

Foreign Student Workforce: Interviews & Qualitative Analysis of International Student- Workers in Fukuoka city

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Foreign Student Workforce: Interviews & Qualitative Analysis of International Student-Workers in Fukuoka city

Carl McNamara Page[†]

Abstract

Over the last five years the demographics and size of the foreign population of Japan has drastically changed and increased. This paper examines the recent trends in Japan in terms of the demographics of the foreign population with regards to immigration policy and how Japan is addressing its labor shortage problem. In particular, there is focus on the rapidly growing groups of Vietnamese, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan populations. This paper takes a closer look at Japan's side-door, de-facto immigration methods for non-specialized labor or so-called low-skill workers; specifically the practice of using foreign students and refugee/asylum seekers as a stop gap in a growing labor shortage crisis.

Through qualitative interviews with foreign-students and refugee seekers who came to Japan with the intention to work, this paper offers a snapshot of a significant and rising trend in Japan's immigration system. From these first-hand accounts, we investigate the circumstances surrounding the individuals and gain in-depth and valuable knowledge of the contemporary situation.

Keywords: Immigration policy, foreign students, refugee, foreign workers, social capital

Outline:

- 1 . Problem Definition
- 2 . Methodology
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- 4 . De Facto Immigration
- 5 . Survey questionnaire and interview results
- 6 . Discussion & Conclusions

1 . Problem Definition

The main focus of this paper will be to examine recent trends in immigration to Japan along with a

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look into the country's immigration policies. A key component of this paper will be to better understand the individuals who are emigrating to Japan and what the reality of their life and labor situations are. Particularly, this paper will be examining foreign student workers and refugee-asylum seekers from three respective countries: Vietnam, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. These groups represent the countries with the largest population growth over the last five years and are a reflection of the direction that Japan's immigration policy is trending.

Considering the well documented situation that Japan is facing in regards to a labor shortage crisis, while also taking into account the recent upward trend in immigration (legal and otherwise), it is vital that we examine closely what the actual conditions and circumstances are for the fastest growing population groups. Furthermore, Japan has a long history of having inconsistent and unclear immigration policies, as well as there being known abuses of certain types of visas, specifically Trainee and Entertainment (Kondo 2015; Oishi 2012), which means that investigating the contemporary situation and status of recent migrants has importance for helping to shape future policy and to ensure the well-being of current and future foreign workers.

Questions and topics that will be addressed in this paper include:

- What are the current conditions and situations involving recent migration to Japan (in the form of the student-worker context)?
- What are some of the problems with Japan's *de facto* immigration policy?
- Is there a mutually beneficial relationship between student-workers and their employers?
- Does Social Capital play any role in the well-being and overall condition of foreign student workers?
- Are foreign student workers satisfied with their current status and situation?

1.1 Uniqueness of Research

While there is plenty of data on the number of foreign students and foreign workers in Japan, where the research lacks is in measuring the well-being and realized circumstances of the individuals. We know the basic facts of Japan's immigration policy but what we don't know is how this policy affects the individuals it is meant to be addressing. Through in-depth, firsthand accounts via survey questionnaire and direct interviews, we are able to gain invaluable knowledge and background on the people who make up the fastest growing foreign populations in Japan. Gaining this knowledge is extremely important for helping shape Japan's future immigration policy and for understanding the status of a widely under-studied situation.

2. Methodology

For this study, the author targeted individuals (foreign language students and refugee/asylum seekers) from the fastest growing three largest groups of foreign migrants in Japan; Vietnam, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Interview subjects were randomly selected by directors of Japanese language schools {Nishinihon International Education Institute, Fukuoka Japanese Language School} in the Fukuoka area who asked their students if they would be interested in participating in an anonymous, voluntary interview-survey. Additionally, refugee/asylum seeker respondents were introduced through an immigration solicitor (Fukuoka International Law Office, Daisuke Shimizu), who asked clients if they would be interested in participating in the project.

Interviewees first completed an anonymous internet survey followed by several direct interview questions from the researcher. All data was collected between November 6, 2018 and November 18, 2018.

Inclusion criteria:

- Vietnamese, Nepalese, or Sri Lankan citizen
- Aged 18 years or older
- Who currently hold a student visa or refugee/asylum seeker visa
- Willing to participate in the study voluntarily
- Who have stayed continuously or with interruption for at least three months in Japan

Participants were initially asked to complete a survey with questions regarding their sociodemographic characteristics, visa type, working status, wages, Japanese and English language ability, physical and mental health, safety, and selected social capital assessment inquiries.

This was then followed up with in-depth interview questions regarding the participant's motivation for coming to Japan, the background on their situations, their opinions about various aspects of the visa process and the immigration system in Japan as whole. Interviews were conducted using appreciative inquiry, an interview method that allows self-reflection of the positive social capital available to and accessed by the participant (Lafferty et al. 2016).

Similarly this research correlates with the work of Go (2018), whom looked at the cooperation of refugee support groups, and conducted an interview survey (8 persons) targeting refugee applicants staying in Japan with special permission due to humanitarian consideration (2017/8~2017/12). An interview survey of one to two hours at the target house or at a restaurant near the place of residence. The results suggest the importance of Social Capital in the applicants overall well-being.

Other qualitative previous research in Japan comes from Moriya (2018) who conducted interviews

with 12 former foreign students who got employed in small and medium-sized enterprises in Japan (2015~2017). The results showed that when comparing the wage levels of Vietnam and Japan at the exchange rate as of 2017, Japan earned more than triple the monthly and annual income. For Vietnamese international students, Japanese companies are attractive.

With the consideration for time, the scope was limited to 15 respondents, five each from Vietnam, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

* Author's note: Relevant direct quotes from interview subjects shall be included in applicable areas throughout the paper. In respect to protecting the anonymity of participants, all quotes will be given with pseudonyms, although the country of origin and age shall be included.

3. Background on the situation in Japan

Japan's overall population peaked in 2008 at roughly 128 million people, ranking 10th largest in the world and 6th largest within the OECD, while the working population peaked several years earlier in 1995 at 87.7 million workers (MOJ 2011). With the current birthrate for Japanese woman at 1.37 children per woman, a steady population decline has been forecasted for the country. According to the UN/MOJ the population is predicted to fall to less than 100 million people by the year 2050 and, furthermore, to less than 80 million by 2100 (MOJ 2010). At the same time, the country has the highest elderly population in the world as a percentage of the total population. These factors combined have led to a labor-shortage crisis.

One of the ways that the country has responded to mitigate the problem, albeit slowly, is by finally taking steps to increase the number of foreign workers. After several years of population decline

Table 1: Projections of Changes in the Total Population, Working-Age Population and Aged Population Rate between 2000 and 2050

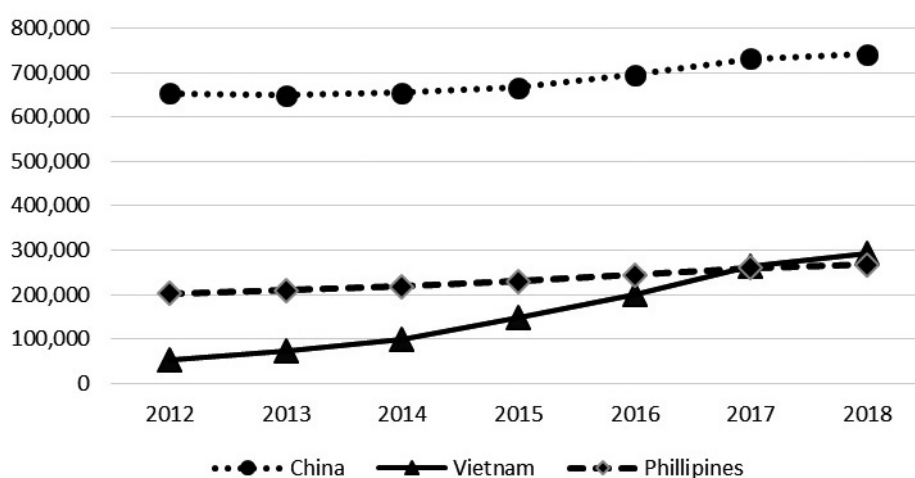
<i>Country</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Productive age population (15-64)</i>	<i>Aged population (65 and above) (%)</i>
JP	-17,386,000	-30,569,000	17.2 - 36.5
GE	-10,946,000	-17,171,000	16.3 - 32.7
SE	3,062,000	1,359,000	17.3 - 22.8
FR	13,999,00	3,361,000	16.0 - 25.5
UK	14,180,000	4,471,000	15.8 - 24.7
AU	14,476,000	7,373,000	12.4 - 22.0
CA	14,531,000	5,643,000	12.5 - 24.7
US	116,259,000	53,470,000	12.4 - 21.4
<i>Note: Medium Variant</i>			
<i>Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (2013)</i>			

amongst foreigners following both the Lehman shock (2008) and the natural disasters of The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami (2011), there has been a steady and significant rise in the number of foreigners living, working, and studying in Japan.

Historically, since the end of WWII the two main groups of foreigners in Japan have come from Korea and China. Most of the Koreans in Japan were people who were brought into the country to work during the period of Japan's occupation of the Korean Peninsula (1900–1945) and then remained. In the case of China, a vast increase occurred in the 1980's with the adoption of the Trainee Visa Program, and again in the 2000's with a push for attracting more international students (Liu-Farrer, 2011). The two other traditionally large groups of foreigners come from The Philippines and South America, so-called *Nikkeijin*-people of Japanese descent, mostly from Brazil and also Peru. However, in the case of The Philippines the number of people has not significantly changed over the last ten years while the number *Nikkeijin* has dropped in nearly in half from their peak in 2007 (MOJ, 2018).

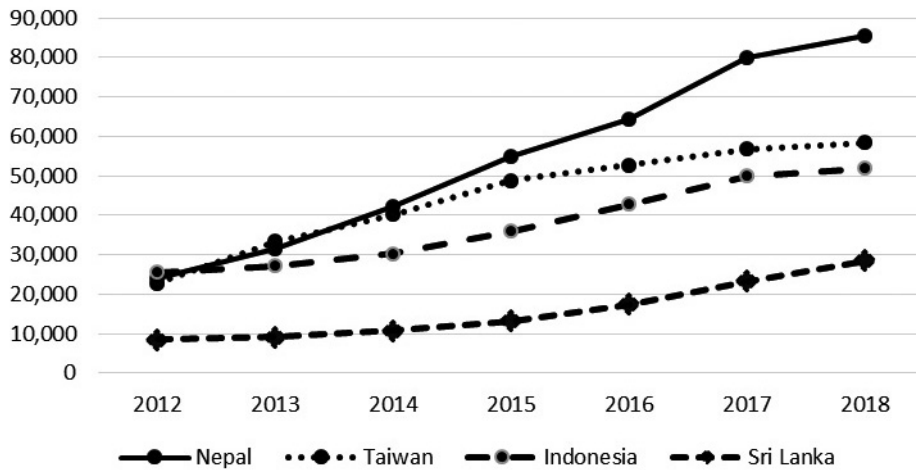
However, over the last few years there has been a change in the composition of foreigners arriving in Japan. Specifically, the number of individuals arriving from Southeast and East Asia is dramatically on the rise. The case of Vietnam is the most notable and deserves considerably attention as there has been an increase of nearly 600% over a six year period, which suddenly ranks as the third most populous foreign country behind traditional heavy-weights China and Korea. While at the same time, countries such as Nepal, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka have also seen relatively substantial increases in the number of citizens migrating to Japan (MOJ, 2018).

Figure1: Recent Trends in Immigration (1)



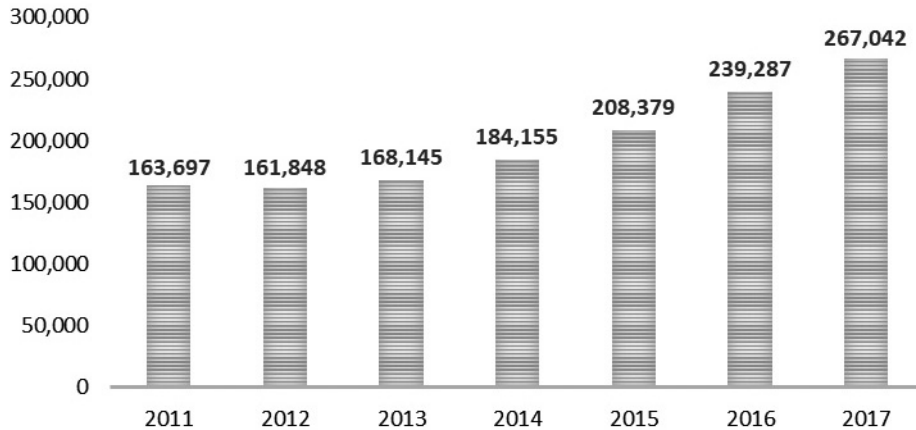
Source: MOJ, 2018

Figure2: Recent Trends in Immigration (2)



Source: MOJ, 2018

Figure 3: YEAR BY YEAR TOTALS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN JAPAN



Source: MOJ, 2018

4.1 De Facto Immigration-International Student Policies

I . Implementation of bringing International Students to Japan

In June 1983 the Prime Minister of Japan, Yasuhiro Nakasone, launched the “Plan to Accept 100,000 International Students” (*Ryūgakusei ukeire 10man nin Keikaku*). The goal was to help globalize Japan and bring the total number of annual international students to 100,000 per year by the year

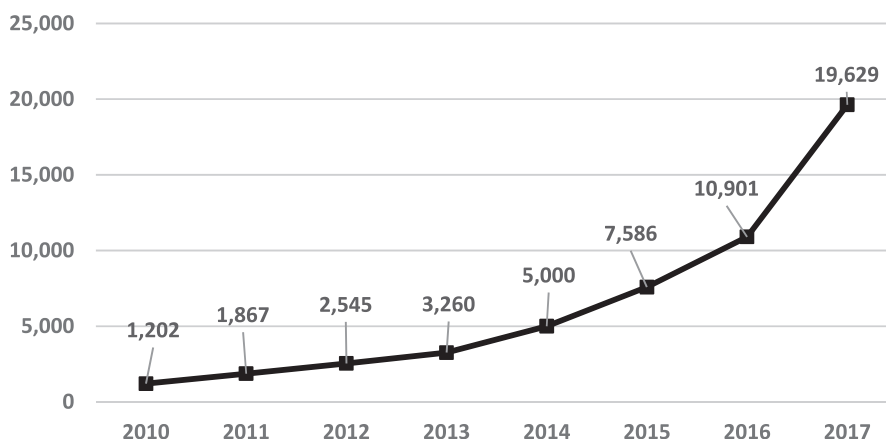
Figure 4: 2017 International Students by Visa Type		
Japanese Language Institutes		78,658
University (Undergraduate)		77,546
Professional Training college		58,771
Graduate School		46,373
University preparatory course		3,220
Junior College		1,915
College of technology		559
Source: JASSO, 2018	Total	267,042

Figure 5: Number of International Students by Country & Year						
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Vietnam	4,373	6,290	26,439	38,882	53,807	61,671
Nepal	2,451	3,188	10,448	16,250	19,471	21,500
Taiwan	4,617	4,719	6,231	7,314	8,330	8,947
Sri Lanka	670	794	1,412	2,312	3,976	6,607
Source: JASSO, 2018						

2000. And while it fell short of reaching its goal, there was a significant increase from the 1983 total of 10,425 to 64,011 international students (JASSO, 2018). However, to reach this goal two extremely important changes were made in the visa application process that laid the foundation for where things are today. First, the government simplified the visa application procedures and allowed language schools to act as guarantors. Second, the law was changed to allow individuals on student visas to amend their visa and obtain a working permit. With a valid working permit, students were allowed to work 28 hours per week during normal school weeks and up to 48 hours per week when school is not in session (Ishikawa 2006). Because of these changes, we can see the first boom of international students coming to Japan via language schools with the intention to work. From 1984 to 1988 the number of pre-college students increased from around 4,000 to over 35,000 (MOJ, 2012). And accordingly the number of Japanese language schools increased from 49 to 309. Many of these new international students were coming from southern China with the intention to work, not study, and they served the purpose of low-skilled laborers. (Tanaka 1995).

Nevertheless, concerns regarding the country's declining population and aging society led to a second major debate in the early 2000s. The issue was no longer about whether foreign workers were needed, but rather what kind of foreigners should be accepted and by what methods (Kondo 2008).

Figure 6: Changes in the number of applicants for refugee recognition



Source: MOJ, 2018

By 2002, Japan did realize its goal of having 100,000 international students annually. However, this number eventually stagnated at around 120,000 annually and eventually the government again decided to implement a plan to increase the number of international students. In a Diet session in January of 2008, the former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda announced the “300,000 Foreign Students Plan” (*Ryūgakusei 30man nin Keikaku*) plan during his policy speech. It was viewed as a vital tool for Japan to open itself up to the world while at the same time expand the flow of people to and from Japan. This time the goal was 300,000 students by the year 2020, and it appears that this goal will be achieved. With previous experience in mind, the government determined that this plan would be targeted at retaining students upon graduation. Yet, the reality is that most of these international students end up working in low-skill jobs, mainly in the service sector (Chiavacci, 2012). In this study we are able to see that the participants were in this exact situation.

4.2 De facto Immigration-Refugee Asylum Seekers

Japan has historically been a very difficult country to be recognized as a refugee. Over the last eight years, of the 51,990 applicants a total of 110 individuals have been recognized as obtaining refugee or asylum status. This works out to a 0.002% acceptance rate. Compared to the European Union which in 2017 received 728,470 applicants seeking refugee or asylum status and granted positively to 538,120 individuals (Eurostat, 2018), or the USA which granted status to 84,944 individuals in 2016 (US State Department, 2017), Japan’s situation is extreme. Looking beyond the overall numbers though, there is another story to tell.

Where Japan’s situation deserves attention is in the drastic increase in the number of applicants over the last eight years. In 2010 there were only 1,202 applicants but by 2017 this had skyrocketed

Table 2: Number of applications for refugee recognition by nationality

		2015		2016		2017
1	Nepal	1,786	Indonesia	1,829	Philippines	4,895
2	Indonesia	969	Nepal	1,451	Vietnam	3,116
3	Turkey	926	Philippines	1,412	Sri Lanka	2,226
4	Myanmar	808	Turkey	1,143	Indonesia	2,038
5	Vietnam	574	Vietnam	1,072	Nepal	1,451
6	Sri Lanka	469	Sri Lanka	938	Turkey	1,195
7	Philippines	299	Myanmar	650	Myanmar	962
8	Pakistan	295	India	470	Cambodia	772
9	Bangladesh	244	Cambodia	318	India	601
10	India	229	Pakistan	289	Pakistan	469
Total		7,588		10,901		19,629

Source: MOJ, March 2018

Table 3: Refugee recognition applicants

Year 2017	Japan	Korea
Philippines	4,895	246
Vietnam	3,116	53
Sri Lanka	2,226	119
Indonesia	2,038	12
Nepal	1,451	149
Turkey	1,195	42

Sources: MOJ, 2018 & Korean Immigration Bureau, 2018

to 19,629.

There is widespread belief that this increase is due to the law change in 2010 which allowed refugee/asylum seekers to obtain work permits while their cases were pending. The work permit has zero restrictions on what type of work nor a restriction on the number of working hours allowed per week as is the case with a student visa. However, it has become apparent that there are a considerable number of applicants who are ostensibly applying for refugee status while their actual intention is of using it as a work visa (MOJ, 2018).

This concern seems credible as two interviewees admitted this was the case in their situations. Of the three refugee/asylum status seekers whom were interviewed, two admitted that their reason for applying for asylum had nothing to do with needing to escape a bad situation but rather was intently for working purposes.

The process for screening refugee applicants in Japan typically averages 9.9 months, but through

Table 4: Basic Statistics of the Survey

Male	n=13	Average Weekly School hrs	17.4	Worked over hrs limit	
Female	n=2	Average Weekly Working hrs	37.7	Yes	n=8
Median Age	24	Number of Part-time Jobs		No	n=5
Average Health Level	7.87/10	1	n=4	Decline to answer	n=2
Average Happiness Level	7.73/10	2	n=10	Paid recruitment agency	
Japanese Language Ability Score		3	n=1	Yes	n=12
Speaking	3.2/5	Average Hourly Wage	¥1100	No	n=3
Reading	2.27/5	Type of Work		Incured Debt by coming to Japan	
Writing	2.13/5	Restaurant	5	Yes	n=11
English Language Ability Score		Convenience Store	7	No	n=4
Speaking	2.67/5	Grocery	3	Decline to answer	n=1
Reading	2.6/5	Delivery Service	6	Paying Remittance	
Writing	2.33/5	Factory	6	Yes	n=6
Japan is Safer than Home Country		Other	1	No	n=9
Yes	n=13	Employment Introduction		Main Motivation Education	
No	n=2	Japanese person	n=8	Disagree	n=9
Undecided	n=1	Non-Japanese person	n=15	Strongly disagree	n=4
Visa type		Worked an illegal job		Undecided	n=2
Student	n=12	Yes	n=4	Main Motivation Work	
Refugee Applicant	n=3	No	n=11	Strongly agree	n=7
				Agree	n=7
				Disagree	n=1

appeals this can be extended as for as long as 23.4 months, which is a considerable amount of time. Furthermore, one can also resubmit their application and begin the process all over. (JAR, 2018) The majority of these applicants have come from South and Southeast Asia. Many countries from these areas have relatively less restrictions placed on them for travel to Japan (Japan Immigration Bureau, 2018). Because of this, it makes applying for refugee status easier.

An indication that many of these applicants are not legitimate would be to compare the situation to that of Korea, Japan's close neighbor and an economically advanced country. In Korea, the Immigration Office issues work permits for refugee applicants only one year after the refugee application date in an extremely restrictive manner, while providing no financial support for refugee applicants (Kimura 2016). A quick glance at the total number of asylum seekers in Korea for the year 2017 for the respective top six applicant countries in Japan shows that there is a radical difference:

Based on this comparison it can be said that there is a high likelihood that many of the applicants are indeed making illegitimate claims for refugee recognition.

5. Survey questionnaire and interview results

The survey questionnaire was conducted via an online survey website, freeonlinesurveys.com, and was distributed through a link sent through email or SMS. Participants could then answer the questionnaire with a smart phone or iPad device. The average time to complete the questionnaire took around ten minutes. Upon completion of the survey the participants would then be interviewed

face-to-face and answers were manually recorded and in some cases, when permission was granted, would be audibly recorded. An outline of some of the basic characteristics can be seen in Table 4:

5.1 Student Visa With the intention to work

Based on the responses to the questions regarding motivation for coming to Japan, it was obviously clear that the overwhelmingly majority of interviewees had come to Japan with the main motivation being intent to work. Of the 12 participants attending a Japanese language school, every single individual had amended their visas to gain a working permit and all respondents held at least one part-time job. During the interviews this was confirmed time and time again:

“Learning Japanese can be fun but I didn’t come here for that. I came here to earn money.”
[Would you say this is common among people that you know in Japan?] *“Definitely, all most everyone I know from my country came here like me.”* [To work and make money?] *“Yes.”*
(N1, Nepal)

“It is common knowledge in Vietnam that you can come to Japan on a student visa and make good money. When I told my family I was going to come to Japan they were happy for me because now I can make money, they said.” [And they knew that you were coming on a student visa with the intention to work?] *“Yes, they knew but I already went to college so it’s not about school for me.”*
(V2, Vietnam)

“School is not important here. I’m just using it so I can work”. [Do you think that many people think like you do?] *“I think that most of the foreigners I know are the same.”* [And you are satisfied with this situation?] *“This is a good opportunity to make money.”*
(SL4, Sri Lanka)

It would appear to be a contradictory system to cause workers to go into debt just so they can earn an income.

When asked about their opinions of the current system, this so-called de facto immigration, there were some surprising and varying answers.

“This is a good situation for me. I can make a lot more money in Japan than Vietnam and the work is not so difficult for me.” [Do you mind not being considered a foreign-worker, even though that is mostly what you do in Japan?] *“It’s not something that I think about.”*
(V4, Vietnam)

“I kind of just go to school to see my friends, you know, like a social thing. And then I go work and make money. It’s ok for me.” [And your school doesn’t mind? The teachers don’t say anything to you?] *“Most of my classmates are doing the same thing, you know. So, nobody says anything.”*

(V1, Vietnam)

“I know one guy who has been going to language schools for five years. He just keeps enrolling and doing his job. He told me he has a nice job at a factory and he doesn’t care about paying the tuition.” [Would you consider doing something similar?] *“If I found a nice job, then maybe.”*

(N5, Nepal)

5.1.1 Recruitment Agencies

Another common thread amongst participants was having paid a recruitment agency in their home country before receiving a student visa to come to Japan. Only three participants had not paid a recruitment agency before entering Japan. There appeared to be a discrepancy in the amount paid by each individual, even within the same country. This could lead to the question of profiteering and if this step is necessary in the process of bringing foreign workers to Japan.

“The situation is not ideal. We are paying such large sums of money just to come to Japan. And then once we get we must work so hard just to get out of this burden”

(N3, Nepal)

“I paid 2.5million rupees (¥1.5million) to an agency to get my student visa but my friend told me that he paid only 1.5million.” [And this covered your other expenses such as travel fees, school tuition, or housing?] *“No, this only to get the visa. Everything else I still needed to pay for.”*

(SL1, Sri Lanka)

From comparing answers to the amount of money paid to recruitment agencies, ¥1.5million seems to be the average but Sri Lanka had somewhat higher fees while Nepal was slightly lower.

Which leads to the next question about going into debt. Of the participants 11 said that they incurred debt in their home countries before coming to Japan. For many this was related to the agency fee and for costs incurred for moving to a new country. This was also a source of mental stress for several of the participants.

“I borrowed money from my family and I have to pay back some every month. They are expecting it from me and if I don’t pay they will be very upset with me and yell at me. It’s not something I

want to think about but I have to.” [Does this cause you stress?] “Yes. I can’t let them down and so I think about it often.”

(V3, Vietnam)

5.2 Refugee recognition seekers

Of the three refugee/asylum status seekers whom were interviewed, two admitted that their reason for applying for asylum had nothing to do with needing to escape a bad situation but rather was intently for working purposes.

“I heard from my friend that you can apply and pretty much start working straight away while the application is being processed. And then if you get rejected you can reapply and keep working.”

(SL2, Sri Lanka)

“I want to keep working in Japan but my visa is going to run out soon and I’m worried about what I can do. It is definitely causing me stress.” *note – this respondent indicated having negative thoughts and inflicting self-harm which could be directly related to this situation.

(SL2, Sri Lanka)

“I didn’t want to pay the recruitment fee in Sri Lanka before coming to work in Japan. Many people that I know who came to Japan had to pay so much money just to get a visa and then they are always having to pay it back. So, I decided to apply to be a refugee.” [So there were no problems or threats facing you in your home country?] *“No. This was my easiest chance to come to Japan.”*

(SL5, Sri Lanka)

As for the third refugee status seeker, his situation was legitimate and he was genuinely seeking refuge from untenable circumstances in his home country.

“I can never go back home, my father told me. He said the situation was not safe. So I borrowed money from my uncle and I paid an agency to get me a tourist visa to Japan. I came and then two weeks later applied for refugee status.”

(SL3, Sri Lanka)

It is very important to keep in mind that although there does appear to be abuses in the system, there are still people who are in need of asylum and refugee status.

5.3 A Look at Social Capital Characteristics

There has been a plethora of research on social capital and its benefits but unfortunately it is a topic that is vastly under-studied for foreign workers in their respective adopted countries. While the main purpose of this paper does not focus on social capital it is a relevant topic that was addressed through the course of the survey and interviews and thus warrants a closer look.

Social capital has been conceptualized as a quantifiable resource and its benefits have been validated in countless researches since Putnam's (1993) seminal work regarding the differences in efficiency within the Italian government. Briefly, The World Bank (2012) defines Social Capital as:

“the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable”

While the OECD (2001) conceptualizes the concept as:

“networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups”

A few of the proven benefits associated with possessing Social Capital include:

- a wide range of health benefits (longer life expectancy, lower death rates) (Kawachi et al 2008)
- economic benefits (gaining higher wages) (Tsuda 2011)
- being conducive to economic growth, stability, and a variety of outcomes (Bjornskov 2003)

For the purpose of this research we will be looking at the five dimensions as defined by the World Bank's outline on measuring qualitative social capital (Dudwick et al. 2006):

- ▶ *Dimension 1: Groups and networks*
- ▶ *Dimension 2: Trust and solidarity*
- ▶ *Dimension 3: Collective action and cooperation*
- ▶ *Dimension 4: Information and communication*
- ▶ *Dimension 5: Social cohesion and inclusion*

● *Dimension 1: Groups and networks*

Understanding the groups and networks that enable people to access resources and collaborate to achieve shared goals is an important part of the concept of social capital. Informal networks are manifested in spontaneous, informal, and unregulated exchanges of information and resources within communities, as well as efforts at cooperation, coordination, and mutual assistance that help maximize

the utilization of available resources (Lafferty et al. 2016, Dudwick et al. 2006)

A perfect example of this dimension and seeing social capital manifest itself in the real world by obtaining employment. In this survey participants were asked the following:

Q24. How did you find your current work?

Introduction (n=15) Advertisement (n=1) Recruitment Agency (n=5)

If you answered A. INTRODUCTION to Q.24, was the person that introduced you Japanese or non-Japanese? (You can choose both)

Non-Japanese (n=15) Japanese (n=8)

“If my friend tells me, hey, I know a good job, do you want to work? I know that I can trust him”
[Why?] *“Because if they say it’s okay then I know that probably the boss is okay, the job is okay, and hopefully the pay is okay, hah hah.”*

(V1, Vietnam)

“We are all trying to help each other with work things.” [What do mean? How so?] *“Like, if someone has a bad job or a bad boss we try to find them a new job. Or if someone finds a good job then they will try to get us into the place.”*

(N3, Nepal)

“The staff at my school are very nice. When I left a job that I didn’t like and they knew I need a job, they introduced me to a new one.” [What type of work was it? What were the conditions like at the new job?] *“It is in a factory, for a delivery company. The pay was much better than my old job but I have to work very early in the morning. It’s okay though, I don’t mind.”*

(SL1, Sri Lanka)

As we can see from the results literally every participant found their job through introduction and through their network of Non-Japanese that they know in Fukuoka. This demonstrates strong social capital ties amongst the community of foreign student workers living abroad in Fukuoka. And with more than half of the participants indicating introductions from Japanese, this can be deduced as a generally high level of social capital with the native Japanese population as well.

● Dimension 2: Safety and Trust

These are key elements to social capital and are the building blocks for a strong and stable community. Being able to rely on someone and believing that no harm will be done to you institutes

a strong correlation to possessing social capital. By looking at the following results from the survey/interview we can see that there is a high level of safety and trust among the participants.

“I feel very safe in Japan, more than in my home country”

(SL3, Sri Lanka)

“I’m not sure about Japanese people. I’ve had my wallet stolen before and I know two friends who this has also happened to”

(V2, Vietnam)

“It’s hard to know if I can really trust Japanese people.” [What do you mean?] “I sometimes feel like people are nice to me on the outside but maybe not on the inside. I hear people say “giajin, gaijin” often when I am together with my friends. I don’t know why they need to say that.”

(SL1, Sri Lanka)

● Dimension 3: Collective action and cooperation

This aspect of social capital is one where we see community building and how groups are formed and nurtured. This dimension is closely related to trust and unity and, for example, how a community might respond to a problem. For this dimension participants were asked:

Table 5: Safety and Trust

Please state your opinion about the following statement: In General, Japanese people can be trusted.

Strongly Agree (n=1), Agree (n=12), Undecided (n=2)

Please state your opinion about the following statement: In General, Foreigners in Japan can be trusted.

Strongly Agree (n=2), Agree (n=11), Undecided (n=2)

How many Japanese people do you know that you trust?

Average = 5.8 people

In Japan, how many Non-Japanese people do you know that you trust?

Average = 9.3 people

Please state your opinion about the following statement: Japan is a safe place to live.

Strongly Agree (n=6) Agree (n=9)

Do you consider Japan to be safer than your home country?

Yes (n=12) No (n=2) Undecided (n=1)

How often do you participate in organized group activities? (Ex: Neighborhood association, sports team, foreigner association, club activity, mutual-interest group, etc)

Very Often (n=0) Often (n=3) Sometimes (n=6) Rarely (n=5) Never (n=1)

“I do some sports with my friends, like play soccer, and sometimes I’ll go to school event.” [Do you feel like you are making stronger connections with people by participating?] *“Hmm, not really.”* [Why not?] *“Because I already hang out with the same people most of the time so it doesn’t feel special to me.”*

(N2, Nepal)

The results from this aspect are inconclusive. While there does appear to be some participation the depth of it does not give the impression to be deep.

The last two dimensions are heavily rooted and closely related to the previous three dimensions so we won’t spend too much time focusing on them in this paper. For example, any information about employment opportunities will be strongly correlated to having group networks. Likewise, feeling like part of a group and working together will be connected to group participation and trust.

● *Dimension 4: Information and communication*

“Most of the things I know about surviving in Japan I learned my foreigner friends here.”

(N2, Nepal)

There is an old saying in English that is very appropriate for describing social capital and its outcomes: It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.

● *Dimension 5: Social cohesion and inclusion*

A question related to this topic was included in the survey. For this dimension participants were asked:

Do you ever feel excluded from a group because you are not Japanese?

Yes (n=9) No (n=4) Decline to answer (n=2)

“I know Japanese people and I have Japanese friends but I don’t always feel like I’m part of their group sometimes.” [Why is that?] *“Sometimes I don’t understand what they are saying.”*

(V5, Vietnam)

“Yeah, whenever I am called ‘Gaijin’ it makes me feel different.” Doesn’t the word mean outsider or alien or something?” [Yes, it does]

(SL3, Sri Lanka)

“I feel like I am not part of the group when Japanese people tell me how Japan is so different for other Asian countries. I am also Asian. I don’t understand it.”

(V2, Vietnam)

In regards to dimension 5, these results from both the survey and the interviews should be considered forms of negative social capital.

5.4. Limitations

As with all survey and interview studies, the more respondents the better. With that in mind, expanding the number of respondents would help improve the quality of the research.

Although the focus of this paper was on three particular groups, including Chinese foreign students would most definitely yield more robust results and offer a different perspective.

The participants were all from Fukuoka prefecture and thus including other parts of Japan, namely Tokyo and Osaka, would improve the research and move away from location biases that may exist.

The two languages used for conducting the research were English and Japanese. Being able to speak in your native tongue facilitates a more nuanced answer and perhaps a clearer one.

In attempting to ascertain a qualitative analysis of the social capital levels of the foreign-student workers who participated in this survey, there were several areas that showed signs of high levels. It can be concluded that Dimensions 1 and 2 showed very high levels while Dimension 3 was inconclusive. Dimension 4 proved difficult to measure while Dimension 5 appears to have shown signs of negative social capital. As mentioned previously, more respondents and, more importantly, a cross-sectional analysis comparing qualitative and quantitative data would certainly improve the clarity of which factors are most influential while also providing greater depth in the results.

6. Discussion & Conclusions

It is clear that immigration and immigration policy is a complicated issue that has no simple solution. While it is obvious that Japan is facing a severe labor shortage crisis, specifically in low-skilled job sectors, the country does not yet appear ready to open its doors to mass immigration as a means to mitigate this problem. As noted, Japan does not have an immigration policy to accept low-skilled workers, so up until now they’ve worked around this issue in three ways: *Nikkeijin*, Trainee Visa Program, and International Students. In essence, de facto immigration.

Recognition and acceptance of foreign-workers would help ease the burden on both sides. Japan could stop pretending that it doesn't have low-skilled immigration and properly establish institutions that can funnel the necessary workers to appropriate industries. Another key element could come to fruition: new tax payers, i.e. contributors to the national social welfare systems.

The situation has the potential to be mutually beneficial for both parties involved. Japan could gain a young, motivated workforce that is more than willing to engage in manual labor and so-called low-skilled jobs, while also potentially providing a source of funding for its social welfare systems. And for the foreign-workers, they would have the opportunity to earn much higher average wages than in their respective home countries with the chance to gain skills such as a trade (agricultural techniques, fishing, logistics, and/or language abilities). Furthermore, for the workers, the benefits could be multifold. Recognition as an asset/resource that allows for access to social welfare services (i.e. healthcare/pension), workers' rights (wages, time-off, proper working conditions) will facilitate more stability, better health and potentially more productivity.

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