

A Long Walk Home:  
Transition and Belonging in an Expatriate Community

by

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Class of 2014

An essay submitted to the  
faculty of Wesleyan University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
with Departmental Honors in Anthropology

Dedicated to  
The American School in Japan Class of 2010

## Introduction

I saw myself in the garden. Around me bonsai branches writhed and wrenched to face the now dwindling sunlight. A fluid mosaic of orange and black koi glided under arched bridges, past stone lanterns and vibrant pink azalea bushes into the large pond at the heart of the courtyard. I could almost feel the summer breeze that gently rustled through deep green foliage and the enveloping hum of cicadas all around me. It seemed to me the epitome of serene, old world beauty, the hectic energy of Tokyo fading like a distant memory—though one never forgotten, as surrounding high-rises provided a reminder of the teeming metropolis from which Happon garden was but a small oasis.

Careful not to indulge too long in the illusion in the window, I turned away to take my place at the table where my parents were now seated. The banquet hall was familiar to me; the carpet, walls and high ceiling emanated golden hues of yellow, orange and brown. Men and women dressed in fine formal wear settled in around the large circular tables that filled the room, which was now buzzing with their excited chatter. At the back of the hall was a stage, across which The American School in Japan's graduating class of 2013 would soon process—just as my classmates and I had done three years earlier.

The men and women in the hall were elite bankers and financiers, directors of multinational corporations, partners of global law firms, professors, teachers and administrators, but they were also parents. Their polite small talk carried an edge of anxiety, anticipation and poignancy, as their children lined up out of sight in the garden, preparing to make their entrance. Siblings, grandparents and family friends were also present, each person a special individual in the life of a graduating senior. This group of seniors and their family members represented the microcosm that is The American School in Japan community in Tokyo.

My mother and father sat to my right, discussing the occasion with the couple across the table: How well this year's Senior Banquet had turned out; how they were coping with their son's imminent departure for college; and, of course, the plan for the "Senior Walk"—the hours-long hike from downtown Tokyo to ASIJ's campus that the seniors would embark on later that night.

"We prefer the term Senior Trek," Mr. Weinland explained. "We don't want people to confuse it with the 'Senior Walk' that will happen on campus."

Mr. Weinland was not only the father of my younger brother Andrew's good friend, he also happened to be the ASIJ high school principal. He continued to explain that he and the vice-principal, Mrs. Kronenberg, would be waiting at school tomorrow morning to open the gates for the arriving seniors and that they were hoping for a safe 'Trek' for everyone involved. Later that night, in his speech to the students and parents, Mr. Weinland would slip in a coy comment: "If anyone were to take a long walk out to school tonight, it would behoove them to bring a raincoat or umbrella, since the forecast looks like there's a good chance of rain." This comment—a joking acknowledgement from the head of the high school of an event that breaks a number of school policies—would come as a surprise to me, recalling a stricter administration during my senior year.

Our conversation was interrupted when Mr. Olson, one of the high school counselors, announced the entrance of the ASIJ class of 2013. As the curtains pulled away from glass doors facing the garden and the class of 2013 walked into the banquet hall in single file, I couldn't help but think back to my own senior banquet. When I stepped across the threshold a warm wave of applause and bright light immediately washed over me. Another step and my eyes adjusted to reveal the room full of familiar faces, their attention and their admiration, recognition and

support, all directed at us. I remember it now as a feeling of effortless comfort and belonging, a swell of emotion I would experience again hours later as I stepped through the front gate and onto ASIJ's campus, ending the journey of my own class' Senior Walk.

But, despite the warm reception, the entrance into the senior banquet was not a homecoming. Years later one of my closest friends, Brady Miller, would remember the emotion of that moment, saying, "It was as if they were breaking the bottle on the ship and watching it sail off." The banquet was a celebration of all we had done and who we had been by the community to which we had belonged—a slide show of baby pictures from each member of the class played during the dinner and teachers and administrators took the podium to laud the class for what it had accomplished in the last four years and more. But after the celebration we were let loose to sail away, making our last commute to ASIJ on our own, without the watchful eyes of our parents and teachers or the protective barrier of a school bus' windows.

As Andrew proudly strode across the stage, I wondered if he felt the same way, if he knew what lay ahead of him, if he also experienced the event as a bittersweet moment. In a few hours he would step out of the train station in Shinjuku to see almost his entire class standing before him, dressed in a combination of exercise clothing and ASIJ Mustangs paraphernalia, "Seniors 2013" written in marker along arms and legs, war paint streaked across cheeks. An alcohol-fueled cacophony of laughter and shouting would fill the air, the mass of people nearing its flash point, each particle vibrating with excitement. The rest of the night would later blur in his memory, miles of dark city streets broken up only by the numerous *konbini* (convenience store) stops along the way, until finally reaching ASIJ's campus in the light of morning. Later that afternoon he would don his cap and gown and process again with the rest of his class, this

time throughout the campus, hugging parents, teachers, friends, even some of the elementary-schoolers for whom he was bus monitor. And the following day he would graduate.

I knew that when he finally got to college, he would have trouble explaining his life at ASIJ to the new constellation of friends forming around him. What is an “international school” after all? Or an expat? Or a Third Culture Kid? These were the terms by which we had learned to define ourselves, to explain our identity, but as he would come to realize, they are not part of the vernacular of the average American student. So, the ubiquitous freshman question “Where are you from?” would become the source of familiar anxiety, requiring a longer answer than the asker had likely expected. From there the conversation would lead to the somewhat embarrassing admission that, “No, I’m not actually fluent in Japanese,” and the fairly obvious response, “Yes, I do like sushi.” But none of it would scratch the surface of his experience: The privilege of being a wealthy American citizen in Japan and the tragedy of growing up an outsider in your hometown.

As the class of 2013 left the stage to join their parents, I turned to look back out at the garden. Once again, I could see myself there, standing amongst the bonsai trees, the thinning twilight at my back. However, my faded image—reflected in the large glass windows that separated me from the idyllic Japanese scene—was just an illusion. I sat inside the Western banquet hall surrounded by my fellow expatriates, a bubble transparent enough only to peer out onto the city beyond. The projection of my image into the Japanese context acted as a reminder of an old sentiment, the feeling of being both within and without, straddling the boundary.

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This essay is an exploration of an annual ‘tradition’ at The American School in Japan known as the “Senior Walk.” Each spring, two nights before graduation, ASIJ high school

seniors gather in downtown Tokyo, usually at around midnight, and embark on a 12-mile trek to ASIJ's campus in western Tokyo. The mass of students, often around 100 people, raucously process through the dark, empty streets of the sleeping city, shouting, singing, drinking, and chatting with the close friends and relative strangers that comprise the group. It is a roving celebration, a herd of teenagers free from the watchful eyes of their parents, teachers and the school administration, but it is also grueling. The almost six-hour journey consists of constant walking, interrupted only by short respites in *konbini* parking lots as students buy alcohol and energy drinks. Needless to say, the miles, alcohol, and lack of sleep, take a toll on the teeming energy of the crowd and the event ends the next morning as a string of smaller groups of exhausted seniors trudge through the ASIJ front gate to the high school gym or field, where they collapse in long-awaited sleep.

The Walk occurs within the context of the school's "Senior Week"—a number of events leading up to the graduation ceremony, including the Senior Banquet, which I have described above, and "Senior Day," which involves a class breakfast and a cap-and-gown procession throughout the campus in front of students, parents, and teachers. The Senior Walk, however, is not an official part of the school's commencement celebrations. It's organization and perpetuation as an event rests solely with each year's senior class. Therefore as an event that is not formalized or mandatory; not every senior participates and some years separate, smaller groups have chosen to make the journey on their own. That said, each year since its founding, the Senior Walk has grown in attendance with a large majority of the senior class participating in recent years.

Importantly, the Walk is not only an unofficial event; rather it actually breaks a number of school policies and even Japanese laws, including underage drinking (the legal drinking age is

20 years old). Some years, seniors have even been detained by the police for disorderly behavior, such as stealing public property (Weinland; Janet). Despite such incidents, as well as emails to parents from the school administration officially discouraging participation in the event, there has been no significant effort to prevent the Walk from taking place (Weinland). This is in part because, for many, the Senior Walk has come to be considered an expected and important part of a senior's graduation from ASIJ. As I showed earlier, the school's administration offers tacit approval, even giving seniors advice on the trek ahead, and according to Tim Olson many faculty members find it "pretty cool." Most importantly though, the student body has embraced the Senior Walk as an event of significance, an undertaking that brings the senior class together just as they prepare to go their separate ways: a rite of passage.

It is through this concept of the 'rite of passage' and the anthropological literature on the subject that I explore the ASIJ Senior Walk. The term rite of passage was first used by French ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep to describe rituals of transition, that is, the "ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social...position to another" (1908:18). Van Gennep discusses the way rites of passage mark these transitions as moments of significance and help to facilitate their realization in social life. Along these lines, the term has become a phrase frequently used to illustrate the necessity of participating in a particular activity at a certain juncture in one's life, even a justification in itself—"you have to do it, it's a *rite of passage*." Religious or secular life-events such as baptisms, bar mitzvahs, graduations, and marriages often fall under this category, in that, through their performance we are transformed (Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology). Whether it is in the eyes of the church, or community, or our perception of ourselves, we emerge from the ritual different than when we entered it.



While it is certainly not uncommon to refer to a high-school graduation event as a rite of passage, I argue that there is still a depth of meaning that this framework can elucidate. In the United States and other countries around the world graduating high school and leaving for college often represents the beginning of adulthood. It is the moment when an individual finally leaves their parents, school, community, and childhood home. Therefore, this transition involves complex emotional ties to people and places and the acceptance of enormous change. For ASIJ students this move is further complicated when considering their lives as students in an international school community, predominated by expatriates (expats).

ASIJ is an “international school” in the sense that it is a private institution in Japan that caters to expatriate families from around the world. According to a study produced by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) in 2010, the roughly 1,500 students that comprise the school’s student body—including preschool, elementary, middle, and high school—represent 40 different nationalities. Furthermore, about 25 percent of these students are bi-national or multi-national, meaning they possess passports from more than one country (WASC). However, in this private school located in Japan’s capital only about 11 percent of students hold exclusively Japanese citizenship (WASC). This makes for a student population and parent community that is comprised primarily of expatriates, that is, individuals living outside of their country of citizenship. In fact, this has been true since the school’s found in 1902 as the Tokyo School for Foreign Children (ASIJ History).

However, even with such a broad range of nationalities in attendance, The American School in Japan has not deviated too far from its namesake. Of the 75 percent of students that are single passport holders about 66 percent are United States’ citizens (WASC). Furthermore, this statistic excludes the majority of bi-national students that hold US passports as well. The large

majority of American students is coupled with a faculty of 164 that includes 107 US citizens and only 20 Japanese citizens, as well as an administrative team that is predominantly American (WASC). Therefore, while being an international school with students from countries around the world, there is also an overarching American cultural emphasis. This is reflected in the curriculum as well, which “is similar to that of U.S. college-preparatory schools” and provides the United States’ Advanced Placement (AP) program as opposed to the International Baccalaureate (IB) program that is used in many other international schools (WASC). Still, there are also significant, though smaller, curricular programs in Japanese language and culture at all grade levels. This is to say that ASIJ—in its student body, parent community, curriculum, and culture—is a markedly American institution located in Japan, yet one that is also constantly influenced by and interacting with the nation and culture around and within it.

