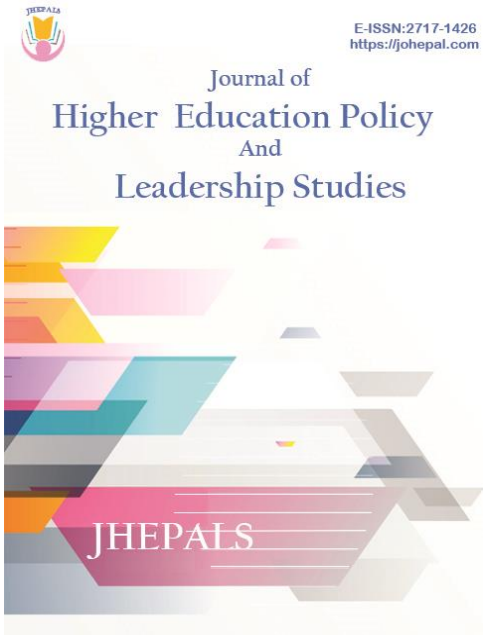
Journal of
Higher Education Policy
And
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

https://johepal.com

Navigating Doctoral Students' Dual-Track Academic Socialisation in Japan



Yusuke Sakurai [1]

Center for Academic Practice and Resources, Hiroshima University, JAPAN
Email: sakurai@hiroshima-u.ac.jp
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1150-3132

Wenjuan Cheng [2] *
Email: chengwenjuan@hiroshima-u.ac.jp
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2569-3451

Shizuki Saruta [3] *
Email: shizuki-saruta@hiroshima-u.ac.jp
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8997-0745

* *Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hiroshima University, JAPAN*

Colloquium Received **2024/03/06** | Colloquium Accepted **2024/06/18** | Published Online **2024/06/30**

Cite colloquium as:

Sakurai, Y., Cheng, W., & Saruta, S. (2024). Navigating doctoral students' dual-track academic socialisation in Japan. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, *5*(2), 103-109.
https://dx.doi.org/10.61186/johepal.5.2.103

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-07]

[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.103]

"Colloquium"

Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 5 Issue: 2
pp. 103-109
DOI:
10.61186/johepal.5.2.103

Navigating Doctoral Students' Dual-Track Academic Socialisation in Japan

Yusuke Sakurai *
Wenjuan Cheng
Shizuki Saruta

Highlights

- Doctoral students learn the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for success in their professional scholarly community.
- In the academic socialisation process within an internationalising academia, doctoral students in Japan are encouraged to integrate into both local and international scholarly communities, which seem mutually disconnected to them.
- Two doctoral students and their supervisor engaged in collaborative dialogue to elicit relevant narratives concerning doctoral 'dual-track' academic socialisation processes in Japan.
- This article illustrates why the students found this dual-track socialisation challenging and the advisor's dilemma in socialising the students in an international community in the Japanese context.

Keywords: Doctoral Students; Doctoral Supervisor; Academic Socialisation; Japan; International Scholarly Community

*Corresponding author's email: sakurai@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-07]

[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.103]

Introduction: Doctoral Education as Academic Socialisation

Taking an autobiographical approach, we—two doctoral students and their supervisor—engaged in collaborative written reflections and present how we made sense of doctoral academic socialisation amid the growing expectation to be internationally active researchers in the Japanese social sciences context. Theoretically, doctoral education is often conceptualised as academic socialisation (e.g., Johnson et al., 2017). Doctoral students gain membership to successfully function as experts by learning the necessary 'values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge' (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 1). Increasing internationalisation encourages doctoral students to integrate themselves into international academic communities with related skills and experience. However, Japanese academic societies in social science are often criticised for failing to meet this expectation. In such an insular context, doctoral students pursuing researcher pathways in Japan fumble with identifying what their socialisation processes should aim for and how they can equip themselves without sufficient training, collegiality, and support. For supervisors who underwent researcher training abroad, it is difficult to ascertain how to support their students at a Japanese institution to socialise amid the disconnection between the local and international academic societies.

Exploring a Sense-Making of Doctoral Students' Socialisation in Japan

Both doctoral students' and supervisors' dilemma in developing as and educating the new generation of researchers in an insular context remain understudied, whilst the literature has often addressed researchers' international socialisation along with their mobility experience (e.g., Véliz, 2020).

The two doctoral students, Shizuki and Wenjuan, are currently enrolled in a doctoral program under Yusuke's supervision. Since Yusuke recently moved to another university, the students started their doctoral studies there too. Here, they shared their researcher training experiences and career prospects.

Shizuki: Internationally-Minded Japanese Student

In my master's program, about half of my peers were from abroad. Since they were excellent in Japanese, I rarely used English, although I learnt how to get along with people from different countries. I also relied on Japanese articles to study my major topic, that is, Japanese language learners. At the new university, one of my peers published their work in international journals; no one had done so at my previous university. My current university offers various opportunities to be 'international': for example, seminars on English presentation skills and financial support for international conferences. Writing support professors help refine my abstracts for international conferences. Yusuke and my university inspired me to write my thesis in English. Yusuke encourages me to share my research output internationally. During my master's studies, I felt like becoming a researcher in Japan, but now I feel like becoming an international researcher.

