

Lund University
Department of Sociology



LUND
UNIVERSITY

The *Ibasho* of Foreign Residents in Japan – Navigating Belonging and Foreignness

Author: Madeleine VU

Master's thesis SOCM05 30 credits

Spring semester 2024

Supervisor: Bo ISENBERG

Word count: 21,107

ABSTRACT

Author: Madeleine VU

Title: The *Ibasho* of Foreign Residents in Japan – Navigating Belonging and Foreignness

Master's Thesis SOCM05 30 credits

Supervisor: Bo ISENBERG

Department of Sociology, spring 2024

The current Japanese population of 124 million is expected to decrease to 104 million by year 2050 (Takahashi et al., 2003) with a rapid aging population and, thus increasing immigration is one of the responses to this demographic concern. Hereon onwards, it will be relevant to understand the social patterns of foreign residents living in Japan and finding out more about their livelihoods as non-native residents. This paper will focus on understanding how foreign residents in Japan negotiate *ibasho* (RQ1) and the changes *ibasho* undergoes when being adopted by them (RQ2). *Ibasho* is a Japanese sociological concept indigenous to Japan. Previously *ibasho* has been primarily researched in youths, Japanese identity, education, and community building. The focus on foreign residents has only been limited to migrant youths in Japan, which is why this project will address the current foreign residents outside of the already existing scopes. A qualitative research method is applied, and ten transcripts of foreign residents are explored in thematic analysis. It has been observed that (1) the foreign residents do construct *ibasho* according to the three common conditions; subjective, objective (Sumida, 2003), and relationships (Abiru, 2012), and (2) they do so beyond the local proximity. They shape *ibasho* according to their lives before and during Japan as individuals giving meaning to their environment and people around them. The results in this paper contribute to the overall understanding of current migration trends in Japan, *ibasho* research, the concept of belonging, and social sciences.

Keywords: *ibasho*, Japan, migrants, foreigners, qualitative research, belonging, sociology

Popular Science Summary

Japan's population, currently at 124 million, is expected to drop by year 2050 with a large majority of the people aging quickly. To deal with this, Japan is considering allowing more immigrants into the country. It becomes important to understand the social patterns of foreign residents and their lives as non-native residents with the increased immigration. This study focuses on how people from other countries living in Japan find their place, called *ibasho*, and how *ibasho* changes depending on them. *Ibasho* is a Japanese concept about where people feel like they belong. The previous research has only addressed Japanese communities, particularly among youths, Japanese identity, education, community building, migrant youths, leaving a gap regarding the broader foreign resident population.

To explore this, ten foreign residents were interviewed to understand how they negotiate *ibasho* and how *ibasho* changes when adopted by them. It is revealed that these individuals create their own sense of belonging based on their experiences and relationships, even if they are not originally from Japan. They construct *ibasho* according to three common conditions: subjective feelings, physical circumstances, and interpersonal relationships, shaping their sense of belonging beyond local proximity and incorporating aspects of their lives both before and during their time in Japan.

By examining how these individuals form and transform their *ibasho*, the study provides valuable insights into the complexities of social integration and the evolving nature of community and identity among Japan's immigrant population.

Acknowledgements

This thesis project has meant a lot to me while I also have learnt much about myself during the writing process.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Bo Isenberg, for his valuable support and patience throughout the duration of my thesis.

I am also grateful for my internship experience in Japan at 学び舎 mom 株式会社 under the supervision of Kiyono Yagami-san as a part of the SOCN21 course and my professional development while pursuing my master's degree at Lund University. I was able to utilize the internship opportunity for brainstorming and building networks valuable to the thesis. The internship would have not been possible without the financial assistance from Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation and the organization's continuous support since my time at Osaka University.

I am also thankful for the professors and academic staff affiliated to the master's program in Sociology at Lund University for providing me the skills and knowledge which have adequately prepared me for the thesis.

I would like to extend my thanks to all my connections in Japan, many whom have supported me in finding interviewees for the project. My time as a BA student at Osaka University has been incredibly insightful too. I am also thankful to the kind participation of all the interviewees.

Lastly, I would like to mention friends and family who have supported me during the thesis writing. Special thanks to Maggie, Heshyan, Shinha, and Travis, for kindly correcting the English. Also, many thanks to my partner, R, who has provided me with much emotional support.

Again, I thank all of you for the support and patience throughout the thesis. I hope to live up to your expectations.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Aim of the Study	3
1.2. Disposition	4
2. Literary Review	5
2.1. The Sociological Significance of Belonging	5
2.2. Previous Research on <i>Ibasho</i>	8
2.2.1. <i>Forming the Japanese Identity: starting from the Youth and in Education</i>	8
2.2.2. <i>Outside of Japan</i>	10
2.3. Foreign Residents in Japan	12
3. Theoretical Framework	15
3.1. <i>Ibasho</i>	15
3.2. Mapping <i>soto-uchi</i>	17
3.3. Notes on Compatibility	20
4. Methodology and Data Collection	20
4.1. Research Design	20
4.2. Data Sources: The Interviewees	21
4.3. Ethics	23
4.4. Limitations	24
4.4.1. <i>Notes on Methodology and Data Collection</i>	24
4.4.2. <i>Notes on the Primary Investigator</i>	25
4.4. Method of Analysis	25
5. Analysis	26
5.1. How Foreigners form <i>Ibasho</i> (RQ1)	27
5.1.1. <i>The Physical Condition</i>	28
5.1.2. <i>The Subjective Condition</i>	32
5.1.2.1. Foreigner in Japan	32
5.1.2.2. Interacting with the Japanese Society	36
5.1.2.3. Creating Meaning as Individuals	40
5.1.3. <i>Relationships</i>	42
5.1.3.1. Interacting with <i>Soto</i> Networks in Japan	42
5.1.3.2. Meaningful <i>Uchi</i> Networks	45
5.2. A Borderless <i>Ibasho</i> (RQ2)	46
6. Conclusion and Discussion	51

6.1. Future Implications	53
7. List of References	54
8. Appendices	68

1. Introduction

Japan's total population was estimated at 124 million people in September year 2023. About 50.6 percent of the total population are above the retirement age (age 65) (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2024). This means that half of Japan's population is currently geriatric. If the demographic trends continue, the population is expected to drop down to 108 million people by year 2050 (Takahashi et al., 2003). The demographic trends are heavily influenced by a declining birthrate with the Total Fertility Rate on all-time low 1.26 in year 2022 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, 2023). This means that the working age group (age 15-65) will also contribute to the geriatric percentage rate as they grow older. A rapidly shrinking and aging population affects a society greatly. The working population will decrease, meaning that the labor force will slow down along with the economy. Simultaneously, government resources will be reallocated to tend to the welfare of the aged population. This strains care insurance programs such as the national pension and healthcare. This is a huge concern for Japan's future. To combat demographic decline, the Japanese government has gathered information and offered solutions. Among these, the government has been leaning in for changes in family-related policies (such as child support and parental leave) (Sano & Yasumoto, 2014), gender equality policies (Coleman, 2016; Tsuya, 2014), and more recently, migration policies.

Japan's strong image as a homogenous society with traditional culture prevails, while as many find it charming and unique. In year 2018, Japan attracted an all-time high of approximately 30 million foreign visitors. However, due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the visiting numbers are recovering from closed borders and year 2022 recorded about 4 million entries (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2023). The top three visas handed out in year 2022 were the temporary visitor (tourist) visa, student visa, and technical intern visa. The fascination over Japan's popular culture productions such as music, anime, and fashion, have gained worldwide traction. Migrants from developing countries see Japan as an economic opportunity while migrants from affluent nations find Japan's culture alluring. Japan's large economy, social safety, and shrinking population, generally attract migrants looking for new opportunities.

Historically hesitant to migrants, Japan introduced the first immigration policy changes in the 1980s when labor shortage was induced by the prosperous economic boom. At the time, Japan

only welcomed skilled migrant laborers but did accept unskilled migrant laborers through ‘backdoor passages’ by purposely handing out ‘official’ visas with vague descriptions for the intended labor, such as the entertainment visa (Chiavacci, 2012; Liu-Farrer, 2020). It gave the illusion that Japan only welcomed the best ‘types of migrants’, but for work industries that were more often questionable, such as construction work or gray zone brothels. However, the distinction between skilled and unskilled migrant laborers is a continuous pattern for immigration to Japan since it especially favors talents from the Global North (Europe, North America, and Oceania) to fill white collar job positions, from teaching professions to corporate work (Iwata & Nemoto, 2018). These highly skilled foreign professionals are invited to Japan with the objective to “brain gain” and are the main group eligible for shortcuts to a permanent residency (Akashi, 2014).

As of year 2023, foreign residents represent 2.5 percent of the total population living in Japan which is approximately 3 million people (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2024). The presence of foreign nationals living in Japan is small in comparison to the inbound visitors and the Japanese natives. As a minority group in Japan, the nationalities, ethnicities, and races, under the foreign resident category is in actuality a highly diversified group of people; ranging from the oldcomers, who initially began their residency since colonial Japan, to the newcomers, who came after the 1980s economic prosperity. The foreign residents’ belonging in Japan is often contested. Although labor demands require their presence, the means of accommodating their residency is a still on-going process; from a lack of access to certain national services to being denied utility or housing services. This diverse group of foreign residents face hardships and discrimination due to prejudice, xenophobia and unchanging traditional sentiments, which often leave these residents wondering whether Japan is right for them (Jung, 2004).

Although the Japanese government paid attention to developing *tabunka kyosei*, a multicultural coexistence government program deployed after the 1995 earthquake disaster, the expectations for it and actual implementation were mismatched in practice. *Tabunka kyosei* efforts were deployed in municipals and in the education systems. In its best effort, was seen as a program with the goal of turning foreign residents into members of the local community (Takahashi, 2015). It entailed support to integrate foreigners on surface levels, such as Japanese language support classes and providing multilingual support at the municipality offices. The promotion of *tabunka kyosei*

resulted in criticism as an assimilation program and lack of attention to actual structurally implemented inequalities (Kashiwazaki, 2016). The *tabunka kyosei* programs did not gain much traction and continued to keep its service on surface level and providing brochures about life in Japan in simple written Japanese (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020).

Going forward towards the future, Japan will continue to face a rapidly declining population if new countermeasures are not maintained i.e. implementing means of retaining foreign residents by accommodating their livelihoods and preserve Japan's image as an attractive place to live in. The migration trajectory is individual to each foreigner arriving in Japan and it is a personal decision influenced by institutional and social contexts (Liu-Farrar, 2020). There is a tendency for foreigners to stay permanently because they have formed foundations of their lives primarily in Japan. Work prospect uncertainties in their own country of origin, process of moving abroad, disconnect to their country of origin, and personal connections to Japan, make leaving Japan harder. However, stale career development and lack of multicultural resources are overall points that contribute to frustrations about life in Japan (ibid.). In cases where foreigners experience a great amount of homesickness along with feelings of marginalization, the decision to leave become stronger (Thomson, 2005). The general experience is that life in Japan is not detrimental and most foreigners 'hang in there' when times are the most challenging (Liu-Farrar, 2020).

It is normal to experience ups and downs of living abroad, however, because of the lack of governmental resources and support systems, foreign residents are most times left to self-suffice. Rather than focusing on what exact material support that the foreigners need, this thesis project intends to explore their lives in Japan based on the current circumstances, and thus, how foreigners negotiate their sense of *ibasho*.

1.1. Aim of the Study

The aim of this thesis project is to analyze how foreigners negotiate belonging in Japan. This will primarily be explored through the Japanese sociological concept known as *ibasho*. It is a notion indigenous to Japan which has gained traction for its relations to the identity formation in Japanese youths, the relation between oneself, and the surrounding environment, where one achieves an ideal state of wellbeing pertaining to self-assurance and contentedness. The word directly

translated means ‘a place to be’ but has encompassed broader aspects on safety, comfort, acceptance from within, and from people around (Sumida, 2003).

Ibasho is the leading framework for this paper because the concept grounds itself first within a Japanese context of Japanese youths, but its usage has diversified without responding to actual diversity within in Japan. More recently, it has also gained attention in America (will be explored further in 2. *Literary Review*) and showcases a start of diverse use of *ibasho*. In addition, while literature about foreigners living in Japan is available, currently there is little research suggesting the *ibasho* of foreign residents in Japan and the flexibility of *ibasho*. Thus, the research questions guiding the study will be the following as to mend these gaps.

- Do foreign residents in Japan form a sense of *ibasho*? If so, how is *ibasho* established and experienced?
- Does a global background affect the Japan specific sociological concept of *ibasho*?

This thesis project is a qualitative study based on ten interviews on currently foreign residents living in Japan and collects the meaning of *ibasho* from each participant as to understand how they navigate their own belonging in Japan. As Liu-Farrer (2020) contended, each of their trajectories are personal, thus it is to be noted that this study limits itself to the data of ten interviewees and is not a generalization of foreigners’ experiences in Japan. In this project, the personal connection each participant has to *ibasho* is closely studied in order to understand what qualities of *ibasho* they encompass and how they contribute to *ibasho*.

1.2. Disposition

The following section will briefly describe each chapter, its essential points, and its purpose explored in this paper.

In *Chapter 1 Introduction* readers will find the introductory section where background, research aims, and questions are presented. The thesis will continue to refer to these aims throughout the different chapters.

Chapter 2 Literary Review consists of a range of previous research on the topics of *ibasho*, foreign residents in Japan, and the sociological significance of belonging. It will guide readers to better understand the context of the study.

In *Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework* the theory of *ibasho* will be presented in detail. This section addresses the foundation of the Japanese sociological theory, *ibasho*, by contending its purpose and use in Japan. The Japan specific notion, *uchi-soto*, will also be addressed as it overlaps with *ibasho* in ways of how proximity, context, and relations, are established.

Chapter 4 Methodology and Data Collection is the section that presents the methods and techniques used to collect the data. The primary data is qualitative and detailed descriptions about its purpose and procedure goes into this chapter; where the data is retrieved and its implications, confidentiality, method of analysis, limitations, and ethics behind data collection.

In *Chapter 5 Analysis* the results of the data collection are presented and interpreted into overarching findings regarding the research questions. The chapter is further divided accordingly to the findings pertaining to *ibasho*.

Chapter 6 Conclusion answers the research questions. Future implications on further research based on the purpose of the paper concludes the thesis project.

2. Literary Review

This chapter presents relevant literature explored in both Japanese and English, and thus does so by introducing the sociological claims of belonging, studies implementing *ibasho* and *ibasho* making, and foreigners in Japan. Each overarching category contribute to understanding the basis of the study and serve as contextual prerequisites to the later chapters of the thesis project.

2.1. The Sociological Significance of Belonging

It is common that an individual senses belonging through the perception of meaning and satisfaction from social relations, places, or instances. It is also a fundamental human need to seek, maintain and provide sense of belonging within ourselves and others around us (Baumeister &

Leary, 1995). Thus, the sense of belonging entails social and psychological aspects that contribute to the quality of life (Hagerty et al., 1996; Lambert et al., 2013). Although the concept started off as an emerging notion within psychology, its close relation to wellbeing affects similarly the individual, community, and sociology.

Social interactions can influence a sense of belonging in ways that affect the individual's participation in society. Its significance has also been found in other areas, such as inclusion (Morrow, 2001), community cohesion and participation (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012), social networks (Paiva et al., 2014), and participation in local neighborhoods (Mata & Pendakur, 2014). Expressions of culture, history, language, and heritage, on social capital influence one's sense of attachment to physical environments (May, 2013; Benson & Jackson, 2013). These findings are particularly interesting because it becomes clear that belonging tells us about identity, forming social and physical connections. Furthermore, it showcases that the sense of self is constructed through social relations with others and the intangible but collective notions on norms, values, and customs (May, 2011).

Understandings of the self through a social engagement has been particularly highlighted under the larger sociological category known as symbolic interactionism. Belonging is also understood as engagement between the self and society. Fortier (2000) contends that a sense of belonging is achieved when one is aware of unwritten social rules and can conduct themselves accordingly in front of others. Thus, there are three sociological theories that implicitly refer to this; in a Meadian fashion the self is constituted by how individual reflects in regard to the perception of the 'generalized other' (Mead, 1934), Goffman's theory (1959) on self where the individual is influenced by social rules in order to present oneself, and Bourdieu's habitus (1977; 1979) which encompasses knowledge of the rules of social engagement within a social 'field'. Belonging is a collective understanding of ourselves and our behaviors (Bell, 1999; Fortier, 2000). Shoter (1993) does emphasize that it is not solely the collective aspect but a feeling of 'contributing to one's own world' (ibid., 193) and our engagement with others. It is also worth to refer to Elias (2001) who viewed society as integral to relationships rather than society and the individual as separate entities. Simmel (1950) also contends how engagement between individuals and society vary in the perspectives; where moving away from the individual, the perspective on society enlarges. Thus,

a way of experiencing society is to navigate one's sense of belonging as being part of society that simultaneously relates to oneself, maintain relations, and behaviors.

Since an individual is multifold; in ways that a person comprises of everything ranging from age, gender, sexuality, religion to specific likes and dislikes, so is belonging. One may belong to several groups, cultures, and/or places simultaneously. This can be truer to those with multicultural background (Ifekwunigwe, 1999). Essentially, the sense of belonging is created through individuals giving meaning to their surroundings by existing, moving, and engaging with it (de Certeau, 1984; Leach, 2002). For instance, finding a new community through a new hobby. On the other hand, the lack of belonging and sense of alienation¹; particularly feeling excluded, disoriented, depressive or homesick (Casey, 1993). Although these experiences that fracture everyday routines can also be productive in realizing new possibilities presented within a given moment (Gardiner, 2004). Belonging can have a great impact on those of young age which, can continue into adulthood (Corrales et al., 2016). Low senses of belonging links closely to youth delinquency, decline in mental health, and poor academic performance particularly during adolescence (Chow, 2007; Freeman, Anderman & Jensen, 2007; Ma, 2003; Marraccini & Brier, 2017; Pendergast, 2018). The method of retaining positive belonging is built around school community; forming self-esteem, making meaningful connections with peers and teachers, and implementing inclusive practices (Chiu et al., 2016; Juvonen, 2006; Sanders & Munford, 2016).

Individuals commonly seek and maintain belonging as an essential part of living with purpose. In Japan the sense of belonging is also explored, but in a conceptual manner known as *ibasho*. The next section will dive deeper into how sense of belonging namely as *ibasho* emerged as a field of study.

¹ Not in the Marxist meaning.

2.2. Previous Research on *Ibasho*

Pronounced *ibasho* in Japanese and written in Chinese characters, 居場所². It is a word often used in everyday speech in Japan meaning ‘whereabouts’, ‘location’, and ‘place’, and it is initially understood. However, other meanings for this very word are ‘a place where one belongs’, ‘where one fits in’, and ‘where one can be oneself’ embodies as *kokoro no ibasho* (*ibasho* of the heart). In fact, Fujiwara (2010) identifies ten aspects of *ibasho*; the foundation of your social circle(s), freedom, comfortability, alone time, rest, belonging, sense of connection, leisure and growth, self-acceptance, and safe place. The word embodies a wide range of use within the Japanese society and across different fields of study, but the very base of *ibasho* describes one’s ‘sense of belonging’, ‘self-assurance’, and ‘home’.

This section will focus on previous research where *ibasho* has been adopted. It has been widely applied on the formation of identity and self-assurance of Japanese youths, and Japanese education. More recent research on *ibasho* is expanding its use outside of the Japan region.

2.2.1. Forming the Japanese Identity: starting from the Youth and in Education

The usage of *ibasho* was first applied onto children’s welfare and the Japanese education system. Since not only did *ibasho* become a growing interest as case studies for the field of psychology (Kitayama, 1993; Hiroi, 2000), but also as a response to the report by the Board of Education on school absenteeism in the early 1990s in Japan (Tanaka, 1992). This popular application of *ibasho* within this field was to grasp methods of school retention (Tanaka & Tajima, 2004) and prevent potential acts of delinquency caused by the lack of *ibasho* (Takemori, 1999). The methods would include extra attention to places within the school in which students would consider *ibasho*. Those places were the school infirmary rooms and counseling rooms, but additionally, having meaningful

² Kanji note on 居場所

The first character 居 means ‘to be, exist, reside, live with’ as the second character 場 means ‘location, place’. Finally, the last character encompasses ‘place, scene, area, one’s house, aspect, part, space, approximately, in the process of doing’ (more details available via the online Japanese dictionary Jisho.org <https://jisho.org/search/%E5%B1%85%E5%A0%B4%E6%89%80%20%23kanji>). Together the characters are read as *ibasho* in the Japanese language.

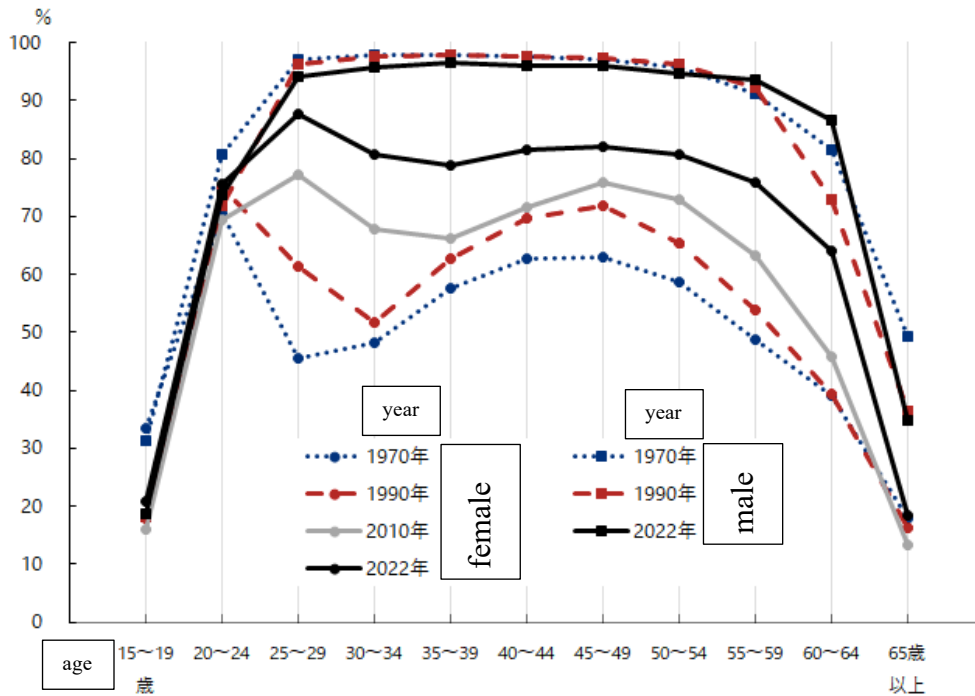
bonds with classmates (Furuichi & Tamaki, 1994). It has since been recognized that *ibasho* is a crucial part of youth welfare and well-being.

The themes of education and youth are highly prevalent in the research on *ibasho* as the recognition of marginalized youths has increased over the years. Primarily these minority youths have disabilities (McGuire, 2021), multi-national backgrounds (Suzuki et al., 2022; Tokunaga, 2021; Tokunaga, Da Silva & Fu, 2021; Yano, 2005), struggling with anxiety (Otaya, 2021), and/or struggling family situations (Bamba, 2010; Bamba & Haight, 2006). These more recent works on *ibasho* emphasize the need for inclusivity in the classroom, proactive supportive methods for *ibasho* creation, and how to increase the formation of self-assertation in minority adolescents. *Ibasho* is seen as a crucial pillar for the formation of an identity, especially the Japanese identity.

A solid and self-assured identity leads to a more stable transition into adulthood, including one's professional and academic prospects for the future (Ozawa, 2002). It can be considered that the motivation to an individual's stability from adolescence to adulthood stems from the idea that Japanese individuals are encouraged to become a *shakaijin* (a person of the society) (Fukasaku, 2017). The term, *shakaijin*, entails that as an adult, you contribute to the society as a full-time worker while earning money of your own (Roberson, 1995). Part-time work or other alternatives are seen as precarious and once you are of age, there is a strong notion that you should find your own stability. It is a conformist notion with underlines of pushing youth into the standardized life path as corporate workers.

This is primarily manifested through the established social expectations specific to Japan seen in the characteristics of maintaining group harmony (collectivism), the *sarariiman* (salaryman) masculinity (Dasgupta, 2005), and *senryo shufu* (full-time housewife) (Ishii & Jarkey, 2002; Terami, 1996). Although women are more active in the Japanese labor market now due to progressive changes in gender norms (Kitao & Mikoshiba, 2022; Rodríguez-Planas & Tanaka, 2022), the labor participation has long been characterized through a M-curve, with temporary absences from labor during childrearing (Kang, 2017).

Figure 3-2 Graph of Labor Participation sorted by Age and Gender from year 1970 to 2022



(Figure 3-2 Graph of Labor Participation sorted by Age and Gender from year 1970 to 2022, Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training, 2023)

College students are encouraged to start their *shuukatsu* job hunting process a year before their official graduation as a part of the annual *shinsotsusaiyou* (new grad hiring scheme). It is the rite from new graduate to the corporate world (Kroo, 2021). Although now obsolete, this process was influenced by the *shuushin koyou* (lifelong employment), which meant that the hiring companies expected the new graduates to work in the same company until retirement (Hamaaki et al., 2010). The *shinsotsusaiyou* process has recently been challenged as youths are showing interest in entrepreneurship, studying abroad or other life priorities, thus deviating from the standardized life path (Sakashita, 2020). In summary, *ibasho* is a precursor of adulthood shaping adolescents to form self-assurance and confidence to successfully navigate the rest of their lives as adults contributing to the society.

2.2.2. Outside of Japan

In more recent years *ibasho* has been expanding onto other places than Japan, namely in America. The making of *ibasho* has been particularly explored in other groups and cultures, primarily

understood as community building. The reasons are twofold; one, understanding which forms of *ibasho* are present for a given group/community, and two, suggesting operations to enforce *ibasho* creation for an enhanced social cohesion and individual wellbeing. This is explored primarily through local community projects (Aida et al., 2023; Mansourian, 2022; Shantini, Widiyanti & Inoue, 2024) or minority groups (Herleman, Britt & Hashima, 2008; Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020; Tokunaga, 2018; Tokunaga & Huang, 2016).

The *ibasho* creation through local community projects have been implemented to foster social cohesion by strengthening communication and participation among locals through activities. Community hubs for the purpose of leisure (Mansourian, 2022), learning (Shantini, Widiyanti & Inoue, 2024) or sharing skills (Aida et al., 2023) are maintained for the purpose of *ibasho* creation. Although the *ibasho* concept is primarily a Japanese thought, what it embodies contributes to the wellbeing of the participants and is shown to have positive outcomes in making stronger bonds through shared activities. Shantini, Widiyanti & Inoue (2024) looked into Indonesian community cases to emphasize that *ibasho* is best implemented with adjustments to the cultural context where it is to be applied to. This is to provide coherency within these *ibasho* making programs.

Minority groups also make use of community activity as a part of *ibasho* creation. Tokunaga and Huang (2016) explored *ibasho* in Chinese immigrant students living the United States. The purpose was to understand how the students negotiated *ibasho* after migrating to America and how participation in the community program, specifically for Chinese immigrant students, affected their making of an *ibasho*. The program proved to be helpful in aiding them acclimate to the new life in America on their terms. An important finding from the study was that understanding *ibasho* can be useful for educators and policy makers accepting international students in North America. Thus, exploring foreign ideas for inclusion practices, such as the concept *ibasho*, can be more beneficial in providing safe spaces for international students. Ideally the practices are implemented as collaborative workshops or events led by the practitioners and stakeholders. These findings were similarly contended for the case of children of Japanese descent living in America attending after-school Japanese language lessons (Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020). Furthermore, Tokunaga (2016) examined Asian American girls' *ibasho* through an ethnographic study observing that these girls negotiate displacement and attachments through their multicultural, young and gender specific

background. It offers new perspectives on immigrant youth as agents contributing to globalization and community building through the way the girls negotiate local ‘home’ and *ibasho*.

Although the concept has its origin in Japan, the way *ibasho* encompasses feelings, thoughts, physical, and psychological aspects of belonging and the making of *ibasho*, is broad but concise enough in finding relevance across spatial and cultural differences. It becomes particularly relevant for *ibasho* creation in communities and examining wellbeing in minority groups.

2.3. Foreign Residents in Japan

The presence of foreign residents in Japan is not a new idea and they have existed in Japan for a long time. Rather, the meaning of ‘foreigners’ has shifted throughout history. This can be particularly observed for ethnic minorities in Japan, such as the Ainu and the Ryukyu, who have been around before the Yamato Japanese claimed them and their lands as Japanese. Although they are still contested as ‘foreign’, their long-term presences in Japan have justified their grouping as ‘ethnic minorities’. This includes previously mentioned indigenous groups and the ‘oldcomers’, primarily consisting of Korean and Chinese migrants from Imperial Japan and earlier (Brody, 2002). They are seen as the first wave of foreign residents in Japan and often hold permanent residencies or are naturalized Japanese nationals (Chapman, 2006).

Since the 1980s bubble economy then enabled the Japanese government to welcome a wave of ‘new’ set of foreigners due to rising labor demands, referred to as ‘newcomers’. These migrants were largely from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. They were invited to Japan for the 3K jobs – *kitanai* (dirty), *kiken* (dangerous), and *kitsui* (physically exhausting) labor (Kashiwazaki, 2013; Kshetry, 2008; Liu-Farrer, 2011). Many of the entertainment visa holders were young women from the Philippines coming to Japan to work at the cabaret or hostess clubs which led the international criticism of Japan partaking in acts of human trafficking (Okamura & Ogasawara, 2005). This was quickly mended to save Japan’s reputation (Ono, 2017). The technical interns, on one hand, aided Japan’s labor shortages in the service and manufacturing industry. However, their working and living conditions were often dire; unpaid overwork, long working hours, abusive coworkers, overcharging rent, gender, and racial discrimination (Chonlawon, 2021). Another cluster were migrant students coming for tertiary education or language school but were more so

seen as Japan's attempt to globalize and sourcing irregular workers (Liu-Farrer, 2011). This was to 'reserve' highly skilled labor visas for individuals from Western countries (Iwata & Nemoto, 2018).

Foreign residents have limited access to voting rights, right to education, child custody, divorce, privacy violations, experience ethnic/racial profiling, and discrimination (Kshetry, 2008; Shipper, 2006). With the COVID-19 pandemic, exclusionary attitudes towards foreigners were heightened among Japanese citizens who had strong pathogen avoidance tendencies and those who infrequently interacted with foreigners (Yamagata, Teraguchi & Miura, 2021). Japanese individuals who interact with foreigners more often, or those who particularly derive from high income households with higher education attainment, were more welcoming of foreigners (Nukaga, 2006; Yamamura, 2009). However, Igarashi and Nagayoshi (2022) do find that those with high education and liberal views still share generally negative sentiments towards foreigners.

The attitudes towards foreigners are deeply complex as anti-immigrant sentiments are still considered highly internalized. It seems that Japanese citizens do understand the circumstances and can comprehend that immigration is a solution to labor shortage and a shrinking population, but they feel hesitant to accept foreigners due to preexisting stereotypes and sentiments on preserving homogeneity (Davidson & Peng, 2021; Kage, Rosenbluth & Tanaka, 2022; Kobayashi et al., 2015; Laurence, Igarashi & Ishida, 2022). Davidson and Peng (2021) showcase findings that Japanese citizens have an image of foreigners as temporary. It is a common perception among the Japanese that foreigners in Japan are temporary visitors; tourists, students and workers. The idea that foreigners settle or naturalize in Japan is not clear, which is why low-skilled labor migrants have often been sidelined from the category of foreign residents (Igarashi & Ono, 2022; Kato, Kuznetsova & Round, 2019).

The notion to preserve Japanese identity and culture is a strong notion in the Japanese sentiment. Accepting more foreigners in Japan is understood as putting Japan's culture and existing values at risk, specifically notions on "politeness (*reigi tadashii*), consideration for people around you (*omoiyari*), respecting rules (*ruuru wo mamoru*), discipline/seriousness (*majimesa*), kindness (*yasashisa*), and hospitality (*omotenashi*)" (Davidson & Peng, 2021, p. 2586). There is a general

belief that these would be challenged if Japan opens the country to foreigners. While Befu and Manabe (1995) found in their public survey that Japanese respondents understand that foreigners are incapable of fully comprehending Japan's culture and society. There is also a common agreement of what qualities are included in being Japanese; having Japanese citizenship, Japanese parents, Japanese language competency, Japanese name, looking Japanese in physical appearances, and residing in Japan (Dale, 1986; Morimoto, 1985; Oguma, 1995; Sugimoto, 2010; Tsuda, 2008; Watanabe, 1954).

The common referral to a foreigner is *gaikokujin* meaning 'foreigner' and is sometimes even shortened as *gaijin*³. The abbreviation is often seen as controversial because it has derogatory connotations. Media and educational portrayals promote positive racial ideologies linked to Whiteness, Westernness, and Americanness, when referring to *gaikokujin* (Iwata & Nemoto, 2018; Kubota, 1998; McCormack, 2007). Even the term 'expatriate' exclusively refers to individuals of Western origins (Peltokorpi, 2006; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). Besides, referral to one individual foreigner is more positive than referring to clusters of foreigners (Laurence, Igarashi & Ishida, 2022). Frequent contact with foreign individuals plays a large role. It creates a 'but you're not like those other foreigners' thinking when well-kept personal ties are in place. This is similarly contended for ethnic groups who have stayed in Japan the longest, for instance, Japanese are more accepting of the 'oldcomer' migrants naturalizing due to their long presence in Japan (Igarashi & Ono, 2022; Kobayashi et al., 2015; Nagayoshi, 2009). The 'oldcomers' have also long participated in civil activism and campaigned against violations of human rights in Japan, especially the *Zainichi* Koreans (Koreans living in Japan before and during Japanese Imperialism) advocated against forced fingerprinting documentation, forced deportation, and unjust employment opportunities (Chapman, 2008; Kashiwazaki, 2000; Lie, 2008). Lastly, it was not until year 2012

³ Kanji note on *gaikokujin* 外国人 and *gaijin* 外人

A literal translation of the words means 'outside person'. The abbreviation is often contested and has derogatory connotations (Curtis, 2011; Toff & Yamamori, 2011).

The first character 外 means 'outside', the second character 国 means 'country/land' and finally, the last character 人 means 'person' (more details available via the online Japanese dictionary Jisho.org <https://jisho.org/search/%E5%A4%96%E5%9B%BD%E4%BA%BA%20%23kanji>).

that the Alien Registration Act was replaced by the Basic Resident Registration Act for long term foreign residents.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will go further into explaining the theoretical details of *ibasho* and contend the conditions that encompass *ibasho*. Furthermore, the Japanese rhetoric and social concept of *soto-uchi* is also presented as to showcase *ibasho* consisting primarily of *uchi* and how the *soto-uchi* relation negotiates relationship proximity. The theoretical frameworks, *ibasho* and *soto-uchi*, also serve as the guiding basis for 5. *Analysis*, where the concepts are explored in the ten transcripts.

3.1. *Ibasho*

As earlier contended, the purpose of *ibasho* was mainly to understand the identity formation and wellbeing in Japanese youths (Bamba & Haight, 2006). Although the term directly translates to ‘where one resides/lives/belong’, the concept itself is widely applied within the Japanese context and has diversified along the way. It exists in everyday conversation and there is a common understanding of what *ibasho* entails. However, there is no concrete set of qualities or conditions in the concept (Nakafuji, 2017). However, there are repetitive traits across the research on *ibasho* and the most common characteristics of *ibasho* have been identified as; the subjectivity of the individual (*tojisha*), relationships with other people, and location (Abiru; 2012), and Sumida’s (2003) two conditions in their study on children’s *ibasho*; subjective (acknowledgement of *ibasho*) and objective (the physical space). Granting this nature of *ibasho*, the following passages will be divided according to the two overarching qualities throughout *ibasho* literature; subjectivity and physical space but will also describe Abiru’s one condition on relationships with other people.

Firstly, the subjective condition of *ibasho* entails the notion of self-acclimation. It emphasizes the power that lies in the individual to define oneself and claim one’s surroundings to call *ibasho* (Bamba & Haight, 2006). Here Sumida (2003) adds a comfortable state of mind and feeling acceptance from others. As previously contended, Fujiwara (2010) identifies ten aspects of *ibasho*; the foundation of your social circle(s), freedom, comfortability, alone time, rest, belonging, sense of connection, leisure and growth, self-acceptance, and safe place. These are all aspects that are identified by the individual. *Ibasho* is never imposed upon a person or a place (Bamba & Haight,

2006). Furthermore, there cannot be an *ibasho* if one's existence is challenged nor if there is no perspective for the progress of one's future development in the surroundings (Tanaka, 2012). Thus, the subjective aspect of *ibasho* is mainly psychological and can positively contribute to one's wellbeing when the conditions are met.

Secondly, *ibasho* can be a physical space, but by itself it is not a prerequisite of the concept. The usual physical locations one roams in, such as one's own house, school, or workplace, can be considered *ibasho* and are the so-called 'third places' (*dai san no ibasho*), places outside of the conventional locations. For instance, in the previous research on *ibasho*, students would consider the school infirmary and counseling rooms as *ibasho* (Furuichi & Tamaki, 1994) or the facility where the community program was deployed (Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020; Tokunaga & Huang, 2016). These spaces can play an active role in *ibasho* making or as an established *ibasho*. The physical spaces alone do not necessarily constitute as an *ibasho*, the place must also fulfill the subjective conditions for it to be considered *ibasho*, hence, the emergence of 'third places'. Regardless, these 'third places' refer to a source of wellbeing (Hashimoto et al., 2022).

Finally, Abiru's (2012) *ibasho* condition on relationship with others. The subjective and objective aspects of *ibasho* do entail the common notion of interacting with other individuals in their surroundings. Previously Furuichi and Tamaki (1994) did contend that students with 'third places' at school, showing signs of self-assurance, and good relations with classmates, are more likely to call school a place of their *ibasho*. Hence, it can be understood that *ibasho* can be affected by the surrounding people if the individual has established relations with them. For instance, the feeling of acceptance can emerge from validating positive interactions, while invalidating interactions can instead make the individual feel challenged and challenge the *ibasho* making process. It may also be worthy to note that these are not solely temporary relations, but also established relationships with others, perhaps because the individual often sees them frequently in the same physical locations. Thus, resulting in a good relationship with the people roaming in the *ibasho* places. If the good bonds are well maintained, eventually the physical spaces themselves can also emerge as an *ibasho*.

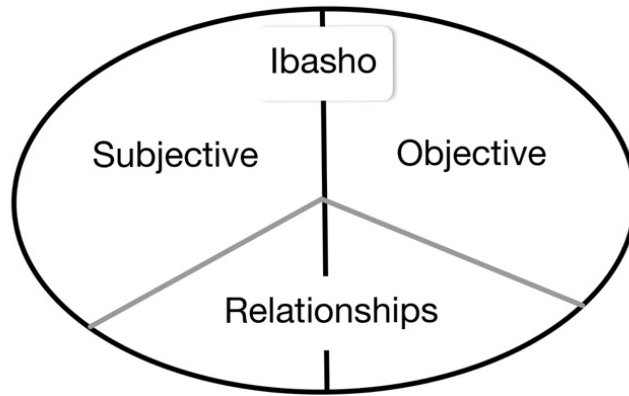


Figure 3.1. Mapping out *ibasho* based on Abiru (2012) and Sumida (2003)

Ibasho is a Japanese sociological concept that refers to a place of comfort, physically and emotionally. In other words, it includes all aspects of physical, mental, social relations, and personal experiences (Suzuki et al., 2022; Tanaka, 2021). The following notion of *soto-uchi* will serve the purpose as to clarify what determines the social proximity to contending *ibasho*.

3.2. Mapping *soto-uchi*

The words *soto* and *uchi*⁴ respectively means ‘outside’ and ‘inside/home’. This distinction is integral in understanding Japanese culture and society. It is a sociocultural and sociolinguistic boundary between what is considered ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. This refers to the proximity of closeness and how oneself is established in relation to others. For instance, in school competitions, Japanese students from the same school unify themselves as a group with organized cheering when competing against other schools. Certainly, there is sportsmanship anywhere else in the world too, but what makes *soto-uchi* unique is how it is executed in the Japanese society. In the essence of *soto-uchi*, the structure actively promotes the Japanese cultural identity by emphasizing collectivism and social hierarchy (Goekler, 2011).

⁴ Kanji note on *uchi* 内

The character means ‘inside, within, and home’ (more details available via the online Japanese dictionary Jisho.org <https://xn--jisho-u53d1g.org/search/%E5%86%85%20%23kanji>).

It does so by showcasing the distinctive features of the inside group and this can be done by how one formulates their relation to other groups, primarily through spoken Japanese and contextual behaviors (Masamune, 1996; Suple, 1994), but also one's responsibilities and place regarding the larger community (Doutrich, 2001). This means that conforming to the mainstream group, the ingroup and its demands, are more valued than one's own individual goals. The *uchi* consists primarily of family, friends, and people from their hometown, while *soto* would simply be outside of these groupings (Bachnik, 1994). For instance, when one thinks about their contribution to the ingroup, it is important that they keep in mind the collective needs of the group and respond to them accordingly. Imagine that the individual would respond to 'how can I simplify this work tasks for my team members?' rather than their own needs. The individual acts by themselves without having to receive orders from others or expressing one's actions because there is a common consciousness (Ikeno & Davies, 2002). This is how group harmony and social hierarchy are maintained in the Japanese society while disruption can lead to the exclusion of the individual in question, essentially a banishment to the *soto* (Konishi et al., 2009).

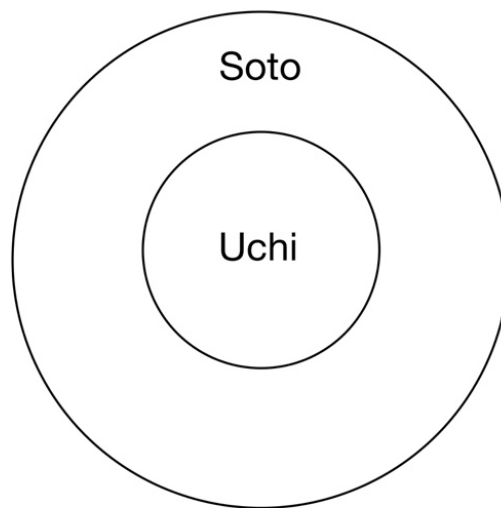


Figure 3.3.1. A visualization of the soto-uchi concept

This *soto-uchi* boundary also determines how one behaves, speaks, and treat others accordingly (Suple, 1994). For instance, in spoken Japanese, it is common to use formality to refer to strangers or superiors, specifically referring to a family name followed with the suffix *-san* to show respect, e.g. Tanaka-*san* (Masamune, 1996). If you have established close personal relations with them ('them' being included in your own *uchi* and you in theirs), you can gradually drop the *-san* or

even call them by their first names. If these close relations are not yet established while the formalities are dropped, it may indicate that you do not respect the other party. Most of the time, superiors would define the proximity first as to not disrupt the vertical relationship. Although complex, this is to showcase how the *soto-uchi* concept can be deployed in real life.

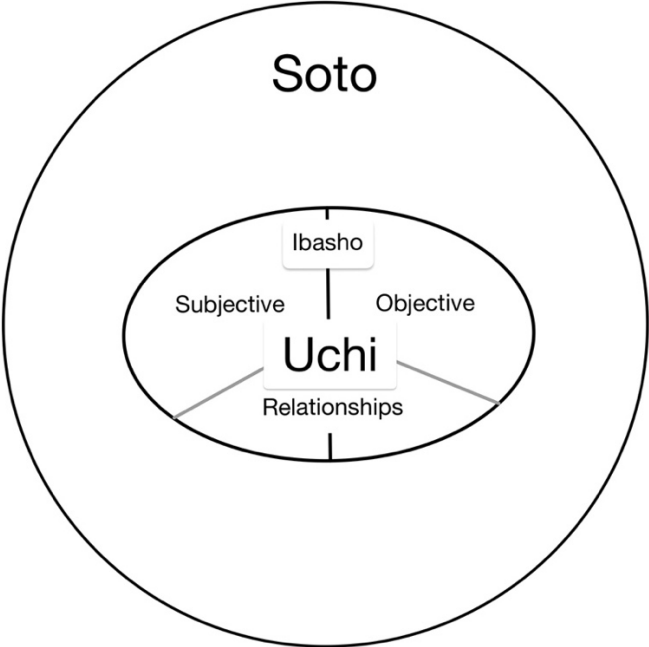


Figure 3.3.2 A visualization of soto-uchi with ibasho integrated

This relates closely to *ibasho* since the proximity of people and locations to the individual are determined by the elements of *soto-uchi*. The concept of *ibasho* includes all the elements that constitutes *uchi*; safety and stability, where one is the most comfortable with oneself, certain people or locations within the *uchi*. Respectively, *soto* represents all that does not constitute *ibasho*. This is not necessarily because it represents the opposite qualities of *uchi*, but simply because it does not spark the *uchi* elements. *Soto* can be considered as ‘anything other than *uchi*’. In the description of *ibasho*, it is clear that people, social bonds, and physical spaces, have meaning to the individual and thus, one responds by maintaining, interacting with them, and valuing those more actively than other people or places that do not fall under the *ibasho* category, also known as *soto*.

3.3. Notes on Compatibility

The presence of foreigners in Japan historically has always been and still is currently negotiated. Foreigners has been in the periphery of Japanese government services as seen in the *Zainichi* Koreans activism in Japan and the ambiguous results of the *tabunka kyosei* program. Foreigners can be considered a *soto* living in Japan, therefore it is not needed to put the same amount of detailed attention as to the *uchi*, ultimately the Japanese people. Since foreigners do still roam in Japan, they are more so identified in contrast to the Japanese population, by Japanese people imagining what being Japanese entails and it is what foreigners do not encompass (Dale, 1986; Morimoto, 1985; Oguma, 1995; Sugimoto, 2010; Tsuda, 2008; Watanabe, 1954). This is integral in *soto-uchi* because the concepts of *uchi* and *soto* both coexist in the same space in order to be present as separate entities. It can also be contended that foreigners deploy their own proximity of *soto-uchi*. Although *ibasho* primarily investigates Japanese youths and the Japanese identity, it is clear in the descriptions of *ibasho* and *ibasho* making that they are both borderless concepts. As previously contended, there are studies on marginalized foreign children in Japan (Suzuki et al., 2022; Tokunaga, 2021; Tokunaga, Da Silva & Fu, 2021; Yano, 2005) and studies taken out of the Japanese context (Aida et al., 2023; Herleman, Britt & Hashima, 2008; Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020; Mansourian, 2022; Shantini, Widiyanti & Inoue, 2024; Tokunaga, 2018; Tokunaga & Huang, 2016) which showcase the wide application of *ibasho* for other groups and locations besides what is primarily contended Japanese. The purpose of this paper is to explore the *ibasho* in foreign residents living in Japan by closing the gaps which have not been explored yet.

4. Methodology and Data Collection

4.1. Research Design

This project is primarily qualitative with data collected from the February 2024 to April 2024⁵. The interview procedure was conducted as a semi-structured method with a minimum target participation of ten interviewees. A total of ten interviews were conducted and sampled through the convenient and snowball sampling methods. The purpose is to understand the connection

⁵ Originally, there was a quantitative part to the study based on the General Belongingness Scale (GBS) (Malone, Pillow & Osman, 2012) that was intended for a mixed methods analysis, however, it was not considered due to the low volume of survey responses.

between foreigners in Japan and *ibasho*; exploring what *ibasho* is to them and how the term is affected by them. Thus, the accounts of ten people contributed to the state of contemporary foreign residents in Japan. An interview guide was prepared in advance for the participants to view beforehand. This was to ensure interviewees the option of reviewing questions.

The purpose of the form was to primarily collect participant demographics and interest in volunteering as an interviewee. The participants responded to ten statements pertaining to belonging in Japan based on the General Belongingness Scale (GBS) (Malone, Pillow & Osman, 2012) (see 8. *Appendices*). The participants were then selected after the set criteria which were as following: (1) currently a foreign resident in Japan by visa requirement, and (2) identify themselves as a foreigner living in Japan. These criteria have been set in careful consideration regarding the legal rights and conditions as a foreigner living in Japan but also experiencing Japan as a foreign resident and the significance of having a self-perceived foreign presence in Japanese society. This was also understood in relation to *ibasho* throughout the interview process.

Once the participants noted their interest in the thesis project, they received the interview guide and were prompted to read the informed consent letter. The participants were invited to schedule an appointment via the online tool, Calendly, for the subsequent Zoom interview. On the scheduled interview day, participants were given a summary about the project and its purpose, as well as the terms and conditions they have agreed to. Each interview was audio recorded via Zoom and lasted for approximately 1,5 hours. The interview guide was split into two parts; part I asks for clarification from each individual form response to the GBS statements, and part II, entailed interview questions specific to *ibasho*. Impromptu follow-up questions were presented, and the participants answered them as they seemed fit. All interviews ended with concluding remarks with gratitude for their participation.

4.2. Data Sources: The Interviewees

The ten interviewees were sampled through convenient and snowball sampling for a higher response rate. Initially it was shared through social media outlets and online forums for foreigners

living in Japan⁶. Interviewees were also encouraged to share it with their friends and acquaintances to reach a wider audience. Thanks to their cooperation, ten interviewees' transcripts were collected and serve as the basis of analysis for this paper.

Participant Name⁷	Gender	Age Group	Country of Origin	Race⁸	Occupation	Total Time in Japan	Language Proficiency⁹
Alia	Female	20s	Thailand	Mixed	Unemployed	6	N3
Alice	Female	10s ¹⁰	French Polynesia	Mixed	Student	2	N4
Elias	Male	20s	The Philippines	Asian	Student	5.5	N1
Jesse	Male	20s	United States of America	White	Working full-time	4	N2
Kasey	Male	20s	The Philippines	Asian	Student	5.5	N2
Linus	Male	30s	Sweden	White	Working full-time	8	N1
Matt	Male	20s	Vietnam	Asian	Student	5	N3
Samantha	Female	20s	The Philippines	N/A	Working full-time	5.5	N1
Samuel	Male	20s	United Kingdom	White	Student	5	N3
Sarra	Female	20s	Indonesia	Asian	Working full-time	5	N2

4.2. Table chart on participants' demographics

⁶ These outlets consisting of Instagram, Reddit, Discord, Line, and HelloTalk.

⁷ The names stated are aliases picked by the interviewees themselves or randomly allocated by the Primary Investigator.

⁸ Participants voluntarily disclosed this information.

⁹ This category refers to the levels measured in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT).

¹⁰ 10s age group consists of ages 18 to 19 years, as only legal adults may participate in this study.

Many of the participants initially came to Japan for the purpose of education and have either continued to do so or started their careers in Japan after graduating. Thus, most of them are in their 20s. There is a mix of their lengths of stay in Japan and Japanese language proficiencies. On average, they have spent about 5 years in Japan and can at least communicate simple everyday level Japanese. Also, most of them had experienced the COVID-19 pandemic while in Japan. All of them currently reside in metropolitan areas of Japan, mainly the Kanto and Kansai regions. Additionally, all except Alice, had responded that they have no close family members in where they reside but did have close friends in the area. Most importantly, all the participants responded, 'Yes' to the survey question 'Do you consider yourself a foreign resident living in Japan?'

4.3. Ethics

This section will discuss three main ethical claims of the project; the influence over interviewees, means of confidentiality, and positionality.

Firstly, there is an acknowledgement that the interview process may influence the participants to some extent. A part of social fieldwork is to ask the interviewees to recall and think about certain situations they have felt and observed as parts of their lives. This can trigger strong emotions during and after the interview has been conducted (Liamputtong, 2011). Triggers were not the case for the majority of the interviews, however half of them had not come across the *ibasho* term before which allowed them to explore the concept on their own as the interview prolapsed. During the interview, I tried to ensure a safe and nonjudgmental space while trying to familiarize with the interviewee's perspectives and think of follow-up questions as an active listener (Lillrank, 2012).

Secondly, the privacy of the participants and intent to protect their data collected for this research were also considered. It was done so by referring to the interviewees with pseudonyms (Im & Chee, 2003) and redacting any details in the interview data that is considered identifiable (Liamputtong, 2006). Interviewees have been asked to read and sign informed letters of consent before the interviews. Their voluntary participation is continuously reminded, and although it was not active for the interviewees in this study, they were free to deny any interview questions in the guide. This is to ensure that the privacy of the participants is protected throughout the project and for minimizing the impact on their everyday lives. By the end of the thesis project, any interview data

that has been stored digitally is permanently deleted as to comply with measures of confidentiality (Mann & Stewart, 2000).

Finally, I, the main author of this project am providing the highest form of transparency within my ability, by providing interviewees sufficient information of the study. Simultaneously acknowledging that a qualitative study, such as this one, does have some level of bias due to the chosen sampling method, a limited number of transcripts as the basis of analysis, but also my positionality in relation to the project. This is addressed and made aware of throughout the project.

4.4. Limitations

4.4.1. Notes on Methodology and Data Collection

It is acknowledged in this study that the analysis is highly influenced by the sampling method and the collected data. Due to the nature of the sampling method, mainly convenient and snowball, most of the participants were of similar backgrounds or has shared the interview opportunity amongst each other. Thus, it is observed that most of the participants were of the same or similar age groups (10s to 20s). They represent recent newcomer migrants in Japan rather than oldcomers of Chinese or Korean heritage, and many other backgrounds were not explored in the interview data. It is a common limitation for qualitative based studies where assumptions and conclusions are partly inconclusive in a larger context (Flick, 2009). It is also acknowledged that the collected data and conclusions would have turned out differently depending on a different set of data, in terms of timing, location, and participant outreach. The three factors will be discussed briefly in the respective order. Timing is an important factor because it influences audience outreach, participant's availability, and the circumstances of emotions or external factors the participants are experiencing at the time of the interview. While assumptions in this project primarily pertain to the collected data, the accounts of the ten interviewees have contributed valuable insight to the understanding of the *ibasho* concept in a context; how *ibasho* is formed and how the participants transform the concept.

4.4.2. Notes on the Primary Investigator

Another observation made in regard to the project is an acknowledgement of the positionality of the Primary Investigator of this very project. This chapter will refer to first point of view from here now and only for the duration of this section. My positionality in this project has a large influence over this paper; from deciding research topic to the evaluation of the interviews. The overall execution may have produced different outcomes or conclusions depending on the Primary Investigator in charge. As for my background, my interest in the research topic on foreigners in Japan developed from my previous academic experience at Osaka University where I received formal education about Japanese society while being present in the country. I have first-hand experience living in Japan as a foreigner myself and communicating with other foreigners. It influences my decision making throughout this paper. However, I do not intend to share my experience through this project but to highlight *ibasho* experiences of other foreigners.

Moreover, understanding my positionality before commencing the writing process of the paper also allowed me to distance myself from the interview data and assertions to my best ability. Although there were notions throughout the interview data that resonated with my own experiences, I was conscious of my actions and decision making. Academic objectivity and transparency were important are referenced throughout the execution of the paper. I can only hope that it was conveyed as it was intended to the readers and acknowledging the limitations of the project can contribute to further transparency, in turn would also improve the credibility of the research.

4.4. Method of Analysis

Given the semi structured qualitative data collection method and the explorative nature of the research questions, a thematic analysis is most appropriate in answering the research questions. Qualitative coding is a meticulous process of making sense of the collected data (Adu, 2012; Bazeley, 2013). This process entails recognizing recurring patterns or meanings in the transcripts, often facilitated by coding to organize the patterns as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, researchers conduct an initial coding sequence to first identify major and emerging patterns in transcripts (Minichiello et al., 2008). It should represent the data and address the aim(s) of the given study. It is also noted that it is not representative of general society due to the limitations of

the sampling methods in a qualitative study including fewer accounts than in a quantitative study (Flick, 2009).

In this explorative study on *ibasho* of foreign residents in Japan, extracting emergent themes from the data is crucial given the diverse, subjective, and contextual nature of *ibasho*, but also the interviewees. The coding of the transcripts for this paper took place in the Nvivo 14 software program to mark and organize codes in regard to the research questions; *Do foreign residents in Japan form a sense of ibasho? If so, how is ibasho established and experienced?* (RQ1) and *Does a global background affect the Japan specific sociological concept of ibasho?* (RQ2). RQ1 is coded on a description-based premise, according to the previously contended three conditions of *ibasho* by Sumida (2003) and Abiru (2012); physical condition, subjective condition, and relationships. On the other hand, RQ2 was created using interpretation-based coding by exploring emerging patterns in the transcripts and devise them as codes. The latter coding approach is a hermeneutic approach (Bentz & Shapiro, 2001) influenced by the researcher's preexisting background and bias to determine the empirical data (Charmaz, 2014). The codes for RQ1 and RQ2 are then grouped into clusters, and thus, overarching themes emerge. These themes will be the structure of section 5. *Analysis*. The process for this was highly subjective and conducted as a part of the decision making as the author of the project but the categorization was executed with the upmost consideration and care to ensure transparency and representation of the interview accounts. These themes will be the basis of analysis in the next section.

5. Analysis

This analysis chapter has been divided in a way that responds to the research questions; *Do foreign residents in Japan form a sense of ibasho? If so, how is ibasho established and experienced?* (chapter 5.1 How Foreigners form *Ibasho* (RQ1)) and *Does a global background affect the Japan specific sociological concept of ibasho?* (chapter 5.2 A Borderless *Ibasho* (RQ2)). The first research question will be answered by looking into the three conditions of *ibasho* contended by Sumida (2003) and Abiru (2012), and its prevalence understood as themes in the transcripts. Themes within these conditions emerge and contribute to *ibasho*. Those will be central to the RQ1 analysis. Whereas RQ2 was explored in a manner where findings in the transcripts established a theme independently from the three contended conditions of *ibasho* (Abiru, 2012; Sumida, 2003).

5.1. How Foreigners form *Ibasho* (RQ1)

First and foremost, it is clear that all participants have an idea of what *ibasho* encompasses and the *ibasho* making which have significance in their lives. In general, interviewees showcased that *ibasho* was something they all were thinking of at different times of their lives, in diverse frequencies and emphasis on the three conditions of *ibasho*; physical, subjective, and relationship (Abiru, 2012; Sumida, 2003).

About half of the interviewees had not come across the term *ibasho* and were, in fact, unaware of its existence. It was rather understood as the common term referring to ‘one’s residence’ and they found the sociological concept through online searches to grasp the nature of the thesis project. Neither the survey or interview guide defined the term, which was to purposely allow them to freely think about *ibasho* and what it encompasses for each of the interviewees. When prompted about *ibasho*, all the interviewees came to the interviews having ideas and comments about *ibasho*. Half of the interviewees understood the term primarily as ‘belonging’ and reflected about it. Although ‘belonging’ and *ibasho* are not direct equivalents to each other, the participants formulated notions encompassing *ibasho*, *ibasho* making, and ‘belonging’.

In fact, four participants, Alia, Linus, Matt, and Samuel, were contemplating whether they have an *ibasho*. They all came to the same conclusion that they were still in the *ibasho* making process, thus, were not able to define *ibasho* entirely. Perhaps because the concept can be overwhelming in a mundane setting, in addition, having a foreign background to reflect about can broaden the opportunities of *ibasho* and *ibasho* making (5.1.2.1. *Foreigner in Japan*). The aspects of *ibasho* do entail some sorts of stability and commitment, which may be contradicting when one’s life, occupational, social, and mobility aspects are not settled on yet. However, despite the uncertainty about *ibasho* in their lives, they were all still able to make comments about what *ibasho* encompasses, what they currently consider *ibasho*, and what aspects of *ibasho* making they are engaged in. Although half of the participants did not come across the term *ibasho* before the study, but they were able to expand on their connections, experiences, and feelings throughout the interview sessions, which directly relates to the conditions of *ibasho*. The upcoming sections will present the data following the three conditions; physical, subjective, and relationships (Abiru, 2012; Sumida, 2003).

5.1.1. The Physical Condition

This theme entails the notion of interviewees' creating meaning in physical locations they roam; it can vary from places across Japan to locations in their country of origin. The common traits in this theme are that interviewees have fond memories of these physical locations and often frequent certain places in Japan and overseas, such as their own apartments in Japan or the family house in their country of origin. All these places have meanings attached to them. This chapter will delve into this trait by first showcasing meaningful locations in Japan and in their countries of origin respectively.

For the places in Japan, most of the participants created meaning and attached those to locations they frequent and enjoyed during their time in Japan. Participants Elias, Jesse, Kasey, and Samantha, all spoke about their residences as an *ibasho* for them. Most of them described their independent apartments while currently Jesse lives in a share house. There is an emphasis on the fact that the apartment is a place of relaxation, safety, and embodies home. Elias described it as "I can just relax, feel like I don't have to put up appearances for other people". He also stressed that his apartment is a judgement free zone, as long as he does not disturb the neighbors. For Jesse, his best friend resides in the same building as him, and they have access to the rooftop where they can spend time and relax together. He really enjoys this. Furthermore, Kasey and Samantha mentioned their residencies as 'obvious' choices of 'home' and *ibasho*.

Kasey: In terms of places, in terms of physical look, in terms of physical spaces, I guess anything that encompasses places where I live and work are the main two things for me, for me to call *ibasho*. My apartment is obviously one, my laboratory was obviously the other one. Um, this might sound weird, but the usual routes I would take to and from home in school, felt like an *ibasho* for me. Because thinking of it from a time, think of it in terms of time spent, aside from home and school, the roads I would always walk through, were the locations I would spend the most time on in Japan, right? Because I would always walk through them. So in terms of that point of thinking, it felt like I belong, it felt like my place. It felt like my route. I guess, I guess that's one way of calling it, it felt like MY route.

It is understandable because they roam this location the most; spend time sleeping, eating, and getting ready in their residencies, and keeping all of their belongings there. Elias was prompted

about moving residencies within Japan and how he would feel about that. He described it as follows.

Elias: Oh, yeah, I would I feel like it would change. Like, maybe it would take some time for me to be able to call that new space an *ibasho* or like, you know, getting used to it at first but like, you know, I try my best. If I would try my best to find a place that I would feel comfortable living in I would feel happy, content, safe living in.

It is clear that apartment is a location they shaped into an *ibasho* because initially they had to find their apartments upon arriving in Japan. After acquiring one, they were able to give the place meaning and reside comfortably enough to make it an 'obvious' physical location of *ibasho*.

From here onwards, other physical locations included in their *ibasho* vary among the participants. As individuals, they make different memories and attach exclusive meanings to places only known to themselves. Other physical locations in Japan contended as *ibasho* are the following in no particular order; *restaurants, café, locations where one's friends are, one's work place, Lake Biwa, Osaka, school laboratory, frequent traveling route, hairdresser, Yokohama, university, park, Okayama, old work office, proximity, and the previous apartment*. These are places where the six participants Elias, Jesse, Kasey, Linus, Matt, and Samantha, would often frequent, think about, and have meanings attached during their time in Japan. They would frequent spaces like *frequent traveling route, workplaces, laboratory, school*, because of work or school obligations but it became a part of their *ibasho* because they spent such significant time there with purpose. Similarly, the cities, *Osaka, Yokohama, and Okayama*, are places where they have resided for a long time and have fond memories there with other important people and thus, established connection to these places. There are perceived qualities that seemingly 'other places' do not have or maybe it has not yet been established. Jesse talks about how he leaves for other prefectures for work shares how good he feels upon returning to Osaka, where he resides.

Jesse: I'm actually you know what that reminds me to like, whenever I like leave Osaka, like, if I go to Tokyo or like go somewhere for work trip or like, go somewhere for a few days like the feeling of like coming back and like getting off at Osaka station like I'm just like, ah like, I'm back. Like I get that feeling every time and that's really nice.

On the locations pertaining on leisure time; *restaurant, café, locations where one's friends are, parks, Lake Biwa, and the hairdresser*, are truly places of their own choosing. This is where they have the most liberty on how to go about their time outside of work and school commitments. The locations are linked to their hobbies and interests, which is why they choose to return to the same locations. There they create meaning by frequenting specific locations, making connections in those places, and gradually include it in their *ibasho*.

A notion that overlaps with the relationship condition of *ibasho* is the emphasis of the *locations where one's friends are*. Elias embodies it by saying that “if we're in a cafe and it's just my close friends there, that I would consider that temporarily *ibasho*”. It is clear that Elias is already leaning into the idea that *ibasho* is not a physical space by itself but a combination of the rest of the *ibasho* conditions. It is also worth considering that he refers to ‘temporary *ibasho*’ and that he experiences the physical *ibasho* in a contextual manner. Here the physical *ibasho* is experienced through the existence of people whose company you enjoy. Alia shared that she is in the *ibasho* making process. Notice how her comment is similar to Elias’s earlier example.

Alia: So like, before I would say, Oh, because they're all in Osaka. Right. So I will feel like, Osaka is my *ibasho*. But now like my friends are in like, Kanagawa or like Saitama and stuff like that. So I feel like when I go there to see them, or if I meet them somewhere else, or like, I meet them like in Kobe or something like that. I will feel like I'm comfortable over there because they're there with me.

This also showcases that the participants are emphasizing *ibasho* as a concept overlapping with its other conditions and can make connections to such ideas. On one hand, Samuel emphasizes the physical proximity to these people.

Samuel: I would have said the first time around when I lived in as you know I lived in Toyonaka (an area in Northern Osaka), which was a very you know the Hankyu used to run right through like, train every two minutes. We could be in the center of our city in 15 minutes, maybe 10 minutes. The entire network must have you know, we were all very close and this time it has been different. I'm living quite far away from everyone else that I used to know and it is different you know there's now, a train every, there's two every hour, and I think 'you poor thing, how do you live?' but you know, you can't access people in the same way and so yeah, I just ended up going for longer stretches of time here not seeing people than I would have done before.

Here Samuel similarly emphasizes his connections when talking about his physical locations. The importance of relationships will be addressed in more detail under the 5.1.3. *Relationships* section but the participants are willing to see them linked. It also reaffirms that *ibasho* and its conditions cannot stand by themselves but is the most coherent when the conditions all align according to the individual.

On the other hand, the common traits in contended in physical *ibasho* for places outside of Japan would be family houses where they grew up in and places they had built connections in before coming to Japan. Particularly the interviewees, Matt, Linus, Kasey, Jesse, and Alice, emphasized that homes in their countries of origin were meaningful places. Each of their family homes are unique by the description of the nearby nature. While Linus described his family home located in “a small town in the middle of the forest in Småland” and emphasized the fond memories he has with his family there as a part of his *ibasho*.

Alice: I went to the same beach since I'm two years old. So I am very bonded with this beach that used to be like next to my house. We have like a beautiful nature and environment, and I feel like a really belong to this place.

Now places that would differ would be the locations aligning more closely with their interests. Here the participants include the following; *their partner's house, best friend's grandparents' house, Hoan Kiem Lake (Vietnam), and Greece*. Participants Kasey, Alice, and Matt talked in more detail about these places and what was particularly important about these locations; the memories they hold there and who were in present in these locations. For Alice's and Kasey's cases, they have people outside of their immediate family that they consider a part of their *ibasho*, a significant other or a dear friend. Kasey described it as follows “*maa*, if I were to call that an *ibasho*, I guess my girlfriend's house, maybe? Like, where my girlfriend is right now that will be an *ibasho* because I know she's my girlfriend.” Thus, makes the places that these people roam in a part of their *ibasho*.

Matt, on the other hand, has more defined *ibasho* locations in his country of origin, Vietnam, rather than in Japan. In his personal experience, Japan has not been ideal for his *ibasho* making. He describes “there isn't an *ibasho* in my life in Japan right now. So I don't really think that it affects my daily life or social life that much”. He perceived the surroundings in Vietnam as livelier and

people as more approachable in comparison. For Hoan Kiem Lake, he contends that he prefers this bustling area with a strong local community and feels more connected there because he speaks the local language. He also expressed that places with bright city lights are mesmerizing to him and what he appreciates with Tokyo, but he stands firm on that his general sense of *ibasho* is not in Japan.

It can be observed that the interviewees are able to establish the physical condition of *ibasho*, even in plural and outside of Japan. Besides the common locations such as one's resident, school, and work, the interviewees contended so many more *ibasho* places, from Japanese cities to places overseas, and everything in between. They also have 'third places' as contended for Japanese students. Their mobility between Japan and their country of origin enables them to build meaningful locations anywhere they roam. The participants have high autonomy over their *ibasho* places and more so through their experience as a foreigner living in Japan. The next section will go deeper into the subjective condition of the interviewees to further understand their *ibasho*.

5.1.2. The Subjective Condition

The central themes for this condition are three; *Foreigner in Japan*, *Interacting with the Japanese Society*, and *Creating Meaning as Individuals*. This chapter will be divided according to these three themes and go into more detail for each of them. Overall, it can be observed that the subjective condition of *ibasho* pertaining to the interviewees' experience is that being foreign residents living in Japan is a colorful experience. There certainly are situations that are challenging but they overcome those frustrations by focusing on the positive memories and connections of their lengthy Japan stay. Moreover, how they perceive and interact with the Japanese society are ways of how they make sense of their everyday life too. Whether they are experiencing life as predominantly as foreigner and interact with the Japanese society daily, it is important to note that they create meaning in Japan as individuals. It is a deciding factor in how they understand themselves in Japan.

5.1.2.1. Foreigner in Japan

This theme encompasses the references of the interviewees which relates to how they live in Japan as foreign residents and how they have built their connection to Japan coming as a foreigner. As it will be examined in more detail, this theme connects closely to the subjective condition because it

is how the participants perceive themselves while in Japan. They understand themselves as foreigners and experience life as such. Now, experiencing life in Japan as such does not mean that the participants refer to feeling of being outcasts of Japanese society nor that they experience deep discrimination. Rather it is understood as in comparison to the average local Japanese person.

Being a foreigner in Japan has been internalized by most of participants in different degrees and they understand that the surrounding environment, the Japanese society, will first and foremost see them as ‘outsiders’ in Japan. Primarily through how ‘Japaneseness’ is already defined and understood both among locals and foreigners. It contributes to the foreigner experience. Samuel defined it in a way which resonates throughout statements of the other participants too.

Samuel: I mostly put it down to, both, it's a few things. It's my race I think first of all, and it's also a certain physical feature of being that I'm quite tall as well and I've never yet come across an incident where I've been mistaken for Japanese, ever. And I don't really expect that that will happen. [...] I mean, it's just true. So with that in mind, that plays into a lot of my interactions with Japanese people. So, the first time people have met me, you know, whether it's other foreigners in Japan or whether it's Japanese people, I would say 99% of people will assume I am foreign and there might be maybe one incident, ever, that they've assumed that I was, like foreign parents born in Japan raised in Japan, but to *gaijin* parents. [...] Yes, I do feel foreign but I don't feel that I'm quite on the 'bad side' of foreign in Japan. [...] I feel that certain nationalities and certain races in the hierarchy of Japanese, foreigners get more positive reactions and can be treated better. Just on a very surface level first impression, so that's why I don't feel like the foreignness has been bad in my perspective, but it might be different for other people.

Samuel also raises several points pertaining to being foreigner in Japan. He acknowledges that being foreigner in Japan has a pluralistic notion attached and refers to the fact that the experience is not equal or repetitive. This resonates because, in the interview data for this project, the details of how they experience their foreignness in Japan are very different. For instance, Jesse and Linus experience frustration in how they are perceived by the Japanese society when they speak an advance level of Japanese since they do not physically camouflage into the Japanese society, their presences in Japan are questioned in a conversation.

Jesse: I do feel like I have confidence with my [Japanese] language, but then at the same time, you know, I feel like sometimes [Japanese] people just like, assume I

won't understand. So that can be like a little bit frustrating. You know, like, I'm talking to someone and like doing my self-introduction, and then like, the person who I'm introducing myself to, like, looks to the other person, like, 'I don't know what the hell he's talking about'. And so that that's like a little bit frustrating.

Alia, on one hand, was blacklisted from a local restaurant with her Japanese friends, but her friends were able to return regardless the warning. She was not able to do the same because the restaurant staff remembers her appearance clearly and were able to deny her entry more sternly.

Samantha, Elias, and Alice, on the other hand, express that they do not feel that they visually differ from the average Japanese, here Samantha uses the term 'Japanese-passing', and find clashes in culture and language more frustrating. This is to showcase that each of their experiences are all unique and that, although they share being foreign residents in Japan, details about their everyday life vary case to case with some overlapping notions. Overall, their experiences, would, in a worst-case scenario, awake feelings of frustration but rarely, if at all, considered detrimental. The interviewees, Jesse, Kasey, Linus, Samantha, and Sarra, shared details about some of their frustrations about accessing services as foreigners. Although it may not deny them the service or affect their lives in Japan heavily, it does make them frustrated. This pertains mainly to apartment renting and partly towards how their names cannot be registered.

Samantha: I think like the basic necessities of life, like when I moved to Tokyo, I looked up, maybe like 30, 30 apartments on my own, like researched and like, did my due diligence, and I think I can say I speak a decent amount of Japanese. But when I went to the real estate, they called all of the 30 *bukken* (apartment articles). And then they were like, oh, *gaikokujin* NG. All of the good apartments! I can't get them! [...] You can't get this basic thing just because you're a foreigner was really like, I don't know, annoying.

Interviewer: Did you, were you able to get an apartment in the end? Or did you use all other alternatives?

Linus: Oh, no I was able to get an apartment. So kind of dependent on where I went to, if I went to a smaller real estate agent, and they would have certain like rules regarding foreigners. But if I went to bigger real estate agents, maybe the price of the apartment would go up a bit, but there were far more options to choose from then. So there was a bit of a give and take there.

The most common experience among the participants is that they were not able to rent specific apartments because the landlords do not accept foreigners as tenants. It does not exempt them to rent apartments overall but often they cannot rent apartments that were to their liking. It makes the apartment hunting process more extensive and disappointing for foreigners. However, the interview participants share that they eventually found other apartments that fit their search criteria, as well as landlords willing to provide them tenancy. It is a situation where the interviewees have adapted to what is available to them, which is most likely a mentality they adopt as a part of living abroad.

Another frustration would also be registering names. Samantha and Kasey share how their full names are often get them rejected when they apply for services, such as credit card application or doing paperwork. The real names of Samantha and Kasey include several middle names. This is not common for the Japanese, whose names normally only consist of one first name and one surname.

Samantha: But like getting rejected when you apply for like a credit card, or like any random things that you apply for on the internet. And they can't even recognize your name because like, too long, or it's not just first name, last name, is kind of like that's like a basic thing that they could have fixed if they just let you use katakana or like, whatever. But they've never really thought about people other than the Japanese people.

It is frustrating to them because it requires extra steps that were not meant to be there in the first place. Kasey and Samantha do explain that it does get resolved in the end. Mainly the frustrations come from a place of the interviewee's leaving their comfort zones. Leaving for abroad comes with compromising comfort and challenging oneself by reestablishing oneself in a new culture, language, and set of systems. Another participant, Sarra, is Muslim and she talks about how she had to adjust in order to practice her religion in Japan, such as doing her five prayers a day when she is back in her apartment or utilizing the multipurpose room at her workplace as a prayer room which requires her reporting her prayer time to her superiors. Although it is not as convenient as in her country of origin, Indonesia, it has not been detrimental to her and her practices. Moreover, in the upcoming paragraphs the interviewees also explore how coming to Japan has been rewarding in the way that they have established connections to Japan as a country.

Most of them first came to Japan in their late teens or early twenties. This has been important for the interviewees in the way that they have established themselves as adults in Japan. They built up social networks, have undergone the procedures of bureaucracy, and explored places on their own terms and done much of it by themselves. Being able to achieve such milestones on their own have also been a reassurance to their Japan experience.

Kasey: So when I think of 'Do I have a sense of belonging in Japan', I would say yes, I would agree to that. I would agree with that. I am well for better for worse. Japan has shaped my young adulthood/early adulthood rather. So I feel like a lot of the things, I feel like my personality has been quite shaped by Japan. And yeah, I feel like mainly because of that, I would say I feel like I sort of am okay. Like, I kind of belong here quote unquote.

Linus: So you know about the hub? it's a British pub place. I got, we had a place like that near our campus and the manager of the place, her husband had an Irish Pub in Yoyogi. So she told me to go there, I did it sometime and I did and started going there frequently. And what, I went there after I came back to Japan, so last time, I would say it was maybe four or five years ago before going there last year. So and I showed up and it's like, *sumimasen* and the owner he looked at me. He's like Linus?! It's like oh! So it's been a couple of places there that I used to frequent and I went to visit I will still welcomed. So that was very heartwarming and probably made me feel like oh my time going here and talking made this relationship happen so.

The other interview participants also emphasize their unique memories they have made so far as a strong reason as of why Japan has grown on them and how it has shaped their belonging in Japan.

5.1.2.2. Interacting with the Japanese Society

The second theme under the subjective condition pertaining to the interviewees is *Interacting with the Japanese Society*. This entails their experiences with their Japanese language proficiency and how the interviewees negotiate Japanese culture. Now because they have acknowledged that they experience life as foreign residents, they provide examples of times when they interact with the intricacies of Japanese society in this overarching theme.

One's ability to formulate sentences and express themselves in the Japanese language have significant impact in how they interact with the Japanese society. Participants with business level

or higher Japanese proficiency, N2 and N1, admit that they might not be as fluent as a native speaker but can at least express themselves freely in their everyday lives. Linus shares an experience when he was hiking in the rural outskirts of the Tokyo area.

Linus: So I went into this really nice looking coffee shop and was just two, one old lady who owned the place and her husband. And the moment that I went into the store, you could just see in their eyes like 'Oh no, what should we do now? There is a foreigner here!' because this is like in the countryside so probably they didn't get a foreign tourists there. But I went up there and I asked them in Japanese 'Oh is this the menu, can I order from it?' and then we started talking and they told me about the history of like the area and how Japan has changed in the later decades. So when I left there, they just went up to the entrance of the store and waved goodbye to me. So that was like a really good moment when I felt like oh, and like, people can accept the scary foreigner so.

Interviewer: Do you feel like being able to speak Japanese really helped in that experience?

Linus: It helped greatly, I would say, I think that even without speaking a high level of Japanese as long as you behave properly and try to work on getting your intentions carried over, then I think that anyone can do it. But it definitely helps, speaking the language.

On another hand, for participants with beginner and everyday level Japanese (N3 and below) noted that their interactions have not been as flexible. Language proficiency makes a difference in how they are perceived in a conversation and the contributions they can make. It is important to note that locals do not criticize them for such. In actuality, the participants criticize themselves and recognize that improving their Japanese skills can make interactions more fruitful.

Samuel: Throughout the years not having a lot of Japanese has shrunk my ability to make friends slightly and it's also a thing of I think when people might have wanted to invite me to events that were totally in Japanese. I was invited, but it didn't feel like a go. I might have felt a bit like, oh, I don't I don't know if linguistically I'm up to that yet, or if I'm gonna make a fool of myself and the other the other reason is that I, because I cultivated who my close friends were throughout the time that Yeah, I mean, if you're, if your friends are close, and you do feel included, and you do those people do kind of you don't feel you're missing out basically.

Now for the references encompassing particularities of interacting with Japanese cultural concepts, it is common that the interviewees feel cultural differences mostly so at the beginning of their stay. Over the years, they were able to overcome or approach the differences regardless of Japanese language level. Those events are specifically about unwritten rules in the society and cultural references in Japan. Sarra has an example when she was visiting her partner's family. There is an unwritten social rule to bring *omiyage* (souvenir) when you visit someone else's home. She recently learned that there is a proper way of giving the *omiyage*.

Sarra: So I think for example, the hidden manner I would say like I just learned that recently, actually. So my partner is actually Japanese so I'm learning like the manner of like visiting someone's home. So I know that the thing we need to say like about like, when visiting someone we have to say like 'ojyamashimasu' or like yeah, when we're like, saying that we're coming and then we have to bring like souvenir but also like, turns out the hidden manners that I realized it's actually there's a way of giving like the souvenir itself, you cannot just give like the bag right away. You have to take, take the stuff out of your bag and like face it like to them and like, and then say like, 'Yeah, this is for you'. So I didn't learn that much until like recently so, so and, of course, I think like, oh, they could understand because I'm a foreigner but of course I want to respect my partner's family as much as I can. So the way I just learned that recently after like living in Japan for five years, still like surprise me. And yeah, I think that's one of the example of like hidden manners that I would say.

Interviewer: How did you come to learn it? Was it your partner that told you or like your partner's family or when you got back home?

Sarra: Mostly like, YouTube or like TikTok. Actually, because like, my partner just say, like, 'yeah, just be yourself, just like chill and stuff'. But then like, of course, like, as someone you know, who's meeting like, his family or so like, you want to, you know, be as respectful as you can. And you know, I'm afraid that some part of it like, maybe my partners thought I already understand but maybe like, it's still unfamiliar with me, for example, because I'm not Japanese, so yeah. So I'll try my best to learn as much as I can. Yeah, but mostly it's self-learning.

As can be observed, she acknowledges that, as a foreigner there are some cultural references that she inherently is not aware of although having spent five years in Japan and counting. Linus describes a dinner experience at the start of his Japan stay and he had left his chopstick planted into his rice bowl. This action is a morbid reference to the Buddhist funeral ceremonies and

Japanese people are taught not to do this since early childhood. Linus did this without knowing the reference and received strong reaction from his Japanese friends at the time.

Linus: [I] accidentally would stick the chopsticks into the rice, which is like, the Japanese taboo. People will get mad at me, it's like, you don't do that. It's like, and why? It's not like I killed someone. Why are you getting so angry? And now it's like, 'you can't do that. It's a cultural thing.' [...] So it's like a big, like taboo. So it's, no matter, I, I know, people who've been living here for like, 20 or more years, and I've talked to them also. And they say also, it's like all these rules, you'll never be able to understand them unless you're born here and even some Japanese people don't really know all the rules here. So but it's strong, more strongly affected with us, foreigners living in Japan, I believe.

What Linus said lastly about how foreigners are more likely to put on a pedestal over these cultural references and some overlaps with some of Elias's and Jesse's comments too. Elias recalled how he was left out from task distributions in his school laboratory, which he connected to the fact that his laboratory upperclassmen did not recognize that he would be able to execute the tasks as a foreigner. He comments "I feel like if I didn't say anything at all then they would have just like, excluded me all together". Jesse approaches this with how he is 'complimented' as *nihonjinppoi* (like a Japanese person) for things he says and does. He takes those compliments with a grain of salt.

Jesse: And I'm just kind of like, well, like, why can't I just be me, you know? They're like, 'oh, like, you know, that's so Japanese of you!' Like, you know, like in a very like complimentary way and then and then I'm kind of having this internal moment, like, have I like, assimilated and like my personality changed? Or is it kind of like, I have these characteristics and these are like, human characteristics that people generally value? I don't know, being patient or like caring about other people? And then like, Japanese, not all I can say, but like in certain situations, those kind of like positive characteristics are ascribed to a certain set of values, which is being like Japanese. Being *nihonjinppoi*. [...] I feel like I'm accepted but at the same time, like, I have to kind of like, I feel like I really have to prove myself. Like, I feel like generally speaking, I have to prove myself before I'm accepted. Some people just take me for who I am. [...] It could have a lot of meanings to it.

It seems to be that having cultural knowledge is helpful in becoming more accepted in an interaction, but it also means that not knowing the references, one might be criticized as Linus, or at least be very conscious of it like Sarra.

5.1.2.3. Creating Meaning as Individuals

The third theme under the subjective condition is *Creating meaning as individuals*. This entails the experiences on how they explore themselves and their sense of self-assurance in Japan.

Now there are two ways the participants explore themselves in Japan. Predominantly through navigating where, when, and how they are their best selves. Although each participant discusses this very differently, Elias's and Sarra's comments encompass the essence of subjective *ibasho*.

Elias: It definitely affects my satisfaction. Because if I feel like I am, I don't have an *ibasho* for like a long amount of time. If I'm not like spending time with the people I consider *ibasho* then I definitely feel less satisfied. I definitely feel less happy. In terms of my daily life, yes, of course, like having a home, my own space to come back to where I feel safe, is something that I look forward to a lot every day, like being able to relax and unwind in a place where I feel like I can be myself and calm and relaxed, yes.

Sarra: I think being in a place where you feel like fully accepted. Being a place where you feel like peace and like comfort helps you deal with yourself, like the thoughts inside your heads the or like, the things that you know, keep bothering you, like, you think about so like once you have these with that, you can like function more properly in like daily life and social life. So like, I think having an *ibasho* really like helps, helps yourself to fully like function in society really like. So if it's like in terms of work, you can do your work, maybe better or like I can do your work properly because you know, when you go back home or you know, when you go back to that person, you can be able to like, you know, be yourself again and like have a safe place again. So yeah.

Other participants also similarly reflect about the where, when, and how of their *ibasho* to confirm that is when they are the best versions of themselves. It is because they can be this best version that they feel satisfaction about themselves, life in Japan, and other aspects of life. This is also explored in regards to time context. This meant that participants would either feel a sense of subjective *ibasho* or a weakened *ibasho* depending on time; for Elias it can be a time of the day in which parks are less crowded while Alice described the fluctuation of her sense of the subjective *ibasho*.

Alice: It was very difficult change because French Polynesia has nothing similar with Japan. So it was like a huge, huge change. In terms of everything. And I

because like there were some issues in my classes I As I've mentioned earlier, it was hard to feel like I was a fit in this country and yeah, I had lots of existential crises and why am I here, etc. But I feel like we all I don't know like most of the people that live here had the spirit of like, after the honeymoon phase where you're like very happy to be here, you kind of feel sad and miss home and yeah, I feel very different in Japan. But because I had, as I said, support from my family. I quickly like got over this phase and I became very curious about everything new that Japan has or it was really nice.

It can be observed that being the best of oneself is not a constant but is also dependent on the external factors, like Alice changing her residence. Samantha also describes how moving to Tokyo last year and breaking up with her partner at the same time was an especially rocky time for her. She felt her sense of *ibasho* fluctuate later because in autumn of last year, she was able to find the right people and places to be in Tokyo. It helped her establish a 'new' *ibasho*.

Now what has been contended so far are cases when one is able to be the best versions of themselves, but participants also note cases when their time in Japan has not enabled them to be that. This particularly pertains to Matt, who is positive that his *ibasho* is not in Japan, but also Elias, Jesse, and Sarra, who have had experienced certain situations that have left them questioned if they can be their best in Japan. In its essence, they felt that being in Japan have stumped parts of themselves; values, and potential, whether it is in work or in private life.

Linus: The only reason why I don't strongly agree is probably mainly because of my working place that is very Japanese and probably I'm one of the few foreigners that they meet. So even though I spent eight years here [in Japan], there are still a lot of, for example, Japanese words that I don't know, especially when it comes to work related things. So if I say something wrong, or if I read a character wrong, then they'd be like, 'Ah, you're just a foreigner in the end, you're not that smart'. They don't say it like that. But it's kinda you can get that belittling feeling, whereas they kinda like they look down on you.

Interviewer: I see.

Linus: But yeah, so it's probably more work place related. I don't feel at home as I would back in Sweden.

Matt: I think this has to do with maybe my personality in a sense. I wouldn't say I'm an introvert, but I wouldn't say I'm extroverted either. So I'm somewhere in the middle and I don't speak up my mind that often. So sometimes, when we're hanging

out, I'm thinking like, 'Okay, I should tell them that maybe let's do this, let's go there'. Or even in sometimes in meetings, you know, being a student does have some limits. Maybe I shouldn't feel that way. Maybe that's a mindset problem. But how to put this, I don't feel like my opinion is taken seriously or if I say it, some people, a classmate or colleagues, they could shut it down pretty quickly as well.

Here Matt discusses that his personality might play a role here but really what he feels is that he is not reaching his best potential and can be himself around the people he is surrounded by. This leads him to feel restricted with his life in Japan.

5.1.3. Relationships

The central themes for this *ibasho* condition are two; *Interacting with Soto Networks in Japan* and *Meaningful Uchi Network*. This chapter will be divided according to these two themes. It is clear that their interactions with the two networks differ since the *uchi* networks have more meaning to them and contributes more to their sense of *ibasho*. While the *soto* networks are either passing experiences or at times challenging.

5.1.3.1. Interacting with *Soto* Networks in Japan

This theme primarily discusses how participants maintain their relationships in their *soto* regarding Japanese people or other foreigners. This pertains to connections regarding people they meet in everyday life but not close networks. Due to this is distanced connection to others, these are not necessarily networks that contribute to their *ibasho* but does relate to how they navigate parts of their everyday life.

Participants describe the interactions with the general Japanese people in passing at school, work, or in their free time. It can range from situations which were challenging to receiving kindness from these networks. Elias and Alice discuss that direct strangers do not pay attention to them, which is something they conclude as 'obvious' given the circumstances.

Alice: And but in some areas where I didn't feel welcome where, how can I say, activities that didn't really relate to my nationality or, for example, I tried to join a photography group [at university] and it doesn't have any links with the French culture or the Tahitian culture or the English language. So because people [the

Japanese students running the group] didn't see really much advantage in knowing me, didn't really feel interested.

Elias: We're talking about like people minding their own business. I feel like they don't care about ME. Maybe they don't have that like strangers don't care about me because I believe that I can pass as Japanese like in terms of looks so they just like mind their own business or whatever I feel like maybe they would be interested or whether that be in a good or a bad way if I did not pass this Japanese but...

Interviewer: Do you, does it affect anything in your daily life?

Elias: No, I wouldn't say so.

The two participants share neutral responses to their *soto* networks. However, participants have also experienced challenging situations which have invoked a feeling of frustration. For instance, Alia observed that, in her university classes, she and other foreign students were picked last in the distribution of members for group assignments. This made her feel not genuinely included in the group setting. Jesse also described how his Japanese coworkers do not refer to him with the *-san* suffix and he is conscious of this phenomenon.

Jesse: It doesn't matter like the relationship that people have with me, you know, like, so like, you know, like I would say like 80 to 90% of my job is in Japanese right now. And, um, you know, like when I'm talking to like my *senpai* or *kohai*¹¹ like I always you know, say like, you know, *dare dare san* or like, *dare dare kun* or something like that, you know, because it's like respect but like, no one ever does that for me, regardless of what my relationship is with them. And, you know, I mean, I don't know like, I always just thought that was kind of interesting, because it's kind of like, you know, if we were speaking in English, then it's a different story, but like, you know, we're speaking in Japanese in Japan.

Matt also describes a situation where he was helping a stranger older Japanese lady asking for directions and their conversation regressed into asking about his background, which he responded to accordingly. The older lady was taken aback, and their conversation was cut short.

Matt: This is more of a defining factor is that there's a sizable portion of foreigners in Japan that cause problems and Vietnamese do take up a big chunk of that. So I

¹¹ The *senpai-kohai* relations are socially vertical signifiers identifying one's tenure at work or school (Sano, 2014). *Senpai* refers to the more experienced person while *kouhai* respectively refers to the lesser experienced.

would understand as to why she would feel a little bit either threatened or uncomfortable talking to foreigners and the way that Japan is media just blows up every single stories with foreigners. [...] So that's like my very first experience is so far, maybe because I haven't been able to communicate well or to have like meaningful Japanese friendships. I don't feel that connected to the country [Japan]. So that's why I really feel like I'm not that accepted by others in Japan. I mean I do feel acceptance from my friends and certain foreigners in Japan, but as a country, they do represent a certain portion of Japan.

The interactions with people in the *soto* do not have to be inherently challenging or neutral. It also includes some positive situations too but because it is not immediate people that the participants care for, thus make the interactions stay on a surface level. Matt describes that his late professor was an astonishing individual who respected all students' opinions in the school setting and made him feel included, but he also recognizes that it was the professor's job to do so.

The participants also run into other foreigners while in Japan and interacting with those not included in their *uchi* comes with mixed feelings. On one hand, they can approach them and because have common experiences that can be a conversation starter, but it is not enough to form close bonds with them.

Alice: So there's like a French community in the university. So French people that are here in exchange, and at first I tried to like become friends with them because I'm French and I wanted to speak French with them and yeah, but I really felt like they were not trying to be friendly with me because I was not fully French if you know what I mean? Like, I didn't feel included in the French community at university. Because I felt like the French people were categorizing me as a Japanese person, not as a French person.

Alice's case is unique. She is mixed race; French and Japanese, grew up in French Polynesia, and has residency in Japan as a foreign resident. She shares that she is not fully accepted in her country of origin nor in Japan, but she is happy to be in Japan to learn more about her heritage. Her background is global and shares that people she gets along with is based on their personalities rather than a similar background as her. However, in the next section, it is clear that their *uchi* networks truly encompasses positive engagements and meaningful social connections pertaining to their *ibasho* in Japan.

5.1.3.2. Meaningful *Uchi* Networks

This theme primarily discusses how participants maintain their *uchi* relationships in Japan. These are people they consider close friends and a part of their community. Overall, it can be understood that they contribute greatly to their Japan experiences and although life in Japan can be challenging, the *uchi* network validate their feelings and opinions.

Their communities consist of friends, family, chosen family, and coworkers whom they have gotten close to. This includes Japanese people and other foreigners in Japan. It also to be noted that they keep in touch with networks they have built before coming to Japan through digital means. Due to this accessibility, people outside of Japan also contribute to their feeling of a strong social network while in Japan.

Jesse: Yeah, and I mean, I don't know, like I said, like, you know, I think I've met some friends who will be in my life forever. Um, in the last, like, few years here, you know, and like, people who have, like, have seen me grow and go through hardship, and like, I've seen them grow and go through hardship and that sort of thing. So yeah, there's a lot of people. Yeah, especially friends. Because I mean, also, it's kind of like, you know, I feel like I'm, I'm part of a kind of, like, chosen family. You know, and it's like, people, you know, it's like, you know, it's like, my friend got sick, and like, we went to the hospital together, you know, at like, 10 o'clock at night. Or, you know, it's like, oh, like, I need help with this, like, can you do this? Or like, you know, I got sick, and like, you know, like, someone brought me like food and like water and stuff, because I couldn't get out of bed type thing, you know?

Kasey: Okay, so yeah. For me, an *ibasho* would definitely need friends. Hard for me to have an *ibasho* without friends. I need to feel like, for me, I need to feel rooted in a place for me to call that an *ibasho*, right? I feel like if I don't have those roots, if there's no compelling reason for me to be there, I wouldn't really feel like I belong, you know? So this would, I guess this would touch upon all of my questions here and out about *ibasho*. But for me, it's the presence of things that drew me to the place as well as that sense of, for lack of a better term, a sense of two-way responsibility. I need to feel like I'm needed by people. I feel like, I feel like I need my presence to be needed by people for me to feel like I belong there. If that makes sense, like, if my presence isn't necessary, then I don't, then if, you know, it sort of feels like I'm not important that feels like I'm not here. Does that make sense? So in that, from that point of thinking, it just, that's why I feel like friends are required for me, because I would like to think that my friends enjoy my

company, and vice versa. So there's a sense of, you know, that sense of responsibility for me to, you know, hang out with friends.

During their time in Japan, they have been able to create communities for themselves consisting of people they have close bonds with and people that either are family or can be considered family to them. Samantha found her community partly through work.

Samantha: If I ever have trouble with anything, I have my boss who was willing to help me with anything. He was the guarantor for my apartment. And he didn't have any problem for doing that. For my ex-boyfriend, he wanted to come to Japan, but he needed like a work holiday. He needed like a guarantor for that too, like a business guarantor. My boss was like, I mean, if this is gonna motivate you for work, then I can do it. Oh, yeah, having those people around me who I can rely on. And I feel like finding my people in Tokyo as well, for who are in like, completely different circles than me, but like, I love them nonetheless. I feel like finding the good people was a big part of me feeling like I belong here.

Samuel also describes similarly through his time in Japan that “I didn't feel distance because I had kind of cultivated my own circles of people, my own networks of people within Japan and it didn't really matter to me”. As will be explored more in the next 5.2. *A Borderless Ibasho* chapter, Linus describes that although his family is in Sweden and that his university friends are dispersed, they still keep in touch through online means. He describes that his family is “definitely an *ibasho* even though they're in Sweden and I'm here. I think that talking to them for an hour or something that, that one hour is my *ibasho*”. Alice describes her close friends she grew up with and are either in French Polynesia or have moved overseas but are still a part of her *ibasho* because they keep in touch through online means. This is further explored how the participants navigate *ibasho* people from existing networks and new ones in Japan.

5.2. A Borderless *Ibasho* (RQ2)

The participants shared that their *ibasho* making and *ibashos* were shaped by their networks and locations they roamed before their arrival in Japan but also while in Japan. They have cultivated a sense of mobility with their *ibasho* making and thus, are able to find several *ibashos* in places they are based in. It also enables them to explore *ibasho* with wider ranges of references to people and places and can therefore choose their *ibasho* with more freedom. This differs from the original

ibasho concept which does not describe flexibility in people, relations, and locations. It primarily describes that it is present and contributes greatly to an individual's wellbeing when the conditions are met. The participants show that there are alternative ways of *ibasho* making and that the sense of *ibasho* can fluctuate throughout their lives depending on their moods and life circumstances.

Although the participants have established new lives abroad in Japan, they continue to keep close bonds with friends and family who are not physically nearby through online means. It contributes to their Japan experience. Samantha shares the following.

Samantha: like my family, even if they're in the Philippines. I, I call my mom every like other day. I update them like I am at work. 'Hello, how are you?' So we talk pretty often. So I think I have a close bonds with my family. And my friends. Yeah, a lot of people even if I don't see them too often, because I've been busy with work. I do still make time to see them every like once in two months or something. So well, my main group of friends I see them like every other week and I'm close with them. And even my friends who are kind of like, on the next level below, I think even if we don't see each other that often we talk on Instagram, they see what I'm doing. I comment on what they're doing. And I feel like if I needed anything from them, or if they needed anything from me, we would show up for each other.

All participants commented similarly to Samantha contending to close bonds from their countries of origin. Interviewees involve them in their everyday life in Japan and although they might not be able to keep in touch as frequent as Samantha, they are able to catch up with people they hold dear in regular frequencies. Samuel describes that his family is still a support system despite the distance.

Samuel: They, again, the family, because I have no family here. It's quite an easy like, okay, my family, and I guess, because my family are all in one place. Like, you know, they're not really scattered. So mentally, that compartment in my head is just like, that's there, you know, that's they're a support system if you need them. They'll always be there for you, without question. But it's the same thing, as I've seen about friends, you miss a lot of birthdays, and a lot of Christmases and weddings and stuff like that. And, you know, that's just part of living abroad, isn't it?

In this sense, the interviewees are able to imagine them in their *uchi* regardless of the location. Furthermore, there is also actual mobility in how they navigate *ibasho* because of the range of

people and locations they can move amongst. This pertains specifically how the participants negotiate *ibasho* on their terms. For instance, the flexibility of their mobilities. This encompasses flexibility in wanting to stay or leave Japan depending on the given time and its circumstances.

Sarra: So um, yeah, I'm planning to work first for like one to three years in Japan. And then honestly speaking, it's still undecided. But I kinda want to pursue a higher degree, so maybe going abroad for Masters or we could live in another country, to work as well. So it really depends on like, future plans, but I haven't got like one thing in mind exactly. But I think after three years, I would like move to another country for like, a while. And in terms of going back to Japan. I would say there's a chance of going back to Japan even after even after, like moving abroad. So yeah, but it's still very undecided.

It showcases that although they can make comments about people and places in Japan as part of their *ibasho*, they can see themselves moving or staying depending on changes in their sense of *ibasho*. Thus, it is also explored that *ibasho* and *ibasho* making transgress borders due to a split sense of meaningful connections the interviewees have developed throughout their global backgrounds.

Alice: I feel connected a bit everywhere like in Tahiti also in France. Not in the US though but yeah, I would say like, I feel like I belong in French Polynesia, for like 60% and then in Japan for 30% and in France for like 10% and not in the US at all.

Linus: I would change a few things maybe it's like find other place to live or that. I'm not [leaning] yet [into] the idea to Sweden as much as I was doing my uni days, because I know that I have *ibasho* or I can make connections in Sweden also. At the moment, I still feel like the studies I went through at university and the skill set that I have are put to better use here in Japan than back in Sweden. There is not that much use of my Japanese skills there.

Samuel: Oh well on a personal level yeah I never liked the idea that going to Japan would change who I was. So I kind of always made an effort to justify what I did like how I lived in Japan and so on as I want to cultivate the types of relationships where I would have had in the UK or anywhere. That was very important to have that because I would have wanted that elsewhere so on that level, yeah, I thought about it on the level of like, if Japan could provide it I don't know if Japan can but like I wasn't I wasn't like everywhere I go, 'Is this my *ibasho*? Am I finding my *ibasho* here?' but I'm definitely here.

As Samuel comments, Japan is part of their overall life experience and contributes to their *ibasho* depending on what *ibasho* making activity they are engaging in while in Japan and what intentions they have as individuals cultivating their own *ibasho*. However, although a global background is unique, Alice and Alia share that their upbringing were confusing and more so, explorative. Here Alia also shows that she is content with coming to Japan despite her ambiguous upbringing.

Alia: maybe because, because I had to constantly always prove that I'm Thai like my Thainess was always questioned. Being in Thailand like, even though I was born, I was fluent, I was born and raised, like I'm literally more Thai and I ever was Sudanese. But still, like people would constantly think that I am foreigner or they would question me like, Am I really Thai and stuff like that. Whereas here like, so I guess, back home, I everyone viewed me as a foreigner, but I wanted to be viewed as a native person. Whereas here [in Japan] I came with the identity of being a foreigner. So what people treated me was the same as how I wanted to be treated. So that's why Yeah, so I felt that be, I belong here more just because people treat me the way I wanted.

As Alia points out, she finds peace in knowing that she cultivated her belonging on her terms in Japan. She contends that she is still in an *ibasho* making process and that she sees herself staying in Japan for 10+ more years. Although her experiences have been mixed throughout her stay so far, she still finds reason to stay similarly to Samuel.

Many of the participants also experience a fluctuation in their *ibasho* making process during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. The Japanese government did not impose strict lockdowns but a state of emergency which requested all residents to complying to stay at home and social distancing. During this time, businesses and shops besides the supermarkets were closed. Businesses would open again within restricted hours once vaccinations were rolled out. Participants experienced staying at home for longer periods of time which allowed them to reflect over their time in Japan. Jesse described that his mother encouraged him to stay in Japan while Alia, although she really wanted to leave Japan, ended up staying due to travel restrictions. Sarra and Elias comment the following.

Elias: Because of Corona, I feel like it was. I feel like the pandemic was a pretty pivotal time period for me. Because I spent quite a bit of time on my own, I couldn't really go out as much. I mean, Japan didn't have like restrictions on, didn't have like

full on lockdowns where they restricted your movement entirely. They had like curfews that made you that made most if not all, restaurants close at 8pm, restrict your traveling, and stuff like that. But, for example, not going to university every day and having only online classes and then not really having a reason to go out and spending most of my time cooped up at home. That led me that was, I guess, important for me to figure out my sense of identity, like spending that much time with yourself alone and also not being able to go back to the Philippines for like three years. Because of the pandemic. I feel like it helped me define myself more like, independent of Filipino culture and my family there and my friends there. And more of like, who I am now, if that makes sense. In terms of if it affected my concept of *ibasho*.

Sarra: And so like, yeah, and in that time, it was a weird time because like some people stuck in their own home country and I was like one of the ones who were stuck in Japan. But also, I feel like the government give like a lot of support in COVID times like, money incentives, and also like I think like, a lot of like masks and like, you know, like, stuff that was helpful back then. Like mask and alcohol and stuff. And, yeah, so I feel like even though it was a hard time, the Japan government was like, a bit quite helpful at that time. So I feel like it also like added to like [my] sense of belonging here in Japan.

Exploring Japan as a part of their *ibasho* is a work in progress. *Ibasho* as a concept does not register the possibility of subjects cultivating *ibasho* across physical and cultural borders. It can certainly be contended that people organize their *ibasho* in a local manner and have been studied in such environments. The literary review presented outcomes in a local community or a group of people contending *ibasho* in close proximity to themselves. Here it can be observed that the interviewees change the meaning of *ibasho* to accommodate their experiences and their backgrounds. It fluctuates depending on the circumstances they find themselves in and what the external factors may showcase new conditions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The mainstream *ibasho* studies on students has not explored the flexibility of the concept as multipurposed and context dependent. The interviewees in this project have also explored that the three conditions of *ibasho* are achieved disproportionally to one another due to the highly subjective and contextual experiences that form a sense of *ibasho*. Consequently, *ibasho* is given meaning as much as the participants find varying degrees of solace in *ibasho*.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

First of all, for RQ1 it is observed that the participants generally form *ibasho* whether they consciously think about their experiences in regard to the concept or not. Half of the participants were not aware of the term but subsequently were able to connect to their experiences to *ibasho* and that aspects of their lives encompass the *ibasho* qualities. The three conditions of *ibasho* vary depending on an individual's time context and circumstances one goes through in a day or during the Japan stay. For instance, how Elias and Alia commented that they have 'temporary' *ibashos* in various physical locations depending if their friends are with them or how the interviewees generally contended *ibasho* making in their free time, and thus people or locations within the *ibasho* are based on this time frame. The combined access to people and places contributes to the *ibasho* formation. Moreover, forming *ibasho* in Japan is influenced by their accessibility and resources as foreign residents. The experience in Japan as a foreigner is highly nuanced and has influence over how networks are maintained, how everyday life in Japan is managed accordingly, and making meaningful connections. In addition, their relationships can be viewed through the *soto-uchi* relations where the *soto* relations are more passing but contributes to *ibasho* in how they see themselves as part of the larger Japanese society. For instance, Matt's situation with the Japanese lady distancing herself from him or Jesse reacting to his name called without the *-san* suffix. They put themselves in a larger context of how they see themselves being perceived in Japan. Whereas the *uchi* relations, a community of close friends, chosen family, and people in their origin countries, contribute greatly to their wellbeing and *ibasho*. They maintain one private community based the *uchi* networks that have existed before their arrival in Japan and during their stay.

This comes to answer RQ2 where the analysis contends that the interviewees shape *ibasho* to their own needs and circumstances. The participants come to Japan with preexisting *ibashos*, people and locations, and seem to generally manage its counterparts built in Japan as a part of their own sense of community and belonging. Thus, referred to family houses, friends and family who were still in their countries of origin or perhaps even elsewhere, like participant Alice who keeps in touch with her close friends through online means despite some of them having left French Polynesia. Additionally, their global backgrounds also assist in their sense of mobility in and out of Japan. Crucial moments during their time in Japan, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or

graduating Japanese university, give reason as to think about their future in Japan. For many participants, they are open to explore their career and personal growth options outside of Japan. *Ibasho* can be contended for local communities overseas and in Japan, but the notion about *ibasho*, not explored yet in the previous literature so far, which is that *ibasho* can be stretched beyond a local community and engage one's networks across borders. Participants do actively adjust the conditions and meaning of the term to their circumstances.

There are two points that were particularly interesting in this project. Firstly, that the participants rarely had interacted with the concept of *ibasho* before the thesis project. More so because it is a concept that most Japanese nationals are familiar with and refer often to in everyday conversation. Especially for participants who spent much time with Japanese friends and have advanced Japanese language proficiency, it is surprising that they had not come across *ibasho* throughout their time in Japan. Perhaps it is a matter of circumstances which have not created openings as to discuss *ibasho* with their Japanese friends in a casual setting. Thus, there has not been many opportunities for them to explore the term *ibasho* as a social concept although it is otherwise commonly contended for where they reside. It also showcases, as Sarra referred to, that there are still Japan specific social and cultural notions unknown to them and that they navigate life in Japan as an ongoing process. Another interesting aspect of the project is the foreigner experience in Japan is both common and diverse at the same time. It may seem contradicting, but it is only specific circumstances where they have shared experiences, such as apartment hunting and generally how they negotiate relations depending on their language proficiencies. While other aspects are experienced more so on an individual level. Samantha's reference to 'Japanese passing' is intriguing because it does hint on the fact that the visual perception of a foreigner may contribute to understanding a clusters of foreigners as 'invisible' or not distinctly 'foreign'. It may also be in turn be interesting to explore those who are born in Japan but visually stand out in a crowd and how it affects their 'Japaneseness' and sense of *ibasho*, particularly third culture kids or mixed raced Japanese. It would certainly be interesting to delve further into these points in more detail in either existing literature or in future research.

6.1. Future Implications

This study contributes to the academic community of social sciences in an overarching manner. In more detail, the project entail topics about qualitative research, migrants, belonging, and Japan. Thus, it would also be in the interest of students or academics within those specialized areas. It may also be interesting to organizations working with diversity and inclusivity, but also organizational bodies focusing on integrating foreign students or workers as laborers. It showcases the effects of current governmental practices in Japan in how they manage foreign residents and the effects on the individual experiences. Since this project is primarily qualitative, the results may be of use for emphasizing details in decision making or policy making affecting livelihoods of minority groups such as foreign residents. However, it is important to note that this paper only concludes results based on ten participants. The study present intrinsic details about how everyday life is experienced in Japan in regard to the *ibasho* concept. It may not be representative of the whole foreign resident population in Japan, but it is a step closer in understanding some of the current foreign residents and their participation in society. Possibly also understanding whether they would want to stay in Japan permanently and what means can be taken to keep them, especially since most of the interviewees are accredited with high academic and professional competencies. This could also be important in knowing how to organize more efficient multicultural communications and policies, especially in Japan where the population is projected to rapidly decrease, and previous multicultural programs have not achieved desirable results. Foreign students and workers may become the solution to labor shortages and the decreasing population, thus not maintaining reasons to continue their Japan tenure may be a loss to Japan in order to stay competitive in the global worldwide market.

7. List of References

- ABIRU, K. 2012. "Ibasha" no hihanteki kento [Critical analysis of "ibasha"]. In: TANAKA, H. & HAGIWATA, K. (eds.) *Wakamono no ibasha to sanko: Youth work ga kizuku aratana shakai [Ibasha for youth and youth participation: New society developed through youth work]*. Tokyo: Toyokan.
- ADU, P. 2013. *Qualitative analysis coding and categorizing*. SlideShare.
- AIDA, T., KIYOTA, E., TANAKA, Y. & SAWADA, Y. 2023. Building social capital with elders' leadership through a community hub "Ibasha" in the Philippines and Nepal. *Scientific Reports*, 13, 3652.
- AKASHI, J. 2014. New aspects of Japan's immigration policies: is population decline opening the doors? *Contemporary Japan*, 26, 175-196.
- BACHNIK, J. M. 1994. Chapter 6. INDEXING SELF AND SOCIETY IN JAPANESE FAMILY ORGANIZATION. In: BACHNIK, J. M. & QUINN, C. J. (eds.) *Situated Meaning*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- BAMBA, S. 2010. The Experiences and Perspectives of Japanese Substitute Caregivers and Maltreated Children: A Cultural-Developmental Approach to Child Welfare Practice. *Social Work*, 55, 127-137.
- BAMBA, S. & HAIGHT, L. W. 2006. Helping maltreated children to find their Ibasha: Japanese perspectives on supporting the well-being of children in state care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 405-427.
- BAUMEISTER, R. F. & LEARY, M. R. 1995. The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529.
- BAZELEY, P. 2013. *Qualitative data analysis: Practical strategies*, London, SAGE.
- BEFU, H. 1984. Civilization and culture: Japan in search of identity. In: UMESAO, T., BEFU, H. & KREINER, J. (eds.) *Japanese Civilization in the Modern World*. National Museum of Ethnology.
- BEFU, H. & MANABE, K. 1995. Empirical Status of Nihonjinron: How Real is the Myth? In: BOSCARO, A., GATTI, F. & MASSIMO, R. (eds.) *Rethinking Japan Vol 2 Social Sciences, Ideology and Thought*. 1 ed. London: Routledge.
- BELL, V. 1999. On speech, race and melancholia: An interview with Judith Butler. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12, 163-174.

- BENSON, M. & JACKSON, E. 2013. Place-making and Place Maintenance: Performativity, Place and Belonging among the Middle Classes. *Sociology*, 47, 793-809.
- BENTZ, V. M. & SHAPIRO, J. J. 2001. *Mindful inquiry in social research*, Thousand Oaks, CA, SAGE.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1979. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge.
- BRAUN, V. & CLARKE, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- BRODY, B. T. 2002. *Opening the Doors Immigration, Ethnicity, and Globalization in Japan*, Routledge.
- CASEY, E. S. 1993. *Getting Back Into Place Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, Bloomington Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.
- CHAPMAN, D. 2006. Discourses of multicultural coexistence (Tabunka Kyōsei) and the 'old-comer' Korean residents of Japan. *Asian Ethnicity*, 7, 89-102.
- CHAPMAN, D. 2008. *Zainichi Korean identity and ethnicity*, Oxon, Routledge.
- CHARMAZ, K. 2014. *Constructing grounded theory*, London, SAGE.
- CHIAVACCI, D. 2012. Japan in the 'Global War for Talent': Changing concepts of valuable foreign workers and their consequences. *Asien: The German Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 124, 27-47.
- CHIU, M. M., CHOW, B. W. Y., MCBRIDE, C. & MOL, S. T. 2016. Students' Sense of Belonging at School in 41 Countries: Cross-Cultural Variability. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 47, 175-196.
- CHONLAWORN, P. 2021. Cheap and Dispensable: Foreign Labor in Japan via the Technical Intern Training Program. *jsn Journal*, 11, 33-49.
- CHOW, H. P. H. 2007. Sense of Belonging and Life Satisfaction among Hong Kong Adolescent Immigrants in Canada. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33, 511-520.
- COLEMAN, L. 2016. Will Japan "Lean In" to Gender Equality? *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, 3-25.

- COMMUNICATIONS., M. O. I. A. A. 2020. 多文化共生事例集（令和3年度版）の公表
[Publication of Tabunka Kyosei Casebook for FY3 Showa]. Ministry of Internal Affairs
and Communications.
- CORRALES, T., WATERFORD, M., GOODWIN-SMITH, I., WOOD, L., YOURELL, T. &
HO, C. 2016. Childhood adversity, sense of belonging and psychosocial outcomes in
emerging adulthood: A test of mediated pathways. *Children and Youth Services Review*,
63, 110-119.
- CRAWCOUR, S. 1980. ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF JAPANESE SOCIETY: An Overview.
Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice, 184-187.
- CURTIS, D. 2011. The gaijin at home: A study of the use of the word gaijin by the Japanese
speech community in Sydney, Australia. *New Voices*, 4, 32-56.
- DALE, P. N. 1986. *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, London & Sydney, Croom Helm and
Nissan Institute for Japanese Studies.
- DASGUPTA, R. 2005. Salarymen doing straight: heterosexual men and the dynamics of gender
conformity. In: MARK, M. & ROMIT, D. (eds.) *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities
in Japan*. London and New York: Routledge.
- DAVISON, J. & PENG, I. 2021. Views on immigration in Japan: identities, interests, and
pragmatic divergence. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47, 2578-2595.
- DE CERTEAU, M. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London,
University of California Press.
- DOURICH, D. 2001. Experiences of Japanese Nurse Scholars: Insights for U.S. Faculty.
Journal of Nursing Education, 40, 210-216.
- ELIAS, N. 2001. *The Society of Individuals*, New York, Continuum.
- FAN, Y. 2010. Branding the nation: Towards a better understanding. *Place Branding and Public
Diplomacy*, 6, 97-103.
- FLICK, U. 2009. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, London, SAGE Publications.
- FORREST, R. & KEARNS, A. 2001. Social Cohesion, Social Capital and the Neighbourhood.
Urban Studies, 38, 2125-2143.
- FORTIER, A. M. 2000. *Migrant Belongings Memory, Space, Identity*, London, Routledge.

- FREEMAN, T. M., ANDERMAN, L. H. & JENSEN, J. M. 2007. Sense of Belonging in College Freshmen at the Classroom and Campus Levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75, 203-220.
- FUJIWARA, Y. 2010. 居場所の定義についての研究 [The study about the definition of the word 'i—basyo']. *教育学論究 [Journal of Education]*, 169-177.
- FUKASAKU, T. 2017. 「社会人の学び」と大学生涯学習に関する一考察：「放課後の子どもの居場所づくりを考える研修会」を一例として [Investigating People and University Students Lifelong Education: A study on Youths' Ibasho Making in Extracurricular Activity]. 弘前大学生涯学習教育研究センター年報 [*Annual report, Center for Research and Education of Lifelong Learning, Hirosaki University*], 1-14.
- FUNCK, C. 2018. 'Cool Japan' – a hot research topic: tourism geography in Japan. *Tourism Geographies*, 20, 187-189.
- FURUICHI, Y. & TAMAKI, H. 1994. 学校生活の楽しさとその規定要因 [Contending Reasons for Enjoying School]. 岡山大学教育学部研究集録 [*Okayama University Faculty of Education Research Journal*], 105-113.
- GARDINER, M. E. 2004. Everyday Utopianism Lefebvre and his critics. *Cultural Studies*, 18, 228-254.
- GIL DE ZÚÑIGA, H., JUNG, N. & VALENZUELA, S. 2012. Social Media Use for News and Individuals' Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Political Participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17, 319-336.
- GOEKLER, J. L. 2011. *Uchi-Soto (Inside-Outside): Language and Culture in Context for the Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) Learner*. Master's Thesis, California State University.
- GOFFMAN, E. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York, Doubleday.
- HAGERTY, B. M., WILLIAMS, R. A., COYNE, J. C. & EARLY, M. R. 1996. Sense of belonging and indicators of social and psychological functioning. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 10, 235-244.
- HAMAAKI, J., HORI, M., MAEDA, S. & MURATA, K. 2010. Is the Japanese employment system degenerating? Evidence from the Basic Survey on Wage Structure. *ESRI Discussion paper series*. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

- HASHIMOTO, N., IMAMURA, Y., UNNO, H. & HORI, Y. 2022. サードプレイスと主観的幸福感に関する研究 [Research on Third Places and Subjective Happiness]. 土木学会論文集D3 (土木計画学) [*Japan Society of Civil Engineers Journal*], 77, 375-383.
- HERLEMAN, H. A., BRITT, T. W. & HASHIMA, P. Y. 2008. Ibasho and the adjustment, satisfaction, and well-being of expatriate spouses. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32, 282-299.
- HIDEKI, M. 2021. Special Issue: "Ibasho," Youth Participation, and Education. *Educational Studies in Japan*, 15, 1-2.
- HIJIKATA, K. 1983. 「日本文化論」と天皇制イデオロギー [*Theories of Japanese Culture and the Emperor Ideology*], Tokyo, Shin-Nihon Shuppansha.
- HIROI, I. 2000. 「居場所」という視点からの非行事例理解 [Understanding Delinquency through Ibasho]. 心理臨床学研究 [*Psychoclinical Research*], 18, 129-138.
- IFEKWUNIGWE, J. O. 1999. *Scattered Belongings Cultural Paradoxes of Race, Nation and Gender*, London, Routledge.
- IGARASHI, A. & NAGAYOSHI, K. 2022. Norms to be prejudiced: List experiments on attitudes towards immigrants in Japan. *Social Science Research*, 102(102647), 1-11.
- IGARASHI, A. & ONO, Y. 2022. Neoliberal ideology and negative attitudes toward immigrants: Evidence from a survey and survey experiment in Japan. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 52, 1146-1157.
- IKENO, O. & DAVIES, R. J. 2011. *Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture*, New York, Tuttle and Publishing.
- IM, E.-O. & CHEE, W. 2003. Feminist issues in e-mail group discussion among cancer patients. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 26, 287-298.
- IMMIGRATION SERVICES AGENCY OF JAPAN. 2023. *2023 Immigration Control and Residency Management*. <https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001407638.pdf>
- INOUE, T. 1979. 「世間体」の構造 社会心理史への試み [*The Anatomy of Sekentei*], Tokyo, NHK Books.
- ISHII, K. & JARKEY, N. 2002. The Housewife Is Born: The Establishment of the Notion and Identity of the Shufu in Modern Japan. *Japanese Studies*, 22, 35-47.

- IWABUCHI, K. 2015. Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: soft power, nation branding and the question of ‘international cultural exchange’. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 21, 419-432.
- IWATA, M. & NEMOTO, K. 2018. Co-constituting migrant strangers and foreigners: The case of Japan. *Current Sociology*, 66, 303-319.
- JAPAN INSTITUTE FOR LABOR POLICY AND TRAINING. 2023. *Graph of Labor Participation sorted by Age and Gender*.
https://www.jil.go.jp/kokunai/statistics/timeseries/html/g0203_02.html
- JUNG, Y. 2004. Can Japan Become “A Society Attractive for Immigrants?” Identity, Gender and Nation-States under Globalization in East Asia. *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, 53-68.
- JUVONEN, J. 2006. Sense of Belonging, Social Bonds, and School Functioning. *Handbook of educational psychology*. Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- KAGE, R., ROSENBLUTH, F. M. & TANAKA, S. 2022. Varieties of Public Attitudes toward Immigration: Evidence from Survey Experiments in Japan. *Political Research Quarterly*, 75, 216-230.
- KANG, J. S. 2017. Evaluating Labor Force Participation of Women in Japan and Korea: Developments and Future Prospects. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 23, 294-320.
- KASHIWAZAKI, C. 2000. The politics of legal status. In: RYANG, S. (ed.) *Koreans in Japan: Critical voices from the margin*. London: Routledge.
- KASHIWAZAKI, C. 2013. Incorporating immigrants as foreigners: Multicultural politics in Japan'. *Citizenship Studies*, 17, 31-47.
- KASHIWAZAKI, C. 2016. Multicultural Discourse and Policies in Japan: An Assessment of Tabunka Kyosei. *The Gakushuin Journal of International Studies*, 3, 1-15.
- KATO, J., KUZNETSOVA, I. & ROUND, J. 2019. The nature of ‘illegal’ migration in Japan and the United Kingdom. The impact of attitudes towards migrants, social cohesion and future challenges. *IRiS Working Paper Series*. Institute for Research Into Superdiversity (IRiS) University of Birmingham.
- KAWAMURA, N. 1982. 日本文化論の周辺 [*Some arguments on theories of Japanese culture*], Tokyo, Ningen no kagakusha.

- KAYAMA, M. & YAMAKAWA, N. 2020. Acculturation and a sense of belonging of children in U.S. Schools and communities: The case of Japanese families. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 119, 105612.
- KITAO, S. & MIKOSHIBA, M. 2022. Why women work the way they do in Japan: Roles of fiscal policies. *CAMA Working Paper 21/2022, March 2022*. SSRN: CAMA (Centre for Applied Macroeconomic Analysis), The Australian National University.
- KITAYAMA, O. 1993. 自分と居場所 [*The Self and Ibasho*], 岩崎学術出版社 [Iwasai Gakujutsu Shuppansha].
- KONISHI, E., YAHIRO, M., NAKAJIMA, N. & ONO, M. 2009. The Japanese Value of Harmony and Nursing Ethics. *Nursing Ethics*, 16, 625-636.
- KROO, J. 2021. Discourses of Anticipatory Futures Among Contemporary Japanese Younger Adults. *Language, Discourse & Society*, 9, 119-136.
- KSHETRY, G. 2008. *Foreigners in Japan: A Historical Perspective*, Xlibris US.
- KUBOTA, R. 1998. Ideologies of English in Japan. *World Englishes*, 17, 295-306.
- LAMBERT, N. M., STILLMAN, T. F., HICKS, J. A., KAMBLE, S., BAUMEISTER, R. F. & FINCHAM, F. D. 2013. To Belong Is to Matter: Sense of Belonging Enhances Meaning in Life. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39, 1418-1427.
- LAURENCE, J., IGARASHI, A. & ISHIDA, K. 2021. The Dynamics of Immigration and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in Japan: How and Why Changes in Immigrant Share Affect Attitudes toward Immigration in a Newly Diversifying Society. *Social Forces*, 101, 369-403.
- LEACH, N. 2005. Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Space. In: EMMA, R. & JEAN, H. (eds.) *Habitus: A Sense of Place*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- LIAMPUTTONG, P. 2006. *Health research in cyberspace: Methodological, practical and personal issues*, New York, Nova Science.
- LIAMPUTTONG, P. 2011. *Focus Group Methodology*. Perlego: SAGE Publications.
- LIE, J. 2008. *Zainichi (Korean in Japan)*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- LILLRANK, A. 2012. Managing the interviewer self. In: GUBRIUM, J. (ed.) *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft* 2ed. SAGE Publications.
- LIU-FARRER, G. 2020. *Immigrant Japan*. Perlego: Cornell University.

- MA, X. 2003. Sense of Belonging to School: Can Schools Make a Difference? *The Journal of Educational Research*, 96, 340-349.
- MALONE, G. P., PILLOW, D. R. & OSMAN, A. 2012. The General Belongingness Scale (GBS): Assessing achieved belongingness. . *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52, 311-316.
- MANN, C. & STEWART, F. 2000. *Internet communication and qualitative research: A handbook for researching online*, London, SAGE.
- MANSOURIAN, Y. 2022. Information sharing in serious leisure as a source of Ibasho and Tanoshimi: A narrative from bonsai growers in Australia. *The European Chapter of the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T-EC)*. online: ASIS&T.
- MARRACCINI, M. E. & BRIER, Z. M. F. 2017. School connectedness and suicidal thoughts and behaviors: A systematic meta-analysis. *Sch. Psychol. Q.*, 32, 5-21.
- MASAMUNE, M. 1996. 日本語におけるウチ ソトの使い分けと呼称について [On Japanese Addressing Expressions and Uchi Soto]. 北陸大学紀要 [*Hokuriku University Journal*], 20, 141-146.
- MATA, F. & PENDAKUR, R. 2014. Social Capital, Diversity and Giving or Receiving Help Among Neighbours. *Social Indicators Research*, 118, 329-347.
- MAY, V. 2011. Self, Belonging and Social Change. *Sociology*, 45, 363-378.
- MAY, V. 2013. *Connecting Self to Society*. 1st ed. Perlego: Bloomsburg Publishing.
- MCCORMACK, G. 2007. *Client State: Japan in the American Embrace*, London, Verso.
- MCGUIRE, M. J. 2021. Sign Bilingual Co-Enrollment Programs as Pathways to Ibasho. *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, 15, 41-56.
- MEAD, G. H. 1934. *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist.*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- MINICHELLO, V., ARONI, R. & HAYS, T. 2008. *In-depth interviewing: Principles, techniques, analysis*, Frenchs Forest, Pearson Education Australia.
- MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, TRADE AND INDUSTRY. 2012. *Cool Japan Strategy*. Creative Industries Division.
https://wise.co.th/wise/References/Creative_Economy/Cool_Japan_Strategy_January_2012.pdf

- MINISTRY OF HEALTH, LABOUR AND WELFARE OF JAPAN. 2023. *Summary of vital statistics (rates)*. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hw/populate/dl/E02.pdf>
- MORIMOTO, T. 1985. *Nihongo omote to ura [Omote in Japanese and its meaning]*, Tokyo, Shinchousha.
- MORROW, V. 2001. Young people's explanations and experiences of social exclusion: retrieving Bourdieu's concept of social capital. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 21, 37-63.
- NAGAYOSHI, K. 2009. Whose Size Counts? Multilevel Analysis of Japanese Anti-Immigrant Attitudes. *JGSS Research Series*, 9.
- NAKAFUJI, S. 2017. *Shinri rinsho to ibasho [Clinical psychology and ibasho]*, Osaka, Sogensha.
- NOMURA, H. 2021. Places of Belonging (Ibasho) and Pursuing One's Dream: The Unstable State of Transition Driven by Youth Culture. *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, 15, 57-68.
- NUKAGA, M. 2006. Xenophobia and the Effects of Education Determinants of Japanese Attitudes toward Acceptance of Foreigners 日本版 *General Social Surveys* 研究論文集 [5] *JGSS* で見た日本人の意識と行動 *JGSS Research Series*, 2, 191-202.
- NYE, J. 1990. *Bound to lead: the Changing Nature of American Power*, New York, Basic Books.
- NYE, J. 2004. *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, Public Affairs.
- OGUMA, E. 1995. 単一民族神話の起源 [*The Myth of The Homogenous Nation*], Tokyo, Shinyousha.
- OKAMURA, M. & OGASAWARA, M. 2005. Japan's Current Countermeasures against Human Trafficking and Challenges. *National Diet Library*, 485. National Diet Library.
- ONO, S. 2017. Nihon ni okeru jinshin torihiki taisaku no gendankai [Current stage of the measures against human trafficking in Japan]. In: OKUBO, S., HIZUME, M. & YOSHIDA, M. (eds.) *Hito no kokusai Ido to Gendai Nihon no Ho: Jinshin Torihiki - Gaikokujin Roudou - Nyuukan Housei. [Globalization of people and contemporary Japan: human trafficking - foreign laborers - Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act]*. Tokyo: Nihon Hyouronsha.

