

Migration Trends and Social Backgrounds of International Migrant Workers from and to Japan

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Summary

Popular countries for Japanese nationals living overseas have been changing since the Meiji Period. As of 1996, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United States was the most popular destination for Japanese migrants, with Brazil in second place. In 2006, the USA remained in first place; however, China rose to number two and Brazil dropped to number three. In 2016, the top two destination countries remained the same as in 2006; however, Australia rose to number three, and Brazil dropped to number seven. Like Australia, Thailand is also rising through the ranks.

Trends in the foreign nationals living in Japan are also changing. According to the Ministry of Justice, until 2006, Koreans were the largest non-Japanese group in Japan; however, in 2007, Chinese nationals rose to number one. The number of Brazilian nationals in Japan increased until 2007. Their numbers have, however, been decreasing since 2008. Currently, the number of Vietnamese nationals in Japan is growing at a rapid pace.

Keywords: Immigration Policy, International Trainees, Working Holiday

Introduction

This paper analyzes of international migration trends of Japanese workers abroad and foreign workers in Japan. During the Meiji period (1868–1912), Japan was an immigrant sender. However, since the 1980s, Japan has been receiving many foreign workers. Despite the economic slump Japan has experienced since the early 1990s, the number of foreign workers in Japan is still increasing.

The types of foreign migrant workers have also changed over time. The Meiji government hired highly-skilled and highly paid foreign academics

and engineers, while during the same period, Japanese nationals immigrated overseas to work as farmers. Currently, Japan is facing an aging population and overall depopulation and requires foreign workers for the care, manufacturing, construction and agriculture industries, in addition to previously mentioned high-skilled workers.

1. Human mobility from and to Japan: Literature Review

Statistics are useful for understanding recent macro-trends; the author of this paper has typically used human mobility statistics published by international organizations and governments. In the case of this paper, the author has relied on statistics from Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Ministry of Justice.

However, sometimes statistics are not able to encapsulate newer trends. In these cases, the use of research papers is important. For example, Fujioka (2017) has studied non-elite Japanese workers in Australia using an ethnographical approach. Nakazawa (2016) has also noted that many middle-class Japanese women are working abroad.

The interview approach is effective in offering a deep understanding of social problems. Idei (2016) has reported on foreign residents living in Japan as de facto workers, such as international students and trainees. Kurematsu (2008) has also reported the problems associated with international trainees in various industries in Japan. Low-wages, long working hours, and unstable employment are often among the issues highlighted in these reports.

Literature review is also essential to studying an issue's historical background. For example, Uemura (2008) has summarized the personal documents of foreign workers hired by the Japanese government and major companies during the Meiji era. In this period, Japan was known as an emigration country. There are many historical studies related to Japanese

emigrants (Iida 1994 and Fukui 2003, 2014). Return migration back to Japan via foreign countries is also possible. Tanno (2013) has studied the historical change of Japanese nationalities, including Japanese descendants born overseas, and foreign descendants born in Japan.

2. The Historical Backgrounds of Japanese Immigrants and Emigrants

Historically, Japan has accepted high-skilled immigrant workers; however, with the exception of Japanese colonies up to the end of WWII, Japan did not officially accept receive low-skilled foreign workers. According to Uemura (2008: 2), 2936 invited, highly paid foreigners (Oyatoi Gaikokujin) were recorded from the end of Edo period to the early Meiji period. Many of these workers were from the UK, the USA, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Their work contributed to the modernization of Japan (Uemura 2008: 8).

However, due to Japan's higher population growth since the Meiji era, Japan became an immigrant sender during the pre-WWII period, with Japanese nationals travelling to the US, Peru, Brazil and other countries. Despite modernization, the industrialization of Japan during the Meiji period was limited and farming continued to be a main occupation.

In the first year of the Meiji period (1868), 153 Japanese workers visited Hawaii to work as farmers without permission from the Meiji government (Iida 1994: 87). Following this unofficial emigration of migrant workers, from 1885 to 1893, 29,069 official migrant workers, supported by the Meiji government, travelled to Hawaii (Iida 1994: 87). Private Japanese immigration to Hawaii also continued. When Japanese immigration to the US was banned in 1924; approximately 200,000 Japanese immigrants lived in Hawaii (Iida 1994: 87).

Due to these early 20th century restrictions on Japanese immigration

to North America, the major destination for Japanese migrants then changed to South America, particularly Peru and Brazil. In 1899, 790 Japanese nationals immigrated to Peru on the ship *Sakura-maru* (Fukui 2003: 36). The first group of Japanese immigrants to Brazil arrived in 1908 on the *Kasato-maru* (Fukui 2014: 67). These migrants contracted to work as farmers; however, over time, their sources of work shifted. During WWII, when many countries banned immigration from Japan, Japan sent immigrants to its colonies instead.

As Japan lost its colonies after WWII, the Japanese islands once again faced overpopulation. Ehara (2007: 24) notes that 6.3 million Japanese nationals from former Japanese colonies returned to Japan in 1945. Immigration from Japan to South America began again during this period. Japanese immigration to Brazil resumed in 1953 with Japanese agents also developing Brazilian farmland (Fukui 2014: 70).

3. Japan as an Immigrant Destination Country

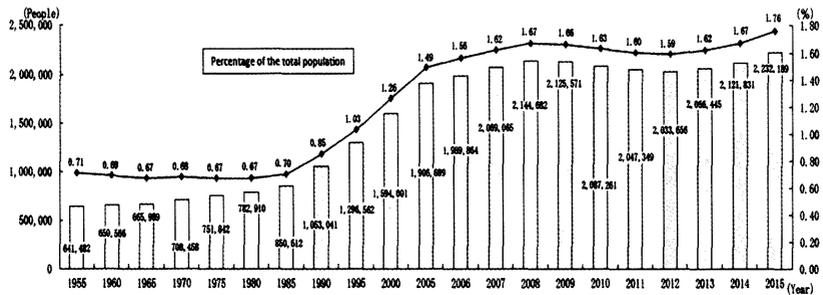
Currently, Japan is facing an aging population and overall depopulation. Japan's rapid economic growth in the 1960s required many factory workers. The Japanese economy quickly recovered from the first oil crisis in 1973, with the bubble economy boom occurring in the latter part of the 1980s. On the other hand, since the latter part of the 1970s, the birth rate remained low.

Due to the shortage of younger factory workers, in 1989, the Japanese government relaxed immigration law (the law became official in 1990) and began receiving 3rd generation Japanese descendants (Nikkei Sansei) as immigrants from Brazil, Peru and other South American countries (DIR 2014: 4-5).

The number of foreign residents in Japan has increased since 1990

(Figure 1). As of 2015, however, the percentage of foreign residents in Japan remains low, with about, 2.2 million foreign nationals living in Japan. However, Japan is more diverse than this figure suggests, as this figure does not include those who have gained Japanese citizenship.

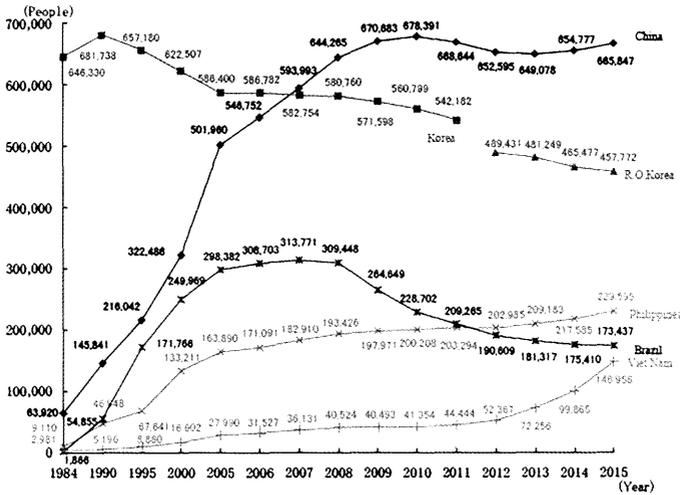
Figure 1 Changes in the number of foreign residents, and changes in the number of foreign residents as a percentage of the total population of Japan



Source: Ministry of Justice (2017) *2016 Immigration Control*, p. 20

Trends in foreign residents in Japan are changing (Figure 2). The number of Korean residents in Japan has been decreasing since 1990. The number of Brazilian residents increased until 2007, but has been decreasing since 2008. The number of Chinese residents increased until 2010 but has recently stabilized. The number of immigrants from the Philippines has increased gradually, while the number of Vietnamese residents in Japan has grown rapidly.

Figure 2 Changes in the number of foreign residents by major nationality/region



Source: Ministry of Justice (2017) *2016 Immigration Control*, p. 21

Despite the end of the bubble economy in 1991, the number of Nikkei workers increased during the 1990s. Until the end of bubble economy, Japanese companies developed a tenured employed system. After the bubble burst, smaller manufacturing companies could not retain this system and the use of short-term contract workers (Haken Shain) became more widespread. According to Tanno (2013: 220–222), many Nikkei workers were employed in small factories under this unstable contract scheme.

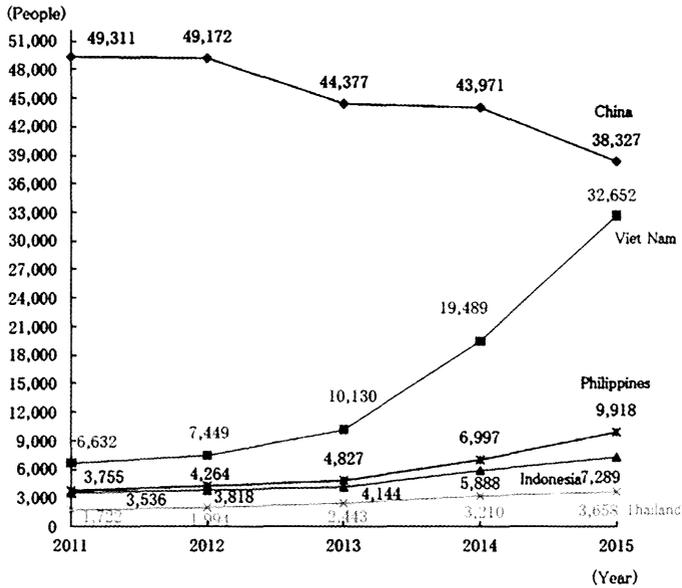
After the 2008 financial crisis (called “Lehman Shock” in Japanese), many contract workers, including the Nikkei were fired (referred to “Haken Giri” in Japanese). At this time, instead of contract workers, some factories began using international trainees (Kenshu-sei and/or Ginou Jishu-sei), who can be paid less than local Japanese and Nikkei workers (Tanno 2013: 234–235). From factories producing cars to those making lunchboxes, many factories now hire international trainees as de facto workers (Kurematsu

2008: 130–132).

When the former international trainee (*Kenshu-sei*) system began in 1981, its aim was to teach advanced technology to trainees at large companies (Gaikokujin Roudousha Mondai 2009: 211). However, the types of sites for this international internship scheme expanded in 1990, and a longer internship scheme (*Ginou Jishu*) than that of the previous system was initiated in 1993 (Gaikokujin Roudousha Mondai 2009: 211). Officially, trainees are not workers; in actuality, however, they are currently *de facto* cheap sources of labor in various fields including, manufacturing, construction, and agriculture.

In about 2010, the majority of international trainees to Japan were from China (Idei 2016: 96–98). However, as Japan's economic depression and China's economic growth, the number of Chinese trainees has been decreasing. Currently, the number of trainees from Vietnam is increasing (Figure 3). Idei suggests that as Vietnam is also experiencing economic growth, the quality of Vietnamese workers who would like to work in Japan is decreasing (Idei 2006: 98–100). Without an improvement to working conditions in Japan, sources of international trainees will continue to change.

Figure 3 Changes in the number of foreign nationals newly entering Japan with a “Technical Intern Training (basic level)” residence status, by major nationality/region



Source: Ministry of Justice (2017) *2016 Immigration Control*, p.11

The aging of the Japanese population has also required nurses and other care workers. Under the EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement) scheme, the Japanese government has accepted international care trainees from Indonesia (since 2008), the Philippines (since 2009), and Vietnam (since 2014). Care trainees work under three year contracts. If they aim to continue to work in Japan after this three year period, Japanese national certificates are required. Three international nurses were successful in passing the Japanese certificate exam in 2010 and 36 international care workers were successful in 2012 (Idei 2016: 114-116).

This international care worker employment system has several problems. A shortage of care workers is a common problem in developed

countries (Karatani 2016: 50–55). The majority of care workers are women from developing countries and separation from families in home countries becomes a social issue. In Canada’s “caregiver” scheme, international caregivers eventually obtain permanent residency status and live with their families (Idei 2016: 123–124). Japan also accepts care workers’ families; however, care workers have to first-pass the national exam, and cannot stay with their family during the internship period (Mori 2008: 25).

Other types of international competitions for care workers also occur. For example, Germany began a similar care trainee system to that of Japan in 2013, and has been accepting nurses from Vietnam and the Philippines (Idei 2016: 126–127). This system requires international nurses to take a national exam for verbal communication. The national exam in Japan is written, and based on medical Japanese, which is difficult to understand for ordinary Japanese speakers (Idei 2016: 127–128).

In addition to factory workers and care workers, and despite Japan’s economic depression, there remains a shortage of workers in other industries. A points system for immigration is effective in selecting specific immigrant workers and entrepreneurs. The points system for immigrant selection was originally developed by the government of Canada in the 1960s, and has been adopted by other countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Japan introduced a points system for high-skilled workers (Koudo Jinzai) in 2012. However, there is fierce competition between potential host countries, as many countries aim to recruit high-skilled foreign workers.

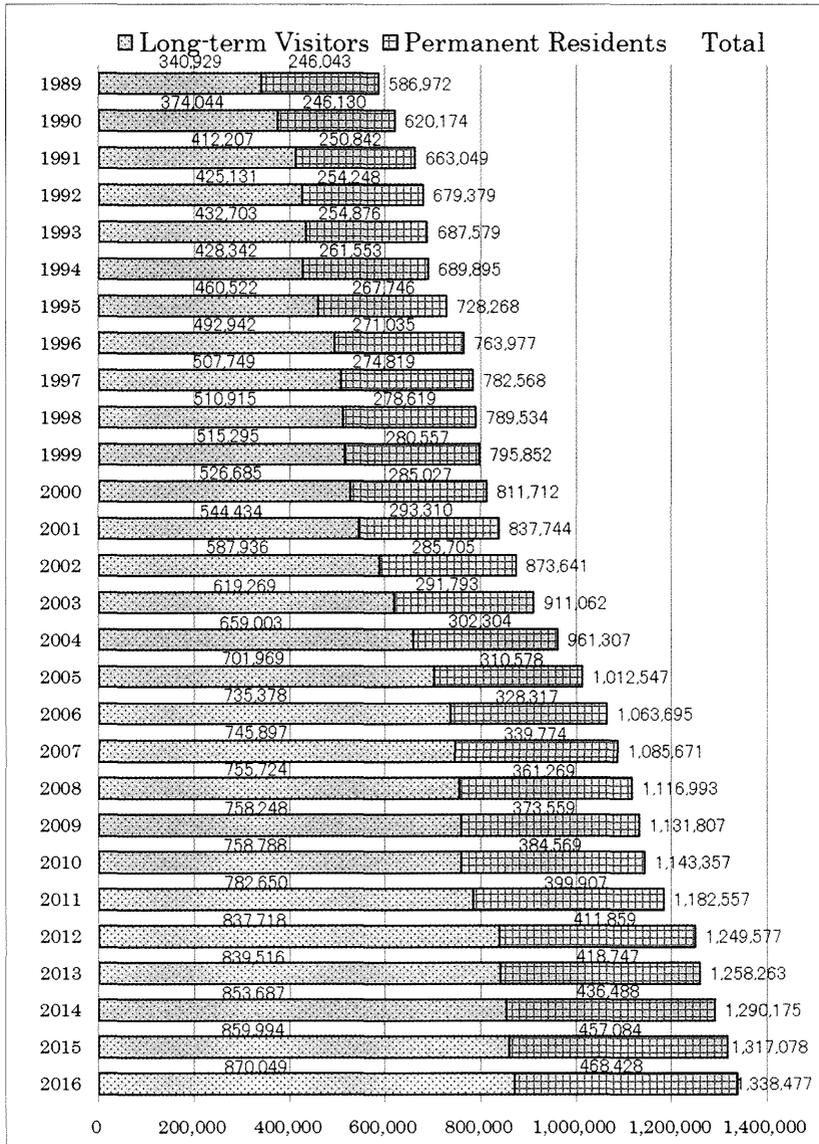
4. Current Issues in Human Mobility from Japan

Classical push-pull theory has dominated international migration research. Japanese migrants during the pre-WWII period, and just after WWII, were considered economic push-pull cases. However, due to the

globalization of Japanese companies, different trends human mobility can also be observed.

Figure 4 shows the number of Japanese people living outside of Japan, who are categorized as permanent residents and long-term visitors. According to MOFA, permanent residents are defined as emigrants who have been permitted to live permanently in a particular country, such as green card holders in the US. Long-term visitors are defined as visitors who stay longer than 3 months but do not have permanent residency. These categories do not include those who lost Japanese citizenship due to emigration. Despite the continual decrease of the total population of Japan, the number of Japanese nationals living outside of Japan is increasing.

Figure 4 Long-term visitors and permanent residents from Japan



Unit: Number of people

Source: MOFA (2017) *Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas*, MOFA, p.20

Trends in Japanese nationals outside of Japan are changing. According to Table 1, Brazil was the second largest receiver for Japanese nationals in 1996; however, this ranking is decreasing year by year. According to Table 2, China became the No.2 receiver of Japanese nationals in 2006, and remains China No.2 as of 2016; however, Australia is becoming a more popular destination and ranked No.3 in 2016. Like Australia, Thailand is becoming more popular and ranked No.4 in 2016.

Table 1 Japanese nationals overseas, 1996

1	USA	273,779
2	Brazil	89,005
3	UK	55,372
4	Canada	26,545
5	Australia	25,688
6	Singapore	25,355
7	Hong Kong	24,500
8	Germany	24,117
9	Thailand	23,292
10	France	20,060

Unit: Number of people

Source: MOFA 1997 web

Table 2 Japanese nationals overseas, 2006

1	USA	370,386
2	China	125,417
3	Brazil	64,802
4	UK	60,751
5	Australia	59,285
6	Canada	44,158
7	Thailand	40,249
8	Germany	33,608
9	France	30,863
10	Singapore	26,370

Unit: Number of people

Source: MOFA 2007, p.14

Table 3 Japanese nationals overseas, 2016

1	USA	421,665
2	China	128,111
3	Australia	92,637
4	Thailand	70,337
5	Canada	70,174
6	UK	64,968
7	Brazil	53,400
8	Germany	44,027
9	France	41,641
10	S. Korea	38,045

Unit: Number of people

Source: MOFA 2017, p.28

The United States has a long history as a Japanese immigrant receiver country. Many descendants of pre-WWII Japanese immigrants are American citizens. Japanese nationals in the USA are a diverse group of workers in Japanese companies in the US, researchers, and students. During the 20th century, Brazil was the largest emigration country from Japan and many of the 1st generation of Japanese immigrants (Nikkei Issei) and some of the 2nd generation of Japanese descendants (Nikkei Nisei) have retained Japanese citizenship.

Other countries have historically constituted non-major immigration countries for Japanese national; however, Japanese companies in these countries are now hiring many of Japanese workers. China is a typical case that reflects growing number of the Japanese workers in Japanese companies abroad. After the burst of the bubble economy in Japan, job-hunting websites for Japanese people, such as “ABROADERS,” “Working Abroad”, “World Post”, and “Kamome Asia,” emerged especially to recruit Japanese workers to China and other Asian countries.

Japanese nationals are travelling as students to Australia and other European countries. The primary purpose of study abroad is officially

education. However, due to the cost of Japanese higher education, countries which offer scholarships, tuition exemptions, work permissions, and job opportunities after graduation have become attractive for younger generations of Japanese nationals.

5. Gender Differentiations of Japanese Citizens outside of Japan

In addition to the push-pull and globalization approaches, newer work-life balance approaches are gradually becoming more common. Nakazawa et. al. (2008) have conducted a study of Japanese women working in Singapore. For Japanese women, international work destination trends have shifted from Hong Kong (1990s), Shanghai (2000s) and Singapore (Nakazawa et. al. 2008: 97). When Nakazawa et. al. interviewed 26 Japanese women working in Singapore in 2006, 19 of their subjects were university graduated.

Nakazawa's case studies of Japanese women working outside of Japan suggest that some of these women work as "self-initiated expatriates" (2016: 80-81). Even though many of the women work in branch offices of Japanese companies, their attitudes are different from those of Japanese workers sent from the company headquarters in Japan. Some female workers also move to several countries.

Work-life balance research is usually undertaken by geographers, anthropologists and sociologists and is qualitatively oriented. As statistics offered by Ministry of Foreign Affairs do not offer enough information about Japanese nationals hired abroad in 1990s, a quantity-based approach was difficult. However, sample research by from research institutes and individual researchers has been available since the 2000s.

According to the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT 2008: 28), 98.2% of Japanese workers outside of Japan sent by Japanese companies in 2006 were male (N = 1,565 people). Similar sample research by

JILPT (2016: 50) also shows that, except in the tourism industry, the majority of Japanese workers sent abroad by Japanese companies in 2010 to 2015 were male (N = 15 companies). According to Shiraki (2012: 10), 98.9% of executives sent from Japan to China (N = 528 people) and 98.8 % to ASEAN (N = 516) in 2012 were male.

Using these gender differentiations, some researchers estimate the number of Japanese women workers who were hired by Japanese companies but as local workers. Hosogaya et al. (2017: 46-48) focused on the number of Japanese women not accompanied by a husband and estimated the number of Japanese self-initiated expatriates outside of Japan. Using a similar method, Niwa et al. (2016: 216-220) tried to estimate the number of locally hired Japanese workers in Dusseldorf.

Compared to the US, China and Europe, the number of Japanese companies in Australia is relatively small. However, as mentioned above, Australia is currently the 3rd most popular destination for Japanese nationals outside of Japan. Using an ethnographic approach, Fujioka (2017: 460-464) has studied young non-elite Japanese people on a working holiday visa in Australia. He interviewed 43 men and 41 women in Australia from 2007 to 2009, mainly in Melbourne. In the case of men, 14 out of 43 interviewees were university graduates. Seventeen of the women were university graduates and 12 were junior college graduates. As indicated by Nakazawa's research in Singapore, Fujioka shows that Japanese women working outside of Japan are highly educated.

Fujioka (2017: 287) also suggests that Japanese working holiday makers are contributing to the numbers of Japanese elites outside of Japan, because non-elite Japanese nationals offer services related to Japan at reasonable prices. Some (though not all) Japanese elites outside of Japan do not possess sufficient local language proficiency upon arrival. Non-elite Japanese

workers who possess local knowledge thus prove useful. Yet, as non-elite Japanese workers typically have fewer language skills compared to locals in destination countries, due to competition for work with locals, the majority of workplaces for non-elite Japanese workers abroad are Japan-related. According to Fujioka (2017: 418), Japanese executives sent from headquarters in Japan are at top of this labor pyramid, while Japanese workers hired by local branches of Japanese companies are in the middle, and working holiday Japanese nationals working as support staff are at bottom in the labor market.

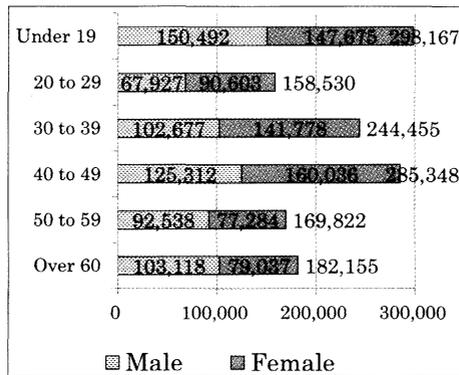
There are a number of youth-specific working visa schemes. Under the UK's "Youth Mobility Scheme," Japanese people can stay in 2 years. The Australian working holiday visa scheme allows stays of up to one year; however, those with experience working in rural areas can apply for a second working holiday visa. Working holiday visas to New Zealand allow stays of up to 1 year; however, potential workers can apply for an extended visa and/or different types of work visas.

As the Haken contract in Japan is usually up to 1 year long, these working holiday schemes are worth trying as the basis for entrance to foreign countries. Fujioka (2017: 258-261) also describes companies who impose difficult work and longer working hours (called "Black Kigyō" in Japanese) in Japan. As career advancement is not easy for non-elites in Japan, a working holiday is used as a tool to reset a hopeless life. Admittance to a postgraduate school outside of Japan is a major challenge for ordinary Japanese citizens; however, a combination of a working holiday and an English language school is a much more realistic option.

The outstanding living and working trends of Japanese women have been thoroughly examined, as noted above. Since 2015, MOFA added age and-gender data to its statistics on Japanese citizens overseas. Figure 5 was

created from this newer version of the MOFA statistics and shows the number of Japanese nationals overseas in 2016, divided by age and gender. With the exception of those less than 19 years old, differentiation between men and women by age is now available. As of October 1, 2016, there were more women aged 20 to 49 abroad than men. People in their 20s are able to stay abroad as students; however, those in their 30s and 40s need jobs. While the percentage of women workers within Japan is low—in 30s and 40s—the overseas pattern is the inverse.

Figure 5 Japanese nationals overseas by age and gender (Totals, 2016)

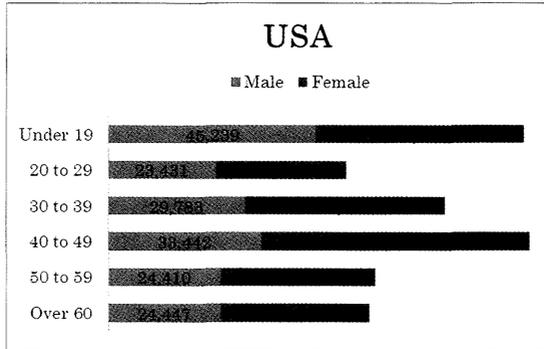


Unit: People

Source: MOFA (2017) *Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas*, MOFA, p.26

This gender disparity can be found to a significant degree in some countries. Figure 6, created from the MOFA statistics, shows the number of Japanese nationals in the US in 2016, divided by age and gender. In the US, with the exception of those under 19 years old, the number of Japanese women is larger than men. As with the overall data, the number of women of working age is large and for those aged between 40 and 49, outstanding.

Figure 6 Japanese nationals overseas by age and gender (USA 2016)

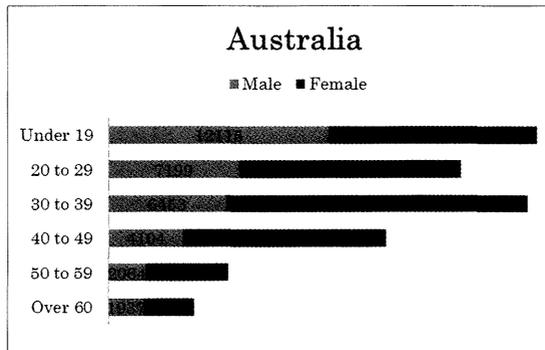


Unit: Number of people

Source: Made from data from the MOFA (2017) *Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas*, MOFA, p.61

Figure 7 is represents the case of Australia. As in the USA, the number of women is larger than men, with the exception of those under 19 years old. However, there are some differences. The percentage of Japanese women in Australia is higher than in the US. In addition, the peak age is between 30 and 39 years old and thus younger than that in the US. One of the reasons for a higher percentage of Japanese nationals in Australia between 20 and 29 is that Australia offers working holiday visas for Japanese nationals under 30.

Figure 7 Japanese nationals overseas by age and gender (Australia 2016)



Unit: Number of people

Source: Made from data from the MOFA (2017) *Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas*, MOFA, p.77

In some cases, long-term visitors are able to stay with a local spouse. While a working holiday is 1 or maximum 2 years long, Japanese nationals (primarily women) who have a local spouse can stay longer in a particular country. In countries that offer a guardian visa for children, parent(s) can also stay longer. In the case of Japanese nationals, male workers sent by Japanese companies typically move back to Japan; however, some women stay in the foreign country with their children. While not statistical research, in a study of Japanese intermarriage in Australia between 2007 and 2008, Hamano (2014: 147) found that 23 Japanese women out of 28 permanent residents had an Australian husband. While there is not enough data, from previous research, the following hypothesis about Japanese women aiming to work abroad may be made:

1. There are greater opportunities for work abroad than in Japan for women.
2. Working conditions in Japan is not suitable for women.
3. Child care in Japan does not suit women of working age.

4. The ways of life of certain foreign countries are friendly and attractive for women.

Conclusion

As noted above, during the Meiji period, Japan was an emigration country. However, due to depopulation and a shortage of workers, Japan now requires many de facto foreign workers. Officially, Japan is accepting high-skilled workers; however, de facto manufacturing, construction, agricultural, and care workers also exist. During the 1990s, the major influx of workers from abroad was constituted by Japanese descendants from South America. Currently, de facto workers are made up of international trainees from East and South East Asia.

Yet, the number of Japanese nationals outside of Japan continues to increase. Due to globalization, many Japanese companies are branching out internationally. There is, however, gender differentiation within this international migration. Japanese companies typically send male executives from Japan to overseas branches and many Japanese women are hired in these branches as local workers. Additionally, some countries, including the UK and Australia, offer special working visa schemes for younger people. These countries have a higher percentage of young Japanese workers, especially women.

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