

# The Psychology of Japanese–Mexicans

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## PREFACE

The psychology of Latin Americans of Japanese ancestry was discussed in a previous report by the author. He focused primarily on people who came to Japan from Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Paraguay, and Mexico to study the Japanese language. In that survey, only Latin Americans of Japanese ancestry who lived in Japan at that time were included, so the number of people surveyed was limited.

Using the same method of research, the author selected just Mexico for this report and focused upon the Japanese–Mexicans who lived in Mexico. A total of 48 subjects which provided a statistically significant sample were surveyed.

The reason the author selected Mexico is that he lived in Mexico for 5 years and has a lot of Japanese–Mexican friends. Many Japanese–Mexicans (Nikkeis) don't speak fluent Japanese. (They call themselves "Nikkei" which means "Japanese ancestry".) Their native language is Spanish, so the research was done in Spanish. The author also teaches Spanish at the university and has the opportunity to visit Mexico annually.

The history of Japanese immigration to Mexico is one of the oldest among the immigrations to foreign countries. It began in the year of 1897. There are approximately 10,000 Japanese-Mexicans living in Mexico today. This number is small compared to the people living in Brazil or Peru. However, in recent years, the second and third generation Nikkei of Mexico have an important role in all Latin America. The First Pan American Congress of Second-Generation Japanese was held in Mexico in 1981.

It was felt that Mexico is representative of Latin America and that a survey on the psychology and personality of the second and third generation Nikkei would be appropriate continuation of previous research.

This research would also be meaningful because recently many Latin Americans of Japanese ancestry have come to Japan to work. More than 200,000 Latin Americans now live in Japan. They are experiencing mental health problems that Japanese psychologists are having to deal with. This clinical situation didn't exist ten years ago.

## STATISTICAL SURVEY

### 1. Subjects and Method

The survey instrument used was the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). In Mexico the MMPI was translated to Spanish and standardized in the 1960s, mostly by Dr. Rafael Nuñez. It has been utilized widely and frequently in Mexico. The Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health of the National Autonomous University of Mexico uses it routinely. The author has close relationship with this institution since he conducted research there 20 years ago.

In general, second and third generation Nikkeis have difficulties in writing Japanese, although many of them speak Japanese. They consider Spanish their native language, so it was necessary to do this survey in Spanish and use the Spanish version of the MMPI.

Because we already have the MMPI results of university students in Mexico (Ofelia Rivera, 1987), Nikkei students or recent graduates of the university were selected. The author participated as a researcher in the MMPI survey of Mexican university students. In Japan he has used the MMPI on students who voluntarily come for counseling to the University Counseling Center for the past 16 years.

Thus, we are able to compare the MMPI results of the Japanese-Mexicans with the MMPI results of Mexican students. This means that we can evaluate the psychology of the Japanese-Mexicans on the range of the Mexican university students. The MMPI is valid not only to find pathology but also to understand psychological tendency of normal people. Based on these reasons, we chose the MMPI as our principal survey instrument.

Let's look at the procedure in more details. The author is acquainted with people who are in contact with second and third generation Nikkei. So, it was easy to have contact with many Nikkei people. Each second and third generation group has periodical meetings to discuss new situations or problems and, sometimes, they also have recreational activities.

Taking advantage of this situation, the author selected an adequate number of people for the survey, and administered the MMPI Spanish version individually.

A total of 48 students, including 22 males and 26 females, took the test. Almost all of them participated in the survey willingly, which was

a great surprise to the author. Generally speaking, the people who are not clients of counseling often show some resistance or a defensive attitude taking a psychological test. We can consider this attitude of Mexican-Nikkeis significant and it will be discussed later.

## 2. Results

Table 1 shows the MMPI results. The means and standard deviations are listed by sex and scales. Table 2 shows the MMPI norms of Mexican university students which were developed in 1984 by Dr. Ofelia Rivera.

In Figure 1 there are two profiles which are male Nikkeis and male Mexicans. Figure 2 is female Nikkeis and female Mexicans. (The numbers of the left are T scores.)

As it can be seen, in case of male students, Nikkeis show higher point than Mexicans on almost all the scales. In fact, t test showed significant differences ( $p < 0.001$ ) on scales 1, 6, 0, and ( $p < 0.01$ ) on scales 2 and 3.

For female students, Nikkeis showed slightly higher point than Mexicans, but statistically there was not much difference. They were more or less similar. Only on scale 0 the difference was at  $p < 0.001$  level, and on scale L, Mexicans were higher than Nikkeis, with a significant difference of  $p < 0.01$ .

At the same time, Nikkei males and females had validity scales as a mountain type. This means that the Nikkeis may have a feeling of anxiety, a feeling of uncertainty, or a help seeking tendency.

(Because we used the MMPI Spanish version, we did not compare Nikkei results with Japanese students' results this time.)

### 3. Short Summary

What do the results mean? The Nikkei males were generally higher than their Mexican counterparts with some significant differences. Three validity scales appeared in the form of a mountain. This means that they tend to have a lot of psychological problems such as anxiety, conflicts and feeling of uncertainty. We could label these people as those who often have problems. Especially, the tendency of somatic problems on scale 1, the suspicious tendency on scale 6, and introversive tendency on scale 0. These points are more conspicuous when compared with Mexicans. The depressive tendency as shown on scale 2 and the dependency tendency as shown on scale 3 are also higher than Mexican counterparts, which also means that Nikkeis potentially have those inclinations. This suggests that Nikkei males have some conflicts or psychological problems when compared with Mexicans.

On the other hand, when we check the profiles of female students, the two did not show significant differences each other except as shown on scale 0. Nikkei females and Mexican females are relatively near the standard line ( $T=50$ ). So, both are considered mentally stable.

The only difference is the introversion shown on scale 0. Nikkei females are more introverted or modest than Mexicans. This could be considered as preservation of Japanese tradition among Japanese-Mexican Nikkei females. The same thing is also applicable to Nikkei males, because scale 0 and scale 2 are also higher than Mexicans.

## INTERVIEWS

After the written survey, 8 people (4 males and 4 females) were chosen from the original group. By interviewing these 8 Nikkeis, the author tried to understand where their conflicts and feelings of uncer-

tainty originated.

## 1. Subjects and Method

Among the 8 Nikkeis, one was second generation and seven were third generation. The ages ranged between 21 and 30. The interviews were carried out individually for 1.5 to 2.0 hours. The language used was Spanish.

The author started the interview by informing them of their MMPI results. Gradually, he asked them about their problems or their general life in Mexico, especially in the Nikkei society, and also interpersonal relationships with the Mexican people.

Since all of them participated in the survey voluntarily, they were very cooperative during interviews. The author felt that they have a strong desire to find out more about themselves through the research.

## 2. Results

Through the interviews, we could see that many Nikkeis have a feeling of uncertainty about their cultural identity, and that this feeling may be related to the psychological difficulties or conflicts which were shown on their MMPI.

Some episodes concerning their conflicts of cultural identity are extracted from each interview as follows:

One second generation female student stated that she is 50% and 50%. This means, "50% Mexican and 50% Japanese". She has never been in Japan, but everybody in Mexico tells her that she is Japanese. In the future, she would like to marry any Nikkei, but not a Japanese or a Mexican.

One third generation female, who is engaged in translation work,

told us that she thinks she is Mexican, since she does not live like the Japanese people at all. However, in the elementary and intermediate schools, her classmates always referred to her as being Japanese. When the teachers mentioned something about Japan in classrooms, everyone looked at her all at once. She stated that she feels she is in between Japanese and Mexican.

Another third generation female stated that she is made “a la Mexicaine”. It means that her physiognomy is Mexican and she talks so much like a common Mexican woman. However, in her childhood, she had frequent quarrels with other Mexican children, and thought that she did not belong to either group; Mexico or Japan. Finally, she added that she is a kind of “mixture” and doesn’t “fit” in either place.

One third generation male student who has an important role in the Committee of Third Generation Nikkeis said; “When I went to Japan, I felt somewhat strange. I felt that I was always a foreigner”. He also said, “When I visited Sento or Japanese public bath with a friend, I felt that I had something very Japanese”. He added that he will never leave Mexico, although he has Japanese physiognomy and he was often made fun of by others in elementary school. Finally, he commented, “We are Mexicans seen by the people in Japan, and we are Japanese seen by the Mexican people.”

Let’s take another third generation male student whose father is second generation and mother is first generation. At elementary school, he had trouble continuously. Some called him “Chinese” or “Japanese”. So he started to learn “Judo” to be able to fight his classmates.

Nowadays, thanks to Japan’s economical development as a nation, some appreciate him as a Japanese. For him life is better now than

before, but in schools he has often felt psychological pressure, since some expected higher achievements from him for being of Japanese ancestry. When he was a child, he tried to change the form of his eyes in front of the mirror. At the end of the interview, he said that his general attitude or way of saying jokes are very Mexican.

### 3. Short Summary

We have extracted some episodes related to Nikkei people's cultural identity problems. Through them, we can perceive their conflicts, feelings of uncertainty, or their psychological unstableness.

The expression made by one male student "we are Mexicans viewed by the Japanese and we are Japanese viewed by Mexicans", is very symbolic. It is exactly the "feeling of a foreigner". These are the situations where Nikkeis are living as foreigners in Mexico or Japan.

Other female Nikkei said, "I am 50% and 50%." This is another expression by which the Nikkei situation is well explained. Another female student used the words: "not belonging to either side", "mixture", or "not fit in any place". All of these expressions signify the same thing.

Everyone gave his or her personal history in which they had problems or difficulties with others in their childhood. We can imagine how these situations have strongly influenced the personality or psychological tendency of Nikkei people.

During the interviews, some of them often spoke with tears in their eyes or held back their tears. The author was profoundly moved and felt that the immigration process sometimes could cause serious problems.



## ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW

Now, let's see the interpersonal relations of Nikkei people from a different point of view. The author had an intensive interview for four hours with one person who was first generation Japanese. Through this interview, we will understand the complex situation of Nikkei society in Mexico more clearly.

This person is first generation, that is, went to Mexico with his parents several years after birth, and now lives in Mexico. (To keep confidentiality, the author has omitted all his personal data.)

He is almost the same age as second generation Nikkei, but had lived in Japan for a number of years before going to Mexico. However, he experienced very similar situations as those of the second generation. He also suffered conflicts of cultural identity, especially during his high school years.

When he was young, he had almost no friends of second generation Nikkei in Mexico. The school was Mexican, so he had interpersonal relationships only with Mexicans. On the other hand, he had frequent troubles with Nikkeis; sometimes they threw stones at him.

In the family circle, the atmosphere was completely Japanese, and they spoke nothing but Japanese. However, once he stepped out of the house, everything was in Spanish. His friends and social relations were only with Mexicans. Nevertheless, his parents didn't allow him to have any close contact with Mexican friends, for example, inviting them to his home. He spent his leisure time indulging in reading the collected works of famous Japanese writers. By the time he was in his late teens, he experienced the feeling of a loss of identity.

One day, he was invited to a party by a Mexican friend and enjoyed

dancing with other Mexicans and experienced a sense of conformity with the Mexicans. However, when he went into another room and saw himself in the mirror, he suddenly realized that he was different from them. This was a great shock to him. At that moment, he was forced to realize that the others around him were Mexicans and were different people. He began to feel uneasy.

The following are examples of the problems he experienced with other Nikkeis. Sometimes, they mistreated him just because he came from Japan. At the Nikkei elementary school where he was attending, his sound knowledge of the Japanese language impeded him from having normal relations with other children. Apparently, the other children were jealous of him because he could speak Japanese.

During those days he felt the ideal partner to be his wife would be any Japanese or Mexican, but not Nikkei. Later, when he reached a marriageable age and when some Nikkei women began to show interest in him, he did not feel happy. Finally, he added the following comment which impressed the author profoundly; "I think it would be the happiest situation if people can live in the country where they were born".

## CONCLUSION

Through this survey and research, we see the conflicts or feelings of uncertainty among Japanese-Mexican people, especially with the Nikkei male students.

In order to understand the psychological conflicts of the Nikkeis, we interviewed them to see the problems and difficulties they encountered

during their childhood. This clarified their conflicts or feelings of uncertainty about their cultural identity. We can see their psychological instability oscillating between Japan and Mexico like a pendulum.

We interviewed a first generation person who was exactly the same age as second generation Nikkeis. We could recognize the negative relations between first and second generations. The psychological conflicts each generation has have been projected in a complicated and sensitive way in their interpersonal relationships.

We have discussed the psychology of Mexican Nikkeis by three different approaches. With these results, we could understand that sometimes they may experience unhappiness when they live in Mexico or when they go to Japan.

Many Nikkei people from Latin America live in Japan today. This may be a good opportunity for the Japanese people to reconsider the implications of immigration to foreign countries.

## REFERENCE

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Table 1 Nikkeis' MMPI

|   | Scale   | Male<br>( <i>N</i> = 22) |             | Female<br>( <i>N</i> = 26) |             |
|---|---------|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|
|   |         | <i>M.</i>                | <i>S.D.</i> | <i>M.</i>                  | <i>S.D.</i> |
|   | L       | 5.32                     | 2.78        | 5.31                       | 2.28        |
|   | F       | 9.50                     | 9.14        | 6.12                       | 5.54        |
|   | K       | 14.14                    | 4.54        | 13.81                      | 3.84        |
| 1 | Hs+0.5K | 16.14                    | 5.98        | 15.12                      | 5.05        |
| 2 | D       | 24.91                    | 5.85        | 25.12                      | 5.09        |
| 3 | Hy      | 23.05                    | 5.52        | 21.58                      | 6.54        |
| 4 | Pd+0.4K | 23.36                    | 5.39        | 21.35                      | 4.99        |
| 5 | Mf      | 26.18                    | 3.86        | 34.12                      | 3.64        |
| 6 | Pa      | 11.86                    | 3.45        | 9.77                       | 3.86        |
| 7 | Pt+1.0K | 28.36                    | 5.30        | 26.46                      | 6.16        |
| 8 | Sc+1.0K | 32.23                    | 11.17       | 27.62                      | 7.45        |
| 9 | Ma+0.2K | 22.14                    | 3.98        | 19.96                      | 4.26        |
| 0 | Si      | 31.59                    | 5.21        | 34.31                      | 5.02        |

Note: Table 1 shows the MMPI results. The means and standard deviations are listed by sex and scales.

Table 2 Mexicans' MMPI

|   | Scale   | Male<br>(N = 734) |      | Female<br>(N = 621) |      |
|---|---------|-------------------|------|---------------------|------|
|   |         | M.                | S.D. | M.                  | S.D. |
|   | L       | 6.19              | 2.80 | 6.65                | 2.70 |
|   | F       | 6.37              | 4.43 | 5.53                | 4.16 |
|   | K       | 15.18             | 4.76 | 15.31               | 4.76 |
| 1 | Hs+0.5K | 11.52             | 2.21 | 14.02               | 2.81 |
| 2 | D       | 21.77             | 4.22 | 23.04               | 4.57 |
| 3 | Hy      | 19.44             | 4.57 | 20.54               | 4.92 |
| 4 | Pd+0.4K | 22.06             | 4.24 | 21.13               | 4.24 |
| 5 | Mf      | 26.21             | 4.16 | 32.95               | 3.85 |
| 6 | Pa      | 8.82              | 3.16 | 9.25                | 3.26 |
| 7 | Pt+1.0K | 26.50             | 5.09 | 26.47               | 5.30 |
| 8 | Sc+1.0K | 28.81             | 5.54 | 28.04               | 5.62 |
| 9 | Ma+0.2K | 21.30             | 4.09 | 20.32               | 4.07 |
| 0 | Si      | 26.39             | 7.31 | 26.70               | 7.69 |

(*Interpretación Clínica y Psicodinámica del MMPI* by Dra. Ofelia Rivera, Ed. DIANA, 1987)

Note: Table 2 shows the MMPI norms of Mexican university students which were developed in 1984 by Dr. Ofelia Rivera.

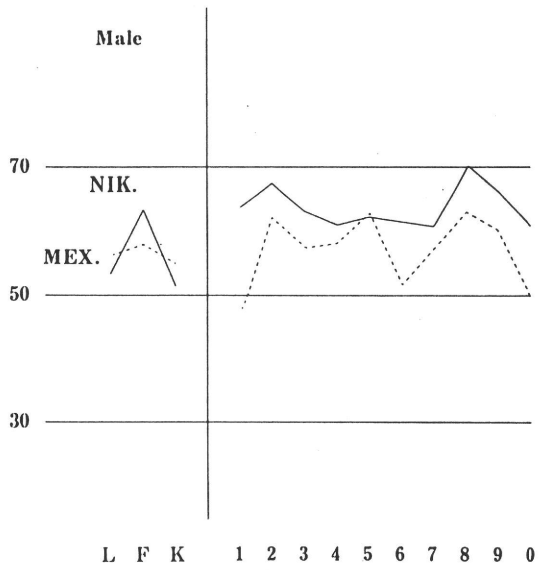


Figure 1 Male Profiles (Nikkeis & Mexicans)

Note: Figure 1 shows the two profiles which are male Nikkeis and male Mexicans. (The numbers of the left are T scores.)

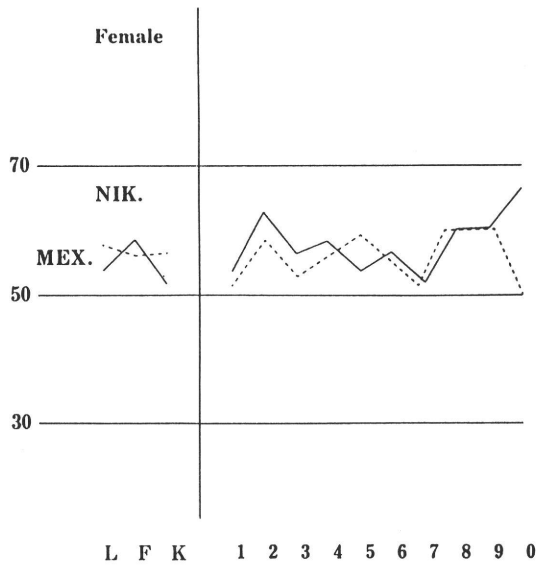


Figure 2 Female Profiles (Nikkeis & Mexicans)

Note: Figure 2 shows the two profiles which are female Nikkeis and female Mexicans. (The numbers of the left are T scores.)