professional goals and pursuing a career. He further explained his reasoning for staying on in Japan by noting: "One of the main reasons I keep staying here is because I keep getting jobs" and later went on to tell me that he is, "very interested in working as an environmental consultant" with a dream of one day starting his own consulting firm. Patrick has been continuously working at improving his skills (i.e. Japanese language, study of Japanese markets/economics, etc.) and has had to adapt and improvise in regards to the job market. Continuing to pursue opportunities in Japan does not necessarily reflect his desire to stay or settle; rather, his current long-term goal is focused on establishing a foundation as a professional consultant so that he might consider more fruitful opportunities (he told me this could be anywhere in the world) as he solidifies his position.

For foreigners, the seemingly unending work opportunities in Japan can be an enticing draw, even when one has already spent years there and returned to Canada. Vincent and Leonard are amongst a few of the participants in my study who have spent three or more years in Japan before finishing their work contracts and returning to Canada. In conversation with Leonard, he spoke about his return to Canada and his subsequent return to Japan:

Ravi: Why did you go back to Canada?

Leonard: I was getting close to 30. No one was really pressuring me. I worry about a lot of things: my parents getting older, whether or not this was something I wanted to do as a career, how long I wanted to live in Japan, I dunno. Just thinking about the future, relationships and where I wanted to be.

R: What about relationships?

L: I had broken up with my girlfriend [in Japan], prior, because she was going to America for a year. When she was coming back, I knew I would be going home at that time. Well, I thought it wouldn't work.

R: Right, so then you became free again? And then you went back?

L: Yeah, I went back and was pretty much unemployed for about five months. I did some translation work, some promotion work on the side. I wanted to find a job that I could use my Japanese abilities. I had one offer to work on a cruise line, but they wanted me to fly back to Tokyo, which would just defeat the purpose of going home. If I were to work in Japan, I would want to be teaching because I enjoy it. And, yeah, I was kinda bummed out for a bit. I had a couple job interviews with the Japanese government but things just didn't pan out. I thought about doing business. But in January, I got hired with Royal Bank of Canada in a call centre doing customer service. Absolutely, absolutely hated the job. Worked there for 8 months. After, I was there for 4 months, I was on vacation in Los Angeles and the University of Calgary informed me that I was accepted into a Master's program in Education. At that point, I started thinking about possibly returning to Japan.

R: Why?

L: Well, I was really torn. I was really happy with my life in Canada. But, like I said, hated my job. Almost got a job offer, like the day before I flew back to Japan, I was really torn. Maybe this is a step in the wrong direction and I shouldn't do this. I have a tendency to worry too much, so I was really, really stressed out and I almost canceled my tickets and ended up coming back. About a month, two months before I came back to Japan, the University of Manitoba contacted me about a resume I submitted about becoming a recruiter for their institution. But they contacted me about becoming a teacher. Had I gotten that job, I probably would have stayed in Canada.

R: Did you go to the interview and then didn't get the job?

L: Correct, I went to the interview and didn't get the job.

R: So, now that you're back in Osaka what are your intentions this time, what's the deal?

L: The deal is I used to stress out so much about the future. Now, I kinda just let things happen as they happen and make all the – do all the things that I have to do to be successful in the future, whether its in Japan or Canada. I anticipate I'll stay here, if or until I'm offered a better job in Canada. And then, who knows what will happen. I may be married, I might have kids, so...

R: So, you're open to staying in either country if it works out.

L: Yeah, but I don't think I want to be here for the rest of my life. I love the country [Japan] but I don't see much of a future for the country economically. And I worry about raising a kid, a family, in a country like this is where...it's just really, really, you know, it's a monoculture. It's not a multicultural country like Canada. People here don't know how to deal with foreigners. I will never, no matter how good my Japanese is, or how long I live here, I will never be accepted as a Japanese person. And you know, I worry about that for my kids, too. Identity issues...the Japanese, not in a 100 years, I can't see them accepting me as Japanese.[17]

