
Articulating Japanese Identities: Socialization Processes through Migration Experiences

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In post-war Japan, traveling abroad has become a common practice and has been undertaken by a wide range of people from varying demographic backgrounds. Although the purposes for which they travel overseas vary, those with the financial capacity move overseas to engage in a particular lifestyle in their chosen destinations. Over the course of their journeys, their migration experiences inevitably lead to a remaking of their identities. To disentangle the migration-identity nexus, this paper examines the construction of a Japanese collective identity amongst Japanese migrants who traveled to Dublin, Ireland. In their post-migration phase, their Irish experience contributed toward altering their perception of Asia. In a context where many forms of differences serve as signifiers of ethnicity, everyday encounters with Asian Others were inevitably instrumental in re-defining Japan's cultural and economic positionality in the Japanese migrants' minds. The question discussed in this paper is, given that Japanese ethnicity tended to be subsumed into an overarching framework of Asian Other, how Japanese ethnic distinctions were articulated and re-enacted in transnational spaces. Through an ethnographic exploration of their day-to-day interactions with Others, this paper will shed light on how they mobilized privilege to draw ethnic distinctions.

Introduction

When Nozomi announced that she was “still pissed off with the guy,” “the guy” in question was a young drunk man who had asked her to tell him about some homonyms for *nihao* (“hello” in Mandarin). “I don’t speak Chinese!” she told him, angry at his casual assumption. “I always challenge those asking me things like that [*nihao*], by asking back: ‘Are you a racist?’ This silences them,” she said. It was a joke, but one which hid a truth:

Those who have an interest in Asia know that I am from a well-off country, but there are some other people who assume that I have come to Ireland as an economic migrant... I can't understand why they [the local Irish] simplistically presume that Asian-looking people [in Dublin] are all Chinese, Thai, or Filipino – Is that all they think about?

During her three-and-a-half-year residence in Dublin, Nozomi had encountered “ethnicity confusion” several times among Irish citizens under the impression that Japan was just one more developing nation in Asia. Behind her polite smile, real anger could be seen, not only against that one drunken “guy” but toward the general perception of Asian people that she had found in the Irish capital. Her narrative sheds light on both the liminal status occupied by migrants and the refusal to accept the homogeneous East Asian identity that they are assigned.

Identity is a contested and central element of the multidimensional social reality of a world, in which the local constantly encounters the global, particularly in the context of transnational migration. Although there are as many definitions of identity as there are migrants, identity is conceptualized as bound up with notions of belonging, both in legal and emotional senses, within diaspora and migration studies. Multiple theories address the discursive conceptualization of identity in the social sciences. However, identity is most frequently seen as the *process* of identifying with group commonalities by recognizing Others and differentiating them from self.^{1 2 3}

For Stuart Hall, subjects construct their identity “on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.”⁴ In so doing, they compare “similarity and difference” and “individuals and collectivities,”⁵ processes which both confirm a subject’s own uniqueness and generate a perception of belonging

1 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

2 Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall, and Du Gay Paul (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1996).

3 Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *The Japanese Self in Cultural Logic* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

4 Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” 2.

5 Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 3-4.

to a specific group. Hall argues that identity is neither fixed nor unified; rather, it is constantly being made. The multiple identities that we create for ourselves reflect the different episodes and periods of life through which we pass, and this continuous practice of identity construction is termed “becoming”. Identity, then, does not exist in the singular; it is in an unending process of reinvention according to changes in the perceptions and context of the self.⁶

Migrant identities can be understood as being formed by a continuous process of construction and reconstruction through interactions during the journey and at the migration destination. Self and others should not be seen as opposites but, rather, as two parts in the same constitutive process; recognition of self is dependent on recognizing Otherness. Identity constantly changes as people move through dense and interlinked social networks. The subject of this paper is the transformation of subjectivity engrained in this process of identity formation. The identity-mobility nexus is widely recognized as a key element of migration experiences, and this study will ethnographically explore the relationship between those experiences and the process of becoming. This study investigated the impact of encounters with Others on transnational migrants’ own fixed perceptions of Asia, to achieve a richer understanding of the multiple ways they delineate and perform identity. Ultimately, this paper will unpack ways in which respondents “became” Japanese.

Data were gathered through fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2011 in Dublin, capital of the Republic of Ireland (hereafter, Ireland). Respondents were temporary (n=34) and long-term (n=15) Japanese migrants, of whom 38 were female and 11 were male, aged between 21 and 58 at the time of the survey. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Most respondents were in their twenties and thirties (the older ones tended to have accompanied their Irish partners) and had migrated alone from Japan to pursue self-realization goals other than economic gain. The students and working holidaymakers in the sample mostly had no contact with Ireland, nor any definite image or perception of the country before traveling. Among the reasons cited for their choice of destination were that Irish visas were easy to obtain, and they wished to benefit from living in an English-speaking environment where there are few Japanese.

6 Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” in *Modernity and Its Futures*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, and Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992), 276-277, 287.

Their narrative of everyday encounters with, and experience of, living in a foreign culture illuminates the processes of identifying the Other and simultaneously discovering their own identities. Ethnic relations are, to varying degrees, an almost universal element in the socialization process of migrants, whether short- or long-term, and the Other. By exploring respondents' experience of racialization during contact with the Other, this study sheds light on the processes of the everyday socialization of Japanese migrants as "Japanese." Analysis of empirical data is presented in a later section; however, it is worth first exploring in some detail the context in which the particular racialization examined here took place.

The representation of Others in Ireland

In recent years, Ireland has undergone swift and dramatic change and is now home to 535,475 non-Irish nationals.⁷ Its unique social, political, and demographic makeup is primarily due to its historic association with the UK. The political and ethnoreligious divisions between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have been the subject of an enormous amount of academic study.⁸ However, the pluralism inherent in that historical situation is now being replaced by a "new" pluralist agenda, namely the arrival of migrants in Ireland.

A significant element in previous narratives of Irishness centered on the migratory history of the Irish diaspora, as the island was a net exporter of migrants for many generations. Today, however, the narrative is being reframed as the island became a target for migrants from the 1990s, leading to numerous social changes.⁹ Ireland gained the nickname "Celtic Tiger" due to the economic boom enjoyed between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s, which was largely driven by the return of highly skilled Irish workers. The pull of the Celtic Tiger narrative was key to the arrival of today's migrant population, who originate from other EU countries, Africa, and South and East

7 Central Statistics Office, *Census 2016 Summary Results – Part 1*, Dublin: Government of Ireland, 2017, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/census2016summaryresultspart1/Census2016SummaryPart1.pdf>

8 John A Murphy, "Religion and Irish Identity," in *Irishness in a Changing Society*, ed. The Princess Grace Irish Library (UK: Colin Smythe Ltd, 1988).

9 Una Crowley, Mary Gilmartin, and Rob Kitchin, "Vote Yes for Common Sense Citizenship: Immigration and the Paradoxes at the Heart of Ireland's 'Céad Míle Fáilte'," *NIRSA: Working Paper Series*, no. 30 (2006).

Asia, and who are primarily motivated by the desire to seek employment.¹⁰ As Fanning observes, the Celtic Tiger era was the first time the Irish economy leveraged foreign labor as a means of growth.¹¹ Consequently, a country, from which huge numbers left in the past, now attracts migrants from over 190 countries.¹² Data from the 2011 census indicate migrants account for approximately 13 percent of a total population of 4,525,281¹³ – a massive increase from the one percent recorded in 1992, who were predominantly Jewish and Travelers. No other EU nation has undergone such a radical demographic transformation.¹⁴ Dublin has transformed into a global city characterized by multiculturalism, driven by the presence of many ethnic populations. As Mac Éinrí observes, a multi-ethnic state has come into being.¹⁵

However, local people have not uniformly welcomed the rapid demographic and ensuing social changes brought by the arrival of refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants, as well as a growing number of children born in Ireland to non-Irish parents. Despite its long history of net emigration, multiculturalism and immigration have also been found in Ireland in the past.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the speed and scale of recent changes have been perceived by many Irish as “a negative development,”¹⁷ and

10 Piaras Mac Éinrí, “Introduction,” in *The Irish Diaspora*, ed. Andrew Bielenberg (Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), 5.

11 Bryan Fanning, “Developmental Immigration in the Republic of Ireland and Taiwan,” *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective*, no.4 (2012): 162-169.

12 Chinedu Onyejelem, “Multiculturalism in Ireland,” *The Irish Review*, no. 33 (2005): 71.

13 “Population Usually Resident and Present in the State by Religion and Nationality,” Central Statistics Office Ireland, accessed July 7, 2014, <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile,7,Education,Ethnicity,and,Irish,Traveller,entire,doc.pdf>

14 Ronit Lentin, “At the heart of the Hibernian post-metropolis: Spatial narratives of ethnic minorities and diasporic communities in a changing city,” *City* 6, no. 2 (2002): 235.

15 Piaras Mac Éinrí, “Our Shelter and Ark? Immigrants and the Republic,” in *Nationalism And Multiculturalism: Irish Identity, Citizenship And The Peace Process*, ed. Andrew Finlay (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 1.

16 Lentin, “Spatial narratives,” 230.

17 Onyejelem, “Multiculturalism,” 71.

racism, both individual and collective, has been part of the backlash.¹⁸ An increased intolerance of non-Irish ethnicities is not only a sign of a city under dramatic transformation but the driver of defensive ethnocentrism amongst its inhabitants.¹⁹ The dissonance between ethnic groups has been theorized in many ways, for example, as deriving from a top-down governmental policy and lack of democratic consultation;²⁰ lack of grassroots cross-cultural contacts between local and migrant communities;²¹ and governmental refusal to acknowledge that racism exists alongside media misrepresentations of ethnic minority groups, particularly asylum seekers, which foster xenophobia.²² In these circumstances, the referendum in 2004 about abolishing the granting of citizenship to anyone born in Ireland was seen as a rational mechanism to restrict the legal rights of asylum seekers to work and control the size and nature of labor migration. As Fanning notes, migrants started to be referred to as “non-nationals” by media outlets and politicians during the referendum campaign, which also saw the national/non-national binary development.²³

The discourse of multiculturalism is a space in which the ideological visions of different ethnic groups compete. The cultural diversity and celebration of differences in the name of multiculturalism are, in fact, promoted by the problematization of foreignness among a previously homogenous group. When different ethnic populations live in close proximity to each other, as in Dublin, “a degree of disavowal” is inevitable.²⁴ This also leads to the creation of a White Irish ethnicity which is both dominant and homogeneous²⁵ and carries in its wake notions of “putative national

18 For example, asylum seekers are often viewed as “problematic” as their presence is perceived to adversely impact tourism, the economy, and local employment opportunities. Peillon recommends group protests of this type should be seen as responses to social, political, and economic relations rather than attempts to persecute marginalized groups. Michel Peillon, “Exclusionary protests in urban Ireland,” *City* 6, no. 2 (2002): 195, 202.

19 Mícheál Mac Gréil, *Prejudice in Ireland revisited. Survey and Research Unit*. (Maynooth: St Patrick’s College, 1996).

20 Lentin, “Spatial narratives,” 242.

21 Onyejlem, “Multiculturalism,” 71.

22 *Ibid.*, 74-75.

23 Fanning, “Developmental Immigration,” 168-169.

24 Lentin, “Spatial narratives,” 230.

25 *Ibid.*, 231.

cultures” and essentialized “singular culture(s).”²⁶ Under this understanding, narratives of exclusion become a fundamental element of multiculturalism.²⁷

However, the problematization of ethnicity is not homogenous in itself: Some groups are viewed as more problematic than others. Moreover, it is less the phenomenon of migration that draws objections but, rather, the issues raised by the migration and presence of certain ethnic minorities.²⁸ Census data from 2011 indicates that approximately 71 percent of the non-Irish population were EU nationals, compared to the 12 percent of Asian nationals.²⁹ Migrants of non-EU origin have expressed growing concern about rights to residence, employment, social welfare, and political participation in Ireland. Across all categories of migrants in Ireland, few have the option of long-term residence. State authorities became concerned that student visas, particularly for language courses, were being exploited by individuals seeking to remain and work in Ireland, with worrying consequences for the domestic labor market.

For this reason, student immigration regulations were reformed in 2009.³⁰ Under the New Immigration Regime for Full-Time Non-EEA Students introduced two years later, non-degree students enrolled in full-time study programs can stay in Ireland for no longer than three years. That period can only be extended if such students then enroll in degree courses and, after graduating, look for work in Ireland. It is now difficult for most Japanese migrants to obtain work visas or permits. Under the perceived need to control ethnic and religious diversity, these are predominantly reserved for migrants from white, Christian nations.³¹ In these circumstances, holders of temporary visas are less prioritized and are disembodied from other long-term migrants.

These developments and the consequent stratification of the migrant population have led to social and ethnic relations being viewed as

26 Gavan Titley, “Everything Moves? Beyond Culture and Multiculturalism in Irish Public Discourse,” *The Irish Review*, no. 31 (2004): 17.

27 *Ibid.*, 11.

28 Steve Garner, “Reflections on Race in Contemporary Ireland,” in *Race and Immigration in the New Ireland*, ed. Julieann Veronica Ulin, Heather Edwards, and Sean O’Brien (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 186.

29 “Population Usually Resident and Present,” CSO.

30 “Stamps - Main immigration,” Irish Naturalization and Immigration Service, accessed March 1, 2021, <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/registration-stamps>

31 Crowley, et. al., “Vote Yes,” 16.

a black-white dichotomy; blackness is associated with asylum seekers, and migrants of African ethnicities principally represent Otherness.³² As a by-product of this development, a group of invisible Others has emerged of migrants who are neither White nor Black, such as the Asian populations who, for Irish citizens, constitute a new variety of Otherness. Historically, relations between Ireland and Asia have taken place within the larger context of British imperialism.³³ Therefore, “Asia,” for the Irish, generally denotes South Asia or China.³⁴ There has been a Chinese presence in Ireland for several decades due to the colonial connection between Hong Kong and the UK. Many ethnic-Chinese Hong Kong residents migrated to the UK from the 1950s onwards, passing through Ireland on their way.³⁵ The Asian population in Ireland is now primarily viewed from an economic perspective. King-O’Riain found positive representations of the Chinese in Irish media, which framed them as “the model minority” due to the perceived economic benefits they confer on the host society. They are perceived as “good short-term” workers who contribute economically to the host country, while posing no threat of permanent residence for legal reasons.³⁶ In this context, the predominant perception of the Japanese remains as faceless Others. This invisibility also derives from the relative newness of Japanese migration and the predominantly transient nature of the Japanese presence in Ireland.

The number of Japanese either traveling to or living in Ireland has doubled over the past ten years. Statistics from 2019 (the latest available) indicated 2,596 Japanese residents, approximately one-third (744) of whom had permanent residence while the remainder (1,852) were temporary

32 Nicola Yau, “Celtic Tiger, hidden dragon: Exploring identity among second generation Chinese in Ireland.” *Translocations* 2, no 1 (2007): 56–57.

33 Louise Harrington, “Simulating South Asia: literature, culture and belonging in Ireland.” *South Asian Diaspora* 6, no 1 (2014): 21.

34 This is reflected in the ‘ethnic group’ item in the national census which appeared in 2006, following a notable rise in inward migration to Ireland. ‘Asian or Asian Irish’ populations are subdivided into ‘Chinese’ and ‘any other Asian background’, which encompasses all those of South Asian background.

35 Yau, “Celtic Tiger,” 49.

36 Rebecca Chiyoko King-O’Riain, “Media Perspectives on Chinese Migrants in Ireland,” in *Globalization, Migration and Social Transformation: Ireland in Europe and the World*, ed. Bryan Fanning, and Ronaldo Munck (London: Ashgate, 2011), 206.

residents.³⁷ One-third of the latter group were businesspeople transferred to the Irish branch of a Japanese corporation, often accompanied by their families. The rest were mainly either undertaking working holidays or were in the country for educational purposes as students, teachers, or researchers.

Young people play a crucial role in the transient migratory streams of a globalized world. The Irish working holiday scheme, in particular, offers migratory opportunities to young Japanese, who typically study at English language schools for periods ranging from weeks to full academic years. The working holiday scheme was first set up in 1980, and the first nationals to benefit from it were Australians. It is now open to 26 other countries and regions, concentrated in Oceania, North and South America, and Europe, including three in Asia.³⁸ In 2007, to mark fifty years since diplomatic relations were initiated between Ireland and Japan, the scheme was opened to young Japanese. The visa allows single entry to Ireland and residence for up to twelve months and is open to Japanese aged 18–30.³⁹ It has become one of the easiest ways for this demographic to visit Ireland, as shown in the rapid rise in numbers taking up the opportunity: 165 in 2010 and 248 in 2013.⁴⁰ Its popularity partly derives from the fact that holders are entitled to work full-time for up to 39 hours per week, unlike student visa holders who must attend school and are subject to more restrictive conditions on working hours. The rise in numbers demonstrates that young Japanese are increasingly taking part in the transient global streams of working holidaymakers and language students.

For all these reasons, it is unlikely that Japanese migrants in Ireland will change their residence status from temporary to long-term, nor any clear economic motivation for their decision to travel to Ireland. The relatively short time Japanese people tend to spend in Ireland partly underlie the politics of differentiation which, in turn, foster the sense of

37 “2019 Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, accessed March 1, 2021, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/page22_003338.html

38 “About the working holiday system,” Japan Association for Working Holiday Makers, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.jawhm.or.jp/system.html>

39 In June 2015, the age limit for working-holiday visa holders was raised from 25 to 30. When my fieldwork was carried out, I encountered one case of a female informant successfully applying for this visa class when she was 33.

40 “2013 Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, accessed May 26, 2014, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000017472.pdf>

belonging generated by the lived experiences of Japanese migrants. If migration mobility is understood as a means of socialization, this group also “became Japanese” through their migration experiences, as they were regarded as just one part of the overall Asian Other by the Irish. Thus, an investigation of their migration experiences sheds light on the processes through which Japanese migrants create, understand, and perform their identities during the migratory journey. The following sections present an analysis of the respondents’ narratives to show how the perception of a collective Japanese identity arose from their experiences of living in Ireland.

The Japanese as faceless Asian Others

After migrating to Ireland, the Japanese encounter “Others” who promote a distinct national and ethnic awareness; for example, respondents drew ethnic distinctions between themselves and other Asian populations, particularly mainland Chinese and South Koreans. Nozomi, the respondent quoted at the beginning of this paper, was not the only interviewee to express irritation at hearing repeated simplistic national/ethnic assumptions, however casual and non-threatening; long-term migrants told similar tales. Maki, the 35-year-old wife of an Irish citizen, was subjected to abuse related to East Asians on various occasions. In one of the city’s less salubrious areas, waiting to push her stroller across the road, she was shouted at by a male cyclist who told her to “go back to your own country with your baby.” She believed the man thought “her country” was China because she had heard phrases such as “go back to China” several times during her two-year residence in the city. She expressed the same resignation as other long-term migrants who experienced similar events in Dublin: that she would simply have to expect racism during the time she spent there.

Racism is part of today’s “real” Ireland. For Anderson, racism derives from national class ideologies and the nineteenth-century European systemized structural dominance of colonized peoples.⁴¹ Race-based hierarchies constructed in particular historical contexts are intertwined with ethnicization or racialization.⁴² More recently, individual racism, including

41 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: London, 1991), 149-154.

42 Michael Weiner, *Race and migration in Imperial Japan, The Sheffield Centre for Japanese Studies/Routledge series* (Routledge, London; New York, 1994), 7.

assaults, which has emerged alongside institutional and collective racism,⁴³ has pervaded Irish society.⁴⁴ The increased xenophobia and racism seen in the country have been attributed to the social changes brought about by a migrant presence. As outlined earlier, the transformation from a homogenous to multi-ethnic state has been extremely rapid in Ireland, only really beginning in the 1990s.⁴⁵ One reaction to this dramatic shift has been reframing a dominant Irish culture through what Titley calls the “exogenous recognition” of other ethnic groups.⁴⁶ Hence, building a homogenous Irish identity entails the identification of minorities in order to create a dominant-subordinate social model.

Like Maki, most respondents had experienced at least one ethnic-based threat or act of discrimination during their time in Dublin. This East Asian discrimination spanned from threats of severe physical violence to the request to explain *nihao*, referenced by Nozomi, and can be seen as an inevitable consequence of a swift transformation from a homogenous to multi-ethnic society. In some cases, the insults based on perceived ethnicity and associated racism experienced by Japanese migrants were random expressions of hatred against all racial minorities. Most frequently, however, the nature of the slur or accusation revealed that the perpetrator believed that they were Chinese. 25-year-old Yusuke, married to an Irish woman, recounted similar experiences but with the added twist of perceptions of gender roles. On several occasions when he and his wife had been out, locals had targeted his wife and asked her why she was with a “Chinese man”. Yusuke said that although he did not care if he was perceived as Chinese, he realized that the perception of him was being used to insult his wife. The respondents’ experiences highlight the imposition of a homogeneous East Asian subjectivity. Simultaneously, it was only after the respondents migrated to Dublin that they became aware of their relationship with Japan and Asian neighbors.

According to 2009 census data, there were about 800 Japanese residents in Dublin at the time of the fieldwork. Public awareness of Japanese culture and people is minimal, deriving almost exclusively from

43 Onyejlem, “Multiculturalism,” 73.

44 Elisa Joy White, “Forging African diaspora places in Dublin’s retro-global spaces: Minority making in a new global city,” *City 6*, no. 2 (2002): 251–270.

45 Mac Éinrí, “Introduction.”

46 Titley, “Everything Moves?” 16.

the city's 13 Japanese restaurants and the Experience Japan Festival.⁴⁷ In contrast, multiple Chinese cultural signifiers exist in the public space, mainly driven by an established ethnic Chinese community. Research conducted by Wang and King-O'Riain on mainland Chinese students living in Ireland demonstrates strong social support networks. These networks help both residents and newly arriving migrants find accommodation, study opportunities, and work.⁴⁸ The authors discerned coordinated attempts to forge ties among ethnic Chinese in Ireland and the homeland, for example, by setting up a Chinese radio station in Ireland and print media available in Chinese supermarkets. Moreover, the huddle of restaurants and supermarkets on Capel Street and Parnell Street (Dublin's Chinatown) represents a physical marker of a Chinese ethnic presence, strengthening China's position as the chief representative of East Asia in Ireland.⁴⁹

As no comparable networking or support infrastructure exists for Japanese residents, some have sought to meet their social needs by setting up a free local magazine for Japanese residents, hairdressers, and professionals such as doctors. Chiho, the wife of an Irishman, stated that she would find it hard "to live here permanently without this social support." Having spent considerable time living in New Zealand and Australia in her twenties, Chiho found her first six months in Ireland difficult. She cited the almost complete absence of Japanese culture in Dublin as one of the primary reasons she was doubtful about remaining there in the long term. This sort of complaint is heard from many long-term migrants, alongside the difficulty of coping with everyday life; however, it is notable that very few have taken the initiative to construct solidarity support networks to address these difficulties. Expressing "Japaneseness" was perceived as doubly difficult due to the small number of Japanese in Dublin compared to Chinese and the fact that, unlike the latter,

47 'Experience Japan', launched 2011, takes place every year in early April in Dublin's Phoenix Park with the aim of introducing Japan to the locals through cultural events including music, story-telling, *kendo* (Japanese fencing) demonstration, dance, food, and workshops. It was founded by Motoko Fujita, the Japanese photographer residing in Chapelizod married to an Irishman, initially to promote Japanese solidarity by bringing together all associated societies and institutions in one place. It aims to attract both Japanese residents and local audiences and foster greater recognition of Japan.

48 Yin Yun Wang, and Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, *Chinese Students in Ireland* (Dublin: NCCRI, 2006).

49 *Ibid.*, 49-50.

Japanese residents had no shared social space wherein they could perform and affirm their culture. For Chiho, the lack of a specifically Japanese space within the Irish framing of Asia was the principal driver of her compatriots' facelessness.

I wish the Irish media featured more the recent news that Japan had loaned the IMF as much as one hundred billion Yen to help them out of their economic predicament! Despite Japan's financial support and my own contribution [her taxes], even local kids mocked me for being foreign on the assumption that I am living in this country for the purpose of making money. I wanted to say out loud that the Japanese government lent a large sum of money to your country because your parents don't work. I am still not comfortable being perceived as an economic migrant... But I feel sorry for those kids, because it's their parents who taught them to behave that way.⁵⁰

Chiho's statement indicates that the Japanese in Ireland feel their situation derives, at least in part, from lack of knowledge among Irish people of what Japan is capable of and, indeed, has done. Chiho felt that many locals believe that, given the magnetic pull of the Celtic Tiger economy of the 1990s and 2000s, all migrants have come for economic reasons. Although she was ostensibly talking about the fact that she did not feel accepted by the local people, her remarks indirectly express her belief in Japan's essential superiority to other Asian nations. The many accounts of social exclusion indicate that Japanese migrants are dealing with a fundamental misconception of their country's status. Rather than being acknowledged as a global political and economic player, Japan is relegated to just one more area within East Asia in the Irish consciousness. A longer history underlies the frustration this engenders in Japanese migrants. After World War II, Japan's economic success allowed it to reposition itself from a defeated nation to an equal partner to Western nations, easing the feeling of marginality that had weighed on the nation since as far back as the Meiji period (1868-1912).⁵¹

50 Chiho was referring to the news that the Japanese government was planning on buying about one hundred billion yen (equivalent to 930 million Euros) of the bonds issued by the European Financial Stability Facility Ireland as part of the bailout of the Irish banking sector. "Japan in pledge to buy eurozone bonds issued by EFSF," *BBC News*, January 11, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-12159399>

51 Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring globalization: popular culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 7.

Japan's pride in its remarkable post-war economic success and its status as the leading nation in East Asia laid solid foundations for developing a postmodern nationalism,^{52 53} which has deployed a burgeoning popular culture as a form of soft power.⁵⁴ The ideological discourse echoed by the respondents' narratives is framed by their country's economic and soft power, the consciousness of which overcomes all differences of gender, class, and place of origin to form the fundamental building block of Japanese collective identity. During their time abroad, respondents embraced this new identity by insisting on the higher international status enjoyed by their nation. Being "mistaken for Chinese," or the common perception that Japan, China, and Korea were largely interchangeable, disturbed the pride of Japanese migrants whose identity rested in knowing that Japan had more significant economic and soft power than the two other countries. Local people seemed unaware that they represented a state that, within Asia, regarded itself as hegemonic. The identity of Japanese migrants was fundamentally unsettled – and the migrants themselves felt marginalized by Irish assumptions of Asian sameness.

Striving for distinction

The dilemma outlined above was an essential driver in young Japanese migrants' decision not to associate with other "Asians" during their residence abroad. Almost all the temporary migrants interviewed said that most Japanese did not take up opportunities to interact with Chinese people and, in fact, tended to exclude them deliberately. Hiro, for example, explained that as a male working holidaymaker:

I now have a lot of Korean people in my social circle, whom I got to know through my Korean housemate. But as for the Chinese, I don't even want to talk to them. They have no second thoughts about assuming that whoever they think looks Asian is Chinese. Even when I tell them that I am Japanese, they don't care what I have said. They

52 Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural nationalism in contemporary Japan: A sociological enquiry* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992).

53 Harumi Befu, "Symbols of nationalism and Nihonjinron," in *Ideology and Practice in Modern Japan*, ed. Roger Goodman, and Kirsten Refsing (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

54 Carl Cassegård, *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 42.

just keep on talking to me in Chinese...They don't have English. They are (immigrant) workers, aren't they?... It's just my impression that mainland Chinese cannot speak any English. Even if they can, they do with a very strong accent...They gave me a sort of puzzled look as if saying "Why do you not speak Chinese?" This idea is very wrong, and I don't like it. So, I tend to avoid the Chinese as soon as I distinguish people as having Chinese nationality...What I don't like about them is their self-righteous bigotry. I felt anger inside and wanted to say "Listen to me, I am neither Chinese nor speak Chinese!"

For Hiro, "China" meant mainland China; hence, he differentiated between mainland Chinese and people from Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, although he stated that he had once had a Taiwanese girlfriend, he demonstrated little interest in interacting with anyone of Chinese origin. Hiro and his housemates (Japanese plus one Korean student) could only socialize with each other and other participants of Japan-Ireland meetup nights they frequented. His housemates were therefore crucial to his everyday wellbeing. Hiro's reluctance to engage socially with any ethnic Chinese people derived from a need to assert a cultural and economic superiority. Hence, he experienced his sense of superior economic status not only as part of his identity as a member of a nation which exerted considerable economic and cultural power but one which required him to be openly contemptuous of the Chinese.

Many other respondents displayed similar ethnically-driven anger and resentment at being mistaken for Chinese by Dubliners. This "misplaced" racial discrimination led some respondents, such as Nozomi and Chiho, to focus their anger on the implied interchangeability of all East Asians and reclaim their "correct" nationality/ethnicity in protest. Their reaction to these types of incidents was to problematize the word *nihao*, which they perceived as racism intended to relegate East Asians to a lower rung of the ethnic hierarchy than the Irish. As a reaction, they sought to differentiate themselves from other Asian populations.