These complex elements of expatriate communities and their relationship to the host country have been previously explicated in the small but insightful body of recent ethnographic literature on the subject (Fechter 2007; Leonard 2010). Expatriate communities generally occupy a position of privilege in their country of residence. There are multiple possible sources of this privilege, including sponsorship by foreign entities such as religious, military, state, or corporate institutions (Pollock and Van Reken 2001:22). In many cases, especially for corporate expats, significant personal wealth is an important factor as well (Pollock and Van Reken 2001:22). And international legal and political status based on citizenship can also be a source of privilege or a disadvantage depending on the circumstances (Pollock and Van Reken 2001:22). Importantly, this privilege allows expat communities to construct bounded, mediated spaces for themselves; they can take or leave much of the cultural and environmental influences of the host country as they wish (Fechter 2007; Leonard 2010). This understanding of expatriate communities offers

significant insight into the ways in which the ASIJ community perceives and mediates its relationship to the city of Tokyo, particularly when discussing the Senior Walk as a rite of passage.

While Anne-Meike Fecther and Pauline Leoanrd provide valuable information on expatriates and their communities, the main focus of their work is adult expatriates. In fact, this literature lacks any substantial discussion of the lives of expat children. However, since the Senior Walk is an event created, perpetuated and experienced by students, it is imperative in analyzing the ritual that one understands the distinctive experiences of the children of expats, as opposed to their parents. To this effect, I will utilize the discourse of “Third Culture Kids” (TCKs), as it is the only significant body of work that pertains specifically to the children and teenagers in expatriate families. Anthropologists Ruth and John Useem first developed the notion of the “Third Culture,” and Third Culture Kids, in describing Western expatriate communities in India during the 1950s and 60s (Pollock and Van Reken 2001:20). They conceived of this Third Culture as drawing on and combining elements from both the original ‘home’ culture and the new, surrounding ‘host’ culture, while remaining a distinct cultural entity in itself (Pollock and Van Reken 2001:20-3). This term has been popularized more recently by the work of Anthropologist David Pollock and the publication of the book *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing up Among Worlds*, which was written by Pollock and his colleague Ruth Van Reken.

In this book Pollock provides the most commonly cited definition of the Third Culture Kid:

“A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background” (2001:19).

Unfortunately, this definition is vague and somewhat misleading. At first glance it appears that Pollock and Van Reken are writing about any child who has experienced some sort of transnational movement, potentially including immigrants and refugees in their categorization, or even minorities that grow up amongst contrasting hegemonic cultural forces in their country of residence. While this gesture of inclusivity was likely purposeful, it becomes clear later on in the book that TCK is an identity category and discourse of privilege. In explicating the TCK experience, Pollock and Van Reken distinguish TCKs from immigrants and other groups by highlighting “expected repatriation” and membership in an “elitist community...with special privileges” as important characteristics of TCKs’ lives (2001:22).

Furthermore, the discourse of Third Culture Kids is circulated primarily in expat communities for expat children. This has been done through organizations such as Families in Global Transition, which caters to sponsoring institutions sending families abroad, and in international schools (fgit.org). In fact, my first exposure to the notion of Third Culture Kids was as a student at ASIJ. In my junior year the head-of-school visited my psychology class to present and discuss the topic. As I recall, much of his discussion focused on whether we identified with the category, which many of us did at the time, including myself. In this sense, Third Culture Kid was offered to us through the school as an identity that we could use to understand and process our international experiences.

Though the definition of TCK is vague, there are still elements of Pollock and Van Reken’s work that offer useful insight into the lives of expat children, and therefore the majority of ASIJ students. As they explain, TCKs have highly mobile childhoods as their parents are often uprooted and moved from country to country. Yet unlike their parents, their identities are often not strongly tied to a particular home country or culture to which they can orient themselves.

Other TCKs will stay in one country for a long period of time and often feel more connected to that place than their supposedly ‘real’ home countries (Pollock and Van Reken 2001). In this essay I do not attempt to categorize all ASIJ students as TCKs or even as expatriates, this would deny the wealth and diversity of the cultural backgrounds and experiences of ASIJ students. However, it is true that essentially every ASIJ student has experienced a particularly transnational or cross-cultural lifestyle during his or her childhood or teenage years. Even the students of full Japanese citizenship have a highly cross-cultural experience, as they are educated in a Western curriculum and social environment. Furthermore, the issues of high mobility, belonging, and privilege that Pollock and Van Reken identify turn out to be fundamental to the significance of the ASIJ Senior Walk for the students and key to understanding its ritual elements.

Therefore it is through these concepts of mobility, belonging and privilege that I explore the symbolism and significance of the Senior Walk as a rite of passage. With this goal in mind I address a few overarching, guiding questions: Why has the Senior Walk become such a meaningful event and an important part of graduating for those seniors who chose to participate? How does the experience of the ASIJ student inform our understanding of this ritual? And conversely, what can the Senior Walk elucidate about expatriate communities, notions of belonging in transnational lifestyles, and our understanding of rites of passage? The first section of this essay will explore the literature on rites of passage, particularly the foundational work of Arnold Van Gennep, in relation to the Senior Walk as a ritual of territorial passage. The second section will discuss the Senior Walk in comparison to the subsequent ‘Sayonara Walk’—the Senior Day cap-and-gown procession through campus—addressing difference relationships to

structure in ritual. Finally, the third section will discuss notions of transformation and belonging in the experience of the Senior Walk.

It must be reiterated that this topic is one with which I have an intimate connection and experiential knowledge. I moved to Tokyo, for the second time, when I was six years old and entered first grade at The American School in Japan. My family had lived in Tokyo once before, for about a year, but this time my father's law firm had us set to stay much longer. Ultimately, I attended ASIJ for twelve years and graduated from its high school in 2010. Therefore I, along with the majority of my classmates, walked about twelve miles from downtown Tokyo to ASIJ's campus in western Tokyo two nights before my graduation. The Senior Walk was a very meaningful event in my life and it would be dishonest not to acknowledge that this essay is, in part, an exploration of my own experience and my life at ASIJ. In fact, my experience is the jumping off point for many of theoretical questions that I will address.

However, as much as this essay draws from my own life, it draws equally from the conversations and interviews I conducted with ASIJ alumni, faculty and administrators. The stories and opinions that I garnered throughout this research at times supported and often questioned my understanding of the Senior Walk and provided the primary information from which my interpretations are drawn. In this sense, I have taken on a project similar to Sherry Ortner's "Fieldwork in the Postcommunity" (1997). Ortner—whose study involved interviewing past classmates after they had moved away from their hometown—argues that 'fieldwork' should not be fixed to a localized or temporal context (1997:76). For this type of study she uses the term 'postcommunity,' to represent research of a group that once was, but is no longer, "part of an actual on-the-ground community" (1997:61). Therefore, like Ortner my project involves fieldwork in a postcommunity, but on an international scale.

Also, while this essay has obvious significance to my own life, my questions and analyses have implications beyond just the lives of ASIJ students. As the world continues along the path of globalization, transnational movements and expatriate communities are becoming an increasingly common way of life (Fechter; Leonard; Ortner; Pollock and Van Reken 2009). As Ortner describes it, “This formation is more true to the shape of the contemporary world,” that is, the prevalence of “geographic mobility...and the increasing fragmentation of lives and identities...under globalization” (1997:62). It is therefore of considerable interest to anthropology, and to myself, that these lifestyles and communities be better understood. In particular, the ways that these groups relate to the countries in which they reside and address issues of identity and belonging merit further study. I hope, then, that this essay might be a small step in that direction.

## Section I: A Literal Rite of Passage

The Senior Walk is a tradition. This was the sentiment expressed, by word or by implication, of every ASIJ student I interviewed. Max, a recent graduate explained, “This is what seniors do...How could you take the bus to school on a morning when everybody else in your class is walking [there].” Stephanie, my fellow alumnus of the class of 2010 seconded this opinion, “I definitely saw it as a ‘rite of passage’...it was something that seniors did.” The underlying idea behind these comments is that the Senior Walk is a given, an event firmly established in repetition through time and fundamental to the ASIJ senior experience. Max cannot fathom why any senior would choose not to participate in the Senior Walk. Stephanie specifically chooses the phrase “rite of passage,” to express the importance of the Walk as a necessary, and necessarily, *senior* activity, explaining that juniors and other underclassmen “do not go on the senior walk” no matter what. Furthermore, both Max and Stephanie use the verb “do” to simply convey the unquestioned importance of participation in the Senior Walk, that it is just what is done.

I, too, took the significance of the Walk for granted when deciding to join in on the event at the end of my senior year. In fact, my eventual participation had never really been in question, not since the year before when I stepped off the bus on the morning of my last exam of the year to encounter all my senior friends strewn about the football field and the halls of the high school. They were ragged: totally exhausted and a little disoriented, and for many of the seniors, pretty hung-over, but they were also ecstatic. I was told, “You have to do it next year,” it was “incredible,” “challenging,” “worth it,” their exasperated post-Walk high—part sleep-deprivation, part accomplishment—intrigued and excited me. I couldn’t wait until my own chance to experience this event, of which I had had just a glimpse.



It is in this way that the Senior Walk has been passed down from year to year, to each new crop of seniors. By the time it was our turn to make the trip, we had been hearing about it for at least four years: the stories of past classes, the departure locations and routes taken, and most of all, the feeling of successfully arriving at school. Each new senior class followed the example of the class before them, to the point that most ASIJ alumni I interviewed only had a vague idea as to how or when the Senior Walk actually began. The interviewee that knew the most about the Walk's origin story was a graduate of the class of 2009, Emi. She reiterated the story she had been told: "I heard that it was a bunch of guys who decided that before the "senior breakfast" they were going to walk from Shinjuku, or Shibuya, and stop at every *konbini* along the way to school and get a drink at every one."

As it turns out, her story is not far from the truth. According to Tim Olson, who has been a guidance counselor at ASIJ for decades, the so-called Senior Walk actually first occurred in 2007. As he recalled "between seven to ten" seniors, a group of friends, decided to walk all the way to school the night before Senior Day, and "might have had a few drinks on the way." This means the Senior Walk is only a seven-year-old occurrence and had gone from "just a spontaneous thing" in 2007 (Olson) to "*the Senior Walk*" by Emi's graduation in 2009 (Emi). In fact, Mr. Olson explained that by the next year, 2008, 30 to 40 members of the senior class, of which his son was a part, participated in walking out to campus as a group. This he notes, would have been to the delight of the 2007 group who, after walking out to school for the first time, expressed a hope that next year's class would do so as well.

