

SELF- AND OTHER – REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KOREAN MINORITY IN JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

Self and Other – Representations of the Korean Minority in Japan

This paper focuses on the study of the diversity, mutual representations and the expression of identity of the Korean minority in Japan, which occurs through the assertion of their existence and value in a foreign country, through an analysis of the problems of their lack of recognition, and through giving them voice. The question of identity in general and national and ethnic identity in particular requires not just the identification of the subject with a specific space as home, but also the examination of the process of production and reproduction of such an identity. The paper focuses on the problems that the minority group of resident Koreans has with understanding, expressing and representing their identities.

KEYWORDS: Japan, Korean minority, nationality, representations, expression of identity

IZVLEČEK

Reprezentacije sebe in drugih med korejsko manjšino na Japonskem

Pričujoča raziskava se ukvarja z raznolikostjo, vzajemno reprezentacijo in izražanjem identitete korejske manjšine na Japonskem, in sicer analizira način uveljavljanja njihovega obstoja in vrednotenja v tuji državi ter njihove pripovedi. Vprašanje identitete, še zlasti nacionalne in etnične, ne zahteva le identifikacije posameznika z domom kot posebnim prostorom, temveč tudi vpogled v proces njenega oblikovanja in preoblikovanja. Članek se osredotoča na težave, ki jih ima manjšinska skupnost na Japonskem živečih Korejcev predvsem z razumevanjem, izražanjem in reprezentacijo svojih identitet.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Japonska, korejska manjšina, nacionalnost, reprezentacije, izražanje identitete

INTRODUCTION

The notion that Japan is “homogeneous” is commonly accepted both inside and outside of Japan. Belonging to a nation-state is referred to as belonging to that nation’s culture,¹ and it is this idea, as a product of a particular political-economic system, which prevents us from expressing and valuing cultural diversity (Macdonald 1995: 296). The notion of ethnic Koreans residing in Japan challenges the assump-

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¹ The concept of “culture” that Macdonald (1995: 294) uses refers to constellations of ideas, technologies and forms of social organization through which people express what it means to be in the world, to be social, to be human. Culture is therefore a process and a product (see also Hall 2002: 2).

tion that Japan is “homogeneous” (see Hicks 1998; Ryang 2005a) and also raises questions about what it means to be “Korean” or “Japanese”. Koreans constitute the largest “foreign” community permanently residing in Japan. Despite their similarities in physical appearance and considerable acculturation to mainstream Japanese society, Koreans in Japan have been discriminated against by both the Japanese state and Japanese society. They continue to face and respond to numerous forms of discrimination, human rights violations and social injustice, as well as intra-communal political diversity, which is relevant to others’ experiences in the west and beyond.

For some time now a significant amount of research on Japanese society has focused on marginalized communities and the problems they face. Such research has highlighted the diversity in Japanese society and has continued to contest previous notions of a homogeneous Japan. As Iwabuchi Koichi (2005: 55) says, “no nation is pure or homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity and culture.” The ethnically marginalized communities in Japan themselves are diverse, with varying and complex backgrounds, histories, origins and circumstances. These communities include migrant (Brazilian, Chinese, Philippine, etc.) and indigenous (Ainu, *burakumin* (部落民)) communities as well as former colonial populations (Koreans, Okinawans-Ryukyu). These communities together create a divergent mosaic of identities living within the nation-state of Japan (Chapman 2008: 11; see also Hicks 1998; Tani 2002; Weiner 2009). The intellectual context in Japan and the accompanying discourses have played a major role in influencing how Koreans and other colonized subjects have been perceived and treated (Chapman 2008: 15; see also Tani 2002). Official Japan has, in the past, denied the existence of these minorities. As a signatory to the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Japan submitted its first report in 1980, which stated that “minorities did not exist in Japan.” The Ainu and other minorities strongly protested the report and as a result the second report in 1987 stated that “although minorities did exist, there were no minority problems” (Hicks 1998: 3). The reality is however slightly different.

Recent research has focused on the study of diversity and the expression of identity of the Korean minority in Japan, through analyzing references and collecting personal memories of members of the Korean minority. The main questions of the paper are how resident Koreans in Japan are represented by Japanese, and how they perceive and represent themselves, and explain their identities. The research was conducted among the Korean minority living in Kyoto in January and February 2012.²

THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The narratives of the past shape one’s cultural identities, and the presence of the “Other” is essential to the formation of national identity and discourses about various concepts such as nation³ or nationalism, which dates to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries in Europe and the end of the nineteenth century in Japan. After the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), Japan was grappling with new ideologies imported from the West and also facing two distinct Others – the “West” and the “East”. Mainstream Japanese nationalism developed as an official ideology (Oguma 2002: xix) together with the ideology of the monoethnic nation-state. This ideology never became dominant in the expansionist regime of the Japanese empire (1930s), which endorsed a discourse of multiethnicity, but it rose to play a central

2 I am very grateful to the Japan Foundation for the financial support which made this research possible and to Professor Ogura Kizo of Kyoto University for all the guidance and assistance during my research and stay in Kyoto.

3 Because of the immense influence the concepts of nation, nationalism and national identity have exerted on the modern world, the concept of nation has been one of the most discussed in modern social and political thought, and continuous endeavours have been made in academia to conceptualize it. Numerous scholars have theorized the concept of nation with similarities and differences, and among many, two contrasting theoretical positions have become prominent: those of the modernists and the primordialists. This paper adopts the theories suggested by the primordialists like Smith, Hastings and Hutchinson (see more in Oh 2009: 373).

role in post-World War II nationalist discourse on Japanese identity and uniqueness (*nihonjinron*⁴ 日本人論). John Lie (2005) argues that the concept of monoethnicity became popular in the late 1960s as it resonated well with a new nationalism born of economic prosperity and nationwide cultural integration, and helped define Japanese identity. In this period, Japanese identity discourse which became popular in the late 1970s defined what it meant to be Japanese according to behaviour patterns, communication styles, values, and aesthetic tastes. This discourse strengthened the reigning ideology of monoethnicity by stressing homogeneity and distinguishing Japanese as unique from peoples elsewhere (Tai 2006: 364–365).

Linked to the idea of homogeneity, other concepts were discussed as well. Racial, ethnic and national categories rather vaguely overlap in the Japanese perception of themselves, hence the concept of *minzoku* 民族 (race/ethnicity) can be interpreted to mean race, ethnic community, nation,⁵ or a combination of all of these (Yoshino in McLelland 2008: 823). Following Kashiwazaki (2005: 14), nationality is treated as distinct from citizenship, which is “defined as a bundle of rights and duties the state confers or imposes upon individuals”. By “nationals” we refer to those who have nationality, “formal membership” in a state. Therefore, the most important requirement for Japanese cultural assimilation is not being born in the country (even for phenotypically indistinguishable people of Chinese or Korean descent), but the possession of “Japanese blood” (Yoshino in McLelland 2008: 823). Consequently, Iwabuchi (1994) has referred to Japanese discourse on “race” as an ideology of “ethno-nationalism” in which “Japaneseness” can be conferred only by blood, not place of birth, acculturation, language proficiency or naturalization.

However, multiethnicity continued to be the social reality in post-war Japan, since former colonial subjects like Koreans still lived in Japan. Japan colonized Korea for three and half decades from 1910 to 1945, incorporating Koreans and other Asians within its expanding empire. Its empire-building coincided with its attempts at modern nation-building after the 1868 restoration of imperial order under Emperor Meiji. The Japanese in Korea, Taiwan, Okinawa, Manchuria and elsewhere sought simultaneously to establish their own privileged position and to assimilate the colonized people through the imposition of the Japanese language and education system (Ryang 2005a: 2). At the beginning they were given Japanese citizenship, which however did not protect them from discrimination, although the government tried to infuse the heterogeneous population with a sense of homogeneity and community (Weiner 2009: 1). In 1947 their citizenship was revoked; they were classified as aliens and given foreigner’s passports. The Koreans were forced to work in mines and munitions factories (Fukuoka, Tsujiyama 1991: 5) and the assimilation politics in that time extended to every aspect of life – political, religious and cultural. From 1939 on the *sōshikaime*⁶ (創氏改名) policy forced many Koreans to adopt Japanese-style names and abandon their Korean names (Ryang 2005a: 2; see also Fukuoka 2000: 6). Although according to the Naturalization Laws Koreans are no longer required to adopt Japanese-style names, there is informal pressure for them to do so as we can learn from many personal stories. This stems from the fact that, as Hicks (1998: 86) has argued, in Japanese thinking, race and ethnicity are not separated.

Thus cultural identity and citizenship issues have been a major problem between the Koreans and the Japanese government. The formation and transformation of ethnic identity and cultural diversity

4 Japan’s rapid reconstruction after the Second World War and its regional and then global economic dominance in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s only fuelled speculation about Japanese superiority and the search for unique indigenous characteristics, and the genre is still very much alive today. It began in the 1930s as Japan accelerated its colonial advance into Asia and the Pacific, when there was much talk about Japanese destiny and the superiority of the Japanese “race” as opposed to the “decadence” of the West and the “degeneracy” of neighbouring “races” (McLelland 2008: 818–819). As Befu (in McLelland 2008: 819) points out, “*Nihonjinron* asserts the conterminousness of geography, race, language and culture”, necessitating that “Japaneseness” be seen as a homogenous category – never hybridized.

5 Stuart Hall also argues that “a nation is not only a political entity but something which produces meaning – a system of cultural presentation” (1992: 292).

6 The term literary means “create a surname and change one’s forename” (Fukuoka 2000: 6).

are concerns Koreans in Japan share with many other minority groups in contemporary societies. Japan's national identity is produced and reproduced by discursive strategies rather than by reality itself. Nationality is understood here as formal membership in a state in the sense of international law (Kashiwazaki 2005:14). As Sonia Ryang (2005a: 2) would argue, "the Japanese government is the one which produces anti-Korean sentiments, from an anti-Korean report made by Diet members in 1947 to disenfranchisement, the government has single-handedly promoted discrimination against the Koreans through many representations."

REPRESENTATIONS

The formation of a national self-image is linked to a great extent to relationships with the Other, and this discourse in modern Japan is inseparable from the discourses on the other parts of the world, and on the minorities within Japan itself (Oguma 2002: xviii). In a society such as Japan's, where individuals customarily follow a speech convention that involves considerable discrepancy between public presentation and private words, the emic/etic⁷ controversy becomes all the more complex. Here social convention allows, or binds, a speaker to tell different versions to different people – sometimes completely revising the previous statement – depending on the speaker's relationship with each of these people. Such a practice is not seen as deceitful or doublefaced, or even as insincere. Thus, any research based on emic or native discourse requires a deep understanding and analysis of this social convention, which itself would inevitably assume the form of etic representation (Ryang 2005b: 224).

Representation is one of the central practices which produce culture and a key "moment" in what has been called "circuit of culture", as Stuart Hall (2002: 1) claims. The "Other" is often represented as the essentializing of "difference" through stereotyping. The great value of capturing the diversity of the world is through binary oppositions, which are reductionistic and over-simplified, (Hall 2002: 8, 235) as in the case of Japan we have "Us/Japanese" and "Them/Koreans".

Thus the category for people of Korean descent in Japan is highly contested. Perhaps the most common term in Japan in the 1990s is *zainichi*⁸ *kankokuchōsenjin* (在日韓国朝鮮人) ("resident South and North Koreans in Japan"). The term "Korean-Japanese"⁹ is also in use, although is not officially recognized and has two essential characteristics, as they are of Korean descent and live in Japan.

The first representation of Japanese Koreans as a part of the Japanese Empire was an attempt to reduce the risk of massive social deviations. Oleg Pakhomov (2011: 176) found that the notion of *naisen yūwa* (日鮮融和) ("Korean and Japanese harmony") appeared right after the massacre of Korean residents in Tokyo following the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. Rumours in the post-quake period about Koreans ranged from accusations that they engaged in robbery, sabotage and looting to poisoning of wells and

7 The controversy over emic and etic representations is always fascinating. It can also be very troublesome, often resulting in a conceptual dead-end. Especially after the impact of the 1980s debate on reflexivity in social and cultural anthropology, championing the etic representation can seem politically incorrect – imposing "our" reasoning on other cultures. Yet merely copying an emic representation will also be politically incorrect since, depending on circumstances, it will exploit native voices for the purpose of "our" academic discourses (Ryang 2005b: 223).

8 The term *zainichi* emphasizes place of residence rather than bloodline. Since the late 1970s, the younger generation has used the term to emphasize their different approach to living in Japan to that of the first generation *zainichi*. This term also avoids the inclusion of nationality as a defining element in identifying this community (Chapman 2008: 4–5; Inadsugi 2002: 559–562).

9 The term "Korean-Japanese" does not exist in order to keep the myth of racial homogeneity alive and it is also a contradiction in terms, since a person can be either one or the other, but not both. This is hard for many Koreans to accept since they feel that retaining their cultural identity is a fundamental right. In relation to this, McLelland (2008: 818–19) points out that Japan refuses to allow dual nationality for its citizens, which is another example of the reluctance to open up the category of "Japanese" to hyphenization, and hence hybridity.

even such far-fetched claims as cannibalism. In response, the Japanese government promoted this idea, which was primarily designed to put the Japanese Korean labour movement under state control.

At the same time, Japanese Koreans became defined as “impure”. The Japanese created a system of moral rationality during the pre-modern era of feudalism, when the need arose for a means of self-description of Japanese society from the point of view of the presence or absence of social pathologies (Pakhomov 2011: 174). Although no longer officially recognized after 1871, their idea of “dirty people” based on occupation such as the *burakumin* (部落民) in feudal Japan and *baekjeong* (백정) in feudal Korea was to supply motivation for all members of Japanese society to maintain their own “purity” and avoid “dirt”.¹⁰ Thus Koreans were cast in a similar light as “dirty people” – *chōsenjin-burakumin* (朝鮮人部落民) in Japan.

Today there is special status for media reports and representations of *zainichi* (在日) Koreans. One reason it has become taboo to feature resident Koreans in the mass media is to avoid possible criticism and denunciation by the minority group that is represented, as Koichi Iwabuchi (2005: 57) points out. Denunciation has been useful and necessary in limiting the circulation of derogatory words and negative depictions of minority groups. Fear of denunciations has led to a generalized avoidance of issues relating to ethnic and other minorities, rather than searching for alternative, more democratic representations.

Chōsenjin (朝鮮人) (Koreans), for example, is not a pejorative word in itself, but its use has been self-censored by the mass media because it was used in a derogatory¹¹ way in conjunction with ethnic discrimination against Koreans. *Chōsen* (朝鮮), originally the name of an ancient Korean state, was resurrected by the Japanese colonial government when the country was annexed. *Chōsenjin*, the term referring to the people in the Korean colony, took on the connotation of inferiority through the Japanese media reports. In them, the *chōsenjin* were described as an incorrigible mob; they were filthy, uncivilized, and violent; they cheated, polluted, and caused trouble, and so on. It was through the *chōsenjin* that the image of Koreans was constructed in Japanese popular discourse as unruly people. In media correctness in post-war Japan there is therefore a curious inversion of this one-sided colonial media coverage, an attempt to cope with a historical problem of the media’s own creation (Iwabuchi 2005: 57; see also Hashimoto 2010).

SELF-REPRESENTATIONS

Historical changes have long shaped the form of political and cultural self-expression of the Korean communities in Japan: resident Koreans have addressed themes and stories of ethno-nationalism, with the dream of returning to the homeland on the one hand, and the image of national traitors who go through the humiliating process of assimilation¹² and naturalization, hiding their ethnic origin, a negative “double” of the former, on the other.

10 This dirtiness is usually associated with the fact that Koreans bred pigs, as pork was important element of the Korean diet. It also associated with smell, as Korean people in the past were considered as “bad smelling”, as the interviewees would say. Garlic, which was a very important ingredient in Korean cuisine (like *kimchi* (キムチ)) and which Japanese people did not use at all in their cuisine, also had a strong smell. Koreans were also excluded from the general housing market and forced to live in tenements and flop houses with poor sanitation and problems with basic health care.

11 There are a variety of pejorative terms referring to Koreans. Many of these terms are viewed as racist. However, these terms do not necessarily refer to the Korean people as a whole; they can also refer to specific policies, or specific historical time periods.

12 Assimilation policy demands the minority group to abandon its distinctive culture, language and customs and merge with the dominant group. It aims to remove the problem of how to deal with minority group by absorbing it (Fukuoka 2000: 13).

For most *zainichi* the sense of self is characterized by numerous conflicting and contesting notions of identity. These are chiefly discussed in terms of powerful binaries (Chapman 2008: 5) and indicate the great complexity of life for many of the *zainichi* population living in Japan. The conflicting allegiance to the two Koreas, the different sense of one's place in Japan (temporary versus permanent, for example), and other concerns weigh heavily in the choice of a proper nomenclature. Their situation paints a picture of a historically situated political situation, intergenerational tension and discrimination by Japanese state-controlled institutions that have spanned decades. Since the end of the Second World War these and many other factors have shaped the way in which the *zainichi* have perceived themselves in Japan. For many, especially third- and fourth-generation Koreans, Japan is their place of birth, Japanese is their first and, in many cases, only language, and they have been educated in Japan.

In the self-representation of resident Koreans in Japan, "where you are at" has tended predominantly to be constituted by the discursive act of fostering one's homeland in their consciousness. However, the attachment of older generations to the homeland has been disturbed by the unequivocal differences between resident Koreans in Japan and Koreans in Korea. In Korea, overseas Koreans tend to be regarded as inauthentic Koreans. The self divided between "Japan" and "Korea" has been a main theme for the cultural expressions of resident Koreans in Japan, but their in-betweenness tended to be negatively represented in terms of lacking authenticity as either Korean or Japanese. Iwabuchi (2005: 63) claims that this is a situation in which "the question of 'where you're from' is made to overwhelm the reality of 'where you're at', the politics of diaspora becomes a disempowering rather than an empowering one, a hindrance to 'identity' rather than an enabling principle."

The new representations in the media might also destabilize the fixed image of resident Koreans in Japan as victims, but produce a new stereotypical image of "hybrid" resident Koreans as nonchalant, apolitical youth. The younger generations do not necessarily feel that the Korean peninsula is their homeland any longer. Their permanent residence in Japan has become an undeniable fact. Since the early 1980s, they have displayed more affirmative views of their own hybridity, and a search for a third way "looking neither to naturalization, which would require them to abandon their ethnicity, not to returning to a divided or even unified homeland" (Iwabuchi 2005: 68).

Their self-representation takes diverse forms including such media as literary, autobiographical, and social-scientific writing, performing and visual arts, music,¹³ historical studies, theatre and film. Theirs is not merely self-representation but engagement with the ongoing perspectives of both Korean residents and Japanese (Ryang 2005a: 7). However, to avoid racial discrimination, many resident Koreans are hiding their descent by using Japanese names, as they were forced to do under Japanese colonial rule. Owing to the physical similarities between Japanese and resident Koreans, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the two by appearance. In the mass media as well in everyday life, Japanese people encounter Koreans without knowing that they are of Korean descent.

In addition to the division between Japan and Korea and the differences between generations, another very significant binary opposition here is South and North Korea and the affiliation to one of the two opposing political organizations, *Chongryun* (총련),¹⁴ which supports North Korea, and *Mindan* (민단)¹⁵ which supports South Korea. The most common self-representations are therefore *zainichi*

13 Because of the difficulty of being employed in more mainstream occupations such as large companies, many resident Koreans enter the sport and entertainment world. Koreans are known for their music performances, as singers, which also serves them as a search for their identity through the whole history of their living in Japan (see Song 2009).

14 In Japanese it is called *Soren* (総聯), an abbreviation of *Zai-Nippon Chosenjin Sorengokai* (在日本朝鮮人総聯合会) (Hicks 1998: 22), which translates as General Association of Korean Residents in Japan.

15 An abbreviation of the Japanese name *Zai-Nippon Daikan Minkoku Kyoryūmindan* (在日本大韓民国居留民団). There is also a third group which is more oriented towards the practical needs of the community called *Mintōren* (民間連), which is not divided between the two Koreas. It is not a formalized organization but holds annual

kankokujin (在日韓国人) and *zainichi chōsenjin* (在日朝鮮人). This binary influenced the fact that there are different representations of self: some *zainichi kankokujin* (affiliated to South Korea) prefer that their language is called *kankokugo* (韓国語), rather than *chōsen-go* (朝鮮語),¹⁶ as one of the interviewees protested vociferously. However, these two organizations do not structure public opinion among Korean residents so rigidly any more. Some young people in Japan have become interested in identity politics, not from the angle of the north-south binary opposition, but with an eye to questioning their future in Japan.

CONCLUSIONS

In focusing on these representations of Koreans made by Japanese and Koreans themselves we can see the notion of difference and the equating of nationality and ethnonational identity. Especially in post-war Japan this equation persisted because nationality remained closely linked with the issues of assimilation, loyalty, and national security. The equation was maintained and reproduced through the interactions between the Japanese state and Korean organizations in Japan. What is distinctive in a comparative perspective is that neither the Japanese state nor the Korean organizations sought to ease access to Japanese nationality (Kashiwazaki 2005: 29). Hara Masaru explains this by saying: "... sharing the same nationality does not require people to have homogeneous culture and lifestyles ... only when naturalized persons become able to say 'I am a Japanese of such and such origin' without hiding their previous nationality will Japanese society be said to have internationalized from within" (Kashiwazaki 2005: 29). As one of the most well known of contemporary *zainichi* intellectuals Kang Sang-jung points out, this is not yet possible in Japan. His discussion of *zainichi* identity demonstrates the importance of negotiation, reconfiguration and representation. He states that: "from the moment *zainichi* are born they are negatively represented in Japanese society. The struggle for a context in which to develop a positive sense of self or identity then involves a difficult process of self-repudiation and recapture."

Like people elsewhere, Koreans in Japan are divided by politics, gender, class, occupation, education, age, and status. Young people have become interested in identity politics not from the perspective of the north-south binary opposition, but with an eye to questioning their future in Japan. Many now actively debate ethnic identity, diaspora politics, and integration in or autonomy from Japanese society. Over time, the number of Koreans willing and able to naturalize as Japanese has increased (Ryang 2005: 6). The majority of resident Koreans in Japan today look toward to a future in Japan for themselves and their children, as the interviewees confirmed. More and more Korean residents, whether or not they choose to become naturalized Japanese citizens or to take Japanese spouses, recognize that, for better or for worse, Japan is their home. Three approaches were identified in this research: *dōkashikō* (同化志向) ("inclination towards assimilation"), *sokokushikō* (祖国志向) ("inclination toward the homeland", even if they did not plan to return there), and *zainichishikō* (在日志向) (much like "third way"), and we can see that there is also a big difference between generations in which way they choose.

Needless to say, social and ethnic discrimination directed against resident Koreans is not simply internal to the media representations. It exists on a societal level, from governmental discourse down to the everyday life of ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, it is true that the media plays a constitutive role in reproducing the discrimination and stigma that resident Koreans endure. Actually, mediated representations of otherness, which are often created and transmitted by limited social institutions, play a powerful role in the strategic construction of Japanese's perception of race and their own racial identity (Lee 2012: 4). In conjunction with the lack of proper historical education concerning its colonial past in

conferences and mobilizes support and contributions wherever and whenever issues present themselves (Hicks 1998: 22).

16 The two languages are more two dialects of one language than two separate languages.

the post-war Japanese school curriculum, media silence about resident Koreans and the name *chōsen*, far from empowering the viewers, has become an effective accomplice to the Japanese state's obliteration of its colonial past. If, as Pierre Bourdieu (in Iwabuchi 2005: 57–58) argued, the limit of language is the limit of politics, the absence of reference to Korea or *chōsen* has placed serious limitations on the Japanese viewers' imagination of, and hence relation to, those resident Koreans who may simply be their neighbours or classmates.

No nation is pure or homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity and culture. All nations contain cultural differences within their boundaries. These differences are, however, often forgotten in the discursive representation of the nation as a racially and culturally homogeneous entity. Likewise, Japan's national identity is produced and reproduced by discursive strategies, rather than by reality itself. The existence of resident Koreans in Japan has not been acknowledged as constitutive of Japan, its society and culture, in either Japanese official discourse or the media. For this reason resident Koreans are faced with numerous conflicting and contesting notions of their identity and representations as "Others" but are still trying to find a way to incorporate themselves into Japanese society.

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