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Acculturation and a sense of belonging of children in U.S. Schools and communities: The case of Japanese families

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ABSTRACT

The population of immigrants in the U.S. continues to grow, with more than one million immigrants arriving every year. This study examines the acculturation of new immigrant and temporary resident children and their parents from Japan, as they navigate two cultures and seek a sense of belonging. Acculturation to a new culture poses various psychosocial challenges, including a loss of a sense of belonging, which can result in social isolation and withdrawal. Examination of the experiences of families from Japan, where group belonging is highly valued, can illuminate the role of belonging in acculturation. We examined individual interviews with 14 Japanese parents in U.S. southern cities. During the interviews, they described the experiences of a total of 23 children from preschool to 9th grade. Parents indicated an absence of a place for children where they feel a sense of belonging (i.e., "Ibasho") in their local schools, which resulted in social isolation, psychological exhaustion, and a reluctance to seek support. Children, however, found their Ibasho at a Japanese Supplementary School, where they attended weekly to receive academic instruction in Japanese, enjoyed playing with Japanese friends, and gained energy to navigate challenges at their local schools. The Supplementary School also served as parents' Ibasho where they exchanged information to navigate cross-cultural experiences. This study has implications for how we can better support acculturation of new immigrant and temporary resident families including those from other cultural groups.

1. Introduction

The U.S. is a country of immigrants, with more than one million immigrants entering the country each year (Pew Research Center, 2019). Relocation to a new culture poses various psychosocial challenges to children and their families. New immigrants and temporary residents often experience disruption in their sense of belonging as they acculturate to their host cultures. Acculturation is a process in which individuals participate in, and adjust to, another culture while maintaining their culture of origin (e.g., Berry, 2001, 2003). Differences in cultural practices, values, and behavior patterns, however, can cause psychological distress (i.e., acculturative stress; e.g., Berry, 2003), which may lead to a loss of a sense of belonging (Kwon, 2018) and social withdrawal (e.g., Seto & Woodford, 2007). How individuals experience acculturation and navigate two cultures likely varies across immigrant groups reflecting their cultural beliefs and practices of origin (Tian et al., 2019), and social attitudes toward them in their host culture, such as discrimination (e.g., Kanno, 2000; Kiang et al., 2016). The outbreak of COVID-19, for instance, has exacerbated discrimination against Asian people, which can disrupt their adjustment to the U.S.

Children, who have not fully developed their cultural identity, are particularly vulnerable and may experience a sense of not belonging to any culture (e.g., Fry, 2007). Yet relatively little research on the cultural and developmental shaping of acculturation has focused on children’s sense of belonging, and how parents support their children in finding a place where they belong.

This qualitative study examines Japanese parents’ narratives on their, and their children’s sense of belonging as they acculturate to the U.S. The experiences of families from Japan, where individuals’ sense of belonging is understood as enhancing their psychological well-being (see Bamba & Haight, 2011), can illuminate how children’s and parents’ sense of belonging affects their acculturation to the U.S., and how...
parents support their children. Their narratives provide insights into how we can better support new immigrant and temporary resident families, including those from other cultural groups.

1.1. Conceptual framework: Cultural identity, sense of belonging, and acculturation

Cultural identity refers to individuals’ understandings of self that allow them to gain social acceptance and a sense of belonging to a particular culture (Schwartz et al., 2006). Many new immigrant and temporary resident children and youth reported confusion in their cultural identities, such as a feeling of being unwellcome and a lack of belonging. Confusion in cultural identity in childhood and adolescence may lead to psychological distress such as depressive symptoms (Schwartz et al., 2006; Wei et al., 2010) and engagement in substance use (Grigsby et al., 2018). In contrast, possessing a stable cultural identity is associated with high self-esteem and life satisfaction (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). Thus, examining the experiences of children can broaden our understanding of the developmental and cultural shaping of acculturation, especially with respect to belonging and cultural identity.

Children acquire shared understandings of self that are necessary to develop cultural identity and function appropriately within a particular cultural group, that is, a cultural self (see Kayama, Haight, Ku, Cho, & Lee, 2020; Shweder et al., 2006), through their everyday social interactions with others, including adults’ socialization practices at home and school, and in the community (e.g., Aruna, 1994; Clark, 2019; Miller, Hengst, & Wang, 2003). Acculturation, which requires a balanced engagement with both the host and home cultures (Berry, 2001, 2003), fundamentally changes the way children are socialized. As a result, they may face challenges in navigating two cultural selves. Children, for instance, may develop a new cultural self through their interaction with peers, educators, and other adults in the host culture (Akiyama, 2016; Berry et al., 2006; Choi et al., 2016; Rhee et al., 2003). A newly acquired cultural self in the host culture helps children navigate and adjust to the new culture, and gain acceptance within their local communities and schools. Yet the new cultural self poses challenges in adjusting back to their culture of origin, especially for children from temporary resident families, or “third culture” children (Fry, 2007), who are expected to return to their home countries. Many children, indeed, experience a feeling of being “lost” and perceive that they do not belong to any culture after they return to their home countries (e.g., Fry, 2007; Kanno, 2000; Kwon, 2018). Thus, maintenance of a cultural self of origin is important for temporary resident children.

Children’s school adjustment in their host cultures is influenced by not only their sense of belonging to local schools, but also their association with the culture of origin (e.g., Choi et al., 2016; Endo, 2013; Paik et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2018), including friendships with children from the same culture (e.g., Kanno, 2000). A strong orientation to their culture of origin, for instance, can help them handle stigmatization and social exclusion at local schools (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2015), reduce psychological distress (Akiyama, 2016; Rogers-Sirin & Gupta, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2006), and motivate them to adjust to their new culture, including acquisition of language. For example, the involvement of some Asian youth in their cultural community of origin is associated with higher English proficiency (Zhang et al., 2018).

