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【論 文】

Japan's New Wave of Immigration?: Focusing on the Strategies of Local Governments in Japan

CHI Naomi *

I. Introduction

The headline of Nikkei Asian Review, “Foreigners in Japan hit record as Tokyo rolls out welcome mat”¹⁾ is one of the many articles that hit the internet in the latter half of 2019, few months after Japan’s new legislation and revision to its immigration control law. The number of foreigners in Japan has reached 2.83 million²⁾ in 2019, which is an increase of 192,000 from the previous year. The increase in foreign workers in Japan are due to various reasons, but one of the major factors include the lack of labour from the shrinking of the working population, due to Japan’s rapid aging society and low birth rate. However, what is less known to the public is that the Japanese government’s ulterior motive is “to leverage immigration in its campaign to revitalize depopulated regions.”³⁾

Japan has long been regarded as a country with tight immigration control, and without an active migration policy. Even during the diet deliberation concerning the new legislation and revision to the immigration control law, Prime Minister Abe had repeatedly mentioned that, “It is not our intention to implement an active migration policy. This policy is to accept foreign human resources for a fixed period as measures to fill in the serious lack of labour.”⁴⁾ Moreover, he stated that, “We do not intend to maintain our nation by bringing in foreign migrants and their family. Please do not confuse this policy as an active migration policy that

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- 1) Minako Yamashita, “Foreigners in Japan hit record as Tokyo rolls out welcome mat,” *Nikkei Asian Review* (Oct. 26, 2019), <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Japan-immigration/Foreigners-in-Japan-hit-record-as-Tokyo-rolls-out-welcome-mat> (last accessed on Dec. 5, 2019).
- 2) Immigration Services Agency of Japan, “Statistics on Foreigners in Japan” (June 2018 and June 2019) http://www.moj.go.jp/housei/toukei/toukei_ichiran_touroku.html (last accessed on January 28, 2020).
- 3) *Ibid.*, Yamashita.
- 4) “Shuin Daihyo Shitsumon: Nyukanhou Kaiseian ni Shusho Imin Seisaku toru kangaenai” (“Questions at the House of Representatives regarding the revision to the Immigration Control Law, Prime Minister does not intend to implement active migration policy”), *Mainichi Shimbun* (Oct. 29, 2018) <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20181030/k00/00m/010/072000c> (last accessed on Nov. 18, 2018).

encourages permanent settlement of foreign migrants.”⁵⁾ Although this legislation has encouraged more foreign workers to come to Japan, many have pointed out the contradictions of this new policy including the fact that, “despite its efforts, migrant workers still tend to seek jobs in Japan's largest cities.”⁶⁾ In short, the lack of labour that Japan is experiencing is not in the large cities, but in the rural areas, however, many local governments still lack the capacity to accept migrant workers. However, some local governments have started to promote its own unique policies on accepting migrants to their region, despite the lack of support by the national government.

The question that this article seeks to answer is how the local governments are incorporating migrants to counter depopulation and revitalize their respective regions. In order to do so, first, this article will examine the new revision and legislation, the history of local government policies toward accepting migrants, and finally, actual case studies of local governments’ initiatives to accept migrants as measures to adapt to the aging society and sustain their community.

II. New Legislation and Revision to the Immigration Control Law

On December 8, 2018, the Japanese parliament passed a controversial bill in the upper house to revise the immigration control law so that Japan could accept blue collar (non-skilled) workers, despite protests from the opposition party. The bill had already passed in the lower house in November. With the lack of details in many areas, including which business sectors will be allowed to hire foreign workers, how many will be accepted and whether they will be eligible for social services, the new law was rushed and enacted on April 1, 2019. The enactment of this new law came as a surprise as Japan has been regarded as not having an active immigration policy and the Japanese government has repeatedly announced that Japan will not accept blue-collar workers. This section will examine the background to the enactment of the new law, the content of the new law and what it entails and the potential challenges to this new law.

(1) Background to the new revision

Before the recent revision to the immigration control law, foreigners who could work in Japan can be categorized into the following: highly skilled workers or those with specified

5) “Imin, Mewo Somukeru Shusho-Gaikokujin no Shin Zairyu Shikakuan futsukani Kagugi Kettei, Teigi Aimai, Susumanu Giron”(“Prime Minister turns his eye away from migration: Cabinet decision on the 2nd regarding the new visa status for migrant workers, definition is ambiguous, not enough deliberation”) *Nishinippon Shimbun* (Nov. 2, 2018) https://www.nishinippon.co.jp/feature/new_immigration_age/article/462334/ (last accessed on Nov. 18, 2018)

6) Yamashita, *op. cit.*

knowledges and professional skills (university professors, scientists, lawyers); people with certain legal positions such as foreign spouses married to Japanese nationals, people with Japanese heritage (Nikkei-Brazilians), and foreign permanent residents (Zainichi Koreans as well as those who obtained residency); people who engage in certain types of paid work based on bilateral agreements signed between Japan and related countries (care workers and nurses under the Economic Partnership Agreement); trainees on the Technical Internship Training Programme (TITP); and those who have obtained permission to engage in activities outside their immigration status (international students who work part-time).

The Japanese government implemented several new immigration statuses, including the trainee status and the long-term residency status for people with Japanese heritage, in its first ever revision to the immigration control law since 1990. The rationale behind the first revision was to compensate for the labour shortage that Japan was experiencing during its economic growth. Though the technical trainees were not considered to be “workers” to fill in the gap, but rather Japan’s way of transferring skills and technology to developing countries, in reality the trainees did fill in the labour shortage in unskilled work. Moreover, the long-term residency status was implemented to bring in the Nikkei-Brazilians who were looking for work in Japan, and even though there are no limitations on what type of work they can work in, many Nikkei-Brazilians work in less-skilled jobs such as assembly lines, factories and food services. In the 1990s, the labour shortage was mainly due to the segmented labour market in which many highly educated young Japanese people refused to work in the low and less-skilled jobs.

However, in light of Japan becoming an aging society⁷⁾, Japan has implemented various institutions to bring in foreign workers to its country, including the acceptance of care workers and nurses from Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam as part of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) in 2008, 2009 and 2014, respectively, and the Technical Intern Training Programme⁸⁾ in 2017. These institutions enabled Japan to bring in care workers and nurses to

7) According to the Japanese Cabinet Office, the aging rate was 17% in 2000 and 23% in 2010, while it is expected to increase to 28% in 2020 and 31.6% in 2030. Cabinet Office, “White Papers on Japan’s Aging Society,” https://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2018/html/zenbun/s1_1_1.html (last accessed on June 21, 2019).

8) The Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP) was implemented in 2017 as part of the Technical Intern Training Act and related ordinances, in which significant portion of the provisions under the Immigration Control Act became provisions under the Technical Intern Training Act. This new programme was implemented in light of criticisms against the former trainee programme over various human rights violation including suspended pay, long working hours and less than satisfactory working environment. Under the new legal provisions, it allowed for the licensing of supervising organizations, a system of accreditation for technical intern training plans, increasing training period and implementing quotas for technical intern trainees. Please refer to: Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO), <https://www.jitco.or.jp/en/regulation/>

compensate for the labour shortage particularly in the care industry, as well as continue bringing in technical interns (formerly the trainees) to work in unskilled work. The Japanese government was preparing for the actual coming labour shortage as the working population from the baby boomer generation were reaching retirement age.

Behind the latest revision and implementation of the new law is a strong push from certain business sectors in Japan that are suffering from a serious labour shortage due to not only the rapidly graying but also declining population⁹⁾. Japan is experiencing an unusually low birthrate as it hit 1.26 in 2005¹⁰⁾ and recovering slightly at 1.42 in 2018¹¹⁾. In 2017, the Cabinet Office announced that Japan has a shortage of 1.2 million in labour intensive industries, such as food and hospitality services, manufacturing, construction, agriculture and fishing¹²⁾.

(2) Revision to the Immigration Control Law

The Japanese Government implemented two new visa categories as part of the recent revision to the Immigration Control Law, including the specified skills type 1 and type 2. Unlike the technical intern programme, the new visas statuses are residency statuses that will enable a foreign worker to live and work in Japan for a fixed period and theoretically protected by the Japanese Labour Standard Law. The two visas are called specified skills type 1 and type 2¹³⁾. The major difference between these two visa statuses are that foreigners on type 1 visa can work up to five years with annual renewals but they may not bring their family, while type 2 allows foreigners to bring their family and stay for a longer period. People on type 2 visas are also eligible for permanent residency if and when they fulfill the necessary requirements. Foreign workers eligible for type 1 visas must have either completed the three-year Technical Intern Training Programme or pass the technical and Japanese language exams and are allowed to work in the following 14 industries including care, building cleaning management, machine parts and tools industry, industrial machinery, electric, electronic and information

index.html (last accessed on June 26, 2019).

