2011-01-01

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Recommended Citation
DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.ARV.24.1.2
Available at: https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/arv/vol24/iss1/3

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Japanese immigration policy in a transition

Junichi Akashi

The island nation has been experiencing inward migration at an unprecedented scale since the late 1980s. From 1952, the year in which Japan regained full sovereignty, until the end of the 20th century, the Japanese immigration policy had been no more than a series of bureaucratic rules and routine practices with some exceptions, and never welcomed immigrants. However, the 21st century ushered in a wave of changes. Keeping in mind the rapidly declining and ageing population, the Japanese public, media, business interest groups, scholars, and politicians have begun to discuss the possibility of officially accepting temporary laborers in labor-intensive sectors, foreign workers in a wider variety of industries such as aged care and nursing, and even immigrants. Concurrently with the strengthening of an immigration-population link in Japan, growth in inward migration has become a major security concern for the government. Hence, immigration has become a topic of intense political debate. In this chapter, I outline Japanese immigration policies with an emphasis on the recent policy orientations, and examine the current debates over immigration.

Historical background

Until the early 1980s, not many foreign nationals sought jobs in Japan, let alone attempting to illegally enter and stay in the country. Even in the period of high economic growth from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, which was accompanied by a labor scarcity, there appeared to be little political commitment on the issue of foreign workers (Bartram, 2000, 2005). Rather than importing foreign workers to mitigate labor shortages, the Japanese government opted to bring laborers from the rural population into the city. In addition, encouraged by the growing demand for labor, an increasing number of housewives joined the labor market.

(Morita, 1994; Kajita, 1994: 11–2). In this manner, the Japanese economy could maintain its economic growth without relying on imported foreign labor.

Since the late 1980s, however, the conditions of the Japanese labor market have changed. Japanese business interest groups and policy makers, among others, have begun to discuss the possibility of importing foreign labor. In practice, a rapid increase in the inflow of foreign nationals into Japan, not to mention “unauthorized” foreign workers, was a de facto phenomenon observed in the late 1980s. As seen in figure 1, the official number of foreign nationals who legally entered Japan in 1980 was approximately 1.3 million. It reached 3.5 million in 1990, and increased to slightly over 9 million in 2007 and 2008, whereas the global financial crisis resulted in significantly fewer foreign visitors in 2009. And yet, a tremendous surge in the number of foreign nationals has challenged Japan, which has traditionally been regarded as a non-immigration country. Parademetriou et al. (2000: vii) once described the Japanese attitude towards foreigners as follows: “the uniqueness of Japanese society and culture must be defended against presumed ‘onslaught’ of foreign immigrants.”

Figure 1: Number of foreign nationals entering Japan, 1955–2009
The rapid increase in cross-border movements is due to the following factors. First, the drastic reduction in international travel cost and the concurrent rise in the individual wealth of nationals from some, if not all, of Japan’s neighboring areas have made cross-border travel affordable. Second, restrictions on the emigration of citizens were gradually relaxed in Mainland China, South Korea, and Taiwan. Third, the Japanese currency has dramatically appreciated since the mid-1980s, thereby making Japan an attractive choice for foreign nationals seeking work opportunities. Fourth, and most important, there was an emerging mismatch between demand and supply in the labor market across the borders. Athukorala et al. (1999: 52), for example, point out that labor scarcity in the labor-intensive industries of receiving countries in the Asian region is not temporary, but structural.

On the one hand, an increasing number of young new entrants to the labor market tended to avoid menial, demanding, and dangerous jobs, leading to a shortage in the Japanese domestic labor pool. On the other hand, unskilled foreign workers were eager to avail of these opportunities for obtaining an immediate income. The ratio of job offers to job seekers reached a peak at 1.44 in 1991 and the labor shortage was so acute that hundreds of small and medium-sized companies went bankrupt because they failed to procure sufficient labor to maintain production. Not surprisingly, the attitudes of the industry and business sectors were even welcoming towards the increase in the inflow of foreign workers. Under these circumstances, the conflict between the pro- and anti-foreign worker factions intensified, and policy reform was called for (Shimada, 1994: 49–54; Iguchi, 2001).³

The 1989 Amendment of the Immigration Control Act

The Japanese government’s approach toward foreign workers—both skilled and unskilled—is clearly stated in the 1989 Amendment of the Immigration Control and Refugee Act (hereafter, the 1989 Amendment) and in the immigration-related policies of the 1990s. At first, the 1989 Amendment increased the number of categories under which residential status could be obtained from 18 to 27. This revision is favorable for foreign nationals who have been admitted on the basis of their professional
knowledge or requisite skills according to the criteria and conditions explicitly stated by the Ministry of Justice Ordinance. In addition to those who are eligible to work in Japan, the 1989 Amendment made it legal for ethnic Japanese individuals living overseas—the so-called “Nikkeijin” (Japanese descendents)—to work without restrictions on the ground of blood relationship and historical ties with Japanese society. It is estimated that 300,000 or more Nikkeijin are presently working in Japan. The category of “long-term resident,” which was introduced by the 1989 Amendment, enables such laborers to work in Japan.

In tandem with the introduction of the “long-term resident” category, the government relaxed the traditional system of hiring trainees, thus enabling small and medium-sized companies (e.g., manufacturing subcontractors) to accept “foreign workers” as trainees. These developments were, at least partly, the consequences of the pressure exerted by the government-industry coalition, which emphasized the interests of Japanese commerce and industry, a part of which would not have survived had these foreign workers not been hired for manual labor jobs at a reasonable cost. In addition, the conditions for accepting foreign trainees were gradually relaxed during the 1990s, in terms of the length of stay and the types of jobs these trainees were permitted to take. According to the Immigration Bureau, almost throughout the 1990s, the number of new trainees arriving in Japan remained relatively low, lying in the range of 30,000–50,000 annually; however, this figure rose to nearly 54,000 in 2000. Since then, the number has sharply increased to 102,018 in 2007 and remained at the same level in 2008. In 2009, the figure decreased by 20 percent compared to the previous year because of the economic crisis and slowdown of the Japanese economy. The largest number of trainees arrived from China, accounting for 53,876 of new arrivals in 2009, followed by Vietnam (4,890), the Philippines (4,726), Indonesia (3,980), and Thailand (2,698).

In 1993, the government introduced a new scheme for admitting foreign workers—the Technical Internship Training Program (TITP). TITP is an enhanced version of the existing trainee program, under which foreign nationals are entitled to engage in on-the-job training for a limited period if they pass a skill
assessment test at the end of the training program. In fiscal 2008, the number of people who transferred from being “trainees” to “technical interns” under the “designated activities” status reached a historical high of 63,747 on an application basis. In fiscal 2009, again, the 2008–2009 economic turmoil caused a reduction by 9 percent over the previous fiscal year, the first decrease since the program was initiated. The largest number switching to become technical interns come from China, accounting for 45,973, followed by Vietnam (4,445), the Philippines (3,243), Indonesia (2,902), and Thailand (897). Under the TITP, the types of work that foreign nationals are permitted engage in are classified into 66 categories as of July 2010. In the beginning, there were merely 17 such categories; however, the number of categories increased as many more industrial sectors have become interested in hiring foreign interns and have prepared skill assessment tests for them. What is distinctive about the 1989 Amendment and subsequent legal arrangements for its implementation is that the government officially declared that Japan would not import foreign workers at the same time at which this amendment was made and implemented. In other words, according to Douglass et al. (2000: 8), the Japanese government has consistently applied its “official policy of allowing foreign workers ‘entrants’ but not ‘immigrants’.” It is for this reason that the Japanese immigration policy has been labeled a “side-door” or “disguised” labor policy. In fact, this side-door policy is a compromise agreement between the two parties involved, namely, the government-industry coalition and the bureaucracy. The government-industry coalition is satisfied with the outcome to a certain extent, because it achieved its goals in real terms. On the other hand, the opponents of the coalition—mostly bureaucrats in charge of immigration and labor—are somewhat satisfied as well, because by way of the government’s official declaration, they believe that they have successfully adhered to, at least in the legal sense, Japan’s fundamental principle of not accepting unskilled foreign workers. Overall, the 1989 Amendment was more or less an acceptable compromise between the parties concerned.
Debates on “immigration” and the population crisis

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the debates and concerns about immigration were largely limited to the benefits and drawbacks of accepting foreign workers. However, at the turn of the century, Japanese immigration policy was faced with new challenges. These challenges pertained not only to labor shortages in particular sectors but also to the pressure of a rapidly ageing society as well as the increasing transnational security concerns.

First on the Japanese government’s agenda is strengthening the link between immigration and population, which is regarded as an indispensable factor for reshaping Japan’s economic and social landscape in the future. Japan already witnessed a decline in the population of productive-age (15–64 years) in 1997; in 2000, a report by the UN population division estimated that Japan would need to accept replacement migration to the extent of 650,000 people every year in order to maintain the size of the productive-age population that it had in 1995. According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, the projected population in the year 2100 is approximately 48 million—by a moderate estimate—which is more than 60 percent lower than the present population; this reduction is due to the ageing population and declining birthrates of around 1.3 percent.

Growing anxiety about the population crisis, persisting labor shortages in certain industrial sectors, and the shrinking Japanese economy is demonstrably reflected in the immigration policy debates at the turn of the 21st century and thereafter. For example, in 2000, the Prime Minister’s Commission on Japan’s Goals in the 21st Century reported that further discussion is necessary on “migrant workers” who are expected to formally become members of the nation.

In addition, a committee under the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (presently known as the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry) also stresses the need for relaxing the criteria for permanent residents or even immigrants on the grounds that human resource inflows will have positive effects on the Japanese society and economy in the long run. Moreover, since around the year 2000, a number of major business groups such as the Japan Economic Federation have put forth supportive arguments. One
such pro-immigration stance was taken by the Mission for Revitalization of the Asian Economy, a study group organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2000. It mentioned the necessity of building a system in which foreign nursing-care providers are accepted in the country in order to sustain the rapidly ageing society.

Compared to the first Basic Plan of Immigration Control introduced in 1992, the second version introduced in 2000 (and also the Third Basic Plan in 2005 and the Fourth in 2010) by the Immigration Bureau shows noticeable developments on several points. The new plan aims to widen the range of acceptance of foreign nationals based on “the need for flexible use of manpower in response, in particular, to changes in industrial structure and corporate behavior” and addresses the problem of the ageing society.

The plan stipulates that the acceptance of foreign workers to cope with the declining domestic labor force and population is not currently a realistic option. Nonetheless, awareness about the serious consequences of low fertility rates in Japan began to spread among policy makers and the elite in business circles in the late 1990s, leading to changes in Japan’s attitude toward foreign nationals one way or another. In March 2005, the Immigration Bureau issued guidelines for obtaining permanent residency based specifically on the applicant’s contribution to Japan in the fields of culture, economy, academia, welfare, art, education, technology, sport, and so on. In the subsequent year, it also formulated, for the first time ever, guidelines specifying the general procedures and conditions for obtaining permanent residency. It should be noted that from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, national policy makers seldom considered “immigrants” as a countermeasure against the population crisis. Instead, the immigration policy introduced the category of “guest workers,” who are subject to strict control based on the rotation principle. At the turn of the century, however, the government started to experiment with some ideas on “immigrants” with a more long-term view.

Japanese society is rapidly ageing due to a diminishing birthrate. Hence, the question of who will provide care to the increasing number of aged Japanese men and women often arises.
Consequently, a frequent topic of discussion these days is that of importing foreign nurses and caregivers, particularly from the Philippines—the major exporter of labor for these occupations. The Philippines has long sought an opportunity to send its workers to Japan, but it was only recently that the two countries initiated bilateral negotiations on legal frameworks with regard to Filipino workers, in the FTA/EPA context. Within the Japanese government, there still exists a conflict between the pro-and anti-foreign worker groups (Sun, 2007). At the risk of over-simplification, one can say that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry are in favor of opening the labor market to foreign nurses and caregivers, whereas the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare is against it, taking the interests of the Japanese Nursing Association into consideration, a professional organization consisting of over 600,000 members and exercising political influence over employment policy making in Japan.

As a result, the Japanese government has, for the time being, decided to accept 400 nurses and 600 caregivers, although it took a couple of years for the Philippine government to have passed the legislation to this effect. Further, in 2007, the government of Japan signed an EPA with Indonesia that enables Indonesian nurses and caregivers to work in Japan, and it took effect in the subsequent year. The growing international and domestic pressure to open the labor market has brought the Japanese government to the negotiation table. The government of Japan also agreed an EPA with Thailand in April 2007, and with Vietnam in December 2008. These documents include terms and conditions for a natural person of both countries seeking entry, stay, and work. However, the possibility of acceptance of Thai certificated care-worker and spa therapist as well as Vietnam nurse and care-worker under the EPA scheme remains an issue for further negotiation.

**Political commitment and the missing argument**

One of the noteworthy developments in the field of immigration policy is that reform proposals and policy recommendations have been presented by a pro-immigration group and major business associations. The former includes an influential politician of the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in
2008, a policy think tank, international organization personnel, immigration scholars, and media persons. To take a simple example, the LDP’s project team on immigration proposed a “Plan for Inviting 10 Million Immigrants” that argues for the inclusion of population factors in the future immigration policy (Akashi et al., 2008).

The proposed LDP scheme for immigration policy reform claims to fulfill the following conditions. First, it should be based on the assumption that the inflow of migrant workers into Japan follows a natural and inevitable historical trend. Second, foreign nationals who work in Japan for a certain period should be entitled to permanent residency. Third, the traditional rotation system (trainees—technical interns) should be modified or abolished. Fourth, the new scheme should provide comprehensive education support and occupational training to prospective immigrants at a reasonable cost. Fifth, the government must create a new agency to exclusively manage all the relevant tasks such as immigration control, social integration, and naturalization.

This is undoubtedly one of the most ambitious legislative endeavors, because such a claim is opposite to Japan’s traditional view of migrants and because the bureaucracy, which has traditionally been responsible for the formulation and implementation of legislation, is inclined to follow the status quo. Even so, the government appears to be lenient, far more than it was, when dealing with the inflow and settlement of foreign nationals. Furthermore, there is popular agreement with regard to forging an atmosphere for the debate on how to reform the traditional Japanese immigration regime, given that migrants are necessary for sustaining the ageing Japanese society and that they are accepted in a selective and effectively controlled manner.

Yet, some issues appear to have been ignored in recent debates including the above policy proposal. First, it is unclear as to how the government of Japan can manage population inflows without violating the human rights of migrants and causing an anti-immigration backlash at the national level. Few pro-immigration groups have sufficiently analyzed predictable cultural-ethnic frictions between immigrants and locals. Further, they are not completely in tune with the opinions of the general public, which is
not necessarily accustomed to the large-scale presence of "immigrants." Furthermore, current debates should bridge the gap between fundamental rules of social security, education system, nationality/citizenship, and election, since these issues will require modification according to the demographic as well as socio-cultural transformation caused by immigration. Therefore, it is imperative to seek or build consensus if Japan is genuinely interested in becoming a country that favors immigration.

Second, the proposed policy reforms and recommendations rarely take into consideration the roles and professional resources of civil society organizations. Moreover, non-governmental actors such as international institutions and local migrant-support NGOs do not actively participate in and influence the national policymaking process. This is because of the relatively limited collaboration between the government and non-governmental actors, especially in the field of immigration. The substantial government–municipality relationship is also ineffective, since there has been a lack of mutual coordination between the two for a long time. Besides, the Japanese government has traditionally been reluctant to make efforts to improve the status of civil society organizations. In the recent policy debates, it is also necessary to clarify, at least partly, the functioning of trade unions and the judicial system because an immigration-friendly country requires varying degrees of support from civil society in terms of finance and personnel.

Third, contemporary debates on immigration rarely focus on the diplomatic aspect, i.e., the manner in which policy regime changes in Japan will affect the entire Asian region. In other words, if Japan decides to accept a greater number of foreign migrants in the following decades, it must resolve the following issues: Who should be accepted? Which countries or regions should be prioritized? Will this strengthen or threaten diplomatic relations between sending countries and Japan? Will it be a bargaining chip for the Japanese government to seek political advantage in international negotiation processes? These questions should be carefully examined immediately and thoroughly. As a matter of course, creating a win-win situation for all parties concerned—the receiving countries, sending countries, and the migrants themselves—would be ideal. Therefore, fostering an intense
dialogue and collaboration among these parties will serve as the foundation for achieving this.

Whether immigration is a feasible last resort or a practical solution to the problems faced by an ageing society may continue to be a contentious issue in Japan. In the current economic slowdown, the government seems to have given less priority to immigration-related policy agendas. The debates over immigration, accordingly, have received less public attention in very recent days. It should be kept in mind that the national approach toward accepting foreign nationals is considerably influenced by political will (or lack of it) rather than simply by economic or social demands. Legislators are reluctant to discuss or engage with the issue of immigration policy due to the scarcity of support from the conservative Japanese bureaucracy. The ambivalent public sentiment further compounds the situation. As such, the immigration issue has failed to become a mainstream policy topic in Japanese politics. Thus, it is still too early to predict the future direction of Japanese immigration policy.

Security concerns

Another important item on the Japanese government's agenda today is the growing concern regarding transnational security. The 1989 Amendment had already introduced sanctions on employers who knowingly hire foreign nationals who do not have proper employment authorization. In addition, the Japanese government implemented a stringent visa policy for specific sending countries in the late 1980s. The revised policy had a significant impact in that it reduced the number of visa overstayers (Sassen, 1993; Akashi, 2001). As of January 2010, the largest number of overstayed foreigners are Koreans (21,660), followed by Chinese (12,933), Filipinos (12,842), Taiwanese (4,889), and Thais (4,836). However, as the number of overstayers has gradually declined (figure 2), the government's concerns has shifted from unauthorized employment and overstay of foreign nationals to transnational illegal activities that were occasionally conducted by international crime syndicates. These illegal activities include collective smuggling and trafficking in persons. This shift of concerns has been incorporated in a series of revisions of the Immigration Control Act since 1997.
The 1997 Amendment of the Immigration Control Act criminalized collective smuggling and introduced legal sanctions against it. Later, the 1999 Amendment of the Immigration Control Act established more stringent legal measures against illegal stays, including a penalty for those who stay after illegal entry and landing. It also extended the period of denial of landing from one year to five years for those who have a record of being deported. Further, the 2001 Amendment of the Immigration Control Act expanded the range of activities for which individuals could face deportation. The 2004 Amendment of the Immigration Control Act increased the fines for illegal entities (e.g., subject to a maximum fine of 3 million yen), illegal employment, and unauthorized stay. Additionally, it further expanded the period of denial of landing for those who have a record of being deported from five years to ten years.

Furthermore, the 2005 Amendment of the Immigration Control Act established a penal provision against those who abet smuggling activities. At the same time, the provision acknowledges that it is the duty of the Japanese government to protect the victims of human trafficking. Both measures were in line with the United
Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The 2006 Amendment of the Immigration Control Act made it obligatory for foreign nationals except those with special permanent status and other exemptions to submit fingerprints and photographs on entry into Japan. This amendment was in accordance with the Action Plan for Prevention of Terrorism adopted in December 2004 by the Headquarters for the Promotion of Measures against Transnational Organized Crime and Other Related Issues and International Terrorism. Finally and most recently, a revision to the Immigration Control Act was approved by the Diet in July 2009. The bill, which will come into effect within a 3-year target period, introduces a highly centralized control measure for foreign nationals staying in Japan. It aims to enhance the monitoring of foreign residents in Japan, and essentially exclude overstayers from the benefits of social security. These policy developments addressed the new agendas discussed in this section, indicating that effective immigration control involves striking a balance between facilitating the entry of “wanted” foreign visitors and simultaneously deterring the entry of “unwanted” ones.

Policy implications for Thai migrants

To date, a series of policy reforms date has caused a sharp reduction in the size of the migrant population that overstayed their residence period permitted in Japan. The number of illegally overstaying Thai migrants was approximately 55,000 in 1993, making them the largest nationality who overstayed. Since then, mainly through the influence of Japanese immigration control policies, their number has dramatically decreased to 4,836 this year. It is important to mention the two latest amendments, in 2006 and 2009, to the Immigration Control Act. The 2006 amendment attempts to interdict illegal entries by imposing fingerprinting of foreign visitors. The latter seeks to put foreign residents under controlled conditions. Under the revised act, which is expected to be fully implemented in three years, migrants who overstay are urged to appear at the immigration control office and apply for a
special residency permit; otherwise, they would be subjected to severe restraints in employment and educational opportunities and basic social security services as well.

Not every overstaying Thai migrant who voluntarily turns him/herself over to the immigration authority will be conferred permission. According to the 2009 revision of the guideline for special permission for residence, the applicants’ length of stay in Japan, their familial relations, the educational circumstances of their children, their criminal record, and several other conditions are taken into consideration when the immigration authority makes a decision. In other words, their future depends on their past record and their family background.

Conclusion

In the period between the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japanese immigration policy started moving in two distinctly opposite directions. On the one hand, a series of policy reforms have explicitly or implicitly enabled employers in certain industrial sectors to employ temporary and low-wage foreign workers. The 1989 Amendment, in particular, was a landmark in that it launched “quasi-immigration schemes” (Thränhardt, 1999). Furthermore, there are noteworthy signs and discourses more frequently after the arrival of the new century, in parallel with the strengthening of immigration-population link, and they might eventually lead to a paradigm shift toward opening up the borders to potential migrants to Japan. While Japan expedited the legalization of foreign workers under the pressure of labor demand and an ageing society, its immigration controls have become crime conscious, in that they aim to reduce overstay or illegal stay. These policy developments have attained significance since the late 1990s and have even accelerated since 11 September 2001. Facing an increase in transnational organized criminal activities such as illegal trafficking and smuggling of migrants, Japan, like all other countries, has been forced to employ measures to combat these problems.

Immigration policy issues in Japan are not restricted to unskilled foreign workers or cross-border crimes. In 2003, the Japanese government initiated a program entitled “Visit Japan Campaign” that was aimed at appealing to foreign tourists. Further,
in order to attract not only foreign tourists but also foreign students, a number of government schemes have been introduced since the late 1990s such as the “New Foreign Student Policy” introduced in 2003 and the “International Student 300,000 Plan” in 2009 (Akashi, 2007, 2010). A series of measures that relaxed the restrictions on the entry of skilled foreign workers have also been implemented (Akashi, 2009a). Although this paper does not directly focus on the issue of refugees, it must be mentioned that in 2005, the Japanese government revised the laws regarding the refugee recognition scheme, in an attempt to pave the way for future reform (Akashi, 2006c). In 2010, Japan started a pilot program of “Resettlement to a Third Country” to accept Myanmar refugees currently in temporary asylum in Thai’s refugee camp. Most importantly, Japanese society has reached a point at which an “immigrant policy” or integration policy needs to be developed and implemented in concert with the current immigration policy. Consequently, Japanese immigration policy today, more than ever before, needs to play multiple roles by coordinating among different objectives and practices.

Notes

1 This article is modified from a paper ‘Options for Japan with regard to immigration in the era of global migration’ presented at the 8th ASEAN Inter-University Conference on Social Development, May 28–31, 2008, Manila, Philippines.

2 Immigration specialists are likely to consider growth and diversity inward immigration as necessary consequence, and argue that immigration policies need to be designed based on the “unavoidability” of the inflows and settlement of foreign workers (Komai, 1995: 247–52; also see Komai 2001). Sellek (2001) underlines “the erosion of state sovereignty” by massive immigration flows, and the ineffectiveness of government control policies over them. For observed general conditions in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, see Miyajima (1993), Oka (1994), Mori (1997), and Iguchi (1998).

3 Not a few government agencies are involved in the field of immigration policy in Japan (Koshiro, 1998; Akashi, 2003). Herbert (1996) identifies the rationale behind the key arguments for and against importing foreign labor in Japan.

4 For policy development regarding highly skilled foreign workers such as IT engineers and other professionals, see Akashi (2006a, 2009a).
5 It is still uncertain exactly what impact the 2008 economic crisis has had on the behavior of Nikkeijin as some who lost jobs returned home while others stayed in Japan seeking a new job.

6 See also Akashi (2006b) for an analysis of political considerations in the foreign workers policy. The article discusses how “politics” is critical in the making of immigration policy.

7 The amendment of the Immigration Control Act in 2009 commenced a new scheme in which practical trainees are subject to the relevant laws such as the Labor Standards Act and Minimum Wage Act. The amendment also introduced a new status of residence for “Technical Intern Training.”

8 Based on the author’s interview with JITCO (Japan International Training Cooperation Organization) on 4 November 2005.

9 For an analysis of the consequences of the 1989 Amendment of Immigration Control Act, see Akashi (2001, 2010).

10 Based on the author’s interviews with government officials of the Immigration Control Bureau, the Ministry of Justice on 21 November 2005 and thereafter, the Employment Security Bureau, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare on 7 November 2005, and other ministries.

11 Available in English at Japanese Immigration Bureau’s Web site (http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/nyukan_nyukan40.html); accessed on 1 October 2010.

12 A remaining gap between supply and demand for labor in the agriculture sector has facilitated the inflow of foreign trainees until today. See the field report “As its work force ages and shrinks, Japan needs and fears Chinese labor,” New York Times (international), 15 August 2008.


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