

【Research Materials】

# American Expatriates in Tokyo and Their Celebration of Holiday

東京におけるアメリカ人移民の祝日の祝い方

YAMAMOTO Takayuki

(山本 貴之)

【 Abstract】

Much literature aims to capture the complex realities of migrant experiences in the age of globalization. Similarly, issues surrounding migrants from the Global North have gained increasing academic attention from scholars of international migration. However, migrants' cultural practices in their hosting countries have scarcely been explored, despite the fact that they mirror crucial aspects of globalization. In the given context, this paper introduces my preliminary research on how American expatriates celebrate different holidays in Tokyo, exploring the points of discussion that their holidaymakings bring up. Among a variety of holidays referenced by informants, this paper singles out their practices on Thanksgiving Day and Halloween, since they produce significant points of discussion surrounding the location of, people attending, food of, and views on the holidays after expatriation. Contradicting a traditional assumption that migrants form ethnic/national communities in hosting societies, the informants for this project told stories of their holidaymakings which exemplify the much more complex realities of their cultural practices in Tokyo. The first half of this paper is devoted to outlining existing knowledge on the research topic and introduces a research question and method. The latter half introduces findings of the research and discusses how expatriation affects migrants' holiday practices.

【 Table of Contents】

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. Description of Research
4. Data and Method
5. Findings

*Halloween*

*Location*

*People*

*Food*

*Views*

*Thanksgiving Day*

*Location*

*People*

*Food*

*Views*

6. Discussion

7. Conclusion

Appendix

References

## 1 . Introduction

Much literature aims to capture the complex realities of migrant experiences in the age of globalization. Similarly, issues surrounding migrants from the Global North have gained increasing academic attention from scholars of international migration. However, migrants' cultural practices in hosting countries have scarcely been explored, despite the fact that they mirror crucial aspects of globalization. In particular, the lives of American expatriates in Japan remain untold, though they comprise the largest migrant population from the Global North in Japan. In the given context, this paper studies how American expatriates celebrate different holidays<sup>1)</sup> in Tokyo, exploring what kind of points of discussion their holidaymakings bring up. The first half of the paper is devoted to providing an overview of existing literature related to the research topic, a description of this research, and an explanation of applied data collection and methods. The second half reports findings and discusses some issues that emerge from the research. Since this project was conducted as a preliminary research for my dissertation, this paper concludes by referring to possible further research topics.

## 2 . Literature Review

Traditional patterns of migration are often associated with global economic inequalities. Scholars of migration have long been explaining them with push/pull models, stressing that both severe economic conditions in sending countries and labor

shortage issues in hosting countries generate a momentum of international population movements. From this perspective, international migration is often pictured as the movement from the South to the North, or from the East to the West. However, the contemporary world characterized by the globalization of goods, people, and information has diversified the reality of international migration. Some academic attention has thus been given to less traditional migratory patterns, which include “high-skilled, marriage, student, or even what has been recently called ‘white’ migrations” (Debnar, 2016, p. 2). These discussions of contemporary migration can be framed with a notion of ‘transnationalism’. As opposed to international perspectives, which presume that migrants usually stay in hosting countries, transnational perspectives assume that back-and-forth movements between multiple countries would aid some individuals in creating multiple networks. In that respect, as Yeoh (2018) argues, global cities are significant locations for observing the multiplicity of diversities which transnational migration entails. For instance, highly-mobile people, in hopes of further moving upwards in their careers, can also be regarded as migrants, in which case migration is a deliberate action (Anno & Wank 2007)<sup>2)</sup>.

These ‘privileged’ migrants, despite a variety of motives in migration, are sometimes labeled as ‘expatriates’ (Croucher, 2012), often connoting the stereotypical image of white businessmen from the West. That being said, the field of critical expatriate studies has contributed much more precise descriptions of actual expatriate experiences to the existing knowledge. As Farrer (2018) overviews, research on expatriates—which initially focused on aspects of their psychological adaptations to working environments in Asian hosting countries—currently covers other issues, ranging from genders and whiteness as ‘springs’ of both privilege and marginalization to the existence of economically unstable expatriates seeking stable positions unavailable within in their home countries. With an increase in numbers of lifestyle and self-initiated migrants, the multiple realities of expatriates have been introduced in academia, casting doubt on the prior one-dimensional understanding of expatriates. Also, instead of recognizing the term as a classification of individuals, Kunz (2016) rather understands ‘expatriates’ to denote social practices. In a similar vein, Farrer further argues that “one *is* not ‘an expatriate’ by virtue of being a certain type of person but rather *learns to be* an expatriate through socialization into an expatriate community with its collective practices and outlooks” (Farrer, 2018, p. 197).

While issues centering on these expatriates have attracted much attention from scholars, the amount of academic literature on them is far from sufficient. Specifically, there is a lack of sociological inquiry into the group-making of expatriates, including their celebration of holidays and festivals. Although Durkheim’s canonical work (1995) has proven the importance of ritualistic collective gatherings in establishing social

identities, he seems to presume that the existence of societies is taken for granted. That is, while the ritualization of holidays and festivals can be seen as a remembrance of preexisting communities and consolidation of collective identities, it should also entail the generation of a new sense of 'us'. This rings especially true in today's highly globalized world, wherein an unprecedented level of cultural, social, and political mixing is evident, a phenomenon that has been sociologically conceptualized as 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007). In fact, migration studies have conventionally treated migrants as an ethnically-oriented group of people, assuming that they form ethnic communities in host countries, and such views have been criticized by some scholars. As Wimmer (2009) notes, "the comparative literature on ethnicity alerts us to the possibility that members of an ethnic group might not share a specific culture (even if they mark the boundary with certain cultural diacritica), might not privilege each other in their everyday networking practice and thus not form a 'community'" (Wimmer, 2009, p. 252).

### 3 . Description of Research

The brief overview of the related literature above leads to a necessity of research on expatriates' gatherings, since they reflect a variety of social facts characterizing contemporary issues of migration. In that respect, this project explored how American expatriates in Tokyo celebrate holidays. A rationale for sampling American expatriates in Tokyo lies in the fact that, in terms of international migrants from the Global North,<sup>3)</sup> they form the biggest population in Japan. Since the majority of them reside in Tokyo, (American Residents in Japan 2019) they are therefore approachable informants. The objective of this research is not to test theories of acculturation/deculturation of migrants, applying positivist approaches; rather, it is to explore the multiple realities of their holiday experiences in Tokyo and to expand the repertoire of theories of expatriation.

### 4 . Data and Method

Based on the idea of constructionism, which perceives social realities as subjective, situational, and culturally variable constructs, the study employed qualitative interviewing as its core method and participant observation as a supplemental method of data collection, aiming to produce theories. Hence, the project was also based on grounded theory (Strauss, 1987). Following a style of grounded-theory-based research introduced by Weiss (1995), three informants were recruited (age range: 44-70, two females and one male); one of them recruited through convenience sampling, and the other two through theoretical sampling. All of them are college graduates (two of

them holding Ph.D. degrees). Informed consent was verbally obtained from all three informants, and each interview lasted approximately an hour. Due to the surge in Covid-19 cases, all of the interviews were conducted online using ZOOM. Since this project was exploratory research, it followed a semi-structured interview guide in hopes of obtaining a fuller description of their holiday experiences, as well as framing potential questions for further research. The interview guide for this research covered five major aspects as follows; (1) what holidays informants celebrate in Tokyo, (2) where they celebrate these holidays, (3) who they celebrate the holidays with, (4) what food they have for the holidays, and (5) their views of holiday celebrations. Data collected from the first informant was analyzed through steps of categorical, general, and integrative coding processes.

## 5 . Findings

The Fourth of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, *Obon*, and *Shogatsu* were holidays celebrated by the informants, and each interview reflected a unique effect of expatriation on their holiday celebration. Since the interviews resulted in discussions primarily about Halloween and Thanksgiving Day, this paper singles them out and explores several themes correlated with issues of *locations*, *people*, *food*, and *views* of the holidays, with references to excerpts from the interviews.

### *Halloween*

#### *Location*

One female informant—who is highly-mobile and has lived in several major cities in Asia, Africa, and Oceania—made mention of the existence of foreign areas. Her annual Halloween celebration used to take place in Azabu Juban, which is known as an area of dense foreign population. Recently, she has been holding a community-oriented trick-or-treating in her neighborhood in Yokohama.

#### *People*

Interestingly enough, despite the abundance of foreigners in these areas, she stressed that there are “not so many Americans. Actually, most of the people that come are Japanese. Our neighbors are Japanese, local, local Japanese. They also celebrate Halloween. And they also have the decorations at the house and the table with candy because they know this area. All the foreign people come here to trick or treat” (Interview 3).

#### *Food*

Although doughnuts are not typically an important food during Halloween, they are of great significance for one informant, reminiscent of her mother’s homemade doughnuts

that she used to have during childhood. She does not cook them herself but buys them at Krispy Kreme. She also buys candies for Halloween at the nearest Costco. Another international food market called National Azabu, as well as the online shopping website Amazon, were referred to in the interview.

#### *View*

For one informant, who gave up being a Mormon when she left the U.S. about 20 years ago, Halloween has a special meaning, since “it’s not a Christian holiday. It’s not a religious holiday. And it’s not a patriotic holiday. It has nothing to do with America. It’s a tradition that, it is a neutral tradition” (Interview 3). The informant rarely celebrates Thanksgiving and Christmas and tries to celebrate the ‘secular part’ of them on such occasions.

#### *Thanksgiving Day*

##### *Location*

One of the remarkable indications regarding locations of holidays is that, while sometimes they celebrate Thanksgiving at home, two of the informants highlighted a particular restaurant called the Pink Cow as a significant location for the holiday. The restaurant is currently located in Akasaka. They also indicated that there are a few other restaurants in Tokyo which feature Thanksgiving dinner.

##### *People*

Two of the informants explained how the celebration of Thanksgiving is a friend-oriented event. For them, although originally celebrated with Americans residing in Tokyo, the Thanksgiving celebration increasingly included diverse participants, regardless of nationalities. One informant who usually hosts the Thanksgiving gathering explained that she “started inviting other people, and then in the past, I don’t know, maybe 10 years ago, it ended up being more people who are not Americans than Americans, simply because, you know, the Americans I knew here were having, you know, their own celebration or people that I didn’t, you know, see a lot” (Interview 2).

##### *Food*

Food is an important aspect of the Thanksgiving celebration. Two informants emphasized that the Pink Cow features a traditional Thanksgiving dinner, although one of them still recognizes a minor difference in how it is served and tastes, noting “the Pink Cow does that stuff [traditional Thanksgiving dinner] although I’m sure that the Pink Cow is not doing a whole turkey. What comes out when they’re serving is like turkey meat, that’s been pre-prepared, pre-sliced, and stuff like that. The taste is significantly different from the whole turkey. It tastes like frozen food” (Interview 1). Also, another informant mentioned Kyle’s Good Finds, a cake shop in Nakano, which also features a take-out style Thanksgiving dinner. Like in the Halloween celebration,

international food markets also play a pivotal role in expatriates' celebration of Thanksgiving, especially at home, since they provide a wide variety of choices of food.

### Views

Interestingly enough, all the informants expressed negative perspectives on Thanksgiving Day, especially when they talked about how the holiday usually provides a space for arguments and family tension in the U.S. One informant expressed how her childhood memories of the holiday are unhappy because of domestic troubles and family quarrels, which is why she stopped celebrating it in Japan. Another informant also remarked that the holiday has become unimportant over years of living outside the U.S. Although he has been celebrating the holiday for several years now, it is largely because of the fact that his bosom friend organizes the gathering, implying the unimportance of the holiday itself. On the contrary, while sharing negative sentiments towards Thanksgiving Day with the other two, one informant emphasized how the holiday has become increasingly important. She explained that the meaning of the holiday shifted over the years, from giving thanks, to rich harvest, to general gratitude for people who have taken care of her.

## 6 . Discussion

Although roughly divided into four categories, the findings above are in fact quite complexly intertwined with each other and help us recognize important points of discussion. First, the significance of a particular restaurant as a location of holiday celebration certainly reflects how some holidays are disembedded from local contexts and reembedded in different locations (Giddens, 1990).

As for Thanksgiving celebration, the shift of the location from home to restaurants stems from several facts, such as the difficulty of buying turkey meat in Japan and the fact that Japanese ovens do not “fit the turkey” (Interview 3). Yet another factor worthy of attention is the line between ‘home for family’ and ‘restaurants for friends’. That is, as one informant stressed, “Some Americans like Jim, his family is here, you know, so when he celebrates Thanksgiving with his family, he wouldn’t be a candidate for the Pink Cow (Interview 2)”. The celebration at the restaurant exemplifies how expatriates living apart from family hold the holiday gathering in Tokyo, inviting not only Americans, but Japanese participants as well. This challenges the popular assumption that migrants often



Picture 1 taken by Takayuki Yamamoto on July 14, 2020. The Turkey Bento from the Kyle's Good Finds in Nakano.

establish ethnically-oriented communities. It also resonates with another informant's celebration of Halloween, which takes place in her local foreign neighborhood in Yokohama but involves a considerable number of Japanese participants. These instances suggest that expatriates holding these gatherings have an impact of some extent upon how local people live their lives, establishing a unique community.

That being said, the question of whether such a community is 'purely' friends-oriented remains. The following excerpt implies that the boundary line between family and friends is blurring to some extent:

In Japan, it [Thanksgiving Day] took on an extra meaning of "Oh, this is a time for family, and it is, for a lot of us, a time for exploring new concepts of family, you know, seeing our deep friendships as family. (Interview 2)

Ostensibly, this serves as an example of fictive kinship, as opposed to 'real kinship' based on blood ties. However, such a conclusion might invite criticism, since anthropological research into kinship has cast doubt on the assumption that genealogical correlation is a pivotal factor in defining a family (Schneider, 1984). In that sense, the informant's subjective recognition of changes in the meaning of family should be understood as an example of how the meaning of each holiday is deconstructed and reinterpreted through the process of expatriation and everyday life in one's hosting society.



Picture 2 taken by Takayuki Yamamoto on July 11, 2020.

The Quality Food Market Sakagami near Kiyose Station. Although the large variety of food at the Sakagami resembles general international food markets, it is also a high-end grocery store.

Food for the holidays, as the take-out style Thanksgiving dinner suggests, is manifested as a localized dish to some extent (Picture 1). Similarly, one informant notes, "I think, once I celebrated [Thanksgiving] with a Japanese family. They invited me and you know...at Christmas...chicken legs" (Interview 1). What he meant here is that the Japanese family served chicken legs for Thanksgiving Day, which are usually served at Christmas in Japan, evidencing localized holiday celebrations. At the same time, the references to transnational corporations and stores of American companies such as Costco and Amazon imply that the economic globalization and technological development of food products transportation have facilitated expatriates' reproduction of 'authentic' holiday experiences with a particular food. It is worth noting that while some restaurants and supermarkets

are located in Minato Ward—traditionally the heart of international living in Tokyo—some other places including the Kyle’s Good Finds and a supermarket called Sakagami (Picture 2) are not necessarily located in such foreign areas. This indicates that expatriates are not always concentrated in ‘environmental bubbles’ (Farrer, 2018).

Finally, the views of each holiday reveal how the informants recognize certain obligations attached to them. For example, in the case of the ex-Mormon informant, Thanksgiving Day is interpreted as a substantially gendered, religious holiday, towards which she expressed her revulsion. Contrarily, Halloween represents Thanksgiving’s much happier counterpart, to her representing cultural neutrality. This instance highlights how holidays are framed by both national and cultural aspects. Another point of discussion which arises from these interviews is tension among expatriates. One informant labeled expatriates as spoiled people and usually “stayed away from the Azabu Juban area because we didn’t want to be with the foreigners” (Interview 3). This is also related to her appreciation of her annual Halloween celebration, during which she observes a good mix of participants. Resonating with the other informant’s celebration of Thanksgiving Day at the Pink Cow, a central meaning of holidaymaking for her is not the maintenance of her religious and national identity, but interaction with locals.

## 7 . Conclusion

It is interesting to see how expatriation pulls some holidays out from particular timeframes like national calendars, weakening ‘day-off’ aspects of these holidays and in turn strengthening their function as community gatherings. In the same vein, this exploratory research illustrates the impact of expatriates upon locals, creating unique communities and contradicting the popular assumption that migrants form ethnically-oriented communities in hosting countries. That being said, the limited number of samples with relatively high social status is far from sufficient, and questions of class aspects remain unanswered. Migrants from Western countries today do not always fit into the category of privileged migrants. Rather, some of them are middling migrants (Lehmann, 2014) whose economic and social statuses do not represent those of global elites. Based on this preliminary project, further research should focus on middling migrants from the U.S. and their holiday practices in Tokyo to more deeply understand migration in the global age.

## Appendix

### General Information About Informants

#### Informant 1

- Gender: male
- Age: 65
- From: Saint Paul, Minnesota
- Occupation: university professor
- Educational background: holding a PhD degree
- Recruitment: convenient sampling

#### Informant 2

- Gender: female
- Age: 70
- From: San Bernardino, California
- Occupation: Aikido lecturer, retired editor and professor
- Educational background: holding a PhD degree
- Recruitment: snowball sampling

#### Informant 3

- Gender: female
- Age: 44
- From: Salt Lake City, Utah
- Occupation: Housewife (MA student)
- Educational background: having a college degree
- Recruitment: snowball sampling

## References

- American Residents in Japan*. (2019, December 3). Retrieved December 7, 2019, from <https://stats-japan.com/t/kiji/11634>.
- Anno, T., & Wank, D. (2007). Seijigaku shakaigaku jinruigaku ni okeru toransunashonarizumu no shikaku. In *Gurobaru shakai no dainamizumu: Riron to tenbo* (pp. 28–58). Jochi Daigaku Shuppan.
- Croucher, S. (2012). Privileged mobility in an age of globality. *Societies*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Debnár, M. (2016). *Migration, Whiteness, and cosmopolitanism*. New York: Palgrave

Macmillan.

- Durkheim, E. (1995). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Trans. Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press.
- Falassi, A. (1987). Festival: Definition and morphology. *Time out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, 1-10.
- Farrer, J. (2018). Changing expatriate communities in Asia and the blurring boundaries of expatriate identity. *Routledge Handbook of Asian Migrations*.
- Fouron, G. E., & Schiller, N. C. (2001). The Generation of Identity: Redefining the Second Generation. *Migration, transnationalization, and race in a changing New York*, 58.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kunz, S. (2016). Privileged mobilities: Locating the expatriate in migration scholarship. *Geography Compass*, 10(3), 89-101.
- Lehmann, A. (2014). *Transnational lives in China: Expatriates in a globalizing city*. Springer.
- Rusu, M. S., & Kantola, I. (2016). A time of meta-celebration: Celebrating the sociology of celebration. *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, 7(1), 1.
- Schneider, D. M. (1984). *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*. University of Michigan Press.
- Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge University Press.
- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 30(6), 1024-1054.
- Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Simon and Schuster.
- Wimmer, A. (2009). Herder's heritage and the boundary - making approach: Studying ethnicity in immigrant societies. *Sociological theory*, 27(3), 244-270.
- Yeoh, B. S. (2018). Transnational migrations and plural diversities: Encounters in global cities. In *Routledge handbook of Asian migrations* (pp. 238-249). Routledge.

---

〔注〕

- 1) The line between holidays and festivals is often blurred, but this paper supposes that holidays can be conceptualized as temporal frameworks of celebration, while festivals can be defined as “periodically recurrent, social occasions in…a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events” (Falassi 1987, 2). See (Rusu & Kantola 2016) for more about the definitions.
- 2) This is not to say that migrants with economic vulnerability do not fit into the category of transnational migrants; for instance, migrants settling in hosting

countries and sending remittances to their home can be seen as individuals belonging to multiple locations and making economic and cultural contributions to both countries' societies. A key aspect of the transnational approach is that it recognizes continuing economic, social, and political relationships between migrants and their home countries. See (Fouon & Schiller, 2001) for more about its definition.

- 3) This paper applies the idea of the Global North instead of the West, since it is debatable whether American expatriates can be described as being from the West. A similar typological dilemma also presents itself in other countries such as the United Kingdom.

## 要旨

近年、移民研究においてはグローバル化時代の移民の複雑な現状をとらえるために、グローバル・ノースからの移民に関して注目が集まっている。しかし、彼女ら彼らの文化実践については、それがグローバル化の重要な側面を反映するにもかかわらず学術的な関心が寄せられていない。この問題意識のもと、本稿は東京におけるアメリカ人移民の祝祭日の祝い方について筆者が行った探索的研究の結果を報告し、研究を通して立ち上がった論点について議論する。具体的には、本研究に参加したインフォーマントが言及した複数の祝祭日のうち感謝祭とハロウィーンに注目し、それら二つに関わる場所、人、食、移住後のインフォーマントの考え方について考察する。国際移民が移住先で民族／国家に基づくコミュニティを形成するという移民研究において支配的な仮説に反し、本研究のインフォーマントは東京における複雑化した文化実践を体現している。本稿の前半では先行研究のレビュー、研究の目的、方法について説明する。後半では、研究結果の報告と、国際移住が祝祭日の祝い方に与える影響について議論する。