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**International faculty in Japanese university contexts:
Understanding their belonging experiences through art**

A thesis
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of the requirements for the degree
of
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Abstract

Belonging has long been recognized as a fundamental human motivation characterized by the need for emotional attachment, interpersonal connection, and feelings of safety. Over time, belonging has come to be taken for granted as a uniformly positive experience to be sought after and achieved. This generalization has prompted debate amongst theorists. One of the most prominent arguments is that belonging is vaguely defined in the literature and that it lacks the conceptual depth and nuance of other key constructs. In the university context, research has primarily focused on belonging's impact on student achievement and well-being. At the same time, academic mobility and diversity in higher education institutions have increased the world over. This invites further investigation of how belonging is experienced not only by students but by members from across entire campus communities. This thesis seeks to understand how four international faculty members experience belonging in their Japanese higher education institutions. Data was gathered through a combination of semi-structured interviews and arts-based unstructured drawing elicitation. These methods resulted in eight transcripts and four participant-produced drawings. Reflexive thematic analysis of the data carried out through a fully qualitative interpretivist constructionist lens led to the generation of four themes. These themes explore belonging as not only a dynamic and relational process, but one that is deeply felt yet risky, uniquely spatial and material, and indicative of the desire for meaning and purpose. Recurring threads of power, identity, and agency were identified throughout these themes. These not only highlight the distinct nature of the Japanese university context but also echo wider debates in higher education literature at large. This analysis aligns with recent research problematizing dominant understandings of belonging as fixed, linear, or readily attainable. By rejecting such oversimplistic views, this study embraces complexity and draws attention to the multiple, messy, and nuanced ways belonging is experienced by international faculty in Japan. Additionally, this study demonstrates that arts-based research methods like drawing elicitation can be used to garner rich understandings of belonging together with participants. This thesis hopes not only to contribute to the literature on international faculty and the Japanese university context. It also seeks to encourage novel approaches to making sense of belonging. Most of all, this thesis hopes to underscore the importance of attending to belonging as an evolving construct critically and with care in higher education contexts.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Globalization has made it advantageous for higher education institutions to compete for quality international faculty due to the immense value they are seen to offer, such as boosting research productivity, fostering innovation, contributing to internationalization and diversity, and ultimately improving institutions' overall profiles (Rumbley & de Wit, 2017). International faculty face a host of challenges in their postings abroad, including language and culture barriers, tension with local actors, lack of clarity about their host institutions' policies, and low levels of satisfaction (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017). While concerns around student belonging have held the focus of researchers for many years (Allen, Gray, et al., 2021), international faculty remain under-researched both in general and with regard to their belonging in higher education settings.

In this thesis, I present a study investigating how international faculty employed in Japanese higher education institutions experience belonging. Within Japanese higher education settings, international faculty are hired as valuable human resources, yet their experiences are characterized by feelings of precarity, marginalization, and tokenization (Brotherhood, 2021). Moreover, their integration and adjustment are often neglected by the universities employing them (Mihut et al., 2017, p. 17). This study makes original contributions to the literature by extending knowledge and understanding both of international faculty in Japan and belonging as a construct. In particular, I hope to tease out the messy complexities of how international faculty make sense of belonging through the use of a non-traditional arts-based method.

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. I begin this introductory chapter with a discussion of my positionality as a researcher, including my personal background and motivations, both of which play a significant role in how this study has been shaped. Next, I will share what makes this topic worthy of investigation, citing my observations as well as findings from and apparent gaps in the literature. Following this, I will describe my research aims, question, and general scope of this study. This chapter will conclude with an overview of the thesis in which the purpose of each chapter is briefly explained.

1.1 Positionality

Before deciding to embark on this project, I had already lived and worked in Japan for nearly ten years. During my time there, my sense of belonging was complicated by my identity as an American woman of mixed ethnic heritage and partial Japanese ethnicity. Consider my family name, which was passed on to me by my paternal great grandfather who immigrated from Okinawa to America in 1917. In the States, my name was mostly innocuous, just another name amongst many

diverse names. When I moved to Japan, my name was suddenly laden with expectations which prompted many questions from locals I encountered. *If you're American, why do you have a Japanese name? Do you have a Japanese name because you married a Japanese man? Your name is Japanese and you look sort of Japanese but not really, so what are you?* All my life I had felt a strong familial and cultural affinity with Japan, and suddenly this affinity was being questioned. It was at once painful, sobering, and enlightening.

By the time I enrolled in my master's program in 2021, I had already been living in Japan for seven years, the last two of which I had spent working at a private Japanese higher education institution as an administrator working closely with international faculty. I had become proficient in the Japanese language, felt I had a strong grasp of the culture, and had made both Japanese and international friends. I was comfortable in my home and my work and had generally gotten used to life in Japan. Despite it all, there was a feeling inside of me that grew rather than diminished. Looking back at my first completed assignment from my first master's paper (2021), I recognize that feeling as an awareness of my belonging, and of feeling ill at ease in Japan:

The *omotenashi* [hospitality] of Japan, which had once been so charming, had become a tiresome burden, a constant reminder that I didn't belong. Speaking to fellow expats and foreigners, I sensed this feeling as shared by many others too ... It seems impossible to escape your status as guest, tourist, spectator; being a foreigner means being in Japan but never truly of Japan.

I found myself existing as an anomaly of neither here nor there, with a Japanese name and face but an American style and way, yearning for the familiar comforts of [home], and especially for the ease with which I could simply be myself without feeling constantly othered. (pp. 4-5)

Remarkably, I found that I was not alone in these feelings. While working with international faculty, I repeatedly observed discussions with my international peers and colleagues about the numerous challenges they had trying to fit in or get used to their lives in Japan, on both personal and professional levels. These discussions happened both in passing and in great length, sometimes in the form of heated frustration and other times, somewhat more painfully, as tired resignation.

Following these experiences and interactions, I began my investigation. The lack of clarity around the definition of belonging together with the evidence that it is strongly impacted by context and setting contributed to my decision to focus my study on how international faculty experience and perceive belonging for themselves in the Japanese university context. Thinking critically about

my personal background, I found my interpretation of belonging in Japan as a foreigner was primarily negative and that I had never reflected on the ways I had coped and grown through those experiences. Therefore, exploring the strategies international faculty use to navigate belonging also became a crucial aspect of my study.

My research is driven by a strong desire to understand how international faculty perceive and understand belonging in the Japanese higher education context. In my time working with international faculty, I realized that each of their stories represented unique understandings and experiences of how it feels to (not) belong. These stories matter because each extends far beyond any one individual and throughout the institution to their fellow faculty members, staff, students, and other stakeholders, thereby potentially impacting the well-being of an entire community. Moreover, I believe that higher education institutions should be caring places that take the well-being and belonging of all their community members to heart. For these reasons, I undertook this study hoping to find out not only what actions international faculty themselves can take, but also what interventions higher education institutions can implement to improve their working environments and foster acceptance and inclusion.

1.2 Worthiness of topic

This research is important for further reasons beyond its relevance and meaning for me personally. Worthiness of topic is one of the eight “big-tent” criteria for quality qualitative research against which I have judged this research (Tracy, 2010, p. 837; the remaining big-ten criteria not mentioned here will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 7). A topic’s worthiness is assessed based on its relevance, timeliness, significance, and level of interest (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Researchers are encouraged to aim for worthy topics that are conceptually compelling and theoretically evocative; however, it is important to remember that such topics can be inspired by the personal events and context of one’s life (Tracy, 2010).

In recent years, both international faculty in Japan and belonging have received increasing amounts of scholarly attention, albeit as separate topics. Belonging is inherently subjective; therefore, a close examination of individual international faculty perspectives within the Japanese context may reveal distinct insights. These may advance our ability to better understand the relationships between international faculty, the Japanese context, and the hurdles they face, which consequently shape their strategies for navigating their belonging. Moreover, many Japanese university settings abound with complex challenges, including power disparities, heavy workloads, and differing expectations (Brotherhood, 2021; Chen, 2024). Such environments can become even more volatile when international faculty must also contend with their fluctuating sense of belonging,

which all too often goes hand in hand with mental well-being. This warrants further investigation into these navigation strategies and ways international faculty advocate for their belonging and well-being.

To the best of my knowledge, no studies have set out to investigate the belonging experiences of international faculty in Japanese universities. This paucity of research is underscored by the limited attention devoted to international faculty as a population overall in higher education institutions (Yudkevich et al., 2017). Therefore, this research could potentially serve institutions within Japan and beyond. Ultimately, I believe this study is worthy and valuable for its contribution to a growing body of literature about international faculty and may help encourage the development of inclusive higher education environments that genuinely embrace the contributions of international faculty.

1.3 Research aim and overview

This qualitative study aims to explore how international faculty experience and navigate belonging in Japanese higher education institutions. In doing so, I hope to address two distinct gaps I have identified in the literature. Firstly, current research on international faculty and belonging is scarce and fails to clearly articulate how international faculty perceive belonging within the unique context of Japanese universities. Secondly, belonging literature overall is rife with ambiguity and more research is needed to clarify its complex nature.

The scholarly community tends to agree on belonging as a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and as a desire to feel as though one is valued by and connected to their surrounding community or environment (Allen, 2021). However, my review of the literature reveals an ongoing and troubled debate on the belonging construct (see Chapter 2). Due to belonging's dynamic, multifaceted, and highly subjective nature, true consensus on its definition remains elusive (Allen, Gray, et al., 2021; Pardede et al., 2021). In the wake of this ambiguity, the field could benefit from research that approaches belonging thoughtfully while embracing its multiplicity and uncertainties.

Despite the valuable role international faculty play in higher education institutions, very little is known about their perceptions of belonging. Japanese universities have yet to fully embrace international faculty (Brotherhood, 2021), which has led to a pattern of struggles with feelings of marginalization, tokenization, and isolation in their roles at Japanese universities (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Chen & Huang, 2022; see Chapter 3). While the literature has hinted at the relationship

between belonging, well-being, and retention (Sakurai & Mason, 2022), I could find no existing literature that addresses belonging specifically for international faculty in Japan.

In response to these gaps, the study I have developed centres on how international faculty in Japanese higher education institutions experience and navigate belonging. To this end, this study seeks to answer the following question:

How do these international faculty in higher education institutions in Japan experience belonging, and how is their belonging shaped?

To answer this question, I investigated how four international faculty subjectively experience and make meaning around sense of belonging (Markula & Silk, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were used together with drawing elicitation as methods well suited within an interpretivist constructionist approach, which “assumes perceptions of everyday life are multi-layered, complex and individual and is therefore concerned with appreciations of subjectivity” (Ward & Shortt, 2018, p. 263).

This study involved four international faculty with a range of teaching and research experience representing three private universities across Japan. All participants have lived and worked in Japan as international faculty for at least three years and less than 25 years. The present research does not seek to generalize about international faculty in Japanese higher education institutions. Instead, it elevates individual participants’ voices and acknowledges that the data and results captured are a direct result of the specific individuals chosen and the researcher’s construction of meaning (Leavy, 2017).

1.4 Overview of the thesis

This thesis is made up of seven chapters. Chapter 1 has established my positionality, the worthiness of the topic, and the aim and scope of the present study. Next, I will present a review of the relevant literature in two parts. First, in Chapter 2 I will explore belonging, the principle construct guiding this study. Then in Chapter 3, I will establish the background against which belonging is situated in this study, namely the higher education context in Japan. Chapter 4 will explain the methodology and design behind the present research. I will begin by sharing the rationale behind my interpretivist constructionist paradigm and fully qualitative methodology, then lay out my research methods step by step, and finally discuss quality and ethical considerations taken throughout. Following this, I present the results of my research in the form of four themes generated through reflexive thematic analysis in Chapter 5, while Chapter 6 discusses key issues and implications raised by the results. Finally, I will conclude this thesis in Chapter 7 by revisiting my

research question and offering final reflections on quality, limitations of the study, implications and directions for future research, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: Belonging

Belonging is typically researched alongside other constructs, resulting in few studies focused on belonging as a standalone phenomenon (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Literature also lacks consensus on how belonging should be constructed and operationalized across contexts and disciplines, making the concept vague overall. Numerous definitions of belonging exist, with twenty unique transdisciplinary operational or conceptual definitions found in a single review of literature produced between 1990 and 2011 alone (Mahar et al., 2013). The lack of a singular definition can be attributed to the fact that belonging encompasses “multiple scales, sites, practices and domains from the affective to the structural and everything in between” (Wright, 2015, p. 394). Despite this ambiguity, belonging is frequently discussed in both academic and everyday circles freely and with familiarity, as if its definition was well-known to the point of being taken for granted. As Wright (2015) aptly describes, belonging is “slippery and axiomatic, flexible and self-evident” (p. 391).

For the sake of this study, belonging is defined as “the subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences” (Allen, Kern, et al., 2021, p. 87). This definition has been selected because it reflects not only the social dimension of belonging, which corresponds to most conceptualizations of belonging, but also spatial, subjective, and shared dimensions of belonging. The use of this definition aligns with current trends in belonging literature that have turned to generative ways of thinking about belonging that seek to explore its multiple facets and embrace its contradictions.

The literature review for this thesis spans two chapters. In this chapter, I will unpack the complexities of belonging starting with its commonly accepted understanding as a fundamental human need. Next, I will distinguish belonging from certain closely related but distinct constructs. Following this, I will problematize normative understandings of belonging by drawing attention to its various key aspects. Finally, given the focus of my study, this chapter will examine belonging in the higher education context. This literature review aims to explore the ongoing debate about belonging’s definition, highlighting its ambiguities and questioning whether this construct should continue to be taken for granted without challenge.

2.1 Dominant understandings of belonging

There is a consensus among many theorists and scholars that belonging is a fundamental human need that must be satisfied. This conception can primarily be attributed to the findings of evolutionary, developmental, and social psychologists, which have come to form the basis of present-day dominant understandings of belonging. From an evolutionary standpoint, creating and

maintaining relationships is a necessary human survival mechanism (Boyd & Richerson, 2009) because humans rely on the successful functioning and cooperation of their immediate social group for access to shelter, food, and protection (Over, 2016). Developmentally, humans have in turn evolved to protect their biological and physical well-being by seeking safety through social connection and belonging (Slavich, 2020), which has prompted psychologists to describe belonging as “almost as compelling a need as food” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498). This need to belong even has implications for infants and young people as belonging has been found to have a strong influence on the early development of our behaviours and motivations to interact with those around us (Over, 2016).

These evolutionary and developmental insights form the basis of several social psychology theories that each assert belonging as a human need. The earliest example of these is Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, which posits that all people have a fundamental need for love and belonging which emerges only after one’s physiological and safety needs have been satisfied. Since then, other human need theories have emerged, such as Alderfer’s (1972) three-stage model of existence, relatedness, and growth, which refers to “relatedness” as the need for interpersonal relationships, or Deci and Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory, which states that relatedness (or the desire to belong and to be loved, cared for, and connected to others) is one of three innate needs that determine human motivation. Despite their differences, these theories support not only the conceptualization of belonging as a fundamental human need but also an understanding of belonging as a motivation to create and maintain relationships (Waller, 2021). Perhaps the most well-known and commonly cited theory of belonging, particularly in education contexts, was developed by Baumeister and Leary. In their belongingness hypothesis, Baumeister and Leary (1995) clearly articulate belonging as a fundamental need for relatedness and social connection that drives people to form relationships. However, to truly satisfy the need to belong, Baumeister and Leary (1995) posit that these relationships must meet two criteria. First, they must feature frequent interactions and be largely positive or free from conflict. Second, the relationships must be stable and ongoing, mutual, and marked by perceivable caring or affection.

Across the literature, positive outcomes associated with satisfying the belonging need (and in turn negative outcomes associated with not satisfying the belonging need) have been reported. Deci and Ryan (2012) propose that the need for relatedness (belonging or love) and its benefits are universally relevant across cultures. Belonging is said to promote mental health, well-being, and self-esteem (Pickett & Brewer, 2004). When the need to belong is fulfilled, people experience positive emotional responses such as contentment and happiness; however, when not fulfilled, negative emotional responses include depression, loneliness, and anxiety (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Unsatisfied belonging needs can also increase the risk of antisocial behaviour and physical illness (Allen, Kern, et al., 2021).

To summarize, there is a strong foundation in belonging research that positions belonging as a fundamental human need based on developmental, evolutionary, and social psychologies. According to these theories, the belonging need is met by establishing social connections and relatedness or by being loved and cared for by others. Satisfying the need for belonging is key to unlocking positive outcomes, while not satisfying this need can trigger a range of negative outcomes. This section not only emphasizes belonging as being primarily based on social relatedness, but also as being universally experienced and desirable for its positive outcomes. These views will be challenged and extended later in this literature review.

2.2 Distinguishing belonging from related constructs

Belonging has grown in popularity as a research construct of interest over the last twenty years and has commonly come to be used alongside closely related constructs. The distinction between belonging and these other concepts may have been somewhat blurred, making the conceptualization of belonging ambiguous and unclear. Therefore, this section will discuss the following related constructs in turn to clarify their relationships with and distinctions from belonging: identity, inclusion, and integration.

2.2.1 Identity

Understanding belonging in conjunction with identity has been a focus of much research. As a well-established and complex concept, identity can be defined in several ways. Identity can refer to one's core self and to an aspirational self, which one can claim or be assigned by others (Erikson, 1968). Social identity refers to how people view themselves and their relationships with different groups (Allen, 2021). Identity can be performative, where people attempt to manage the impressions they give to be perceived a certain way by certain people (Butler, 2003). Such performances are usually motivated by the desire to *identify with* others or a group with whom you share commonalities, such as values or characteristics like religious beliefs or abilities (Anthias, 2018). This in turn relates to group or collective identity, which is the perception of sameness and identification with a group (which can be based on nationality, gender, sexuality, social status, and so forth) in comparison to a separate and external other (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011).

Some theorists argue that the term belonging has “emerged alongside, and partly replaced or challenged, the concept of identity” (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016, p. 234). For example, understandings of identity draw similarities to understandings of belonging as “an emotionally

charged social location” that combines “perceptions and performance of *commonality*” and “a sense of *mutuality* and more or less formalized modalities of collective *allegiance*” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 2). However, one major difference between these two constructs is that “identity is a categorical concept while belonging combines categorisation with social relating” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 4). Both belonging and identity can highlight commonalities and differences, and how these form norms, boundaries, social bonds, and collectives (Anthias, 2018). However, while identity “relies on sharp boundary building,” belonging can move beyond boundaries, thereby “widening borders, incorporating, defining new common grounds” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011, p. 4). Identity has also been criticized for focusing too closely on individual claims, whereas belonging facilitates inquiries beyond the individual into their broader spaces, contexts, and meanings (Anthias, 2018).

2.2.2 Inclusion

Another construct that is commonly discussed alongside belonging is inclusion, a construct that has become popular in both education and organizational research. This can be seen in recent diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) trends in institutional initiatives, where membership in a group is strongly foregrounded. These trends refer to inclusion as the actionable ways companies and institutions make workplaces fair, transparent, and welcoming; meanwhile, belonging is referred to as the outcome of inclusion actions, such as the way those actions make members of that institution feel (Verlinden, 2024). In a similar vein, Shore et al. (2011) view belonging as one dimension of inclusion, which they define as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” (p. 724). This definition points out the tension between the fundamental need to belong to a group and maintaining a distinct self-concept and identity (Shore et al., 2011).

Over time, the terms inclusion and belonging have sometimes come to be used interchangeably, which theorists argue implies a false equivalence that could confuse. For example, Leary (2021) has criticized Shore et al.’s (2011) use of inclusion and exclusion to describe high and low states of belonging for being misleading, stating that “people are often ‘excluded’ in ways that do not affect their feelings of belonging” and vice versa (p. 127). However, belonging is not limited solely to social connection or group membership, as previously established. Moreover, Anthias (2018) points out that simplifying belonging to be about inclusion “leaves questions about what the criteria are for this, and how subjects, both individual and collective, are to meet these criteria, and who decides what the criteria are” (para. 21). While belonging does not escape the social and political

constructs that also govern inclusion, belonging's ability to also move beyond these to embrace other non-human and affective dimensions of the belonging experience makes it distinct.

2.2.3 Integration

Acculturation and integration are two processes international faculty may be faced with when they go abroad to pursue their careers. Acculturation refers to the changes that occur both psychologically and culturally through continued contact with people of different backgrounds from one's own (Schwartz et al., 2010). For example, Berry (1997) proposes that when someone enters a new culture, acculturation can be approached through four strategies based on how much they engage with or acquire the receiving culture and how much they maintain their original culture. These four strategies are assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration.

According to Berry (1997), integration is when individuals entering a new environment embrace the new receiving culture while simultaneously maintaining their own original culture (Berry, 1997). Achieving integration is commonly positioned as an ideal and desired end state; however, some scholars argue that such an assumption can be imperialist or even xenophobic (Bowskill et al., 2007). Integration has also been criticized as a one-sided conceptualization, where newcomers must integrate and become entirely responsible for integrating while insiders can influence but need not worry about integration, excepting any changes that may arise as a consequence (Klarenbeek, 2019). In response, there has been a turn toward a two-way relational approach to integration that positions insiders as an intrinsic part of the integration process, stating that such an approach would break down stigmatizing barriers and discrimination (Klarenbeek, 2019). Indeed, some theorists argue that belonging is a crucial successful outcome of the acculturation process and that the fundamental need for belonging motivates and shapes the acculturation process (Komisarof, 2018).

In summary, identity, inclusion, and acculturation and integration are constructs that are separate from but closely related to belonging. By examining each of these constructs individually, I hope to demonstrate some part of the range and depth belonging captures, as well as the many jobs it takes on as a complex construct. As Anthias (2018) says, belonging "wears different hats and these hats serve different questions that are related but not mutually distinctive" (p. 21). The semantic and theoretical debates surrounding these terms shine a light on the ongoing ambiguities and tensions Anthias' questions raise.

2.3 Challenging and extending dominant understandings of belonging

In general, belonging scholars tend to focus on belonging's associations with social connections and relatedness to the point of ignoring other important aspects of belonging (Allen, Kern, et al., 2021). Belonging does not only occur in the presence of or in relation to people; valued forms of involvement, connection, and fit can also be perceived in relation to objects, environments and places, or even spiritual realms (Hagerty et al., 1992). This is one way in which belonging stands apart from other closely related constructs that focus primarily on social relationships. This section will briefly explore several important aspects of belonging, including place-belongingness and materiality; politics of belonging and translocationality; non-belonging; and multiple and dynamic belonging, all of which trouble the somewhat straightforward representation of belonging summarized in the previous section.

2.3.1 Place-belongingness and materiality

Belonging can be described as a personal emotional attachment and feeling “at home” in a particular place (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 369). Feeling at home is an intimate experience of feeling comfortable in a familiar place where you are safe and secure (Lähdesmäki et al., 2022), which Antonsich (2010) refers to as “place-belongingness” (p. 645). Place-belongingness overlaps closely with Fenster's (2005) theory of personal belonging, which assumes that a sense of belonging can be nurtured through private everyday activities, such as homemaking practices or daily commutes to and from work. Through these activities, people accumulate emotional connections, memories, and spatial knowledges of a particular place (Fenster, 2005). This process, called “place-making” (p. 243), is particularly relevant in discussions of mobility and boundary-crossing as individuals build new homes and communities outside of what they know and find familiar (Castillo, 2014). Mobility can also create feelings of “in-betweenness” (p. 338) which highlights how spatial belonging can become a negotiation of multiple or even simultaneous place attachments at once (Huot et al., 2014). This negotiation not only engages with material and embodied experiences of place-making but also with temporal experiences of nostalgia over the past as well as hopes and expectations for the future (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016).

Most definitions of belonging focus primarily on the social side of belonging and tend to overlook its other essential aspects, including materiality (Allen, Kern, et al., 2021). However, place-belongingness highlights how materiality in belonging can be experienced through peoples' embodied interactions with their physical surroundings (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). Shifting focus away from human exceptionalism (that is a view of humans as in a position of power and privilege over non-human realms, according to Braidotti [2019]) marks a significant socio-material or

posthuman turn in research towards examining the active roles of materials and material practices play in our lives (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022). The posthuman turn allows us to think beyond the social dimension of belonging and consider how “belonging is constituted as an intimate interaction with nature, a material relation to the physical environment and biosphere” (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016, p. 238). Moreover, decentering humanness opens new avenues for considering how human, non-human, and more-than-human actors are relationally entangled in belonging experiences (Gravett, Ajjawi, Bearman, et al., 2023).

As material spaces become emotionally charged over time, they tend to become centres of social connection and relations, as happens with families or community members (Lähdesmäki et al., 2022). Moreover, as people become intimately more knowledgeable and familiar with the places they inhabit, their sense of belonging and territoriality over those places becomes stronger (de Certeau, 2011). Therefore, even though personal place-belongingness can be experienced in material and embodied ways, it cannot be separated from its specific social contexts nor escape subjection to local discourses.

2.3.2 Politics of belonging and translationality

When the personal dimension of place-belongingness comes to be shaped by the social dimension in which it is experienced, it is then conceptualized as the “politics of belonging” (2006, p. 197). According to Yuval-Davis’ (2006) theory of the politics of belonging, belonging is “a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion” (Antonsich, 2010, p. 645). The politics of belonging overlap closely with Fenster’s (2005) formal belonging, which assumes that belonging can manifest as a “formal structure” that is official and public-facing, such as citizenship (Fenster, 2005, p. 242). Put simply, the politics of belonging refers to the struggles that ensue between those who have the power to grant belonging and those who seek to claim belonging. Struggles arise when dominant groups assume belonging is equivalent to maintaining sameness and identity; this assumption places pressure on those entering new contexts to assimilate and accept the dominant culture, language, values, and so forth (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Formal structures of belonging draw attention to the criticisms of identity’s focus on sameness, and particularly how it empowers some groups while excluding others (Hall, 1996).

Belonging theorists sometimes use alternative lenses to examine the complexities of how belonging is located within social and political landscapes simultaneously. For example, Yuval-Davis (2006) frequently discusses the politics of belonging in terms of intersectionality. First coined by Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality is a widely-used feminist framework and analytical approach to understanding the meanings and consequences of occupying multiple identities and group

memberships. Intersectionality relies on the assumption that discrimination and exclusion occur within overlapping “mutually constitutive” axes of difference rather than on only one axis (Hopkins, 2019, p. 937). However, Yuval-Davis’ (2006) use of intersectionality has also been criticized for being overly tied to rigid identities. For example, Anthias (2008) argues that intersectionality is dangerous for its construction of people as “belonging to fixed and permanent groups (e.g. ethnic, gender and class groups) which then all enter, in a pluralist fashion, into their determination” (p. 14). As an alternative, Anthias (2008) proposes the use of translocationality, which addresses issues of identity by instead focusing on social locations and processes “which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions” (p. 5). For those researching within the context of academic mobility, as I am doing in the present study, the flexibility of translocationality may offer a larger scope for understanding the complexities of belonging as international faculty cross boundaries and contexts (Koh & Sin, 2020).

Ultimately, belonging can be influenced by social context, identity, and discourses of power. However, as Antonsich (2010) points out, research tends “to mobilize belonging as a synonym of collective identity” (p. 647). The use of belonging and identity synonymously can lead to harmful assumptions, which stresses the need for further clarification of how belonging is operationalized. Moreover, the belonging construct is far broader in scope than identity alone, as this literature review demonstrates. Later, I provide further discussion of the distinctions between belonging and identity.

2.3.3 Non-belonging

Inequalities and discrimination can limit access to belonging, especially for minoritized groups (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). Despite belonging’s apparent significance, research shows that a large number of people struggle to experience belonging and are impacted by the negative effects of non-belonging, including loneliness and isolation (Allen, Kern, et al., 2021). As demonstrated in the discussion of the politics of belonging, a condition of belonging is claiming and being granted access to belonging (Anthias, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Identification as part of a particular group does not presuppose one can belong to that group. According to Wright (2015), “the opposite of belonging may be exclusion; it may also be isolation, alienation, loneliness, displacement, uprootedness, disconnection, disenfranchisement or marginalization” (p. 395); for this reason, it is necessary to examine the context of non-belonging, including, how, when, and why it occurs.

Dominant belonging understandings generally frame belonging as positive and to be sought after and non-belonging as negative. Consequently, very little research on possible alternative framings or outcomes of non-belonging exists. For example, Guyotte et al. (2021) state that feelings

of belonging and non-belonging are relational and not mutually exclusive. Moreover, “belongingness is not inherently good” (p. 556) for students who choose intentionally not to belong (Guyotte et al., 2021). Studies indicate that the choice to opt out of or resist belonging may be preferable for various reasons (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022). For example, people may choose against forming feelings of belonging based on exclusionism and sameness (e.g., racism or political extremism). Indeed, as Harris and Gandolfo (2014, p. 574) ponder: “Could marginal subjectivities be a kind of belonging, offering a kind of comfort in not-being something?” Regardless, the paucity of non-belonging studies suggests that scholars may fail to consider the experiences of those who struggle to belong or purposefully choose not to belong (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022). Expanding research into these areas could further challenge normative assumptions of belonging and bring about new understandings of non-belonging.

2.3.4 Multiple, dynamic, and processual belonging

As this section has demonstrated so far, belonging as a construct is multiple, dynamic, and processual. The experience of belonging is simultaneously socio-material, fluid, and situated (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022; Wong, 2024) as people cross boundaries, inhabit various social locations, form emotional attachments to different places, groups, and materials, and hold multiple identities at once (Guyotte et al., 2021). As such, belonging is at once a highly subjective and individual experience but also relational and shared. According to Lähdesmäki et al. (2016, p. 237), belonging can be perceived as “situational, constructed across one’s lifespan, and constantly being negotiated.” Therefore, belonging is not finite or firmly secured; instead, it is a dynamic and constantly ongoing process (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Gravett, Ajjawi, Bearman, et al., 2023). Employing the notion of “sticky” emotions from Ahmed (2014, p. 191), Gravett, Ajjawi, Bearman, et al. (2023, p. 2) “conceptualise belonging as sticky, but also flickering in its instability, entangled with affect, and on the move.” This description draws attention to the ways belonging and non-belonging are emotionally felt and embodied, echoing back to the earlier discussion on feeling at home, forming attachments, hope, memory, and nostalgia.

In summary, this section has attempted to introduce the following major aspects of belonging: place-belongingness and materiality; politics of belonging and translocationality; non-belonging; and multiple and dynamic belonging. Together, these aspects demonstrate the complexities of belonging and how they have come to be embedded in nearly all aspects of life. This discussion troubles dominant understandings of belonging by highlighting the reality of belonging as neither inherently good nor fixedly achievable; as much more than social connection and

relatedness; and as a highly complex entanglement of power, materiality, affect, and more under ongoing construction.

2.4 Belonging in higher education

The literature on belonging in higher education is largely focused on students and their belonging to their institutions. This is perhaps due in part to growing attention to the increased importance placed on belonging during youth and adolescence (Yeager et al., 2018). According to Strayhorn (2012), student belonging can be defined as “a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (p. 4). More recent definitions of student belonging also emphasize students’ interactions with their peers and teachers and student feelings in connection with and towards their schools (Allen & Boyle, 2018). Regardless, most major definitions of student belonging in higher education are founded on the conceptualizations of belonging as a human need (Strayhorn, 2012) and as a feeling of strong emotional attachment, sense of safety, and act of identification (Yuval-Davis, 2006), both of which have previously been discussed. In addition, student belonging has come to be associated with academic success, persistence, and motivation (Freeman et al., 2007; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hausmann et al., 2007). Consequently, belonging has come to be taken for granted as something that can and ought to be achieved by students in higher education as evidenced by recent manifestations of pedagogy, practice, and policy (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022).

While belonging’s positive associations can be applied to all students, minoritized student groups seem to face more challenges when it comes to developing their sense of belonging in campus environments (Strayhorn, 2012). The term minoritized refers to the social construction of underrepresented groups in social systems and institutions. In Harper’s words (2013, p. 207), “persons are not born into a minority status” but are “rendered minorities in particular situations and institutional environments that sustain an overrepresentation.” Minoritized student groups, therefore, can include any group that is underrepresented within their university milieu, such as students of colour, LGBTQ+ students, international students, and so forth.

The challenges faced by minoritized students link back to the earlier discussion of the politics of belonging which pointed out the tension between those with the power to grant and those who claim belonging. To mitigate this imbalance, a strong focus of research in higher education now focuses specifically on how to foster inclusive belonging environments for minoritized student groups (Meehan & Howells, 2019). For example, in a qualitative study comparing how minoritized students and privileged students (those who did not self-identify any minoritized identity) define and

experience belonging, Vaccaro and Newman (2016) found that both groups of students indicated distinctly different perspectives. Both groups agreed that belonging is defined by feelings of comfort and fitting in; however, minoritized students also defined belonging as safety, respect, and the ability to be one's authentic self while their privileged counterparts did not (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Such a discrepancy suggests that belonging definitions may not be consistent across different populations. This troubles the narrative of belonging as universally experienced, particularly for studies that use qualitative surveys to measure belonging based on a predetermined definition (Allen & Boyle, 2018).

Belonging research about higher education faculty and staff is scarce, especially when compared to the vast amount of belonging research that has been conducted about students. Higher education has grown increasingly neoliberal, marketized, competitive, and individualized (see Chapter 3), thereby making universities into potentially contentious spaces for academics (Hil et al., 2022). By contrast, the desire for connections, relationships, and care in learning and teaching in higher education has also grown more evident in higher education research (Felten & Lambert, 2020; Gannon et al., 2019). This draws attention to the significance of relationality, identification, and belonging for academics (Baker & Burke, 2023). Academics are subject to power hierarchies and academic cultures that can constrain belonging and cause feelings of unwelcome and exclusion (Rickett & Morris, 2021). At the same time, exclusion can work to bond academics through the emotional labour of "carefully listening and understanding" to create an atmosphere of "being seen and recognised, not as a cog in a machine, but as a person who matters" (Gravett, Ajjawi, Bearman, et al., 2023, p. 12).

This section has briefly described belonging in higher education settings. Firstly, it highlighted the fact that student belonging is steeped in normative understandings of belonging. As such, institutional policy and practice are strongly informed by belonging in terms of its positive association with student achievement, motivation, and success. Meanwhile, compared to their counterparts, minoritized students struggle more with developing their sense of belonging; this is a distinction that prompts further investigation into how belonging might be defined in different ways by different populations. Finally, against the neoliberal and highly competitive backdrop of academia, evidence of faculty yearning for more belonging, connection, and care has been found. Altogether, this section demonstrates that it might be possible for universities to critically review their stance on belonging to better care for their students and faculty, bearing in mind the diversity of experiences and needs when it comes to belonging.

2.5 Summary

This literature review began by establishing belonging as a fundamental human need, then went on to explore belonging's related but distinct constructs, some of its key aspects, and conceptualizations of belonging in higher education together with relevant scholarly debates and arguments. As a construct, belonging shows incredible breadth and complexity, and yet normative understandings of belonging seem to miss much of this complexity, particularly within higher education contexts. For example, it is commonly understood that belonging is inherently good because it functions as a fundamental human need and is typically associated with positive outcomes. However, research shows that non-belonging can be a preferred and chosen alternative to belonging, and I argue that more research into the experiences and effects of non-belonging is needed. Additionally, theorists sometimes assume that belonging is universally experienced, perhaps because of its origins in evolutionary and developmental psychology. The universality of the belonging experience is problematized by investigations of belonging for minoritized students demonstrating the ways belonging can manifest in a variety of ways through intersecting social locations, identities, and places. Finally, the assumption that belonging can and ought to be achieved is drawn into question by understandings of belonging as multiple, dynamic, constantly under negotiation, and never fixed. In this study, I hope to extend the growing seeking to tease out belonging's complexity, particularly for international faculty in Japanese universities.

Chapter 3: Higher Education in the Japanese Context

Proceeding from Chapter 2, this chapter acts as the second part of the literature review for this thesis. Since I am focusing on belonging in the Japanese context specifically, this chapter will establish the background for this study by discussing the history and current state of modern higher education in Japan. I will outline the key concepts that foreground international faculty's belonging experiences and understandings of belonging in the Japanese university context, including internationalization, "Japaneseness" (Goodman, 2007), and exclusionism. Then, I will illustrate Japan's active role in neoliberal pursuits and the massification of education as well as its use of academic mobility and international faculty as tools for acquiring "world-class" status. To clarify the terms and scope of the present study, I will describe the current state of higher education in Japan then clearly define international faculty for this study and share their demographic makeup. As the literature review draws to a close, I will share what we know about international higher education faculty experiences in Japan so far, both in general and in relation to the belonging construct. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of the chapter's key points.

3.1 The Meiji Era and internationalization

The Meiji Era, lasting from 1868 to 1912, marked a turning point in Japan's history, national identity, and higher education. After over 200 years of self-imposed isolation, Japan emerged in 1868 to embrace modernity and seek acceptance and recognition from the Western world for the first time (Reischauer, 1974). It was during the Meiji Era that Japan abandoned feudalism, making way for a more egalitarian education system meant to equalize the classes (Stigger et al., 2018). This reformation included the founding of Japan's first Ministry of Education in 1871 and the adoption of Western academic models (Altbach, 2007; Stigger et al., 2018). These reforms created the foundation of Japan's first modern tertiary institutions through to its present-day education system. While the Meiji Era is characterized by the myriad of ways that Japan opened to the outside world, it also sparked a profound sense of nationalism and a "secluded nation mentality" which would have a lasting influence on Japan's international relations, policy, and education (Burgess et al., 2010, p. 461).

One of the most significant characteristics of the Meiji Era was Japan's acknowledgment that to become an influential national presence on the world stage, Japan must forge connections within the global community (Burgess et al., 2010). Despite its growing overseas connections, Japan's persistent isolation and extreme self-perception of uniqueness (which will be further discussed later in this chapter) were criticized as counterproductive to its relationships in the world economy

(McConnell, 1996). Therefore, Japan continued to fall behind in terms of integrating foreigners into its daily life and institutions compared to other countries (McConnell, 2000). Thus, while other countries were busy learning how to manage their growing diversity as late as the 1970s, Japan was still struggling “to ‘create diversity’ and to acquaint its insulated people with foreigners at the level of face-to-face interaction” (McConnell, 2000, p. ix). As a result, internationalization became a crucial issue that sparked profound change in Japan’s higher education system in the early 1980’s.

Internationalization, or *kokusaika* in Japanese, became embedded in Japanese higher education rhetoric with the implementation of government-led strategies aiming to internationalize universities nationwide starting in the early 1980’s (Huang & Welch, 2021). A commonly cited definition states that higher education internationalization is “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p. 2). However, it quickly became clear that stakeholders in Japan held inconsistent and often contradictory interpretations of internationalization (Yonezawa, 2010). This prompted Goodman (2007) to call *kokusaika* a “multivocal symbol” (p. 85) of internationalization. The multivocality of the term *kokusaika*, Goodman (2007) explains, allows internationalization in the Japanese context to be viewed as “boundary-strengthening” and as a “more global concept transcending any idea of national identity” simultaneously (p. 72). On the one hand, some saw *kokusaika* as an invitation to harden nationalistic distinctions between themselves and the rest of the world; at the same time, others viewed *kokusaika* as a chance to develop global understanding and open dialogue between nations with the hope of learning from one another (Goodman, 2007, p. 72). In terms of the present study, I argue that these competing views of *kokusaika* have a hand in shaping the present higher education context in which international faculty find themselves.

3.2 Japaneseness and exclusionism

To better understand how *kokusaika* is “based in Japaneseness” (Goodman, 2007, p. 72), it is important to situate Japaneseness within *nihonjinron*, meaning the theory of the Japanese people. *Nihonjinron* goes beyond mere Japanese patriotism by seeking to claim the essence of Japaneseness as defined by three concepts used almost interchangeably: nationality, ethnicity, and culture (Sugimoto, 1999). The discourse around *nihonjinron* in Japan can be traced as far back as the seventeenth century; however, once Japan ended its seclusion in the Meiji Era, *nihonjinron* discourse was recalibrated to define Japanese distinctiveness in relationship to the West (Akagawa, 2015). At its heart, *nihonjinron* assumes a “belief in the purity of Japanese culture” (Akagawa, 2015, p. 37) and the “fundamental assumption that Japaneseness, which every single Japanese supposedly

possesses, has existed indefinitely, that Japaneseness differs fundamentally from 'westernness'... and determines all aspects of Japanese ways of life” (Sugimoto, 1999, p. 82). This view of the Japanese as completely homogenous is a constructed worldview that privileges the ethnic Yamato Japanese majority while ignoring the presence of the Ryūkyū and Ainu indigenous peoples, resident Koreans, and other minoritized groups (Morita, 2017).

Japaneseness has implications for non-Japanese residents of Japan as it manifests in exclusionary practices. Such practices, or indeed attitudes and opinions, are aligned with the “insistence that foreigners should do things the Japanese way” (Morita, 2015, p. 1). These exclusionary practices can be seen as a reflection of the politics of belonging and identity as discussed previously. At the time my research was conducted, evidence of these exclusionary practices could still be seen. For example, rampant conformity and uniformity present in Japanese society create intense pressure for foreigners, including international academics, to abide by the given norms (Sugimoto, 2014). As Chen (2022b) recently found, this makes integration into the country incredibly challenging for international faculty. According to Morita (2015), “not only does the [Japanese] government acknowledge Japanese exclusionism, it is aware that exclusionism can be a hindrance” (p. 4). With regard to this study, international faculty belonging too may be impacted by lingering nihonjinron sentiments and exclusionary practices at Japanese institutions.

3.3 Neoliberalism and the massification of higher education

Across the world, globalization has spurred the rapid development of higher education, which led to the formation of knowledge-based economies and significant international mobility among educators, students, and researchers (Yamada, 2022). Globalization can be defined as “the broad economic, technological, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education and are largely inevitable in the contemporary world” (Altbach, 2007, p. 123). As markets and networks opened across the world, motivations for internationalization in higher education moved away from the development of peace and mutual understanding toward increased competitiveness and capitalist gain (Knight, 2015). “Universities have increasingly operated with market-driven intentions,” Yamada (2022) states, “attracting international students charged with increased tuitions, increasing prestige by recruiting top international talent, and working towards quantitative internationalization metrics that may increase their standings in world rankings” (p. 95). The growing influence of neoliberalism – which assumes that “competition reigns, resources are limited, policies are market-driven, and individual worth is tied to financial and monetary profit” – on global practices in higher education has become a growing concern (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017, p. 156). This concern is

furthered by university massification, referring to increased demand for and access to higher education (Altbach, 2007).

In response to these global trends, neoliberalism came to underpin Japanese educational reform practices in the 1990's (Chen & Huang, 2023). During this time, Japan underwent a massification and reform of its higher education which resulted in the rapid development of its private universities and also granted universities freedom to organize their curriculums and generate profit through tuition fees (Liu, 2022). Neoliberalism eventually became even more firmly embedded in Japan's higher education when national universities were corporatized with the implementation of the National University Corporation Law in 2004 (Chen & Huang, 2023). In the years that followed, "the government continuously launched strategies and policies regarding promoting higher education through quality assurance, diversification of higher education to meet dynamic changes and enhancing research capacity to maintain Japan's higher education's international competitiveness" (Liu, 2022, pp. 136-137). The present study thus takes place in a context characterised by neoliberalism-driven individualism and competition that could potentially reduce international faculty to resources rather than people in their own right.

3.4 Academic mobility and international faculty in higher education

The mobility of students and academics has come to be recognized as a crucial component of internationalization (Morley et al., 2018). Mobility in this context refers to border crossing for the purpose of study or work; mobility can be termed outward or inward, depending on the direction of the border crossing in relation to the country of destination (Teichler, 2015). In the context of this study, international faculty are mobile academics moving inbound to Japan from other countries. As universities shift their focus toward competing for the employment of top academics from abroad, academics have more opportunities than ever to become mobile and seek opportunities outside of their home countries (Trembath, 2016). In the face of powerful neoliberalism and globalization trends, international faculty have increasingly come to be seen as valuable human resources (Yudkevich et al., 2017). Sometimes termed the "spearhead of internationalization," international faculty are desired for their varied global perspectives, teaching methodologies, and international research potential and networks which encourage diversity, innovation, and reform (Yudkevich et al., 2017, p. 3).

Like the term internationalization, there is no single agreed-upon definition for international faculty in higher education, and even the term itself is contentious. A review of the literature reveals the use of numerous terms, such as "foreign academics," "academic migrants," or "expatriate researchers," with definitions that often vary or need further clarification (Trembath, 2016). For

example, while “some research defines international faculty by place of birth (i.e., foreign-born) or by citizenship (i.e., non-Japanese citizen), others prefer to describe them as non-national citizens or foreign passport holders” (Huang, 2018b, p. 266). To avoid potentially problematic assumptions of othering and strangeness, I have opted against using the word “foreign” to describe international faculty (Kristeva, 1991; Said, 1994). Instead, I have chosen to use the term “international faculty” because it is the most widely used in higher education research (Huang, 2018b).

In line with past research conducted on international faculty in Japanese higher education institutions, I define international faculty as individuals who are employed full-time as lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, or full professors in higher education institutions and who do not hold a Japanese passport. This definition extends to those who participate in a combination of service, research, and teaching, thereby excluding post-doctoral lecturers and those who work in purely administrative roles. For participants of this study, international faculty mobility is self-initiated and may be intended as permanent or temporary.

Aiming to make the hiring of international faculty in universities a key internationalization strategy, the Japanese government introduced the Foreign Faculties Employment Act in 1982 (Green, 2021). This act allowed universities to hire the non-Japanese nationals necessary to accommodate the Japanese government’s new goal of enrolling 100,000 international students by the year 2000 (Yonezawa et al., 2014). This perceived value of international faculty has been reinforced by popular university ranking systems which now include internationalization as one of their ranking criteria (Trembath, 2016). These ranking systems, like Times Higher Education and Quacquarelli Symonds, assume a positive correlation between an institution’s international faculty ratio and its attractiveness to students and overall quality (Glass et al., 2021; Rumbley & de Wit, 2017; Yudkevich et al., 2017). In line with Japan’s neoliberal and internationalization aims, inbound academic mobility to Japanese institutions is seen as crucial to improving global standing and reputation for excellence in world-class education, thereby making international faculty highly desirable human capital (Brotherhood, 2021).

The Japanese government has continued to incentivize the hiring of international faculty with the implementation of government initiatives like the Global 30 project in 2009 and the Top Global University project in 2014 (Brotherhood, 2021; Huang, 2018b; Yonezawa et al., 2014; Yudkevich et al., 2017). As a result of cumulative efforts since the 1980s, the number of international faculty hired in higher education institutions in Japan has increased rapidly, rising from about 1% of all full-time academics in 1983 to just over 5% by 2022 (Chen & Chen, 2023; Sakurai & Mason, 2022). Looking ahead, this trend is likely to carry on as Japan continues to rely on inbound academic mobility to internationalize its education. For this reason, it is important to consider the current

experiences of international faculty in Japanese higher education institutions as well as what the future holds for this increasing population.

3.5 Japanese higher education institutions today

Japan is home to roughly 800 higher education institutions (Sakurai & Mason, 2022), 77% of which (as of 2020) are private institutions operated by school corporations (Liu, 2022). The remainder are public and national institutions operated by local and national government entities (Huang, 2022). Within Japan's higher education system, private, public, and national institutions perform different functions. As private universities are dependent on tuition fees and influenced by the needs and trends of the global market, they mostly provide popular humanities and social science programs (Huang, 2022). By contrast, public institutions tend to support regional and local community development while national schools focus on STEM fields and research engagement (Huang, 2022). These differences influence the roles and activities of international faculty. For example, international faculty hired at national universities are more likely to take part in research activities than in teaching (Huang, 2022).

The academic hierarchy in Japan resembles that found in many Western countries (Green, 2021). The highest academic position is full professor, followed by associate professor, assistant professor, and then lecturer. Full professors are typically tenured, while associate professors may gain permanency via a "tenure track" after a period of review. Assistant professors and lecturers are usually fixed-term contract hires, but assistant professors have more potential for advancement. In contrast to tenure and tenure-track positions, contract employment is common for both international and Japanese academics. While it is legally possible for contract hires to stay in their position for up to ten years, it is far more common that institutions allow renewal of such contracts for only between three and five years at most (Green, 2021). Tenure track positions are rare, and it is uncommon for institutions to create new permanent positions to keep fixed-term hires after their contracts run out. In line with such efforts as the Top Global University Project put forth by the Japanese government, some researchers hope that the tenure and promotion process in Japan may become more transparent and offer clearer, more consistent criteria in the future (Green, 2021).

As of 2022, international faculty make up 5% of all full-time faculty members in Japanese higher education institutions (Sakurai & Mason, 2022). This represents a 400% increase in full-time international faculty since the establishment of the Foreign Faculties Employment Act in 1982 when international academics were allowed to be hired as tenured professors in public and national universities (Chen & Chen, 2023; Huang, 2022; Sakurai & Mason, 2022). While this growth may seem

substantial, it is relatively low when compared to universities in other countries where international faculty commonly account for 25% or more of overall full-time faculty (Trembath, 2016).

The largest number of international faculty are employed by the private sector to be involved in language education, humanities, and social sciences, and many of these faculty come from English-speaking countries (Huang, 2022). However, when viewed by country of origin, the largest proportion of international faculty come from China, followed by South Korea, America, and the United Kingdom (Huang, 2018a). The majority of international faculty in Japan working in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields are from China, Korea, and India (Yonezawa et al., 2014). Nearly half of all international faculty in Japan overall have received their final degrees in Japan (Huang, 2018b), which invites the speculation that Japanese institutions prefer to recruit international faculty who have a strong understanding of Japanese culture and language to avoid the need for potential reform (Chen, 2022a, 2022b). As Japanese institutions carry on recruiting and the international faculty community grows, it will become increasingly important to monitor how Japaneseness and exclusionism may play out in Japan's higher education contexts.

3.6 Experiences of international faculty in Japan

While research interest in international faculty has grown with Japan's increased focus on internationalization and encouragement of inbound academic mobility, research on international faculty in Japan remains limited. Earlier studies seemed mostly concerned with gaining a general understanding of international faculty in Japan and primarily focused on faculty members' demographics, work roles, and reasons for expatriating. The national survey conducted by Huang (2018a) found that while international faculty were drawn to Japan for the beauty of the country and cultural appeal, other important reasons for expatriation to Japan were academic and professional reasons (e.g. research opportunities and funding) as well as to improve their quality of life (e.g. cleaner water and air) or to be with family (e.g. Japanese partners living in Japan). International faculty were also motivated to move to Japan for the opportunity to satisfy their desire for self-actualization and improve their self-esteem (Huang, 2018a).

In recent years, qualitative research on the lived experiences of international faculty in Japan has been growing. There are now several threads of literature exploring international faculty members' views on internationalization and their roles at their institutions (Brotherhood et al., 2019), their integration experiences (Brotherhood & Patterson, 2023; Chen, 2022a, 2022b; Chen & Huang, 2022), their work conditions (Brown, 2019), and most recently their career intentions (Chen, 2024; Chen & Chen, 2023). Overall, this research offers a pessimistic outlook on Japanese higher education institutions for international faculty. Although they are meant to serve as innovators and

catalysts of reform, international faculty members perceive themselves as tokenized symbols of internationalization, indicating that Japanese institutions may be treating the recruitment and hiring of international faculty as largely performative (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Chen, 2022a; Chen & Huang, 2022). Feelings of marginalization amongst international faculty are widespread (Brotherhood et al., 2019). These feelings can be attributed to a lack of autonomy and professional agency, such as being denied access to mainstream academic activities and decision-making and a general lack of resources needed to improve their dissatisfactory circumstances (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Brown, 2019; Chen, 2022b; Chen & Huang, 2023). International faculty can also experience alienation from their Japanese colleagues due to their minoritized status as well as cultural or language barriers (Komisarof & Hua, 2016) but often receive little social or linguistic support from their institutions (Brotherhood & Patterson, 2023).

Not all studies were entirely negative. For example, Huang et al. (2019) found that international faculty were generally satisfied with their employment situations and professional environments. Additionally, Gaitanidis and Shao-Kobayashi (2020) found that international faculty can increase their sense of agency when allowed to actively participate in internationalization efforts and engagement curriculum development. Yonezawa et al. (2014) found that international faculty in the STEM field tend to feel that they are treated equally to their Japanese counterparts. However, unlike those hired in humanities or social sciences, international faculty hired in STEM fields tend to have received their final degrees in Japan (Yonezawa et al., 2014). Indeed, despite feelings of tokenization, most international faculty still choose to remain in Japanese universities; this choice is based on a variety of factors, including ease of mobility together with internal and external benefits (Chen, 2024; Chen & Chen, 2023).

Several studies have investigated integration in the Japanese university context (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Brotherhood & Patterson, 2023; Chen, 2022a, 2022b; Chen & Huang, 2022, 2022). One study found that the majority of faculty viewed integration as a two-way mutual process that benefited most when adaptation efforts were made by faculty and Japanese colleagues alike (Chen, 2022a). This study also found that international faculty view integration not as an achievable state but as an ongoing and valuable process of engagement, equality, and forming an attachment to Japan (Chen, 2022a). Moreover, integration was described as equal in psychological terms to subjective feelings of belonging, home, comfort, and love (Chen, 2022a). However, in a study that adopted the definition of integration as a “two-way process of mutual accommodation” (p. 510), participants were unable to give any examples of integration or instances of Japanese actors engaging in this process with international faculty at all (Brotherhood et al., 2019). Brotherhood et al.

(2019) argues that this might be a contributor to how little reform internationalization initiatives have been able to effect in Japanese higher education institutions.

Despite the growing body of literature highlighting the challenges and negative experiences of international faculty in Japan, research on international faculty members' well-being or belonging remains scarce. In a study identifying well-being profile clusters amongst early-career international faculty, Sakurai and Mason (2022) found that the majority of early-career international faculty experience moderate levels of sense of belonging, control of workload, and career development engagement, but that this same group also experiences the highest levels of stress. Their results suggested that while all international faculty regardless of background can benefit from well-being support, it is particularly important for early-career fixed-term tenure-track faculty who reported poorly across all measures (Sakurai & Mason, 2022). In another study of early-career international faculty in Japan, Sakurai and Mason (2023) found that faculty who experience greater collegiality were also more likely to experience a higher sense of belonging, intention to stay, and less stress. However, sense of belonging has not been reasonably explained by these existing studies and further focused investigation into belonging in the context of international faculty in Japanese universities is needed.

3.7 Summary

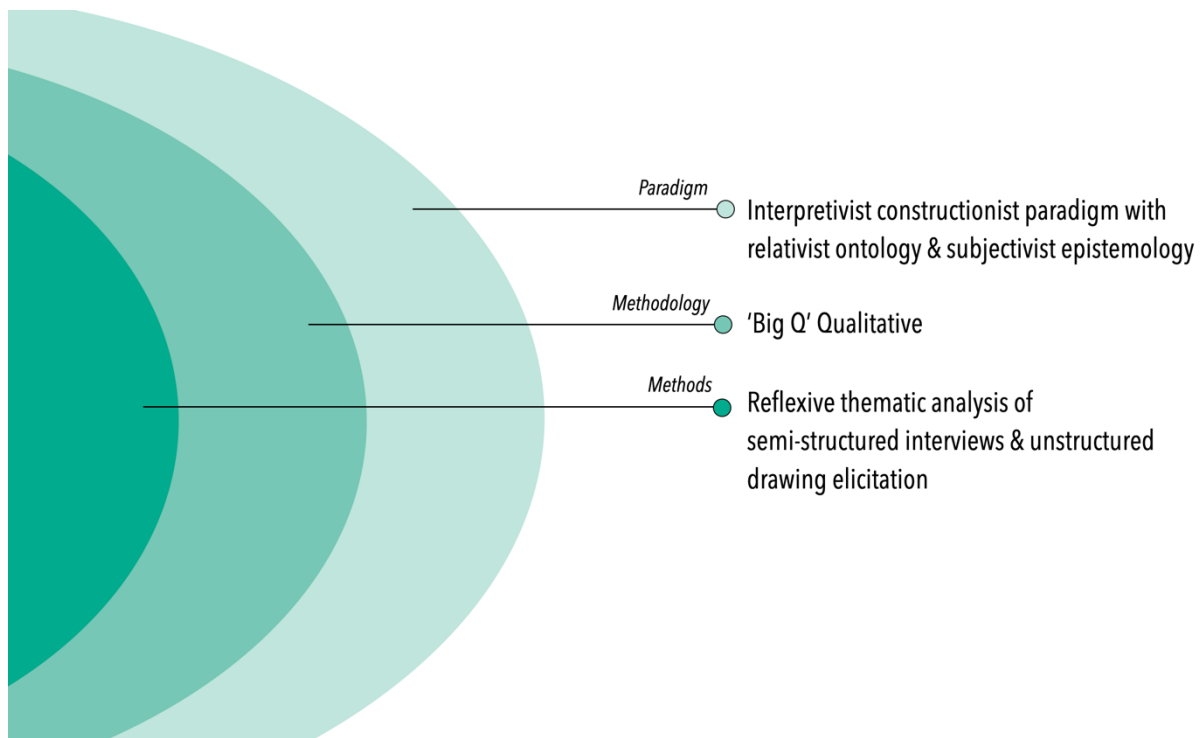
This literature review grounds the present study within the context of Japan by giving an overview of relevant history and its impact on Japanese higher education. Japan's emergence in 1868 from its lengthy isolation and seclusion was not without its implications. The secluded nation mentality together with lingering sentiments of Japaneseness have strongly influenced Japan's discourses of internationalization with deep-seated notions of homogeneity, exclusionism, and boundary-building. Moreover, rapid change and reform inspired by Japan's belated introduction to the West and the global market have led to the massification of the country's higher education system. Driven by neoliberalism and international competition for excellence in higher education, Japan's internationalization initiatives encouraged inbound academic mobility and the view of international faculty as valuable human resources. This has resulted in the rapid growth of the international faculty population in Japan. However, international faculty have overwhelmingly expressed feelings of marginalization, isolation, and lack of support from their universities. This, therefore, calls into question whether historical exclusionary practices and *nihonjinron* mentality are not still at home in Japan's universities; whether universities' neoliberal drives have made international faculty into tokens of empty internationalization rhetoric; and whether there is more that can be done to help international faculty belonging at their universities. The present study seeks

to contribute in a small way to answering these questions by investigating how belonging plays out for international faculty in this unique and contentious context.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The literature reviews in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 explored the research context of this study. Turning to methodology, in this chapter I will map out the design of this study, which is overviewed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Overview of paradigm, methodology, and methods



This chapter will start with my overarching paradigmatic positioning, explaining the nature of, and ambiguities around, the interpretivist constructionist paradigm as well as its relationship with the relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology I have chosen. Next, I will discuss my chosen methodology and methods, beginning with a justification of my use of qualitative methodology and then a summary of my methods and procedures, including participant recruitment, data generation through semi-structured interviews and unstructured drawing elicitation, and reflexive thematic data analysis. To conclude, I will assess the quality of the study by referencing Tracy's (2010) eight big-tent criteria for qualitative research. All design choices described in this chapter were made bearing the following research question in mind:

How do these international faculty in higher education institutions in Japan experience belonging, and how is their belonging shaped?

4.1 Paradigm

My research seeks to understand the nature of belonging from the perspective of international academics in Japanese higher education institutions. This requires a worldview or paradigm that acknowledges the complex and varied ways that international faculty may experience belonging in their unique contexts. Therefore, I adopted an interpretivist constructionist paradigm which is qualitative by nature and asserts that “the world is essentially a construct; human knowledge is radically interpretive; there are no perspective-independent facts” (Willis, 2007, p. 66). Since the interpretivist constructionist paradigm combines two perspectives, it is worthwhile to examine interpretivism and constructionism separately before outlining how they come together.

The interpretivist paradigm has deep philosophical roots in the works of Kant. Kant posited that the world cannot be known objectively because humans cannot ignore the influence of their subjectivity (Willis, 2007); rather, the world can only be known as it is rendered by the human mind (van der Walt, 2020, p. 66). Interpretivist scholars reject the notion that the purpose of research in the social sciences should seek to objectively explain, asserting instead that it should strive towards *verstehen* or understanding (Chen et al., 2011). The fundamental belief of the interpretivist paradigm is that reality is socially constructed; therefore, “interpretivists believe an understanding of the context in which any form of research is conducted is critical to the interpretation of the data gathered” (Willis, 2007, p. 98).

Constructionism and constructivism are seen as separate paradigms in some literature but are discussed together or even synonymously in other texts. For this reason, it is important to distinguish these two approaches. There are different forms of both constructivism (Guterman, 2013; Schwandt, 2007) and constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, the most striking distinction between constructivism and constructionism is that the “former focuses on meaning making and the constructing of the social and psychological worlds through *individual*, cognitive processes while the latter emphasizes that the social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through *social* processes and interaction” (Young & Collin, 2004, pp. 375, emphasis added). For this reason, constructivism is typically characterized as a psychological construct and constructionism as a sociological construct. I have chosen constructionism specifically as the paradigm for the present study because of this more social focus.

When conducting research, it is important that all theoretical perspectives employed work coherently (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Taken together, interpretivism and constructionism form a paradigm that allows situated and careful investigation into the specific context of international faculty in Japan. The interpretivist constructionist paradigm seeks to understand individual

constructed social realities and the nuances they hold, while also bearing in mind the competing discourses that foreground and influence those realities. To enact this paradigm, I adopted a relativist ontology and a subjective epistemology, both of which Markula and Silk (2011) argue align with an interpretivist constructionist paradigm. A relativist ontology means I accept that reality is subjective, individually experienced, changing over time, and ultimately multiple (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Adopting a subjectivist epistemology allows me as the investigator to co-create the knowledge generated by this study together with my participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) as I seek to understand and interpret their multiple realities and the social contexts through which they have been constructed (Cohen et al., 2018).

4.2 Methodology and methods

In this section, I first discuss the overarching Big Q qualitative methodology used in this research. I will then share information regarding the participants, the three-stage data generation process, and the use of six phases of reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the generated data.

4.2.1 Qualitative approach

A fully qualitative methodological framework was selected given its appropriateness to the paradigm and topics being studied. The interpretivist constructionist paradigm encourages in-depth investigation of participants' individually constructed realities, social locations, and contexts; this task is better suited to qualitative research than to quantitative research, which tends to describe the world through numbers and measures rather than rich descriptions (Creswell, 2014). International faculty represent a diverse population from varying backgrounds. Moreover, belonging is a multifaceted construct that is both deeply felt and situated. Qualitative research is useful for capturing complexity and contradiction (Braun & Clarke, 2021) as it seeks to produce knowledge about and through the exploration of human experiences (Nowell et al., 2017). It is also distinguished by its acceptance of participants' interpretations of their lived realities and its focus on how meaning is made in context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Together these attributes fit well within the bounds of this study's interpretivist constructionist paradigm, which is itself inherently embedded in qualitative values.

Because all aspects of this study are qualitative by nature and were considered through a qualitative lens, this study can be referred to as Big Q qualitative. Big Q research is particularly well-suited to investigating nuanced social phenomena because of its emphasis on thick descriptions of participant accounts, subjectivity, and context-based interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). While small q is characterized as positivist and more scientifically descriptive, Big Q is distinctly non-

positive and reflexive (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Big Q's reflexivity embraces the foundational qualitative concept that researchers are themselves instruments of the research (Cohen et al., 2018). All methods employed in this study emphasize this point (as evidenced throughout this chapter and in the discussion of findings), and my attempts to engage thoughtfully with these methods heightened my awareness of how my relationships with both participants and the data were mediated through my subjective interpretations.

4.2.2 Participants

As noted in Chapter 3, existing literature includes overlapping but slightly varying definitions of international faculty. However, studies tend to agree that international faculty include those employed full-time at higher education institutions and who do not possess the host country's nationality or citizenship (Chen, 2022a; Huang, 2018b; Sakurai & Mason, 2023). Given the Japanese context of this study, I therefore defined international faculty as those who:

1. either self-identify as non-Japanese or who do not hold a Japanese passport,
2. are employed full-time as a lecturer, professor, assistant professor, or associate professor at a university in Japan, and
3. currently live in Japan.

Recruitment of participants and all other fieldwork commenced following the approval of my ethics application (Appendix A). As someone who actively works in higher education in Japan, I wanted to reach as widely as I could both within and beyond my immediate network while recruiting participants. To do this, I decided to use snowball sampling (Cohen et al., 2018), reaching out to known and unknown colleagues in my field directly (Appendix B) as well as to non-Japanese key leaders in Japanese higher education institutions (Appendix C). In each case, I shared the information sheet (Appendix D) and consent forms (Appendix E) and requested they be passed on through their academic networks.

Six potential participants expressed interest in the study. I used purposive sampling to maximize the variation of the dataset (as recommended by Cohen et al., 2018; Leavy, 2017; Seidman, 2013); in my case, this meant narrowing the six volunteers down to four by considering each volunteer's country of origin, self-identified gender, position at their institution, year of arrival in Japan, number of years working abroad, level of ability to speak Japanese, and aspiration to live and work in Japan (either temporarily, long-term, or undecided). Table 1 offers brief descriptions of each of the four participants selected to take part in this study, using the pseudonyms chosen by each participant. To avoid jeopardizing their anonymity, I deliberately have not provided further

identifying details and instead simply indicated the diversity across the four participants in these descriptions.

Table 1. Participant descriptions

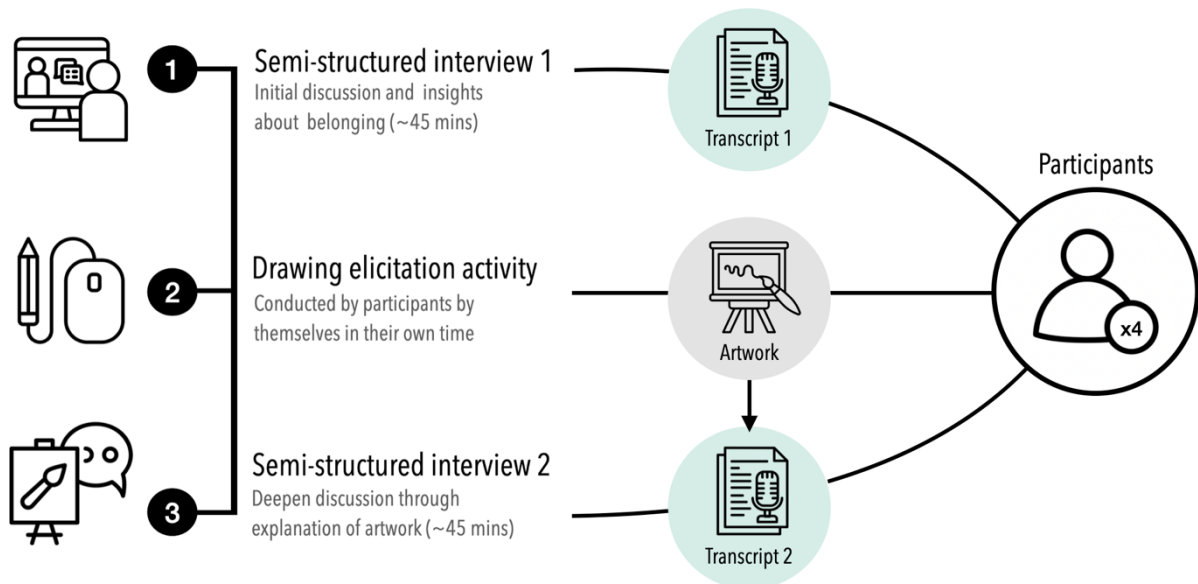
Bob
Bob is an early-career academic on a fixed-term contract as an English language lecturer at a private university in Japan. Prior to this, Bob took his first full-time posting as a university educator outside of his home country at a different university in Japan, where he worked until the end of his fixed term contract of four years. Bob is from an English-speaking country and his Japanese language skills are conversational. Although he has lived in Japan for nearly five years, he is undecided as to how much longer he will remain and continue teaching there.
Noah
Noah is an early-career academic on a fixed-term contract as an assistant professor at a private university in Japan. Japan marks not only Noah's first posting abroad at a tertiary institution but also his first posting as a tertiary teacher in general. Noah uses English-medium instruction to deliver content-based lessons to students for whom English is not their first language. Noah is from an English-speaking country and his Japanese language skills are intermediate. His intention is to stay and live in Japan long-term with his partner, who is a Japanese national.
Anna
Anna is a permanent associate professor of international relations at a private university in Japan. As an experienced academic, Anna has worked in multiple universities in Japan as well as in North America and Europe. Anna is from an Asian country and her Japanese language skills are fluent. After more than ten years in Japan, she remains undecided regarding her intentions to live in Japan long-term or for just a short time longer.
Jasper
Jasper is an experienced academic who received his first posting at a private university in Japan and has grown his career from part-time fixed-term lecturer to tenured full professor of English over the course of more than twenty years in Japan. At the time of this interview, Jasper was still an associate professor. He has since been promoted to full professor. Jasper is from an English-speaking country and his Japanese language skills are conversational. Jasper and his partner who is a Japanese national decided to raise their children in Japan and have remained ever since.

4.2.3 Data generation

The qualitative methods for data generation in this study were conducted in three stages, as can be seen in Figure 2. First, I conducted initial one-on-one interviews with each participant, which helped me to get to know the participants, gain their trust, and explore their understanding of belonging. Next, I asked each participant to complete a drawing elicitation activity (detailed in this section) independently before conducting a second interview with each participant during which they shared their artwork, and we were able to view and discuss them together. During this final stage, participants could explain and interpret the drawing, which became a catalyst for further

discussion on belonging. This final interview also offered an opportunity to follow up on any points of discussion from the first interview that required clarification.

Figure 2. Data generation flow and resulting artefacts



During the second stage of data generation, I used an arts-based method called drawing elicitation to support and augment interviews within an overall qualitative approach. Elicitation refers to research methods that encourage participants to share their thoughts and ideas in response to written, verbal, or visual stimuli (Barton, 2015). More specifically, drawing elicitation is when researchers ask their participants to produce a drawing in response to a particular question or topic, the goal being “to capture and project their experiences, feelings, emotions and thoughts onto paper in an attempt to explore and make sense of the image” (Ward & Shortt, 2018, p. 267).

Drawing elicitation activities, like interviews, can be conducted using structured, semi-structured, or unstructured techniques. For this study, I chose to use an unstructured drawing activity because it is more commonly used than the structured or semi-structured approaches and because the unstructured approach allows participants to respond freely on a blank sheet of paper to a given prompt, thereby minimizing researcher influence on participant outputs (Ward & Shortt, 2018). The drawing prompt in this study was:

Create a piece of art that represents your sense of belonging or aspects of your belonging in your role at your institution in Japan.

As I designed this activity to be completed by participants on their own, I also shared an art activity instruction sheet (Appendix F) for further explanation. Two participants made artworks on paper

which they photographed to share, and two made digital artworks. Upon completion of our second interviews, each participant sent me a digital file of their artwork.

My motivation to incorporate an arts-based method initially stemmed from my background and education as a fine artist. Upon critical reflection, though, it also became important to me personally and epistemologically to use an arts-based method because I believed it would allow participants freedom of voice and expression, encourage a holistic view of their experiences, and facilitate a collaborative sense-making process (Ward & Shortt, 2018). This is possible because arts-based methods position participants and researchers side by side in the viewing of the participant-produced artwork while empowering participants to guide its interpretation and discussion (Shortt & Warren, 2012). Additionally, gaining a deep understanding of participants' subjective experiences, perspectives, and voices is vital to the constructionist approach underpinning this study, and drawing elicitation has come to be known as a worthwhile tool for prompting rich and emotive accounts (Ward & King, 2020). This is especially true concerning aspects of participants' lives that they may take for granted or otherwise overlook (Barton, 2015).

The interviews before and after the completion of the participant-produced artwork were semi-structured. I prepared open-ended question schedules (Appendix G and Appendix H) for both interviews. This format allowed me to react flexibly and in a context-sensitive way during the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018), which was particularly key during the second round of interviews when participants presented their artwork. Semi-structured interviews are frequently used to capture nuanced and complex meanings (Kvale, 2008) and qualitative arts-based and visual methods have been found to evoke deep reflexive and emotive accounts from participants (Ward & Shortt, 2020). Together these methods can explore the messiness and contradictory nature of not only belonging as a construct but also of the complex realities unique to each participant.

All interviews were conducted and recorded online by distance via Zoom due to travel limitations and other hurdles regarding participants' in-person availability. Although I had intended to conduct the interviews in person as much as possible (given a planned trip to Japan), I found that the facilitation and structure of the interviews online did not differ significantly from if I had conducted them face-to-face. Conducting the interviews online presented several practical advantages. For example, online interviewing is efficient in terms of flexibility and investment of time while allowing participants to control their interview setting and location as well as how they self-present during the interview; self-presentation could include where their camera is positioned or what camera "background" they choose (i.e., blurred, virtual, or non-virtual, Żadkowska et al., 2022).

Table 2. Interview information

Name	Interview 1 Duration	Interview 2 Duration	Days between interviews
Anna	43:03	47:25	17
Noah	44:13	48:07	18
Bob	41:34	45:17	4
Jasper	56:29	58:37	25

Table 2 shows that interviews ranged from 41 minutes to 58 minutes, with the average interview lasting 48 minutes. Together, the eight interviews comprised 6 hours and 24 minutes of interview time and resulted in eight transcripts for a total of 101 single-spaced pages of interview data. The break between the first and second interviews was as short as four days and as long as 25 days, depending on the participants' schedule and how long they foresaw they needed to complete the activity thoughtfully.

4.2.4 Data analysis

I analyzed the interview transcripts using the reflexive thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). Reflexive thematic analysis is “a method for developing, analyzing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 4) where the aim is to produce “a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in the data” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 848).

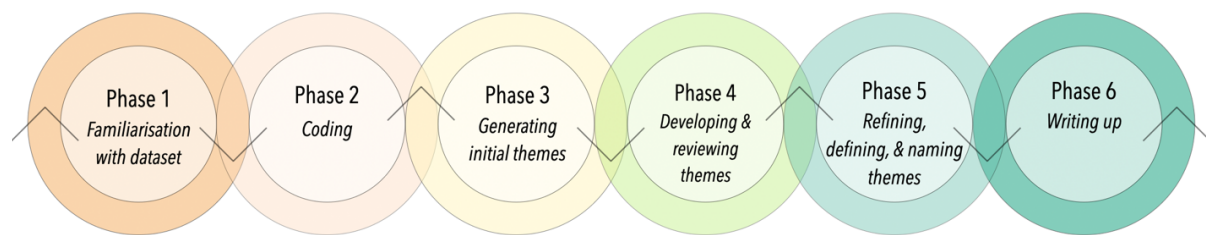
There are several variations of thematic analysis methods. I chose reflexive thematic analysis specifically because it is a Big Q qualitative approach to data analysis that positions researcher subjectivity as a valuable resource in the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The interpretivist constructionist paradigm and qualitative methodology assumed in this thesis form a view of knowledge as subjective, contextual, and radically interpretive; as such, reflexive thematic analysis is well suited to this study. Moreover, reflexive thematic analysis encourages the development of rich and thorough descriptions of themes found across the entire dataset while also highlighting nuanced and detailed accounts; this kind of approach is particularly valuable when investigating under-researched topics and groups of people, as is the case with the present research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It is important to note that although the participant-produced drawings were a crucial aspect of the data gathered for this study, I as the researcher did not analyze the artworks as standalone data on my own. Instead, special care and attention were given to the language participants used during our follow-up interviews as they explained the meaning behind their

drawings, described their artistic choices, and oriented me to the figures, objects, symbols, and spaces they depicted. By facilitating in-depth and often emotive narrations given directly from international faculty members' highly contextualized insider perspectives, these artworks provide a window into potentially exciting insights into how international faculty in Japan socially construct their realities in relationship to belonging.

The reflexive thematic analysis process is made up of six phases, as shown in Figure 3. However, analysis involves moving forward and backward through each phase, where individual phases require repeated reflection and review, and each phase can be revisited as necessary (Terry et al., 2017). I was aware of my role as a researcher in the cocreation of meaning during both data generation and analysis and kept a reflexive journal for tracking my thoughts, choices, and challenges throughout (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I will now outline my progression through each of these phases.

Figure 3. Six phases of reflexive thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2021)



Phase 1: Familiarisation. My initial engagement with the data took place through the transcription process. I used a digital transcription tool called otter.ai to generate a first draft of transcripts then crosschecked and corrected each transcript against the recorded interview audio. I then listened to all interviews again without reading the transcripts or note-taking. This gave me a chance to reflect on the interview experience and consider the main topics covered in each interview. Next, I printed and read the transcripts two more times, making notes by hand in the margins of initial trends and items of interest. I also printed and viewed participants' artwork while reading, making note of where they referred to their artwork in the transcripts and sometimes labelling how their artwork was described directly on the artworks.

Phase 2: Coding. Coding is the act of seeking out and labelling individual extracts from the data that hold specific meanings that could be potentially relevant to one's research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I conducted three iterations of coding. During my first iteration of coding, I highlighted quotes and wrote initial codes in the margins directly on the printed transcripts while also listening to the interview audio. For the second iteration of coding, I decided to transition my work from analogue to digital by using the software Nvivo. This first required that I retroactively

input the codes I generated from iteration one into Nvivo. Then, I began the second iteration of coding entirely using NVivo. While reading through each transcript without audio, I created new codes without editing or deleting the codes I had generated during iteration one. After these first two iterations of coding, I had a total of 314 unique codes across eight transcripts.

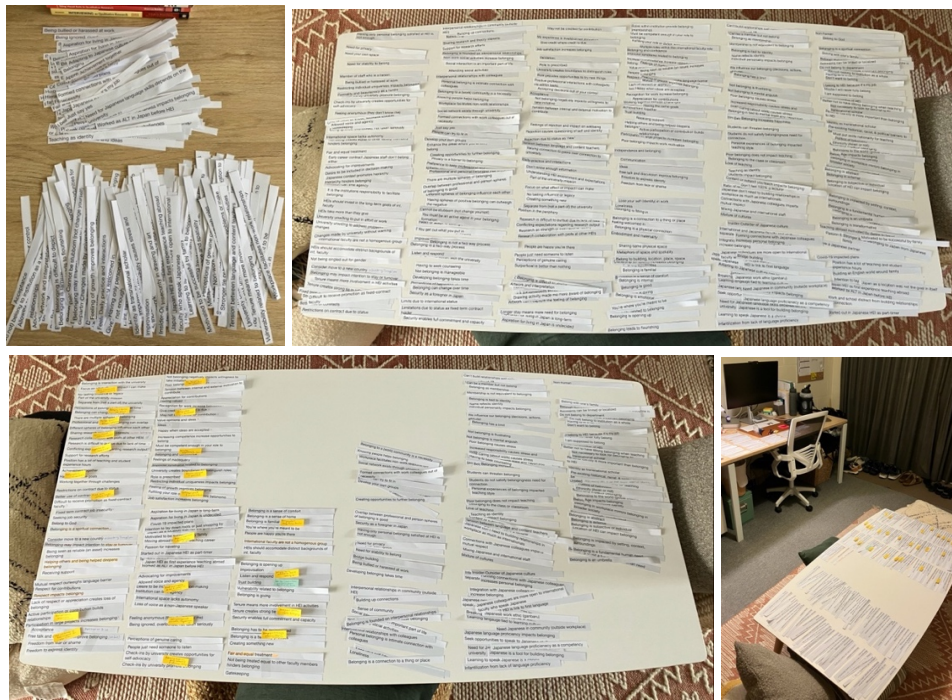
When I first started coding, I stayed close to participants' words and coded semantically, Semantic coding mainly aims to capture an explicit, descriptive, or summative level of analysis of the data (Byrne, 2022). However, as I grew more familiar with the data and the coding process, my coding became increasingly latent or indicative of deeper, more conceptual meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Latent coding requires more interpretation and creativity from the researcher (Byrne, 2022). An example of a semantic code from iteration one is "*personal life can get in the way of building belonging at work,*" and a latent code example from iteration two is "*belonging is an act of vulnerability and trust.*"

I described my process for coding iteration three in my digital reflexive journal:

Rather than going through each interview one by one, this time around is more about going through all the existing codes I have from my previous two rounds, identifying codes that are the same or redundant, deleting codes that are unnecessary, and refining codes with new wording ... I have exported the codes as a master list, printed them, and cut them up. Now I am going to consolidate them physically by hand, removing duplicates, combining similar codes, and renaming codes as needed.

This third iteration of coding (which can be seen in Figure 4) resulted in the reduction of 314 codes down to 91. During this iteration, I wrote brief descriptions of each of the 91 codes in Nvivo to clarify my understanding. I also tracked my code deletions and combinations in a separate Nvivo folder for reference.

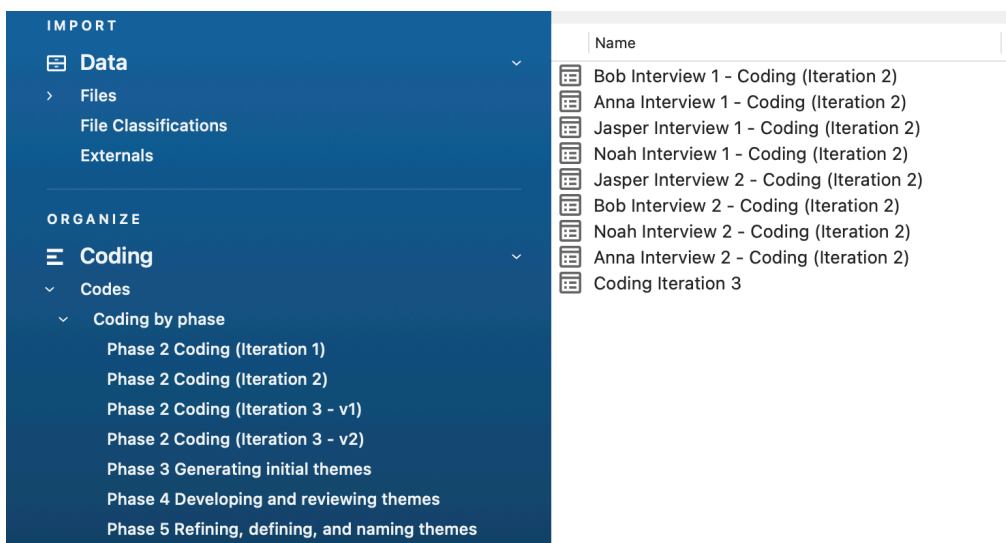
Figure 4. Images of the third iteration of Phase 3 Coding: Reducing and refining codes by hand



Source: Photos by Maryann Miyashiro

Working in Nvivo allowed me to form a clear and transparent audit trail from phase 2 through subsequent phases. By creating separate folders for each iteration of coding, and later for theme generation and development, I was able to track the progression of codes and themes at every stage. In addition, I used the Nvivo Note feature to create Memos to act as separate entries in a digital reflexive journal tied to the data analysis (a sample of entries can be seen in Figure 5). These Memos gave me a space to critically reflect on how I was interpreting the data and responding to challenges throughout the data analysis process.

Figure 5. Screenshot of Nvivo showing code and theme folder organization by phase and iteration (left) and list of reflexive journal entries made while coding (right)



Phase 3: Generating initial themes. Viewing codes as the smallest units of meaning in analysis, the next step is to begin seeking out conceptual patterns in those codes by sorting them into clusters of shared meaning or themes that address your research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To do this, I used a digital mind-mapping software called Wondershare EdrawMind. This software allowed me to create visual mind maps (see Figure 6) of initial themes by moving individual codes into clusters which I could name and edit relatively quickly and easily. Further examples of in-progress mind maps from my data analysis process can be found in Appendix I. During my first iteration of initial theme generation, I worked quickly and formed clusters based on my instincts. This attempt to cluster all the codes resulted in thirteen rough candidate themes. This acted as a kind of practice round, allowing me to get familiar with the codes and the clustering process.

Figure 6. Example mind map of code clusters



In my second iteration of theme generation, I put aside my first attempt and started fresh. Working more slowly and methodically, I generated five themes and thirteen sub-themes, which I then proceeded to revise in subsequent iterations of the initial theme generation. I took an exploratory and inductive approach to theme generation by using my participants’ experiences “as the starting point for engaging with meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 56) and attempting to keep my interpretations grounded in the dataset rather than pre-existing theory (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). To do this, I reviewed my code descriptions and reflexive journal entries from Phase 2 alongside the coded data extracts and participant-produced artworks to inform my sense-making. This, together with active journaling of my theme generation process, helped me maintain an open

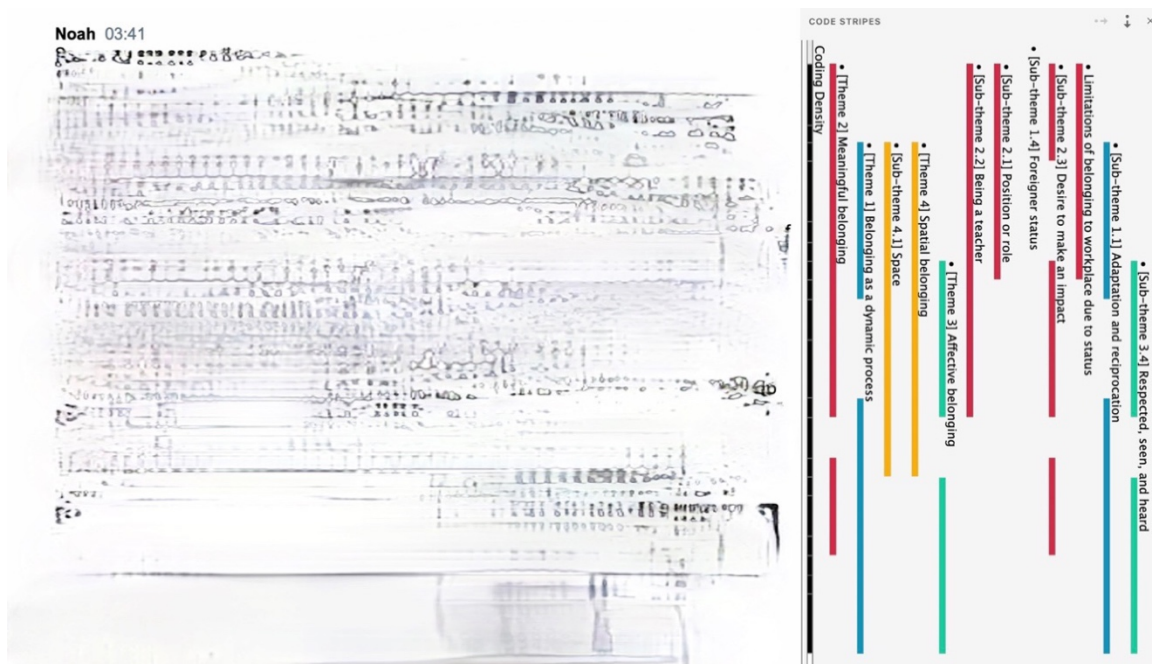
mind and be willing to let go of early ideas. This is captured by my reflexive journal entry reflecting on iteration three:

For a while, I thought I was doing all right, but the more I think about how I have organized my themes, sub-themes, and codes in relationship to the dataset, the more I feel like they aren't working. Sometimes they're too broad, sometimes too specific. I grow too fixated on the tentative names I assign the themes and allow them to limit how I think. I understand now why naming is reserved for later on.

This process of building up and even abandoning ideas across five iterations of initial theme generation eventually resulted in four candidate themes which I referred to tentatively as *belonging as a dynamic process*, *meaningful belonging*, *risky belonging*, and *belonging spaces*.

Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes. To assess the four candidate themes and their suitability in relationship to the dataset as a whole, I used NVivo to revisit each interview transcription once again. During this review, I prioritized checking the themes against the coded extracts to make sure concepts and quotes were viable within the context of whole interviews. By viewing the code stripes in NVivo alongside the interview text (see Figure 7), I was able to see which passages were dense with themes and meaning in the interviews. This informed the mind maps and diagrams I created to identify key ideas in each theme and to visualize how themes intersect, overlap, and contradict. As I progressed through each interview, I also collated quotes that best illustrated ideas consistent with the themes.

Figure 7. Screenshot of NVivo showing a sample of interview 2 (text blurred to protect raw data) with participant Noah (left) and corresponding code stripes (right)



Phase 5: Refining, defining, and naming themes. By engaging with the themes through mind maps and the raw dataset, I was able to refine my ideas to the point of putting them into words. Taking time to free write and articulate my themes to critical friends and my supervisor also helped me clarify the definitions of individual themes and allowed me to think through their descriptions and formulate definitions. I started to grow aware of the themes as parts of an overall story about my participants' experiences as evidenced by the dataset. The general ideas behind each of the four themes did not drastically change from Phase 3 to Phase 5. However, as the theme definitions were refined, so were their names. At this point, the themes came to be known as *Belonging as an active two-way negotiation*, *Belonging as a pursuit of meaning*, *Risky and emotional belonging*, and *Belonging as spatial, embodied, and material*.

Phase 6: Writing up. As I drafted my results chapter, the ideas and boundaries of each theme became clearer and more defined. Even at this late phase, the reflexive thematic process remained iterative. I continually moved back and forth between my writing, mind maps, and the raw data set, sometimes revising codes and their fit with individual themes. At this point, I was deeply engaged with the literature as I worked on my chapters on belonging and the Japanese higher education context. Doing literature work simultaneously with this final phase of analysis bolstered my theoretical understanding of key issues present in the data and pushed me to remain open to new interpretations, patterns, and links across the themes.

To summarize, my interpretivist constructionist paradigm and Big Q qualitative methodology position me, the researcher, as an active agent in the data analysis process. This positioning is reinforced by the nature of my chosen data analysis method, reflexive thematic analysis, which views the subjectivity of the researcher as a valuable tool for the development of rich and nuanced interpretation. Throughout all six phases of the iterative analysis process, I kept a reflexive journal to maintain my awareness of my role as co-creator of knowledge. This journal enriched my personal growth while also adding to the sincerity and credibility of this study by allowing me to draw from my own detailed personal accounts to be able to describe my process in this write-up.

4.3 Quality

The quality of this study was judged against the “big-tent” criteria for quality in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). Of the eight big-tent criteria, I will discuss four here. They are rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, and ethics. I have chosen to discuss the remaining criteria in the chapters deemed most relevant to them. The location of the discussions of all criteria (listed in the order indicated by Tracy [2010]) can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Location of the eight big-tent criteria in the thesis

Big-tent criteria	Chapter	Section
Worthy topic	1: Introduction	1.2
Rich rigor	4: Methodology	4.3.1
Sincerity	4: Methodology	4.3.2
Credibility	4: Methodology	4.3.3
Resonance	6: Discussion	7.2.3
Significant contribution	6: Discussion	7.2.4
Ethics	4: Methodology	4.3.4
Meaningful coherence	6: Discussion	7.2.5

4.3.1 Rich rigor

A rigorous study is marked by an abundance of thick descriptions and explanations of appropriate theories and methods (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). To maintain rigor, I adhered to the procedures I set out in my initial ethics application and kept a clear audit trail through data generation and analysis. I also recorded notes and reflections regularly in my reflexive journal at every stage of the research process, starting with the formation of the research question through the completion of the project. Before the commencement of official interviews, I conducted two practice interviews to confirm the effectiveness of the interview schedules. I was flexible and thoughtful with my timeline to ensure that sufficient time was allotted for thorough analysis and for facilitating and onboarding member reflections. Additionally, during the theme generation and initial writing-up phases of my reflexive thematic analysis process, I spoke regularly with a critical friend. A critical friend is typically someone uninvolved in the research project who can offer feedback, pose valuable and challenging questions, and encourage reflection (Swaffield, 2007). As a novice qualitative researcher, having a critical friend to lend insight into the data and its interpretation was invaluable to my growth and progress. During these conversations, I was careful to protect the integrity of my participants by prohibiting access to their raw data and maintaining their anonymity.

4.3.2 Sincerity

Sincerity is characterized by the reflexivity of the researcher and transparency regarding the methods and challenges experienced throughout the study (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Reflexivity is an ongoing and active process of critical self-reflection embedded in all aspects of qualitative research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Meanwhile, transparency is about being truthful and clear about one's process, including disclosure of any mistakes, surprises, or unresolved elements that may have

arisen in the research (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Both reflexivity and transparency are characterized by a sense of honesty and vulnerability, and together they facilitate more thoughtful ethical practice because they sensitize researchers to the complexities and tensions that may arise when working with participants (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

To maintain an active practice of reflexivity and transparency throughout this study, I kept a regular journal of my reasonings, reflections, choices, and challenges. As Braun and Clarke (2021) point out, reflexive journal entries may be tedious at times, but they can also provide a map of our process and a springboard for questioning our assumptions. I made weekly entries in my journal to track my progress and my entries became more frequent once I started the data generation and analysis to track my in-process thoughts and reactions. My journal (see sample extracts in Appendix J) was kept both physically in a notebook and on the computer, taking the form of written textual entries, digital mind mapping diagrams, sketches, and memos in NVivo. Reflexive journaling helped me to understand and visualize my development as a researcher and the ways I simultaneously shaped and was shaped by this process.

4.3.3 Credibility

Credibility is important because it signals that research is trustworthy and dependable (Tracy, 2010). When conducting research grounded in interpretation, as is the case with this study, a researcher's analysis must be compelling, convincing, and plausible (Tracy, 1995). Three ways to achieve credibility in qualitative research are showing evidence of thick description, multivocality, and seeking member reflections (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). In this study, I have strived to achieve credibility by using thick descriptions and by employing member reflections; the small sample size precluded extensive use of multivocality.

Thick description is characterized by contextualized analysis and rich interpretation that captures emotion, assigns motivation, and demonstrates meaningfulness (Ponterotto, 2006). Quality reflexive thematic analysis is also conceptualized in this way, particularly when it comes to contextualizing data extracts during the writing-up phase (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, in my results and discussion chapters, I contextualize my interpretations through extensive use of participants' quotes. The use of thick description is not only aligned with my chosen data analysis method but also with my interpretivist constructionist paradigm which states that because reality is constructed and knowledge is interpreted, understanding then should be contextual (Willis, 2007). By giving a thorough and careful explanation of my paradigm earlier in this chapter, I hope to make my position explicit and demonstrate credibility.

Another practice that improves credibility is member reflections where researchers share early findings with their participants (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Member reflections move beyond merely checking with participants for accuracy in that they invite participants into an active process of dialoguing, feedback, and collaboration (Tracy, 2010). After the completion of interviews and review of transcripts, I notified participants that I would ask for their participation in a series of member reflections. I facilitated these reflections in two phases. Firstly, at the start of my reflexive thematic analysis to deepen my familiarity with my participants and data, I wrote summaries of my participants' backgrounds and interpretations behind their artwork. I sent these individual write-ups to each participant for their review. Later, after my reflexive thematic analysis and my initial write-up of the analysis were completed, I shared this initial draft with participants in a second round of member reflections and invited them to offer their reflections. The feedback I received from both rounds was incorporated into my final writing. This integration of participants' voices ensures the trustworthiness and credibility of the final results, particularly in a study where subjectivity could be questioned (McKim, 2023).

4.3.4 Ethics

Lastly, ethical research is characterized by upholding ethics in procedures, situations, relationships, and upon exiting or concluding the research (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). As a researcher, I strove to maintain ethical integrity throughout this study. Ethical considerations in this study included the privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent of the participants, ways of maintaining trust and mitigating discomfort, attention to potential power imbalance, and dissemination of the thesis. As noted earlier, formal ethical approval was secured (see Appendix A) before embarking on the study.

I shared all critical information regarding my research with participants before their final decision to join, including the study's aims, processes, and how the research would be shared afterwards (Cohen et al., 2018; Mutch, 2013). Gaining the informed consent of participants ensured their full comprehension and acknowledged their self-determination, or right to withdraw their participation (Cohen et al., 2018). I also made every effort to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. Participants were able to choose their pseudonyms and all identifiable names of institutions, cities, people, etc. were removed from interview transcriptions and participant-produced artworks. All data and consent forms were securely stored, backed up, and password-protected via a University of Waikato network. These considerations ensure participants have agency and feel at ease as much as possible during the research process.

In addition to ensuring that participants are sufficiently informed and that their privacy is safeguarded, qualitative researchers also have an ethical obligation to minimize any distress they may cause to participants in the course of the study (Whitney & Evered, 2022). While drawing elicitation is a common arts-based research method, it is not unusual for adults to find such a situation awkward or uncomfortable (Ward & Shortt, 2018). Indeed, some participants expressed anxiety over their self-perceived lack of creative or artistic skills when doing or talking about the drawing elicitation activity. To mitigate their discomfort, I intentionally planned for the drawing activity to be done privately and allowed participants to take as much time as they deemed necessary to complete the artwork before scheduling our second interview. I also assured participants that the activity was meant mainly as an opportunity for creative self-reflection, that there was no right or wrong way to approach the activity, and that their artistic skills would not be judged.

In consideration of relational ethics, I have done my best to acknowledge the voices of my participants and treat them with respect (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Given the open-ended nature of qualitative research, continued communication with participants even after receiving their consent is necessary to maintain their trust and autonomy (Watanabe et al., 2011). As per the consent form, participants were able to withdraw their participation up until the time they had reviewed and approved their final transcripts and artwork. Participants were also invited to participate in member reflections on the preliminary results. These reviews and reflections give participants a chance to confirm that the transcripts are accurate and free of information that might render them identifiable (Rowlands, 2021) and to give feedback on whether the results are meaningful and comprehensible (Tracy, 2010). Providing participants with ways to provide feedback keeps them involved in the process and allows them control over how their data is represented.

Careful consideration of potential power imbalances is a critical ethical consideration as both participants and researchers are vulnerable to relational issues involving power (Mutch, 2013). As the researcher, I am arguably in a privileged position over my participants in that I determine the structure and terms of this research project from the outset. However, this power imbalance was in turn arguably offset by our professional and academic statuses. For example, I am an administrative staff member while my participants are academic faculty. Moreover, I am only a beginner researcher working towards completion of my master's degree while my participants are working professors and experienced researchers holding master's degrees or PhDs. Power imbalances were further mitigated with my chosen methods. For example, by using interviews and drawing elicitation together, I hoped to build trust and potentially diminish any present power imbalance by allowing participants agency over what is discussed through the presentation and explanation of their self-

generated artwork (Lynch & Glass, 2020). Additionally, data analysis was limited to transcriptions not only to prioritize the collaborative sense-making process but also to ensure that the intended meanings behind participants' artworks were not misrepresented (Ward & Shortt, 2018). I hope that participants' active and ongoing contributions further mitigate power imbalances by prioritizing and empowering their voices at every stage of this collaborative research process.

Exiting ethics refers to the ethical considerations that go beyond the data collection and are reserved for after the study has been completed (Reid et al., 2018). The results from this research will be shared with both participants and the scholarly community at large. Furthermore, the thesis resulting from this research will be shared directly with participants upon completion and submission. The final thesis will also be made available in the University of Waikato Research Commons Database which is open to the public.

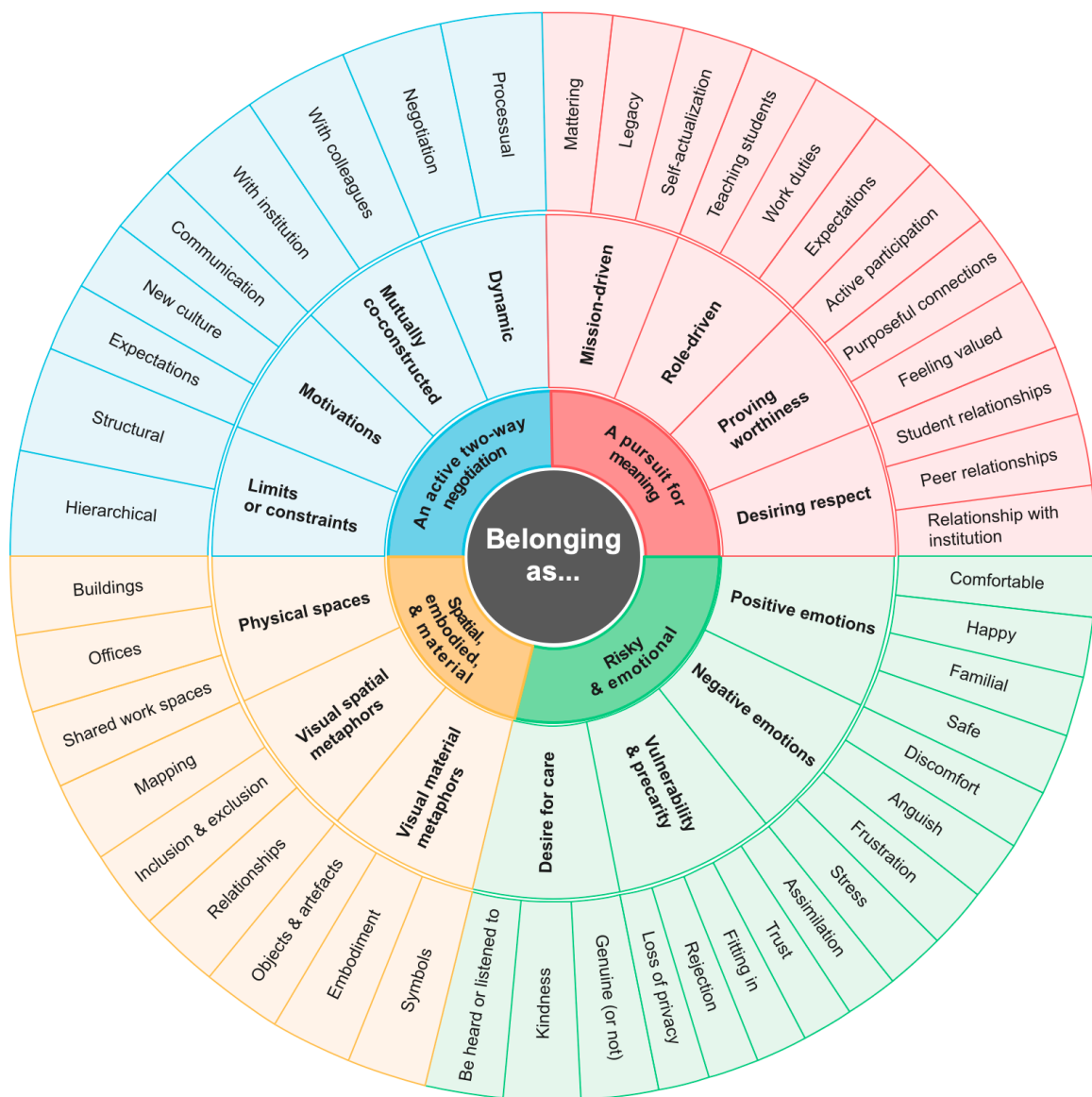
4.4 Summary

I started this chapter with an in-depth description of this study's theoretical underpinnings, explaining its interpretive constructionist paradigm, relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and qualitative methodology. Altogether, this paradigm is coherent and has guided this study from its beginning through to its conclusion. This paradigm allows me as the researcher to seek an understanding of my participants' socially constructed and highly subjective views on belonging while grounding my interpretations within the contextualizing historical, political, and cultural discourses relevant to their roles and perspectives. Semi-structured interviews and unstructured drawing elicitation were chosen as data generation methods that would encourage rich outputs from participants and facilitate collaborative sense-making of those outputs. I used reflexive thematic analysis as a Big Q analysis technique for its embrace of researcher subjectivity and thick description. To conclude this chapter, I discussed quality using four of Tracy's (2010) eight big-tent criteria for quality in qualitative research, adding to the discussion of quality across the thesis as a whole. The following chapter will present the results of my reflexive thematic analysis.

Chapter 5: Results

This chapter presents four themes related to belonging for international faculty in Japan. Themes were generated through reflexive thematic analysis of eight participant interview transcripts, four of which featured a discussion of participant-produced artworks. These artworks offered a unique view into the four participants' experiences of belonging by not only building upon and clarifying points of discussion from our initial interviews but also leading to new and deeper insights in our second interviews.

Figure 8. Visualization of themes resulting from reflexive thematic analysis



The four themes generated in this study support conceptualizations of belonging as multiple, shifting, and nuanced (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). The first theme, *Belonging as an active two-way negotiation*, describes how the four international faculty members in my study actively co-construct their belonging with both members of their institution and the institutions themselves. The second theme, *Belonging as a pursuit of meaning*, focuses on the role of purpose and meaning in the development of participants' belonging. The third theme, *Risky and emotional belonging*, considers the emotional landscape underlying the dynamic process of belonging. Finally, the fourth theme, *Belonging as spatial, embodied, and material*, explores the roles that artefacts, bodies, and surroundings play in participants' understandings of belonging. These themes are summarized in Figure 8, which offers a visualization of the themes and relevant results, highlighting key ideas related to each theme.

As there are four themes and four participants, I have chosen to visually feature one participant's artwork in each theme as a way of integrating the artworks into the presentation of results. This is not because they were the only participant to speak on that theme; all four participants contributed to each of the themes to different degrees, and I do still refer to other participants' artworks as they are relevant to the four themes. To read the biographical descriptions of each participant, see Table 1 in Chapter 4. To see each participant's artwork as full-page spreads, refer to Appendix K.

5.1 Belonging as an active two-way negotiation

Active, ongoing negotiation was key to how participants experienced belonging. These negotiations were illustrated in different ways in each participant's artwork. For example, Anna's artwork (Figure 11, p. 58) depicts two tango dancers to express belonging as an active and interactive process of her finding out "whether I fit with the institution or not." Through the metaphor of tango, Anna explained that belonging is not fixed but something that she can construct over time by listening, reacting, and improvising as one would do during an unchoreographed dance. Through this process, Anna feels that she has successfully been able to develop her sense of belonging:

It is a two-way, not a one-way approach because the process of me trying to adapt myself was responsive and people at [my institution] were also listening to me and finding a better way for me to become part of them.

Even though Anna has lived and worked abroad and in Japan for some years, this process is ongoing. “Improvising is something that I'm really not very good at,” Anna says, “but I'm trying to do that slowly.”

Jasper's view on this negotiation process is similar to Anna's in that they both place emphasis not only on the importance of forming connections but also on the degree of agency international faculty have when it comes to the co-construction of belonging. In Jasper's view, international faculty can intentionally influence their behaviour, actions, decisions, and attitudes, all of which contribute to a sense of belonging. Even given the reciprocal nature of belonging as a negotiation, Jasper states that how one approaches belonging is key:

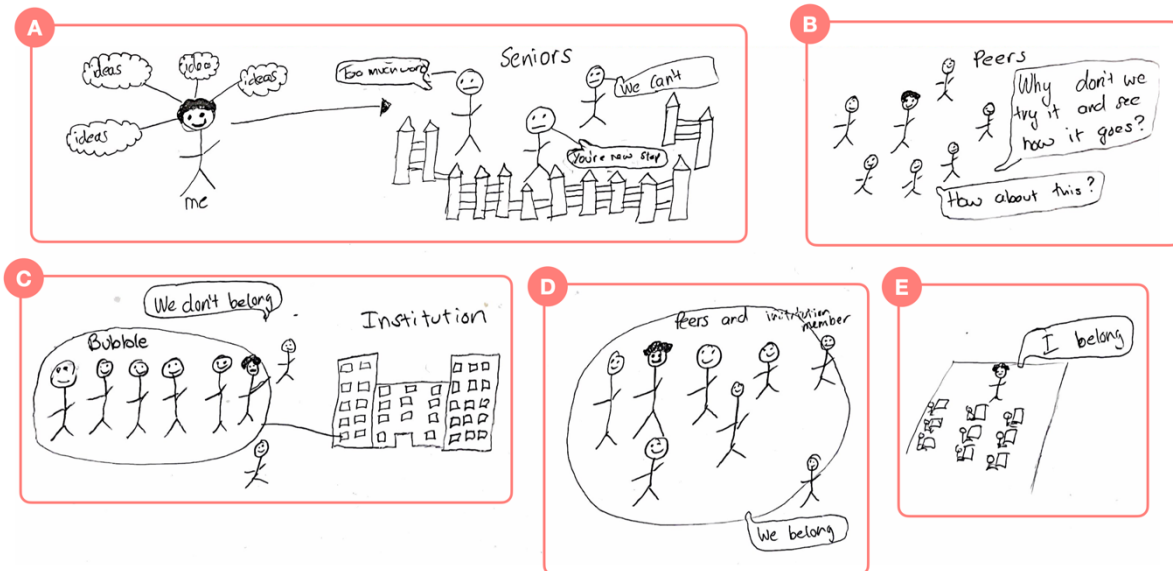
I suppose it depends how people react to you. ... But you need to kind of put yourself out there a bit, I think, in order to give yourself that chance to feel a sense of belonging. ... I think it depends what you put into something. Whatever you put in, I think you do tend to reap some kind of reward from that.

Jasper and Anna also apply this “you get out what you put in” (Jasper) mentality to learning Japanese for the sake of making connections at work and in the community. Both Anna and Jasper view learning Japanese as invaluable because Japanese can be used as a tool to improve belonging not only in the workplace but in everyday life when engaging with the local community and culture. For Jasper who lives in a small town that mainly uses a “very strong dialect” of Japanese, not knowing the language can feel like a “barrier” to belonging. By learning the language slowly over time, Jasper is “able to use [his] Japanese at work and build relationships with people” in the community at large which has improved his sense of belonging. In another example, Anna's appearance sometimes led locals to believe that she “doesn't really look like a foreigner.” This led to perceived expectations regarding her level of Japanese cultural and language understanding. Although this felt like a kind of “double hurdle” for Anna, she realized: “Either I make the decision to - and I would learn the language and I go into the [Japanese] culture - or I stay away. And I wanted to go in.”

Whereas Anna and Jasper highlight the ways international faculty can be agents in the co-construction of their belongings, Bob demonstrates ways that agency can be limited or constrained when the negotiation process is perceived as one-sided. Bob's artwork illustrates his experiences of (non-)belonging at his institution through a series of vignettes (labelled in Figure 9) illustrating the dynamics between himself and various key actors. First among these actors are the “seniors” (vignette A) who are largely emblematic of Bob's feelings of not belonging. Bob explains that the seniors are in fact fellow international faculty working and leading within his department. Moreover, the seniors are mainly Western men who are “permanent and also tenure track, but definitely not

the same level as us.” “Us” here refers to the “peers,” or the group of fixed-term foreign language teachers with whom Bob identifies (vignettes B, C, and D).

Figure 9. Bob’s artwork (pencil on paper) with vignettes labelled A through E (labels added by researcher)



According to Bob, the tension between the seniors and the peers can be attributed to differences in contract, as Bob and the peers’ statuses as fixed-term faculty engender feelings of marginalization. The tension between these two groups can also be attributed to communication and leadership styles, as the seniors tend to employ top-down methods of management and are seen as closed off and remote from the fixed-term faculty. For example, Bob elaborates how the seniors repeatedly stymie his sense of belonging by putting formal structures in place that reinforce a sense of “hierarchy amongst the lecturers.” Although Bob implied that emphasis on hierarchy is not uncommon in the Japanese context, he also shared his belief that hierarchy “hinders people's ability to feel like they can contribute or feel like their opinions are relevant.” This is illustrated in vignette A in the artwork, about which Bob states:

The initial part when you have me over here [within vignette A on the artwork] is just like someone with lots of ideas. And like sharing those ideas to perhaps senior staff or management. But it's always, you know... I get rejected. For example, if it's too much work, or we can't do it, or you can't do it, or you're new, so slow down.

Bob goes on to say, “I’ve had this said to me many times, you know. ‘You’re new. Stop.’” This draws attention to the ways Bob’s status – as someone new to the institution, an early-career academic, or both – impacts how he is perceived and treated by the seniors, which then has repercussions for his sense of belonging.

Noah also observes how fixed-term contract and early-career statuses intersect with and impact belonging, and not only for international faculty:

I see myself as an early-career contracted international faculty member. But the early-career and contract base can apply to a lot of Japanese friends I have. And I think a lot of this idea of not belonging to the institution, it's shared for those people too. And that's where [my artwork] kind of exaggerates a little bit, that Japanese versus international thing. But it's not just, that's not the only thing that's going on.

According to Noah, certain faculty or staff are not “viewed on the same level” by institutions, and these preconceptions undermine the mutual willingness needed to adapt and change necessary for belonging.

Overall, all participants perceived belonging as an ongoing and active negotiation between themselves and their given contexts. Some participants (Jasper and Anna) described how they felt able to co-construct their belonging by choosing how to adapt or react to their surroundings. This suggests that international faculty have agency in the negotiation process. By contrast, other participants (Bob and Noah) brought attention to how their agency can be limited or constrained by members of the institution or even by the institution itself, resulting in both loss of belonging and feelings of marginalisation. These constraints seemed to be shaped by their status as international, early career, or fixed-term contract faculty. The need for reciprocation and active participation from all parties in relation to belonging was consistent across all participant accounts.

5.2 Belonging as a pursuit of meaning

This theme explores participants' desire for meaning within the ongoing process of negotiating belonging among international faculty, their colleagues, and institutions. According to the participants, it is not only important that both international faculty and their institutions share a willingness to change and adapt. Participants also emphasized the importance of working together with the institution and their colleagues towards meaningful shared aims. This is captured in Anna's artwork (Figure 11, on p. 58) by the dancers positioned on the left side of the frame with their gazes fixed towards the right. “They're staring at the same side,” Anna explains, “because you have to have the same goal.”

Noah elaborates on this idea in his artwork (Figure 10). The institution (called *honkō* in Japanese) is central to Noah's understanding of belonging. The *honkō* is both literal and imagined, as Noah refers not only to the institution as a place but also to “the heart of the institution” and “the fundamental things that the university does” towards its overall mission and goals. According to

Noah, belonging for international faculty is improved when they are “welcomed in, encouraged to enter and become a part of the institution itself, the real institution.”

Figure 10. Noah’s artwork (digital art using an electronic tablet and drawing application)

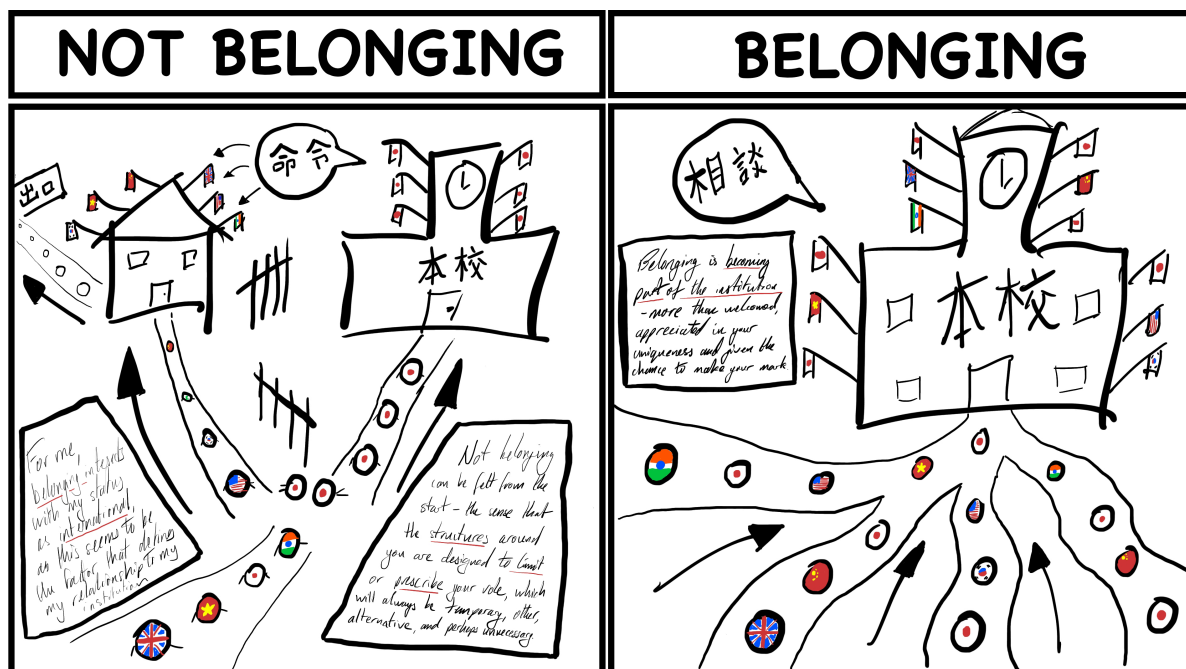


Table 4. Explanation of Japanese characters and reproduction of text used in Noah's artwork

NOT BELONGING (left)	Meaning
出口 (deguchi)	Exit
命令 (meirei)	Order or command
本校 (honkō)	Institution or university
Text box (left)	“For me, <u>belonging</u> intersects with my status as <u>international</u> , as this seems to be the factor that defines my relationship to my institution.”
Text box (right)	“Not belonging can be felt from the start – the sense that the <u>structures</u> around you are designed to <u>limit</u> or <u>prescribe</u> your role, which will always be temporary, other, alternative, and perhaps unnecessary.”
BELONGING (right)	
相談 (sōdan)	Consultation or discussion
Text box	“Belonging is <u>becoming part of the institution</u> – more than welcomed, appreciated in your uniqueness and given the chance to make your mark.”

This encouragement to enter can be seen in his artwork, as all lanes converge to one leading to the honkō. Noah explains further:

It's not that every person who comes in has a massive impact, but the kind of like, aggregation of all of these people in there, and all of the aspirations and ideas and experiences that they bring to it means that over time the university as a whole, the

honkō, the real university becomes slightly different, and starts to reflect those experiences.

This sentiment is echoed by Bob, who says that “being able to share, being able to feel like I'm actually adding value to the institution and being able to fully do my job” is important to his sense of belonging. “Whether I'm developing the curriculum, whether I'm, you know, collaborating with other members of staff,” he explains, “that is my role. I am supposed to be here.” Belonging may require adaptation and reciprocation from all parties, but for even deeper belonging it seems there must also be a goal of “working with others to create something new” (Anna) and “becoming this new whole together” (Noah).

To feel like they had become a meaningful and integral part of the institution, participants expressed the need to form purposeful connections and prove their worthiness to belong. For example, Jasper described “feeling quite fortunate” because he was able to “get involved in quite big projects” when he was first hired at his university. “The more you do,” Jasper says, “then I think people start to rely on you more and more. And I think as soon as people start to rely on you, that's also part of a sense of belonging.” In the same vein, Noah is working to “build his reputation with students and faculty” by focusing on improving his teaching and by taking on more responsibilities and additional roles. Noah says this is his “attempt at showing my competence and hoping that will be rewarded by opportunities to belong, by being rewarded with recognition for what I can do.” The feeling of pressure to become someone “dependable,” “indispensable,” and “valued” for their contributions was shared by Noah, Jasper, and Bob in particular, all of whom have held or currently hold fixed-term contracts at their institutions. For Noah and Jasper, an additional motive for becoming indispensable is to earn job security and be promoted from fixed term to permanent contract status, which Jasper has already done. Noah suggests that such a promotion would allow him to “just focus on doing the best that you can and contributing in every way that you can to the institution, building something really special because it's your institution” without feeling as if he is “there on borrowed time” with “one eye on the exit.” Ultimately though “it comes down to respect really,” Jasper says. “I think you can always feel like you're just a cog in the machine kind of thing if you're not careful.”

Participants often attributed thwarted senses of belonging and mattering to a general lack of respect. “I think the longer you feel like, ‘I'm in this little house here,’” Noah explains, referencing his artwork (Figure 10, on p. 53), “and that there's a barrier stopping me from getting security, safety, and having my voice heard in a more meaningful way, I can imagine just stopping trying to make your voice heard.” This comment is aligned with Bob's experience. In the previous theme, I

described his feelings of repeated rejection when he poses ideas, which are part of Bob's attempts to meaningfully contribute to his institution. Bob elaborates on this, saying:

Maybe you might suggest an idea ... but because of who you are within that institution, the ideas might be taken forward but you're not accredited with that idea. So, then I also lose a sense of belonging because it's like, because of who I am, I'm not able to add my name to this idea that is mine. And so going forward, it becomes someone else's idea. So, I'm not respected enough to put forward ideas or for me to be accredited, so I don't belong within that space.

After having this experience of not being acknowledged for his contributions, Bob sensed his "willingness to take initiative" within his institution overall plummet:

I realized that sometimes I just need to not care about the institution and just focus on the people that are around me, whether that's my peers and so on. And not care so much about making any big structural changes or introducing any big structural or organizational ideas, and just focus on what effect can I do ... to have an impact within my classroom, or what can I do to have an impact amongst my peers.

As Noah observes, "It's a matter of like, again, feeling like your voice is heard. ... I don't feel like you can belong somewhere where you're invisible." That said, these feelings of disrespect and invisibility did not extend to the classroom. Rather, all participants seemed to experience a sense of purpose or meaning while in their classrooms and while working with students. The belonging that participants felt while working with students seemed strongly tied to how they identify as educators and to the sense of purpose they derive from that role:

What's the reason that you're even in this job? And I think ultimately, it's to help students. And I guess if you feel like you are, then that also connects to your sense of belonging, I think. If you feel like you're doing a terrible job of teaching ... then I think that weakens your sense of belonging in a way. (Jasper)

Bob says definitively that "within the classroom setting, it's just like, you know, I'm 100%. I feel like I belong in that particular role." Unlike his feelings towards his institution, Bob attributes his sense of belonging in the classroom to "the relationship that I have with my students, and the level of respect that we have for each other." Moreover, Bob stated that no matter how his belonging might deteriorate elsewhere in the institution: "It will never affect my teaching, because that is who I am. That is what I want to do." Noah, too, was struck that his strongest feelings of belonging come from interacting with his students:

More than any interaction I've had with colleagues outside of my immediate team, the interactions that I have with students are really, give you that sense of being respected and valued. And I think that's really quite powerful for me.

As a transnational scholar, Anna says that she tries “to break this idea of sense of belonging, like, as strong” because she thinks that “for someone who is teaching, the way we look at the world, having too strong attachment, sometimes it doesn't really help to teach.” In addition, managing the diverse students in Anna’s international relations classes can be “very chaotic” and “challenging” at times. This led Anna to self-evaluate her teaching style and pedagogy by listening to and engaging students more deeply; this became “an important element if I want to continue teaching or have a meaning of what I do,” linking back to how the pursuit of meaning and purpose plays out in experiences of belonging.

To summarize, this theme unpacks the link between belonging and the desire for purpose and meaning participants experienced. Some participants (Noah, Anna, and Bob) want to feel as though they are working together towards a common goal, such as the mission set forth by their institutions. They also want to feel that their contributions change and improve upon their institutions in turn. Some participants (Jasper, Noah, and Bob) responded to this desire for purpose and meaning by trying to become more deeply involved in university activities to demonstrate their value to their institution. These efforts, however, were sometimes thwarted when participants felt disregarded or disrespected by their institutions. This was demotivating for some participants and forced them to scale back the scope of their realm of influence. This meant focusing on finding meaning in their roles, and especially in their roles with students. This theme, therefore, suggests that the pursuit of belonging for international faculty is not only about social or cultural factors but importantly involves a pursuit of shared and personal goals that create meaning and purpose.

5.3 Risky and emotional belonging

Participants emphasized belonging (and, conversely, not belonging) as deeply felt. Having belonging inspired powerful positive emotions from participants. For example, Anna shared that feeling successful in opening up and interacting with colleagues and students strengthened her belonging, made her happier, and even had a positive impact on her approach to teaching. Noah sees belonging as a familial feeling of “you're where you should be, and the people around you are happy you're there.” He goes on to say:

[Belonging is] incredible. It's transformative, but it does feel, in times that I've experienced it, it does feel like quite luxurious. It makes everything else feel better. And it has enormous spillover effects for different parts of your life.

For Bob, too, belonging is “a strong sense of comfort in terms of me being able to express my own identity with [colleagues] without fear or shame.”

By contrast, participants described the lack of belonging – due to being unable to adjust to life in Japan or forge relationships at work or from feeling underappreciated at their institutions – as “bitterly frustrating,” “real discomfort,” “suffering,” and “mental anguish.” In an extreme example, Bob described an experience of ongoing bullying, harassment, and racism at his institution which caused stress, lack of sleep, and the need for counselling. In addition to the experience itself, the lack of action from his university also impacted Bob's belonging:

When I was approaching management, within the first three weeks nothing was being done about it. So, I think that then at that point, it definitely did affect my sense of belonging because it's like, I have this issue that I'm trying to bring forward, but it's not being addressed. And it wasn't until like, I think it was like week thirteen or something and an incident happened, which then eventually led to [them] being fired.

After the perpetrator of the harassment was dealt with, Bob was relieved but was also left questioning whether the institution had considered the incident “important enough to be dealt with.” This caused a decrease in his motivation to continue pursuing belonging at his university and cast doubt on his overall comfort and satisfaction in Japan.

Participants felt exposed to risk and vulnerability when attempting to belong to the university and make connections with colleagues. This is most clearly illustrated by Anna's artwork and description of tango as a metaphor for belonging. According to Anna, as well as revealing the two-way negotiated nature of belonging (see Section 5.1), tango as a metaphor reveals that the pursuit of belonging is a vulnerable and challenging act that requires international faculty to “not come with everything that you have and be stubborn with it” but to “to listen, to open up myself, and work with others.” Such openness and trust, not unlike the improvisation required while dancing, can leave you feeling exposed and “a lot more naked.” These sentiments are echoed by Jasper, who says that “as you develop that sense of belonging, you kind of open yourself up as well.” He goes on to say that the stronger your belonging becomes, the more you “give of yourself,” and that for some this may even feel like an imposition on their sense of personal privacy and therefore be undesirable.

Figure 11. Anna's artwork (pencil, ink, and watercolour on paper)



The riskiness of belonging is particularly salient for international faculty when considering the precarity between choosing to adapt to their university for the sake of belonging and the possible loss of self that this adaptation may involve. For international faculty who wish to be accepted as they are, rejection can be daunting. For example, Bob says: “I think being rejected has forced me or made me not want to be rejected and to feel like I have to try to fit in. So, in terms of my emotional well-being, it's difficult.” For those who take on the task of adapting more directly, the risks may include not only rejection but assimilation. “You have to find a good balance between adapting yourself without losing too much of who you are. Because you are adapting yourself,” Anna explains, not “giving up all of yours[elf]” because it is important not to “lose your colour.”

Given the vulnerability and emotionality participants have described, it is unsurprising that the importance of care to the development of their belonging was also highlighted. For example, participants expressed that routine and even informal check-ins from leaders in their department or university could produce a sense of belonging because they evoke a sense of genuine caring. For Bob, such check-ins can also facilitate conversations about issues international faculty may otherwise have had no opportunity to voice. Jasper and Bob agreed that being listened to is a key component of feeling cared for. This held true even if those listening were just “going through the motions” (Bob). “At least you're being kind of listened to some,” Jasper explains, “and things are being taken into consideration, even if it doesn't go anywhere.” Participants recognized moments of kindness and caring in which people “treat you as a human being” (Jasper) in simple gestures, like greetings

given in passing, receiving reminders about due dates or words of encouragement, and being invited to social events or work lunches. “If people have made any effort to reach out and, you know, just welcomed me,” Noah says, “I’ve always said yes to that and tried to do my best to jump into that and not forget that kindness.”

In summary, while participants agree that belonging is a two-way negotiation (Section 5.1) and an important pursuit for meaning (Section 5.2), they also stipulate that the process is not without risks. Engaging with and adapting to colleagues and institutions can require a level of vulnerability that can be challenging and unfamiliar for international faculty. A tension also exists regarding the extent to which participants choose to adapt. Not enough adaptation could mean increased pressure to fit in and even rejection, but too much adaptation could cause feelings of identity crisis or loss of self.

Having a strong sense of belonging is characterized by positive feelings of happiness, comfort, and transformation. Meanwhile, the lack of belonging is characterized by negative feelings ranging from frustration to anguish. Moments of caring and kindness are also keenly felt, so much so that participants even appreciate gestures that are less than genuine. Altogether, this theme demonstrates that belonging can trigger deep emotional responses and feelings of precarity that may have implications for the mental and physical health of international faculty.

5.4 Belonging as spatial, embodied, and material

The preceding three themes each make it clear that belonging for international faculty can be impacted by their dynamic, purposeful, and emotional connections with people. By contrast, this theme explores how belonging can be impacted by relationships with non-human entities. As such, this final theme collects together a range of points brought up by participants that are variously linked to space (both real and metaphorical), objects and materiality, and bodies and embodiment. Examples of each will be explored in turn.

Participants discussed belonging in connection to space in different ways. For example, Anna explained that her workplace “as an abstract institution has my sense of belonging because that’s the only reason I continue to live in Japan.” However, she went on to say that her belonging is also tied to specific physical spaces her institution comprises:

I think I belong to that building. Now that you asked me that, I kind of picture the building. Not a human being, like my boss or my division, or the president of [my current university]. ... It sounds weird, but for me, it’s a materialized place because that’s when I feel I belong here. It’s the space, the physical space that makes me feel like, ‘Oh, I’m

back here and I have my place.’ ... My office there represents my sense of belonging, maybe more than others.

Noah describes how space has changed his experience of belonging by contrasting his different office spaces. Last semester, his office was in an “isolated” and “silent place where [he] never got bothered” off at “the other end of the corridor.” This year, though, he shares an office with a colleague amongst a cluster of offices occupied by other colleagues and comments:

It’s nice that we now have this sort of area that feels like it’s not necessarily owned by our team but feels like our team has been able to define it and we’ve built kind of an atmosphere. (Noah)

For Noah, having this space where he can work together with colleagues and receive visits from students is “a really lovely part of the job and part of coming to campus.”

Some participants used visual metaphors and imagined spaces within their artworks to illustrate how they perceive their belonging as bound or limited. For example, Noah draws “what the world feels like ... in situations where I don’t belong” in his illustration of a single lane that splits into two (Figure 10, on p. 53) representing a “segregation of influence that is based on your nationality or your national status.” In this scenario, the honkō has been reserved for Japanese nationals, particularly those in senior-level positions. At the fork, the international faculty are “shuffled off to outhouses,” or separate “international spaces” meant for people who “are seen as disposable and not really interacting with the main business of the university.” This international space is not only segregated but also bounded by expectations for what can and should be done by the international faculty occupying those spaces due to “restrictions placed on it by the kind of structures at the heart of the honkō.” Similar restrictions are also illustrated in Bob’s artwork (Figure 9, on p. 51). For example, in vignette A of Bob’s artwork, the gate between the seniors and himself represents his inability to appeal to his senior management and to “get past that gate they’ve created.” Then in vignettes C and D, Bob is together with his peers (fellow fixed-term contract colleagues) in a “bubble” that marks them as distinctly separate from the institution as a whole. Individuals placed along the edge of the bubble attempting to “bridge the gap” between the peers and the overall institution can be anyone from outside the peer group, including Japanese faculty or administrative staff as well as international faculty from other departments. However, there is no initiative from the seniors to help or encourage the integration of the peers with the rest of Bob’s institution.

Moving away from metaphors of space, Anna and Jasper use other metaphors in their artworks to highlight how their belonging is tied to physical materials, bodies, and symbols which in

turn seem to become loaded with meaning and significance. For example, Jasper’s artwork (Figure 12) is built around the central figure of a mountain. “The mountain is quite a good symbol in itself,” Jasper explains, “because it’s a kind of very stable object, and I think if you belong to something or somewhere, then you need that kind of stability.”

Figure 12. Jasper’s artwork (digital art using PowerPoint application)

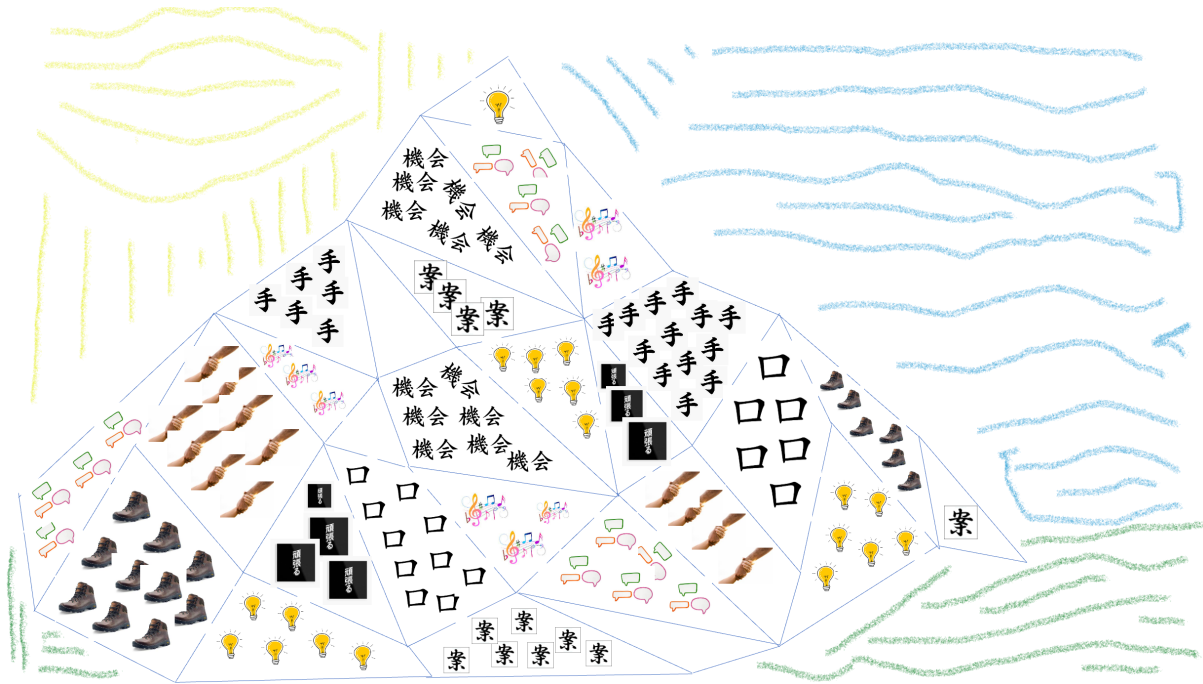







Table 5. Explanation of Japanese characters and reproduction of text used in Jasper's artwork

Japanese kanji	Meaning
手 (<i>te</i>)	hand
口 (<i>kuchi</i>)	mouth
案 (<i>an</i>)	idea
頑張る (<i>ganbaru</i>)	to persevere; to do one's best
機会 (<i>kikai</i>)	chance or opportunity

For Jasper, stability was crucial because he and his wife were keen to settle down in his wife’s hometown where they had built their house, which acted like a kind of “anchor” to that place. Being located near his wife’s hometown in Japan, his institution “provided that sort of stability” that they needed to raise their family. The mountain is created with a network of lines which Jasper says represent the connections one makes while working at a university. Altogether, the connecting lines form geometric shapes across the mountain’s face, and each is filled with a pattern of repeating Japanese characters (*kanji* in Japanese) or small images. Jasper explained that kanji and images are used together to convey his status as someone who is simultaneously inside and outside as an international faculty member. The images forming the mountain each represent key factors that impact Jasper’s belonging, including mutual support (represented by the hands and *te* kanji), sharing

ideas (represented by the lightbulbs and *an* kanji), open communication (represented by the speech bubbles and the *kuchi* kanji), mixing cultures (represented by the musical notes), and working together through challenges (represented by the hiking boot). These are elaborated in Table 6. This artwork therefore demonstrates how representations of space, materials, and symbols allow Jasper to make sense of his current state of belonging.

Table 6. Breakdown of Jasper’s artwork

	“We’re kind of helping each other, right? So, I guess if you belong somewhere, the more you help others or you’re asked to help others and you get help from others. This is all kind of a way of deepening your sense of belonging. So that’s why the hands are there.”
	“The lightbulbs are representing ideas.”
	“The mouth or <i>kuchi</i> is to kind of represent communication, but then you can say I’ve also put speech bubbles for that.”
	“Music kind of represents kind of cultural aspects of being at [my current university], I suppose... It could be anything connected to culture, really, and the fact that there’s a mixture of cultures.”
	“Hiking to the top of the mountain is sort of like a challenge, and there are various challenges of course at [my current university] that you’re working on together...”

Turning to Anna’s artwork (Figure 11, p. 58), the tango metaphor and imagery conjure a sense of bodily physicality, which further suggests that belonging can be embodied. Recalling the tango lessons she once took, Anna elaborates:

[My instructor] constantly explained that tango, you are not actually working alone. You have to feel the tension through the hand gesture, or you have to feel what your partner wants you to do for the next step. So, it’s the body gesture, it’s the eye contact, it’s the movement and everything. You listen to it, you feel it, and then you make your next step. It’s not solely coming from your side. And you have to work together in order to make something new.

Overall, this theme explores the variety of ways participants make sense of belonging in relationship with spaces, bodies, and objects. While some examples showed how participants’ belonging is impacted by actual physical spaces on their campuses and in their homes, other participants explored and articulated ideas of belonging through visual metaphors in their artworks. For Noah and Bob, spatial-visual metaphors offered a way to map and express how they perceive

their belonging as limited and bound by their institutions. For Jasper and Anna, visual metaphors are linked to objects and bodies. By considering the various ways that belonging can play out through spaces, artefacts, symbols, and metaphors, this theme raises questions about alternative expressions of belonging as not only non-human but also agentic and embodied.

5.5 Summary

This chapter reported the outcomes of reflexive thematic analysis of the interview data, which generated four themes for making sense of participants' experiences of belonging in Japanese higher education institutions. The participant-produced artworks presented here seemed to enrich the interview data as participants were able to consider their experiences of belonging thoughtfully in visual and verbal modalities. Participants identified belonging as an active, ongoing, and dynamic process in which their agency can be exerted or constrained. Belonging was also related to participants' desires to be valued members of their institution, able to achieve meaning and purpose in their roles. Participants also described how negotiations of belonging can prove risky and precarious, thereby conjuring intense positive and negative emotions. Finally, spatial, material, and embodied dimensions of belonging were explored through participants' accounts of how their belonging manifests in and through physical and metaphorical spaces, non-human things, and symbols. These results indicate that belonging for international faculty is multifaceted and complex and that their belonging experiences are not neutral but sit uneasily within the Japanese university context.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In the current study, four themes were generated through reflexive thematic analysis. These themes highlight how the four international faculty involved in this study make sense of belonging:

- An ongoing process of mutual co-construction in which their agency can be exerted or constrained by power dynamics present within their institutions.
- Linked to their desire to be valued and respected faculty members who can contribute meaningfully to their institution.
- Part of a deeply felt complex emotional landscape, which highlights the precarity and risk to both well-being and identity that international faculty members can experience as part of negotiating belonging.
- Enacted in and through socio-material space, including attachments and relationships to physical spaces as well as depictions of spaces, materials, and bodies as metaphorical expressions of belonging.

This chapter will explore each of these themes in depth, unpacking their significance relative to existing literature. To conclude the discussion of these themes, I will consider the ways power, identity, and agency act as interwoven threads throughout. As well as offering an insider view into the lived experiences of these four international faculty, this chapter shows how my study may provide some insights into how belonging is experienced in the Japanese higher education context and how dominant understandings of belonging can be disrupted.

6.1 Belonging as an active two-way negotiation

This theme encapsulates how belonging was conceptualized by the participants as an ongoing and active negotiation between themselves and their institutions. Interacting and forming connections with colleagues plays a role in this negotiation process, which reflects the strong emphasis on belonging's social dimensions present in dominant understandings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to participants, belonging is felt when this negotiation is perceived as a reciprocal engagement by both international faculty themselves and members of their receiving institution. Reciprocal engagement forms a sense of connection, relatedness, and shared experience, which Mahar (2013) notes may sometimes surpass the strength of connections formed based on identity, or identification of sameness in physical or behavioural attributes. As per the tango metaphor shared in Chapter 5, belonging requires active attention from both parties as they react to each other's movements and improvise their way smoothly through the dance. This metaphor highlights how participants view belonging as an ongoing co-construction between themselves and their

institutions. As if in a “circuit of action and reaction” (p. 393), belonging is not a fixed state but a relational process (Wright, 2015).

Participants’ descriptions of the belonging negotiation as a process of change and adaptation are reminiscent of descriptions of acculturation in the literature discussed in Chapter 2 (e.g. Schwartz et al., 2010). In addition, participants’ descriptions of the two-way belonging process bear a striking resemblance to Chen’s (2022a) recent study on international faculty integration in Japanese institutions (discussed in Chapter 3), which found that international faculty perceive integration as “a beneficial two-way process in which efforts by both international faculty and Japan should be made” (p. 1). Chen’s (2022a) finding supports the recent scholarly turn away from integration as a one-way process that forces the responsibility of integration entirely onto newcomers (Klarenbeek, 2019). Chen (2022a) also found that international faculty view integration as psychologically equivalent to subjective feelings of belonging, comfort, and feeling at home. These results together with the results of the current study demonstrate the conceptual closeness of belonging and integration as constructs. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to continue to study them as separate (albeit related) constructs because, as this discussion will go on to show, belonging’s scope reaches far beyond integration’s conceptual capacity.

The results of the present study suggest that belonging begins to break down when its negotiation is deemed one-sided. This seemed to occur when participants sought to integrate but perceived that their institution had adopted a separation approach. Separation occurs when individuals avoid or reject others while putting preference on maintaining their own group culture or identity (Berry, 1997). This results in feelings of exclusion, which in turn limit one’s perceived power to interact and hinder their sense of belonging (Mahar et al., 2013). By contrast, other participants described feeling empowered to decide when and how to belong. Being able to choose to interact and then form a sense of belonging (or not) offers a sense of self-determination, meaning that individuals have “control over to whom or what they belong to and the power to develop satisfying reciprocal interactions” (Mahar et al., 2013).

Early-career and fixed-term contract participants in my study perceived greater constraints on their sense of agency than other participants. This pattern aligns with existing research indicating that early-career international faculty in Japan are dissatisfied with how isolating bureaucratic management and communication in Japanese institutions can be (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Brown, 2019). This signals a struggle that links to the politics of belonging discussed in Chapter 2, where who does and does not belong can be based on notions of sameness or hierarchy. The feelings of agency experienced by the more mature and permanent international faculty participants may stem from

longstanding experience living and working in Japan or familiarity with higher education contexts and their present academic cultures, which is learned through a process called socialization (Clarke et al., 2013). However, socialization too has been problematized for being “nothing more than assimilation” in that it assumes all academics should eventually succumb to the static norms established by their institutions (Tierney, 1997, p. 7). A growing amount of research has been done on early-career international faculty (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Sakurai & Mason, 2022, 2023; Sakurai et al., 2023). However, results from the present study indicate it could be helpful to also focus belonging research on mature, experienced international faculty in permanent or tenured roles since their experiences appear to be different from those of early-career faculty. As belonging is an active and ongoing process that develops over the course of a lifetime (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016), studies comparing the belonging experiences of early-career and late-career international faculty could also prove worthwhile.

Overall, seeing belonging as a two-way negotiation (the first theme found in my study) resonates with many ideas in the existing literature on both belonging and international higher education faculty in Japan. However, possible future research directions have been identified through this study’s consideration of the experiences of more mature or experienced international faculty.

6.2 Belonging as a pursuit of meaning

This theme explains that to belong, the participants in this study desired to contribute meaningfully and feel like valued and respected members of their institutions. The results of this study seem to indicate that relationships and connections on their own are not enough to satisfy belonging. Participants also described a psychological need for a sense of fit with the institution itself, and to be valued for ideas and contributions. This echoes Hagerty et al.’s (1992) theory of human relatedness, which states that belonging is composed of two dimensions: valued involvement (the perception that one is valued, needed, and accepted) and fit (the perception that one’s identity or characteristics are congruent with their surrounding environment). Previous research confirms that people can continue feeling a lack of belonging if they are never valued, respected, heard, or able to express themselves authentically within their community (Mahar et al., 2013; Wright, 2015). According to hooks (2009), the pursuit of a meaningful and worthwhile life is belonging’s central principle. My study’s theme of belonging as a pursuit of meaning resonates with each of these perspectives in the literature.

While participants expressed the desire to contribute to their universities in meaningful ways (e.g., contributing to the university mission or institutional reform and improvements), some

participants consistently felt unable to. This aligns with the literature, which stresses that many international faculty members perceive oft-touted institutional goals of internationalization and world-class education as little more than empty rhetoric; instead, international faculty often feel marginalized, lack agency over their workload, and are excluded from mainstream academic activities, making them much less able to make institutional changes or improvements (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Brown, 2019; Chen, 2024; Chen & Chen, 2023). This sense of marginalization, a “process in which international actors are restricted to peripheral roles and excluded from full participation in the local academic mainstream” (Brotherhood et al., 2019, p. 503), is a symptom of power imbalances. Moreover, the current study and past research in the Japanese context both confirm that this marginalization is frequently experienced by “those in the Humanities, those without previous experience in Japan, those who possess propaganda value due to their international appearance and those who are not from countries that use Chinese characters” (Chen, 2024, p. 10).

