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Constructing who can be Japanese: A study of social markers of acceptance in Japan

Adam Komisarof[1] Chan-Hoong Leong,[2] and Eugene Teng[2]
[1]*Faculty of Letters, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan, and* [2]*National University of Singapore, Singapore*

Social markers of acceptance are socially constructed indicators of adaptation (e.g., language skills or adherence to social norms) that recipient nationals use in deciding whether to view an immigrant as a host community member. This study had two objectives: (a) to distill the markers considered important by Japanese undergraduates to accept immigrants in Japanese society and (b) to test the premises of integrated threat and social identity theories by ascertaining the effects on marker endorsement of perceived immigrant threat, contribution, relative social status, and intergroup permeability. Native-born Japanese (the term "native-born Japanese" is used throughout this article to refer to people born as Japanese citizens—differentiating them from immigrants who are Japanese citizens naturalized after birth) from 12 Japanese universities (N = 428) completed an online survey. Marker importance ratings were factor-analyzed, and three latent dimensions were found representing sociolinguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic markers. Multiple hierarchical regressions discerned the main effects of immigrants' perceived threat and contribution on social markers as well as their interactions with intergroup permeability and immigrant relative status. The results underscored perceived threat's consistent role in increasing marker importance and suggested divergent paths to acceptance: Immigrants perceived as "low-status" were expected to conform to sociolinguistic and ethnic markers, whereas socioeconomic markers were stressed more for "high-status" immigrants when perceived immigrant threat increased and intergroup boundaries were considered less permeable.

Keywords: immigrant acceptance, immigration in Japan, national identity, social identity theory, social markers of acceptance, social markers of acculturation.

Migration fuels intense debates worldwide as to what should be the demographic texture of recipient cultures (e.g., mono- or multiculturalism) and what it means for immigrants to become accepted members in host societies. While the concomitant embracing of host and immigrant cultures (i.e., integration) is seemingly the strategy linked to optimal sociopsychological outcomes for immigrants (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013), Leong (2014) argued that integration is not achievable in every situation or acculturation domain and that some cultural features clearly matter more than others to gain acceptance. Indeed, a rethink appears necessary in how acculturation should be theorized, as hosts often expect immigrants to embrace key characteristics of the national culture, or selective assimilation (Navas et al., 2005).

Consequently, Leong (2014) proposed an alternative framework using *social markers of acculturation* as a benchmark of intercultural adaptation. The markers are socially constructed indicators (e.g., adherence to social norms; expression of mainstream beliefs, attitudes, or values; and competencies such as language skills), or the perceptual signposts that recipient nationals use in deciding whether a migrant is a part of the host community. These milestones collectively reflect the degree of host inclusiveness, as they clarify which and how many of the markers are considered important.

Such markers appear pertinent in Japan, a "tight" society featuring a premium on conformity to conventional social norms and expectations (Gelfand et al., 2011), suggesting that the Japanese place importance on immigrants acquiring the markers to be accepted. Thus, markers provide a platform to study Japanese attitudes toward immigrants and can help immigrants and other acculturating groups to better understand expectations of them to realize membership. Markers may also be utilized exclusively by host society members when they are unrealizable through acculturation (e.g., changing one's birthplace or genealogy) or expected in quantities so numerous that they become almost impossible to achieve.

While social markers of acculturation constitute a relatively novel contribution to the literature, similar concepts demarcate slightly different psychosocial

Correspondence: Adam Komisarof, Faculty of Letters, Keio University, 5-4-17 Kajino-cho, Koganei-shi, Tokyo 184-0002, Japan. E-mail: Komisarof.adam@gmail.com

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phenomena in unpacking social inclusion, acculturation expectations, and national identity. For instance, various researchers (Jones & Smith, 2001; Kunovich, 2009; Shulman, 2002) have utilized data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) which, depending on the version, tested for seven or eight "attributes of national identity"—many of which appeared in the survey for our study of Japan. Critical differences between ISSP-based studies and ours include the scope of the markers examined (41 appeared in our survey) and our inductive method of generating culture-specific markers through focus groups. In addition, the ISSP examines the content of national identity, or how hosts define themselves, whereas our focus is on the criteria employed by hosts when deciding whether to accept immigrants as they do other native-born citizens. Alternatively, Kiely, Bechhofer, Stewart, and McCrone's (2001) *identity markers* are "social characteristics presented to others to support a national identity claim and looked to in others, either to attribute national identity, or receive and assess any claims or attributions made" (p. 33). Identity markers are conceptually similar to social markers in that they are signals of differences that construct the boundaries of national ingroup membership.

National identity can be *ascribed* or *achieved*. The former depends on largely or completely immutable criteria such as shared genealogy, territory, and/or religion (Esses, Dovidio, Semenya, & Jackson, 2005; Ha & Jang, 2015; Weinreich, 2009); the latter by an individual choosing a national identity (Weinreich, 2009) as well as fulfilling selected social contracts such as endorsing specific values and principles (Ditlmann, Purdie-Vaughns, & Eibach, 2011; Reijerse, Van Acker, Vanbeselaere, Phalet, & Duriez, 2013), respect for the host country's cultural traditions (Ha & Jang, 2015), or voluntary commitment to laws and institutions (Esses et al., 2005). Ascribed and achieved concepts elucidate the criteria by which people construct their national identity and decide whether to accept immigrants as national ingroup members. Accordingly, we have changed the nomenclature from Leong's (2014) social markers of acculturation to *social markers of acceptance* (SMA) because acculturation is possible for achievable markers (e.g., language acquisition), but not for ascribed ones (e.g., genealogy or birthplace); yet, either type can impact host society acceptance and hence qualifies as SMA.

Leong's (2014) concept of social markers is not aligned with either ascribed or achieved identities nor other categories of citizenship identity such as *civic* versus *ethnic* (Smith, 1991). SMA deconstructs more precisely and in variegated fashion the membership criteria within a national culture without imposing preexisting labels derived from such typologies. Recipient nationals' marker choices reveal what they consider as the essential attributes for immigrants if they are to be accepted in the host society to the same degree as a native, and the more markers endorsed (and the greater importance placed on them) implies a narrower definition of acceptance, requiring immigrants to meet a more demanding, exacting criterion to become a full member in the recipient society, whereas less markers (especially if weakly endorsed) reflect a more inclusive benchmark, as the path to acceptance features fewer and less rigid requirements. Thus, our study aimed to distill the markers that Japanese consider essential for immigrants to adopt to be accepted and to discern contextual conditions which influence such choices.

Theoretical Framework

The Meaning of Acceptance

Central to this study is societal acceptance—an outcome intimately related to belonging, which Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, and Collier (1992) defined as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (p. 173). Humans pursue belonging by choosing a social identity with particular groups and seeking acceptance there (Shore et al., 2011). Immigrant acceptance can be variably operationalized. For instance, host citizens may believe that immigrants contribute invaluably to the country's economic well-being (i.e., their functional indispensability) or agree that they are part of the national identity (i.e., identity indispensability) (Guerra, Gaertner, Antonio, & Deegan, 2015). In our study, focus groups almost exclusively discussed acceptance in terms of identity indispensability; in the survey, however, participants defined acceptance according to their own criteria, as we asked them what would be necessary to accept and view immigrants as Japanese citizens in the same way as native-born Japanese.

Analytical Framework and Hypotheses

This study's analytical framework was inspired by Leong (2014) and informed by integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Stephan and Stephan (2000), outgroup prejudice is predicated by two categories of threat: realistic (concerns about competition over economic resources including jobs and public services) and symbolic (apprehension about the erosion of culture and identity). Host nationals who perceive immigrants as sources of realistic or symbolic threat may reject them on the basis of their perceived burden on (or

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competition for) economic resources or their "incompatible" social identities, respectively (Esses & Jackson, 2009). Perceived threats from immigration predict greater social exclusion by raising the barrier of entry in the host society (Kiely et al., 2001), or in this case, increasing the number of markers deemed necessary for acceptance (Leong, 2014). The conceptual opposite of perceived immigrant threat is contribution—how much immigrants enrich lives in the recipient culture, and host nationals who see immigrants playing constructive roles in their society are likely to endorse fewer markers (Leong, 2014).

Alternatively, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits an inherent desire for positive distinctiveness by identifying with an ingroup that compares favorably with an outgroup. Outgroup threats are considered more intimidating if host–immigrant boundaries are porous, as the permeability reduces the ingroup's positive distinctiveness. In this study, intergroup permeability differs from outgroup acceptance; such permeability refers to the stability of the intergroup boundary between the Japanese and immigrants, with greater engagement between them enabling higher permeability, as such engagement (e.g., through studying or working together) increases the potential for moving between groups, or a more porous intergroup boundary. Under conditions of greater perceived threat, higher permeability is thought to strengthen emphasis on importance of the markers and diminish prospects for acceptance. Intergroup permeability's magnification of threat is also more acute when the outgroup is seen as being of lower social status, as it is undesirable for low-status outgroup members to easily gain ingroup membership (Terry, Pelly, Lalonde, & Smith, 2006). Thus, host nationals who believe immigrants occupy a comparatively lower social status, while concomitantly viewing the intergroup boundary as permeable, would be less accepting by imposing a more stringent set of marker-based criteria.

In Leong (2014), the relationship between perceived threat posed by immigration and consequent choices of social markers was moderated by the degree of hosts' socioeconomic confidence, but our moderating variables come from a social identity framework. Although socioeconomic confidence is not irrelevant in Japan, we considered more pertinent Japanese emphases on ingroup membership and identity (Befu, 2001) as well as social hierarchies (Komisarof, 2011) and, thus, our adoption of intergroup permeability and immigrant social status, respectively, as moderators of threat. We intentionally did not predict the underlying factor structure of the social markers in Japan; latent dimensions, if any, would emerge through exploratory factor analysis, and we assumed threat and contribution would influence all latent factors uniformly. These variables and their relationships are depicted in Figure 1, with the following hypotheses offered to test such relationships:

H1: Increases in perceived threats from immigrants will be associated with stronger endorsement of social markers, i.e., immigrants must meet more stringent criteria to be accepted the same way as a native-born Japanese person.

H2: Conversely, perceived contributions from immigrants—assumed to have effects opposite to threat—will be associated with weaker marker emphasis, i.e., less stringent criteria.

H3: Perceived threats and intergroup permeability will jointly determine marker endorsement—i.e., increased threats will be associated with stronger endorsement when intergroup boundaries are considered more permeable.

H4: Contributions by immigrants and intergroup permeability will jointly determine endorsement of markers—i.e., greater contributions will be associated with fewer markers endorsed (i.e., more accepting criteria) when intergroup boundaries are deemed less permeable.

H5: Threats and relative social status will jointly determine marker endorsement—i.e., increased threats will be associated with stronger endorsement when immigrants are believed to occupy lower social status than native Japanese.

H6: Conversely, immigrant contribution and social status will jointly determine marker endorsement, as contribution will be associated with less stringent acceptance criteria when immigrants are thought to occupy higher social status compared to native Japanese.

H7: Threat, intergroup permeability, and relative social status will jointly determine the markers emphasized—i.e., increased threat coupled with porous intergroup boundaries and perceptions of immigrants occupying lower social status will result in the sharpest increase in marker emphasis.

H8: Contribution, intergroup permeability, and relative status will jointly determine marker endorsement, so that high contributions under less permeable intergroup boundaries along with perceptions of immigrants as occupying higher social status will result in more flexible acceptance criteria, or weaker marker endorsement.

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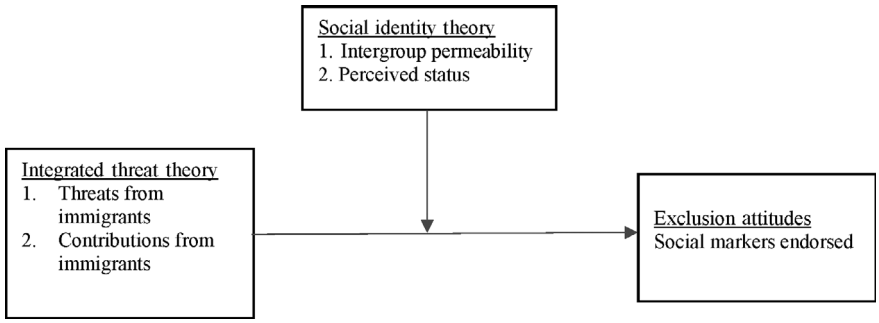

Figure 1 The hypothesized relationships between the social markers endorsed and the two predictors of perceived threat and contributions from immigrants. Two variables are hypothesized to moderate threat: intergroup permeability and perceived immigrant status (from social identity theory).

Acculturation Context in Japan

Japan differs from traditional immigrant societies, with its small immigrant and foreign resident populations: Approximately 500,000 immigrants (primarily Chinese or Korean in origin) have naturalized there in the past 50 years (Japanese Ministry of Justice, 2019a), and there are only 2.64 million non-Japanese residents (Japanese Ministry of Justice, 2019b)—about 2.1% of the population. A greying workforce and low birthrate make admitting greater numbers of naturalized immigrants and foreign workers a promising means of achieving demographic sustainability and averting a future economic crisis. Nevertheless, Japan has one of the smallest shares of migrants among countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Debnar, 2016).

Broadly, there are two schools of thought about the social context of acculturation in Japan (reviewed in Komisarof & Leong, 2016). The "optimistic" school argues that demographic imperatives will force Japan to admit foreign workers and become multicultural; moreover, many non-Japanese are already valued community members. The "pessimistic" school contends that the non-Japanese population is miniscule and will remain so, as the government promotes primarily temporary migration instead of permanent settlement; furthermore, the Japanese construct a sharp dichotomy between themselves and foreigners, which makes the prospect of immigrants "becoming" Japanese nearly impossible. Applications of this article include ascertaining the likelihood of immigrants being accepted as Japanese as well as which SMA are prioritized to gain such acceptance, thus helping to determine which of these schools of thought is better reflected in our participants' attitudes.

The importance of this study extends beyond Japan to general acculturation scholarship. Japan is thought to utilize predominantly ascribed, ethnicity-based markers as the foundation of its ingroup identity and in its acceptance criteria for immigrants (Befu, 2001)—in contrast to Singapore, the multicultural society examined in Leong (2014). Therefore, identifying markers of importance and the variables influencing their choices in such a different social context constitutes a critical step in developing marker-related theory. Moreover, Japan is one of many countries—including Eastern European nations (Shulman, 2002)—where ethnic-based markers for migrant acceptance are believed to be utilized predominantly. Our study tests such assumptions and, in the process, attempts to identify any achievable, nonethnic markers which are used as acceptance criteria in societies like Japan's (i.e., in nations that are not traditionally immigrant-receiving and where multicultural ideologies do not have a long historical foothold).

Methods

Sample, Data, and Procedures

An undergraduate student population was selected not only for its accessibility but also because acculturation literature about Japan overwhelmingly addresses working adults (reviewed in Komisarof, 2011), thus omitting the attitudes of youth who will shape future intergroup relationships. However, university students may have weaker expectations for markers than the general population, as Kunovich (2009) found that education and socioeconomic status (undergraduates tend to be higher in both than do representative samples) related negatively to expectations for immigrant assimilation. Therefore, the views of undergraduates are not necessarily representative of the general populace, but can indicate how societal attitudes may change in the future.

Prior to the survey, four sessions of focus groups comprising 3 to 7 students each were conducted at two universities (where the first author taught) to probe and

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create culturally appropriate survey items for the Japanese context (n = 18). Each session was attended by volunteers who were rewarded with a gift certificate equivalent to US $5. The discussion guideline followed a script with an open-ended format (Table S1 explains the focus groups guideline in greater detail). Topics included what makes someone Japanese and which markers participants expected from immigrants to accept them. Students also read a survey draft that had been tested in Singapore and commented on any unclear instructions or unsuitable questions.

Focus groups resulted in five types of survey modifications. First, some markers from Leong (2014) were revised to improve cultural appropriateness; for example, "speaking with a local accent" was rewritten as "able to speak Japanese at a similar level to a native" because focus groups advised that the new wording would tap into the acculturation domain of speaking competence while avoiding the complex issue of stigmas associated with Japanese dialects used outside of their associated geographic regions. Second, survey instructions were honed to emphasize the SMA necessary to accept an immigrant as one would a native Japanese citizen; as informants noted that there are various types and levels of societal acceptance, each which would likely entail different sets of SMA-related expectations. Third, 17 new markers were added to the survey while three of Leong's items were omitted because there was no equivalent Japanese acculturation domain (e.g., "Able to speak Singlish") (Table S2 distinguishes which items were incorporated directly from Leong, were modified, or were new). Thus, our survey contained 41 markers to Leong's 27. Fourth, we replaced Leong's binary response format (i.e., "Is this an important marker of acculturation?") with ratings on a 7-point Likert scale for each item's importance for immigrants to be accepted. The Likert scale enables a finer assessment of the strength of such opinions (which, as focus groups emphasized, are not necessarily binary yes/no choices but rather questions of degree) and also lends readily to factor analysis to identify the domains of markers favored among respondents. Finally, in addition to testing each marker's importance, we assessed its ease of accessibility/achievement, as this was thought to provide a richer gauge of a marker's influence on immigrant acceptance than was importance alone.

Our 20-min online survey was completed by 428 undergraduates—all native-born Japanese citizens recruited through convenience sampling from 12 universities concentrated in the Tokyo–Yokohama metropolitan area and its environs as well as in Osaka and Nagoya. Aside from 3 older participants, the age range was 18 to 24 (*Mdn* = 19). One hundred sixty-three (38.1%) participants were male, and 251 (58.6%) were female (with 14 providing no entry).

Questionnaire Measures

The online survey included the following variables as perceived by participants: (a) immigrant threat, (b) immigrant contribution, (c) relative social status of immigrants, (d) intergroup permeability, and (e) SMA.

Perceived threats from immigrants. The 11-item instrument assessed both realistic (e.g., "Job opportunities will be reduced for native-born Japanese if we have more immigrants") and symbolic threats (e.g., "Increasing immigration to Japan will dilute our national identity"). The instrument was adapted from Leong (2014), with a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A higher score indicated greater perceived threats from immigrants, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$.

Perceived contributions from immigrants. The four-item instrument measured perceived contributions from immigrants (e.g., "Immigrants contribute to Japan's development as much as natives do") and was adapted from Leong (2014), using a 7-Likert scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*); a higher score implied greater immigrant contributions, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.67$.

Intergroup permeability. The three-item instrument was adapted from Terry et al. (2006) and assessed the ease for immigrants to engage with Japanese in various social contexts (e.g., "How easy would it be for you to be involved in work/school with immigrants, for example, working on the same project?"). We employed a Likert scale of 1 (*very difficult*) to 7 (*very easy*), where greater scores suggested a more porous sociopsychological intergroup boundary, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.65$.

Social status. Social status was adapted from Terry et al. (2006), measured with a single item on a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (*lower in social status*) and 7 (*higher in social status*): "Compared to most people in Japan, immigrants as a group are generally lower/higher in social status."

Social markers of acceptance. Participants rated each of the 41 items for importance on a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*) for immigrants to be "accepted and viewed as a Japanese citizen, like a native-born Japanese citizen is." A higher score indicated more stringent standards for immigrants to acquire SMA. To account for the differential degree of difficulty in acquiring the markers, each item had a

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corresponding measure on the ease of acquisition ("How difficult or easy is it to acquire this marker?") on a Likert scale of 1 (*almost impossible to acquire*) to 7 (*can be acquired easily*).

Results

Framework for Analyses

Descriptive data on the ratings for perceived importance of each SMA were collated. The measurement was factor-analyzed, and the latent dimensions derived from the analysis formed the outcome measures. Each dimension was based on the aggregated score of all the markers that loaded onto it. These dimensions revealed the acculturation domains valued by the Japanese for immigrants to be accepted (detailed results for all of the markers tested are in the supplementary file, Table S2). This was followed by bivariate correlations between the independent and dependent variables and a multivariate regression model predicting each latent variable outcome (with immigrant threat and contribution as the predictors and immigrant social status and intergroup permeability as moderators).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis using the principal components method was performed on the scores measuring perceived importance. The initial unrotated solution yielded nine factors with eigenvalues > 1.0, explaining 62.8% of the total variance. The top four factors had eigenvalues > 2.0 and explained 47.1% of the total variance. In the interest of parsimony, factor extraction was restricted to eigenvalues greater than 2.0. Using the Promax rotation method and removing markers that did not load on any factor by at least 0.4, we reached the final three-factor solution.

The first factor, *sociolinguistic markers* ($n = 7$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$), accounted for 26.3% of the total variance and emphasized near-native Japanese proficiency (i.e., speaking, reading, and writing), which enables immigrants to think and behave as the Japanese and to maintain the social order by observing local laws and customs. The second factor, *ethnic markers* ($n = 7$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$), dictated that immigrants abandon their native cultures, assimilate to Japan generally, embrace Japanese religion (Shintoism and/or Buddhism), be ethnically Japanese, demonstrate a deep social embeddedness by raising families in Japan with their children adopting Japanese citizenship, and prove their unwavering commitment to the nation by supporting local brands, participating in charity organizations, and investing in local businesses. This factor explained 12.9% of the total variance. The third factor, *socioeconomic markers* ($n = 7$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$), accounted for 10.0% of the total variance and emphasized immigrants' economic contribution to Japan through finding stable employment in fields where there is a labor shortfall and by performing work which requires a college degree. In addition, immigrants were expected to develop congenial interpersonal relations with Japanese coworkers and to possess positive attitudes toward Japanese society. The items comprising each factor and their respective factor loadings are in Table 1.

Sociolinguistic markers were deemed most important ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.16$), yet also somewhat difficult to achieve ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.93$); less important were socioeconomic markers ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.25$)—a factor considered slightly easy to acquire ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.62$), whereas ethnic markers were least important ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.00$) and also somewhat difficult to achieve ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.70$). Descriptive statistics and interscale correlations can be found in Table 2. Pearson coefficients ranged from low to moderate between the three latent factors, which suggests that the outcomes were relatively distinct, and interscale correlations ran in the expected directions, reinforcing confidence in variables' convergent validity. [Correction added on 29 November 2019, after first online publication: Mociolinguistic has been changed to Sociolinguistic for correctness.]

Hierarchical Moderated Regression

A three-step hierarchical regression was performed on each set of social markers (sociolinguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic) with the main effect terms entered in Step 1, followed by the two-way interactions in Step 2, and three-way interactions involving Threat × Social Status × Intergroup Permeability, and Contribution × Social Status × Intergroup Permeability in Step 3 (see Table 3). All independent variables were centered by their overall means prior to modeling, and all items under each latent factor were weighted by the ease of acquisition to control for the levels of difficulty in acquisition of the markers. This procedure was performed using the formula:

$$\sum_{i}^{7}[x_i/y_i],$$

where x_i measures the importance of marker i, using a rating of 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*); y_i measures how difficult or easy it is to acquire marker i, using a rating of 1 (*almost impossible to acquire*) to 7 (*can be acquired easily*).

By controlling for variability on the ease of acquisition for individual marker i, the loading for each latent factor is calibrated to produce a more nuanced

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Social Markers of Acceptance and Factor Structure and Loadings for Marker Importance

Factor structure and markers	Ease of acquiring marker *M* (*SD*)	Importance of marker *M* (*SD*)	Factor loading[a]	Variance explained
Sociolinguistic markers				
Able to speak conversational Japanese	4.13 (1.32)	5.95 (1.31)	0.829	26.3%
Able to read Japanese at a similar level to native Japanese	2.98 (1.33)	4.78 (1.60)	0.802	
Writes Japanese at a similar level to native Japanese	2.86 (1.34)	4.67 (1.64)	0.777	
Speaks Japanese at a similar level to native Japanese	2.95 (1.30)	4.68 (1.68)	0.712	
Has Japanese common sense	3.67 (1.30)	5.50 (1.44)	0.678	
Behaves like a Japanese	3.54 (1.39)	3.86 (1.85)	0.650	
Obeys local laws and customs	4.11 (1.37)	5.80 (1.41)	0.524	
Ethnic markers				
Embraces or converts to Shinto or Buddhism	2.65 (1.61)	1.95 (1.41)	0.725	12.9%
Participates in the work of local charity organizations/NGOs	4.08 (1.28)	2.23 (1.33)	0.638	
Supports Japanese products and brands	4.62 (1.52)	2.11 (1.30)	0.611	
Invests in or sets up a Japan-based company	3.43 (1.32)	2.96 (1.63)	0.436	
Children are Japanese citizens	3.77 (1.26)	3.56 (1.79)	0.430	
Parents or ancestors are Japanese	2.83 (1.41)	3.36 (1.93)	0.422	
Gives up foreign cultural norms or behavior	2.71 (1.38)	2.99 (1.65)	0.419	
Socioeconomic markers				
Gets on well with coworkers	4.44 (1.23)	4.76 (1.91)	0.780	10.0%
Considered a talent in their industry	4.00 (1.12)	4.39 (1.84)	0.757	
Works in a field with a labor shortfall in Japan	5.06 (1.26)	3.38 (1.76)	0.678	
Has at least a certain monthly income	3.94 (1.13)	4.37 (1.80)	0.651	
Has at least a college degree	4.07 (1.28)	3.81 (1.97)	0.626	
Embraces a positive attitude to the host society	4.66 (1.25)	5.41 (1.59)	0.472	
Is gainfully employed	3.75 (1.19)	4.79 (1.89)	0.460	

Note. NGOs = nongovernmental organizations.
[a]Factor analysis on "importance of markers."

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Interscale Correlations

	M	*SD*	No. of items	α	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Sociolinguistic markers[a]	5.04	1.16	7	0.86	0.60***	0.34***	0.10*	−0.10*	0.02	−0.08
2. Ethnic markers[a]	2.74	1.00	7	0.74		0.39***	0.25***	−0.16**	−0.15**	0.06
3. Socioeconomic markers[a]	4.42	1.25	7	0.81			0.14**	−0.07	−0.11*	−0.05
4. Threat	3.57	0.79	14	0.81			–	−0.439***	−0.127**	0.083
5. Contribution	4.31	0.84	4	0.67				–	0.163**	0.046
6. Intergroup permeability	4.14	1.17	3	0.65					–	0.089
7. Social status	2.59	1.13	1	–						–

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
[a]Mean score of unweighted markers.

perspective on immigrant acceptance in Japan. For instance, both "obey local laws and customs" and having "Japanese common sense" are markers considered important ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 1.41$) and ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.44$, respectively), but the latter is also significantly more difficult to acquire ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.37$) and ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.30$, respectively), $t(427) = -6.47$, $p < .001$. While both items form part of the

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Table 3
Hierarchical Moderated Regression on Weighted Factor Scores

Variables	Sociolinguistic markers				Ethnic markers				Socioeconomic markers			
	ΔR^2	*B*	*SE*	*p*	ΔR^2	*B*	*SE*	*p*	ΔR^2	*B*	*SE*	*p*
Step 1	0.056**			.000	0.07***			.000	0.06***			.000
Threat (T)		0.68†	0.41			0.85***	0.22			0.57**	0.20	
Contribution (C)		−0.21	0.39			−0.10	0.21			−0.11	0.19	
Intergroup permeability (IP)		−0.19	0.24			−0.20	0.13			−0.36**	0.12	
Social status (SS)		−1.04***	0.25			−0.37**	0.14			−0.28*	0.13	
Step 2	0.004			.89	0.03*			.04	0.02†			.091
SS × IP		−0.03	0.22			0.08	0.12			−0.10	0.11	
T × IP		−0.12	0.31			−0.13	0.17			−0.18	0.16	
T × SS		−0.04	0.33			0.27	0.18			0.44**	0.17	
C × SS		−0.17	0.32			−0.17	0.18			0.29	0.16	
C × IP		−0.18	0.29			0.26	0.16			0.08	0.15	
Step 3	0.001			.74	0.00			.93	0.03***			.000
T × SS × IP		−0.10	0.23			−0.03	0.12			−0.39**	0.11	
C × SS × IP		0.11	0.21			0.03	0.11			0.14	0.10	

Note. All *B*, *SE*, and *p*-values are at Step 3.
$^{\dagger}p < .10$. $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

Sociolinguistic factor, the ease (or challenge) to acquire a marker should be considered in theorizing and measuring immigrant acceptance; items that are important, but almost or completely unachievable, should be assigned greater emphasis because they signal a hardened intergroup and identity boundary. This approach is similar to a weighted regression model where the measurement at each level of the predictor is adjusted for its relevance to the construct. Thus, our weighted method enabled us to gain insight on whether a particular benchmark that was considered important was also thought to be reasonably attainable and, hence, whether highly valued markers provide accessible avenues to membership in Japanese society or constitute largely unsatisfiable, exclusive criteria.

Sociolinguistic markers. The overall model was significant, $F(11, 427) = 2.468$, $p < .01$, with a main effect for immigrant social status and a marginal effect for perceived threats, $p = .097$ (see Table 3). Therefore, respondents who viewed immigrants as occupying a lower relative social status imposed a more stringent benchmark for sociolinguistic markers; those who viewed immigrants as a threat marginally imposed more markers. None of the interaction effects were significant. The overall model explained 6% of the total variance in the dependent variable. There was no evidence of multicollinearity, as the largest variance inflation factor (VIF) was <1.6.

Ethnic markers. The overall model was significant, $F(11, 427) = 3.973$, $p < .001$. Increased immigrant threat predicted greater exclusion based on ethnic markers, while perceptions of immigrants having high social status predicted a less stringent benchmark for these markers (see Table 3). The overall model explained 9.5% of the total variance in the dependent variable. The two- and three-way interactions were not significant. No VIF exceeded 2.0.

Socioeconomic markers. The overall model was significant, $F(11, 427) = 4.785$, $p = .001$, with main effects for perceived threat, intergroup permeability, social status, and a two-way (Threat × Social Status) and a three-way interaction (Threat × Social Status × Intergroup Permeability). The model explained 11.2% of the total variance for the dependent measure. For main effects, increased threat predicted a more stringent benchmark for the socioeconomic markers, and higher immigrant social status predicted a more lenient requirement. While the two-way interaction (Threat × Social Status) was significant, the combined influence from Step 2 in the two-way interaction terms was not, $\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $p = .091$, so this interaction was not analyzed further as per Aiken and West's (1991) recommendation; moreover, the three-way interaction involving Threat × Social Status × Intergroup Permeability was significant, so there is no conceptual requirement to examine the lower order Threat × Social Status interaction. There is no evidence of multicollinearity as no VIF exceeded 1.6.

To analyze the three-way interaction, we first split permeability ratings into two groups based on the three-item mean scores: Respondents with a mean below the

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scalar midpoint of 4 were classified as the low permeability group (n = 170), and those above the midpoint were considered to have high permeability (n = 201) (those with permeability ratings at the midpoint were omitted because they conceived the ingroup boundary as neither permeable nor impermeable). Analysis of simple slope effects in the *low* permeability group revealed that those who saw immigrants as enjoying higher social status than Japanese people expressed significantly greater desire to use more stringent socioeconomic markers as a condition for acceptance, as compared to those who viewed immigrants with relatively lower status, high status: $B = 5.085$, $p < .001$; equal status: $B = 3.879$, $p < .001$; low status: $B = 2.674$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 2). However, among respondents who perceived *high* intergroup permeability, the interaction between threat and status was not significant, $B = -0.219$, n.s.

Status of the hypotheses. In line with H1, perceived threat from immigrants generally predicted endorsement (i.e., was at least marginally significant) for more stringent markers across all latent factors (Sociolinguistic, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic). Perceived contribution did not predict any outcome measures (contradicting H2). As neither social status nor permeability acted as a moderator to the predicted relationships between threat and each marker factor—or for contribution and each marker factor—H3 to H6 were not supported. Although not part of our hypotheses, relative social status of immigrants demonstrated a main effect on all of the latent factors, and intergroup permeability had a main effect on socioeconomic markers. A three-way interaction affected socioeconomic markers, but in a direction contrary to H7: Under the low-permeability condition, perceived threat predicted more stringent socioeconomic markers among immigrants perceived to be of higher, rather than lower, status. H8 was not supported.

Discussion

The results measuring marker importance and ease of acquisition show a complex, nuanced view of Japanese expectations for immigrant acculturation, with a strong emphasis on sociolinguistic adaptation and, to a lesser extent, socioeconomic markers. Items loading onto sociolinguistic and socioeconomic markers included 9 of the 10 most highly rated individual markers in terms of importance; thus, almost all of the broadly endorsed SMA fit into these domains. The only marker in the top 10 which did not load onto one of the factors was "Has lived in Japan for a period of time." Participants endorsing this marker were asked how many years an immigrant should live in Japan; 5 years was the most common response.

The importance of sociolinguistic markers coupled with their perceived difficulty of acquisition reflect strong expectations for immigrants to learn the language, follow social norms, and develop the "common sense" to comport oneself appropriately along with acknowledgement of the challenge of doing so. The importance and ease of acquiring socioeconomic markers likely reflect agreement with well-known government policies to utilize immigrants and guest workers to mitigate Japan's looming population crisis and strengthen the economy. The lack of strong endorsement for ethnic identity (indicated by this factor's low mean score for importance) suggests that the respondents valued a multicultural outlook grounded in respect for different ways

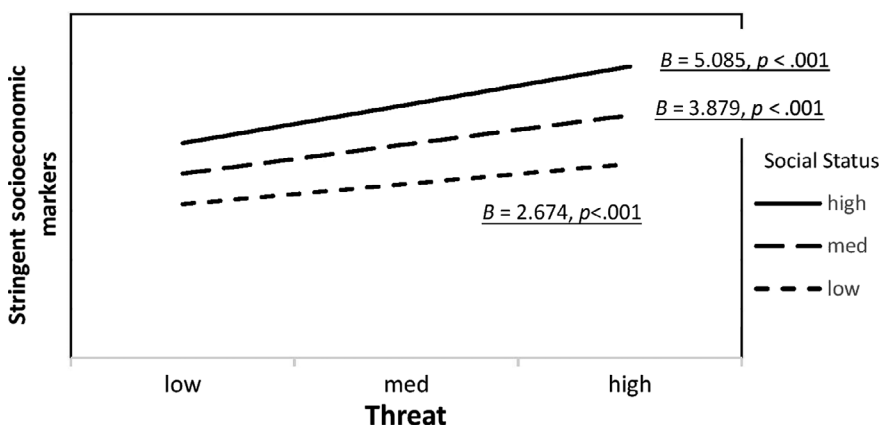

Figure 2 The interaction between threat, social status, and intergroup permeability (under conditions of low permeability) for socioeconomic markers, lending to an analysis of simple slope effects. Analysis of simple slope effects in the low-permeability group revealed that those who saw immigrants as enjoying higher social status expressed significantly greater desire to use more stringent socioeconomic markers as a condition for acceptance versus those who viewed immigrants with relatively lower status.

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of life. The cause is unclear, however, and may reside in the steadily increasing number of foreign residents in Japan, which has doubled since 1990 (Japanese Ministry of Justice, 2019b)—gradually normalizing non-Japanese and, by extension, immigrants, in everyday Japanese life. Such views could also be the result of participants' youth, privileged socioeconomic status, and/or higher education, which may contribute to inclusive views of national identity (Kunovich, 2009).

The de-emphasis on Japanese ethnicity and ancestry contradicts extensive research, reviewed by Befu (2001) and Komisarof (2011), contending that both are required for acceptance in Japanese society. Our findings could reflect a new consciousness among young Japanese toward immigrants (thus supporting the optimistic discourse presented earlier in the Acculturation Context in Japan section), yet other interpretations (reminiscent of the pessimistic discourse) cannot be completely dismissed—especially considering the ethnic markers' rated difficulty of acquisition: If, as the literature broadly asserts, the Japanese commonly assume that immigrants cannot become fully Japanese, then ethnic markers could be unimportant because they are considered unlikely or impossible to achieve. Thus, it remains to be seen whether our findings reflect a definitive shift among Japanese youth toward accepting greater diversity or a reinforcement of calcified intergroup boundaries.

Predictors and Moderators for Sociolinguistic Markers

For the sociolinguistic markers, threat marginally predicted more exclusive attitudes toward immigrants, but contribution had no effect. While not predicted by our model, but consistent with our understanding of social identity theory, status had an inverse relationship with these markers, as markers were more stringently applied toward immigrants perceived as low status than those perceived as high status. There was no interaction between threat and social status or threat and permeability; consequently, there is no evidence of any moderating effect. The literature overwhelmingly has agreed that migrant groups perceived as high status in Japan (who tend to be Caucasian and originate from affluent Western nations) often receive privileged treatment, including exemptions from learning Japanese and from comporting themselves according to social norms dictated by common sense (Debnar, 2016; Komisarof, 2009). In contrast, immigrants accorded lower status (usually non-Whites, especially from countries with developing economies) are expected to minimize expressions of their native culture by following Japanese norms and communicating in Japanese (Inoue & Ito, 1993; Liu-Farrer, 2012). Such conclusions echo our finding of sociolinguistic markers being applied less stringently to "high-status" immigrants—with one important caveat: Although we have conjectured that participants rating immigrant status may have had distinct immigrant groups in mind, it is unclear whether they actually did so, as our single-item status indicator reflects the general status of immigrants without specifying subgroups. Consequently, future research should gather data for various immigrant ethnocultural groups to better differentiate such findings.

Predictors and Moderators for Ethnic Markers

Greater perceived threat resulted in a keener emphasis on these markers; hence, when feeling threatened, participants were more likely to endorse this exclusionary category of markers comprising Japanese ethnicity, an embrace of Japanese religion, and assimilationist views such as the need to abandon one's native culture. Though not predicted by our hypotheses, our findings suggest that perceived low status of immigrants also engendered such exclusive attitudes associated with these markers, whereas high-status immigrants were less likely to face such expectations. Ample research on Japan has concluded that stricter assimilationist expectations are levied toward migrants accorded low social status (usually non-Whites from countries with developing economies) and that greater license to behave according to one's native culture is given to "high-status" migrants (typically Caucasians from affluent Western nations) (Debnar, 2016; Komisarof, 2009); however, parallels between our findings and those in the literature have the same limitations discussed for sociolinguistic markers.

Predictors and Moderators for Socioeconomic Markers

Threat predicted greater importance placed on the socioeconomic markers; moreover, the interaction between threat, status, and permeability indicates that high status predicts *stricter* expectations for these markers under conditions of increased threat and low permeability—contradicting our hypothesis and intuitive understanding of status and its effects on immigrant acceptance. Analysis of simple slope effects in the low-permeability group revealed that among those attributing immigrants comparatively higher social status, there was a significantly greater desire to use more stringent socioeconomic markers as a condition for acceptance, as compared to those who viewed immigrants as commanding lower status. Under conditions of perceived *high* intergroup permeability, increased immigrant threats predicted stronger emphasis on socioeconomic markers

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regardless of immigrants' perceived status (i.e., no interaction with status).

Why is this so? "High-status" immigrants were likely expected to comply more strictly with socioeconomic markers because they were seen as greater threats to Japanese jobs, even under low-permeability conditions. On the other hand, "low-status" immigrants from countries with developing economies have long been used for jobs which most Japanese avoid because they consider them *kitanai, kitsui,* and *kiken*—that is, dirty, demanding, and dangerous (Debnar, 2016). Consequently, these immigrants do not threaten Japanese employment as much because they fill an exigent workforce need. High-status immigrants, however, directly compete with the Japanese for many coveted white-collar positions. Hence, even when permeability is low and the ingroup boundary secure, socioeconomic markers were stringently applied due to this threat posed by high-status immigrants; to be accepted, they are expected to prove themselves indispensable to the economy and have excellent coworker relationships—thus providing economic and social benefits that clearly go beyond those offered by their Japanese competitors for the same premium jobs. As these interpretations are speculative, the interaction effects warrant further research to unpack the reasons for such divergent responses to threat, intergroup permeability, and perceptions of immigrant status.

Further Implications for Theory Development

Surprising was the lack of effects associated with contribution. Although immigrants are often portrayed in the mass media as sources of labor, allowed in the country for the express purpose of bolstering Japan's economy in fields where the workforce is depleted, the view of immigrants as contributors to Japan appears less prominent than their images as threats to Japan's social fabric, public safety, and cultural continuity. Threat's unequivocal role was clear in bolstering exclusive attitudes via increased marker endorsement. Moreover, threat perception appears to be a psychological mechanism by which the markers may move from achievable (i.e., low importance and relatively easily acquired) to ascribed (i.e., high importance coupled with difficulty of acquisition). Although Jones and Smith (2001) noted the coexistence of ascribed and achievable forms of national identity in the minds of individuals, our findings extend this notion to specific markers and also identify threat as a possible catalyst for such reframing processes.

The varied results for the three latent factors suggest that each factor requires its own refined theoretical framework and predictors. These relationships should be tested in future research in Japan as well as other national contexts to provide a firmer theoretical foundation for the nascent concept of SMA.

Whither Immigration in Japan?

The findings allude to group-specific strategies and paths toward acceptance which diverge for low- and high-status immigrants. For low-status immigrants, conformity to an array of sociolinguistic and ethnic markers (and socioeconomic markers when intergroup permeability is high) provides a means of gaining acceptance, whereas for high-status immigrants, a more flexible adherence to sociolinguistic and ethnic markers coupled with striking social and economic contributions are likely to strengthen belonging. Our study can help immigrants understand Japanese marker-related expectations and maximize chances for acceptance through adaptation (if they so choose). These findings also challenge Japanese people to consider whether their expectations for markers enable acceptance or hinder it—providing a potential catalyst for making Japanese identity more fluid, inclusive, and accessible to immigrants who are needed to supplement Japan's dwindling domestic workforce.

Study Limitations

Kiely et al. (2001) argued that markers need to be studied in social context—that is, some markers are more readily perceivable (e.g., racial appearance), whereas others require more intimate knowledge (e.g., one's birthplace). Therefore, the likelihood of certain markers being utilized to accept or reject immigrants varies with their accessibility—a measure not assessed in this study but recommended for future research. Moreover, we did not consider how the importance of the markers may change in interaction with each other. For example, native-born Japanese could consider common sense more important for immigrants with Japanese ancestry than they would for those of European or African origin—expecting those who "look" Japanese to "act it." Future research should aim to reveal a more nuanced view of how the markers are employed in various combinations and social contexts.

Although our study utilized a concise criterion for immigrant acceptance (i.e., to the same degree as native-born Japanese), we could have tested for different types of acceptance such as functional versus identity indispensability, as immigrants may be regarded as part of these domains to divergent extents (Guerra et al., 2015). Moreover, the markers considered necessary to achieve these forms of acceptance may vary. Therefore, future studies should examine different types of acceptance and the markers considered necessary to achieve them—ideally from both Japanese and immigrant perspectives.

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This study used a nonrandom sample of university students; consequently, the findings are not generalizable to the broader population. A representative sample across age groups and other demographic variables (e.g., gender and region) will be essential to clarify broader Japanese beliefs about SMA. In addition, constructs such as relative status or permeability were conceptualized as unidimensional instruments and used limited numbers of items. Their low internal consistency and the single-item construct for relative status require further verification in future studies. Finally, the results of this study are correlational, and a causal relationship cannot be established.

Despite these limitations, this article contributes to the literature in several respects. We not only tested the importance of a broad array of markers, identifying their underlying factors, but also assessed their ease of acquisition, thus creating a more sensitive assessment of how markers are used to construct ingroup boundaries. This research also constitutes a substantial step towards deepening understanding of SMA beyond the context of Singapore. Finally, by examining the relationship between markers and variables associated with social identity theory, the dynamic, contextual nature of Japanese acceptance of immigrants was realized and the theoretical foundation of SMA clarified and strengthened.

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Supporting Information

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