Understanding the construction of the frame for professional identity: a case study of Japanese academics in early career stage

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The individual can determine what is good or what they value by having the frame and if they lose this frame they become 'at sea' and experience disorientation (Taylor 1989). This paper explorer Japanese academics' efforts to construct the frame for their professional identity and discuss how the sense of 'security' affect their decision-making.

The life and work of academics have been changing and a number of researchers have started to work on capturing construction of identities today (Henkel 2000, Rhoades 2007, Barnett and Di Napoli 2008, Gornall, Cook, Dauton, Salisbury and Thomas 2013). Because the idea of discipline-based identity as an academic identity is such a firm and influential one, academics whose actual experiences do not fit the picture inevitably face the sense of disorientation. Through my previous study (Sato unpublished thesis) I identified three factors that have shaken the frame for academics: academic training in inter-disciplinary field; working experiences in non-traditional academic posts; and the emerging discourse of teaching and learning. Firstly, the emergence of inter-disciplinary fields has produced PhD holders without any particular training in one of those more established disciplines. They are expected to understand and move between various disciplines. As a result, those with inter-disciplinary background often face a sense of dislocation on the land of higher education. Secondly, the impact of massification and the political discourse of accountability and quality assurance have led to the introduction of non-traditional academic position such as those in educational development and career service. Experiences of those in a 'third place' (Whitchurch 2008) are different from those in traditional academic post and thus, they naturally question about their role. Lastly, ideas such as 'student-centered teaching', 'active learning', and 'student as consumer' have made academics to rethink the purpose of university education, their role and values as a teacher.

Then how do individuals react to fulfill the expectations and meanings associated with the given role and how do they make sense of their lived experiences to construct the professional identity? In my research, I conducted 15 in-depth interviews with Japanese academics in their early career stage who either have inter-disciplinary background or are in non-traditional academic role. I used the description of academics in an established faculty drawn from the

literature as a tool to stimulate reflection of interviewees. I encouraged interviewees to tell me stories related to their decision-making as it would reflect their priorities and values. Based on the interviews, I argue that individuals tend to make decisions not based on academic values but on their evaluation of what might bring the sense of security. Among the interviewees, the sense of security is often associated with career prospects and it affects individual's choice of communities to belong to. Interviewees usually belong to multiple communities such as academic community, professional community, and institutional community. Different communities offer different frames for professional identity therefore the individual's decision about the order of priority among communities he/she belongs to indicate the frame. In the presentation, I invite participants to look at relationships between the sense of security, communities, and career prospects and to build a model to understand formation of frame for professional identity.

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