

NEW PATHS FOR SOCIAL ADAPTATION IN TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION: THE CASE OF A MIGRANT COMMUNITY IN TOKYO, JAPAN

Mitsuko ONO and Nuntiya DOUNGPHUMMES (both Mahidol University, Thailand)*

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Summary

This article aims to research the process of international migrants' adaptation in terms of the interactive communication between migrants and their host society, using the concepts of "social cohesion" and "integrative communication theory" as communicative methodologies. This study intends to explore the new paths for global migrants' adaptation through such an investigation through the case of a migrant community in Japan. The significant theoretical issue in the research on the adaptation of global migrants is the discussion of the "segmented assimilation theory" proposed by PORTES and ZHOU (1993). Assimilation theory is fundamentally a one-way approach, as its perspective is essentially placed on only the host society. Thus, the authors deem it necessary to research the adaptation of international migrants in different dimensions.

* Mitsuko ONO, Ph.D., M.A., Lecturer (first author) and Nuntiya DOUNGPHUMMES, Ph.D., M.A., Associate Professor (corresponding author), both: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (RILCA), Mahidol University, Salaya Campus, 999 Phuttamonthon sai 4 Road, Salaya, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand.
– Emails: Mitsuko.ono@mahidol.edu, nuntiya.dou@mahidol.ac.th.

This research employed an ethnographic approach to collect qualitative data at the research site in Tokyo, where the most significant migrant community in Japan is located. The data collection methods include fieldwork visits, interviews, and participant observation between 2020 and 2022. The study applied a communicative approach to the migrants' adaptation, focusing on the interaction with the host society and on the experiences of individual migrants. Results particularly point to if there is a certain extent of ethnic strength in the host society, even if migrants experience rejection, it helps foster positive communication with locals and the host society. However, it was also found that for this to be the case, a certain degree of acceptance experience is necessary, and it is essential that the host society has an openness to strangers. Moreover, such a research framework allows us to examine the possibility of transcending the limitations of categorical views such as "adaptation/non-adaptation" of migrants in host society.

Keywords: Adaptation of migrants, social cohesion, segmented assimilation theory, Japan, Tokyo

Zusammenfassung

NEUE WEGE DER SOZIALEN ANPASSUNG IN DER TRANSNATIONALEN MIGRATION. FALLSTUDIE EINER MIGRANTENGEMEINSCHAFT IN TOKIO, JAPAN

Dieser Artikel zielt darauf ab, den Anpassungsprozess internationaler Migranten in Hinblick auf die interaktive Kommunikation zwischen Migranten und ihrer Aufnahmegesellschaft zu untersuchen, wobei die Konzepte des „sozialen Zusammenhalts“ und der „integrativen Kommunikationstheorie“ als kommunikative Methoden verwendet werden. In diesem Sinn sollen im Rahmen der vorliegenden Untersuchung neue Wege und Perspektiven der Anpassung globaler Migranten am Beispiel einer Migrantengemeinschaft in Japan analysiert werden. Ein signifikantes theoretisches Konzept in der Forschung über die Anpassung globaler Migranten ist die von PORTES und ZHOU (1993) vorgeschlagene „segmentierte Assimilationstheorie“. Die Assimilationstheorie ist im Grunde ein einseitiger Ansatz, da ihre Perspektive im Wesentlichen nur auf die Aufnahmegesellschaft gerichtet ist. Die Autoren halten es daher für notwendig, die Anpassung internationaler Migranten in verschiedenen Dimensionen zu untersuchen.

In dieser Studie wurde ein ethnographischer Ansatz verwendet, um qualitative Daten am Forschungsstandort Tokio zu erheben, wo sich die größte Migrantengemeinschaft Japans befindet. Die Methoden der Datenerhebung umfassen Geländearbeit und Besuche vor Ort, Interviews und teilnehmende Beobachtung zwischen 2020 und 2022. In der Studie wird ein kommunikativen Ansatz zur Analyse der Anpassung der Migranten angewendet, der sich auf die Interaktion mit der Aufnahmegesellschaft und auf die Erfahrungen der einzelnen Migranten konzentriert. Die Ergebnisse weisen insbesondere darauf hin, dass ein gewisses Maß an ethnischer Stärke in der Aufnahmegesellschaft, selbst wenn Migranten Ablehnung erfahren, die positive Kommunikation mit den Einheimischen und der Aufnahmegesellschaft fördert. Darüber hinaus erlaubt uns ein solcher Forschungsrahmen, zu untersuchen, welche Möglichkeiten bestehen, die Grenzen kategorischer Ansichten wie „Anpassung / Nichtanpassung von Migranten“ in der Aufnahmegesellschaft zu überwinden.

Schlagwörter: Anpassung von Migranten, sozialer Zusammenhalt, Segmentierte Assimilationstheorie, Japan, Tokio

1 Introduction

The flow of transnational migration has increased with globalisation since the late 1990s. According to IOM's World Migration Report 2022, the number of international migrants has increased in all UN regions. Specifically, it has increased significantly in Europe and Asia compared to other regions. Asia experienced the most remarkable growth from 2000 to 2020, at 74 percent, around 37 million people in absolute terms. Reflecting on this social phenomenon, international migration is a complex global issue. In social science, global migration has been researched with the adaptation process into the host society. The research on the adaptation of global migrants primarily discusses the framework of the "segmented assimilation theory" proposed by PORTES and ZHOU (1993). This theoretical concept presumes three assimilation patterns as consequences of the social mobility of the subsequent second migrant generation. However, it has been criticised and modified by many previous studies up until now, and it is still a controversial discussion that remains unresolved (YAMANOUÉ 2022). In addition, assimilation theory is fundamentally a one-way approach as its perspective is essentially placed on only the host society (VERTOVEC 2009; DOUNGPHUMMES et al. 2021). Also, some scholars have pointed out the limitation of segmented assimilation theory arguing that it ignores some cases which cannot explain the hypothesis (KARIMI and WILKES 2023; STEPICK and STEPICK 2010; ZHOU 1997). Thus, the authors deem it necessary to explore the adaptation of international migrants in different dimensions.

The Japanese society referred to in this article is known as a non-immigrant society that has never officially accepted migrant workers. However, the population of foreigners has been increasing. In the late 1980s, due to economic growth, the number of foreign workers coming to Japan from neighbouring Asian countries in search of work increased rapidly. In addition, the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which was revised in 1990 to allow the issuance of a new category of visa with work eligibility to people of Japanese descent from South America, brought in many people, mainly from Brazil and Peru, and as a result, the foreign population in Japan increased rapidly and became more diverse in ethnicity (ONO 2020). The number of foreigners in Japan continued to grow, and according to data from the Japanese Immigration Service Agency Report from 2005 to 2021, the number exceeded the 2 million mark for the first time in 2005. In 2011 and 2012, the number temporarily declined due to the Great East Japan Earthquake. However, it has been on the rise again, with statistics for 2021 showing the foreign population at approximately 2.76 million. The foreign population, which has continued to grow, has gradually become more established and settled in the region after significant life events such as marriage and childbirth. Today, it is increasingly important to welcome them as local community members (ONO 2020).

The Japanese government responded to the rising of the foreign population by refusing entry to overseas immigrants under its official "closed-door" immigration policy (PENG 2016). However, Japan has been accepting a significant number of immigrants unofficially

using the “side-door” policy, which allows company trainees, students, entertainers, and ethnic Japanese foreigners, or “*Nikkeijin*”¹⁾, to do unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, enabling the country to manage labour shortages in manufacturing and service sector industries while maintaining the official non-immigration policy. Since the 1990s, the Japanese government has been changing its position on allowing entry to immigrants because of the increase in visibility of the *Nikkeijin* and other foreign-born populations in the local community (PENG 2016).

While the social issues have predominantly been the main concern and focus of studies surrounding international migration in Japanese society, their “Invisible Settlement” as described by KAJITA et al. (2005), makes it challenging to capture these migrants’ lives, mainly how they manage to adapt in this monolithic culture of Japan. In order to capture the nuance of these migrants’ adaptation, this ethnographic study focuses on investigating the critical component of cross-cultural adaptation – the interactive communication between migrants and their host society (KIM 2001). It chooses a migrant community in the Okubo area in Japan, which is the biggest migrant community in Tokyo, as a field site. The study also incorporates the concept of “social cohesion” as a broad framework to explore paths of global migrants’ adaptation. Social cohesion theory uses several specific indices to investigate the linkages between social cohesion and socio-cultural and economic factors in increasingly diverse societies. The use of specific indices contributes to this complex global phenomenon of migration.

2 The Communicative Approach to the Social Adaptation of Transnational Migrants

The study of the adaptation of international migrants in host societies began in the 1920s with the Chicago School of Sociology (see, e.g., ANDERSON 1923; ZORBAUGH 1929; GANS 1962), and it has continued to be investigated for nearly a century to the present day in the field of social science. In these studies, the central theme of immigrants’ social integration in host societies has been analysed using the “assimilation” theory as the central approach. Assimilation theory was originally formulated by Robert E. PARK (cf. PARK 1914; PARK et al. 1925), and it later emerged as a series of operational concepts with the analytical concept in the book “Assimilation in American Life” (1964), which Milton GORDON wrote. According to MURAI (2011), GORDON classified the assimilation process into the following seven dimensions: cultural/ behavioural assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identificatory assimilation, attitude-receptional assimilation, behaviour-receptional assimilation and civic assimilation, and discusses that complete assimilation is accomplished by marital assimilation, i.e., international marriage (MURAI 2011, p. 97).

Following GORDON’s study, various academics participated in considering his assimilation theory. However, as DOUNGPHUMMES and ZARCHI (2021) point out, GORDON’s model was criticised as being simplistic and unidirectional, thus setting off academic debates

¹⁾ The descendants of Japanese emigrants to Brazil, Peru, and other countries are given special long-term stay visas.

that led to the incorporation of more significant variables and the projection of more complex outcomes. For example, the “Segmented Assimilation Theory” formulated by Alejandro PORTES and Min ZHOU (1993) has been referred to in the research of second-generation Asian migrants in the United States. In the segmented assimilation theory, three patterns are assumed as consequences of subsequent second generations: assimilation into the white middle class (upward mobility), upward mobility maintaining ethnic culture/language, and downward assimilation (YAMANOUÉ 2022).

The segmented assimilation theory has been criticised as unscientific in the following points: Firstly it observes different data sets in the construction of hypotheses. In addition, Asian Americans and some other ethnic groups tend to move upwards while maintaining a strong sense of ethnic belonging, but they are explained as an “exception” in the theory. KARIM and WILKES (2023, p. 23) state: “Instead of abandoning its hypotheses of upward or downward mobility when faced with adverse evidence, segmented assimilation creates a chain of exceptions and has, thereby, become an unfalsifiable theory that wants to explain all outcomes.”

Also, VERTOVEC (2009) points out that until the mid-1990s, research in the field of international migration tended to focus on the impact of migrants on host societies, and research was conducted with the frame of investigation only on the host society side. For example, there was a tendency to examine how migrants adapt to or do not adapt to the host society and how the host society is or is not transformed by the impact of migrants on the host society. However, with the increase in globalisation since the late 1990s, the patterns of migrant activities have changed as migrants often go back and forth between their countries of origin and host societies regularly, and research has begun in Western countries to understand transnational migrant behaviour or patterns of activity within the framework of “transnationalism” (VERTOVEC 2009).

Numerous academics have adopted the concept of transnationalism to explain migrants’ transnational way of life and their social activity. Transnationalism is a concept which helps to understand transnational migrants who have diversified their social activity patterns alongside the spread of globalisation. Transnationalism assumes the influence of both the host society and the migrant’s country of origin, and the transnational practices of the migrants across two countries are essential from an analysis perspective. The transnational lifestyles of migrants and the transnational networks formed by such practices have also been clarified (BASCH et al. 1994; SMITH and GUARNIZO 1998; SMITH and EADE 2008; VERTOVEC 2009).

Though “assimilation”, or “transnationalism”, has been a significant concept in the field of study on the international migrant, “social cohesion” (hereafter, SC) has emerged as a significant concept in dealing with immigrants in English-speaking countries in recent years. According to HEALY et al. (2016), since the mid-1990s, there has been an increasing interest in the issue of social cohesion among academics and policymakers and in public commentary. In 2011, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) hosted the International Conference on Social Cohesion.

In Australia, The Scanlon Foundation has conducted an extensive survey called “Mapping Social Cohesion” annually since 2007. The foundation introduced the “Scanlon Monash Index” (hereafter, SMI) to measure five domains that conceptualise social cohe-

sion: Belongings, worth, social justice, political participation, and acceptance/ rejection (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute 2022).

Social cohesion is usually applied to measure behaviour within a socially diverse community, and immigrants are one of the crucial elements of such communities. MIZUKAMI (2016) focuses on Japan's social cohesion related to immigration issues. He argues:

“Social cohesion also interrelates with the way in which immigrants and minority groups become participants in social life and therefore in their relations with the citizens of the host nation. In some areas, ethnic businesses have been prosperous, but this prosperity has not always been shared by local communities. In fact, some surveys have shown that Japanese communities now need a renewed understanding of social cohesion or need to develop a new sense of solidarity to aid in the revitalization of inner cities.” (MIZUKAMI 2016, p. 33, p. 44)

The literature discussed above shows that social cohesion is related to immigration issues as it places great importance on the relationship between immigrants and their host society. It also suggests that local communities need to build relationships with immigrants. Through this discussion, it is apparent that developing a new sense of solidarity or belonging, such as social cohesion, can affect the revitalisation of local communities.

This study focuses on the difference in perspective between the concept of assimilation and social cohesion. Whereas the assimilation concept essentially explains the adaptation process to migrants' host society, social cohesion can be described as a concept that aims at a new community model built through the interaction between migrants and the host society. In this sense, the concept of social cohesion can embrace a more communicative approach, and the authors refer to social cohesion to analyse current transnational migration. The participants in our study include migrants who are treated as “exception” in segmented assimilation theory, i. e., those who upwardly move with a sense of ethnic belonging rather than a mainstream identity. Incorporating social cohesion as an analytical framework helps shed light on their “real-life” adaptation experiences rather than simply labelling them as the “exception”.

In the field of intercultural communication studies, on the other hand, DOUNGPHUMMES and ZARCHI (2021) focus on KIM's (2001) integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation as his theory attempts to capture in one conceptual framework the communication between migrants and host societies, which has been analysed in two separate approaches, anthropological and psychological. KIM (2001) argues the importance of “host communication competence” to cross-cultural adaptation. The adaptation succeeds only when the strangers' internal communication system overlaps with the natives. Thus, for immigrants and sojourners, the linguistic symbols, codes and meanings of the host communication system must be learned and internalised (KIM 2001). These abilities are collectively identified in her argument as “host communication competence”.

In addition to the focus on interpersonal communication and mass communication activities as the key elements that constitute the concept of host communication competence, KIM (2001) argues that “interpersonal communication activities involving native-born members of the host environment, in particular, play a vital role in the cross-cultural ad-

adaptation process” (p. 75). Moreover, she focuses on host environment conditions, which include host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength, together with the internal conditions of strangers themselves, including preparedness for change, ethnic proximity, and adaptive personality as significant phenomena that affect interpersonal communication activities. The authors think KIM’s theory is rather comprehensive in the aspect of cross-cultural adaptation as it addresses both the migrant’s communicative competence and the host’s receptive factors, such as conformity pressure, that influence the adaptation. So basically, it includes both the migrant and host involvement in the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

Through these arguments related to international migrants’ social adaptation, the authors deem it significant to research how the recent international immigrant, who is characterised as having transnational practices, builds a relationship with the host society. This article refers to the following two perspectives as conceptual backgrounds: the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) that constitutes the concept of social cohesion and KIM’s argument for cross-cultural adaptation, in particular, the focus on the interactive communication between immigrants and the Japanese, and the socio-cultural conditions of Japanese society. Together, these conceptual backgrounds form the foundation of this study that aims to capture the interaction between transnational immigrants and their host society concerning socio-cultural structure.

3 Research Methods

This research employed an ethnographic approach to collect qualitative data in the migrant community called “Islamic area” in Okubo, Tokyo. The data collection methods included conversational interviews and participant observations, which were carried out between 2020 to 2022 by a Japanese researcher (one of the authors). Notably, the researcher has established a rapport with the people in the community since her doctoral research work that spanned from 2012–2016. The 2020 project was thus grounded on the rapport which allowed her to enter the participants’ lives without being seen as intrusive.

3.1 Participants

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants. They were migrants living and working in Okubo’s Muslim community. Conversational interviews and participant observations were conducted with seven participants: three Nepalese, two Indian, and two Bangladeshi. Three Nepalese were Hindu males and all other participants were Muslim males, with three participants residing in Okubo for more than 20 years and speaking fluent Japanese and four living in the area between two to six years with limited Japanese linguistic ability. In terms of age, only one was below 40 years, three participants were between 41–50 years, and three were above 50 years. Three of them were business owners, and four worked as shop assistants. One shop was owned by an Indian, one was owned by a Bangladeshi, and one shop was run by a Nepalese. Only one was married

to a Japanese, and the other six were married to a woman of their nationality. Their education backgrounds varied from a high school level to a master's degree in a Japanese university.

P*	Sex	Age	Nationality	Married to	Length of stay in Japan	Japanese linguistic ability	Occupation	Educational Background	Length of interview time
<i>a</i>	male	57	Nepal	Nepalese woman	22 years	fluent	business owner	master's degree in a Japanese university	120 min.
<i>b</i>	male	62	India	Japanese women	35 years	fluent	business owner	high school in India	120 min.
<i>c</i>	male	46	Bangladesh	Bangladesh woman	28 years	fluent	business owner	master's degree in a Japanese university	100 min.
<i>d</i>	male	60	India	Indian woman	not sure	cannot speak	works for the halal shop of <i>b</i>	not sure	approximately 30 min.
<i>e</i>	male	28	Bangladesh	Bangladesh woman	1 year and several months	cannot speak	works for the halal shop of <i>c</i>	not sure	approximately 20 min.
<i>f</i>	male	not sure	Nepal	Nepalese woman	6 years	very limited	works for the halal shop of <i>a</i>	high school in Nepal	approximately 30 min.
<i>g</i>	male	38	Nepal	Nepalese woman	6 years	very limited	works for the halal shop of <i>a</i>	high school in Nepal	approximately 40 min.

P* ... number of the interviewed participant

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The main content areas focused on the migrants' lives in Japanese society, how well they adapted to the host society, i. e., their sense of belonging and what facilitated or impeded them from being part of the society. Open-ended questions and extensive participant observations were used. The actual interviews and participant observations were conducted between 2020 to 2022. All interviews took place in either the participants' workplaces (shops) or on the road while the participants were working. Each participant was interviewed a few times for 30–120 minutes. For those who could speak Japanese fluently, each interview took between 1.30 to 2 hours, and for those who could not, the interviews were conducted in English, often between 20–30 minutes.

These interviews were conversational, during which the researcher participated in the participants' daily routines, such as selling products and doing encounter services. Interviewing notes and observation data were written right after each interview was finished and the researcher had left the interviewee. Written notes and observation data were then preliminarily analysed before the subsequent visits and interviews. The second and third interviews were conducted to gain more in-depth knowledge of certain issues and to cross-check the accuracy of previously obtained information. These following visits served two purposes: to reconfirm the previous findings and to continuously engage with the participants' social life.

3.3 Data Analysis

The interview and observation data were translated into English by the Japanese researcher. Both researchers first read the translated scripts and then analysed the themes using the inter-coding technique and the theoretical concepts of social cohesion in connection with cross-cultural adaptation. During this stage, the researchers cross-checked their codes and analytical themes to ensure consistency of interpretation and avoid bias. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities. Notably, in the data interpretation process, the researcher, who was not Japanese, played a crucial role in helping verify the findings through an intercultural lens. SASIWONGSAROJ et al. (2024) clarify the advantages of cross-national teams in transnational migration research.

4 Overview of the Okubo Migrant Community in Tokyo, Japan

The research site, Okubo, is one of the small areas in Shinjuku, Tokyo and is the biggest migrant community in Japan. Over 80 percent of the foreign population lives in the heart of Tokyo, including the central business districts. According to the Tokyo Statistics Division, Bureau of General Affairs, Shinjuku has the highest number of foreign populations with 40,279 people in 2023. Shinjuku with a foreign population ratio of 11.4 percent is the only district in Tokyo with a foreign population of more than 10 percent. Interestingly, this situation has stayed the same after covid-19 pandemic.

Looking at the foreign population in Okubo area, according to the statistics data of Shinjuku, the percentage of foreign population of the total population in Okubo area in recent years accounts for 40 to 45 percent (Shinjuku City report from 2019 to 2023). This percentage indicates that one in two or three people is a foreigner. In addition, the foreigner ratio in Okubo area of the foreign population in Shinjuku accounts for over 30 percent in recent years, which indicates that over one-third of total foreign residents in the Shinjuku ward live in Okubo area. From these situations, the Okubo area has been focused by academics and policy makers since the inflow of migrant workers has been a controversial debate in the Japanese society as its contradiction with the non-immigrant country image.

The historical evolution of Okubo provides an understanding of why it has become the biggest migrant community in Japan. ONO (2020) is familiar with Okubo's history with

migrant workers. After the mid-1950s, it was known as a “bedroom town” for domestic migrant workers. The Okubo area is in Shinjuku in Tokyo — one of the biggest commercial areas in Japan and where a world-famous amusement district named Kabukicho is located. When Kabukicho was constructed in 1957, Japan was in the midst of a period of rapid economic growth, and young people from rural areas migrated to central Tokyo in search of work. Kabukicho was no exception. Okubo began becoming a popular residential area for domestic migrant workers from rural areas because of its convenient location near Kabukicho. Also, according to INABA (2008), there was an area called the “wooden apartment belt”. In the 1950s and 1960s, it became an urban area with a high concentration of wooden apartments (INABA 2008, pp. 54–55).

In the 1980s, however, it became the “bedroom town” for transnational migrant workers as there was an increasing number of foreign workers living in the wooden apartments in Okubo. This was due to the unprecedented economic boom in Japan in the mid-to-late 1980s. During this period, Japan, especially the urban areas in and around Tokyo, attracted many workers from neighbouring Asian countries. These migrants chose the inner cities as their places of living. In addition, there was a growing number of foreign students in the Okubo area due mainly to the Japanese government policy, namely the “100,000 Foreign Students Plan”. These students usually rented rooms in affordable wooden apartments in the Okubo area, which had been prepared for domestic migrant workers in the past.

The immigration of those foreigners has transformed Okubo into the most significant migrant community in Tokyo. In recent years, Okubo has been lined with various ethnic-owned businesses, and at mealtimes and on weekends, the main road in the Okubo area, Okubo Street, is crowded with foreigners and Japanese. Although Okubo is commonly known as a Korean town, it is, in fact, a multicultural space including Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese areas, a mixture of various ethnic business areas, and predominantly Islamic business areas. To illustrate the multicultural image of Okubo, we briefly present the description of those four areas.

First, the Korean town can be seen as a compact version of Myeongdong, the downtown area of Seoul, South Korea. Its area is lined with Korean restaurants, relatively large supermarkets selling Korean foodstuffs, Korean cosmetics shops and shops selling clothes and accessories bought from Korea (see Figure 1). Second, the Chinese and Taiwanese areas are also lined with food shops, restaurants, bookshops, and internet cafés, mainly on the main street (Okubo Street). Unlike Korean Town, there are fewer shops selling cosmetics and clothing in the Chinese and Taiwanese areas compared to Korean Town. Third, multicultural streets are where people run various businesses from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Thai, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Bangladeshi, and Japanese. Lastly, the Islamic area is where halal food shops (see Figure 2), halal restaurants and mosques are located. There are also Nepalese restaurants run by Nepalese and mobile phone shops run by Indians and Bangladeshis. The Islamic area is a busy place with people of South Asian and African descent, including those from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

As mentioned above, from the 1950s to the 1980s, Okubo was a bedroom town for domestic migrant workers and later for migrant workers and international students, mainly



Source: Taken by the author in 2021

Figure 1: Korean restaurants on Okubo Street



Source: Taken by the author in 2021

Figure 2: The halal grocery in Okubo run by an Indian business man

from neighbouring Asian countries. From the 1990s to the present, Okubo has become a famous “ethnic town” in Japan, housing various ethnic groups and businesses, including Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Nepalese, Myanmar, Bangladeshi, Indian and Thai. Nowadays, Okubo is an area that many people – both foreigners and Japanese – have visited at least once. Okubo is a place where migrants seek their own culture and for Japanese people to gather in search of foreign cultural experiences.

KIM (2001) points out the vital role of interpersonal communication activities for immigrants’ cross-cultural adaptation in the host society. This includes the element of “host receptivity” as an environmental condition in the host society that influences interpersonal communication activities. She argues that “host receptivity is reflected in the degree to which a given environment is open to, welcomes, and accepts strangers into its social communication networks and offers them various forms of social support” (KIM 2001, p. 79).

In this sense, Okubo’s historical and socio-cultural background shows that Okubo has accepted strangers from Japan and overseas since the 1950s. Okubo’s multicultural history has facilitated the openness towards people from different ethnic backgrounds, as exhibited by the Japanese living in the area. This way, the town has been functioning as a gateway for foreigners.

5 Results

In this section, the data from the conversational interviews and participant observations in the Okubo area is provided and analysed to examine how the participant, as a transnational migrant, is able to connect with the host society and gain access to social networks. Furthermore, the data provided is aligned with the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI), which constitutes social cohesion. Regarding the SMI index, the authors focus on the aspects of “political participation” and “acceptance/ rejection”. Also, focusing on the “host environment condition”, including “ethnic strength” and “host conformity pressure” the index is a key aspect for cross-cultural adaptation based on KIM’s theory.

5.1 Ethnic Group Strength

Participant *a* has been running his business in Okubo area for 16 years since he established his own company and opened a halal food grocery in 2008. He has frequently travelled between Japan and Nepal. He has written and posted various articles based on his experience in Japan and his articles gained readership in Nepalese communities in both Japan and Nepal. He has also been an executive in a Nepalese association in Japan and has dealt with social issues in Nepal.

“Working for the Nepalese Association in Japan, I am in charge of the activities that support the education of Nepalese children. We are working with schools and education-related government agencies in Nepal, receiving data and investigating the family problems of children who do not attend school.” (Participant a)

Participant *b* opened his halal shop in Okubo in 2001. When he opened his shop (the first shop) in this area, there was only one halal shop in Okubo. Soon after opening the first shop, he opened the second one, larger than the first one. After that, he established his own company, which led to the expansion of other businesses, such as a halal restaurant and a mobile phone sales shop. In terms of management, the company employed around 15 people, all his relatives. Since opening his halal shop, he has gradually brought in relatives from India. In addition, he was also the owner of a mosque for foreigners, which was located just in front of his shop.

“The people who come to the mosque are all foreigners, from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, and Malaysia, and most of them are from Bangladesh. There are no Japanese, and the mosque is not related to Japanese society.” (Participant *b*)

Participant *c* established his company in Okubo in 2009. His first business was an internet and mobile company, and after that, he opened a halal grocery in 2014 in the same area. His halal grocery is small, the same as many other ethnic groceries. According to his interview data, his shop has grown into a halal grocery that sells nearly 100 million yen in its fifth year of operation. He was also a member of the Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Board in Japan. The association organised a large Bangladeshi food festival in Tokyo once a year. The festival was held in a park close to Ikebukuro station in Tokyo. It was attended by Bangladeshis in Japan and Japanese people from the neighbourhood, who could enjoy Bangladeshi food and culture.

As the interview data above shows, it can be considered as an example of “ethnic group strength”, which constitutes the host environment conditions as participants *a* and *c* act as directors of associations of the migrants’ communities, and *b* is the manager of an immigrant religious institution. Such aggressive self-assertion and participation in ethnic group activity serve to promote cross-community building. In addition, it can be seen to strengthen ethnicity or collective ethnic identity. Such “ethnic group strength” affects the degree of social adaptation to the host society.

5.2 Political Participation

Political participation more generally refers to voluntary activities people undertake to influence public policies, either directly or through selecting persons who make policies. There are fewer opportunities for transnational migrants to participate in such political activities in their host society, as foreigners in Japan do not have the right to vote in elections. Also, the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) defines political participation as including the activity of getting together with others to try to resolve a local problem. Thus, this section highlights activities that include direct political activity and other activities connected to the local communities or their issues.

First, the three halal groceries discussed in this article have been operating in Okubo for over ten years and represent halal groceries in Okubo. However, they do not participate in local associations such as the Okubo Neighbourhood Community Association (hereafter

NCA) or the local Merchants' Association. For example, *b* and *c* were not even aware of their existence. Okubo NCA does not simply exclude foreign shops, as many Korean restaurants are now members of the NCA. However, there are significant differences between the Korean community in Japan, which has a long history dating back to before World War II, and Southeast Asian migrants who came in late 1980. On the other hand, *a* is aware of the existence of such local associations but chooses not to join them. He states, "Membership of local merchants' association does not work for our business. For the Japanese, halal groceries are like 'spice museums'. They come to look but do not buy." However, *b* and *c*, for example, expressed a willingness to join if invited by the local community. The interview data showed that they expect building good relations with the local community to be good for their business. Also, other participants in this study were not aware of its existence.

Interestingly, participant *a* has participated in different types of local activities for a long time. He has participated in two community events held by the Okubo NCA: a cleanup activity and a disaster-prevention activity. He talked about his participation in the cleanup activity as follows:

"I have been participating in the cleanup activity for many years. I enjoy the activity as it gives me the opportunity to communicate with other people living in Okubo and to be an acquaintance with the staff at the local government. Communicating with people in the community is suitable for foreigners and businesses. Also, foreigners' way of throwing out rubbish is seen as not good manners. I want to show the Japanese living here that I, as a foreigner, pick up trash on the road and don't dispose of rubbish irresponsibly." (Participant *a*)

The participant's active involvement in community activities has given him the opportunity to interact and develop his network with Japanese people living in the Okubo area. Moreover, he intended to alter the Japanese perception of migrant behaviour related to the manner of rubbish disposal through his participation in the cleanup activity.