Vincent also has experiences of going back-and-forth between Canada and Japan, but unlike Leonard, he can imagine himself possibly settling in Japan and even belonging there. He had worked as an LLJ teacher for three years in Mie prefecture in Japan. Vincent's time in Mie presented him with a serendipitous encounter with one Japanese family in particular that, over the course of a few years, became his home-away-from-home. In fact, he mentioned during our interview that, in more than one way, his "Japanese family understands [him] more than [his] Canadian family." Vincent graduated with a Bachelor's degree in music education before embarking on his first sojourn in Japan. Upon returning to Canada, he decided to pursue a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). We met in Montreal before he departed for his second sojourn in Japan and he explained his choice to return to Japan:

Vincent: And now, as you know, I'm going to Japan again. So, now my

[17] By "being accepted as Japanese", I believe Leonard means to be accepted as a citizen with equal rights and access to all forms of employment and a general feeling of belonging.

parents are like: “He’s gone, again!” So, after my 3 years in Japan, it was a very rational decision to come back to Canada because I wanted a Master’s degree.
Ravi: Why not there?

V: I wanted to do a TESL program.

R: Not a music one?

V: Right. And this is a very rational decision. I have friends in music, Master’s, Ivy League universities, and they work part-time selling tickets for the orchestra. They would sell records but no one buys that stuff anymore. Or, they are part-time in elementary school teaching. So, I could have stayed in Japan at that point. I could have but I thought, what if in 10 years I lose my job or the market is down and now I only have my Bachelor’s in music? What if they don’t think my experience is enough? So, it was a rational decision to get my Master’s in teaching English. So, then I started thinking do I want to stay in Canada or do I want to go back to Japan...

R: What were your relations with your friends like when you came back?

V: Almost non-existent. At McGill [university], I had good friends but after we graduated we sort of drifted and I mean, we’re Facebook friends. And my friends from my hometown, I don’t see them anymore, we can’t relate at all.

R: What do you mean by not relating?

V: I’ve changed so much. For people in Montreal, people in my hometown. Even Montreal is another planet with people thinking differently. So, after being through 12 years in Montreal, and then Japan, a few travels in Asia, so, for them as soon as they graduated, find a partner, get married, have children and stay there - which is good but that’s not what I’m doing.

R: What were you doing?

V: Single, no kids, higher education, and my idea is to travel again. So, not to stay here. Even with my family, I don’t know if it’s a generation gap, it’s impossible for them to understand that I want to leave this place. For them, it’s the best place in the world even if they’ve never been anywhere else.

R: And for you?

V: For me, it's not. I don't know if somewhere else is better and you don't know unless you try it.

R: So, it's not that you're unhappy with Canada...

V: Oh, no, no. I love Montreal. And I'm sad, I meet great people here and then think oh no, I won't see them anymore. And music opportunities are great here. And again, it's a very rational decision. I looked at the job market with the best conditions and benefits and I found them in Japan, not here.

R: So, it's about your pursuits, not about where you are...

V: I think so. Of course I would miss Japan but I would stay here [Canada]. It was my plan when I came back for my Master's: well, if I found a good job, something like a CEGEP, a partner, oh yeah, I could stay here. But, so, I mean, it's difficult to know if you're responsible for it not happening, I mean for having a partner. I move around every year, so that's difficult. And job opportunities, that too. Of course I don't have opportunities here.

R: But, you've tried...

V: Yeah, in Halifax, there were no opportunities. But, I've been single forever. You know you meet people along the way, have a few dates, I've had so many first dates but you know, it just doesn't go anywhere because well, I wanna go back to Japan, or, in Halifax, I knew I didn't want to stay there and she did so that's it, it's a deal breaker.

R: You always expected to be moving?

V: Yeah, at that point. Even while I was in Japan, I wasn't on the dating scene. I was just doing my life – I've been single for a long time.

R: Now that you're going back with LLJ, where are they placing you this time?[18]

V: Even though I asked for anywhere in central Japan, they're sending me to Tohoku in Sendai.

R: How did you react to that?

