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Exploring the Perceptions of Newcomer Immigrants in the Japanese Inner City

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Abstract

This paper examines how newcomer immigrants perceive and experience life in Nishinari, a stigmatized inner-city neighborhood of Osaka, Japan. Based on two-and-a-half years of fieldwork and interviews with 31 immigrant residents, it proposes a typology of "perceptions of Nishinari" to capture the diverse and complex ways in which immigrants understand their environment. Through these grounded accounts, this paper reveals the dynamic and evolving interpretations among immigrants in Japan's marginalized urban spaces.

Keywords

territorial stigmatization; neighborhood perceptions; immigrant; lifeworld; Nishinari; Osaka

Introduction

This paper is an adaptation of the fourth chapter from the author's master's thesis completed at Osaka City University (now, Osaka Metropolitan University). Based on two-and-a-half years of fieldwork and participant observation in the impoverished inner-city neighborhood of Nishinari in Osaka, Japan between 2014 and 2017, this research seeks to understand the significant increase of newcomer immigrants (hereafter referred to as "immigrants" or "migrants") [1] living in the target area [2] by delineating their migration processes, networks, and varied relationships with Japanese society. The findings presented

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1 The term "newcomer immigrants" refers to migrants, mostly from the Asia mainland and Southeast Asia, who moved to Japan from the late 1980s onward. This term is used to distinguish between so-called *Zainichi* Koreans and other non-Japanese who either moved or were forcibly relocated to Japan during its occupation of Asia prior to and during the Second World War.

2 The field for this paper is defined as the northwest portion of Nishinari Ward, known in Japanese as 西成北西部 (*Nishinari hokuseibu*). This area is sociologically significant because it represents the largest *hisabetsu buraku* (discriminated community) in Japan and played a large role in galvanizing the postwar *Dowa* Movement. While Nishinari Ward writ large is also historically significant as a symbol of inner-city poverty in Japan, this research focuses on the Nishinari area to better understand the transition away from a uniquely Japanese form of discrimination to the more generalizable phenomenon of immigration, inner-city poverty, and stigmatization. "Nishinari" and "the Nishinari area" are used interchangeably to refer to the field of research, while "Nishinari Ward" is only used when referring to the larger surrounding area.

here—namely, descriptions of the lived experiences of 31 immigrants in the Nishinari area gleaned from semi-structured interviews[3]—represent an attempt to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions of immigrants living in a highly-stigmatized part of the Japanese inner city, and how does this inform our broader understanding of the ways in which immigrants understand and interface with the communities in which they reside?

The lived experiences of immigrants in Nishinari are inherently complex, diverse, and dynamic. This dynamism is manifested in the varied ways in which immigrants perceive and describe their place of residence. As residents, the immigrants' diverse perceptions of the Nishinari area (hereafter referred to as "perceptions of Nishinari"[4]) provide valuable insight for interpreting recent changes and social trends in the area. While research on the migration process and social capital seeks to illuminate how immigrants come to make Nishinari their home and the kinds of relationships they form there, questions concerning how these people perceive their living environment and their experiences within Japanese society are invariably more subjective. The goal of this paper is to provide a framework for the common "perceptions of Nishinari" by interpreting the narratives of immigrant residents.

This paper will begin with an overview of the prior research devoted to uncovering immigrants' perceptions of their environment. Following that, I will introduce the concept of the lifeworld and elucidate the "perceptions of Nishinari," the central theme of this research. After identifying the factors contributing to the framework, I will analyze the typology of the "perceptions of Nishinari" through case studies. Finally, this paper will conclude with a discussion of cognitive variability, focusing on how one's "perception of Nishinari" can change over time.

1. The perceptions of immigrants

Among the qualitative literature on immigrants, the views and perspectives they hold of their host societies is a central theme. Indeed, this topic's impact is far reaching, stretching beyond the domain of sociology to a wealth of other disciplines, from psychology and anthropology to economics and political science. For the purposes of this paper, I review previous studies in the field of urban sociology to better understand the influx of immigrants into marginalized and impoverished neighborhoods.

In Japanese urban sociology, Hideo Aoki (1993) views international migration as a re-stratification of the urban underclass of the host society. This argument focuses on the processes of sending and receiving and offers a typology of the position of foreign workers in the Japanese labor market. In his delineation of the stratification of workers, Aoki emphasizes both the fluidity and the diversity of the lower urban strata in Japanese society. However, as this argument rests strongly on the historical backdrop of the early 1990s, it reduces

[3] Interviews were conducted in Japanese or English, depending on which language the participant was more comfortable using. In only one circumstance was interpretation necessary (participant K3), in which the participant used Korean, and a mutual acquaintance translated into Japanese. Further, each interview participant is assigned a code consisting of a letter representing their nationality and a number corresponding to the sequence of their interview. For example, P2 designates the second Filipino participant interviewed for this study.

[4] "Perceptions of Nishinari" is used here to reflect the Japanese term 「西成地区観」, which indicates immigrants' subjective interpretations of their neighborhood, rather than objective assessments.

foreigners residing in the areas studied to merely manual laborers. As a result, the scope of Aoki's analysis is overly narrow when one considers the current situation in which the social status and occupations of foreign residents have become highly differentiated.

Kahoruko Yamamoto (2000; 2010) conducted similar work in Kotobukicho, a *yoseba*, or district within a Japanese city where day laborers congregate to find work, of Yokohama city. Through her exploration of the perspectives of manual laborers from Korea and the Philippines residing in Kotobukicho, Yamamoto found that these immigrants differ from the Japanese residents in the area. That is, contrary to the Japanese, who are subject to a degree of exclusion from larger society and bear an inferiority complex, the immigrants in Kotobukicho see it as a place where they can earn high wages and interact with their fellow residents. Although an interesting and important point, Yamamoto's representation of immigrants assumed that they have maintained the same, homegeneous perspectives since their arrival in Japan.

In this respect, western urban sociology is instructive. The study of urban migration has its roots in the Chicago school of sociology (Park and Burgess 1925; Zorbaugh 1929), and this paper focuses on a theoretical shift that occurred during the mid-1980s. It was at this time that the traditional theoretical frameworks proposed by the Chicago school (namely, assimilation, multiculturalism, and ethnic enclave theory) started receiving criticism for not reflecting reality and being too ethnocentric (Zhou 1997). Consequently, focus was placed on reexamining the immigrants' journey within their host societies, and a richer understanding of the immigrant experience in the United States—namely, that variation exists within the immigrant community and they cannot be expected to simply assimilate into the middle class—took hold. The segmented assimilation theory was the first to posit that immigrants, especially second-generation and onward, integrate into different segments of the host society, leading to diverse social and economic outcomes (Portes and Borocz 1989; Portes and Zhou 1993), while also taking differences within immigrants' perspectives into account. As Yamamoto (2000, 2010) analyzed in Kotobukicho, newly arriving immigrants tend to perceive and experience their place of residence differently from general society. A similar trend can be observed in large American and European cities as well. From their research in Miami and San Diego, Portes and Rumbaut (2014: 178) point out that, contrary to their predictions, and even though most immigrants live in relatively poor areas, many of them think positively of these areas[5]. These perceptions are seen as the result of a combination of factors, namely the living conditions and experiences in their home countries and host societies.