However, is not my goal in this essay to assess the validity or authenticity of the Senior Walk as a tradition based on any real or imagined continuity with the past. After all, in high school four years might as well be time immemorial: as new freshman enter and seniors

graduate, the new can very quickly become the established. Instead, the validity of the term ‘tradition’ in describing the Walk is not as relevant to this essay, or interesting to me, as the significance of the invocation itself. The use of this term demonstrates that the Walk is of such importance to the student body, and to seniors especially, that it has come to be considered a meaningful and necessary annual event, i.e. “what seniors do,” in an incredibly short time. As Emi put it, the Senior Walk is a “new tradition,” but one that has been “engrained into the senior heart of ASIJ.”

Following our own Senior Walk, as my classmates and I attempted to rouse ourselves from the floors and benches and make our way to change into our caps and gowns for the Sayonara Walk, each underclassman we encountered would ask one question: “How was it?” And just like the seniors before us, we would respond that it was “amazing,” “difficult,” and “unforgettable.” We desired to share the impact of this event, yet by the same token were often unable to find the words. Simply recounting the stories of our Walk proved to be unsatisfactory; the emotion of the moments, whether joy or melancholy, were impossible to convey, so all we could tell them was “you *have* to do it” before your graduation. We told this to our friends and to our siblings, wanting each of them to share in our experience, to the point that by my younger brother Andrew’s graduation in 2013, “it was accepted that you just did it. Everyone did it” (Andrew).

The importance of the Senior Walk in the eyes of the students—that it is for many a *part* of graduating from ASIJ—illustrates that extent to which it is perceived of as a ‘rite of passage.’ Since sociologist and anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep coined the term in his foundational 1908 text *Les Rites de Passage*, and especially after its translation into English in 1960, the phrase “rite of passage” has largely become a part of common vernacular beyond

anthropological discourse. In the common understanding of the term, defined by the *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, rites of passage are “rituals which mark the passing of one stage of life and entry into another.” In this sense, the Senior Walk derives further importance by its positioning just two nights before commencement, in part bridging the gap between the world of ASIJ seniors and that of alumni.

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The significance of this event, the imminence of graduation, and the stories I had heard from past seniors were all swimming in my head as I stepped out of my mother’s car in Shibuya. In front of me stood a mass of about a hundred of my classmates, already brimming with an infectious energy that was manifested in raucous laughter and shouting. The faint smell of alcohol pervaded the air surrounding the group, a telling sign that many of the seniors had used their time waiting for the rest of the class to drink copious amounts of Asahi or Kirin beer, ‘*chuhai*’ mixed drinks, or various types of hard alcohol, all of which are available in any *konbini* in Tokyo. When I arrived, though, the crowd was already preparing to leave and moments later we embarked the night-long journey out to ASIJ.

As I look back on the Senior Walk now, much of the trip after this departure blurs together in my memory. This is in part due to the four years that have past since my participation, but even then, just days after the Walk I could not have recalled many specific events or their order in time. This is because the vast majority of the walk consists of relatively uneventful walking. When I think back to that time I remember hiking, skipping, hobbling, and running, depending on where we were and how long we had been traveling. I picture jumbled sequences of expansive grey streets, framed by apartment buildings, traffic signs, and lampposts.

The fact is, even during the Walk I had very little idea where I was or where we were headed, I simply followed the classmates ahead of me who appeared to have a better idea of the terrain than I or had smart-phones with GPS. As it turns out, though, these hours of constant traveling that comprise the Walk are actually fundamental to its experience and an important part of its meaningfulness—a point that Van Gennep speaks to in his description of ‘rites of passage.’

In *Les Rites du Passage*, Van Gennep primarily defines and discusses three theoretical categorizations that comprise these rituals: “Rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation” (1908:11). He explains that while these three elements—which he also calls preliminal, liminal, and postliminal, respectively—may not be emphasized equally in every rite of passage, they are almost always present in some form (1908:11). Anthropologist Victor Turner, who used Van Gennep’s categories of rites of passage in his own work, defines rites of separation as “compris[ing] symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group,” and rites of incorporation as the phase in which “the passage is consummated” and the participants are reincorporated into the social structure (1967:94). Van Gennep’s transitional or “liminal” stage, which Turner takes on as a primary focus, is the stage of ambiguity that most rites of passage contain: the “betwixt and between” phase to facilitate the transition between two fixed states (1967). Of course, these classifications are largely invented distinctions in service of Van Gennep’s project, which was rather positivistic in nature (Spencer 1961). Throughout the text, Van Gennep seeks primarily to describe, rationalize and categorize various ritual accounts. However, these categories can be perceived and applied in multiple different ways.

For instance, instead of dividing the Senior Walk into three distinct rites, it is possible to consider this whole period of time, culminating in the ASIJ graduation ceremony, as a rite of separation. This becomes clear when considering the context of this ritual as a high school

graduation at an international school, versus the socio-cultural contexts with which Van Gennep and Turner were working, i.e. “relatively stable” communities (Turner 1967:93). The participant in an Ndembu initiation rite, which Turner focuses on, is clearly reincorporated into the community under the assumption that he will continue to live amongst them in a new social capacity, thereby “returning him to the customary routines of life” (Turner 1967, 1969; Van Gennep 1908:ix). An ASIJ student, however, is not geographically anchored to Tokyo in the same way; their graduation and, for the most part, subsequent departure to the United States or elsewhere for college means a drastically decreased connection to the community and the possibility of never returning. As Brady lamented, “I love [Japan] so much, but I know I’m never going back there” (Brady). This sentiment of separation is significant to the Senior Walk and one that I will address further in the following sections.

While these categorizations are somewhat useful, Van Gennep’s in-depth discussion of territorial movement in rites of passage is far more interesting and applicable to my own project. As it turns out, the literal utilization of spatial, territorial movement is actually a fundamental aspect of Van Gennep’s original conception of the rite of passage. He devotes an entire chapter to the topic, explaining that, “Territorial passages can provide a framework for the discussion of rites of passage” (1908:15). Van Gennep notes, as the basis for his territorial discussion, that passages from one domain to another have always been “accompanied by various formalities” (1908:15). He argues that these formalities stem from “the idea of the sanctity of a territory,” as a spatial location delineated by set boundaries (1908:15-18). The delineation of these territories, then, creates a series of prohibitions on entering or exiting and defines the spaces of passage, which Van Gennep names “neutral zones,” as highly charged, or “sacred,” in relation to the

profane space within the bounded territory (1908:18). He then relates this to transitions between social spaces:

“Whoever passes from one [side of a boundary] to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds. It is this situation which I have designated a transition, and one of the purposes of this book is to demonstrate that this symbolic and spatial area of transition may be found in more or less pronounced form in all the ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another” (1908:18).

It seems to me that this conception of the rite of passage as literally a ‘territorial passage’ has remained undeveloped in anthropological discourse and been replaced by a primarily metaphorical understanding of the word “passage,” as evidenced by the *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*’s definition, which leaves out any explicitly territorial component. Many contemporary Western rituals commonly considered rites of passage, such as high school graduations or wedding ceremonies, may involve some spatial movement, but not to the extent that Van Gennep describes above, nor are these movements usually considered the central elements of the event. Van Gennep himself attributes the “magico-religious” quality of these passages primarily to so-called “semicivilized” peoples, in comparison to “civilized” countries where these territorial passages are still marked, but less so and within the “secular domain” (1908:15). The Senior Walk, however, challenges this problematic attribution to “semicivilized” groups, in its equally symbolical and significant focus on spatial movement and crossings.

As I have explained, the Walk is at its core a 12-mile hike through the streets of Tokyo. We trekked for hours on end through dark streets without any real sense of position or direction. Even the repetitive act of walking, without any significant change in scenery for miles, was in itself disorienting: time and space passed by continuously, but each hour or mile was indiscernible from the last. Without landmarks or other ways of dividing the up the trip, the Walk produced a sense of timelessness for participants. Most of my interviewees had difficulty

recalling their stories of the Senior Walk. The beginning and end of the trip was clear, but the vast majority of time in between appeared to be only a nebulous conflation of disparate memories. As Andrew pondered during our interview, “What else happened? ... There was a lot of walking.” In fact, having gone through the Walk most recently, Andrew was the only interviewee who was even able to estimate a time frame to the event: “I think it took us 5 and a half [hours].”

This disorienting experience of participating in the Senior Walk closely relates to Van Gennep and Turner’s discussions regarding periods of transition in ritual. Van Gennep argues that in the liminal passage between bounded spaces, both physical and social, the participants of the rite “waver between two worlds” in a “neutral zone” (1908:18). He defines the “neutral zone” as a space outside the community’s profane, everyday world—a region that is not well known, even potentially dangerous (1908). Victor Turner adds to this understanding of liminality, explaining that during the liminal stage of a rite of passage “the state of the ritual subject (the ‘passenger’) is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (1967:94). He further argues, “We are presented, in such rites, with a moment in and out of time” (2008:360).

Van Gennep’s and Turner’s conceptions of the liminal, transitional periods in rites of passage closely reflect the experiences of ASIJ alumni who participated in the Senior Walk, especially their feelings of spatial and temporal disorientation that created a moment “out of time.” Therefore, as a rite that takes place primarily in transition between the home and the campus of ASIJ, the Walk utilizes the streets of Tokyo between these delineated worlds as a ‘neutral zone,’ a realm of ambiguity and emotional charge *outside* the everyday lives of the seniors. However, this appears to contradict much of the sentiment built into the Senior Walk:

ASIJ senior participants have spent years of their lives in Tokyo, and students often refer to the Walk as a “goodbye” to the city (Max; Janet). How can the Walk be considered a passage through an unknown, disorienting ‘neutral zone,’ if it takes place in the streets of the city to which they feel intimately connected?

While this sentiment of familiarity is often expressed, a few interviewees specifically noted that the actual geography traversed during the Walk is unfamiliar to practically all ASIJ students (Janet; Andrew). The Senior Walk does not take place in downtown Tokyo, through the neighborhoods of Roppongi, Azabu, Shibuya, Yoyogi, or Shinjuku where many ASIJ students live and/or spend their free time; downtown is the departure point. The majority of the Walk is a passage through the more residential districts of western Tokyo, with which ASIJ students have very little experience. As Janet, a class of 2010 alumnus, explained, “It was sort of like a myth we were creating in our minds because we had never been to half the places we were walking through, [even though] we were saying, ‘this is our city. Tokyo is our home. We’re...saying goodbye to it.’” It was a myth because the actual parts of Tokyo that seniors cross through that night to get to ASIJ are far removed from their everyday world.

