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## TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL BELONGING OF BANGLADESHI MIGRANTS IN SOUTH KOREA

Belonging to one's homeland is common and universal for human beings. Transnational culture belonging is the practices and actions of some elements such as language, food, clothes, song, etc. that refers to a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture or place. This study aims to examine transnational cultural belonging among Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea. A quantitative study was conducted based on 310 surveys on Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea during six months from March 2016 to August 2016. The results show that Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea have strong transnational cultural belonging to their homeland. The highest degrees of transnational cultural belonging were found "talking in their native language" and "eating traditional food" in cultural originality belonging and "watching Bangladeshi television" in cultural entertainment belonging. The results support the studies of Bangladeshi migrants in western countries as strong transnational belonging at homeland. This study suggests subsequent studies to compare transnational cultural belonging of various migrant groups through sampling based on socio-demographic factors.

**Key words:** Bangladeshi migrant, international migration, Bangladesh, South Korea, transnational cultural belonging

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### Оңтүстік Кореядағы Бангладеш мигранттарының трансұлттық мәдени тиесілілігі

Өз Отанына трансұлттық тиесілілік адамдар үшін ортақ және әмбебап болып табылады. Трансұлттық мәдениетке тиесілілік - бұл адамның белгілі бір мәдениетке немесе орынға тиесілілік сезімін білдіретін тіл, тамақ, киім, ән және т.б. сияқты кейбір элементтердің тәжірибесі мен әрекеттері. Бұл зерттеу Оңтүстік Кореядағы Бангладеш мигранттарының трансұлттық мәдени байланысын зерттеуге бағытталған. Сандық зерттеу 2016 жылдың наурызынан тамызына дейін алты ай ішінде Оңтүстік Кореядағы Бангладеш мигранттарының 310 сауалнамасы негізінде жүргізілді. Нәтижелер Оңтүстік Кореядағы Бангладеш мигранттарының өз Отанына күшті трансұлттық мәдени байланысы бар екенін көрсетеді. Трансұлттық мәдени байланыстың ең жоғары дәрежелері «ана тіліндегі әңгімелерде» және «дәстүрлі тағамды тұтынуда» сияқты мәдени бірегейлікте және «Бангладеш теледидарын көру» мысалында мәдени ойын-сауықта табылды. Нәтижелер батыс елдеріндегі Бангладеш мигранттарының зерттеулерін отанында күшті трансұлттық тиесілілігін растайды. Бұл зерттеу әлеуметтік-демографиялық факторларға негізделген іріктеу арқылы әртүрлі мигранттар топтарының трансұлттық мәдени байланысын салыстыру үшін кейінгі зерттеулерді жүргізуді ұсынады.

**Түйін сөздер:** Бангладеш мигранты, Халықаралық көші-қон, Бангладеш, Оңтүстік Корея, трансұлттық мәдени байланыстар.

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### Транснациональная культурная принадлежность бангладешских мигрантов в Южной Корее

Транснациональная принадлежность к своей родине является общей и универсальной для человека. Принадлежность к транснациональной культуре - это практика и действия некоторых элементов, таких как язык, еда, одежда, музыка и т.д., которые относятся к чувству принадлежности человека к определенной культуре или месту. Это исследование направлено на изучение транснациональной культурной принадлежности бангладешских мигрантов в Южной Корее. Количественное исследование было проведено на основе 310 опросов бангладешских мигрантов

в Южной Корее в течение шести месяцев с марта по август 2016 года. Результаты показывают, что бангладешские мигранты в Южной Корее имеют сильную транснациональную культурную принадлежность к своей родине. Наивысшие степени транснациональной культурной принадлежности были обнаружены в «разговорах на родном языке» и «употреблении традиционной пищи» в принадлежности к культурной самобытности и «в просмотре бангладешского телевидения» в принадлежности к культурным развлечениям. Результаты подтверждают исследования бангладешских мигрантов в западных странах как сильную транснациональную принадлежность к родине. Это исследование предлагает последующие исследования для сравнения транснациональной культурной принадлежности различных групп мигрантов посредством выборки на основе социально-демографических факторов.

