

Citizenship and Belonging Among Newcomer Immigrants in Japan

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Over 2 million foreign nationals currently reside in Japan legally, and the majority of them newcomers. Although foreigner population is small compared to the total population in Japan, foreign residents have become an increasingly visible presence in Japanese social and economic life. How are these immigrants integrated into Japanese society? This paper, by examining the narratives and practices among immigrants in Japan, shows a complex picture. On the one hand, immigrants who have lived in Japan for a substantial period have demonstrated a high degree of cultural assimilation and social incorporation. On the other hand, Japan, despite its multicultural coexistence programs, has not made immigrants feel that they are “immigrants” of this country, let alone potential participants of its democratic political process. In their minds, Japanese society remains culturally unique and Japanese identity primordial and fixed. This does not mean that immigrants are frequently rejected or discriminated against in their daily life. What I have observed is that through both multicultural coexistence programs and immigrants’ own efforts in assimilating, many immigrants have a high appreciation of Japanese society, and some form a sense of belonging to at least a segment of Japanese society. However, this appreciation and localized belonging do not translate into identification with Japan or develop into a true sense of political citizenship, their Japanese nationality notwithstanding.

Key words: Newcomer immigrants, Japan, belonging, citizenship, multiculturalism

It was December 23, 2012, the Sunday after the national voting weekend. Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party had just beaten Noda’s Democratic Party of Japan, and Abe once again became the Prime Minister. Inose Naoki was elected the new governor of Tokyo on December 18th. I walked into the parent’s room of the weekend Chinese school. Knowing many parents there were naturalized citizens, I asked if they had voted the week before. I first asked Xiao who was married to Japanese. She said she didn’t, because she didn’t quite understand whom to vote for. Lisa’s mother said that her whole family, her (Chinese) husband and her adult son, all got up late, so they decided not to go. Other people laughed, saying the voting was done all day. She chuckled, and said, “We have no idea whom to vote in any case.” The only person that voted was Qi, but she didn’t know whom she voted for because “my (Japanese) husband took my card and went to vote.” She said, “He did that for me every time. He was very conscientious. I can’t care less.”

When everybody was expressing the consensus that they had no idea whom to vote, I suggested that we should probably see who would be good for immigrants like us in the long run. Pan retorted, “We should see what is good for Japan. When Japanese people are getting better off, foreigners will get better off too (In Chinese: *Riben ren hao le me, wai guo ren ye hao le me.*)” I asked, “What if the condition

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for the Japanese to have a better life is to deny the rights of the foreigners?” Pan said it would not be possible. Japan needed foreigners. I told them about the newly instituted foreigner residential card (*gaikokujin zairyūkādo*) and the purpose for doing that—to connect the computer system of Ministry of Justice and city governments in order to manage immigrants especially in the case of residential status changes, so as to prevent visa abusers or undocumented migrants. Some women voiced approval (of the measure) and said it was good to regulate. Pan said of course Japan was trying to control. It was not an immigrant country, unlike America, and had no experience of immigration. It was learning to manage immigration.

The story above is from my field notes at a weekend Chinese language school. Shortly after this brief discussion that I deliberately initiated for my own research interest, the conversations among the mothers went back to the usual topics—*juku* (cram school), children’s junior high school choices, and other education and childrearing related issues.

This little snapshot shows that, first of all, most Chinese immigrants at my field site had very little interest in Japanese politics. Participating in political activities, in this case, voting, was not something high on their priority list. Second, despite the expanding population of foreign residents, Japan is still considered a non-immigrant country even by immigrants themselves. At least in the immigrants’ narratives, the Japanese and the foreigners were different categories of people. Finally, the Chinese immigrants here seemed to be on the side of Japanese authority. They were more eager to conform to the Japanese social norms than to question them.¹

As an immigrant myself, my immediate reaction toward their political indifference and conservatism was disappointment. I was hoping to see a more active engagement in Japan’s civic activities among this group of middle class and well-adapted immigrant parents. But I was not surprised. The lack of engagement of immigrants in host society’s political process has been documented in different European and North American countries. Studies in the US show that first generation ethnic Asian migrants are less likely to vote (Cho et al. 1999, Lien 2004, Logan et al. 2012). Asakawa (2003)’s survey among naturalized immigrants in Japan shows that only three percent of them chose voting rights as a reason for applying for citizenship. Immigrants naturalized mostly for practical reasons such as securing their stay in Japan. On the other hand, it can be argued that their conservatism—the lack of intention to change Japan and to change the relationship between Japan and immigrants might itself signify their acculturation. These Chinese immigrants show a strong tendency to follow Japanese lifestyles and social norms. They fully embrace Japanese way of education, acting as typical middle class Japanese parents who send their children to various cram schools and care immensely about their education mobility. Moreover, these Chinese middle class immigrants identify strongly with the average Japanese position, believing in the importance of maintaining social order and regulating migration.

This paper, drawing on immigrants’ narratives and practices, attempts to understand such an appar-

¹ As typical of the narratives among Chinese immigrants with secure legal statuses, the undocumented immigration or visa overstaying phenomenon in the Chinese community is considered a social stigma.

ent nonchalance toward civic participation in the host polity yet at the same time a conformist attitude toward Japanese society. Although Japan provides specific institutional and social contexts that have shaped immigrants' self-understanding of their positions in and relationship with the host society, some of the social psychological mechanisms indicated in the Japan case might not be so unique to Japan. Instead, they are characteristics of the immigrant-host society relationship in the modern world when ethno-national identity is repeatedly reinforced in both home and host societies and when transnational communications and travels are not only technically feasible but also practically necessary.

Citizenship and Political Incorporation: A Literature Review

With the globalized population movements and the expanding trend of transnational migration, both citizenship and belonging have become increasingly complex. There have been many discussions about a lack of political participation among the immigrants. Immigrants are either not interested in applying for citizenship or treat citizenship as instrumental for practical benefits (Ip et al. 1997, Asakawa 2003). How to interpret immigrants' lack of interest in gaining political membership and in civic participation in the host polity? Among research about issues around immigrants' citizenship consciousness and political incorporation, three types of discussion stand out. The first type of discussion centers on the different notions of citizenship. Some scholars argue that the concept of citizenship is based on western political philosophy and a liberal democratic tradition, focusing more on individual rights and obligations (Ip et al. 1997). Many immigrants are from societies that embrace different types of "citizenship". For example, some Asian immigrants are from a tradition that center their commitment and loyalty to families and communities (ibid). Many immigrants were also from countries that are not liberal democracies, and have had no chance to vote and to exercise the political rights of citizenship. Instead, they had a form of passive citizenship (Turner 1990). Civic participation is therefore not a form of political culture familiar to them.