Thus, the existing literature suggests that balanced cultural identities, or a sense of belonging to both cultures, promote healthy integration of immigrant and temporary resident children into their new culture (e.g., Burgos et al., 2017; Koga, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2015). In other words, both acquisition of skills necessary for participation in activities in the host culture, such as language competency, and adherence to practices of their culture of origin can enhance children’s psychological and social adjustment in local peer groups (Berry et al., 2006; Koga, 2009). In contrast, a failure to develop integrated cultural identities can lead to low self-esteem and withdrawal from social interactions (Schwartz et al., 2015).

1.2. Japanese immigrant and temporary resident families in the U.S.

Japanese immigrant and temporary resident families are important cases to examine the cultural shaping of acculturation. The number of immigrants and temporary residents from Asian countries, including Japan, has increased substantially in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2015; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018). Currently, the Asian population is the second largest immigrant group (6% of the U.S. population), and is expected to become the largest group by 2065 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Further, as of 2016, 61% of temporary residents and their families who have entered the U.S., for instance, for work and study, were from Asian countries (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018). Likewise, the number of Japanese immigrants and temporary residents in the U.S. has increased about 1.5 times over the past two decades (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The Japanese population, including immigrants, comprises 7.5% of the Asian population in the U.S. (2012). Japanese people also comprise 6.4% of the Asian temporary residents in 2016. Among them, 64% were temporary workers and their families (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018). Thus, supporting the acculturation of Asian immigrants and temporary residents, particularly school-aged children, is essential, as they grow to become contributing members of the increasingly globalized society.

Acculturation of new Japanese immigrants and temporary residents has received increasing attention as an exemplary case, although current studies of East Asian immigrants in the U.S. primarily focus on those from China and South Korea (see Endo, 2016). The available empirical literature, which also includes a number of dissertation studies that are not peer-reviewed, suggests that cultural support networks for new Japanese immigrant and temporary resident families are critical to their adjustment to local schools and communities (e.g., Akiyama, 2016; Harkins, 2001; Kanno, 2000; Nozaki, 2000; Sakamoto, 2006; Seto & Woodford, 2007; Toyokawa, 2005; Yeh et al., 2003). Yet the Japanese population in the U.S. may face greater challenges in locating and accessing cultural support relative to other East Asian immigrants due, in part, to its smaller size and dispersion (see Akiyama, 2016; Endo, 2013; Paik et al., 2017). The Japanese population, including Japanese Americans and immigrants, is spread across the U.S., mostly in major cities in California, Hawaii, and metropolitan areas such as Seattle, New York, Washington DC, and Chicago (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). This dispersion limits new immigrants’ and temporary residents’ access to Japanese communities and resources, especially those living in small cities (e.g., Akiyama, 2016). For example, many Japanese temporary workers and their families are sent from Japanese companies to work in their U.S. branches (Shima, 2011; Takimoto, 2001), many of which are located in midwestern and some southern states that do not have well-developed Japanese communities (see Akiyama, 2016). Children and spouses of temporary residents who do not have adequate English proficiency are particularly vulnerable (Akiyama, 2016; Izumi & Gullón-Rivera, 2018; Takimoto, 2001). The limited access to cultural resources by Japanese families makes them an exemplary case to examine their sense of belonging and acculturation.

1.3. Japanese cultural contexts: Sense of belonging and Ibasho (a place they belong)

The Japanese case is particularly important to understanding how a sense of belonging and the access to cultural resources affect the acculturation of new immigrants and temporary residents, because Japanese culture generally places a high value on group belonging (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Disconnection from Japanese cultural groups, as well as challenges in adjustment to the new culture, can make Japanese immigrant and temporary resident families vulnerable.
to acculturative stress (e.g., Akiyama, 2016; Kanno, 2000; Seto & Woodford, 2007). In order to understand Japanese people’s sense of belonging and its impact on acculturation, some understandings of Japanese concepts, such as *Ibasho* and *zikoro*, are necessary.

*Ibasho* (Irni: present; basho: place) is a physical and psychological “place” where individuals feel acceptance, belonging, comfort, security, and freedom (Bamba & Haight, 2011, see also Kayama et al., 2020; Kayama & Haight, 2014). According to Japanese folk psychology, *Ibasho* can enhance individuals’ psychological well-being (see Bamba & Haight, 2011), and provide relief and aid in recovery from stress (Kayama & Haight, 2014). *Ibasho* also provides protection from anticipated challenges, and serves as a source of motivation to overcome them (Bamba & Haight, 2011; Kayama & Haight, 2014). In contrast, an absence of *Ibasho* negatively affects individuals’ functioning. People may feel emotionally stressed, engage in problematic social interactions (Bamba & Haight, 2011), and isolate themselves from others (Kayama & Haight, 2014). Thus, we expect that the presence or absence of *Ibasho* may also affect Japanese immigrants’ and temporary residents’ experiences of acculturation (see Akiyama, 2016; Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020).

Further, some understandings of a Japanese cultural self allow us to understand children’s psychosocial functioning within and outside of their *Ibasho*. Japan can be characterized, broadly, as a group-oriented society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, a Japanese cultural self, in general, emphasizes the self as a social agent that is interdependent and flexibly responsive to the social context; that is, social experience of self, *jibun* [one’s share of something beyond oneself] (Lebra, 1976). Beginning in early childhood, learning beliefs and behaviors that support the maintenance of social relationships is considered as a primary socialization goal at home and school (Azuma, 1994). Yet Japanese people also retain a strong sense of “self”, that is, the individual experience of self, *kokoro* [heart and mind] (Lebra, 1976). *Kokoro* reflects the inner world, such as desires, interests, and feelings (Okamoto, 2006). Within their *Ibasho*, individuals may express their *kokoro* freely, for instance, toward those with whom they have mutually accepting relationships, such as family members and friends (Bamba & Haight, 2011).

Japanese children are socialized to balance these two selves, the *kokoro* and *jibun* (e.g., Hosaka, 2005; Lebra, 1976). Challenges arise when the individual (*kokoro*) and social (*jibun*) experiences of the self are in conflict (Shimizu, 2001). For example, explicitly disclosing their *kokoro* outside of their *Ibasho* can disrupt individuals’ relationships with others (*jibun*). Yet, a total involvement in groups can result in a loss of the individual experience of self (*kokoro*; Doi, 1971, 2001; Lebra, 1976). To balance these two selves, Japanese people prefer to express their thoughts and desires implicitly, including through facial expression and tone of voice. They, in turn, are required to be sensitive to, and understand, others’ indirect expressions, and accommodate them without disrupting their relationships (Azuma, 1994; Lebra, 1976).

In contrast, a mainstream U.S. cultural self generally emphasizes the self as an individual with stable traits (Rogoff, 2003; Shwedler et al., 2006). In U.S. socialization practices at home and school, for instance, individual children’s strengths, rights, and independence generally are emphasized relatively more than in Japan, including through adults’ encouragement to express their thoughts and feelings explicitly (e.g., Shwedler et al., 2006). In such a context, children and their families from Japan, who are not accustomed to explicit self-expression outside of their *Ibasho*, and who are sensitive to others’ responses to their struggles, may become reluctant to express their needs of support and isolate themselves to protect their “self.” These cultural differences can delay their acculturation (Harkins, 2001; Seto & Woodford, 2007).

### 1.4. Acculturation and Belonging of Japanese and Asian Populations in the U.S.

Although few empirical studies examine a sense of belonging with respect to acculturation (but see Kwon, 2018), the literature on cultural identity of immigrants, including those from Asian countries, provides some insights into Japanese immigrants’ and temporary residents’ sense of belonging (e.g., Akiyama, 2016; Fry, 2007; Koga, 2009; Takimoto, 2001).

#### 1.4.1. Perceived Sense of Belonging and Acculturation

How exposure to a new culture and separation from individuals’ culture of origin affect immigrants’ and temporary residents’ perceived sense of belonging and acculturation may vary depending on whether or not their relocation is voluntary (e.g., Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2010), the extent to which they maintain social relationships in their country of origin, and the availability of, and access to cultural resources and communities within their host culture (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009). For recent Japanese immigrants and temporary residents, who typically maintain relationships with relatives and friends in Japan, physical distance and a lack of Japanese cultural resources can exacerbate psychosocial distress, and delay their acculturation to the host culture (Seto & Woodford, 2007; see also Schwartz et al., 2006, 2010).

Children’s perceived feeling of belonging also affects their acculturation to local schools, motivation to engage with school activities, and their relationships with peers and educators (Ham et al., 2017). School-aged immigrant children from various cultural groups reported lower levels of acceptance at school than the general population, in part, because of school policies and environments that are not inclusive of students from other countries (Ham et al., 2017). Immigrant and temporary resident children, including those from Japan, also reported discrimination, social isolation (Akiyama, 2016; Kanno, 2000; Kiang et al., 2016; see also Tobin et al., 2013), and language barriers (Nozaki, 2000; Seto & Woodford, 2007; Yashima & Tanaka, 2001; Yeh et al., 2003). Some Japanese children’s sense of not belonging also led to social isolation and withdrawal (Sato & Woodford, 2007; see also Ham et al., 2017). For children from Japan, particularly, relationships with teachers and classmates at local schools affect their school functioning (Miyanoto & Kuhlman, 2001). As children gain language competency, acquire interpersonal skills expected in the host culture, develop friendships with local children, and adjust to their local schools (Akiyama, 2016; Takimoto, 2001), they report reduced levels of psychological distress (Rogers-Sirin & Gupta, 2012).

#### 1.4.2. Barriers to Children’s and their Families’ Acculturation

Differences in cultural values and practices between individuals’ home and host cultures, in general, are considered barriers to acculturation (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2010; Tian et al., 2019). Consistent with Confucianism and Buddhist beliefs, Asian people, generally, are sensitive to others’ responses to their actions, including any individual differences (e.g., Kayama et al., 2020). They may become reluctant to seek formal support that could ease acculturative stress, which increases their vulnerability to acculturation (Harkins, 2001; Yen et al., 2003). Further, in Asian cultures, children’s self-expression of their feelings and preferences, especially towards adults, is considered disrespectful (Arora & Algios, 2019; Rhee et al., 2003). Asian, including Japanese, immigrant and temporary resident youth, for instance, expressed difficulties in disclosing their school struggles to their parents and educators (Harkins, 2001; Rhee et al., 2003; Yen et al., 2003), and isolated themselves from peers in times of stress (e.g., Seto & Woodford, 2007). Asian children who have family support, in contrast, tend to function better at their local schools in the U.S. (Rhee et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 2018).

Parents’ adjustment to a new culture also affects children’s acculturation. Japanese temporary resident parents, for example, reported that stress they have experienced due to relocation to the U.S. has led to their children’s increased behavior problems and adjustment challenges (Izumi & Gullón-Rivera, 2018). Japanese parents also reported a perceived feeling of social isolation, which left their children struggling alone at their local schools (Seto & Woodford, 2007). They, however, discussed that their engagement with a group of Japanese...
parents within their local communities provided mutual social and emotional support, necessary for their adjustment to the U.S. (e.g., Sakamoto, 2006; Toyokawa, 2005).

Further, stereotypical labels of the Asian population as a “model minority” (e.g., high achievers, studious, respectful, quiet, etc.; Kiang et al., 2016; Nozaki, 2000) also interfere with children’s acculturation. Such labels may motivate children to conceal their struggles to fulfill expectations of the host culture, and prevent them from receiving necessary support (Kiang et al., 2016). Educators also may misunderstand children’s school struggles. Some elementary school teachers, for instance, considered Japanese temporary resident children’s behaviors that did not fit the stereotype of model minority, such as inattentiveness, as problematic and referred them to specialized services. Children, however, reported that their challenges were due to language barriers (Nozaki, 2000). School-aged Japanese, and other Asian, children also reported racial discrimination, including unfair treatment and social exclusion at school (Kanno, 2000; Kiang et al., 2016), which can lead to low self-esteem and depressive symptoms (Kiang et al., 2016).

1.4.3. Addressing barriers to acculturation: Japanese Supplementary Schools

Japanese Supplementary Schools provide an important context to examine children’s and their parents’ sense of belonging within the U.S. Similar to many language and cultural heritage schools across the U.S., including for children from Asian (e.g., China, Taiwan, and South Korea), and Western (e.g., France, and Germany) countries (e.g., Lee & Shin, 2008; Liao, 2017; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015b; Paik et al., 2017), a central goal of Japanese Supplementary Schools is to help children learn and maintain their language and culture (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology, 2015), which has a critical importance for children’s development of cultural identity and a sense of belonging (e.g., Endo, 2013; Hornberger & Wang, 2008; Uttal & Han, 2011).

Japanese Supplementary Schools typically serve compulsory school-aged children (1st to 9th grades) living abroad, for example, because of their parents’ job requirements, and children from Japanese immigrant families. Supplementary Schools, generally, are established and operated by local Japanese communities with support from the Japanese government (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology, 2015). As of 2016, there are 80 Supplementary Schools approved by the Japanese government across the U.S., including in relatively small cities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology, 2016). Many of them are supported by U.S branches of Japanese companies that have Japanese employees with school-aged children. The size of Supplementary Schools and how they are operated vary, depending on the size of each Japanese community (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2015a). Small Supplementary Schools, for instance, receive limited support from the Japanese government, and are required to supplement their programs by utilizing resources available within the community, including parents, who may volunteer to assist in implementing weekly activities.

At Japanese Supplementary Schools, children receive instruction in Japanese, following the Japanese academic standard, usually on Saturdays (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology, 2015). The day at school is structured, as much as possible, in accordance with a typical school day in Japan, such as academic instruction, lunchtime, and cleaning their classrooms. Children are also exposed to Japanese culture through their participation in seasonal events typically implemented in Japanese public schools, such as a sports festival. Through participation in these academic and non-academic activities, children are socialized to learn Japanese culture (e.g., Endo, 2013), including values of group belonging and respect for others.

Overall, the empirical literature on Japanese immigrant and temporary resident families suggests that Japanese communities serve as important resources that help them overcome acculturation challenges, but with relatively less attention to how their sense of belonging to Japanese communities helps them navigate two cultures. This study, thus, aims at examining Japanese families’ experiences of acculturation, and how their Ibasho, where they feel a sense of belonging, in local and Japanese communities, including Japanese Supplementary Schools, supports their acculturation. Their narratives can provide insights into our understanding of the roles of cultural resources and belonging in supporting acculturation of children and their families.

1.5. Current study

This study is part of a larger study examining acculturation of Japanese immigrant and temporary resident families in the U.S., particularly on their cultural identity and self (Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020), and how parents support children at home. This report focuses on parents’ narratives on their, and their children’s sense of belonging, at Ibasho, in Japanese and local communities. Through qualitative approaches, we consider: 1) What are Japanese parents’ observations of their children’s acculturation to local schools and their sense of belonging? 2) How do parents understand their children’s Ibasho in their local schools and Japanese Supplementary School as they acculturate to the U.S.? 3) What are Japanese parents’ perceptions of their own Ibasho?

2. Methods

2.1. Research site of the study

As detailed in (Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020), our research site is a relatively small-sized Japanese Supplementary School in a southern city, serving children from 1st through 9th grades. These children attend local schools and receive instruction in English during the weekdays. The state in which our research site is located is among those that have the lowest percentage of foreign-born population (2019), and English language learners in public schools (Pew Research Center, 2018). We expect that the relative lack of Japanese cultural resources allows parents to elaborate challenges they and their children have experienced in local schools and communities, and their experiences at the Supplementary School as their Ibasho.

Most of the families commute to the Supplementary School from cities approximately 1–2 h’s drive away on Saturdays. Despite the long distance, this Supplementary School serves as one of a few community resources that allow children and their parents to access Japanese language and culture. Typically, parents take their children to the Supplementary School by 9am in the morning, and spend a day, until 3 pm, at the school or in the community while their children receive instruction. Every week, about 10 parents and their younger children stay in a waiting room in the school. The waiting room serves as a place for parents to exchange information with other parents and share their experiences, and for younger children to learn Japanese with other children and adults outside of their families.

2.2. Participants

During the period of data collection in 2017, about 25 children from...
Japanese immigrant and temporary resident families attended this Japanese Supplementary School. All parents of children who attended the Supplementary School were initially invited to participate in this study through an e-mail announcement from Yamakawa, who served as an administrator of the school. Kayama, then, visited the school weekly and recruited parents in person in the waiting room, or when parents dropped off their children at school. Nearly all parents (92%) she met in person agreed to participate in individual interviews. A total of 14 parents from 11 middle to upper-middle class Japanese families participated (see Table 1). Nine families moved to the U.S. one to three and half years prior to the interview due to the fathers’ work obligations. They were sent from Japanese companies to work in their U.S. branches, and expected to return to Japan in a few years. Parents from two other families have been in the U.S. for more than 10 years, and do not have a plan to return to Japan. They came to the U.S. as students, and obtained permanent resident status after their graduation. Their children were born and raised in the U.S. Parents described the experiences of a total of 23 children from preschool to 9th grade.

2.3. Data collection and analyses

Parents participated in semi-structured, audio-recorded individual interviews, which lasted approximately 40–60 min. All interviews were conducted in Japanese by Kayama in a private, empty classroom. In two families, both parents participated in interviews together. Two other parents from the same family participated in the interviews individually. During the interviews, parents were prompted to discuss their, and their children’s experiences at local schools, communities, and the Japanese Supplementary School; and their sense of belonging, including Ibasho, in the U.S.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and analyzed in Japanese by the authors whose native language is Japanese. Through repeated readings of transcribed interviews, Kayama induced emic codes capturing participants’ experiences, particularly of Ibasho, using analytic induction techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2007). The initial codes were critiqued by Yamakawa, and the coding system was revised. We, then, independently coded all interviews. Any disagreements between coders were resolved through discussion. We continued to revise our coding system so that our definition of each code was consistent with participants’ descriptions, including through negative case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Yamakawa’s perceptions as an administrator were used to reflect on her day-to-day experiences with participant parents and their children for the purpose of triangulation.

2.4. Research team

Both authors are Japanese citizen and have experienced adjusting to the U.S. over the past two decades. Kayama’s research has focused on socialization practices at public schools in the U.S. and Japan (e.g., Kayama et al., 2020), which guided the formulation of this study, data collection, analyses, and writing. Yamakawa has served as an educator at several Japanese Supplementary Schools for 15 years. Her insider perspectives enhanced the credibility of our analyses. Yet her administrative role at our research site may affect parents’ voluntary participation and their narratives. Her primary roles, thus, focused on analyzing data and writing.

3. Results and discussion

Parents described the absence and presence of Ibasho, where they and their children felt a sense of belonging, and how their Ibasho affected their experience of acculturation. Parents, generally, described an absence of Ibasho for their children at school, in both the U.S. and Japan, where they were treated as “visitors”. Most children considered the Japanese Supplementary School as Ibasho. Yet some children who had local friends also considered their local schools as Ibasho. Parents described their own Ibasho primarily at the Supplementary School.

3.1. Absence of Ibasho

3.1.1. “Visitors” and “foreigners” at local schools in the U.S.

The majority of parents from temporary resident families described an absence of Ibasho in local communities, and noted that their children were not fully involved in activities at local schools. Parents discussed that how others treat their children at local schools, as well as their limited English proficiency, have affected their children’s Ibasho and acculturation to their local schools. Some parents, for instance, perceived that their children were treated as visitors, and that educators had lower expectations for their children because of their status as “foreigners”. Emi’s (2nd grade) mother, living in the U.S. for two and half years, described:

My child is talkative at home, but she doesn’t talk to others outside much. [Her teacher] says, “She is always smiling. She is doing fine, although she doesn’t speak much.” I thought teachers didn’t take [my child’s challenges in communicating in English seriously]. How they treat her looks to me like, “She has done good enough as a foreigner, but not [as good as other children].”

The teacher’s comment on Emi’s school functioning may reflect a common practice in the U.S., at home and school that focuses on children’s strengths (Miller & Cho, 2018; Shwedet et al., 2006), which the majority of participant parents report is not typical in Japan. Emi’s mother, rather, interpreted the teacher’s comment as reflecting her lower expectation for Emi. Several other parents also expressed anxiety regarding their children’s school functioning in response to their teachers’ positive comments. Nozomi’s (7th grade) and Yuuki’s (3rd grade) mother elaborated her anxiety:

I really don’t know my children’s achievement. It’s been only one year [in the U.S.], so I think there are lots of things teachers are making exemptions [e.g., letting them pass, even if they are far behind]. At a parent-teacher conference for my older child, her teacher said she was doing good. They also wrote, “Very Good” on my children’s work, but I think their work is not good enough.... These [comments] make me anxious.

Parents’ anxiety also may reflect Japanese socialization practices at home and school that consider challenges children face as opportunities for them to learn from solving problems (Kayama & Haight, 2014; Lewis, 1995). From the Japanese perspective, U.S. educators’ responses may be interpreted as a sign of lost educational opportunities for their children.

Nozomi’s and Yuuki’s mother also described her children’s strategies to “fit” in the classroom by remaining quiet, even if they do not understand:

[Many Japanese] children can’t say easily to teachers that they don’t understand, unless teachers ask them, “Do you understand this? Did you get it?” They may just let it go. My children can’t speak to [teachers] in English well. Thus, they try to be quiet, so they don’t have to [bother their teachers]. I tell them “Ask your teachers,” but they say, “I’m good.”

This strategy, however, may lead to educators’ confusion, over whether their reluctance is due to language barriers or a lack of understanding. Their hesitation to speak up can also be interpreted through the lens of

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[^6]: All parents, regardless of their plans to return, or not to return to Japan prioritize their children’s English proficiency. English proficiency gained in the U.S. can become their children’s strength after they return to Japan.
the summer. The experiences at Japanese schools, however, reinforced interpersonal skills, some parents sent them to schools in Japan during summer vacation (Sueda & Wiseman, 1991; see also Fry, 2007). "Different" experiences from others can lead to teasing, bullying, and social exclusion.

Ryota’s father described, ironically, skills children have acquired to fit in at U.S. local schools can stand out in Japan. Japan is a relatively homogeneous country, and the concept of diversity is still new. Any differences from others can lead to teasing, bullying, and social exclusion (Sueda & Wiseman, 1991; see also Fry, 2007).

Other parents also described their children as "visitors" and being "different" at schools in Japan.

3.1.2. “Visitors” and being “different” at schools in Japan

Parents expressed concern that their children would also be treated as “outsiders” in Japan, and lose their Ibasho status. After their relocation to Japan, for instance, their children have already learned some behavioral patterns expected in the U.S., even if they may still struggle at their local schools. Their children’s behaviors, thus, may be considered “different” in Japan. One father, for instance, described his third grade son, Ryota, after 3 years in the U.S.:

He’s never been to schools in Japan, and started building personal relationships with others in the U.S., at school. So, how he expresses himself is almost like American. His expression has become very strong. He often says, “I can do it!” In Japan, his strong attitudes can be considered as lacking sensitivity and thoughtfulness. Others may become annoyed by my child who doesn’t know how to express himself thoughtfully.

Other parents also described their children as losing Japanese communication and interpersonal skills, such as sensitivity and thoughtfulness, that are important to maintain a Japanese cultural self. As Ryota’s father described, ironically, skills children have acquired to fit in at U.S. local schools can stand out in Japan. Japan is a relatively homogeneous country, and the concept of diversity is still new. Any differences from others can lead to teasing, bullying, and social exclusion (Sueda & Wiseman, 1991; see also Fry, 2007).

In order for their children to maintain Japanese language and interpersonal skills, some parents sent them to schools in Japan during the summer. The experiences at Japanese schools, however, reinforced their “visitor” status. Hiroto’s (4th grade) and Kenji’s (2nd grade) parents, who planned to permanently return to Japan in a year, temporarily sent them to the school Hiroto attended as a 1st grader. Their mother expressed concern about Hiroto’s peer relationship:

If my children can’t speak proper Japanese, other children may pick on them... When we went back to Japan for two weeks, Hiroto met his friends there. His friends looked curious, hearing Hiroto using English words even when speaking in Japanese... They looked confused about [those English words]. Hiroto even hasn’t noticed how he speaks Japanese has changed.

