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Social markers of acceptance in Japan: examining acceptance criteria for immigrants of different ethnocultural heritages /

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Abstract
This study utilized social markers of acceptance (SMA) to understand whether and how Japanese host national inclusiveness changes according to immigrant place of origin. SMA are socially constructed benchmarks (e.g., linguistic proficiency or genealogy) that receiving nationals use in deciding whether to view immigrants as national ingroup members. Japanese nationals (N = 1,309) participated in an online survey to identify how SMA importance varied with perceptions of immigrant threat, contribution, status, and intergroup permeability toward immigrants from China, South America, and Western countries. Respondents emphasized ethnic and civic SMA more, becoming less inclusive across all three groups if immigrants were viewed as posing high levels of threat. Differences in marker emphasis toward the immigrant groups were found for perceived immigrant contributions and intergroup permeability. The latter finding underscores that Japanese may need less permeable intragroup boundaries and a sense of psychological distance before becoming accepting of some immigrants, while more permeable boundaries and a sense of similarity may benefit others in being accepted. Chinese were seen as the most threatening, Westerners as highest in status, and South Americans (who primarily do unpopular blue-collar jobs) as highest in contributions yet lowest in status—suggesting that Japanese view immigrant contributions primarily in terms of doing blue-collar work that Japanese eschew. Overall, the findings did not demonstrate unambiguous double standards in acceptance criteria, but rather the shifting role of SMA in constructing social boundaries depending upon the immigrant group being considered, with each boundary condition reflecting different obstacles and enablers for immigrants to belong. Such patterns differed from Western countries, as immigrants to Japan were not necessarily accepted from wealthy nations or the same ethnic group as the receiving majority. Attitudes towards immigrants in Japan were concluded to be both universal and group specific.

Keywords
social markers of acceptance; immigrant belonging; immigration in Japan; national identity; ethnic and civic identities

Resumen

Palabras clave

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Although immigrants are frequently discussed as undifferentiated wholes, they often experience vastly different treatment in their receiving societies depending upon their national origin, ethnicity, and/or racial characteristics (Devos & Mohamed, 2014; Grigoryev, 2022; Tartakovsky & Walsh, 2022; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Similar status-based tendencies in favour of "desirable" immigrants have been identified in Western developed economies such as the US, Netherlands, and Britain (Zhirkov, 2021), and clear preferences for migrants of the same ethnic group as the host majority, particularly those from wealthier nations, have been expressed throughout Europe (Heath & Richards, 2014).

Research indicates that in Japanese society, immigrants are placed in a hierarchy of desirability and approval, experiencing disparities in social acceptance based on their nationalities, racial appearances, and ethnicities (Komisarof & Leong, 2016; Liu-Farrer, 2020). Those perceived as "high status" are often White, originating from Western nations with advanced industrialized economies, whereas "low status" groups are typically non-White and from countries with developing economies. The current study aims to assess whether various groups of immigrants face different acceptance criteria that enable or impede them from becoming ingroup members in Japanese society. This question has important implications for intergroup processes beyond Japan, since research is split as to whether attitudes toward immigrants are universal or group specific (Zhirkov, 2021).

This study also examines whether acceptance criteria change due to contextual variables—i.e., perceived immigrant threat, contribution, status, and intergroup boundary permeability. We compare three immigrant groups (whose members have naturalized as Japanese citizens) with substantial geopolitical and historical ties to Japan: Chinese (Japan's most populous migrant group), South Americans (predominantly of Japanese ancestry from Brazil and Peru; Liu-Farrer, 2020), and Westerners (typically conceived as Whites from North America, Western Europe, and Oceania's more developed economies). Though these

groups (excluding Chinese) do not correspond with any one nation-state, such categories for conceiving immigrants are broadly shared within the Japanese public (Debnár, 2016; Liu-Farrer, 2020). They also provide notable points of contrast for examining Japanese attitudes towards various types of immigrants: Chinese are phenotypically similar to Japanese but ethnoculturally distinct, Westerners are phenotypically and ethnoculturally different (with exceptions among those of East Asian origin), and South American migrants are usually at least partially ethnically Japanese (and to the same extent phenotypically similar).

Social Markers of Acceptance

Leong (2014) proposed social markers of acceptance (SMA) as a framework for conceiving intergroup boundaries and inclusion. This framework is based upon the premise that to gain social acceptance similar to native-born citizens, migrants are expected by members of their receiving society to possess features considered important in that society's national identity. Social markers are the specific socio-psychological criteria valued by recipient nationals to decide whether a migrant should be accepted in their community. These markers act as benchmarks of social embeddedness (e.g., raising families in the receiving society), economic capital (e.g., considered a talent in one's industry), or cultural competence (e.g., speaking the local language or following norms). More markers endorsed by destination society members, or greater emphasis placed upon them, reflects more exclusive host attitudes, as it is harder for immigrants to satisfy such expectations and gain social acceptance. Moreover, if receiving nationals believe the markers to be not only important but also difficult to attain, a more inflexible intergroup boundary is constructed (Komisarof et al., 2020). Therefore, the SMA that are emphasized towards different groups may vary in terms of their numbers, importance, and/or the ease with which they are thought to be acquirable by immigrants. Nonetheless, the context of intercultural contact also plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes: destination society members' perceptions of immigrant

threats, contributions, and status; intergroup boundary permeability; and the strength of host nationals' national identity may affect inclusivity (Jassi & Safdar, 2021; Komisarof et al., 2020, 2023; Leong, 2014; Leong et al., 2020).

Ethnic and Civic National Identity

National identity is often described as *ethnic* or *civic:* ethnic national identity embodies beliefs that one's national ingroup has an immutable shared ancestral origin (i.e., an ascribed identity), whereas civic national identity is achievable by gaining citizenship, participation in societal institutions, and embracing common values, ideals, rights, and responsibilities among citizens (Pehrson et al., 2009; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Such concepts have critical consequences. As Chung (2010) contended, citizenship policies of any country are "based on deeply rooted understandings of nationhood . . . [reflecting] shared understandings of what the 'nation' should look like, who is worthy of membership, and who should be granted rights and privileges administered by the state" (p. 18).

Civic national identity is broadly assumed to be more inclusive (though some, e.g., Taniguchi (2021) and Komisarof (in press), have questioned this) because it can be realized with voluntary efforts and encourages societal participation. Conversely, ethnic national identity is rooted in mostly unchanging characteristics as well as essentialist assumptions about who belongs (Reijerse et al., 2013). The ethnic-civic distinction has found robust empirical support internationally, but specific features associated with the two dimensions vary between nations (Jassi & Safdar, 2021; Komisarof et al., 2023; Kunovich, 2009; Leong et al., 2020; Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010; Taniguchi, 2021). Research utilizing the SMA framework has supported the ethnic-civic distinction in Japan, Singapore, Canada, Australia, and Finland (Jassi & Safdar, 2021; Komisarof et al., 2023; Leong et al., 2020). In other words, these studies have found strong evidence that markers can be categorized into ethnic

and civic categories and that those clusters of ethnic and civic markers can be separately analyzed for their relationships to other variables related to intergroup boundary construction.

Importantly, the emphasis among receiving nationals on ethnic or civic national identity markers is not necessarily consistent, as the criteria expected of immigrants can vary due to prejudice (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Depending on the migrant group being considered (including racial/ethnic characteristics and/or country of origin), host nationals might apply entirely different markers, or use the same markers, yet with inconsistent degrees of emphasis. Such capricious standards have been noted in longstanding immigrant receiving societies including the US (Devos & Mohamed, 2014). Though these disparities can be pernicious, some people are unaware of them—i.e., they may describe their beliefs in civic terms but use ethnic national concepts unconsciously (Devos & Mohamed, 2014; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). For example, Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) reviewed research in which many White US Americans unconsciously associated US American nationality with White ethnicity, though when asked on self-report measures to define what makes someone a "true American," they endorsed markers of civic national identity such as respecting American political institutions.

The next sections link SMA to integrated threat theory and social identity theory. Various studies (Jassi & Safdar, 2021; Komisarof et al., 2020, 2023) found the variables treated by these two theories to have a close relationship with SMA. Therefore, we used these theories and associated variables to help assess whether SMA are applied differently to select groups in Japan.

Integrated Threat Theory and Immigrant Contributions

According to Stephan et al. (2009), threat is experienced "when members of one group perceive that another group wishes to, or is in position to, cause them harm" (p. 43). Threat has been shown to contract group boundaries, making it more difficult for outgroup

members to join (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013). Integrated threat theory differentiates threat as realistic (i.e., competition for limited resources such as employment, land, and/or public services) or symbolic (i.e., destabilizing the ingroup's culture, identity, and/or way of life) (Nshom et al., 2022; Stephan et al., 2009). Perceived outgroup threat positively correlated with social marker emphasis in various studies, with host nationals either emphasizing greater numbers of markers (Jassi & Safdar, 2021; Leong, 2014) or placing more importance upon ethnic and civic markers (Komisarof et al., 2020, 2023)—suggesting that greater marker importance, whether for civic or ethnic markers, corresponds with higher exclusivity.

Immigrants can also be seen by hosts as contributing economically to the receiving society (e.g., taking undesirable jobs, accepting low salaries, or possessing human capital) or introducing novel, desirable cultural elements (e.g., food, clothes, or music; Li & Kung, 2023; Tartakovsky & Walsh, 2022). Li and Kung (2023) noted the dearth of research about receiving society members' perceptions of immigrant contribution compared with those of immigrant threat, as well as the necessity for studies to better assess the relationship between perceptions of contribution upon immigrant-directed attitudes and behaviors. Perceptions of immigrant contributions have been shown to associate with decreases in endorsement of SMA in Singapore (Leong, 2014) as well as in both ethnic and civic SMA in Japan (Komisarof et al., 2023), indicating that intergroup boundaries become more inclusive with such positive assessments.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) offers another framework for understanding why and how emphases on markers change with context. According to SIT, people seek belonging in groups from which they derive positive social identities and self-concepts (Terry et al., 2006). They differentiate themselves from outgroups by making intergroup comparisons favouring their ingroup and bolstering perceptions of their own

distinctiveness (Hagendoorn, 1995). Social markers highlight specific criteria for group inclusion, so when they engender characteristics thought to be prototypical of the ingroup, SMA can promulgate a positive sense of that group's distinctness when utilized in intergroup comparisons. For example, if "having Japanese common sense" is a marker, then Japanese may assume that their "unique" common sense makes them special.

Research in many countries indicates that outgroup members are ranked as either more or less attractive social partners and that there is broad consensus within countries about those rankings (Hagendoorn, 1995). While SIT does not entirely account for said consensus, importantly, it posits that contact with esteemed outgroups will enhance an individual's status; furthermore, people maintain a distance from outgroups that they perceive as lower in status (Zhirkov, 2021) since their positive social identity would be eroded if such outsiders gained ingroup membership (Terry et al., 2006). Here, status is conceived as respect in the eyes of others, in contrast to power, which refers to resource control (van Kleef & Cheng, 2020). In Japan, Komisarof et al. (2023) found that threat's positive effects for both civic and ethnic marker importance were stronger when Japanese host nationals viewed immigrants as lower in status, thus restricting ingroup access.

Intergroup permeability is based on perceived boundary porosity and the consequent ease of crossing over from one group membership to another (Terry et al., 2006). SIT predicts that threat associated with outgroup members is amplified when intergroup boundaries are highly permeable, especially when outgroup members are seen as lower in status, as admitting such outsiders would result in diminished positive distinctiveness (and this possibility grows more likely with porous boundaries). However, results depend on how intergroup boundary permeability is operationalized (Armenta et al., 2017; Terry et al., 2006).

The current study measured receiving nationals' views on the likelihood of immigrants being seen as Japanese and the psychological distance they perceive between Japanese and those immigrants—i.e., the potential seen by Japanese for immigrants to cross the intergroup boundary. Using the same operationalization and scale, Komisarof et al.'s (2023) findings contradicted SIT, as there were greater civic and ethnic SMA emphases (i.e., more exclusive attitudes) toward immigrants under increased threat with *less* intergroup boundary permeability. In other words, Japanese emphasized SMA less when they saw immigrants as having a higher likelihood of being seen as Japanese and felt less psychological distance from those immigrants. Komisarof et al. (2023) theorized that this operationalization of intergroup boundary permeability demonstrated such correlations since the sense of similarity associated with high intergroup boundary permeability reflected a stance that immigrants were not considered so different from Japanese—in a sense, not significantly threatening. This lack of perceived threat obviated the use of SMA to bolster the intergroup boundary. Given such findings and our shared scale for measurement of this variable, we expect high intergroup permeability to engender less SMA importance in the current study, too.

Intergroup Context in Japan

While many advanced industrialized nations face pressure to reduce immigration, Japan is welcoming more foreign labour and immigrants, driven by the dual constraints of a greying workforce and low birthrate (Strausz, 2021). Non-Japanese residents have doubled in the past 25 years to approximately 3.4 million (Japanese Ministry of Justice, 2024b), or 2.5% of the population. Yet Japan accepts few naturalized immigrants: in the past 50 years, altogether about 520,000 people obtained Japanese citizenship—mostly Korean and Chinese nationals (Japanese Ministry of Justice, 2024a). To better understand the extent that Chinese,

South American, and Western immigrants are accepted within Japan, each group's demography, recent migration history, and sociocultural context are summarized below.

Chinese Migrants

Chinese people constitute Japan's largest foreign group—currently over one-quarter of the non-Japanese population. In the past 50 years, an additional 150,000 have naturalized to Japan (Japanese Ministry of Justice, 2024b). In the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese migration increased dramatically, stimulated by a shortage of low-wage labour in small- and medium-sized businesses (Tsuda, 2005). In addition to numerous blue-collar workers, many Chinese are Japanese university students, or graduates working in white-collar corporate positions (Liu-Farrer, 2020). Though Japan's immigration policy officially targets highly skilled individuals, most migrants do not comprise such; the economy is structurally dependent upon low-wage labourers willing to take jobs largely shunned by Japanese. This demand is met by migrants primarily from China and other Asian countries who are usually limited to three-year, non-renewable visas tied to specific employers; moreover, they often lack protections against forced labour and substandard wages (Liu-Farrer, 2020).

Researchers have argued that Japanese have longstanding beliefs in Western superiority and Asian inferiority (Kawai, 2020), with Chinese facing pressure to minimize public displays of their cultural heritage and follow Japanese norms (Komisarof & Leong, 2016; Liu-Farrer, 2020). Thus, we expected them to face stronger expectations to comply with the markers than immigrants seen by Japanese as higher in status. Tense China-Japan historical and contemporary political relations fuel negative perceptions of Chinese in Japan (Liu-Farrer, 2020); additionally, as the most populous immigrant group by far (Ministry of Justice, 2024b) in a nation where monoethnic narratives form an important component of the nation's imagined community (Kawai, 2020), Chinese can be seen as both realistic and symbolic threats to the status quo.

South American Migrants

Most South American migrants are of Japanese descent and originate from diaspora communities in Brazil and Peru; these return migrants are primarily second or third generation *Nikkeijin* (Japanese descendants born overseas) and often of mixed lineage (Liu-Farrer, 2020). They first came in large numbers to Japan in the late 1980s during an economic crisis in South America. The revised Immigration Control Act in 1990 further encouraged migration by permitting *Nikkeijin* up to the third generation to work in Japan on unlimited renewable visas, based upon reasoning that their Japanese ethnic roots would make their adjustment easier than other foreign nationals (Kawai, 2020; Tsuda, 2005). However, various points of sociocultural friction between *Nikkei* South Americans and Japanese have drawn mass media attention, demonstrating a greater cultural divide than many Japanese anticipated (Liu-Farrer, 2020).

Like Chinese migrants, South American *Nikkeijin* are primarily a source of low-wage labour, typically employed in a series of temporary factory jobs without promotion tracks (Kawai, 2020; Tsuda, 2005)—though Chinese migrants are more likely to do white-collar work (Liu-Farrer, 2020). Also, like Chinese, many South American *Nikkeijin* feel their native culture is marginalized and its public expression discouraged, leading Sekiguchi (2002) to conclude that the only way for them to be accepted is to culturally and linguistically assimilate and become Japanese citizens. Thus, like Chinese, South American immigrants are expected to face greater pressure to comply with SMA than high status migrant groups.

Western Migrants

"Westerners" comprises a broad category, yet one that is regularly utilized within Japanese society. It usually refers to people from the more developed economies of North America, Western Europe, and Oceania (Liu-Farrer, 2020)—though it is a term that has not escaped criticism for confounding important differences between the experiences in Japan of

various “Western” groups (Debnár, 2016). While Westerners may be from any ethnic group, they are typically associated with Whiteness, as well as affluence and high status (Kawai, 2020). In contrast to Chinese and South American *Nikkeijin*, Westerners are privileged based upon their racial appearance and country of origin (McConnell, 2000)—treated with deference as esteemed guests in Japan but also frequently kept at a “polite” distance from daily routines and unstructured, spontaneous social interactions. Whereas Chinese and *Nikkei* South Americans are broadly expected to assimilate to Japanese norms in public places and communicate in Japanese, Westerners are often assumed to be unable to understand Japanese culture or language (Befu, 2001; Komisarof, 2014) and thus exempted from numerous Japanese social norms, including speaking Japanese (Komisarof, 2009). Komisarof et al. (2020) found that SMA tend to be less strictly applied to “high status” immigrants in Japan, thus granting them greater license to behave as they would in their home countries. As Westerners are commonly perceived to be this type of privileged group (Asai, 2006; Komisarof, 2009, 2012), we expect them to face less pressure than Chinese or South Americans to comply with SMA.

Aims of Study and Hypotheses

The goal of this study is to understand if and how Japanese social acceptance changes according to immigrant place of origin. We focus on the following hypotheses:

H1. We predict a positive effect between perceived threat and strength of marker endorsement. The relationship between perceived threat and marker endorsement will depend on the immigrant group. Given deep-rooted political tensions between China and Japan and the large Chinese population in Japan, perceived threats will have the greatest effect on markers toward Chinese, followed by South Americans, and finally Westerners.

H2. We hypothesize a negative effect between perceived contribution and marker emphasis. This effect will be greatest for Westerners (who are broadly conceived as highly skilled workers that government policy favours), followed by South Americans and Chinese due to negative stereotypes against them for undertaking blue-collar work.

H3. In line with Komisarof et al. (2023), there will be an interaction between perceived intergroup permeability and threat. Threat's effect will be most pronounced (i.e., we will see the greatest marker emphasis) when permeability is low. This effect should be strongest for Chinese and South Americans, followed by Westerners.

H4. There will be an interaction between perceived intergroup permeability and contribution. Contribution will be most influential (i.e., we will see the weakest marker emphasis) when permeability is high. This effect should be strongest for Westerners, followed by Chinese and South Americans.

H5. There will be an interaction between perceived immigrant status and threat. The effect of threat will be most pronounced (i.e., we will see the strongest marker emphasis) when status is low. This effect should be stronger for Chinese and South Americans, followed by Westerners.

H6. There will be an interaction between perceived immigrant status and contribution. Contribution will be most influential (i.e., we will see the weakest marker emphasis) when status is high. This effect should be strongest for Westerners, followed by Chinese and South Americans.

Thus, we hypothesized that Japanese construct acceptance criteria that are easier for immigrants to meet when Japanese think that they benefit from immigrants, and they embrace criteria that are harder to meet when immigrants are seen as threats. These relationships further depend on the perceived status of the groups in question and permeability of intergroup boundaries (Figure 1 depicts these associations). Yet we also expected intergroup

differences, so these hypotheses were tested for each immigrant group to identify how marker emphasis changed according to the group being considered. To further untangle variations in how intergroup boundaries are constructed between Japanese and these three groups, we compared the mean scores of independent and dependent variables.

Though civic national identity is generally posited in the literature to be more inclusive than ethnic national identity (Reijerse et al., 2013), when viewed from the perspective of SMA importance, both civic and ethnic markers serve as criteria that can be used to accept or reject immigrants' social acceptance (Komisarof et al., 2020, 2023). Thus, the most inclusive option is not an emphasis on civic markers, but rather a low importance placed upon both types of markers to create more flexible criteria for host society acceptance (Leong et al., 2020). Consequently, we did not predict differences in how ethnic and civic marker importance would differ across each immigrant group, but we did run tests to confirm whether or not such correlations deviated from each other.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Methods

Participants

To establish the factor structure for marker emphasis, a national sample of native Japanese respondents (N = 1,309) was collected by Rakuten Insight in Japan using an online panel. The two-latent factor structure (Komisarof et al., 2023) was confirmed (i.e., civic and ethnic national identity), with their associated markers listed in Table 1. All respondents were Japanese citizens since birth (including participants with dual nationality), currently living in Japan, and at least 20 years old.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Measures

Participants responded to the sets of items below in Japanese in relation to one group only: immigrants from China (n = 465), South America (n = 418), or the West (n = 426). Descriptive statistics, psychometric properties, and bivariate correlations of the variables are reported in Tables 2 to 4. All constructs demonstrated good reliability. For all measures, items were reverse-scored where necessary and then averaged to form a composite score for each construct, such that higher scores indicate greater levels of that construct. All items for measures were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Demographic items assessed gender, age, rural vs. urban residence, educational background, and income level.

[Insert Tables 2, 3, and 4 here]

Social Markers of Acceptance

Participants were asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale the importance (1 = *not at all important* to 7 = *very important*) and ease of acquisition (1 = *almost impossible* to 7 = *very easy*) of 25 markers adapted from Komisarof et al. (2020). Importance scores identified the characteristics that are considered essential for immigrants to have to be accepted and viewed in society as Japanese like native-born citizens, while ease scores illustrated how likely it is for immigrants to acquire those characteristics. Examples of SMA included, "Physically resembles a Japanese" and "Behaves like a Japanese."

Perceived Threat

Perceived immigrant threat was measured using 15 items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) adapted from Leong et al. (2020). Examples included, "Increasing immigration into Japan will dilute our national identity" and "Job opportunities will be reduced for native-born Japanese if we have more immigrants." Table 3 shows inverse relations between perceived threat with immigrant's status, contribution, and intergroup permeability, and positive relation with ratings on importance of ethnic markers. The evidence supports the construct validity of the threat measure.[1]

Perceived Contribution

Perceived immigrant contribution was gauged using five items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) from Leong (2014), such as "The skills that immigrants have are the types that Japanese people need most" and "Immigrants shoulder the same amount of social responsibilities as native-born Japanese." Fit indices (CFI = .988, TLI = .975, RMSEA = .075) indicated construct validity.

Immigrant Status

Perceived group status was assessed using three items on a 7-point Likert scale to tap the domains of social, economic, and educational status (1 = *the group is lower in status than Japanese*, 4 = *the group is equal in status to Japanese*, and 7 = *the group is higher in status than Japanese*). Items included "Compared to most people in Japan, immigrants as a group are generally lower/equal/higher in social status" and "Compared to most people in Japan, immigrants as a group are generally lower/equal/higher in economic status." Fit indices (CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000) indicated construct validity.

Intergroup Permeability

Intergroup permeability was measured using seven items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) adapted from Armenta et al. (2017), such as "Immigrants to Japan can physically appear as a Japanese person if they want" and "Japanese people and immigrants to Japan are fundamentally different." Table 3 shows the inverse relations between intergroup permeability and the importance of ethnic markers as well as perceived threat, and positive relations with perceived immigrant status and contribution. The evidence thus supports the construct validity of the measure.[2]

Analysis Plan

Identical analyses were conducted for all three immigrant groups. First, CFA was used to verify that the factor structure of the SMA identified from the national representative

sample in Komisarof et al. (2023) also applied to each group here. Three-step hierarchical regressions were run for both civic and ethnic markers. Demographic variables were entered in Step 1, independent variables (i.e., threat, contribution, status, and permeability) in Step 2, and two-way interactions in Step 3. The independent variables were grand-mean centred prior to conducting the hierarchical regressions. In line with the method adopted by Komisarof et al. (2020), items in the latent factors were weighted by their ease of acquisition to control for the varying perceived difficulty in acquiring the SMA. The items in each latent factor were summed up to provide an aggregated measure of the factor score, using the formula $\sum_{i}^{no\ of\ factor\ items} [\ xi\ /\ yi\ ]$, in which:

- *xi* measures the importance of marker *i* with a rating of 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*),
- *yi* measures the difficulty of acquiring marker *i*, using a rating of 1 (*almost impossible*) to 7 (*very easy*).

Each latent factor's loading produces a nuanced perspective on immigrant acceptance in Japan. For instance, if two markers are believed to be important, with one considered easy to achieve and the other almost impossible, the latter constitutes a more formidable barrier to immigrant acceptance, as it is less likely to be satisfied. We then applied the Fisher Z-transformation score to compare the strength of the coefficients between groups on the main and simple slope effects, allowing us to confirm the status of the hypotheses. Finally, to further clarify inconsistencies in intergroup acceptance, we examined differences in variable mean scores between immigrant groups.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Table 5a reports the results of the CFAs for the three immigrant groups, all of which indicated acceptable model fit for the factor structure of SMA (Hu & Bentler, 1999; McNeish

et al., 2018). Table 5b reports the results of the multi-group CFA, which suggests metric invariance—thereby providing further validation that the factor structure is indeed similar across the three immigrant groups. Next, results from each of the three immigrant groups will be detailed and afterwards, the status of the hypotheses presented via intergroup comparisons of those results.

[Insert Table 5a here]

[Insert Table 5b here]

Chinese Immigrants

Hierarchical regressions: Civic markers

A comparison of nested models supported the more complex model—i.e., the model with interactions (Step 3) is more suitable, $F(4, 451) = 3.41$, $p = .009$. This model was significant, $F(13, 451) = 8.03$, $p < .001$, with main effects of income, threat, and permeability, as well as interaction effects of threat × permeability and contribution × status. As the largest Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) < 1.82, there was no evidence of multicollinearity. All hierarchical regression analyses for the civic markers are reported in Table 6.

[Insert Table 6 here]

Civic markers were more strongly endorsed by individuals with lower incomes ($B = -0.04$, $p = .011$). To interpret the threat × permeability interaction, a simple slopes analysis was conducted (see Figure 2) at different levels of permeability (i.e., -1 *SD*, mean, +1 *SD*). Civic markers were emphasized more when immigrants were perceived as a greater threat, although the rate of increase varied as a function of intergroup permeability. The highest rate of increase was observed when intergroup permeability was low (low permeability: $B = 0.20$, $p < .001$; mean permeability: $B = 0.14$, $p < .001$; high permeability: $B = 0.09$, $p = .027$).

[Insert Figure 2 here]

A simple slopes analysis was conducted at different levels of status to analyse the contribution × status interaction (Figure 3). Civic marker endorsement was lower as immigrants were perceived to contribute more, but the rate of decrease varied as a function of group status. The highest rate of decrease occurred when group status was high (low status: $B = 0.01$, $p = .758$; mean status: $B = -0.05$, $p = .146$; high status: $B = -0.11$, $p = .010$). No main effect was found for contribution, and no interactions were identified between contribution × permeability or threat × status.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Hierarchical Regressions: Ethnic Markers

A comparison of nested models supported the more complex model, $F(4, 451) = 7.67$, $p < .001$. This model was significant, $F(13, 451) = 8.93$, $p < .001$, with main effects of education, income, threat, contribution, and permeability, and threat × permeability and contribution × status interactions. All hierarchical regression analyses for the ethnic markers are reported in Table 7.

[Insert Table 7 here]

Ethnic markers were emphasized more by individuals with higher levels of education (i.e., earned a university degree; $B = 0.13$, $p = .016$), and by individuals with lower incomes ($B = -0.04$, $p = .019$). To interpret the threat × permeability interaction, a simple slopes analysis was conducted (Figure 2) at different levels of permeability. Ethnic markers were more strongly endorsed when immigrants were perceived to be a greater threat, although the rate of increase varied as a function of intergroup permeability. The highest rate of increase was observed when intergroup permeability was low (low permeability: $B = 0.21$, $p < .001$; mean permeability: $B = 0.14$, $p < .001$; high permeability: $B = 0.07$, $p = .063$).

A simple slopes analysis was conducted at different levels of status to analyse the contribution × status interaction (Figure 2). Ethnic markers were endorsed less when

immigrants were perceived to contribute more, although the rate of decrease varied as a function of group status. The highest rate of decrease occurred when group status was high (low status: $B = 0.02$, $p = .683$; mean status: $B = -0.08$, $p = .008$; high status: $B = -0.18$, $p < .001$). No interaction effects were found for contribution × permeability or threat × status.

South American Immigrants

Hierarchical Regressions: Civic Markers

A comparison of nested models supported the more complex model, $F(4, 404) = 7.03$, $p < .001$. This model was significant, $F(13, 404) = 6.20$, $p < .001$, with main effects of income, contribution, and permeability, as well as threat × status and contribution × permeability interactions. As the largest VIF < 1.49, there was no evidence of multicollinearity.

Civic markers were more strongly endorsed by individuals with lower incomes ($B = -0.04$, $p = .030$). To interpret the threat × status interaction, a simple slopes analysis was conducted (Figure 4) at different levels of status. Civic marker endorsement varied as a function of both perceived threat and group status; civic markers were emphasized more when immigrants were perceived to pose a greater threat, with the highest rate of increase when group status was low (low status: $B = 0.10$, $p = .026$; mean status: $B = -0.03$, $p = .448$; high status: $B = -0.16$, $p = .002$).

[Insert Figure 4 here]

A simple slopes analysis was conducted at different levels of permeability to analyse the contribution × permeability interaction (Figure 5). Civic markers were less vigorously endorsed when immigrants were perceived to contribute more, but the rate of decrease varied as a function of intergroup permeability. The highest rate of decrease was observed when intergroup permeability was low (low permeability: $B = -0.18$, $p < .001$; mean permeability:

B = -0.12, p < .001; high permeability: B = -0.07, p = .140). No effect was found for threat, and no interaction effects were identified for threat × permeability or contribution × status.

[Insert Figure 5 here]

Hierarchical Regressions: Ethnic Markers

A comparison of nested models supported the more complex model, $F(4, 404) = 6.23$, p < .001. This model was significant, $F(13, 404) = 6.08$, p < .001, with main effects of income, contribution, and permeability, and a threat × status interaction. Ethnic markers were emphasized more by individuals with lower incomes (B = -0.05, p = .004), when immigrant contribution was perceived as low (B = -0.12, p < .001), and when permeability was perceived as low (B = -0.10, p = .003).

To interpret the threat × status interaction, a simple slopes analysis was conducted (Figure 4) at different levels of status. Ethnic markers endorsed varied as a function of both perceived threat and group status; ethnic markers were emphasized more when immigrants were perceived to pose a greater threat, with the highest rate of increase when group status was low (low status: B = 0.10, p = .019; mean status: B = -0.01, p = .679; high status: B = -0.13, p = .006). No other main or interaction effects were found.

Western Immigrants

Hierarchical Regressions: Civic Markers

A comparison of nested models supported the more complex model, $F(4, 412) = 4.15$, p = .003. This model was significant, $F(13, 412) = 4.77$, p < .001, with main effects of threat and status and a contribution × permeability interaction. As the largest VIF < 1.68, there was no evidence of multicollinearity.

Civic markers were more strongly endorsed by individuals who perceived greater threat (B = 0.08, p = .005), and those who perceived immigrants as low status (B = -0.10, p < .001). To interpret the contribution × permeability interaction, a simple slopes analysis was

conducted (Figure 6) at different levels of permeability. Civic markers were more vigorously endorsed when immigrants were perceived to contribute more, but the rate of increase varied as a function of intergroup permeability. The greatest rate of increase was observed when intergroup permeability was high (low permeability: B = -0.02, p = .580; mean permeability: B = 0.04, p = .128; high permeability: B = 0.09, p = .004). No effect was found for contribution, nor threat × permeability, threat × status, or contribution × status interactions. However, the main effect for status concurred with our understanding of SIT.

[Insert Figure 6 here]

Hierarchical Regressions: Ethnic Markers

A comparison of nested models supported the more complex model, $F(4, 412) = 2.42$, p = .048. This model was significant, $F(13, 412) = 6.55$, $p < .001$, with main effects for residence, threat, and status. Ethnic markers were more strongly endorsed by those living in urban settings (B = 0.13, p = .003), individuals who perceived greater threat (B = 0.13, $p < .001$), and those who perceived immigrants to be of low status (B = -0.05, p = .018). There was no effect for contribution or interactions of any kind. However, the main effect for status did match our understanding of SIT.

Immigrant Group Comparisons

Status of the Hypotheses

We applied the Fisher Z-transformation to compare the strength of the coefficients between groups on the main and simple slope effects—i.e., how perceived threat influenced SMA importance for Chinese, South Americans, and Westerners. First, threat predicted significantly greater emphasis upon ethnic and civic markers for Chinese and Westerners, but not South Americans. The impact of threat on civic and ethnic markers for Chinese and Westerners was not significantly different (Fisher Z-score = 0.90 & 0.15, for civic and ethnic markers, respectively, both non-significant). Thus, the findings contradicted H1. Perceived

immigrant contribution associated with less importance placed upon ethnic and civic markers for South American immigrants, and less emphasis upon ethnic markers for the Chinese. There were no significant effects for Western immigrants. The impact of contribution on ethnic markers was not significantly different for Chinese (B = -0.08, p = .008) and South Americans (B= -0.12, p < .001) (Fisher Z-score = 0.60), which contradicts H2.

The overall main effect of intergroup permeability aligns with our expectations, as greater permeability predicted less importance placed upon civic and ethnic markers for Chinese (B = -0.11 and -0.13; p = .010 and < .01, respectively) and South Americans (B = -0.09 and -0.10; p = .018 and .003, respectively). However, there were no effects for Westerners, and the impact of permeability on the markers was not significantly different for Chinese and South Americans (Fisher Z-score = -0.30 and -0.45, for civic and ethnic markers, respectively, both not significant), thus contradicting H3. Nor was H4 supported, as there was only one significant contribution x permeability interaction—for Westerners' civic markers—and the result does not align with the expectation that contribution is linked to fewer markers endorsed in the high permeability condition. Finally, threat x status had consistent effects for markers only for South Americans (both civic and ethnic SMA), whereas contribution x status had consistent effects only for Chinese (both civic and ethnic SMA), contradicting H5 and H6, respectively.

In summary, the hypotheses were rejected, in part due to the many conditions that needed to be satisfied for them to be proved (i.e., predicted correlations running in the right direction for all three groups plus a specific order for the strength of those associations). However, we did identify two types of important intergroup differences: (1) effects running in opposite directions (detailed above), and (2) significant differences in mean scores for key variables (explained in the next subsection).

Group Mean Comparisons

To further clarify variations in intergroup acceptance, we also examined differences in variable mean scores between immigrant groups. As we ran multiple ANOVAs, the overall Type I error was controlled for using the Bonferroni correction, with the adjusted α at .05/6 = .008. Scores on ethnic marker importance, ethnic marker ease of acquisition, threat, contribution, status, and permeability significantly differed across the three immigrant groups. Further post-hoc tests were run for these six variables to identify exactly which groups differed significantly (results in Table 2). For ethnic marker importance and ease of acquisition, Chinese (M_i = 3.52, M_e = 3.76) scored higher than South Americans (M_i = 3.10, M_e = 3.50) and Westerners (M_i = 3.24, M_e = 3.56). Perceived threat was greater for Chinese (M = 4.25) than for South Americans (M = 3.85) and Westerners (M = 3.89). For contribution, South American (M = 4.27) scores were higher than Chinese (M = 4.08) and Westerners (M = 4.10), whereas for status, Westerners (M = 3.53) were rated as largest, followed by Chinese (M = 3.33), and last by South Americans (M = 3.10). Finally, for intergroup permeability, South Americans (M = 4.34) had the greatest scores, then Westerners (M = 4.20), and the lowest were Chinese (M = 4.05) immigrants. The statistical differences are explained in the next section.

Discussion

Two latent factors underscore SMA in Japan. *Civic* markers stressed near-native Japanese proficiency (i.e., speaking, reading, and writing), amicable relations with Japanese coworkers and neighbours, and positive attitudes towards Japanese society. Immigrants were expected to think and behave like Japanese (i.e., to have Japanese "common sense"), observe Japan's laws, have valued skills in the labour market, and be economically self-sufficient. Finally, they were expected to live in Japan at least 5 years, likely to provide adequate time for them to develop such knowledge, skills, and stations in life. *Ethnic* markers stressed immigrants' assimilation to Japanese culture while following Japanese religion (Shintoism

and/or Buddhism), being ethnically Japanese (or at least physically resembling one), raising families in Japan (with their children as Japanese citizens), and showing their commitment to Japan by supporting its products and brands, participating in charitable organizations, and investing in local businesses. Immigrants also needed a college degree and to work in a field with a labour shortfall.

Civic and ethnic marker endorsement were strongly correlated for all three groups (see Tables 3 and 4). Other studies have found similar correlations (Pehrson, 2019; Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010) between general endorsement for civic and ethnic forms of national identity, yet others have observed negative correlations (Reijerse et al., 2015) or none at all (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015). In explaining such results, Pehrson (2019), as well as Reeskens and Hooghe (2010), explained that people who endorse one kind of national identity also tend to endorse the other one, too. While we did not run such analyses, we can speculate that given Japan's high degree of tightness (Gelfand et al., 2011), where social norms and standards are expected to be broadly and stringently enforced, it is quite plausible that this logic could apply to our findings, too.

Effects for Immigrant Groups

For Chinese immigrants, income's positive effects for both civic and ethnic markers indicate that lower-income Japanese were more likely to view Chinese as competitors for jobs, which is unsurprising given the large number of Chinese immigrants doing blue-collar work. The interaction between threat and intergroup boundary permeability for civic and ethnic markers indicates that greater threat correlated with higher marker emphasis, and more so when permeability was low. Thus, as hypothesized, Japanese appear more accepting when they perceived less threat—particularly when they saw intergroup boundaries as less rigid. Interaction effects between contribution and status for ethnic and civic markers revealed that greater contribution was associated with less marker emphasis, with the highest rate of

decrease when status was high. This suggests that Japanese were more accepting when they perceived Chinese contributing to Japan, but especially so for high-status, white-collar Chinese immigrants. Such findings align with previous studies of SMA, though this precise interaction has not been identified before. In Singapore, Leong (2014) concluded that perceptions of immigrant contributions associated with decreases in endorsement of the number of markers, while Komisarof et al. (2023) found in Japan that such perceptions negatively correlated with the strength of both civic and ethnic marker importance. In the same study, Komisarof and colleagues also observed interactions between threat and status, such that threat's positive effects for both civic and ethnic marker importance were weaker when Japanese nationals viewed immigrants as high in status. These results suggest that perceptions of high immigrant contribution and high status both associate with lesser marker emphasis and greater inclusiveness, thus having similar implications as the interaction identified in this paper.

For South American immigrants, the positive effect of income for both ethnic and civic marker emphasis demonstrates that Japanese with lower incomes were more likely to view them as competitors for their jobs (like Chinese immigrants)—probably because migrant labourers are often paid sub-minimum wages (Strausz, 2021). The interaction between threat and status reveals that greater threat perceptions associated with more civic and ethnic marker emphasis, but these effects were markedly stronger when status was low. Therefore, Japanese were more accepting of South Americans perceived as high status—presumably reflecting biases against migrant blue-collar labourers. For ethnic markers, contribution and permeability each had negative main effects, while for civic markers, their interaction showed that greater perceived contribution correlated with less marker emphasis, with the highest rate of decrease when intergroup permeability was low. Thus, when the boundaries were viewed as more porous, Japanese emphasized ethnic markers less, ostensibly

because they share a similar heritage with *Nikkei* South Americans. However, for civic markers, a firmer intergroup boundary coupled with perceived immigrant contributions made Japanese more accepting. Speculatively, Japanese employing civic markers felt threatened by the potential of *Nikkei* South Americans to "pass" as Japanese and hence preferred a clear intergroup distinction before relaxing their marker-related expectations (which they were more likely to do if they viewed *Nikkei* South Americans as contributing to Japan). Similarly, Tsuda (2008) observed that many Japanese create a restrictive form of Japanese identity excluding *Nikkei* Brazilians by claiming that native Japanese language proficiency and cultural traits (such as politeness and diligence) distinguish them from *Nikkei* Brazilians despite their shared ethnicity.

For Western immigrants, threat had positive effects—whereas status demonstrated negative effects—on civic and ethnic markers. Thus, Japanese constructed more inclusive acceptance criteria when perceived threat was low and status high. Various studies agree that Westerners in Japan are thought to be high status and often receive exemptions from marker-related expectations that they learn Japanese and follow Japanese norms (Debnár, 2016; Komisarof, 2012). However, this predilection for accepting high status Western immigrants has limits: civic marker emphasis surprisingly grew towards Westerners seen as contributing to Japan as intergroup boundary permeability became more porous. Presumably, this stance constitutes a reaction against the Western hegemonic legacy in Japan (e.g., the post-World War II military occupation) and ambivalence toward Japan's Westernization. Given Westerners' high status and hegemonic history, Japanese employing civic markers needed an unequivocal insider-outsider distinction to feel secure enough to be accepting; without it, a porous boundary could create fear of usurpation by a group that has tried to conquer Japan before and that enjoys a privileged position in everyday interactions.

Comparing the effects for all three immigrant groups, various patterns emerge. First, perceived threat, either through main or interaction effects, consistently associated with a more exclusionary posture (i.e., stronger ethnic and civic marker endorsement)—supporting integrated threat theory. Threat had the greatest effect on marker importance toward Chinese, demonstrating the prominence of Japanese perceptions of Chinese as threatening in the construction of Japanese-Chinese intergroup boundaries. Also, except for civic markers applied toward Westerners, perceived contribution consistently correlated with less marker emphasis either through main or interaction effects, thus underscoring its important role in reducing marker importance and increasing inclusivity. Further, Japanese host nationals demonstrated unambiguous preferences for high status migrants, i.e., "highly skilled" workers (in line with social identity theory). Intergroup boundary permeability yielded the most varied yet telling results: for some groups and types of markers (Chinese civic/ethnic and South American ethnic), high permeability associated with greater acceptance, while for other groups and types of markers (South American and Western civic), a clear boundary correlated with more inclusivity—thus underscoring which immigrant groups, under which types of national identity, are more likely included when Japanese people feel boundaries are porous and psychological distance close, as well as when Japanese require a firmer sense of intergroup difference to be accepting.

Intergroup Comparison of Variable Means

By comparing the mean scores of the variables of interest (Table 2), we further untangled differences in how Japanese construct boundaries with the three immigrant groups. First, for ethnic SMA importance and ease of acquisition, Chinese had significantly higher scores than South Americans or Westerners—possibly reflecting Japanese expectations that Chinese assimilate and that they have the easiest path of the three towards acquiring the Japanese ethnic national identity markers that are not immutable (e.g., raising children in

Japan who become Japanese citizens). This is somewhat surprising given the shared ethnicity between *Nikkei* South Americans and Japanese, yet it may reflect a greater sense of ethnic similarity that Japanese feel towards Chinese (given their shared Confucian roots and long history of sociocultural exchange) compared to *Nikkei* South Americans. However, all mean scores were below the midpoint for importance and ease of acquisition, seemingly indicating that acquisition of an ethnic national identity by members of these immigrant groups was considered both unlikely and relatively unimportant, as an ethnic national identity is the province of Japanese ethnics born in Japan. Means for civic marker importance and ease of acquisition did not significantly differ, but all scores were above the midpoint. This illuminates a comparatively higher importance and ease of acquisition for civic (over ethnic) markers—i.e., for all three groups, civic markers constitute a more likely path to acceptance than trying to adopt an ethnic Japanese national identity.

Chinese were seen as more threatening than South Americans or Westerners (as the comparison of effects in the previous section also indicated), which could be due to their large population, the tense China-Japan political relationship, or other forms of perceived realistic or symbolic threats. For contribution, Japanese rated South Americans significantly higher than Westerners or Chinese. Though both South Americans and Chinese are well known for doing "3D" (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) jobs that Japanese largely avoid, Chinese also have a visible presence in business and as university students, and Westerners are largely associated with white collar work (Liu-Farrer, 2020). Thus, Japanese seemed more focused on the blue-collar contributions of South Americans than those of immigrants performing "highly skilled" jobs.

As for status, a clear hierarchy emerged, with Westerners at the top, followed by Chinese and then South Americans. South Americans' ranking as lowest in status but highest in contributions underscores how much Japanese saw immigrant contributions primarily in

terms of doing 3D work. Yet high contributions were not enough to offset South Americans from having the lowest status—suggesting that their economic contributions doing 3D work were valued but not their personhood. All three groups are below the scale midpoint—i.e., they have less status than Japanese, which contradicts the narrative that Japanese have an inferiority complex toward Westerners.

For intergroup permeability, South Americans were seen as closer to passing as Japanese (presumably because of their Japanese ethnicity) and as nearer in terms of psychological distance than Westerners, who in turn scored higher than Chinese. This psychological distance that Japanese felt toward Chinese may be related to their high perceived threat. However, such distance appears paradoxical in that Chinese were viewed as the most capable of acquiring ethnic markers—a contradiction to unpack in future research.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The results of this study are correlational, so causal relationships cannot be established, and the survey comprised self-reports, so social desirability could have biased responses. Additionally, participants may have unintentionally misrepresented their marker preferences in everyday interactions by endorsing markers that match their conscious understanding of which markers they value when their daily behaviour is actually shaped by exclusionary, unconscious assumptions. For instance, Japanese may have responded to the survey in a manner reflecting their self-image that they are inclusive of immigrants, when in fact they hold unconscious biases that influence everyday interactions. Thus, our study did not differentiate between implicit and explicit concepts of national identity and their associated markers, which could be achieved in future studies using, for example, experimental methods described by Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) and by Devos and Mohamed (2014).

Recommendations for future research include testing other variables in relation to SMA that drive uneven acceptance of immigrant groups. For example, perceived cultural distance, particularly in terms of social values, has been shown to be associated with low tolerance and negative attitudes toward migrants (Albada et al., 2021). Assessing such distance among receiving society members toward various immigrant groups and its impact upon SMA emphasis could yield a more comprehensive view of how intergroup processes affect SMA importance and intergroup boundary construction.

Future research may also examine SMA's role in diverse types of acceptance. This study operationalized acceptance as being accepted to the same degree as native-born Japanese. Alternatively, categorical indispensability (i.e., immigrants are considered to be an indispensable part but not necessarily prototypical of the destination society) plays an important role in support of immigrants maintaining and publicly expressing their heritage culture, as well as enjoying a strong sense of societal belonging (Verkuyten et al., 2014). As markers may differ that are believed necessary to achieve various operationalizations of acceptance, future studies are encouraged to consider diverse types of acceptance and the markers deemed essential to realize them. Lastly, the current analytical method, while useful as an exploratory approach, can be sharpened by collecting more data (at least 500-600 responses for each immigrant group) to build a sample that allows for robust 3-way interactions, i.e., target samples (e.g., Chinese/South Americans/Westerners) × subjective intergroup beliefs (e.g., status and intergroup permeability) × threat/contribution.

Despite these limitations, this paper makes important contributions to the literature about national identity and SMA. The findings demonstrate how intergroup boundaries can be differentially constructed via SMA, depending upon the immigrant group being considered by receiving nationals. In doing so, Zhirkov's (2021) question was addressed as to whether attitudes towards immigrants are universal or group-specific, clearly uncovering both shared

patterns (e.g., the effect of perceived threat) and group-specific ones (e.g., the varying role of intergroup boundary permeability in influencing marker importance). Finally, this work serves as a foundation—both in terms of its theoretical framework and design—for future studies in other countries to investigate variations in intergroup boundary construction between receiving nationals and different migrant groups.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to understand if and how Japanese social acceptance changes according to immigrants' place of origin. Japanese perceptions of threat were highest towards Chinese despite their robust contributions to the economy in both blue- and white-collar sectors. Yet Chinese were also viewed as most likely to adopt an ethnic national identity—suggesting widespread ambivalence towards them. South Americans were seen as contributing greatly to Japan through their 3D work, yet their status was lowest among the three groups, which suggests that Japanese value their role as labourers in jobs that Japanese themselves tend to avoid, yet do not value their personhood to the same extent. Given the greater importance placed upon civic and ethnic SMA among low status *Nikkei* South Americans, this group appears to be marginalized as long-term labourers without commensurate belonging in Japanese society. Finally, the Japanese tendency to place greater importance on civic markers when Westerners have both lower intergroup boundary permeability and greater contributions raises another notable intergroup difference; it appears that Japanese need to clearly distinguish themselves from Westerners, particularly those who are socially embedded enough to contribute to Japan socially and economically, before becoming more accepting of them in civic terms. Moreover, no such path could be identified for Westerners' belonging via ethnic SMA. These findings highlight Westerners' position as outsiders granted high status, yet only with very specific, narrow means of achieving greater belonging in Japanese society—i.e., as a group clearly distinguishable from Japanese who

have acquired civic markers. Therefore, unlike the tendencies (primarily in Europe and the US) described in the introduction, we cannot say that in Japan immigrants from wealthy countries (i.e., Westerners) and those of the same ethnic group as the host majority (i.e., *Nikkei* South Americans) get clearly favourable treatment in terms of social acceptance. Also, these findings did not demonstrate unambiguous double standards in acceptance criteria, but rather the shifting role of SMA in constructing social boundaries depending upon the immigrant group being considered, with each boundary condition reflecting different obstacles and enablers for immigrants to belong.

Japan needs immigrant labour—more so as the native population continues to shrink. Whether it is for blue-collar work that Japanese generally shun, or to bring new professional skills, the country's economic well-being is tied intimately to its ability to attract and retain naturalized immigrants and foreign workers. Immigrants who can fulfil such roles come in all forms—i.e., countries of origin, racial characteristics, and ethnicities—so it is critical to Japan's self-interest that diverse groups feel accepted.

This study illuminates ways for Japan to become more welcoming of immigrants regardless of their country of origin. One critical finding is that no matter the group considered, threat perceptions promulgate host national exclusivity. Rather than ignoring threat, it is more constructive to acknowledge the feeling and help locals to differentiate their fears from the uncertainties that immigrants might introduce (Tartakovsky & Walsh, 2022). Moreover, this study shows that across groups, perceived immigrant contribution associates with inclusivity, so to increase immigrant belonging, governments can emphasize the positive economic and cultural benefits that immigrants bring. This can be achieved by recasting mass media images of immigrants—which often portray them as threats to host national jobs, the survival of local culture, and public safety—as contributing to a more richly diverse society and a stronger economy. Similar messages can be promulgated in education. Moreover,

depictions of immigrants in mass media and education often focus on the underprivileged struggling on society's margins. To cultivate more balanced images, immigrants can also be portrayed with high educational, professional, and/or social status (as perceptions of high-status correlate with inclusivity). Such recommendations extend far beyond Japan, as images of immigrants in mass media and education can be strategically improved in countries spanning the globe.

Notes

1. We could not use fit indices to evaluate construct validity due to the presence of reverse-worded items. These items often result in the creation of a method factor (Lindwall et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2016), which in turn leads to inaccurate fit indices.
2. Similar to the threat scale, we could not use fit indices to evaluate construct validity due to the presence of reverse-worded items.

Table 1. Civic and Ethnic Markers of Acceptance.

Civic Markers	Ethnic Markers
Able to speak conversational Japanese	Embraces or has converted to Shinto or Buddhism
Embraces a positive attitude to Japanese society	Supports Japanese products and brands
Has Japanese "common sense"	Physically resembles a Japanese
Gets along well with his or her neighbours	Participates in the work of local charity organizations/NGOs
Observes Japanese laws	Has a college degree
Able to read Japanese at a similar level to native Japanese	Has children who are Japanese citizens
Able to write Japanese at a similar level to native Japanese	Invests in or sets up a Japan-based company
Able to speak Japanese at a similar level to native Japanese	Parents or ancestors are Japanese
Gets on well with workplace colleagues	Gives up foreign cultural norms or behavior
Considered a talent in their industry	Works in a field where there is a labor shortfall in Japan
Earns enough income to be economically self-sufficient, or without the need for public assistance	
Behaves like a Japanese	
Has lived in Japan for at least 5 years	

Table 2. Immigrants from China, South America, and the West: Means, Standard Deviations, and Internal Consistencies.

Variable	China				South America				The West			
	M	*SD*	Range	α	*M*	*SD*	Range	α	*M*	*SD*	Range	α
Civic (Weighted)	1.24_a	0.62	0.14-7.00	.93	1.18_a	0.61	0.20-7.00	.94	1.17_a	0.48	0.22-6.54	.92
Civic (Importance)	4.81_a	1.20	1.00-7.00	.93	4.64_a	1.21	1.00-7.00	.92	4.57_a	1.25	1.00-7.00	.93
Civic (Ease)	4.38_a	0.95	1.00-7.00	.92	4.34_a	0.93	1.00-7.00	.92	4.26_a	0.99	1.00-7.00	.93
Ethnic (Weighted)	1.09_a	0.57	0.18-7.00	.80	1.02_a	0.58	0.19-7.00	.87	1.05_a	0.47	0.18-4.00	.74
Ethnic (Importance)	3.52_a	1.27	1.00-7.00	.88	3.10_b	1.25	1.00-7.00	.89	3.24_b	1.38	1.00-7.00	.91
Ethnic (Ease)	3.76_a	0.88	1.00-7.00	.82	3.50_b	0.93	1.00-7.00	.84	3.56_b	1.04	1.00-7.00	.87
Threat	4.25_a	0.96	1.40-7.00	.93	3.85_b	0.91	1.00-7.00	.91	3.89_b	1.00	1.00-7.00	.92
Contribution	4.08_a	0.89	1.00-7.00	.84	4.27_b	0.91	1.00-7.00	.84	4.10_a	1.05	1.00-7.00	.87
Status	3.33_a	0.98	1.00-6.67	.84	3.10_b	1.05	1.00-7.00	.89	3.53_c	1.09	1.00-7.00	.89
Permeability	4.05_a	0.75	1.00-7.00	.68	4.34_b	0.91	1.14-7.00	.79	4.20_c	0.83	1.14-7.00	.71

Note. Means sharing the same subscript are not significantly different from each other (Tukey's HSD, $p < .05$). Effect sizes for mean comparisons can be found in Supplementary Table 1.

Table 3. Immigrants from China: Bivariate Correlations.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) Civic (Weighted)	-									
(2) Civic (Importance)	.45***									
(3) Civic (Ease)	-.51***	.34***								
(4) Ethnic (Weighted)	.75***	.33***	-.34***							
(5) Ethnic (Importance)	.27***	.54***	.14**	.49***						
(6) Ethnic (Ease)	-.37***	.19***	.60***	-.40***	.41***					
(7) Threat	.32***	.41***	.14**	.30***	.36***	.18***				
(8) Contribution	-.20***	.08†	.23***	-.21***	.01	.20***	-.32***			
(9) Status	-.21***	-.13**	.10*	-.13**	.19***	.30***	-.23***	.20***		
(10) Permeability	-.26***	-.24***	.01	-.28***	-.35***	-.15**	-.48***	.15**	.09*	-

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Immigrants from South America and the West: Bivariate Correlations.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) Civic (Weighted)		.45***	-.44***	.78***	.27***	-.32***	.11*	-.25***	-.14**	-.14**
(2) Civic (Importance)	.48***		.40***	.33***	.50***	.15**	.36***	-.02	-.08†	-.29***
(3) Civic (Ease)	-.39***	.48***		-.27***	.23***	.57***	.24***	.15**	.09†	-.13**
(4) Ethnic (Weighted)	.52***	.43***	-.11*		.50***	-.33***	.12**	-.26***	-.03	-.18***
(5) Ethnic (Importance)	.15**	.53***	.31***	.50***		.49***	.38***	-.10*	.29***	-.39***
(6) Ethnic (Ease)	-.31***	.23***	.59***	-.28***	.57***		.28***	.05	.34***	-.22***
(7) Threat	.17***	.42***	.26***	.32***	.48***	.33***		-.20***	-.08	-.51***
(8) Contribution	-.04	.22***	.31***	-.16***	.07	.18***	-.19***		.01	.19***
(9) Status	-.23***	.04	.26***	-.11*	.32***	.43***	.06	.20***		-.08
(10) Permeability	-.05	-.15**	-.13**	-.20***	-.37***	-.29***	-.52***	.08	-.08	

Note. Correlations for immigrants from South America are represented above the diagonal, and correlations for immigrants from the West are represented below it.

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 5a. Confirmatory Factor Analyses for the Factor Structure of SMA for Immigrant Groups.

Immigrant Group	χ^2	*df*	*p*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]
China	676.63	133	< .001	.923	.878	.094 [.087, .101]
South America	643.17	151	< .001	.921	.890	.088 [.081, .095]
The West	468.73	120	< .001	.953	.918	.083 [.075, .091]

Table 5b. Test of Measurement Invariance for the Factor Structure of SMA.

Model	χ^2	*df*	$\Delta\chi^2$	*p*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]
Configural Invariance	1307.5	318			.952	.905	.084 [.080, .089]
Metric Invariance	1350.4	356	42.9	.266	.952	.915	.080 [.076, .085]
Scalar Invariance	1414.4	394	64.0	.005	.951	.921	.077 [.073, .081]

Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Civic Markers.

Variables		China		South America		The West	
		B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Step 1		$\Delta R^2 = .015$		$\Delta R^2 = .008$		$\Delta R^2 = .005$	
	Intercept	1.34^{***}	0.13	1.23^{***}	0.14	1.15***	0.11
	Gender (Female)	-0.04	0.06	0.02	0.05	-0.02	0.05
	Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Geographic Area (Urban)	-0.04	0.06	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.05
	Education (Degree)	0.09	0.06	0.03	0.06	0.02	0.05
	Income	-0.04*	0.02	-0.03+	0.02	-0.00	0.01
Step 2		$\Delta R^2 = .148^{***}$		$\Delta R^2 = .100^{***}$		$\Delta R^2 = .091^{***}$	
	Intercept	1.39^{***}	0.12	1.19^{***}	0.14	1.23^{***}	0.11
	Gender (Female)	-0.05	0.06	0.02	0.06	-0.04	0.05
	Age	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
	Geographic Area (Urban)	-0.05	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.05
	Education (Degree)	$0.10^{\dagger}$	0.06	-0.01	0.06	0.04	0.05
	Income	-0.04^{*}	0.02	-0.04^{*}	0.02	-0.00	0.01
	Threat	0.13^{***}	0.03	-0.01	0.04	0.10^{***}	0.03
	Contribution	$-0.06^{\dagger}$	0.03	-0.17^{***}	0.03	0.02	0.02
	Status	-0.09^{**}	0.03	-0.08^{**}	0.03	-0.11^{***}	0.02
	Permeability	-0.12^{**}	0.04	-0.08^{*}	0.04	0.02	0.03
Step 3		$\Delta R^2 = .025^{***}$		$\Delta R^2 = .058^{***}$		$\Delta R^2 = .035^{***}$	
	Intercept	1.37^{***}	0.12	1.19^{***}	0.13	1.23^{***}	0.10
	Gender (Female)	-0.05	0.06	0.02	0.06	-0.04	0.05
	Age	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
	Geographic Area (Urban)	-0.05	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.05
	Education (Degree)	$0.11^{\dagger}$	0.06	-0.01	0.06	0.03	0.05
	Income	-0.04^{*}	0.02	-0.04^{*}	0.02	-0.00	0.01
	Threat	0.14^{***}	0.04	-0.03	0.04	0.08^{**}	0.03
	Contribution	-0.05	0.03	-0.12^{***}	0.03	0.03	0.02
	Status	-0.05	0.03	-0.03	0.03	-0.10^{***}	0.02
	Permeability	-0.11^{**}	0.04	-0.09^{*}	0.04	0.01	0.03

Threat × Status	-0.04	0.03	-0.12***	0.03	-0.02	0.02
Threat × Permeability	-0.07*	0.03	0.01	0.03	-0.00	0.02
Contribution × Status	-0.06*	0.03	-0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
Contribution × Permeability	0.01	0.03	0.06*	0.03	0.06**	0.02

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

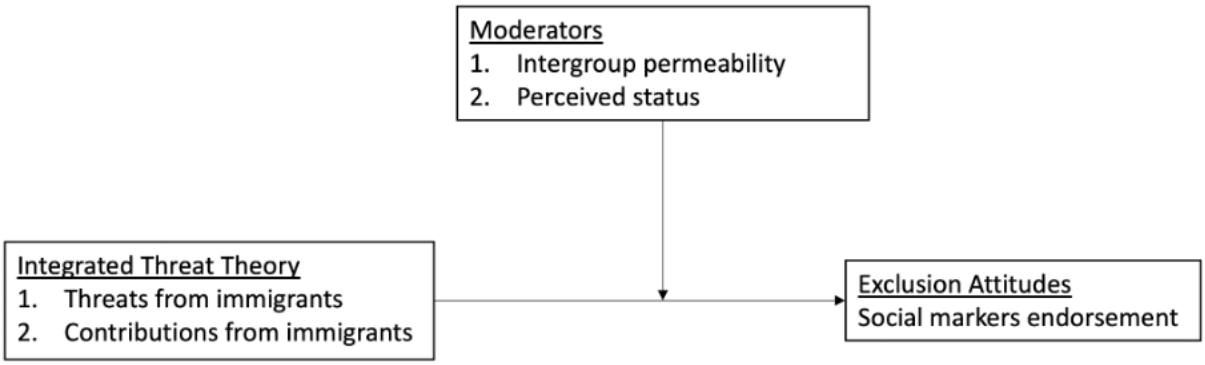
Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Ethnic Markers.

Variables		China		South America		The West	
		B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Step 1		$\Delta R^2 = .018$		$\Delta R^2 = .015$		$\Delta R^2 = .029^{*}$	
	Intercept	1.13^{***}	0.12	1.19^{***}	0.13	1.02^{***}	0.11
	Gender (Female)	-0.06	0.06	0.01	0.06	-0.05	0.05
	Age	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Geographic Area (Urban)	-0.03	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.15^{**}	0.05
	Education (Degree)	0.09	0.06	-0.01	0.06	0.00	0.05
	Income	$-0.03^{\dagger}$	0.02	-0.04^{*}	0.02	-0.01	0.01
Step 2		$\Delta R^2 = .133^{***}$		$\Delta R^2 = .097^{***}$		$\Delta R^2 = .123^{***}$	
	Intercept	1.15^{***}	0.11	1.08^{***}	0.13	1.07^{***}	0.10
	Gender (Female)	-0.07	0.05	0.03	0.06	-0.05	0.05
	Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
	Geographic Area (Urban)	-0.04	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.13^{**}	0.04
	Education (Degree)	$0.10^{\dagger}$	0.05	-0.01	0.06	0.04	0.04
	Income	-0.03^{*}	0.02	-0.05^{**}	0.02	-0.01	0.01
	Threat	0.09^{**}	0.03	-0.01	0.04	0.13^{***}	0.03
	Contribution	-0.08^{*}	0.03	-0.16^{***}	0.03	$-0.04^{\dagger}$	0.02
	Status	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.03	-0.05^{**}	0.02
	Permeability	-0.14^{***}	0.04	-0.10^{**}	0.04	-0.03	0.03
Step 3		$\Delta R^2 = .054^{***}$		$\Delta R^2 = .052^{***}$		$\Delta R^2 = .020^{***}$	
	Intercept	1.16^{***}	0.11	1.08^{***}	0.13	1.07^{***}	0.10
	Gender (Female)	-0.07	0.05	0.03	0.06	-0.04	0.05
	Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
	Geographic Area (Urban)	-0.05	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.13^{**}	0.04
	Education (Degree)	0.13^{*}	0.05	-0.02	0.06	0.02	0.04
	Income	-0.03^{*}	0.01	-0.05^{**}	0.02	-0.01	0.01
	Threat	0.14^{***}	0.03	-0.01	0.04	0.13^{***}	0.03
	Contribution	-0.08^{**}	0.03	-0.12^{***}	0.03	-0.04	0.02
	Status	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03	-0.05^{*}	0.02
	Permeability	-0.13^{***}	0.04	-0.10^{**}	0.03	-0.03	0.03

Threat × Status	-0.01	0.03	-0.11***	0.03	0.00	0.02
Threat × Permeability	-0.10**	0.03	-0.03	0.03	-0.04†	0.02
Contribution × Status	-0.10***	0.02	-0.03	0.02	-0.00	0.01
Contribution × Permeability	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02

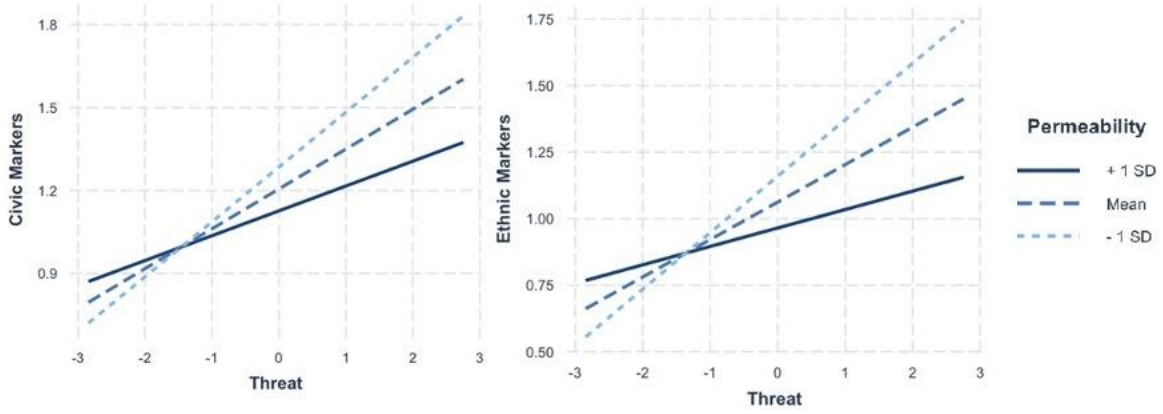
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Figure 1. Research Framework: Relationships Between Variables.



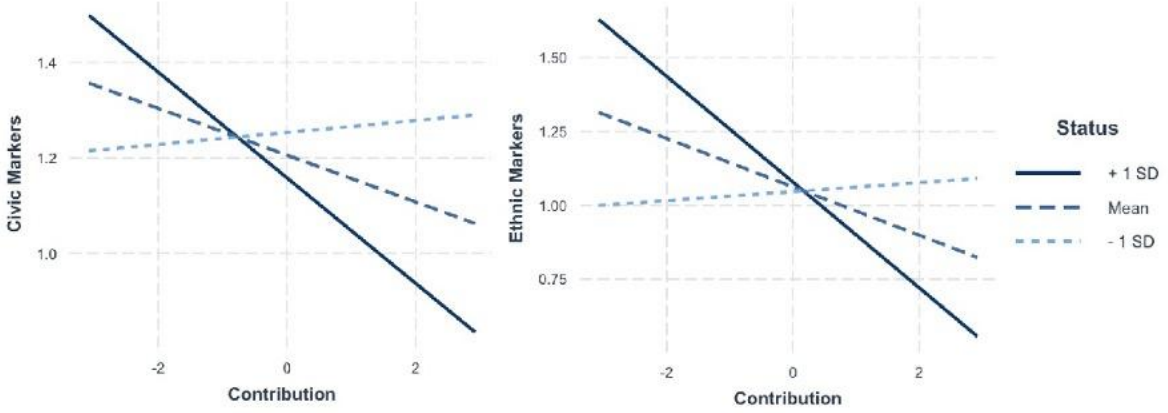
Moderators
1. Intergroup permeability
2. Perceived status
Integrated Threat Theory
1. Threats from immigrants
2. Contributions from immigrants
Exclusion Attitudes
Social markers endorsement

Figure 2. Simple Slopes Analysis for Ethnic and Civic Markers (Chinese Immigrants): Threat × Permeability.



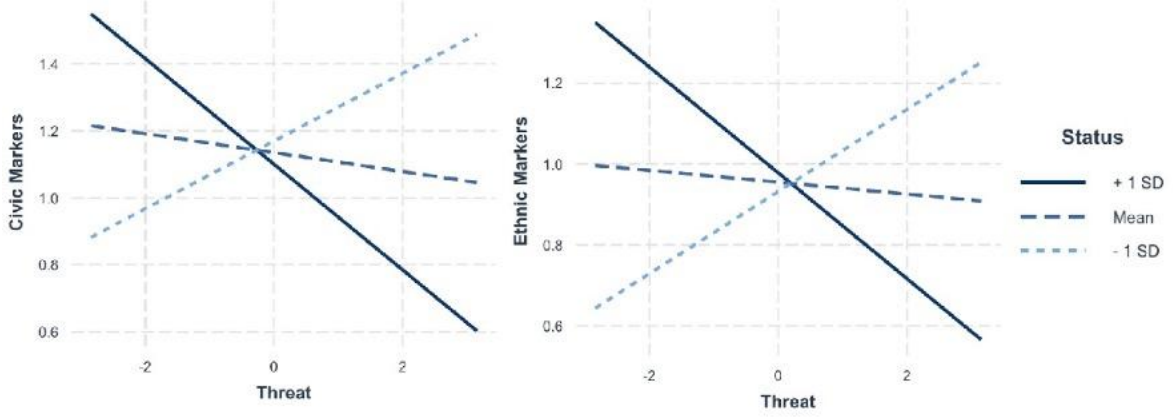
Civic Markers
Ethnic Markers
Permeability
+1 *SD*
Mean
-1 *SD*
Threat
Threat

Figure 3. Simple Slopes Analysis for Ethnic and Civic Markers (Chinese Immigrants): Contribution × Status.



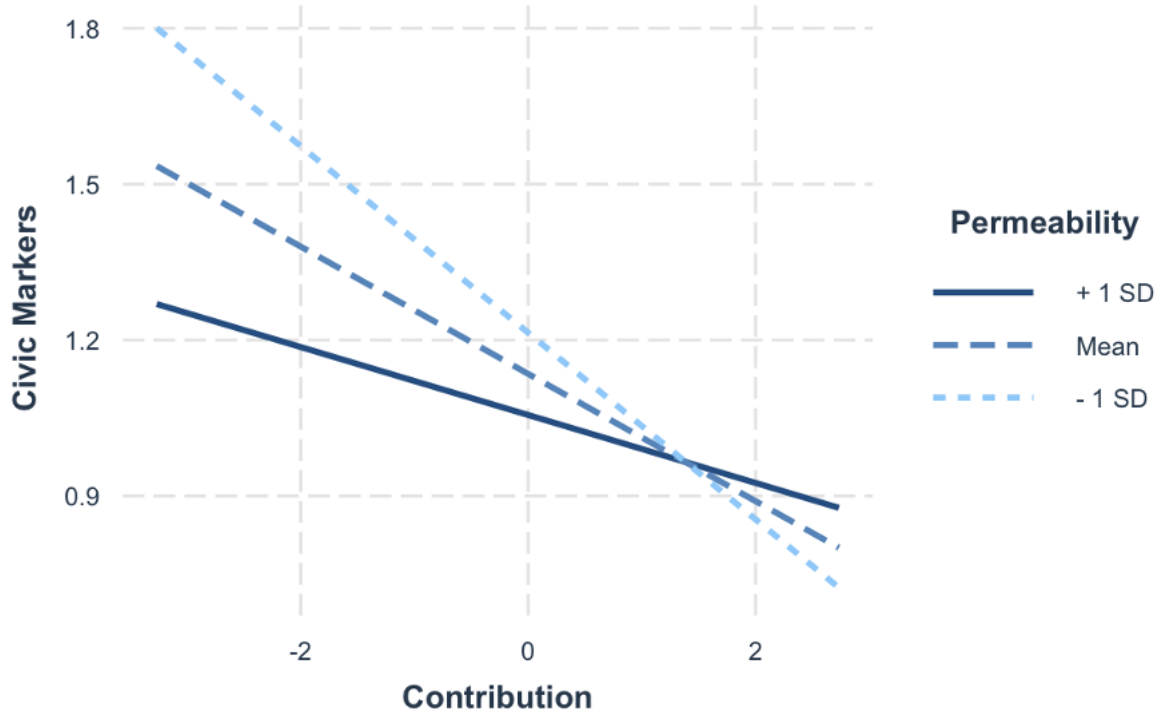
Civic Markers
Ethnic Markers
Status
+1 *SD*
Mean
-1 *SD*
Contribution
Contribution

Figure 4. Simple Slopes Analysis for Ethnic and Civic Markers (South American Immigrants): Threat × Status.



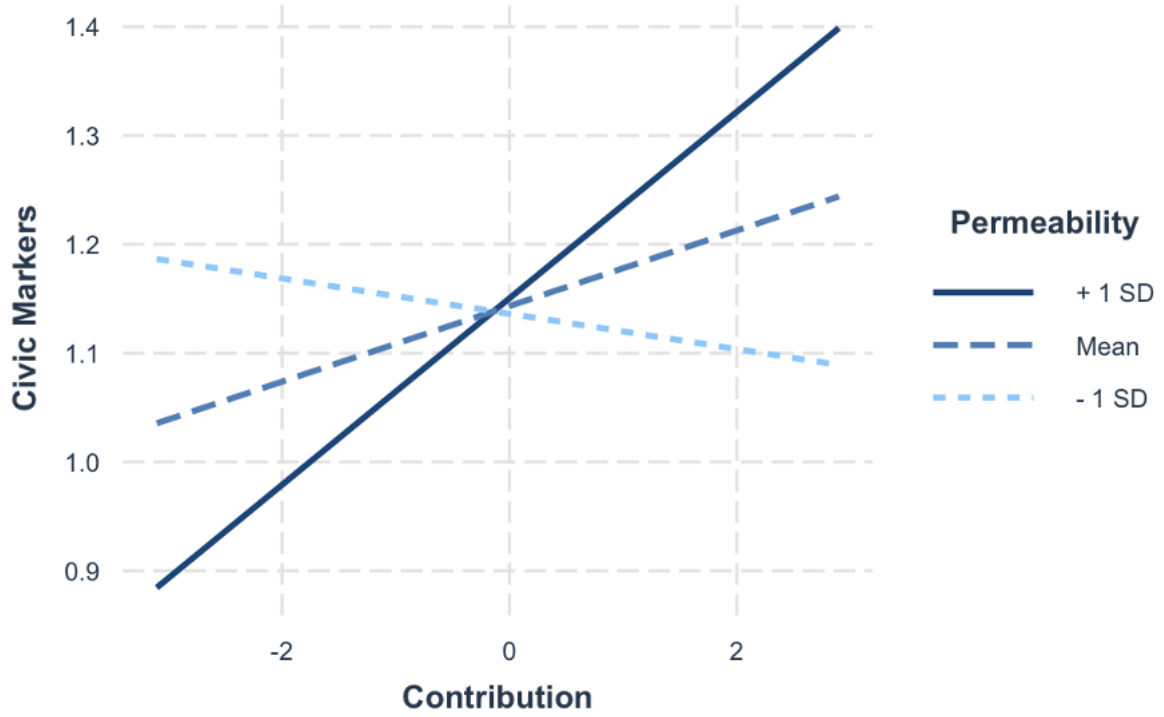
Civic Markers
Ethnic Markers
Status
+1 *SD*
Mean
-1 *SD*
Threat
Threat

Figure 5. Simple Slopes Analysis for Civic Markers (South American Immigrants): Contribution × Permeability.



Civic Markers
Permeability
+1 *SD*
Mean
-1 *SD*
Contribution

Figure 6. Simple Slopes Analysis for Civic Markers (Western Immigrants): Contribution × Permeability.



Civic Markers
Permeability
+1 *SD*
Mean
-1 *SD*
Contribution

Declaration of conflicting interests / *Declaración de conflicto de intereses*
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article. / *El (Los) autor(es) declara(n) que no existen posibles conflictos de intereses. con respecto a la investigación, autoría y/o publicación de este artículo.*

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The data that support the findings of this work and all supplementary materials are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author at komisarof.adam@keio.jp, and contingent upon signing a data sharing agreement. /

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