

Unearthing the Soil of Home: An Autoethnography of The Meanings of Home

*In a field
I am the absence
of field.
This is
always the case.
Where I am
I am what is missing.*

*When I walk
I part the air
and always
the air moves in
to fill the spaces
where my body's been.*

*We all have reasons
for moving,
I move
to keep things whole.*

— Strand (1990).

INTRODUCTION

A part of the beginning quote is used by Dani Shapiro (2019) in the scene where Strand told her she was not Jewish in person. She did explain the implications of the quote. I think it is meant to suggest how she tried to connect with something that suddenly disappeared from her identity as she found out that her father was not the biological father, leaving a blank space in herself. She and her husband looked for her biological father without a clear intention of doing it. Her Jewish identity, which was also a tie with her father, unexpectedly mutated into confusion, and the loss instigated the desire and longing for a part to fill in the blank to reconstruct the whole. She wanted to connect with a part of herself existing somewhere distant.

What is home with all the vicissitudes? For this project, I attempted to illustrate the historical development of belonging and selfhood through the account of my life and relationship with the concept of home. In the past eight years, I kept traveling between Japan and the U.S. to locate myself in changing cultural environments. The meaning of home to me has shifted over the time at personal, local, and national levels because of the mobility. Where can I belong to if I keep moving from one place to another? What does it even mean to be part of something? To offer insights into these questions, I cast a gaze upon myself and the past to narrativize the history of who I am now and what I think of as my home. I would argue that home is one's historical events to which one keeps referring back by piecing out bits of memories to construct the continuity of self.

_____ I use autoethnography as the approach to present my story as a scope into identity construction. Additionally, I use the concept of spiritual landscape (Allerton 2009) as the guide to interpret my story, which provides an analytical framework of “historical process of interaction between people and the environment in which both are shaped” (236). Allerton further discusses that the interaction between people and their environment functions as the way they connect with each other explaining that “landscape becomes meaningful to them partly through practical activity, as they climb up steep paths, walk through deep mud, or are bent over in the hot sun, transplanting rice seedlings” (236). I extend this idea to apply to the connection between mental/imaginative places and my identity. I try to encapsulate the “practical activity” as the bridge between individuals and the place in the autoethnography. Throughout my life, I have interacted with different aspects of personally meaningful places, including not only the physical surroundings but also invisible realms such as the historical and cultural backgrounds.

Places as landscapes are, like humans, constantly changing internally and externally. “Over time, a landscape, which is never complete but always being made and re-made, will become saturated with memories, its places often acting as ‘mnemonic pegs’ (Basso 1996, 62) for stories and reminiscences” (Allerton 2009, 237). Even if you did not witness or experience the process of making and re-making, shared identity let you do that; for example, in my case, I feel connected to Japanese heritage sites around the U.S. or the historical locations in my hometown because of the shared national or local identities. However, it is also true that I am not part of the Japanese-American diaspora, being an international student in the U.S. Furthermore, in my hometown the environment I was born and raised is vastly different from that of the older generations before the extensive landfill and urban development, so I don’t share their “practical activity” that constructed the relationship between the place and them. I can only construct “my” version of home, which Rushdie (1992) discusses with the idea of “imaginary homeland”, by comparing old pictures and current scenery or reading accounts of those who lived through the change, piecing out bits of historical records.

Regarding Autoethnography

Chang (2008) explains that autoethnography as an anthropological method “shares the storytelling features with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation (43)” and is “to be reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context (46).” Which sociocultural context can I locate myself? I am a male Japanese, with Chinese father who has naturalized in Japan. Since graduating from Japanese public middle school, I became an international student in private schools in the U.S. since high school, which makes me bear the Asian identity before Japanese. In the U.S., I am an alien and am not Japanese-American. I was not there as a citizen or a

researcher but a student, which was the premise of my presence in the country. My family stayed in Japan while I studied in the states.

Kondo (1986, 84) discusses production and assessment of anthropological knowledge from fieldwork with pondering the position of the researcher. She says, “knowledge is always knowledge from a particular perspective. Understandings are situated within culture, history, and biography. In order to assess the epistemological status of our interpretations, we should take into account certain crucial parameters of our understanding” with one factor of the assessment being the “degree of distance — personal and cultural, emotional and cognitive-- from one’s informants.” Here, she is mainly concerned with being inside or outside a particular culture. As a female Japanese-American studying Japanese society, she tries to analyze her position as a researcher/outsider and also participant/insider. The knowledge she produces during her fieldwork could be from her as an outsider or an insider, and this simultaneity of identities caused her “dissolution” of her sense of self.