The second approach to the issue of immigrants' weak citizenship consciousness focuses on the changing institutional framework of citizenship. Globalization and regional integration has fundamentally changed the institution of citizenship. Citizenship and the rights associated with it are traditionally tied to one's membership in a nation-state. In recent decades, many scholars have pointed out that nation-states are no longer the sole conferrers of political and social rights associated with citizenship. Regional governance and the universal human rights regime have made many of these rights available to immigrants with or without national citizenship (Soysal 1994, Castle and Davidson 2000). The regional integration in Europe and the increase of transnational mobility of people have given rise to supranational citizenship (Soysal 1994), transnational citizenship (Bauböck 1995, Kivisto and Faist 2009) and even the notion of global citizenship (Folk 1993). Immigrants can obtain the civic, political and social rights—the traditional tripods of citizenship rights (Marshall 1950) from different rights granting institutions. Increasingly, residency itself allows immigrants to access most civic and social rights and partial political rights. As a consequence, many immigrants are satisfied with a long term or per-

manent resident status, feeling no incentives to become citizens of the host country. Denizens or quasi-citizens are all terms used to describe such tendencies. Chung (2010) shows that this is true in Japan as well. Except for voting and assuming government positions, permanent residents in Japan have as many rights as citizens.

The third types of discussion focus on the relationship between immigrants and the host as well as sending societies. The classic argument is that there are difficult phases of assimilation, and that political assimilation is realized after immigrants have been economically and culturally assimilated and often happens only to second and third generation immigrants (Gordon 1964). This is supported by some studies in the United States (e.g. Cho 1999, DeSipio 1996). However, the findings are not consistent and some researchers point out that among some immigrant groups the third generation is less likely to vote than the second generation (Lien 2004). Aside from assimilation argument, studies have also tried to discover the effects of socialization and migration contexts on civic participation (Logan et al. 2012).

Another type of research investigates immigrant identity and belonging. Research shows that even among immigrants who are naturalized, there is a decoupling between the political and legal aspects of citizenship—their understanding of the rights and to certain degree responsibilities in the host society, and the cultural and identificational aspects of citizenship—their emotional relationship with the host society (Soysal 2000, Gilbertson and Singer 2003, Brettel 2006). For example, Gilbertson and Singer (2003) observed a surge of naturalization among the Dominican immigrants in the US during the post-1996 welfare reform period. They find that immigrants sought naturalization in order to gain legal protection for both their residency in the US and the benefits that were entitled to previously but were increasingly denied to them under welfare reform. In fact, they argue that for many Dominican immigrants, U.S. citizenship does not necessarily signify their intention for permanent settlement or incorporation in the U.S. If anything, U.S. citizenship functions to allow older immigrants to continue a pattern of transnational residence. They call such citizenship “protective citizenship” (p. 44). They quoted one Dominican immigrant saying “I’m not doing it (naturalizing) because I feel it in my heart (Gilbertson and Singer 2003, p. 44).”

Brettel (2006), on the other hand, reports that many naturalized immigrants in the US, at least in their narratives, do show their awareness of their civic responsibilities. She shows that the majority of immigrants, Vietnamese—Indian, Nigerians and Salvadorians, naturalized primarily for pragmatic reasons. American passport is a useful “paper”, securing rights such as spousal inheritance and employment opportunities. However, she observes that her respondents’ reasons for naturalization do not simply represent a defensive approach to legal changes. They do indicate a “sense of responsibility as well as of rights” (p. 96). Some immigrants mention they plan to exercise their rights to vote and even to send their children to military. She calls this kind of citizenship “pragmatic citizenship” because even if it does not translate into immigrants’ emotional attachment to the host society, it is beyond a narrow self-protective mentality. She argues that the reasoned approach to naturalization shows that

immigrants have demonstrated a form of “political belonging”. However, they are yet to show a sense of “cultural belonging”.

In Japan, Asakawa (2003) conducted a survey of several hundred naturalized citizens in the late 1990s and inquired about their motivations for naturalization, their satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding naturalization. The main reason is reported to be a realization that they are to stay in Japan and the citizenship secures their status. Moreover, in Japan, institutional discrimination persists in areas such as housing and labor market. Without Japanese nationality, immigrants are frequently denied access to rental properties and certain occupations. Some immigrants naturalized in order to remove those sorts of institutional barriers. In comparison to utilitarian responses, those who answered “gaining voting rights” as the primary reason were only 3 percent of the sampled (Asakawa 2003).

Why are immigrants nonchalant toward political participation? How much sense of belonging is needed in order for immigrants to actively participate into the political process? These questions might find some implicit answers in Ghassan Hage (2000)’s notion of passive versus governmental belonging. In his analysis of the discourses of multiculturalism in Australia, Hage (2000) differentiates two formulations of national belonging. One is that “I belong to the nation” and the other is “‘This is my nation’ (i.e. ‘The nation belongs to me’ (p. 45). He argues that the former one implies a sense of passive belonging in the sense of being part of it, meaning “that he or she expects to have the right to benefit from the nation’s resources, to ‘fit into it’ or ‘feel at home’ within it (p. 45).” The other mode of national belonging, what Hage calls governmental belonging, is “the belief that one has a right over the nation, involves the belief in one’s possession of the right to contribute (even if only by having a *legitimate* opinion with regard to the internal and external politics of the nation) to its management such that it remains ‘one’s home’ (Hage 2000, p. 46). Hage argues that only the latter form of belonging allows one to feel entitled to having a view about the government and management of the nation.

In a way, it is easy to see that what Brettel (2006) considers belonging at the political level is still a passive form of belonging. Immigrants are open to the responsibilities entailed from gaining the citizenship. Yet, only a true sense of identification with the nation can lead to active participation in the managing and governing of the state. So, in the case of Hage’s Australia, the indignant whites who felt entitled to saying how the Australia society should be showed a governmental belonging, a belonging that can be translated into political voices. This paper follows this line of inquiry and tries to understand immigrants’ relationship with Japanese society and to find out how immigrants’ political attitude might be a manifestation of their relationship with Japanese society.

Data

This paper primarily draws on qualitative interview data I have collected between 2011 and 2013 among first generation newcomer immigrants in Japan. The author and a team of Chinese, Korean and Filipino graduate students interviewed 130 first-generation immigrants. Among the interviewees, 80 were Chinese; 40 were newcomer Koreans; and 10 were Filipinos. Interviewees were recruited through

Table 1. Demographic profiles and residential statuses of the interviewees

National Origins	Total number (persons)	Gender		Average length of residency (years)	Permanent residents (persons)	Naturalized citizens (persons)
		Female	Male			
Chinese	80	36	44	11 (5, 24)	34 (42.5%)	11 (13.7%)
Koreans	40	31	9	16 (7,37)	16 (40.0%)	2 (5%)
Filipinos	10	8	2	15 (5,25)	4 (40%)	0 (0)

research assistants' own social networks. The basic criteria were the length of residency and residential status. We selected those who had stayed in Japan for at least 5 years and were not current students at the time of interview. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that a multi-lingual interview guide with basic questions was given to the RAs before the interviews. These were all typical qualitative interviews that last somewhere between one hour to 2 and a half hours. All interviews were fully recorded and transcribed. Table 1 presents these interviews' demographic characteristics.

The interview data is supplemented with the author's participant observation in a weekend Chinese language school for children where many middle-class Chinese parents regularly gathered.

Japan's New Immigrants: Profiles, Patterns of Migration and Incorporation

How immigrants enter Japan to a large extent conditions their relationship with the host society by determining their locations and the possible trajectories of mobility in Japanese society as well as prescribing the possible patterns they can interact with the host society. Restrictive immigration policies in Japan mean that immigrants who are in Japan usually come with institutionalized channels and with well defined purposes. In this section, I provide a sketch of the profiles of the largest immigrant groups, and explain how the manners of their migration condition the patterns of incorporation present among immigrants.

Immigrant Profiles

By the end of 2011, 2.07 million legal foreign residents registered in Japan, making up 1.63% of the total population of 127.7 million people in Japan. Among these 2 million foreign residents, 54.5% were women while 45.5% were men (Ministry of Justice 2012).² Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos, Brazilians and Peruvians were the top five nationalities (Figure 1).³ Although Koreans were numbered at about 545 thousand, 70 per cent of them were in the category of Special permanent residency, meaning *Zainichi* Koreans, those who entered Japan before and during WWII and who had lived in Japan for at least two generations. The newcomers Koreans were only about 160,000. There are also many naturalized immigrants in Japan. In the decade between 2003 and 2012, over 140 thousand immigrants obtained

² http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/nyuukokukanri04_00021.html

³ In 2012, the Filipino migrants surpassed the Brazilians to become the third largest foreign resident group.

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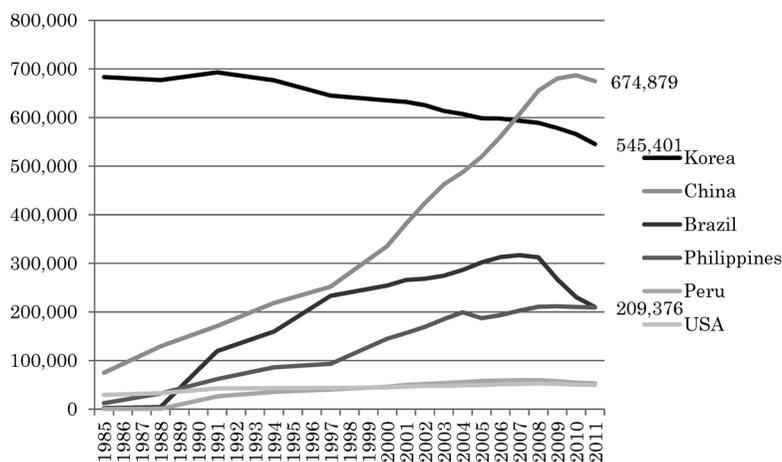


Figure 1. Major nationalities of registered foreign residents in Japan (1985–2011)

the Japanese citizenship. Among them, Koreans were over 82,000, and the Chinese were 43 thousand.⁴ While the majority of the naturalized Koreans were third or fourth generation Zainichi, almost all naturalized Chinese were newcomers.⁵

Migration Patterns and Migrant Characteristics

For the Japanese government, students and skilled migrants are the most desirable migrants.⁶ As a result, most of the Koreans and Chinese new immigrants in Japan are former students, skilled workers, and their spouses. Some Chinese and Koreans are marriage migrants who entered Japan as spouses to Japanese nationals. In comparison, most Filipinos entered as Japanese spouses and entertainers.⁷ Being entertainers was once the most common migration channel for the Filipinos. Before Ministry of Justice imposed strict regulation on this visa category, there were years when tens of thousands of Filipino women entered as entertainers (Douglas 2000, Oishi 2005). Many of them later on married Japanese nationals and became spouses. Table 2 shows the residential categories the newcomer Chinese, Koreans and Filipinos occupied in 2011.

The newcomer immigrants are predominantly women. As Table 3 shows, women outnumber men

⁴ “過去 10 年間の帰化許可申請者数、帰化許可者数等の推移,” Ministry of Justice, URL: http://www.moj.go.jp/MINJI/toukei_t_minj03.html, accessed on April, 20th, 2013.

⁵ In the six year from 2006 to 2011, the number of Special Permanent Residents among the Koreans, the category for Zainichi Koreans, reduced by nearly 54,000. During the same period, 44,450 Koreans became Japanese citizens. Some of the reduction of Zainichi residents might be due to deaths, but the others were naturalized. This stronger naturalization tendency is reported in studies about Zainichi Koreans (e.g. Chung 2010).

⁶ Even though “trainees” are the most numerous new entry cohort every year, this visa category is equivalent to guest worker and is not conversable. Therefore trainees have to leave Japan upon the expiration of the contract and have very little opportunity to eventually settle in Japan.

⁷ In 2011, the largest entry category for both Chinese and Koreans were students. The largest category for the Filipinos was spouses of Japanese nationals. See “国籍別 新規入国外国人の在留資格,” URL: <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/List.do?lid=000001089430>, accessed on April 20th, 2013.

Table 2. The major residency categories of Chinese, Filipino and Korean newcomers in Japan in 2011 (MOJ 2012)

	投資・経営	技術+ 企業内転勤	人文知識・ 国際業務	興 行	技 能	技能実習	留 学
中国	3,974	28,004	34,446	389	17,657	107,601	127,435
672,282 (99.6)	0.6%	4.2%	5.1%	0.1%	2.6%	16.0%	19.0%
韓国・朝鮮	2,872	7,701	9,166	313	1,421	22	21,678
160,169(29.4)	1.8%	4.8%	5.7%	0.2%	0.9%	0.0%	13.5%
フィリピン	41	2,870	920	4,188	302	8,233	677
209,332 (99.98)	0.0%	1.4%	0.4%	2.0%	0.1%	3.9%	0.3%
	家族滞在	特定活動	永住者	日本人の 配偶者等	永住者の 配偶者等	定住者	その他
中国	61,481	5,374	184,216	51,184	8,078	30,498	11,945
672,282 (99.6)	9.1%	0.8%	27.4%	7.6%	1.2%	4.5%	1.8%
韓国・朝鮮	16,750	4,444	60,262	18,780	2,523	8,288	5,949
160,169(29.4)	10.5%	2.8%	37.6%	11.7%	1.6%	5.2%	3.7%
フィリピン	2,226	2,372	99,604	38,249	3,347	39,331	6,972
209,332 (99.98)	1.1%	1.1%	47.6%	18.3%	1.6%	18.8%	3.3%

significantly among the Chinese and the Filipinos. Nearly two thirds of Chinese residents in Japan are women and over three quarters of Filipinos are women (Table 3). Given that the majority of the marriage migrants are women,⁸ it is not too farfetched to expect that the overall female presence among the new immigrants is much higher. Comparing to the Chinese and the Filipinos, Koreans seem to have a more balanced gender ratio but women were still 55 percent of the total. However, Korean newcomers are only 30 percent of the Korean population in Japan, so it is not clear how the gender ratio is among the newcomers.

Social Incorporation and Cultural Assimilation

Due to the restrictive migration channels, upon landing in Japan, the new immigrants usually enter Japanese institutions immediately, as students, skilled employees or spouses, mostly wives. Their statuses prescribe that they need to orient themselves in a new cultural and social environment and adapt to it as soon as possible. Although immigrants face different kinds of difficulty in Japan, most of them eventually learn the rope and become competent in their new environment.

The Chinese and Korean have the relative advantage of cultural affinity with Japan, at least in terms of language. The Chinese easily recognize many Chinese characters in written Japanese which provide

⁸ 平成 18 年度「婚姻に関する統計」の概況 <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/jinkou/tokusyuu/konin06/konin06-3.html>

Table 3. Gender distributions of Chinese, Koreans and Filipinos (MOJ 2012)

Nationality	Total		
		Male	Female
China	674,879	280,165	394,714
Korea (including N.K)	545,401	248,985	296,416
Philippines	209,376	46,146	163,230

them a tool to access Japanese culture. Most former Chinese students we interviewed spent one to two years in the language school and then advanced to vocational schools or universities. Starting from zero, many of them managed to pass Level One Japanese proficiency test after just one and a half years. After receiving several years of language and formal education, most of them were proficient in Japanese. Also because of the pressure to pay for their living and future tuition, many of them started working at part time jobs immediately after landing in Japan (Liu-Farrer 2011a). Zeng Lan, a 32-year old Chinese woman, currently a real estate agent in a Japanese company, started to work immediately after entering Japan in 2002. From working for a Chinese restaurant when she couldn't speak Japanese at all, she gradually accumulated more Japanese skills and moved to part time jobs at Japanese restaurants. Later on, she discovered that working for convenient stores in residential areas allowed her to understand Japanese society and cultural practices much better. She spent most of her vocational school and university years working at different convenient stores.

The spouses and dependents usually learn Japanese more informally. Some participated in local governments' free Japanese language programs. Others gradually acquired conversational Japanese through daily interaction and watching Japanese TV.

Because immigrants enter schools, firms, and families directly after they land in Japan, most of them have to learn to adapt to the institutional environment. Their interactions with Japanese people are constant and their relationships with the Japanese society are direct, in the form of classmates, coworkers, bosses and workers, husbands and wives, teachers and students. Through frequent socialization and through conflicts and compromises, many immigrants gain a very deep understanding of Japanese society. Adopting different comparative frameworks, the Chinese, the Koreans and the Filipinos all demonstrate a good grasp of the work ethic, social rules and cultural practices of Japanese people.

Not only do they understand Japan's cultural practice and social rules, the new immigrants also practice them. In my field site at a Chinese language school, I notice that most parents do not speak Chinese with their children. Not only do women who marry to Japanese husbands use Japanese with their children exclusively, Chinese women who marry Chinese men also speak Japanese with their

children. To the degree almost none of the immigrant children at the Chinese language school speak Chinese. In the usual parent conversations, *juken* (entrance examination for getting into selective Japanese junior high schools) and *juku* are the most common topics. Sometimes some mothers bring their infants and small children to the parent room. The music and the games they play were all typical Japanese ones. Listening to the music, once a mother mentioned how nostalgic she was toward the early morning children's program on NHK.

The majority of the immigrants we interviewed experienced reverse cultural shocks or even physical discomfort when visiting the sending society. A Chinese young man explained that he felt really "out of touch with" Chinese society. He didn't know any of the words and culture among his old friends. A friend of his spent his first half year after returning China from Japan learning the new vocabulary and customs. Besides language, he also felt Chinese way of life became difficult to accept.

In terms of lifestyle, I feel I am more adapted to the Japanese lifestyle. Even though it is tiring I feel my life (here) is full (*chongshi*). What I mean is, although work is very tiring, but (I) have vacations. If I go out shopping, I feel very comfortable. Japanese service is very developed. Also, everywhere you go, it is clean and orderly... it can make me relaxed. In China, when I go back, I have to be on guard of pick pockets. I can't go to the toilet when I go out. And, wherever you go, the air is foul (*wuyanzhangqi*). Really dirty, I feel. It is tiring to have a stroll in the street. ... I feel that since I am living here, gradually I am following the Japanese way of thinking. If I go back, I have to learn from the beginning again.

(Interview, April 11, 2011)

Economic Roles: Niche in the Transnational Economy

Immigrants' economic positions and roles also contribute to their perception of their relationship with Japan. Even though Japanese firms need foreign workers, they are not culturally and organizationally adapted to accommodate foreign employees. The rigid process oriented corporate practice (Ono 2007), gendered work patterns, the culture of hierarchy, and the inflexible promotion scheme make it very unattractive for foreign employees (Liu Farrer 2007, Oishi 2012). Moreover, immigrants' niche in the corporate Japan is usually in the transnational and globalizing business. As I explained elsewhere, most Chinese turned employees were largely positioned in transnational businesses with China. They also see their own opportunity lying in Japan's globalizing sector (Liu-Farrer 2011a). Some of the former students and skilled migrants eventually become transnational entrepreneurs (Liu Farrer 2007). The Koreans have the similar trajectories. Many of them enter firms that have businesses with Koreans. Some enter Korean-owned multinational businesses. Because of the presence of a large number of old comers, some former students find work in Korean-run small firms right after language schools.

Few spouses, Chinese, Korean or Filipinos, participate in the labor market as full-time regular em-

ployees. Many work on the part-time job market in factories and other service industry. Some others, however, try to utilize their foreign cultural capital and work as part-time language teachers, teaching Chinese, Koreans or English. Well-educated Filipino women in particular consider English language teaching their niche occupation. Some more entrepreneurial women also start ethnic business and even transnational business. In my sample, there are Korean women who run Korean esthetic salons. One Filipino woman goes to car auction business and runs a transnational business of used cars between Japan and the Philippines.

Between Permanent Residency and Citizenship

In this section, I describe the immigrants' choice of permanent residency or naturalization, and analyze their rationales. In particular, I highlight their narratives about the association of citizenship with nationality, and how they present or deny such an association in justifying their own choices. I argue that both associating and disassociating these two concepts show that immigrants are strongly influenced by the ethno-nationalist discourses that link their identity with nation-states.

Permanent residency over nationality

Newcomer immigrants have shown strong inclination to be long-term settlers in Japan. As Table 2 shows, 27.4% Chinese, 37.6% Koreans and 47.6% Filipinos held permanent resident status. According to Japan's Ministry of Justice's Immigration and Control Act, the minimal residency requirement for applying for Permanent Residency in Japan is 10 years.⁹ According to Japan's Nationality Law, an immigrant is eligible for applying for nationality after 5 years of continuous residency. In a way, one can argue that, if immigrants are eager to secure their legal statuses in Japan, naturalization is more readily available than permanent residency. However, as shown in Table 1, immigrants in Japan have a much stronger tendency to obtain permanent residency than nationality, even though they have to wait an extra five years to be eligible. What my sample indicates is not too removed from the general reality. In 2011, 33,351 immigrants obtained permanent residency in Japan while one third of that number (10,359) obtained nationality of Japan.¹⁰ This picture is also consistent with the trend among Chinese newcomers. In the recent decade, three times as many Chinese obtained permanent residency as those who were granted nationality (Liu-Farrer 2012).¹¹

⁹ Ten years of residency is a normal condition for applicants. Spouses to Japanese nationals, foreigners with outstanding contributions to Japan, and highly skilled migrants who have the required points according to the newly instituted point system might apply for permanent residency with fewer than 10 years of residency.

¹⁰ The success rate for naturalization is generally high in Japan. In 2011, 11,008 people applied, and 10,359 people were granted nationality. The success rate is 94%.

¹¹ The calculation is more difficult for the Koreans and the Filipinos. For the Koreans, the naturalization rate is higher (5,656) than those who obtained permanent residency (2,180). However, since the majority of Koreans in Japan are *zainichi* Koreans with Special permanent residency, only around 29 percent of Korean residents are newcomer Koreans who entered Japan since late 1970s. For the Filipino, the difficulty lies in that the Ministry of Justice does not have a separate category for Filipinos who obtained nationality. They are lumped into the Other category.

Permanent residency as a pragmatic choice

Except for several Korean immigrants who expressed no intention to stay in Japan for long, and felt there was no particular advantage associated with a Japanese permanent residency, most interviewees did not hesitate to apply for permanent residency when eligible. Those who haven't yet applied all expressed the intention to do so. As Chung (2010) describes, permanent residency in Japan gave immigrants access to practically all social services for Japanese citizens except voting rights.¹² When inquired about their motivations to obtain permanent residency, they indeed offered mostly pragmatic reasons.

What attract most immigrants to permanent residency are the security of being able to reside in Japan without worrying about visa, the access to bank loans, the freedom to live unhinged to particular institutions or to choose different occupations. In fact, permanent residency is a goal which many immigrants struggle to achieve. As Meng, a 34 year old Chinese man explained,

In the future, (I am thinking), after all (in) the current job in the Japanese company, I feel that it is much harder for me to climb up than the Japanese. It needs a lot of effort. So, if it is possible, I would like to have my own business, to have something to myself, even if just a little restaurant. Or, ... mm... concrete plans, I don't have concrete plans yet. Because, it might have to do with my personality, I feel that (I) need to do it well what I have to do today. So, the first step, I think... because I have one more year to be eligible for permanent residency, so I am thinking, after this year, that is, when I get my permanent residency, then I will think about other stuff, my career in the future.

(Interview, August 26, 2011)

Permanent residency triumphs over citizenship because immigrants have practical considerations about future. Many expressed reluctance to naturalize because they eventually wanted to go back to their home countries or go to a third country. For example, Ms. Kim, a 41-year old Korean woman with two children, obtained permanent residency but would not consider naturalization. Her family planned to go to Australia in three years so that their children could speak better English and become a real "international person". Chen, a Chinese woman who married to a Japanese man, said,

I am almost 47. In three years I will be able to get my retirement pension in China. I was a kindergarten teacher for over a decade. Adding the years spent on education plus other working years, my pension money every month won't be too shabby. Also, if I naturalize as a Japanese national, it will be troublesome to go back to China. It is too much trouble for my husband who has to leave the country every 6 months. So I am definitely not going to naturalize.

¹² Permanent residents are mostly prohibited from voting in local elections.

I am okay with a permanent residency, and get a reentry every three years. It is convenient in both places.

(Interview, September 1, 2011)

Other immigrants weigh the relative advantage of permanent residency and citizenship and drew the conclusion that Japanese nationality was not so desirable, especially in light of the development of the home country. This is obvious among the Chinese and the Koreans whose home country economies were ascending relative to Japan. As the following conversation with a Chinese engineer shows,

Q: Your current status is permanent residency. Have you considered naturalization?

A: No, I didn't. I think Chinese nationality is good. There is no need to naturalize. Japanese nationality doesn't have much advantage, except the voting rights and the not needing a visa to go abroad. But you can't guarantee that in 10 years Chinese still need visas (to go overseas). If you give up Chinese nationality, you can't get it back. If I wanted to naturalize, I could have done it 10 years ago.

(Interview, August 5, 2011)

Even among those who had no plan to return to home country and who confessed to be very acculturated in their daily life, there was a lack of interest in citizenship. As this Korean man describes,

If possible, (I) want to continue to live in Japan, live in the current environment. I am not considering returning to Korea. But, (I) don't see the necessity to naturalize. I do not particularly like Korea or dislike Japan. Naturalization doesn't make it more convenient for me. Right now, I have permanent residency. Other than voting rights, I am treated the same as Japanese.

(Interview, September 23, 2012)

Nationality and Ethno-cultural identity

Most immigrants would not consider applying for Japanese citizenship because of a strong association between nationality and ethno-cultural traits, and in Filipinos' case, also racial. As May, a Filipino woman who married to a Japanese man, explained,

I don't have the feeling that I'm an outsider (of Japanese society), although I still don't want to be a citizen. Although my husband has been telling me for a long time now to convert to Japanese citizenship, I'm the one who doesn't want to. (Interviewer: Why don't you want to?) First of all, my color, my face, they're very Filipina (chuckles). Is there any Japanese woman who

looks like this? And, secondly, I'm not an expert in *kanji*, I still find it difficult to write in their language. There, that's another reason... And... it's like, I couldn't adapt to their attitudes... (Interviewer: What is it exactly that you couldn't adapt?) Their being selfish... and their lack of belief in God. So maybe I do have a role here, to share with them... Although I don't really need to share with all the Japanese. The ones who... as much as possible, I'd like to share the words of God. Maybe that's my role.

(Interview, March 14, 2012)

This association between ethno-cultural traits and nationality is also expressed among those who have become Japanese citizens or intended to naturalize. Naturalized people or those who have such intention tend to talk about the pragmatic reasons for naturalization. As Chris, a 38-year-old Filipino entrepreneur states,

Yeah, I see myself changing my nationality, possibly. Not like I wanna do it right now. I could feel that I am Filipino, but I think that nationality should be a choice. It shouldn't be like, imposed on you. I love being Filipino. There are a lot of things that make me proud, but being Japanese will give me better opportunities. If I want opportunities, then I should change my nationality. But without doing so, if I could have the same opportunity, I think if I became rich then I wouldn't have to change my nationality. The thing is, I wanna be more global. Then if I go global, my Japanese nationality will help me more than my Filipino nationality, if you know what I mean. If I have a Japanese passport and I speak English. I am Asian and Western, I think I will be successful in global business. I will have a Filipino body with Japanese documentation. It will be a lot easier for me to achieve it.

(Interview, February 17, 2012)

Among all three national groups of immigrants we have interviewed, the Koreans had the strongest opinions against naturalization. One Korean woman believed that the only situation that made sense to naturalize was when somebody really wanted to marry a Japanese person and naturalization was a condition required by the Japanese family.

More Chinese in our sample naturalized. Yet, they tend to focus on the pragmatic reasons. The Chinese would say that even if you obtained Japanese nationality you cannot become Japanese national, and by relinquishing your Chinese citizenship you became nobody. In fact, among both the Chinese and the Koreans, there is sometimes a disdain again those who have naturalized. Naturalization is considered a stigma, meaning selling out. Below is a story told by a 39-year-old Chinese woman, a permanent resident.

I heard... heard this story, that is... like, somebody was also naturalized, then he was going through the immigration when he went back to China. The immigration had windows for Chinese and windows for foreigners. He might have gone to the Chinese window holding a Japanese passport. The person said... no he couldn't do it there. He said, "but I am Chinese." Then, the person at the window said, "Oh, you still know that you are Chinese?" Hahaha... (Interviewer: Being sneered at?) Yes, and then I felt, this (getting naturalized) would be criticized (*bei ren shuo*).

(Interview, February 19, 2012)

Those who have naturalized tend to keep a low profile and often keep their Japanese citizenship a secret. Once when I asked a group of Chinese people whether they had naturalized, those who didn't naturalize said proudly, "No, of course not, we are Chinese. That's it." Those who had naturalized remained quiet, and would not answer until I asked them individually and in a much lower voice. One person laughed and said, "Yes, I have betrayed my country (*pan guo le*)."

In summary, immigrants in Japan largely prefer permanent residency status to citizenship. Their choices are often packaged in the narratives of practicality. Permanent residency allows them enough legal freedom and social rights in Japan and for most immigrants they were enough. Except one Chinese man who have lived in Japan continuously since mid-1980s who stated that to naturalize was to have a say in Japan's decision making process and to have the same political rights as other Japanese tax payers, political rights in Japan are not something immigrants mentioned. Similarly, to justify their choice of Japanese nationality over permanent residency, those who have been naturalized tend to give practical reasons, such as the convenience for business travel. Obtaining Japanese nationality is therefore framed as a pragmatic choice instead of an identity choice. In terms of identity, it is considered impossible for non-Japanese immigrants to truly become Japanese. Japanese is a certain category of people, as Chinese, Korean or Filipinos are certain categories of peoples. Being a Japanese, as being a Chinese, a Korean or a Filipino, is primordial, deeply rooted in one's lineage.

Understanding Immigrants' Political Indifference in Japan: A Discussion

As an important signal, a choice of permanent residency over citizenship shows an indifference of immigrants toward their own political rights in Japan. The choice of nationality, on the other hand, echoing Brettel (2006)'s observation among immigrants in the US, is largely a response to pragmatic concerns. There is an ostensible lack of interest in host polity among the new immigrants in Japan. Political participation in the host society is rarely mentioned. There are many reasons for such political indifference. In this section, I will discuss several themes that have been recurrent in immigrants narratives, albeit to different degrees and sometime with different contents among the immigrants of three national groups. I argue the immigrants' political indifference has much to do with: first, their lack of a collective immigrant identity; second, their lack of a sense of belonging to Japan—an identification

with Japan; and finally, a transnational and sometimes even cosmopolitan outlook.

Cultural Assimilation and the Absence of a Collective Immigrant Identity

As pointed out previously, immigrants in Japan are very much acculturated. This has a lot to do with Japan's restrictive immigration regime. Immigrants enter Japan through particular institutional channels under the restrictive migration policies. Upon landing, immigrants are immediately thrown into the Japanese social world. Unlike in the US or Australia where immigrants can find a substantial ethnic community to ease such a transition, the immigrants in Japan have to confront the Japanese society directly. Their interaction with Japanese is direct, immediate and frequent, and the pressure for them to fit in is high. By the time they have gone through the educational institutions, find stable jobs, or settle in the Japanese families, they have to a large extent acquired the cultural competence in Japan.

However, despite the level of acculturation, what immigrants in Japan lack is a collective immigrant identity. Immigrants we have encountered generally reject using the label "immigrants" to identify themselves (Liu-Farrer 2011a), because they don't think Japan is an immigrant country, unlike the US or Australia. They consider themselves foreigners, trying to make a living in Japan which requires that they learn the cultural rules and fit in the existing Japanese society. The more culturally assimilated they are, the better they understand and accept the cultural logic of Japanese society. They have encountered institutional discrimination, especially when they look for housing or try to get promoted in Japanese companies. They don't approve some of the xenophobic practices persistent in Japanese. They complain as well, among themselves. Yet, they don't try to have a political movement to change it, because it is Japan. Japan is an island country and is not yet an immigrant Society. Most of them do not even entertain the idea of living in Japan for the rest of their life, despite their permanent residency and citizenship. Even when there is an emotional attachment and a sense of belonging, it is often a result of not having an alternative—the home society has become both socially and culturally unfamiliar.

The decision to settle in Japan and to naturalize does not translate into an active participation into their political process.

Having local belonging but not national belonging

Despite the fact that none of the immigrants consider Japan an immigrant country, quite a number of immigrants responded positively to our question whether they had a sense of belonging (*guishugan*) to Japanese society. Women marrying to Japanese men tend to show a clearer sense of belonging to the Japanese society. However, when they talk about their sense of belonging to Japan, what they really mean is a sense of fit in the local community. As a 40 year old Chinese woman, Jing Yu, answered to the question whether she had a sense of "belonging" in Japan,

Yes, in the neighbor hood I live in. Sometimes my neighbors forget that I am not a Japanese person when they are talking to me. I feel that I am already part of the Japanese society, com-

pletely fit into it. For example, I will feel that I am returning to home when I come back from my visit to Shanghai.

(Interview, September 16, 2011)

More often, though, immigrant men and women tie their sense of belonging to small groups or circles such as their families, workplaces, hobby groups, or co-ethnic professional circles. For the religious Filipinos and the Koreans, the church and the ethnic congregations are where they feel a true emotional connection with others. Those places are where they spend most of their leisure time. In comparison, for non-religious immigrants, especially the Chinese and some Koreans, families and children, if they have them, are the focus of their affection and attention.

There are several narratives about a more abstract and nationalized belonging. One man, fond of Japanese service and life style, considered himself to possess a consumer's belonging to Japanese society. Several men decided they were members of Japanese society because they were taxpayers, making economic contribution to the country. More often, though, national belonging is associated with their home country. It is another word for identity.

As manifested in the narratives about permanent residency and citizenship previously, immigrants invariably essentialize their own identity as well as the Japanese identity. While the permanent residents avoid naturalization because of their strong association between national citizenship and national identity, the naturalized citizens try to decouple these two.

Moreover, immigrants' narratives are full of stereotypes about themselves and the Japanese people. The warm Koreans and the cold Japanese; the rule-abiding and civilized Japanese and the unruly and rash Filipinos; the outcome oriented Chinese and the process-focused Japanese, and so on so forth... The national discourse of Japaneseness that became part of the national narratives spread by the successful Japanese businesses in the world (Kosaku 1992) had a particular strong influence on immigrants' perception of the Japanese. *Nihonjinron* lends immigrants a discursive tool to frame their experience.

I argue that such ethnonationalism, and the nationalization of individual identity pose as unsurpassable barriers for immigrants to adopt the citizenship consciousness in the Japanese society. These nationalistic narratives about both Japan and their home countries persistently remind immigrants of the divide between themselves and the host country, stopping immigrants from identifying with the host society. Such a strong notion of Chineseness, Koreanness, Filipinoness and Japaneseness reflects decades of nation-building efforts in all these countries. Particularly among the Chinese and the Koreans, their national narrative is constructed on the misery of war and colonization by the Japanese. This reinforced narrative of historical antagonism has planted deep roots in immigrants' mind. As a result, immigrants have no incentive to participate in their host polity.

Transnationalism and Cosmopolitanism

Another important factor that causes immigrants' political indifference toward Japanese society is both their transnational outlook and sometimes a cosmopolitan attitude. This transnationalism and cosmopolitanism has to do with both their economic roles in Japan and their self-perceived outsider position as "non-immigrant" foreign residents in Japan.

As I have shown in the section on immigrants' economic incorporation, because of the booming economy between Japan and China and Korea, the Chinese and Korean immigrants tend to occupy niche in Japan's transnational economy with their home countries (see Liu-Farrer 2007, 2011a, 2011b for a more detailed description of Chinese immigrants' transnational occupations and entrepreneurship). The Filipinos are mostly part-time irregular workers. However, one entrepreneurial immigrant woman in our sample has been doing successful business in the transnational trading with the Philippines. Most recently she was engaged in used car trading, buying cars at the car auction and selling them in the Philippines.

Their living arrangement and life course design also reflect a transnational outlook. Many of the Chinese have bought houses in China, and paid into social security and pension there. Some Koreans, after living in Japan for over a decade, hesitate to even apply for permanent residency in Japan. The Filipinos in Japan tend to shoulder the burden to support their often large family in the Philippines, sending their numerous nephews and nieces to school. Despite the fact that they do not go back to the Philippines often and do not even know whether they will go back eventually, they buy properties in the Philippines, and sometimes even join business initiatives in the Philippines.

A cosmopolitan attitude is also visible. After living in Japan for many years, because of the acculturation and the fact that they have established their life world in Japan, some immigrants start to realize that going back home is no longer a viable choice. The Chinese and the Filipinos even express a sense of ontological insecurity when they talk about their home countries. However, they will always be foreigners living in Japan. They instead try to find a framework for their identity. As a Chinese woman entrepreneur states,

I don't think it is necessary for us to be blended into Japanese society. We can't be really blended into it, and neither do we want to. Chinese are Chinese. We have different ways of life. We just participate in their society and work with them. Besides, the economy has become global. ...I am working in the global economy, not a particular Japanese one.

(Interview cited from Liu-Farrer, 2007)

Many Chinese and Korean migrants hope to send their children to North America for higher education, hoping their children will eventually have a much wider playing field.

The Limits of Multicultural Coexistence Programs

In order to fully utilize the human resources brought by the foreign migrants, to avoid cultural conflicts, and to better incorporate foreign residents into Japanese social life, starting from the 1990s through local governments' initiatives and later promoted in mid-2000s by Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, multicultural coexistence policies and programs have become formally instituted in most Japanese prefectures and cities.

Japan's multicultural coexistence programs rely on local governments to provide services to foreigners residing in their locales and to incorporate them into local communities (Tagmeyer-Pak 2000, Kibe 2011, Aiden 2011, Nagy 2014). *Tabunka kyōsei* is also a culturally oriented program (Kibe 2011). As the name *tabunka kyōsei* implies, it presents its central issue of coexistence of people from different ethno-cultural background as cultural difference. In the 2006 'Report of the Working Group on Multicultural Coexistence Promotion' (*tabunka kyōsei no suishin ni kansuru kenkyūkai hōkokusho*) published by Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIAC), *tabunka kyōsei* is defined as 'people who differ in nationality, ethnicity, and so on, recognizing one another's cultural differences, and living together as members of the local community, while trying to build a relationship based on equality' (MIAC 2006: 5, quoted from Aiden 2011: 223). In the same month, the MIAC Local Administration Bureau sent a letter addressing all local governments, together with its 'Plan for Multicultural Coexistence Promotion in Local Communities' (*chiiki ni okeru tabunka kyōsei suishin puran*), asking local governments to produce their own 'guidelines and plans for the promotion of multicultural coexistence in keeping with the circumstances of the respective regions' (Aiden 2011). In practice, local governments' programs mostly focus on removing linguistic barriers for the access to services and promoting appreciation for different cultures. Many city or ward offices provide multilingual services at ward/city offices and offer free or affordable language lessons to foreign residents. The cultural divisions of the ward offices regularly organize international cultural events, providing residents from different national backgrounds opportunities to show case their cultures (Aiden 2011).

To what degree Japan's multicultural coexistence programs have had effects on immigrants' incorporation in Japan? The interviews reveal that immigrants, especially spouses to Japanese nationals and dependents—often wives of Chinese immigrants, do utilize services, especially language services, provided by the multicultural coexistence programs under the local governments. Quite a few immigrants participated in the cultural activities organized in these programs. When being asked whether she had any information about other foreign residents in the area, Ms. M, a 40-year old Chinese woman living in Saitama Prefecture, said,

The newsletter has it. The newsletter issued by the city office has it. Every month, every city office will issue a newsletter to every household. In there, it says how many people of this nationality or that are living in the city. Also, there are foreigners' cultural exchanges, international exchanges. Residents of all nationalities go. Some cook Korean food, Chinese food. Or take with you, and have a potluck. And then you do some performances. There are activities like that. (Interviewer: Have you participated?) (I) participated a lot before. I often took some food there. Wrapped some dumplings and went. (To the interviewer:) You can participate in those activities too. There are a lot of them. You can go and ask your city office when will be the next exchange. You can ask them, and then participate in it. It is really good.

(Interview, May 4, 2011)

This is about the extent immigrants feel the influence of multicultural coexistence programs. They do appreciate such activities, and they make them feel welcome and do generally enhance their appreciation of Japanese society. Yet, it is obvious that in those cultural programs, they are still treated as foreigners and cultural representatives of their own countries. Such programs might foster a sense of local belonging. However, to what degree such a local cultural program instills in immigrants a political will to ask for institutional reforms is uncertain.

Conclusion

This paper tries to understand newcomer immigrants' lack of political interests and participation in the Japanese society. As a focal phenomenon, I describe their choices of permanent residency or citizenship in Japan and their narratives around such choices. I argue that their reasoning for both choosing permanent residency and citizenship shows their instrumental concerns and a disinterest from host polity. I argue that such political indifference has to do with many factors. Among them, the ethno-nationalistic narratives about Japan and their home countries play an important framing role. Because the national identity is essentialized for both the Japanese and the immigrants, it becomes immutable, making it cognitively impossible for them to become Japanese. Despite their local belonging, immigrants cannot cultivate in themselves a sense of national belonging—that they belong to Japan the nation. Moreover, the persistent perception of Japan as a non-immigrant country prevents immigrants from establishing a collective immigrant identity. The absence of both a national belonging and an immigrant identity potentially deprive immigrants of both the interest to participate in the national politics and the will to organize social movements. Local cultural programs and general civility of Japanese society have helped to alleviate the possibility of acute and widespread conflicts.

Second, because of the restrictive migration channels, the immigrants in Japan tend to come in through established channels and enter Japan's formal institutions. There is a lot of pressure for them to fit into Japanese society, be it school, workplace or family. As a result, they make a great effort in acquiring Japanese language and cultural skills, and trying to understand and follow the Japanese way of

life. To a large extent, they are culturally assimilated into Japanese society. Such assimilation makes them prioritize the Japanese perspectives, and tend to naturalize institutional discrimination against foreigners. In the extreme case, as I presented at the very beginning of the paper, immigrants buy into the notion that “When Japanese people are getting better off, foreigners will get better off too.”

Finally, their economic location in Japan is either on the secondary labor market or on the emerging labor market that has to do with the transnational economy with their home countries. This kind of economic role affects their perception of their position in the society and their understanding of their relationship with it. As a consequence, they acquire what Vertovec (2004) terms “bifocality”. When designing their career and life, they constantly refer to both host society and home society, weighing options and making choices. This, again, leads to a pragmatic attitude toward citizenship.

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