**Ключевые слова:** бангладешский мигрант, международная миграция, Бангладеш, Южная Корея, транснациональная культурная принадлежность.

## Introduction

International migration has emerged significantly in recent decades all over the world due to substantial progress of economic globalization and advanced communication, reaching 258 million in 2017, up from 173 million in 2000—an increase of 49% since 2000 (UN report, 2017). Due to this faster growth rate, the share of migrants in the total population increased from 2.8 in 2000 to 3.4 per cent in 2017 (UN report, 2017). Bangladesh is the fifth largest immigrant country in the world whose 7.5 million people living outside the country's borders (UN report, 2017) who are categorized into low-skilled (51.87%), semi-skilled (15.28%), skilled (32.68%) and professional (0.17%) (IOM).

Migrants maintain a variety of relationships in the process of migrating to a destination country. Transnational migrants have multi-positioned relationships to different locales on account of their migratory journeys; the social, symbolic and material ties retained to their homelands, and the newer sets of social relations formed in a current place of residence (Wood & Waite, 2011). It is a complex set of relationships across at least two locales that migrants embody a shifting of belonging from one place to another place and some factors work behind this shift including cultural belonging. These factors lead an individual's life to be meaningful and worth finding a place where he/she belongs. The absence of this place of belonging makes a sense of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and displacement (Antonsich, 2010). Transnational belonging refers to transmigrants' practices and engages in everyday life to the life cycle of social interactions in transnational social spaces which signal or enact an identity. It demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group and when people explicitly recognize this, highlight the transnational elements of who they are (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). They engage in transnational social spaces and express

belonging to homeland practicing culture through watching native media, preparing and eating food, and arranging various community activities for preserving the language, cultural practices and traditions.

Migration from Bangladesh to South Korea started in the late 1980s, when South Korea experienced a severe unskilled laborer shortage in small and medium sized industries. They migrated as transient workers under the labour import scheme the "Foreigners Industrial Training Programme (FITP)" and had to do 3D (Dirty, Dangerous, and Difficult) jobs. Migrants were also forced to return home at the end of the contract. But they did not receive basic wages as much as South Koreans received and wanted to stay in South Korea as long as they could because of their better economic future. As a result, South Korea hosted thousands of irregular and regular migrants. After growing public concern in labor problems, South Korea took "the Act Concerning the Employment of Permit for Migrant Workers" in 2003 for developing the guest worker system "Foreigners Industrial Training Programme (FITP)" and entered into effect in 2004. Finally, the comparatively standard "Employment Permit System (EPS)" was replaced by the FITP in 2007. In this system, there are some rules and regulations in favor of labor that ensure high wages, good job environment, and human rights. As a result, the quality of Bangladeshi migrants rises significantly from unskilled to semi-skilled and non or less educated to higher educated. Besides, the volume of expected migration increases significantly but only few of them can migrate because of the quota system of the EPS. The total number also depends on the owners of the companies who are free to choose and select migrants among 15 countries.

From the late 1990s, a new and diversified thinking was seen among some Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea such as changing visa status through investing in business especially in Halal

food business and marrying South Korean girls. A new group of investors, professional, and student migrants from Bangladesh joined the migration process in the 2000s because of the remarkable socio-economic development of South Korea. The total Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea is 15429 (Korea Immigration, 2016) in September 2016 and the migration flow is still continuing with increase. South Korea is one of the most popular and ideal destination countries for Bangladeshi people.

The Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea engage in social, symbolic and materialistic ways across both host country and homeland. Since migrants are living or settling in the host country, it raises questions on the present status of belonging to the homeland. They might feel disconnected from their sense of belonging to their place of origin. In contrast, they can be seen as troublesome in embodying belongings to the host country. They may not wish to emotionally engage in a national project due to their transnational positionalities, and/or they may feel debarred from such an identity due to persistent social exclusions at the everyday scale (Waite, 2012). Transnational cultural belonging includes cultural expressions, traditions, and habits as well as cultural practices that is considered one of the basic pillars in building nations through beliefs, values, norms, and social practices (Hafiz, 2019). So research needs to understand the ways of migrants' interacting to homeland that perceives and relates to belonging. The increasing of migrants' interconnectedness has changed the ways of life that raises interesting questions about the relationship with the nation states in which they 'belong'. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the transnational cultural belonging of Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea.

### **Theoretical Discussion and Previous Studies**

Transnational migration is a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders, settle, and establish relations in a new state, maintain ongoing social connections with the polity from which they originated (Schiller & Fouron, 1999). Transnationalism is "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" and migrants are transnational when they "develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political that span borders" (Basch, Schiller & Blanc, 1994). It

refers the processes to trans bordered relations of individuals, groups, firms and to mobilizations beyond state boundaries where all interact with each other in a new space and economic, socio-cultural, and political activities ensued. Modern diaspora is considered as having the potential to be transnational actors. While the term transnationalism emphasizes the ways in which nations are no longer able to contain or control the disputes and negotiations through which social groups annex a global dimension to their meaningful practices.

Transnational belonging refers to feelings of being at home that cross the borders of nation-states (Vertovec, 1999). Migrants mostly mean their birthplace or country of birth as home (Glorius & Friedrich, 2006). Belonging allows an affective dimension not just being, but longing (Probyn, 1996). It is a strong and inevitable feeling or attachment that exists in human nature resulting from one's own choices. It is a fundamental human motivation that is so universal and the need to belong is found across all cultures and types of people. All human beings need a certain minimum quantity of regular and satisfying social interactions. Inability to meet this need results in loneliness, mental distress, and a strong desire to form new relationships.

Migrants belong to several groups, national or regional spaces. The discursive construction of modes of belonging includes tentative and random attachments to tradition, culture, religion, family and workplace; feelings of belonging; and legal forms of membership (Richter & Nollert, 2014). Belonging beyond transnational ties, migrants wish to extend their interests in the roots, the places and people in their home land. It is an emotional attachment and loyalty in narratives about their feelings towards their home countries and their places of residence (Erkmen, 2015). The common form of expression of the sense of belonging of migrants to homeland that is based on personal and particular connections. The attachment is to a particular location, which embodies 'home', to people (family and a close network of friends), and to memories associated with that location, and thus comes to represent the country (Erkmen, 2015).

Belonging is about a) different social locations that emerge along different power axes and social categorizations, b) individuals' identifications and emotional attachments, and c) shared ethical and political value systems (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It is considered of multiple narratives of belonging, influenced by different historical trajectories, and of social realities that are able to form senses

of belonging far beyond those tied to ancestry, authenticity, and places of origin. Belonging associates to spatial which often relates to specific localities and territorialities (Antonsich, 2010). Space here can be both a geographic place and a symbolic space described as familiarity, comfort, security, an emotional attachment, a feeling of being at home.

The concept of belonging stresses the creativity of changing daily situations and contexts, including both individual particularities and biographical positionalities as well as the social position within hegemonic structures. Belonging is a socio-material resource that arises by means of multiple and situated appropriation processes. Belonging describes alterable attachments that can be social, imagined, and sensual-material in nature. It is defined as material-semiotic aspects of social reality: 1. the corporeal and the individual experiences that people have because of their physical dis-positions, 2. Tenure relations and the allocation of resources and 3. Objects / artefacts or material cultural productions, forms, and images (Youkhana, 2015). Belonging comes into being between people and things, and between people and people, through material conditions. A more fluid and less bounded conception of belonging can be imagined as a rhizomatic and chaotic network composed of multiple attachments of heterogeneous actors. These practices include social, imagined, and sensual-material. Migrants are therefore commonly observed to experience simultaneity in their feelings of belonging to homeland as well as host country.

Migrants actively maintain their sense of belonging to the country of origin through several activities during integration into their host societies; especially through preserving their ethnic culture. Migrants usually listen regularly to their ethnic radio stations, watch television channels and read newspapers etc. (Guarnizo & Diaz, 1999). In addition, various associations work as 'cultural brokers' for the migrants' communities in their host societies. Cultural belonging refers to practices and engagements that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group, for example wearing a Christian cross or Jewish star, flying a flag, or choosing a particular cuisine etc. (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Migrants preserve their ethnic identity through organizing various sports events, folk music and dance programs, national holidays and ethnic festivals (Orozco et al, 2005). Preparing, eating and sharing their ethnic food expresses their strong connections

with home, and signifies their ethnic identity (Vallianatos & Raine, 2008).

### **Operational Definition of Cultural Belonging**

Transnational culture is the practices and actions that provide identity for the performers. It is an identity that refers to a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. There are some elements of culture such as language, food, clothes, song, etc. Belonging is an attachment with a specific group, belief, and nation that brings feelings of inclusion and identity. Every human requires belonging to meet the needs resulting from loneliness and mental stress. It is human emotional need to be accepted whether it is family, friends, co-workers, or something else. People tend to have a natural desire to belong that is universal across all cultures and different types of people. The social, cultural, political and economic changes have taken place during the past century that present us with new ways of belonging that transcend physical and virtual boundaries. The attachment is to a particular location which embodies home to represent the country (Erkmen, 2015).

Transnational cultural belongings to the homeland of Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea on feelings of symbolic and material change, the strength of attachment and composition. Therefore, it forms different results depending on the degree and configuration of transnational belonging.

Culture is an identity or feeling of belonging to a person's self-conception and self-perception that is related to the country. It is not only the characteristic of the individual but also the group of members sharing the same cultural identity. Transnational cultural belonging refers to cultural expressions, traditions and habits as well as to the cultural practices such as food, clothes, customs etc. It makes migrants emotional to their homeland from abroad through language, food, clothes, television, newspaper, song, festival, customs etc.

Transnational culture is the practices and actions that provide identity for the performers. It is considered as one of the basic pillars in building nations. It is an identity that refers to a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. Normally, people internalize the beliefs, values, norms, and social practices of their culture and identify themselves with that culture. There are some elements of culture such as language, food, clothes etc. Those are defined as original culture and listening to music, singing songs, watching

television, reading newspapers etc those are defined as entertainment culture. Originality is the aspect of being novel and distinguishable. It is unique and substance. Entertainment is a form of activity that gives pleasure and delight. Individuals have different preferences in entertainment. The experience of being entertained has come to be strongly associated with fun and laughter. Following this, transnational cultural belonging is divided into 02, first is transnational cultural (originality) belonging and second is transnational cultural (entertainment) belonging. In this study, transnational cultural belonging is defined by talking in native language, eating Bangladeshi food, wearing traditional dress, watching TV programs, spending time reading newspapers, singing songs, celebrating religious festivals, practicing traditional customs etc. In this study, I apply the tools of the 08 items to measure cultural belonging. I use Likert scales ranging from 1 to 5 points from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items are like 'I like to talk in Bangla' and 'I like to practice Bangladeshi traditional customs.'

### Research Design

This study is a quantitative research work based on a survey questionnaire on Bangladeshi migrants in

Korea. The total 310 surveys are conducted according to profession and region. The analysis method of this study is based on SPSS Statistics 21.0 of collected data of the total 310 survey questionnaires conducted during six months from March 2016 to August 2016 in areas in Korea populated with Bangladeshi migrants, including Gyeonggi-do (Ansan, Paju, Ujeonbu, Sanguri, and Khwangju), Seoul, Incheon, Gwangju, Busan, Daegu, Ulsan, Gimhae, and Jinju. The survey questionnaire was written in two languages, English and Bengali. The author visited manufacturing factories, Bangladeshi restaurants, halal grocery stores, and mosques in the survey areas and collected data. The main target group in this study is laborers, since most of the Bangladeshi migrants in Korea are laborers. Other groups include migrant groups with future potential to grow in numbers: students, professionals and businessmen.

Though most of the Bangladeshi migrants are labor, I select them as the main target group in this study. Then thinking of the future potential of migration, students, professionals and businessmen are also selected in others groups. Among the respondent, labor is 227 proportion of 73.23% and others 26.67%. Among others, student is 33 proportion of 10.65%, professional 43 proportion of 13.87%, and businessman 7 proportion of 2.26.

**Table-1:** Sampling

Profession	Population (person)	Proportion (percentage)
Labor	227	73.23
Others	83	26.67
Total	310	100

The KMO for verifying the fit of the sample is .853 and the significance value of Bartlett's sphere test is .000. It shows the size for the sample is very

good. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are all above .771, showing desirable internal consistency and credibility of the factorial scal.

**Table-2:** Reliability Analysis of Measurement Variables

Concept	Variable	Item	Cronbach's	Alpha
Transnational Belonging	Cultural (originality) belonging	3	.853	.901
	Cultural (entertainment) belonging	3	.771	

### Socio-demographic Characteristics of Bangladeshi Migrants

It was examined the socio-demographic characteristics of Bangladeshi migrants and the

statistical significance of the intersection frequency (or crossing ratio) among general characteristics of social network and transnational belonging. In this study, only statistically significant results are presented ( $p < .05$ ). In addition, the results describe

the social network and transnational belonging according to the socio-demographic of Bangladeshi migrants in Korea.

The socio-demographic characteristics of Bangladeshi migrants in Korea is as table 9. The total participants of this study is 310. Most of them are 20-40 years old. 140 migrants are below the 30-year proportion of 45.2% and 140 migrants are in the 30-39 proportion of 45.2% of the total migrants.

According to the living period of migrants in Korea, the highest number is less than 3 years, that is 141 migrants, a proportion of 45.5% of the total participants since most of the participants are labor and they have to leave Korea after contact period of 4 years 10 months. Among others 73 migrants are in 3-5 years' proportion of 23.5% and 96 migrants are more than 5 years' proportion of 31.0% of the total participants.

**Table-3:** Socio-demographic Characteristics of Migrants (N = 310)

Division	Content	Frequency	Ratio
Age	Less than 30	140	45.2
	30-39	140	45.2
	More than 39	140	9.6
Duration in Korea	Less than 3 years	141	45.5
	3-4 years	73	23.5
	More than 4 years	96	31.0
Gender	Male	301	97.1
	Female	09	2.9
Marital Status	Married	160	51.6
	Unmarried	150	48.4
Religion	Islam	286	92.3
	Hinduism	24	7.7
Education	Below HSC	75	24.2
	HSC pass	87	28.1
	Bachelor pass	87	28.1
	Masters pass	61	19.7
Present occupation	Labor	227	73.2
	Others	83	26.8
Visa Status	E9 (labor)	219	70.6
	Others	91	29.4
Occupation in Bangladesh	Private job	77	24.8
	Student	106	34.2
	Businessman	78	25.2
	Others	49	15.8
Reason of migration	Economic	227	73.2
	Others	83	26.8
Living area	Capital	179	57.74
	Others	131	42.26

According to gender, 301 migrants that is 97.1% of the total participants are men and 9 migrants that is 2.9% of the total participants are women. Generally Bangladeshi females were not allowed to migrate alone abroad because of local culture. It was the cause of losing honor in the eyes of society (Lee & Hafiz, 2014).

The number of married and unmarried migrants are almost the same. 160 migrants are the married proportion of 51.6% and 150 migrants are the unmarried proportion of 48.4% of the total participants.

Bangladesh is a mixed ethnic country but most of the people are Muslim that is 88% of the total population and the second highest is Hindu 8%. In this study, Muslim comprised 286 migrants, which is 92.3% of the total participants and Hindu are 24 migrants, made up 7.7% of the total participants.

Characteristics of Cultural Belonging of Bangladesh Migrants in Korea

In this study, I analyze transnational cultural belongings. A total of 06 items are used for the 5 points scale (1~5 points). Table shows the results of transnational belonging of Bangladeshi migrants in Korea.

**Table-4:** Analysis of Transnational Cultural Belonging (N = 310)

Measured Items	Total	Average	SD
Cultural (originality) Belonging	Language	4.78	.445
	Food	4.78	.428
	Dress	4.62	.583
Total		4.73	.431
Cultural (entertainment) Belonging	Television	4.29	.920
	Newspaper	4.24	.980
	Song	4.25	1.013
Total		4.26	.805

The overall average of transnational cultural (originality) belonging is 4.73( $\pm 0.431$ ), cultural (entertainment) belonging is 4.26( $\pm 0.805$ ). Among transnational cultural (originality) belonging of Bangladeshi migrants all components show high average as follows: talking in native language ‘Bangla’ 4.78( $\pm 0.445$ ), eating traditional food 4.78( $\pm 0.428$ ) and wearing traditional dress 4.62( $\pm 0.583$ ).

Among transnational cultural (entertainment) belonging of Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea also reflects comparatively higher average as follows: watching Bangladeshi television 4.29( $\pm 0.920$ ), reading Bangla newspaper 4.24( $\pm 0.980$ ) and singing traditional song 4.25( $\pm 1.013$ ).

### Discussion and Conclusion

Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea gave strong transnational cultural belonging at homeland. Transnational cultural belonging of migrants is strong ‘migrants have very strong feelings and connection to their homeland’ (Glorius & Friedrich, 2006). Transnational cultural (originality) and cultural (entertainment) belonging to Bangladeshi migrants is strong 4.73 and 4.26. But cultural (originality) is little more than cultural (entertainment) belonging. It supports the general concept of transnational cultural belonging of migrants. Migrants preserve their ethnic identity through various cultural belongings (Orozco at al., 2005). Talking in native language ‘Bangla’ and eating Bangladeshi food is higher of transnational cultural (originality) belonging of Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea ‘food expresses their strong connections with home, and signifies their ethnic identity’ (Vallianatos, & Raine, 2008). Watching Bangladeshi television is higher among transnational cultural (entertainment) belonging of Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea.

It shows strong transnational belonging to homeland of Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea. The results support the studies of Bangladeshi migrants in western countries as strong transnational belonging at homeland. Belonging to one’s homeland is common and universal for human beings (Hafiz, 2022).

Transnational cultural belongings to the homeland of Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea is the strength of attachment and composition. The different results of transnational cultural belonging depends on the degree and configuration of belonging. Culture is feeling of belonging to a person’s self-conception and self-perception that is related to homeland. It refers to cultural expressions, traditions and habits as well as to the cultural practices and makes emotional to their homeland from abroad. People internalize the original culture through their beliefs, values, norms, and social practices that is the aspect of being novel and distinguishable. Entertainment is a form of activity and the experience of being entertained comes strongly associated with fun, pleasure and delight.

This study has limitations in generalizing migrants. Since laborers are the majority of Bangladeshi migrants in South Korea and set as the target group of this study, it does not show the overall situation of migrants in South Korea. In addition, the differences of religious and gender groups are so high that they are not statistically significant in analyzing the differences of transnational belonging. As mentioned, transnational belonging of migrants can vary according to various socio-demographical characteristics, so subsequent studies are necessary to compare the transnational belonging of various migrant groups through sampling based on socio-demographic factors.

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