However, in my case, I am both the informant and the researcher. I, as the writer of the autoethnography, retrospectively writes about myself from the past, as an informant. I have been in different cultural contexts. For example, Japan culturally operates on the codes of ideological homogeneity (McVeigh 2014, Oguma 1995, 1996). The majority Japanese understand Japan as a mono-racial, mono-cultural, and mono-linguistic. Therefore, I, whose father is Chinese, am already a minority in Japan although phenotypically invisible. Hyphenated identities, such as Chinese-Japanese, would be out of norm, designated as *hafu* (“half”) to refer to those who are mixed race or ethnicity. *Hafu* is more generally used to refer to those who have non-Japanese heritage no matter what the proportion is; thus, for example, a quarter Japanese would also be *hafu*. My pursuit of Japaneseness may be partially attributed to such “incomplete” national or

ethnic identity ideologically implemented. Additionally, having studied in the U.S. for eight years, I feel I am not part of the mainstream Japanese life. Having the experience of immersive exposure to other cultures is a minority. For example, every time I tell somebody my background of living abroad, they would most likely say the same things such as, “so are you fluent in English?”, “I’m so jealous!”, “speak some English!” To them, I am “different”, not entirely part of them. Therefore, whenever I introduce myself, I also automatically other myself from ordinary, “homogenous” Japanese.

I am also a first-generation college student next to my older sister. My father didn’t go to high school. I am not sure if he even graduated from middle school in China. His family was in poverty and had to leave the home to make a living on his own, which he does not talk frequently nor in detail. My mother, on the other hand, graduated from high school in Japan, then decided to study Chinese to be a translator. While she was studying the language in Beijing, they met and quickly got married there. But I don’t get to hear their story in detail either.

I have studied in the U.S. for eight years since June 2015. After spending three years in the high school in Southern Florida, called North Broward Prep School, I went up north to Richmond, Indiana for Earlham College. Throughout the years, I would go back to Japan for winter and summer vacations. Then, went further north for the University of Michigan. After spending eight months in Ann Arbor, I had to leave because of the pandemic. Having briefly stayed at my college friend’s home for about a month, I came back to Japan in May 2020. The last time I was in Japan before that was August 2019. My experiences going back and forth between Japan and the U.S. should give valuable insights into the multiplicitous meanings of the concept of home that vary in different sociocultural contexts.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: RETROSPECTION AND INTROSPECTION

Infancy

I was born in an artificial land of Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture, which did not exist until the 1960s. I lived in an apartment in a housing complex, often referred to as *danchi*. The entire district called Mihama Ward of Chiba City is a landfill area filled with housing complexes with schools and some stores. Some complexes give an impression of prison due to the identification numbers on the gray wall with no decoration. I don't remember much from this time. A few things I remember is that I was at home all the time besides going to kindergarten. I also remember when I tried to help my mother fill the gas heater, but I couldn't figure out how. My father would come home really late while the rest of us were sleeping. One time, my mother and sister went to the flea market held in the common area of the complex, and I decided to stay home alone. But somehow I got scared, and ran out of the house to find my mother. We moved to the current home when I was five. But we kept the apartment room even after having moved out because my father purchased it instead of renting it. We left a lot of stuff there such as furniture, so we sometimes would go back to clean or take something to the new house. We kept it unoccupied for so long, and things were covered with dust. I was still little when we revisited there, and my sister's dolls were left there covered with dust and creepy. It was scary and unnerving to see where you used to live being abandoned and covered with dust. Today, my father rents the room to someone else.

Elementary School: Virtual World and Imperial Japan

I didn't enjoy school. Instead, I was obsessively into video games. I would feel at home when I turned on the console to see and hear the beginning graphics and sounds (sort of like how Mac makes a noise when it starts). In the virtual synthesized world, I could jump 10 feet high, fly, and revive. I was living in a dream world, so to speak. It also fascinated me that each video

game had its own world and story so that I could virtually become part of them. My parents did not like me playing video games. I don't remember sharing anything fun with them.

When I was around 10, I found interest in the Japanese imperial history, especially during WWII. Prior to that, I was playing combat video games and got interested in military matters such as mechanics of weapons and military gestures. Then I wondered about Japanese military. I looked up online to find out that Japan does not hold military forces since the end of WWII. Instead, there are Self Defence Forces. I further researched to find out about the imperial militaries. Looking at the photographs of the imperial soldiers, I was first surprised by the vastly different past of Japan that seemed to be full of dignity and discipline.

I found out that my school library had several books on WWII and Imperial Japan. I went there almost everyday to read the photobooks of the war. What grabbed my attention was the brutal photographs of dead bodies and the devastations of the battlefield that the textbook wouldn't show. Japan was like a different place back then, I thought. What struck me the most is probably the discipline and devotion of the soldiers for the divine emperor, *ten`nou*, who was, by the time of WWII, used by the military officers as the tool of propaganda and ideology. The officers would give command to soldiers as the messenger of the emperor, and whoever did not listen to the officers were punished as traitors (*kokuzoku*) or "non-national (*hi-kokumin*)". Part of the tragedy of Imperial Japan also originates from the extreme nationalism, which ended up killing its own people as the sacrifice for the nation and the emperor. The Kamikaze unit was formed towards the end of the war as Japan was losing the war. They had scarce resources for weapons, so they used humans as the substitute for bombs. I read several accounts and watched documentaries about them. I even went to Yasukuni Shrine that enshrines those who died in the line of duty as *eirei*. There are songs from the war time that sing how the soldiers would see each

other as spirits in the shrine, which I memorized. None of my Japanese relatives fought during the war; my grandfather was too weak and so was my great grandfather. Instead, they served as cooks. I just wanted to go there because the movies and songs mentioned this place. I had casual respect for them, but not as extreme to worship them.

Thinking about the soldiers who died as sacrifice, I wondered what it would be like to die for something or somebody that you see as bigger than your life? They had no choice because they and their families would be called traitors if they did not obey the order. Before the attacks, some of them could not see their families so had to write letters to them. However, they could not express their fear or reluctance to die even to their family because of the government censorship and surveillance. They were not supposed to write anything against the war. Some of them were as young as seventeen years old, and they had to accept their death. What would it like to decide that you are going to die in a week at a high school age? I did not see such a history critically, instead, was impressed by the extremity. There was nothing I particularly looked up to devote myself for. So all the militarist and nationalist gestures interested me.

Learning the brutality of war, I started to see things differently. Learning about war brutality, I was keenly aware of the proximity and inevitability of death. But thoughts on death made me think about how I should live and made me ask meanings of life. Moreover, This land of Japan that I regard as taken-for-granted was part of the war. Sometime in the past, the cities were reduced to debris and ashes with dead bodies with the sacrifice of human lives. That my country participated in the mass killing made me see it differently. My home country was once a country that would tell high school boys to die for the nation. Such a vast change is kind of incomprehensible. That's why I kept learning about it, I think.

Around the time I was eleven years old, or the 5th grade, my mental capability started to grow. I was thinking to myself wondering how other students would react if they learned about the war and its brutality. Would they still be able to run around the room and laugh with the promise of death? I was also fighting with the mean teacher. The day before my graduation, I yelled at her to shut up. I now find most of the teachers I had in elementary and middle schools dysfunctional as educators. They would teach only to follow, never ask nor explore. They only know how to read off from the textbook. In a sense, Japan has not changed since the wartime; teachers tell students what's right and wrong reading off the textbook as truth, and if you question that truth, you will be punished. After I yelled at the teacher, she did not come to talk with me, nor did anybody in the class. I'd rather be left alone, anyways.

Middle School: Music and Departure

My middle school was located next to the elementary school. So most of the people I went to elementary school with also went to the same school. I stopped talking to people at school. Instead, I found my shelter in the school library, taking a refuge, so to speak. But I didn't particularly like reading. I just wanted to be in a quiet place because most students seemed mindless, so I chose not to be part of them. In Japanese schools, students are assigned a fixed room, and teachers move between rooms. So I had to spend much time with other classmates. The class member was renewed after a year as a tradition. I really disliked going to school because I didn't have friends and it was too boring. I didn't want to leave home. But I knew my parents wouldn't listen. So I would listen to my favorite music in a dark room to calm myself until the time to leave. I would leave home late enough so that I wouldn't have to wait in the classroom until class started. The roads would be empty by the time I leave (students in Japan usually walk alone to school). During classes, I would write down song lyrics that I memorized

to pass the boring time. That was a way to feel at ease during the stressful time. I wanted to go home as soon as possible everyday, not because I missed home but disliked the school settings.

Toward the end of the first year of middle school, I started playing guitar when I was thirteen. Since then, my whole interest shifted from video games to music and guitar. I practiced everyday in my room, a place I felt most at home. I got absorbed into guitar. It occupied my mind during school. I kept thinking about all the chords and songs I was practicing as if to escape from the reality at school. At fourteen, I started writing songs primitively by putting random chords so they sound nice. I loved the idea that there is no right or wrong in music as long as it sounds and feels good. I used the internet to learn music. No one told me to, but I autonomously did like the time I was learning about the Japanese history. I would fall asleep and wake up to music.

My favorite band was, and still is, Southern All Stars, the Japanese band still active today since the 80s. Then, I learned from the internet that the leader of the band was influenced by the Beatles (who doesn't?), so I started listening to them. Initially, I could not differentiate who was who. But now, their faces are the most familiar faces to me, next to my family and friends. I met my best friend through the Beatles at middle school. He moved to my hometown from Tokyo during the second year. We were in different classes but talked often during class breaks. We are still friends today, and he has been the first person I would meet, next to my family, whenever I came back from the U.S. I also listened to other British and American musicians who motivated me to study English. Poetic and creative expressions helped me to learn colloquial expressions that textbooks wouldn't teach in detail. Besides pops, I was listening to classical music, namely Bach. I was daydreaming I would want to be an organist in a small town in Germany if I could be reborn as someone else. I was not impressed by Japanese pop music.

In the last year of middle school, I was under a lot of pressure because of the competitive entrance exams for high school. There is an expression for such competitiveness, “entrance war (*juken sensō*)”. Each school has their own exam, so I would have had to visit all the schools to take the entrance exam in the coldness of winter (Japanese school year starts in April so exams would be usually around January). I wasn't studying enough, and my parents also got stressed. One day, my mother had to come to school for a meeting with my teacher. During the exam seasons, it is normal to talk about the academic prospect and which school would be realistic to apply, with the teacher with a parent. It was like interrogation; in a big empty classroom, there is the teacher on one side of the table and my mother and I on the other side. After the meeting, she saw a poster about studying abroad on the wall and later talked about it with me and father. At the time, my sister was already studying abroad in Australia for a few months (she seemed to be fantasizing about white people and western culture in general). Then my father suggested the option to study in the U.S. It was very sudden, and I didn't answer instantly. Although I enjoyed talking with the English teachers at school (Japanese government hires English teachers to send them to Japanese elementary and middle schools as Assistant Language Teacher, often called ALT), I never have thought about going to school overseas. It took me some time to respond to that option.

I remember, I was lying on the grass outside the school building looking up at the sky during the lunch break thinking about studying abroad. Some classmates asked me if I wanted to join them to play catch, but I said no. I don't remember what month or season it was, but it was warm. I kept looking. There was one piece of cloud. I followed it with eyes. I noticed the shape of it kept changing while moving along with the wind. The edge of the cloud was diffusing into the air, which reminded me of a video game I was playing years ago. It was sort of a chatting

game with a computer character that asks about the player. At the beginning, the character asked what I would like to be reborn as, and my answer was the cloud in the sky letting the wind decide its path. Then, without thinking too much further, I decided to go to the U.S. I was relieved from the “entrance war”, but, at the same time, nervous to tell others about the decision because I was finally starting to make friends. The decision meant a farewell to them.

High School: Confine and National Identity

During the three years at the high school in Florida, I longed for Japan as a country and strongly identified myself with it. During the first year, I wanted to quit and transfer to a Japanese high school. I texted my mother about it, but she said it was too early to decide on that. Then, I thought it would be futile to keep telling her how much I wanted to go back. They didn’t really listen to me. So I rarely texted or called them. Talking to them was more stressful than comforting. I just endured those years, probably one of the most Japanese things to do (*gaman*). I wouldn’t call the desire to go back homesick because it lasted until the day I graduated from high school. For the longing for Japan, I grew my love and passion for the country and wanted to know more about its culture so that I could call myself an ambassador of Japan.

Florida was an interesting place for me to build attachment and mental affiliation with Japan as the core of my identity. I witnessed variations of Japan as my home in different cultural contexts. The very first time I felt closeness to the country was when I went to Disney World in Orlando for a school trip. There was a Japanese word on the board that says hello in different languages. It was refreshing to see the Japanese letter in a foreign land juxtaposed with other languages as a sign of international diversity (however commodified). Second thing to note is that there were several Japanese restaurants around the campus although they were not run by Japanese owners. Although they say sushi, it was not the kind of sushi familiar to me; they were

indigenized with cheese, crunchy fries, and spicy sauce. I enjoyed seeing such modalities of Japanese culture. Additionally, the interior of the restaurants were interesting. They have Japanese decorations, BGM, and food that are somewhat different from what I would see in Japan. For example, I sometimes see the small cat statue with a hand up, which is regarded as a charm to invite customers and wealth in Japan, in any Asian restaurants around the U.S. Here, Japan is regarded as part of the dynamic Asian culture, I thought. It was, again, refreshing to find the Japanese artifact in a foreign culture, but the American would not differentiate, say, Japanese from Chinese; they are all under the umbrella of “Asian”.

Third, there is a Japanese museum and garden in the northeast of the school in the Delray Beach area, called Morikami Museum (Morikami Museum Website). I volunteered there throughout the year to earn the community service hour that was part of graduation requirements. They had five annual events where I could volunteer: summer festival, fall festival, cosplay event, spring festival, and bonsai exhibition. Besides the bonsai exhibition, all the festivals were huge and hundreds of people came, including Japanese families. It was fascinating to see how they represented Japanese cultures. Although I initially expected the events to be twisted with American local adaptation, they were not as strange as I expected, probably because several Japanese staff worked there. Moreover, the building called *Yamato-kan* (“Yamato Hall”) exhibits emulations of Japanese spaces such as the interior of a bullet traintown, a shopping street, a store, and a regular household with furniture, where I could virtually experience Japan. Although some of them are outdated and seemed like the 70s or 80s, I still enjoyed being surrounded by Japanese things and feeling at home. Among these exhibitions, there is a small space dedicated for the history of the land where the museum and garden is built although it is very small and brief as if it is enshrined in a quiet place with little disturbance. The entire garden was once a

Japanese colony called Yamato Colony established in 1904 (Pozzetta 1976, Kawai 2020, Gregersen 2021). The museum and garden was named after the last Japanese, George Morikami who did not have any children and donated the land to the Florida state.

In high school, there were many other factors that made me conscious of Japan as my home country. I was, for example, surrounded by other international students in the dorm, and they would form groups based on their countries of languages they speak, including other Japanese students. But there are some students who did not be part of such groups. They spoke several languages or mixed race/ethnicity, and I was one of them. I did not spend too much with the Japanese group. During my junior year at high school, I had three roommates from Germany, Austria, and Russia (who was expelled later to be replaced by a Swedish person). I became friends with the Austrian guy, who was interested in Japanese culture. He often asked me about things or habits in Japan, and I could not give accurate answers or simply didn't know stuff, which inspired me to learn more about my home country's cultures such as religion, education, and manners to name a few. Learning about my culture made me realize how much I didn't know about Japan. I initially, for example, didn't know the difference between Buddhism and Shinto, the Japanese indigenous religion, nor could differentiate temples and shrines. I told him about Japanese school and how we wear the same uniforms and eat the same food together after food is distributed to everyone in the class, he said it sounds like communism, which I agreed with.

I also became aware of myself as Asian. One time some students I didn't know said “*nihao*”, or “hello” in Chinese. I replied, “what?” to suggest I'm not Chinese although I knew how to say hello in Chinese and I am half Chinese. The same thing happened to me in college and in Ann Arbor although it was not a student but random adults probably not part of the schools. I didn't mean to deny my Chinese heritage, but it was annoying that they assumed that I

speaking Chinese because I am Asian. They asked where I am from after they learned I don't speak Chinese; it should be the other way around. However, a similar thing would happen in Japan. In Japan, some Japanese would say "hello" to foreigners they don't know (but not to other Asian peoples because the Japanese don't associate them with Euro-American culture). Being foreign, especially white and black, is associated with American accented English in Japan, so even if someone doesn't speak English as their primary language, the Japanese assume they speak English. I would say, don't talk to a stranger in a foreign language.

During the senior year, I traveled around the states to visit colleges I got accepted to while also visiting Japanese heritage sites, as a sort of a pilgrimage of Japaneseness that I was yearning for. First, I went to Virginia to visit George Mason University, which allowed me to take a train to National Mall in D.C. to see the cherry blossoms from Japan sent in 1912 by the mayor of Tokyo Yukio Ozaki ("History of the..." n.a.). As the national tree of Japan, Cherry Blossoms symbolizes a beginning as it blooms in spring when a new school and business year starts. I was longing for the flower because I had not seen them since I left Japan after middle school. The fact that the trees were from Japan made me feel at home with the familiar view of the flowers covering the roads and ponds. After D.C., I flew to Seattle to visit Seattle University where I unexpectedly found a Japanese garden, Kobe Terrace Garden with a stone lantern and different kinds of trees gifted by Seattle's sister city Kobe. I stayed at the historic inn, Panama Hotel, designed by a Japanese-American architect, Saburo Ozasa and built in 1910 on "South Main Street in Nihonmachi, or Japan Town" (Kaplan 2016). The current owner of the hotel, Jan Johnson, collects Japanese dolls exhibited in the display window at the ground level. The hotel also stored other historical artifacts such as wooden boxes the Japanese immigrants used to ship their belongings from Japan to Seattle. In the basement of the hotel, there is the only remaining

of Japanese public bath house, named *Hashidate-yu*, used by the Japanese-Americans (Rash n.a.). In 2015, the entire structure of the hotel and the bathing facility was selected as a “National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation” (Chasan et al.). During the stay before becoming a National Treasure, I talked to the owner of the hotel to ask about it. She said usually it’s closed, but she showed it to me since I was so curious about it and the whole history of the hotel.

Apart from longing for Japan, I deepened my love for music through meeting a great guitar teacher. He is from Cuba and still active in Miami today. He played and taught jazz in class and inspired me to listen and practice the music. Not only that, he taught us about resilience saying, “nothing happens overnight”. (He also shared his personal stories with the class as well, such as how his father encouraged him to pursue what he loves and how his first marriage failed. He called me by my last name and so did my classmates. I asked him why, and he answered because he respected me. I didn’t ask further, so I don’t know why he respected me while calling other students by their first names.) Music is a way to communicate with myself and express self. It allows me to understand and articulate things ineffable. Jazz was a perfect musical language to explore the plurality and versatility of self with innovation, originality, and free spirit. I think it is also how I connected with Western worlds.

I made another important decision during the senior year. I applied to colleges around the U.S. looking for Japanese studies. I got accepted by several colleges including Earlham College and Seattle University. I visited both to decide. While the city of Seattle was wonderful with a big Japanese community, the school only had Asian studies program without a specialized Japanese studies department. So I decided to go to Earlham College, which is in the middle of

corn fields but had a strong Japanese Studies program. I chose to learn about Japan academically instead of immersing myself in the Japanese diaspora of the West Coast.

College: Cultural Anthropology and Local Home

_____ During my time in college, my definition of home became a more locally based identity being exposed to the internal diversity of Japan. Earlham College is a Quaker school in the industrially devastated Richmond, Indiana. While the campus was full of diversity with students from all around the states and world, the city itself felt closed and desolate. The local people's livelihood is dependent on big malls like Walmart and Best Buy. The downtown is full of empty stores and a closed mall. The campus felt isolated from the rest of the town. There was no place to go outside the campus, so I stayed at campus all the time where almost all the students lived, which helped me concentrate on studying.

In anthropology classes, acquiring an outsider perspective and analytical scope into Japan as a subject of study significantly changed how I see Japan. The discipline made me aware of sociopolitical constructions of Japaneseness through othering "non-Japanese" inside and outside its territory. Internally, the Japanese government suppressed and assimilated indigenous people throughout history. (For example, Ainu, Ryukyuan, Korean, Chinese, and Burakumin. See Okamoto 2011) Externally, foreigners are demarcated from mainstream Japanese discourse.

Earlham's close relationship with Japan starts from WWII. When the U.S. government announced internment of Japanese individuals, the president of the school decided to protect their Japanese students from getting caught (Hamm 1997). Since then, Earlham has developed a community of Japanese cultures in and outside the campus. The library has numbers of Japanese books and texts in different disciplines for those who are interested. The music department holds several Japanese instruments. There are a few notable Japanese art performers who graduate

from Earlham such as Christopher Yohmei Blasdel, a shakuhachi player (“Christopher Yohmei Blasdel”), and Richard Emmert (“Between the Stones”), a noh performer who adopted the story of Elvis Presley in the noh style. So I had a chance not only to learn but to perform Japanese culture.

One of the main reasons I chose Earlham was to meet Japanese exchange students. This school had an annual exchange program with Waseda University in Tokyo (but it stopped when I was a junior) to invite around fifteen Japanese exchange students. They had several Japan-related events throughout the year to promote the cultural experiences where I participated in preparation before and performance during the events. One of them is the spring festival that started in the 70s. Meeting new Japanese people outside Japan was an interesting experience along with witnessing an environment where the culture is performed, which reminded me of the times I volunteered at the Morikami museum in high school.

