

Japanese Policies and Realities

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I will divide my talk into four parts. Firstly, I will talk about the revival of the discussion on immigration policy; second, the policy and history of immigration; third, the general situation regarding immigrants; fourth, the effect of immigration on human security.

As regards the first topic on the revival of the discussion on immigration policy in Japan, during the economic stagnation lasting more than ten years, the discussion on immigration had calmed down and there was not a hot debate. However two shocking reports shook Japanese society and we are now seeing a revival of the discussion on immigration policies.

The first report was made by the Institute of Social Security and Population Problems, which is attached to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor. The Institute's population estimates were released in 1997 and it was estimated that Japan's population would decline from 2007 and would drop to about one half around 2050. Furthermore, if we compare those 65 and older against those in productive years of 15-64, the ratio will increase up to 1:2. The second shock came from the United Nations Population Division in its famous report on replacement migration. The report was released in 2000 and said that the Japanese population will peak in 2005, from when it will decrease drastically. Therefore, to replace this population decrease--to maintain the population scale of 2005--we would have to import 300,000 migrants every year from foreign countries. And if we wanted to keep the size of the productive-age population steady, we would have to import 600,000 migrants each year into Japan. These two reports added fuel to general discussion in Japan as to whether we should import workers; how to formulate immigration policy and so on, turning it into a hot topic.

I would now like to move on to the second part of my talk: the policy and history of immigration. In spite of the fact that the Japanese economy had not yet recovered from the recession caused by the oil crisis of the early 1970s, there was an unexpected influx of foreigners between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. This was the start of the period of "newcomers", who fell into four categories. First were women working in the sex and entertainment industries in the late 1970s. The largest group in this category were Filipinas, later followed by women from Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Entertainment visas covering theatrical and musical performances and other forms of show business enabled Filipinas and others to enter the country. The second group consisted of refugees from the three Indo-Chinese countries of Vietnam,

Cambodia, and Laos, whose influx triggered the signing of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Acceptance of refugees began in the late 1970s in response to international demand, and reached its peak in the 1980s. The number of acceptable refugees totaled just over 10,000 people, and the influx ceased after the introduction of screening in 1987. It should be noted that with the exception of the Indo-Chinese refugees, the number of political refugees accepted in Japan has been negligible. This morning we heard about the accurate number of refugees from Professor Yamanaka. The third type of newcomers were the second- and third-generation returnees from China. Many Japanese who went to or were born in Manchuria when it was a Japanese colony were stranded there after World War II, and approximately 5,000 of them returned to Japan. They brought with them or sent for not only their spouses and children, but also their grandchildren and their families, who are known as the second- and third-generation returnees from China. My estimate is that there are a total of 60,000 such people in Japan who have Chinese citizenship. The fourth category consists of businesspersons from Europe and the United States. This marked the starting point of the “newcomers” to Japan.

What I call the second period of Japanese immigration history was the period of expansion for newcomers from the late 1980s to the collapse of the bubble economy in the early 1990s. This period was marked by an increased demand for various kinds of cheap labor to deal with the labor shortage caused by an economic boom and by an influx of people seeking self-actualization. The primary supply of cheap labor during the period of expansion was foreigners, either working illegally without a work permit, or overstaying their expired visas. The former entered the country as *shuugakusei*, people studying the Japanese language or other subjects in a variety of schools other than institutions of higher education specified in the school education law, or as trainees, or interns. By the collapse of the bubble economy, the number of workers who had overstayed their visas had reached about 300,000. Most low-paid workers were men from the neighboring countries of Korea, China, and the Philippines, and other parts of Asia and from the rest of the world. The second supply of cheap labor in addition to the illegal laborers was Japanese descendents from Latin American countries who began to arrive in Japan in the late 1980s. Alongside the influx of low-paid workers, so-called “self-actualization people” entered Japan during this period of expansion. They were mainly university students and *shuugakusei* who wanted to have new experiences, or widen their outlook or knowledge in a foreign country, such as Japan.

In response to the increasing influx of immigrants the Japanese government proposed an amendment to the Immigration Control Act at the end of the 1989, in accordance with the spirit of the existing act, and it aimed at barring illegal foreign workers from entering Japan. This law

took effect on June 1, 1990. The main change in the new act was the introduction of a system of penalties of up to three years of imprisonment or fines of up to 2 million yen for employers or brokers who knowingly hired illegal workers or secured their employment. Another major characteristic of this act was liberalization of the policy governing the entry and residence of the *Nikkeijin*--the children and grandchildren of Japanese nationals and their spouses overseas. This led to the arrival of many *Nikkeijin* from Latin American countries such as Brazil, who came with the intention of working in Japan. In late 1991, only a year after the enforcement of the revised immigration control act, the Japanese bubble economy collapsed and ushered in a long period of economic recession, which has lasted to this day. Since 1991, the Japanese economy has changed from a labor-shortage economy to a labor-surplus economy. Accordingly, in several parts of Japan, some foreign factory workers have been laid off because of the labor surplus and have been replaced by Japanese. During this stagnation period, the number of illegal workers decreased slightly under the influence of the labor market and the revised immigration control law. In contrast, the influx of Japanese descendants from Latin American countries increased substantially immediately following the collapse of the bubble economy and even today the number is increasing slightly.

Some scholars say that Japan has adopted a backdoor policy for the import of migrant work force, but in my opinion it is not a backdoor policy, but Japan is virtually shutting the door, and the effect is that capital has moved from Japan to China or Southeast Asia, for example, in quest for cheap labor. The Japanese economy is now characterized by deindustrialization, or industrial hollowing-out. This phenomenon again shrank the demand for labor in Japan, and so this is another reason why the transition from a labor-shortage to a labor-surplus economy has appeared in this stagnation period.

After the shock of the two reports mentioned earlier, the Ministry of Justice announced in 2000 a very interesting second basic plan of immigration control. The Japanese government has turned its footing from closure to a more open policy of foreign migration to Japan. The five pillars of this second basic plan are worthy of note. First, the smooth acceptance of the migrant labor force that Japan wants; second, the promotion of the trainee system and the internship system; third, good treatment of foreigners staying in Japan long-term; fourth, the actual and effective management of illegal residents, of which I will talk later; and fifth, the expansion of refugee acceptance.

I will now move on to the third part of my talk: the general situation of immigrants. There are now a total of two million foreigners in Japan, accounting for 1.4 percent of the Japanese population. But among the two million persons, 500,000 are oldcomers, mostly of

which are Koreans. Therefore newcomers total 1,500,000. Of these Chinese represent the most, at 400,000 persons. The Chinese immigrants are very diversified, ranging from the professional management personnel to blue-collar workers and students. We also must not forget the second- and third-generation returnees. Next are the Brazilians, at 250,000 persons. This group is mainly engaged in legal blue-collar work. Lastly there are Koreans, and Filipinos and Filipinas. The conspicuous character of the Koreans is that most of them are legal migrants but a quarter of the Korean newcomers are illegal workers. The Filipinas are prominent because increasingly they are the wives of Japanese men. About five years ago, Filipinas and their future husbands typically met in *o-mise* or sex-related enterprises, in other words as customer and hostess. But now it is more common for Filipinas to be introduced by an already-married Filipina friend to her friend or cousin. Following Filipinas are Peruvians, Thais, and Americans, together accounting for about 50,000 persons. This morning Professor Mushakoji did not speak about the Thai females. Among trafficked females, Thai girls are the most serious victims of international criminal organizations, and their numbers in Japan are rapidly increasing.

Speaking about the population of migrants, illegal migrants have now dropped to 200,000, and they stay in Japan for an average of about five years. There are already many visa overstayers that have been in Japan for up to ten years. NGOs have organized a campaign against the Japanese government's maltreatment of these illegal overstayers, asking for the introduction of special permission of residence in Japan. As a result, those visa overstayers with children of junior high school age or older have been spared "illegal" status. This shows that NGOs are not as weak as we had thought. The most visible human insecurity is that of illegal workers. According to my estimates, of the 900,000 foreign labor force in Japan, professional management and white-collar workers account for about 100,000 persons, and blue-collar workers number about 800,000 persons. The 900,000 foreign workers represent about 1.2 percent of Japanese labor force, which is a very low level for an advanced country.

The final part of my presentation deals with the effect of immigration on human security. Japan has not experienced such a serious problem as in other advanced countries. Why? One reason is that the foreign-to-native population ratio is very low. I also think that local governments, NGO activity, and the bad experience the Japanese had in our relationship with the oldcomer residents in Japan have given good lessons to the people and the government of Japan. Finally, I will talk about criminal offenses. Research, not by the police but by the academics, shows that foreign criminal offenders amount to 1,769 per 100,000. This is more than three times the level of Japanese offenders, which is 525 per 100,000. This appears very high, but the criminal acts are caused above all by international criminal organization based in China or Korea,

who essentially “hit and run.” These international criminal organizations have targeted Japan as a place for crime and this explains why the crime rate among the foreigners in Japan appears so high. But in the case of Brazilians, it is a different story. Brazilians are now experiencing segregation from Japanese society and juvenile dropouts are very prominent, explaining why the juvenile delinquency rate is the highest among the Brazilians in Japan than children in other foreign groups. In my opinion, the Brazilian community is now the most problematic in terms of human insecurity. Among the Chinese in Japan, the crime rate is slightly below the rate among the Japanese, but among the Chinese visa overstayers the crime rate is significantly higher. So, non-Chinese visa overstayers are not as prone to criminal behavior as the Japanese.

Lastly, on the issue of whether Japan should change its immigration policy to open the country to cheap labor, the Japanese industries in the mainstream have moved overseas, and I think this trend is irreversible. Therefore I think that the admission of cheap labor into Japan would only make an underclass stratum in Japanese society.