Further, children who started 1st grade in the U.S. do not know the school system in Japan. Takahiro’s (3rd grade) father, who planned to return to Japan in a year, described his child’s struggles when he visited a Japanese school for several weeks:

He enjoyed exploring the school [that was different from his local school in the U.S.]... But it took time for him to learn and follow everyday routines at school. He himself looked confused a bit. When I visited his classroom, [how he behaved] looked like an “outsider”, different from other Japanese children.

Parents reported that educators in Japan also treated their children as visitors, knowing that they would leave in a few weeks. Taichie’s (3rd grade) and Emi’s (2nd grade) mother described their experiences at a Japanese elementary school during the summer:

At school, teachers kindly adjusted their expectations to [what my children] need. They said, “It’s ok if she can’t do it.” For example, they had swimming classes [just like many schools in Japan]... Children who didn’t meet the goals, such as how long they can swim, had to go to extra swimming classes. My children, who can’t swim, didn’t have to go. There might have been such exemptions academically as well [e.g., writing in Japanese].

3.1.3. Consequences of the absence of Ibasho: Making use of the visitor status

While children’s perception of being treated as visitors may limit their full participation at school, parents discussed that their visitor status, in both the U.S. and Japan, can lessen the pressure on children.
Some parents even made use of this status to support their children. Rina’s (4th grade) and Runa’s (2nd grade) mother, after living in the U.S. for 3 years, described:

In the U.S., we feel “easy”, at times, because we can be “foreigners.” Once we go back to Japan [permanently, in a month], there are rules we need to follow…. We are not allowed to make any excuse [as Japanese]. I’m telling my children, “Now, [in the U.S.], even if you [can’t do well at school], teachers may just say, ‘It’s fine, you’re a foreigner,’ but teachers in Japan won’t say that to you”.

Several parents, especially those who have older children, also acknowledged that educators’ accommodations for their children, as foreigners, reduced the pressure and stress their children experienced at their local schools. Although educators’ accommodations, such as reduced homework, may remind them that they are still treated as visitors, they also are aware that these accommodations are necessary for their children who are not fluent in English. Hazuki’s (9th grade) and Aki’s (7th grade) mother, after 1 year in the U.S., described:

My younger child still is in middle school. In the past two [school] years, since we came to the U.S., she has benefitted from some reduced work. My older child is in high school, and there is no such exemption. If he gets lower scores [in class assignments], that affects his final grades, [just like local children]… He is having a harder time [than his sister].

Similarly, some parents reported that their children enjoyed their visitor status in Japan. According to parents, Michi (2nd grade) and Sachi (Kindergarten), who were born in the U.S., enjoyed visiting Japan because they were treated as visitors. Although this family does not plan to move back to Japan, they consider that maintaining their relationships with relatives in Japan is important, and occasionally visit them. The father described their children:

My children like visiting Japan, although usually it’s not very long, like a month. Everyone they meet welcomes them [and gives them what they want]. For them, visiting Japan is more like a vacation. So, it’s fun. It would be different if they had to live in Japan. It will be hard for them, going to school [every day] and a cram school, [just like other Japanese children]. They would probably say, they like their school in the U.S.

Parents from temporary resident families also described similar challenges. Takahiro’s father observed his son at a Japanese elementary school, “Going to school and having to finish homework everyday, he is enjoying [at his local school] now, but still is not himself there.”

In contrast, at the Japanese Supplementary School, parents observed that their children enjoyed talking about Japanese cartoons and TV characters familiar to Japanese children.

Parents also discussed that **Ibasho** at the Japanese Supplementary School provides a safe place where children do not have to be conscious about adjusting to U.S. expectations. Children, especially those who were upper elementary school-age or older when they came to the U.S., have already acquired a Japanese cultural-self, such as being attentive to what other people may say (**jibun**) and carefully expressing their thoughts (**kokoro**; see Lebra, 1976). These children appear to be pressured in U.S. local schools, where explicit self-expression is expected (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder et al., 2006). Haruka’s (6th grade) father, for example, described, “If they communicate like when they were in Japan, [even speaking in English], local people don’t get it. Instead, they have to be able to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ clearly, and say what they think. This is what my child is still struggling.” At the Supplementary School, however, they do not have to be cautious about such expectations. Aki’s (7th grade) mother discussed:

In the U.S., when she wants [others] to do something for her [i.e., **kokoro**], she needs to ask them. It’s different from Japan where others usually notice what she needs [i.e., **jibun**], even before she tells them. My child knows that at her local school, she needs to speak up, but she can’t say [what she thinks] immediately. I think she is always cautious at school all day. At the Supplementary School, she feels safe and can focus on her study.

In short, children’s shared interests in play and communication styles, including jokes, made them feel comfortable (see Kwon, 2018), and helped them find their **Ibasho** at the Japanese Supplementary School. Haruka’s (6th grade) and Takahiro’s (3rd grade) mother noted, “The same value they are sharing is making it easier to understand each other.” Despite Japanese people’s preference of implicit expression (e.g., Lebra, 1976), parents’ narratives illuminate that, in their **Ibasho** at the Supplementary School, children from temporary resident families can express themselves, and enjoy talking and playing with their friends, which is similar to children in Japan (Bamba & Haight, 2011; Kayama, Haight, Ku, Cho, & Lee, 2020). Within this protected environment, Jun’s (7th grade) mother described, “[He] can freely express his thoughts, but at his local school, he still is exploring to what extent he can express his honest thoughts (**kokoro**). He is enjoying [at his local school] now, but still is not himself there.”

Yet parents discussed that some children, especially those who came to the U.S. before the school age, may find their **Ibasho** at their local schools, as well as at the Supplementary School. These children are not exposed to Japanese culture, including toys and TV characters as much as older children. Younger children also have relatively more common experiences with their local classmates than older children, and tend to have friends at both their local schools and the Supplementary School.
A mother described her son, Takahiro, who came to the U.S. when he was in Kindergarten. “He’s completely [adjusted to] his local school. It doesn’t matter for him if he plays with his local or Japanese friends. He’s enjoying playing with any friends.” These parents’ narratives suggest that the presence of friends with whom children can play and enjoy together regardless of their languages is important for their *Ibasho* in local communities and schools. As Akiyama (2016) described, friendship, particularly, with local children can facilitate their acculturation to U.S. local schools.

Likewise, parents reported that children who were born in the U.S., relative to those from Japan, recognized their local schools as their *Ibasho*. They were exposed to the English environment and U.S. culture earlier than children from temporary resident families. Although their parents spoke to them in Japanese at home, once they started preschool, children quickly learned English, and adjusted to U.S. culture through their interactions with preschool teachers and peers. Parents of these children reported that local schools are where their children fully enjoy playing with other children and freely express their thoughts. For them, studying in Japanese at the Supplementary School has become a burden. Sara’s (1st grade) mother described:

> When I asked her which school she likes, she said, her local school.

At the Supplementary School, she has friends, but for her, it’s more like a place to study, which has become stressful for her... She speaks English [better than Japanese].

Yet Sachi’s and Michi’s parents noted that the presence of Japanese friends motivated their children who were born in the U.S. to go to, and find their *Ibasho* at the Supplementary School.

### 3.3. Absence and presence of *Ibasho* for parents

Similar to children, many parents perceived themselves as “visitors” in both the U.S. and Japan, and described an absence of *Ibasho*. In the U.S., primarily because of the language barriers, they are reluctant to participate in community activities. Further, a few parents considered social isolation in their local communities as an opportunity to excuse themselves from responsibilities and obligations within the communities. One mother described:

> In the U.S., we are foreigners and not involved in any local communities. I feel free. There may be something I should do, but I don’t know. If there are any, I don’t think I can do. I can’t understand [English] anyway... We are indeed outsiders. Adults can stay away from [these responsibilities], unlike children [who have to adjust to their schools].

In the absence of *Ibasho* (see Bamba & Haight, 2011), parents, as well as children, may become less motivated to fulfill their social responsibilities and participate in activities as full members. The use of their visitor, or “nonmember”, status as an excuse, however, further excludes them from local communities and schools, particularly, in the U.S. where they are expected to express their interests and needs more explicitly (see Shweder et al., 2006) than in Japan.

Many parents also described an absence of *Ibasho* in Japan. Some parents noted that they were no longer full members of the community to which they belonged in Japan. They are reluctant to share their experiences in the U.S. with their friends in Japan, who may not fully understand them. Some parents also were concerned that telling them about the U.S., even challenges, may be considered “showing off.” In Japan, relocation to Western countries is considered a privilege (see Fry, 2007; Koga, 2009). Any sign of differences, such as their children’s Westernized attitudes and English fluency, may cause others’ rejection and envious attitudes toward them (Fry, 2007; Kanno, 2003; Sueda & Wiseman, 1991).

Rather, participant parents feel closer to parents they see at the Japanese Supplementary School who have similar experiences and can understand each other. Parents described that weekly meetings with other Japanese parents not only allow them to relieve stress and enjoy talking freely in Japanese, but also help them adjust to U.S. systems and culture. They exchanged information about their children’s local schools; and provided, and asked for, suggestions to solve any problems. Just like children, parents have to manage challenges in adjusting to the U.S. (Izumi & Gullón-Rivera, 2018; Seto & Woodford, 2007). Participant parents observed that their common experiences of navigating challenges in the U.S. have strengthened their relationships (see Sakamoto, 2006; Toyokawa, 2005), and created *Ibasho* for them. One mother, for instance, described, “Every week, as soon as we get to the Supplementary School, we immediately begin talking [in the hallway] about what happened since we met last week.” This Supplementary School, especially, is located in an area in which the number of immigrants, including those from Japan, is low. For participant parents, this weekly meeting is one of a few opportunities they can immerse themselves in Japanese culture. Another mother described:

> For us, something we can understand each other as Japanese is important. If we don’t come to the Supplementary School, there are not many chances we see [Japanese people]. … This is a very precious place [for parents] to get together, exchange information about what is happening in Japan, and at times, support each other and [relieve stress] by expressing frustration. It’s not easy to find such a person [in my local community].

The experiences of immigrant parents are somewhat different. They do not consider weekly meetings with Japanese families as a source of support. Rather, conversations with parents who recently came from Japan reminded them of Japanese culture. A mother stated, “Meeting with parents from Japan reminds me how much I have become like an American mother [which I took for granted].” The interactions with Japanese families drew their attention back to Japanese culture, and allowed them to acquire up to date information about Japan.

Finally, the Japanese Supplementary School provides a physical space where parents feel comfortable with speaking in Japanese without worrying about local people’s responses to them. Some parents, for example, are cautious about speaking in Japanese in public spaces. An immigrant mother elaborated her concern:

> [When speaking in Japanese], I don’t want to be told, “What did you say? Something bad [about us]?” Also, when talking to my children in public spaces, for example, when I correct my children in Japanese, other people don’t understand [what I say]. They may react as if I am abusing [my children].

Thus, the Supplementary School is an important place, their *Ibasho*, where they feel comfort and acceptance, free from critique regarding their differences in the local communities.

### 4. Conclusion

This report is one of the first empirical studies examining a sense of belonging among Japanese immigrant and temporary resident families (but see Akiyama, 2016; Koga, 2009; Takimoto, 2001), in particular, their *Ibasho* (see Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020). Japanese parents, who value group belonging, articulated how their children’s Japanese Supplementary School has become their, and their children’s *Ibasho*, a place that provides them with a sense of belonging and eases acculturative stress. Parents, however, indicated an absence of *Ibasho* at local schools and communities, in both the U.S. and Japan, where they perceive that they are treated as “visitors”, which is devastating to their psychosocial well-being. In the absence of *Ibasho*, Japanese families not only continue to struggle, but also may withdraw from fulfilling responsibility as “full members”, which also is a loss of opportunity for local schools and communities to benefit from their participation. Japanese parents’ narratives draw our attention to belonging and *Ibasho* as a source of support for acculturation of new immigrant and temporary resident families, possible relevance to those from other cultural groups.
4.1. Implications

Although there is no English term that refers to *Ibasho*, Japanese parents’ narratives on *Ibasho* and belonging have some theory, policy, and practice implications. The existing literature on immigrant and temporary resident families from various cultural groups suggests the importance of access to cultural resources of origin in their adjustment to the host culture (e.g., Dimitrova et al., 2015; Kanno, 2000; Koga, 2009; Zhang et al., 2018), including at Supplementary Schools (see Endo, 2013). Yet it has disregarded how a sense of belonging affects their social and psychological functioning, and cultural adjustment. The absence of *Ibasho* at local schools increases vulnerability of children, particularly those from temporary resident families. In contrast, the presence of *Ibasho*, for example, at Supplementary Schools can strengthen children’s sense of belonging, and help them gain energy to overcome challenges.

According to Japanese folk theories, *Ibasho* cannot be created by others (Bamba & Haight, 2011). Rather, individuals find their *Ibasho* within their social relationships. Parental participation in their children, for instance, found their *Ibasho* in their relationships with others who speak the same language, have similar experiences and interpersonal norms, and enjoy culturally-nuanced plays and conversations (e.g., TV and cartoon characters, jokes, etc.). Professionals’ roles, thus, should include developing social ecologies and contexts, such as Supplementary Schools, in which children and their parents can find their *Ibasho*. Local churches established by cultural groups also may provide such social contexts (Lee & Shin, 2008; Utal & Han, 2011). Many Korean Culture Schools in the U.S., indeed, are operated by Korean churches (Lee & Shin, 2008). Yet not all immigrant and temporary resident families, particularly children (Kwon, 2018), including those from Japan (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2015a), have access to cultural communities in which they may find their *Ibasho*. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop cultural communities particularly designated for children, like Supplementary Schools, that serve as a linkage between their home and host cultures, and help them navigate cross-cultural experiences.

The ways in which Japanese Supplementary Schools are operated may suggest how we can support the development of cultural communities for children. Although Japanese Supplementary Schools are primarily operated by local Japanese communities with some support from the Japanese government, a few Supplementary Schools, including the one that served as our research site, are supported by U.S. local governments and universities. The involvement of local governments and universities is critical to the establishment of Supplementary Schools in small cities that do not have many Japanese cultural resources. Cultural groups that do not have strong governmental support from their countries of origin also can benefit from an increase in the formal support available in U.S. local communities to develop and sustain cultural resources necessary for the acculturation of new immigrant and temporary resident families.

What is missing in Japanese parents’ narratives is collaboration between cultural resources, including the Supplementary School, and local schools that also may become *Ibasho* for their children. Indeed, the literature on Korean Culture Schools indicates a lack of collaboration with local public schools (Lee & Shin, 2008). Supplementary Schools have resources to support new immigrant and temporary resident children at local schools, such as culturally-sensitive instructional strategies. Sharing information about children between their local and supplementary schools also allows educators to support children in a consistent manner. Such collaboration also may facilitate parents’ involvement in their children’s local schools, which parents may find difficult due to their limited English communication skills (e.g., Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020). Local school educators’ active engagement with Supplementary Schools, which parents consider as their own *Ibasho*, can support, and facilitate, parents’ communication with local school educators, and hence their children’s active participation at local schools.

Ultimately, the presence of *Ibasho*, either within cultural or local communities, supports children’s acculturation, and facilitates their development into adults who can contribute to the increasingly diverse society. Existing research on children from various cultures suggests that the experiences of overcoming challenges arising from cross-cultural adjustment have some positive impacts on children’s development (Haneda & Monobe, 2009; Kwon, 2018; see also Fry, 2007), such as acquisition of global perspectives, including languages, cultural knowledge, and skills to adjust to new cultures. These perspectives and skills have become even more important in this rapidly globalized society, and can expand children’s future career path (Kwon, 2018).

4.2. Limitations

Limitations of this study include our focus on parents’ perceptions to examine their children’s experiences. In order to further discuss children’s sense of belonging and *Ibasho*, it is necessary to examine children’s voices. Further, we relied on parents’ narratives to understand their children’s experiences at their local schools and the Supplementary School. Observations at school, and perceptions of educators can deepen our understanding of children’s sense of belonging at school. The second limitation arose from the relatively small size of the Japanese population, particularly immigrant families, in our research site. Due to the small size, immigrant parents’ perceptions do not represent Japanese immigrant families in general. Rather, we used their perceptions to illustrate the continuum of experiences, from families who recently relocated to the U.S. to those who have already acculturated. Finally, we purposively selected this Supplementary School located in a community that has limited cultural resources for Japanese families. The experiences of families who participated in this study may be considerably different from those living in metropolitan cities that have a larger Japanese population.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Misa Kayama: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. Naomi Yamakawa: Validation, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105612.

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A comprehensive review of research on children's acculturation and identity development, highlighting the complexities and nuances of cross-cultural transitions. The text draws from a wide range of studies, including those focusing on immigrant families, bilingualism, and cultural resilience. It provides insights into the psychological, social, and educational implications of acculturation processes. The bibliography includes works by leading scholars in the field, offering a rich resource for further exploration.

The text is structured to cover various aspects of children's acculturation, including cultural identity, family dynamics, and educational outcomes. It discusses the challenges faced by children in adapting to new cultural environments, and the role of parents and educators in supporting these processes. The research is grounded in empirical data from diverse cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of understanding the individual experiences of children and families.

Key findings from the reviewed literature include the significance of parental support, the role of peer relationships, and the impact of cultural practices on children's well-being. The text also highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in addressing the multifaceted nature of acculturation.

This comprehensive review is an essential resource for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers working in the areas of child development, cultural psychology, and multicultural education. It offers a solid foundation for future studies and practical applications aimed at enhancing the well-being and success of children in diverse cultural settings.
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