_____ Meeting the Japanese exchange students made me aware of which part of Japan I am from. Since we are all from Japan, we would naturally ask more specific locations. Instead of saying I am from Japan, now I could say I am from Chiba. And they would ask which part of Chiba I am from to further narrow down my origin that is the Chiba City, the capital of the prefecture. Regional identity played a significant role in the interaction with the exchange students. Some of them who are from outside the Tokyo area were treated a bit differently from the majority of Tokyo area students because they might have slight accents or different cultural backgrounds such as what they eat (i.g., one student from central Japan has eaten koi fish, which is unusual in the Tokyo area).

Taking cultural anthropology classes further narrowed down my identity to local level, by making me aware that I am not from everywhere in Japan nor every part of it. For example, I

don't know the dialects or local cuisines of, for example, the western part like Kyoto and Osaka. And there are several prefectures I have never been to. I had to ask what it means to be a Japanese because the word "Japan" entails such a vast diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, religion, demography, geography, regional customs, and so on. I only went through an aspect of Japan primarily at the locality of where I grew up. (I felt a little out of place when I went to Kyoto because they speak and act differently there.) The realization of local identity is the beginning of my long-term interest and research of my home town, especially the Inage district of Chiba City.

I was also going through a personal transition at turning twenty and becoming no longer a teenager. I felt paranoid about it. This was before winter break. I was planning to go back to Japan while thinking whether I should attend the coming of age ceremony, called *seijin siki*, which is annually held by local governments around Japan. I had to decide before going back so I could book the returning ticket to the U.S. To attend the ceremony, I had to come back a week after the school resumed. I was hesitant to go because I had complex feelings about meeting my middle school peers. I wasn't close to them except for a few. Although I did not have any trouble with them, I was feeling insecure to reunite with them. I think I was trying to detach myself from them for unknown reasons. Probably, I perceived them as part of who I used to be but no longer. I went to consult with my advisor about it around midnight because he usually stays in office late. (He is half American and half French teaching ethnomusicology. He is also a graduate of the University of Michigan.) I don't recall exact words I told him to explain the situation, but I think I said it would be too nostalgic to see them in person. I was not sure how to articulate. He suggested that I go because this might be the last time to meet some of them. Hearing that, I decided to go as a gesture of farewell to my childhood.

I went to the ceremony with the friend whom I shared the love for the Beatles with. The ceremony was disappointing. First, I went to the stadium where the main ceremony occurred. Some city government officials talked about becoming an adult on the stage, but I could not hear anything because the space was crowded and extremely noisy with people chatting. The talk was mainly about the legal responsibility for several taxes. I didn't pay attention to that at all. No one did. Outside the stadium, there was a crowd of people turning 20 from the entire district. Some of them wore colorful and showy clothes making noises with megaphones and sprinkling alcoholic drinks to perform delinquency. After this, I went to a party specifically for my middle school classes. My year had four classes with thirty students in each. Most people showed up including the teachers. I was very excited and enjoyed taking pictures of the scenes and the people. But I got too excited and had a stomachache so remained seated to calm down while others were drinking heavily. Some of them drank until throwing up and being unable to walk straight.

There was a second party for each individual class afterwards. This party was not planned unlike the previous one, so people formed groups based on who they preferred to spend more time with. The class members changed after the first year, so some people made a group with the members of the first class. I went with the members after the change, which consisted of around ten of us. On the way to the restaurant, we didn't talk much for some reason. At the restaurant, we still didn't start talking. Alcohol got us finally talking. Most of us had low alcohol tolerance. Some were falling asleep, but more alcohol helped us enjoy the moment. After this, I went to another restaurant with one of the class members. I was extremely drunk and couldn't walk straight. My memory was not intact, but I think we had personal and intimate conversation. Sometime after this day, I thought that we couldn't even talk without intoxication. Is this what it

means to be an adult? Although we enjoyed the drunk conversation, I am not in touch with him, nor with any of them.

When I was still thinking about going to the ceremony, I was walking around the school library. And I happened to find a big picture book about different ethnic groups and their rites of passage around the globe. I don't remember the title or the author. I opened the pages of an African tribe's coming of age ceremony where they conceptualize adulthood as death of childhood. They die once as a child and reborn as an adult; however imaginative or conceptual it is, the epistemological experience of the death is real. Then, I suddenly became convinced that I existentially died once as the person that I had been until middle school. I became no longer the person I once was. This was a relief to me because I kept being haunted by thoughts of my peers from middle school. It is not the distance that I feel about my childhood, but demarcation.

