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Three-Way Process of Integration in Japan: Migrants and Ethnic Communities During Pandemic Crisis

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Abstract

This paper explores how the COVID-19 pandemic was mitigated by receiving states, individual migrants, ethnic communities, and sending countries and how these reflect the three-way integration process in Japan. It contributes to migration and integration studies by focusing on the mobilization of migrants and communities, and roles that host and home countries play, using the COVID-19 pandemic as an example. This paper analyzes experiences of Filipino and Russian-speaking residents in Japan, their community activities, and gives a textual analysis of the Japanese press. These findings reveal that in the absence of actions from the host and sending countries, there is higher possibility for individual actors to generate informal networks. We also observed disparities in pandemic responses between Filipino and Russian-speaking communities. Filipinos were supported by local NGOs and individual Filipino migrants online and offline, while Russian-speaking communities consolidated via online communication. Finally, we predict that the pandemic led to marginalization rather than integration of ethnic communities in Japan. Such exploration of the crisis response enables examination of present-day social ties among migrants, their construction, and how they are maintained.

Keywords: COVID-19, Multicultural Community, Integration Process, Japan, Migration

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Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic significantly impacted societies, economies, healthcare, culture, and other aspects of everyday life. Globally, as of 8 November 2022, “there have been 629,978,289 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6,582,023 deaths, reported to WHO” (WHO Health Emergency Dashboard 2022). Furthermore, in Japan, from 3 January 2020 to 8 November 2022, “there have been 22,706,566 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 47,069 deaths” (WHO Health Emergency Dashboard 2022). “COVID-19 has even been referred to as the ‘disease of the Anthropocene.’ . . . In its origins and spread through the human ecology COVID-19 exposes vulnerabilities in how we have come to live in the 21st century, how we feed ourselves, and how we connect with one another” (Cooper 2021: 71).

Japan has maintained relatively low pandemic mortality rates, compared to other developed countries. “A top-down activation of Japan’s culture of self-restraint (*jishuku*) – in this case refraining from any unnecessary activities – is at the center of Japan’s comparably low infection numbers and fatality cases” (Vogt and Qin 2022: 252). Aldrich and Yoshida (2020: 220) point out that the country “dodged a bullet without strong leadership from the prime minister, an efficient bureaucracy, or the use of advanced technology,” with low infections rates and deaths explained by widespread voluntary self-quarantine (*jishuku*) and massive reductions in social interactions. The term *jishuku* suggests “a need to take precautions to ensure that the spread of the coronavirus would not continue – but such calls were not directed to everyone equally” (Giammaria 2020: 2).

While the disease affected all countries, pandemic experiences differed by social status, class, gender, ethnicity/ nationality, and other social categories. It contributed to increased vulnerabilities for already vulnerable groups – women, children, homeless, refugees, and migrants. This study aims to address one such group – migrants. We explore how the COVID-19 pandemic was mitigated by receiving states, individual migrants, ethnic/ language-based communities, and sending countries and then how these reflect the reality and possibility of implementing a three-way integration process in Japan. It contributes to migration and integration studies by focusing on the mobilization of migrants and communities, and the roles that host and home countries play using the COVID-19 pandemic as an example.

According to the Ministry of Justice, there were 2,933,137 registered foreign residents in Japan by the end of 2019. This number decreased six percent in the following year.

As such, according to the 2020 Population Census, the overall population of Japan was 126,146,099, where the number of Japanese was 123,398,962 (E-Stat 2021), meaning that there were 2,747,137 foreign nationals in Japan by summer 2020. In this paper, we focus on two ethnic/language-based groups: Filipinos and Russian-speaking nationals from former Soviet Union countries (FSU) – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. According to E-stat (2020), there were 279,660 Filipinos residing in Japan. Among those, males – 83,657; females – 196,003 (70%). The major visa statuses were “permanent resident” (133,188), “long-term resident” (53,941), “technical intern training” (32,707), “spouse of Japanese national” (21,802), “engineer/ specialist in humanities/ international services” (8,250), “spouse or child of permanent resident” (7,315) and so forth. As for Russian-speaking nationals, there were 16,310 nationals of the main migrant sending countries of the FSU – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. These included 6,992 males and 9,318 (57%) females. Major visa statuses of the nationals of these countries were “permanent resident” (5,459), “student” (3,525), “engineer/ specialist in humanities/ international services” (2,128), “dependent” (1,738), and “spouse of Japanese national” (1,450).

When it came to border crossing and migration in Japan, the government advised Japanese nationals to refrain from all nonessential overseas travel (The Japan Times 2020e). Vogt and Qin (2022) point to the exclusionary policies in terms of immigration restrictions, as such repatriating Japanese nationals were expected to voluntarily comply with self-isolation requirements, while foreigners and residents of Japan, were restricted from entering the country until the end of August 2020. The authors emphasize that Japan’s approach at managing COVID-19 showed that foreigners inside Japan were a target of similar welfare policies, however the government simultaneously distanced the nation from outside world by implementing a strict differentiation between Japanese nationals and foreign residents of Japan.

Furthermore, “foreign migrants in Japan have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, particularly in terms of employment, through reduced wages and job losses, mental health and inequitable access to support” (Burgess 2022). Osaki (2020) further highlights several structural factors that made the impact of the pandemic more severe for foreign residents: language barriers hindering access to information and services; financial difficulties caused by inability to receive public health insurance by some groups of migrants (those on provisional release status and pending approval for refugee status);

and cultures and habits, including hugging friends, lack of wearing masks and sharing utensils. Researchers also reported issues of increased domestic violence experienced by foreign women and closures of shelters due to the pandemic (Tanaka 2020).

Differences in the extent of the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on foreign residents, based on the type of employment, nationality and sector employed were studied by Asato (in Carlos and Plantilla 2020). He found that the self-employed migrants were affected the most, followed by those in the services sector, particularly in food and beverage, hotels, and entertainment. He also confirmed that migrant workers experienced a 54% decrease in their monthly income, from an average of JPY137,000 prior to COVID-19 to JPY63,000 during the pandemic, with the Chinese and Indonesian respondents in the survey suffering the worst impact. Furthermore, part-time workers and dispatched workers also experienced a greater decrease in income compared to full-time workers. The personal attributes such as age and gender contributed to the extent of the effect, with older people and women experiencing greater income loss.

The following discussion will respond to the following questions: how is the integration process implemented in Japan? Is it possible to say that integration is a three-way process in Japan? Who are the main parties of integration? How was the process of integration affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? How do foreign residents in Japan cope with the pandemic and what are the vulnerabilities exposed by this crisis that impact multicultural community building (*tabunka kyōsei*)? This paper analyzes experiences of Filipino and Russian-speaking nationals who resided in Japan and their community activities at the time the COVID-19 pandemic started in February 2020; host (Japan) and home (FSU and the Philippines) countries' responses; as well as the approaches that foreign residents used to mitigate the effects of the crisis.

Our findings reveal that, during the pandemic, home (sending) countries were unable to provide support for their nationals abroad. Furthermore, due to the lack of actions from host and home countries, there was a greater likelihood for individual actors to generate informal networks. We also observed disparities in pandemic responses between Filipino and Russian-speaking groups. Filipinos were supported by local NGOs and individual Filipino migrants and Japanese nationals both physically and online, while Russian-speaking groups consolidated via online communication. We predict that the pandemic led to an increased influence of digital networks and possible marginalization, rather than the integration of ethnic/ language-based communities in Japan, and that it is

premature to discuss integration as a three-way process in Japan. Such exploration of the crisis response also enabled examination of present-day social ties among migrants, their construction, and how they are maintained.

Integration as a Three-Way Process

Integration is a complex term, and its definition has changed over the past two decades. We adopt the definition of integration that is “the process of becoming an accepted part of society” (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016: 14), that presumes “interaction, personal and social change among individuals and institutions across inter-related areas of life” (Charsley and Spencer 2019: 1). The question of migrant integration is an issue widely discussed in the European Union and the UK.

Evaluating the concept of integration discussed before the 2000s, Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx (2016: 1) argue that “[I]ntegration was defined in a rather limited way in that early phase: until 2003 EU policies started from the implicit assumption that if the legal position of immigrants was equal . . . to that of national citizens and if adequate instruments were in place to combat discrimination, integration processes could be left to societal forces.” Later, the Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment compiled by the European Commission in 2003, defined integration as a two-way process and “was conceived as a balance of rights and obligations, and policies took a holistic approach targeting all dimensions of integration (including economic, social, and political rights; cultural and religious diversity; and citizenship and participation)” (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016: 1-2). It was expected to engage “not only the new-comer or member of a marginalized group but also other residents – an interaction which is fundamental to the outcome” (Spencer and Charsley 2016: 4).

Academic literature further identifies measures and indexes to evaluate the integration of migrants, as “measuring the degree of becoming an accepted part of society will allow us to capture the diversity of (stages of) the process” (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016: 14). For instance, Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) propose three levels (legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural/ religious) and three indicators (individuals, organizations, and institutions), which affect interactions between migrants and host society. Charsley and Spencer (2019) propose that these processes occur through five dimensions – structural (employment, education, housing), social (integration with other people, relationships, social networks), civic and political (involvement in community life

and democratic processes), cultural (values, attitudes, and behavior) and identity (sense of belonging, local and national identity).

While local actors are catching up with understanding and implementing two-way programs, EU policies have moved forward to further formulate integration as a three-way process. As such, “A major shift in policy framing came in 2011 with the renewed European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country¹⁾ Nationals, which added the countries of origin as a third key actor in the process of immigrants’ integration, thereby introducing the three-way process” (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016: 2). The sending countries’ role is three-fold: preparing migrants for integration before departure, supporting them while in the EU, and preparing them for temporary or permanent return to their home country (European Commission 2011). The shift to a three-way process approach changes the focus from two actors (immigrants and host community) to three actors (immigrants, host community, and countries of origin), raising such questions as why this shift happened and whether a three-way approach is relevant for integration (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016: 3). However, the inclusion of home countries as a third actor implies an orderly and organized process of migration, which does not necessarily reflect and include all types of migrants. In addition, as Zwysen and Demireva (2020) argue, not all integration programs and strategies have similar effects on different types of migrants. Their settlement process differs, and subsequent opportunities will depend on visa status.

Currently, we see a trend to focus on a two-way process in Japan’s integration initiative – the Plan for the Promotion of Multicultural Community Building (*tabunka kyōsei suishin puran*), which started in 2006 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. It is aimed at long-existing ethnic and cultural minorities, foreign residents, and multicultural families with Japanese nationals (Kondo 2017). There are four main frames in the Plan: 1) Communication support – multilingual support and Japanese language studies; 2) Daily life support – welfare, housing, education, healthcare, pensions; 3) Multicultural community building at the local level – awareness of multicultural programs and support of independent living of foreign residents; and 4) Regional revitalization and globalization (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2017). As “frames cannot always be analysed directly, they often have

1) Refers to non-EU nationals legally residing in the European Union.

to be reconstructed from policy documents and political discourse” (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016: 21). The Plan for the Promotion of Multicultural Community Building is gender and migration status insensitive, providing a framework for local governments to implement projects according to their needs. Most of the local initiatives are aimed at learning language, network creation and becoming accustomed to Japanese daily life (Kim and Streich 2020).

We will evaluate whether migrant integration processes in Japan reflect the three-way process as discussed in the EU context, using the COVID-19 pandemic as an example. This will allow us to evaluate the state of integration programs, how these programs positively/ negatively affect migrants, and identify further necessary steps for their smooth settlement.

Methodology

Our study aims to evaluate institutional and individual vulnerabilities of migrants caused by the pandemic and how these eventually affect the multicultural community building process. Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016: 22) argue that to examine the formulation and implementation of policies, it is necessary to focus on governance: “This means taking into account a wider range of actors, including other administrative levels such as regional and local governments; other institutions, agencies, and practitioners within the state apparatus; and other relevant actors, such as politicians, NGOs, and private institutions.” For these purposes we conducted a qualitative analysis of Japanese press published in English. In particular, we reviewed articles published by the Japan Times from December 2019 to December 2020 with the focus on keywords such as coronavirus, pandemic, and COVID-19. To identify the response of sending governments, we reviewed the news releases of home country embassies. Furthermore, to understand how individual migrants and groups coped with the pandemic, we conducted online surveys among individual foreign residents, as well as interviews with local NGOs and foreign groups/ communities’ representatives.

The focus of our research were Russian-speaking nationals and Filipino²⁾ who resided

2) Although this Special Issue is focused on Russian-speaking migrants, we start discussion from introducing Filipino migrants and their situations to provide a backdrop and contexts of a large ethnic group that resides in Japan for longer period, compared to nationals from FSU countries. This allows us to highlight the differences of experiences and strategies of Russian-speaking migrants, while acknowledging historical order of their settlement in Japan, smaller number, and

in Japan by the time of the pandemic. We focus on these two groups for several reasons: Filipinos are one of the oldest newcomer groups in Japan, include many labor and marriage migrants, and their experiences during the pandemic can give us hints on the general trends in migrants' integration and crises experiences. Russian-speaking nationals from former Soviet Union countries (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan) started settling in Japan almost two decades after Filipinos, with the majority also being labor and marriage migrants. Both groups have languages significantly different from the Japanese language, increasing the difficulty in acquiring Japanese reading and writing language skills, and are consequently more vulnerable in institutional and socio-cultural contexts. Both groups are dispersed across different areas of Japan, as their migration was regulated by labor needs and marriage partners' residence. Furthermore, these two groups were a convenient sample as the authors had access and built rapport with them as part of previous research and are native Filipino and Russian speakers. Finally, "studies that compare the integration processes of different immigrant groups in the same institutional and policy context of a nation or a city . . . reveal that different immigrant groups may follow different paths of integration" (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016: 24).

To capture trends in the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Filipino and Russian-speaking residents, two surveys – one in Filipino/ English and one in Russian – were conducted via Google Forms through a snowball sampling method. The surveys were administered in the early months of the pandemic – May-August 2020 – which allowed us to document the immediate responses and processes occurring in different sectors of society; to identify issues and explore factors associated with the pandemic that long-term foreign residents faced in Japan; as well as to define and review the main participants of integration processes in times of crisis. The surveys comprised of questions on the sources of information regarding the COVID-19 crisis; problems/ concerns related to the COVID-19 crisis; effects of COVID-19 crisis on employment conditions; and, support in dealing with problems and concerns related to the COVID-19 crisis.

There were 322 valid responses from the Filipino group, and 86 responses from the Russian-speaking group. As the main goal of our surveys was to measure economic impact on long-term migrants, we excluded those on temporary or student visa statuses as their

dispersion across the country.

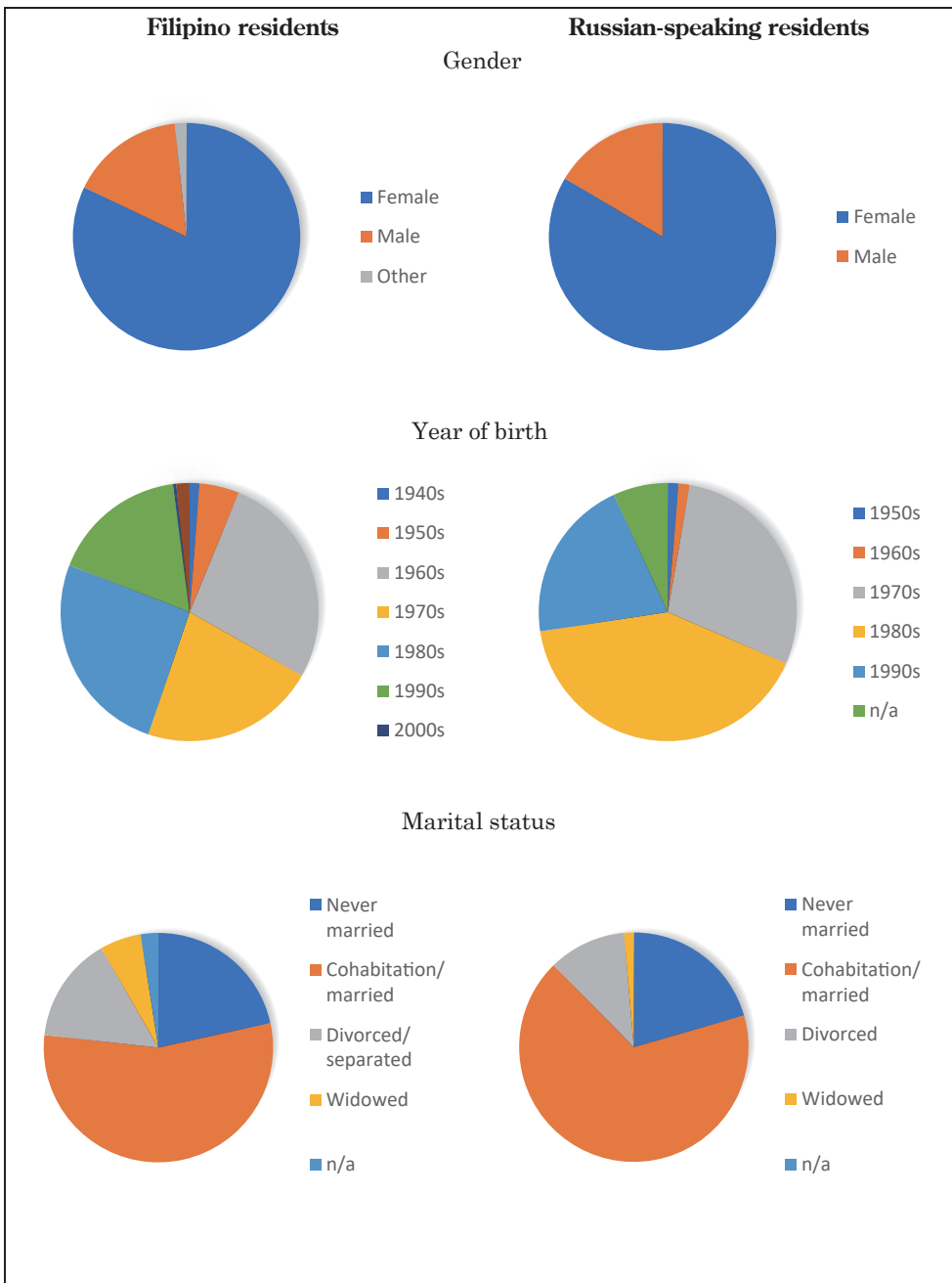


Figure 1. General profile of survey participants

visa statuses do not presume work or long-term settlement in Japan as the main purpose of staying in Japan; do not allow work (temporary visa) or have limitations on working hours (student visa); furthermore, there is institutional and informational support that exists within students' affiliated institutions that presumably allows those on student visas to navigate their daily issues. The 241 and 73 respondents considered in this report have the following general profile (Figure 1).

1. Citizenship: Filipino residents – 232 persons with the Philippine citizenship and 9 persons – naturalized Japanese citizens; as for Russian-speaking participants: Russia – 62, Ukraine – 6, Belarus – 3, Kyrgyzstan – 2.
2. Place of residence: all Filipino responses were collected in Kansai area: Osaka – 35%; Kyoto – 23%; Shiga – 21%; Nara – 11%; Hyogo – 6%; others and no answers – 4%. As the number of Russian-speaking residents in general is much smaller than those of Filipinos, we did not limit our survey to one geographic area. There were 67% Kanto residents, 18% of Kansai (Osaka, Hyogo, Kyoto) residents among others.
3. Status of residence (visa):
 - Filipinos: permanent residents – 51%; long-term residents – 15%; working visa (not including technical intern trainees and designated activities) – 14%; technical intern trainees – 8%; and dependents of Japanese or foreign permanent residents – 9%;
 - Russian-speaking residents: permanent residents – 45%; long-term residents – 14%; dependents of Japanese or foreign permanent residents – 22%; working visa (not including technical intern trainees and designated activities) – 16%.
4. Employment:
 - Filipinos: hospitality – 14%; care workers – 13%; English teachers – 10%; education/ research development/ information technology – 9%; manufacturing – 8%; other sectors (full-time) – 18%; other sectors (part-time) – 21%; not employed/ no answer – 7%;
 - Russian-speaking residents: education and business – 18% each; hospitality, entertainment, and information technology – 7% each; homemaking – 11%; unemployed – 4%. As for full-time employment – 53%; part-time employment – 26%; freelance – 4%; not employed/ other – 7%.

In the following sections we discuss several issues raised in our surveys (Table 1)

Table 1. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on foreign residents

	Filipino participants (Fil.) n=241	Russian-speaking participants (RSP) n=73
What are your current problems regarding the COVID-19 crisis? (multiple answers)		
My employment conditions changed	59% (141)	44% (32)
It is difficult to get accurate information about COVID-19	16% (38)	25% (18)
I cannot sustain my family's daily needs (food, utilities and other basic necessities)	24% (58)	8% (6)
I cannot concentrate on my studies and/ or work	26% (62)	16% (12)
I feel anxious about my health, my family and the future	74% (179)	45% (33)
I feel (more) stressed out	34% (81)	23% (17)
I miss my family and friends	34% (83)	36% (26)
I cannot return to my home country even if I want/ need to	33% (80)	64% (47)
I have no problems related to COVID-19	4% (9)	14% (10)
How did COVID-19 affect your current employment situation in Japan? (multiple answers)		
I was dismissed from work because of COVID-19	16% (38)	8% (6)
My income decreased because of COVID-19	43% (104)	47% (34)
My contract was not renewed	4% (9)	3% (2)
My working hours (for full time, part time and <i>arubaito</i>) were reduced	22% (54)	19% (14)
I am busier at work because of COVID-19, I work longer hours	14% (33)	8% (6)
My income increased because of COVID-19	2% (6)	4% (3)
I have to do telework/ work from home	18% (43)	34% (25)
Worried about uncertainties of work conditions	27% (66)	14% (10)
Worried that I will get sick with COVID-19 because of my work	38% (91)	15% (11)
No impact on my employment conditions	5% (13)	12% (9)
Who assists/ helps you to address your concerns related to the COVID-19 crisis? (multiple answers)		
Family members and relatives in Japan	32% (78)	55% (40)
Family and relatives in the home country	12% (29)	49% (36)
Family and relatives in other countries except Japan and the home country	2% (6)	11% (8)
Filipinos/ Russian-speaking nationals in Japan (friends and ethnic/ language-based organizations)	16% (39)	29% (21)
Work-related organizations (ex: English teachers' association and labor unions) in Japan	5% (13)	4% (3)
Employer or company where I work	20% (49)	14% (10)
Local NGOs and religious organizations	6% (14)	0% (0)
Home country government agencies (example: Consulate)	5% (11)	1% (1)
Japanese government agencies (example: welfare office, <i>kokusai kōryū kyōkai</i>)	14% (34)	8% (6)
No assistance	33% (79)	14% (10)

relating to Japan's pandemic regulation, pandemic impact, methods of mitigation among foreign residents, and the assistance of sending countries for long-term residents in Japan.

Host Country – Japan's Pandemic Regulation

To evaluate Japanese government's attitudes toward foreign residents and the process of integration, in this section we discuss border control issues and aid for foreign residents.

Border controls and visas. There were several large concerns among Filipinos and Russian-speaking survey participants (Table 1). These were 1) anxiety about their health, family, and the future; 2) missing family and friends and 3) inability to return to their home countries. Three Russian-speaking respondents added the question: "When will the borders (with Russia) open?" One interview participant mentioned that without visiting home country at least once a year, the life in Japan seems too hard and stressful to handle.

Vogt and Qin (2022) argue that in response to the pandemic, Japan, once again, implemented the *sakoku* – "closed country" – approach (Vogt and Qin 2022).³⁾ During the pandemic, Japan's migration authorities, as well as border-regulating institutions in other countries, revealed contradictions in terms of migration governance and belonging. As such, "Japan is not the only country that has imposed border measures aimed at curtailing the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in the country. In earlier stages of the pandemic, some nations even went as far as to temporarily ban their own citizens from crossing their borders" (Osumi 2020: n.p.). This led to further tightening of border controls and visa regulations:

States have adopted a mixed 'citizens first' approach in terms of public health protection and restriction of mobility enforcing territorial border closures. At the

3) *Sakoku* is an isolationist policy adopted during Tokugawa period (1603-1868). This policy imposed limitations and controls over contacts and relationships of the country and its nationals with the outside world. These included banning Christianity, exiling foreign nationals or limiting some of them to living in designated areas, limiting foreign trade, and prohibiting overseas Japanese who stayed abroad from returning to Japan. The country was reopened only in mid-1800s (Goodman et al. 2003).

same time, as the pandemic has unfolded since early 2020, states are providing protection to both temporary residents and people with ‘pending’ status (waiting for regularisation or visa renewal) to avoid their finding themselves in a situation of irregularity under the pandemic emergency. The pandemic border closures have indeed raised numerous complex legal, political, and ultimately symbolic questions about what community, solidarity, belonging, and civic responsibility mean (Triandafyllidou 2021: 4).

Foreign residents’ concerns regarding crossing borders were largely due to Japan’s immigration regulations. From the first confirmed case on January 16, 2020 (The Japan Times 2020a) and unfolding of the coronavirus threat, Japan tightened border controls for those arriving from China and South Korea from March 4 (The Japan Times 2020d). The borders were gradually closed for all foreign nationals with suspension of the issuance of new visas from the end of March 2020 (The Japan Times 2020d; 2020f; 2020h; 2020i). Moreover, Japan is the only Group of Seven member denying entry to long-term and permanent residents and has set no clear criteria for their return. . . . [U]nder Japan’s regulations imposed April 3, all foreign nationals, including those with permanent residence status and their non-Japanese spouses, and those who are married to Japanese nationals, will be subject to the measure if they try to return to Japan from any regions affected by the pandemic (The Japan Times 2020j).

By the beginning of June, The Japan Times (2020k) noted that Japan had softened its stance on humanitarian grounds and said that it would allow foreign residents to re-enter the country regardless of their visa status. These humanitarian grounds include “people who have been separated from their family due to the restriction,” “foreign residents who departed with children enrolled in Japanese educational institutions, who are now unable to attend classes,” “people who are undergoing treatment, slated to undergo surgery or give birth at a Japanese medical institution; people who left Japan to undergo surgery or give birth abroad; and those who left the country to attend a relative’s funeral or visit a family member in critical condition,” and “those who left to appear in front of a court overseas as a witness” (The Japan Times 2020l). The visa applications processing for foreign nationals started only in July 2020 (The Japan Times 2020k). However, even in these cases, “foreign nationals need to meet strict criteria for exemption from the nation’s entry restrictions – either for humanitarian reasons or if they qualify for an

exemption given to business travelers from selected countries” (The Japan Times 2020m). Overall, as Arudou (2020: n.p.) points out “2020 was the year it became clear that foreign residents don’t ‘belong’ in Japan, regardless of whatever lives they have made and how much they have contributed to Japanese society. When push came to shove – and it did thanks to COVID-19 – even a permanent resident of Japan has no more status than a tourist.” It is important to mention that “from the perspective of the receiving society, exclusionary policies are an expression of a general perception of immigrants as outsiders, which inevitably adversely affects immigrants’ integration” (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016: 16). Overall, as Kopp (2020: n.p.) argues, such “disparate treatment of non-Japanese residents will become one factor of many that individuals and companies weigh when considering whether to come to or stay in Japan, joining a list of grievances that includes housing discrimination, low salaries, high taxes, long work hours and communication challenges.”

Pandemic regulations inside the country. As for those residents who resided inside Japan at the start of the pandemic and border restrictions, there were a variety of issues many faced in 2020. The Immigration Services Agency, an affiliate of the Justice Ministry, granted “a one-month grace period for foreign nationals whose visas expire in March or April to apply for renewal of their visa or a visa status change. Short-term visitors are not eligible for the new policy” (The Japan Times 2020f). According to Osaki (2021: n.p.), many foreign visitors were stuck in Japan in limbo, as “they had no valid visa that would allow them to work and eke out a living. It wasn’t until the end of November that immigration authorities in Japan announced the rollout of special measures designed to permit struggling visitors . . . to work for up to 28 hours per week, in what was slammed by some critics as a belated move.” Furthermore, the Immigration Service Agency announced a special arrangement for technical intern trainees and other work permit holders allowing the “change [of] their legal status to ‘designated activities’ in order to find other jobs if their original workplaces are affected by COVID-19” (Tanaka 2020: 6).

Some local governments along with the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare started providing multilingual information and call center support to inform temporary and long-term residents about the pandemic. For instance, Aichi Prefectural Government provided free multilingual translation services for tourists and tourism-related companies (The Japan Times 2020b) in early 2020. Tokyo has established Tokyo Coronavirus

Support Center for Foreign Residents (TOCOS) providing a three-party call (foreigner, health center and interpreter) in 14 different languages. The Ministry of Education was also considering providing multilingual information on the COVID-19 by email to unauthorized schools for foreign nationals (The Japan Times 2020n). However, there was a “dearth of multilingual translation services at public health centers” (Osaki 2020: n.p.) by November 2020.

As for financial aid, all long-term residents along with Japanese nationals were eligible for a special fixed payment (*tokubetsu teigaku kyūfukin*) of JPY100,000 per person. Later, with the vaccine roll-out from June-July 2021, all foreign residents, including undocumented ones, were eligible for free vaccination. Households that contracted coronavirus were eligible to receive food packages, as they were requested to quarantine inside their residences. The government also provided emergency funding for small-sized businesses and low-income families. Most households, including foreign residents, received two masks provided by Shinzo Abe’s government to each household – “*Abe no masuku*”. The masks were distributed by post and aimed to fulfill mask shortages caused by the pandemic. In addition, no lockdowns or mandatory restrictions were imposed in Japan. The people were urged to self-restrain (*jishuku*), while the government announced several “states of emergency” in different areas and prefectures to contain the spread of the virus. However, as Burgess (2021: 14) argues, “while equality and some degree of flexibility has indeed been a welcome feature of Japan’s COVID-19 measures, a key problem has been that access to that support – in particular the language barrier – has created structural inequity (unfair distribution of resources due to a failure to recognise cultural differences in ability to access those resources).” Considering the lack of understanding of the needs of foreign residents, it became a responsibility of local governments, NGOs and ethnic/ language-based communities to provide necessary assistance to foreigners in Japan.

Sending Countries: Consulates and Embassies

The second party in the three-way process is the sending country. “One typically thinks of migration policy as *immigration* policy, but every immigrant is also an emigrant with ties to a place of origin . . . Migrants’ states of origin are taking an increasingly strong and proactive interest in these transnational connections” (Gamlen 2019: 3). As Gamlen (2019) argues, local ethnic or diaspora institutions in host countries play a few roles in

connecting migrants with their home countries. These roles include: “negotiating bilateral agreements over the supply of migrant labour to other countries”; “preparing migrants to undertake their journeys legally, avoid being scammed by smugglers and traffickers, and return promptly when their visas expire”; “protecting the rights and interests of migrants living in other countries by providing benefits and subsidies”; preserving the identities and ties of emigrants and their descendants to the homeland, through cultural and educational programmes and exchanges” and so forth (Gamlen 2019: 3-4).

To evaluate the support provided by sending countries and how transnational ties with home institutions were supported during the COVID-19 crisis, we asked survey participants whether they applied for financial support provided by either their home countries or by Japan. Among Russian-speaking participants, only 36% (26) received additional financial aid from Japan’s government (this did not include JPY100,000 aid paid to all residents by the Japanese government), while others did not. As for Filipino residents, none reported receiving financial aid from the Philippine or Japanese governments at the time of the survey. Later on, however, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)-registered Filipino workers or active members of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) availed of the PhP10,000 (about USD200) special cash assistance to affected Filipino workers overseas as stipulated in the OWWA Special Order No. 053, Series No. 2020, Special Financial Assistance to the Stranded Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) due to the 2019 Novel Corona Virus Acute Respiratory Disease (2019 NCOV ARD) (Department of Labor and Employment website 2020).

Furthermore, on the question about sources of support and information, 11 Filipinos and only 1 person from the Russian-speaking group mentioned receiving information from their home country government agencies (embassies, consulates and so forth). Also, 16% (39) of Filipinos received support from Filipinos in Japan (friends and Filipino organizations), while there were 29% (21) participants in the Russian-speaking group receiving information from Russian-speaking sources (friends and organizations) in Japan.

To further estimate the level of support from home states, we reviewed website news of embassies and consulate services of the countries our survey participants originate from, in the period from March 2020 till December 2020. As a measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus, many countries responded with travel restrictions, border closures

and lockdowns. This left many tourists, who found themselves outside of their home countries, stranded overseas. As a result, many news updates on websites of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan were focused on border controls, closures, and restrictions for those entering these countries and planning trips to Japan. Russian and Kyrgyzstan embassies provided information on return flights for their nationals stranded overseas. The Embassy of Kazakhstan collected information on Kazakhstan's citizens residing in the country to provide emergency information. The embassy also provided a hotline phone number for its citizens in Japan. The Embassy of Ukraine released an announcement on the program named *Zaschita* (meaning – “protection”) from its Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressing Ukrainian nationals abroad. The program aimed at delivering consular and visa support in cooperation with foreign legal authorities to protect Ukrainians and provide information about return possibilities. Also, this program provided pandemic information on the destination countries, established networks with local Ukrainians for those stranded overseas, and dealt with other issues caused by COVID-19. The Ukrainian Embassy also organized an outreach program for its nationals in November 2020 in Nagoya city at Aichi prefecture for consular services, such as notarized documentation, issuance of different types of certificates: marriage status, changing citizenship, receiving Ukrainian citizenship and so forth. All the embassies provided information on the COVID-19 situation in their home countries and information on governmental decisions related to the pandemic.

On the other hand, the Philippine Embassy provided extensive information on COVID-19 by separating it in a specific section on their website. There was an advisory on the state of emergency announced in Japan, providing specific details on its meaning and steps:

While there is a State of Emergency,

Stay at home and go out only if necessary

Maintain social distancing

Wear face masks when leaving the house

Avoid going to places that are closed spaces, crowded places and close-contact settings such as bars, night clubs, karaoke live-music houses, theaters, cinemas

Avoid attending crowded events

We are asking you to avoid going out of our Prefectures to prevent the spread of

COVID-19.

If you live in another Prefecture that is not covered by the State of Emergency, avoid traveling to Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama, Osaka, Hyogo, and Fukuoka unless necessary.

Above all, let's stay calm

Public transportation such as trains and buses will continue to operate

There will be no checkpoints and no road closures

Supermarkets, konbini, restaurants, banks, post offices and other essential services are still open

The operation of public services such as electricity, water, gas, telecoms, banking, and garbage collection is still normal

If you have emergency concerns, you can contact the Embassy (The Embassy of the Republic of Philippines 2020).

As well as extensive information on border controls between Japan and the Philippines, there were also multilingual information hotlines provided by the government of Japan; distribution of an extensive chart on what should be done if people residing in Tokyo suspected having COVID-19 symptoms or those who were worried about getting infected, created by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. The Philippine Consulate in Osaka arranged multiple outreach missions across its area of jurisdiction (Okayama, Hiroshima, Kurume, Oita, Fukuoka and Mie) for documentation-related services.

Overall, the response to pandemic was varied with most embassies and local consulates' duties aimed at returning nationals to their home countries or providing information about the COVID-19 situation in their countries. This indicates that home governments and representative organizations do not yet play a significant role in migrants' integration, thus it may be too early to include them as a part of integration process in Japan's case.

Individuals and Ethnic/ Language-Based Communities

As with individual migrants in the surveyed groups, the COVID-19 impact was non-uniform among Filipino and Russian-speaking residents. Table 1 summarizes the main issues survey participants reported in relation to the pandemic and changes in their daily lives. As is clear from information provided, there was a particularly large number

of Filipino participants who felt anxious about health, family, and future (74%); whose employment conditions changed (59%); and those missing their families and friends (34%). On the other hand, Russian-speaking participants reported more anxiety about not being able to return to their home countries (64%); anxiety about health, family, and future (45%); and changing employment conditions (44%). For a considerable number of respondents, COVID-19 also led to income decrease (Fil. – 43%; RSP – 47%) and having to do telework (Fil. – 18%; RSP – 34%), while other responses varied greatly depending on the group. As for the support, Japanese families and families in the home countries were the largest source of support for both groups, while respondents also mentioned support provided by local employers, NGOs, and Japanese government organizations.

The most affected Filipinos and Russian-speaking nationals were those who worked in the entertainment industry (as hostesses in bars) and tourism. Many of them belong to the migrants' group whose residence status (long-term, permanent resident, spouse of a Japanese national), gender (women), sector employed (entertainment) and type of employment (contractual and daily-wage workers) intersect. Noticeably, they worked in the hospitality sector in which self-restraint (*jishuku*) and social distancing were expected to be strictly observed. As many of them have the status of permanent or long-term residence, or spouse of a Japanese national, they were not subjected to regulations and monitoring as foreign workers. They worked on a temporary basis without an employment contract and employment insurance. These conditions made it easy for their employer to lay them off without any severance pay or other forms of assistance. Prior to the pandemic, many entertainers received their salary in cash and daily, so that it was relatively easy not to declare income and pay taxes. During the pandemic, they were forced to declare their income and pay taxes to avail of the Japanese government's employment subsidies.

Another vulnerable group were divorced women with children or single mothers, who were employed in the entertainment sector or part-time jobs that had decreases in working hours and income. These women found it difficult to sustain their household, not only because they lost their source of income but also because they had to deal with their children who needed to stay at home and attend their classes online.

Filipino residents. Filipino residents in Japan dealt with the loneliness and anxiety caused by the crisis in a variety of ways. One method was to revive and strengthen social ties, especially with families and friends in the Philippines, and other parts of the world.

They shared not only food and supplies but also information about the pandemic via SNS, especially Facebook and Messenger. Many of them started to listen to online church services and prayer sessions aired live from the Philippines. Enterprising Filipinos began to sell food online, with Facebook friends and friends of friends as the main customers. Interestingly, the pandemic also paved the way for many of them to take interest in local programs for foreigners disseminated through local NGOs and official government websites. There was also a considerable number of Filipinos who took up care work, the labor demand of which did not subside during the pandemic.

The role of Filipino community organizations, such as Filipino Migrant Center (FMC) in Nagoya and Japanese NGOs such as the *Minami Kodomo Kyōshitsu* in Osaka, were also crucial in the survival of Filipinos in Japan. These organizations became the “linking tie” that connected the government with Filipinos especially in terms of disseminating information, reaching out and providing advice and goods to Filipinos in the local community. They also assisted Filipinos in filling out application forms for government monetary support, subsidies, and loans. They also provided free language interpretation services to Filipinos who needed government assistance with their health, finances, and work. These organizations also became a bridge between Japanese and Filipino companies and persons who wanted to give donations to Filipinos in need.

While these community organizations were largely successful in their mission to assist Filipinos during the pandemic, many community leaders emphasized that they could have done more if they were able to gather more resources, such as local and Filipino expertise, money, time, and information at the time it was needed. How to gain more support and cooperation from both Japanese government agencies, and Philippine government agencies in Japan, such as the Embassy and consulates, was also a concern that, if solved, could lead to more pro-active and synchronized responses to problems. Reaching out to Filipinos who needed help but were reluctant to come forward to seek it was also a challenge.

Russian-speaking residents. As for the Russian-speaking group, most support was provided by foreign residents themselves via online Russian-language based communities for those who live in Japan. As such, almost from the start of the pandemic, some individuals organized crowdfunding activities with a variety of purposes. The largest one was to support Russian travelers stranded in Tokyo airports till their return flights were arranged. Thus, local Russian-speaking volunteers collected money for food or food

donations, arranged their stay in the Chiba prefecture Christian monastery and helped with medical and transportation assistance. Other activities included raising awareness for Russian-speaking mothers and their Japanese nationals' children who were stranded overseas, unable to return to Japan due to border closures for foreign residents of any type. There were several medical crowdfunding activities supporting one temporary visitor, stranded in Japan's hospital and unable to pay medical fees due to an absence of health insurance and the emergency surgery required. Other crowdfunding activities included local Russian-speaking residents and financial aid for their treatment (mainly cancer-related diseases) and help for funeral arrangement of children of single mothers. While some of these activities were not directly related to COVID-19, they became more frequent and noticeable during the pandemic, compared to the earlier period of the existence of online communities.

From the start of the pandemic, we observed increased communication among members of Russian-speaking groups. With the leadership of some of the groups' founders there were organized informational sessions about Japanese society and its culture; weekly online meetings for group participants to communicate among each other and to get to know each other; and constant update on information on COVID-19 and other happenings in Japan. Once overseas travels were allowed for foreign residents, individual participants provided information on their experience of travel, quarantines, PCR tests, and advice and points to pay attention to during the trip for other groups' members.

This period also saw a proliferation of food-related businesses, with many Russian food bars and restaurants selling their food online. There was also an increased number of individuals selling their food produce online, including pastries and cakes, home-made bread, home-made dumplings and dough, marinated and pickled vegetables, salads, jams, meat products and so forth. Some farmers began selling vegetables and fruits that are hard to find in Japan (e.g., beet roots, dill, apricots). Several individuals promoted their import business of food from Russia and former Soviet countries, including traditionally popular dairy and meat products, pickled vegetables and salads, herb teas, cheese, dried/smoked fish, and caviar. Apart from food, Facebook groups' members and overseas Russian-speaking nationals advertised language classes, including Japanese, English and Russian; psychological counselling and life/ skill coaching; as well as topic-based classes (math, chess, guitar). Some participants, mostly women, even started arranging dating and marriage activities for single (Japanese) men, who were interested in dating

Russian-speaking women (this usually implies women from Slavic background). We assume that this was a result of increased communication in online communities during the pandemic and hence, larger participation from members on the daily basis. It also may have resulted from constraints on entertainment (bars, restaurants, cinema, clubs and so forth), which reduced chances for organizing people to meet face-to-face.

There are two significant differences that we observed among Filipino and Russian-speaking residents: most of the pre-pandemic activities aimed at Filipino residents were organized via Christian churches (not only Catholic) or NGOs, which led to the decrease of contacts among residents due to the pandemic crisis, social distancing, and suspension of many services. Thus, restrictions on large gatherings drove many Filipinos to gather in small groups of close friends outside the church, which simultaneously weakened church-based organizations. On the other hand, due to their small number and dispersal across Japan, Russian-speaking nationals tended to meet in small groups formed on the intersection of factors such as area of living, marital status, interests and hobbies, lifestyles, country of origin and religious affiliations. However, with the start of the pandemic and the necessity to receive information and updates, many turned to Russian-language-based Facebook communities, which led to increased communication, information sharing, and services during the pandemic. Also, in case of both groups we see the activity of individual leaders and activists as key in consolidating groups. In case of Filipinos, it was individuals and NGOs that organized charity and documentation events, while in case of Russian-speaking group it was individuals who were promoting information sharing, crowdfunding activities, and other services.

For both groups, we see “self-help organization” and mobilization of services, which Yoshitomi (2010: 89-90) defines as “an organization with clear objectives of engaging in various activities through self and mutual help towards living as a member of the local community.” We observed that these groups were comparatively effective in consolidating members, providing information, and delivering aid, especially those organized online. We argue that such self-help organization, as it was more prominent in case of Russian-speaking group, may possibly lead to creation of ethnic/ diasporic,⁴⁾ or language-based

4) By diasporic we refer to the group self-identification (such as, Russian-speaking group in our case). As Gamlen (2019) points out, the features of diasporic group are dispersion to two or more locations, members’ orientation toward their “homeland,” and ongoing maintenance of their identity. The degree of “diasporic” senses differs depending on circumstances, galvanized by wars, natural disasters, political campaigns and so forth.

communities and these should be highlighted as an additional party to the three-way process of integration, or a third party by possibly substituting the home (sending) country. However, it is still necessary to observe whether such consolidation of activities will continue in the post-pandemic realities.

Concluding Discussion

The main objective of this article was to evaluate processes of integration of foreign residents in Japan, how these were affected by the pandemic, and to establish actors that play significant roles in the processes – sending and receiving countries, individuals and ethnic or language-based communities. We see that absence of migration and integration policies, as well as lack of representation of foreign residents in the political discourse, led to significant disadvantages faced by long-term foreign residents of Japan in terms of restrictions related to movement across borders. While foreign residents in Japan at the time of the pandemic were target of same welfare subsidies as Japanese nationals, the information and application forms were mostly distributed in Japanese. We also observed disparate and uncoordinated governance of migrant integration among host society institutions in Japan. Furthermore, through the examples of pandemic crisis mitigation we see the need to reconstruct relationships among involved institutions and organizations to streamline activities necessary for two-way and three-way integration processes.

As for sending countries and their involvement in the integration process, we did not observe significant influence or visibility of diasporic institutions during the pandemic crisis. Most information provided by home governments was related to COVID-19 border restrictions and quarantine measures. This leads us to conclude that home countries are far from becoming an influential party in the integration process.

Finally, we saw differentiated impacts and responses in Filipino and Russian-speaking groups. In the pre-pandemic era Filipinos largely depended on in-person communication through religious and NGO activities, which were diminished and even weakened (in case of church-based groups) during the pandemic. For this reason, local Filipino communities, Japanese NGOs, and concerned individuals were required to fill the void of support from the beginning of the pandemic. Furthermore, we can predict that the activities of Filipino-related groups and NGOs as well as Russian-speaking online groups in times of COVID-19 will become a source of creation of ethnic/ language-based communities

for those living in Japan and a source of diaspora cohesion for home institutions,⁵⁾ as individuals in these communities understand better each other's needs, responding with timely information and help, more rapidly than state actors and other organizations, and connect people from different areas across Japan. Also, as it happened with Russian-speaking group, we argue that digital media are a new source of self-identification and a platform for migrants and ethnic institutions, as they nurture migrants' sense of belonging and provide with a variety of support in crisis situations.

Overall, it can be concluded that integration in Japan generally leans toward a one-way process, where migrants and their communities are expected to adapt to life in the receiving country, rather than the process of integration being organized in a two- or three-way manner, which involves active exchange with the receiving society and support from the home country. We see a lack of understanding and support of migrants' needs and realities by the host government, as well as a lack of support from home governments. Despite this, it is still important to include multiple parties and actors in the analyses of integration, which will help to move the focus of settlement and its regulation from actors and their positions to an examination of how social ties are built and maintained.

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5) Even though both – ethnic/ language community and diaspora – are oriented toward a “homeland,” we differentiate between ethnic/ language-based communities and diasporic groups, as the former are based on ethnic and language commonalities and represent unorganized networks that bring members together in the migration destination, while the latter is “homeland”-oriented and can be used by sending countries' diasporic institutions as a source of political mobilization.

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