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Migration flows in a transnational age

Zainichi communities in Japan

Topic and Research Question

One of the worldwide most discussed topics in the last decades is the interminable flow of migrants heading to industrialized nations as well as connected aspects such as the economic, political, financial, social and cultural implications of these migration movements for both the country of origin and the host-country.

This master's thesis attempts to investigate migration movements in East Asia and explores transnational migration flows by means of a case study focusing on the Korean communities in Japan, called *Zainichi* 在日. Therefore the following research questions will guide this thesis: The first question addresses aspects influencing the condition of *Zainichi* communities in their new host-land and in their former home-land.

Research Question I: "Which socio-economic, political and cultural aspects in the home-land Korea and in the host-land Japan influence the situation of *Zainichi* as transnational migrants?"

The second research question analyzes the migrant communities of *Zainichi* in Japan as well as transnational networks. **Research Question II: "What are the key aspects of the *Zainichi* communities in Japan and what characterizes their relations to Korea?"**

The thesis is focusing on the time from 2005 onwards given that it has been forty years since the relations between Korea and Japan have been normalized and a treaty has been signed. However, due to the significance of past incidents for the contemporary *Zainichi* communities, the different generations of *Zainichi* will be taken into account as well.

State of the Art

A growing number of publications takes the transnational perspective of present-day migration flows into account (e.g. Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Faist 2000a) and highlights the transnational phenomena in general and diverse aspects such as transnational identities or social structure in specific (e.g. Vertovec 1999, Levitt 2001a, Beck 2008, Faist 2014). The body of literature concerning migration flows between Korea and Japan mostly focuses on labor migration (e.g. Tamura 2003), 'comfort women' (e.g. Tanaka 2009) or the public opinion on immigrants (e.g. Mazumi 2015, Kage et al. 2016).

Publications in Japanese and Korean consist of sociological and anthropological evaluations of *Zainichi*

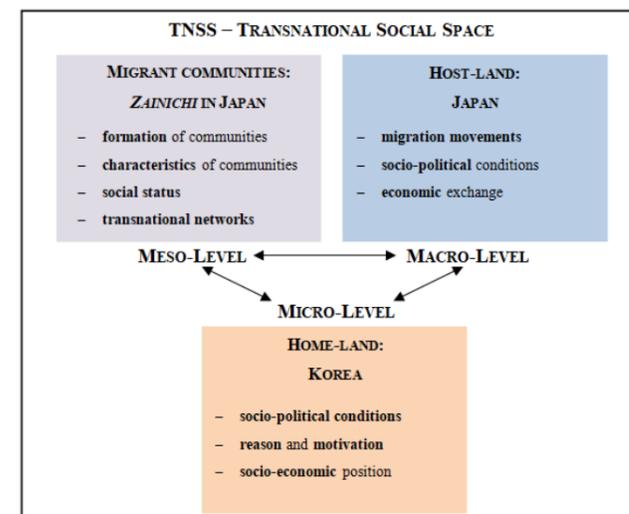
communities based on data of past field research as well as emphasize individual fates (e.g. Ryang 1997, Gen 2002, Lie 2008, Suzuki 2016). This master's thesis not only looks for the bigger picture, but also depends on current data.

Methodology and Approach

The thesis is based on the theory of transnationalism. This concept tries to understand the contemporary migratory phenomena in relation with the changing global aspects while at the same time uniting various aspects of transnational migration in a so called 'Transnational Social Space' (TNSS) (Faist 2000a).

The TNSS builds a reference frame and is divided into three levels. Korea as the country of origin constitutes the micro-level and Japan is the country of settlement representing the macro-level. While key aspects of the micro-level are the socio-economic and political condition of migrants as well as the reason for emigrating, the analysis of the macro-level on the one hand focuses on the socio-political conditions of the host-land and on the other hand on the relations between the countries including economic exchange. In addition, a meso-level dealing with *Zainichi* communities is added and analyzes their characteristics, their social status as well as networks and organizations used by *Zainichi*.

The following illustration sums up the above described key aspects of the framework:



Main Facts

The year 2015 marks the fiftieth anniversary since the normalization of the relations between Japan and Korea. However, already before the treaty was signed, migration movements in the form of labor mobilization to Japan took place. In fact, *Zainichi* represent one of the largest migrant communities in Japan. However, despite a high degree of cultural and social assimilation, *Zainichi* are marginalized based on the strict nationality law, which legally considers the second, third and fourth generation of *Zainichi* foreigners. Consequently, Japan is "the only advanced nation with a fourth-generation immigrant problem derived from exclusivist policies" (Lee 2012:1).

Although most *Zainichi* have obtained the legal status of "(special) permanent resident", they are still subject to the Alien Registration Law of 1952, which has a great impact on the everyday life of *Zainichi*. Therefore, the communities often face the same challenges as newly arriving migrants and their social status is changing based on public opinion or policies. As a result, every year a large number of *Zainichi* uses the opportunity to get naturalized in order to obtain a better social status. In fact, although there has been a significant improvement of the socio-economic position of *Zainichi* in the Japanese society, some socio-economic inequalities between the Japanese population and the *Zainichi* communities still remain.

Results

The analysis of Korea on the micro-level as the home-land has concluded that the migrant flows of *Zainichi* were especially influenced by political and socio-economic aspects. Korea has large overseas communities, which resulted in policies such as the Overseas Korean Act in order to support these communities. Studies on the motivation behind the emigration have shown that the most important factors are economic opportunities, family reunifications and marriage.

The study of Japan as the host-land on the macro-level has illustrated that *Zainichi* in Japan are equally influenced by political, economical, social and cultural aspects. The political and economic relations between the two countries had a great impact on the situation of *Zainichi*. Since both Japan and Korea are counted among the major players in the region, close economic relations are not only beneficial for the countries itself,

but also for the economic position of the whole East Asian region. *Zainichi* contribute to the economic exchange with remittances. These payments are a stable form of income, which promotes consumption and economic growth. The analysis of the social and cultural aspects among other things takes the public opinion into account, which has shown that all generations of *Zainichi* face similar obstacles such as discrimination.

The examination of the meso-level has demonstrated that the *Zainichi* communities are heterogeneous and connect migrants with different views, demographic characteristics and transnational identities. In fact, the analysis of the demographic constitution illustrated that the development among the Korean communities coincides with the rapid ageing Japanese society while the core destinations of Koreans follow the urbanization trend. Since the founding of the *Zainichi* communities in Japan, various organizations and institutions have been established, whose objective it is to support the *Zainichi* as well as promote transnational exchange between the two countries in the form of social and cultural remittances.

Summing up, it can be concluded that the conditions of *Zainichi* in Japan have significantly improved over time and although there exist similarities between previous generations and contemporary communities the constantly changing and evolving global environment will confront future generations with new challenges.

References

All references can be found in the full version of the MA thesis available at <http://othes.univie.ac.at>.

About the Author

Sarah Anna Juen holds a BA and MA in Japanese Studies from the University of Vienna. Her research interests include the dynamics of international relations in a transnational age as well as Japanese literature in general and the author Murakami Haruki in specific.



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