V: Before I got the news, I told myself many times, you're going a second time so you must be prepared to go wherever they'll send you and lower

[18] LLJ administrators make an internal decision regarding the placement of their employees, although candidates are encouraged to note any specific cities or regions they might prefer.

your expectations because it will not be the same. And if you don't want that, don't go with them, go with another country. And when I heard Sendai, it's a whole shock, you're thinking Fukushima, tsunami, you Google it and there are only pictures of destruction. But at the same time, I know it's temporary for me to be there. I always told myself to be open to anything I would get, so I have to keep the door open and if I love it, I may stay a few years. I've been in contact with people there and they've stayed there for over 5 years so there must be something behind it. And if I don't, Japan is a small country with a lot of people so there are opportunities for teaching.

R: Can you expand on the idea about what it means to be an international worker and being abroad and always moving?

V: It's a big dilemma. Always. It's always a dilemma for me if I should stay in one place and build something or keep bouncing back and I feel like now I'm really living my life and this is something I should do while I'm at this point in my life where I'm young and healthy. And I shouldn't wait until I'm 60 and ready to retire and travel because it's not going to happen. So, I should do this now. And there will be time later...and that's why I wanted to become a teacher, so I could go anywhere and find a job. It's very rational somewhere, even if it's an emotional reason behind it.

R: What about the emotions?

V: Well, that's the part that makes me want to travel, not just stay here, find a partner, make a baby, buy a house and a car. That's the idea, I want to become a better person, discover the world. And I don't really realize it, and when you meet people along the way, and you tell them what you've done, their reactions are like: "Oh my god, I wish I could do that!" and then you kind of realize "oh yeah, that is great. I'm extremely lucky to have done that" and I feel I'm not done doing that. If I were staying here – I've been back 4 years from Japan – and I think about it every single day. And that's why I chose to re-apply and go back. Every day I think about it, every day I have a friend, something in my life, something I eat, the way I think, there's something about Japan that's so...yeah.

R: Is it about Japan then or could it be the same elsewhere?

V: Very good question. I don't think so. My personality was a good fit even before I went, I think. I'm an extremely structured person and I like the discipline. I have a strong self-discipline, maybe too much. So, it worked well. And when I got there, it was confirmation, oh yeah, my personality fits here. I have this overly...I'm a neat freak at home, I felt I had a good match. It would not be the same, for say, Thailand. I love Thailand, went there for 3 weeks, and I have a friend there that teaches

there, but no, I can't. I need this infrastructure, this safety, many things that Japan provides that I like.

R: Can you expand on that?

V: Well, personally speaking, when we hear about blood type, A-type, that's me.[19] I'm super punctual, I like when people are punctual and organized, and I like when the society is organized, I feel I can rely on the society. Education is extremely important for them, which is not always the case here. They're polite. There's a look for aesthetic and the quality of things, not only the price, sometimes you think: "Oh my god, things are expensive!" but usually it's of good quality, the food for example. Of course there are bad things, I'm not blindly in love with Japan. But, they are definitely, all this, the way I was welcomed, left a very nice impression. The way people get together in difficult times. At the same time, there was a hurricane – was it Sandy or Katrina in The United States, some catastrophe. And I was with a Japanese family, together, watching the news...

R: So, this time, what do you want out of this new experience?

V: First, I talked with my Japanese mom and if she wanted me to go back to the same place. I know they're getting older and I'd love to help. And we both agreed that I should get a new experience because you'll never know if it's going to better or worse, so I decided I'll go wherever LLJ wanted to send me.

R: You had a choice with LLJ?

V: No, but I could have taken another job with a local job or an *eikaiwa* [English conversation school]. So, it's very difficult not to have expectations, and I'm trying to do what I can. Getting older too, so you realize that you're not willing to take crazier or bigger risks. But, to be perfectly honest, I will not stay, well LLJ is a temporary experience, but my wish is not to stay 5 years on LLJ or be an assistant teacher forever. If I love my situation, I'll stay there as long as I like it. But, the point is after my contract will be over, to find something better, of course. That's what we should all do. If I could do that, I would love to teach at a university in Japan.

[19] Vincent is referring to a Japanese personality typecast system involving blood types that are designed to describe aspects of a person's personality based on a person's blood type. This typecast system is similar to zodiac-horoscope descriptions in North American culture. While it is not usually considered as a serious depiction of people's personalities, it can be useful as a shorthand explanation of oneself or others in general conversation.

Since our interview, I later found out that Vincent had secured a post at a Japanese university and subsequently rescinded his contract with LLJ. As Vincent explained to me that his personality, and even his blood type 'A' character tendencies, make a nice match with Japan and its people, I also observed a careful and meticulous tone in his voice as he talked about his decisions, weighing the risks of taking on new opportunities as he contemplated getting older and what he might really want out of his life. However, now that Vincent has secured a post at a university, teaching a mix of English, music, and cultural studies, he may have found what many of my interlocutors have repeatedly alluded to as a kind of career path that aligns with enough of their ideals and interests to create a comfortable and perhaps permanent working and living situation. We can also see a similar decision making process in Leonard's case: "Now, I kinda just let things happen as they happen and [...] do all the things that I have to do to be successful in the future, whether it's in Japan or Canada." In the same manner, Patrick also told me that while he feels he has already realized the kind of experiences he hoped to find in Japan, he will probably continue living there as long as his career prospects continue to grow. For these interlocutors, it appears that career and jobs are an important driving factor behind what might keep them in Japan or persuade them to return home. In the next section, I will elucidate what can happen when some expatriates decide to say a 'final' farewell to Japan and settle in Canada.

Sayonara: Reintegrating and Settling into Canada

Leaving Japan is not always what it seems. That is, amongst all my interlocutors, the idea of eventually returning again to Japan for a visit (at the least) seemed highly plausible. The idea of leaving Japan, then, often leaves residual effects: of a longing to go back, or missing particular Japanese festivals, events, people, or simply a period of one's life that represents a unique experience. We have seen in some cases (e.g. Vincent, Kirk, Leonard, et al.) that the draw to go back to Japan can be overwhelming and returning is a choice often made out of a careful consideration of what would be most satisfying in terms of one's personal and/or professional life. For others, though, leaving Japan meant turning the page and moving on to other prospects. Still, this rarely means that one dispels all aspects of Japan from life; in fact, we have seen in Chapter 2 how returnee expatriates in

Montreal may seek out Japan-related communities to celebrate and commemorate certain past experiences and to forge new ones.

But reintegrating back into life in Canada is not always a smooth and simple process. Victoria told me that upon her return to Montreal from Japan, she was feeling unsure about many things about her future. In addition, her apartment, which she had left open to a sublet, was a complete disaster:

> Ravi: So you came home to Montreal and what happened?
>
> Victoria: I got really, really depressed. I never had culture shock in Japan but reverse culture shock hit me like a truck. It was unbelievable how out of place I felt. Nothing made sense. Partly because so much changed. Over the 2 years I was gone, all my friends got married, my uncle died, my parents got a new car, refurnished their house, got dental work done so they looked different, and a lot of places I used to go had closed. There were so many changes in Montreal! It didn't feel really familiar anymore. I think it was just like, really bad reverse culture shock. I had serious problems with the people who had been subletting my place. Before I left, it was an amazing apartment. Before, I didn't know if I was going to come back so if I really hated it there in Japan, then I could come back, so I thought I should sublet since it's such a good place and price...well, that was a really big mistake. I had rented it to a really nice couple. Grad students, really nice, good people, you know? And then they broke up and the boyfriend kept the apartment. I don't know what happened to his life but when I came back he ended up not paying rent and I hadn't heard from my landlord or anything. So, he neglected that and the apartment – and I'm not exaggerating – to the point of mental illness. All my plants died, he never watered the plants, a tree I had since grad school. The stench was unbelievable, every dish was dirty, there was garbage everywhere, dead plants. I had to hire a cleaning service. The guy was dodging phone calls, so we couldn't contact him to evict him. We had to hire a cleaning service, threw away my mattress, couch, bought new furniture, repainted, like, just, it was a saga, a tragedy, and I'm still, I can't...
>
> R: How long had you been living there?
>
> V: For 2 years, so, that was very difficult. Combined with all the changes and it all converged into this kind of reverse culture shock. I'd gone from a life of knowing exactly what I was doing and there was a lot of certainty to zero certainty. And I went into a very dark place, and I basically only snapped out of it. A friend of mine I had met through LLJ who had gone back the year before, and we had been talking, and then I went to visit him in California. And, I made plans to fly down and visit but I was just so

depressed, and I actually called him up and said: “Listen, I’m in a really bad place and I haven’t done anything” and he was like, “Just do it, just buy the ticket right now and be here in a week and we'll have fun.” And so I bought the ticket over the phone and I went and spent a week in L.A. and it was so much fun! I went to Disneyland, I went to the beach, and we had sushi together! And when I came back from that trip, I felt like I just came back from Japan. I was like: “Now I'm back.” It was like I needed that extra “leaving and coming back as a fresh start” so I was actually able to get a grip, I was fine after that.

R: What is it about that California trip that made the difference?

V: It was like doing stuff for fun. It was seeing friends, just relaxing. From the time that I returned until then, it had been this loop of problems with the apartment, being stuck at my parents’ house for months. I was homeless, jobless, totally uprooted, didn’t have anything; I didn’t have a grip on me. And it was just always sort of the same thing. And then, until I broke that loop, doing something totally different. And I had actually lived in California for a period of my life, so we did a nostalgic road trip: I went to San Diego and we found the apartment that I had lived in. We drove past and it was like: “This is crazzzy”, and doing all these things, it was intensely positive, and just different, so it was like a reset button.

R: So, when you came back again what happened then?

V: I stopped sitting in my room with the blinds drawn and just started being a person again. It’s sort of like when you come back, and nothing’s there. Immediate stagnancy. I feel a like it was a period I went through that sucked. It wasn’t until I was over it that I was able to move on with my life. And I feel like I’m in better place in my life now than in Japan. I mean, things are more difficult economically obviously because you know the high LLJ salary and I’m kinda struggling but I’m doing things that I really love to do and all these opportunities, and all this stuff going on...I have a boyfriend now, which is nice, also.

Some of my interlocutors told me of their post-return plans, which often involved a mix of job hunting and graduate school considerations. They explained their plans with an assuredness, though, which gave me a strong impression that returning to Canada meant that they were ready and determined to make certain choices about their careers and personal lives in ways that could have long-term effects or require long-term investments of time. Victoria, upon emerging from her depression, managed to secure a number of part-time jobs, one of which was associated with a Japanese organization in Montreal. She also managed to join a business startup where she could employ her

academic background in linguistics and she is even working on a novel, a true passion for her. Years before, when Victoria first arrived in Japan, she had been in a phase of experimenting with English teaching as a potential career. In returning to Canada, however, she had a clearer picture of what she wanted to do, although, attaining her new goals presented a different set of obstacles, mainly having enough money. Similarly, George described his transition back into Canada as a thoroughly planned course of action with a clear focus on what he wanted:

> Ravi: What happened after your second year in Japan?
>
> George: I was ready to move on to something else. I knew I wanted to do further studies. I also knew that I could immediately upon my return that I couldn't do my linguistics studies because my background in political science and psych, I had to do some transitional studies. At the same time, I still wanted to keep my connection to Japan and continue studying languages so that's why I invested that year in Asian studies and took up Mandarin, which I did at McGill [university] and UQAM [university].
>
> R: Was this full-time?
>
> G: Part-time. I also had part-time work in graphic design, technical support, website management. and just a bunch of contract work. Translation, writing.
>
> R: How many jobs do you have?
>
> G: Many!
>
> R: What year was this then?
>
> G: 2011, but then there was the student strike.[20] So, that kinda postponed my certificate by a semester and I also began to take a few classes in the faculty of Education to begin my Master's in Linguistics.
>
> R: So, do you have any specific career goals now and are they linked to your teaching experience?
>
> G: I would really like to get involved in research and development for computer assisted language learning and that would also include East

[20] George is referring to a Montreal-wide (and other minor regions) university and college student strike in which many students took to the streets in protest against rising tuition costs at universities throughout Quebec. During this time, many university and college classes were cancelled and/or postponed resulting in a deferral and complication of graduation or general class schedules.

Asian languages, if possible.

R: What about future plans in terms of staying here or moving somewhere else?

G: I think I would like to stay here. I would like to find work that would allow me to go back and forth to Japan for business trips or something but I wouldn't necessarily want to live there in the long term. And yeah, one of the reasons when I went to Japan on LLJ, I didn't have any ties here, but actually, my partner is an embalmer and she wouldn't be able to work outside of Quebec. Her diploma wouldn't be recognized if she wants to continue that work, then that means we have to stay in Quebec.

In Anaïs' case, she had decided to leave Japan after a year. Her fiancé (now husband) was working in Montreal and she felt the need to be back with him and move on to a career more fitting to her qualifications and professional goals. She was able to secure a post at an LLJ office stationed in Montreal and she reflected on working for LLJ and how living in Japan has affected her life:

Ravi: Did you know that you would come back and work for LLJ?

Anaïs: It's kind of weird, and I don't really tell people this, but I wanted to be involved with LLJ even before I left Japan. I was looking at things going on, I thought I wanted to help with this. This is something I want to do, but never could I have imagined that the position would open up like it did.

R: Especially Montreal…

A: Yeah, of all places. And that I would get chosen for it and that it would develop to be what it has become so I've been very fortunate.

R: So, how has what you're doing now changed your relationship with Japan?

A: It feels like a continuation. I always have a foot in LLJ, because I have to be aware of what's going on in Japan, what people need to do to prepare to go there. As I've been in this post for an extended period of time, my role has evolved. At first, I was the go-to person as to what is going on in Japan right now because I had just come back. Now, I have to leave that to other people but have to be sure that the right information is being furnished by the right people and also, partner with more senior members of the program and more senior alumni and try to see with them what they have to bring to the table that is worthwhile so that all the information put

together, that I have to have this perspective on the whole thing, that the whole thing works and people get what they need before they go.

R: So, what does working for LLJ, the experience, mean to you?

A: At first you have all these different stages to go through but at the end, you are changed because all of a sudden, Japan is no longer foreign to you, it's part of who you are just as much as your identity here. And I think the LLJ experience is wonderful for that. At least that's how we've been trying to do it here, to fuel this idea that we're a family. You go in, you become part of something. And that's almost kind of Japanese in a way. It's not just you going to Japan and doing your thing and you leaving. You all of a sudden become part of this shared experience. There's this group of people out there that if you suddenly meet another LLJ person, all of a sudden, poof, you have a bunch of things you can talk about and everybody's face lights up and you know. And I've met people who've had difficult times in Japan, too. That's a little bit rougher, but I mean, it's bound to happen. Even with them, though, you get this sense of connection. And we really try to nurture that here, so that people, you know, train together, leave together, visit one another when they're there, come back, work together again to try to give back to the program. And there's this notion also that LLJ is not just this thing where, you go, you do your contract, you come home and you're done. We're looking for people that want to give back. So, that fits into that notion of family, I think. And it's insane the amount of money that goes into this program but I think if every LLJ employee that is hired and goes there and does their thing is able to treat the program with the same respect that was given to them, it just embellishes the experience even more.

R: You're so rooted in your job and it's such a part of your life. But, no position lasts forever, so to speak. So, what could comes after this? Could you see yourself living in Japan? Would your husband want to go there?

A: We've talked about it. I don't know if I'm ready to raise my daughter there. For all the positive things I talk about for LLJ, there are still some difficult hurdles to overcome, especially for younger people who are very impressionable, and there are all kinds of, even within Japan. Take out all the *gaijin* [foreigner] factors. There are some issues there as well. Especially having that foreigner ticket. When you're a university graduate, you know what you're capable of doing. You already have a rough idea of who you are, so you're better equipped to deal with some of the things that happen in Japan. But, to be a child, I don't know. Mind you, I know people who have had a lot of success there. So, maybe I'm also attached to being here. I mean, I did come back and I was happy to be back. I'm attached to both, really. Never say never. But, I don't think I'm ready to live there at this point in time, specifically. And, maybe that's also part of my own

shortcomings. Maybe I feel for all I've learned of Japanese culture, there are still some things that I could learn, things I feel that maybe I haven't adjusted to fully. And again, even though some things are part of who I am, and there are some parts that are not, things that I disagree with, and I'm comfortable with that. And same thing with here. There are some things that I live through on a daily basis and I think to myself how Japan is doing this so much better. But, at the same time, it happens to me in Japan as well.

R: Is there anything that you'd like to add?

A: Well, we can end on the whole "Japan changes your life" thing – not just me, people I've met. People who have gone on LLJ have never come back, well, not like that. But, I mean, decide to stay in Japan. People have gone on to other international work. Some people have married, had children, have a whole new life there. Some have gone on LLJ, come back, gotten together with other LLJ participants, had families. Some very good friends of mine: he went on LLJ, his wife is Japanese, and people think he met his wife while on LLJ, but no, they're completely unrelated. He went, he did his thing and came back. She came here to study English and French and then they met, had kids, etcetera. So, a lot of people go into LLJ thinking one thing and then you're being there, you're meeting the people, just interacting with the culture, the people, the nature, it changes who you are, and then you come out. LLJ is like this box with a big question mark and what comes out, nobody knows, and nobody can explain really why, it's just all these factors. And it's the same for me, you had mentioned with the *shinenkai* [end of the year party] last December, you know, the fact that I had met someone [her husband] who was interested in Japan, and then he suggested LLJ, and then I went without him and then we stayed together for that time. I've met people who have went on LLJ that left a significant other behind and it didn't work out and then they went their separate ways and some stayed together so I was part of that 'group'. But, the whole reason why we met was because of 'Japan' in the first place, and LLJ has definitely enhanced that, and like I said, now we have a Japanese family over there and you know, I mentioned my karate *sensei* [teacher], he came to our wedding. We went to visit him a couple of times, and then, last year I visited him, and now he's going to come visit our daughter, so you know, it's just this thing where I could not have imagined in a million years where I would be going into LLJ that I would know this could happen. And that's the beauty of it, that going to Japan can be anything that you make it, but I don't want to say that either, because there's so many factors that you don't control. So, it's this big question mark, you go in with an open mind and a lot of resilience and a lot of adaptability and a lot of love for Japan, and where you're from, too. We didn't really talk about that in the interview, but who you are and

> where you're from, parcels of yourself that you want to share with Japan, that says a lot, too.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explored different points in time in which young professionals working in Japan tend to question their professional and personal positions. The drive to find a fulfilling career seems to be a common concern amongst most of the participants in my study. However, the experience of living in Japan, of leading an expatriate life for a time, has also affected the outlook of most, if not all, of my interlocutors. As Anaïs put it, the experience of living in Japan "changes you", and this assertion seems to resonate strongly amongst my interlocutors. While some of my interlocutors who have returned to Canada are more comfortable about letting go of the prospect of future long-term travels to Japan or elsewhere, others are still open to the idea of weaving travel and work together into their lives. And still others have learned to treat the job market as an international venue, where Canada and Japan have become equally viable sources for work opportunities. It appears that the experiences accrued while living abroad have given many of my interlocutors a better sense of what they want out of their lives. Young professionals who return to Canada may or may not be in a better working position, but the combination of an increased confidence in oneself, skill set building, and general experiences seem to help solidify and focus their resolve to succeed in whatever goals they set for themselves.

Conclusion

The participants in my study represent, in part, an emerging set of trends in the social dynamics of transnational movement and the life course. Many of these participants have experienced foreignness in their early formative years. This means their parents might have participated in hosting foreign students from abroad, or took their children on trips, or enrolled them in schools with the option to explore diverse languages or cultures. Canada is arguably a country that provides many opportunities for different forms of cultural exchange. As technologies such as the Internet and social media have become commonplace in many middle class households and public places, young people from a diverse range of backgrounds are able to connect with a digital version of the world in a way that enables or encourages exploration beyond the confines of one's immediate surroundings. What is most encouraging is that technology allows communication and different forms of exchange to occur amongst different young people more frequently, which might further promote the idea of travel as an opportunity to understand the complexity of an increasingly globalized world.

