



Constructed Reality of International Migration in Homeland Community: The Narratives of Life Histories of Returned Migrants in Northern Thailand

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Introduction

One of the characteristics of recent international migrants is that they do not necessarily settle in the host community but return to their homelands or repeat migrating back and forth. After returning to the home community, how do the returned migrants narrate their experiences to others? And how does the home community react to their narratives? Seeing the case of a village in northern Thailand, this study attempts to elucidate the multilayered realities of the life histories of returned migrants, focusing on the social context of the home community which the returned migrants must face as well as the interaction between the social context and the narrative strategies of individual returned migrants. Specifically the study highlights, based on the profiles of the returnee workers from Japan, how the returned migrants were seen and thought of in the home village community and what kinds of strategies the returned migrants adopt to construct their realities against the villagers' perception, thus demonstrating that migration is a multi-layered experience, which consists not just of interaction with the host society but with the home society as well.

How do the returned migrants tell their experience of working abroad in their home community? The underlying interest to this question is the trend to globalization, which pushes the number of migrant workers across the borders and changes the quality of migration from the traditional models. It is pointed out that one of the characteristics of recent migrants is that they do not necessarily settle into the host societies but return to their home communities or continue to move around (Yamamoto 1996: 127). With this qualitative change of the phenomenon of migration, the paradigm, the dominance of assimilation theory in migration studies and policies, is pressed for change. In other words, the traditional model where migration is perceived as a one way exodus between two countries, where migrants would be assimilated into the host community as 'immigrants', is no longer functioning and needs a new paradigm.

A number of new studies have begun to appear, especially in the fields of international

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labor movement and migration studies, which elucidate the existence of temporary migrants who do not necessarily settle in the host societies, who continue to move within the network of the home country and the working destinations, as well as those who form an ethnic group in the host country without being integrated.

Conventional studies in this field, however, are divided into two groups. The first group consists of the studies which attempt to reveal migration patterns from the attributes of migrants and their objective data. The second group consists of the immigrant or ethnic community studies, in which the adaptation/differentiation process of immigrant groups in host countries is elucidated from the surveys of immigrants regarding their identities in the host countries. The former includes the ‘four steps process’ theory of Castles and Miller (1993=1996) and Massey et al. (1998), while the latter group includes a study by Glick Schiller et al. (1994) regarding transnational communities and Kajita et al. (2005) as well as urban sociological ethnic community studies in Japan conducted by Okuda (1994), Hirota (1997) and Tajima (1998).

The cause of this dichotomy seems to come from the following elements. Firstly, those studies that focus on the migration patterns do not highlight the everyday reality of migrants. Secondly, as for those studies that focus on the adaptation/differentiation process, while they deal with the subjective views of the immigrants, they do not take quantitative data such as migration patterns into account, or they make a presumption of a one-to-one correlation between the subjective aspect of migrants and the aspect of quantitative data. In other words, there has been a tendency to describe a correlation between a particular migration pattern of recent immigrants and a particular adaptation/differentiation process as a one-to-one match.¹

This study focuses on a mismatch between the actual situation and the constructed reality and tries to investigate the function of it, setting deliberately aside the quantitative data such as migration patterns. The study focused on the contexts of the narratives rather than taking the narrations of the migrants at ‘face-value.’ According to the social constructivism, *reality* is a set of selected meanings amongst an infinite number of possible meanings. People refer to the set of meanings and then select their behavior. Those meanings and behaviors are referred by others and create a new set of meanings. This study, by highlighting the interactions between the social contexts of the home society and the migrants’ individual narratives and by illustrating the constructed realities which is multilayered, is an attempt to elucidate the complex relationship of subjective and objective views of the recent migration phenomenon.

¹ However, recently some studies, without constraint of this framework such as Aoyama (2007), Hayami (2006; 2009), Igarashi (2004) and Nagasaka (2009) are conducted. Although each study is conducted in different field and is motivated by different aim, this study is one of these attempts which focus on subjective meanings of migration experiences alongside migrants themselves.

1. Thai Returnee Workers from Japan

1.1. Overview of Thai Population in Japan

Let us start from the statistics of Thai population in Japan. Thai population visiting Japan started to increase from the mid 1980s, reaching its peak in 1991, and still shows an increasing tendency, albeit slower, since 1995 (Amemiya et al. 2002: 21). The visa statuses of Thai nationals registered in Japan in 2000² shows a total number of 29,289 people among which ‘spouse of Japanese national’ accounts for 12,272, ‘permanent resident’ accounts for 2,015 and ‘tourist’ accounts for 4,000 (Japan Immigration Association 2001). According to the foreign resident registration, more female than male Thai are in Japan with a ratio of seven to three (Amemiya et al. 2002: 23).³ The number of ‘illegal over-stayers’ is decreasing after reaching its peak in 1993 with 55,383, as of 2000, 23,503 were counted (Ministry of Justice 2001).⁴

As for the geographic distribution, the top five concentrations of Thai population in Japan in 2000 are: Tokyo with 4,301, Ibaraki prefecture with 4,272, Chiba prefecture with 4,082, Kanagawa prefecture with 3,059 and Nagano prefecture with 1,931 (Japan Immigration Association 2001).⁵ The number in Ibaraki and Chiba prefectures is growing rapidly since the 1990s with the difference between the regions and Tokyo getting smaller. According to Inaba, their meeting places are Thai food shops, ethnic restaurants and karaoke pubs. Though there seems to be some self-help relationship between friends and acquaintances forming in these places, there do not seem to be any residential concentration or political activities forming among them (Inaba 2002: 32-34).

These are just a rough summary of a typical profile of a Thai in Japan and not every migrant is in the same situation. However, this very typical profile of a Thai is thought to correlate closely to the stereotypical views of the home society.