More recent studies, however, have begun exploring immigrants' perceptions from the approach of social psychology, focusing on the link between place of residence and life chances, experiences of discrimination, and stigma (Broto et al. 2010). This has revealed more varied interpretations of immigrants' perceptions of their place of residence and host society, adding nuance to what was once characterized as generally positive. Indeed, when immigrants are unable to move to their desired location due to economic exigencies, many cases reveal that they go on to criticize and discriminate against other residents (Smith and Ley 2008; Wacquant et al. 2014). In sum, while immigrants' perceptions and experiences of their place of residence necessarily and

[5] Jensen and Christensen (2012) and Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001) also report similar findings from different fields, the former in East Arlburg, Denmark, and the latter in Kolkata, India.

naturally differ from what is common in the larger host society, we must also acknowledge the internal gradations that exist among immigrants themselves.

French sociologist Serge Paugam (2005) argues that taking diversity into account is a theoretical and analytical advancement. Indeed, he posits that in order to understand the process of poverty, it is necessary to simultaneously consider the social representation of poverty and the experiences of those identified as poor. In doing so, it becomes clear that poverty has different meanings depending on the level of economic and industrial development of a country or region, making it possible to analyze the subjective aspects of poverty as well. This study shares Paugam's awareness of the subjective nature and experience of poverty: to fully understand the case of Nishinari and avoid simplistic generalizations, it is necessary to employ an analytical framework capable of addressing the area's extensive diversity.

2. From the "lifeworld" to "perceptions of Nishinari"

The concept of the "lifeworld" has been frequently used by social scientists in an attempt to comprehensively understand the lives of their subjects. Tomoko Fukuda (2012: 14), who studied transnational networks of Pakistani residents in Japan, summarizes the usage of this analytical framework as follows:

> The concept of the lifeworld has often been used in Japanese migration research. It involves a reconstruction of the subject's reality through participant observation, interviews, surveys of living conditions, and especially life histories and ethnography. (translated by the author)

It is important to note that the lifeworld does not aim to represent reality itself, but the reality of the parties concerned. Although the methodological superiority of empiricism and subjectivism has long been debated, the goal of the lifeworld is not objectivity. Rather, it is incumbent upon the researcher to be as aware as possible of his or her own positionality, and to describe and reconstruct in concrete terms how the participant's habits and behaviors are subjectively conceived and expressed (Frick 2011).

By focusing on the participant's daily practices and the diversity within them, the lifeworld is informative when examining the relationship between social structure and the individual. As Ijichi (2000) explains from her fieldwork on Jeju Island, the study of the lifeworld cannot be constructed from the traditional dichotomy of structuralism and individual agency, but must recognize the give-and-take between the two. No matter how much an individual is constrained within a given social structure, there is always room for improvisation and negotiation to emerge.

It is in this vein that the concept of the lifeworld informs our understanding of Nishinari. As mentioned above, the "perceptions of Nishinari" that this paper aims to uncover necessarily reflect the participants' lifeworlds. As will be detailed in the next section, the "perception of Nishinari" is the subjective interpretation by each participant of the place in which he/she lives, and I will analyze the specific factors and process of its formation. Given such conceptual complexity, a comprehensive description of the lifeworld—made up of everyday practices, such as customs, values, backgrounds, cultural practices considered traditional, improvisation, social structures, and more (Ijichi 2000)—falls beyond the scope of this paper. As such, the "perception of Nishinari" is a thread that runs through the lifeworld of immigrants, but is not equal to it.

Nevertheless, the sociological significance of elucidating the "perceptions of Nishinari" can be summarized in the following two points. Firstly, even if the level of analysis does not reach that of the lifeworld, it is still possible to reconstruct the "perceptions of Nishinari" from the participants' narratives. These perspectives, inherently subjective, are rooted in deep and

meaningful personal experiences. Above mere observations of whether Nishinari is good place to live or not, objections to Japanese society, complex attitudes toward experiences of discrimination, and contradictory statements emerge through this form of expression, providing valuable data for interpreting the relationship between social structures and the individual.

The second point of sociological significance is its contribution as a case study. The immigrants living in the Nishinari area represent a growing population of subalterns in Japan's "stigmatized inner-city," and their understanding of social status and perceptions of their situation provide a unique case study that informs urban sociology, immigration studies, and Buraku studies. As outlined in the previous section, the accumulation of research focusing on the perceptions held by immigrants in recent years has forced researchers to acknowledge the diversity that exists within those views, making it difficult to advance theory beyond descriptive observation. In this paper, I posit four types of "perceptions of Nishinari," keeping in mind the improvisational and variable nature of the participants emphasized in the lifeworld framework. Of the four types presented here, some have been observed in other fields, while others have yet to be outlined in detail. Moreover, by examining the process by which immigrants' perceptions are formed, it is possible to draw connections between the Nishinari area and other marginalized inner-city neighborhoods studied around the world.

3. The formation process

Portes and Rumbaut (2014) point out that not only do the attitudes and perceptions immigrants hold differ according to their place of residence and host society, but that significant variation can be also observed within the same immigrant communities. Based on findings from previous studies which posit that immigrants' subjective perceptions are mainly shaped by various social and economic factors in their home and host societies, in this section, I will examine the factors at play in forming participants' "perceptions of Nishinari."

The conditions in migrants' home countries provide a useful starting point. The culture and social norms, level of economic development, standard of living, and native language of immigrants living in Nishinari are all determined by their country or region of origin, and it is important to note that this directly impacts their subjective perceptions. As such, it can be said that the cultural and socioeconomic conditions of the home country shape immigrants' habitus and form the basis of their worldview prior to migration (Bourdieu 1972; Broto et al. 2010). After leaving their home country and moving abroad, immigrants compare and judge their destination against standards and expectations formed in their home country, at least initially. Merton (1957) investigated the same phenomenon through the concept of relative deprivation. That is, whether one is satisfied or dissatisfied with their circumstances is determined not by absolute conditions, but by the relative standards each individual adopts (Merton 1957; Pettigrew et al. 2008). This explains why immigrants tend to have different perceptions from those of the general society in their host country; a phenomenon which can also be observed in Nishinari.

The level of economic development in an immigrant's country of origin and their social status within it are important factors informing their "perception of Nishinari." More specifically, whether the participant came from a developed society or a developing country, and whether their background was middle-class or working-class, are all meaningful factors influencing their interpretation of Nishinari. In some cases, circumstances in the home country are directly connected to the migrant's purpose for migrating to Japan. For example, participants N1 and N2, both of whom were

born in northern Nigeria, fled to Japan to escape persecution by Boko Haram. The Koreans interviewed for this study came to Japan through a network of compatriots that directly tied their place of birth to the Nishinari area. In all cases, however, the criteria immigrants adopt for evaluating their place of residence vary depending on their motivations for migration and expectations when moving to Japan, and these differences are ultimately reflected in the "perceptions of Nishinari."

