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Issue of Multicultural People in Globalizing Japan: (Cultural) Identity, Mental Health and “Ibasho”

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Abstract

The number of multicultural people has increased over many years with the globalization of the world economy. Japan is no exception. *Ibasho* is a Japanese unique concept and means one's place where one feels secure, comfortable, and accepted. There are very few studies on *ibasho* among people with multicultural backgrounds. Suzuki (2018) refers to relationships among identity/cultural identity formation, mental health (including subjective well-being) and *ibasho*. In this paper, we examined the relationship among mental health, identity and *ibasho* with a focus on *ibasho* in the case of two groups of people with multicultural backgrounds: International students ($N = 105$) living in Japan, from 30 countries (Study 1) and Japanese-Indonesian young people ($N = 10$) living in Indonesia (Study 2). In Study 1, a questionnaire survey and interviews were conducted, and in Study 2, multiple interviews were carried out. In both studies, the analysis was mainly qualitative in nature. The results showed that there was the relationship among *ibasho*, mental health, and (cultural) identity, and creating *ibasho* was very useful to support for cultural identity formation of multicultural people as well as to maintain their mental health.

Keywords: *Ibasho*, cultural identity, mental health (subjective well-being), multicultural people, Japan

Issue of Multicultural People in Globalizing Japan: (Cultural) Identity, Mental Health and “Ibasha”

Ibasha is a concept unique to Japan and can be briefly described as “one’s place where one feels secure, comfortable and accepted.” It is said to be difficult for translating into other languages (Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006). “Home” in English could be a similar word to ibasha but non-identical. Ibasha is a part of the daily language, it has multiple meanings depending on the context (Doi, 1994). Therefore, ibasha has no conclusive definition as a technical term. According to the Kojien dictionary (1991), the original meaning of ibasha is “irutokoro” (where you are) or “idokoro” (whereabouts), namely physical place/space. However, since the “Tokyo Shure” (the name of the free school) was established as ibasha for children refusing to go to school in 1985, ibasha has become to indicate psychological place/space more and more (Ishimoto, 2009). It is considered that ibasha essentially contains both one’s “physical/actual living place” (e.g., house, school) and one’s “psychological place” (e.g., family, friends) (Suzuki, 2012): Some people have both ibasha but some only one of both ibasha. Furthermore, physical and psychological ibasha are not always equal. Therefore, to distinguish physical ibasha from psychological ibasha is useful not only for studying about ibasha but also for assisting minority children and youths in creating ibasha (Suzuki, 2016). Creating ibasha is very important to support the cultural identity formation of multicultural people and to promote their mental health. There is also the term “sense of ibasha,” which refers to the feeling or consciousness of having ibasha.

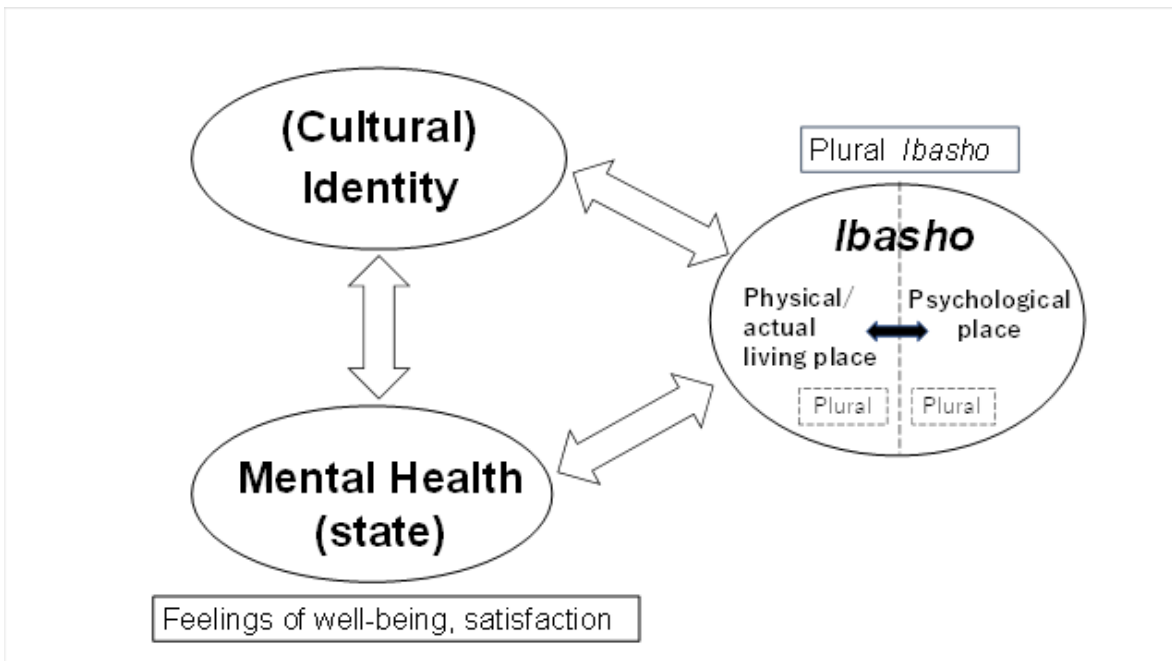
In recent years, the number of people with multicultural backgrounds in Japan has been increasing, such as international students, foreign workers and their families, children of interculturally married parents (intercultural children) and students returning from abroad. They often feel that they do not have ibasha, and some of them have difficulty in forming an identity and maintaining their mental health. Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has warned educators that when children say “I have no ibasha,” it could be a sign that they are suicidal (2008). Without ibasha, one may feel as if one’s existence has been denied, or become invisible with no place to belong (MEXT, 2008; Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006). Suzuki (2018) refers to hypothetical relationships among (cultural) identity, ibasha and mental health (Figure 1). Figure 1 shows those three factors interacting with each other. It is also pointed out that ibasha influences (cultural) identity formation and the maintenance of mental health (Suzuki, 2016; Tsutsumi, 2002; etc.). Furthermore, Tsutsumi (2002) notes that when young people feel “No ibasha,” it means that their ego-identity is in crisis. Ibasha could play a significant role in mental health and (cultural) identity formation.

There are still only a very limited number of studies on ibasha of people with multicultural backgrounds, because the rapid increase of such people is a relatively recent phenomenon in Japan. Nukaga (2014) has reviewed past literature on ibasha of border-crossing minority children and youths (e.g., newcomers, international students, Japanese-descended or bicultural youths) and highlighted that they possessed multiple ibasha not necessarily within their host countries but also transnationally. “Minority youths not only can

connect with people and things in their homeland but also receive various images of homeland through transnational media while residing in the host society” (ibid., p.175). Border-crossing minority youths create “imaginary ibasho” or “virtual ibasho” due to the advancement of communication technologies such as SNS (Murata & Furukawa, 2014; Tokunaga, 2014; Yamanouchi, 2014). Through the analysis of the life history of a Japanese American with two roots, Murphy-Shigematsu (2014) also examined the process of finding ibasho that transcended national borders without sticking to a single ibasho. There are also Ishibashi (2019) on ibasho of international students and Suzuki (2014, 2016, 2017 September) on cultural identity, ibasho and subjective well-being of Japanese-German women with two roots.

Figure 1

(Cultural) Identity, Ibasho, and Mental Health (Suzuki, 2016, partly modified)



It is known that identity, especially cultural identity plays a very important role for people living in multicultural settings (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2002; Suzuki, 2008). Minoura (1984) describes cultural identity as the sum of the deep feelings, lifestyles, behaviors, interests, preferences, and ideas that come from being, for example, Japanese or American. Cultural identity is an aspect of group identity (Erikson, 1959), or social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and considered as a subordinate concept of identity (ego identity). Cultural identity is thought to play an important role in the formation of ego identity. In this study, cultural identity is taken and defined as “feelings or consciousness that one shares regarding a particular culture with other members of a particular group” (Suzuki, 2011).

Health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (2004, p.10). Mental health is included in the definition. Subjective well-being (SWB)

emphasizes positive aspect of mental health and generally means a feeling of happiness or a sense of satisfaction. SWB is a broad concept and includes emotions as well as satisfactions with specific and general areas of one's life (Diener et al., 1999).

There were a few researches on the relationships between *ibasho* and mental health (SWB) or *ibasho* and (cultural) identities. Suzuki (2012) investigated interculturally-married Japanese women who moved to Indonesia and showed that positive evaluations (feeling of happiness, sense of satisfaction, mentally stable feeling) of life were connected with *ibasho*. They regarded their lives as positive when they had both physical and psychological *ibasho* or one of them. *Ibasho* where one can be oneself has a positive impact on SWB (Suzuki, 2018; Yano, 2018). Ishimoto (2010), who distinguished between "social *ibasho*" (*ibasho* with other persons) and "personal *ibasho*" (*ibasho* without other persons), also pointed out that "social *ibasho*" was positively correlated with mental health (well-being). Herleman, et al. (2008) showed that *ibasho* had a significant relationship with the adjustment, satisfaction, and well-being of expatriate wives. The relationship between *ibasho* and identity (ego identity) has been also suggested (Ozawa, 2000; Suh, 2003; Tsutsumi, 2002).

As already mentioned, Suzuki (2018) has referred to the importance of *ibasho* for cultural identity formation as well as the relationship among identity/cultural identity formation, mental health (including SWB) and *ibasho* (see Figure 1). However, no study has clarified the relationship among the three concepts of *ibasho*, cultural identity, and mental health. In this paper, we will examine the relationship among (cultural) identity, mental health (including SWB) and *ibasho*, focusing on *ibasho* in the case of two groups of people with multicultural backgrounds, namely international students living in Japan (study 1) and children of interculturally married parents living abroad (study 2), because those are well recognized as people with multicultural backgrounds in Japan. Furthermore, the importance and usefulness of the concept of *ibasho* in supporting people with multicultural backgrounds, especially in cultural identity formation and mental health promotion, will be discussed.

Study 1

According to Ohashi (2008), in order to prevent mental health problems of international students, it helps to create a comfortable community (*ibasho*) where they do not feel isolated. However, having *ibasho* or not having *ibasho* is meaningless to foreign students because they hardly know the word *ibasho*, although other cultures may have a remotely similar concept.

In Ishibashi's study (2019, July) conducted as a preliminary survey, 21 international students from 19 countries, who encountered *ibasho* for the first time, defined the meaning of *ibasho* in English in four categories: 1) physical place (e.g., "my place/ home/ garden," "safe & comfortable space"), 2) psychological/sensory/emotional place (e.g., "fun," "happiness," "peace," "comfort," "safe," "freedom"), 3) social place (e.g., "shared value/time/activity/place with friends/family/others"), and 4) personal place (e.g., "true self," "free to be myself as who I am"). Those meanings of *ibasho* were consistent with the results of some studies on *ibasho* that were responded by the Japanese (Ishimoto, 2010; Sugimoto

& Shoji, 2006). Therefore, we found that the concept of *ibasho* was understandable to international students coming from various cultures.

The study 1 focuses on the *ibasho* of international students with different cultural identities. Furthermore, we will discuss that having *ibasho* or finding *ibasho* in Japan may help successful acculturation process and psychological well-being (SWB) of the international students.

Study 1: Methods

Participants were international students ($N = 105$, 55 females, 50 males; 48 married, unmarried 57; ranging from 23 to 42 years old, $M = 31.7$) in a graduate school in Japan, from 30 countries (top three: 13 from Indonesia, 11 Vietnam, 10 Kirgiz Republic; areas: Asia, Africa, Middle East, North America, Europe, & others). The length of stay in Japan at the time of the research was from six to 20 months. Survey (one time), semi-structured individual interviews (1-2 hours, 1-2 times), and group discussion were conducted in 2020 (for about three months). Here, the focus will be mainly on the survey and the semi-structured interviews.

In the survey, the participants were asked to write freely about which place or space in Japan and their home countries they wish to be when having “a particular emotion or sense.” “Particular emotions or senses” were feelings of “security/safety,” “belonging,” “self-worth,” “freedom,” “happiness,” “comfort,” “when you need to feel spiritual or religious connections (spiritual & religious connections),” or “when you are depressed (depression).” Those eight items were developed based on previous researches. The questionnaire was in a matrix format as shown in Table 1: For each of the eight items in the columns, the rows were labeled “where,” “with whom?” (“myself (alone),” “my family,” etc. with multiple answers), as well as a column for describing “when.” For example, for “feeling secure and safe,” one could write “my home” as a place (where), and “anytime” (when), select “my family” (with whom) as additional information. That is, home was *ibasho* for the person to feel secure and safe. The responses were categorized by a method following the KJ method (Kawakita, 1970).

Face-to-face personal interviews were conducted in English. The content consisted of the participants' responses to their own questionnaires. For each answer, the participant gave a more detailed explanation and the interviewer asked further questions to delve deeper into the answers of the questionnaire. Each participant was also interviewed about his or her cultural background, life in the home country, and adjustment experience in Japan. Ethical considerations were taken into account during the surveys and interviews.

Study 1: Results

1. Ibasho's survey

The responses about *ibasho* were classified into three categories (A-C). The figures in parentheses are the percentages of respondents in the total number of participants ($N = 105$).

Table 1
Ibasho Survey Sheet (Image) With Some Common Responses

Feelings	Where	With Whom						When	
		Myself (alone)	My Family	Close Friends	Group (community, etc.)	People (other than close friends)	Pets		Spiritual Power/Higher Power
Safe & Secure	My home		X						Anytime
Belonging	University			X	X	X		X	To talk
Self-worth	My room	X						X	Anytime
Freedom	At park	X		X					To sit
Happiness	Restaurants		X	X	X		X		To talk
Comfort	Anywhere		X	X	X				Wherever with my family and friends
Spiritual & Religious Connection	Church	X	X					X	To pray
Depression	On my bed	X						X	To cry

(A) Physical place (ibasho) (98.10%)

1) current residence such as dormitory or own room (80.0%), 2) religious facilities such as temple, mosque, or church (74.29%), 3) home in one's home country (73.33%), 4) in nature, such as rivers, mountains, parks, etc. (62.86%), 5) campus facilities of the current university (58.1%), 6) public facilities, such as shopping malls, coffee shops, restaurants, etc. (36.19%).

(B) People and others as ibasho, i.e., places where one can feel one's existence in relation to others (95.24%)

1) family (92.38%), 2) close friends (90.48%), 3) community/others (77.14%), 4) spiritual existence (48.57%), and 5) pets (40.95%).

(C) Specific activities as *ibasho* (99.05%)

1) a place to talk with someone (67.62%), 2) lying down or sitting (54.29%), 3) playing (52.38%), 4) praying (43.81%) and so on.

In addition to the above, respondents also answered that a space (*ibasho*) where they could have privacy was equally important (96.19%). When faced with difficulties such as loneliness and depression, the participants preferred to be alone (75.24%) or with family (36.19%) or close friends (25.71%) as *ibasho*. Furthermore, 83.8% of the participants had religious faith. Although those with religion chose a smaller number of *ibasho* than those without religion, they mentioned more *ibasho* associated with religions (e.g., facility, activity, and people). A chi-square test showed that there was a significant difference between participants with and without religion in their responses to *ibasho*, $\chi^2(1, N = 105) = 0.021$, $p < .05$. But there was no significant difference between gender, marital status, age, and response to *ibasho* ($p > .05$).

2. Case studies

The following are some of the common cases found in interviews with international students. Descriptions in parentheses [] were added by the authors.

Case 1: Denial of cultural identity to home country and search for *ibasho* in Japan

I don't find my *ibasho* in my country...actually, I don't speak my [ethnic] language [well]. I speak mostly Russian cause it's our second language. So, I can't speak [my language] clearly and understand clearly. I actually don't understand many of our traditions and mindset of people. I came to Japan also with the feeling that maybe I can find *ibasho* here...After I visited many countries, I understand my [ethnic] people more than before...I have sense of belonging to my place, not my country but my city I was born, but I don't live there for a long time. But still, I have some belongingness there. When I came back from other countries, there is something like a little feeling of relaxation that I'm home. But maybe after a year, I just want to move out.... I see that the mindset of Japanese people is more suitable for me, convenient for me, easier to understand than my people...if I don't speak [English], I could look like a Japanese a little bit. (Male from Central Asia, in the 20s, married)

Case 2: *ibasho* and mental health (psychological well-being) in the cultural adjustment process

...coming to Japan, I used to cry because of [being] homesick and call my family to tell them like I'm not doing good. I was stressed. But then I am ok now. Our official language [in my country] is French....I started making friends who were speaking fluent in French [in original], then there were some who doesn't know [French but English] ...then I started speaking English with other people also...and opened [up] to communicate with people in other culture ... it was easier to make friends for me when I can laugh... you can laugh with your friends until you cry, then that's gonna be my real *ibasho*! If I can laugh it means I am happy. Now my *ibasho* is here, then my home in my country is second. (Female from North Africa, in the 20s, unmarried)

Study 1: Discussion

Regardless of the category, more than 70% of the international students listed the following ibasho: family (92.38%), close friends (90.48%), current residence (80.0%), community/others (77.14%), religious facilities (74.29%) and home in one's home country (73.33%). The top two (family and close friends) and the fourth (community/others) were in Category B (People as ibasho), while the rest (current residence, community/others, and home in one's home country) were in Category A (Physical ibasho). It is clear that Category B "People as ibasho" is important to international students. Family, religious facilities such as mosques or Hindu temples, home in one's home country are located in their home country, and are not accessible in Japan in many cases. Ibasho in Japan is one's current residence (one's own room in a dormitory), which may help to ensure privacy, but it cannot be compared to the value of family and home as ibasho. Unless they find an alternative ibasho to their family in Japan, the feeling of loneliness will remain, and they will not be able to get feelings of happiness and satisfaction (SWB). International students who have a base in their home country and plan to return there after their studies leave their most important ibasho in their home country. Therefore, in order to accommodate to a new culture, they need temporary ibasho, especially ibasho to interact with others.

A particularly interesting finding was that about 75% of the international students listed "religious facilities such as temple, mosque, or church" as ibasho, and that there was a difference in ibasho (fewer places overall and more places related to religion) between those who were religious and those who were not. In previous studies of Japanese people's ibasho, religion has never been mentioned. This may be due to the fact that Japanese people with a particular religion are in the minority. Next, we will discuss each case, focusing on ibasho, mental health, and cultural identity.

In Case 1, he feels a sense of belonging in the town where he was born, but is negative about his native culture. As he says, "I have sense of belonging to my place, not my country," and "When I came back from other countries, there is something like a little feeling of relaxation that I'm home. But maybe after a year, I just want to move out," he has ambivalent feelings on his own cultural identity or cannot accept it and has no ibasho in his home country ("I don't find my ibasho in my country"). He hopes to find ibasho in Japan ("maybe I can find ibasho here"). Lack of a sense of belonging (ibasho) in their home country and the search for new ibasho are one of common reasons for study abroad. It is an attitude of searching for ibasho where they can be themselves, including their cultural identity. Case 1 showed that ibasho reveals one's degrees of psychological connection with cultural identity of home country. If he finds a positive connection with ibasho (in his home country), it could help him to build his cultural identity. Instead, he has a hope of finding ibasho in Japan for his positive state (well-being) because he thinks that the Japanese mentality (mindset) suits him, and his Japanese-like appearance ("I could look like Japanese") would fit with Japanese people. It means that ibasho can help the formation of cultural identity, and searching the ibasho in process of a cultural identity formation seems to be a motivation of seeking SWB.