International experience is advantageous for a successful career, especially in Japanese universities. However, I see international and Japanese academic societies existing separately, since neither encompasses the other. Becoming an internationally active

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-07]

[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.103]

researcher in Japan appears challenging. For example, since most Japanese researchers in my field seldom read English articles, I should write my research articles in both Japanese and English for domestic visibility. I am still uncertain if I can develop my academic skills exclusively in Japan to be qualified as an international researcher. Perhaps, by participating in some international conferences held in Japan, I can enhance my performance, but I worry that I cannot adequately do so only in Japan. I am still ambivalent about travelling abroad.

I should also develop my abilities expected in the Japanese academia. I took a course for Japanese academic writing, and some associations organised events to connect with local researchers. These experiences develop my sense and expertise as a researcher and remind me of the importance of engagement in Japanese academia. I would not want to sever the connections, even if I sojourn abroad. Although challenging, I wish to maintain my networks by writing articles and attending conferences in both languages—maintaining the balance.

Wenjuan: International Student from China

Language is a major concern. In my master's program, I grappled with using two foreign languages, Japanese and English. Most professors there earned doctorates abroad, and their course materials were in English, although Japanese was a language of instruction. My thesis addressed international students' communication, and many useful studies were published in English; however, I wrote my thesis in Japanese. At first, I felt uneasy about why I, majoring in Japanese language education in Japan, needed to read that much in English. However, I gradually realised that I could not have finished my research without English articles. Additionally, concern about my academic practice—getting inputs in English but making outputs entirely in Japanese—has intensified. Therefore, after my doctoral studies began, I started attending academic English writing classes and writing my papers in English. Although I had Yusuke's guidance, I had little understanding of English academic writing. This requires more time and effort, and I am still struggling with it.

I have little exposure to authentic international academic interaction. Under Yusuke's guidance, I participated in international conferences to date; only few students at my prior university did. There is little expectation of a conference presentation from master's students, nor was there a strong expectation of international publications from doctoral students. Yusuke encouraged us to present at international conferences and even practiced with me before my first international presentation. Furthermore, whilst it seems unfeasible to make international outputs without sufficient support, little training opportunities were available in general. Now at the new university, we have more support to polish my academic English and access to international opportunities. Yusuke instructs us on how to find English articles and regularly shares information about international events, which allows me to be in contact with international communities. I see benefits in these experiences for my career. Nowadays, despite my international background (like me as an international student), it is not competitive enough if you have only Japanese publications and have little 'international' experiences in the English-speaking academic communities.

My major concern is how I would simultaneously engage in both Japanese and international academic communities. This directly concerns my language challenge and limited international opportunities in my academic socialisation. For four years in Japan, I have sensed my academic growth and recognised the importance of networking in Japan,

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-07]

[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.103]

too. I am also willing to interact with researchers from other backgrounds for my future advanced research and career. However, few connections exist between these two communities due to differences in languages, cultures, and research outlets. It appears challenging to develop my skills and knowledge required in the two distinct communities within my limited doctoral timeframe.

Yusuke: Returning Home to Japan

After my undergraduate studies in Japan, I completed my graduate studies in Australia and Finland. I had researcher training with Finnish researchers who produced scholarly outputs and participated in international dialogue in English. I too published internationally refereed articles with locals, participated in European conferences, and developed my social network. I felt excited to work with people from diverse backgrounds and exchange unique perspectives. I also appreciated the attitude of egalitarian relationships and sound work-life balance in the Finnish academia. These experiences formulated my educational philosophy in nurturing young researchers.

I regularly share my pedagogical tenets with the students. Since both Shizuki and Wenjuan have been pursuing a career in research, I have encouraged them to read articles written in English and participate in international activities. However, I am sometimes concerned about whether I support their ideal selves, or I merely justify what I have done. Particularly, Wenjuan travelled from China to study in Japan. I occasionally wonder whether my expectation is incompatible with the Japanese academic society, where they might work in the future. I also wonder if it is feasible to train internationally active researchers in the Japanese context. I understand that socialising into international academic societies is unanalogous to becoming an English-speaking researcher, but too much attention has been paid to it in reality. I am uncertain if I have successfully conveyed the value of egalitarian collegiality and sustainable work-life balance in a researcher's career. I believe that the lack of this remains a pressing concern in Japan, although it is hardly practiced in reality.

Dual-Track Socialisation Endeavour in Japan

In our collaborative reflection, we ended up with some lacuna for future inquiry topic—sense-making of academic socialisation in a somewhat insular context. We acknowledge the importance and value of both local and international socialisation, although we feel the communities are largely discrete—values and practices are not compensating each other. Students' motivation for integrating to the global academy originated from the expectation of job market, needs as intellectual sources, and Yusuke's encouragement. Nonetheless, they expressed their concern over the lack of opportunities and local collegial climate for their international socialisation. They noted that publishing their work at international outlets is uncommon in social science, which indicates the scarcity of local peer encouragement. National and institutional encouragement appears clear, but few colleagues nearby do so. While opportunities of academic English training are available, they are still unsure about how they effectively develop in the Japanese context, even just English skills. Yusuke also felt uncertain about his encouragement being egoistic. The academic socialisation literature often argues that students' institution is a place for their knowledge and skill development leading to an academic career (Yao & Vital, 2016). Nevertheless,

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-07]

[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.103]

current Japanese social science research communities fail to effectively support future researchers to socialise into international communities.

Although internationalisation initiatives are obvious in Japan, it seems important for both sides of doctoral dyads to negotiate their mutual expectations and skills required in students' career endeavours. Having Yusuke's support, the two students were invited to the socialisation endeavour to the global academy. In their training processes, Wenjuan's effort in studying as an 'international' doctoral student to be a future 'international' researcher is worthy of attention. Her initial scepticism about Yusuke's expectation of English article reading closely concerns with her ideal future selves and identity formation as a disciplinary expert. Shizuki had an informal advisory relationship with Yusuke before her doctoral admission. Their negotiation processes in responding external expectation of internationalisation remain unclear. Our two students were positive about engaging in international scholarly activities, but there are also students who are content with exploring their subject entirely in their comfort zone. Little is known about how they see the current national and institutional expectation for internationalisation.

Our dialogue delved into our experiences of training and being trained as internationally-oriented researchers in a Japanese context. Practices and memberships appear disconnected in many respects between international and local communities, such as in terms of values, languages, and community members. Since their peers in social sciences hardly share the same socialisation destination, they need to independently grapple with their challenges exclusively with the supervisor's support in addition to institutional technical support. Globalisation may make academic socialisation processes 'multi-track'. There seems little understanding of how both novice and experienced researchers engage in the processes, if two societies are distinct. The literature has barely addressed internationally-oriented supervisors' sense-making of their advisory practices in such an insular context. Our dialogue allowed us to reflect upon some timely, emerging issues of internationalising higher education, which, we believe, is also relevant in other non-English speaking countries. Research should shed light on their challenges in navigating doctoral students' 'dual-track' socialisation in similar contexts.

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-07]

[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.103]

Colloquium

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

This work was supported by JSPS under KAKENHI Grant [Number 20K14025].

Human Participants

The authors developed this article based on their own narratives. All authors have agreed on articulating their views in this publication. Further ethical considerations are observed in alignment with the authors' institution.

Originality Note

The authors confirm that the manuscript is their original work, and if others' works are used, they are properly cited/quoted.

References

Johnson, C. M., Ward, K. A., & Gardner, S. K. (2017). Doctoral student socialization. In J. C. Shin, & P. Teixeira (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of international higher education systems and institutions* (pp. 1-4). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9553-1_296-1

Véliz, D. (2020). The socialization of international doctoral students in the USA. In J. C. Weidman, & L. DeAngelo (Eds.), *Socialization in higher education and the early career: Theory, research and application* (pp. 149-160). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33350-8_9

Yao, C. W., & Vital, L. M. (2016). "I don't think I'm prepared": Perceptions of U.S. higher education doctoral students on international research preparation. *Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education*, *1*, 197-214. https://www.jspte.org/Volume1/JSPTEv1p197-214Yao2521.pdf

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-07]

[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.103]

Dr. Yusuke SAKURAI is currently Associate Professor at Hiroshima University, Hiroshima, Japan. He received a PhD from the University of Helsinki, Finland. His main areas of interest are pedagogy in higher education, university students' learning, and support for early career researchers, with recent emphasis on the experiences of international doctoral students and early career researchers. His work explores the challenges and opportunities faced by these groups, including their sense of knowledge and intellectual development, well-being, and career visions. He has been involved in various projects and initiatives to enhance the support and development of early career researchers in international academic environments. He has studied and worked in several countries, including Thailand, Australia, Malaysia, Egypt, Finland, and Japan.

Ms. Wenjuan CHENG is an international PhD candidate at Hiroshima University in Hiroshima, Japan. Her research focuses on the internationalisation of higher education, with a particular interest in doctoral education and the development of early career researchers in the context of globalisation. Her current doctoral project examines the academic publishing experiences of Japanese doctoral students.

Ms. Shizuki SARUTA is a Ph.D. student at Hiroshima University in Japan. Her work focuses on the psychology of Japanese language learners. She worked as a Japanese language teacher after receiving her master's degree from her previous university. Her recent research interests include international researchers' Japanese learning and their motivation to learn.

[Downloaded from www.johepal.com on 2026-11-07]

[DOI: 10.61186/johepal.5.2.103]

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) which allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator.