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Abstract

This paper describes a study into the cultural identity of bi-cultural people of Japanese and Spanish-speaking Latin American origin. An online questionnaire created and translated into Spanish was used. Respondents currently reside in Japan and in other countries, have a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, and a range of international living situations. Results show that due to the variety in participant backgrounds, very few patterns emerge in the data. However, common issues are language and customs, and a plethora of other experiences are highlighted.

Keywords : Japan ; South America ; Spanish-speakers ; cultural identity ; ethnicity ; bi-cultural ; bi-ethnic.

Introduction and Background

Nikkei, or nikkeijin are ‘Japanese emigrants and their descendants who have created communities throughout the world’ (Discover Nikkei, no date). According to The Association of Nikkei & Japanese Abroad (2017), of the 3.8 million Nikkei, around 214,500 of them are living in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, with the largest numbers in Peru (100,000) and in Argentina (65,000). There are also 250,000 of these Nikkei currently living in Japan who have returned from overseas. Of these, 34,575 are Peruvian (E-Stats : Portal Site of Official Statistics

of Japan, 2015). This considerable population of people live as ethnic or cultural minorities, and are relatively unrepresented in the international and most domestic media.

Japanese began migrating abroad when restrictions were loosened after the Meiji restoration in 1868. Before this time citizens were not permitted to leave the country. Many headed to the United States until 1921 when the Immigration Act was introduced and drastically reduced the number of Asians entering the country (Franco, 1996). The knock-on effect of this was that more Japanese began migrating to Latin America, which had a labour shortage, as an alternative to the United States (Kunimoto, 1993). These new Japanese arrivals gradually integrated and some even married Latin Americans and had bi-ethnic offspring.

When the Japanese economy began to boom during the 1980s, and the situation in Latin America was less favourable than previously, some of the migrants began to return to Japan for work. More recently, some of these returnees have again migrated to Latin America due to the failing Japanese economy and temporary nature of the visa status offered to them.

Literature Review

Acculturation

Berry (2003) developed a well-known model of acculturation. The process of adapting to a bi-cultural or mixed-culture situation is known as acculturation, and developing an attachment to one of these cultures is the development of a cultural identity. In terms of outcomes, the two extremes are assimilation and marginalization. Assimilation is the complete acceptance of the majority culture ; the cultural society surrounding the individual. Marginalisation is the opposite end of the scale, in which an individual does not accept or connect with any of the two

or more cultures (Berry, 2003). Between these two polar outcomes are integration, which means accepting both cultures equally, and separation which involves connecting with the minority more than the majority culture (Berry, 2003). In the worst-case scenario, in the UK, Australia, and the United States marginalisation has led to young Muslims getting involved with extremist terrorist groups.

It is clear from previous research that resettling can be a difficult experience ; migrants who perceive that they are discriminated against can experience stress and health problems as a result (Johnson-Agbakwu et al., 2016). The model outlined above implies that there is the potential for them to be stuck between or outside of these very different cultures. As well as general research into acculturation and the issues associated with migrating and adjusting to a new culture, there are examples of case studies in specific cultures. As this paper is focused on Japan and Spanish-speaking South Americans, there is not space to include case studies outside of this realm.

Temporary Foreign Workers and Immigrants in Japan

Japanese government policy and rhetoric maintains that foreign workers in Japan must be skilled in order to be admitted. However, actual analysis of the data shows that this is not the case. Japan is using a majority of temporary foreign workers as manual and low-skilled labour (Komone, 2018). This may, in part, explain some of the reluctance of the Japanese government to implement long-term policies that assist in the integration of immigrant workers. In contrast to Singapore's policy of 'integration and multicultural coexistence' (Komisarof & Leong, 2016 : Abstract), Japan has naturally erred towards encouraging assimilation of immigrants into the dominant Japanese culture. Temporary foreign workers in Japan have been known to struggle to assimilate, leading some researchers to call for increased measures to remedy the situation at a localised level in Japan (Iguchi,

2012), and to criticize existing efforts as superficial (Green, 2018). The literature has identified several causal factors for this struggle. Firstly, foreign workers have restricted rights and have been known to be mistreated in Japan (Kamibayashi, 2013). Also, the Japanese language is notoriously difficult to master, and in any case most workers are only issued temporary visas and a large proportion return to their home country after staying long enough to save a sum of money. Komai (2000: 322) believes that Japan still views foreigners residing in Japan as ‘people to be controlled and monitored rather than as equal contributors in Japanese society’. There is also the infamous uchi-soto culture in Japan which means that individuals who are considered outside a certain circle are treated as outsiders while those who are ‘one of us’ are treated as insiders. Similarities may be drawn with high school clique culture, but in any case, anyone who looks or acts non-Japanese may be treated as an outsider and unwelcome except as a customer and therefore brief visitor (Toh, 2016). The ramifications of the uchi-soto culture extend to the employment market, whereby, except for those employed in special ‘foreigner’ roles such as language teachers, anyone who is not fluent in Japanese is unable to be promoted beyond manual employment (Takenoshita, 2014). These temporary foreign worker positions do not benefit from pay-increases and welfare benefits, and these roles are susceptible to becoming obsolete in the event of an economic crash, which happened most recently in 2008-2009 (Takenoshita, 2014). At that time, many of the foreign workers employed in Japan became unemployed. The ‘dekasegi’ or returning Japanese Nikkei who had migrated abroad but returned to Japan for work during the economic bubble era, were primary victims of redundancy during this period (Kadia, 2015), with the Japanese government even resorting to bribery to make the dekasegi leave.

Japanese in Latin America

The largest Japanese community in the world outside of Japan is in São Paulo. According to one source, there are as many as 1.6 million Japanese in the Brazilian metropolis (Culture Trip, 2017). Although issues of racism against Asians in Latin America have been documented (Ko, 2016), it appears that most Nikkei adapt and settle into their bi-cultural contexts. From personal conversations with Nikkei in Japan this certainly seems true in most cases. One of the most significant examples of the success of Japanese integration into Latin America was the election and tenure of the ethnically Japanese and Peruvian-born President Alberto Fujimori in Peru between 1990 and 2000 (Encyclopedia Britannica, No Date). There is also a famous Japanese-Brazilian film director called Tizuka Yamazaki (Hirabayashi, (2002). Despite the success stories, many of the Japanese diaspora have historically been swayed in their migration by economic hardship and/or promise. Currently, although the Japanese economic miracle is a distant memory, for many Nikkei the financial situation in Japan remains more attractive than that in Latin America. Combine this with the added benefits of public order, political stability, and personal safety, and it is easy to see why many who left Japan in the past have now returned.

Rationale

This study used an online questionnaire constructed and distributed using the Survey Monkey website (No Date). This was because the intended respondents are scattered across Japan and Latin America and it was impractical to contact them by mail or meet them face to face. A larger sample would have been ideal but access to Nikkei was difficult to organise. Had the sample been larger, perhaps a quantitative study would have been preferable. As a result of this situation, the

questionnaire elicited qualitative data in order to collect participants' thoughts, opinions, and explanations in greater depth. I had previously used this questionnaire to survey the cultural identity and experiences of Japanese-Brazilians (Marshall, 2019). On that occasion, the questionnaire and explanation were translated into Portuguese, and on this occasion, it was translated into Spanish, but the content was identical.

Research Questions

What culture do the Spanish-speaking Latin American and Japanese Bi-Cultural Community in Japan identify with most readily ?

What culture do the Spanish-speaking Latin American and Japanese Bi-Cultural Community outside of Japan identify with most readily ?

What aspects of the culture do the Spanish-speaking Latin American and Japanese Bi-Cultural Community in Japan have problems with ?

What aspects of the culture do the Spanish-speaking Latin American and Japanese Bi-Cultural Community outside of Japan have problems with ?

Participants

The first four questions (See Appendix 1) elicited personal details from participants in order to create a clear picture of exactly who the data for this study was being collected from. Participants were contacted in a 'snowball' style through my existing personal contacts. The questionnaire was then passed on by those people to friends and family members both in Japan and abroad. A total of fifteen respondents completed the questionnaire. It is possible to see from the responses that these people ranged in age from around nineteen to sixty-four years old.

People from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds were included ; from 100% Japanese to 100% Argentinian. In between there was a variety of mixed-ethnic balances, for example, one participant was 25% Peruvian, 25% Cuban, 50% Japanese, and another was 50% Honduran and 50% Japanese. Of the respondents, while most reside in Japan, one was in the United Kingdom and one was currently in Spain. Concerning the number of years spent living in Japan for those currently in Japan, this ranged from 100% of their life for one nineteen-year-old respondent, to just four out of thirty-four years for another. Three respondents had lived in two countries other than Japan, with one stating that they had been in Peru for sixteen years and the United States for one, and another having lived in Peru and the U. S. for eight years each. The third did not specify which countries they had lived in other than Japan. Finally, the respondent currently in Spain had lived in Japan for one year, Spain for thirteen years, and Australia for seven years. The respondent currently in the U. K. had lived in Japan for three years, the U. K. for two years, and Argentina for twenty-four years.

Two of the respondents (50% British, 50% Japanese, living in Spain, and 100% Japanese living in the UK) indicated that they are not, in fact, ethnically Latin American at all. Discluding the data from these participants was considered but this was decided against for three reasons. Firstly, both participants responded entirely in Spanish. Also, having read the explanation for the questionnaire and continued completing it, it can be assumed that these individuals consider themselves to be at least partially Spanish-speaking Latin Americans, culturally, if not ethnically. Finally, the responses from these participants added to the richness and variety of data collected.

Of those surveyed, seven replied that their parents were the generation of their family who relocated abroad, and six said it was their grandparents. Only one replied that their great-grand-parents had migrated, while only one had taken the

decision to migrate themselves.

The combination of all of these different factors in participants' backgrounds means that those who completed the questionnaire were not only bi-, but truly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural individuals with a vast array of inter-cultural living experiences.

Methodology

The seven-item questionnaire was written in English (Appendix 1) and then translated into Spanish (Appendix 2) using basic translation software. The researcher has an intermediate level of Spanish proficiency and used multiple sources of translation to corroborate any areas of uncertainty in the meaning of vocabulary. Questions were written to avoid leading respondents toward giving a certain answer. The explanation tried to make clear that all opinions would be respected and that the aim of the data collection was to give a voice to the thoughts and experiences of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural respondents. The majority of responses were written in Spanish, but a small number were written in English. None of the participants wrote in Japanese. All of the responses in their original format and language can be seen in Appendix 3. For all questions, responses were open ; allowing unlimited words, rather than multiple choice or Likert type responses. This was in order to encourage participants to explain their situations and to allow opinions and explanations to be provided in an unrestricted format.

Results

The results for questions five, six, and seven probed information about cultural identity, and specific problems in existing in an alien or bi-cultural situation.

Question 5) 'Where do you feel most 'at home'(if anywhere) ?' yielded some interesting responses. Despite the fact that thirteen participants are currently living in Japan, and most participants have spent a considerable proportion in Japan, only seven said that this was the culture where they felt most 'at home'. Three feel more comfortable in Argentinian culture, two in Peruvian, and one in Spanish. Two respondents gave neutral-type responses, with one stating that they feel equally at home in both cultures, and one saying 'I don't know'.

Question 6) 'What problems did you have adjusting to the new country (if you moved) ?' showed that language is one of the main issues facing bi-cultural individuals, with eight respondents mentioning it specifically. Four people cited 'customs' as a problem, with one other writing 'idiosyncrasies', one writing 'cultural codes', and one writing 'Japanese thinking'. One person wrote 'racism' and one wrote 'discrimination', and two people responded 'nothing'. Finally, one responded that they had moved to Japan at four years old and so Japan has always been their country.

Question 7) asked participants 'What aspects of the two cultures do you feel are the most different / difficult to deal with?' Three responses again mentioned language specifically, with one specifying even further, saying 'Japanese'. Two stated that 'customs' generally were difficult to deal with, while one just wrote 'culture'. Within the realm of customs, however, several more specific comments were included. These were 'punctuality', 'organisation', 'way of thinking' 'teaching methods', and 'I am not yet accustomed to the Latin American environment'. Three other answers partially related to 'customs' were 'interpersonal relations', 'personality' and 'expressing what you think' which may be diagnosed as aspects of acceptable behaviour. Somewhat separately, 'politics' was cited, as was 'treatment at work'. Additionally, 'the family union in Japan and the disorder in

Peru' and 'identity problems... am not from here or from there!!'. One person said 'nothing' while one put a hyphen (-) to indicate no comment or nothing.

Limitations

This study only surveyed a small sample of fifteen respondents. While this is not necessarily a problem, the depth of the data collected was not sufficient to compensate for this in terms of providing robust interpretations and conclusions. Also, the 'snowball' sampling method is convenient but not particularly comprehensive if intending to extrapolate findings to a wider population of bi-cultural or bi-ethnic individuals. Offering questions in Japanese as well as in Spanish may have made the potential respondents more representative of those immersed in the Japanese culture more than Spanish-speaking cultures. Also, a human translator was not used to translate questions into Spanish, nor to translate responses back from Spanish into English. While it is thought unlikely by the researcher that any major errors in meaning have been made, it is possible that minor nuances or meanings may have been overlooked or slightly misinterpreted. Finally, it would have been preferable to gain access to more participants in Latin America as was possible with the previous study (Marshall, 2019), in order to make the study at least marginally more representative of bi-ethnic and bi-cultural individuals on both sides of the Pacific.

Discussion

As I know from personal experience, relocating to another country and/or culture can be a major upheaval at any age. Depending on the situation, a move such as this can be stressful and destabilizing for some individuals,

while others seem to take it in their stride. In addition to this personal ability to cope, there are many aspects of the transition and of a host culture which can make individuals more likely to fall into one or other of the four categories of acculturation ; assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Securing gainful employment and establishing a supportive community of friends, for example, are significant factors that may increase the likelihood of happiness. Finding happiness in the majority culture of course has a great deal of influence on the acculturation process. Additionally, the Japanese and Latin American cultures are very different in many ways and one can imagine that transitioning from one to the other might cause some considerable upheaval for adults and perhaps confusion for children or teenagers. However, despite the obvious cultural differences, it appears that the foremost trouble that these participants encountered in their personal migrations was related to language. An analysis of the responses showed that cultural issues seemed secondary to this.

The provision of assistance by the local and national authorities is one way in which a host country can send a clear message that newcomers are welcome. In some instances this has been shown to be lacking, and has led to problems for foreign workers and to them feeling unwelcome (Cruel & Schneider, 2010), (Kogan, 2010), (Takenoshita, 2016). With Japanese being such a tricky language to pick up, the provision of language assistance by the authorities is imperative. However, in many cases, language assistance is provided only in languages from wealthy countries, despite foreign workers coming from a wide variety of countries. One example of this is that of the 12,038 foreign residents in Ehime Prefecture (Stats Japan, 2018a), 2,766 are from Vietnam (Stats Japan, 2018b). Matsuyama City Hall (No Date) provides language assistance in English, German, Korean and Chinese. Portuguese and Spanish language assistance do seem to be available in some places with a higher rate of foreign workers from Latin American countries.

Conclusion

Despite all of the potential problems that can plague foreign workers, the group surveyed here generally seemed relatively positive and content. My overall impression is that these Spanish-speaking bi-cultural individuals appear to be more happily assimilated into their respective majority cultures than the Brazilian-Japanese respondents I surveyed recently. This is because there were only two references to racism or discrimination compared to five mentions of these types of issues by Brazilian-Japanese participants residing in both Brazil and Japan. In addition to this, responses were shorter and with less examples of issues and complaints. There is always more that can be done to help minorities such as these, but it seems that the Spanish-speakers generally consider themselves to be without major grievances.

Suggestions for further research

Any research which replicates or improves on the current one would be worthwhile and would be beneficial in terms of understanding of bi-cultural communities and individuals worldwide. In particular, I would recommend larger-scale quantitative questionnaires which would be able to produce results and conclusions that are more representative of the greater population of 3.8 million Nikkei. Alternatively, more focused and in-depth qualitative studies involving case studies or interviews would allow the collection of rich, detailed data, and may shed more light on the experiences, opinions, and feelings of bi-ethnic individuals and communities. In addition to this, research into the policy and practice of local and national governing authorities in terms of the assistance they provide to immigrants and foreign workers would be beneficial. Also, the perceptions of immigrants and

foreign workers on the provision of facilities and assistance ought to be collected, collated, and published in order to see whether there is anything more that the authorities could be doing to reduce stress and increase the chances of assimilation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 :

Survey questions in English :

- a) Where do you live at the moment ? (country & city)
- b) Please tell me your cultural heritage. For example, I am 75% English and 25% Egyptian.
- c) Which generation of your family first migrated abroad ?
- d) How many years have you lived in Japan / in your other country ?
- e) Where do you feel most 'at home' (if anywhere) ?
- f) What problems did you have adjusting to the new country (if you moved) ?
- g) What aspects of the two cultures do you feel are the most different / difficult to deal with ?

Appendix 2 :

Survey explanation and questions in Spanish (the format in which they were distributed to respondents) :

La identidad cultural de los japoneses latinoamericanos (solo hispanohablantes)

Yo estoy conduciendo un estudio sobre la identidad cultural de personas con nacionalidad mixta, que son mitad o parcialmente japonesas. También estoy interesado en las personas que inmigraron a Japón de otros países. Espero que esta investigación ayude a alentar la comprensión intercultural y que exponga algunas de las dificultades para vivir o crecer dentro de un ambiente multicultural.

- a) ¿Dónde vives en el momento ? (País & Ciudad)
- b) ¿Cuál es su herencia cultural ? Por ejemplo, soy 75% Inglés y 25% Egipcio.
- c) ¿Cuál generación de su familia que fue la primera en mudarse al exterior ?
- d) ¿Cuántos años has vivido en Japón y cuántos años en tu país de origen ?
- e) ¿En qué cultura se siente más cómodo (si tiene alguna) ?
- f) ¿Qué problemas se enfrentó para ajustarse en el país nuevo (si se ha mudado) ?
- g) ¿Qué aspectos de las dos culturas te sientes que son diferentes / difíciles de lidiar ?

Appendix 3:

Respondent's answers for questions 1-4 displayed in a thematic chart. Questions 5-7 are displayed below.

1. Where do you live at the moment?
2. Please tell me your cultural heritage. For example, I am 75% English and 25% Egyptian.
3. Which generation of your family first migrated abroad?
4. How many years have you lived in Japan / in your other country?
- | | | | |
|------------------------|--|---------------|---|
| España, Valencia | 50% Inglesa, 50% Japonesa | • mis padres | Japan : 1 year.
España 13 años, Australia 7 años |
| Japón, Okinawa | Peruana 50%, Japonesa 50% | • mis abuelos | Japon 27 años,
Peru 12 años |
| • Reino Unido, Londres | 100% Japones | • mis abuelos | • 3 años en Japon, 2 años en el Reino Unido, 24 años en Argentina |
| • JAPON, MATSUYAMA | • 100% japones | • mis padres | • 48 años, Argentina 16 años |
| japon, Matsuyama | • Japon 50%, Argentina 50% | • mis padres | Japan : 19 years. |
| Japón, Saitama | • 50% japonés, 50% argentino | • mis padres | • Japan : 20 years
Argentina 18 |
| Japon, Matsuyama | • 100% argentina | yo fui | Japan : 22 years.
Country of origin : 40 years. |
| Japon, Matsuyama | • Argentina 25%, Japonés 75% | • mis abuelos | • Japan : 10 years, Argentina 29 |
| JAPON, Tokyo | • 25% peruano, 25% Cubano, 50% japones | • mis abuelos | Japan : 14 years
Pais 2 : 14 years |

japon, tokyo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% japon, 25% Mexico, 25% francia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mis abuelos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan 20 • Pais 2 : 4
Japón, Tokyo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% hondureña, 50% japonesa • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mis abuelos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan : 15 años Pais 2 : 6 años • Pais 3 : 3 años
Japan, Tokyo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% peruano, 25% japones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mis padres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan : 16 years 14 en Peru
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japón, Kawasaki 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% peruano, 25% Japonés 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mis padres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan 11 Peru 8 Estados Unidos 8
Japón, Tokyo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peruano 94%, Japonés 6% • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mi tatarabuelo es japonés 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japon 4 años • Peru 25
Japon, Tokyo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75 Peruana, 25 Japonés 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mis padres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan : 12 16 Peru 1 US

5. Where do you feel most 'at home' (if anywhere)?

6. What problems did you have adjusting to the new country (if you moved)?

7. What aspects of the two cultures do you feel are the most different / difficult to deal with?

Española	Idioma y costumbres	Política	
Japonesa	El idioma y las costumbres	Ya no me acostumbro al ambiente de Latinoamérica...	
Argentina	Códigos culturales	—	
japonesa	el lenguaje	las costumbres, forma de educar	
Japon	nada	la personalidad	
Argentina	Idioma	Japonesa	
Japon	Idioma costumbres,	Forma de pensar	

Argentina	Idioma, costumbres, idiosincracia	Costumbres, Cultura, Relaciones Interpersonales, Trato en el Trabajo.
Peruana	Idioma	El idioma
japonesa	Me mudé a los 4 años entonces para mi siempre Japón a sido mi país	Problemas de indentidad ... no ser ni de aquí ni de allá !!
No se	Racismo	Expresar lo que piensas
Japonesa	El pensamiento japones	La union familiar en japon y el desorden en peru
Igual en todas	Discriminacion	Organización y puntualidad
Peruana	Ninguno	Ninguna
Japonesa	Idioma	Idioma