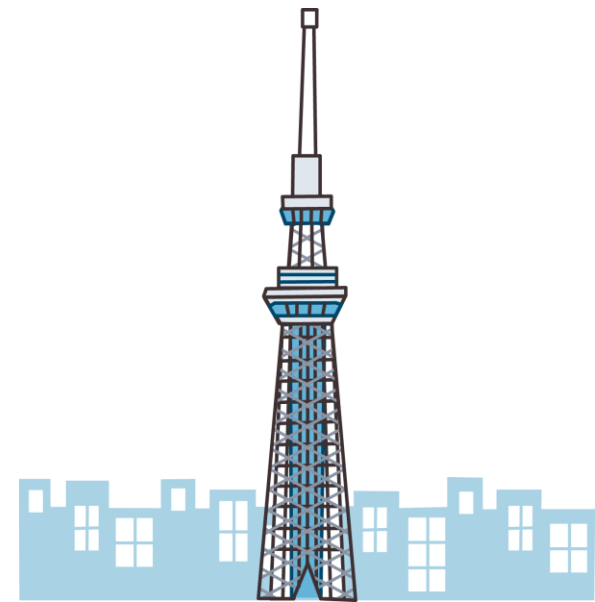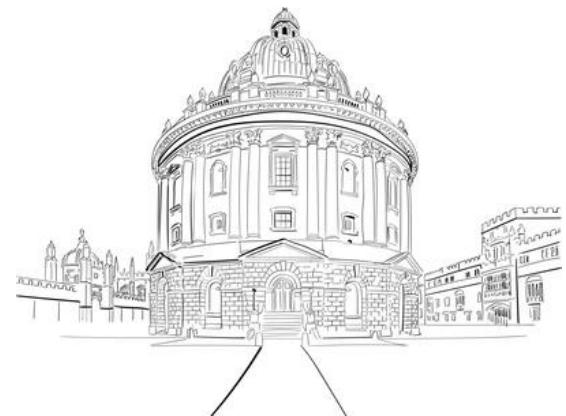# Migrating through university

International students' migration journeys in Japan

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Centre for Global Higher Education Webinar

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Order of the presentation

— A brief look at student migration to Japan

— The role of agency

— Narrative research methods

— Four vignettes* of migrating through university

— Discussion and conclusions

2

*To be published in the upcoming CGHE book *Changing Higher Education in East Asia* (Marginson & Xu, 2022)

ISM as a gateway to migration

— Just as governments have invested in student mobility,
some are now investing in student migration.

— Marketing campaigns to attract students

— New visa pathways for international graduates

— Both for work, and for job-hunting

— Preferential treatment in immigration regimes

— Education-migration nexus

— International student mobility and migration "have increasingly become entangled—even to the point where it appears both have merged" (Baas, 2019, p. 223).

(Baas, 2019; Chaterjee, 2015; Robertson, 2011, 2013)

Student migration to Japan

— A step beyond the "internationalisation" period in Japanese higher education

— A receptive environment for student migration

    — Low barriers to entry

    — Extensive economic and social rights during-study

    — "Designated activities" job-hunting visa

    — Preferential treatment when seeking highly-skilled
      employment and permanent residency.

— The largest group of foreign nationals in Japan
  have become candidates for long-term migration

(Brotherhood, 2020; Cabinet Office, 2018; METI, 2018; Ota, 2018; Sato, 2021; Yonezawa, 2020)

The role of *agency* in student migration

— Existing research has focused on systematic factors in student migration.

— Agency of individuals

    — "Seldom explored" (Tan & Hugo, 2017).

    — "the notion of agency… has not been the explicit focus of theoretical and empirical investigation" (Tran & Vu, 2018, p. 167).

— Little empirical evidence of how student-migrants "navigate a myriad of systemic, cultural, and personal challenges" of the education-migration nexus.

(Arthur & Nunes, 2018, p. 602; Tan & Hugo, 2017; Tran & Vu, 2018)

Research methods I:
A temporal model of agency

Iteration	Practical-Evaluation	Projection
Habitual action and the "selective reactivation" of patterns of action	Practical and normative judgment between trajectories of action	Imaginative creation of possible patterns of action, suitable to the actor

— Reveals individuals' "agentive orientation" at a specific time

— Supports insight into changes in agency over time.

(Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

Research methods II: Narrative analysis

Methodology | Biographical-Narrative "Entry" Interview During Study | 9-15 months | Semi-Structured "Exit" Interview Post-study

— Composite Vignettes

— Illustrative narratives drawing on data from all participants.

Habit   Judgment   Imagination   Mixed

(Dwyer, Davis & emerald, 2017; Polkinghorne, 1995; Wengraf, 2001; Willis, 2019)

Drawing on the past

I was also raised in a very bilingual environment. All of my classmates and peers came from very similar backgrounds; they were returnees. I think that has everything to do with my present trajectory…

A lot of people around me follow that route. Study abroad, then go home, that's the overwhelming impression I have…

I'm happy because I could receive a degree from a foreign country. People value that experience; I feel it's more valued…

Past experience

Important others

Shared understandings of appropriate conduct

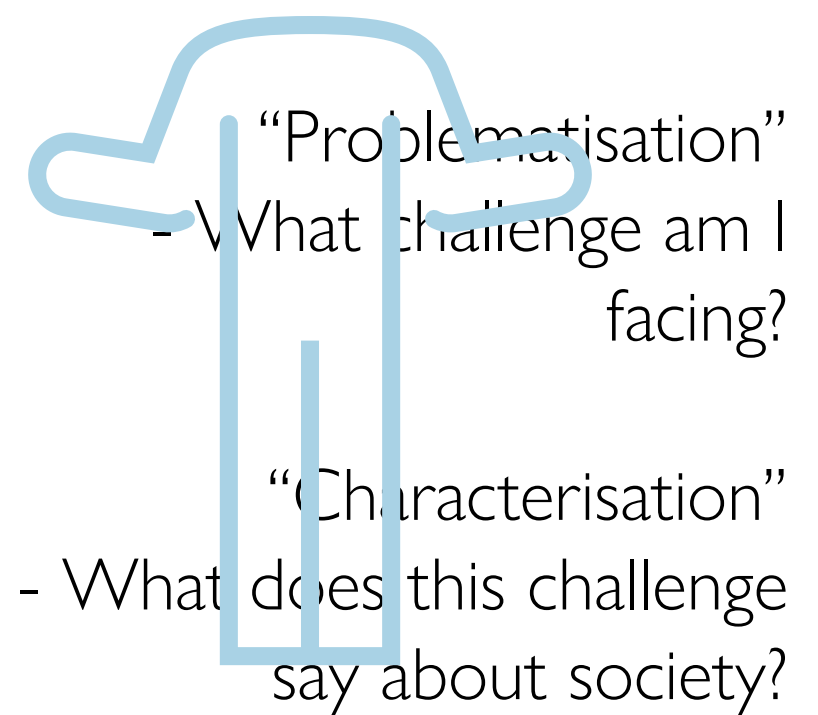Power of social expectations

Judgment in the present

Most of my learning here hasn't been through the program itself, or my job, but rather through interactions with the Japanese society.

I guess the tricky part, now that I'm past the transition, is that now this is the evaluation period for seeing if this is a place where I could settle, long-term…

So, do I want to live here? I wouldn't say it that directly. I think as a migrant, you want to feel welcome…

I got very mixed messages; I think Japan is getting to the point where it might have to slowly renegotiate how it positions itself vis-à-vis the rest of the world - but is it my battle to fight?

Reflexivity regarding their changing position in society

"Problematisation"
- What challenge am I facing?

"Characterisation"
- What does this challenge say about society?
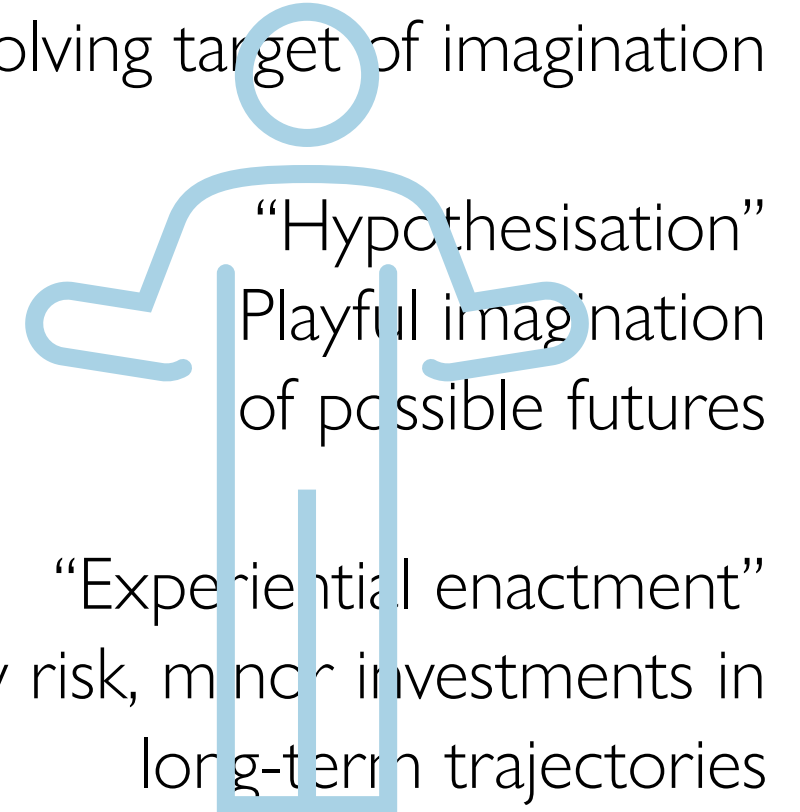
Imagination of the future

I'm the type of person that's always planning, thinking of the future. Even in primary school, I dreamed of studying abroad...

So, I made a plan A, plan B, plan C. I was preparing everything to go there, and thought about the contingencies, just in case…

In a sense, it was hypothesis testing to see if a life in Japan would be viable. It was a low-risk way to try it…

I am okay with adapting to life here, but I'm also keeping my options open….

Evolving target of imagination

"Hypothesisation"
Playful imagination
of possible futures

"Experiential enactment"
Low risk, minor investments in
long-term trajectories

Mixed

Things could have been so different…

But I don't necessarily go places just because I know people there, I don't try to just walk in others' footsteps…

Once I got away from that discourse, that sense of what other people do, I was opened to new ideas…

I was assessing it as a potential migrant. But I don't know what's going to happen in the future, so I'm going to do my best now to open as many options as I can…

Truer reflection of an one individual's narrative
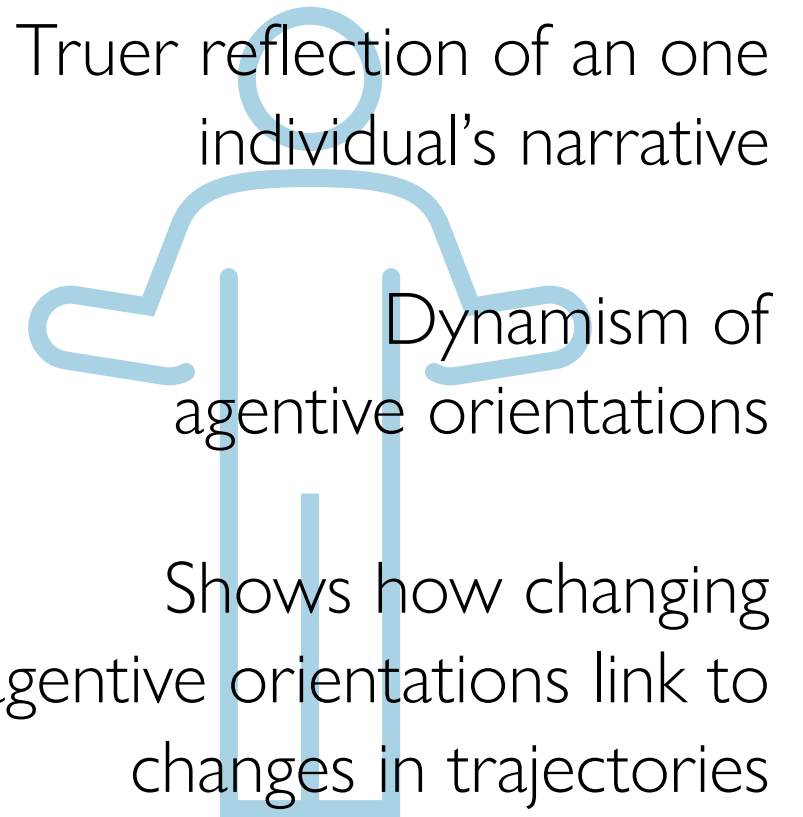
Dynamism of agentive orientations

Shows how changing agentive orientations link to changes in trajectories

Findings and significance

— Dynamism of agency over time

— The different practical tools that emerge in the context of different agentive orientations

— Individuals' desires must be understood as dynamic

— If we are to support international students in their education-migration trajectories, we must be alert to this dynamism rather than ignoring it for administrative convenience.
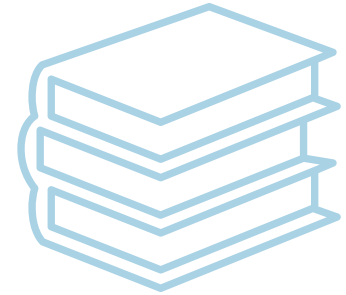
A future project

How, and to what effect, have Japanese universities become "migration intermediaries"?

(Liu-Farrer & Tran, 2019; van den Broek, Harvey & Groutsis, 2015, p. 2)

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