

Nepali Entrepreneurship in Japan: Transnational Lives of Nepali Immigrants

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PhD Dissertation

By focusing on **transnational network**, the dissertation examined the **causes**, processes, and **social consequences** of the Nepali migration from Nepal to Japan to work in **Nepali restaurant** as a **cook**.
“skilled labor”

4000 Nepali restaurant (Indo-curry) in Japan, **700** in Tokyo
Spreading to smaller town

A Nepali restaurant in Hokkaido





- One of the **poorest country** in the world
- Nepali per income GDP is **\$700** (Japanese **\$38,000**)
- 2011 census -Total population **26** million (**4** million working abroad)
- **30%** of the country total **GDP** contributed by **foreign remittance**
- More than **500,000 young Nepalis** depart annually to abroad
- **40 %** of Nepali population are **below 15 years** old (in Japan only **15%**)

Nepali Migration to Japan

- Nepali migration to Japan is **recent phenomenon** but increasing rapidly
 - About **5,314** in 2005 increased to **over 90,000** in 2019
 - Become **the largest South Asian community in Japan**. More than **two times** Indian Immigrants (**35,419**) and **five times** Pakistanis (**16,198**)
- **Until the early 2000s** the majority of Nepalis entered to Japan with the status of “**short-term visitor**”, overstayed their visas and **worked “3D” jobs**. (Minami 2008; Yamanaka, 2000 and 2008)
- **Since the mid 2000s** the Nepali migration to Japan increased rapidly with a work visa “**skilled labor (cook)**” to work at Nepali restaurant.
 - **Skilled visa-12,547** , the second largest, (Chinese- 15922)
 - Now about **40,000 Nepalis** are associated with Nepali restaurants.

Beginning of My Research

- From 2008, I began **ethnographic film project**, collected audio-visual data about the **daily life of Nepalis in Japan and their families' life in Nepal** and the data has resulted into an ethnographic film **“Playing with Nan”** in 2012.
- Further conducted **multi-sited fieldwork** (Marcus, 1995) in **both ends** of the **migration chain** for PhD research.

Malma Village
“Little Japan”



More than 2,000 migrated to Japan

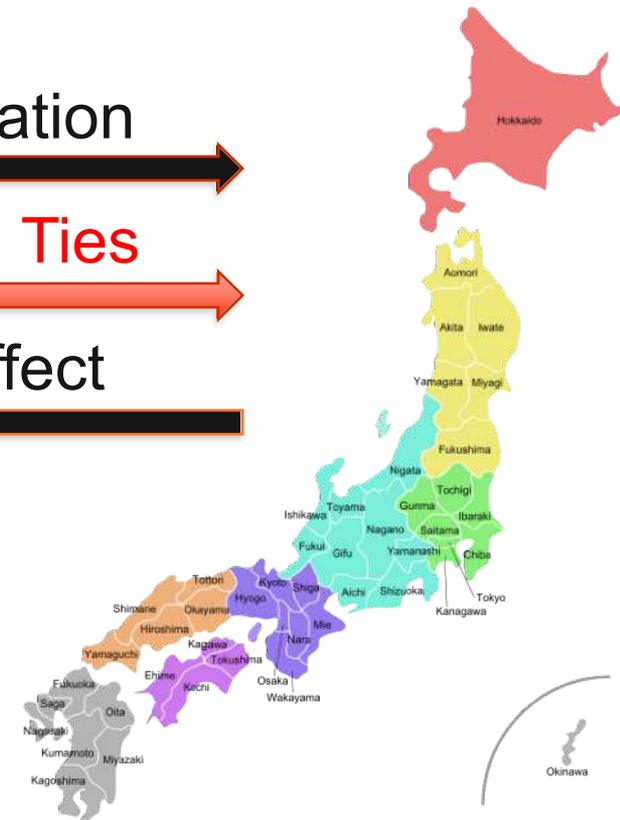
Network Migration



Transnational Ties



Emigration Effect



“Why and how have so many people from Malma been able to migrate in Japan?”

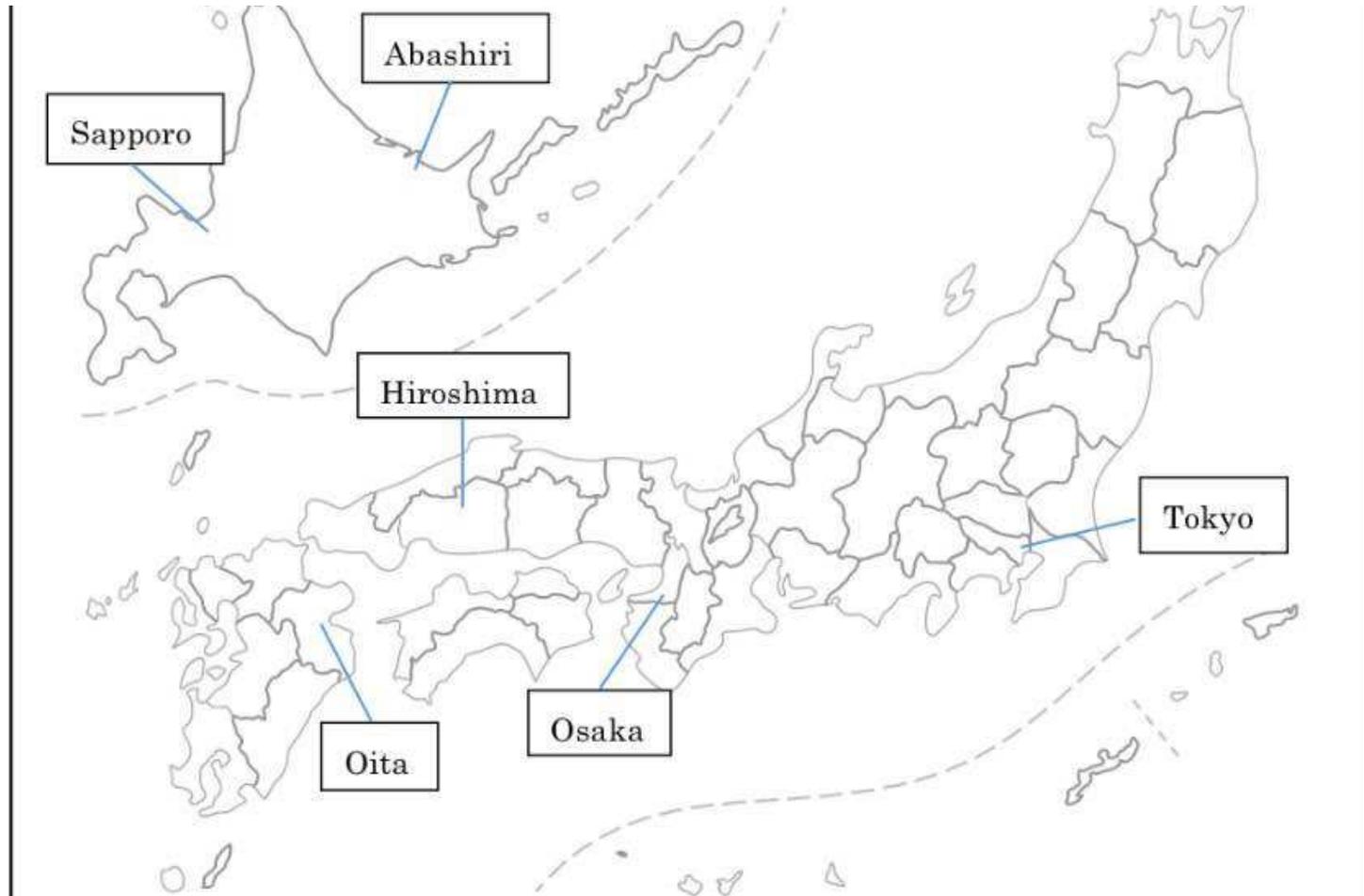
Each of them paid \$15,000 to restaurant owner to get visa to enter Japan.

A owner brought in 40 Nepalis in the last few years and earned millions.



**Expansion of Nepali Restaurant Trade in Japan:
*An Emerging Nepali Transnational Community***

The Research Field In Japan



The primary field site: Tokyo and Abashiri

The secondary field site: Osaka, Oita, Hiroshima

Participant Observation, **in-depth video interviews with 145 migrants,**

A Typical Nepali Restaurant Setting



Participant Observation: Hokkaido-2, Tokyo-3

Visited to 96 restaurants **for short term fieldwork** and video interviews

- I became a **volunteer staff** and **participated** with the Nepali workers
- Focus on the **network/relationship** between the **workers** and the **owner**
- **Intimate details** of the restaurant's business



Living with Nepali Restaurant Workers



I participated the situation as an “**active listener**”.

Learned actual life phenomena, social relationship and transnational ties.

Transnational **families’ conversation**: what they talked about

Being with Nepali Migrants in their Off Duty



- Shopping, visiting Hospital, friends and restaurant in Shin-Okubo
- Employed **participant observation** and “**deep hanging-out**” approach
- Gained a deeper knowledge of **the migrants’ life** in the Japanese society

- **Shin-Okubo** was one of my **main locations** for conducting fieldwork in Tokyo.
- I kept my **focus on a Nepali groceries shop** where on average 500 Nepalis a day would visit the shop.
- The fieldwork in Shin-Okubo was very fruitful to capture the **Nepali family migration-related socio-economic dynamic**.



Participating with Nepali Community Associations



Researching and Recording Nepali Festival Activities in Tokyo, 2016

Social network, transnational ties, transnational practices
Social, cultural and **economic dimension of Nepali immigrants**

The Research Field In Nepal

- The primary field site:
Malma
- The secondary field site:
Kathmandu, Baglung,
Galkot area and Dolakha

Map of Nepal

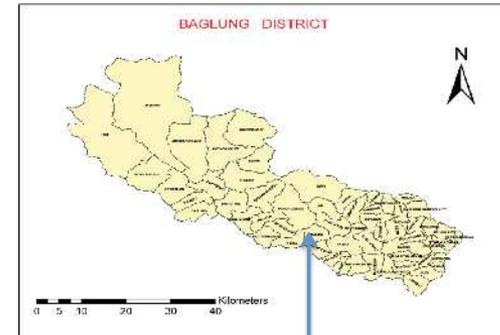
Source: <http://hondajazz.anondns.net/nepal-map/>



Baglung District in Nepal

Map of Baglung District

Source: <http://www.nepaljapan.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/baglung-district-map.jpg>



Malma Village in Baglung District

Map of the research area¹ in Nepal

¹ Malma village is the primary field-site of the research. Kathmandu, Baglung and Dolakha are the secondary field sites.

The Fieldwork in Malma



*Video Interviewing with a Woman in Malma, Nepal
Her two sons works in Japan*

Connecting Transnational Families by Using a Video Camera



These **video screenings** were very **useful** to **evoke comments, memories,** and discussion which was **very useful** for understanding the **migrants'** **previous background,** their **social networks,** and the **migration process.**

From Ethnographic Film to Text

- **Camera as research tool** - Collected 600 hours ethnographic audio-visual footages (**Japan and Nepal**)
- From **ethnographic footages** into **ethnographic notes** (ethnographic footage → editing → film) - Ethnographic film



(ethnographic note → textualisation → text)– Ethnography

(Peter Crawford, 1992)

Economics of the Nepali Restaurant Trade

- The expansion of Nepali restaurant business throughout Japan
4000 Nepali restaurants (Indo- curry restaurants)
(Also helping to revitalize, revive and sustain the rural Japan)



Economics of the Nepali Restaurant Trade

- It takes an average of US\$50,000 to US\$80,000 and an average monthly revenue of US\$25,000 to \$40,000
- The work visas can sell US\$15,000 so that Nepali restaurant owners had raised the money to open their restaurants
- A senior cook gets monthly 120000 Japanese yen for his work: 16 hours a day and six days a week (approximately 400 hours).

The Restaurant Niche

- The restaurant trades are central islands of Nepali culture in the larger Japanese society
- Only 10 % know Japanese language

The restaurant trade - the immigrants to live, work and prosper without changing their way of life to suit Japan social expectation

- Distinct sections where the immigrants can interact with outside world on their own terms.
- The restaurant niche does not require a high degree of knowledge and understanding about the host culture
- It is **simple** for an immigrant **to start a restaurant** once he has found enough investment and a suitable location.

Family Migration

- Since 2011 family migration has been increasing
- The immigrants are permitted to claim their wives and all of their children under age 16 as dependents.
- Nepali International School in Tokyo

•Nepali Cooks' Wives

Those wives are well known as “*man* wives” because they are earning lots of Japanese *man* (the Japanese 10,000 yen note). Monthly about 25 *man* yen (250,000 JPY)- 20 times more than Nepal.

Cooks' wife:

When they were in Nepal



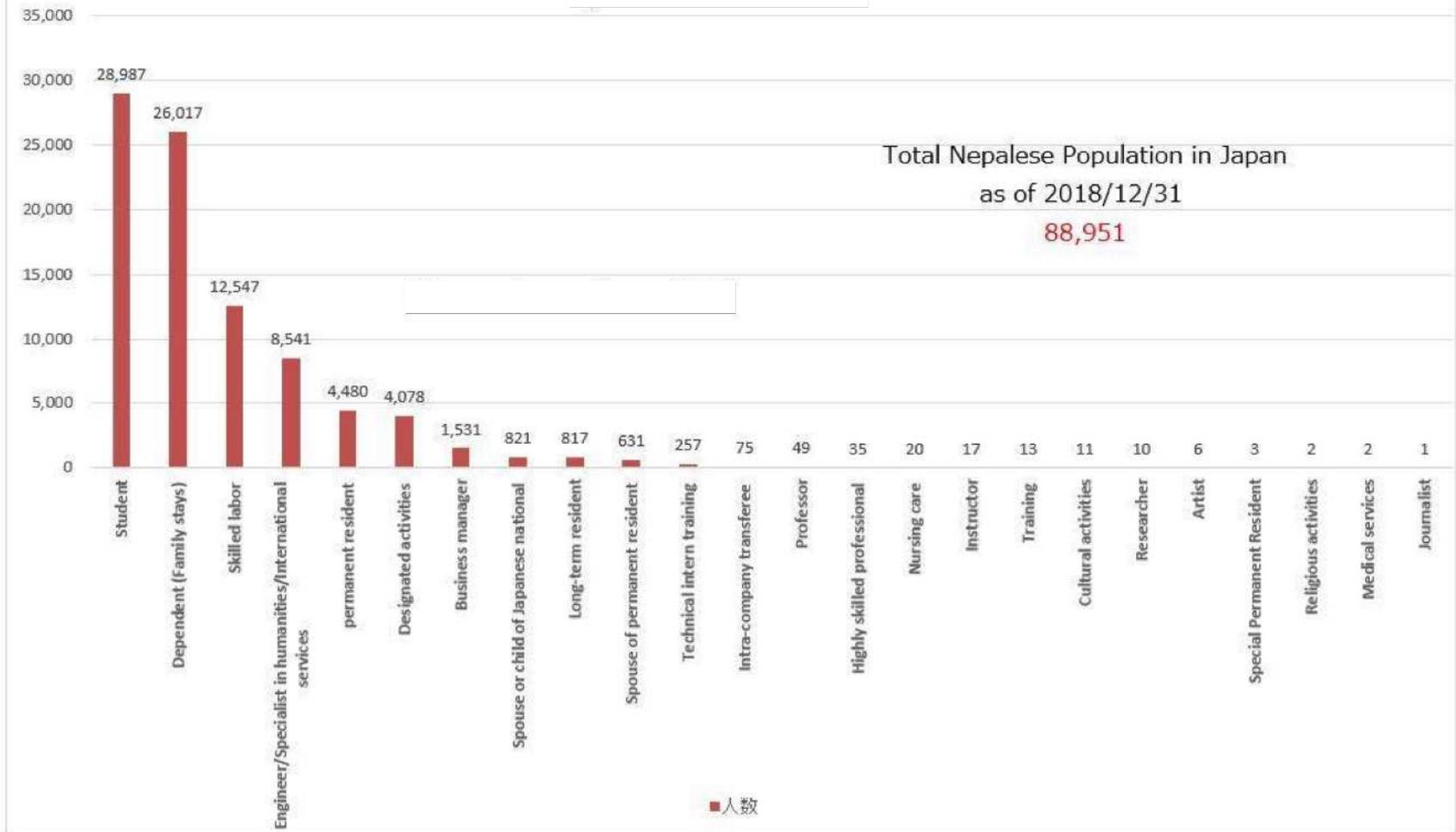
Cooks' Wives at Event in Tokyo

Empowered: Socially, economic, culturally
Celebrating Nepali Teej Festival in Tokyo



Diversity at Home and Abroad

More than 100 ethnic/caste groups in Nepal
Over 100 Nepali Immigrant Associations in Japan



Migrants' Ties to the Home Community

- **Family Remittances:** The Migrants Tie to Their Family
(For Housing, education, health, farm, food, clothing, festival, social events etc.)
- **Collective Remittance:** The Migrants Tie to the Village
(Road, School,, micro hydropower, Health-post etc.)
- **Social Remittance:** Ideas, Skill and Knowledge
- **Information Communication Technologies:** Fostering Migrant Ties to The Home Community
- **Playing an Active Role at a Distance**

An Analytical Framework

- **Transnationalism** may be utilized to refer to Nepali **migrants'** **transnational ties across countries** – and to capture all **sorts of social formations**, such as transnationally active networks, transnational communities, groups and organizations (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992).
- Applied to **depict the circulation of people, funds, and ideas** within **transnational families** that extend from Nepal to Japan.

Thank you very much
for your attention!