When I was leaving Japan after the ceremony, I no longer felt reluctant to depart. Until then, I had not wanted to leave home. But then I was willing to say I go *back* to school. My understanding of the gesture of the travel had changed. This was during my sophomore year of college, or the fifth year since I first came to the U.S. I started enjoying my life in America with new friends I made prior to the winter break. I had both Japanese and American friends who were Japanese majors. I am still in touch with many of them. Some of them live in Chiba Prefecture (one of them lives across the street in front of my Chiba home). I enjoyed life at Earlham and spent meaningful time deepening self-understanding and meeting people whom I can share my interest in Japan with. Also, I recently met a new person in Japan who graduated from Earlham a few years prior to my entrance. This school is one of the most familiar places for me where I can feel at home in the U.S.

Present: Studying Hometown

While still in Ann Arbor, I thought of studying my hometown for the graduate project. So, in a way, that I had to stay at home in Japan to attend classes entirely online was an opportunity for me to do research on my hometown. I have been finding historical information about my hometown since high school. I wanted to know what this place was like, how the people lived here, how this place became the way I know it today. My curiosity about the history goes back to my middle school. One of the English teachers, who is Japanese, was from this area and lived through the historical change. He once mentioned that the national road was right next to the shoreline so that waves would wet the road and the cars when up tide. This stuck in my head but did not interest me to find out more about it at the time. During high school, I already saw my home differently when I returned from the U.S. Everything, even the street light, seemed nostalgic and precious. I would pay attention to things I would not have if I didn't go to the U.S.

My perspective on my home had changed to see ordinary things extraordinary, and this is how I first picked up on the peculiar scenery of the shrine gates sitting on both sides of the national road. I wondered why one of them was there far away from the shrine (I don't remember when this was, however). There is no cross way or path between the two gates. Later I discovered online that the first gate, which is distant from the shrine, was there well before the road was made. This discovery was the gate to my journey into the past and history of my hometown.

Chiba Prefecture shares the border with Tokyo Prefecture. It is a peninsula surrounded by Tokyo Bay on the west and by the Pacific on the east and south. Before the modern era, the area consisted of three different districts: Shimōsa, Kazusa, and Awa. After WWII, the Tokyo Bay side went through an extensive industrialization and urbanization to support post-war Japan's rapid economic growth. The coastline of the industrial area is called Keiyō Industrial Zone

(“Keiyō Industrial Zone” 1998), which is built on landfill areas since the 60s. The land reclamation for the industrial development and constructions of residences for the workers caused the destruction of the traditional livelihood built upon the coastal landscape such as seaweed cultivation and gathering shellfish on the shallows. Additionally, urbanization of the inland also led to the disappearance of traditional housings and locally based economies.

Although most part of the old landscape disappeared because of the development, there are still few remaining maintained by the city government. One of them is the house sitting next to the shrine I mentioned above. Built in the early 20th century, this house hosted the brother of the last emperor of Qin Dynasty, Pujie, and his Japanese wife, Haru, for a few months. (“Inage, a house” 2021). There is also a cottage owned by one of the first whisky sellers in Japan, Den`bei Kamiya, whose bar is still in use in Asakusa, Tokyo. Next to this cottage, a Chiba City Gallery (“Chiba City Gallery”) hosts several local events, including exhibitions of old equipment for the local productions. They also used to hold annual conversation events twice a year where the people who lived before and through the landfill development, which stopped due to the pandemic. I attended them for a few times to listen to the elders discussing, collectively trying to recollect the memory of the lost livelihood based on the water. I was the only one who didn’t have those memories or experiences besides the facility staff. I felt out of place being so young among the people who are of my grandmother’s age. I felt distant from them because of the age gap. I wanted to talk to them but wasn’t sure how to interact. Was I supposed to be polite and formal? Or be casual as their grandchild? I couldn’t figure it out, so I remained as a silent listener.

There are also museums and libraries that have old photographs of the old city and the life around the coastline to show what it was like in the past. The photographs capture the

instances of past life captured in the black and white pictures as if to symbolize the distance between then and now. As well as the sceneries' changes, the people in the photographs look different with exotic wearings that we wouldn't see today. Only the shapes of roads and some buildings tell that the space captured in the picture are, in fact, the same locations as today's. Nonetheless, these records of the past allow me to construct a spiritual, imaginative landscape superimposed on the current landscape in front of my eyes. I can see the shallows on the national road. I can hear the sound of waves in the noises of the vehicles. My home has, like myself, gone through numbers of transformations both visible and invisible to present what it has become in the present moment. And we keep changing, slowly but surely with the turnings of the tide.

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