To extract themselves from their predicament, Japanese migrants frequently reinforced their national status by refusing to associate socially with Chinese people. Indeed, most of the temporary migrants interviewed had little, if any, interest in interacting with the Chinese. The main reason was that the Chinese migrants were there to find work, while the Japanese were in Ireland for other reasons; hence, they did not have shared objectives. When asked to explain why they felt superior to the Chinese, respondents cited various stereotypes, describing Chinese people as uppity, loud,

impudent, boorish, and poorly dressed. However, these prejudices and vague antipathies appear to derive more from negative portrayals of the Chinese people in different types of media than from any personal experience.

In large part, the prejudice expressed was underlain by the difference in Chinese and Japanese economic success and perceptions of greater social orderliness, as demonstrated by Japan's more advanced technologies and better-quality public services. In reality, however, the social status of Chinese people in Ireland is quite similar to that of the interviewees. Data from 2008 indicates that 43 percent of the total Chinese population in Ireland were students, mainly in their twenties, and originating from urban regions, whose migration was part of a journey to achieve an education and boost their professional prospects.⁵⁵ Most had jobs in low-paid sectors to support themselves and pay for their education and were short-term residents like the Japanese interviewees. Despite these similarities, Japanese migrants leverage their country's status as a modern economic and cultural power to claim superiority over their Asian neighbors and, simultaneously, a closer alignment with the West.

After World War II, Japan's successful pursuit of modernization won it an acknowledged place among Western nations.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, there is considerable consensus in the literature that, driven by the economic growth in Asia since the 1990s, Japan has switched its focus back to its Asian neighbors, strengthening the so-called "Asianism" and creating an overarching Asian identity.^{57 58} This high-level shift in priorities did not seem to be reflected in the attitudes of young Japanese people in Ireland concerning China. A continued perception of China as representing Asian backwardness has led them to protest their designation by the Irish as faceless East Asians and insist on a distinct economically and culturally privileged Japanese identity. As external depictions of Japan interact with individual processes of subjectification, Japanese migrants are caught in a position of neither being

55 King-O'Riain, "Media perspectives," 207.

56 Iwabuchi, *Recentring globalization*, 7.

57 Takashi Machimura, "Living in a transnational community within a multi-ethnic city: making a localised 'Japan' in Los Angeles," in *Global Japan: The Experience of Japan's New Immigrant and Overseas Communities*, ed. Roger Goodman, Ceri Peach, Ayumi Takenaka, and Paul White (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

58 Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation, Japan in the Modern World* (Armonk, N.Y.; London: M. E. Sharpe, 1998).

aligned with a Western nor an Asian identity.⁵⁹ Occupying this problematic middle ground, respondents indicated that their privileged Japanese identity was partly built on belonging to a nation founded on a structural accumulation of economic and cultural capital to which they had access.

In contrast, in the view of Hiro and other respondents, the Chinese were perceived as unable to acquire such capital. Proficiency in English and the ability to perform certain Western behaviors were commonly viewed as benchmarks of internationalization. Hence, the decision of respondents not to associate with Chinese migrants is best interpreted as a determination to step back from the enduring Irish perception of homogenous Asian backwardness. Ironically, this insistence on differentiation leads Japanese migrants to characterize the Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kongese as a homogenous group of economic migrants rather than differentiating them by the considerable occupational and ethnic diversity they present. All are placed in the generalized category of “Chinese”⁶⁰ in the same way that the Irish appear to place Japanese in the generalized category of East Asians. This generalization only perpetuates the perception of Asians as an undifferentiated mass.

In relation to Koreans

In contrast to the hostility shown toward Chinese migrants and the attempts to differentiate themselves from Asian Others, the younger interviewees were happy to incorporate Koreans into their friendship groups. The two groups often came into contact at language schools, workplaces, and residences. Noriko, the 28-year-old wife of a Japanese expatriate, stated that she had met more Koreans and had more contact with Korean culture than she had the Irish and Irish culture during the ten months she had been living in Dublin:

It is said that the number of Japanese students studying abroad has been declining, but it appears that more and more Korean people go overseas. When seeing the upsurge of the Korean cultural and economic power, I can see why. Samsung has now become famous worldwide. I don't have any Chinese

59 Susanne Klien, *Rethinking Japan's Identity and International Role: An Intercultural Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 22.

60 Yau's study of second-generation Chinese also shows how they struggled to identify themselves against this type of homogenization, unlike the 'new' Chinese sojourners, mainly students from mainland China. Yau, "Celtic Tiger," 48–69.

acquaintances here, not to mention Chinese friends. But instead, I have got to know so many Korean people after coming to this country. Many of them are very friendly and pro-Japanese. I gave up on the Irish long ago [because of her inability to speak English].

Interacting with Koreans of a similar age to herself, Noriko forged friendships with classmates while excluding fluent or native English speakers from her social circle. Her words can be interpreted as referencing a shared Asian culture and sense of belonging, as she cites her Korean friends' knowledge of Japanese popular culture.

The shared experience of being strangers in a foreign land can forge a powerful bond between marginal peoples, leading to the formation of friendships. In the context addressed in this study, non-native speakers of English share the experience of insecurity due to their limited proficiency. Most young Japanese people therefore seek out other Japanese students or working holidaymakers of a similar age. Simultaneously, they complain that they have not managed to improve their language skills. Migrants such as Noriko, similarly, form a social life with other non-native speakers, including Koreans and people from other European nations. The friendships which form among these individuals are based on a shared experience of social exclusion, perceived marginalization, and the adventure of discovering Dublin.

The Japan-Ireland meetup nights and Saturday language exchange that most temporary migrants frequented were often attended by Korean and Hong Kongese migrants and served as fora where young Japanese migrants came into contact with fellow Asians. The phenomenon of achieving an "Asian experience" in a third context has been seen in other locations. For example, White's case study found an increased pan-Asian consciousness among young Japanese travelers in Hoi Chi Min.⁶¹ An image of shared cultural and regional heritage provided common reference points which fostered a sense of "Asianness." Fujita's study of young Japanese residents in New York and London shows how the London group of respondents felt decidedly superior to the Taiwanese and Koreans. In contrast, the New York group became very friendly with their Asian neighbors because all three countries had similar levels

61 Bruch White, "Re-Orient-ing the Occident: How Young Japanese Travellers are using the East-West Dichotomy to Dismantle Regional Nationalism," in *Dismantling the East-West Dichotomy: Essays in Honour of Jan van Bremen*, ed. Joy Hendry, and Heung Wah Wong (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 127-129.

of industrialization. Although Fujita has not described the discrepancy in their perception of the Taiwanese and Koreans, more critical is the fact that both the London and New York groups considered mainland Chinese to be “racial insiders” but simultaneously “cultural outsiders.” This distinction indicates the cultural gulf which divides the mainland Chinese from other Asian nationalities.⁶²

The respondents in this study exhibited similar patterns of socialization to those revealed by Fujita. Social relationships mainly emerged through contact at language or other schools, leading to the presence of Korean students at most social events frequented by Japanese students. Forging relationships with Koreans was facilitated by the perception that Korea, unlike China, has common cultural reference points with Japan and a similar capitalist system. Japanese-Korean encounters gave rise to a sense of solidarity as the Japanese students ‘discovered’ how much they had in common with Koreans. This realization fostered a sense that both national groups belonged to one particular “Asianness” based on a shared cultural heritage and strong cultural and economic capital – neither of which were attributed to “the Chinese.” Most of the temporary migrants among the respondents framed their perception of the Japanese as culturally and economically superior to other Asian groups in these class-based processes of othering.

Conclusion

Respondents’ experience of multiple interactions over time with both Dubliners and Asian Others was an essential element in framing a Japanese collective identity. In social spaces which did not have clear signifiers of national culture to guide locals, the Irish tended not to see ethnic diversity among the Asians in their midst. In this context, the Japanese became faceless Asian Others and had to position their ethnicity within a discursive narrative of “Asianness,” which many found unsettling. This situation gave rise to a new collective identity framed as an insistence that Japanese cultural and economic privilege should be acknowledged rather than subsumed into a general homogenous Asian identity. Reclaiming their status as Japanese ethnicity was an essential means for the Japanese migrants to re-empower themselves. Hence, they were driven to carve out a Japanese collective identity differentiated from both the West and the rest of Asia, which many viewed as backward. With a perception of ethnicity based on notions of class,

62 Yuiko Fujita, *Cultural migrants from Japan: youth, media, and migration in New York and London* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 79, 91-92.

many migrants continued to see other Asians as an undifferentiated mass.

As many of the respondents had traveled to Ireland to pursue cultural and social capital, their rationale for not mixing with people they saw as inferior was that it would neither help them achieve this objective nor acquire any other type of capital. Instead, they sought to encounter people of perceived similar or higher social and cultural status, namely Westerners and, sometimes, Koreans. They viewed themselves as obliged to uphold 'superior' moral and cultural values. This conditioning acted as a brake to cosmopolitanism and, especially, to their ability to see past stereotypes of Chinese people.

The ethnographic data also suggests that the degree of the respondents' flexibility appears to be based on how far they were exposed to Dublin's broader social landscape. There was a tendency among those who had come into contact with Chinese people in Ireland to experience a realization of common Asian ground and values. Unfortunately, this point has not been discussed here for lack of space. Although the respondents might be engaged in multiple modes of identity construction, the ethnographic data reveals that the encounters with Others in the destination were the points of reference against which they re-defined their sense of belonging to Japan. Whether short- or long-term residents in Dublin, their stay had not always resulted in a transnational identity but, rather, in a strengthened national and ethnic consciousness. As Japanese migrants were exposed to local social discourse, the gap between Japanese and Chinese remained the same, or in some cases, increased. The ethnic tensions between Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese that originate from colonial times, as well as more recent political tensions, played a part in changing where they belonged. Therefore, it can be said that the migrants interviewed for this study undertook a process of becoming within a transnational space.