Case 2 illustrates the process of cultural adjustment from isolation and a lack of ibasho to the gradual building of relationships and the feeling of "having ibasho," through her new

friends. During her adjustment, she searched for people who would be her friends (psychological *ibasho*). As she says “you can laugh with your friends until you cry, then that’s gonna be my real *ibasho*! If I can laugh it means I am happy. Now my *ibasho* is here,” she is able to laugh with her friends who are now her psychological *ibasho*. In the survey of Study 1, the importance of friends (close friends) as *ibasho* (top second) for international students was already shown, and in Case 2, we can see how Japan becomes *ibasho* through her gradually making friends as psychological *ibasho*. Case 2 can be interpreted as overcoming stress, having *ibasho*, and feeling happiness as well.

It shows how mental health stabilizes with having psychological *ibasho* (friends in Japan). It is a common example of the process of adjustment to a new environment (culture) which also shows that *ibasho* is important for mental health (SWB). When one moves from one culture to another, the person may experience a loss of *ibasho* by isolation and a lack of having a community for connecting with others which can be the psychological stress factors during the adjustment period. It is important for such individuals to have social support to prevent psychological stress of the acculturation (Berry, 1997; DSM-V, 2013). Even if one finds new *ibasho* in a new place, it may be temporary *ibasho* until one returns home. Even if so, it would contribute to one’s psychological well-being.

Overall, we found that 1) family, close friends, current residence, community/others, religious institutions, and home in home country were the top places of *ibasho* for the international students, and many of *ibasho* were inaccessible from Japan; 2) Case 1 and 2 indicated that *ibasho* was related to mental health (SWB) and cultural identity formation; and 3) religious institutions, which had never been mentioned by the Japanese, were given as *ibasho* and so it would be meaningful to further examine *ibasho* in relation to the religious aspect. Providing international students with *ibasho* during their stay in Japan, even if only temporarily, can be useful in supporting their psychological well-beings and the formation of their cultural identity.

Study 2

Children with interculturally-married parents, namely intercultural children with Japanese ancestry, have plural cultural backgrounds and grow up in multicultural environments. For them, cultural identity formation is a very important issue throughout their lives. It would be desirable for those intercultural children to establish their “identity as intercultural children with Japanese ancestry,” namely an identity in which two cultures are mixed/blended (Suzuki, 2004, 2008). The preconditions for that are acquisition of both languages and cultural knowledge as well as a social environment that accepts them (*ibid.*). It can be inferred that such a social environment is linked to their *ibasho* and related to the maintenance and promotion of their mental health. In the study of Japanese-German young women who have Japanese mother and German father and living in Germany, they form bicultural identities (identities as intercultural children with Japanese ancestry), and those are classified into three types: Balanced (the same degree of two cultures), German predominant, and Japanese predominant bicultural identity (Suzuki, 2014, 2016, & 2017).

Those women with balanced bicultural identity have both physical and psychological *ibasho* and are mentally healthy. Psychological *ibasho* includes non-residential place (*ibasho*) and “imaginary *ibasho*” is important *ibasho* for them. The research suggests that having plural *ibasho* gives stable feelings, comfort and promotes mental health (SWB). The study 2 aims to clarify the relationship between cultural identity and *ibasho* which also touch on SWB, concerning Japanese-Indonesian young people living in Indonesia.

Study 2: Methods

Participants

Ten out of 31 Japanese-Indonesian young people with Japanese mothers and Indonesian fathers living in Bali, Indonesia (five males, five females; six married, four unmarried; at the last interview, ages range of 20s to early 30s; at the start of the research, infants) were the participants. Those ten were first-born children and, in addition to local schools, they attended the Japanese Part-time School (JPS) from kindergarten or first grade until at least the middle grades. Half of them were born in Indonesia, and the other half in Japan, but they moved to Indonesia when they were very young. All had siblings. All but one were Bali-Hindus. They had graduated from vocational schools or higher and had visited Japan temporarily, but the duration and frequency of their stays varied. All but three (women) had jobs. Overall, their backgrounds were similar.

Period & Place

It is part of a longitudinal field study from 1991 to 2019 (2-3 times a year, 2-6 weeks each) in urban areas in Bali, Indonesia (homes, local schools, JPS, etc.). Bali is a world-class tourist spot (3,900,000 people, 5,561 km², 90% Bali-Hindu [The Ministry of Tourism, Indonesia, 2020]). More than 3,000 Japanese and Japanese-Indonesians are living there. In general, Japanese people are well accepted, and the Japanese language is highly regarded. That is, the participants are in a social environment that accepts them, which is one of the conditions for the cultural identity formation as intercultural children with Japanese ancestry.

Procedure

The “Cultural Anthropological-Clinical Psychological Approach (CACPA)” (Suzuki, 2002; Suzuki & Fujiwara, 1992) was employed. This approach combines the methods of cultural anthropology and clinical psychology, namely, longitudinal fieldwork, respect for rapport & support, long-term/frequently repeated interviews & participant observations, and macro & micro perspective. In this study, the part of the narratives about *ibasho*, cultural identity, and mental health (SWB) from the interviews (semi-structured and unstructured interviews) were mainly used. The length of each interview was varied between 30 minutes to 5 hours, approximately. Each person was interviewed multiple times. Recording devices were used when permitted by the participants. The interview language was Japanese and when necessary, Indonesian was spoken. Ethical considerations have been taken into account.

Analysis. All recorded data were transcribed verbatim and transcriptions were prepared in chronological order for each case. From the transcription and interview notes, all parts related to cultural identity, SWB, ibasho and relevant matters (e.g., self-evaluation of language & cultural knowledge) were extracted and grouped by concept or matter for each case. Based on those, in each case, cultural identity was identified, SWB was ascertained, and ibasho was further analyzed. Field notes were also referenced during the analysis.

Table 2

Language Levels and Cultural Knowledge of the Japanese-Indonesian Young People (Self-Evaluation)

Cases	Gen-der	Age	JPS years	Conversational ability Japanese vs. Indonesian*	Japanese Compe-tence**	Cultural knowledge Japan (J) vs. Indonesia (I)
A	<i>F</i>	30s	9	9<10	4	J = I
B	<i>F</i>	30s	7	6<10	3	J < I
C	<i>F</i>	20s	6	7<10	3.5	J = I
D	<i>M</i>	20s	8	6<10	3	J < I
E	<i>F</i>	20s	8	8 = 8	4	J < I
F	<i>M</i>	20s	5	8<10	4	J = I
G	<i>M</i>	30s	5	5<10	2.5	J < I
H	<i>F</i>	20s	7	6<10	3.5	J = I
I	<i>M</i>	20s	6	10=10	5	J = I
J	<i>M</i>	30s	14	10=10	5	J < I

Note. *Rating 1-10 (natives of the same age), ** Rating of 1- 5 (highest), JPS = Japanese Part-Time School, M = male, F = female

Study 2: Results and Discussions

Languages and cultural knowledge of the Japanese-Indonesian young people

Table 2 shows their language levels and cultural knowledge according to their self-evaluation. About their “conversational ability in Japanese and Indonesian,” 10 is the same level as native speakers. Cases A, E, F, I, and J have high scores (8 points or higher) in both languages, among which Cases E, I, and J are at the same level in the two languages. For the “Japanese competence” (comprehensive self-evaluation of speaking, listening, reading, and writing), 5 is the best (same level as native speakers). Cases A, E, and F are 4, and Cases I and J are 5. Overall, their Indonesian is the same as that of native speakers

(10 points except for Case E), but there are individual differences in their Japanese. Among them, Cases I and J have equal and high scores in both languages.

Regarding “cultural knowledge,” we have asked the participants to talk about the level of their knowledge about Japan and Indonesia in comparison with native speakers from each country, and to compare the level of cultural knowledge. Since their mothers are Japanese and they have attended the Japanese Part-time School (JPS), they have a certain amount of knowledge about Japan, but there are differences due to the number of visits to Japan and the length of their stay, etc. All of them have sufficient knowledge about Indonesia because their fathers are Indonesian, they have grown up in Indonesia, have attended Indonesian schools, and reside in Indonesia. Half of the cases (A, C, F, H, & I) have comparable knowledge of both cultures and are at about the same level as native speakers. The other half (B, D, E, G, & J) have rated their knowledge of Indonesia as dominant, but the differences between the two cultures depend on the person. It is quite usual that the language and culture of the domicile (Indonesia) is naturally acquired and becomes the dominant language and culture (Suzuki, 1997). Therefore, it can be said that the Japanese-Indonesian young people have acquired both languages and cultural knowledge, which is one of the preconditions for intercultural children to form “identity as intercultural children with Japanese ancestry.”

Cultural identities, subjective well-being (SWB) and ibasho of the Japanese - Indonesian young people

With regard to the participants' self-evaluations of their cultural identities, all of them have “bicultural identity” of Japan and Indonesia. However, they are divided into Type 1 (T1) “balanced bicultural identities” (4 cases: C, F, I, J) in which both cultures are equal, Type 2 (T2) “Indonesia dominated bicultural identities” (4 cases: B, D, G, H) in which Indonesia is dominant, and Type 3 (T3) “Japan dominated bicultural identities” (two cases: A, B) in which Japan is dominant (Table 2). Case J is categorized as T1 because he says, “Both are the same, but since I've been here for a long time, I'm becoming more and more Indonesianized, so Indonesia may be slightly more dominant.” The SWB was rated by the researcher on the participants' narratives of happiness and satisfaction. Five is the highest. All of them are 3 or above. The SWB of T1 seems to be slightly higher than the other types. This is similar to the results of the previous study with Japanese-German participants (Suzuki, 2014). In terms of ibasho, the Japanese-Indonesian participants have mostly understood it through their learning experiences at the JPS, conversations with their Japanese mothers, and visits to Japan. In general, Type 1 has multiple ibasho for both Japan and Indonesia, T2 has more ibasho for Indonesia than for Japan, and T3 has more (or more significant) ibasho for Japan than for Indonesia.

Next, we would like to examine ibasho in detail, focusing on Type 1 “balanced bicultural identities,” especially Case J, who has high SWB (5), high conversational ability in both languages (10), and high Japanese competence (5) (see Table 2 & Table 3). In order to maintain the anonymity of the case, some of the content has been changed to the extent that it does not affect the essence of the case.

Case J (male, 30s, married, Bali-Hindu, company employee) was born in Japan, spent a few years there, then moved to Indonesia, and grew up there. After graduating from an Indonesian university, he found a job at a Japan-related company where he could make use of his Japanese language skills. He had learned Japanese by attending the JPS for a long time (14 years, from kindergarten to high school) in addition to the local school and strongly believed that his advantage was his Japanese language and knowledge of Japan. He said: "When I thought about my characteristics, it was Japanese. I wanted to use my Japanese." "I didn't want to forget my Japanese, so I decided to work in a job where I could use it." He had a close relationship with his Balinese father and relatives. He has also good relationships with his Japanese mother.

Table 3
Cultural identities, Subjective well-being (SWB) and Ibasho

Types of bicultural identities		Cases	Cultural identities* Japan vs. Indonesia	SWB**	<i>Ibasho</i>
T1	Balanced	C	J = I	3	Multiple <i>ibasho</i> for both Japan and Indonesia
		F	J = I	4	
		I	J = I	5	
		J	J ≤ I	5	
T2	Indonesia-dominated	B	J < I	4	More <i>ibasho</i> for Indonesia than for Japan
		D	J < I	4	
		G	J < I	3	
		H	J < I	4	
T3	Japan-dominated	A	J > I	3	More <i>ibasho</i> for Japan than for Indonesia
		E	J > I	3	

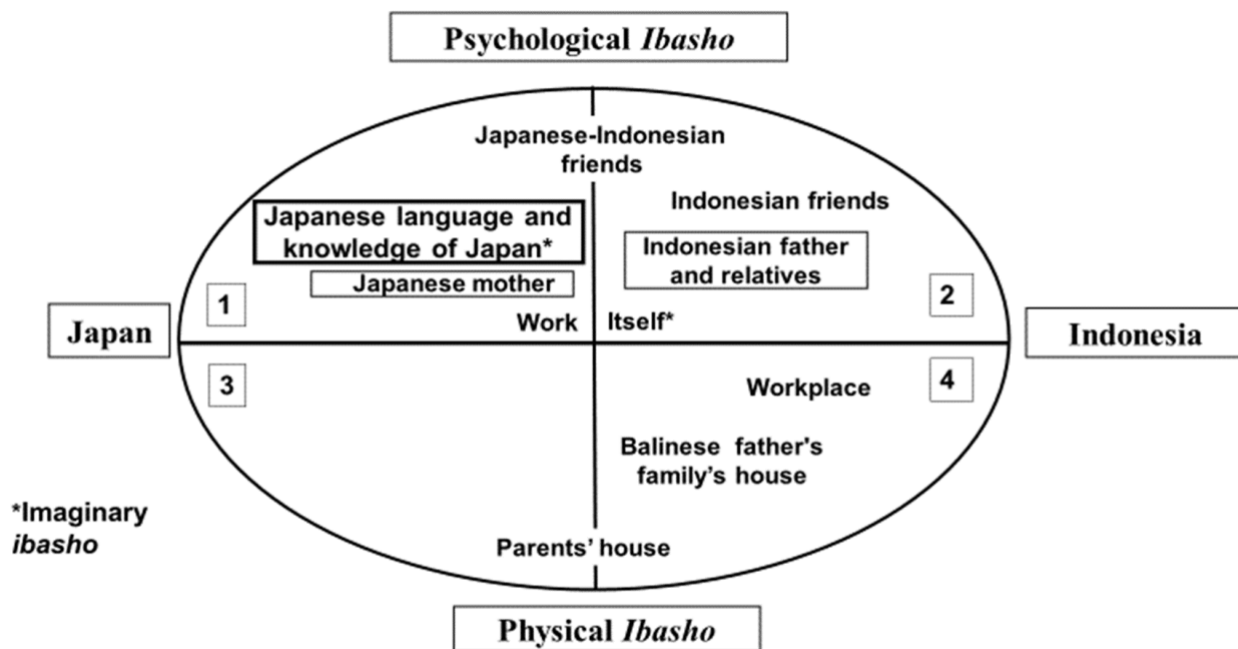
Note. * self-evaluation **Rating of 1 - 5 (highest) by the researcher

Figure 2 shows "Ibasho of Case J." His plural *ibasho* are located in all four *ibasho*. It means that he has multiple cross-border *ibasho* in Japan and Indonesia, as well as both physical and psychological *ibasho*. "Japanese language and knowledge of Japan" is "imaginary *ibasho*" and the most important for him as "Japanese Psychological *Ibasho*." His Japanese mother is also significant "Japanese Psychological *Ibasho*," and his Indonesian father and relatives are "Indonesian Psychological *Ibasho*." He is well integrated in the Balinese local community and satisfied with his life.

Case J, an example of “balanced bicultural identities” between Japan and Indonesia, had multiple *ibasho* in both Japan and Indonesia and a high SWB, which indicates that there is a relationship among *ibasho*, cultural identity, and SWB.

In summary, the following can be stated: (1) The participants had formed bicultural identities by being accepted into the Balinese social environment and by having acquired both languages and cultures to some extent; (2) The Japanese-Indonesian young people with the balanced bicultural identity had multiple transnational physical and psychological *ibasho* in Japan and Indonesia. They also tended to have higher SWB than other types; (3) In order to form a bicultural identity, it is necessary to have *ibasho* in both cultures, and therefore *ibasho* plays an important role in the formation of cultural identity. (4) The existence of multiple *ibasho* can also promote SWB as well as cultural identity formation. Therefore, regardless of whether it is physical or psychological *ibasho*, creating *ibasho* is essential for the cultural identity formation and mental health of “intercultural children with Japanese ancestry.”

Figure 2
Ibasho of Case J – Plural Ibasho in Japan and Indonesia



Note: * Imaginary *ibasho*; the left half (1 & 3) is "Japanese *ibasho*", the right half (2 & 4) is "Indonesian *ibasho*", the upper half (1 & 2) is "Psychological *ibasho*", and the lower half (3 & 4) is "Physical *ibasho*."

General Discussion

The purpose of this study was to clarify that the unique Japanese concept of *ibasho* was related to cultural identity and mental health (including subjective well-being), which were considered important for people with multicultural backgrounds, and to examine its usefulness in supporting people with multicultural backgrounds, especially in maintaining and promoting cultural identity formation and mental health.

Study 1 was conducted on international students with various cultural identities who first encountered the word “*ibasho*.” They were able to understand the meaning of *ibasho* and the most frequently mentioned *ibasho*, such as family, close friends, and current residence, were the same as those frequently given by the Japanese (e.g., Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006). It was also shown that *ibasho* was related to mental health (psychological well-being) and cultural identity formation among international students. Even if the stay is temporary, it is important for the host country to provide *ibasho*, or at least physical *ibasho* (e.g., a café for international students), to support international students, including their mental health (psychological well-being) and cultural identity formation.

In addition, “religious institutions” given as *ibasho* by the international students are considered to be specific to people of faith and have never been mentioned by the Japanese. It is necessary to examine *ibasho* in relation to the religious aspect.

Study 2 was part of a long-term study using the research methods (that combined cultural anthropology and clinical psychology) including longitudinal fieldwork, repeated interviews, etc. and focused on Japanese-Indonesian young people who lived in Indonesia but understood the word “*ibasho*.” The results showed that the Japanese-Indonesian young people with balanced bicultural identity had multiple *ibasho* concerning both Japan and Indonesia and had high subjective well-being. It was also suggested by Suzuki’s studies of Japanese-German women (e.g., 2017). Therefore, it was concluded that *ibasho* is essential for the cultural identity formation and mental health (subjective well-being) of “intercultural children with Japanese ancestry,” and that it is important to create *ibasho* for them.

Previous studies on *ibasho* of Japanese people have shown relationships between *ibasho* and mental health (e.g., Ishimoto, 2010), and suggested relationships between *ibasho* and (cultural) identity (e.g., Ozawa, 2000). However, no study has clarified the relationship among *ibasho*, cultural identity, and mental health. Herleman, et al. (2008) had already noted that *ibasho* correlates with several psychological concepts and Suzuki (2018) suggested a relationship between the three concepts of *ibasho*, mental health, and (cultural) identity. We consider that the two studies, Study 1 and Study 2, have clarified, to some extent, the relationship among *ibasho*, mental health, and (cultural) identity. We were also able to show that *ibasho* is important and effective for people with multicultural backgrounds in forming cultural identity and maintaining or promoting mental health. However, there are several limitations of this study: 1) the number of participants in the study was small (especially in Study 1); 2) the research was mainly qualitative (case study), and the participants were only international students and Japanese-Indonesian young people. In the future, the results of this study will have to be validated by increasing the number of

participants, employing quantitative research, and conducting studies with people from various multicultural backgrounds (e.g., immigrants, returnees, and expatriates), while more sophisticated methodology should be used to reveal the substance of relationship between *ibasho*, mental health and cultural identity. Furthermore, “imaginary *ibasho*” and “virtual *ibasho*” through the use of IT devices should be examined in more detail in relation to cultural identity formation and maintaining mental health.

The Japanese concept of *ibasho* can be used heuristically to deal with research on social and psychological issues among multicultural people. It does not mean that the concept can be applied only within the Japanese contexts. The concept of *ibasho* may be applicable to any cultural situations no matter where and what people are involved. In fact, we are collecting expressions from other cultures and languages which relate to *ibasho*. Regardless of society/culture, there are immigrants from foreign countries, new comers from a countryside to a large city within a country, new students at school, new employees, etc. Some of them are to experience alienation, maladjustment, social isolation with varying degrees. What they need, among other things, is a place where they feel secure, comfortable, and accepted, that is *ibasho*. Creating *ibasho* may be done at various levels, such as at the government organizations, both central to local levels, various agencies, companies, schools, etc. Even though it is difficult to support “creating psychological *ibasho*,” it is meaningful to provide physical *ibasho* that has the potential to become psychological *ibasho*.

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