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Japanese LGBT Diasporas

Gender, Immigration Policy and Diverse Experiences

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract After discussing Japanese immigration histories and statistics to the USA, Canada, and Australia, as a background, the introductory chapter surveys the conditions of LGBT individuals in contemporary Japanese culture and society, including some popular notions, such as "gay-friendly Japan," the difficulty of coming out of the closet, the lack of legal protection of LGBT individuals and couples at the national level, as well as gender inequalities in employment and sexuality. Also, a number of publications concerning LGBT refugees and immigration are examined and some of the major objectives of the present project are discussed. In addition, the chapter discusses methodology, including the online survey the author conducted in the summer of 2018, including the categories of questions, languages used, closed-end, and open-ended questions. While taking the online questionnaire, participants often noted comments and explanations. Also, about half of the participants volunteered to participate in a follow-up study and the majority of them enthusiastically shared their experiences and thoughts. Their narratives serve as a valuable source of information for an ethnographic analysis of their experiences. Additionally, the chapter offers statistics on the participants ($N = 55$), including their nationalities, linguistic diversity, sexuality, gender identity, and the average number of years overseas, as well as some of the major characteristic of select participants ($N = 35$).

Keywords Japanese migration history · Queer migration · Asian & Pacific Islanders (API) · LGBT refugees · LGBT rights

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Introduction

While empirical studies on LGBT refugees from Muslim countries are common, these studies are rare from Northeast Asian countries. Through a close examination of the data collected from an online survey, as well as follow-up responses, this study explores the lives of Japanese LGBT individuals in the USA, Canada, and Australia and seeks to find some of the major reasons they have left Japan, their present situations, needs, and future plans. The findings from the three different countries will be comparatively examined. Also, the findings from this project will be compared with the findings from previous studies on LGBT refugees and carefully examined to identify some of the major similarities as well as differences between Japanese LGBT immigrants and LGBT refugees.

A refugee from Japan may sound an oxymoron; however, the findings will attest, although Japan does not have a sodomy law, LGBT experiences in Japan are not any better. Japanese society seems to "tolerate" (*kanyō*) its queer members, as long as they stay in their place on the society's margin, Japanese LGBT individuals typically experience an overt, direct rejection, including homophobia, when they come out to their parents. Due to their social marginalization as well as rejection by their parents, Japanese LGBT individuals suffer greatly and have some profound reasons to leave the country.

Once in the USA, Canada, or Australia, Japanese LGBT diasporas continue to have some major difficulties, due, for example, to immigration issues, cultural differences, and a language barrier, among others. Further, the findings attest that migration to these countries is a gendered experience and that gay men, and possibly bisexual men, seem to have some critical advantages over the others at multiple points in Japan as well as abroad in their course of migration. Moreover, immigration as well as LGBT policies in their host countries play major roles in their experiences abroad. In conclusion, I will address their special needs among Japanese LGBT diasporas, highlighting suggestions and recommendations for lawmaker and activists, and propose social services aimed at them.

History of Japanese Migration Prior to World War II

In Japanese history, a little over a million people have migrated overseas. Apart from a few diplomats, travelers, and the like, the majority of

them have left the country over the last 150 years, notably, approximately 800,000 people from the mid-nineteenth century to the outbreak of World War II (JICA 1994). In the beginning, Japanese migrants were bound for Hawaii and the American West Coast, the two most popular destinations, as well as Canada's Vancouver Island and Broome in Western Australia, to a lesser extent, seeking a better opportunity in the New World. The great majority of them were farmers and predominantly male. Japanese migrants initially arrived in the New World in the 1860s and 1870s (Daniels 2006; Sissons 1972; Stanlaw 2006).

Hawaii and the American West Coast

In 1868, the first year of the Meiji period, a shipment of 141 men, six women, and a child arrived in Hawaii, marking the beginning of Japanese emigration. They were under three-year contracts; yet, the majority remained, thus becoming the founders of the Japanese community in the islands. For the next 16 years, however, the Meiji government prohibited contract labor emigration, in order to evade the horrors of and the stigma attached to the coolie trade, as experienced by their Chinese counterparts (Daniels 2006, 30–31). In 1885, as discussed below, due mostly to some domestic problems, contract labor migration continued, and more than 30,000 Japanese came to Hawaiian plantations before 1895, when it was ended.

Since then, Japanese migrants continued to arrive in Hawaii, this time as free agents. Overall, some 180,000 Japanese had migrated to Hawaii by 1924. At the same time, it is believed that many of them were eying the American West Coast as their final destination. The annexation of Hawaii in 1898 facilitated their movement to the US mainland and some 40,000 of them made their secondary migration to the US mainland by early 1908 (Daniels 2006, 31). One of the major pull factors for the USA was a growing demand for cheap labor to replace Chinese immigrants after the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which resulted from fear of the so-called Yellow Peril, a growing anxiety over cheap Chinese labor (Chan 1991, 55). Additionally, beside the Japanese immigrants in Hawaii who made their secondary migration the American West Coast, there were a small group of political exiles from Japan who founded an agricultural colony at Gold Hill in California, as early as, 1868. According to the census, there were 148 Japanese, the great majority of them in California, in 1880, nearly 25,000 in 1900, and around 125,000 in 1924 (Daniels 2006,

31). In addition, Japanese prostitutes and barmaids arrived in the American West starting around 1887 (Oharazeki 2013).

Yet, in the early years of the twentieth century, as the Japanese immigrants formed the basis of their livelihood, anxiety over the rapid growth of cheap Japanese labor, particularly in California, resulted in the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement (1907) between the two governments, halting immigration of Japanese (male) workers (Daniels 2006, 32), at the same time, diverting new Japanese emigrants to Latin American countries, notably Brazil and Peru (Stanlaw 2006, 47). After the agreement, existing families reunited and tens of thousands of Japanese bachelors brought wives from Japan, often as the so-called picture brides, whom they had not seen prior to marriage, thus the Japanese population still continued to grow (Daniels 2006, 32). This changed with the enactment of the so-called Asian Exclusion Act, as part of the Immigration Act of 1924, banning the immigration of all Japanese, until 1965 (Stanlaw 2006, 47).

In addition, there were some added difficulties Japanese immigrants and their families endured. In the US mainland, although Japanese immigrants began as migrant laborers, many of them quickly became leaseholders or proprietors. They were exceptionally successful. For example, by 1919, Japanese farms in California produced about 10% of the market value in the state. Yet or due to their economic success, the Japanese in California and also in other states in the American West Coast experienced persistent prejudice and discrimination in law, employment, and housing (Daniels 2006, 32). Notably, people of Japanese ancestry were barred from owning farmland in California by laws by the 1920s (Stanlaw 2006, 47). Furthermore, Japanese immigrants were not allowed to become naturalized (Daniels 2006, 32). Toward the end of World War II, tens of thousands of Japanese immigrants, including American citizens, were incarcerated as "too loyal to Japan and its emperor," thus considered potential enemies (Takaki 1989, 379–405).

Vancouver Island, Canada

A smaller number of Japanese migrants arrived in Canada. In 1940, there were about 25,000 and the great majority of them were concentrated (nearly 95%) in a small area of British Columbia. The main economic niches there were fishing, particularly salmon fishing, mining, and lumber industries (Daniels 2006, 33; Oiwa 2006, 121). Unlike the USA, Canada

allowed Japanese immigrants to become naturalized citizens, technically, British subjects until 1947 (Oiwa 2006, 123–124).

However, as did the USA, Canada followed suit and enacted its own "Gentlemen's Agreement" (1907), limiting the number of new immigrants to 400 annually. Also, four years later after the Asian Exclusion Act of the USA, Japan was forced to limit 150 passports per annum, in order to bar picture brides (Daniels 2006, 33). Some believe that racial prejudice and discrimination in both law and custom so constrained their livelihood that the Japanese Canadian community constituted an ethnic enclave, a small, self-contained society, in Vancouver (Oiwa 2006, 121–122). Also, the persecution of the Japanese Canadians during World War II was considered crueler than that of the Japanese immigrants in the USA and their American descendants, for example, forcing them to move east of the Rockies, or denounce their Canadian citizenship (Oiwa 2006, 123–124). Of note, Canada's racist immigration policy was terminated in 1947, 18 years earlier than the USA.

The White Australian Policy

Japanese migration to Australia was quite limited. Except the very early immigrants in the late nineteenth century, notably the Japanese pearl farmers who settled in Broome in Western Australia for the pearling opportunities there (Idriess 1950; Sissons 1988), or those who worked on sugarcane farms in the Northern Territory and Queensland (Shiobara 2004, 247), there were only a little more than a couple thousand Japanese immigrants who had arrived in Australia before 1979, due mainly to the so-called White Australian policy (the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901), which remained in effect until 1975 (Museum Victoria). After World War II, most of the Japanese immigrants were deported, thereby vanishing the Japanese organizations there, with an exception of approximately 600 Japanese war brides who gained entry after 1952 (Shiobara 2004, 247; Sissons 1988, 637). Additionally, there were Japanese women who worked as prostitutes in Australia around the turn of the century (Sissons 1977).

Push Factors (Prewar Japan)

There were some profound reasons for Japanese migrants to leave the country. Soon after the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry of the USA in 1853, Japan ended its national seclusion policy, which lasted approximately