Despite any difficulties they may have experienced in other areas of their work life, this study’s participants seemed to feel a sense of purpose and reward from interacting with and serving their students as educators. This is consistent with the experiences of other academics in higher education settings (Knight, 2002) and also highlights the tension that may arise between the personal values of individual academics and the constraints or limitations which may be imposed on them by their institutions (Skelton, 2012). Early career and non-tenure participants were vocal about their feelings of marginalization and precarity, which they attributed to their lack of job security and limited hope of future promotion, experiences which are echoed in the literature (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Chen & Huang, 2023). As a result, these participants exhibited feelings of doubt, concern, and uncertainty, which can give rise to a sense of “tainted identity,” or constant self-questioning and disconnection from oneself (Adler & Lalonde, 2020). Such negative feelings and indeed experiences of non-belonging have sparked increasing levels of organizational cynicism (consisting of general negative feelings and critical behaviours towards one’s institution, often as a coping mechanism) amongst academics (Batiste et al., 2021). This cynicism was also present in early career participants of this study.

In summary, participants’ desires to feel valued and respected as members of their institutions echo previous belonging research. However, consistent with existing research on international faculty in Japan, certain participants regularly felt marginalized, stripped of agency, and unable to contribute to their universities in meaningful ways, which often resulted in self-doubt and cynicism regarding their institution. Therefore, to improve international faculty belonging, Japanese universities must consider how to ensure their faculty feel more engaged and empowered in their roles and institutions overall.

6.3 Risky and emotional belonging

Consistent with existing literature discussed in Chapter 2, this theme highlights how participants experienced belonging as deeply felt as well as risky and precarious. While the emotional nature of belonging is commonly taken for granted, scholars rarely explore this dimension as a topic unto itself (Wright, 2015). Moreover, although research has evidenced international faculty members' challenges with forming collegial relationships and managing their work, very little is known about the relationship between these challenges and international faculty members' emotional engagement and sense of belonging, particularly in Asian higher education institutions (Sakurai & Mason, 2023). This study contributes to this gap by demonstrating how participants from this study find that the emotionality of belonging has a profound effect on the ways they navigate their roles at their institutions.

Participants' strong emotional reactions as a result of (non-)belonging illustrate the role of relationality in "belonging-as-emotion," and the way relationality constructs meaning for individuals and collectives (Wright, 2015, p. 398). Consistent with prior literature, participants in this study expressed that successful interpersonal relationships generally produce positive emotional responses while a lack of relationships produces negative emotional responses (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They also confirmed that being rejected or feeling unwelcome hindered belonging (Antonsich, 2010). As participants interacted with colleagues, they seemed to perceive the importance of fit, or feeling that their characteristics are suited to their surrounding environment (Hagerty et al., 1992). More than that though, participants seemed to need to feel as though they could express their identities (Sporton & Valentine, 2007), feel safe, and feel free of alienation before they could belong (Antonsich, 2010). My study thus confirms these patterns (found in the literature on belonging in other contexts) for the case of these international faculty in Japanese higher education contexts.

Participants exhibit anxiety regarding assimilation, which demonstrates both the tension between their needs for both belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011) as well as the pressure to submit to the dominant power structures present within their institutions mentioned in Chapter 2 (Yuval-Davis, 2016). Japanese institutions are laden with power dynamics that can impact the ways international faculty feel and negotiate their belonging. Given this potentially uncertain and emotionally charged setting, it is unsurprising that participants expressed feelings of precarity and exposure. These feelings are also featured in the artwork illustrating the belonging negotiation as an improvisational tango dance (Figure 10, p. 53). Engaging in the pursuit of belonging, like engaging in a dance, requires openness, trust, and a willingness to change and adapt. Moreover, the uncertainty regarding whether those efforts will be reciprocated could make international faculty

feel even more vulnerable, thereby demonstrating that group membership and even basic connection are insufficient if people feel unheard, unvalued, and unable to express their identities (Wright, 2015). In the case that those efforts are not reciprocated, international faculty may feel pressured to assimilate. Participants' accounts allude to an aversion to assimilation, which can be defined as a one-way process of adaptation to more closely resemble the mainstream academic culture (Brotherhood et al., 2019) and requires relinquishing one's values and conforming one's identity to the mainstream (Schneider & Crul, 2010).

Amidst this tension, participants explained that experiencing a sense of care and connection from their institutions is key to improving their belonging. This echoes the emphasis in current higher education research being placed on care and connection in response to increasingly uncaring neoliberal university contexts (Gravett et al., 2021). For participants, a basic aspect of care was being listened to by members of their institution, particularly those in leadership or management roles. The desire to be heard and cared for is consistent with several theories popularly associated with belonging. Examples include the self-determination theory's proposed need for relatedness, which is the desire to be cared for and loved (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and the belonging hypothesis' assertion that to satisfy belonging, a person has to believe they are cared for and loved (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In addition, participants shared that caring can be expressed in everyday gestures and that even small gestures of kindness can be impactful. This demonstrates how "micro-moments" of caring in mundane environments can produce positive affect (Gannon et al., 2019, p. 49).

To conclude, this theme reflected participants' descriptions of how belonging is deeply felt, inspiring strong positive and negative emotional responses. These results are consistent with a wide range of belonging research. However, it is notable that this affective realm of belonging was so salient for the participants also experiencing pronounced accounts of vulnerability, assimilation, harassment, and desire for care (see Chapter 5). This raises questions about the emotional and mental well-being of international faculty in Japan overall and invites further investigation of how specific tensions present in the Japanese higher education context contribute to international faculty well-being.

6.4 Belonging as spatial, embodied, and material

The previous three themes focused primarily on how belonging was experienced by the participants in terms of interpersonal connection and relationships. By contrast, this theme examines how participants made sense of their belonging through relationships to non-human entities (such as spaces and materials) and embodiment.

Participants' accounts of connections to physical spaces demonstrate their recognition of place-belongingness at their institutions and in Japan (2010). According to Probyn (2016), tuning into shared physical spaces and proximity can allow us to understand and experience belonging in new ways that do not rely on essentialism or identifications of sameness. By constructing homes and offices on campus, participants engage in place-making through the cultivation of spatial knowledge, everyday routine, and emotional attachments to those spaces (Fenster, 2005). Recent belonging studies have noted the importance of spaces and materials to students in higher education contexts (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022) and have shown how spaces can positively stimulate affect and empathy amongst faculty (Gravett, Ajjawi, Bearman, et al., 2023). My study confirms these findings as certain participants described the positive impact their physical spaces and surroundings had on their sense of belonging and emotional well-being.

On the other hand, space can also raise questions of access, power, and agency. Gulson and Symes (2007) draw attention to how "the language of exclusion is, by and large, spatial; who's in, who's out, at the heart, on the margins" (p. 99). Spatial metaphors for exclusion were evidenced not only within participants' verbal descriptions but also within their artistic illustrations. Participant-produced drawings of gates erected, lanes diverging, and segregated spaces echo "issues of borders, fences, and boundaries" present in prior belonging research, particularly research focused on migration and mobility (Mee & Wright, 2009, p. 775). Moreover, parallels can be seen between my study and existing studies showing that international faculty in Japanese university contexts, and early career and fixed-term contract faculty in particular, experience little to no ability to contribute to institutional reform and a general lack of professional autonomy and agency (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Brown, 2019; Chen, 2022b; Chen & Huang, 2023). Taking a spatial approach to belonging "invites attention to the spatial relationships of [higher education], considering how space is inhabited and by whom, uncovering power dynamics within the institution and in campus spaces" (Carruthers, 2018, p. 47).

Participants referenced space, materials, and bodies repeatedly through their artworks to illustrate and map the ways they belong. Through a posthuman lens, this signifies attention to the "more-and-other-than-human" world (Taylor & Hughes, 2016, p. 2). Participants' artworks demonstrate ways that objects and materials are highlighted as actors in how we understand belonging, and participants can "give voice to a thing-power," demonstrating that agency is not reserved for humans alone (Bennett, 2010, p. 2). The presentation of bodies in participants' artworks draws attention to how performances or enactments of belonging can be both embodied and material (Wright, 2015). Moreover, it emphasizes how our materialized bodies, too, contribute to

performances and understandings of belonging (Barad, 2015). Therefore, bodies, materials, and spaces together can actively co-constitute belonging.

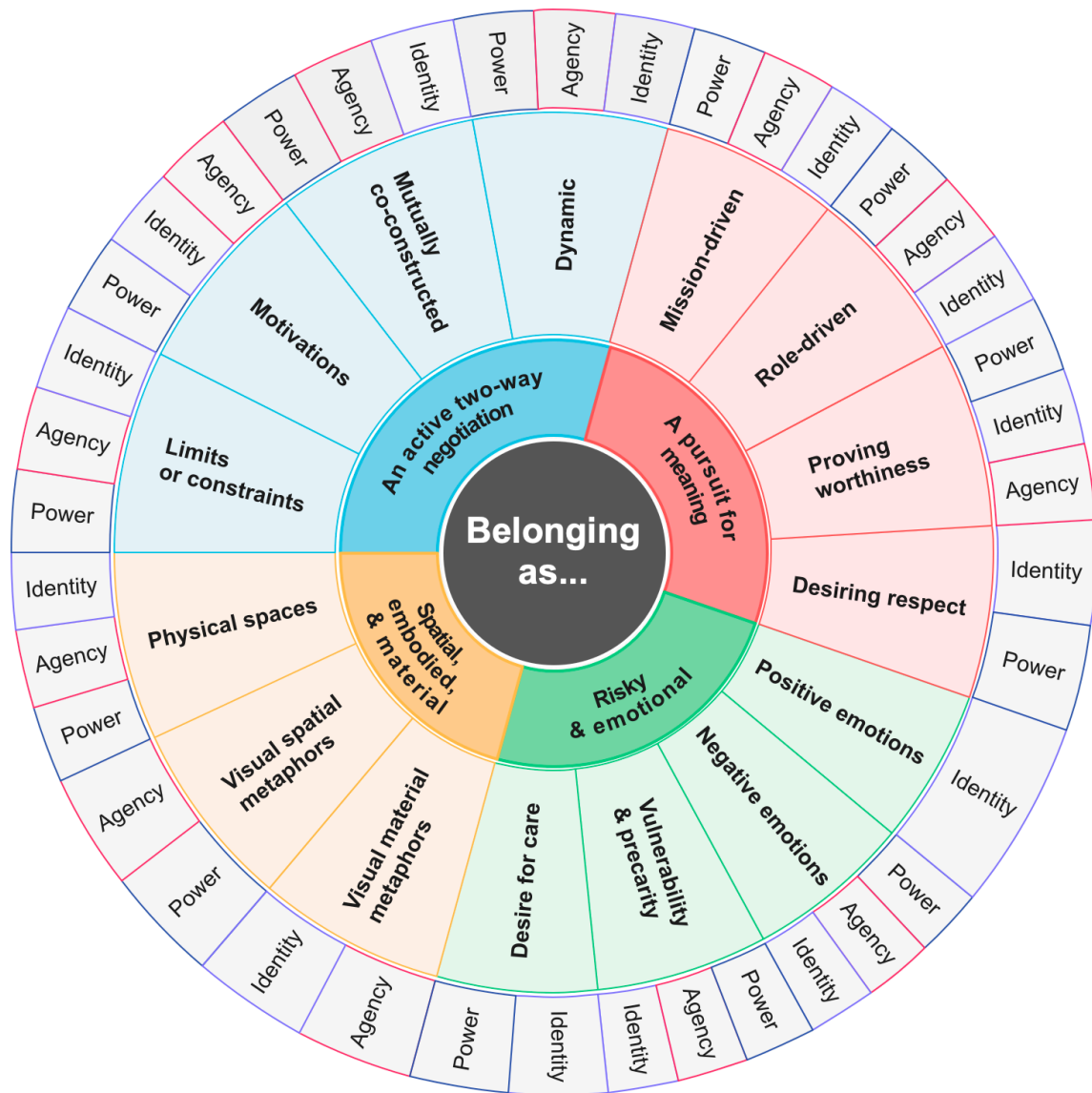
Trending policies and discourses in higher education tend toward inclusion and inclusive practices. However, growing research decentering the role of humans and focusing on ways that belonging can be understood in more-than-human ways (Gravett, Ajjawi, Bearman, et al., 2023; Trudeau, 2006; Wright, 2015) indicate the conceptual limitations of the construct of inclusion due to its boundedness to human interaction and sameness (Mee & Wright, 2009). By contrast, belonging's conceptual flexibility – as demonstrated by the accounts of participants in this study – may prove more helpful for understanding the changing topologies of higher education contexts (Gravett, Ajjawi, & O Shea, 2023) and for moving beyond humanist understandings to consider relationality with spaces and with non-human or more-than-human entities (Country et al., 2016).

In summary, as participants actively engaged in place-making at their institutions, spaces and materials took on key roles in their belonging, as was evidenced by existing higher education research on both students and faculty as well. In addition, some participants' use of visual-spatial metaphors illustrated how power dynamics in their institution played out, emphasizing once again the feelings of exclusion that they and other international faculty in Japan from previous research frequently experience. Furthermore, this study suggests that belonging can be co-constituted by the relationality of space, materials, and bodies, and this invites further investigation into how belonging can be understood in new and innovative ways in higher education contexts.

6.5 Interwoven threads: Power, identity, and agency

As I worked through this analysis, it became clear that threads of power, identity, and agency were interwoven throughout all four themes presented here. To demonstrate this, Figure 13 presents a visualization of the four themes once again, this time with indications of where I came to understand the themes link to power, identity, and agency. While these interwoven threads only became apparent late in the analysis, I briefly reflect below on how each thread in turn seemed to intersect with participants' experiences and accounts of belonging in their Japanese higher education contexts.

Figure 13. Visualization of themes and their connections to power, identity, and agency



The first interwoven thread, power, was strongly evidenced across all four themes. To understand how power impacted participants' sense of belonging, I considered who had the power to grant or take away the conditions necessary for belonging to flourish. In most instances, participants were subject to the complex social power relations that made up their institutional and social milieus. These power dynamics were made tangible by participants' artworks, which illustrated the ways their experiences were regulated and bounded. The primary dynamic of power found in this study was that the participants' employing institutions, and leaders therein, exercised their disciplinary power upon the subjectivized international faculty (Foucault, 1977) in ways that seemed to best benefit the needs of the institution. This often occurred at the expense of the belonging and well-being of their international faculty, as was evidenced by participants' accounts of being marginalized and underappreciated to the point of feeling disrespected, frustrated, and

anguished. This could be indicative of the problematic neoliberal agendas at play at higher education institutions, which can result in uncaring universities that overlook blatant discrepancies and treat belonging and well-being as the individualized endeavours of those positioned at the periphery (Baker & Burke, 2023).

The second interwoven thread was identity. Identity's complexities and close relationship with belonging were previously discussed in Chapter 2, but the way these complexities play out in the themes is explained here. According to Foucault (1977), identities are constituted in and through the power-imbued social relations we experience every day. The politics of belonging, outlined in Chapter 2, draws attention to how formal structures tend to decide who should and should not belong based on the assumption that belonging should maintain the sameness of identity of the dominant group (Fenster, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2016). This dynamic can indeed be seen in the *nihonjinron* mentality unique to Japanese university cultures that others international faculty and assumes the Japanese way of doing things should be preserved (Morita, 2015). Issues of identity that participants reported in this study included being subjected to exclusion and marginalization based on their identity (whether it be as a foreigner, early-career, or non-tenured); experiencing tainted identity and self-doubt in response to working in precarious conditions; and the desire to belong necessitating the openness of adaptation, which makes one susceptible to the risk of assimilation and loss of identity. International faculty form their identities across multiple axes of difference not explored in this study (e.g., sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, ability, and so forth) while also crossing geographic and cultural borders. As such, this study is far from comprehensive in terms of how identity and belonging can be impacted for international faculty in Japanese university settings.

The final thread that I saw interwoven across the study's themes was agency. Agency is interactive by nature, expressed through relationships between actors in changing social locations (Adler & Lalonde, 2020). Agency is itself articulated through power, where "agency-power" is exercised by individuals who seek to "actualise their capacity to transform the world through the performance of the subject positions that define their integration in the social system" (Haugaard, 2022, pp. 348-349). This was evident in the ongoing two-way negotiations of belonging that participants engaged in. However, in those situations when universities refused to reciprocate in the adaptive integration process, agency and self-determination were constrained and the interactive flow of belonging negotiation was halted. In other words, institutional power (thread one previously discussed) overcame individual agency (thread three discussed here). Additionally, participants' attention to the material, spatial, and embodied ways belonging can be experienced brought alternative understandings of agency to the fore. Understood through posthuman and new material lenses, agency is not exclusive to humans, and non-human and more-than-human entities are

agential actors; as a result, people, things, and places are recognized are not bounded but entangled and relational (Barad, 2007). Consider, for example, the artwork depicting boots, lightbulbs, and clasped hands, amongst other symbols, and how together they form the multiple facets of a mountain representing the participants' belonging at his institution.

Power, identity, and agency are intertwined throughout these findings, but these threads extend far beyond the present study and into larger debates present in higher education research. Universities at large are rapidly changing sites of tension. With increased demand and provision for higher education proliferates, universities are rapidly privatized and global academic mobility of students and faculty grows more prolific (Forest & Altbach, 2007). The volatility of this context is well-researched, and questions of power, identity, and agency are prominent threads throughout. I acknowledge that these threads of power, identity, and agency as well as their impact on belonging can afford more in-depth exploration. However, due to time constraints and the fact that these threads were distinguished late in my analysis, the present study represents only a small aspect of this vast literature.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed the four themes generated in this study, and how each of those themes demonstrates a different way that participants experience and understand. This discussion highlights how complexities of belonging are enacted and manifested through power, agency, and identity. As such, my analysis emphasizes that belonging is not neutral, simplistic, or linear. Instead, belonging is active, ongoing, and negotiated, laden with purpose and meaning, deeply felt and risky, and experienced through spaces, materials, and embodiment.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this qualitative study, I used an interpretivist constructionist paradigm to explore how four international faculty members experience belonging in Japanese higher education institutions. Participants shared their experiences by engaging in semi-structured interviews and producing artworks in response to an unstructured drawing elicitation prompt. The use of reflexive thematic analysis to interpret the interview data resulted in four themes. Together, these themes illustrate the multiple, dynamic, and complex ways belonging plays out for these international faculty in their unique contexts in Japan.

This chapter starts by revisiting the research question motivating this study, and considering how and to what extent this question can now be answered. Next, I will reflect on the study itself, considering my reflexivity, choice of methods, final quality considerations (including significant contribution, resonance, and meaningful coherence), and limitations of the study. Following this, I will identify implications of this study and directions for future research. Finally, I will offer my concluding thoughts on belonging's relevance and import.

7.1 Answering the research question

This study set out to answer the following research question:

How do these international faculty in higher education institutions in Japan experience belonging, and how is their belonging shaped?

Firstly, belonging was co-constructed by participants together with their institutions in an ongoing process of reciprocal adaptation. As this negotiation takes place within the social milieu of institutions, belonging is also subject to the power dynamics present within those institutions. Institutional powers overcame the individual agency of participants as institutions frequently refused to engage in and adapt as part of the belonging negotiation, which could be attributed to the tendency of dominant structures to grant or deny belonging based on sameness.

Secondly, belonging was positively impacted when participants felt respected and valued. Despite desiring to fulfil their roles and be meaningful contributors to their institution, international faculty often felt excluded from mainstream academic activities, lacking the agency and resources to make changes or improvements. This resulted in marginalization, feelings of self-doubt, destabilized sense of identity, and cynicism. However, belonging

remained strong in interactions with students during which participants felt the most sense of purpose, reward, and agency.

Thirdly, belonging was deeply felt, eliciting strong positive and negative emotions depending on whether participants perceived they were welcomed, rejected, safe, or alienated. Additionally, belonging was considered risky and precarious. Participants were anxious about institutional pressures to assimilate, which would mean losing their sense of identity and uniqueness. Early career and fixed-term contract participants felt especially precarious, and the uncertainty of their professional positions negatively impacted their belonging and emotional well-being. Gestures of care were identified as one way institutions could alleviate these anxieties and improve international faculty belonging.

Finally, belonging was developed through participants' active place-belongingness and place-making, which created positive emotional attachments to workspaces. Belonging was also articulated through spatial metaphors showing where they were (not) allowed to belong, as demonstrated by participant artworks visually mapping the power dynamics at their institutions. Artworks by other participants depicted how belonging can be experienced as non-human and embodied, which suggests that space, materials, and bodies are all relational and can co-constitute belonging.

7.2 Reflections on the study

Having completed the study and answered the research question as outlined above, this section seeks to reflect on how this research unfolded. This reflection will consider my reflexivity, choice of methods, the final three big-tent quality criteria used to assess this study (significance of contribution, resonance, and meaningful coherence; Tracy, 2010), and the limitations of this study.

7.2.1 Reflexivity

As an interpretivist constructionist researcher, I am an active instrument in this research whose subjectivity cannot be disentangled from this study (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Cohen et al., 2018). In Chapter 1, I described my motivations for undertaking this study, with particular emphasis on my own belonging experiences in Japan as an American woman of mixed ethnic heritage and partial Japanese ethnicity. The way I think about Japan and belonging has changed since I first started this study. I attribute this change in large part to my move to New Zealand (after nearly ten years of living in Japan) at the start of this thesis journey. The act of crossing country borders has meant becoming an outsider once again, this time in a completely foreign context for which I have few points of reference. As I progressed through this study, I found myself reflecting repeatedly on my

belonging in Japan. This made me realize that despite my turbulent feelings upon leaving, I was in fact an insider of Japan in many ways. At the time of writing this reflection, I find myself suspended once again in belonging limbo. It is bizarre yet beautiful to feel my sense of belonging to Japan surging in nostalgic and unexpected ways while simultaneously confronting the joys and discomforts of an unfamiliar new setting.

I believe that these experiences have heightened my sensitivity to belonging in my own life, and I did my best to impart some of this sensitivity to how I received and interpreted the belonging experiences my participants so generously shared with me. At the same time, I was also conscious of the need to not allow my views to get in the way of listening to my participants. This was challenging at times. For example, during the coding process of my reflexive thematic analysis, I realized how important it was to be critical of whether my past experiences were shaping how my codes developed. Was I tending towards certain codes to the exclusion of others? Was I allowing myself to see the whole picture even when it differed from my own? To work through these uncertainties, I frequently used my reflexive journal to clarify my thinking and reflect on how my subjective interpretations were impacting the process of my research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

7.2.2 Choice of arts-based drawing elicitation method

As I explained in Section 4.2.3, my decision to use arts-based research, particularly drawing elicitation, was motivated by my background as a drawer and painter. Looking back on my research process now, I believe that the use of drawing elicitation as a method for data collection was beneficial to this research and that it provided a means to foreground participants' voices and elicit rich, in-depth, and emotional accounts. This is because it provided participants with the chance to reflect on their belonging experiences and consider how they have been taken for granted in their lives as international faculty (Rose, 2014).

The most impactful part of this study for me as an artist-researcher was when each participant revealed their artwork. Those moments were tense with anticipation and excitement, I think for participants as well as for myself, and coming together to view and interpret those artworks was powerful and intimate in ways that I could not have anticipated. Although participants were shy and sometimes apprehensive about their artistic skills, I perceived that all participants approached their artworks thoughtfully. After receiving the prompt, some participants seemed to immediately know how to illustrate their belonging while others expressed a great deal of uncertainty. Additionally, some participants felt as though their self-perceived "poor" artistic abilities were inadequate, saying in their second interview (after completing the artwork) that they felt they had failed to capture the affective emotional dimension of belonging they wanted to

express in their artwork. Other participants shared that viewing their completed artworks surprised them and that the act of visualizing their belonging manifested their feelings in ways they did not even realize to be true until put onto paper. This demonstrates the power of drawings to access deep emotions (Guillemin & Drew, 2010) and be able to “articulate thoughts and feelings that usually remain implicit” (Rose, 2014, p. 27). These observations hint at the richness and complexity drawing elicitation has to offer (Prosser & Loxley, 2007). Moreover, this process highlights how research is more than collecting and analysing data; it is also about engaging participants (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015).

Using drawing elicitation in this study was exciting, challenging, and inspiring for me. Had time constraints allowed, one way I would have extended the study’s arts-based research scope would be to present some part of my findings in the form of my own artwork. This could be done perhaps by reacting to or blending the artworks of my participants into a new artwork, or by making four new artworks, one for each of the themes generated through reflexive thematic analysis. Extending these ideas, I would also like to explore the use of arts-based methods through posthuman and new material lenses, which together might make it possible to “understand and learn the entangled embodied and socio-material ways we know our place-worlds and how through every day and arts practices, we perform, make, and learn belonging” (Page, 2020, p. 17). For example, I am intrigued by the embodied physical and emotional act of creating artful artefacts, how the resulting artefact has the potential for agency, and how these can be brought together as a means of co-constructing belonging in higher education settings.

Proceeding from here, I will address the final three of the eight big-tent criteria used to assess the quality of this study (Tracy, 2010). They are significant contribution, resonance, and meaningful coherence. As noted in Chapter 4, the full set of eight criteria has been used to guide and assess the study, with each criterion being discussed in an appropriate chapter as summarised in Table 3 (p. 43).

7.2.3 Resonance

Research that has resonance is able to engage with readers who have little to no background knowledge of the topic under investigation (Tracy, 2010). Resonance can be achieved through aesthetic merit, meaning that the research is complex and impactful, or through transferability, meaning that the research is evocative and easily applied to readers’ own lives or experiences (Tracy, 2010). To support resonance in this thesis, I have done my best to share my investigation, and my role in this investigation, authentically and transparently. It is also my hope that this text might be engaging for readers, particularly readers who are interested in the fields of belonging, Japanese

higher education, or perhaps arts-based research methods. However, I acknowledge that the resonance of this study is limited by my emerging skills as a researcher and writer. Ultimately, I must leave it to readers to judge whether this work might, in some small way, resonate meaningfully or prove worthwhile.

7.2.4 Significant contribution

My study contributes to beginning to explore gaps in the literature examining international faculty in Japanese higher education contexts. The research on international faculty in Japan is scarce. Much of the literature to date has focused on internationalization (Brotherhood et al., 2019), integration (Brotherhood & Patterson, 2023; Chen, 2022a, 2022b; Chen & Huang, 2022), and work retention and intention to stay (Chen, 2024; Chen & Chen, 2023). In the literature, belonging has been mentioned in passing in relation to the psychological aspects of integration (Chen, 2022a), and it has been positioned as merely one aspect of quantitative studies focused on overall well-being or the impact of work environment on work engagement (Sakurai & Mason, 2022, 2023). To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study not only to look exclusively at the belonging experiences of international faculty in Japanese higher education institutions but also to employ arts-based research methods with this population. As such, the present qualitative research offers a small but rich view of international faculty members' lived experiences, thereby opening new perspectives on belonging in Japanese universities.

This research also extends burgeoning new theoretical perspectives of belonging. As argued in Chapter 2, although the belonging literature is vast, belonging as a concept has been criticized for being "vaguely defined" and "ill-theorized" (Mattes & Lang, 2021, p. 5). Although this study is not sufficient for clearing these ambiguities, it does offer a unique view of situated belonging from an under-researched context and perspective. By elevating the voices of international faculty in Japanese higher education contexts in this research, I hope to encourage other scholars to consider their perspectives in future research.

7.2.5 Meaningful coherence

Meaningfully coherent studies are attentive to their intentions throughout. This coherence and meaning is achieved by maintaining consistency from the study's proposed paradigms through their methodology and methods, by grounding the research in the relevant literature, and ultimately by accomplishing the study's stated purpose (Tracy, 2010). In this thesis, I have been explicit about my choice of paradigm and explained the ways I have embedded this paradigm in my data generation, analysis, and quality assessments (Chapter 4). For example, I deliberately employed

member reflections (see Section 4.3.3) – a practice that embraces subjectivity and multiple truths by inviting participants to actively dialogue and give feedback on the analysis process – because of its fit with my interpretivist constructionist stance, choosing this approach rather than member checks, which emphasize validity, accuracy, and confirmation of a singular truth according to Tracy (2010). Additionally, I attempted to situate my study in the major areas of this study by including two literature reviews, one on belonging (Chapter 2) and one on Japanese higher education contexts (Chapter 3). Finally, in Section 7.1, I shared how I answered my research question and shared key findings resulting from this study. Therefore, to the best of my abilities as a novice researcher, I have constructed what I hope to be a meaningfully coherent study.

7.2.6 Limitations

This study is not without limitations. The qualitative nature of this study is a strength because it allowed for thickly contextualized analysis and discussion of participants' experiences. However, it was also a weakness because such rich data situated deeply in context meant the need to tread carefully while reporting to avoid breaching anonymity and non-traceability (Cohen et al., 2018). Therefore, certain details and aspects of participants' experiences present in the raw data could not be divulged and explored without the risk of revealing participants' identities.

Adoption of the interpretivist constructionist paradigm was a strength because it allowed me to pay close attention to contextualizing historical, political, and cultural discourses so that I could better understand issues related to power and ideology (Young & Collin, 2004). However, at the onset of this project, I did not anticipate having to investigate particular large theoretical bodies of work, which have become important as a result of gathering and engaging with the data (for example, posthuman theory or Foucault's writings on power and agency). There is still much more to learn about these theories and concepts, and given a second attempt at this study, I would consider adopting one or more such lenses across the study for added depth. That said, this thesis as it has been executed is still useful as an indicator of the importance of these concepts and as a stepping stone for me as a researcher to venture in such directions in the future.

Finally, owing to my choice of paradigm and the assumption that realities are socially constructed, the results from this study cannot be generalized. This is done knowingly and with the aim of understanding these particular realities in an in-depth way and without any assumption that they may be true for all international faculty.

7.3 Implications and directions for future research

The implications and possible directions for future research I offer here represent my interpretations of what this research has to offer other researchers, international faculty, and institutions in Japan and how the study could be extended in the future. Given the foundation of my use of the interpretivist constructionist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and understood through interpretation, I recognize that readers may interpret the implications of the findings generated by this study differently from those shared here.

Firstly, this study found that belonging can be viewed as a relational process or negotiation in which both international faculty and their institutions must engage and reciprocate for belonging to flourish. Therefore, Japanese institutions and staff need to be mindful of how their actions support or obstruct belonging for international faculty, particularly for early career and fixed-term international faculty who seem to suffer most from experiences of exclusion and dissatisfaction. Given their vulnerability, a growing amount of research is now investigating the challenges faced by early-career international faculty. However, results from the present study indicate it could also be helpful to focus research on mature, experienced international faculty in permanent or tenured roles. As belonging is an ongoing process that changes over the course of a lifetime (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016), studies comparing the belonging experiences of early-career and late-career international faculty could also prove worthwhile.

Secondly, this study showed that international faculty are often in precarious and vulnerable positions, as when they are at risk of assimilation, alienated, feeling unvalued, and insecure about their job stability. Moreover, when international faculty are unable to engage meaningfully in ways that positively impact their institutions, they can lose their sense of belonging, have feelings of self-doubt and marginalization, and turn to cynicism. To counteract (or hopefully prevent) these negative responses, Japanese universities must consider how to disrupt existing power imbalances, allow their international faculty to become active agents able to make positive impact in their institutions, and become more caring institutions.

Finally, participants in this study demonstrated the importance of physical space and place-making to their sense of belonging, which invites more consideration from Japanese institutions into how their on-campus spaces are helping or hindering belonging for their international institutions. In addition, participants' artworks suggest understandings of belonging tied to physical materials, spaces, and embodiment. Given the immense pressures international faculty feel to adapt or otherwise fit in, it may be worthwhile for scholars to investigate how relational and non-human

ways of belonging could relieve this pressure. Further studies utilizing posthuman or new material lenses could also help open new avenues of belonging research in higher education.

7.4 Concluding thoughts

I started this research believing that I knew what research was. I thought it was precise, controlled, and unattached. In fact, it is messy, dynamic, and incredibly vulnerable – not unlike belonging. I knew taking on this study would be challenging, but I did not expect my own voice to be one of the biggest challenges I would face. Learning to balance my scholarly voice with my human voice, and weaving those with the voices of scholars and my participants, to add in my small way to belonging and higher education research – this was a tremendous and hugely rewarding undertaking.

Carrying out this study with the four international faculty who shared their experiences with me has been my great pleasure and privilege. In the words of Wright (2015), “Belonging (or not) truly has the power to change lives, to make communities and collectives, to bring together and separate in the most intimate, loving, accepting, exclusionary or violent ways” (p. 391). When it comes to Japanese higher education institutions, I believe that attentive and reciprocal ethics of care can and should be taken to improve the belonging of their international faculty and all institutional members. I hope that this thesis will encourage and inspire others to investigate belonging for the betterment of higher education contexts in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Division of Education Research Ethics Committee approval letter

Te Wānanga Toi Tangata
Division of Education
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton,
New Zealand, 3240

Division of Education Research
Ethics Committee (DEREC)
fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz
www.waikato.ac.nz



12/6/2023

Dear Maryann Kristina Miyashiro

Division of Education Research Ethics Committee Application Approved FEDU015/23

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled “Drawing from lived experiences of belonging: Using arts-based methods to engage with foreign academics in Japanese universities” was approved by Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee on June 12th, 2023.

Please be aware that the Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards



Chair

Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee (DEREC)

Appendix B: Call for research participants



Call for research participants!

Are you a foreign academic faculty member at a Japanese university?

What is the aim of the study?

This study will investigate how foreign academics define and experience belonging in their roles at higher education institutions in Japan. Using semi-structured interviews and arts-based approaches, this study will explore a range of issues pertinent to the working lives of foreign academics in Japan, including what factors they perceive as contributing to or hindering their sense of belonging.

Who can participate?

To be eligible, you must:

- be employed full time as an academic staff member of a higher education institution in Japan,
- currently live in Japan, and
- either self-identify as non-Japanese or not hold a Japanese passport.

What will participants do?

Participants will take part in:

- two in-person interviews (about 45 minutes each).
- one art activity (about 15 to 30 minutes).

All interviews and activities will be conducted in English.

Interested in participating?

Access the Information Sheet and Initial Consent Form here:
[link to be added here]

[QR code here]

Contact the researcher Maryann Miyashiro at [email address here] with questions.

This study has been approved by the Human Ethics Committee of the Division of Education at the University of Waikato.

Appendix C: Invitation to participants e-mail template

Dear [insert],

My name is Maryann Miyashiro, and I am currently working on my Master of Education thesis at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I am writing to invite [you // the foreign teaching staff affiliated with centre/institution name] to consider participating in my research project, which has been approved by the Education Ethics Committee of the University of Waikato Education Division.

What is the aim of the study?

This study aims to investigate how foreign academics define and experience belonging in their roles at higher education institutions in Japan using an arts-based approach. The study will explore a range of issues pertinent to the working lives of foreign academics in Japan, including what factors they perceive as contributing to or hindering their sense of belonging.

How are participants chosen?

Up to four foreign academics will be interviewed and take part in an art activity as part of this qualitative study. To be eligible, individuals must be employed full-time as an academic staff member of a higher education institution in Japan, currently live in Japan, and either self-identify as non-Japanese or not hold a Japanese passport. Interested participants should read the information sheet and then complete and return the consent form attached.

What does participation involve?

Participants will take part in two in-person interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes each and also one art activity lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interviews and art activity will be conducted at a time and place convenient to the participant within the next two to three months. While in-person interviews are preferred, online accommodations via Zoom can be made should the participant be unable to meet in person. Participants will also be asked to review transcripts of the interviews, which may take up to an additional 1.5 hours. All interviews and activities will be conducted in English.

What are the benefits of this study?

Some people may find participating in this study beneficial as a way to reflect on and speak about their personal and professional experiences verbally and through artistic expression. Also, the final findings of this study may fill a gap in how we understand sense of belonging and inform institutions on how to support foreign academics' belonging.

Please share this invitation to participate and the corresponding information sheet and consent form within your academic network in Japan. All interested participants are asked to read the attached information sheet then complete the consent form and email it to me directly at [email address here]. Feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Thank you for your generous support of this research project.

Kind regards,

Maryann Miyashiro

Appendix D: Information sheet

My name is Maryann Miyashiro, and I am currently working on my Master of Education thesis at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I am writing to invite you to consider participating in my research project, which has been approved by the Education Ethics Committee of the University of Waikato Education Division. Before moving on to the consent form, please review the information provided below.

1. *What is the aim of the study?*

This study aims to investigate how foreign academics define and experience belonging in their roles at higher education institutions in Japan using an arts-based approach. The study will likely explore a range of issues pertinent to the working lives of foreign academics in Japan, including what factors they perceive as contributing to or hindering their sense of belonging.

2. *How can I be chosen?*

Up to 4 foreign academics will be interviewed and take part in an art activity as part of this qualitative study. To be eligible, you must be employed full-time as an academic staff member of a higher education institution in Japan, currently live in Japan, and either self-identify as non-Japanese or not hold a Japanese passport.

3. *What would my participation involve?*

As a participant, you will take part in two in-person interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes each and also one art activity lasting between 15 and 30 minutes. The interviews and art activity will be conducted at a time and place convenient to you within the next two to three months. While in-person interviews are preferred, online accommodations via Zoom can be made should the participant be unable to meet in person. The interviews will be audio recorded and the artwork you produce in the art activity will be photographed or copied. You will also be asked to review transcripts of the interviews and photographs or copies of your artwork, which may take up to an additional 1.5 hours. All interviews and activities will be conducted in English.

4. *What are the benefits of this study?*

Some people may find participating in this study beneficial as a way to reflect on and speak about their personal and professional experiences verbally and through artistic expression. Also, the final findings of this study may fill a gap in how we understand sense of belonging and inform institutions on how to support foreign academics' sense of belonging.

5. *Are there any risks to me if I participate?*
This study has little to no risk to you. However, you will be asked to create and discuss original artwork about your sense of belonging and this may make you feel uncomfortable or cause some distress. If this happens, you may talk to me about these feelings at any time. You also have the option to withdraw your participation from the study as needed.
6. *Will anyone know I am in this study?*
No names or identifying details about you or your affiliated institution will appear in any publications or outputs resulting from this study. As images of the artwork you produce for the art activity may also appear in publications resulting from this study, it is recommended that you refrain from using sensitive content that you would not want to share (e.g., personal photographs) or anything that would identify you or your institution (e.g., logos). In the event that such content is used, the researcher will ask your permission to alter the image and remove identifying details before use. Data collected from this study will be securely stored and password protected for up to five years before being destroyed. Every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity, though it cannot be completely guaranteed.
7. *What will be published?*
Data gathered in this study, including transcripts of your interviews and artwork produced in the drawing activity, will be used to write and publish a Master's thesis. This data may also be used as source material for other outputs, such as journal articles, conference papers, or presentations. You as a participant own the raw data you generated during the study. However, all outputs, including the thesis, articles, papers, or presentations, resulting from the data will be the property of the researcher. The thesis will be made available in the [University of Waikato Research Commons Database](#) and I will share a summary of the findings with you upon request.
8. *Has this study been ethically approved?*
This research project has been approved by the Humans Ethics Committee of the Division of Education at the University of Waikato.
9. *Who can I talk to about the study?*
If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me as your researcher any time via email at [email address here] or by phone [phone number here]. You are also welcome to contact the research thesis supervisor Dr Katrina McChesney at k.mcchesney@waikato.ac.nz.

10. *What if I don't want to participate?*

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the project at any point up until you have reviewed and confirmed the interview transcripts.

11. *What do I do if I want to participate?*

If you have read this information sheet and would like to participate, please complete and sign Part 1 of the consent form and send it to me by email at [email address here] within ten days of receiving this invitation.

Thank you for your generous time and support of this research project. I hope you will consider taking part and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Maryann Miyashiro

Appendix E: Informed consent forms

Part 1: Initial Consent to Participate

Those who are interested in participating are asked to complete Consent Form Part 1 and return it to the researcher via email. If you are chosen to participate, you will be asked to complete Consent Form Part 2 before proceeding to Interview 1 of the study.

1. Please tick [✓] the boxes below to indicate your agreement with the corresponding statement. Leave the box blank if you do not agree.

- I have read the information sheet about the research and understand the nature of the project.
- I consent to participating in two interviews lasting 45 minutes each and one art activity lasting up to 30 minutes.
- I consent to my interviews being audio-recorded and transcribed and my artwork being photographed or copied.
- I consent to verifying the typed transcripts of the interviews and the photographs or copies of my artwork which may take up to 1.5 additional hours to complete.

2. Please provide the following background information. The asterisked items (*) may be used to select the participants for the study. Your preferred pseudonym will be used in place of your name in the thesis and resulting publications. If no preference is given, one will be provided.

Full name:	
Preferred pseudonym:	
Date of birth:	
Gender identification*:	Select one: [Female] [Male] [Prefer not to say] Preferred description (please specify): []
Country of origin (nationality)*:	
Position at [institution]*:	
Year of arrival in Japan*:	
Number of years working abroad*:	
Ability to speak Japanese*:	Select one: [None] [Conversational] [Fluent]
Aspiration for living and working in Japan*:	
Select one: [Temporarily (up to 5 years)] [Long term (more than 5 years)] [Undecided]	

3. Please sign and date this form below.

Signature: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / 2023
day month

Part 2: Consent to Become a Participant

The following is to be completed prior to the start of Interview 1 of the study. Please tick [✓] the boxes to indicate your agreement with the corresponding statement.

I have read the Information Letter about Maryann Miyashiro's research study for her Master of Education thesis at the University of Waikato and I understand the nature of this project.

I understand that I will participate in two interviews, that these interviews will be audio-recorded, and that the transcripts from these interviews may be included in the thesis or other publications resulting from this research.

I understand that I will participate in one drawing activity and produce one piece of artwork in this activity, that photographs or copies of this artwork may be included in the thesis or other outputs resulting from this research, and that raw data resulting from this study will be securely stored for a period of up to five years before being destroyed.

I understand that my anonymity will be maintained, though it cannot be guaranteed, and that no names or identifying details about me or my affiliated institution will appear in any publications resulting from this study.

I understand that I have a right to:

- Receive, review, and amend the transcriptions of my interviews.
- Receive, review, and amend the photographs or copies of my artwork.
- Withdraw from the research any time until I have approved the transcription of my interviews and photographs or copies of my artwork.

I understand that this project has been approved by the Humans Ethics Committee of the Division of Education at the University of Waikato and that I may contact the researcher Maryann Miyashiro via email at [email address here] or by phone [phone number here] if I have any questions or concerns about this project or my participation in this project. Alternatively, I may also contact Dr Katrina McChesney, the thesis supervisor, via email at k.mcchesney@waikato.ac.nz.

I consent to participating in two interviews lasting 45 minutes each.

I consent to my interviews being audio-recorded and transcribed.

I consent to participating in one art activity lasting up to 30 minutes.

I consent to having my artwork photographed or copied.

Participant name (please print): _____

Participant signature: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / 2023

day month

Appendix F: Art activity instruction sheet

Art Activity Instruction Sheet

Before our second interview, your task is:

Create a piece of art that represents your sense of belonging or aspects of your belonging in your role at your institution in Japan.

Here are some questions to consider before you start:

- How do you visualize belonging?
- Can you draw or depict your current sense of belonging right now?
- What does belonging look like for you as a foreign academic in Japan?

This activity is an opportunity for you to express yourself creatively, and you will have the opportunity to explain what you have created and why during our second interview. There is no right or wrong way to approach this task and your artistic skills will not be judged in any way.

Please work on a single sheet of A4 or A3 paper. If you need paper, some will be provided to you at the end of this session. You may use any tools you prefer to produce your artwork, such as pencil, pen, or paint, photographs or magazine cuttings with glue or tape to form a collage, digital tools such as Photoshop or PowerPoint, or even a mixed media approach with multiple tools. Use whatever you are most comfortable with or that you have on hand.

This activity is expected to take you between 15 to 30 minutes. You are welcome to spend more time, as long as it causes no burden to you. Please note that your resulting artwork from this activity forms part of a research project. At the end of our next interview, I will either photograph or scan the artwork or, with your permission, keep the artwork as an artefact. I may reproduce an image of your artwork in my thesis or other publications, so please refrain from using sensitive content that you would not want to share (e.g., personal photos) or anything that would identify you or your institution (e.g., logo).

If you have any questions about the art activity, please feel free to contact me via email at [email address here] or by phone at [phone number here].

Appendix G: Interview 1 schedule

Project Explanation

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My research project is about experiences of belonging. More specifically, I am interested in understanding how foreign academics in Japan define and experience belonging in their professional lives in higher education.

Before we go any further, I would also like to thank you for signing the Consent Form and confirm that you have your copy of the form as well as the project Information Sheet.

As a participant of this research, our work together will consist of three parts: our initial interview today, an art activity, and a final follow-up interview. Both interviews will last roughly 45 minutes. With your permission, I will audio-record and transcribe our interviews. I will then send you a copy of the interview transcriptions for your approval or amendment. The final transcripts will act as my data.

The art activity, which I will explain in full at the end of today's session, may take anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes to complete. The resulting artwork which you produce will also be used as data in this project. So, with your permission, I will photograph, scan, and/or save a digital copy your artwork which I will also ask you to approve or amend as necessary.

Please know that I will work to ensure your anonymity at every stage of my project and that you may withdraw as a participant at any point up until you have given approval or the transcript and visual data. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me or my supervisor using the details provided in the project Information Sheet.

During our interview today, we'll start by learning a little bit about you and your role here at [institution name] and then move into how you define and experience belonging.

Part A: Initial Background Questions

- Tell me about your role here at [institution name].
- How long have you worked at [institution name]?
- What do you teach at [institution name]?
- Are you involved in any research activities?
- What type of visa do you hold, and how long is your visa valid?
- Tell me about your aspirations for living and working in Japan.

Part B: Belonging questions

The following are likely lines of questioning in this semi-structured interview. It is possible only a selection of these questions may be used in each interview, and that follow-up questions and prompts not listed here may be included on an individual basis.

- What does the phrase “sense of belonging” mean to you?
- Define “belonging” in one or two sentences.
- Are there any other words or phrases you might use to describe about belonging?
- How do you view belonging as a foreign academic in Japan?
- How do you know when you do or do not belong?
- How easy or hard is it to belong?
- Is belonging something you show on the outside or an internal experience?
- Do you think integration and belonging are the same or different? In what ways?
- Do you feel like you belong? Why or why not?
- What or whom do you feel a sense of belonging to?
- What factors impact (increase or diminish) your sense of belonging?
- Do you feel there are things about you as an individual that may help or hinder the way you experience belonging?
- Please describe a time at [your institution] where you felt you did or did not belong.
- Has your sense of belonging changed over time? In what ways?
- Can people influence their sense of belonging? How?
- To what extent is belonging in your control? Do you have agency over belonging, or is it more attributed to the environment?
- What do you do to navigate your sense of belonging?
- What advice would you give a new foreign academic to help them feel like they belong?
- What advice would you give to a colleague experiencing poor belonging?

Thank you for answering my questions and sharing your thoughts with me. Now I would like to introduce the next part of your participation: the art activity.

Art Activity Explanation

Before our second interview, I ask that you participate in an art activity. Your task is: *To create a piece of art that represents your sense of belonging or aspects of your belonging in your role at your institution in Japan.*

Here are some questions to consider before you start:

- How do you visualize belonging?
- Can you draw or depict your current sense of belonging right now?
- What does belonging look like for you as a foreign academic in Japan?

This activity is an opportunity for you to express yourself creatively, and you will have the opportunity to explain what you have created and why during our second interview. There is no right or wrong way to approach this task and your artistic skills will not be judged in any way.

Please work on a single sheet of A4 or A3 paper. If you need paper, some will be provided to you at the end of this session. You may use any tools you prefer to produce your artwork, such as pencil, pen, or paint, photographs or magazine cuttings with glue or tape to form a collage, digital tools such as Photoshop or PowerPoint, or even a mixed media approach with multiple tools. Use whatever you are most comfortable with or that you have on hand.

This activity is expected to take you between 15 to 30 minutes. You are welcome to spend more time, as long as it causes no burden to you. Please note that your resulting artwork from this activity forms part of a research project. At the end of our next interview, I will either photograph or scan the artwork or, with your permission, keep the artwork as an artefact. I may reproduce an image of your artwork in my thesis or other publications, so please refrain from using sensitive content that you would not want to share (e.g., personal photos) or anything that would identify you or your institution (e.g., logo).

All of this information is provided on the Art Activity Instruction Sheet for you to take with you. At this time, do you have any questions? If you have nothing else to add, this concludes our first interview and I will end the recording now. You may also contact me after this interview at using the contact details provided on the sheet. Thank you.

Appendix H: Interview 2 schedule

INTERVIEW 2

Art discussion

Before beginning the interview, display the participant-produced artwork between the participant and researcher, either positioned upright on a wall or flat on a shared table. Since it is unclear what topics or themes the participant-produced artwork will prompt, the following questions are to be used as starting points and further questions may be asked in the moment based on the artwork itself.

Thank you for joining me today. During our first interview, I asked you to create a piece of art that represents your sense of belonging or aspects of your belonging in your role at your institution in Japan, and today I would like to ask you some questions about the artwork you created. Before we begin, I would like to remind you that there is no right or wrong way to approach this task and that your artistic skills will not be judged in any way. Furthermore, I will not be analysing your artwork directly, only what you say about it. For this reason, I would like to start by asking you to narrate or describe your image verbally.

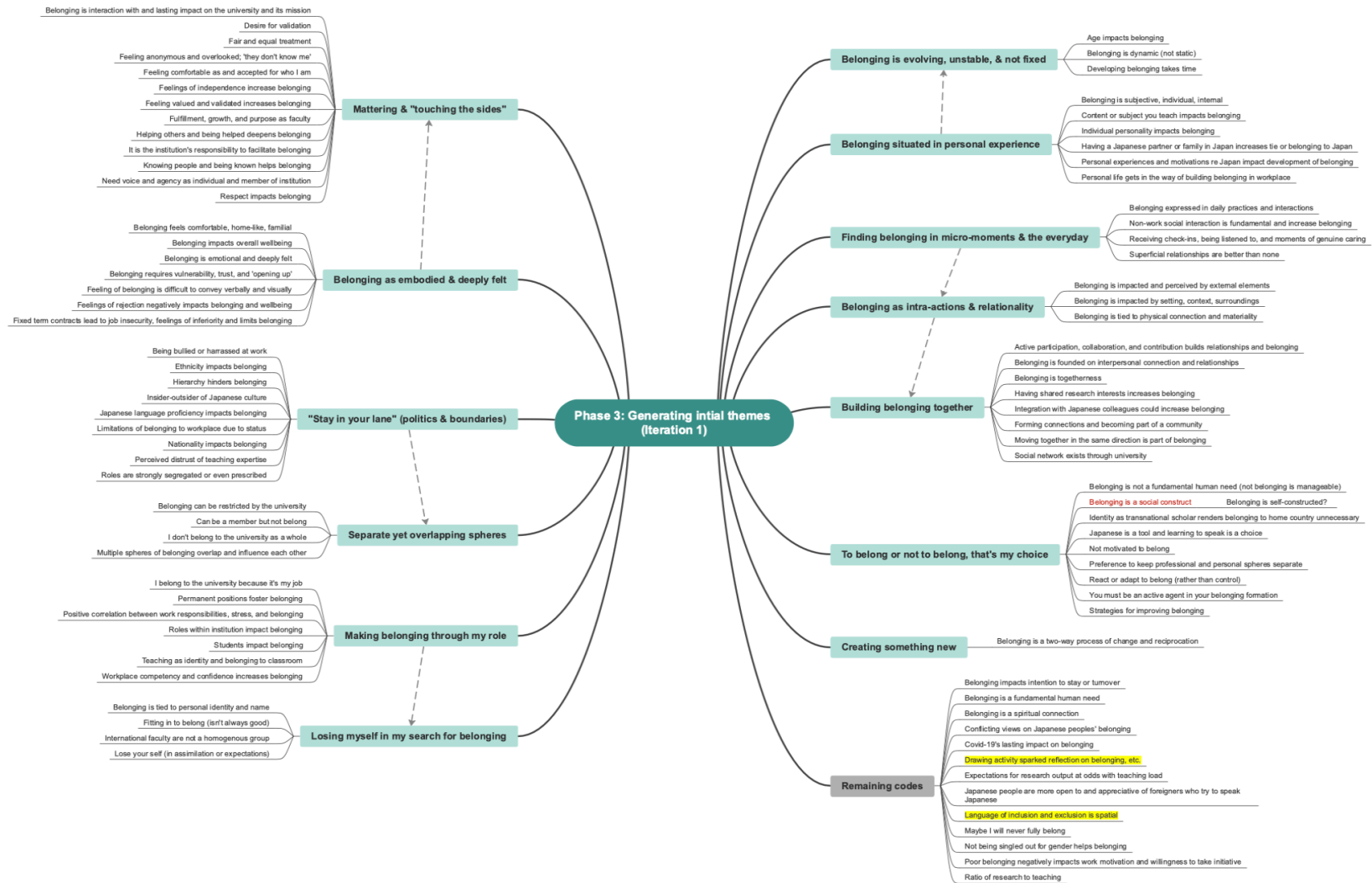
- In your own words, please describe the image you have created. What is depicted (person, place, symbols, words, etc.)?
- Tell me about why you chose to express belonging in this particular way.
- How does the image you have created reflect your understanding or current experience of belonging as a foreign academic at [institution]?
- What media have you chosen to use for your artwork and why?
- You have chosen to use certain colours, lines, textures, or images. Do they hold any special meaning or connection to belonging? If yes, how/why?
- How did you find this activity? Was it easy or difficult? Why?

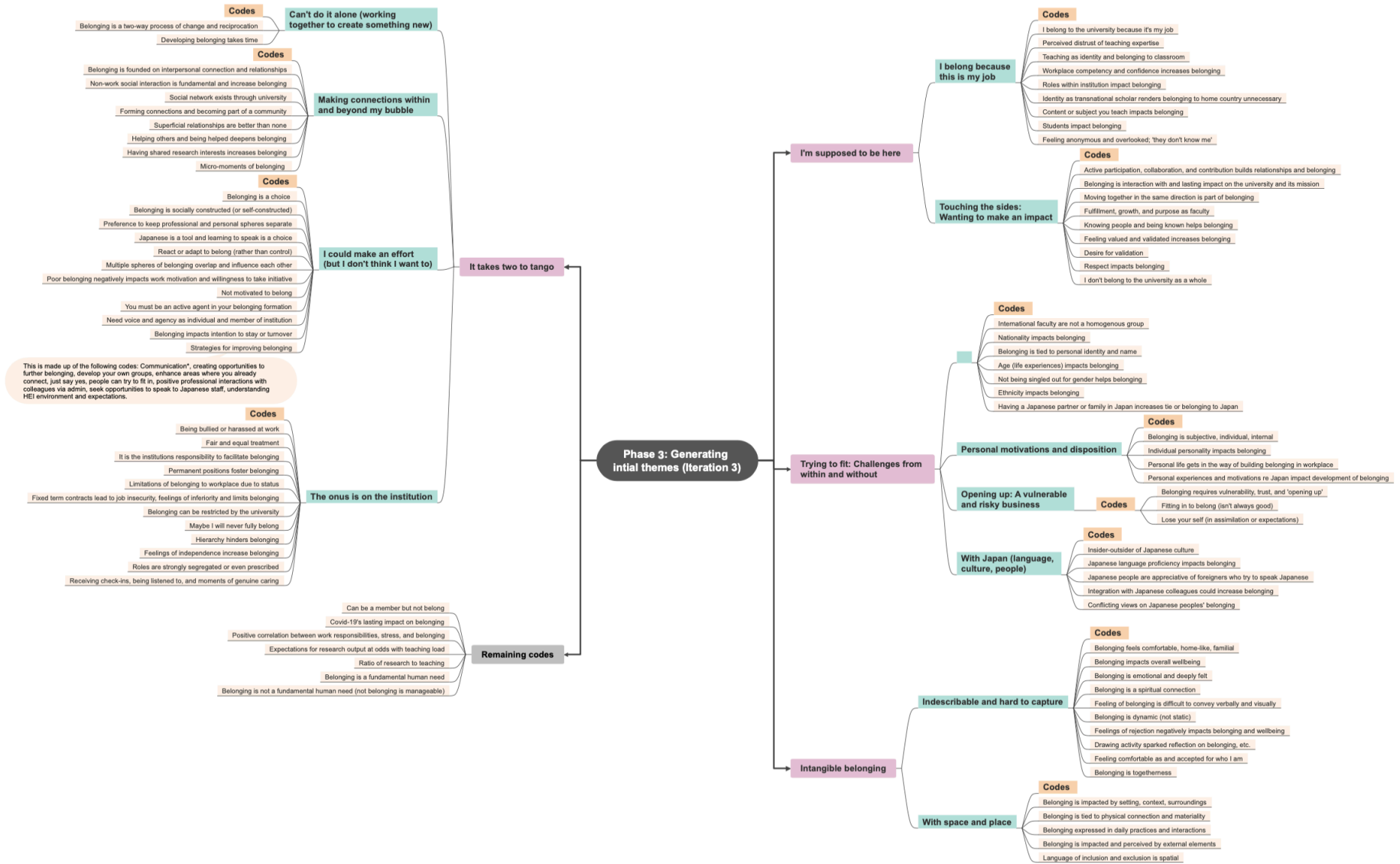
Conclusion

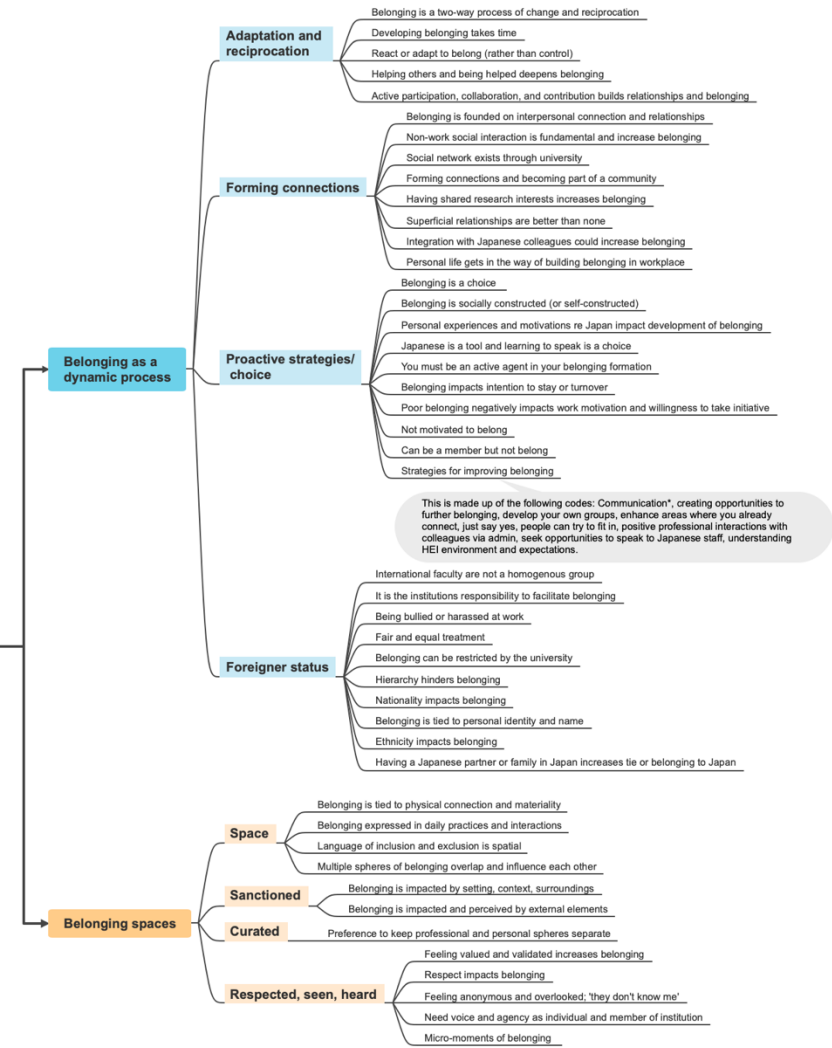
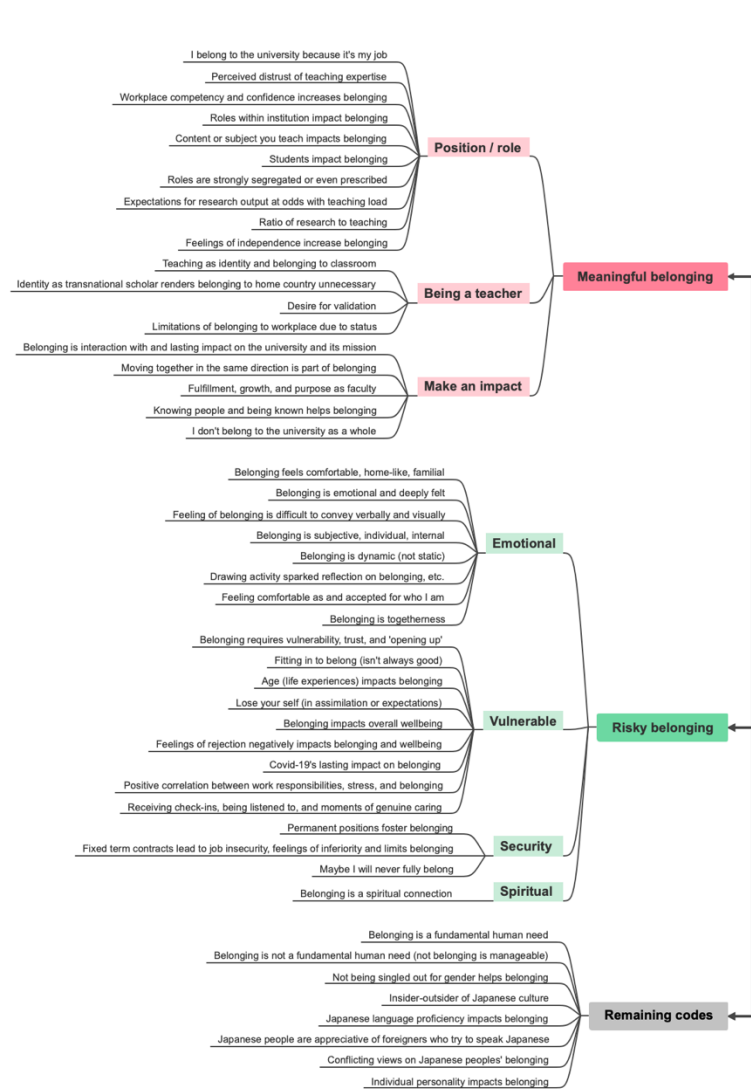
In approximately 3 weeks, you will receive an email from me with the transcripts of our two interviews as well as the copies or photographs of your artwork. At that time, you may review these documents and let me know if you have any questions, comments, or amendments to be made.

Thank you for participating in this study. I am grateful for your willingness and openness during our time together. Do you have any questions? If there is anything further you would like to discuss, this concludes our first interview and I will end the recording now. Please feel free to contact me later if there is anything else you would like to discuss. I appreciate your time and feedback.

Appendix I: Examples of in-progress mind maps from the data analysis process

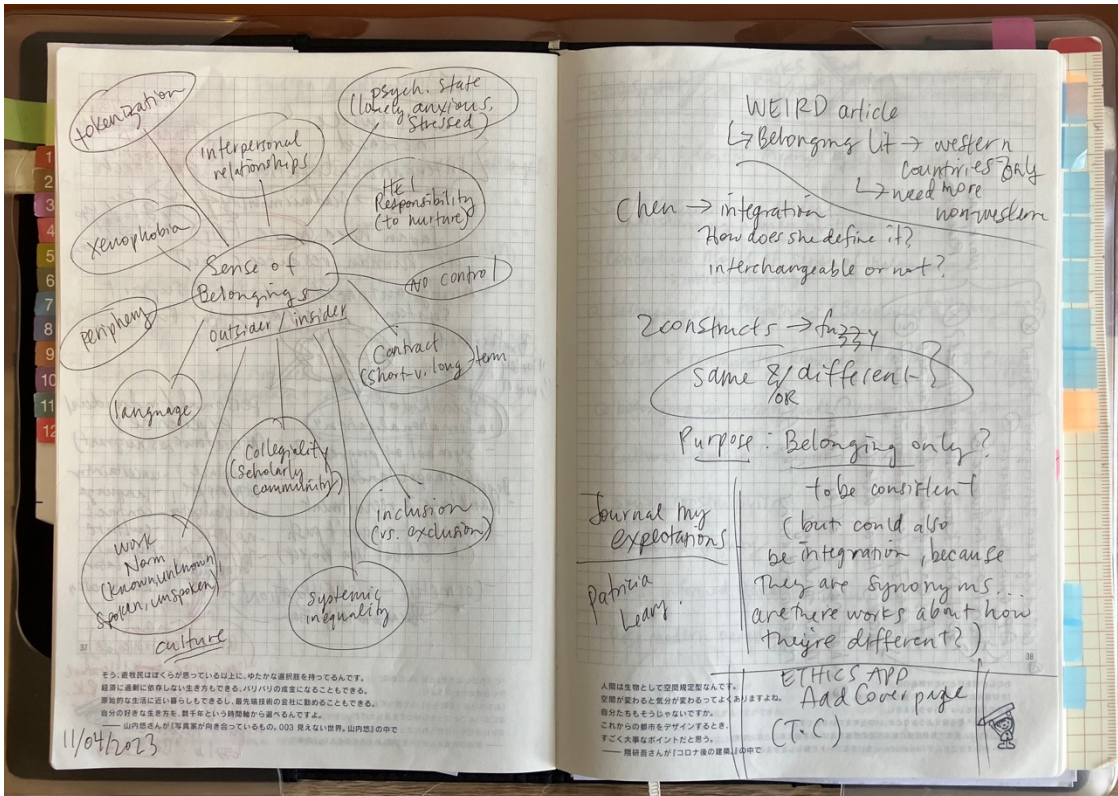
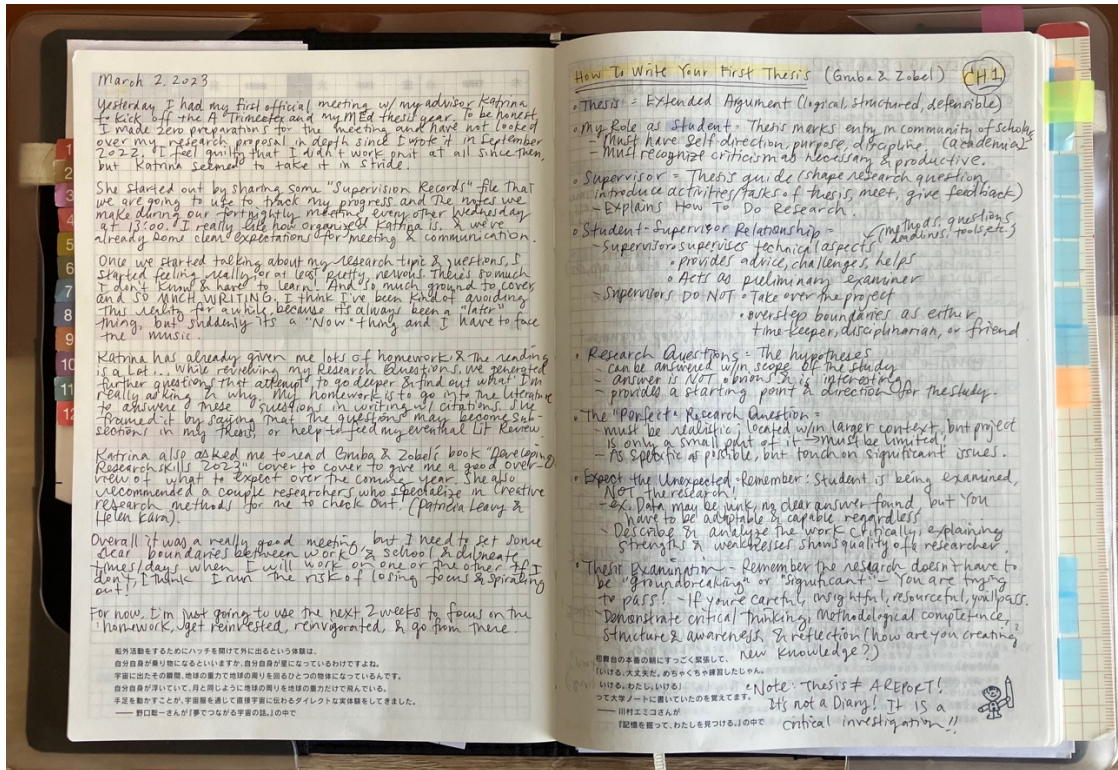


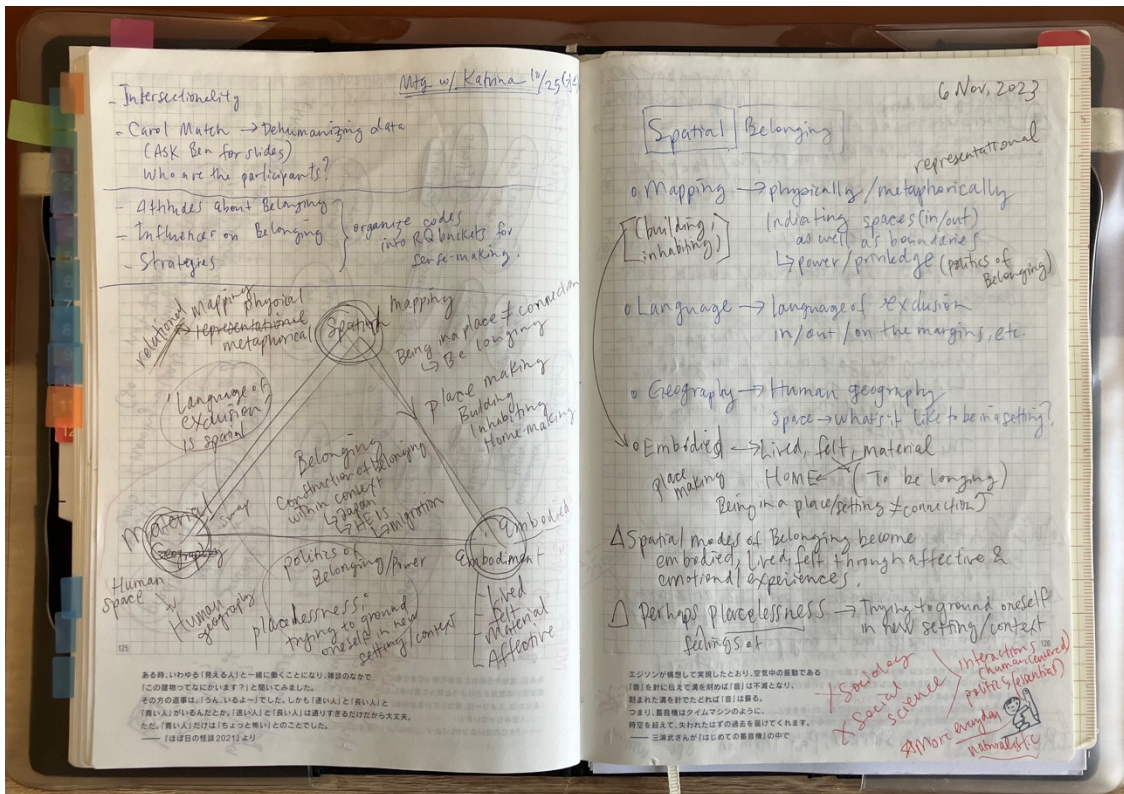
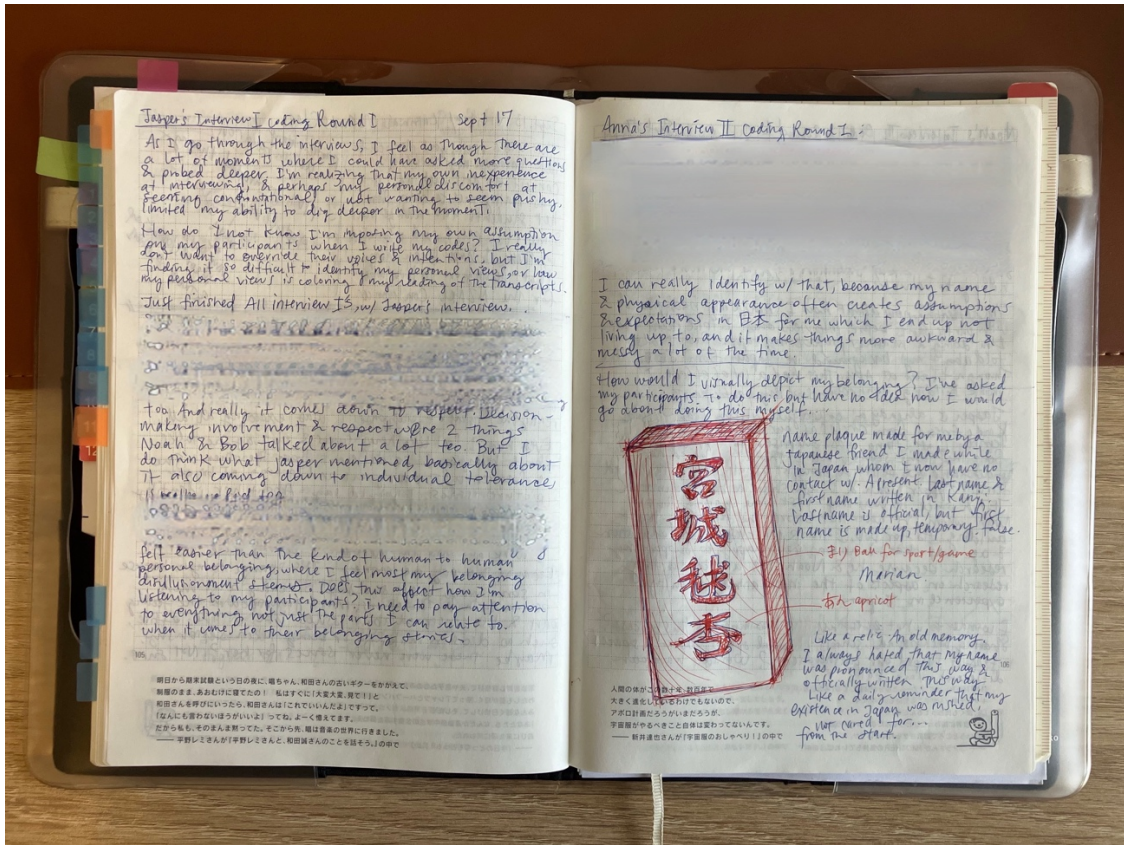




Appendix J: Samples from my reflexive journal

Photographs of the physical journal (text blurred to protect participant anonymity)

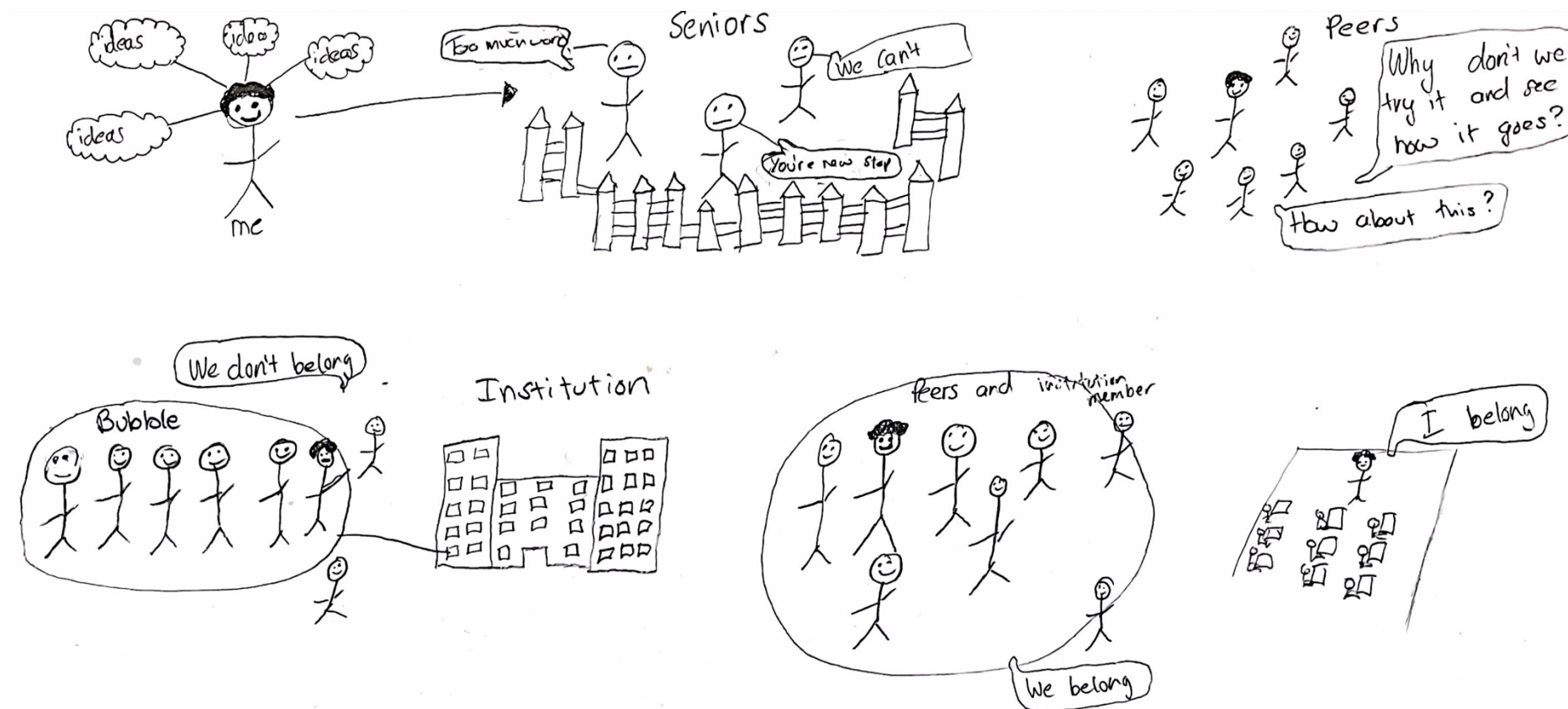




Source: Photos by Maryann Miyashiro

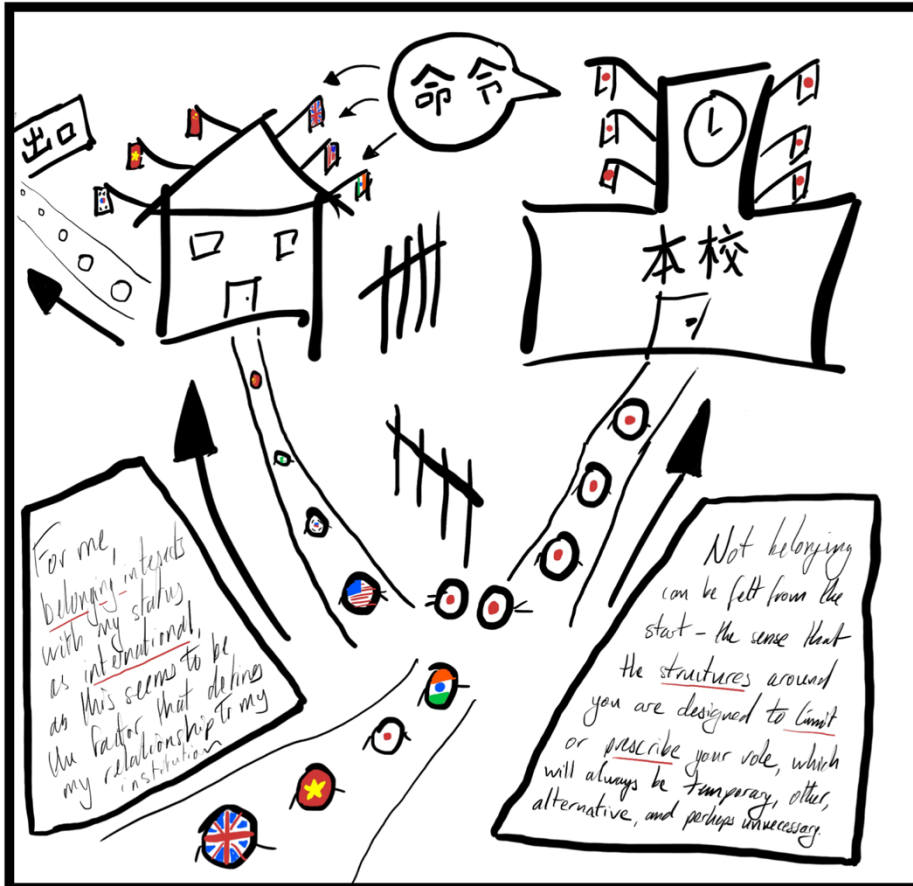
Appendix K: Participant artworks

All participant-produced artworks are reproduced by permission as per Appendix E: Informed consent forms.

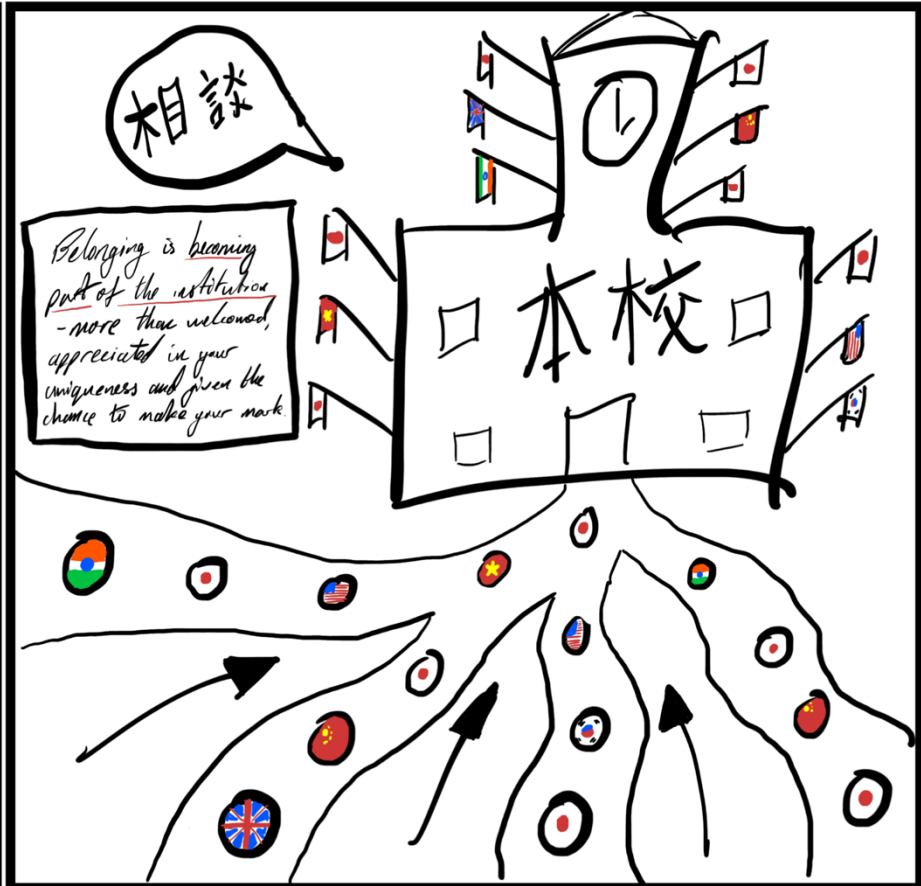


Artwork by Bob (pencil on paper)

NOT BELONGING



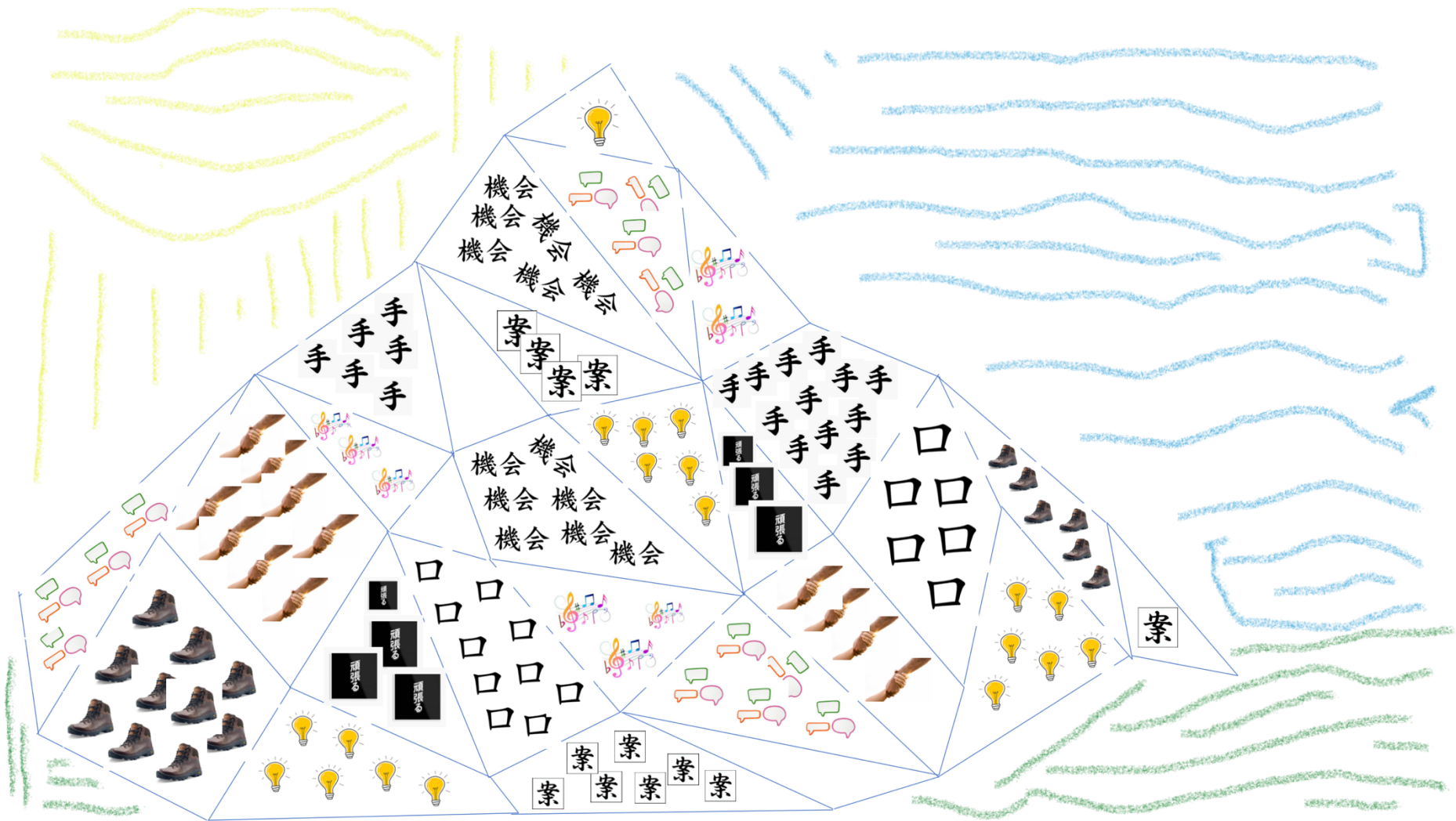
BELONGING



Artwork by Noah (digital drawing)



Artwork by Anna (pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper)



Artwork by Jasper (digital drawing and collage)

