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Key issues impeding the integration of international faculty at Japanese universities

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Abstract

The study is devoted to identifying the key issues impeding the integration of international faculty at Japanese universities via a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews with 40 international faculty hired in Japanese universities with various backgrounds were conducted. The interview data were analyzed based on a three-stage coding procedure, namely open, axial, and selective coding, which identifies the main themes through increasing the level of data abstraction. The study identified the key issues from work, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions in the context internal to Japanese universities, and environmental dimension in the context external to Japanese universities. Meanwhile, the study also acknowledged the perceptual differentiation of these issues depending on international faculty's backgrounds. Based on the principles of Embedded Intergroups Relations Theory, it appears that the key issues differ according to international faculty's identity (country of origins), cultural backgrounds (previous experiences in Japan), and their organizational characteristics (academic ranks and disciplines). In other words, junior faculty in the Humanities who were not from countries in which Chinese characters are historically used or without previous experiences in Japan tend to perceive themselves as tokens at Japanese universities. Theoretical and practical implications including policies, future studies, and support systems are offered for policymakers, researchers, and university administrators.

Keywords Key issues · Integration · Tokenization · International Faculty · Japanese Universities · Qualitative

Introduction

Given the acknowledged desire to promote the internationalization of higher education (HE) and build world-class universities, the recruitment and presence of international faculty have been the subject of growing attention for policymakers and researchers in recent decades. International faculty bring benefits to universities tangibly and intangibly (Da Wan & Morshidi, 2018), contributing to knowledge production in education (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017; Mahroum, 2000), global collaborations, and high productivity in research (Hazelkorn, 2007; Kim et al., 2011). Moreover, international faculty have been characterized as a valuable resource to enhance the internationalization of higher education institutions (HEIs) by creating a multicultural environment. Therefore, hiring international faculty constitutes a significant pathway towards those goals especially in some non-English-speaking countries including Japan (Stephan et al., 2016). The Japanese government has made a great stride in their recruitment, leading to a significant structural increase in the number of full-time international faculty from 1.17% in 1983 to 5.00% in 2021 (MEXT, 2021).

Despite their perceived value and expansion in numbers, international faculty at Japanese universities felt difficulties integrating into the Japanese academic mainstream (Brotherhood et al., 2020; Brown, 2019). Regrettably, some of them have perceived themselves as a 'tokenized symbol' of internationalization (Brotherhood et al., 2020; Stewart & Miyahara, 2011). While most previous studies were concerned with their general characteristics (e.g., Huang & Chen, 2021; Huang, 2018a, 2018b), such as demographic situation, work roles, and motivations, there has been little focus placed on their integration at Japanese universities. More importantly, given the acknowledgment of being tokenized, investigations into the key issues impeding their integration at Japanese universities are lacking. The emergence of the COVID-19

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pandemic has reinforced the need to explore those significant issues as international faculty may suffer more than ever before. On the one hand, they tend to face more barriers such as physical isolation and discrimination towards specifically foreigners in Japan (e.g., Nippon Hoso Kyokai, 2021). On the other hand, institutional support practices may be inefficient and ineffective due to the lack of experience in dealing with such situations and delays in administration work caused by the pandemic (Huang, 2021).

The study is devoted to identifying the key issues impeding the integration of international faculty at Japanese universities via a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews with 40 international faculty hired in Japanese universities with various backgrounds were conducted. The next part makes a brief introduction to key features of the historical development of international faculty's recruitment in the Japanese context, followed by literature review. After an explanation of methodology, the article presents research findings by analyzing the interview data. The study concludes by reflecting on new findings, offering implications, and presenting limitations.

Japanese context

Dating back to the Meiji era (1868–1912) when the Japanese modern HE system was built by learning from the ideas and patterns of Western countries like Germany, the U.K., the U.S., and France, many Europeans and North Americans faculty were invited to work in Japan as experts, consultants, and first-generation university teachers (Ebuchi, 1997; Yonezawa et al., 2014). Although the model of German research universities seems to have had a significant impact on Japanese academics since the early twentieth century, as foreigners came from more than 20 countries were hired, the period from the late nineteenth century to the late 1920s are viewed as the phrase of Westernization from the perspective of internationalization of HE (Ebuchi, 1997; Huang, 2019).

In the post-WWII period, under the supervision of the US occupation forces, Japan's HE started a so-called process of Americanization by introducing almost exclusively American ideas and standards to Japan's education system. English language, which is one of many general education courses, became a compulsory subject for university students. Many foreign language teachers, especially those from English-speaking countries, such as the US and the UK, began to be hired at Japanese HEIs. They were hired as foreign teachers, but could hardly become full professors or obtain tenure positions, neither were they eligible to participate in administration operations at their institutions (Research Institute for Higher Education, 1980). It was not until the late 1970s, while promoting internationalization of Japanese HE, that the Japanese government realized the importance of improving the status of foreign teachers. In 1982, the *Special Measures Act for the Appointment of Foreign Staff at National and Public Universities* was adopted to combat those issues by granting full professorships to international faculty (Kitamura, 1989). This facilitated a rapid expansion of international faculty at Japanese national and local public universities.

Faced with increasingly competitive emerging economies in Asia, the Japanese government has made significant strides to attract international students and faculty since the early 2000s, especially those from Asian countries (Yonezawa et al., 2014). More recently, the Japanese government has launched the 'Global 30' program in 2009, and the 'Top Global University Project' in 2014. One of the missions of the selected universities, including both national/public and private institutions, is to actively recruit international faculty and international students (MEXT, 2014). However, as the private sector accounts for the largest share of the total HEIs (nearly 80%) in Japan, private HEIs recruit the largest number of international faculty who are mainly concerned with teaching undergraduate students in humanities and social sciences, and especially foreign language teaching. They are quite different from those international faculty in national/public HEIs who conduct both teaching and research activities and mostly belong to the disciplines of engineering and natural sciences (Huang, 2018a).

Regarding the overall demographic information of international faculty at Japanese HEIs, according to a national survey conducted recently by Huang (2018a), Chinese faculty accounted for the largest proportion (45%) in total, followed by Korean faculty (22%), American faculty (17%), British faculty (8%), and so on. International faculty have become more diversified not only in their demographic backgrounds but also in their work roles since, in contrast to their predecessors hired before the 1980s who were mainly engaged with language teaching, many of them undertake similar academic activities to Japanese faculty, including both research and teaching. Moreover, some are even strongly expected to conduct the work roles that Japanese faculty can hardly play, especially those concerning internationalization of Japanese universities (Huang, 2018a). Overall, international faculty contribute to Japanese HEIs by their indispensable roles in various aspects including nurturing students, developing international campuses, networking global collaborations, and promoting the global ranking of Japanese universities (Horta & Yonezawa, 2013; Huang, 2018a).

Literature review

Since the focus of the study is placed on issues impeding the integration of international faculty at Japanese universities, previous studies in two broad fields were reviewed. One is concerned with the term integration, which has been

analyzed through the integration discourse in migration studies from both theoretical and practical approaches, and its application in the field of HE research. The other is about the factors influencing the integration of international faculty, which were reviewed mainly from work and socio-cultural aspects.

Discourses of integration

The term integration, which is widely employed in migration studies, originally derives from the Latin word *integer*. Investigations in migration studies are primarily based on theoretical and practical approaches. Theoretically, being structured as a form of incorporation, integration has been explored from three main frameworks: assimilationism, multiculturism, and structuralism (Alba & Nee, 1997). Assimilationism assumes that immigrants should become similar to the mainstream of natives, which impacts integration theory significantly (e.g., Gans, 1992). In addition, multiculturism stresses the importance of the presence and value of immigrant groups, which reinforces the participation of immigrants despite the ethnic/cultural differences with the majority of natives (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). Finally, structuralism highlights the social dimensions of integration, as a lack of integration may lead to inequality in social structures (e.g., Zhou, 1997). Practically, substantial studies have investigated integration from the perspectives of immigrants as integration is generally taken as their duty (Rutter et al., 2007). The voices of immigrants reveal that compared with abstract notions, their integration is more associated with their daily life experiences, such as income (Datta et al., 2006), workplace participation (Spencer et al., 2006), and children's education (Cherti & McNeil, 2012). Likewise, Ager and Strang (2008) identify 10 indicators of integration ranged in 4 distinctive groups from the perspectives of refugees.

The employment of the term integration in the field of HE research is largely informed by theoretical concepts from migration studies while also considering the practical characteristics of international talents. For example, given the acknowledged organizational exclusive culture, international faculty are expected to follow existing academic practices (Brown, 2004; Cooper & Stevens, 2002; Hopwood & McAlpine, 2007), which is largely consistent with the assimilationist principle of migration studies. In contrast, in conjunction with the internationalization of HE, many studies underscore a two-way process of integration, highlighting the mutual adaptation of both host institutions and international faculty (e.g., Gheorghiu & Stephens, 2016), which is aligned with notions of multiculturalism. Additionally, the structural aspects of integration, such as basic rights, employment, and insurance, seem to be largely irrelevant to international faculty as they have been hired as highly skilled professionals with basic social welfare.

Therefore, integration can be considered highly contextualized. A shared concept of integration in the field of HE research remains lacking. In addition, although integration is considered as primarily an issue for immigrants-international faculty (Rutter et al., 2007:99), their own perceptions on the notions of their integration have rarely been addressed. Therefore, to be more relevant to this scholarly concern, Chen's (2022) definition of integration has been applied in the study as it investigated the concept of the integration of international faculty at Japanese universities from their own perspectives through interviews with 40 international faculty. According to Chen (2022), the integration of international faculty in Japan can be characterized as a long-term two-way process of acquiring equality, developing engagement, and forming a feeling of attachment towards Japan.

Factors impeding integration

Regarding the factors impeding the integration of international faculty at their affiliations, previous studies have constantly suggested that it is closely associated with distinctive facets of their profession. Two broad components of factors related to their professions have emerged, namely, work factors and social–cultural factors (e.g., Munene, 2014). Work factors are considered to be issues directly related to their profession. For instance, empirical evidence reveals that the integration of international faculty is negatively affected by disadvantageous working conditions, such as unstable positions, enlarged responsibilities, and reduced autonomy (Corley & Sabharwal, 2007; Selmer & Lauring, 2011; Siekkinen et al., 2017; Van Der Wende, 2015). Social–cultural factors refer to organizational cultural contexts and features of host affiliations. Notable issues include international faculty's cultural similarity with host countries and language proficiency. For example, some international faculty perceived the 'rudeness, and cultural unawareness' of their American colleagues and students due to their cultural dissimilarity, which has been considered as a significant element impacting their integration in US HEIs (Gahungu, 2011). In addition, 'heavy, thick' accents were also thought to have a profound effect on their integration in the US (Gahungu, 2011; Villarreal, 2013).

The integration of international faculty seems to be more elusive in non-English-speaking countries as in addition to the same challenges as within English-speaking countries, the local cultural milieus may intensify their integration issues. For example, the leadership and expectations of HEIs are often not shown in written forms but in unspoken pretexts (Hall, 1981), as Shin (2012) suggested that many formal consensuses of Korean universities are achieved in

the informal settings, such as dinners. In addition, many international faculty have to cope with the negative impact caused by lack of proficiency in local languages although such proficiency may not be acknowledged as a stipulation for employment (Gress & Shin, 2020; Yudkevich et al., 2016). Moreover, the cultural value in many Confucian countries, such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam, is associated closely with the integration of international faculty (Froese, 2010; Gress & Ilon, 2009; McCornac & Chi, 2005). This is because according to Confucian-collectivistic traditions, there is a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders. The insiders tend to be well treated and trusted, while the outsiders were likely to be treated with indifference, or even discriminated against (Triandis, 1995). Therefore, international faculty, as foreigners, may have endured the detrimental impact of Confucian-collectivistic value to varying degrees depending on the individuals.

In Japan, previous studies concerning international faculty remain primarily investigating their general outlook and perceptions of Japanese universities (e.g., Huang, 2018a, 2018b; Huang & Chen, 2021; Yonezawa et al., 2013) while scholarly focus placed directly on the integration of international faculty at Japanese universities is extremely limited. To date, only a few prior studies were associated with the constraints that international faculty encountered at Japanese universities, describing international faculty as tokenized symbols of internationalization. For example, many international faculty perceived their recruitment as being closely aligned with their international visibility regardless of their specialties (Brotherhood et al., 2020; Brown, 2019; Stewart & Miyahara, 2011), and they felt they were treated differently due to their different roles from Japanese faculty (Brotherhood et al., 2020; Huang, 2018a). In addition, the insistence on Japanese language at Japanese universities has also been considered as a significant factor impacting their integration (Huang et al., 2019). A recent study clarifies their integration experiences at Japanese universities only from an exclusionary perspective (Chen & Huang, 2022).

Given this acknowledgment of being a token of internationalization, there is a dearth of research investigating the issues impeding international faculty's integration at Japanese universities directly. Despite explorations of the challenges encountered, it is unclear to what extent the influence of those challenges is related to their integration. Moreover, the focuses of previous research have been primarily placed on the work experience of international faculty, little is known about other aspects of their professional lives at Japanese universities, such as socio-cultural aspects. Further, given the diversity of international faculty at Japanese universities, scholarly interest on the issues about whether the integration of international faculty varies depending on their different backgrounds is extremely limited. Therefore, to better combat the issue of tokenization at Japanese universities and to develop a more comprehensive support system, there is an urgent need to investigate the specific issues impeding the integration of international faculty from their own perspectives.

Methodology

Conceptual framework and research questions

Embedded Intergroups Relations Theory (EIRT), proposed by Alderfer and Smith (1982), has been adopted in the study as it contributes to clarifying the impacts of diverse identities of minority workers while integrating into the majority organizations. Japanese HEIs, comprising a 4.71% numerical representation of international faculty, meet the compositional characteristics of this theory.

According to Alderfer and Smith (1982), working organizations consist of different groups within which diverse memberships are contained. Broadly two types of groups can be characterized, identity groups and organizational groups. Identity groups refer to those who have common biological traits (e.g., race, ethnicity, age), or similar historical experiences. Organizational groups represent those who occupy similar work positions (e.g., supervisor, faculty), share similar work experiences and organizational perceptions. The third dimension of cultural identity has been added subsequently by Cox (1994) to identify the interactions among diverse cultural groups, emphasizing the distinctiveness of shared cultural norms and values among the members. Therefore, individuals can be included to varying degrees in various groups from identity, organizational and cultural dimensions, and the variations in the groups they belong to significantly impact their overall integration at their affiliated organizations. Based on the revised EIRT and the literature review, two research questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. What are the key issues impeding the integration of international faculty at Japanese universities?
2. Do these issues differ according to international faculty's backgrounds?

Methods

In answering these research questions, a qualitative approach was adopted using semi-structured interviews conducted between July and November 2020. The subjects were 40 full-time international faculty hired in different Japanese universities with various backgrounds. The main interview question concerning the study is 'what are the factors impeding your integration at Japanese universities?'. Follow-up relevant questions were also asked. The main languages

used in the interviews were English, Chinese, and Japanese depending on the preferences of the participants. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, except for eight face-to-face interviews, all the interviews were conducted via online platforms, such as Zoom, Skype, and Wechat. Except for two, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed professionally. To ensure the accuracy of the interviews, the transcripts were reviewed and approved by some of the participants, especially the two without recording. The duration of the interviews varied between 40 min and 2 h depending on the participants. To comply with ethical considerations, serial numbers were used to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Sampling was stopped when no new findings can be found by the new participants (Benner, 1994).

Regarding the analytical process, the interviews were analyzed based on a three-stage coding procedure with an increasing level of data abstraction. The first stage was open coding. All debriefing transcripts were imported into Nvivo 12 in their original languages, and the useful phases were coded by the participants' words that emerged originally from the transcripts or special terms close in meaning to their own words. The second stage was axial coding. Sub-themes (e.g., unequal promotion opportunities, difficulties in relationships), which were used as potential themes, were developed in this stage through analyzing the coded nodes and combining those with similar meanings. The codes in other languages (Chinese and Japanese) were translated into English at this stage. To ensure the accuracy of the sub-themes, the core ideas of unclear codes, especially those in Chinese and Japanese, were confirmed via three main methods: firstly, consulting with participants to obtain their own words; secondly, applying English expressions that are acceptable to them from among several phrases proposed; thirdly, applying the codes used in relevant English literature with an understanding of their main ideas. The last stage was selective coding. The sub-themes were aggregated into more specific and significant themes to identify the key issues and the dimensions where the key issues were distributed. Four main dimensions (work, cultural, interpersonal, and environmental) emerged at this stage.

Population and sampling

Based on previous studies (Huang, 2018a, 2018b), three main criteria are applied to define international faculty: 1. those who are full-time employees; 2. those who do not hold Japanese passports/citizenship; 3. those who were educated at primary and secondary schools outside Japan. Therefore, those who were part-time employees with Japanese passports and received their junior high school education in Japan were eliminated from the potential target population of the study.

To ensure sufficient variety of the participants, the personal attributes of participants, such as nationality, gender, position, and discipline were considered. In addition, given the distinctive three different Japanese HE sectors (Huang & Chen, 2021), which are national universities (funded by the Japanese government and are mainly engaged in producing doctoral students and undertaking scientific research), local public universities (administered by the local authorities and primarily concerned with training undergraduate students who can contribute to the development of local society), and private universities (school corporations mainly involved in educational activities for undergraduate students in Humanities and Social Sciences), their institutional characteristics of international faculty's affiliations, such as the type and location of their affiliated universities were also taken into account. Despite the lack of participants from the Shikoku region, the study obtained 40 participants from seven other regions. Three methods were used to find the participants. Firstly, invitations were made to eligible respondents who agreed to be interviewed from Huang's (2018a, 2018b) national survey ($n=20$). According to the information they left in the questionnaire mentioned above, formal invitation letters were sent out to invite the respondents to participate in the interviews. Secondly, requests were made to potential participants from various Japanese universities ($n=15$). To increase the number, the potential participants were approached according to the information posted on the homepages of their affiliations. Thirdly, snowballing sampling was adopted ($n=5$). The participants found by this method were mainly introduced or recommended by the participants who had already been interviewed. The overall characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Interview findings

The summary of the interview findings is structured around the main themes from the data analysis. When asked about the issues impeding their integration, the participants used concreted examples drawn from their experiences to illustrate the issues they encountered at Japanese universities. Drawing on their narratives, despite being interrelated, the key issues, being considered impeding their integration were identified broadly from work, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions in the context internal to Japanese universities, and environmental dimension in the context external to Japanese universities. The dominant themes were presented in Fig. 1, which were analyzed through an inductive process subsequently.

Work dimension

The work dimension includes the factors that are directly related to the job or career of international faculty at their

Table 1 Outline of the participants

NO.	Affiliation	Area	Nationality	Position	Discipline	Educational degree obtained in Japan
F1	National	Chūgoku	Iran	Associate Professor	Engineering	Yes
F2	National	Chūgoku	Bolivia	Assistant Professor	Economy	No
F3	National	Chūgoku	India	Assistant Professor	Physics	No
F4	National	Chūgoku	Vietnam	Assistant Professor	Engineering	Yes
F5	Local	Touhoku	Russia	Associate Professor	Computer Science	No
F6	National	Chūgoku	Korea	Assistant Professor	Education	Yes
F7	National	Kyūshū & Okinawa	Canada	Associate Professor	Linguistics	No
F8	Private	Kinki	China	Associate Professor	Marketing	Yes
F9	Private	Kyūshū & Okinawa	UK	Associate Professor	Education	No
F10	National	Chūgoku	Iran	Assistant Professor	Environment	No
F11	Private	Kinki	China	Lecture	Literature	Yes
F12	Private	Kantō	US	Professor	Literature	No
F13	Local	Kyūshū & Okinawa	US	Associate Professor	English	No
F14	National	Chūgoku	UK	Associate Professor	Linguistics	No
F15	Private	Kantō	Australia	Professor	Political Science	No
F16	Local	Touhoku	UK	Associate Professor	Education	No
F17	Private	Kantō	Ireland	Lecture	Computer Science	No
F18	Private	Kantō	German	Professor	History	No
F19	National	Chūgoku	Thailand	Associate Professor	Agriculture	Yes
F20	Private	Kinki	UK	Professor	Literature	No
F21	National	Chūbu	Ireland	Professor/Representative	Psychology	No
F22	Private	Kinki	US	Associate Professor	English	No
F23	National	Kinki	New Zealand	Professor	Biogeography	No
F24	Local	Chūbu	US	Associate Professor	Linguistics	No
F25	Private	Kyūshū & Okinawa	US	Lecture	Linguistics	No
F26	Private	Kantō	UK	Professor	Linguistics	No
F27	National	Chūgoku	US	Assistant Professor	Psychology	Yes
F28	National	Chūbu	China	Associate Professor	Film Studies	No
F29	National	Hokkaidō	China	Assistant Professor	Engineering	Yes
F30	Local	Chūgoku	US	Professor	Linguistics	No
F31	Local	Hokkaidō	German	Professor/Dean	Chemistry	No
F32	National	Kantō	China	Assistant Professor	Anthropology	Yes
F33	Private	Hokkaidō	UK	Associate Professor	Education	No
F34	Private	Hokkaidō	Brazile	Lecture	English	No
F35	National	Kinki	Mexico	Lecture	Chemistry	Yes
F36	National	Hokkaidō	Srilanka	Associate Professor	Chemistry	Yes
F37	National	Kantō	UK+Poland	Assistant Professor	Economy	No
F38	Private	Kyūshū & Okinawa	US	Lecture	Music	No
F39	National	Touhoku	Brazile	Associate Professor	Engineering	Yes
F40	National	Chūgoku	Korea	Associate Professor	Engineering	Yes

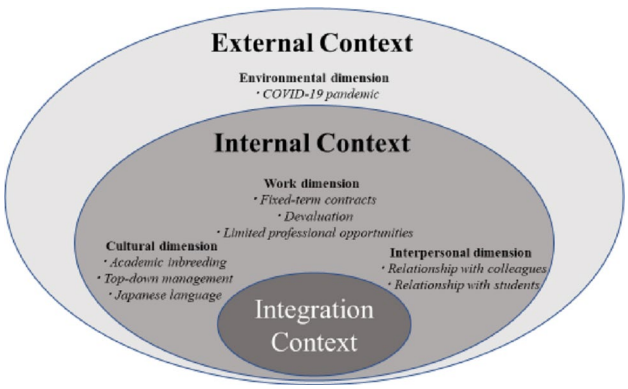

Fig. 1 Key issues impeding the integration of international faculty

workplaces. As highly skilled professionals, the majority of participants expressed great concern about their career prospects at Japanese universities. It seems that their integration in the work dimension is impeded by constraints ranged in mainly three aspects, work contracts, devalued work roles, and professional opportunities, which may highly contribute to their departure (O'Meara et al., 2014).

Fixed-term contracts

Firstly, many participants described the anxiety caused by their fixed-term contracts at Japanese universities. Since stable work employments are inherent to shaping organizational commitment (Huang et al., 2019), fixed-term contracts largely lead to employees' insecurity, which militates against

commitment to their affiliations. This is probably why many participants perceived themselves/being regarded as a visitor at Japanese universities, as F3 stated:

> My contract is just three years. So, they (Japanese colleagues) are just taking me as a guest. Actually, I'm just a guest here. (F3)

It seems that many junior participants in the study were especially disadvantaged by this fixed-term contracts, as they were more prone to untenured positions due to the current educational system. This can be found from the quotations of the following participants:

> Another stress is an unstable position. Usually, the contracts are short for young faculty members, 3 years, which gives an instability feeling. (F10)
> I feel like the only international faculty member I've heard of who has achieved this (tenure-track) is X. That worries me a lot. And that's a big obstacle that I think I will face because there's a lot of ambiguity about my post, not currently being tenure track. (F27)

In addition to the subjective instability experienced by international faculty, the nature of their temporary contracts also deprives them of many opportunities to interact with their Japanese colleagues. Because of the short stay caused by their fixed-term contracts, many Japanese faculty find it difficult to build long-term relationships with them and are therefore reluctant to engage with them too much, which also indirectly reduces the integration of international faculty at Japanese universities, as one participant explained:

> Because of the contracts, they (international faculty with fixed contracts) are very transient. Because sometimes they stay only for a short time, and then they leave…Japanese teachers prefer to interact with other long-term foreigners. (F24)

Devaluation

While many participants from natural sciences and social sciences expressed their perceived integration, most of the participants from humanities shared negative experiences regarding their devaluation at Japanese universities. They commonly stated their conjecture that their foreignness, such as their native language and international visibility, was the top priority for their recruitment, and generally, they were required/expected to conduct the activities that were not equivalent to their professions, such as language teaching or administrative works.

> They wanted a native speaker of English. So, in a way, it's only because I'm foreigner that I can get the job. (F14)
> When they first saw me, they were like, oh, you're not as *Gaijin* (foreigner) as we thought, because I didn't look *Gaijin*…(but) they (Japanese colleagues) wanted a native (English) speaker instructor who was 40 years and above. I am a native (English) speaker and that year I just turned 40. So, I thought really the program is specifically for me. (F24)
> The work I did at the time was actually more like a *Jimu* (Admin staff). We were *Jokyo* (Assistant professor) in name, but the work we did was to pick up foreign students. Then, if the foreign students have any problems, for example, they need to make bank account or something, we have to take them there. (F32)
> Most of the time that they (Japanese colleagues) were asking me to teach classes about English, like technical presentation, technical writing, academic writing, and everything English-related…I'm not an English Teacher, my major is science engineering. But they are asking me to do something like that. (F39)

Limited professional opportunities

Moreover, the participants in humanities further described their absence from university management and shared their concerns regarding their lack of professional opportunities compared with their Japanese colleagues. It appears that they were more commonly confined with heavy teaching workloads, which may result in their less research productivity. The performance-based evaluation system applied by Japanese universities leads to their academic disadvantages, which impact their promotion and participation in institutional management (Horta & Yonezawa, 2013). This may partly explain why the proportion of international faculty in senior positions tends to be considerably lower than that of Japanese faculty (Huang, 2018a).

> There are no foreigners making decisions at any level. That's what frustrates people. People like me, I've been here close to 19 out of 20 years. I have permanent residency. And some of the other teachers, also permanent residency, permanent positions. But absolutely no, say in any university policy working hours, anything like that. (F22)
> Dare I say an expert in my field (English education)? One of the big frustrations is often I am excluded from decision-making regarding English education. So, I might be in a meeting, and they (Japanese colleagues) are going to discuss the program, but they asked me to leave. (F26)
> The contract *Eigokyoushi* (English teachers) have to teach many more classes than a tenured teacher…So

> they feel like a member of some different group, like an outsider, in a way. (F34)

The issues related to the work dimension of international faculty addressed above are most directly relevant to international faculty's academic lives, which should be of concern. Many participants, especially the junior international faculty and those from humanities, reported their inability to capitalize on their expertise. And generally, they were discouraged by the institutional practices of Japanese universities from pursuing their career ambitions and investing in their affiliations, contributing significantly to their perceived tokenization at Japanese universities.

Cultural dimension

In addition to the factors directly linked to their work, many participants elaborated on the barriers caused by the organizational culture of Japanese universities as they are also closely related to their work experiences, and can be viewed as an equally essential element impacting their integration (Turchick Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013). These factors are categorized into the cultural dimension since they are closely associated with the institutional culture of Japanese universities.

Academic inbreeding

Japan has been characterized as a 'self-contained' system, largely because Japanese universities tend to hire those who have connections with them (Yonezawa et al., 2014). Thus, many international faculty entered Japanese academic market through their graduate education (Huang, 2018a). This system has enabled the organizational identity and stability of Japanese HEIs to be maintained, which is an important feature of Japanese HE (Horta et al., 2011). However, for those lacking Japanese connections, such institutional culture and practices may increase the possibility that they will experience perceived unfairness in their job-hunting process.

> Something that also bothers me. When you apply for a position…in many cases, these are fake. So, this is what usually happens in Japan...They (Japanese universities) make the open call and ask that person to apply. So, the person applies, like 40 or 50 other poor people also apply. They don't even look at their applications...It's not fair that they do it, especially for foreigners. (F1)

It is also likely that compared with such 'insider' faculty, international faculty without connections tend to perceive a reduced sense of belonging at their affiliations. 'Outsider' international faculty may struggle to integrate into their affiliations since the style of their performance is different significantly from the insider faculty and the existing structural culture of their affiliations (Horta et al., 2011). Such a phenomenon is indicative of a closed academic culture, excluding the infusion of new perspectives, which may lead to the disappointment and distrust of Japanese universities by 'outsider' international faculty.

Japanese language

One significant issue that is being mentioned consistently is the Japanese language, which is positively associated with the integration of international faculty (Froese, 2010; Gress & Shin, 2020; Yudkevich et al., 2016). Despite the bilingual policies adopted at some departments of Japanese universities, such as those associated with G30 projects (Ota & Horiuchi, 2018), the dominant language used in the academic environment remains Japanese. Thus, in contrast to English-speaking countries, many international faculty at Japanese universities are expected to possess both English and Japanese language skill (Huang et al., 2019). For the participants who have had previous experience in Japan, such as those who graduated from Japanese universities, Japanese language and culture do not seem to be a serious problem, as one participant mentioned:

> I got Ph.D. degree from N University, I spent 3 years there as a student. That allowed me to better know the society, to make some friends, to learn the language. I think it made life easier for me. (F1)

However, for those who don't have such experience, it seems extremely difficult to master Japanese language. Given the acknowledged lack of linguistic support in some Japanese universities, constraints stemming from Japanese language are apparent, as stated below:

> It's difficult for me to integrate because they (affiliation) operate in Japanese. All the meetings are managed in Japanese. And the project leaders are operating and thinking in Japanese. I'm not fluent in Japanese, it's difficult for me to see what is really going on. (F23)
> What always surprises me is that these are meetings for English where we're talking about English teaching and everything. Yet, the majority of the time that we spend in these meetings is in Japanese, it's like, why? So that's something that I feel is a burden on me. (F24)

Although previous experience in Japan can greatly facilitate oral Japanese skills, when it comes to academic written Japanese, most of the participants reported a lack of proficiency. This is largely because what is needed in written Japanese are more formal expressions and the flexible use of kanji (Bothwell, 2019).

> One reason for the isolation is lack of Japanese ability. After many years, I was able to do basic conversation but I can't really function academically in Japanese. Unless the foreigner is very proficient in Japanese, they will likely be isolated because everything is done in Japanese. (F14)
> Language is a big hurdle. I can understand and I can communicate. The biggest problem for me is writing grammatically correct, Japanese sentencing, email communication, and writing reports, especially the Kanjis. I hate that. (F31)

Therefore, many participants expressed their envy of those from countries that have historically used Chinese characters, such as China and South Korea, as they seemed to be functional in Japanese, informed largely by knowledge of their native languages. Likewise, none of the participants from Chinese character countries mentioned their difficulties regarding Japanese language.

> It's too difficult for me…But we have a quite large number of professors who were originally from China…they are very well integrated. They speak the perfect Japanese language. They have been here for many years, and they have already achieved very high ranks...they're just Japanese professors. (F5)
> I admire the Chinese people because I feel that Chinese people can integrate better. They are much better at learning Japanese…accepting Japanese the way it is. Western people we often liked…why Japanese are like this. (F14)

Top-down management

Moreover, as hierarchy-based academic institutions (Shin, 2015), the management of Japanese universities has been generally conducted by the upper echelons of Japanese universities, who were mostly Japanese (Huang, 2018a). Even though many participants asserted their exclusion from institutional discussions, the implementation of reforms in this regard seems extremely difficult (Stewart & Miyahara, 2011) due to the active opposition of senior higher-ranking Japanese professors (Brotherhood et al., 2020). Consequently, many international faculty remain at the periphery of the Japanese management mainstream without participating in the decision-making processes, which is indicative of a closed institutional culture. Ultimately, not being valued largely lead to increasing dissatisfaction among those international faculty (Gress & Shin, 2020), decreasing their organizational commitment and integration.

> My Japanese is ok. In the meeting, the person in charge, he refused to answer any questions from foreign faculty. If you ask in English or Japanese, it doesn't matter. He didn't even make eye contact with you, just ignore you completely and talk to the person next to him…I don't mean one time, I mean, every single time any foreign faculty said something. (F16)
> In X University, it was exactly like this. I was an assistant professor. I was not given sufficient information to follow the procedure of the administration of our department. When I suggested, even in written form, it was ignored. (F18)
> It's a top-down process, which means they may tell you what they will do. But they don't need you to say yes or no, because they already decided everything, and just inform you about it. (F28)

As revealed above, the factors at the cultural dimension demonstrated Japanese universities as extremely exclusionary HEIs from the recruitment of international faculty to their daily institutional practices. It seems that many Japanese universities prefer to stick to their existing cultural practices rather than infusing new perspectives, thereby excluding international faculty without Japanese domestic knowledge from the existing frameworks, as stated by Bothwell (2019). Although similar difficulties may also be encountered by Japanese faculty, the conservatism of Japanese management puts more burden on international faculty as generally they have comparatively less domestic knowledge of Japan.

Interpersonal dimension

While most participants expressed their positive impressions regarding their interpersonal relationships with their Japanese colleagues and students at their affiliations, some stressed their difficulties in this regard. The establishment of departmental relationships requires both international faculty's familiarity with the interpersonal skills of the local community and an open host environment. The lack of either may lead to an additional burden on the integration of international faculty. The issues concerning the interpersonal interactions between international faculty and Japanese people, such as their Japanese colleagues, Japanese students, and local Japanese people in general, are included in this dimension.

Relationships with Japanese colleagues

In some cases, it seems that despite adequate language and professional skills, attempts by international faculty to initiate relationships were generally declined by their Japanese colleagues, which lends credence to Richardson and Zikic's (2007) contention of the difficulty of developing a relationship with local colleagues when working abroad. As

collaboration improves the perception of international faculty of being a member of the community (Palmer & Cho, 2012), their inability to establish collaborative relationships is detrimental to their sense of belonging in their affiliations.

> I expected to have more research collaboration with my (Japanese) colleagues at H University, but I still do my research in collaborating with my previous networks in Australia, China, New Zealand, and Malaysia without the presence of my colleagues at our department...In my opinion, they are not eager to have such collaboration with foreign faculty members. I have already proposed them two times, and I could see that they were not eager for joining. (F10)
> I was trying to collaborate with (Japanese) professors in my department for 5 years, and they are always postponing, nothing happened there. (F39)

Relationships with Japanese students

Regarding their interpersonal interactions with Japanese students, likewise, some participants described their negative experiences caused by the teacher–student relationship. For example, some participants felt they were discriminated against by Japanese students due to their status as foreigners. This issue may be simply caused by differences in culture or values. However, it results in the frustration of international faculty in their interpersonal relationship building with students. As F35 reported below:

> The biggest challenge is the (Japanese) students because sometimes they don't listen to what I say... If I tell them to do something, they discuss it with Japanese professors. And Japanese professors will give some ideas. And they (Japanese students) follow their (Japanese professors') ideas, not my idea. So, some Japanese students don't want or respect a non-Japanese boss...If the boss is Japanese, they do 100% what the boss says...Not just me, my other friends (international faculty) also experienced. (F35)

Similarly, F10 summed up his situation regarding interpersonal relationships with Japanese local people succinctly as follows:

> In my opinion, one of the difficult issues here is that most people get used to being isolated. Most of our colleagues and Japanese students do not like to communicate with foreign staff as I can feel it. (F10)

Previous research has consistently suggested that the establishment of interpersonal relationships with local people improves integration processes (Harrison & Michailova, 2012) as it not only helps to enhance the domestic knowledge of international faculty and build social support networks but also contributes to facilitating a more open academic environment. Therefore, the lack of interpersonal relationships can lead to a closed environment, which, in a vicious circle, may result in international faculty's perceptions of tokenization.

Environmental dimension

Finally, the tension caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the context external to Japanese universities is classified into the environmental dimension, which was remarked upon by the majority of the participants. Even if some participants raised no issues in other dimensions, they specifically mentioned the significant impact on their integration caused by the physical isolation as a result of the pandemic. Keeping social distance is indeed effective to combat the pandemic, however, given the significance of interactional relationships, reduced social interactions with colleagues and students are clearly detrimental to integration.

> Now, we're all kind of in this self-isolation or university isolation so we were not really in face-to-face touching of people. There's a little bit more of a sense of feeling more distant from things and the community. (F24)
> Now I'm not seeing these people…So everybody was incredibly busy with restructuring their classes so that they could teach online. So that, in a way, you could say COVID has impeded building relationships. (F33)
> So, that kind of conversation or discussion makes us integrate or connect with students. But now we don't have it because it's online, and it's difficult sometimes to establish a better relationship with them by the internet, the Zoom. (F35)

Some newly hired participants further shared their sentiments about the pandemic by pointing out the negative impact on administration procedures. The knock-on effects on the successful implementation of their new jobs and the establishment of relationships with their colleagues caused by the pandemic have distanced them from their affiliations professionally and socially.

> I have not signed my work contract yet due to the Corona crisis as everything is done online…Since April, I'm teaching there. (But) when I see these people, I couldn't find out who is the man dominating things. No idea. (F18)
> It definitely postpones whatever officially sanctioned, systematic integrative activities…there would be a lot of Japanese great fanfare like *Kangeikai* (Welcoming party) or these kinds of things to get to know your new colleagues, which is something that I always love

about Japanese society…not at all because of Corona. (F27)

It seems that the social isolation caused by restrictions on movement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered the progress of institutional management and crushed the possibility of social interactions, leading to increasing social isolation and separation of international faculty both physically and psychologically. Although Japanese faculty may have had similar experiences, this negative influence is especially severe on international faculty since they are away from their home countries (Banerjee & Rai, 2020). Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic can be viewed as a profound factor impeding their integration at Japanese universities.

Discussion

As analyzed above, three main points need to be discussed subsequently. Firstly, due to the implementation of neoliberal theory at Japanese universities through new public management (Deem & Brehony, 2005), such as the Incorporation of National Universities in 2004, many Japanese universities are faced with a decline in funding and the perceived need to improve scientific competitiveness. Therefore, many of them increasingly recruit employees on fixed-term contracts, especially junior faculty, and adopt various performance-based evaluation systems (Mock et al., 2016). Employment on short-term contracts can be particularly destabilizing regarding work and immigration status, leading to the lack of recognition, such as being considered merely as a visitor in their affiliations. These fixed-term contracts are also associated with heavy workloads and sometimes fewer salaries/grants (Rappleye & Vickers, 2015), and restricting professional development. These constraints result in an uncertain career prospect, and are clearly detrimental to the integration of many international faculty. Additionally, the performance-based evaluation systems seem especially critical for international faculty from Humanities as many of them were engaged in language teaching activities. Despite strong consciousness of advancing scholarly reputations, the devaluation of their specialties and excessive teaching loads leave them juggling the minimum requirements for promotion, which impedes their career ambitions (Brown, 2019; Horta & Yonezawa, 2013).

Secondly, the difficulties related to Japanese organizational and interpersonal culture may be closely associated with Japanese exclusionism, which insists on the Japanese existing frameworks and excludes new perspectives. This largely explains the profound impacts of international faculty's country of origins and previous experiences in Japan on their integration, contributing to informing their domestic knowledge of Japan, such as Japanese language, culture, and Japanese universities' mechanisms and management, and developing their departmental relationships with their Japanese colleagues and students. This is detrimental to international faculty lacking domestic knowledge of Japan and leads to reduced departmental interactions and stunted professional ambitions. Thus, many international faculty seemed confined to a state of underperformance and limited interactions with their Japanese colleagues, leading to a vicious cycle in which more Japanese faculty may further entrench their negative perceptions of some international faculty and believe they lack sufficient competence for leadership positions (HUANG, 1992). This lack of recognition and concomitant exclusion contributes significantly to the feelings of distrust and disappointment, and thus, impedes the integration of international faculty.

Thirdly, the COVD-19 pandemic was found hindering interpersonal interactions and the development of relationships, which may lead to the prevalence of negative psychological states, such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Elbay et al., 2020; Huang, 2021). Although support is key to successful integration (Hsieh & Nguyen, 2020), the support from Japanese universities in this regard seems to be insufficient. The global outbreak of the pandemic was officially announced as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization on January 30th, 2020. The suddenness of its appearance made it difficult for the Japanese governments and universities to take timely and appropriate responses to its impact and address all the issues international faculty face in a satisfactory way. This is probably why the COVD-19 pandemic was considered as exacerbating the integration issues of all international faculty.

Conclusions

Given the perceived tokenization of international faculty at Japanese universities, despite existing studies investigating their challenges, the key issues impeding their integration at Japanese universities remain unclear. The study filled this gap by identifying the key issues and analyzing the perceptual differentiation about the issues according to the diverse backgrounds of international faculty. The new findings can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, the study identified various key issues impeding the integration of international faculty from work, cultural, interpersonal dimensions in the context internal to Japanese universities, and environmental dimension in the context external to Japanese universities. In line with most of the existing evidence (e.g., Huang et al., 2019; Nishikawa, 2021), data analysis underscores the profound impacts of the issues from work, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions, such as international faculty's fixed-term contracts, devaluation, Japanese language, and interpersonal relationships with

their Japanese colleagues and students. In addition, the study supplements the existing evidence by highlighting the significant impact of the COVD-19 pandemic on international faculty's integration, which has not been fully addressed yet by previous studies. Given the acknowledged negative effects, the COVD-19 pandemic needs to be taken into consideration when discussing integration, as it is not conducive to the formation of a sense of belonging, especially for those who are away from their home countries (Banerjee & Rai, 2020), such as international faculty.

Secondly, the data analysis suggests that the issues tend to vary by international faculty's identity (country of origins), cultural backgrounds (previous experiences in Japan), and organizational characteristics (academic ranks and disciplines). In other words, junior faculty in the Humanities who were not from countries in which Chinese characters are historically used or without previous experiences in Japan tend to perceive themselves as tokens at Japanese universities. The impacts of international faculty's country of origins and academic ranks are consistent with what was found by a previous study (Huang et al., 2019). Extending the scope of existing research, the data analysis underscores the profound influences of international faculty's previous experiences in Japan and their academic disciplines on their integration, which can be acknowledged as the original finding of the study. Additionally, the study also enriches the principles of EIRT by highlighting the impacts of the pandemic on all international faculty without differentiation. It is highly possible that despite belonging to the same identity, organizational or cultural groups, some individuals may still feel isolated. This is because, as emphasized by the participants in the study, interpersonal interactions are integral to forming perceptions of integration, which may be hindered by environmental factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, when applying this model, the practical situation should also be of concern.

As for implications for research, the study seeks to provide empirical insights to further relevant research, especially in the Japanese context. In addition, since the study suggests that issues in cultural, interpersonal, and environmental dimensions are equally as important as those in the work dimension, scholarly attention in those dimensions is greatly needed. Moreover, the study underscores the significant impact of the issues on almost every aspect of international faculty. Interventions at various levels, therefore, should be considered essential. And the coordination of comprehensive policies should be undertaken to foster the formation of international faculty's organizational commitment and improve the overall attractiveness of Japan.

Regarding implications for practice, the provision of a more equitable and supportive environment where international faculty are equally treated and well mentored should be prioritized. To illustrate, given the stranding consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, more relevant measures should be taken by the Japanese government, HEIs, and local communities. In addition, the necessity for equal recruitment processes, stable work contracts, and transparent promotion systems is clear. Sufficient and effective support mechanisms to facilitate interpersonal interactions with Japanese colleagues and students would be advantageous, because it may contribute to the transcultural experiences of both international faculty and Japanese faculty and students.

There are some limitations in the study. Firstly, constraints from the term integration must be acknowledged. Even with an accurate explanation, the understanding of this term may differ substantially depending on the participants. Secondly, the study focused solely on the perspective of international faculty at Japanese universities. Further studies are needed to focus on Japan's perceptions of international faculty's integration. Thirdly, the use of a qualitative approach obviously limits the depth of further explorations with regard to the measurement of the impact of the issues. Similarly, it is hard to explore the connections between issues situated at different levels. Finally, since the focus of the study is exclusively on the international faculty at Japanese universities, it remains unclear to what extent it can be generalized to international faculty at other HEIs in Japan and in other countries.

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