Young westerners are not the only ones engaged in global communication. Facebook, for instance, has now expanded its parameters to the far reaches of Indian villages where the potential for social interaction with other young curious people is possible. Thus, by the time many young westerners reach a point in their lives where they might pursue an opportunity abroad - be it tourism, work, or otherwise - their exposure to foreign experiences and people is, in many cases, increasingly becoming more commonplace. As Julia Harrison (2003) has pointed out, this kind of mobility is no longer reserved solely for the very wealthy. Thus scholarly work (Amit, 2010a) has turned its attention to high schools and universities that package short-to-long term 'educational' or 'career building' opportunities into their programs as a way to denote professional and self-development. Upon graduation, young professionals have opportunities to interact with global job agencies that continue this sort of training: of experiencing the world through structured programs to empower certain privileged young people with 'invaluable' experiences and skills to better establish a successful life. The combination of a professional work opportunity coupled with a persisting interest in foreign cultures or places can thus lead to a sojourn abroad. This sort of transnational

venture may further open up other possibilities in their life course that they had not previously considered. In my study, I have shown how success and the pursuit of an enriched life, is not so neatly demarcated in terms of jobs, material possessions, marriage, and children. This is not to say that the young people who participated in my study do not desire such things or experiences – rather, what is changing is the pace at which they are willing to make long-term occupational, residential, and domestic commitments. Added to this, these young people appear to be willing to view 'home' as an attachment that is in flux. Hence extended periods away from their natal family and friends can be considered acceptable. In most cases this kind of separation appears to be temporary, but in other cases, a more enduring distance may be established.

The concept of youth, in conjunction with the accounts of my interlocutors, seems to be treated as a period in which there are a plethora of opportunities presented. My interlocutors seemed to treat these opportunities, such as professional career options, as indicators of how they might experiment with their future, given that their general recent graduation from university or job in Canada left them feeling stagnant about their lives. The desire to change their lives appeared to be timely, in that most were aware, if not in accordance, with the idea that settling down is an inevitable fact of life (Amit, 2011). As my interlocutors explained their current or past experiences of life in Japan, it became particularly evident that while they considered the fact of getting older, the pressures of their loved ones, and their own changing aspirations, an important part of life was to try – to try to accomplish their goals, and that life would probably sort itself out in some fashion – and that this luxury, of being able to try and experiment with such options made them extremely privileged people. For those who returned to Canada, the idea of venturing off to another country for years seemed to have run its course. Travel in the sense of tourism remains appealing for these returnees; and this demonstrates a sort of transformation of the idea of travel for them. That is, in an attempt to live and experience life 'fully' as privileged young Canadians, many of the participants in my study have capitalized on their education/training and taken up professional posts abroad temporarily in order to assume the next phase of their lives with the assurance that their transnational experiences have empowered their understanding of who they are and what they want out of their lives.

Thus, mobility theorists should vigorously explore how certain opportunities, as presented by institutions or job agencies, offer certain groups of people, such as young western professionals, the opportunity to explore a variety of interests in a seemingly global capacity. An increase in both social and physical mobility is thus linked to new possibilities in one's life course. Furthermore, as they engage with particular kinds of transnational institutions and job agencies, young people may be more willing to see their future career options most clearly through the lens of certain strategically marketed professional programs designed to 'help' or 'empower' them to explore their potential as 'global citizens'. That is, the offer presented is that they might find gainful employment while fulfilling other kinds of goals, aspirations, or dreams of escaping the pressures of everyday life in Canada. Meanwhile, the pressure to become 'successful' or 'rich' or 'responsible adults with families' is potentially offset – temporarily – at the prospect of establishing adulthood on their own terms, and amongst other likeminded travel enthusiasts. The participants in my study, many at different points in their lives, seemed to tacitly agree with one another that what is most important about discovering one's place or feeling of belonging in the world is the freedom to explore different career options and to approach longer term commitments (such as having children) at their own pace and on their own terms. Interesting to note, the idea of a 'culture of intimacy' (Walsh, 2009), where some young people in my study may have established intended long-term romantic relationships while abroad, did not appear to determine their decisions to move around in regards to other important aspirations and goals. In this sort of framing, then, we can begin to see some potential inter-generational shifts in the way in which some young people are choosing to pursue their individual life goals in contemporary terms. At the same time, analysts are introduced to different kinds of vital conjunctures, where young people are finding it possible to continuously define new experiences and junctures in their life course as impressionable moments and paths worth exploring.

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