Another determining factor in the foundation of the "perceptions of Nishinari" is the migration pattern, specifically, whether they moved to Japan by choice or not. Of the participants who had no say in the decision, many began living in Nishinari immediately upon arriving in Japan. For them, their new neighborhood came to represent all of Osaka city and, by extension, Japanese society as a whole.

> P2: "(Before coming to Japan,) I knew almost nothing about this country and had no expectations in particular. I only came here because my mother told me to… When I first came to Nishinari, of course I was very happy because it is totally different from the Philippines. You know, the city is clean, there are no cockroaches or rats. I liked it because I could go anywhere by bicycle. And I liked the Japanese baths (ofuro) right from the start."

This account can be considered representative of the experience of those who moved to the area with no other recourse. This group of immigrants, who moved into the Nishinari area without any awareness of its relative social status, invariably evaluate their new life based on standards inculcated in their home countries. For those like participant I1, an Indonesian immigrant who has only lived in the Nishinari area and explains that he "fell in love with Japan because of its food and the warmth of the people," Nishinari serves as the benchmark for Japanese society. However, as their stay in Japan grows longer and they gain a deeper understanding of the area in which they live within larger Japanese society, their criteria change, and with it, their "perception of Nishinari" changes as well.

Conversely, most immigrants who chose to move to Japan lived in other regions of the country or parts of Osaka for some time—and therefore developed, to varying degrees, an understanding of Japanese society and the stigma associated with Nishinari—prior to moving in. Indeed, exposure to negative comments about their choice of residence, such as "Nishinari is scary" or "overrun by homeless people," or through the process of visiting the area themselves, they begin to form the basis of their "perception of Nishinari" in advance. Given that they decided to live in Nishinari despite the existence of these negative biases and other available options, we can assume that the area met their standards in one way or another, even if it was not ideal. In other words, the immigrants who make a rational decision to move into Nishinari do so with prior knowledge and set of expectations that make them less likely to be surprised by their area of residence than members of the previously discussed group. Moreover, if these immigrants find life in Nishinari to not match with the discriminatory rhetoric they faced prior to moving in, they feel further justified in their choice of residence.

In addition to factors relating to the home country, the immigrants' lived experiences in Japanese society also influence the "perceptions of Nishinari." Broadly speaking, immigrants' relationship with Japanese society and means of accumulating social capital are largely determined by their Japanese language skills and access to compatriot networks. In general, the more an immigrant personally associates with Japanese people, the more likely he or she is to become aware of public perception of the Nishinari area, which in turn impacts their "perception of Nishinari." When immigrants who previously held a favorable impression of their neighborhood are told of the "dirty and dangerous Nishinari," a cognitive dissonance

occurs, causing some people to change their views, others to become conflicted.

That being said, there are situations in which immigrants are made aware of the status of Nishinari even without forging strong bonds with Japanese society. For example, K1, a Korean woman, first learned of Nishinari discrimination by interacting with a cab driver who was reluctant to let her ride when she shared her destination. Of the participants interviewed for this study, K1 thinks more positively of the Nishinari area than most, yet even she admits that this experience—a symptom of territorial stigma—made her reconsider her place of residence. While there are cases of long-term residents who never come to realize how Nishinari is thought of by larger society, generally, participants' ability to understand and speak Japanese improves the longer they live in Japan, thus increasing their exposure to dismissive or outright discriminatory views.

In sum, it can be said that immigrants' "perceptions of Nishinari" are shaped by both experiences in their home country as well as those within Japanese society. However, it is also necessary to account for the role of individual attitudes in this analysis. Data from this survey reveals that two immigrants who share similar backgrounds and experiences—and even members of the same family—can form completely different "perceptions of Nishinari." As such, despite my best efforts in analyzing the factors discussed here, I must also recognize that there is a limit to their predictive power. In the next section, I will construct a typology of the "perceptions of Nishinari" and examine it through illustrative case studies.

4. Uncovering the "perceptions of Nishinari"

In explaining the typology of "perceptions on Nishinari" (Table 1), the following two points should be noted in advance. First, the "perceptions of Nishinari" discussed below are ideal types inductively derived from the data of this survey, and do not claim to be an exhaustive summary of all of the possible subjective views of immigrants. As ideal types, each is intended to analyze general trends rather than to wholistically describe the narratives of the participants in their entirety. Secondly, the "perceptions of Nishinari" are not mutually exclusive, but contain partially overlapping aspects. While this will be discussed in detail in the following section, it is because individual perceptions often change organically over time and rarely fit neatly into one type in perpetuity. Therefore, the classification of each participant represents only what his or her perception was at the time of the interview, and it should not be assumed that their type is fixed or incapable of changing in the future. As I covered at the

Table 1: The Typology of "Perceptions of Nishinari"

#	Type	Main Characteristics	Applicable Participants
1	Ignorance is Bliss	• Unaware of the existence of discrimination • Hold generally positive views of their place of residence	13 of 31
2	Positive Defiance	• Aware of the existence of discrimination and actively oppose it • Hold positive views of their place of residence and seek understanding from general society	12 of 31
3	Internalized Discrimination	• Hold biases toward the area and its residents • Support social stigma against Nishinari while simultaneously being a victim of it	4 of 31
4	Inferiority Complex	• Vacillate between positive and negative views toward the area • Sensitive to discrimination and conditioned to believe it	2 of 31

beginning of this paper, traditional assimilation theory was pilloried by the following generation for being too simplistic to properly ascertain the immigrant experience (Zhou 1997). As such, the similarities between the following types are a feature, not a bug, of this framework, in that it allows us to capture the breadth, depth, and complexity of the views expressed.

4.1. "Ignorance is Bliss"

The first "perception of Nishinari" may initially seem surprising given the prevalence of negative discourse surrounding the area, but it proves to be quite natural upon examination. The main characteristic is that participants of this type live in Nishinari without any knowledge of its social status and perceive the area in a positive or neutral way, thus leading me to name this type "Ignorance is Bliss"[6]. These participants are unable to pick up on the region's characteristics and the stigma it faces from general society, evaluating their place of residence solely through comparison with their environment in their home country. At the time of this study, 13 of 31 participants interviewed fit the "Ignorance is Bliss" type. Their backgrounds are diverse—two Nigerians, one Indonesian, four Filipinos, one Italian, one American, two Chinese, one Vietnamese, and one Nepali—spanning four continents and a broad range of economic development.

How does this perception emerge and persist? While varying in nationality, age, occupation, and gender, most participants in this type are relatively young, the majority of whom are international students and short-term visitors. There is considerable variation in migration processes as well: while reliance on organizational networks is the most common pattern, there are also those who deliberately chose to live in the Nishinari area. While this type is diverse in terms of attributes, they all share a low level of Japanese language proficiency and weak connections with Japanese society.

While foreign students naturally come to Japan with the goal of learning the language, in dorms and at their part-time jobs, and even after graduation, they are surrounded by classmates and other non-Japanese, making it difficult for them to establish personal relationships with Japanese people. Despite the fact that they are in contact with Japanese society in an educational setting daily, they live unaware of the history, social status, and existence of discrimination in their place of residence. The same trend can be observed with short-term missionaries, such as Filipino participants P3, P4, P7, and American participant A1, who focus their time and attention on their work, and Nigerian asylum seekers, like N1 and N2, who necessarily prioritize establishing a stable foundation for their lives. In all of these cases, participants have only limited engagement with Japanese society and thus have few opportunities to learn about the Nishinari area or encounter discrimination.

Blissfully ignorant of public prejudice, these participants form a "perception of Nishinari" that is unencumbered by negativity and stigma from the outside. As prior research indicates, immigrants in such a position tend to judge the host society and their place of residence within it based on the conditions in their home country, and in the case of these 13 participants, developing countries (Nigeria, the Philippines, China, Nepal, Vietnam, and Indonesia) make up the overwhelming majority. When compared to where they grew up, the Nishinari area is relatively clean, well-maintained, safe, and far from inferior in their eyes.

[6] In the original Japanese, this type is referred to as 「井の中の蛙」, which is the first half of an idiom that can be directly translated as "a frog in a well does not know the great ocean." Metaphorically, this idiom represents a person unaware of the world beyond one's small bubble, so for the English translation, I have adopted "Ignorance is bliss" to capture the same sentiment.

Let us examine the narratives of three immigrants who fit this type.

> IN1 (Indonesian male student): "(Where I grew up in) Bali is dirty and the streets are quite dangerous."
> Author: "Oh, crime, you mean?"
> IN1: "There was a lot of crime near my parents' house, yeah… But in Japan, in Nishinari it is clean and free, and I don't have that kind of fear at all.

> P3 (Filipina missionary): "I really don't know anything about Nishinari. Well, I know that it is very different from Manila. But I think Nishinari is very peaceful. The people are quiet and kind, busy, in general. I feel like Nishinari is a place to raise a family."

> V1 (Vietnamese male student): "Osaka is a bustling city, but it is very easy to live here (in Nishinari). It is close to Namba[7], and there are many trains, convenience stores, and supermarkets. And everyone is very kind and helpful. It is safe and convenient, and there are many beautiful stores…I liked living in Vietnam, but the roads are not good, there are many traffic accidents. It's just a lot less convenient. In Nghe An Province, where I lived, there are only three supermarkets."

These three participants share a significant amount in common: they all came from Southeast Asia, migrated to Japan in their early twenties, and have only lived in the Nishinari area within Japan. Like other participants in this type, they tend to describe their place of residence largely through comparisons with their home countries, revealing interpretations of Nishinari that directly oppose the commonly held images of fear and prejudice shared by Japanese society.

While the area's proximity to downtown Osaka is geographical fact, the perception that Nishinari is a relatively clean and safe area indicates a lack of knowledge about Japanese society. Without historical context, it is no surprise that these immigrants are unaware that the Nishinari area is a *hisabetsu buraku*, but they also fail to recognize that they are living in the middle of the largest concentration of poverty in all of Japan. IN1 reveals through the statement "in Japan, in Nishinari it is clean and free" that his lens for interpreting Japanese society is indeed Nishinari itself. P3, who goes so far as to emphasize the area's promise for raising children, is oblivious to the fact that Nishinari has the highest number of single-parent households in Osaka, in addition to the highest aging rate and the shortest average life expectancy in Japan.

There are others in this type who do not give as much credit to their place of residence[8]. Most of these participants are living there for economic necessity, although some are residing with their families. Unlike those quoted above, these participants do not speak of Nishinari in such lofty terms ("comfortable" was the most colorful expression used by these five), but they seem to be satisfied overall with the low cost of living and rent. These participants do not necessarily seek to establish a life in Nishinari; they just happen to live there now, and would probably move to another area given the chance. However, they demonstrate no awareness of the area's social status—nor do they harbor any distaste toward it or its residents—which fits the mold for the "Ignorance is Bliss" type.

It is worth clarifying that to acknowledge the existence of this type is not to deny the narratives of these participants as inconsistent or untrue. Given that subjective perception is constrained by one's mental models, a participant who has not been socialized in Japan cannot be expected to understand its complex social structures and history of discrimination and ostracization. Until these participants

[7] Namba is one of the main commercial and entertainment districts of Osaka, located in the south-central part of the city.

[8] There are five subjects in particular who fit this pattern: N1 and N2, a Nigerian male and female, P6, a Filipino, and C1 and C3, a Chinese male and female.

accumulate the time and experience required to understand their place of residence in the context of larger Japanese society, their "perception of Nishinari" is of an area with a higher standard of living than their home countries. This type is, therefore, transitory: while 13 participants shared this "perception" at the time of the interview, the same trend can be observed in all participants who had no say in moving to the Nishinari area immediately after migration. The "perception of Nishinari" that an immigrant transitions into, however, depends on his or her experiences, evolved understanding, and reactions to one's changing conditions.

4.2. "Positive Defiance"

Participants who fall into the second type also appreciate the Nishinari area, but speak based on an entirely different perception than those of the previous type. These immigrants form an identity of "Positive Defiance" against Nishinari discrimination and broader social inequality in Japan. Interestingly, the backgrounds of those who hold this "perception of Nishinari" are even more diverse than the "Ignorance is Bliss" type, and it is difficult to find similarities in their home environments or the circumstances surrounding their migration. The 12 participants in this type come from seven countries: the Philippines, Germany, South Korea, Nepal, China, India, and the United Kingdom. There is considerable variation in their age, gender, occupation and relationship to Japanese society as well. That being said, there are three throughlines that unify this type: these participants have generally lived in Japan for an extended period of time (the one exception being HI, an Indian male who has only lived in Japan for two years), they have an accurate understanding of the social status and stigma associated with the Nishinari area, and they actively defy discrimination and prejudice from the general public.

"Positive Defiance" is characterized by a high level of Japanese language ability and extensive contact with Japanese people. Of these 12 participants, nine are Long-term Residents or Permanent Residents, and five have intimate relationships with Japanese people. It is also worth noting that only three of these participants have lived in Nishinari from the beginning of their stay in Japan. Excluding P1 (a Filipina) and K1 and K6 (South Korean women), who moved into the area directly from overseas, the others made the conscious decision to reside in Nishinari after living in Japan for a certain period of time. While differences of degree exist between these participants, the fact that they deliberately chose to move into Nishinari even after learning of the area's social status is revealing. Despite the diverse criteria that informed their decisions (while K4 and UK2 (South Korean and British, respectively) emphasized economics, H1 (Indian male) prioritized proximity to work, P5 (Filipina) and Chinese participants C2 and C5 valued potential job opportunities, and G1 (German male) declared eloping with his Japanese partner as the main reason), it is clear that they moved into the area with a specific set of expectations. Choosing Nishinari, in the face of certain discrimination and social stigma, is their first act of defiance.

How do participants articulate this mindset? NE1, a Nepalese male who graduated from a Japanese language school and vocational school and has lived in Nishinari for three years, describes his experience as follows:

> Author: "What did you know about the area before you moved in?"
> NE1: "Well, I knew that Nishinari is considered the most dangerous area in Osaka, yeah. My teachers and friends constantly told me that it was dangerous to live here… I was a little disappointed that my friend believed that, so one day I invited him (to come to my apartment). 'Nothing's gonna happen, man, just come over,' like that. But he refused, he didn't come. I've lived here for three years now, and never once felt in danger, but I still get comments (from friends and others). I've just learned to stop paying attention."

Uncomfortable with the stigma and generalizations he faced on a regular basis, NE1 took concrete steps, like inviting his friend to visit the area, to dismantle them. Cognizant of the strong negative perceptions handicapping the area, he seeks to share his experiences and raise awareness amongst those around him. The efficacy of his actions, however, are tenuous at best, evinced by expression like "he refused, he didn't come" and "but I still get comments." Despite this, he continues to demonstrate an unwavering spirit of positive defiance with his concluding statement: "I've just learned to stop paying attention."

C4, a 71-year-old Chinese woman who began living in the Nishinari area in 2001, reflected on her first impressions of the community and the 15 years since.

> C4: "(My first impression was that) I didn't think badly of the area at all. When I first came here, people told me that it was not a nice area, but once I arrived, I had trouble finding things I thought were bad. The image of Nishinari is bad—that's for sure—but the area itself is not so… When I was studying Japanese at Y Junior High School[9], people used to say that Nishinari was not a nice place to live, but I always argued with them that that was not true…There are many schools, shopping is convenient, and everything is inexpensive. And as for transportation, there is the subway, Nankai Line, JR Line, and buses as well. For me, Nishinari is a very nice place to live. I say this with pride."
> Author: (with a laugh) "I know what you mean. People are often surprised when I tell them I live in Nishinari."
> C4: "Well, people who don't know about the area say that it is not a good place, or they just talk about the reputation of Nishinari in general. I guess it takes actually living here to see the good."

C4 makes a clear distinction between outsiders "who don't know," who merely accept the widespread discrimination of the area wholesale, and residents who "actually" understand what it is like to live there. In proudly asserting the benefits of living in Nishinari, C4 is fighting a similar battle to NE1. She seeks empathy from those around her, to varying degrees of success. Ultimately, however, she rationalizes the position of those who think poorly of the area by stating that actually living in Nishinari seems to be a prerequisite for appreciating its upside.

K4, a South Korean male, first came to Japan as an international student. He later moved into the Nishinari area after discovering its inexpensive housing. Following graduation, he found a job, married a fellow South Korean migrant, and started preparing to settle down. He recalls that after becoming financially viable, he was torn for a considerable period of time as to whether he should raise his family in the Nishinari area or not. However, he admits that as time passed, and he became more comfortable with the area, his mindset changed. He described this process as follows:

> K4: "In the beginning, you know, the rent was cheap, the cost of living was cheap, and I that was just the kind of place I was looking for. But when it came to my family, well, I was pretty worried. For a little while, I was unsure. But I got to know a lot of people at my kids' school, got involved with PTA, and when I talked to people, they were all very warm-hearted. Actually living here with my family, I found that it was a very nice place. Now, I have no worries and plan on staying here at least until my youngest (the youngest of five) graduates from school."

Despite changes in priorities due to becoming a father, K4 opted to remain in Nishinari after careful consideration, and he now feels at ease. Further, like C4, he uses the word "actually" to emphasize the difference between the reality of living in the area versus the public image of it. He had the following to say regarding the area's social status:

[9] Y Junior High School is not located in the Nishinari area.

> K4: "There are many rumors, not so good rumors. Even 15 years ago (when I first moved to the area), there were rumors, you know, and people saying all kinds of exaggerated things. But these rumors, well, they make me very sad, because that's not what actually living here is like. For me, this is a wonderful place to live. I could call it my second home. There isn't one part of me that wants to move elsewhere."

K4, who has forged a connection with the Nishinari community over the course of his time living there, is distressed by the area's reputation. Despite this, K4 remains loyal to Nishinari, not only by participating in the PTA and contributing to various community causes, but by positively defying the discrimination that plagues the area.

In addition to the three immigrants introduced above, P1, K1, and K6, who could not choose where they would live in Japan, also fit the "Positive Defiance" type. This is worth noting because unlike those who moved into the Nishinari area with prior knowledge of its public perception, these three participants went through a phase of "Ignorance is Bliss" shortly after migrating. Over time, however, each of them became aware of their situation for one reason or another. This is a pivotal juncture in the arc of immigrants living in Nishinari, and various reactions are possible. Nevertheless, if the participant's lived experience does not align with the negative portrayals being propagated, leading them to believe that discrimination is unreasonable, the "perception" of "Positive Defiance" beings to emerge.

Participant P1's case sheds light on this point. P1 is a 20-year-old Filipina who migrated to Japan in April 2014 to live with her mother (P5), who has lived in the Nishinari area for 11 years. In her first year in Japan, with only beginner-level Japanese skills, she struggled working part-time at a *bento* shop. Following that, she joined a Japanese language school in Uehonmachi, some five kilometers from her home in Nishinari, where she spent the next year intensively learning the language. During this time, P1, who had the characteristics of the "Ignorance is Bliss" type until then, expanded her sphere of everyday life—both geographically and socially—and as a result, learned about discrimination in Nishinari for the first time.

> P1: "At first, a teacher at school told me. Somehow that teacher found out that I live in Nishinari and approached me, with this *really* worried look on her face. She told me to be careful, that was about it. And then shortly after that, I got the same thing from my classmate. First, he laughed when he heard about Nishinari and said something like, 'You live in the ghetto.' This really made me think. I don't know if Nishinari is the ghetto, like I don't even know what a ghetto is in the first place. Why can't I see what these people seem to know (about Nishinari)?"

The experience of being repeatedly insulted created an internal conflict, which would ultimately lead to an evolution of her awareness from "Ignorance is Bliss" to "Positive Defiance." Six months later, during our second interview, the change in P1 was evident.

> P1: "I'm used to it now. You know, people making fun of where I live, hearing lies told about me."
> Author: "You're *used* to it?"
> P1: "Yeah, it happens all the time. But I think my perspective on Nishinari has changed a lot. At first, I couldn't stop thinking about it 'cause people were saying all kinds of things. I was like, 'Is my neighborhood really dangerous?' you know? But I've lived here for two years now, and have never felt "in danger" as they say. To be honest, I'm quite comfortable here. I go out alone at night, and I always ride my bicycle to my part-time job. Now I just ignore the people who have something to say (laughs)."

It goes without saying that this narrative is based on a different "perception of Nishinari" than the first interview. What is most important, however, is that of the several possible reactions P1 could have had to learning about how her place of residence is perceived by society at large (and

the same goes for K1 and K6, who had similar experiences), she chose to reject the biases she was told were common sense and trust her lived experience. Although the following section reveals a different reaction to similar circumstances, the "perception" of "Positive Defiance" is unaffected and unwavering when confronted with staunch territorial stigma. Regularly using expressions like "I don't care," "actually live here," and "it's a nice place," these participants highlight the gap between real conditions on the ground and negative popular opinion, taking pride in the lives they are building in Nishinari.

4.3. "Internalized Discrimination"

The third type, named "Internalized Discrimination," refers to immigrant residents of the Nishinari area who have adopted the same viewpoint as general society toward their place of residence. Four participants share these characteristics: two are long-term residents of Nishinari, Korean females K2 and K3; the remaining two, a Filipina (P2) and a British male (UK1), both moved elsewhere after only residing for a short period of time. The first two are fluent in Japanese and have received permanent residency. The latter remain unable to speak Japanese, and P2 has already returned to her home country.

These participants also share a common origin story. With the exception of UK1, the other three relied on connections with compatriots when moving to Japan, meaning that they could not choose their place of residence. K3 briefly summarizes this experience by saying that upon leaving her home country and coming to Japan, "I just ended up here and that was it." UK1 differs from this in that he was already living in Japan prior to moving into Nishinari. He recalls that there was a two-month gap when changing jobs before he could start at his new company, and economic necessity led him to choose a guesthouse in the area. As he never intended to live there long-term, UK1 did not integrate into the community and moved out as soon as his financial situation allowed him to do so, just three months after moving in.

Further, the three women who fit this type each carry the scars of discrimination. When K2 was a student, for example, she was discriminated against by her Japanese classmates for being foreign and came up against prejudice toward Nishinari for the first time when she started working at a company just outside of Osaka city. P2 laments a different aspect of her plight, saying that foreign residents like her are at an extreme disadvantage because they can listen but not speak. "I can't defend myself outside of my home. It's sad when you can't express what you really feel."

But why do these participants, who have experienced the injustice and cruelty of discrimination firsthand, ultimately end up viewing their place of residence in a similarly prejudicial light? Examining the narratives of "Internalized Discrimination" provided a useful starting point.

> P2: "In the beginning I quite liked Nishinari."
> Author: "In the beginning?"
> P2: "Yes, in the beginning. But now, I think Nishinari is just full of strange people."
> Author: "Really?"
> P2: "There are a lot of crazy people, you know. Well, I don't know if they're actually crazy or just mentally ill, but there are a lot of them. And there are a lot of homeless people, too. You know that place near Shin-Imamiya station[10]?"
> Author: "Yes."
> P2: "It's like it's not even Japan. It's like, it's hell over there."

It is clear from this recollection that as P2 grew more familiar with the area, her "perception"

[10] P2 is referring to Kamagasaki, an area located in the northeast part of Nishinari ward where day-laborers, elderly men, and other socially-marginalized people congregate. Strictly speaking, Kamagasaki does not fall within the Nishinari area as defined in this paper.

shifted to one largely critical of her surroundings. Yet, while her reaction is similar to the others in this type, P2 is unique in that her inability to speak Japanese left her unaware of the larger, socially imposed discrimination against Nishinari. Put another way, P2's distaste for the Nishinari area developed independently from public perception, which sets her apart from the "Internalized Discrimination" type.

UK1 condemns many of the same aspects of the area as P2, but does so from a slightly different perspective.

> UK1: "I think Nishinari is a place for outcasts. Alcoholics, poor people, old people, people without jobs. It doesn't seem stable, you know, like people just come and go. I don't know if Nishinari is related to the *Burakumin* people, but anyway, there are a lot of poor people there…It's been two years since I left (Nishinari) and of course I don't wanna move back. People reject Nishinari, they say, "It's not Japan," as if the area does not exist. I don't go that far. I don't think people should reject it, or ignore it, either. I lived there, too, you know? But the place you live has an effect on you, so as long as I'm in Japan, I'm fine living somewhere else."

UK1 justifies his decision to move out by asserting the influence of one's living environment. However, it is interesting to note that UK1's "perception of Nishinari" diverges from those who completely look down on it. Although he clearly states that he no longer wishes to be associated with the area, he nevertheless expresses empathy and a degree of understanding for its residents, resisting the impulse to reject it entirely.

Having spent more than half of their lives in Nishinari, participants K2 and K3 have endured repeated experiences of social stigma. K3, who says that she would have no place to go even if she returned to South Korea, frames her harsh critique of Nishinari within the backstory of her migration to Japan and changes to the area.

> Author: "You said earlier that you didn't know anything about the Nishinari area before you moved here."
> K3: "That's right. Perhaps that's why I managed to live here: because I didn't know about other places… But you come to understand an area once you live there, right? Its color, shall we say. If I had children, I would have probably moved. For the children's sake, for their education. But I couldn't have kids, so here I am."
> Author: "Is that so? What is your opinion of Nishinari now?"
> K3: "I don't think it's a good place. No, even living here now, I don't think so. Just look at how many people there are on welfare. I hate to say it, but Nishinari is like the trash can of Japan. And maybe 10 years ago or so, more people started coming from other places and things got worse. (Residents have) no manners. They spit on the ground, in front of people's houses. That's Nishinari."

K3 was shocked when she came to understand the state of affairs in Nishinari and says that she argued with her husband several times about moving out. Her sharpest criticism is based in a comparison of Nishinari today to the Nishinari of the past, focusing on changes in the area due to an inflow of new residents—specifically, the socially marginalized, like welfare recipients—and the deterioration of moral standards in the community.

K2 also began living in the Nishinari area at a young age, but unlike K3, she concentrates more on outside influences in relating her story.

> K2: "I'm not discriminating, but there are a lot of old men and women on the street, and it's just a bit depressing. I don't like that part. I want to live in a livelier place."
> Author: "Really? So you'd like to leave Nishinari?"
> K2: "Well, it's not that I want to leave. It's not that I want to live here, either, it's just that I came here when I was little and didn't have a choice…But as an adult, I'm just tired of having to explain to people why I live here and be told that the area is dangerous. When people talk about Nishinari, they're referring to the people who are from here. But I'm not from here, I was

> born in Busan, and I don't appreciate being talked about like that. If I had had a choice (when moving to Japan), I wouldn't have chosen this place."

K2 dislikes being confused with other residents and distances herself from Nishinari and the gaze of discrimination by emphasizing that she was not born there. This is a strategy for coping with discrimination and has been identified in poverty studies literature and case studies of various other urban neighborhoods (Auyero 1999; Wacquant 2000). While K2 does acknowledge Nishinari's convenience, her ultimate stance is one of self-preservation, redirecting any negative bias she receives toward the area and its native residents.

As demonstrated above, the "Internalized Discrimination" of these four participants is not perfectly uniform, as each individual articulates his or her "perception" based on their own awareness and diverse experiences. While the targets of their criticism may vary, each is similar in their final analysis of the Nishinari area being an unworthy place for them to live (Popay et al. 2003).

Another commonality is that all four of these participants experienced some sort of difficulty or hardship either during their residence or prior to moving in. For example, K3 stated several times during the interview that if she had been able to have children, she would have put the Nishinari area behind her long ago. In other words, the very fact that she still lives in Nishinari is a reminder of the future she never got to build. In addition, UK1 moved into Nishinari due to financial exigencies: in between jobs, he was forced to make a rational decision during the poorest stage of his life in Japan. For him, this area is not only a place for "have-nots" to congregate, but also represents painful memories of economic uncertainty when he too could not afford to live elsewhere. While others in Nishinari inherited poverty, UK1 moved into it by necessity—a bitter sign that life was not going as planned.

It goes without saying that this study is limited in its ability to distinguish between discriminatory perceptions toward one's place of residence and explanations of the hardships one experiences whilst living there. However, the readily observable differences in the favorable descriptions of the area and lamentations over its public perception from the "Positive Defiance" type and the harsh criticisms levied by the participants in this section reveal the more general role of life satisfaction in determining one's response to territorially-based discrimination. In this way, we cannot separate how one chooses to narrate their "perception of Nishinari" from their sense of contentment in the area.

4.4. "Inferiority Complex"

"Inferiority Complex," the final "perception of Nishinari" analyzed in this study, is both the most complex and ambiguous. This type includes characteristics from "Positive Defiance" and "Internalized Discrimination," but also demonstrates an irresolute view toward discrimination. Only two participants (K5 and K7) fit this type, both of whom are Korean women with a long history in Nishinari. Despite a large age difference, both worked temporarily at a local shoe factory before moving on; the former to become a housewife, the latter to qualify for social welfare. Now, they spend most of their time in the Nishinari area and have many acquaintances in the community, most of whom are immigrants from South Korean or have Korean ancestry. Their lives are similar in many ways, except that K7 is married to a Japanese man, while K5 is married to a *Zainichi* Korean, whose parents moved into the area during the pre-war period and stayed there.

This type is unique in that it does not take a firm stance. While both women speak to the area's advantages (geographical convenience, friendly people, easy lifestyle, etc.), they also acknowledge its shortcomings and readily point on the impact of discrimination and negative

social status. However, this narrative differs from that of "Internalized Discrimination" in that it is not a personal indictment of Nishinari, but rather a rephrasing of the public discourse, with no individual value judgment mixed in. In other words, these participants are acutely conscious of the views imposed on them from the outside and equivocate when asked about what the Nishinari area means to them.

> K5: "I'm a little different from my husband. He grew up here. I didn't know the first thing about Nishinari when I moved in, just another neighborhood in Japan. I found out what Nishinari is like later on, though."
> Author: "And what did you find out?"
> K5: "Well, I'm not Japanese, but I speak as someone who has lived here for a long time, not as a foreigner. This place has a bad image. In the past, the people here were very discriminated against. It's not the same now, but if I didn't know about the history, I guess I'd think differently, I wouldn't care so much. But when I talk to people, I can't help but wonder what the other person is thinking."

K5 mentions numerous facts about the area—its history, the existence of discrimination—without inserting her personal opinion. She does admit, however, the fear and anxiety of painful social interactions.

K7 similarly interweaves public discourse and personal experience, making it difficult to determine where her narrative begins and ends. At 71-years-old, K7 reflected on her 23 years in Nishinari in the passage below:

> K7: "I don't think much has changed here because we were always poor. People say that (the area) has gotten much worse. I'm not so sure. I mean, I guess it's a little worse now than it was before."
> Author: "So it's changed somewhat?"
> K7: "I think so."
> Author: "What has?"
> K7: "But *we're* the same, you know. I haven't worked for about 10 years now, I'm still on welfare, so I guess it's the same."
> Author: "What do people say?"
> K7: "Well, I often hear that the community is getting worse. 'It's getting worse every day,' that kind of thing. A lot of people seem to have that feeling. Things are more expensive now, rent is going up, you know, like a downward spiral. I keep hearing that, and maybe it's just me, but not much has changed."

In this single quote, K7 wavers back and forth between two different positions. In the first half, she agrees with popular opinion that the area is deteriorating, but as she continues, she seemingly becomes less convinced, and finally asserts that "not much has changed." While K5 focused more on discrimination and its ill-effects, it is still evident that these two formed their "perceptions of Nishinari" on a solid foundation of public discourse.

Given the passive nature of this worldview, the content of their narratives is fluid and ambiguous, making it difficult to follow at times.

> K7: "So, Nishinari is… well, when I tell people that I live in Nishinari, it's like I left a bad taste in their mouth or something. Because that's the image, that's how people think of this place. I don't have children, but I think young families should live somewhere else. For the kids' sake. If I had the money, I might want to move to a different place. Who knows? But I'm old, so I gave up on all that long ago."

In this quote, K7 makes a distinction between her "perception of Nishinari" and the "Positive Defiance" and "Internalized Discrimination" types. Although K7 does not harbor as strong an attachment to Nishinari as the participants of the former type, she herself is not prejudiced against the area and does not condemn it or its residents, as one might expect from the latter. However, the manner in which she declares that she would hypothetically like to move out given a family or financial resources, only to immediately deny it as a mere pipe dream is interesting. Even after residing in Nishinari for many years—and admitting that she is significantly happier living there than in Korea—it remains an uneasy topic of discussion for her, one that she prefers to avoid if possible. Of the 31 immigrants

interviewed, these two were the only participants who talked more about the negative public perception of the area than their own lived experiences. It is this sense of inferiority that lies at the core of their "perceptions."

K7 concluded the interview by saying, "To put it simply, Nishinari is a great place for the poor and downtrodden: they can live here, they can survive." In passing, this seems like something an immigrant from the "Positive Defiance" type might say, but close examination of this statement reveals an embedded sense of inferiority. Even when upholding the area as "a great place," she qualifies this praise by pointing out that it is "for the poor and downtrodden." It is not a place to grow and thrive, but rather one where residents—herself included—can "live" and "survive." While a detailed analysis falls outside the scope of this paper, Wacquant and others have noted that this heightened sense of awareness toward one's place of residence is a manifestation of territorial stigma, which can influence even the most benign social interactions (Wacquant 2007; Arthurson et al. 2014).

5. Concluding observations: Change and variability in the "perceptions of Nishinari"

To summarize the typology of the "perceptions of Nishinari" laid out thus far, I focus on the variability in participants' perceptions to identify meaningful patterns. In doing so, it becomes clear that each individual immigrant's "perception of Nishinari" is not fixed, but shaped by a dynamic interplay of various factors over time. However, I do not aim to simply reiterate that the subjective consciousness of immigrants in a new environment is subject to change. Such an assertion actually misses out on a crucial part of the participants' narratives.

A. Portelli (1991: 50), a leading expert on oral history research, writes about the potentiality of interview data and the meaningful subjectivity of oral history as follows,

> "Oral histories tell us not just what people did, but what they intended to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."

In the context of this paper, Portelli's assertion reveals that when participants speak about the Nishinari area, they are not merely recounting their subjective experiences, but also situating their place of residence within their lives and ascribing meaning to it. Beyond the surface-level judgment of whether the Nishinari area is a good place to live or not, their narratives are saturated with messages about what kind of place the area was in the past, what kind of place they hoped the area could be, and how they themselves have changed as a result of residing there. As such, it is important to consider what the participants reveal about themselves through their portrayals of Nishinari, in addition to interpreting the specific "perception of Nishinari" being expressed. This analysis will focus on general trends that can be observed in each type.

As is evident from the examples introduced in the previous section, immigrants' "perceptions of Nishinari" follow a step-by-step formation process. All of the immigrants who had no say in their place of residence initially go through a phase of "Ignorance is Bliss," typically harboring positive first impressions of the area in comparison with their home countries. Whether or not their perceptions change often depends on the extent to which their understanding of Japanese society evolves—usually as a result of improved Japanese language skills and the development of new relationships with Japanese people. This process of "socialization" represents a transition from "Ignorance is Bliss" to another type.

This study indicates a few possible results of the socialization process. While participants like P1 and K1, who admit feeling confused initially, were able to transition from "Ignorance is Bliss" into "Positive Defiance," the progression is generally not so seamless. K6, for example, explains that socialization led to significant dissatisfaction—both with her life and

environment—that lingered until she eventually adjusted. In her own words,

> K6: "I was shocked, honestly. I mean, I saw men with skin diseases and naked men wandering around. I didn't understand anything at first, but it sure seemed like there were a lot of crazy people hanging around Nishinari. It was really hard for me to get used to. I couldn't accept what was going on around me."

K6 was one of the staunchest supporters of the Nishinari area in this study, but it is clear from the quote above that she moved through a period of "Internalized Discrimination" before arriving at her current type, "Positive Defiance." There are, however, those who do not make the second transition. Of the four cases presented in section 4.3, three of them changed from "Ignorance is Bliss" directly into "Internalized Discrimination," and still maintain a negative stance toward the area.

Another pattern recognizable from the data is the transition from "Ignorance is Bliss" to "Inferiority Complex." Given that the narratives typical of the "Inferiority Complex" type are ambiguous, it is possible to interpret them as currently undergoing the process of transition, on the way to finally settling on a different type. However, it is not the case that these participants are deciding between embracing the path of "Positive Defiance" or falling into "Internalized Discrimination." The contradictions apparent in the narratives of K5 and K7 are not the result of a "socialization-induced" paradigm shift, but rather speak to the conflicts that regularly emerge in their daily lives and interactions. As such, it is better to read this instability not as an indication that their "perception of Nishinari" will inevitably change in the future, but rather as a feature of this type itself, subject to subtle changes even from one day to the next.

The diverse lived experiences of the immigrants in this study and the typology of "perceptions of Nishinari" presented here point toward complexity, variety, and depth, challenging the reductive explanations relied upon in prior research. Indeed, in contrast to conclusions drawn in earlier studies of marginalized and impoverished areas, most participants did not perceive their place of residence as inferior—highlighting the importance of recognizing cognitive diversity (Porgham 2016). Among them, some are entirely unaware of Nishinari's social standing, while others consciously fight against it. By accounting for the variable of time, we can even observe the same participant change their perception of Nishinari (and by extension, Japanese society) by 180 degrees over the course of their residency. In each of these cases, the "perception of Nishinari" and its mode of expression are not uniform, but fluid and constantly evolving, often irrespective of the public perception of their place of residence.

However, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there are aspects of the "perceptions of Nishinari" that need to be examined beyond the frameworks of variability and cognitive diversity. The typology presented in this paper uses interview content—positivity, negativity, the degree of accuracy versus the degree of exaggeration, and so on—as the primary focus of analysis, but we must also be careful not to overlook how factors like the participants' life stage and sense of self are reflected in their narratives. Although the "Ignorance is Bliss" type has limited knowledge of Japanese society and is therefore limited in its ability to accurately assess the situation in Nishinari, the narratives tend to emphasize two key points: safety and freedom. While asylum seekers represent an exception, many of the participants in this type are young people—mainly international students and short-term missionaries—from developing countries, and their narratives are replete with the desire for a life unburdened by the daily stresses and persistent anxieties that characterize their experience back home. To the "Ignorance is Bliss" type, questions concerning his or her place of residence in Japan take on a fundamentally different meaning from that of a permanent resident. For the former, whose future in Japan most likely remains uncertain, the act of moving

into the Nishinari area represents a continuation of their first departure from home, symbolizing both the pursuit of adventure and their initial sense of independence. Even if these individuals were to learn the language and remain in Japan long enough to experience socialization, they are likely to maintain a positive view of Nishinari as long as they remain apprehensive about returning to their home country.

As described in the previous section, the positive evaluation offered by the "Positive Defiance" type is fundamentally based around the convenience and "livability" of the area, and many of these participants explain that their lives improved upon moving into the Nishinari area. For example, it was in Nishinari that Chinese immigrants C2, C4 and C5 obtained permanent residency; in Nishinari, Indian male H1 escaped the frantic pace of Tokyo and found suitable living conditions to match his laid-back personality; and in Nishinari, K4 purchased his first apartment, allowing him to settle down and devote himself to family life. Following a period of extreme poverty and separation from her family, P5 obtained long-term resident status and transformed her life after establishing a successful business in the Nishinari area. This success enabled her to bring her two children, who had remained at home in the Philippines, to live with her in Japan. Although few other cases in the "Positive Defiance" type have backstories as dramatic as that of P5, we can observe a distinct betterment in each of these participant's lives. Through "Positive Defiance," these immigrants do not only seek to expose the inaccuracy of public perceptions toward Nishinari. For them, Nishinari represents profound personal transformation, regardless of the extent to which these life events are related to their place of residence. In this sense, "Positive Defiance" is not merely a stance against discrimination and inequality; it is also an effort to safeguard a place they see as essential to their self-actualization. When Nishinari is disparaged, their journey to find happiness in Japan is endangered as well.

Conversely, "Internalized Discrimination" falls at the opposite end of the spectrum. In these narratives, the Nishinari area is commonly paired with hardship and strife. As noted in the previous section, these participants found themselves in challenging circumstances while residing in Nishinari. For P2, the Nishinari area is a signifier for confusion and loss of agency; for UK1, economic instability; for K2, it serves as a place of disempowerment; and for K3, a place where she could not start a family. Although the problems these immigrants face vary, each offers their own painful narrative of Nishinari. To process the struggles of the past, they distance themselves from—or openly reject—the Nishinari area and its residents, symbolically cutting ties with distressing memories.

In sum, the "perceptions of Nishinari" are not merely the subjective perceptions of one's place of residence, but also expressions of these immigrants' self-identities. Just as residents engage in a reciprocal relationship with their place of residence, the "perceptions of Nishinari" are inherently dual in nature as well. They reflect not only the subjective judgments immigrants make about the area, but also a reflection of their evolving identity in relation to place and society. While this paper is limited in its scope, the "perceptions of Nishinari" framework offers important insights into the dynamic and complex experiences of immigrants living in marginalized areas.

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