



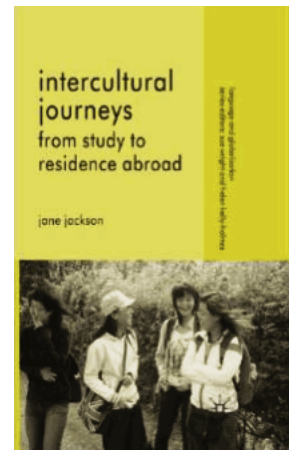
Book Review

Intercultural Journeys from Study to Residence Abroad

by Jane Jackson

Palgrave Macmillan (2010)

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First, a point of clarification is in order. In this text, "sojourn" and "residence abroad" do not refer to extended periods of overseas residency. Instead, these terms underscore the varied ways that even short-term foreign visitors can interact within non-indigenous host communities. Whereas "study abroad" is a term with a clear intellectual and academic focus, Jackson prefers terms such as "residence abroad" and "overseas sojourns" to highlight some of the experiences that may occur both in and out of formal class. Hence, this study is not about persons who've spent months or years overseas – it focuses on how a small group of Chinese university students changed after a short 5-week stay in the U.K. This 251-page text provides emic and etic accounts of how one study abroad program appears to have impacted the informants in terms of intercultural competence, identity construction, as well as English proficiency. Before outlining the results of this study, let's briefly look at the methodology underlying it.

Methodology

A contrastive sample of four undergraduate English majors from the Chinese University of Hong Kong with no prior overseas experience was selected as this study's main informants from a cohort of 14 participants. The main informants were all female, native Cantonese users, and with B1 or B2 CEFR English proficiency levels.

This study employed six qualitative research instruments: (1) the informants' study abroad application letters, (2) their pre-departure journal entries, language use logs, and student surveys, (3) one semi-structured bilingual pre-departure interview, (4) frequent pre-sojourn, sojourn, and post-sojourn observation field notes, (5) one post-return survey, and (6) a semi-structured post-return interview in the language of the informant's choice. Despite the small number of informants in this study, the author also employed one quantitative tool: Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman's revised *Intercultural Development Inventory* (2003). This 50-item scale with a 5-choice Likert response format reputed to measure ethno-centricism and ethno-relativism according to Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1993).

All informants took three different semester-length pre-departure orientation classes focusing on literary studies, ethnographic research, and intercultural communication prior to their 5-week overseas experience. The author taught two of those classes, and also served as a research advisor while the participants were in England. Their sojourn included a homestay, morning ESL classes, and regular cultural excursions. Students were required to keep diaries and also complete periodic reflections. An "English only" policy was established for this sojourn, and informants generally refrained from using Cantonese. Upon returning to Hong Kong, the author supervised a semester-length writing project for this cohort. Students were required to write a 30-page dissertation in English and they conferred with the author on a weekly basis during that period. Jackson used an open coding framework via NVivo (Ver. 7) to organize the varied data from this study.

The Intercultural Development Inventory was administered to all 14 program participants three times: once before the pre-departure training, then again when it ended, and finally just after this cohort returned to Hong Kong.

Results

Interpreting the quantitative *Intercultural Development Inventory* scores changes is problematic since the standard error of measurement of that scale is not reported, nor are any of the confidence intervals or detailed descriptive statistics. The actual inventory items themselves are not public for commercial reasons, making independent validation difficult. The issue of sample size is also relevant: a cohort sampling over several years may have been the best way to obtain valid and reliable data. For these reasons, we shall limit our discussion to the qualitative results.

A wide range of findings concerning L1/L2 identity formation, cross-cultural understanding, and language utilization are summarized in this text. Towards the end of this volume, the author concludes:

intercultural communication/ethnography courses and short-term sojourns, when carefully planned and sequenced, can have a positive impact on student development (e.g. sociopragmatic awareness, enhanced cultural knowledge). With adequate sojourn preparation, students can become more systematic language and cultural learners and, ultimately, enhance their intercultural competence. (p. 188)

Although Jackson affirms that, "a short-term sojourn with systematic predeparture, experiential elements, guided critical reflection, and ongoing support can have a positive impact on L2 students who have a high level of ethnocentrism on entry" (p. 137), she also points out how outcomes vary widely among participants. A willingness to interact within a new culture, to learn from mistakes, and engage with those from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are some of the variables appearing to shape sojourn outcomes.

Some Pros and Cons

There are three particularly nice features to this book. First, it relies on thick descriptions of how each SA participant changed over a nine-month period. It was interesting to read different sojourner accounts of the same events. Second, Jackson's probing questions offer a lot to think about regarding study abroad program design. Study abroad program organizers and intercultural researchers will appreciate much of this volume's practical advice. Finally, the main theoretical framework behind this study is explained in detail, integrating abstract descriptions with concrete sojourner experiences.

This work also has at least three limitations. First, Jackson's *sampling* differs from most study abroad programs in Japan. Her informants were generally fluent in English, with high grade point averages, and perhaps more motivated to study overseas than most Japanese university students. If we regard study abroad as a gendered experience (Twombly, 1995, par. 3), the fact that all core informants were female should also be considered when interpreting these results. Male sojourners might have somewhat different experiences from the young women portrayed in this study.

A second limitation of this study is its *timeframe*. This study extends just one semester after the informant's return from England. In light of Rexeisen's *Boomerang Hypothesis* (2012-2013), we need to consider the possibility of attrition: at least some of the program participants are likely to return to pre-sojourn baseline behaviors.

Third, as Sutin (2011, p. 308) pointed out when reviewing this text, some of the theoretical concepts mentioned herein are explained rather briefly. For those already familiar with the SA literature, this issue is inconsequential. However, novice readers may be perplexed by references to concepts such as Bryam's (1997) *savoirs* or Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) *habitus*. Those seeking a firmer theoretical grounding of these and other related concepts are encouraged to read Jackson's 2013 text.

The Bottom Line

It is natural to compare this work with Jackson's 2008 text. Whereas both books highlight the experiences of a small number of students from a university in Hong Kong to Great Britain, this text offers more detailed descriptions of the study abroad program's pre-sojourn and post-sojourn

components. It also provides a more comprehensive list of research tools. Not surprisingly, the references on topics such as linguistic identity and code-switching are more recent. As such, we feel this book probably is of more practical value to those planning to do study abroad research. In short, this work is worth reading for those interested in conducting SA research or administering study abroad programs. Japan-based readers will likely need to offer more linguistic affordances to their programs than Jackson employed. Those lacking the time to read this entire book from cover to cover will find the final two chapters particularly helpful.

- Reviewed by Allan Goodwin & Tim Newfields

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