- OTAYA, S. 2021. How Has the Support Called “Ibashi” been Discussed? *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, 15, 17-26.
- OZAWA, K. 2002. 居場所とアイデンティティを現象学的アプローチによって捉える試み [Ibashi and Identity through a phenomenological approach]. 東京工芸大学工学部紀要. 人文・社会編 [*Tokyo Polytechnic University Engineering Journal for Culture and Society*], 25, 30-40.
- PAVIA, P. C. P., DE PAIVA, H. N., DE OLIVEIRA FILHO, P. M., LAMOUNIER, J. A., E FERREIRA, E. F., FERREIRA, R. C., KAWACHI, I. & ZARZAR, P. M. 2014. Development and Validation of a Social Capital Questionnaire for Adolescent Students (SCQ-AS). *PLoS ONE*, 9.
- PELTOKORPI, V. 2006. Knowledge sharing in a cross-cultural context: Nordic expatriates in Japan. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 4.
- PELTOKORPI, V. & FROESE, F. 2009. Organizational expatriates and self-initiated expatriates: Who adjust better to work and life in Japan ? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20, 1096-1112.
- PENDERGAST, D., ALLEN, J., MCGREGOR, G. & RONKSLEY-PAVIA, M. 2018. Engaging Marginalized, “At-Risk” Middle-Level Students: A Focus on the Importance of a Sense of Belonging at School. *Education Sciences*, 8.
- ROBERSON, J. E. 1995. Becoming Shakaijin: Working-Class Reproduction in Japan. *Ethnology*, 34, 293-313.
- RODRÍGUEZ-PLANAS, N. & TANAKA, R. 2022. Gender norms and women’s decision to work: evidence from Japan. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 20, 15-36.
- SAKASHITA, M. 2020. Generation Z in Japan: Raised in Anxiety. In: GENTINA, E. & PARRY, E. (eds.) *The New Generation Z in Asia: Dynamics, Differences, Digitalisation*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- SANDERS, J. & MUNFORD, R. 2016. Fostering a sense of belonging at school—five orientations to practice that assist vulnerable youth to create a positive student identity. *School Psychology International*, 37, 155-171.
- SANO, K. 2014. The Study of the Senpai-Kouhai Culture in Junior High Schools in Japan. *Sociological Insight 2014*, 6, 59-68.

- SANO, Y. & YASUMOTO, S. 2014. Policy Responses to Population-Declining Society: Development and Challenges of Family Policies in Japan. *In: ROBILIA, M. (ed.) Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe* New York: Springer.
- SHANTINI, Y., WIDIYANTI, I. A. & INOUE, H. 2024. EXPLORING LEARNING COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDIES FROM INDONESIA TO IBASHO IN JAPAN. *Novateur Publications*, 77-84.
- SHIPPER, A. 2006. Foreigners and Civil Society in Japan. *Pacific Affairs*, 79, 269-289.
- SIMMEL, G. 1950. The field of sociology. *In: WOLFF, G. (ed.) The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: The Free Press.
- STATISTICS BUREAU OF JAPAN. 2024. *Monthly Report September 1, 2023 (Final estimates) , February 1, 2024 (Provisional estimates)*.
<https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/jinsui/tsuki/index.html>
- SUGIMOTO, Y. 2010. *An Introduction to Japanese society*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- SUKLE, R. 1994. Chapter 5. UCHI/SOTO: CHOICES IN DIRECTIVE SPEECH ACTS IN JAPANESE. *In: BACHNIK, J. M. & QUINN, C. J. (eds.) Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- SUMIDA, M. 2003. Children's Ibasho and interpersonal world. *In: SUMIDA, H. M. (ed.)*. Fukuoka, Japan: Kyushu University Press.
- SUZUKI, K., ISHIBASHI, M., SUZUKI, Y. & NITTA, F. 2022. Issue of Multicultural People in Globalizing Japan: (Cultural) Identity, Mental Health and "Ibasho". *In: KLICPEROVA-BAKER, M. & FRIEDLMEIER, W. (eds.) Xenophobia vs. Patriotism: Where is my Home? Proceedings from the 25th Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 304.
- TAKAHASHI, F. 2015. *Integration and Separation of Immigrants in Japan - Teachers' Orientations to Identity and Culture -*. Doctor of Philosophy Ph.D Dissertation, University of Oxford.
- TAKAHASHI, S., ISHIKAWA, A., KATO, H., IWASAWA, M., KOMATSU, R., KANEKO, R., IKENOUE, M., MITA, F., TSUJI, A. & MORIIZUMI, R. 2003. Population Projections for Japan 2001-2050 With Long-Range Population Projections: 2051-2100. *Journal of Population and Social Security (Population)*, 1, 1-43.

- TAKEMORI, M. 1999. 心の発達における居場所の役割 [Ibashi in Mental Development]. 鳴門教育大学研究紀要. 教育科学編 [*Naruto University of Education Journal*], 14, 127-136.
- TANAKA, H. 2012. *Wakamono no ibasho to sanko (Ibashi and participation for young people)*, Tokyo, Toyokan Shuppansha.
- TANAKA, H. 2021. Development of the ibasho concept in Japanese education and youth work: Ibasho as a place of refuge and empowerment for excluded people. *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, 14, March, 3-15.
- TANAKA, M. & TAJIMA, S. 2004. A study on Ibasho at junior high school. *Kyushu University psychological research*, 5, 219-228.
- TANAKA, T. 1992. 登校拒否(不登校)問題について--児童生徒の「心の居場所」づくりを目指して(学校不適応対策調査研究協力者会議報告) [Responding to non-attendance at school - Aiming for ibasho making for students (Collaborative Report on Non-Attendance at School)]. 教育委員会月報 [*Monthly reports of the board of education*], 44, p25-29.
- TERAMI, Y. 1996. Ambivalent Meanings of "Being a Mother" : Identity Formations of Japanese "Sengyo-Shufu" Women (Full-Time Housewives) in Their Child-Rearing Practices. 神戸親和女子大学研究論叢 [*Kobe Shinwa Women's University Research Collection*], 30, A331-A353.
- THOMSON, A. 2005. My Wayward Heart: Homesickness, Longing and the Return of British Post-War Immigrants from Australia. In: HARPER, M. (ed.) *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants 1600-2000*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- TOFF, M. & YAMAMORI, T. 2011. Aren't There Any Better Ways to Refer to Non-Japanese than Gaijin? . *Journal of Aichi Shukutoku University, Faculty of Global Culture and Communication*, 1, 85-98.
- TOKUNAGA, T. 2018. *Learning to Belong in the World: An Ethnography of Asian American Girls*, Singapore, Springer Singapore.

- TOKUNAGA, T. 2021. Co-Creating Ibasho at a Part-Time High School in Tokyo: Affirming Immigrant Students' Lives through Extracurricular Activities *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, 15, 27-39.
- TOKUNAGA, T., DA SILVA, M. I. & FU, M. 2021. Participatory Action Research with Immigrant Youth in Tokyo: Possibilities and Challenges of Ibasho Creation Project. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, 46, 40-51.
- TOKUNAGA, T. & HUANG, C. 2016. "I feel proud to be an immigrant" How a Youth Program Supports Ibasho Creation for Chinese Immigrant Students in the U.S. *In: MA, W. & LI, G. (eds.) Chinese-Heritage Students in North American School*. New York: Routledge.
- TOYOTA, H. 2011. Differences in Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Self-Acceptance as Function of Gender and Ibasho (a Person Who Eases the Mind) of Japanese Undergraduates. *Psychological Topics*, 20, 449-459.
- TSUDA, T. 2008. Crossing ethnic boundaries: Japanese Brazilian return migrants and the ethnic challenge of Japan's newest immigrant minority. *In: GRANBURN, N. H., ERTL, J. & TIERNEY, R. K. (eds.) Multiculturalism in the New Japan: Crossing the Boundaries Within*. New York: Berghahn.
- TSUYA, N. 2014. The Impacts of Population Decline in Japan: Demographic Prospects and Policy Implications. *Forum 005*. Suntory Foundation Research Project: Suntory Foundation Research Project.
- WATANABE, S. 1954. *Nihongo no kokoro [The Heart of the Japanese Language]*, Tokyo, Kousansha Gendai Shinsho.
- YAMAGATA, M., TERAGUCHI, T. & MIURA, A. 2023. Effects of Pathogen-Avoidance Tendency on Infection-Prevention Behaviors and Exclusionary Attitudes toward Foreigners: A Longitudinal Study of the COVID-19 Outbreak in Japan¹. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 65, 158-172.
- YAMAMURA, E. 2009. Frequency of contact with foreigners in a homogenous society: perceived consequences of foreigner increase in Japan. *MPRA Paper*. Munich: University Library of Munich.
- YAMAMURA, T. 2011. アニメ漫画で地域振興 *[Local Revitalization Through Manga and Anime]*, Tokyo, Tokyo Horei Shuppan.

- YANO, I. 2005. 外国人の子どもの人権と居場所 [Migrant children's human rights and ibasho]. 横浜国立大学教育人間科学部紀要. I, 教育科学 [*Yokohama National University Faculty of Human Sciences Education Department Journal*], 7, 133-148.
- YOSHINO, K. 2005. *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*. Taylor and Francis.

8. Appendices

Interview Guide for the *ibasho* of foreign residents living in Japan

Last Edited: March 1, 2024

Duration: 1h 30min

Please notify the Primary Investigator at the start of the interview if there are any questions you would like to NOT answer

Note that other questions besides written in the Interview Guide may present itself in the duration of the interview

Introduction

- Tell me about yourself (age, occupation, background, current location, gender)

Part I: Further Clarification on Interviewee's Survey Responses

Here the Primary Investigator will ask for clarification on your responses to the previous survey you have responded to prior to the interview

Small break

Part II: Interview Questions

Do you feel like you belong in the place you are in currently? Why and When?

Do you have times this sense of belonging feels challenged? Why and When?

Do you normally think about *ibasho* 居場所?

In your terms, what qualifies as an *ibasho* 居場所?

Are there people (friends, family, coworkers, strangers, etc.) included in your *ibasho* 居場所?

Are there certain places (your house, cafe, workplace, etc.) included in your *ibasho* 居場所?

Do you have a place you call *ibasho* 居場所 in Japan? Where? And Why?

Do you have a place you call *ibasho* 居場所 in your country of origin? Where? And Why?

If yes, what are the similarities/differences between your *ibasho* 居場所 in Japan and in your country of origin?

Does having an *ibasho* 居場所 affect your daily life?

Does having an *ibasho* 居場所 affect your life satisfaction?

Does having an *ibasho* 居場所 affect your social life?

Concluding

- Any concluding remarks, questions or additional comments?
- Any alias (fake name) you would like to be referred to throughout the project? Otherwise one will be randomly allocated

Thank you for your participation!

Survey: The *Ibasho* of Foreign Residents Living in Japan

I am a graduate student at Lund University, conducting a study on the sense of *ibasho* 居場所 of foreign residents living in Japan

This is a general survey in English; **collecting quantitative data** and **requesting the kind cooperation for interview**.

Estimated time: 10-15 minutes

NOTE: Only individuals legal of age may participate.

For any further questions, please contact me via mandeline.vu@hotmail.com

The survey is active from February, 2024

Last edited: February 27, 2024

* Indicates required question

1. Email *

Please read the following
STUDY PROCEDURES

- This Google Form primarily entails the collection of quantitative data.
- This Google Form will be available from February 15, 2024 till May 31st, 2024*
- Volunteers wishing to participate in the interview will be individually contacted and notified over the interview procedure.
- Data retrieved from the form and interview will be used for analytic and academic purposes for the final project as a part of Lund University course SOCM05 Sociology Master's Thesis
- Any interview data related to the project will be deleted after the completion of SOCM05 Sociology Master's Thesis

**The sampling may override the expected end date due to changes in the data collection process and/or the completion of the course SOCM05 Sociology Master's Thesis*

CONFIDENTIALITY

The quantitative data retrieved will be anonymous. For the purposes of this research study, your comments will not be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants, in which will be used on all research notes, documents and writings
- Keeping notes, recordings, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a crypted folder
- Any related interview and participant data will be deleted after the completion of SOCM05 Sociology Master's Thesis course

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated

to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the header. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator (see contact information available in the page header).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked about your consent. After you agree to the written information, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed. In case of withdrawal, please notify the Primary Investigator.

2. **I have read and I understand the provided information. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand that this form will collect data used for analytic and academic purposes.** *

Mark only one oval.

- I consent
 I do not consent

Basic Information

3. Gender (If 'Other', please specify) *

Mark only one oval.

- Female
 Male
 Other: _____

4. Age (NOTE: Participants younger than 18 years old may not participate in the survey) *

Mark only one oval.

- 18-20
 21-30 (20s)
 31-40 (30s)
 41-50 (40s)
 51+ (50s+)

5. Country of Origin *

6. Ethnicity *

7. Race (if you are comfortable providing this information)

8. Occupation *

9. Education (last finished) *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than secondary education
- Secondary education
- Diploma/certificate from vocational school/community college
- BA/MA/Ph.D or higher

10. Annual Income *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 3 mil yen
- 3-5 mil yen
- 6-9 mil yen
- 10+ mil yen

11. Marital Status *

Mark only one oval.

- Married
- Divorced/widowed/separated
- Single

Questions Regarding Your Residency in Japan

12. Do you consider yourself a foreign resident living in Japan? (Please refer to 'Other' if you wish to elaborate) *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes (If yes, please answer the next question)
- No
- Other: _____

13. If yes, how 'foreign' do you feel?

Mark only one oval.

- 1 2 3 4 5
-
- Not Entirely

14. How many total years have you spent in Japan? *

15. In which Japanese city do you currently reside in? (if you have resided in several cities up until now, please name them in parenthesis) *

16. Close relatives in current city/local community *

Mark only one oval.

- None
- 1-5 people
- 6-10 people
- 10+ people

17. Close friends in current city/local community *

Mark only one oval.

- None
- 1-5 people
- 6-10 people
- 10+ people

18. Which VISA do you have? (You may choose several if you have received more than one VISA type during your time in Japan) (Detailed description of VISA types are available [here](#)) *

Check all that apply.

- Highly Skilled Professional
- Working Visa
- General Visa (Cultural Activities, Student, Training, Dependent)
- Specified Visa (Spouse, Child, Designated Activities, Long-Term Residence)
- Diplomatic/Official
- Naturalized Japanese Citizen
- Japanese National

19. What is your level of Japanese language(JLPT)? *

Mark only one oval.

- Advanced (N1)
- Business Level (N2)
- Conversational (N3)
- Basic (N4)
- Beginner (N5)

20. In which year did you start your long-term residency in Japan? *

21. For what purpose did you first come to Japan? *

Mark only one oval.

- Education
- Work
- Family
- Marriage
- Travel
- Other: _____

22. Generational Status *

Mark only one oval.

- I came to Japan on my own (1st Generation)
- My parents came to Japan (2nd generation)
- My grandparents came to Japan (3rd generation)
- Other: _____

23. Were you present in Japan during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2023)? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Other: _____

24. How much longer do you expect to stay in Japan? *

Mark only one oval.

- less than a year
 1-3 years
 3-5 years
 6-9 years
 10+ years
 Indefinitely

Questions Regarding *ibasho* 居場所

25. Please write up to 10 words that comes to mind when you think of *ibasho* 居場所 (Please separate the words with comma,;) *

26. What is *ibasho* 居場所 to you? and why? *

Questions regarding belonging in Japan

- 7 = Strongly agree
- 6 = Agree
- 5 = Somewhat Agree
- 4 = Don't Agree or Disagree
- 3 = Somewhat Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

Adapted from Malone, G. P., Pillow, D. R., & Osman, A. (2012). The General Belongingness Scale (GBS): Assessing achieved belongingness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(3), 311-316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.10.027>

27. When I am with other people, I feel included *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Stro | | | | | | Strongly Agree

28. I have close bonds with family and friends *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Stro | | | | | | Strongly Agree

29. I feel like an outsider in Japan *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Stro | | | | | | Strongly Agree

30. I feel as if people in Japan do not care about me *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Stro | | | | | | Strongly Agree

31. I feel accepted by others in Japan *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Stro | | | | | | Strongly Agree

32. Because I do not belong, I feel distant *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Stro | | | | | | Strongly Agree

33. I feel isolated in Japan *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Stro Strongly Agree

34. I have a sense of belonging in Japan *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Stro Strongly Agree

35. When I am with other people, I feel like a stranger *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Stro Strongly Agree

36. I have a place at the table with others (at my work/school/local community) *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Stro Strongly Agree

37. I feel connected to Japan *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Strongly Agree

38. Friends and family do not involve me in their plans *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Strongly Agree

Request for Interview

39. I wish to volunteer and be contacted for interview *

Mark only one oval.

Yes (If yes, please leave your email below)

No

40. Full Name (how you would like to be addressed in parenthesis)

41. Preferred Pronouns

42. Email address

Please refer to the following link to find an online appointment.

<https://calendly.com/oumaddievu/draft-soc05>

After a successful scheduling, you will be provided with information related to your participation (participant information, interview consent form and interview questions). Please read the information carefully as preparation for the interview session.

43. Scheduling a Zoom appointment *

Mark only one oval.

- I have understood the contents and scheduled a session via Calendly
- I have understood the contents and I will schedule a session later (you will receive email reminders)
- I am not participating in the interview

Thank you for your kind participation!

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms