Living together as a mixed couple in France: the analysis of intercultural interactions from view of the life path and conjugal relationships

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to validate some epistemological and analytical perspectives in the study of intercultural interactions[2]. In this perspective, this paper employs an empirical research carried out during my research from 2016 to 2018, titled "Domestic unfairness in mixed couples"[3], which examines how Japanese migrant women share housework and parenting with their non-Japanese partner in France and how they justify it. The in-depth interviews were conducted with Japanese migrant women, in order to understand how these interviewees interact with values of the Other in France, especially in the process of both their migration and the integration into a mixed couple. Most importantly, through the intercultural interactions in a mixed couple, this paper analyzes the construction and reconstruction of their gender values relating to the conjugal and family relations.

This article is divided into four sections. Firstly, in regard to theoretical background, some analytical concepts will be explained in order to apply them to studies on intercultural interactions in mixed couples. These concepts also lead to a better understanding of my interviewees' characteristics which are characterized by their migration and the conjugal mixedness[4]. The second section focuses on the problematic and research target of this paper. In the third section, the analytical concepts introduced in the first section will be applied to my empirical research. Lastly, I will propose epistemological and analytical perspectives for the further comprehension in the study of intercultural interactions.

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[3] Takeda, Kanako. "Injustice ménagère dans le couple mixte : à travers les récits de femmes migrantes japonaises à Lyon et à Paris." Master thesis, ENS de Lyon, Dir. Emmanuelle Santelli, 2018.

[4] The term of the "conjugal mixedness" is particularly cited from the study of Beate Collet (2017).

Theoretical background

In this first part, three important key concepts are presented for the analysis of intercultural interactions in mixed couples, regarding to characteristics of my research target: the primary and secondary socialization, the women's migration and the conjugal mixedness.

Secondary Socialization and Matrimonial Life

My research target population is migrant women raised in Japan, who migrated based on their voluntary decisions (*cf.* De Gourcy 2005), specifically in regard to their study, work and integration into a couple. Conversely, they did not relocate for objective needs such as political or economic necessity or through family reunification. They spent their childhood in their mother country and migrated to other host countries in their adulthood by themselves or as a result of their new household formation. That is why the first analytical concept, the primary and secondary socialization, presented by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1966 [2012] gives us some clues to understand how their geographical and social interruption from their childhood influences the construction of their values in present time. Burger and Luckmann explain that primary socialization functions as a period of acquiring the assigned roles and attitudes during our childhood, especially through experiences in our family and school. Secondary socialization allows us to apply and adapt these acquired roles and attitudes through, for example, our work experiences, higher education and matrimonial life. The important point is these two periods of socialization are not clearly divided, and the primary socialization is conserved and re-actualized by situations during the secondary socialization. This theory of socialization serves the analysis of Japanese migrant women's situations, by considering a geographical and social interruption between their primary and secondary socialization. Hence, they spent the primary socialization in Japan where they weakly or strongly acquired gender values commonly shared in Japan, but after their migration, they also learn gender values widely shared in France. Several quantitative and qualitative studies show that Japanese women go through unfair circumstances because of their gender, for instance, in regard to the withdrawal from work after giving birth (Maruani; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare), the high rate of part-time jobs (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, *op. cit.*), and the overburden of housework in a couple (Nakamura and Akiyoshi). Moreover, these results are more important in Japanese situations than in the French ones. Thus, the question is how the women being studied conserve or modify their gender values acquired in Japan when they confront others' gender values in France.

As Berger and Kellner (1993 [1964]) emphasize in their analysis of marriage, a matrimonial life contributes to constructing another referential world during this secondary socialization. In their analysis, a spouse is qualified as "significant other par excellence" which brings the other spouse into socialization, by contacting each other's values intimately. François de Singly (2014) explains this process in the following passage: by the conjugal communications, "each partner transforms their criteria of judgment, aligning him- or herself with the way their loved one sees the world" (325, translated by the author) and "the self is replaced by the *conjugal self* (*Moi conjugal*), another identity, another subjective world, elaborated by the conjugal conversation" (326, translated by the author). Nonetheless, the past is not vanished in the process of secondary socialization. He asserts that "on the one hand, [the past] is validated by the conjugal conversation, and on the other hand, it remains in the personal identity." (332, translated by the author)

In summary, the conjugal relationship plays an essential role in the process of our secondary socialization, by influencing the transformation of values acquired during our childhood. However, some values acquired during our first socialization might keep influencing our ideologies and identities.

Women's Migration and Japanese Women

To comprehend more the characteristics of my research target, the second analytical concept is crucial: the "women's migration". In the academic area, women's migration has not attracted attention for a long time even if women have constituted a large part of migrants in the world. In other words, women have been considered as "attached" to the male migrants, on the basis of their lack of autonomy in this displacement. In the 1970s, sociologists in France started to examine social contributions of women's migration (Miranda et al.). In these studies, women's migration is not only analyzed as a simple geographical displacement, but also as a social displacement involving the renegotiation of gender relationships between different societies having various gender norms and values (Catarino and Morokvasic; Cossée et al.; C. Sakai; J. Sakai).

Nowadays in France, the presence of migrant women is, furthermore, remarkable both in terms of their number and their representation. A research result of Ined (The French Institute for Demographic Studies) highlights the fact that women constitute the major proportion of migrants in France (Beauchemin et al.). Most importantly, the increase in the number of migrant women is due to their autonomous movement for work and study, rather than to objective and material facts such as political and economic needs or family reunification (*ibid.*).

Besides, the figure of Japanese women's migration also has remarkable meanings in France in terms of gender representation. In 2016, more Japanese women (26,119 women, 63%) were living in France than Japanese men (15,522 men, 37%). About

1,7 times more women (16,576 women) have arrived in France as primo arrivals staying there for more than 3 months (holders of a long-stay visa valid as a residence permit) than those coming for family reunification (9,543 women). Above all, among primo arrivals, motivation for studies, teaching or research was the most important (about 38%) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Policy Division).

"Conjugal Mixedness" and Power Balance in Couple

Finally, the third analytical concept, the "conjugal mixedness", allows us to understand the power balance constructed in mixed couples. A mixed couple is differentiated from a "couple in general" not only because of different cultural backgrounds of its partners. But also because, as I explained earlier, one partner goes through the migration, hence the geographical and social displacement. Gabrielle Varro (2003), specializing in sociology of mixedness, points out two possible social reactions to the conjugal mixedness: this concept represents the willingness to integrate the Other. On the other hand, it also reflects the imperative distinction between "us" and "not us". This distinction is produced by characteristics and attributes that each partner owns, for example their cultural, ethnic, geographical, religious and linguistic background. Additionally, other social characteristics, like gender, nationality, age, original social background, occupation, *etc*. cannot be ignored either (Filhon and Varro; Riaño et al.; Santelli and Collet).

Beate Collet (2017), specializing in sociology of conjugal mixedness, synthesizes empirical research on this topic and points out that these social characteristics are incorporated into a hierarchy, because of their social value and positions differentiated in their country of residence. For this reason, they also constitute an asymmetrical power balance in a mixed couple. The conjugal mixedness is thus "in relation to the social order (norms), but we must also consider its intersectionality that brings into play 'race', class and gender." (*ibid.*,149.)

From this perspective, the transmission and appreciation of the Other's values and cultures cannot be symmetrical between spouses, because the relationships between them and the relationship of a spouse to his or her country of residence are a priori asymmetrical. As François de Singly (*op. cit.*) also points out, each cultural background and the conjugal power relation can affect their way of embracing values of the other spouse.

Problematic and method

Problematic

Overall, my research target population experienced a migration which involves a geographical and social interruption between their primary and secondary socialization, and as a result, the establishment of a couple with their non-Japanese partner. Their migration might also lead some changes in gender values by socializing them in the new environment of their host society. In order to understand intercultural interactions in mixed couples, this paper will take into consideration the following questions.

The first question is how a way of reconstruction of values among the women being studied is affected by the integration into a mixed couple in France, by taking account of the important role of a spouse in this process. This paper will focus on some changes of consciousness that the interviewees encountered during their migratory path, especially before and after the integration into a mixed couple. Secondly, I will extend my analysis on how Japanese migrant women revise and modify their gender values through their matrimonial interactions with a non-Japanese partner raised in France (so-called French partner below). And on how those interactions would lead the Japanese migrant women to reinterpret their experiences. The last question concerns how the situation of "migrants" influences the intercultural interactions in mixed couples. This paper will pay attention to the relation between their country of residence and the power balance within the mixed couple.

Research Target and Method

This article makes use of biographical interviews conducted in Lyon and Paris in France with 15 Japanese women during my research from 2016 to 2018. To be eligible for this study, these women were selected according to their common characteristics described below.

Firstly, all the selected women were born and raised in Japan. This condition allows us to understand the impact of their primary socialization on their perception of current situations. Likewise, their French partner was also raised in France during his childhood. Secondly, they migrated to France without any political, economic or family reunification reasons. In other words, they came to France for voluntary reasons such as their study, work and integration into a couple. Third, all the selected women are currently in a transnational mixed couple (so-called mixed couple) and live together with their French partners. Finally, they all maintain regular employment (part-time or full-time) or any other form of full-time work in France. This condition is applied in order to determine their certain social and professional independency.

The biographical method, applied in this article, aims to understand the subjective interpretation of the past and the current situation by the interviewees, from the point of view of their life paths. The narrative histories of their life are in fact constructed with selected life events which are revalued depending on their current situations (*cf.* Bourdieu 1986; Demazière 2007). Therefore, the biographical interviews allow us to

find out how these interviewees (re)construct values in their current life in France, based on their experiences and those subjective and personal interpretations. Their life stories are partially quoted under a pseudonym (see Appendix - Profiles of interviewees).

Analysis

Intermittent Evolution in Intercultural Interactions

The biographical narratives of the interviewees reveal an uncertainty and the instability of their establishment in France, especially for those who came to France by themselves out of the context of integration into a couple. In my research cases, there are at least 7 different paths preceding their establishment[5] in France. Some

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[5] I employ the term "establishment", but in the sense of installation with a long-term project. This can always be one of their settlement places during their migratory history (cf. De Gourcy, *op. cit.*).

women came to France to study with the intention of returning to Japan for their career; other women came to France after their employment(s) in Japan to enjoy French life for a limited time; others go back and forth between Japan and France for the purpose of searching for their "best" way of living.

Without regard to the presence of their job in France, the interviewees foresee beforehand difficulties to live alone in France on taking into account the inaccessibility of a work permit, the distance with their family, language barrier and unsuccessful job searching. Here is a story of Umi who came to France after 5 years of work experiences in Japan to have a "vacation" from her daily life, and decided to go back to Japan on leaving her temporary job in France: "*To establish my future, I thought that [temporary work in France] was not enough. I was still able to stay in France. But... I finally stayed a year longer than expected thanks to my job that I have found by chance [in France], but it still was not enough to live alone independently. So I thought it was better to work in Japan. If I had a family in France, I could have stayed. But what I could do on my own was limited [in France] because of a lack of skills. So, I faced up to the reality and decided to work [in Japan] taking advantage of French and professional experience.*"

For those women, staying in France before their integration into a couple is often recognized as temporary. And it is often described with positive implications in interviews. For example, some extended her stay because it was "*very fun*" meeting new friends and knowing other cultures; others described their one-year stay in France as "*vacation*"; others value their experiences in a "*country in individualism*" in a positive sense, where people know what they want to do without being sensitive about others' attention. Here we can observe a phenomenon of "residential tourism" introduced by Benson and O'Reilly (2009). Benson and O'Reilly underline some correlation between a tourist destination and a migration destination, and explain that "in some cases the migration destination continues to be socially constructed in terms of holiday and its concomitant meanings." (614) Tourism is in this sense taken advantage of pursuing "the exotic and the other", which are distinguished from daily life and routine. And in their choice of the migration, "Ideals become feasible and attainable lifestyle choices." (*Ibid.*)

However, these Japanese women were still aware of difficulties, or even the impossibility of settling down in France by themselves. So that the coexistence of the good impressions of their temporary stay in France and the impossibility of remaining there leave great or modest influences in their lives on having come back to Japan. Some women shared their unpleasant experiences or sentiments in the Japanese society after the short stay in France. Nagisa promised her parents, before two years of study in France, to return to Japan and seek employment there. However, for two years of her employment in Japan, she felt that the fact of having lived in France annoyed her colleagues, because her way of working was different from other colleagues'. The same kind of unpleasant feeling toward people around is also observed in the other interviewees' cases. Momo affirms that: "*When I came back*

after three months' study in foreign country, I couldn't talk to people [in Japan]. I went to look around in different places [in a foreign country] and then discovered that there are various people living in the world. When I came back to school after having earned money for tuition fee, some other college students looked like childish to me, so I couldn't make friends (laugh)." Through the experiences abroad, they re-evaluate their previous life in Japan in comparison to life, people and atmosphere they have faced there. This gap between themselves and people around in Japan has not been identified, or even has not existed before their journey abroad.

In this context, meeting their future partner was a significant factor allowing them to stay in France. The integration into a couple led to their settlement in France and the relocation of their life there. The attitude of interviewees toward accepting French ideologies and philosophies had a great impact on their daily life, as they began to construct their conjugal and familial projects in the long term in France. They "needed" to combine values and cultures acquired in the Japanese society with the ones leaned in France, depending on needs in their daily life. In my research cases, they adopted the "French way" of thinking, described by the interviewees themselves, especially in terms of reconciling work and family life. Some women started complying with their coworkers' work styles, described as going back home early without regard to their work left; others absolutely wanted to keep working even after giving birth, because, according to them, it is considered as normal in the French society. In addition, this newly acquired "French way" of thinking also affected their domestic life: some think that it is normal for French husbands to let their wives keep working even after marriage or child birth, and agree to share housework to enable it. On the other hand, Japanese values and customs are positively maintained in symbolic and cultural dimensions, such as in daily meals, transmission of the Japanese language, contact with Japanese people through Japanese communities, or friends and family. Furthermore, original and learned values interoperate in some situations, especially when the latter concerns family strategies. For instance, the choice of children's name is carefully considered in order to allow both Japanese and French people to pronounce it easily.

Consequently, we have to separate the analysis of single migrants and migrants in couples when we study their intercultural interactions. In the case of single migrants, their stay in France is especially characterized by temporality and lack of long-term projects there. So their perception of French life is often positive and it could provide the residential tourism effect mentioned above. In the case of migrants in a couple, their stay in France gives rise to strategic consideration of the way in which their couple, family and themselves survive. More they accept the ways of thinking shared in the country of their residence, more their lives do not have conflicts with others. Instead, values and customs acquired in Japan are conserved by their "cultural bricolage", initially proposed by Mathieu (2007) as "religious bricolage", which represents the deliberate maintenance by carrying out cultural practices in daily life and at critical moments.

Thus, to answer the first question on how a way of reconstruction of values among the interviewees is affected by their integration into a mixed couple in France, the intention to learn about cultures and values shared in France is not in advance associated with the migration of the interviewees. It evolves throughout their migratory paths and their conjugal and family integration. However, this evolution is not linear, but activated, de- and reactivated at moments and needs, as they experience the latter.

Geographical Imaginaries in Conjugal Interactions

In the life in France, the interviewees are surrounded by many possible "significant others" in their workplace or outside of work. As I already mentioned above, some women learned how to keep work and family-life balance from their coworkers, or an option of keeping their job after giving birth. However, the presence of their French spouse in daily life affected in particular their gender relationship and values in a couple and family.

Firstly, we see the cases showing how some Japanese women believe more than before they can establish an egalitarian conjugal relationship, for the reason of the egalitarian "nature" of their partners. In this regard, they especially accent the participation of their partners in domestic work, child-rearing and family relationships, no matter how much the proportion is. In fact, the interviewees also answered questionnaires about the share proportion of their housework and child rearing tasks with their partner. Although the housework was in the majority of cases mostly performed by the wife, the perception of the matter differs depending on individuals[6]. For example, even if her partner performs and performed much less housework than she does now as formerly, Natsu who has worked full time with two preschool children told her gratitude to her partner: "*French men are cooperative. Even in the evening and at night, women do not take care of their children alone. I took on more of these tasks during my maternal and parental leave, but even then he continued to help me*." In their narratives, "French men" were mostly represented by their spouse. They, as their spouse, were considered as "naturally" cooperative and attentive to their family as part of the educational and family contexts in which they have raised. These positive images about the gender equality in France could especially be established as representation, but not necessarily in the objective reality in terms of the sharing of the housework and parenting.

Secondly, the interviewees did not in advance have egalitarian expectations toward "French men", but rather built it after their encounter with "French men" in their daily lives, and also in comparison with the Japanese people or society. The

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[6] See more detail in my thesis (Takeda, *op. cit.*).

cooperative behaviors of "French men" are considered by the interviewees as essential for women to be successful at both work and family lives. In contrast to that, "Japanese men" or Japanese society would discourage women from working after marriage and pregnancy. For example, Kaede whose priority is child rearing but who continues working in full time with two children in primary school, described the imaginary comparison between French and Japanese life: "*I did not have any ideals about my future marriage. But, by staying in Japan, I knew I could not work. I cannot be sure of that, of course. But if I had children [in Japan], I would work part-time. On this point, I am really happy to have come to France. I am relieved that my life is not like the one I would have had if I stayed in Japan (laughs).*" To some extent, they re-evaluated their situations in comparison with Japanese women's positions that they have observed, or through the situations of their relatives.

To the second question on how Japanese migrant women revise and modify their gender values through their conjugal interactions, the Other's gender values are utilized to reinterpret their experiences. Although, they also bring about some realization of their unexpected dispositions and aspirations for the present and future.

Emotional Work and Reflexivity

To the last question, how the situation of "migrants" influences intercultural interactions, we have to take into consideration their way of accepting values learned in France. Because the latter could also rely on their social positions in the host society.

To start with, some interviewees' stories described emotional work[7] they have carried out to maintain a good conjugal relationship with their partner. First of all, we have to understand that Japanese migrant spouses are often socially in the state of dependent on their partner: mostly, their residence permit is due to the conjugal and family relationship in France instead of having their own work permit. Maintaining a good conjugal relationship is consequently crucial for their citizenship and sheltered life in the host country. Yuki moved to France to live with her French husband, but working in France is very difficult for her. She tried to talk about it with her husband, but at the same time, she has to control herself in order to maintain a good relationship with her partner: "*I was psychologically stressed because of the pressure of my work, and so I talked too much about it to my partner. He told me I could talk about it until I relieve [my stress]. But I have to be careful that my work doesn't interfere too much with our relationship.*" Some women declared that they do not have a close personal relationship in France except for their partner's. Their partner is, as a result, nearly a

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[7] A phenomenon of "emotional work" is initially described by Hochschild and Machung (2012) as the wife's efforts to regulate their emotions for their own well-being in the interaction with her family and entourage.

rare person whom they count on. Their emotional work also represents their state of solitude, in which they do not have enough support or people to rely on for overcoming difficulties. It is well described in a narrative of Arare whose spouse is in a state of depression and who resolves problems in matrimonial and family life on her own: "*I'm telling you about it now, but I think other people feel depressed when I talk to them about sad things, instead of happy things. If that is the case, it is best not to talk about it. I resolve that on my own. For example, I cry or scream alone (laughs). Ah, besides, I listen to CDs I brought from Japan (laughs). At an extremely high volume.*" The consciousness of their fragile social position can also reinforce their emotional work to resolve problems on their own for the couple's sake, in order not to be left behind in the host country.

Secondly, for many of the interviewees, the emotional work is also obliged to do as a "foreigner" who is part of French society. In other words, they adapted their way of thinking in becoming conscious of the fact that they are "foreigners" in France. It is interesting to note that they explained differences in behavior between two partners by cultural aspects, rather than by other aspects such as gender, social background or educational contexts. This short interview quote with Nagisa whose partner bought a house without consulting her, represents it: "*He bought this house in believing 100% that I would agree! If it were in Japan, it would be unbelievable.*" The conflict of values with their French partner is often interpreted as a result of cultural differences, which leads to women's reflexivity[8] about their behavior as a minority in France. In admitting a virtue about Japanese "*A-Un no Kokyu*", which means people who can do the mutual understanding without words and instant explanations, Umi also learned how to behave in a couple in France: "*The Japanese don't say things directly, they keep quiet. But, like that, I sometimes let my frustration explode all of a sudden. And I learned that you have to say it little by little [to your partner]. When I feel bad, I say so. That way, we can have a discussion with him.*" All in all, the way of adopting the Other's values may be contextualized by power balances built between the two partners within a mixed couple, in relation to their society of residence.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the value of intercultural interactions is diversified depending on life path and the actual situations of each individual, as it separates the analysis of single migrants and migrants in a couple. The intercultural interactions have more or less significant impact on life strategies of individuals depending on

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[8] Reflexivity in the modernity is well explained in Giddens (1995), as the revision of practice in the social life by individuals.

their state of residence in a country. In addition, we have to take account of their current status and situations in their host country either, in order to understand possible motivations or discouragements in the process of intercultural interactions. In my research cases, Japanese migrate women in mixed couples adapt their attitude toward accepting values learned in France according to their profits and needs for themselves, but also their conjugal and family ones. However, this attitude also depends on the social and civil position of a migrant woman to her host country, resulting in the asymmetrical power balance with their partner as well.

As conclusion, this article proposes some epistemological and analytical perspectives for the research on intercultural interactions. Based on the consideration described above, it is crucial to analyze the life path of the population being studied which would make diverse the value of intercultural interactions at the place where these interactions occur. Besides, their relationship to the place where they experience the Other's values depends on their own cultural and social characteristics, as well as their social position in the place. Thus, we need to examine this relationship by utilizing the intersectional analysis.

Appendix– Profiles of the interviewees

Table 1: Age, place of residence, duration of marriage/PACS, place of meeting with partner, number of children, occupation

Name	Age	Living at	Marriage/pacs (years)	Meeting with partner in	Children Number (age)	Occupation JP = Japanese company
Haru	45	Lyon	18	France	3 (15, 12, 5)	Regular employment in full-time(JP)
Natsu	41	Lyon	8	Japan	1 (9)	Regular employment in full-time(JP)
Sakura	47	Lyon	9	Japan	2 (11, 6)	Public service worker (JP)
Tsukushi	43	Lyon	11	France	2 (9, 5)	Employee & enterpreneur
Kaede	42	Lyon	11	France	2 (10, 6)	Regular employment in part-time (JP)
Aoi	43	Lyon	15	Étranger	2 (11, 9)	Full-time employment
Wakaba	44	Paris	17	France	1 (10)	Enterpreneur
Arare	43	Paris	14	France	1 (10)	Enterpreneur
Aki	40	Lyon	5	Japan	0	Regular employment in full-time(JP)
Umi	59	Lyon	17	France	0	Enterpreneur
Shiori	48	Lyon	8	Japan	0	Regular employment in full-time(JP)
Nagisa	36	Lyon	2	Étranger	0	Regular employment in part-time
Midori	32	Paris	1	France	0	Regular employment in part-time (JP)
Yuki	29	Paris	2	France	0	Regular employment in full-time(JP)
Momo	36	Paris	0.5	France	0	Employee & enterpreneur

Table 2: Income, occupational status, age difference with partner

Name	Income superiority	Household income	Occupational status (Woman)	Occupational status (Man)	Age difference (Partner +/-)
Aoi	Sup.	7 000 €	Employee	Self-Employed	1
Wakaba	Sup.	3 800 €	Self-Employed	Self-Employed	6
Arare	Sup.	3 000 €	Self-Employed	Self-Employed	8
Nagisa	Sup.	1 000 €	Employee	Unemployed	-4
Yuki	Sup.	1 700 €	Employee	Unemployed	-2
Momo	Same	1 000 €	Entrepreneur & Employee	Self-Employed	1
Tsukushi	Inf.	5 000 €	Entrepreneur & Employee	Self-Employed	0
Aki	Inf.	4 000 €	Employee	Employee (Managerial position)	-7
Midori	Inf.	3 000 €	Employee	Self-Employed	22
Sakura	Inf.	7 000 €	Employee	Self-Employed	1
Kaede	Inf.	4 000 €	Employee	Employee	2
Haru	Inf.	10 000 €	Employee	Employee	0
Umi	Inf.	6 200 €	Self-Employed	Employee	-2
Natsu	No answer		Employee	Employee	No answer
Shiori	No answer		Employee	Employee	-13

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