² Since my field research was conducted in 2000 and the collected narratives which is analysed in the latter part of this paper are those of at that time, the statistics shown here are those of 2000. As of 2009, Thai nationals registered in Japan shows a total number of 42,686 people among which ‘spouse of Japanese national’ accounts for 9,113, ‘permanent resident’ accounts for 13,883 and ‘tourist’ accounts for 1,102 (Japan Immigration Association 2010).

³ In 2000 Thai nationals registered in Japan were 29,289 among which 21,523 were female and 7,766 were male (Japan Immigration Association 2001). In 2009 they were 42,686 among which 31,494 were female and 11,192 were male (Japan Immigration Association 2010). There exists the same gender imbalance.

⁴ As of 2010, Thai over-stayers were 4,836, 5.3 percent of all the over-stayers (Ministry of Justice 2010).

⁵ In 2009 the top five concentrations of Thai population in Japan are: Tokyo with 7,193, Chiba with 5,492, Ibaraki with 4,950, Kanagawa with 4,256 and Saitama with 2,711 (Japan Immigration Association 2010).

1.2. Profiles of 12 Returnee Workers from Japan in a Village in Northern Thailand

A field survey was conducted in a village (Tambon)⁶ in the Dok Kham Tai district (Amphoe) of Phayao province (Changwat) in Northern Thailand (See Figure 1). It is an agricultural area growing rice, maize, soybeans and fruits and also known for producing a large number of migrants to domestic urban areas such as Bangkok as well as overseas including Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

I conducted interviews with twelve returnee workers from Japan⁷, ten females and two males, with an age range of 22 (born in 1977) to 45 (born in 1955) at the time of the survey. They had been in Japan during 1988 to 2000, with resident durations ranging from two to twelve years with an average of 5.7 years. Most of them did not want to reveal their visa status while in Japan and it was assumed that they had entered Japan with a short stay visa (30 to 90 days) and over-stayed.

As for education, most of them had only elementary qualifications. One had no formal education, nine terminated elementary school between fourth and seventh grades⁸, one finished junior high school and

one dropped out at university. As for marital status, four had families (spouse and child) in the village while eight were single. Among those who were married, two males had a wife and children in the village before they went to Japan, and two females married after they came back to the village from Japan. All female returnees were single when they went to Japan; either unmarried or divorcees. Four of these single



Figure 1: Location of Phayao Province in Thailand

⁶ Total area of 31 square kilometers covering 11 hamlets (muubaan) with total population of 5,747. For convenience these hamlets are described as 'the village' in this study.

⁷ The main field surveys were conducted in 2000. Interviewees were found on a personal basis, a contact leading from one returnee to another returnee, within the village. The surveys found 31 returnees from both domestic and overseas migrations, among which twelve had been to Japan. Interviews regarding their life story were conducted for all 31 returnees. The main body of the interview consisted of 5 items; 'growing up', 'time leading to the migration', 'life and work at the destination', 'life and work at home after returning' and 'present situation and future intention'. All the information such as ages in this paper is that of at the time of the survey. Each interview lasted one to two hours; sometimes the interviewer and the interviewee conversed in Japanese and other times, using a Thai interpreter, the conversations were conducted in English and Thai. The interviews for G, K and A were conducted by the author in Japanese. The interviews were recorded and transcribed later. The quotes in section 2 are all from these transcribed interviews.

⁸ Compulsory elementary schooling went from four to seven years in 1960 and changed to the present six years in 1977 (Onaka 2002: 34-35).

female now have Thai-Japanese children.

Ten out of twelve people had experience of working outside the village prior to going to Japan: among them nine had worked in Bangkok, one in another prefecture and one overseas, showing a pattern of going to Japan via a city experience. It was interesting to find a case where the person went straight to Japan from the village. Their occupations in Bangkok were factory worker, service industry worker, housekeeper, food stall worker, and working in a shop run by a relative. One female had worked in a factory in a southern prefecture. One male had worked as a truck driver in Iraq before he went to Japan. This is not unusual since there were other returnee workers in the village, from Singapore, Macao, Australia and Saudi Arabia.

So in what kind of work were they engaged in Japan? Eight said they worked in the service industry such as a barbecue restaurant, hostess bar and pubs while two seemed to be in a forced prostitution ring and another two worked as construction laborers. As for the places they first lived and worked after arriving in Japan: three in Ibaraki, two in Tochigi, Chiba, Tokyo and one in Kanagawa, Nagano, Aichi prefectures respectively. Five of those who went first to Ibaraki and Tochigi were all engaged in hostess bars and sex industry, there might have been a period when agents with connections in these two prefectures in Japan were recruiting in this village.

Table 1: Amount and the Usage of Remittance from Japan

Case	Age	Sex	Remittance per Month (Yen)	Usage of Remittance
A	22	F	150,000–200,000	Living cost for parents etc., building houses for parents and self, saving for self.
B	28	F	70,000–90,000	Living cost for parents, education cost for younger sisters, building a new house, saving for self.
C	29	F	30,000	Living cost for parents etc., saving for self.
D	30	F	100,000	Saving for self (dress making school fee).
E	33	F	(Saved for self)	Saving for self.
F	34	F	60,000–90,000	Living cost for parents etc., purchasing farmland and tractor, building a new house, saving for self.
G	35	F	100,000–150,000	Repaying loans of parents and brother, living cost for parents and children, building a new house.
H	35	F	(Sent frequently, amounts unknown)	Repaying loan of parents, living cost for parents etc., building a new house.
I	35	F	50,000	Repaying loan for traveling to , living cost for parents etc.
J	38	M	90,000–120,000	Building a house for parents in law, purchasing farmland.
K	41	F	0	–
L	45	M	150,000	Living cost for wife and children, living cost for mother, building a new house.

Source: Interviews conducted by the author in 2000.

Did these immigrant workers send money home? Table 1 shows the amount and usage of remittances the twelve returnees sent home from Japan. Except for one, represented here as E, who does not have family in the village and therefore did not have any family obligation, ten out of eleven regularly sent money home, with a frequency of every month or every three months. As for the amounts, four were sending 30 thousand to 90 thousands yen a month and almost five were sending more than 100 thousand yen. The main usage of the money they sent was for family living costs, education costs for children and construction costs for their homes, while two used it for agricultural investment.

As for their present situation in the village, three were not working, two were agricultural day laborers, five were small scale landed farmers and two were categorized as others. These two categorized as others were dressmaker and taxi driver in the village and both started their business with the money saved while working in Japan.

In the following sections, three cases, represented as A, G and K in Table 1 will be discussed. Their narratives show uneasiness, swinging between their own views and the perceived views of the villagers. By interacting with villagers' views, they construct their own realities that demonstrate the main theme of this paper, the multilayered realities of experience of migration.

1.3. Views Held by the Villagers for Migration

Since 1970s, when internal migration from northern villages to cities in south was increased because of a shortage of rainwater for agriculture, Dok Kham Thai district became known for supplying a large number of female workers working in sex industries in south. Their "beauty" is also one of the discourses which are well known (Pongpaichit 1982=1990: 95). It can be said that the name, Dok Kham Tai, has become emblematic of sex workers in Thailand. These social discourses are behind the background of the villagers' views toward migration.

Saito (2004), who conducted research on the female returnees of human trafficking victims in Phayao prefecture in 1997 and the follow-up study seven years later, stated the problems of the communities who receive the returnees as follows:

The victim may return home full of homesickness and nostalgia, but if she does not bring any tangible economic benefit, she may be looked down upon by the community, even by her own family. ...In particular, the returnees from Japan, those who had been engaged in the sex industry since their late teens would face two obstacles. Firstly they have very limited opportunities to build their lives apart from

going back to sex work or getting married. Secondly it is difficult for them to feel self-worth, since the society stigmatizes them as ‘bad girls.’ Those who can not feel self-worth tend to put their efforts into gaining economic power in order to be accepted by their family and the society. (Saito 2004: 66)⁹

As shown, a woman who has returned from Japan can be stereotyped by their home villagers. One such stereotype is a sex worker and another is a ‘failed’ returnee. In 2000, a group was established by human trafficking victims in Chiang Rai province¹⁰, focusing on the eradication of ‘greed which pushed led them into the hands of human traffickers as well as the prevailing value system in rural communities in which women are encouraged to self-sacrifice’ (Saito 2004: 68).

Since ‘Returning home without economic benefit means psychological strain with the family who was expecting it and discrimination from the local community’ (Inaba and Saito 2005: 36), some of the returnees do not speak about their experience in Japan, do not socialize and live isolated life or worse, became alcoholics.

Meanwhile, Pongpaichit (1982=1990) studied women who worked in massage parlors in Bangkok and the attitude of their home villagers towards them, the ‘south-goers’ (village women who go to Bangkok and work in the sex industry). The study that was conducted in north eastern and northern villages stated:

[While the villagers in the north eastern villages have severely critical attitudes towards these women], the villagers in northern villages seem to have mixed feelings. ...The attitudes of northern Thais are different according to their social class. While the middle class with education looks down on massage girls and the ‘south-goers’, the poor seem to be more relaxed about it. ...In the four villages I investigated, the villagers did not label those who went to the south as socially dishonored, but those who came back home as ‘failures’ seemed to be looked down upon. (Pongpaichit 1982=1990: 98-99)

According to Pongpaichit, women who work in massage parlors in Bangkok are considered as an economical rather than an ethical issue in northern villages. The interviews with the men in the village revealed that quite a large number of them said that going south was not a hindrance for marriage and might be allowable even after marriage if there was an economic case. Some villagers in the north even praised those women as being loyal to their parents (Pongpaichit 1982=1990: 100-101).

⁹ Translated by the author. In the citations, ‘...’ indicates the omissions by the author and [] shows complementary information by the author.

¹⁰ Self Empowerment Program of Migrant Women (SEPOM).

The interview by the author with twelve returnees as well as previous studies reveals the home villagers' common perceptions, i.e. (1) prejudice against returnees whom the villagers considered to have been engaged in sex industry and (2) contempt against 'failed' returnees who did not earn enough in Japan.

Though there are differences among localities and social classes, sex work is still generally perceived negatively and it is certainly conceivable that the returnees suspected of being in the industry would be looked down upon accordingly. These perceptions of villagers are giving mental suffering to female returnees who have already been injured psychologically by the sex work itself. The interview conducted by the author suggests that the villagers share the view that 'going to Japan is to work as a prostitute' and female returnees in general, whether or not the individual was indeed in that industry, seem to be subjected to this view.

The villagers expect economical benefit from those working in Japan. From the villagers' point of view, 'going to Japan' is for the benefit of the family in the village; to build a new house, to feed the parents, siblings and children. The expectation must be bigger for those going to Japan than those who merely going to the south of Thailand. Therefore, for those who 'fail' to realize these expectations the view is harsher. They are viewed as 'losers' who failed to fulfill their 'purpose' of 'going to Japan' as generally expected.

In this villagers' understanding, how do the returnees tell of their experience in Japan and what kind of strategy do they employ toward the villagers? In the following section, an attempt was made to reveal the multilayered realities focusing on the interactions between the understanding format of the villagers and the narratives of individual returnees.

2. What the Narratives Show

The narratives of life histories of three of the twelve cases, G (35 year-old female), K (41 year-old female) and A (22 year-old female) as shown in this section, will be analyzed. The analysis is divided in three items; (1) the narrative regarding the motivation for going to Japan, (2) the narrative regarding the life in Japan and (3) the narrative regarding the relationship with the family, with added items (4) the narrative regarding the perception of female returnees and (5) the narrative regarding the 'failed' returnees.

2.1. Life History of G (35 year-old, Female)

G was born in 1965 as the second child among four siblings. Her father was a landed farmer and also ran a carrier business. She had elementary school education up to the

seventh grade and helped on the family farm till the age of twenty. She worked in a clothing factory in Bangkok from 1985, aged 20, for two years, then returned home and married, having two children. She divorced at the age of 27 and went to Japan in 1993 at age 28. She worked for six years in Japan as a hostess in bars and waitress in Ehime, Nagano and Tokyo. Pregnant, she went back to her home village to have the baby. The interview was conducted soon after she came back to the village from Japan. She returned to Japan soon afterward.

2.1.1. Narrative Regarding Motivation for Going to Japan

G's narrative was coherent and full of confidence. Above anything she emphasized the motivation of going to Japan. She said she was studying cooking and language at an employment agency in Bangkok in order to work as a housekeeper in Hong Kong when she was 28 years old after divorcing. She changed her destination to Japan around that time when she met a broker at a restaurant. That was how she explained the background but what she emphasized was her motivation. In the interview, she dwelt long on this point.

After divorcing, I faced big debts, not just mine but my father's, too. Then my brother had a traffic accident with the truck. His friend died...We had to pay compensation for the family of the friend as well. My father had to pay all these money. I felt sorry for my father...I thought it might be a good idea to go to Japan since earning is good there...I had two children to look after, too...My mother was seriously ill that time, it was a hard time...My ex-husband ran away, so everything was on me. It was a hard time. I'm so unlucky including my marriage.¹¹

G says that the motivation of going to Japan is purely economical, such as to pay off the loan left by her ex-husband, compensation for the traffic accident caused by her younger brother, medical costs of her mother and education costs for her two children. She emphasizes her duty as a daughter to help her parents as well as her duty as a mother to feed and educate her children. Her narrative insists that going to Japan is not for herself but for the economical benefit of her family, especially for her parents.

At the time of the interview, she was already determined to go back to Japan. The purpose was clear; to finish off the construction of the new house for her parents and herself. The house was already half built with the money G had sent from Japan and she said she had to go back to Japan to complete the construction. Her narrative is dominated by the concept that going to Japan is purely for earning money. At the same time she repeats her perceived

¹¹ In the quotes, '...' indicates the omissions by the author and [] shows complementary information by the author. All the quotes in 2.1 are from the interview with G on 16 February 2000.

reality that going to Japan is for improving her family life in the village, which could only be realized by her self-sacrifice. She also says that she wants to marry a Japanese man but that would be ‘not for love but for my father and the family.’ For her, marriage is another way of bettering the family’s life.

She tells about her education as such;

School?...All the classmates went to higher school but I could not. We were still poor at that time...I was sad and lonely that time...Everybody, all these classmates are teachers and doctors now, and they are happy. I’m the only one who is still struggling.

Her perception that only she is struggling because of her lack of education leads her reasoning that she has to go to Japan. In reality it is hard to think that most of her classmates went on to higher education, but her lack of opportunity to get a proper occupation such as teacher, owing to her educational background, is narrated as an important reason for working abroad.

2.1.2. Narrative Regarding Life in Japan

How did G perceive life in Japan? Her constructed reality can be seen from the following narrative about sending money home.

I sent 150 thousand yen out of 180 thousand of my wage per month. That leaves 30 thousand yen for my living costs. It was hard, but what else can I do? I have so many loans to pay back. I have father, mother and children as well. I also worry about schooling for my children.

G says that she sent almost all the money she earned and had a meager existence in Japan. What she prioritizes is her family in the village, her parents and the schooling of her children. This kind of narrative, not of an immigrant but of a temporary worker, informed not just her lifestyle and earning of money but also about learning the Japanese language. G said that she learned only Japanese words on the menu in order to work as a waitress. The narrative shows that she put an effort into learning the host country’s language, not to adapt to life there, but just to become employable there, making no further effort to assimilating into the society. This kind of narrative is also seen among the male returnees who worked as construction labors in Japan. They also said that they tried to solve problems such as sickness or changing their jobs by talking to the brokers or Thai colleagues, not necessarily by communicating with Japanese people. These kinds of narratives demonstrate that, they perceive that, though they might be living in Japan, their

whole attention is focused on the home village.

2.1.3. Narrative Regarding the Relationship with the Family

G explained why she returned to the village as follows:

I want to go to Japan again. I didn't want to come back that time. But my mother was having a terrible time. She was ill, very ill...I used to call the family every week...My second child also said "I want see you. I don't remember your face. Please come home, please." So I told her "Ok, I'll come home." And I returned. But life is hard here again.

G narrates that she was in contact with the family in the village by phone every week, that her children missed her very much. Actually, she was away from home for six years. But her narration is constructed on the basis that she has strong ties with the family and because of that, even though she herself wanted to continue working in Japan, she had to come home. In other words, she insists that she is an essential part of the family's wellbeing as the bread-winner, mother and daughter.

G also emphasizes her role as a good parent when it comes to education for her children. Her children were raised by their grandparents while G was in Japan and go to school not in the village but in a nearby city.

The name of the school my children attend was something like...[G can not remember the name]. This school is a little more expensive than the school in this village. The academic level is totally different...What I think is that they don't have mom and dad at home and grandparents can't supervise their study...So it's better for them to go to a better school...I put them in a good school for all this time.

She says that, though she was away from home, it did not mean that she was abandoning her children, nor uninterested in their education. Rather they go to a more expensive 'better school.' She seems to have strong intention for upward mobility, even proud that she is providing better educational opportunities for her children than other villagers. And, of course, she perceives her migrant experience as the financial source of the children's education.

2.1.4. Narrative Regarding the Perception of Female Returnees

The first thing G said when she started talking about the experience in Japan was; "I went to Ehime prefecture for club work, not for dating." 'Dating' means going out of a bar and a

club with a customer, implying prostitution. The first thing she wanted to say was that she was not a prostitute. When asked “How did you find work in Japan?” she responded as follows;

I was introduced to a person there [gambling house]. He said “Do you want to go to Ehime prefecture?” So I asked what the job was, and he said it was working in a club. I asked “Does it mean dating?” and he said “No.” I made it clear that I didn’t want dating but he assured me I wouldn’t have to do it...I don’t want to do that.

She says that the first thing she paid attention to when looking for work was to make sure that it was not prostitution. She also said that she needed to make detailed explanations of what a hostess work means to her parents in order to convince them. She continued that her parents as well as the other villagers do not know what hostess work means: chatting, singing karaoke with customers and making cocktails, since there is no such thing in the village.

These narratives of G suggest that female returnees tend to be labeled as ‘prostitutes’ in the village. At the same time it reveals her strategy for coping with the stereotyped prejudice. Later in the interview, she repeated several times that she did not work as a prostitute.

In the village I don’t talk about it [that she went to Japan] much. Since coming home, I haven’t been out much. I didn’t even go to the festival today...Country people talk, you know. It’s true that I did not work as a prostitute, but when I say I was working in a barbeque restaurant, they say “It can’t be, you were dating with men, weren’t you?”

Facing these unkind remarks, she said she did not go out much and kept her distance from those who talk in the village. She insisted that she did not work as a prostitute and attributed the villagers’ disagreeable view to their ignorance. The sense of value in the village, that is, ‘prostitution is a vice,’ still dominates her mind. G even asserted that Dok Kham Tai district is infamous for having a large number of prostitutes but this is because those ‘bad girls’ who sell their bodies lie that they come from there. In her narrative as opposed to these ‘bad girls,’ she is ‘a temporary migrant worker’ sacrificing her life for the sake of the family.

2.1.5. Case Summary

I examine and summarize G’s narrative in two respects; Firstly (1) what kind of reality does her narratives attempt to construct in responding to the villagers’ understanding? And secondly, (2) how do the villagers suppose to see her attempt?

(1) G maintains the villagers' view, that is, going to Japan is to improve the life of the family left in the village, in her own narrative. With this line of narrative she constructed her perceived self of 'successful one (so far)' who went to work in Japan for her family and achieved the purpose of improving their lives.

(2) This self-constructed reality of G's is agreeable with the understanding of the villagers' and it is a convincing story. Therefore this 'success story' will be retained and reproduced in the village. However, the degree of G's success is still an open question for the villagers and she must be feeling unease. Her uneasiness is demonstrated by her intention of going back to Japan. In order to reach an understanding with the village, she would earn 'sufficiently' and to take the direction of establishing herself in the village as an 'economic success case.'

Another aspect of G's reality which does not agree with the village is its understanding of the 'going to Japan = prostitution' equation. Against this and against the lack of understanding of her work in Japan among the villagers including her parents, G has constructed her narrative that the villagers were ignorant of cities or of Japan. Since she retains the village equation of 'prostitution = vice', she has to repeat her claim that she is not one of them and give a detailed explanation of what hostess work consists of. Even with these efforts, she is aware of the gap between the two realities, putting her into the situation of not talking about Japan with the villagers or keeping her distance from them.

As seen in this section, G is not dwelling comfortably in her constructed reality so far.

2.2. Life History of K (41 year-old, Female)

K was born in 1959, the fourth child of six siblings. Her parents were agricultural day laborers. Though the youngest two went to elementary school, the four older children including K could not go to school and K worked as an agricultural laborer since she was about six years old. Then she worked in Bangkok as a housemaid. When she was 31 years old in 1990, she went to Japan and worked in a bar in Tokyo for six months. She met a Japanese man and quit work, living with him for the next eight to nine years, then came home. She did not send money home while she was in Japan. At present she is living with her physically disabled older brother with his son, working as agricultural day laborer.

2.2.1. Narrative Regarding Motivation for Going to Japan

The direct trigger for K to go to Japan at the age of 31 was an invitation from her friend who got married in Japan and she tells of her motivation in short words as follows;

Nobody knows of my going to Japan. I didn't tell. I didn't think much. I was still young. Ok, [31 years old is] old, but still a child. I wasn't thinking anything. I just wanted to go to Japan, go and see Japan, that's all I was thinking.¹²

She said that she just wanted to go and see Japan, that's all she was thinking. Contrary to G's rather lengthy explanation of the economical benefit of going to Japan, K tells us that she went to Japan without any plan, because she was just curious. This kind of narration as the reason for going to Japan will not be accepted by the villagers since their understanding regarding going to Japan is to bring economical benefit for the family to improve their lives.

2.2.2. Narrative Regarding Life in Japan

How does K tell her experience of life and work in Japan?

I didn't work everyday. There were off-days and I didn't work when I wasn't feeling well or when I had a cold. I worked about two weeks in a month. When not working, I just stayed at home, looking through books and such. I couldn't go out because I didn't have any money. After six months I met my boyfriend and I didn't work after that. We kept a dog, a rabbit and fishes as pets. All I did was feeding those pets, because my boyfriend didn't have any money to spare either. He was old, kind and gentle. That life continued for eight years.

K does not describe her experience in Japan as a working life. Her memory of Japan is dominated by her life with the Japanese boyfriend. She said she only worked for the first six months and even that was not constant. She said "I didn't work because my boyfriend had a part-time job. My life in Japan was good because Japanese are gentle and kind, aren't they?"

She also remembers the friendship with other Thais in Japan as good times when she made 'good friends' and 'went out together' or 'met them at festivals.' She does not recall any relationship with them regarding the exchange of work-related information or helping each other when somebody was ill.

2.2.3. Narrative Regarding the Relationship with the Family

When asked the reason why she came home, she stated her homesickness for her family in

¹² All the quotes in 2.2 are from the interview with K on 18 February 2000.

the village but immediately changed the topic to her present ‘homesickness’ for her boyfriend in Japan.

The reason for coming home was to meet her brothers and sisters. You become anxious to meet them if you stay out for long...But I didn’t really want to come home. Japanese are really kind...I call my boyfriend in Japan every Sunday...I can’t have any leisure time, because I don’t have anything. [As for sending money from Japan] I didn’t send any. [As for the communication with the family from Japan] I did only occasionally. I didn’t have any savings either.

She said she didn’t send money to her home village nor communicate with her family often. Her reason for coming home was homesickness, but what she emphasizes here is her tie with her Japanese boyfriend. He does not send money to her. But she narrates her calling him on every Sunday as very important.

Not much suffering since coming back to Thailand. But it’s annoying, because I have my dog and my boyfriend there in Japan. It’s no good. I’m lonely. Life is hard in Thailand because I don’t have anything. I’m poor. There are part-time jobs available in Japan and if you work you are paid. [But here there are no such jobs]...I don’t have husband or children. I don’t know about my future, not yet. I don’t have money. I just keep thinking “What shall I do, what shall I do?”...I want to go back to Japan.

K narrated her life in Japan with her boyfriend and her dog as more important than her life in the village. She didn’t have any future plan for her life in the village or going back to Japan but she insisted that she wanted to return there. In that narrative, she emphasized her wishes to live again in Japan with her boyfriend and the pet animals, not any economic benefit such as sending money home or saving. It is a totally different reality of ‘going to Japan’ compared to G who wished to go back there to earn money to send back to her family.

2.2.4. Narrative Regarding the Perception of ‘Failed’ Returnees

Though she spent more than eight years in Japan, she now works as an agricultural day laborer, living in poverty. She stated her relationship with the villagers after coming back as follows;

Yes, plenty of talk behind my back. Because we are poor and everybody says “they have no money.”...I’m not playing around everyday. I drink alone and go to sleep when I am drunk...I don’t go out much because there are lots of malicious people.

Because I am poor though I went to Japan, they say “she can’t work,” “she doesn’t have money” or “I feel sorry” and I don’t want to hear that...Thai people just sneer at me...They say they feel sorry but it’s just words. What they think in their hearts is totally different.

K was poor and had no education before going to Japan and is still in poverty now. Her narration suggests that those who do not send money home are subjected to scornful eyes in the village. Those scornful eyes, thinly veiled as sympathy, brand her as ‘an incompetent migrant’ or a ‘loser.’ K strongly denied this stereotype in her narrative by way of telling how her life in Japan was fulfilled and fun. But this kind of constructed reality of hers will not be accepted by the village, or worse, will be ignored. While resenting the villagers’ sneers, K is trying to construct her reality of going to Japan as a meaningful experience.

2.2.5. Case Summary

Here I examine and summarize K’s narratives in two respects which previously shown in 2.1.5.

(1) K is trying to construct her reality against the villagers’ understanding of ‘going to Japan is for the benefit of the family in the village.’ Her constructed reality is that ‘life in Japan was fun and fulfilled.’ Her experience as a migrant in Japan was that she was having an easy life, though without much money, surrounded by a kind Japanese boyfriend and pet animals, only working when necessary, getting easy money without hard labor.

(2) This constructed reality of hers can not be accepted by the villagers, whose understanding of the purpose of going to Japan is to work extremely hard and send money home to improve the family’s life. In this circumstance K’s migration experience will be viewed only as a ‘failure’ and the reality, which K is attempting to construct, will probably only sound like ‘loser’s nonsense’, not even an excuse. K’s constructed reality of migration will be sneered at and ignored, not taken seriously or given any value.

2.3. Life History of A (22 year-old, Female)

A was born 1977 as the youngest of six siblings. Her parents were landed farmers and she finished her elementary school education while helping her parents. Her parents lost their farmland when she was 14. She left the village at the age of 13 to work in a laundry shop run by her relative in Bangkok. She lived in Bangkok for three years, sometimes worked at a Karaoke bar and brothel. She was sending a part of her income to her family in the village even then. She went to Japan in 1992 at the age of 15, endured the harsh environment of forced prostitution for the first 14 months in Tochigi prefecture. She then

broke free from the ring with a help of a Japanese boyfriend, worked as a waitress and bar hostess in Nagano prefecture and others. She stayed in Japan for six years and two months, regularly sending money home. Presently she lives in a newly built big house with her parents, a older brother and a sister.

2.3.1. Narrative Regarding Motivation for Going to Japan

The first thing A told about her experience of migration was that she was cheated. The trigger for her to go to Japan at the age of 15 was the solicitation by a broker in Bangkok and she described the situation as follows;

I was cheated. I had very hard time in Japan. In Bangkok somebody I didn't know much, said "Do you want to go Japan?"...He said "You can earn a lot working as a house maid. They'll pay you 100 to 150 thousand yen a month." I thought that's great. After that [quitting the relative's laundry shop], I made some friends...I worked in the nightlife district such as karaoke bar. From the very beginning I made a mistake, started working in that way. I continued working at night. Well, not good jobs.¹³

The job which was waiting for her in Japan was not a house maid but a harshly forced prostitution. She said it was totally unexpected and unacceptable. This narrative comes together with her feeling of regret that "I made mistake, started working in that way", when she described her past, working in Karaoke bar and club, after quitting her relative's shop, who took her in as a young girl. Nevertheless she also stated her motivation of going to Japan as follows;

[Why did you want to go to Japan?] No particular reason. I just wanted to go. I just wanted to go and see Japan. That's all. I thought "Cherry blossom? What does it look like? Is it as beautiful as people say? I want to go and see that." When you are young, it's easy. And yes, I wanted to see snow!

Her constructed reality full of curiosity such as 'I just wanted to go and see' does not sit very comfortably in her narrative regarding her motivation for going to Japan. One of the reasons is that she holds another reality that she was cheated, which dominated the narrative. She went to Japan without telling her parents, who were against that idea, only telling them after she had arrived there. She said that though nobody in the village knew that she had gone to Japan, it was soon guessed by the villagers because of the money she sent home every month.

¹³ All the quotes in 2.3 are from the interview with A on 18 February 2000.

2.3.2. Narrative Regarding Life in Japan

The life for A in Japan was an extremely harsh experience.

The work I did, the work I did for about one year was...not a good job. Yes, prostitution. I was cheated. I was told that I was to be a house maid, but the reality was totally different. The first place...it was in Utsunomiya. There are these places, just like ordinary flats, full of Thai girls...everybody is the same, all cheated. You don't have passports, can't go home, you don't have money...I thought I could go home in six months. But I couldn't. Paying the debt took me about one year and two months. Four million seven hundred thousand yen! That's a lot of money.

For the first 14 months, she did not have the freedom to go out, let alone go home with the everyday regime of working to repay the huge 'debt.' She kept only 25 thousand yen a month for herself for food and sent between 150 to 200 thousand yen home.

However, she also says that life in Japan was not all hard experiences. After getting away from the forced prostitution, she started a new life with a Japanese boyfriend. One of the most important experiences for her in Japan must have been the relationship with him. She related the experience as follows;

Since I stayed longer, I learned the language a bit...I left the place with a friend...I had a Japanese boyfriend so I rented a flat using his name. After that I worked a part-time job...My boyfriend took me many places. I could go any places by myself. There are good things in life in Japan. Japan is a nice place. There are no bad things, not at all...Foreigners make problems among themselves. The experience in Japan was good for me, I think. There are good Japanese men, aren't there? Of course there are bad people too, but I met only good people.

The relationship with the Japanese people around her, including her boyfriend, has some weight in this narrative. However, this personally important experience of hers is not easily accepted by the villagers. As will be shown in 2.3.4, her narrative that there are good men as well as bad ones amongst the Japanese is not easily understood by the villagers.

2.3.3. Narrative Regarding the Relationship with the Family

On how she decided to come home, she responded as follows;

There were no more places I could work. I worked in almost ten places...So I went to the Thai Embassy and told them that I wanted to go home. I think I was homesick.

I have been always, always, holding myself hard. I had been always thinking that I would go home when I had earned a lot, for everybody, for my family and for myself.

This narrative of the experienced reality of the immigrant is striking in that she endured so much for her family. She does not narrate her migration experience as a ‘success story.’ Though in her constructed reality, she positions migration as a period of time for earning money, her experience of maximum suffering and endurance makes the notion somewhat stand out.

When asked if she thought of going to Japan again, she said;

No. I don’t think so. I...I kind of got tired. [I worked in Japan] For such a long time...It’s ok being a farmer, if it’s my place. I’m tired of far away places...My family don’t ask me to do so either. They say “Please do not go anymore.”

The narrative that she ‘got tired of far away places’ shows how she perceives her migration experience as extremely harsh. On the other hand, her narrative of ‘it’s ok being a farmer, if it’s my place’ shows that she seems to be refusing sentimental views of a family and a village as ‘family whom I supported with extreme efforts’ and ‘the sweet homeland.’ She is being driven to silence with suppressed uneasiness towards the villagers, putting her personal migration experience into the villagers’ stereotyped understanding of ‘dutiful daughter,’ ‘successful person,’ or ‘victim’ who endured harsh prostitution.

2.3.4. Narrative Regarding the Perception of Female Returnees

The following narrative of hers shows that villagers suspect that economically successful returnees such as A earned their money by doing ‘bad things’ relating to criminal gangs, as follows;

If I say there are good men in Japan, they say like, “there are bad men, Yakuza is the most scary one.” There’s one girl around here, who went crazy after coming back from Japan. It is said that she was treated violently by Japanese. People say she must have been a prostitute in Japan and made lots of money since she built a new house...Everybody says things like ‘the daughter of that family went to Japan and doing well in the vice trade.’ There are many who say such things but I’m not interested. I just ignore such comments. It’s no good.

For this kind of remark, there is no way for her to cope other than repeating her explanation of being cheated or forced into silence. She also mentioned that the villagers would not

listen to her when she tried to explain about the decent men she met in Japan.

Nevertheless, she explains why these female returnees from Japan build new houses as follows;

All those who went to Japan, everybody's the same. They all build beautiful, big houses. Everybody, who went all the way to foreign a country, will want to have a nice house, beautiful house.

A modern concrete house was the purpose of the migration before they left the village, which becomes the symbol of the value as well which the migrant has achieved. Whatever the means of achieving that was, it is an expression of self as a 'successful person' or a 'dutiful daughter' before the eyes of the villagers. A seems to be attempting to construct her own reality of migrant experience, both using and resisting, at the same time, this unavoidable perception of the villagers.

2.3.5. Case Summary

A's narrative reveals that there are several lines of the villagers' perception towards her. One such is a 'successful person' or a 'dutiful daughter' who achieved the purpose of improving the life of her family, another is a 'victim' of prostitution ring. And there is also contempt for women engaged in 'prostitution.'

Towards these perceptions of the villagers, A's narratives on her experiences as a migrant are complex. It can be said that social pressure is forcing her narrative to become incoherent.

Firstly, (1) though A describes herself as 'victim' of a prostitution ring, she has more lines of realities as a migrant that can't be contained in the 'victim' narrative. Examples are her Japanese boyfriend as well as those memories after escaping the ring that she met 'only good people.'

(2) However, this reality conflicts with the villagers' understanding that 'she earned her money by doing bad things with bad people in Japan' which forces her into silence. In order to assert herself, she has to enforce her constructed self as 'victim' who was cheated by 'bad people.' By doing so she has to recognize the gap between herself and the villagers.

Secondly, (1) A must be feeling the desire of the villagers to see her as 'dutiful daughter' who improved the life of the family or as 'successful person' who went to Japan. There are

jealousy and envy under their admiration and her narrative strongly suggests that she is aware of it.

Despite this background, A's self-perceived reality of migration is not necessarily 'successful person.' In a subtle way, she seems to refuse to be put into the stereotypes of 'successful person' or 'dutiful daughter' nor to indulge in idiosyncratic and nostalgic notion of 'family' and 'homeland.' For A, who feels that she endured the maximum suffering for the sake of the family and says with a sigh of resignation that 'it's ok being a farmer, if it's my place,' the realities are not agreeable ones with the villagers and she seems, in a sense, to be even critical for them. In other words, she might well be feeling isolated from the villagers' understanding regarding going to Japan, which ultimately admires and envies the money made through any means, including the inhumane world of forced prostitution.

(2) It is almost certain that the villagers do not recognize this unspeakable side of her reality. She does not have an outlet for her reality in the bipolar definitions of the villagers' perception of 'dutiful daughter' and 'prostitute.' Even given a chance, her narrative would be perceived by the villagers as a 'hardship-prior-to-the success story' or draw criticism against 'bad girl' or given sympathy in 'poor little girl' sort of way. In the end, it would probably be merged into the village context of 'a dutiful daughter who succeeded through going to Japan.'

Although A feels uneasiness, she knows quite rightly that her migration experience can only be valid when perceived as the story of 'a dutiful daughter who succeeded through going to Japan' and expressed as such in the village. Building a big modern house in the village might have been her initial purpose of going to Japan. But for her who returned home, the house is the only form of self-expression that can be understood by the villagers. The impressive house is the only tangible way for her to share the experience of migration, the whole reality of which can never been understood fully by the villagers.

As shown in the above, A's constructed realities swings constantly between the stereotypes of the villagers, which makes the narrative incoherent, eventually forcing her into silence with suppressed feelings of alienation.

Conclusion—Contexts of Narratives and Strategies for Constructing Reality

From the narratives of three female returnee workers, it was confirmed that their realities are constructed, not only based on the interactions with the host communities but also with the home community—the village.

G brought the villagers' understanding of 'going to Japan' into her life in Japan and led a stranger's life there. Her life in Japan was penny pinching, dedicated to sending hard earned money home and her effort to assimilate into the host country was minimal.

Therefore G's narrative is fluent. There is no conflict with the understanding of the villagers' of 'going to Japan is for the benefit of the family in the village.' She constructs her reality that she was 'a migrant worker who worked hard sacrificing herself as a dutiful daughter/mother for the family in the village.' Since her constructed reality is agreeable and easily understood by the villagers, it certainly will be repeated and further established. Though G's constructed reality is seemingly stable, she may be feeling unease about the degree of her success—a glimpse of this is shown in her narrative about her intention of going to Japan again.

Contrary to G, K and A lived a life that was different from the villagers' understanding of going to Japan. K only worked two weeks in a month, and did not send money home. Her life was paid for by her boyfriend. Such a life in Japan was totally different from the villagers' understanding, which is based on the stereotypical migrant worker who fills all waking hours with work. A was forced into prostitution and put to a harsh form of work which was unthinkable before she went to Japan. After she escaped from the ring, she kept earning money in part-time jobs and also had pleasant times such as going out with Japanese men who were kind to her.

Since K and A had experiences beyond the understanding of the villagers, a conflict arises between their realities and the villagers' view. From the villagers' point of view, K's experience is just a failed case of migration. What K had to face in the village after coming back from Japan was the villagers' perception of 'incompetent' and 'loser' a migrant who did not send money home. To deal with this, she is trying to construct a competing reality of her own, which is that of a migration experience of a comfortable life centered around her life in Japan with her boyfriend, not a life based on work. But her narrative relating this reality is sneered at and ignored by the villagers as of no value. Surrounded by this relentless stereotyping of 'loser,' K will be increasingly frustrated and accumulating inner resentment.

Meanwhile A's experience is greeted by the villagers as 'successful person/dutiful daughter' who achieved the 'purpose' of working abroad. At the same time, as the reverse side of the same coin, villagers look on her with jealousy and envy, sneering at her as 'prostitute' or pitying her as 'victim' of a prostitution ring. A is trying to construct a competing reality against these views, but her narrative is made incoherent and she is forced into silence with suppressed feelings of alienation. For example, she explains to the villagers that there were good Japanese men who were kind to her, but the villagers brush

her off saying that all these men were gangsters or that she was doing bad things in Japan. The reality she wanted to construct—the encounters of ‘good people’—which is personally important for her, is always shaken and the memories will never be expressed.

Though in some situations she plays along with the villagers’ perception of ‘successful person’, in other situations she resists letting her migrant experience be molded into the village stereotype. The village label of ‘dutiful daughter’ and ‘successful person’ provides her experience of harsh labor with value, at the same time she is aware that the village terms of these words are praises without knowledge, which encourages individual sacrifice. She is unable fully to construct a narrative of ‘successful person’ with this perception gap between her reality and that of the villagers so she can not talk about it. Being aware that her migration experience can never agree with the villagers’ understanding, her narrative gets less and less coherent and more muted, as she tells her story.

The realities of migration experiences are first formed in the host communities based on interactions with them. These three females must have gained their own experiences in Japan and have returned to the village with their own realities.

As demonstrated in this study, these original realities are reconstructed in the home communities, interacting with the value system of the village. The returnee workers face the villagers’ understanding of what going to Japan means in the home community’s context. What this study especially highlighted is the understanding of the villagers, who define going to Japan as bringing economical benefit of the family, divide the returnees as ‘successful’ and ‘failed’, and look down on female returnees as ‘prostitutes’ or pity them as ‘victims.’

By focusing on three female returnees from Japan, the study elucidated the process in which they were attempting to reconstruct their realities of migrant experiences by interacting and sometimes competing with the villagers’ understanding. The study also showed that because of this interaction of the perceived realities of the villagers regarding migrants generally, some returnees would develop their own narratives relatively easily while others could not. G’s narrative, which is agreeable to the villagers’ understanding, is coherent and once this reality of hers is constructed, it would take hold and get firmer as time goes by. On the contrary, K and A are facing a conflict of perceptions, because they had spent their time in Japan in ways which are different from the villagers’ understanding, and they are trying to construct competing narratives in their own ways. By doing so they are repeatedly forced to explain what the migration meant to them and, under this pressure, the construction of their realities swings back and forth, making their narratives incoherent or forcing them into silence with suppressed feelings of alienation. Thus multilayered realities of migration experience are created, heavily interacting with the migrants’ home communities.

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