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Author(s)	SOIPOV, Jasur
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Japanese Language School and Labor Migration:
Uzbekistan Participants' Perspectives

SOIPOV Jasur

Introduction

Migration, both in Uzbekistan and globally, is a very dynamic process and it has changed over time due to economic, political, sociocultural, and educational reasons.

Within the last 28 years, Uzbekistan has witnessed three major waves of migration. Firstly, it is common knowledge that a large number of non-Uzbek people had settled in Uzbekistan for various reasons during the Soviet period. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these people returned to their home countries due to manifold reasons [King and Melvin 2000; Radnitz 2006].

By the 2000s, population growth and a difficult economic situation resulted in unemployment growth, which led to labor migration from Uzbekistan to other countries. At the same time, increase in energy prices in Russia and Kazakhstan led to a significant rise in the living standards of their population and creation of job opportunities. This motivated a large number of Uzbek citizens to migrate to those countries as labor workers [Sadovskaya 2006; Ivakhnyuk 2006]. Between 2000 and 2014 out-bound migration from Uzbekistan increased quickly and steadily.

However, sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014 by the United States and the European Union, and the depreciation of the Russian ruble negatively affected immigrants, significantly decreasing their remittances and leading to the adoption of destructive policies regarding migrants in those countries. These circumstances and rapid globalization caused Uzbek migrants to return to their homeland and find new destinations such as the Middle East (Turkey and Iran), the Persian Gulf (Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia), East Asia (South Korea, Japan), the European Union, North America and others [Ryazantsev 2016; Yun 2016; Virkkunen 2017]. Gradually, other migration avenues have opened up, making it possible for increased outward mobility for Uzbek people. One shining example is the mobility prospects for Uzbekistani students, which has not been researched under the aegis of migration from Uzbekistan to Japan in general, and to Japanese language schools in particular.

Methodology

The study used qualitative analysis for data accuracy. Data collection came from two sources: direct interviews with 43 students of language schools in Japan and information from the Ministry of Justice of Japan, the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), and the Association for the Promotion of Japanese Language Education.

Data analysis

Analysis of the data from the Ministry of Justice of Japan shows that patterns of migration from Uzbekistan to Japan changed dramatically from 1994 to 2018. Firstly, during this period, the number of Uzbek migrants to Japan increased by about 200 times from 20 migrants in 1994 to 3951 migrants in 2018. Secondly, some categories increased slightly (diplomats, highly skilled professionals, investor/business managers), other categories grew with some fluctuations (officials, professors, researchers), and still other categories (specialist in humanities/international services, temporary visitors, dependents) grew significantly. The most significant pattern of migration involved students. In comparison with six students in 1994, in 2018 the index increased by nearly 400 times, reaching 2366. Student migration is diverse within itself.

Our analysis of the data from the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), and the Association for the Promotion of Japanese Language Education, shows that between 2009 and 2018, there was a small increase in the number of Uzbek students in graduate schools, junior colleges, and university preparatory courses while in university (undergraduates) and in professional training colleges, Uzbek individuals increased nearly 6 times during this period. We can see that the most significant numbers belong to Japanese language institutes because in 2009 there were no students in this category. However, in 2018 the number reached 1427, and numbers hovering around this level constitute the current pattern of Uzbek citizens in Japan.

Due to their overwhelming number, we chose Japanese language students as our target for data collection. In total, the study involved interviews with 43 students whose average age is 25. It must also be noted that most of the respondents were males (39 males, 4 females).

The data analysis reveals that Uzbekistani students in Japanese language schools are more interested in earning money than continuing their education.

The most important problems of Uzbek students are false information provided by mediators in Uzbekistan. There are three reasons why mediators market their services so aggressively: first, they receive service fees ($500 – $1200) from potential students; second, they receive revenues ($600) from language schools for attracting new students; and finally, there is harsh competition among such mediators.

Students are often unable to find a job when they arrive in Japan because they do not know the

Japanese language well. In order to find a job, they have to use the services of other mediators or friends. They have to work because they must repay their debts. In order to cope with their financial responsibilities, they have to work a great deal more.

Problems after starting work

Consequently, they generate more problems, including violating labor legislation and neglecting their studies.

Problems after graduating from their Japanese language schools

After finishing their Japanese language schools, these students face new types of problems. Due to poor attendance and poor Japanese language skills, they cannot resume or continue with their education. They have to enter low-level vocational schools/universities. This leads to abandoning their studies again. Some of them cannot enter any vocational schools or universities and have to return home. Some students cannot enter vocational schools or universities, not because of their own transgressions but because of the bad behavior of previous Uzbek students.

The problems above produce new types of problems

Students choose illegal ways to stay in Japan. This creates a negative image about Uzbek students in Japanese language schools, vocational schools or universities in Tokyo, who then refuse to accept students from Uzbekistan. Consequently, newcomers have to go Osaka, Hokkaido, Sendai or other places where the Uzbek reputation has not been sullied. Due to the increase of illegal Uzbek students in Japan, the Japanese Ministry of Justice has imposed restrictive policies for newcomer Uzbek students.

Conclusion

Uzbek students come to Japan to pursue personal and professional dreams. Unfortunately, they are often deceived by mediators who exaggerate the potential benefits of coming to Japan. Most students get loans from different donors and once their plans are not accomplished they fail to cope with their financial responsibilities. Because of false information provided by mediators, potential students are imposing responsibilities upon themselves which they would not otherwise.

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(Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba)