

Examining the Phenomenon of Nepalese Curry House Entrepreneurship in Japan through a Diasporic Framework:

Implications for the livelihood, cultural identity,
and social harmony of ethnic minorities in Japan.

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Introduction

From the early 2000s to the present day, immigration to Japan by Nepalese through curry restaurant entrepreneurship has occurred in an unprecedented way—in a wave of very large numbers over a relatively short period of time. This paper focuses on critical immigration issues facing Japan and the relationship between immigrant groups and the host society through the microcosm of the establishment of Nepalese curry restaurants and the circumstances of the Nepalese community in Japan.

This study examines and explores important and practical steps and ways that Nepalese immigrants and communities in Japan can survive, sustain their livelihood, and potentially flourish in Japan. In considering the exploration of the Brazilian and other experiences in Japan and the unique aspects of current Nepalese migration to Japan, the findings of this research provide insights into why Nepalese have been able to succeed, while other immigrant communities have struggled. Some concepts that align here include “Gastrodiplomacy” and “Foodie Culture”. This research paper aims to harness the data aligned with this movement to reflect on fundamental issues for Japan:

- The livelihood of immigrant groups in Japan.
- The challenges of maintaining social harmony in Japan with the influx of immigrants to Japan.
- Strategies that can be employed by the Nepalese community in Japan that have the potential to provide a “roadmap” for other immigrant groups and Japan to follow in the near future.

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Research Questions

This paper's aim is to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What factors led to the swift rise of Nepalese curry shops across Japan?
2. What insights can be gained from examining Brazilian migration to Japan prior to the influx of Nepalese immigrants?
3. What are the keys to business sustainability, expansion, and development for Nepalese restaurant entrepreneurship?
4. How does "food" as an aspect of culture have a special influence over a host society?
5. How do the charges brought against Japan by the United Nations regarding the Technical Intern Training Program reflect on immigration policies in Japan?
6. Considering the findings of this study, what insights and suggestions can be offered for the success and livelihood of the Nepalese community going forward in Japan?

Research Methodology

The methodology for this paper consists of three main research approaches and research tools:

- **Literature review**

The literature review is important to understand the context of the settings and situations in order to align and employ concepts for the investigation. Regarding the contextual aspects, I will focus on Brazilian immigration to Japan in order to establish a "baseline" for some of the comparisons and assessments of this research.

- **Qualitative interviews**

This paper also employs qualitative interviews in order to examine and explore the personal experiences of Nepalese immigrants in Japan. Collecting interview data that provides detailed insights into the lived experiences of the Nepalese immigrants is vital for validating the contextual aspects of this research—including factors that are used to compare and contrast with the Brazilian experience—as well as unearthing unique and discrete aspects of the Nepalese experience in Japan which are valuable for the research forays of this paper.

- **Ethnographic field observations**

This study employs ethnographic field observations to balance and enhance the data and insights collected from the qualitative interviews. The main purpose of the ethnographic field observations

is to gain insights into the Nepalese experience through community-wide perspectives.

Interview method and data

In order to analyze the experience and reflect on the experience of Curry Entrepreneurs in their business, I used the narrative inquiry method in my research methodology in this study. It helped me to participate in the narrative details of the participants consciously. I have developed a close partnership between the participants and myself, which has built trust and respect. For anonymity, I have replaced the names of the interviewees with a pseudonym so they feel comfortable sharing information for this research project. Here are the follow-up questions, which were numerous but the basic set of interview questions included the following:

Questions for qualitative interviews of Nepalese curry restaurant entrepreneurs.

- Start with a formal introduction, success/challenges
- Regarding food.
- Business models/strategies.
- Effect of Covid.
- Thoughts on the diaspora.

Questions for field observation interviews at Nepalese festivals in Japan

- About the interview subject and familiarity with Nepal.
- About the festival experience.
- Thoughts on the international communities in Japan.

The Brazilian Experience in Japan

The peak of Brazilian immigration to Japan preceded the current rise of Nepalese immigration to Japan by approximately 20 years. The circumstances that have spurred the current movement back to Brazil provide a valuable and critical backdrop for the investigation of Nepalese immigration. The focus provides a roadmap for positive and negative outcomes for other immigrant groups in Japan.

Specifically, the rise in Nepalese immigration is occurring at the same time when immigration from Brazil is declining and long-time Brazilian residents in Japan are increasingly returning home to Brazil (Mieko Nishida, 2017). The Brazilian experience in Japan offers a chance for reflection

and alignment with data and observations from the Nepalese community in Japan.

Comparison of Brazilians and Nepalese immigrants.

Years	Number of foreign residences from Brazil	Number of foreign residences from Nepal
1995	171,770	
2005	298,380	5,314
2007	313,770	8,417
2010	228,700	17,149
2015	173,440	55,236
2018	201,865	88,951
2020	208,540	96,824
As of June 2022	207,081	125,798

Source; Statistics of Foreign Resident

Conclusion

This research paper has focused on the unique qualities and aspects of the Nepalese diaspora in Japan in order to shed important light on issues of immigration and social harmony in Japan which will be increasingly critical for the success of the nation and its residents going forward from now. One of the unique explorations of this paper was the focus on Nepalese curry restaurants which represented not only a subsection within the Nepalese diaspora but a subsection within diaspora studies as well. It provided very important insights and considerations from the spirit of entrepreneurship.

This study did not utilize the entrepreneurship of Nepalese curry restaurant owners to explore business and trade aspects but to explore aspects connected to the human spirit which would provide unique insights into the pathways that should be considered for the success and well-being of all diasporan groups in Japan and elsewhere.

Specifically, it was found through this research that Nepalese curry restaurant entrepreneurs possessed a sense of self-awareness and self-assuredness in the face of the challenges of striving in Japan as foreign workers. They were able, in large part, to avoid the trap of being stuck in a cycle of toiling through low-wage service and physical labor positions that did not lead to personal, family, or generational development and progress in Japanese society. These negative aspects of working in

Japan for migrant workers have been devastating for many communities, on a personal level, and on a community level. It has led to the return of many Brazilian migrant workers after a few decades of having their dreams and hopes dashed. Hard work proved to be futile for them in progressing in Japanese society and the trend now is a return to Brazil with feelings of failure, disappointment, and resentment.

But through this research, it has been shown that the Nepalese curry restaurant owners and workers are displaying a different path forward in Japan. This paper has shown the Nepalese subjects of my study have faced many of the same challenges that the other diaspora groups in Japan suffer. And this study has outlined that these challenges are outlined and defined through Diaspora Studies as typical outcomes for migration around the world. And yet, the reactions to these challenges by the subjects of my study have differed from the usual and typical diasporan groups in Japan and around the world.

I propose the “spirit” of entrepreneurship is the key that allows a sense of self-worth and self-dignity that has allowed this cohort of the Nepalese diaspora to ride out the waves of adversity and hope for the best outcomes on the other side. I am not saying that migrants need to be business-minded or that more of them need to venture into businesses with an entrepreneurial spirit. I am saying that ownership of one’s future is important and critical for the human spirit. It translates to a wide discussion for me in these ways:

- Societies need to recognize the worth and value of migrant workers.
- The government needs to regulate business practices and safeguard against illegal and unscrupulous working conditions for migrant workers.
- The government and companies need to propose and enact programs and campaigns to provide pathways toward the progress and development of migrant workers. Etc.

The Nepalese curry restaurant entrepreneurs have shown that their ownership of their futures has allowed them to maintain dignity and self-worth in the face of diversity. I believe they have been able to secure enough of a path and hope for their futures in Japan through entrepreneurship. But they also have made inroads into Japanese culture and society that were not afforded some of the other migrant groups. Food as mentioned has been a conduit to share Nepalese culture. But that sharing has also resulted in mutual sharing. Understanding Nepalese culture through food has opened doors and hearts for accepting Nepalese culture, food, and people, and it has allowed mutual sharing, a sharing of Japanese culture in return. All of this has combined to create possibilities and potentialities for continued sharing, understanding, and mutual respect and appreciation. I feel this

is an excellent example of how cultural harmony can be achieved in an increasingly multicultural society in Japan in the future.