Van Gennep’s conception of a liminal social and physical space, then, is predicated on the existence of territories delineated by known boundaries. From this delineation derives the particular social charge of the so-called neutral zone, defining it in opposition to the bounded realm of the profane and ordinary, thereby allowing its liminal possibilities (Van Gennep 1908:15-18). He notes that this charge manifests itself in the numerous prohibitions or taboos on the crossing of these boundaries (1908:16, 20). Therefore, we can consider these transition rites, of which the “passages” through social and physical barriers are key, as acts of ritual transgression (Taussig 1998). This makes the Senior Walk an essentially transgressive act. That



said, however, if the Senior Walk is a transgression, a crossing of the boundaries of physical and social space, what is actually being transgressed? What boundaries do these seniors cross? To what delineated, profane territory is the ritually traversed space of Tokyo in contrast?

It may appear, as much of the literature on transnational migrations and globalization suggests, that such globally mobile lifestyles give way to fluid, and unbounded culture exchanges (Fechter 2007:20-21). However, in the case of most expatriate communities, ASIJ included, this is not so. As Fechter argues in her ethnography of expatriates living in Jakarta, expats typically construct boundaries that delineate their community and differentiate it from the host culture or country (2007:23-7). She notes that this is known within expatriate communities as the expat “bubble,” that is, the particular spaces, lifestyles and communities that expats maintain separate and in distinction to local life (2007:17). However, as Fechter explains, these boundaries are not simply partitions; they are “permeable and negotiable, and...sites of mediation” (2007:25). This is not dissimilar from Ruth Useem’s original conception of the ‘Third Culture’ as “that interstitial culture...which is created, shared, and carried by persons who are relating societies, or sections thereof, to each other,” in that it is a unique and separate sphere, but one that continuously interacts with the local culture and the original cultures of the members that comprise it (1976:18). This “bubble” allows not only for the maintenance and reinforcement, but also for the “transgression of boundaries,” as part of life in an expat community (2007:26).

Fechter also examines some of the “territorial counterparts” to these bounded social spaces (2007:24). One territorial space that she highlights is that of the expat home, explaining, stating that “most expatriates’ dwellings tend to disconnect the inhabitants from ordinary Jakartan surroundings” (2007:63). This is exemplified by the common corporate expat residences, in Jakarta and in Tokyo, of spacious high-rise apartments with Western interiors and

furniture and “panoramic views of the city” (2007:63). The existence of these expat spaces goes beyond just the home. As Pauline Leonard explains in her ethnography of expatriate businessmen in Hong Kong, they “appear to take refuge” in their office buildings in the “business/financial/governmental zones of the city” (2010:117). She also notes that social life largely takes place in specified bars or “expatriate clubs”—a good example being the Tokyo American Club (TAC), a membership club with recreational facilities, salon, and dining options, to which many ASIJ families belong (2010:118).

Of course, these discussions of expat spaces are focused primarily on adult expatriates and therefore leave out the most important site for children and teenagers who are also part of these communities: the international school. As Pollock and Van Reken point out, the school is an important part of the expatriate community and the curriculum, administrators, teachers, and peers greatly influence the Third Culture Kid’s experience (2001:45-8). This is in part because the school is where the expat student spends most of his/her waking hours; ASIJ high schoolers would often spend from 8:30am until 6:00pm at the school due to after-school activities such as athletic teams. The school also became a hub for expat families that would come to campus for competitions or performances of different teams and groups.

It is clear, then, that expats do construct bounded social and territorial spaces as part of what they call their expatriate community. That is not to say that they do not interact with the city of Tokyo or its residents at all but that these interactions are often mediated by existing boundaries, offering a privileged degree of choice as to when, where and how such interactions will take place. Furthermore, as Michael Taussig discusses in his article “Transgression,” the very existence of boundaries such as these allows for the possibility of their transgression, setting up the conditions for events like the Senior Walk (1998). Using Van Gennep’s description, the

Walk can be conceived of as a literal “rite of passage”—that is, one that crosses the boundaries of social *and* territorial space, stepping outside of the everyday space of the ASIJ community and transitioning through a physical and experiential liminal zone.

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It is no coincidence that these students have created for themselves a rite of passage of such magnitude and territorial focus. For the average ASIJ student, territorial movements and crossings are essential components of their life experience. Pollock and Van Reken argue that the TCK lifestyle is one characterized by “high mobility,” explaining: “Mobility is normal in the third culture experience. Either the TCKs themselves, or those around them, are constantly coming or going. The people in their lives are always changing and the backdrop of physical surroundings may often fluctuate as well” (Pollock and Van Reken 2009:17).

These comings and goings are a defining characteristic of life at ASIJ and as expats in Japan. For a majority of students this involves a certain degree of transnational and cross-cultural movement. By growing up in Japan, the American and other non-Japanese students necessarily travel great distances, requiring formalized crossing procedures—specifically, the system of immigration and customs procedures and portals that one must go through to legally enter the country. Van Gennep actually uses the passport—a document apparently out of fashion at the time of his writing in 1908—as an example of the “various formalities” that are put in place to facilitate national territorial crossings (1908:18).

Furthermore, for most ASIJ families this is not a one-time trip from the United States to Japan, it is a constant mobility facilitated by the privilege of an expatriate lifestyle. Expat families will often have their flights covered by an “expat package” from the corporation—or

will pay with their own personal wealth. In the first five years of our stay in Japan, my father's law firm paid for tuition, living expenses, and travel expenses, which allowed us to travel back to the United States each summer and winter. This international lifestyle and the institutional and financial resources at expats' disposal also facilitate a privileged travel and tourist experience throughout many different countries and cultures around the world (Pollock and Van Reken 2009:63-4).

The high frequency of transnational and cross-cultural movements makes "passage" a familiar and important aspect of a Third Culture Kid's life (Pollock and Van Reken 2009:64-5). Although "high mobility" is perhaps an ostensibly moot concept in an increasingly globalized context, expats still maintain a particular pattern of movement that differentiates them from tourists or business travelers. Many Americans, for instance, travel across country or vacation internationally, but expats spend significant periods of time living in a foreign country, transitioning and settling into and out of different lifestyles (2009:65-6). Also, even ASIJ students who live most of lives in Japan, like me, are affected by a high frequency of mobility within the community, as friends, families and teachers move in and out of their lives due to ever-changing job assignments and circumstances (2009:65-6).

There is still another element of mobility that is quite specific to the ASIJ experience: the commute to school. ASIJ is located between the districts of Chofu and Fuchu, about 12 miles west of downtown Tokyo where most ASIJ families live. This means that for students to get from their homes to school and back they must take the train or ride an ASIJ bus, about an hour commute each way. The school runs 27 of these buses on different routes to transport over 1,100 students, out of approximately 1,500, the rest of whom either live around campus or take the train to school (ASIJ Buses).

Interestingly, the page affectionately dedicated to “Our Buses” on the ASIJ website puts a strong emphasis on “community” with regards to this means of transportation. In a video on the page Janet Witt, the Director of Transportation, asserts that “each bus becomes a community onto its own,” which is seconded later by a high school student who explains that “you bond with your friends, you bond with upperclassmen and underclassmen...It’s actually a big part of social life for ASIJ” (ASIJ Buses). This micro-community is even complete with leaders, or “bus monitors,” who are paid to maintain order and a safe environment on the bus; this is a position for which a large number of upperclassmen bus riders are hired. Furthermore, the page extends the notion of “community” beyond the actual bus ride, exclaiming that “The bus stop itself becomes a **community** where parents and students gather in the morning. Before long you’ll know all of the other families in the neighborhood” (ASIJ Buses, original emphasis).

The school, then, portrays the bus as an extension of the ASIJ community itself. In essence, an ASIJ student can leave their expat home, walk to a bus stop surrounded his/her ASIJ peers and their parents, and take a bus full of ASIJ students to campus, effectively avoiding extensive interaction with the city of Tokyo. In fact, Fechter and Leonard both speak to the fact that transportation becomes another means of separating the expat world from the local (2007; 2010). Therefore, we can conceptualize the bus ride as part and parcel of the bounded expat “bubble”—the insulated vacuum shoot that takes ASIJ students from one expat center (the home) to another (the international school). This is the reason that, as Janet pointed out, by the time of their graduation, seniors have not actually experienced and do not actually know any parts of the city that are traversed during the Senior Walk: they’ve been driving over it on the highway for years. Andrew expressed this paradox perfectly:

“We had all been on this route; this is Route 20. We’d all driven on it; we’d been on the Chuo [expressway], which is right above us. We’d taken the bus ride forever. And I’m

realizing while I'm walking this: I have no idea where I am, but I've gone this route my entire life."

As ASIJ students we spent our lives looking out the bus window as we drove over this part of the city, catching a glimpse of the top of an apartment buildings or an odd advertisement on a billboard. This physical space through which we passed each morning and afternoon had been both inconsequential and integral to our lives in Tokyo. So as we marched towards ASIJ for the last time we found ourselves immersed in a part of the city we thought we knew or did not care to know, engaging with it and disoriented by it.

Therefore, the meaning behind the Senior Walk is intimately tied to this means of transportation in the lives of ASIJ students. First of all, without the existence of this commute, and the physical distance between downtown Tokyo and ASIJ that makes it necessary, the Walk as it is would be unimaginable. By its nature, it exists in contrast to the normal, everyday commute. This point is highlighted by the fact that the morning of the Senior Walk is actually the last commute that any senior will make as an ASIJ student, that is, before graduation. In this context, Max's comment—"How could you take the bus to school on a morning when everybody else in your class is walking?"—takes on even more meaning: that this last commute should be marked in some way and not be just another morning bus ride. In this sense, the Walk is not only a transgression of the bounded ASIJ community but one that specifically references the mobility and transition that has characterized most of these students' lives. The Walk makes reference to these movements through the conscious and symbolic rejection of the routine bus commute, instead adopting a mobility of the students' own devising, one that takes the form of a trial passed down from class to class.

Significantly, the choice involved in this passage adds another layer of symbolism for ASIJ students. At the core of this experience of mobility discussed by Pollock and Van Reken is

what they term “transition” (2009:65-6). I have made much use of the word transition in this essay, so it is important to note that Pollock and Van Reken define the term as “when we physically move from one place to another,” specifically referring to the movements of TCKs from residing in one place to residing in another—especially in another country or culture (2009:66). This type of transition is one that I, and many other expatriate ASIJ students, have undergone, as indicated by our very presence in Tokyo. It is the experience of being told as a child barely in pre-school, “We’re moving to Japan,” and not knowing what “Japan” is, not to mention the implications of this seemingly simple phrase. So, for the child in an expat family, “transition” means being uprooted from friends, family, teachers, places, and planted anew somewhere else, often a completely different and distant cultural environment (Pollock and Van Reken:65-6).

What I mean to say is that despite the fact that their lives are quite privileged in many ways, it is also important to note that when looking at the movements and mobility of ASIJ students, the decisions to make such transitions are never theirs. These moves are often the choice of the parents or the whim of a corporation or other sponsoring organization and can often come as a surprise and find us unprepared (Pollock and Van Reken 2009:65-6). So as ASIJ students leave behind their expat lives and began life on their own, there is a desire to acknowledge and respond to this highly mobile, transitory lifestyle. The Senior Walk, then, can be construed as a way for ASIJ seniors to mark this final transition out of the expat world in a way that takes control and asserts independence of mobility, as well as symbolically engaging with students’ feelings of geographical connectedness to the city of Tokyo.

