

SKILLED AND UNSKILLED CHINESE MIGRANTS IN JAPAN

Context and perspectives

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This paper is the result of a number of contributions for conferences and seminars between 2011 and 2012. The analysis developed below does not represent the core of the fieldwork I have been involved in during my study period at the Maison franco-japonaise Research Center (French Research Institute on Japan, in Tokyo). This research project deals more precisely firstly with marriage and migration – involving a series of interviews with Chinese women who arrived in Japan due to arranged marriages – and, secondly, with support associations for women migrants in Japan, collecting biographies of Japanese activists and the staff of NPOs. The fieldwork produced on support associations is part of a Japan-French group research project funded by the French and Japanese national research agencies (the ANR and the JSPS respectively). The project is entitled Local Initiatives against the Exclusion of Foreigners (ILERE): <http://www.initiative-locale-migration.fr/index.html>.

The various contributions I have focused on for this paper provide a much needed broader analysis of the context into which foreigners migrate in Japan today, with an emphasis on the more peripheral areas (where most of the women I have interviewed live) and on the case of Chinese migrants.

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Introduction

During the last three decades, Japan has been one of the main destinations for Chinese migrants and expatriates. In 1980, the Chinese population in Japan was just over 50,000. Thirty years later, according to Immigration Bureau statistics, this number had grown thirteen-fold to 687,156 in 2010. In 2007 the Chinese surpassed the Koreans, who are often able to obtain Japanese citizenship, as the largest group of foreign residents in Japan. This number does not include the few thousand Chinese who have achieved naturalization every year since the 1990s, or the estimated 20,000 undocumented Chinese residents. The Chinese now constitute one third of all foreign residents in Japan.

Chinese residents in Japan can be divided into four main groups according to the way in which they came to Japan: as students, skilled workers directly recruited from China, technical interns, or as spouses of Japanese nationals. The first two groups result from the Japanese government's migration policy towards skilled workers. In Japan a large percentage of Chinese residents entered Japan as students (college or pre-college) and then decided to stay and work in Japan. The policy creates skilled workers, who have also mastered the Japanese language and thus re-socialized in Japan, contributing not only to the Japanese economy, but to civil society as well.

In contrast with this group, "less qualified workers" enter Japan as technical interns and generally contribute to the economy on a short-term basis. The technical intern program accepts foreign "workers" for a period of one year, with an optional extension of two years after completion of a short test. Local authorities rarely attempt to incorporate such categories of short-term residents into local community life. This is particularly visible in rural areas where many Chinese interns work in the farming and fishing sector, clothing industry and small food processing companies. Many Chinese residents in Japan have also arrived through marriage with a Japanese national. Since the mid-1980s, rural authorities and social groups in Japan have tried to attract foreign spouses to the country in order to counter depopulation and to contribute to local workforces and economies.

After the financial crisis following the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy in 2008 and the Great Earthquake in East Japan in 2011, rural areas are apparently losing their appeal for low skilled foreign workers. My

fieldwork also demonstrates the swift decrease in married migrants over the last few years in areas such as the Yamagata Prefecture. Foreign residents, especially Chinese residents, generally conglomerate in Japan's major metropolitan areas, which are also areas with the greatest economic and innovative potential for growth. However, as long as Japan is concerned with the sustainability of more peripheral prefectures as part of its national dynamics, the role of immigration becomes crucial to the future of these regions.

In this paper I propose to focus on two prefectures on the north-east Sea of Japan coast: Niigata and Yamagata, which both bear comparison with other peripheral prefectures. Like most prefectures in the Tōhoku, along the Sea of Japan, on Shikoku Island and Kyūshū Island, Chinese residents represent a larger percentage of foreign residents than the national average and mainly arrived via the technical intern program or via marriage.

I first wish to look at several broad aspects concerning trends in immigration to Japan as well as national context and national policies. The two main immigration related challenges are, firstly, the international and regional context of competition for talent, and secondly, the national context of demographic decline. Political debate and policies have openly focused on the first challenge and since the 1990s have developed measures to attract highly qualified workers. Japan is reluctant however to respond to the second challenge with immigration and very few decision-makers advocate the necessity of compensating for population decrease with migrants, especially in peripheral areas.

In the second part of the paper, I shall focus on the case of Chinese migrants in Japan. A description of the process of skilled immigration will reveal the disparities between metropolitan areas (essentially Tokyo) and peripheral areas. Finally I shall question the sustainability of the modes of channeling immigration to more peripheral areas, through the Technical Intern Training Program and through migration due to marriage.

Part 1

The immigration context

1/ *Trends of migration to Japan*

Among the general trends relating to the number of foreign residents in Japan (*i.e.* foreigners who stay more than 3 months), I would like to focus on two points: the fast increase in the number of Chinese residents since the 1990s and the decrease in the total number of foreign residents since 2008.

Figure 1 illustrates the fast increase of Chinese residents in Japan. The renewal of Chinese migration to Japan started like in many western countries in the 1980s when China started to liberalize the mobility of its population (Pina-Guerassimoff 1997, Xiang 2007).

Migration trends appear different for each main nationality group, depending on their legal and professional status in Japan. After the 2008 crash, the total foreign population started to decline. Numbers of Chinese are still on the increase but at a slower rate than before.¹

If we look more closely at more peripheral areas on the local level, we will note a trend towards reduction much earlier. While the number of foreign residents has decreased since 2009 on the national level, more peripheral areas started experiencing such changes from 2006 onwards, as is the case of the Yamagata Prefecture (figure 2). The upshot of the 2008 financial crises was mainly to consolidate the decrease in activity in these areas.

It is also interesting to look at trends relating to foreign residents' statuses. Residential statuses requiring higher qualifications (engineers, specialists, skilled workers, investors in figure 3) have been less affected by the decrease. Interns, spouses of Japanese nationals and long term residents, who for a large part hold less qualified positions, show a more drastic decrease.

We can see that most highly skilled workers² first entered Japan as students. Hence we may note that the number of foreign students was not affected by the 2008 crisis (figure 4). It is still too early to assess

1. The scope of this paper does not extend to all foreign groups. For analysis of their situation, a large body of literature is dedicated to each group.

2. A definition of "highly skilled" migrant workers in Japan is proposed by Nana OISHI (see bibliography).

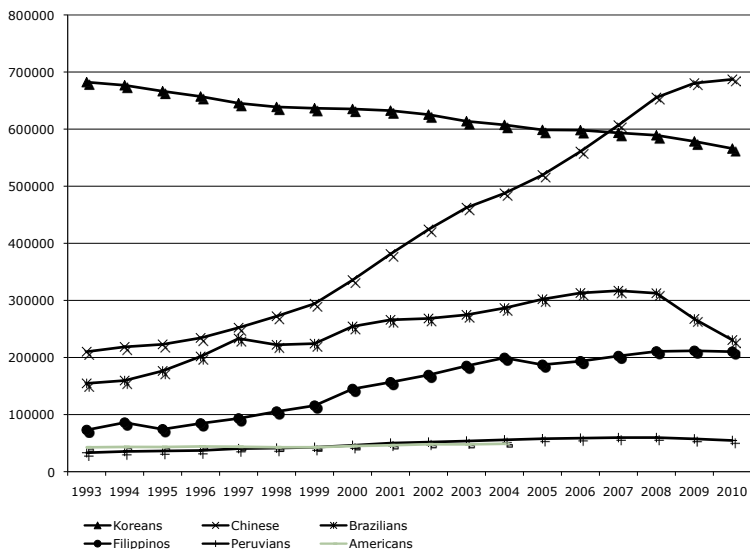


Fig. 1 Evolution of the number of foreign residents in Japan by nationality

Source Immigration Bureau, Immigration Control, Tokyo, various years.

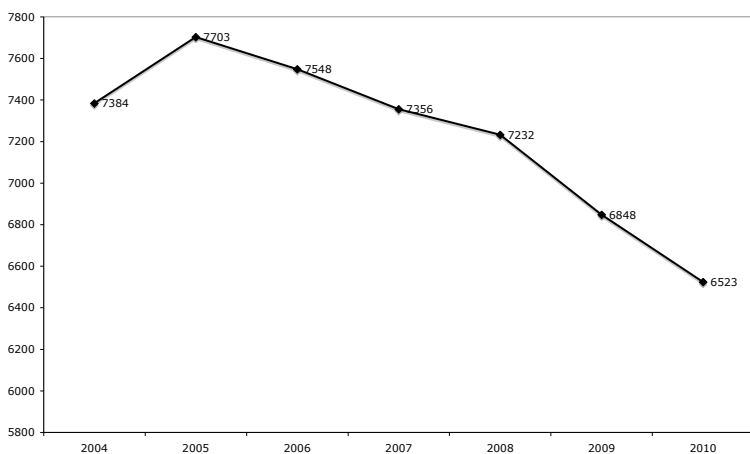


Fig. 2 Evolution of the foreign population in Yamagata Prefecture

Source Yamagata Prefecture, International Exchange and Trade Office: "Yamagata-ken ni okeru kokusaika suishin no hōkōsei", March 2011.

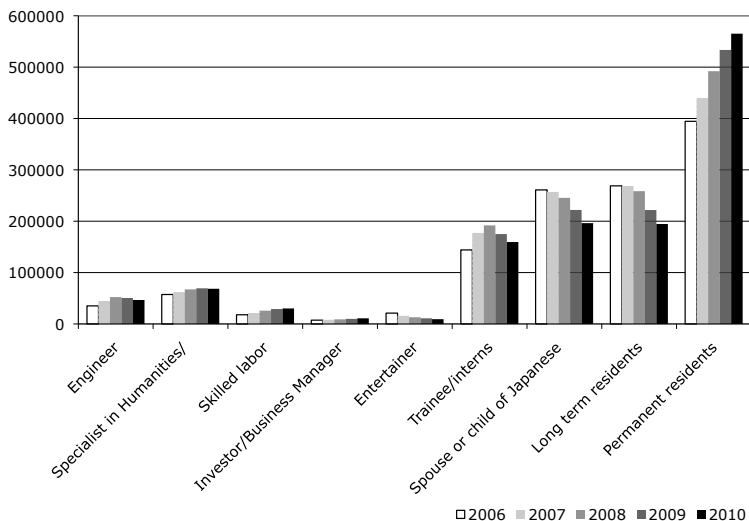


Fig. 3 Evolution of the number of foreign residents by status, 2006-2010

Source Immigration Bureau, Immigration Control, Tokyo, different years.

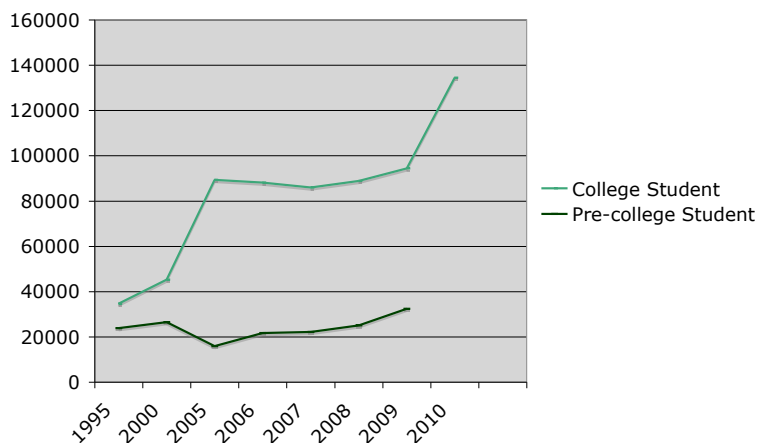


Fig. 4 Evolution of the number of foreign college students in Japan, 1995-2010

Source Immigration Bureau, Immigration Control, Tokyo, 2011.

Remark In the case of students, from 2010 figures onwards also include "pre-college students" (students in language schools or vocational schools) as the two different statuses have been merged into one.

the impact of 3.11 but September saw only a 7.6% decrease in the number of foreign students (a majority in language schools; graduate student numbers have increased). While the number of exchange students decreased by 86%, degree students (the most numerous) increased by 7% (as universities possibly attempted to compensate for an expected decrease in arrivals). However, the numbers of those changing status from student status to employee has clearly decreased, which is worrying from the point of view of maintaining a skilled workforce (this idea will be developed in the second part when looking at Chinese students).

In terms of the impact of March 11, the first statistics from the Bureau of Immigration indicate that the number of foreigners entering Japan has decreased by 24.4%. If we exclude foreigners with a residence permit, *i.e.* the entries for short term stay, the decrease was 31.2%.³ But

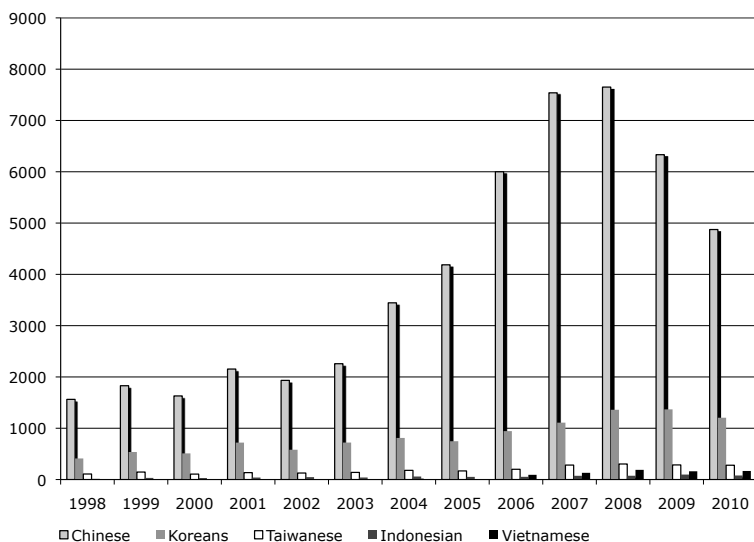


Fig. 5 Evolution of the change of status from student to employee by nationality, 1998-2010

Source Immigration Bureau, Immigration Control, Tokyo, different years.

3. Tourism Center Statistics 観光統計センター, online: <http://www.tsurumoto.com/tourism/2012/01/20117135449244.php>

this short term decrease is to be expected, so it will take another one or two years to assess the real impact of the catastrophe and its economic consequences. In the immediate aftermath of the 2008 crisis, for example, the number of yearly entries decreased by 17%, but increased rapidly the following year. More qualitative research is currently in process looking at the way such disasters may impact migration. Like any difficult period, the earthquake mainly accelerated or confirmed choices that had more or less already been made: to settle in Japan and integrate into society (showing solidarity with the victims of the tsunami presented an opportunity to show proof of settlement), return home or move onto a new destination according to existing networks.⁴

When considering those entering or leaving Japan, the potential draw of the country depends on both the country of origin and the immigrant's status/occupation in Japan. To analyze and accord significance to statistics without qualitative knowledge of these residents is difficult. While on the one hand, it is clear that fewer people have been entering each year (except for students and investors, among other groups), on the other, many are still passing through the permanent residency and naturalization processes.

2/National and regional context: demographic decline and economic recession

Immigration is seen as an issue in Japan for two main reasons. Firstly, it is intricately connected to the debate on demography. Japanese population is the fastest ageing population in the world. In 2009, the proportion of the population over the age of 65 stood at 22.7%. Should Japan maintain a certain level of population, with a balanced division between active and non-active citizens? Should replacement migration become a solution? What is Japan doing to attract new residents, or rather, more precisely, new citizens?

Secondly, pro-immigration arguments highlight the questions of competitiveness and innovation, and thus economic dynamism. The idea is widely shared that the highly skilled labor market has become

⁴. From ongoing fieldwork research by Gracia Liu-Farrer, elements of which were presented at the conference "Migrant Communities in Japan in the Aftermath of the Tohoku Earthquake" conference, Sophia University, Tokyo, 18 Feb. 2012.

increasingly globalized and that the economic future of each country will depend on its ability to attract (much more than to educate) the best talent. It is also said that new migrants have a higher propensity to take risks and launch innovative activities. Failure to develop a highly skilled competitive workforce means innovation and productivity is weakened through outsourcing and off-shoring. Highly skilled migration is considered as an important incentive for economic growth. How attractive is Japan to foreign workers? Can it retain this attraction in the future? What policies are in place to target the most-skilled workers? And how does Japan define its skilled workforce requirements?

Both sides of the debate have naturally been impacted by the recent economic crisis and the impact of the March 11 earthquake.

The Ageing society

According to a press release from the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (国立社会保障・人口問題研究所) issued on January 30th 2012, estimates for Japan's population in 2060 show a decline of 86.74 million people (32.3% over 50 years), while the proportion of people over 65 would reach 39.9%. The total population is expected to contract by 30% in the next 50 years and the active population by almost 50%. If this is the case, how can Japan maintain its social and economic system as it is currently organized?

“As a consequence, it will be necessary for just 1.3 persons of working age to support one person who is 65 years or older. Such a rapid population decline will slow the economic growth rate, make it difficult to sustain government finances and the public pension system, and also make it hard to maintain an economic and social system requiring manpower in such areas as health care and long-term care.”⁵

The Japanese population is ageing very fast. The Japanese population has been ageing faster than in rich Western countries: over a 24 year period, 1970-1994, the proportion of over-65s jumped from 7.1% to 14.1%. The same demographic change took 61 years in Italy,

5. Nippon Keidanren: “An Economy and Society that Responds to the Challenges of a Declining Population,” Oct. 14 2008 (online, consulted 20 April 2012).

85 years in Sweden and 115 years in France.⁶ Furthermore, in the post-war era, rural areas in Japan were also badly affected by an unusually rapid depopulation. The urbanization rate rose from 37% in 1950 to 63% in 1960 (today it is 78%). Japan is also concerned with another demographic trend: a decrease in marriage, especially among men. The proportion of unmarried male over-50s (indelicate referred to as “lifetime bachelors”) increased from below 4% in 1985 to over 15% in 2005. The Greater Tokyo Area is the most concerned by the decrease in marriages, but less urbanized prefectures also show levels of single households higher than the national average.

Another important factor in the demographic issue is that China, the main provider of new residents in Japan will also soon undergo dramatic demographic changes that are sure to have an impact on migration trends. The growing number of single-children will affect Chinese desires to leave the country and stay abroad for a long time.

Competition from Asian countries and beyond

Reference is often made to the context of increased competition within the Asian area. Migration and especially the migration of highly-qualified workers is a crucial element of this competitiveness. In terms of competition for skilled workers, Japan mainly competes with the USA, Canada and Australia and their attractiveness as Anglo-Saxon countries. But to this list we can also add Singapore, and more recently Korea and China.

Japan may appear less aggressive than other countries in the competition for attracting talent. Targets have been set gradually at the political level (for a short review, see Oishi 2012) and a willingness to develop a more active policy was part of the New Growth Strategy under Kan’s government. The ambition, in terms of migration, was to double the flow of people between Japan and the rest of the world. A section of the New Growth Strategy plan was dedicated to growth “driven by pioneering new frontiers” which included the “fostering of global talents and increasing acceptance of highly skilled personnel.” The main targets were to promote the strategic acceptance of foreign students and to attract talents through preferential treatment (Cabinet 2010). The

6. Statistical Handbook of Japan, Statistics Bureau, 2010.

most recent measures implemented in Japan - the point system and the Global 30 – shall be detailed in the following section.

Apart from Korea and China, all Asia-Pacific Area countries actively engaged in attracting skilled workers are English-speaking countries (or in the case of Singapore, both English and Chinese-speaking). Most of these countries have supply-driven migration policies and Singapore's policy is probably the most emblematic of them. Different statuses are defined according to immigrants' levels of qualifications and income (*Employment Pass*, *P Pass* and *Q Pass*) offering a gradation of advantages. Singapore, "the Global Schoolhouse", has also campaigned to sell itself as an academic hub offering the best of Anglo-Saxon education and Asian spirit. Attracting students is clearly part of its wider policy to attract highly qualified workers. For instance a Tuition Grant Scheme was set up to cover foreign students' tertiary education in exchange for a commitment to work for at least 3 years in Singapore after graduation.⁷ Singapore has actively developed a Global City identity, offering interesting conditions to the most qualified.

In terms of education, when it comes to attracting future skilled workers, Japan is handicapped by its language, compared to other countries where English is the national language (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA, Singapore, Hong-Kong) or where a section of tertiary education has been provided in English for a long time (Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia). Japan has to compete with this English-Speaking Asia-Pacific Area. In 2006, the USA welcomed 22 % of all international students, followed by Great Britain (12%), Australia (11%), France and Germany (10% respectively). Then came Asian destinations, whose market share is growing rapidly: China (7%), Japan (5%), Malaysia and Singapore (2% each).⁸ Japan is eager to reach the same share as France or Germany which, like Japan, have no tradition of education in English.

7. See the website of Singapore Ministry of Education: <http://sam11.moe.gov.sg/tass/menu/tg.htm>.

8. Veronica Lasanowski, Line Verbik, *International Student Mobility: Patterns and trends*, accessible on the site of The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education. Consulted on April 10th 2010 on: <http://www.wes.org/educators/pdf/StudentMobility.pdf>.

3/Political measures focusing on highly skilled workers and metropolitan areas

If Japan elects to use immigration to boost demography and the economy, questions must be asked of Japan's appeal to highly-skilled workers, as well as its appeal as a country for immigrants to settle.

In a recent article, Nana Oishi tackles the question of why Japan has failed to increase its numbers of highly qualified workers. For qualified immigrants, Japan already has a number of attractive factors, such as "fast family reunification, permanent residency potential, and no labor market test." Oishi's argument is based on recent studies of successes and failures in policies governing highly skilled migration in European and Anglo-Saxon countries. These policies targeted four main factors: economic conditions, openness of professional markets, universities' ability to attract foreign students, and tolerance (Oishi 2012: 1081).

Likewise, a recent working paper by the OECD pointed out that:

"Active recruitment means more than just facilitating work permits for employers or for aspirant immigrants based on credentials. While highly skilled migrants may be attracted to countries with widely spoken languages and high wages regardless of the obstacles, a country with moderate wages and its own unique language will need to do more than just lower administrative barriers."⁹

While wages in Japan may be attractive, the language, the work environment and employment philosophy (an aspect not developed in the OECD report) are still barriers for students and skilled migrants. Oishi's fieldwork confirms these different aspects. As she underlines, many corporations may be interested in hiring foreign students after their graduation, but many are worried about incorporating them into the workplace due to the language barrier. Very few companies have adopted English as an alternative language at work. Japanese companies are also concerned with employee turnover. Often they invest in the training of new employees in the expectation that they will stay for a long time. Foreign employees however are considered as potentially

9. Working paper online: http://www.oecd.org/document/46/0,3746,en_2649_37415_46676654_1_1_1_37415,00.html (Consulted on April 12th 2012.)

more mobile than Japanese employees (Oishi 2012: 1086-87). Not only is the language a barrier, but also work habits and career opportunities (the glass ceiling). Highly qualified workers tend to move to foreign countries to foster long-term career plans. In Japan, many are disappointed or discouraged by the promotion system. In the case of Chinese skilled workers, the “glass ceiling” factor has been well illustrated by Liu-Farrer’s fieldwork (Liu-Farrer 2011).

In the last few years, two new plans have been launched to attract highly skilled workers further.

Point system

In the Asia-Pacific area, several countries have implemented point systems to attract qualified workers with Canada, New Zealand, and Australia among them (other countries with such a system include the UK). Point systems, or “list of occupations” systems, (Canada, Australia and France) provide clear indications that work force requirements also apply to other sectors beyond those requiring high levels of education. Some occupations open to immigrants do not require a university degree. This is not the case in Japan, where the categories targeted by the point systems are all highly skilled categories: education and research, high level engineering, investment and business management.

While in the two first categories the level of education is an important criterion, it is less important in the third category. Only the third category is open to different profiles and skills not covered by academic qualifications. Thus the third category privileges professional experience and income level. Compared to other point system policies, the Japanese example is based on a narrow definition of “skilled workers” as mainly tertiary education graduates.

The point system is a sign of a shift in Japan’s immigration policy. However caution becomes the operative word when faced with issues incurring some kind of “social burden.” The parents of the highly-skilled residents, for example, are accepted if they live with their children and their stay is limited to three years.

PRESENT SITUATION - foreign skilled residents (skilled working visa)	NEW SPECIAL TREATMENT for highly skilled workers recognized by the point system
Work authorized in a limited panel of positions according to the residential status	Work authorized in a broad range of activities included into three categories: - "education and research" - "highly qualified specialists and engineers" - "business management"
Permanent residency after more than 10 years of residency	Permanent residency after 5 years of continuous activity with the status of highly skilled worker
Work of the dependant possible only with a special permission from the Immigration Bureau and limited to 28 hours a week	Possibility for dependants to work full time in Japan even if their level of qualification does not respond to the actual criteria asked for the different types of working visas
No possibility of being accompanied by parents	Parents of the highly skilled workers or his/her partner can accompany
No possibility of being accompanied by domestic workers except for a very few exceptions	Possibility to bring along domestic workers

Fig. 6 Comparison of the advantages given to highly qualified workers in Japan in the general visa system and in the new point system.

Source Based on information available on the website of the Immigration Bureau of Japan [consulted May 2012]: http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/info/120416_01.html

Global 30 Project/ "300,000 foreign students Plan"

In 2008, the Government of Japan announced the "300,000 Foreign Students Plan," which called to increase the number of foreign students in Japan from the current 140,000 to 300,000 students by 2020.¹⁰ Its aim is to dramatically increase the number of foreign students studying in Japan in the next five years as a means of expanding the pool of highly skilled workers:

10. Guidelines (「留学生30万人計画」骨子の策定について) were published on the website of Monbukagakushou MEXT on July 29th 2008: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/20/07/08080109.htm

“We believe that proactive acceptance of foreign students, who become a major source of high-level human resources, by Japanese institutions of higher education, leads not only to the reinforcement of Japan’s international human resource pool but also builds human networks between Japan and other countries, enhances mutual understanding and fosters greater amicable relationships, and contributes to global stability and world peace [...]

Meanwhile, if we look at the current state of foreign student enrollment in other countries, we see that in the case of Germany, a developed non-English-speaking nation like Japan, foreign students account for 12.3% of all students enrolled in an institution of higher education. In France, foreign students account for 11.9% of all students in an institution of higher education. (Meanwhile, foreign students in an English-speaking nation account for, in the case of the UK, 25.1% of all students in higher education, and likewise 26.2% in Australia.)

If Japanese institutions of higher education are to secure a level of foreign student enrollment similar to that of other developed nations, there is a need to increase the percentage of foreign students from the current 3 percent-plus to a percentage close to that of Germany or France, or about 10%. (In other words, 10% of 3 million students, which is roughly equal to 300,000.)” (Interview with the officer in charge of the plan at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.¹¹)

Promoting the transition from school to work, already a concern in the past, is part of the Global 30 Project. Several recruitment companies have created job fairs dedicated to foreign students in Japan on the same model as the *setsumeikai*, the existing company recruitment events for Japanese students. The recruitment and career management agency Disco, for example, organizes special recruitment forums dedicated to foreign students¹²: *Gaikokujin Ryūgakusei no tame no Career Forum*.

11. Interview on the governmental official website called “Study in Japan” to promote the studying in Japan (gathers all the information needed to study in Japan): <http://www.studyjapan.go.jp/en/toj/toj09e.html>

12. See the company website and the fair notice on http://www.disc.co.jp/topics/gairyu_20111228.htm

Global 30 Project

Project of the MEXT, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, for Establishing Core Universities for Internationalization

A selection of universities that will function as core schools for receiving and educating international students. In 2009, thirteen universities were selected. These core universities will play a major role in dramatically boosting the number of international students educated in Japan as well as Japanese students studying abroad.

1. What is the Global 30 Project for Establishing Core Universities for Internationalization?

Japan formulated the 300,000 International Students Plan in July of 2008, with the aim of receiving 300,000 international students by 2020. The “Global 30” Project for Establishing Core Universities for Internationalization is being implemented to realize this goal by selecting measures for the internationalization of universities including the recruitment of international students, along with forming Japan’s centers of internationalization. Selected universities will receive **prioritized financial assistance of 200 to 400 million yen per annum over the next 5 years. Endowed with this aid, each university will strive to recruit 3,000 to 8,000 international students.**

2. Thirteen Universities to Lead Japan’s Internationalization!

In 2009, the following 13 universities were selected as global centers:

Tohoku University,
University of Tsukuba,
The University of Tokyo,
Nagoya University,
Kyoto University,
Osaka University,
Kyushu University,
Keio University,
Sophia University,
Meiji University,
Waseda University,
Doshisha University,
and Ritsumeikan University.

3. Action Plans for the Core Universities!

Core universities will take the following steps to create an attractive educational and research environment for international students.

- 1/ Expansion of course programs by which degrees can be earned through English-only classes
 - Establish courses at the universities selected through which English-only degrees can be obtained: 33 undergraduate courses and 124 graduate courses over the next 5 years
- 2/ Enhancement of systems for receiving/hosting international students
 - Enhance systems for receiving/hosting international students, such as specialist support in studying and academics, as well as for completing various procedures and formalities both in/out of the university; and provide internship programs at Japanese corporations, etc.
- 3/ Provide international students with opportunities to learn about Japanese language and culture
 - A plan to provide high-quality instruction in Japanese language and culture
- 4/ Promotion of strategic international cooperation
 - Establish two separate overseas offices per core university, to enable local recruitment through admissions tests, etc., and boost the number of Japanese students studying abroad through exchange study programs, etc.

4. Establish an "Overseas Office for Shared Utilization by Universities" as the liaison for Study in Japan!

Establish a "Overseas Office for Shared Utilization by Universities" as the liaison for Study in Japan; in 8 cities in 7 countries. Upon completion, these offices will provide comprehensive information on Japanese universities overall, including enrollment seminars, admissions tests, etc.

Tunisia (Tunis) [University of Tsukuba], Egypt (Cairo) [Kyushu University], Germany (Bonn) [Waseda University], Russia (Moscow, Novosibirsk) [Tohoku University], India (New Delhi) [Ritsumeikan University], India (Hyderabad) [The University of Tokyo], Uzbekistan (Tashkent) [Nagoya University], Vietnam (Hanoi) [Kyoto University].

Source MEXT website: <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/highered/1302274.htm> (consulted on April 20th 2012.)

English

DISCO
CAREER AGENT

一人ひとりに
ベスト
コンサルティング

HOME 新卒就職 はじめての転職 グローバル転職

お問い合わせ よくある質問 企業の皆様へ

ディスコ - 新卒就職トップ > 2012年度卒業予定のトップ > 外国人留学生のための就活サポート

Career services For International Students

外国人留学生のための就活サポート

自分の出身国以外で働くということはとても難しいことですが、それ以上に外国（日本）だから経験できることや学ぶことは多いはず。

ディスコキャリアエージェントでは、外国人留学生のための各種セミナーや企業紹介など、さまざまな情報をお届けし、就職活動のスキルアップを応援するとともに、新しい可能性を広げお手伝いします。

卒業後、日本で仕事をしてみたいという強い思いと目的をお持ちの方を応援します！

日本企業の採用制度について

日本では、中途採用よりも新卒採用を重視する傾向があります。業績の悪化によって中途採用を減少・中止しても、新卒採用を行う企業は少なくありません。それは、企業の理念を継承し、将来の幹部となる人材を長期的な視点で育てていきたいという考え方があるからです。

日本企業に就職する外国人留学生の数は、ここ数年で確実に伸びています。

事業のグローバル化が進んだことで、日本の企業でも、国際的な観点をもち、語学力の高い優秀な人材を採用したいと考えようになっているのです。外国人留学生の能力や意欲の高さに、日本企業が期待しているといってもよいでしょう。

日本での就職活動で気をつけなくてはならないこと

ポイント❶ 学力・知識があるだけでは採用されない

日本企業は「会社の方針」に従って社内外との信頼関係を築き、会社に貢献できる人材を求めています。そのため選考では「能力・知識」はもちろんのこと、「どんな考え方をするのか」「組織の中でどんな行動をするのか」を重視しています。

ポイント❷ それぞれの企業で求める人材像は異なる

日本企業は、個人としてよりも組織の一員としての行動や言動を求めます。そして、その企業のブランドにふさわしい社会人であることを重視します。企業によって企業理念や価値観が異なるため、「優秀な人材」の定義も異なりますし、どんなに学力や人間性が優れていても「会社に合わない」と判断されれば、なかなか採用につながりません。

つまり、エントリーシートや履歴書を書く段階で、「私はこの会社の求める人材に近いで

まずは登録を！
新卒就職
サポート申込

APPLY
THIS
SERVICE

すでに登録済の方 ▶ 登録内容の確認・更新

エージェントと進める就職活動とは

適性テスト a vocational aptitude test

海外大生の ための 就活サポート

理系学生のための 就活サポート

外国人留学生のための 就活サポート Career services For International Students

紹介企業一例

就職相談 面談・セミナー 申し込み

Fig. 7 Web page of the recruitment agency DISCO dedicated to foreign students

Source <http://www.discocareer.com/first/2013/foreigner.html>

The Global 30 Project's targets are not new, but budget increases¹³ and other incentives have been introduced to produce a more “aggressive” policy so that Japan can maintain its share of the global education market.

*Measures reinforcing inequalities
between central and peripheral areas*

The point system will inevitably attract people to the economic and financial centers of Japan, and to wherever innovative, dynamic companies and research centers are to be found, in other words where most highly skilled foreigners are already living.

A glimpse at Global 30 Project progress also makes clear that those universities selected to join the project are the best universities between Tokyo and Osaka, plus the Tōhoku and Kyūshū Universities. 17 more universities should have joined the program, but this is now unlikely due to budgetary restrictions.

This project will – if it is not already the case – further confirm the imbalance in the geographic distribution of accepted requests for a change of visa from student to worker status (figures 8). Not surprisingly, Tokyo and the Kantō area receive the highest number of accepted requests for changes in status. Industrial areas such as the prefectures of Aichi, Shizuoka, and Gifu, the most dramatically affected by the 2008 crash, have seen a decrease in students participating in the local economy. Meanwhile, less industrial areas, the focus of this paper, clearly benefit little from this system. In Yamagata where the number of foreign students is very low, only 12 students stayed on to work post-graduation in 2008, dropping to 4 in 2009. In Niigata, where the number of foreign students is relatively high (over 1,000), increasingly less students have been staying on every year, with only 38 in 2009.

Similar to Tokyo, smaller cities in Japan also hold job fairs targeting the students who will soon be graduating. Following the measures taken in Tokyo, less attractive prefectures have also begun to attempt to promote contact between foreign students and local enterprises under the

13. The budget is said to have been cut by 30% a few months later because of the 2008 economic turmoil (<http://chronicle.com/article/A-Slow-Start-for-Japans-Ef/124346/>)

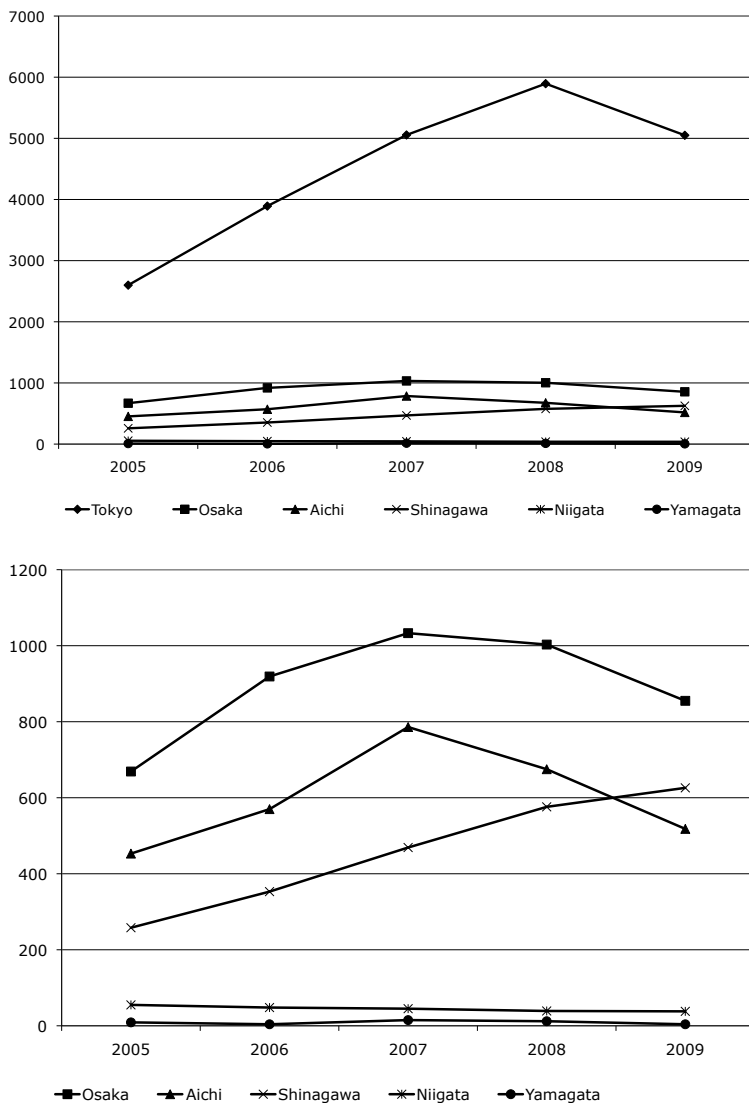


Fig. 8 Foreign students who obtained a work visa after graduation by prefecture, 2005-2009

Source Immigration Bureau: Heisei 21 nen ni okeru ryūgakusei nado no nihon kigyō e no shūshoku jōkyō ni suite (Employment of foreign students in Japanese enterprises in the year Heisei 21), July 2010, online: http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/nyuukokukanri07_00020.html (accessed on February 1st 2012).

initiative of the local authorities, usually via the International Exchange Association of the Prefecture or the city.

In the Prefecture of Niigata, the Association for International Exchanges (Niigata-ken kokusai kōryū kyōkai) has been organizing seminars on the topic of foreign student employment since 2007. They invite both local entrepreneurs and foreign students to take part in the seminars alongside a speaker from the Career Management Agency, Disco, to present the incentives for foreign student recruitment. The last seminar was held in October 2011: “Support seminar for the hiring of foreign students” (Ryūgakusei shūshoku shien seminā). Fourteen companies took part in the event from the following business sectors: hotel businesses (3), travel agencies (1), food processing (2), education (1), construction (2), catering (1), IT (1), machinery and equipment (2), metal working (1). Distribution by nationality of the students was: 3 Mongol, 1 Malaysian, 1 Burmese, 5 Vietnamese, 1 Thai, and 33 Chinese,¹⁴ the Chinese contingent unsurprisingly the largest. Chinese students were also the most favored by companies. According to a survey produced in 2011 of 968 companies by the recruitment agency, DISCO, the proportion of companies intending to recruit foreign students in 2012 rose from 13.1% to 24.5%. Many of these companies have a significant presence (offices, plants, etc) abroad, and 54.4% of them placed priority on recruiting Chinese students.¹⁵ Recruitment of foreign students is most often linked to development projects abroad. According to respondents, more enterprises were willing to recruit Chinese employees after the 2008 crash due changes in managerial strategy such as the relocation of production or further forays into China’s growing consumer market to compensate for the local economic crisis. This appeal to China confirms the “occupational niche in the transnational economy” (as described by Liu-Farrer, see above) and, at the national level, the total Chinese population in Japan is one of few that did not decrease after 2008, a steadfast presence that highlights the extent of their settlement. However, at the prefectural level, inequalities have been further accentuated.

14. Interview with the President of the Association for international exchange of the prefecture of Niigata, 10 Feb. 2012

15. Gaikokujin ryūgakusei no saiyo ni kansuru kigyō chōsa (Companies Survey on foreign students recruitment), Disco Career Research, 18-26 August 2011, online: <http://www.disc.co.jp/uploads/2012/01/11kigyō-oversea-report8.pdf>

The desire on the part of more peripheral regions to take part in this dynamic is further illustrated by the think tank ERINA (The Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia, Kan Nihon-kai keizai kenkyūjo 環日本海経済研究所) based in Niigata City. The think tank is dedicated to the study and promotion of the Northeast Asia economic zone (Japan coast, Japanese Prefectures, Far Eastern Russia, Mongolia, North and South Korea and Northeast China, *i.e.* Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces) and publishes studies into national economics and economic exchange. The aim of the Northeast Asia economic zone is to promote exchange and investment between countries with complementary assets (natural resources, working force resources, financial resources). In the past 8 years, ERINA has also organized (no doubt at the request of prefectural authorities) an annual job fair for foreign students, which takes place in May for recruitment after graduation in March the following year. In 2011, the fair featured approximately 15 companies and 80 foreign students, and resulted in two or three recruitment contracts. Additional effort has been made at the local level to retain qualified foreign workers but these attempts have proved largely ineffective.

The challenge for non-metropolitan areas is not only to attract foreign workers and professionals, but also to keep them, or to keep working with them. The flow to central urban areas is even more dramatic in the case of foreign workers than of Japanese workers. Studies of foreigners' mobility within Japan show that foreigners tend to concentrate in the major cities even more than Japanese residents. In 2007, the Tohoku area, for example, lost 0.59% of its total population, while the decline in foreign residency was 2.44% (Ishikawa, 2011). Students from these areas are more inclined to move to central Japan after graduation to look for jobs.

Furthermore, when examining the needs of peripheral areas, the issue is not only one of attracting and retaining highly skilled workers. In the perspective of population replacement, and the maintenance of economic activity and community life over the whole territory, highly skilled workers should be the only category to be encouraged to settle in Japan. But, to the present, national policy has tended to focus on attracting highly skilled workers only and a taboo still prevails regarding less qualified immigration.

Part 2

Is Japan still attractive for skilled and less skilled Chinese migrants?

1/ The importance of education in attracting skilled workers

Japan's official policy is certainly not pro-immigration, but when we look at what is often referred as the "side-doors" of immigration (Kajita 2001) - *i.e.* student visas and the resident status for Japanese descendants - it is clear that Japan has been opening its doors to immigrants since the 1990s. Due to the status transfer system where student visas are switched for one of 13 visas for skilled workers, many Chinese people do settle in Japan after their studies. There are no quotas for these transfers and the majority of visa requests are accepted each year.

From student to working visa

In 1983, Japan's government announced a plan to raise its number of foreign students to 100,000 by the year 2000. The student visa thus provided a privileged immigration route for young Chinese adults.

One of the main channels for qualified Chinese workers to work in Japan and for Japan to attract qualified workers from China is the possibility for college, or pre-college, students to change their status of residence for employment. In 1984, only four Chinese students were able to obtain working visas after graduation from the Japanese university system; in 1985, this figure had increased to 38, while in 2008, the number peaked at 7,651. Since 2008, the figure has decreased, but the proportion of requests accepted has remained the same (above 90%), which implies that the decrease comes from a lower number of Chinese students requesting a visa change. For many years, Chinese students accounted for approximately 70% of accepted status change requests. The total number of Chinese students who have obtained Japanese work permits since the beginning of the 1980s exceeded 62,000 by 2010.

The evolution from student status, to working status and then to a permanent visa (or naturalization) is an established process of

settlement among the Chinese (Le Bail 2011). In her thesis on labor migration from China to Japan, Gracia Liu-Farrer underlines how occupational niches specializing in transnational business have emerged as a result of the expanding the transnational economy between China and Japan, as well as the result of the skill sets many of Chinese students in Japan possess, as the majority of them are enrolled in undergraduate science and humanities programs (Liu-Farrer 2011: 86, 99). The 2008 crash may have encouraged this tendency as more Japanese companies sought to offset losses by enhancing business relations with

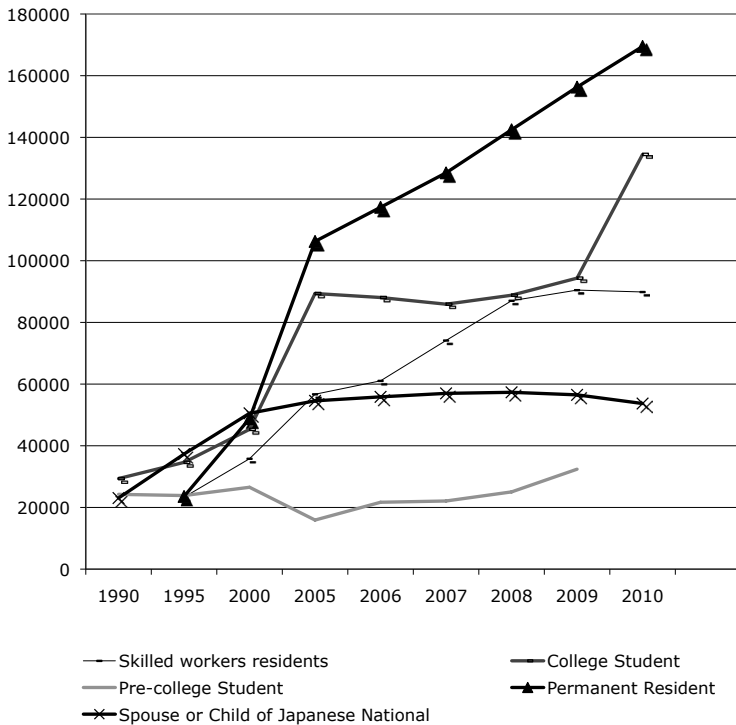


Fig. 9 Evolution of Chinese students, skilled workers and permanent residents in Japan, 1990-2010

Source Immigration Bureau, Immigration control, Tokyo, 2011.

Note Since 2010, college and pre-college student categories have been merged into one student category.

China or relocating production to China. Chinese students who have graduated in Japan have become ideal actors in Japanese companies' internationalization.

The transition to entrepreneurship

As demonstrated in various papers on qualified Chinese migrants, it is not uncommon to see former students and employees creating their own companies and taking advantage of their position as a bridge between two countries and two markets (Le Bail 2005; Wang 2005). Liu-Farrer explains the large number of Chinese who elect to switch from employee to entrepreneur through a series of factors from job security to lack of career opportunities due to discrimination (Liu-Farrer 2011: 100-104).

Transnational entrepreneurs bring to bear the complementary capacities of their adopted country and their country of origin. The IT company EPS illustrates very well how Chinese students, who arrived in the 1980s and who graduated from Japanese universities, managed to succeed in Japan and then extend their activities back to China. EPS was founded in 1991 in Tokyo by a new arrival from China. Today the company has over 1,000 employees, was floated on the stock exchange in 1998, and has since opened branches in Peking and Shanghai (Le Bail 2005). Foreign entrepreneurs may not only capitalize on their capacity to act as mediator, but also on the needs of transnational communities (Tajima 2003). The statistics confirm a rapid growth of the number of Chinese business managers and investors in Japan.

Any country hosting Chinese immigrants knows the benefits of being connected to international Chinese entrepreneur networks and the dynamism these bring. But once again, the hegemonic recipient of these migrants is the greater Tokyo area. Among the 3,300 Chinese managers and investors in 2010, 1,444 were residents of Tokyo and 2,274 in Tokyo plus Chiba, Saitama and Shinagawa. They were only 3 in Yamagata and 14 in Niigata.

Interviews confirmed that, except for a few small companies created by the Chinese such as trading and IT companies, very few foreigners launched their activity in peripheral areas. The director of ERINA underlines that very few Chinese would invest and create their

enterprises in Niigata since the situation to develop new activities is more difficult for them.¹⁶

Japan also benefits from former Chinese residents in Japan who have returned to China and who now play an intermediary role in various operations such as trading and subcontracted work in China. This kind of cooperation is particularly welcome among activities struggling from the recession. In 2010, the newspaper *Asahi* presented two cases in the North-East area of Japan (Tohoku) under the title “Young Chinese key for long-term gain.” The first case was that of Yu, a student from North-East China, who graduated from the Japanese Iwate University. Entrusted with encouraging the Iwate Prefecture’s economic interests in Dalian in 2005, he suggested selling traditional Nanbu cast-iron teapots in China. In 2008 he played an intermediary role negotiating a major contract with China. He also connected the Iwate Prefecture with Daketang, a famous tea house in Shanghai. Since then, Nanbu teapots have become very popular in China, where the unit price can reach \$1,000. A traditional once-threatened craft has now been revived in Iwate and training in the craft among the young has been resumed.¹⁷

More uncommon is the case of He, who was not a student but a technical intern in Japan and only spent three years in the host country as a manual worker. In 1992 He came from Hubei, to Sanjo in Niigata Prefecture to work in a metal processing company, Pearl Metal. At the time, 30 other companies in the city also invited Chinese interns due to manpower shortages. At the end of the contract, he contacted the director of the company to sell products (woks, pots, pans) in his Chinese hometown. Since 1995, he has been head of the Chinese market for the products. Today there are more than 300 retail outlets in China and 30 former Chinese interns now take charge of sales in China.¹⁸

As we have seen, China is the main source of foreign students in Japan, and these students become the main source of qualified professionals, investors and entrepreneurs. In part 1, we presented the policies implemented in 2008 as part of the “300,000 Foreign Students Plan.” The implementation of the plan confirms the current process

16. Interview, February 11th 2012.

17. Young Chinese key for long-term gain, *Asahi shimbun*, dec. 21th 2010. Online: <http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201012200316.html> (consulted on dec. 22th 2010).

18. *Idem*.

from studies to working and settlement of the Chinese in Japan. But as shown in the first part of this paper, this process seems to be increasingly concentrated in the Kantō area, as figure 8 illustrates.

Not surprisingly, peripheral areas welcome few foreign students and even fewer stay in the Prefectures to work after graduation. There is a vast imbalance in the division of status transfers from student to working visa. Tokyo and the Kantō area deliver most permissions and the situation did not change much after 2008. On the other side, industrial areas such as the prefectures of Aichi, Shizuoka, and Gifu which were more dramatically affected by the 2008 crash have undergone a decline in the number of students who obtained positions in local businesses. Less industrial areas, meanwhile, clearly benefit little from this system. In Yamagata where the number of foreign students is very low, only 12 students stayed to work in 2008 and 4 in 2009. In Niigata where the number of foreign students is relatively high (more than 1,000), less and less students stay every year; there were only 38 in 2009.

If we look at Chinese populations in prefectures such as Niigata and Yamagata, the profile of Chinese residents is very different and they are not renowned as sources of dynamism. More often foreign populations in such areas are excluded from participating in civil society and “invisibilized” due to their legal status and social image.

2/ Aging society, care issues and the maintaining of local small-scale activities in peripheral areas.

While the reform of immigration law (to be implemented in 2012) proposes new measures to attract “highly skilled” workers, nothing will necessarily change for “unskilled” (and manual) workers. The Training and Technical Internship Programs, the main means of bringing manual workers to Japan, were reformed in 2010, but have not been transformed into a proper immigration policy as proposed by several lobbying groups inside and outside Japan.

Another means once encouraged by local authorities to maintain communities was the promotion of international marriage, commonly referred to as “marriage migration,” a form of migration often studied as part of working migration.

Today, both the number of technical interns and marriage migrants has decreased. Areas with underlying social conflict, who may also be discouraged by the few tools they have at their disposal to attract migrants seem to avoid the debate on immigration. The presence of lesser qualified workers is not an issue in innovation and development, but of promoting and maintaining economic activities on a local level and preserving social communities, which even at local levels can be considered as contributing to Japan's dynamism.

*The mainly “unskilled” Chinese population
in Niigata and Yamagata Prefectures*

Figure 10 shows that in Yamagata and Niigata, compared to the situation in the whole country, the peripheral prefectures welcome technical trainees in a larger proportion (the most remarkable case is Ibaraki Prefecture). It also shows an evident lack of attractiveness for skilled workers (even if they do host a high amount of students, like Niigata). What is less apparent in these figures is the greater proportion of foreign spouses with Japanese children. In Yamagata, where foreign spouses arrived earlier, many were nationalized or received permanent resident status; the large percentage of Chinese permanent residents is mainly due to the immigration of Chinese spouses (while in Tokyo, most permanent residents arrived as students).

Thus in these areas the Chinese mainly arrive as technical interns and spouses of Japanese nationals. In the case of Yamagata where the Chinese represent 44% of the total foreign population, the number of foreign residents has been declining since 2006. This is largely due to fewer numbers of companies willing to welcome interns and to the decline in new spouses arriving in the Prefecture.

*Technical interns: polemics and lost of attractiveness.
Is radical change to policy necessary?*

The situation in Japan differs from place to place, but, in all cases, the controversy surrounding internship programs and the decline in local economies have led to a decrease in the number of interns (figure 11). The technical intern programs have been extensively criticized inside and outside Japan for concealing workers' exploitation

behind a discourse of international cooperation. In response to criticism, the program was reformed in 2010, but the structure remains very similar and comparisons are often made with Korea, where a similar system was stopped a few years ago to avoid the unfair importation of labor force.

To replace such a system, civil groups within Japan have proposed alternative policies. This fresh input to the issue of unskilled migration focuses on the needs of the labor force – and residents – in areas suffering from depopulation and economic recession (most recently the

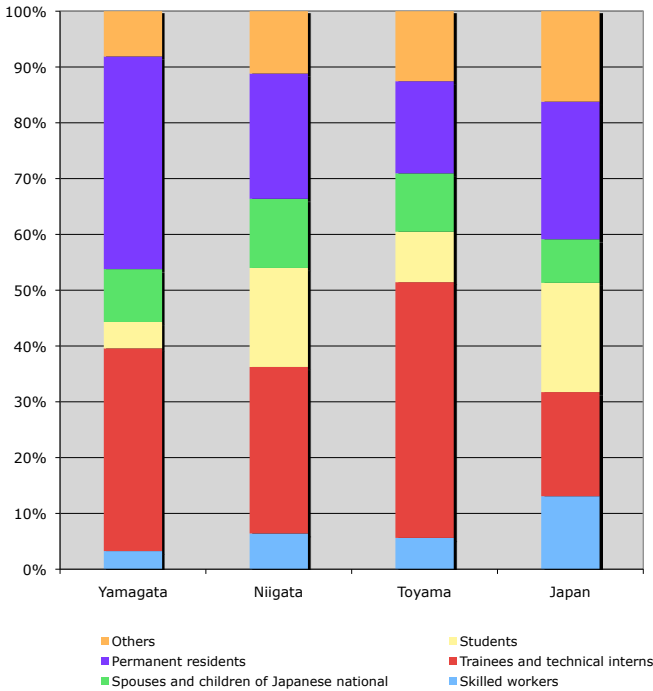


Fig. 10 Division of Chinese residents according to their status of residence in different prefectures

Source National statistics online (accessed February 1st 2012): <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/List.do?lid=000001074828>.

Note “Skilled workers” refer to residents with one of the 14 kinds of work permit. “Trainee and technical interns” cover technical interns (a new status that appeared in 2010), plus the few remaining trainees and the residents with the “specified activities” visa.

revival of Sanriku after the Tsunami has inevitably been at the heart of the debate). One example is the proposal to promote the entry of foreign teenagers into professional high schools in remote areas, or areas experiencing population and economic decline. Work positions would readily be available post-graduation, in particular in the farming and fishing sectors. Instead of restricting interns to a 3-year stay, the idea proposes to give migrants the opportunity to become local citizens.

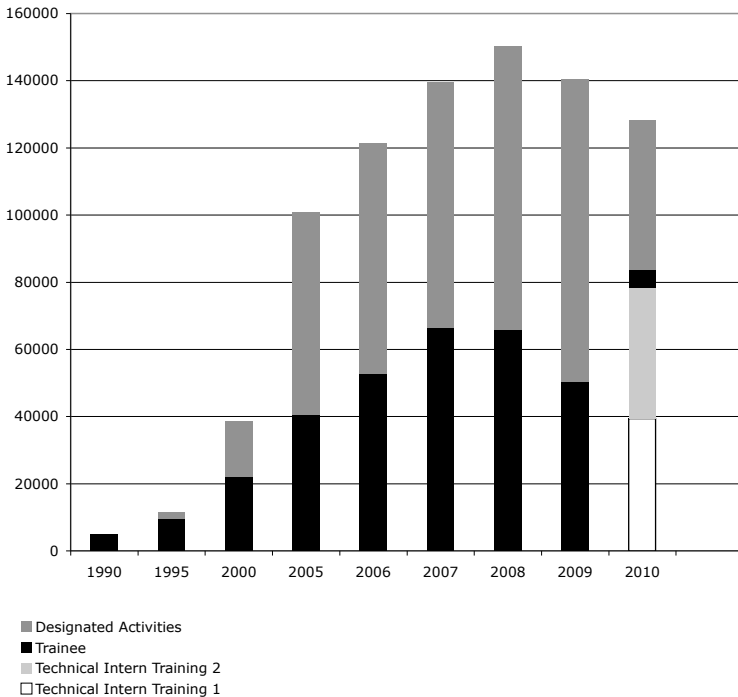


Fig. 11 Evolution of the number of Chinese trainees and technical interns in Japan, 1990-2000

Source Immigration Bureau, Immigration Control, Tokyo, various years.

Note The Trainee and technical intern programs reform was implemented in 2010. Very few foreigners now enter as trainees. Previously trainees would obtain a "designated activities" visa with the mention "technical intern" after one year; they now receive a "technical intern" visa for three years.

This particular proposal was put forward by Sakanaka Hidenori, former director of the Immigration Bureau in Tokyo and now creator and director of the Japan Immigration Policy Institute (JIPI, <http://www.jipi.or.jp/goaisatsu.html>), a small think tank on immigration issues based in Tokyo. Sakanaka published an essay in 2007, which has sparked considerable debate. The book was named “Japan, the Country of Immigration. 10 Million Migrants to Save Japan.”¹⁹ In 2008, the National Diet member Nakagawa Hidenao also gave support to the idea in political climate hostile to increased unskilled immigration.

The proposal was echoed by the Keidanren in a report entitled “An Economy and Society Capable of Responding to the Challenges of a Declining Population” (October 14, 2008).

The report starts by looking at the case of skilled workers and students, but a larger section is dedicated to the very broad and imprecise case of “foreign workers with a certain level of qualification or skills.” The terms of the report’s proposal are much more specific however and it advocates accepting workers into sectors where work force requirements are already known, such as construction, farming, fishing, the care sector, etc.) The report calls for a reform to training programs so that lesser skilled workers can also settle for longer in Japan.

The report is particularly concerned by the situation of medical workers and caregivers, stating that the first round of hiring nurses from Indonesia had been a failure. It also states that the conditions for visa renewal are too draconian, and Keidanren estimates a shortage of 1.8 million nurses and caregivers by 2055 (p. 19).

These proposals from 2008 may gradually finally have an effect on policy makers. No clear position has yet been noticed, but since the Democratic Party succeeded the LDP, official change is expected. For some enhanced immigration will become inevitable to alleviate demographics. Others believe that Japan is ready to adapt to a shrinking, aging population.

19. Sakanaka Hidenori 坂中英徳, Asakawa Akihiro 浅川晃広, *Imin kokka nippon. Senman nin no imin ga Nihon o sukuu* 移民国家ニッポン——1000万人の移民が日本を救う, Tokyo, Kajo, 2007. In English: Sakanaka Hidenori, “The Future of Japan’s Immigration Policy: a battle diary,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, online: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Sakanaka-Hidenori/2396>. See also: Lawrence Repeta (with an introduction by Glenda S. Roberts), “Immigrants or Temporary Workers? A Visionary Call for a ‘Japanese-style Immigration Nation,’” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 48-3-10, November 29, 2010, online: http://www.japanfocus.org/-Glenda_S_-Roberts/3450#.

What is of interest in Sakanaka's position is that he does not speak so much of skilled/unskilled migrants, but of future residents. He also underlines the special needs of those sectors hit by recession.

"In agricultural areas where the population has been drastically decreasing, local people are eager for people to settle in their localities. People living in the countryside do not often express themselves, but I assume that they want the government to make quick decisions to welcome people from abroad. If Japan develops a policy to open the doors to immigrants, then people in the fishing and farming sectors everywhere would similarly become more welcoming to migrants from foreign countries." (Sakanaka 2011: iii)

Sakanaka's appeal tends to remind us that Japan not only needs a labor force or professionals in major cities, but also in areas that have long been impacted by continuous population decline. It is his belief that even the farming and fishing sectors have to remain dynamic and support the dynamism of the whole country.

In more rural areas, the only step taken to relieve population decrease has been to allow local entrepreneurs to hire technical interns, which does not promote migration for settlement or contribute to long-term efforts to maintaining local communities. Progressively, small enterprises (SMEs) that do not renew intern requests often decide to cease activity. The number of SMEs ceasing activity increased after the 2008 crash, but the trend was also evident before crisis struck.

The spouses of Japanese

As previously discussed, there exists a second group of Chinese residents in remote areas who are married to Japanese nationals. Such immigration has sometimes helped local communities fight against depopulation and find workers for the home caring professions and local SMEs.

As we have already seen in the first part, Japan is ageing rapidly and the country is concerned by the decline in marriage. On closer inspection, in some remote areas, the percentage of unmarried elder sons could be as high as 70% (Takeda 2009). As Pierre Bourdieu described in his study of the Béarn area in France, as it opened out to the outside

world, “for farmers, the marriage market is a dramatic chance to discover the transformation of the value table and the collapse of the social prices attributed to them.” (Bourdieu 2002: 229).

In Japanese rural areas, depopulation is generally attributed to the phenomenon of single eldest sons. The burden on the eldest sons to take care of their parents and to perpetuate the family business is commonly considered as detrimental to marriage. To maintain the population and the life of small communities, local authorities have sometimes implemented measures to facilitate marriage with Japanese or foreign women from outside the home towns and villages.

In the 1970s, a great number of rural localities relied on national funds distributed to help prevent against the depopulation of the countryside and launched various programs to promote marriage and births among residents. Local authority involvement in the private sphere was often criticized, but many, in the name of the community, continued to develop new initiatives. According to a survey carried out in 2004 among 2,253 towns and villages (967 of which had less than 10,000 residents), 50% still actively promoted marriage in some way (62% in the case of towns with a population under 10,000). There are three main kinds of marriage promotion measures: the employment of marriage counselors, financial support for marriage ceremonies, and the organization of “courting” events encouraging partners to meet each other, such as parties, sporting events, trips outside the town, etc. (Yaguchi 2004).

Courting events are called *miai* party in Japan. *Miai* refers to the formal meetings of traditionally arranged marriages. The institution of arranged marriages has disappeared but the term remains to speak of mediated marriages. For instance in the Yamanashi prefecture in 2003, local Diet members established an association to organize *omiai* parties. As elsewhere, these events present an opportunity to gather groups of roughly 50 people comprised of local men and women, some of whom may come from other prefectures. Appeals for women are communicated through the classic media channels as well as through the vast number of blogs dedicated to marriage.

Among the large range of initiatives taken to facilitate marriage among local residents, some towns have prioritized “international marriages,” where potential spouses are invited from other countries. In Asahi (Yamagata Prefecture), local authorities started proposing

marriage counseling as early as 1975 and invited women from nearby cities to participate in ski tours and wine tasting sessions. In 1985, in cooperation with mayors of towns and cities in the Philippines and with the help of a marriage agency, they organized trips to the Philippines for local unmarried men, who, during their stay, met Filipina women. This initiative resulted in 9 couples settling in Asahi. The event received broad coverage in the Japanese media, which praised the warmth and obedience nature of Filipina women. At first, everyone seemed enthusiastic about the initiative and other remote collectives rapidly imitated it until NGOs concerned with human trafficking intervened. As a result of increased criticism, local authorities ceased to be involved in the mediation and private agencies took over the activity.

The difficulties foreign women experienced adapting to their new environment, the necessity for small towns to address the social needs

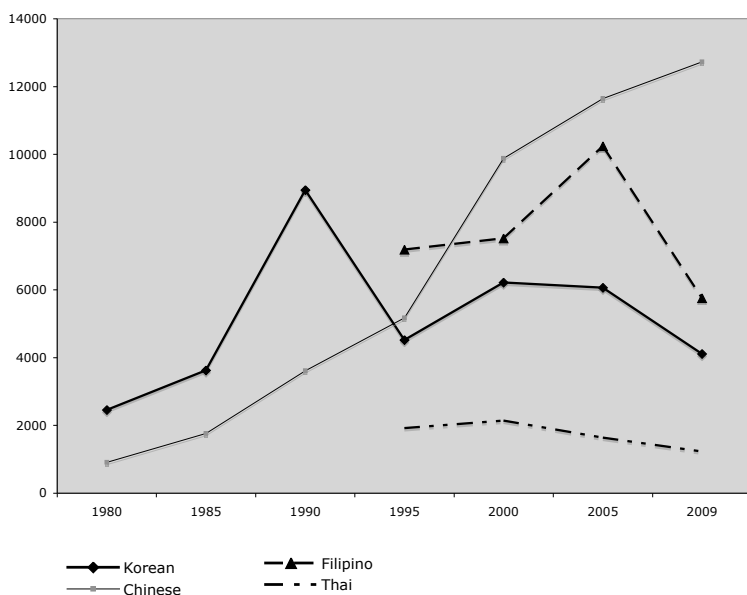


Fig. 12 Evolution in the number of marriages between Japanese men and foreign women (by women's nationalities)

Source Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Vital Statistics 2009, online: <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/ListE.do?lid=000001101601>.

of their new inhabitants (language classes, education of foreign children, support with immigration procedures, etc.) and the high divorce rate that ensued from such arrangements led many to rethink transnational marriage initiatives.

The following graph shows the evolution of international marriages, among which many are arranged marriages. Marriages with Chinese women have increased due partly to the fact that more and more Chinese people now live in Japan, but also due to the expanding match-making industry and the chain migration process.

Foreign wives also represent a potential workforce for local businesses. Due to low Japanese language skills, and sometimes their lack of qualifications, foreign wives often find jobs in local SMEs. Otherwise, foreign spouses of Japanese also undertake care work at home, looking after the elderly and raising children.

Today the number of international marriage is on the decline. Some areas of Japan clearly do not appeal, but the influx of foreign wives may be redirected to other areas. Figures show that the tendency toward international marriage varies from one nationality to the other. Figures for Chinese women are still up, while for Filipina and Thai women the decline should be interpreted as a result of tougher “entertainment visa” policies, and the subsequent drop in the number of women visiting from these countries as candidates for international marriage. The case of the Korean women is more complex as analysis must take into account the decrease in Korean visitors to Japan and the democratization and sudden economic development of Korea.

Changes in marriage migration trends are due to many factors: Japanese economic stagnation, Chinese economic development, and failures of previous marriages. It must be said that as long as foreign spouses suffer prejudice, they will never feel accepted in towns or villages, thus discouraging further immigration.

Conclusion

The Chinese population in Japan is still on the increase and urban areas are still attractive for both qualified and lesser qualified Chinese residents. Peripheral areas have clearly become increasingly less attractive. Since these areas mainly require manual workers, the question

of whether Japan should introduce an official policy for immigration in specific activity sectors in order to support revitalization becomes central.

Guidelines for the reconstruction of Sanriku after the Great Earthquake talk about the necessity to promote immigration to these areas, but such discourse is still officially limited to qualified migrants. Rare are the voices calling for the recognition of economic participation from technical interns and the social benefits for long-term immigration of lower skilled workers to peripheral areas in Japan.

The new measures Japan is implementing to attract foreign workers (*i.e.* the new point system for skilled workers, the 300,000 foreign students Plan) will hardly benefit those economically less attractive areas in Japan. What these more peripheral areas need are workers in the clothing and metalwork industry, and the construction, fishing and farming sectors. In these sectors, foreign workers should also be entitled to long-term residential programs, not only to 3-year internship programs. Regarding the status transition from student to employee as has been described here, measures should be taken to promote the employment of foreign students after graduation in less attractive areas, while immigration policy could contribute to broader measures stimulating the revival of peripheral areas.

Since immigrants in smaller Japanese cities and rural areas genuinely migrate as spouses and technical interns, their input as workers and citizens in the local community is not recognized. If Trainee and internship programs remain the main channel for introducing workers into peripheral prefectures, the host society should at least make an effort at social inclusion and especially avoid segregating interns inside the vicinities of plants or farms. The notion of unskilled immigration is, in itself, problematic; other terms, such as “manual workers” might be more appropriate to describe the actual situation and avoid stigmatization. Systematic suspicion is counterproductive for the welcoming of foreign residents.

There is an urgency to disseminate information about immigration and to create spaces of interaction between Japanese nationals and foreign migrants. Foreign wives or workers are still too often depicted as poor migrants and fortune seekers. Not enough is known about their background. Communication and mutual understanding is necessary to smooth the integration of foreigners, especially the spouses

and their children. Much more than for qualified immigration, where migrants are less targeted by discrimination and are readily socialized into cosmopolitan communities, unskilled migrants, especially in more peripheral areas, demand a much more pro-active policy in terms of integration.

While proposals within Japan to become more attractive to highly skilled migrants have been mainly of a technical nature (international schools, social security, pension plans, social mobility, and raised salaries), there is a provide a better welcome to less qualified workers, who, in the perspective of replacement migration, are potential future citizens. This would require structural changes to Japanese services (such as the Japanese school curriculum, the quality of language education, anti-discrimination laws, etc) and to Japanese identity (to embrace valorisation of foreign parents and children's culture)

Finally, in the case of China, for instance, better treatment of interns and spouses could contribute in a small but strategic way to improving Chinese-Japanese relations. Today, many spouses, interns and even students may return home with stories of excessive hard work and conflictual relations with Japanese bosses, colleagues and families. Even if China's authorities have avoided proffering any opinion about technical interns, the system is widely criticized by international institutions such as the IOM and by Japanese militant groups.

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