

## Introduction

# JAPAN AS AN ETHNO-NATIONALIST IMMIGRANT SOCIETY

9:50 a.m., September 24, 2014. Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau.

I found a chair at an unoccupied desk in the middle of the room and sat down with the A4-sized manila envelope handed to me by two women staff sitting at the entrance. The room resembled a typical classroom. A podium was placed in the front. Beside it stood a whiteboard with the day's agenda handwritten in blue marker. Three rows of two-seat desks and chairs were mostly filled. I looked around me. There were over twenty people in the spartanly furnished space. A few more were signing in. Most looked East Asian, and the one white man and one black man stood out. A couple of others might have been South or Southeast Asians. There were as many women as there were men. It was quiet inside the room, and the atmosphere was a little tense. People sat and checked the stack of forms and sample applications inside the envelope or stared at their phones. A few who came with their families were whispering to each other.

At 10 a.m., a man in a white shirt and tie came in, a nametag hanging against his chest. He introduced himself as an officer in the Citizenship Department, greeted the crowd, and proceeded to explain the agenda written on the whiteboard. A moment later, a man in a suit walked into the room and stood behind the podium. He was introduced as the head of the Citizenship Department. "Good morning," he said. "I will call out your names. Please come to the front to receive your citizenship notification." He then took out a stack of papers and started to read out the names—most were either Japanese sounding or the Japanese pronunciations of Chinese and Korean names. "Fua-ra- Gurashia sama." He called out my katakana name with an honorific suffix. I walked up to the front. He held out the paper with both hands, lowered his head a little, and said "*Arigatogozaimasu*" (thank you). I gave him a slight bow, took it with both hands, and reciprocated with my own "Thank you" in Japanese. On the paper was a statement indicating that my application for Japanese citizenship had been approved by the minister of justice on September 11, 2014.

After the department head bowed and walked out of the room, the man in the white shirt approached the whiteboard. "Now you have all become Japanese nationals [*Nihon kokumin*]. What this means is that you will have the rights and obligations of Japanese citizens." He pointed at the whiteboard and explained that we would now be able to vote in elections, hold a Japanese passport when traveling abroad, and be protected by the Japanese state inside and outside Japan. He went on to explain the detailed administrative steps we needed to take after receiving this citizenship document, including registering with our own local city office and sending back our foreign resident cards within three weeks. It was then that I realized that the piece of paper I received was not a certificate to be held onto but an official notice to be delivered to the city office where I resided.

Without much fanfare and with no ceremonial speech or emotional pledge of allegiance, on September 24, 2014, along with the thirty-some people in that room and the hundreds of others in other rooms across Japan, I became a Japanese citizen.

I am one of the millions of immigrants in Japan. This book tells our stories. It explains why and how we have come to this country, how we have made our home and raised children here, the complex relationships we have built within and with it, and the different forms of attachment and belonging we have cultivated in this place. The stories of immigration in Japan are particular because they have taken place in a social and political context rife with contradictions, and in a country that for many people is still an unlikely destination of immigration. At a global level, however, these stories are also common because the normal destinations for immigration are increasingly those that consider themselves ethno-national societies. Immigrant lives in Japan, therefore, illustrate the forms and features of an immigrant society borne out of an ethno-national one, and the patterns of mobilities and belongings that can take place in such a previously nonimmigrant context.

## Japan as an Immigrant Country

Most people do not associate Japan with an “immigrant country,” for understandable reasons. Postwar Japan was considered an anomaly among advanced economies due to its reluctance to import foreign workers despite a significant labor shortage. David Bartram (2000) argues that Japan in the 1960s and 1970s started to demonstrate labor force profiles similar to those in Western European countries a decade earlier. While countries such as Germany and France signed labor agreements to import foreign workers as early as the 1950s, Japan remained largely closed to labor immigration even at the cost of slowing down productivity and damaging small and medium-sized firms. This resistance to foreign labor marked Japan as a “negative case” of immigration for many years (Bartram 2000). The country has gradually let in more and more immigrants

since the 1980s, but the 2.6 million foreign nationals still stood at a little over 2 percent of the total population of 128 million in the country in 2018, a relatively low presence compared with most other industrial nations.

The Japanese government also studiously avoided defining an “immigration” policy. Although some researchers have started calling Japan an “emerging migration state,” because it has taken “halting steps” toward a national immigration policy (Hollifield and Sharpe 2017, 386), it is not an official discourse. Instead, Japan’s immigration policy is called by “any other name” but the “i”-word (Roberts 2018). On January 28, 2016, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in a National Diet session, responded to inquiries about the necessity to increase the import of foreign labor to appease depopulation and labor shortages by affirming yet again that “we are *not* adopting the so-called ‘immigration policies.’ ” Moreover, the image of Japan does not seem to match that of an immigrant country. Japan, to both its people and outsiders, is a racially homogeneous and culturally unique island country. Part of the lure of Japan lies in its distinctiveness, sometimes with a fantastic inflection.

However, Japan has become an immigrant country *de facto*. Starting in the 1980s, to stave off economic decline caused by labor shortage and in the name of internationalization, Japan has tried different programs to bring in foreign workers. For example, the 1989 Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA) drastically changed migrant admissions procedures and added ten new categories of persons who might be considered eligible for resident status. In 2012, Japan

became one of the most liberal states in its policies for granting permanent residency to highly skilled migrants. On December 8, 2018, the Diet passed yet another Immigration Reform Act and for the first time in the postwar history allows individuals to enter Japan as uncredentialed manual workers. In other words, over the past three decades, Japan has opened its door wider and wider. People are not only allowed but also encouraged, recruited, and even coaxed to come to this country as workers or students or both (Liu-Farrer and Tran 2019). As a result, the population of foreigners has been rising for the past three decades and is likely to increase significantly in the near future. Japanese law provides people in most of these entry categories a path to permanent residency and naturalization. In 2018, out of the 2.6 million foreign nationals,

over 1.18 million were either permanent residents or special permanent residents. On top of that, over four hundred thousand individuals have become Japanese citizens since 1980 (Du 2015).

Why, then, do both the Japanese government and people inside and outside Japan hesitate to accept the discourse of immigration and the reality of its transformation into an immigrant society? I believe this hesitation has to do with Japan’s ethno-nationalist self-identity and the widespread myth surrounding its monoethnic nationhood, on the one hand, and the conventional, albeit anachronistic, definition of “immigrant country” and the difficulty for people to associate an immigrant country with an ethno-nationalist one, on the other.

## An Ethno-nationalist Japan

This resistance toward immigration, before the 1980s in the real practice and since then merely the discourse of it, reflects Japan’s struggle with its ethno-nationalist self-identity. Ethno-nationalism is essentially a superimposition of nationalism (a political program) onto ethnicity—a “readily definable way of expressing a real sense of group identity” (Hobsbawm and Kertzer 1992, 4). Japan identifies itself as a nation whose nationhood is founded on the ideology of a common descent (Befu 2001). Japan did not have such a unified ethno-based self-understanding before the modernizing movement known as the Meiji Restoration (1868). Rather, the Tokugawa regime’s “rule by status”—a practice that segregates the ruled by groups—created segmented cultural traditions and practices. The Meiji Restoration invented interrelated family, state, and emperor traditions and related material symbols and memorial sites in order to create a unified nation-state and a new relation between the ruler and the ruled (Fujitani 1993).

Racial purity and cultural homogeneity are at the center of Japanese ethno-nationalist discourses. Often referred to as *Nihonjinron* (discourses of Japaneseness), these discourses emphasize that Japan's ecological features—namely, the geographic constraints of living on a string of islands—and Japan's subsistence economy (wet rice cultivation) led to its peculiar social formation, cultural practices, and national mentality (Dale [1986] 1990; Yoshino 1992; Befu 1993). In different historical periods, the relative positions between Japan and other countries led to subsequent changes in the discourses. An emphasis on Japanese inferiority in comparison with the West could be seen during the Meiji period and again during early decades of the postwar era. On the other hand, “when Japan defines itself in a strong position, as in the 1930s and in the 1980s, *Nihonjinron* positively defines Japan's identity and becomes a tool of nationalism” (Befu 1993, 125).

Historically sponsored and promoted by the government as Japan's state ideology (Yoshino 1992; Befu 1993), such ethno-nationalist discourses nonetheless became deeply entrenched in the postwar Japanese social consciousness because of their propagation by a plethora of actors, including government agencies (such as Japan Foundation), business corporations, intellectuals, and public scholars. In particular, a resurgent postwar economic prosperity emboldened various power holders in Japan to revive this ethno-national myth and to claim that the strength of Japan lies in its ethnic homogeneity and cultural uniqueness (Yoshino 1992; Lie 2000; Sugimoto 2010). Such nationalistic discourses seem to have resonated with “the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings, and interests of ordinary people” (Hobsbawm 1992, 10). Publications on *Nihonjinron* were widely disseminated and devoured by ordinary Japanese. Befu (1993) provided some statistics of the circulation of several typical *Nihonjinron* publications (by the time he did his research) to offer a glimpse of the popularity of this genre of writing. Doi Takeo's *Amae no Kz* (1971), the Japanese version of *The Anatomy of Dependence* (1973), was reprinted in soft cover copies 147 times. Nakane Chie's *Tate Shakai no Ningen Kankei*, which in English is called *Japanese Society* (1970), had gone through 79 printings.

After decades of such cultural dissemination, these discourses have become constitutive elements in “Japanese people's ‘common-sense’ or ‘everyday knowledge’, their ‘taken-for-granted’ image of national character. They reflect and determine social reality or what a people know about their world” (Burgess 2010, 4). Though academics inside and outside Japan have repeatedly critiqued *Nihonjinron* and made great effort in debunking the myth of Japan's cultural uniqueness and racial homogeneity, these ethno-nationalist discourses linger on in the national consciousness.

The expanding presence of foreigners in the country and the many (localized) efforts to integrate them do not necessarily challenge these fundamental beliefs about Japan's national character. This is because programs aiming to integrate immigrants, such as those under the directives of multicultural coexistence (*tabunka kysei*), do not refute but instead help reinforce an essentialized Japanese identity and culture (Tai 2007; Burgess 2012). Opinion surveys indicate as much. Using data from the International Social Survey Program, conducted in 2003, Nagayoshi (2011) shows that the majority of Japanese respondents are capable of embracing an ethno-national identity while at the same time voicing support for multicultural coexistence, at least in principle.

The past three decades have seen increasing involvement from advocacy groups in the fight for social and political rights for foreigners (Pak 2000; Shipper 2008; Milly 2014). Frequently wrapping their political activism in discourses of human and citizenship rights (Tsutsui 2018), such civil society involvement is pushing Japan toward a more open and inclusive society. However, in what way such political action can or ever will shake the ethno-nationalist identity of Japan remains uninvestigated.

To summarize, the ethno-nationalist discourse is a major reason for Japan's reluctance toward immigration. In the minds of most people, Japan is, and should be, a monoethnic society (Kashiwazaki 2013, 42). Nonetheless, this ethno-national identity does not imply the urge to bolt the door. An ethno-national society can even welcome immigrants, although this welcome is premised on the implicit understanding of fundamental group differences and on the fact that there will always be an invisible wall separating us from them, even when “they” are among “us.” The experiences of immigrants in Japan that are described in this book make it clear that this ethno-nationalist identity is at the root of Japan's many institutional and social dilemmas in dealing with immigration. Moreover, it is something internalized by immigrants themselves as well, and to a few, this aspect of Japan is even considered attractive.

## “Immigrant Country” in an Age of Global Mobility

Aside from overcoming the unease of superimposing an immigrant country onto an ethno-nationalist society, there is also a need to combat the stereotypical image of the “immigrant country” in order to see Japan as one. In both official discourses and individual narratives, “immigrant countries” seem to represent a particular category of nation-states, those that were established by settlers who colonized the territories, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. These countries typically issue “immigration visas,” which define one's (supposed) purpose of permanent settlement. For example, US immigration law divides entry visas into two types: immigration and nonimmigration. The term “immigrants” refers exclusively to those who arrive at the US border with “immigration” visas. Consequently, applicants from around the world often are denied visas to the United States on the ground that they show an intention to immigrate (Kraly and Warren 1992).

Because of such nation-building histories and legal frameworks, settler countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia are perceived as qualitatively different from a country such as Japan or those in Asia and Europe where immigration has not been considered a significant part of the national history and nobody upon entry is automatically granted the status of a permanent settler. However, this distinction was never clear-cut and has in the contemporary era become increasingly blurred. First of all, these so-called immigrant countries might have in the past promoted their openness and solicited immigration to recruit labor power. Nonetheless, the inscription on the Statue of Liberty has always been an ideal and not a reality. Throughout modern history, none of these immigrant countries have extended their unconditional welcome to everybody. In fact, we are seeing increasingly stringent controls over immigration. The lengthening wall along the US-Mexico border and the Australian refugee detention centers located in Nauru and Papua New Guinea fly in the face of both the “American Dream” and the “Australian Dream.”

Second, in the age of globalization, people’s mobility takes them to every corner of the world, and immigration increasingly takes place in nonsettler countries. For instance, many European countries now have higher percentages of foreign-born populations than the United States (OECD 2018). In terms of public opinion, according to a 2015 Pew Survey, Germans expressed a much more pro-immigration attitude (66% in favor) than Americans (51% in favor) (Krogstad 2015). In Japan, although foreign residents are but a small percentage of the total population, the absolute number, 2.6 million, is significant. Many of them have also obtained permanent residency, and some, like me, are no longer counted in the statistics after obtaining Japanese citizenship. Their presence, transient or permanent, has infiltrated every arena of Japan’s economic and social life as they construct intricate social relations, from the intimate to the institutional.

Third, all migration researchers know that legal categories do not define individuals’ intentions, let alone outcomes. My own experience illustrates the fickleness of intentions. When I stepped off the airplane at Narita Airport with my husband and four suitcases on September 2, 1998, I thought my stay in Japan would be temporary—two, maybe three, years. I had not foreseen that sixteen years later, I would become a Japanese citizen. Likewise, immigration status does not mean that one necessarily becomes an immigrant in the conventional sense of settling down and starting a new life in a new land. As the wealthy Russians and Chinese who hold multiple passports and permanent residencies have demonstrated, official immigration status does not, necessarily, make one a settler (Liu-Farrer 2016a, 2018).

In fact, the romantic notion of a definitive, onetime migration—a notion that feeds the imaginary of an immigrant country—has never represented the reality. Even in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many migrants arrived, stayed, and then returned home. As Massey and Malone (2002) point out, if such a circular mobility was common among immigrants during an era of steamships and telegraphs, it must be all the more prevalent in an era of jet airplanes and telecommunications. Indeed, the concept of immigration has become increasingly irrelevant in regions such as the European Union, where national borders for human mobilities within the region have largely dissolved, making many forms of migration temporary. The liberated “Euro stars” (Favell 2008) could move around the continent through their life course searching for education, work, social circles, and lifestyles that speak to their particular desires and meet their specific needs. Every country in the EU has therefore become at the same time the country of origin and destination.

Because of such inconsistency, indeterminacy, and changes in the processes and trajectories of migration, I believe the concept of immigrant country should be adjusted. The term “immigrant country” should simply refer to any country that provides foreign nationals multiple legal channels to enter and legal paths and institutional frameworks for permanent settlement. There could be different types of immigrant countries depending on their nation-building histories, including historically embedded ethnic relationships, and legal frameworks, measured by different degrees of inclusiveness and different emphasis on conformity. For example, extending the common categorization of nation-states by civic versus ethnic (Kohn 1944), civic immigrant countries and ethno-nationalist immigrant countries could be two easy types. The traditional immigrant countries such as the United States and Canada are arguably the former, and Japan, Korea, Germany, and Italy are possibly the latter. Moreover, since ethno-nationalism operates at both discursive and institutional levels, countries in the process of accepting immigrants might adapt institutional practices to an immigrant reality that result in the changing discourses about the identities of the nation or the emergence of multiple and alternative discourses. Therefore, civic and ethnic nationalist components might exist in the same immigrant context.

To define a country such as Japan as an immigrant country, an ethno-nationalist one no less, suggests that in an age of globalization, patterns of migration have fundamentally changed, and that the experiences of migrants in the traditional settler countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia no longer represent the majority of the larger migration phenomena taking place in the world. With its strong cultural and ethnic national identity, Japan represents the type of immigration destination that is emerging in many parts of the world. Indeed, we might say that even traditional immigrant countries such as the United States increasingly see themselves in ethno-nationalist terms, making the perspective from Japan even more relevant.

## **Characteristics of an Ethno-nationalist Immigrant Society as Observed in Japan**

This book details how the immigration process unfolds in Japan. The ways immigration takes place in Japan and the social, economic, and emotional lives of immigrants in this country illustrate a few characteristics that might be distinctive of an immigrant society that emerged out of an ethno-nationalist one.

### **DISCURSIVE DENIAL OF IMMIGRATION**

The discursive denial of immigration describes the ethno-nationalist state that we have all witnessed. Adherence to an ethno-nationalist identity does not necessitate a rejection of immigration, not when the country's economic health and societal functioning depend on it. It does, however, mean that immigration often remains a taboo in political discourses. It becomes a semantic game the politicians in Japan play (Roberts 2018) and underpins a naive immigration policy that (still) expects most migrant workers to be just temporary manpower (Ruhs and Anderson 2010).

### **ANACHRONISTIC INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES**

Because of its reluctance to admit to the reality of immigration long after it has taken place, many institutions in Japan—from education and the employment system to banking and the housing market—and many administrative procedures, big and small, are often found unequipped to deal with the needs and expectations of an immigrant population. For example, despite its ostensible enthusiasm about global talents, an obstinate corporate Japan still tries to turn global talents into Japanese salarymen. In Japanese schools, “we the Japanese” (*ware ware Nihonjin*) remains a standard refrain, and in extreme cases offering English classes to third-graders is resisted by some parents for fear of jeopardizing children's

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ability to learn their national language.

### **PRAGMATISM IN IMMIGRATION AND THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS**

Because immigration is largely taking place without officially being recognized as such, as a large part of the book aims to illustrate, the process of becoming immigrants is best described as contingent and pragmatic. The notion of Japan as a “single race nation,” an “island nation,” and a nonimmigrant country with a strong cultural identity has influence on immigrants' expectations and practices. Immigrants tend to profess no prior intention to settle and usually hold a one-step-at-a-time approach. The settlement is contingent on the success of each of these steps in a restrictive legal path. Moreover, whether immigrants leave or stay depends also on a range of immediate existential conditions, including economic opportunities, the presence or absence of emotional attachments, and social embeddedness as well as the stage in their life course.

### **POSSIBLE (BUT DIFFICULT) NATIONAL BELONGING, IMPOSSIBLE NATIONAL IDENTITY**

Japan being in many ways unequipped to accommodate immigrants does not mean immigrants are not capable of being attached to and building lasting relationships with this country. An ethno-nationalist society with its particular cultural and social practices still has its own attractions. Depending on how individuals interpret the particular concept, some immigrants do articulate a sense of belonging to Japanese society. Nonetheless, Japan's discourses of Japaneseness have been internalized by immigrants and used as an explanatory framework to make sense of their migration experiences as well as their identity. This has inevitably become an emotional hurdle for immigrants to identify themselves with the Japanese nation. A constant struggle over inclusion and exclusion at identification level appears among not only the first-generation immigrants but also their children. In other words, immigrants have difficulty identifying themselves as “Japanese,” even with a hyphenated identity. For example, the Korean immigrants who have lived in Japan for generations have gradually shifted the location of their identity, advocating a new subjectivity for the younger generations (Chapman 2007). Nonetheless, this “third way” suggests that the third- and fourth-generation Korean immigrants identify themselves as *Zainichi*, which literally means “residents in Japan,” instead of Korean Japanese.

These characteristics of an ethno-nationalist immigrant society are generated from observations made from immigrant Japan. The case of Japan might be unique in its specific characteristics, but the migration patterns into this type of destination are far from unique. The rapid expansion of global mobility has turned every single country in the world into a real and potential place of immigration. Like Japan, most such societies lack institutional frameworks, incorporation programs, or cultural narratives to support immigrant settlement. Therefore, observing how immigrants make decisions regarding mobility and settlement in Japan and what kinds of relationships they are able to establish within and with the host society provides insights into new patterns of immigration and integration.

## Immigration after the Mobility Turn

Though in one sense provocative, a book titled *Immigrant Japan* might be seen as conceptually behind the times. Traditional “immigrant studies” were largely borne out of the American sociological tradition, with an analytical focus on how immigrants adjust in the destination country. Their mobility outcomes are largely evaluated by their accomplishments in the host society. This analytical approach met its first challenge around 1990 with the emergence of studies on transnationalism. Although circular and return migration took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the revolution of transportation and communication technologies in the late twentieth century made migrants’ transnational ties and activities increasingly visible. The introduction of transnational perspectives liberated migration studies from a largely receiving country perspective focused on migration outcomes. Consequently, the term “transnational migrants” took the place of “immigrants” and has since become a more appealing alternative as it conveys the image of migrants planting their roots in the host society without severing those in their homeland. Their social ties expand across borders, and through these ties they develop religious, economic, and political practices transnationally. Empirical and theoretical works on migrants’

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transnationalism have flourished since the last decade of the twentieth century.

The diversifying patterns, expanding scopes, and accelerating speed of population movements in the twenty-first century have necessitated new analytical tools and conceptual frameworks. Stemming from research on tourism and transportation, a new line of inquiry that focuses on mobility itself has emerged. Celebrated as the “mobility turn” or “new mobility paradigm” (e.g., Urry 2000), mobility research pays attention to the institutional frameworks, material infrastructures, and social systems that give rise to diverse phenomena involved in physical and virtual mobility. It studies the conditions that create mobility and stasis, scrutinizes the process of movement, and questions the justice of the mobility regime. The “mobility turn” has both liberated and complicated migration research. The fact that mobility itself has become an object of examination has allowed for an expanding empirical scope as well as space for theoretical innovation. For example, migration research now needs to ask not only why immigrants move from one place to another but also how they manage to move. The materiality of mobility, the different power dynamics that affect unequal experiences of mobility, and the relationship between mobility and immobility have all engaged intense research attention. Concepts such as “migration infrastructure” and “production of mobility” (Xiang and Lindquist 2014; Lin et al. 2017) are but some examples of how such a turn has opened up new areas of inquiries and improved our understanding of cross-border migration. Moreover, along with the transnationalism research, the mobility scholarship no longer treats migration as a linear process to a particular end (i.e., settlement and integration into the host society).

The “mobility turn” has also expanded the range of objects of inquiries in migration studies. Those phenomena that were exceptional and peripheral to migration research, such as mobile elites (e.g., Kiriakos 2014) and global nomads (e.g., D’Andrea 2007), have now moved to the center of the field. Moreover, by paying attention to the process of mobility, the indeterminacy of migration manifests more saliently. It has become evident to researchers that the trajectories of mobility are contingent on unpredictable conditions and unexpected events, and that the boundaries between different categories of mobile subjects are blurred. One type of mobility can morph into another. For example, research has demonstrated that tourism and migration overlap and are mutually causal (Williams and Hall 2000). Tourists might become settlers when they are enthralled by the lifestyle of the place they visit (O’Reilly 2003; Benson and O’Reilly 2009). Similarly, corporate expats can leave their original firms’ internal career tracks and stay on in the place they are transferred to (Farrer 2010; Horiuchi 2015), and a large number of international students find jobs and gain permanent residency in the places where they study (Liu-Farrer 2011a). At the same time, however, depending on political climates, migration regimes, and economic opportunities, all of these “settled migrants” may still retain the prospect for further movements. Therefore, they do not necessarily commit themselves to one particular location.

With these complications and uncertainties, does the concept of “immigration” become irrelevant? I argue not. Immigration research implies particular research agendas. Despite the charges of being a “sedentary” social science (Urry 2007) or committing “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Shiller 2003), traditional immigration research and its preoccupation with territorially bounded objectives cannot be completely done away with. As mobility researchers recognize, mobility and mooring are a reciprocal process—deterritorialized people reterritorialize in another place (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). The tradition of migration research generally presumes that individual migrants will play a structurally significant role in the place they move to—for example, as workers in the local economy and as members of the family and the community—and establish multiple meaningful ties with that place. Therefore, it can be said that while mobility might denote the action and process of moving from one position (spatial, social, or temporal) to another, an immigration lens focuses on how and where mobile subjects situate and embed themselves structurally, socially, and geographically.

Similarly, “immigrants” is still a relevant concept, but one that needs to be expanded beyond legal resident categories. In this book, “immigrants” is used to refer to those individuals who enter Japan with the intention to settle, who have attained permanent legal residency, or who have stayed in the country beyond the initially designated activities but with no immediate plan to leave. This book examines such immigrants’ roles in Japan’s economic and social life, and the types of

relationships they have established in Japan and with the nation itself. It also questions how Japan, with its specific migration regime and social cultural life, has shaped these immigrants' reterritorialization process.

## Locating Belonging

A central inquiry of this book is how immigrants make mobility decisions, especially why they choose to stay in Japan and what kinds of relationships they are able to establish within and with this "nonimmigrant" society. It shows that migrants' decisions to move or to stay, on the one hand, have to do with the legal and institutional factors of sending and receiving societies, individuals' actual economic and social experiences, and their assessment of future promises in different locales. On the other hand, people's mobility trajectories are modified by their changing relationships with different places in the migration process—the places they originated from, the places where they have dwelled, and the places they are currently inhabiting. In other words, immigrants' migration decisions are strongly influenced by their sense of belonging.

To belong is a strong psychological imperative. People long for security, association, and recognition. In social psychology, belonging is defined as "a subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs or personal characteristics" (Mahar, Cobigo, and Stuart 2012, 102). It is a fundamental human motivation, closely related to a person's subjective well-being that directly influences one's practices and performances in the particular environment they are in (Hagerty et al. 1990; Baumeister and Leary 1995). Immigrants' sense of belonging is a window into their migration experiences and relationships with different places as well as social groups.

Belonging is a major theme emerging from classical sociology (Yuval-Davis 2006). Labels such as "marginal man" (Park 1928) and the "sojourner" (Siu 1952) have been influential concepts that depict the sociopsychological outcomes of migration and the conundrum of (non)belonging in the early twentieth century. With the expanding global population mobility as well as the increased awareness of the transnationality of migrant orientations, research on migrant belonging has been flourishing since the 1990s. Social scientists from different disciplines are actively engaged in exploring the nature of as well as the conditions for immigrants' sense of belonging. Research often analyzes belonging from two perspectives: as a form of territorial attachment and as a discourse of political membership. The former, also termed "place-belongingness," sees belonging as a personal and intimate feeling of being "at home" in a place (Antonsich 2010). Home in this sense does not simply refer to the material space of a domestic abode, however, but rather stands for "a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment" (hooks 2009, 213, quoted in Antonsich 2010, 646). The latter, described as a politics of belonging, is "a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of social-spatial inclusion and exclusion" (Antonsich 2010, 645). It is often used interchangeably with identity and frequently tied to citizenship (e.g., Castles and Davidson 2000; Ehrkamp 2005, 2006; Hartnell 2006).

Place-belongingness recognizes that, first of all, human beings have a strong emotional need to attach to places. Nearly a century ago, the American sociologist Robert Ezra Park made an astounding claim that "the human creature is a good deal of a vegetable" (Park and Burgess 1925 [1984], 156). He then explained: "This is evident in the invincible attachment of mankind to localities and places; in man's, and particularly women's, inveterate and irrational ambition to have a home—some cave or hut or tenement—in which to live and vegetate; some secure hole or corner from which to come forth in the morning and return to at night" (156). Second, migration is essentially a form of "displacement" or "deterritorialization," and, therefore, examining the ways in which migrants reterritorialize is naturally one of the projects of migration studies. Places provide the physical as well as social spaces that can facilitate or disrupt the anchoring of one's belonging. Moreover, the places immigrants feel attached to vary on geographic scales, from one's own apartment (Walsh 2006), to the neighborhood (Ehrkamp 2005), to nation-states (Ho 2006, 2009). Indeed, sometimes it is the little physical details in one's environment that binds him or her to a place. Walsh (2012), for instance, described the case of a British woman from New Castle who claimed she felt at home in Dubai because of the feelings invoked by the stretches of beach she walked on, the malls she shopped in, and the morning sun that shone through her bedroom window.

Aside from "place-belongingness," the "politics of belonging" is the other analytical focus in migration studies. What kinds of immigrants are allowed to cross the border? Who can become members of the national community? How many and what kinds of rights can be conferred on immigrants? Such questions not only contest and transform legal and institutional frameworks but also challenge fundamental understandings of national identity and notions of citizenship. Much work on migration—especially legal studies and political science research—examines the legal frameworks and government policies of the receiving host country. Frequently wrapped in discourses on multiculturalism, they address the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants at the level of the nation, city, and local community (see, e.g., Joppke and Morawska 2002; Chung 2010; Nagy 2013). In particular, scholars point out that the different degrees of political membership are often determined by the social locations individuals and groups occupy in "the multiple power axis of difference, such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, stage in the life cycle, sexuality, ability and so on" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 200). The "so on," in many countries, might also include religious and cultural practices.

However, “every politics of belonging involves two opposite sides: the side that claims belonging and the side that has the power of ‘granting’ belonging” (Antonsich 2010, 650). With accelerating population mobility, there is an increasing amount of concern over immigrants’ lack of political belonging. In classic migration theories, political incorporation is the peak point of the assimilation process (M. Gordon 1964). As a result, immigrants’ sense of belonging to the host society is often gauged through their inclination toward naturalization. With the globalized population movements and the expanding trend of transnational migration, however, there seems to be an “erosion of citizenship.” Naturalization rates declined in major immigrant countries, and many long-term immigrants remain denizens in the societies where they settle (Hammar 1990). Several theories attempt to explain this phenomenon. Some researchers direct our attention to the cultural differences in the understanding of social and political membership. Ip, Inglis, and Wu (1997) argue that the concept of citizenship is based on Western political philosophy and a liberal democratic tradition that focuses more on individual rights and obligations. Many immigrants are from societies that embrace different types of “citizenship.” Participation in civic society is therefore not a form of political culture familiar to them. The second argument focuses on the changing institutional framework of citizenship. Citizenship and the rights associated with it are traditionally tied to one’s membership in a nation-state. As a consequence, many immigrants are satisfied with a long-term or permanent resident status, feeling no incentive to become citizens of the host country. “Denizens” or “quasi-citizens” are terms used to describe such tendencies (Hammar 1990). Chung (2010) shows that this is true for the case of Japan as well. Except for voting and assuming government positions, permanent residents in Japan have as many rights as citizens.

Not only is the naturalization rate decreasing, but research also shows that naturalization itself does not necessarily manifest a sense of belonging. Among immigrants who are naturalized, there is a decoupling between the political and legal aspect of citizenship (their understanding of the rights and responsibilities in the host society) and the cultural and identificational aspect of citizenship (their emotional relationship with the host society) (Soysal 2000; Gilbertson and Singer 2003; Brettell 2006). Similar situations exist in Japan. Asakawa (2003) found from a survey of several hundred naturalized citizens in the late 1990s that the main reason for pursuing Japanese citizenship was respondents’ realization that they would stay in Japan and citizenship would secure their status. Moreover, in Japan, institutional discrimination persists in areas such as housing and the labor market. Without Japanese nationality, immigrants are frequently denied access to rental properties and certain occupations. Some immigrants naturalized in order to remove those institutional barriers (Asakawa 2003).

These different analytical approaches, place-belongingness, and politics of belonging, as well as observations regarding the multidimensionality of belonging, indicate the complexity as well as the slipperiness of belonging as a concept. This book takes what Sarah Wright calls a weak theory approach to belonging that promotes “attention to affective assemblages, to the ways things, people, affects and places, with different trajectories, may come together, albeit in often tentative,

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inconclusive or evolving ways” (Wright 2015, 392). Relying on data from immigrants’ narratives of home, homeland, at-homeness, and their own descriptions of their relationships with Japan, belonging in this book is considered as both an emotional construct and a political discourse. It is used to understand immigrants’ self-conscious social locations in Japanese society and their understanding of their relationship with the host country and its people. Through investigating their sense of belonging, including where and how they construct such emotional attachments and how they narrate them, this book aims to capture the conditions and the “things” that attach people to a place, a social group, or a nation.

This investigation is of particular significance for a study on immigration into Japan. As explained, Japan is not a traditional migration destination. Immigration does not feature prominently in its national autobiography. Its rigid migration regimes, distinct patterns found in organizational as well as social relationships, and ethno-nationalist discourses discourage the identification of this country as an immigrant society. Investigating whether, as well as how, immigrants achieve a sense of belonging in Japan and to where they attach themselves, therefore, helps illuminate the particular characteristics and processes of immigration into a relatively unexplored type of immigrant receiving context. It also allows us to understand the nature of their relationship with Japan as well as the places where they came from. This is of particular significance with the immigrant children who grew up in Japan—the 1.5 and second generations. Understanding their sense of belonging and desires for mobility allows us to examine and comprehend Japan as an immigrant society by giving us insights into both the promises it offers and the challenges immigrants face.

This investigation of belonging also has implications for migration studies outside Japan. In the contemporary era, mobility has become a sign of modern subjectivity signifying one’s worth, and therefore it is commonly constructed as an aspiration (Chu 2010). The increasingly globalized and interlinked economy has also brought many practical opportunities for geographic mobility. As a result, mobility and immobility reflect not only immigrants’ varied structural positions in the migration infrastructure but also an outcome of constant negotiations between the desire to move and that to stay. Understanding how mobile subjects make mobility decisions illuminates the social and affective dimensions of contemporary migration.

# Immigrants in Japan and Those in This Book

By June 2018, there were over 2.63 million mid- to long-term and permanent foreign residents and 66,000-plus irregular migrants living in this country. In addition, over four hundred thousand people have naturalized as Japanese citizens since 1980. Except for Korean nationals, of which the majority are descendants of migrants who entered Japan during the colonial

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period (1910–1945), over 80 percent of these immigrants came after 1980. Asians accounted for four-fifths of the total foreign resident population in 2018. China, Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines were the top sending countries. In total, more than two-thirds of mid- to long-term foreign residents in Japan were from these four countries. South Americans, especially Brazilians, also have a significant presence in Japan. Most of these Brazilians are *Nikkei*, ethnic Japanese, even though the majority of them are of mixed descent (Linger 2001; Green 2012). Numbering over 196,000, the Brazilians were the fifth-largest immigrant population in Japan in 2018. Nepal, Taiwan, the United States, Thailand, and Indonesia completed the top ten list of sending countries.

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This book tells the stories of immigrants from different national backgrounds. While it makes great efforts in presenting immigrants' diverse experiences and in illustrating the multiple dimensions of immigrant life in Japan, it does not claim to offer a representative sample of the various immigrant groups. Instead, this book uses individual narratives to understand immigrants' particular as well as collective conditions. The readers might find that the individuals staged in this book are often middle-class working migrants (appendix B), and therefore wonder why no more undocumented migrants and casual laborers are introduced here. This appearance, in fact, reflects both my methodological choice and the effects of Japan's immigration regime. I will explain both.

First, the book is on "immigrants," those potential or de facto long-term settlers. It explores their migratory trajectories and their decision making—their reasons for coming to Japan, how they make a living and establish themselves in this country, how they negotiate mobility decisions, and the reasons for forming certain relationships with this fabled monoethnic society. Therefore, I selected only immigrants who have lived in Japan for a substantial period of time, have had more exposure to different realms of life in Japan, and were legally free to make choices. Because this is a qualitative study, I have also tried to find a wider range of experiences and perspectives and therefore did not follow the statistical distributions of the population. The majority of the interviewees had been in Japan for at least five years, had working experiences or were married. A few students' narratives are included in the section on student migration (chapters 1 and 2), but they are a minority in this sample. However, the reasons that I have few irregular migrants and casual workers in my data have a lot to do with Japan's restrictive migration regime.

Japan has implemented selective migration policies (see details in chapter 2). It welcomes students and skilled migrants and also allows spouses of Japanese nationals or family members of the students or skilled migrants to enter. It is, however, reluctant to admit what it calls unskilled (*mijukuren*) or simple labor (*tanjun rdsha*). The 1989 ICRR includes fourteen employment visa categories. Thirteen of these visas are designated for typical highly skilled migrants, including such classifications as "engineer," "investor/business manager," "intra-company transferee," "specialist in humanities and

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international services," and "professor." The only category that is truly skill based is that of "skilled worker" (*gin*). Ninety percent of these skilled workers are cooks (MOJ 2010, 10). The demand for menial and low-wage labor is met by migrants in the categories of "trainees" and "technical interns," mostly from Asia, as well as *Nikkei* Brazilians who were brought back to Japan through transnational labor brokerage (Tsuda 2003). The latter are granted long-term resident status, which imposes no restriction on activities in Japan. In addition, the hundreds of thousands of international students in school are also a source of cheap labor (Liu-Farrer 2009). While beginning in April 2019 "specified skilled workers (SSW)" in different menial labor categories will be allowed to enter, the program had not yet started at the time this project was completed.

The migratory potentials are different for different categories of migrants. Those who hold one of the fourteen categories of visas, and who are students, spouses to Japanese nationals, or permanent residents, long-term residents, and dependents, can extend their stay, convert their visas to other categories, and eventually apply for permanent residency. Those who are in the categories of "technical interns" and "trainees," on the other hand, are usually not allowed to stay for more than three

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years. Not only is their residency terminal, their visa categories are not convertible, meaning that they cannot apply for other visa categories without leaving the country. Moreover, their stay in Japan is tied to their employment with particular

employers. They are not allowed to change jobs in Japan, and their presence is largely limited to the confines of the workplace. Very few of them have managed or have the prospect to remain in Japan, and therefore, with a few cases who

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later on reentered Japan in other visa categories, few became the subjects of this book.

Undocumented migrants are also underrepresented. Among the individuals I interviewed in the early 2000s, there were more undocumented migrants who worked as low-wage labor and lived in precarious situations (see Liu-Farrer 2008, 2010). However, almost all of them have been deported since 2003 when the Ministry of Justice started the campaigns against illegal stay, in the name of crime prevention (Yamamoto 2010). There were over sixty-six thousand individuals who overstayed their visas in 2018. The number has seen an increase in the past several years. Nonetheless, because of the tight police control, their presence is mostly clandestine, not visible in public. Their predicament is worth much research and humanitarian attention, but they do not have the types of mobility choices that are the interest of this book.

This book uses individual narratives to convey the conditions and experiences of immigrants in Japan as a whole instead of as defined groups. Individual narratives are again used to disclose the ways in which immigrants locate and attach a sense of belonging in Japan. This individualized approach resonates with Brubaker's (2004) and Pfaff-Czarnecka's (2013) recommendation to avoid treating groups, ethnic or national, as a priori. Of course, there are group differences. Immigrants' mobility trajectories often take on group characteristics resulting from their collective conditions in Japan's immigration regime. However, because of the recognition of internal diversities within the group as well as the intersectionality of these dynamics, this book avoids making generalizations about national characteristics. Moreover, this is fundamentally a qualitative study. Though I have conducted over two hundred interviews with people from diverse backgrounds, I do not trust that my data can lend accuracy to inferential statistical analysis. The research project was not designed for that purpose. However, class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality do play roles in every aspect of immigrants' lives. When it can be safely correlated, I link patterns of practices and outcomes to people's demographic profiles.

## In What Follows

Except for the introduction and the conclusion, the book follows (more or less) a chronological order, following immigrants' migratory process from entering to settling. Chapter 1 asks what attracts people to Japan. Using narratives, it explains how Japan is positioned in migrants' imagined cartography of global mobility. It shows that, first of all, Japan is a land filled with opportunities. Japan provides economic incentives for some, and education opportunities and career alternatives for others. At times it is a way to escape oppressive circumstances in immigrants' home societies. Second, Japan has also been a place imbued with fantasy. Japan attracts those who have genuine cultural interests in the country. Rising from the ruins of war, Japan dazzled the world with its rapid advances in technology and economic power. The economic miracle drew people in to explore Japan's social and cultural practices. Since the 1990s, Japanese anime, manga, and video games have gained worldwide fandom. Thus, for people with cultural interests, Japan is not merely one destination out of many; it is exactly where they want to be.

Not all who want to migrate can and will arrive in Japan. Chapter 2 emphasizes that migration is a collective action orchestrated by different actors, both human and nonhuman, that either facilitate or hamper mobility. This chapter presents demographic profiles of immigrants in Japan and categorizes the channels and processes of migration that have helped shape such particular demographic profiles of Japan's immigrants. These channels include side doors for the importation of "unskilled workers" (entertainers, trainees, students, Nikkei Brazilians) and selective talent programs for skilled migrants (such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching program), marriage migration, and the expanding networks of global mobility such as student exchange programs, research collaborations, and recruitment agencies. The logic of different dimensions of this migration infrastructure is used to explain the particular outcomes of different types of migration.

As a central part of adult life, work gives meaning, status, and identity to people. Furthermore, the workplace is where personal relations and social lives are developed. Work is even more significant for immigrants since, for many, it is the point of entry into Japanese society. Their jobs and career achievements often have a strong impact on their decision to either stay in Japan or leave. Chapter 3 maps the diverse patterns of immigrants' labor market participation and career mobility. It highlights in particular the strategies that immigrants employ to find their niche in Japan's economy—from occupational niching to transnational entrepreneurship.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore immigrants' mobility decision making. In a nontraditional immigrant country such as Japan, where a myth of ethnic homogeneity and cultural uniqueness constitutes its national identity (Burgess 2010), and where immigration as a concept and policy solution to the demographic crisis is shunned, settlement and mobility in and out of Japan take on a fluid and uncertain nature. Immigration trajectories are always contingent on many factors, ranging from job opportunities and economic stakes to degrees of life satisfaction and transformed emotional geographies. Moreover, staying

or leaving is not necessarily a fixed outcome. In an age of mobility, people construct cross-border ties and try to maintain flexibility. To leave for another destination or return to the home country does not necessarily mean a permanent exit. On the contrary, it often leads to a more transnational and global mobility.

What does an immigrant's narrative of longing for home or belonging express? What does its opposite—the lack of a clearly defined home and belonging—suggest? Moreover, in the absence of an expectation of commitment to the country or permanent settlement, how do immigrants find their sense of belonging, define home, and construct their relationships with Japanese society? Chapter 6 engages these questions by analyzing the narratives of immigrants of various nationalities. It explores how immigrants' cultural backgrounds, migration experiences, socioeconomic circumstances, and social relationships as well as master narratives of nationhood and concepts of personhood affect people's conception of home and belonging, perceived relationships with Japan, and future mobility intentions. These findings help us grasp the social and psychological mechanisms of people on the move and understand the cultural repertoires from which they draw to interpret their situations.

Three decades after the onset of large-scale migration, Japan is seeing more and more children of immigrants who have grown up in Japan. If the experiences of North American and European countries are any indication, immigrant children's social mobility outcomes and whether they are able to identify themselves with the host societies matter to not only their own well-being but also the well-being of the societies they live in. The last two substantive chapters trace out immigrant children's education experiences and identity journeys. The Japanese national educational system, especially at the elementary and secondary levels, is ill designed for integrating immigrant children. Its monocultural institutional logic often alienates and marginalizes children of immigrants. However, parents' socioeconomic locations in Japanese society as well as in the global hierarchy have a strong impact on their children's mobility trajectories and sense of self. Though most children of immigrants have experienced some difficulty growing up in an ethno-national education system, their parents' ability to maneuver resources to ameliorate situations and overcome obstacles affects how their mobilities unfold in their life course. For example, while most middle-class Chinese children growing up in Japan are able to attain educational mobility and cultivate a cosmopolitan self over the course of a transnational childhood, most Nikkei Brazilian children are mired in the increasingly precarious low-skilled labor market and occupy a marginal position in Japanese society. Moreover, Japan's ethno-nationalist identity still stands in the way of integrating these children. Though immigrant children can develop their identity and eventually find their own individual biographies, Japan is at best a component in that biography, one color that constitutes the mosaic of their identity.

What kind of immigrant society is Japan becoming? The book concludes by revisiting the central issues that characterize immigrant experiences in Japan. Japan's transition into an immigrant society happens at a time when the rest of the world seems to be moving in the other direction and becoming increasingly ethno-nationalist. At the same time, migration is not slowing, and individuals' migration trajectories have become highly diverse. If Japan can shed its monoethnic and monocultural national identity and reform the outmoded institutions that reinforce such an identity, it could even emerge as one of the most attractive destinations for migrants.