## Section II: A Tale of Two Walks

Looking at the mirror in the high school conference room, I couldn't quite shake the feeling that it was not my image reflected in the glass. The nagging dissonance kept me turning back, analyzing the reflection once again. Perhaps it was the bags under my eyes—a souvenir garnered at some point along the 12-mile journey that had taken me here—or the fact that my cap only barely clung to my head, rather unsuccessfully containing the bushy curls that attempted to spring forth from beneath it. Or maybe it was something else. I had seen so many ASIJ seniors walk through campus in this attire, a black cap and gown with golden stole draped over their shoulders, and each time it had made sense: They had earned it; they were mature and accomplished and *seniors*. How many of them had I hugged goodbye as they walked passed toward the high school courtyard, a smile briefly stifling their stream of tears? I could still remember the excitement and awe we felt as elementary schoolers watching the oddly-attired seniors parade through our section of campus, each of us waiting anxiously to catch a glimpse of one of the few seniors we knew, usually our bus monitor, and maybe even get a wave or a hug.

Now it was our turn. I shuffled out of the conference room-turned-changing-area, fully clad in my black and gold graduation garb, and assembled with my class in the high school gym, where only hours earlier many of us had been passed out napping. We lined up, preparing to walk the path through campus that fifteen classes had before us, a “tradition” that began before my time at ASIJ (Olson). It would take us through the elementary school, the middle school, the high school, and then out again into the courtyard, where we would pass through the old ASIJ gate and step on each ‘class stone,’ ending with our own. We were ready now. Pomp and Circumstance began to filter in through the loudspeakers and Mr. Olson announced us, “I present to you the class of 2010;” it was our cue.



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An anthropological study of the Senior Walk is necessarily complicated by the fact that there are, actually, *two* “Senior Walks.” One Walk, which has been the focus of this paper so far, is the long, midnight trek made by the senior class from downtown Tokyo to the ASIJ campus in western Tokyo. The second Walk occurs that following day, known as Senior Day, and is an official part of the ASIJ events schedule (Parent Letter). As high school principal Mr. Weinland put it in a letter to senior parents, “The Sayonara Walk...is one of the highlights of the week. We encourage you to come if at all possible.” In this description Mr. Weinland remarks on the significance that this Walk has to the ASIJ community. He also refers to it as the “Sayonara Walk,” which is another common name for the event, and therefore the way that I will refer to it for the remainder of this paper, in order to avoid confusion between it and the previously discussed ‘Senior Walk.’

But what are we to make of the fact that there are two Walks and that they share a name? This naming implies a relationship or connection between the two events. As Mr. Olson speculated, perhaps the group that first walked from downtown Tokyo to the school thought that “as long as we’re doing a walk, let’s do a legitimate 20 kilometers.” Mr. Weinland added, “They’re related in that you have students traversing ground that they’ve been [traveling] one way or another for years and doing it in a more celebratory and meaningful way,” noting the importance, to both events, of ritual passage through specific territory. Though the original rationale is unclear, the Sayonara Walk was certainly an established event long before the Senior Walk, and therefore the Senior Walk has developed in relation to it—as evidenced by both its name and its position right before Senior Day. How, then, do these two Walks compare? Does

the Senior Walk *do* something that the pre-existing Sayonara Walk did not or does not? In this section I explore these two Walks in relation to one another, focusing on their differences as a means of better understanding the significance of the Senior Walk as a rite of passage.

The most immediately evident difference between the Sayonara Walk and the Senior Walk is that the Sayonara Walk is an official and institutionalized ‘tradition,’ as opposed to the Senior Walk, which is a creation of the ASIJ student body and not an official school event. As the letter to senior parents demonstrates, the Sayonara Walk is clearly an established event, supported by the school administration and ASIJ community. Mr. Weinland described it as a way of walking through, and saying goodbye to, the school “in a celebratory way and in a structured way.” This structure is provided by the school and includes “a number of levels of symbolism and tradition” (Weinland).

In deconstructing this symbolism and tradition, it is clear that the Sayonara Walk is not only supported by the school, but also supportive *of* the school as an institution and community. This becomes apparent in an ASIJ News description of the Sayonara Walk:

“This ASIJ tradition, the “Senior Walk,” ends with the soon-to-be graduates walking through the historic gate which dates back to 1934. They then gathered in the student courtyard where they view the class stones donated by each graduating class dating back to 1959 and added their own to the pathway.”

This demonstrates a clear invocation, in the Walk’s specific ceremonial elements, of ASIJ’s past and its long history as an institution. Graduates are led over a pathway made up of these ‘class stones’ and are told to make sure they step on each one as they walk, so as to avoid bad luck. In doing so, the Walk, and the participant, are validated through contact with ASIJ’s history and, in turn, validate the institution by recalling and then joining its storied past.

This mutually supportive characteristic of the Sayonara Walk relates to Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff’s conception of the structural “secular ritual.” They argue that, as in religion,

secular rituals are used “to lend authority and legitimacy to...organizations, occasions, moral values, view of the world, and the like” and are therefore part of the “structured side of social behavior” (1977:3-4). They also contend, borrowing from Durkheim’s work on religious ritual, that through ceremonial components, such as repetition over time and a “collective dimension,” the ritual acts as a celebration of the community and often carries of message of “social/cultural perpetuation” (1977:7-9). In this sense, the invocation of ASIJ’s institutional history, through the ritual elements of the Sayonara Walk, legitimizes and supports the institution and the community.

This broader community element is particularly central to Sayonara Walk. Mr. Weinland explained, “The [Sayonara] walk is really about saying goodbye to the people as much as to the place.” This was also clear in the letter to senior parents, asking them to watch the Walk if at all possible. Since many parents do come, and the senior walk passes throughout the entire campus, it is really constructed as an event for the whole ASIJ community. As Mr. Weinland described it, “Younger siblings, teachers you’ve had, parents [you know because] you’ve had play-dates at their houses, or played on their teams...are all sharing this moment with you.” Andrew added that for him:

“It wasn’t just about going back to the elementary school and seeing where your old classes were or...seeing your teachers. It was also being a first grader and seeing the seniors walk and now *being* the senior. That was a big deal. I had looked forward to it for 12 years.”

Here Andrew references the importance of visibility in the Sayonara Walk—that it is an event seen year after year by the ASIJ community, which helps to give the Walk its significance.

Witnessing the seniors dressed in their ASIJ uniform of black gowns and gold stoles—the school colors—fosters a sense of pride and an aspiration: the desire to one day be in their place. Janet also noted that “the experience of being a bus monitor made [the Sayonara Walk] so much more meaningful,” because you got to see all the children from your bus. In this way, the Walk

reaffirms relationships between graduating seniors and students in the elementary and middle schools—a connection in part created in the transitional ‘micro-community’ of the ASIJ bus. Therefore, the Sayonara Walk is a visible and collective ritual that strengthens bonds within the ASIJ community, helping to perpetuate it through time.

It also reaffirms present and past relationships between teachers, administrators and other adults, such as parents. As Janet added, “I remember just looking for the teachers I wanted to say ‘hi’ to and hug.” This was a sentiment seconded in all my interviews. Randy Wanless, a faculty member at ASIJ, cited this part of the Walk as providing an element of “catharsis,” evidenced in part by the amount of crying that is so often displayed in the Sayonara Walk. As Sarah, a graduate of the class of 2011, explained, “everyone was crying” and afterward “you were so emotionally drained.” So, the Sayonara Walk not only reaffirms these relationships but addresses, and helps to ease, the emotional process of saying goodbye. In this sense, the Sayonara Walk relates back to Van Gennep’s “rite of separation” as a way of describing the broader graduation week (1908:11). Through the Walk, the school provides an occasion in which the ASIJ community can process this separation—the loss of one fourth of the high school student body—and the senior class can say their goodbyes, in a ritualized framework.

The Sayonara Walk, then, can be seen as primarily structural in nature. I mean this partly in the sense that it is a highly structured event characterized by a set path, uniformed attire and a specific decorum, all formulated by the institution of ASIJ. But it is also reasserts social structure, as Victor Turner’s describes, in that it focuses on the “relationships between social positions,” essentially reiterating and supporting the sets of relationships in a community (Turner 1969:131). As I have explained, the Sayonara Walk acts as an affirmation and “commemoration,” as Andrew described it, of these daily relationships between seniors and their

friends, teachers, parents and even fellow bus riders. It also facilitates the separation of ASIJ seniors from the school community in a way that is cathartic, providing a moment to express sadness and say goodbye. In doing so, the Walk helps ASIJ process the loss of a large portion of its student body and move on as an institution and community.

Therefore, as a structural ritual, the focus of the Sayonara Walk is ASIJ itself. As Sarah explained, during the Senior Walk everyone felt “such a deep connection with ASIJ,” and for the seniors it was really about “how much we were going to miss this place.” This focus on ASIJ is first evidenced by the symbolism of the ritual itself, which, as I mentioned, references ASIJ’s history and tradition as an institution. Furthermore, the emotional aspect of the event helps to maintain and perpetuate ASIJ into the future through catharsis. This act of maintenance is also addressed by Fechter, who argues that expat communities “construct, maintain, and negotiate” their bounded worlds. Once again, this maintenance fits in with a structuralist conception of ritual as “a declaration of form against indeterminacy,” in this case, a formal and predetermined moment for the expression of emotion, that symbolizes unity and a “promise [of] continuity” for the school (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:16-18).

Interestingly, Mr. Weinland framed the Sayonara Walk somewhat differently, stating, “The [Sayonara] Walk is really about the whole class,” due to the symbolism of walking together in caps and gowns and the inclusion of the every senior. However, the ASIJ alumni with whom I spoke portrayed the experience as a primarily personal and individual matter. Janet succinctly described this apparent paradox:

“Even though we were physically walking as a group, wearing the exact same clothes—from the outside eye it seems like we’re one collective whole—our minds, or at least my mind wasn’t about the group; it was all about myself and my relationship with ASIJ and the faculty and how I could wrap up my own K-12 education.”

I think that this speaks to a difference of perspective in ritual, that is, between the subjects of the ritual and those watching it. From the perspective of the ASIJ community members witnessing the ritual, the senior class appears as a cohesive unit, each one in the same attire and walking the same path. This is in addition to the broader purpose of the event as an occasion to say goodbye to the graduating class, which makes the group of seniors the focus of onlookers' attention. However, for the seniors, the Sayonara Walk is "about reliving your experiences in school" (Andrew). So each senior is having a personal and markedly different experience than their classmates. Emi described her memory of the Sayonara Walk similarly:

"We were walking in a group, but it felt like much more of a personal experience for me as opposed to a unifying experience. People were having memories and they were having emotions that weren't part of what I was feeling. And obviously I was feeling different things at different times."

Therefore, even as a ritual focused on commemorating the relationships between ASIJ seniors and the community and campus at large, the experience becomes highly individualized from the seniors' perspective. Each place they go and person they see evokes a different memory or emotion than the person standing next to them.

Emi illustrated this point by recalling a particular moment during her Sayonara Walk. She explained that, having only attended ASIJ for five years, she did not feel as emotionally invested walking through the elementary and middle schools as other seniors did. However, the minute she stepped into the Ricketson Theatre (RT), she "broke down" into tears. Emi explains that, having been very active in theater and music during high school, the theater had a special significance to her although "everyone else was fine at that point because they didn't care about the RT." Andrew and Sarah described similar instances in which particular places or people triggered an emotional reaction for them, showing how, as Emi put it, "walking through the school really reflects your emotional investment."

I still remember pulling away from the embrace of yet another teacher to fold back into the solemn march of black gowns and realizing that Brady was no longer by my side. Brady Miller had been one of my closest friends since the second grade and if you had asked me a week prior—or a year, or five years, or ten—who would be beside during the Sayonara Walk, I would have said him. However, as I went to hug one teacher and he went to another, we found ourselves separated very early on in the procession. What was more surprising is that it didn't really matter. We were both fully preoccupied with the memories and relationships we had cultivated over the years with teachers, parents, underclassmen and the physical campus of ASIJ—these were the focus of the Sayonara Walk. And besides, we had already had our time to bond.

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While the Sayonara Walk is clearly meaningful and emotional for seniors and the rest of the ASIJ community—a significance I certainly do not mean to disregard in my characterization of the event as structural—it appears that there is something missing for the participants. With each senior's experience shaped by their own individual histories and relationships—personal memories swimming through their heads at each turn—there is no means for bonding between seniors. In fact, there is really no opportunity for socializing, or any interaction between seniors, built into the event. As Janet noted, the Sayonara Walk was not really about “us as a group,” but about “our individual ties to the school.” As it turns out, this is where the Senior Walk has something to offer. The alumni I interviewed specifically noted the Sayonara Walk's lack of group connection in contrast to the experience of the Senior Walk. Janet explained, “The aim of [the Senior Walk] is for us to come together and accomplish something as a class; it's completely

focused on us...whereas in the [Sayonara] Walk...the goal is more to reflect on your time...at ASIJ.” Janet and other alumni used phrases such as “a part of the group,” “bonding,” “unified,” “shared” and “solidarity” to describe the specific sense of connectedness that they felt during the Senior Walk (Sarah, Emi, Janet).

This sentiment, expressed to some extent by all the ASIJ alumni I interviewed, can best be understood in terms of Victor Turner’s notion of ‘*communitas*.’ Turner broadly defines ‘*communitas*’ as the “communion of equal individuals” and the “recognition [of] an essential and generic human bond” (2008:360). Explicating this concept, Turner states that “Among themselves, neophytes [ritual participants] tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism. Secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenized” (2008:359-60). Similarly, the sense of unity and solidarity described by Senior Walk participants appeared to transcend common divisions, and I argue, constituted a comparable feeling of *communitas*.

Like any high school, ASIJ is divided, to some extent, into friend groups and ‘cliques,’ which Sherry Ortner defines as “subsets of groups of friends predicated on other markers of success in America—physical attractiveness, money, ‘popularity,’ athletic ability, leadership/political savvy, and so on” (1997:65). Though Ortner specifies these categories of social division in high schools as common “in America” they exist in a similar capacity at ASIJ as well (1997). However, during the Senior Walk these social divisions, the high school versions of what Turner calls “rank and status,” seem to disappear, or at least become relatively trivial. Sarah described this communal atmosphere: “We were walking with all these different groups of people that I wasn’t necessarily friends with but...it was great, it was so fun, just such a lot of camaraderie.”



Of course, it is important to remain realistic in analyzing this bonding between classmates. As Mr. Weinland pointed out, “The [Walk] doesn’t involve everybody,” and “has the potential of being sometimes a divisive thing.” Despite the fact that in recent years a large majority of the class has participated in the Walk, there are still those that choose to stay home. More often, a group of seniors will decide to participate in Walking out to school, but do so separately from the larger group. For instance, Stephanie explained that her and a group of friends chose to make the trek out to school on their own, primarily to avoid the alcohol consumption they knew would be prevalent in the larger group. In Max’s year his friends also walked separately from the larger group to steer clear of the drinking aspect. Furthermore, Max and Stephanie both expressed that it was not only an aversion to drinking, but the feeling that they did not “relate to the rest of the grade” and the “party lifestyle,” of which the Walk seemed to be an extension. Therefore, high school divisions and friend groups can influence seniors’ decisions to participate in the Walk with the rest of the class.

Emi explained that in her senior year the alternative Walk group was much larger, roughly 20-25 people, which caused controversy in that some seniors in the main group were upset the others had chosen to break off. She responded to this controversy by saying, “I hate that thing that happens at the end of senior year when everyone wants to be friends with each other... We had four years to be friends and you didn’t give a [care].” Emi’s comments certainly support Mr. Weinland’s view that the Walk “has the potential to highlight or exacerbate cliques or friend groups.” However, Emi also admitted to wondering if “maybe we did it wrong,” and saw merit in Walking as a whole class. And, despite Walking separately from most of his class, Max thought, “When it comes to the actual symbolism of the walk, I think probably everybody

felt that the same.” Essentially expressing that even if it is done separately, the Walk is still a shared senior experience to some extent.

While I agree that the Walk can be divisive with regards to the decisions made beforehand—whether to join the main group or participate at all—my interviewees still clearly depicted the experience of the Walk as a time in which old divisions were broken down. Andrew, Janet, Sarah and Brady all remembered talking to and getting to know classmates that they had never had much contact with previously (Andrew). Though Mr. Weinland speculated that the Walk might also emphasize cliques because seniors are not “covering the same ground, at the same pace,” in some ways this turns out to be the opposite case. In fact, as the Walk goes on and the class slowly drifts apart over the distance, seniors do not necessarily divvy up into friend groups or cliques, but rather into almost random groupings (Andrew, Brady). In particular, Andrew remembered his friend ending up in a grouping that he characterized as “the weirdest group of people,” due to their total lack of familiarity with each other. Instead of being upset with this, Andrew’s friend ended up considering it a positive and meaningful happenstance, because the groups of relative strangers bonded over the course of the Walk (Andrew).

These interactions, which totally disregarded cliques and social “status,” helped to forge bonds between long-time classmates and create the sense of “*communitas*” expressed by these ASIJ alumni. As Turner explains it, quoting Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*, *communitas* is “being no longer side by side...but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*” (2008:372). Therefore, in attempting to accomplish the physical goal of reaching ASIJ together, seniors experience this sense of deeper connection with each other. In fact, Emi speculated, “I think that might be why people have held on to this

tradition of doing the [Senior Walk]...It is much more about friendship and being together and being united...a shared experience.”

It is crucial to note that the Senior Walk, in contrast to the Sayonara Walk, is a transgressive ritual. As I have noted previously the Senior Walk occurs in a period and space of liminality; it is a transgression of the ordinary, everyday expat world that the Sayonara Walk so strongly represents. In fact, though Turner does not discuss it much, liminality often occurs concomitantly with transgression in that it is a “period outside normality,” facilitating the breaking of norms and taboos (Taussig 350). Turner de-emphasizes this transgressive dimension of ritual; as Michael Taussig remarks, Turner’s discussion of liminality in ‘rites of passage’ depicts it as “increasingly balmy and innocent” (1998:350). The Senior Walk, however, is certainly not a balmy or innocent event.

As I have described it previously the Walk is a roving celebration. We irreverently marched through the sleeping city, carelessly disrupting the sanctity of the night’s silence—shouting and singing at the top of our lungs. In retrospect, the event is in many ways on par with Caillois’ description of communal transgression in the festival: “Huge gatherings...defined by dancing, singing, excitement, excessive eating and drinking...to the point of exhaustion, to the point of sickness” (1939:281). Similarly, seniors spend hours engaging in excessive consumption—of alcohol, energy drinks and food made available by 24-hour *konbini*—and the excessive expenditure of energy.

I was surprised to see some of my classmates freely urinate sides of buildings and discard their empty beer cans without a second thought. During my Walk one senior even carelessly stole a piece of public property—an orange traffic cone connector—and was apprehended by Tokyo police. He was eventually released from custody without issue, but these troubling police

encounters have continued to occur up until the most recent graduating class' Walk. The total disregard for taboo and city law grows out of the Walk's liminal character: Outside their normative worlds seniors feel embolden to do ignore the rules and restrictions of daily life. As Janet explained, we felt like "anything goes...It was so centered on us... We wanted to feel like nothing was constraining us."

Of course, this element of transgression puts the school administration in a difficult situation. While, as Mr. Olson explained, there was originally some backlash in the parent community, reflected in an official anti-Walk administration stance, my conversation with Mr. Weinland demonstrated a change in this position. Mr. Weinland explained that the administration's main concern was the safety of the student body and thought it best to follow a somewhat supportive policy to facilitate the safest trip possible. Andrew concurrently noted that in his senior year the vice-principal of the high school had gone to him, as the president of the senior class, to offer advice on a route and timeline for the upcoming Walk. In this sense, the Senior Walk almost appears to be what Max Gluckman called a "licensed ritual" (1955). Gluckman explored the ways in which transgression is tacitly allowed, and sometimes encouraged, during ritual moments (1955). However, Gluckman's primarily structuralist argument focuses on the ways in which transgressive "ritual is socially valuable" by ultimately emphasizing and supporting taboos and hierarchies (1955:110). Even Turner agrees that in liminal rites, ultimately "the authority of the elders is absolute" (1967:100).

Here the Senior Walk departs once again from a structural perspective in that, while tacitly supported by the administration, the Walk is not institutionalized; it is perpetuated and carried out by each senior class. As Janet described, it was "centered on us," as well as being created by us. This focus on the seniors, by the seniors, undermines a structuralist perspective

and also points back to a key function of transgression in the Walk: its facilitation of *communitas*.

Turner importantly argues that *Communitas* develops specifically out of liminal situations. For instance he discusses how liminal rites like the Senior Walk are often characterized by seclusion and the shared experience of an ordeal, which help create an atmosphere of intimacy and bonding. Furthermore in the liminal period participants “are withdrawn from their structural positions and consequently from the values, norms, sentiments, and techniques associated with those positions” (1967:105). As a result, normative divisions and hierarchies become irrelevant, and participants are able to “confront one another...integrally and not in compartmentalized fashion as actors of roles,” resulting in the development of *communitas* (Turner 1969; 1967:101). So as seniors transgress the boundaries of the ASIJ community into liminal seclusion in the streets of Tokyo, they are able to develop this bond, forged even stronger by a shared experience of a physically, mentally and emotionally exhausting trial.

Furthermore, intoxication, which Taussig notes is a common means of transgression seems to have actually helped facilitate the bonding sense of *communitas* experienced among seniors (1998). A few of my interviewees, even if they did not drink during the Walk, noted instances during the Walk in which someone they had not known particularly well opened up to them and tried to connect with them, while under the influence (Andrew; Janet; Brady). In this way, the consumption of alcohol played a role in dissolving longtime barriers and divisions between seniors and encouraging socializing.

It is no surprise then that camaraderie and unity—i.e. *communitas*—was the biggest difference that graduates noted between the Sayonara and Senior Walks. As a structural ritual, the Sayonara Walk contains no means of interpersonal communication or bonding between

seniors and focuses on the institution of ASIJ. The Senior Walk is much the opposite in that occurs within a liminal zone outside of the normative structures of ASIJ, in which the shared experience of transgression helps create *communitas*. As writer Georges Bataille explains, “The festival is the fusion of human life. For the thing and the individual, it is the crucible where distinctions melt in the intense heat of intimate life” (1989:54) Therefore we can conceive of the Sayonara Walk and Senior Walk as two very different, but complimentary, rituals. The Sayonara Walk is a structured, institutionalized event and ASIJ, as a school and a community, is central to its significance. The Senior Walk, on the other hand, exists outside the institution of ASIJ; its focus is the bond between seniors.

### Section III: Home

It was daylight now. I couldn't quite recall when the sun had risen, or where we had been when it did, but it was a stark contrast from the persistent darkness that had characterized the journey thus far. The landscape had begun to change now as well. We no longer trekked through the grey valleys of Tokyo's bustling downtown; corporate cliff faces had given way to tree-lined streets and red brick sidewalks. Ajinomoto Stadium, towering above the tightly packed two-story homes that comprise much of Tokyo's Chofu district, had been our guiding beacon for the last hour, but now it loomed overhead. We were close.

I knew the area well, though not from walking its streets. I had gazed out at this scene from the window of my bus every school day for twelve years. Now I was standing in it, surrounded by it. The sight of the stadium and the brick sidewalk lined with cherry trees had always meant one thing: we were arriving at school. On any other day, this sight would have signaled me to put away my iPod or compelled me to hectically skim the remainder of my assigned AP European History reading for an impending quiz, but today it meant much more. For my companions and me, this would be our last trip out to The American School in Japan as students. Tomorrow we would graduate, shedding our identities as high school seniors and our places in the ASIJ community in which many of us had grown up.

This was not just the end to an hour-long bus ride, but a much longer and more grueling journey. Six hours before, we had embarked from our meet-up location downtown, a group of about a hundred eager seniors brimming with energy and excitement. By this point, however, it was just eight of us finishing the journey together. The once expansive column of students had slowly spread apart into smaller groups over the course of the night. Furthermore, the contagious

energy that propelled us early on had been exhausted long ago, leaving us fatigued, dehydrated, and slightly delirious. Still, we pressed on.

Brady and I walked in lock step. Between us, arms draped around our shoulders so that we could support his weight, was our mutual friend John. John was one of many other seniors who had taken advantage of the lack of supervision and frequent *konbini* stops during the Walk to consume copious amounts of alcohol. He had managed to cover a considerable distance on his own, but as the walk progressed it became all too clear that John would not be physically capable of making it to school without help. Brady and I took it upon ourselves, then, as his friends—and two of the handful of sober participants—to help get him there. We carried him for over an hour, with each of the eight members of our group taking turns supporting his weight. Of course, this proved especially difficult considering our own exhaustion and John's dehydration, vomiting, and fluctuating level of awareness.

Despite John's dire situation, I do not recall considering any other choice but to take him the rest of the way. It seemed imperative and calling the school or John's parents would have brought serious and undesirable attention to John's transgression. This speaks in part to our own naïveté and lack of experience regarding alcohol, certainly, but also to the underlying importance of the Walk. John was compelled to finish the Walk just as we were compelled to help him finish it. In addition, the physical act of carrying John brought us all closer and was part of the sense of *communitas* we developed during the trek. Supporting John's weight, his arms around our shoulders, felt completely reasonable in this context; it was simply a manifestation of the emotional connection and camaraderie that had carried us all to this point.

As we left Ajinomoto Stadium behind, entering the final leg of the Senior Walk, our group had been alternating carrying John for at least an hour. He was more lucid now, but still



too weak to support his own weight. In fact, at this point we were all barely able to continue, but the sight of such familiar terrain kept us moving and our spirits high. I no longer recall exactly how the conversation turned at this point. Maybe John was beginning to recognize what had transpired in the last few hours and how dire his situation had been. Whatever the reason, John began to cry. His tears came on without warning and flowed freely—exhaustion and intoxication had broken down any emotional barriers that might have restrained them. He then expressed his gratitude for our help taking him this far and for our friendship. Moreover, he lamented the fact that our time together was coming to an end, anticipating the dissolution and distance that graduation would bring.

This sentiment sparked something in Brady and I that had been dormant throughout the Walk, and probably throughout the whole year. Our nerves were raw, laid bare by fatigue, and susceptible to the poignancy of the moment. John's expressions of emotion struck us at our most vulnerable. And just like that, we too burst into tears. Brady, John and I wept openly, but just as we cried we also laughed. We laughed at the absurdity of our tears and of the situation—how far we had come, how close we were to finishing. Perhaps most of all, we laughed and cried because we were overwhelmed. Any thoughts or reasons that had fed into the emotion we felt were consumed by its powerful immediacy.

In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille discusses the expression of overwhelming emotion with remarkable similarity to what Brady, John and I experienced. For Bataille this phenomenon, which he terms “sovereignty,” is the point when total presence in the moment supplants all conscious thought, creating a state of “unknowing” (1991:203). He writes:

“This is the case if we weep, if we sob, if we laugh till we gasp... These moments, like the deeply rhythmical movements of poetry, of music, of love, of dance, have the power to capture and endlessly recapture the moment that counts, the moment of rupture, of fissure. As if we were trying to arrest the *moment* and freeze it in the constantly renewed gasps of our laughter or our sobs” (1991:203).

Similarly, with each laugh or sob Brady, John and I clung desperately to the moment at hand. But what was it about this moment in time and space that was so urgent, so precious, that we aspired to abolish its necessarily fleeting character? Maybe, as our mutual friend Rachel later claimed, John's crying was just meaningless drunken emotionality and we had played into it. While I am sure that John's intoxication eased open the floodgates, it does not invalidate the sentiments he expressed, which resonated so deeply with Brady and me. I cannot know for sure what caused John's tears, but perhaps John looked down the road from Ajinomoto Stadium, as Brady I did, and saw a great many things coming to an end: not just the Senior Walk itself, but our entire lives at ASIJ and in Japan.

Until now I had not yet cried over graduating high school and leaving my family, friends and home behind. In retrospect, I think the fact that I was actually going to leave had not yet sunk in; it did not *feel* real to me. Once again, Bataille offers significant insight. He explains, "The object of these tears is itself unanticipated; like death, it is only, all of a sudden, the impossible coming true, becoming *that which is*" (1991:210). This was really at the heart of our reaction in that moment—the impossible, the unimaginable, was finally coming to pass. As Brady put years later, "We all realized in that moment that our whole lifestyle up to that point was going to be different...it was right then." Our lives in Tokyo, as high schoolers and as members of the ASIJ community were all coming to a close. And while a strict comparison of the Senior Walk to the experience of death might appear a bit melodramatic, I think there is still value in the metaphor. Bataille argues that the end of a life is such an unimaginable occurrence to the human mind that in its presence all thought leaves us and we are overcome by emotion (1991:205-7). Similarly, the realization that Brady described—"the object of our tears"—was the

moment when life as he had known it ceased and a new one began. We mourned the life we had lost, yet celebrated the victory of surpassing it.

This transition, from the end of one life and to the beginning of another, is the very basis of rites of passages. As Van Gennep first conceived of it, the rite of passage necessarily accompanies, and realizes, the transition between one stage of life and another (1908:2-3). Furthermore, Turner explains that in many societies the rituals accompanying these transitions were inundated with the symbolism of death and those in transition were treated simultaneously as corpses and newborns (1967:96). As Brady's account illustrates, this change, which can be as dramatic as leaving the city, community, and family in which you grew up, is akin to the loss of a lifestyle and a large part of one's identity. It for this reason that rites of passage are also referred to as "life-crisis rituals," emphasizing the crisis of identity and position that is inherent in such drastic transitions (Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology).

It is no surprise, then, that we experienced this emotional moment of realization just as the Senior Walk came to an end. That moment that we clung to so dearly with each sob and 'gasp of laughter' was one in which we were still ASIJ students, still residents of Tokyo, still surrounded by our closest friends and family, still *ourselves*. Because once we crossed through the gate into ASIJ campus, we would be different. In fact, by this realization we already were. As Brady explained, this was the "moment of actualization," when his own recognition of this imminent, drastic life change finally made it real. In essence it transformed him, and John and I as well. This is the real work of the rite of passage. As Victor Turner argues one should "regard transition as a process, a becoming and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation" (1967:94). Therefore, the rite of passage not only accompanies a transition, but makes it possible, actually changing the participant over the course of the event.

Of course, on some level we had always ‘known’ that the time would come to graduate and leave, but we had never truly believed it. Bataille explains, “We anticipate [the impossible] *against all reason*,” until it finally occurs, “when anticipation dissolves into NOTHING,” and tears fill the void (1991:207-9). It is out of this complicated interplay between the fear of the ‘impossible’ and the denial of its imminence that the moment of realization, and of transformation, derives its poignancy. As Brady described it, “Throughout this whole celebration there is just this feel in the background of mild fear and not wanting to leave... That is what really made it so impactful for me: that feeling... and then all of a sudden realizing ‘whoa, it’s here. This is it.’” The fear of leaving Tokyo was in the air during the course of the entire Senior Walk, imbuing the celebratory occasion with an underlying anxiety and culminating in its realization. It is through this realization of the inevitable truth that we were transformed and no longer saw ourselves as ASIJ students.

By the time we reached the gate entrance to ASIJ’s campus the tears had subsided. Our final effort was fueled solely on the excitement of our success and the promise of much-needed nap, but we had made it. However, our triumphant arrival was bittersweet, colored by the poignant reality with which we had come to terms. Brady recalled, “As you stepped over this line, you stepped into the future. You had made this long journey from downtown to ASIJ, but now what... Now its time to go.” So, when the moment had come, the eight of us put our arms around each other and stepped through the gate together.

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I cannot claim that the end of the Senior Walk was this transformative moment for every ASIJ senior who participated that year, or any other year. Each person would realize this

transition in their own time and their own way. For many, the moment of emotional outpouring would come a few hours later as they said their farewells to teachers, parents and peers during the Sayonara Walk. For instance, Andrew remembered during the Sayonara Walk, as he hugged one of his favorite teachers goodbye, “I just start[ed] bawling and it wasn’t at all anything that was forced. There was no thinking involved...nothing went through my head. It was just instantaneous crying.” Confronted with saying goodbye to a mentor with whom he was close, Andrew experienced the same primacy of emotion and ‘unknowing’ that I had arriving at school.