- 9) Haruki Deguchi, "A New Immigration Policy for Japan," *The Japan Times* (Dec. 4, 2018) <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/12/04/commentary/japan-commentary/new-immigration-policy-japan/#.XRpelvZuLMR> (last accessed on June 26, 2019).
- 10) The Cabinet Office of Japan, "White Papers on Japan's Birthrate," https://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shoushika/whitepaper/measures/w-2017/29webhonpen/html/b1_s1-1-1.html (last accessed on June 26, 2019).
- 11) "18nen no Shuseisu 918 man, Saitei o Koushin, Shusei Ritsu 1.42" [Total Number of Births in 2018 was 918, 000, Record Low, Birthrate at 1.42], *The Nikkei Shimbun* (June 7, 2019) <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO45809520X00C19A6MM8000/> (last accessed on June 26, 2019).
- 12) The Cabinet Office of Japan, "Monthly Topics: Recent Economic Indicators," https://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai3/monthly_topics/2018/0302/topics_052.pdf (last accessed on June 30, 2019).
- 13) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Specified Skills Worker," <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000459527.pdf> (last accessed on June 28, 2019). Please note that the quotation marks were added by the author.

services, construction industry, shipbuilding industry, automobile repairs, aviation industry, accommodation, agriculture, fishery, manufacturing food and beverages and food industry service. Once a candidate passes all the requirement then he/she must seek for a position through job-placement agencies and obtain a contract with a company before acquiring the visa. Type 2 visas are only available for those working in construction and shipbuilding and the foreigner must have completed the technical intern training programme.

The Japanese government is expected to grant this new specified skilled workers visas to 340,000 blue-collar workers over the next 5 years, in addition to the technical trainees¹⁴⁾.

(3) Challenges to the New Law

As mentioned above, one of the main reasons for implementing this new law was to fill in the acute labour shortage, but also to minimize some of the serious problems with TITP, such as long working hours, extremely low-wages, harassment and abuse¹⁵⁾. This is due to the lack of worker oversight, therefore, the new law will allow worker oversight to big private job-placement agencies that could manage large number of people more efficiently and professionally. Under the TITP, worker oversight was delegated to the chamber of commerce, trade union and agricultural cooperatives which some have pointed out that, “it put corporate profits first and are not fulfilling their oversight responsibilities.”¹⁶⁾ However, even though the TITP has faced serious criticisms, the Japanese Government has announced to continue the program along side the new visa statuses. It is still unclear as to how the Japanese government will manage the two programmes, how much improvement there will be with the new visa statuses and whether worker oversight will be further enforced.

The Japanese government has repeatedly announced that the revision and the implementation of new visa statuses are not the implementation of immigration policy nor accepting non-skilled workers, but to utilize talented and skilled human resources from abroad. Prime Minister Abe stated that, “the entire country is short of workers, and the new system is needed for talented foreigners to further contribute to Japan” and that the government will “set clear caps on the numbers (of additional foreign workers) and limit the period (they can stay in Japan),” insisting that the new measures do not constitute a policy to accept foreign

14) Mitsuru Obe, “Five Things to Know About Japan’s Revised Immigration Law,” *Nikkei Asian Review* (April 1, 2019) <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Japan-immigration/Five-things-to-know-about-Japan-s-revised-immigration-law> (last accessed on June 28, 2019).

15) Osamu Uchiyama, “Foreign trainees describe harsh realities before Diet members,” *The Asahi Shimbun* (Nov. 9, 2018) <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201811090049.html> (last accessed on July 1, 2019).

16) “Japan’s foreign trainee program suffering from shocking lack of oversight,” *The Japan Times* (August 13, 2014) <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/13/national/japans-foreign-trainee-program-suffering-shocking-lack-oversight/#.XRqMsPZuI2x> (last accessed on July 1, 2019).

immigration¹⁷⁾. The “non-existence” of an active immigration policies means that Japan still lacks not only the administrative and support structures but also has yet to implement policies for integrating foreign migrants to Japanese society.

However, some have a more optimistic view of the new revisions. Mr. Toshiro Menju, who is the Director of the Japan Centre for International Exchange, states that,

“This is a historic shift, worthy of being called ‘the year immigration began,’ and Japan is the only developed country without an immigration policy, and in that sense our stubbornness had reached its limit. The reason why the government does not refer to this as an immigration policy is due to concern for the negative image people have towards the word ‘immigration.’ The biggest success of this new policy was creating an opportunity for a national discussion of immigration policy, which had been taboo until now. It would be necessary in the future to decide whether to eliminate the Technical Intern Training Program, the reality of which has diverged from its supposed intent, or to limit it to its original goal of international cooperation.”¹⁸⁾

The next section will examine the local governments’ initiatives on accepting migrants to counter depopulation and to revitalize their community.

III. Migration and Local Government

As mentioned earlier, the Japanese government revised the Immigration Control and Refugee Law and implemented new visa statuses as measures to fill in the labour. With this revision, there is a considerable increase in migrant workers, however, even though this poses as a chance for small local municipalities to counter depopulation and revitalize their community, many still lack the manpower and infrastructure to integrate migrants into their community. This section will attempt to first, examine the history of the acceptance of migrants into local communities starting from 1990, when Nikkei Brazilians and Peruvians were able to apply for the heritage visa, and second, explore some of the new and innovative measures introduced by progressive local governments to attract migrants to their community.

(1) Migrants at Present:

According to an investigation conducted by the Ministry of Justice, there are

17) Naoki Oita and Jun Aoki, “Abe Reiterates Need to Accept More Foreign Workers in April Next Year,” *The Mainichi Newspapers* (December 11, 2018) <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20181211/p2a/00m/0na/004000c> (last accessed on July 1, 2019).

18) Toshihiro Menju, “Imin ‘Gannen’ Kadai to Tenbo,” [Immigration Year One: Prospects and Challenges], *Sekai* (No. 918, March 2019) pp. 27-30.

approximately 2.64 million foreigners living in Japan (Ministry of Justice, 2018)¹⁹⁾, which is 2% of the total population. Compared to the previous year, there is 28% increase of Chinese, 17% increase if Korean, and 11% increase of Vietnamese.

In terms of employment, there are approximately 220,000 companies that have hired 1.46 million migrant workers (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2018)²⁰⁾. Compared to the previous year, there is an 11% increase (20,000 more companies) and 170,000 more migrant workers. In terms of visas status, 34% of the migrant workers on working visas, while there is 20% increase in Technical Internship Training Programme (TITP) and 15% increase in Permission to Engage in Activity Other than that Permitted by the Status of Residence Previously Granted²¹⁾.

(2) Transition of Migrant Workers

1. *Nikkei* (People with Japanese Heritage) on Long-Term Residency Visa

The Japanese government revised the Immigration Control and Refugees Law in 1990, and one of the major changes included the implementation of the long-term residency visa for *Nikkei* or people with Japanese heritage. Majority of the people holding this visa include *Nikkei* Brazilians and Peruvians, who “came back” to Japan to seek employment during Japan’s bubble economy. At the time, Japan desperately needed to fill in the labour gap especially in the non-skilled or 3D (dirty, difficult and dangerous) work, even though the long-term residency visa allows them to work in any industry.

In the past and also in the present, many *Nikkei* Brazilians and Peruvians work in logistics, manufacturing plants and factories of electronics and electric equipment, and live in public housings with their family. In the past, had started to clash as the local Japanese residents and *Nikkei* Brazilians and Peruvians as they started to share living spaces in public housing, often time due to the difference in culture and living habits. Many local governments were forced to face the challenges of implementing measures to ease the tension between the two communities, as well as provide public service, Japanese language education and other social services. In the past, *Nikkei* Brazilians and Peruvians were considered to be “temporary visitors” to earn a living (*dekasegi* in Japanese), therefore, even though the Japanese central government created a new visa category specific for those with Japanese heritage, they failed to provide other services necessary for them to settle in Japan. However, in recent years, many *Nikkei* Brazilians and Peruvians are settling permanently in Japan, thus, the local governments

19) Ministry of Justice, “Transition of foreign residents in Japan by nationality” (June 2018).

20) Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “Employment of foreign workers” (June 2018).

21) Many people holding this visa status are those who are on student visas who have applied for this visa to work part-time (up to 28 hours a week).

are under the pressure to implement their own policies to tackle the issues at hand.

2. Migrant Workers Working on Permission to Engage in Activity Other than that Permitted by the Status of Residence Previously Granted

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of migrant workers working in construction and the service sector (food and beverages, convenience stores, hotels, etc.). Many of those who work in the above industries are migrant workers who are on the TITP or on student visas that have a permit to engage in activities other than that of the status of residence. These migrant workers must apply for this permit at the immigration office before they engage in any type of work, and their working hours are limited to 28 hours per week.

However, one of the serious problems with migrant workers in this group is that it ultimately diverges from their original purpose of residing in Japan. For those who are on TITP, many of them work in poor working environment and is exploited as “cheap labour”²²⁾. For international students studying in Japan, some students have been reported to work over the limit of 28 hours, diverging their attention from their original purpose of studying at school. It has been reported that some Japanese language schools have “covered” for their students and adjusting their attendance so that they can keep their visa status even though they have not cleared the criteria to maintain their status²³⁾.

In terms of nationality, in the 1990s and 2000s, there was an increase in Chinese and Korean, since 2010, there has been an increase of Vietnamese, Nepalese, Filipino/Filipina and Burmese. Migrant workers in this category usually do not make much contact with the local residents and do not live in groups, so they face different challenges than the Nikkei Brazilians and Peruvians that live as a community in public housing and suburban housing.

3. New Visa Status “Specified Skills Type 1 and 2”

As mentioned above, the Japanese Government implemented two new visa categories as part of the recent revision to the Immigration Control Law, including the specified skills type 1 and type 2. Unlike the technical intern programme, the new visas statuses are residency statuses that will enable a foreign worker to live and work in Japan for a fixed period. The details of the two visa statuses as described in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

22) “Ginou Jisshu Keikaku Nittei Hatsu no Torikeshi, Ehime no Hosei Kaisha (Immigration denies sewing company in Aichi to accept TITP),” *Sankei Shimbun* (July 3, 2018). See also “Sissou Jisshusei 7000 nin, Ihou Zangyo・Chingin Mibarai demo Sokoku Kaerazu (7000 TITP interns missing, many of them cannot return home even though wages are not paid and working overtime illegally),” *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (June 30, 2018).

23) Kensuke Serizawa, *Konbini Gaikokujin* (Foreigners working in convenience stores) (Shincho Shinsho, 2018).

website are as follows:

A) Specified skills type 1: This status of residence is applicable to foreigners who work in jobs that require “considerable knowledge of or experience” in specified industry fields such as care, building cleaning management, machine parts and tools industry, industrial machinery, electric, electronic and information services, construction industry, shipbuilding industry, automobile repairs, aviation industry, accommodation, agriculture, fishery, manufacturing food and beverages and food industry service.

B) Specified skills type 2: Status of residence for foreigners engaged in jobs that require “proficient skills” in specified industry fields including construction and shipbuilding

There was a lot of controversy concerning the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugees Law and the implementation of the new visa statuses, however, many local municipalities that are home to manufacturing companies and factories have indicated their interest. Also, local municipalities that are facing serious lack in labour in care, fishery, agriculture food and beverages and other service industries have already started to hire staff members specifically to handle matters concerning the acceptance of migrant workers, as well as create and implement policies to house these workers in their local municipalities. For example, in Tochigi prefecture, they created a new position for professional coordinator to match migrant workers with businesses and companies in the prefecture. Moreover, Yamagata prefecture and Saku City of Nagano prefecture are currently working to establish a department in the local government and city hall to accept migrant care workers²⁴.

(3) Policies Concerning the Acceptance of Migrants at the Local Level

This section will examine the various policies concerning the acceptance of migrants initiated by the local governments.

1. Guideline of Acceptance of Migrants Through the Collaboration of Local Governments (2001~)

24) Tochigi Prefectural Government, Press Release (April 8, 2019), http://www.pref.tochigi.lg.jp/f04/houdou/gaikokujin_koyousoudan.html (last accessed on August 22, 2019). Yamagata Prefectural Government, Press Release (April 25, 2019), <https://www.pref.yamagata.jp/pickup/interview/pressrelease/2019/04/25114506/> (last accessed on August 22, 2019). “Naganoken Sakushi, Gakokujin Kaigo Jinzai no Katsuyou de Iken Koukankai (Saku City in Nagano Prefecture, Town Meeting concerning the Utilization of Migrant Care Workers),” *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (November 18, 2018), <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO37708050T11C18A1L31000/> (last accessed on August 18, 2019).

In the 1990s, with the increase of Nikkei Brazilians and Peruvians in various cities in Japan, the local governments decided to collaborate and create a joint guideline on accepting migrants to their community. Thus, in 2001, few of the local municipalities established the “Council for Cities of Non-Japanese Residents (*Gaikokujin Shuju Toshi Kaigi*)” in order to “create a diverse community composed of people with various background.”²⁵⁾ It began as a council for exchanging and sharing policy ideas, and even making policy recommendation to the national government²⁶⁾.

2. Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence Plan and Measures by the Local Government (2006)

When the number of foreign residents in Japan hit 2 million in 2005, the Ministry of Internal Affairs notified all the local governments to devise a guideline for the acceptance of foreign residents in each respective local municipality. More precisely, the ministry requested the local municipalities to design a plan for the “promotion of multicultural coexistence,” following the guideline proposed by the ministry. This included the following three items: 1) supporting the communication between the local Japanese residents and foreign residents; 2) supporting the lives of foreign residents; 3) community building for diverse and multicultural coexistence²⁷⁾. The ministry also requested that each local government to implement policies to accept foreign residents and collaborate with external organizations such as non-profit organizations and international exchange associations.

As of 2019, only 6% of all local municipalities have implemented an independent plan for the promotion of multicultural coexistence. Many municipalities have included aspects of the plan into their general plan or as part of their internationalization plan. Some small sized municipalities do not even have any plans to establish and implement such policies.

3. Effect of Depopulation and Regional Revitalization (2010~)

In 2010, the effect of population decline due to the aging society and low birth rate started to influence the guideline on accepting migrants into Japan. In 2014, the Japan Policy Council announced that in the near future, some regional cities would “completely disappear” with the rapid depopulation. Following this announcement, Prime Minister Abe publicly announced the

25) The idea was proposed by Hamamatsu City in Shizuoka Prefecture, and the original members include Toyota City in Aichi Prefecture and Ota City in Gunma Prefecture.

26) The Council had advised the national government to abolish the alien registration and change it into the resident card, which came to affect in 2012.

27) Ministry of Internal Affairs, “Tabunka Kyosei no Suishin ni kansuru Kenkyukai Hokokusho 2018 (2018 Final Report of the Meeting on the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence)” http://www.soumu.go.jp/menu_news/s-news/01gyosei05_02000118.html

“General Strategy for Revitalizing Cities, People and Jobs” and requested the local municipalities to establish new targets to increase its population and to create new opportunities to attract more people.

IV. Case Studies of Innovative Policies to Accept Migrants

This section will examine three particular case studies of local municipalities that have implemented innovative policies to accept foreign migrants. One is Hamamatsu City in Shizuoka prefecture, home to the biggest Nikkei Brazilians community in Japan. The second case is Higashikawa Town in Hokkaido, home to the very first Japanese language school that is owned and operated publicly by the town. The last case is Yoichi Town also in Hokkaido, one of the very first municipalities to accept foreign care workers.

(1) Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture

The total population of Hamamatsu is 810,000 of which 23,000 are foreign residents (2.9% of the total population). It is home to the biggest Nikkei Brazilian community in Japan, where 39% of the total foreign residents are Brazilian, followed by 16% Filipino and 11% Chinese. One of the reason Hamamatsu is a popular destination for migrant workers is because many logistics and electronics companies have their plants and factories in Hamamatsu. The number of migrant workers in 1988 was merely 2700, however, in 1992 this number increased to 11,000 and peaked in 2008 at 33,000.

Hamamatsu City played an active role in finding the Council for Cities of Non-Japanese Residents, and has implemented its original and unique policies for foreigners, which has been included in the “2nd Hamamatsu Multicultural Coexistence City Vision (2018-2022)”. In this vision, the main directions include: 1) constructing the community together with residents with diverse background; 2) developing the community by utilizing diversity; 3) accepting people into the community so that everyone can live in a safe and comfortable environment²⁸⁾.

The city has outsourced many of its projects to the Hamamatsu Foundation for International Communication and Exchange (HICE). The two main pillars of HICE include the operation and management of the Hamamatsu Intercultural Centre and the operation and management of Hamamatsu Foreign Resident Study Support Centre. The Hamamatsu Intercultural Centre was established in 1992 and is responsible for multilingual consultation, disaster prevention and relief. The Hamamatsu Foreign Resident Study Support Centre was established in 2010, and is responsible for operating a Japanese language course, as well as

28) Hamamatsu City Hall, “2nd Hamamatsu Multicultural Coexistence City Vision (2018-2022),” <https://www.city.hamamatsu.shizuoka.jp/kokusai/kokusai/kokusaitoppage.html> (last accessed on Sept. 10, 2019).

supporting children with school, mental health, and finding jobs in order to decrease unemployment of foreigners living in Hamamatsu.

(2) Higashikawa Town, Hokkaido

Higashikawa Town in Hokkaido was traditionally a farming village with a population of 10000 in 1965. With urbanization and population decline, the total population severely dropped to 6000 in 1994. The town desperately needed to find measures to try to increase its population so in 1994, the town proposed and implemented an ordinance in 1998 to “create a community that is open to the world (世界に開かれた町づくり)” and in 2009 started the short-term Japanese language and culture training project. By 2014, 1000 people had visited the town to learn Japanese language and culture. In 2015, the town established the first ever municipal Japanese language school (owned and operated by the town) in Japan for the purpose of disseminating Japanese language and culture, promoting the town to the world and to revitalize the community through people’s interaction and increasing its population²⁹⁾.

The town established the Japanese language school not so much to encourage permanent settlement, but to attract people to come on a mid to long term basis to enjoy the life in Higashikawa. This is not because the town does not welcome them, but more because it does not have the capacity nor enough jobs to accommodate those who wish to stay for a longer period. However, in the future, the town is planning to expand the school, build more dorms, increase the number of instructors and create more profit so that they can accommodate more foreign students. Moreover, since the town is also rapidly aging, they are in collaboration with a care and nursing school in nearby Asahikawa, so that they can train and foster care workers that would stay in Higashikawa as care takers of the elderly.

It has been 4 years since the establishment of the school, and the total population of the city has now increased to 8300. Some of the students that finished the course have found ways to stay in Japan semi-permanently and permanently³⁰⁾.

It is worth mentioning that in an opinion poll conducted by Asahi Shimbun, 32 prefectures had responded that they would like the national government to establish more public Japanese language schools rather than receive subsidies to pay volunteers to teach Japanese language to migrants³¹⁾.

29) Higashikawa Town Office, “Higashikawacho Nihongo Kyoiku Jigyou Gaiyo (Overview of the Japanese Language Education Project in Higashikawa Town,” (April 2018).

30) During an interview with the mayor of Higashikawa Town, he mentioned that currently there are former students who got married to a Japanese. He also mentioned that there was another student who has started his own business. Interview was conducted on April 12, 2018.

31) Kyosuke Yamamoto, “Gaikokujin dou Ukeireru? Jichitai nado no Torikumi kara saguru (How to accept foreign migrants? Approaching from Various Measures by Local Governments),” *Asashi*

(3) Yoichi Town, Hokkaido

Yoichi Town is a traditionally a farming and fishing village with a total population of 18637. In 1960s, the population was close to 28000 as fishermen from all over Japan relocated to Yoichi to fish herring. Herring played a major role in the history of Yoichi since the early days of the town's development, with the vast majority of fish being processed into fertilizer rather than consumed by humans. However, with urbanization and depletion of marine resources, people gradually moved out of Yoichi. It is also one of the most rapidly aging local municipalities in Hokkaido, with the rate of people over the age of 65 at almost 39%³²⁾. In Yoichi, there are two general hospitals, 14 clinics, 12 dentists and two comprehensive care homes for the elderly that is owned and operated by the same corporation called the *Yoichi Fukushikai* (Yoichi Welfare Centre).

The *Yoichi Fukushikai* accepted their very first foreign care worker in 2000, a Filipina care worker who already had residency status to work in Japan. She left a very positive impression with fellow care workers, thus, the director of the care home, Mr. Kameo, decided to accept more foreign care workers in 2004, within the framework of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). This decision was also based on the lack of labour that the care home was experiencing at the time. However, the care workers they accepted returned to the Philippines even before taking the national exam because of their family. Mr. Kameo states that, "Many foreign care workers that come to Japan on the EPA have to fulfill strict criteria, tend to be from middle class families and own property in their home country, so they come to work for few years and return home to be with their family. If the EPA encouraged residency and allowed them to bring their family, I think they would stay, but the EPA does not allow for that."³³⁾

Mr. Kameo further states that, "Our request to the central government is to implement a comprehensive immigration policy that will allow skilled migrants to come to Japan to work and settle with their family. The Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP) nor the EPA are sustainable and does not meet the needs of the local community nor the migrant workers themselves."³⁴⁾

The *Yoichi Fukushikai* is working closely with the local government to bring more migrant workers to Yoichi. They have been conducting job fairs and seminars in the Philippines and Northeast region of China to publicize and attract potential care workers to Yoichi. Mr. Kameo

Shimbun, March 3, 2019.

32) Yoichi Town Hall, "Yoichi by numbers (Suji de miru Yoichi)" http://www.town.yoichi.hokkaido.jp/machi/syukai/files/suui_de_yoichi_2018.pdf (last accessed on Oct. 4, 2019).

33) Information obtained through an interview with Mr. Kameo, the director of Yoichi Fukushikai (Yoichi Welfare Association) on April 18, 2018.

34) Ibid.

says that Yoichi will continue to accept care workers on EPA in parallel with finding skilled workers through these job fairs and seminars.

V. Tentative Conclusion

This article examined how local governments are incorporating migrants to counter depopulation and revitalize their respective regions. In particular, this article looked at the recent revision to Japan's Immigration Control and Refugees Law, the history of local government policies toward accepting migrants, and three particular case studies of Hamamatsu City, Higashikawa Town and Yoichi Town, to illustrate the local governments' initiatives to accept migrants as measures to adapt to the aging society and sustain their community.

As mentioned above, the increase of foreign migrants in Japan are due to various reasons, but the most pressing factors include the rapid aging society and depopulation due to the low birth rate, and the most affected are the rural areas in Japan. Therefore, as measures to counter depopulation and serious lack of labour in specific sectors, the Japanese government made a "sudden shift" to accept more foreign migrants. This came as a surprise as Japan has long been regarded as a country with tight immigration control, and without an active migration policy.

The new policy has brought about some results as Japan has experienced an influx of migrants, however, despite the Japanese government's intention, many migrants find jobs and settle in the big cities. The real lack of labour in Japan is not in the large cities, but in the rural areas, though, many local governments still lack the capacity to accept migrant workers. While the Japanese national government has made a general policy to increase the number of migrants, on the other hand, it has not implemented any substantial policies to support the local governments and there is a lot of pressure on the local governments to come up with their own initiatives, despite the lack of infrastructure and budget to prepare for the acceptance of migrants to their community. However, what is interesting is that some local governments have implemented their unique policies despite this lack of support by the central government as illustrated in this article. Many local governments are now learning from these innovative cases, and the author intends to continue to survey new case studies of local government's unique initiatives.

Japan's New Wave of Immigration?: Focusing on the Strategies of Local Governments in Japan

CHI Naomi

Abstract

The number of foreigners in Japan has reached 2.83 million in 2019, a 3.4% increase from the previous year. The increase in foreign workers in Japan are due to various reasons, but one of the major factors include the lack of labour from the shrinking of the working population, due to Japan's rapid aging society and low birth rate. However, the Japanese government's ulterior motive is to utilize immigration as means to counter depopulation in the rural areas. Japan has long been regarded as a country with tight immigration control and without an active migration policy, however, with the recent revision to the Immigration Control and Refugees Law in 2019, the Japanese government has made a sudden shift to accept more migrants to Japan.

The new policy has brought about some results as Japan has experienced an influx of migrants, however, despite the Japanese government's intention, many migrants seek to find jobs in the big cities. The real lack of labour in Japan is not in the large cities, but in the rural areas, though, many local governments still lack the capacity to accept migrant workers. However, some local governments have started to promote its own unique policies on accepting migrants to their region, despite the lack of support by the national government.

The question that this article seeks to answer is how the local governments are incorporating migrants to counter depopulation and revitalize their respective regions. In order to do so, first, this article will examine the new revision and legislation, the history of local government policies toward accepting migrants, and finally, actual case studies of local governments' initiatives to accept migrants as measures to adapt to the aging society and sustain their community.

Keywords

Japan, immigration, migration, local government, multicultural coexistence