5.3 Acceptance/ Rejection

The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) refers to the following items as the domain of acceptance/ rejection: experienced discrimination, assistance in maintaining customs and traditions, and a sense of pessimism about the future. This section focuses on the interview data related to the participants' sense of acceptance and rejection. Two participants talked about the connection between the host community:

"There is less opportunity for migrants to communicate with people in the local community. However, Japanese people here do not pay too much attention to us because there are many foreigners in Okubo, so living with foreigners here is normal for them." (Participant *a*)

"In my case, it wasn't that hard to find a place to shop. The current shop location is rented from a Japanese owner, who could not find a lender for the property

for more than six months, and when I applied, the owner was happy to say yes.”
(Participant c)

These two accounts indicate a sense of acceptance the migrants cultivate in the host society. In particular, the experience of participant c can be considered as an indication of “being accepted” by the host society, as it is very difficult for a foreigner to sign a rental contract for a property owned by a Japanese. This acceptance could be because people in Okubo have accumulated experience encountering immigrants from other parts of Japan and overseas for more than half a century. Also, participants f and g explained that their communication with the Japanese was limited to occasional interactions with Japanese customers and Japanese delivery people when purchasing goods, but “they are all good people”.

However, the participants sometimes detected a sense of rejection as reflected by these participants’ accounts.

“The ethnic businesses gathered, and the Japanese ran away from Okubo. This is because they were beginning to dislike foreigners, and some of them could not maintain their businesses in such ethnic towns.” (Participant a)

“What I think is that the Japanese do not want to get close to us. They do not want us to be one of the members of Japanese society. For example, our shop and the Japanese shop have a completely different atmosphere. The way we display the products is different from Japanese. Sometimes we display our products in the shop front. Our customers and shop staff talk a lot and sometimes loudly. The Japanese do not think this kind of atmosphere is good. They may think that they come from abroad, do business here (Okubo), succeed and steal customers from the Japanese.” (Participant c)

One of them also expressed his frustration in searching for his new office. He said that although he found several vacant buildings, his application was all rejected because of he was not a Japanese.

These participants felt a sense of rejection from the way the Japanese ran away from the area because of the immigrants’ social or cultural events and being treated with inequality in the property rental scheme without any logical or legal explanation. However, feeling rejected has motivated some to try to conform to the host culture, such as participating in the host community cleanup activity because, as KIM (2001, p. 79) explains, “host conformity pressure” influences the communication activity of strangers and it challenges the strangers to adapt to the host culture and communication system”.

6 Discussion

This study intends to investigate the new paths of social adaptation for transnational migrants by applying the communicative approach, which focuses on the interaction between transnational migrants and their host society. In this investigation, the authors specifically refer to the concept of social cohesion and KIM’s (2001) integrative communication the-

ory. Furthermore, in such investigation, ethnographic research is applied to analyse their interaction with the analysis of socio-cultural social structures.

The findings of this study show that migrants who have been long-term residents of the host society for more than ten years, have good Japanese language skills and are successful in their ethnic businesses expressed stronger experiences of rejection in the host society than those who have not. However, these participants uniformly expressed active participation/ willingness to participate in local activities in the host society. This may at first sight seem contradictory, but referring to KIM's theory, the experience of rejection in the host society (conformity pressure) may encourage migrants' effort of social participation.

It is important to note here the factors under which conformity pressure becomes a driving force for social participation rather than hostility toward the host society. The participants in this study have strong experiences of rejection as well as some experiences of acceptance, which are premised on a "tolerance to the stranger", backed up by the immigration history of the target area, Okubo. KIM (2001) advocates the significance of interpersonal communication activities to cross-cultural adaptation for international migrants and posits host receptivity as the key determinant of interpersonal communication activities. The notion of host receptivity in this research involves, at a macro level, the historical development of a town revolving around migration, and at a micro level, community involvement and personal experience with the locals.

In the context of new community models in the age of international migration, it is vital to have such a system that supports the formation and maintenance of "ethnic strength" and ethnic communities based on the assumption that the host society is open to strangers. If a community is formed to a certain extent, the result of "host conformity pressure" may not simply be antagonism toward the host society, but, as the Okubo example shows, may lead to "harmony" behaviours, in which people try to present themselves as good members of the host society. However, this study suggests that what is important here is the host society's tolerance toward strangers.

In segmented assimilation, factors contributing to upward and downward mobility for each migrant group include "modes of incorporation", specifically government policy in the host country/ society, the existence and extent of prejudice against the migrant group, and the size and structure of the ethnic community. The need for governmental schemes to support the strengthening of ethnic communities, the experience of acceptance/ rejection of migrants and the contribution to migrant associations were equally essential factors in this study. In addition, the results of this study further suggest that "tolerance of the host society" could be added as an important key factor in the host reception environment. However, the limited number of participants in this study requires continuing larger-scale ethnographic research in the future.

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