That this transformative realization sometimes occurs after the Senior Walk does not lessen its importance as a ritual. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo asks “whether [ritual’s] process is immediately transformative or but a single step in a lengthy series of ritual and everyday events” (1993:16). He offers the possibility that ritual acts as a catalyst—the impetus of a process in which the real cultural and emotional depth are revealed at another time (1993:15). So, whether John’s tears or a goodbye to a teacher was the spark, the poignancy of that juncture in space and time had been building since the beginning of the Senior Walk. But this anticipation during the ritual is not necessarily resolved by its end, but may extend into the Sayonara Walk, the commencement ceremony, or even longer for some. As I discussed in the previous section, the rituals during this Senior Week period such the Sayonara Walk, and even commencement itself, relate to and compliment the Senior Walk in the process of transitioning seniors out of the ASIJ community.

Even though it may be expressed at different times for different seniors, what is clear from the accounts above, and those in earlier sections, is the extent to which graduating from ASIJ invokes particularly strong emotional reactions in ASIJ students. This fact, perhaps, is most clearly demonstrated by the existence of an event of the magnitude of the Senior Walk itself. But

what about graduation did many ASIJ seniors find so moving? Why have they created and maintained such a dramatic rite of passage to mark their exit?

The difficult transition from the end of one life to the beginning of the next is in many ways a part of any high school graduation. For most American teenagers who plan on going to college, and even many of those who do not, graduating from high school involves a similar process of leaving their childhood homes, their friends and teachers, and starting anew life somewhere else. Sherry Ortner's work "Fieldwork in the Postcommunity," in particular, speaks to this contemporary American reality that individuals no longer stay in their hometowns and years or decades after high school may be found transplanted across the country (1997).

However, Ortner's example of American post-graduation dispersal differs greatly from the ASIJ alumni experience in a number of ways. Out of her 1958 graduating class from a high school in Newark, New Jersey, 60 percent of her classmates still lived in either New Jersey or nearby New York state and 40 percent lived within just a 16-mile radius of their high school (1997:68-9). She explains that this proximity fosters a postcommunity that maintains an extensive web of personal relationships, such as belonging to the same synagogue or country club, or having children that go to school together (1997:69). Furthermore, these classmates not only are able to remain connected to each other by this proximity, but also to the town or city in which they grew up. This is a post-grad reality that most ASIJ alumni will not experience.

As I discussed previously with regards to the symbolism of passage in the Senior Walk, the lives of ASIJ students, particularly the expat majority, are characterized by a high degree of mobility. Pollock and Van Reken discuss this mobility in relation to a feeling of "rootlessness" experienced by many TCKs (2009:123). They argue that being repeatedly 'uprooted' causes the TCK to have difficulty connecting to any one place in particular and to grow up with an elusive

sense of ‘home’ (2009:123-6). Pollock and Van Reken also discuss the situations of TCKs who have lived for long periods of time in one country, which leaves them torn between their connection to that country and their inability to fully belong there (2009:125-6). In both these cases, it is understandable that students with such a normally tenuous connection to ‘home’ would react strongly to leaving a community and place in which they had grown comfortable.

Furthermore, underlying these realities of mobility and ‘rootlessness’ is also an experience of the temporality of community and ‘home’ that differs from the Ortner’s example. Four years after graduating from ASIJ, returning to Tokyo is no longer a homecoming for me. Though my family still lives in Tokyo, they have moved out of my childhood home and the neighborhood in which I grew up. My closest friends and even most of my friendly acquaintances from high school do not return to Tokyo during college breaks like they did the first couple of years after graduation. This is because, as is the reality of expat life, their parents have left Japan: off to another country on another assignment or perhaps returned ‘home’ to the United States. As Janet noted, even visiting ASIJ is not really the comforting return she had wished it would be and can even be quite awkward. As we walk through the halls of the high school there are very few familiar faces—all our underclassmen friends have graduated and we are not close with most of our former teachers the way we once were. Even my relationship to the broader city of Tokyo is more tenuous, from my loss of familiarity with the subway system to my declining language ability.

In this way, expat communities and are highly temporal, fleeting. As Brady explained, if “people are living in a foreign country, they’re staying there *temporarily*...It’s impossible to recreate.” He further lamented, “Now my family lives in California...I have no connections to Japan anymore.” Brady points specifically to this temporality: as expat families come and go,

sooner or later the ‘home’ that Brady had grown up in would no longer be recognizable. This speaks to the fact that, for expat child, connection to the host country is intrinsically tied to their parents, to their legal residency status, to the other expats that are around them. If one’s emotional connection to place is filtered through their ties to a particular community residing there, then the replacement of that community over time renders the place emotionally unrecognizable.

This is in large part the crisis of the Senior Walk and the senior’s graduation from ASIJ: the knowledge that the home they experience now will not be there upon their return or that they may not even be able to return. While this is true to some extent for Ortner’s classmates, in that the postcommunity no longer exists together in the same place. Most of them likely have parents and other family or friends who still reside in their hometown, possibly even in their childhood homes, and at the very least their proximity allows them the possibility to return to this home if they so desire. This is a capability that Brady, Sarah, Emi and many other ASIJ alumni lack. Not even ASIJ reunions, which Ortner argues are meant to relive the experience of community as it once was, can be seen in this way since the majority of them are held not in Tokyo, but in cities around the United States.

My brother and I still marvel when, while out shopping or getting lunch in our parent’s hometown of Keene, New Hampshire, our mother will run into an old high school classmate. Even if the trajectory of our lives were to take us back to Tokyo, the likelihood of running into someone from our childhood or teenage years at a supermarket is pretty miniscule. For the ASIJ student, ‘home’ is not so easily anchored to geographic location; it is a precarious phenomenon and will inevitably dissipate over time. So for each senior graduating does not just mean leaving a world behind, but also coming to terms with the fact that they can never truly return.



## Conclusion

It is important to note that Ortner's discussion of the postcommunity is almost two decades old now and contemporary experiences of mobility continue to shift more and more towards the global. Globalization has meant a dramatic proliferation of privileged transnational movements and the growth of expatriate communities worldwide (Fechter 2007; Leonard 2010). Furthermore, communication technologies have made building and maintaining relationships across distance much more manageable and common since Ortner's work in the 1990s. In fact, this is probably best illustrated in the contrast between by my own "fieldwork in the postcommunity," which was conducted primarily through Skype video calls, and Ortner's daunting task of contacting classmates through mail correspondence and traveling around the country by car to conduct face-to-face interviews (1997).

So, with regards to this globalizing world, the question arises: how will people contend with issues of mobility, identity, community, and geographic location in an increasingly transnational context? Fechter discusses numerous authors that present transnational movements as fluid, unbounded, exchanges (2007:20-1). For instance, she quotes James Clifford and George Marcus' 1986 work *Writing Ethnography: The Poetics and Politics of Culture*: "There are no traditionally fixed, spatially and temporally bounded cultural world from which to depart and to which to return: all is situated and all is moving" (2007:20). As Fechter explains, this is part of a move in anthropology away from the constraining arguments of "old anthropology" which perceived culture as essentially grounded in local contexts (2007:20-1). These theories project onto the lives of expatriates a liberating and fluid ease of movement and communication, not tethered to a hometown or home culture. However, they do little to engage with the on-the-ground realities of expat lives and experiences.

While expat communities, such as that of ASIJ, may provide evidence of cross-cultural exchanges and ‘global flows,’ it does mean that concepts of fixity, boundedness, and ‘home’ have been rendered moot in this globalizing context. In fact, the idea that ‘home,’—as spatial, geographic location connected to a community of friends and family—holds no power, no draw, for the transnational individual is wholly false. If the Senior Walk demonstrates anything, it is the extent to which a stable community grounded in geographical space holds great appeal to people who grow up experiencing repeated transnational movements.

The Walk demonstrates the ways that expat worlds like ASIJ are in fact bounded, constructed, and mediated—how expats carve out spaces and forge communal ties. Furthermore the transgression of these boundaries during the Walk reveals a desire for more intimate connection to physical territory: to be anchored. It is difficult to say exactly what the source of this desire might be, although it appears that a life of constant transitions and ‘rootlessness’ is not the liberating experience that some might make it out to be. Even these ideals of ‘home’ do not bare resemblance to the global realities, or are simply constructions of the human imagination, the desire they instill in us, the comfort they give us, and the loss we feel when they cease to exist are no less real.

As I write this essay, I am once again a senior and face the daunting process of graduation. The world I have created for myself since arriving here four years ago is, just as my life at ASIJ before it, in threat of dissolution. Friends disperse and physical distance is often supplanted by emotional distance. The spaces I inhabit are destined to be filled by someone else’s belongings and someone else’s memories. The sadness and loss I felt leaving ASIJ, then, is vividly illuminated by the presence of a similar experience now. The anticipation of the impossible becoming ‘that which is,’ of having to start over once again, drifts closer to the

forefront seniors' thoughts and conversations each day. From this vantage point, the significance of the Senior Walk for me and my classmates is even more evident.

The gravity of this juncture in time for ASIJ seniors, which I have explicated in the last section, is fundamental to understanding what the event means to them and what it does for them. While the Senior Walk helps to bring about a painful realization of loss, it also, in turn, addresses and assuages these feelings. As I have discussed in the first section, the explicit and dramatic territorial passage at the center of the Senior Walk is a symbolic reaction to the experiences of mobility and transition that have characterized much of these students' lives. At a time when they once again face the turmoil of departure, the Walk acts as an assertion of independence of mobility—a passage of the seniors own choosing, devised and passed down by those who have left before them. From this point on, their movements are no longer tied to their parents or the whims of global organization; they are their own.

Additionally, the transgressive elements of the Senior Walk, in conjunction with the structural ritual of the Sayonara Walk, address the loss of community and home directly. The Sayonara Walk is a cathartic commemoration of the relationships to people and place that the senior has built over the years and helps to ease the necessary separation of these ties. Though at first glance the Senior Walk may appear to be just a pre-grad party, an excuse to drink and be wild outside of supervision of parents and the school, it does much more. The Walk is a festive celebration of the senior class, by the senior class. As a physical, mental, and emotional trial in liminal seclusion, the Walk is a shared ordeal that forges deep bonds of *communitas* that will last even as classmates and friends disperse across the globe in the coming months.

Therefore, the Walk helps facilitate the realization of loss of home and community, as well as the emotional catharsis and assertion of independence that is necessary for the senior to

move on. In this way, the Walk not only celebrates the past, but turns towards the future. As Van Gennep put it, the rite of passage is the “means [by] which a person leaves one world behind him and enters a new one” (1908:19). The Walk took us out of the world we had grown up in—the expat community of ASIJ in Japan—and into the future as an ASIJ alumnus and college student. As much as I miss the world I left behind in Tokyo, the one that I entered has been equally rich, challenging, and exciting: both informed by the experiences of the past and filled with the potential of the present. I can only hope, then, as I face the reality of another daunting departure, that I might find an equally meaningful way to celebrate this world, to indulge in the comfort and happiness I feel here, while still moving on to the next.

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