

Asian Studies, Leiden University

**Understanding Japan's new "Immigration Policy":  
Conflicting Discourses and The Politics of Economic Migration**

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MA in Asian Studies, specialization in Japanese

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Word count: 15663

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## **Introduction**

Japan's immigration policy seems to be a popular subject nowadays, due to Japan's rapidly aging society. With more people reaching the retirement age, not only are there less people to participate in the labor market, the costs of taking care of these people will also rise. As a consequence, Japan's economy is expected to suffer from a labor shortage. (Chung, 2010; Peng, 2016; Green, 2017; Nakata, 2017)

When looking at the subject of immigration regarding Japanese society, the common conception seems that Japan is reluctant to implement an immigration policy, being that the main reason for this reluctance lies in Japan's unique history. Japan has often been described as a homogeneous society, frequently cited as one of the main reasons Japan facilitates a vetted immigration policy compared to other advanced nations. (Yamamoto, 2013; Akashi, 2014; Peng, 2016) It is important to note that the term 'homogeneous nation' has to do with Japan's nationalism and sense of self. (Peng, 2016; Komine, 2018) Japan should not be described as such because it isn't; Japan has had a significant history of immigration. (Yamamoto, 2013; Kondo, 2015, Roberts, 2017; Komine, 2018)

Over the years, changes have been made to Japan's immigration policy. From introducing the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to entice foreign health care workers from the Philippines and Indonesia, to the development of a point-based system for highly skilled workers, to opening up more work sectors for foreign workers that enter under the newest visa category of 'specified skills' in 2019.

### *Research question*

What are the political sentiments behind Japan's current immigration policy and to what extent is there a difference between policy-making and policy outcome?

This research question will take several factors into account in order to answer this question, such as how the policy allows for foreigners to immigrate to Japan and what the social impact of that policy is on Japanese society.

## *Method*

In the first chapter, this thesis will outline the definitions used in this research, the government institutions that are involved in the policy-making, execution of these policies, and the statistics regarding foreign workers in Japan, which will serve as the foundation for the next part of this thesis.

The second chapter consists of core publications on the immigration policy, foreign workers, and perception of immigrants in Japan. It will utilize the most recently published research on these topics, as well as research that closely relates to this thesis.

The third chapter will discuss how the immigration policy was first constructed, including an overview of the development of the policy up until now. It is instructive to study the role of immigration in Japan's past to understand why the immigration policy is the way it is in contemporary Japanese society. Furthermore, it can help isolate the sentiments behind the current immigration policy.

The fourth chapter will continue with an analysis of the current immigration policy of 2019 in order to break down the reasons behind it and with what purpose the government has constructed this policy.

The topic of the fifth chapter focuses on public attitudes towards foreign workers, as well as the current political debate on this topic. This will be examined by analyzing the discourse of immigrants and foreign workers in digital articles published in the two largest newspapers in Japan: the *Asahi Shimbun* and the *Mainichi Shimbun*.

This chapter will also analyze primary Japanese sources, such as documents submitted to the Cabinet Office, in order to find out what the current debate is on foreign workers. By analyzing Japanese media and primary government sources about immigration issues, this thesis aims to find out if this media coverage and government sources presents positive or negative aspects of immigration.

## Chapter 1

### *Definitions*

The definitions regarding immigration, and government institutions that are involved in the immigration policy-making and execution of said policies, are forming the background of this thesis.

The Ministry of Justice defines the term ‘immigrant’ (*imin*, 移民) as “individuals who enter the country on the assumption that they will reside permanently.” (Ministry of Justice, 2019)

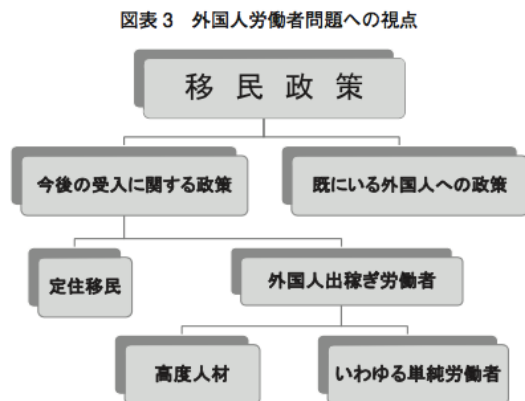
The problem is that according to this definition, there are no immigrants, which is in line with the Japanese government not naming it an actual immigration policy. (Kodama, T., 2015, 9) It is referred to as the “Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act”. (Ministry of Justice, 2019)

While many research publications do not give an actual definition of the word, it can be assumed that most Western scholars use the United Nations definition of a long-term migrant as “a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least one year.” (UN Statistics Division, 2019)

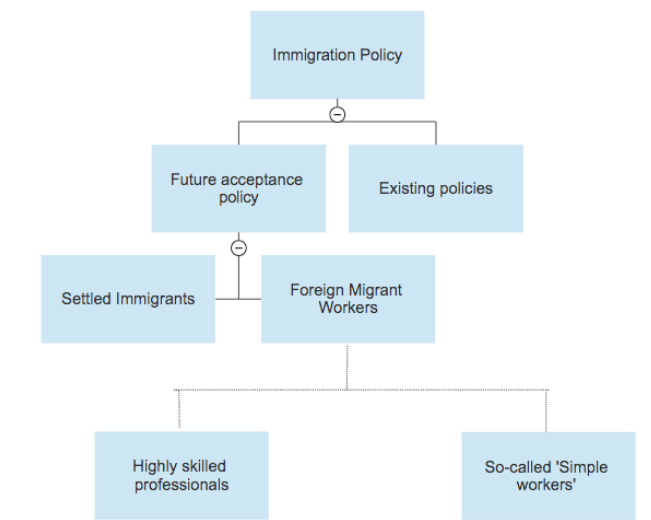
The challenge of determining what definitions to go with is that the words ‘immigrant’, ‘foreign worker’ (*gaikokujin roudousha*, 外国人労働者), ‘advanced human resources’ (*koudo jinzai*, 高度人材), and ‘highly skilled workers’ (*jukuren roudousha*, 熟練労働者) are used interchangeably.

It is not always clear which of these the targeted group exactly includes and therefore making comparisons or drawing conclusions from academic sources on how these people are perceived can be very difficult.

Junichi Goto’s research paper published in 2015 uses a hierarchical tree chart to describe the above-mentioned issue of the usage of specific terms in Japanese society. This differentiation between specific terms and their definitions serves as a framework for this thesis.



Original chart in Japanese (Goto, 2015, 39)



Translation in English

According to this chart, the immigration policy consists of two categories. It is important to differentiate between the already existing policies and possible future policies. It is also important to make a division between settled immigrants and foreign migrant workers. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the main arguments for increasing the number of temporary foreign workers is the ageing society and the shortage of workers in future Japan. For that reason, settled migrants and foreign migrant workers should not be grouped together, as their economic impact on Japanese society is significantly different. (Goto, 2015, 39) It is also assumed that migrant workers will work in Japan for a certain period of time, but will then return home. (ibid, 36)

The most prominent groups of settled migrants in Japan are the 'Zainichi' ('to stay in Japan') Koreans and the so-called 'Nikkeijin' ('people of Japanese descent'). As the translation of Zainichi implies, this group consist of Koreans who moved to Japan before the Second World War and have obtained permanent residency in Japan but didn't accept Japanese nationality, and their descendants. The Nikkeijin consists of Japanese people whose previous generations immigrated to South-American countries such as Brazil and Peru and their descendants, but were born and raised overseas. (Roberts, G.S., 2017, 91) The Nikkeijin should be considered migrant workers, as a share of their income is sent to their home country, but in case of economic uncertainty in Japan, they show a tendency to leave Japan and move back home. Therefore it can be said that they are not fully settled in Japan. (Goto, 2015, 44)

The last two categories that this thesis will work with are the highly skilled professionals and the 'simple workers'. This will be discussed in the next chapter, considering these definitions are related to the current immigration policy.

### *Government institutions*

The official 'Nyuukokukanri kyoku' 入国管理局 ('Immigration Bureau of Japan') is a part of the Ministry of Justice. The National Diet is responsible for the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which was last revised in 2016 and translated in English in 2019. (Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2019) Even though the name would imply differently, it is not the central bureau that controls all the aspects of immigration. (Roberts, G.S., 2017, 98) Other ministries handle specific parts of the immigration process. For example, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (*Monbu-kagaku-shou*, 文部科学省), also known as MEXT, is the department that handles all issues regarding education. The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (*Kousei-roudou-shou*, 厚生労働省), also known as MHLW, is the department that handles social security and immigrant related labor affairs. (Kobayashi, H., 2010, 31) When it comes to the actual application for visas and permits, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Gaimushou*, 外務省) handles these issues through the embassies. However, once you are in Japan and applying for a residence permit or extending your stay, the Immigration Bureau will handle these affairs.

There have been attempts to create an Immigration Agency (*iminchou*, 移民庁) first presented during the Panel on Immigration Control in September 2014. This panel, formally named 'Policy Discussion Panel', is a "private advisory panel for the Minister of Justice, which outlined recommendations on immigration control administration in general." (Basic Plan for Immigration Control 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, MOJ, 2015)

Back in 2005, Sakanaka Hidenori, former director of the Tokyo Immigration Bureau, established the Japan Immigration Policy Institute. (Roberts, G.S., 2017, 91) Sakanaka has been an advocate for increased immigration and has been publishing essays and books on why Japan should increase its number of immigrants. According to Sakanaka, as mentioned in an article written by Michael Hoffman and published in the Japan Times in 2017, the ageing population and shrinking workforce in Japan are referred to as the

main reasons for opening up the country. It is important to note that the Institute no longer exists.

However, starting April 2019, the Ministry of Justice has decided to upgrade its Immigration Bureau to an agency. As written by Sakura Murakami in a Japan Times article published on August 28<sup>th</sup> 2018, they decided on the upgrade to “deal with an anticipated influx of foreign workers.” Not only will the current Immigration Bureau be revised, they will also increase their staff with reportedly 500 more people.

### *Statistics on foreign workers*

According to the Ministry of Justice, there were approximately 2.38 million foreign national residents covered by the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 2016. (Ministry of Justice, 2016)

According to the MHLW, the number of foreign workers in 2018 was about 1.46 million. (*gaikokujinkoyou joukyou*, 外国人雇用状況 “Foreigner Employment Situation”, MHLW, 2018) The working age population in Japan at the end of 2018 was approximately seventy-five million, with a total of approximately sixty-six million people employed by the end of 2018. (‘Main Economic Indicators’, OECD, 2019) That means that, of all the working people in Japan, foreign workers make up for about one and a half percent of the total workforce.

Breaking down by nationality, China has the largest number of foreign workers in Japan with a total of 389,117 people, accounting for 26.6 percent of the total number. Vietnam holds the second largest number, accounting for 21.7 percent of the total and third are the Philippines, accounting for 11.2 percent of the total number of foreign workers. (ibid) Three countries were significantly increasing their number of foreign workers in Japan; those were Vietnam, Indonesia and Nepal respectively. (ibid)

The working-age population of foreigners in Japan, which includes ages 15 up to 64, is at eighty-five percent considerably higher than the Japanese at sixty percent. (Mizuhi Research Institute, 2018) Of the number of foreign workers in Japan, those who belong to the group of ‘non-qualification activities’ such as study abroad, increased by fifteen percent between 2017 and 2018. (*gaikokujinkoyou joukyou*, “Foreigner Employment Situation”, MHLW, 2018) In that same one-year period, the number of foreign workers



who are part of the Technical Intern Training Program, increased by 19.7 percent. (ibid) In the professional and technical field, the number of foreign workers increased by 16.1 percent. (ibid)

In terms of what prefecture these foreign workers work in, as expected, Tokyo holds the highest number of foreign workers with 27.2 percent of the foreigners. (*gaikokujinkoyou joukyou*, “Foreigner Employment Situation”, MHLW, 2018) That is 3.82 percent of the total population in the prefecture of Tokyo. (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2018) Aichi holds second place with 8.1 percent and Osaka holds third place with seven percent. (ibid)

According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) that Japan and 33 other countries are part of, Japan ranks fourth on the ‘inflow of foreign population’, behind the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany. (International Migration Database, OECD, 2017) In other words, the number of immigrants is, compared to the other member countries, considerably high.

However, the criterion for registering foreigners differs per country. For example, you are registered in Germany as an immigrant if you hold a residence permit and intend to stay longer than one week. In the United States you are registered when you hold a permanent resident status. The United Kingdom includes asylum seekers who ended up staying for more than a year. Japan registers immigrants when they have a valid visa and intend to stay longer than three months. Because not all these requirements for registering foreigners are the same, comparisons between countries are difficult to make. Besides, the OECD does not have the tools available to measure the inflow of the foreign population by themselves, and are therefore dependent on the countries’ own population registers and other statistics. This means that we should not just rely on these statistics, even though in some research articles the OECD statistics have been used to support the argument of Japan being an immigrant country.

## Chapter 2

### *Core publications*

The first part of this literature review will focus on the association between foreigners and crime, which has been one of the concerns linked to increased immigration. A substantial amount of research has been done on this subject with conflicting results.

In 2010, Yamamoto Ryoko holding a PhD in Sociology from the University of Hawaii and whose research focuses on international migration, has published a research paper on the link between immigration and crime. She also mentions that the targeting of a specific group can be the reason for the foreign criminality discourse. In this case, the targeted group consists of *Rainichi gaikokujin* ('foreigners coming to Japan'), who were a new and growing population in Japan. She states that empirical studies on crime and immigration have not yet found a higher crime rate amongst immigrants than amongst the native population. Her research supports the term 'moral panic' that is being described as 'the fear of or the concern with crime that is disproportional to the actual harm.' She concludes that there are several reasons for why the foreign criminality discourse came into existence. One of those has to do with the loss of trust in the police and the consequences of that.

A research paper co-authored in 2013 by Yamamoto and Johnson, also mentions that foreigners became a target by the Japanese police at some point. However, according to them, this was due to changes in the perception of crime, and not simply because they were foreigners.

Continuing on this subject of the association between crime and immigration, in 2010 Kobayashi Hitoshi has written his master thesis on immigration and crime rates in Japan. Kobayashi has conducted research on the perceived relationship between crime and immigration, by using Japan's demographic data, crime statistics and other socio-economic indicators. He uses five data sources from the Japanese government to test his hypothesis that immigration is negatively correlated to crime rates in Japan. In other words, immigration has a positive effect on the crime rates, so an increase of immigration could lead to a decrease in crime.

However, his research has not affirmed the hypothesis, and only the second model that specifically looked for a link between violent crime and immigration, revealed a positive

correlation between felony crime and immigration. Deriving from the other two models he used for his research, it can be concluded that immigration and total crime rates in Japan are not related. Put in another way, according to his research immigration has no negative impacts on overall crime rates in Japan. He acknowledges that shortcomings of his research were mainly because of data insufficiency, notes that it is important for policy makers to consider the statistics bureau to have more open data through online sources to support further research, and that transparency plays a significant role in building trust in the relationship between the people and the government.

Kobayashi also did research on social integration of foreigners in Japan. He states that the government should be responsible for the well being of immigrants in order to help them integrate into Japanese society. Kobayashi also mentions the importance of the establishment of an actual immigration agency in his master thesis, with the purpose of helping immigrants integrate into Japanese society. Regardless of this being his opinion, his suggestion on determining the socio-economic consequences of immigration on Japanese society is still a topic of research for other scholars today. He suggests that the policymakers should assess the costs and benefits of immigration in order to make efficient changes to the policy.

It is important to know the impact of an immigration policy, which has the purpose of increasing the number of foreign workers, on the Japanese workers' wages and job availability, as well as Japan's economic prosperity. This importance can be seen in the following research:

Junichi Goto, who obtained his degree from Yale University and is currently employed as a professor in Economics at Keio University, has published a research paper in 2015 in Japanese in which he conducts an economic analysis of the current foreign worker policy. He uses empirical data and, after a careful examination of all the variables involved, he concludes his research stating that it seems unattainable to observe a positive effect on the economic welfare by increasing the number of foreign workers. According to his research, taking the ageing population and declining birth rate into account, the number of foreign workers needs to be about 5.26 million in order to see a positive effect on the economic welfare.

Considering the fact that the working population of Japan is currently about seventy-five million, this means foreign workers need to make up about fifteen percent of the total

workforce. (OECD, 2019) Junichi Goto argues that because of these statistics, the government should look into other options to help overcome the labor shortages, such as encouraging younger people and more female workers to participate in the job market. This will probably bring a separate set of challenges.

Besides the economic impact of immigration, public sentiments towards immigration have also been extensively researched.

A study in 2014 by Kobayashi, Collet, Iyengar and Hahn on Japanese attitudes towards foreign workers, has found that there seems to be a person-positivity bias on the perception of immigrants, because individual workers are viewed more positively than the groups of categories they belong to. They conclude that it is difficult to fully understand what Japanese people think about these abstract groups such as 'foreigners' and 'immigrants', because most research has always been focused on measuring their perception of 'foreign workers'. The difficulty regarding the definitions of these terms and their interchangeability will be discussed further in this thesis.

Another study in 2014 by Junichi Akashi, who holds a PhD in International Political Economy from the University of Tsukuba, argues that even though systemic changes have been made to the immigration policy, these changes do not yet enable foreigners to become full members of the Japanese society. His research consists of an analysis of policy recommendations and transcripts of governmental meetings in which the immigration policy was discussed. Based on this research, he states that the changes that have been made to the policy were restricted and limited, because there is no consensus within political parties. He also mentions that, in political debates as well as in the media, the word 'imin' is being avoided.

In a paper written in 2015 by Kodama Takashi, who served as the Economic Research Director at the Daiwa Institute of Research, analyzed data regarding immigration. He mentions the 300.000 students plan, which is a goal of the Japanese government to reach in 2020, and quotes that the objective for this goal was "to globalize Japan's society through the promotion of social acceptance of foreigners after completion of their studies." (Kodama, T, 2015, 10) He then states that this plan by itself should be considered a type of immigration policy, even if the government does not refer to it as such.

He agrees with Erin Chung's paper published in 2010, by stating that the problem of integration is not really discussed on a national level, mainly because of the small population of foreigners in Japan, and thus it becomes a very local problem. The question remains whether the government itself is willing to form integration policies on a national level.

David Green worked together with Yoshihiko Kadoya in 2015, to analyze the findings of the Japanese General Social Survey (JGSS) in order to determine public sentiment on immigration in Japan. One of the main points they found, contrary to what a lot of Westerners seem to think, is that Japan is not unique in its general attitudes towards immigration. The views of Japanese people on increasing the foreign population, according to the analysis of the JGSS, have stayed virtually identical between 2000 and 2010. Green and Kadoya wonder what factors could be influencing the public attitudes towards immigration. From their own research, they conclude that superficial contact and the English-speaking ability of Japanese people are both associated with less negative views on immigration. In other words, when Japanese people came into contact with foreigners and were able to communicate in English, even on a superficial level, they were less likely to view immigration in a negative way.

Their research also concludes that potential economic gain is seen as a benefit of increased immigration. This is in line with the Japanese immigration policy whose main purpose is to increase the number of foreign workers to account for labor shortages. Green and Kadoya questioned how the fear of different cultures affected views on immigration in Japanese society, yet their research did not provide any answers to this question.

They have constructed a thorough representation via empirical data gathering of the views on immigration, yet absent from this data is the proof of a causative relationship between the ability to speak English and more positive views on immigration. Their research showed a connection between the two, but could not determine reasons behind that association.

David Green continues this research on public perception towards immigration in Japan in 2017. This research specifically focuses on the factors that influenced public opinion. His framework involves three theories, namely cultural threat theory, contact-threat theory and the salience of change hypothesis. By using the latter, he found that there was a negative correlation with the foreign population size and perceived growth of the

foreign population. Furthermore, he states that the negative perception of the Nikkeijin in Japan is in line with the cultural threat theory: The more different the culture, the more issues it will produce. He states that Japanese people seem to understand immigration for economic reasons, possibly because of the current labor shortage and the need for foreign workers, yet the resistance towards immigration might come from the fear of cultural differences. He cites the perception of ethnic homogeneity in Japanese society as a possible reason for this.

In 2015, the research done by Green and Kadoya found that older individuals tend to view increased immigration less favorably.

However, a research paper written by Nakata Hiroyuki in 2017 on attitudes towards immigration concludes that the older generation carried a more positive view on immigration. Nakata considers the economic-threat theory to be the reason for this result. The older generation does not view immigrants as potential competition in the job market.

Nakata also found a positive association between information campaigns on the benefits of immigration and the view on immigrants in general. More specifically, these campaigns contained information that justifies an increase of immigration in some way or another. In most cases this contained information on the effects of the ageing society. This seems to imply that communication, such as these information campaigns, from the government to the people could help shape the public perception on immigration.

Glenda S. Roberts from Waseda University authored a research paper in 2017 on the terminology regarding the immigration policy, more specifically on why policy makers are avoiding the word 'imin'. (Roberts, G.S., 2017, 89) This has been mentioned by Akashi in his paper of 2014 as well. Roberts also agrees with Kodama, as they share the same view on how Japan is not fully addressing immigration, nor naming it an actual immigration policy.

According to this paper, Abe's policy is still focused on foreign workers, instead of permanent residents and therefore actual immigrants. Even though his policy is not focused on immigrant groups, there are a significant number of students and technical intern trainees that, after their program is finished, choose to continue residing in Japan. Foreigners in this group are, at some point, applying for permanent residency.

Besides that, from the 1990's onwards, part of the group of Asian workers that Japan recruited due to its workers' shortage, has naturalized as Japanese citizens. Roberts says that for Abe to not focus on these groups of immigrants in Japan is denying part of the immigration flow to Japan. Her research concludes that, due to the situation described above, there is a lot of hidden immigration to Japan. As Kobayashi stated in his article, Roberts also stated that there is a lack of a central immigration agency that oversees all issues related to immigration.

Her research is primarily centered on the examination of the naming of policies by the Japanese government. It is therefore conducted solely from a governments' point of view. Roberts does not take the potential interaction between the government and the people into account.

Regarding the usage of certain words in the political field, the naming of policies, and public perception, Torigoe Chie has published a Japanese research paper in 2019.

He is a professor at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, with a PhD in communication and a specialization in fields such as racism and critical discourse study, and has conducted research on the distinction between the words 'foreigner', 'immigrant' and 'foreign worker'. He uses discourse analysis as his research method, and Discursive Psychology, a form of discourse analysis that focuses on psychological themes in talk and images, as his theoretical framework.

He states that while the category of 'foreigner' should include foreign tourists, workers and migrants alike, in Japanese discourse, 'foreigners' are an entirely different group altogether. According to his research, the word 'foreigner' had a positive association due to a globalization and social diversification discourse. The word 'immigrant' had a negative association, with the description of an immigrant overlapping with the meaning of the word refugee. It seems like Japanese people think of immigrants as people who want to come to Japan in order to escape from bad living conditions, or because they have no choice. Surprisingly, the word 'foreign worker' had a positive association to blue-collar workers, who are then described as hard working, serious, and good at their job. However, foreign workers seem to not be associated with white-collar work at all, and mainly pictured to be people from other Asian or East-Asian countries.

To summarize his research, it seems that the difference in meaning and whether they are positively or negatively viewed has to do with the underlying discourses in contemporary Japanese society.

In the process of determining public sentiments, conducting an objective and unbiased research is challenging. While his research has been imbedded in a theoretical framework that serves his study well, the shortcoming of this research is the study group. This group consists of 104 first-year students at the Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka. Due to the wrong sample size bias, as well as having little to no diversity in the demographic and/or educational background of the study group, the survey may prove to have too many challenges to remain a proper statistical representation of Japan's population.

There are publications of research that seem to have a rather strong opinion about the situation in Japan regarding immigration and foreigners.

Apichai Shipper wrote a research paper in 2005 on illegal foreigners. He states that government officials and newspapers are misusing the statistics on crime by not putting them into context or comparing them to other significant data. While other papers, such as Yamamoto's paper in 2010 and Green and Kadoya's paper of 2013, have supported this statement, Shipper states that government institutions have used foreigners to strengthen their control and increase their political power. With phrases such as 'state-sponsored racism', his paper seems to push the idea of a racist Japan that uses foreigners as pawns in their own political scheme. (Shipper, 2005, 305) In my opinion, Shipper draws his conclusion a little too fast. Shipper does not have a PhD in East Asian or Japanese studies, but in Philosophy. Besides this paper, he has published a book named 'Fighting for foreigners: Immigration and its impact on Japanese democracy', which implies Shipper is generally concerned with the position of foreigners in Japan.

Erin Chung from Northwestern University wrote a chapter about immigration and citizenship in Japan in 2010, where she states that the term 'kyousei', meaning co-existence in English, is based on avoiding conflict and maintaining the status quo. Where she first states that kyousei "is a type of assimilatory multiculturalism in that it acknowledges that despite differences between Japanese and foreign residents, all can live together peacefully by tolerating these differences", a couple of sentences later she describes co-existence as "also placing a heavy burden on foreign residents to minimize



their differences so that they do not provoke antipathy on the part of their fellow Japanese residents.” (Chung, E., 2010, 170)

First of all, these two sentences are inconsistent with each other. Second of all, the above-mentioned quote is the authors’ own opinion about it. There is no anecdotal or factual source of any kind behind this opinion. Her opinion that the meaning of the word ‘co-existence’ is associated with avoiding conflict and disregarding foreigners is extremely vague and far-stretched. The underlying negative assumptions on how this co-existence functions in Japanese society is pushing for the idea that the usage of the word ‘kyosei’ by the Japanese government is disabling multiculturalism.

Yamamoto and Johnson state in their paper of 2013 that there is an obvious need for increased immigration in Japan for economic reasons. They wonder if it would be better to switch to integration-oriented immigration policies, instead of control-oriented ones.

They ask the question whether that switch of policies could lead to a ‘less fearful approach to immigrants’ by the Japanese people. Even though there is supportive research such as Akashi’s paper of 2014, Kodama’s paper of 2015, and Peng’s paper of 2016, to show that Japanese people could indeed be considered cautious towards immigration and immigrants, using words such as ‘fearful’ display certain underlying assumptions about Japanese society.

Ito Peng from the University of Toronto published a research paper in 2016 about the importance of public sentiments and the national collective imaginary in policy change. She states that the immigration policy reforms are moving so slowly, especially compared to the ones for health- and social care, because it is related to Japanese people’s sense of identity. She continues by stating that the homogeneity of the Japanese society is a myth that is mostly expressed through stronger national sentiments. She analyzed the Basic Plan for Immigration Control published by the Ministry of Justice from 2000, 2005, and 2010, and has performed content analysis on the two largest newspapers in Japan, concluding that the governments public messaging and the positive media coverage did not result in a change of public sentiment towards immigration. The public polls presented by the government on a yearly basis have not shown a positive association with immigration by the Japanese people. She states that the Japanese government is willing to open up to immigration, but the Japanese people

hold on to the myth of homogeneity too much to change their sentiments on immigration.

This statement alone disregards the Japanese peoples' ability to change in the future.

Therefore, a more academically correct way of making a statement like this would be to talk about the influence of the myth of homogeneity in contemporary Japanese society.

It is important to stay cautious about generalizing statements that have no exact measurement to be based upon, and for that reason words such as 'too much' or 'too little' should be avoided if possible.

## Chapter 3

### *Development of the immigration policy*

The chronological development of immigration to Japan can be divided into six distinctive periods, as indicated by Kondo Atsushi in his research paper on the development of the immigration policy, published in 2015. See the summary below.

- (1) No immigration during the isolation period (1639-1853).
- (2) Opening the door, large emigration and colonial immigration (1853-1945).
- (3) Strictly controlled immigration and emigration (1945-1951).
- (4) Strict immigration during the time of advanced economic growth (1951-1981).
- (5) Strict immigration, but refugees accepted and aliens' rights are improved (1981-1990).
- (6) Relatively strict immigration, but ethnic repatriates, trainees and irregulars come to work as unskilled workers (1990- ).

In contrast to the summary presented above, even during the isolation period there were Chinese immigrants who were settling in Japan's port cities. (Kashiwazaki & Akaha, 2006)

In the second period mentioned in the summary, in pre-war Japan, there was a large influx of Korean migrants due to colonialism.

The Immigration Control Law that came into effect in 1952 can be considered the first immigration policy Japan adopted, modeled on the U.S. system. (Kashiwazaki & Akaha, 2006) This law was abolished when the new 'shutsunyuukokukanri oyobi nanmin ninteihou' (出入国管理及び難民認定法), which translates to 'The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act', came into effect in 1982. (Ministry of Justice, 2019)

In the 60's Japan chose to not rely on foreign labor, and dealt with the labor shortages by automating production, starting production companies overseas and using other sources of domestic labor. (Chung, E., 2010, 149) Even though a few scholars note that Japan did not have this 'dependence on foreign labor', namely Mori (1997) and Chung (2010), other scholars note that post-war Japan already had a significant number of foreigners from China, Taiwan, and Korea, yet official statistics on these numbers are

not available. (Morris-Suzuki 2006; Kashiwazaki & Akaha 2006) The migration flow to Japan might have been slow during this first period of economic growth, but that does not mean Japan did not already have foreign workers contributing to Japan's economy at the time. (Kondo, 2, 2002) This can be referred to as the distinction between 'old comers', which includes immigrants who have lived in Japan since before 1952 as well as their descendants, and the 'new comers', who are considered to be foreigners that entered Japan around and after 1980. (Kashiwazaki & Akaha, 2006)

Few scholars also note that in the second half of the 1970's the influx of migrant workers was initiated by the importation of Asian female workers who started working in the Japanese entertainment industry. (Morris-Suzuki 2006; Chung 2010)

The second period of economic growth that led to Japan facing a labor shortage, was in the 80's. (Chung, E., 150, 2010) Japan managed to increase domestic labor, but the 'bubble economy' and the strength of the Japanese Yen started to make Japan an attractive country for workers from abroad. (ibid)

This contributed to Japan experiencing a large influx of Asian foreign migrant workers. (Kashiwazaki & Akaha 2006; Chung 2010) It also caused foreign migrants to enter Japan on a tourist visa and purposely overstay this visa in order to continue working in Japan. (Kondo 2002; Kashiwazaki & Akaha 2006; Chung 2010) It is estimated that Japan reached the number of 300.000 illegal foreign workers in 1993, which was brought down to about 230.000 in 2001. (Ministry of Justice, 2019)

In response to this economic migration in the 80's, the Japanese government revised the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1989 and implemented it the year after. (Mori 1997; Kondo 2002; Kashiwazaki & Akaha 2006; Komine 2018) It is important to note that part of the economic migration before 1989 consisted of trainees/interns, skilled workers and co-ethnic migrants. (Akashi, 2010) It was not until 1989 that the immigration policy shifted its focus to groups such as the highly skilled workers and health care workers. The new Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was put in place to rearrange visa categories that promoted foreign skilled labor, as well as to prevent illegal work. (Kashiwazaki & Akaha 2006; Chung 2010) What this meant concretely is that the visa categories were expanded from eighteen to twenty-seven, and only the visa categories meant for highly skilled workers

permitted labor. In other words, according to this immigration law unskilled foreign labor is prohibited. (Chung, 2010, 151)

Even so, there was still a way to get unskilled foreign workers to enter Japan under this new immigration law, specifically reserved for the Latin-American Nikkeijin. (Kondo 2002; Kashiwazaki & Akaha 2006; Goto 2007) Foreign workers of Japanese descent up to the third-generation qualified for a long-term resident visa that allowed them to reside in Japan for a maximum of three years, while their visa can be renewed an indefinite number of times. On this visa, work activities are unrestricted. (Kondo 2002; Chung 2010; Komine 2018) According to Chung, this can be seen as the exception to an immigration policy that overall discourages unskilled labor or settlement in Japan. (Chung, E., 2010, 151) Kondo considers the long-term resident visa to imply a hidden intention of getting the Nikkeijin resettled in Japan. (Kondo, A., 2002, 8) Even though the introduction of this long-term resident visa was not meant for just the Nikkeijin, but also for refugees, victims of human trafficking, undocumented migrants who were granted amnesty, and parents to (half)-Japanese children, it ended up becoming a visa mostly granted to the Nikkeijin. (Komine, 112, 2018)

Another way of allowing unskilled workers to enter Japan was enabled through the establishment of the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) (*Ginou jisshuu seido*, 技能実習制度) in 1993. (Chung, E., 2010, 151) Despite the fact that its main purpose was and still is educational, it has been argued that the TITP was a way for the Japanese government to allow cheap foreign unskilled labor into the country. (Kondo 2002; Chung 2010) One of the reasons for this might be the fact that it is much easier for both the foreign trainee/intern, as well as the company he will intern for, to enter Japan. For a highly skilled worker visa you need to be able to prove your skills and experience, while this is not required for a trainee visa. (Komine, 113, 2018) The TITP has been criticized for its low wages and exploitation of foreign trainees. (Kondo 2015; Komine 2018) While social rights improved over these years for migrant workers, the Technical Intern Trainees, as they were not recognized as foreign workers, were the last to get access to social security benefits in 2009. (Komine, 117, 2018)

The division between highly skilled labor and simple or unskilled labor has always been of importance to the Japanese government in formulating these first immigration policies. Whereas trainees/interns or Nikkeijin will never be regarded as unskilled

workers, the emphasis of the immigration policy lies on the acceptance of only skilled labor. (Kondo 2002; Komine 2018)

In 1992, the 'First Basic Plan' published by the Ministry of Justice, recommends labor migration as a way for Japanese people and foreigners alike to benefit from each other. This is the first time the government specifically mentions economic benefits as a purpose for labor migration. (Kondo, A., 2002, 12) However, the plan was mainly focused to bring back the number of illegal foreign workers, as the plan stated to 'counter illegal foreign workers'. (Ministry of Justice, 2000)

In 2000, the 'Second Basic Plan' talks about the contribution of foreign workers to Japan's globalization and its economy. (Kondo, A., 2002, 12) In the light of demographic changes in Japan's society, the discussion slightly shifts towards a more active approach in regards to foreign workers. (Peng, I., 2016, 285) In the introduction of the Second Basic Plan it is stated that:

*'With the population rapidly aging with less childbirth, and with the total population expected to begin decreasing in the 2000s, Japan is faced with the task of coping with the decreasing workforce and finding measures to cope with it. (...) However, if you trace back the history of Japanese society and give thought to the Japanese peoples' perception of society, culture and their sensitivity, it would not be realistic to suddenly introduce a large number of foreign labor.'* (Ministry of Justice, 2000)

This citation reflects a cautious approach towards foreign workers. However, this changes into a stronger realization that foreign workers might be necessary for Japan's economy long-term.

*' (...) However, the time has also come for the immigration control administration to consider what the acceptance of foreign workers should be in a population-declining age.'* (Ministry of Justice, 2005)

The 'Fourth Basic Plan' published in 2010 seems to be pressing for a more active approach towards foreign workers.

*' (...) It is required that the acceptance of foreign nationals who are needed by Japanese society is carried out even more proactively.'* (Ministry of Justice, 2010)

It might seem like these small changes in the way the government discusses the foreign workers' policy are somewhat insignificant. Several scholars have referred to the immigration policy reforms as 'slow-moving'. (Kodama, 2015; Peng 2016; Komine, 2018) Some scholars describe these policy reforms as slow for the reason of there being resistance towards foreign workers coming into the country. (Kodama, 2015; Green 2017) Another reason is that, due to the Prime Ministers' economic policies, also referred to as 'Abenomics', Japan has not focused on immigration to begin with. (Akashi, J., 2014, 188) Chung states that these reforms only push for an increase of foreign workers, while not providing a notion on actual immigration and settlement of these foreign workers. (Chung, E., 2010, 167) In agreement with Chung, Kobayashi states that the government perceives immigration as temporary, which in turn does not push the government to analyze the consequences of immigration as a whole. (Kobayashi, H., 2010, 26)

## **Chapter 4**

After discussing in Chapter 3 how the immigration policy of Japan was first constructed and Japan's history of immigration, this thesis will continue with an overview of the immigration policy as of April 2019. It will also examine the terms 'highly skilled professional' and 'foreign worker' to demonstrate the difference between policy-making and reality.

### *Current immigration policy*

The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was passed on November 18 2016, and implemented on the 28<sup>th</sup> the same month.

The Japanese Ministry of Justice has published and translated both the 'Basic Plan for Immigration Control Policies' and the 'Immigration Control Report'. These documents are accessible through their website, and have been accessed for this thesis in April 2019. The most recent Basic Plan for Immigration Control dates to 2015, and the most recent Immigration Control Report is from 2016. (Ministry of Justice, 2019)

The latter contains information on the Technical Intern Training and the acceptance of foreign nationals through the 'point-based system for highly skilled professionals'. These are the main two categories of migrants coming to Japan to work. Both have undergone major changes in 2013 due to the revision of the 'Japan Revitalization Strategy' (revised in 2014) and the revision of the Technical Intern Training Program as a consequence of that.

Firstly, the Technical Intern Training Program has the purpose of promoting "international cooperation through skill transfer etc., to developing regions etc." The system has been expanded in 2016 by enabling technical intern trainees to stay for a period up to five years under certain circumstances. (Immigration Control Report, Ministry of Justice, 2016, 79)

Secondly, the points-based system for highly skilled workers has been implemented since May 2012 and is still undergoing revision. The system is aimed at "foreign nationals who have advanced capabilities and qualities and are expected to contribute to Japan's economic growth." (ibid, 80) Under the three following categories of 'advanced academic research activities', 'advanced specialized activities' and 'advanced business



management activities', points will be distributed for characteristics such as 'academic background', 'personal career' and 'annual salary'. If the foreign worker reaches seventy points, he or she is considered to be a highly skilled professional and will therefore receive preferred status in terms of immigration. (ibid) The highly skilled professional is allowed to stay in Japan up to five years. Under the newer second category of highly skilled professional, if you have been in Japan for at least three years under the status of highly skilled professional and pass the other requirements, you may extend your stay to an indefinite period. However, this is different from a permanent resident status, because you are only allowed to engage in activities that require a highly skilled professional worker. (ibid, 81)

Due to the implementation of the points-based system, the number of highly skilled professionals has been growing every year.

In the first year after the implementation of the points-based system, only 313 foreign highly skilled workers entered Japan through this system. (Basic Plan for Immigration Control 5<sup>th</sup> edition, MOJ, 2015, 8) As a response to this low number, the government reformed its policy by making the permission requirements more flexible. Consequently, the number went up to 532 in the year after, and to 1608 the year after that. (ibid) At the end of June 2017, the number of high-skilled foreign workers recognized by the points-based system was as high as 8515. (Immigration Control Report, Ministry of Justice, 2018, 82)

However, it is important to note that this number reflects the total number of foreign workers who have entered Japan through this points-based system. It is also important to note that in the first couple of years after this system coming into effect, there were a reasonably high number of foreign workers who changed their status to that of a highly skilled professional. For example, at the end of 2013 the total number of highly skilled professionals was 845, with 417 of those adjusting their status. (Kondo, A., 2015, 164) Therefore, the number found in these government issued papers does not reflect the annual increase of foreign workers recognized by this system.

Yet the government has made it clear they are focused on the increase of the number of highly skilled professionals, entering Japan through this points-based system.

As decided in the 'Growth Strategy 2017', the government set a goal of having 10.000 highly skilled professionals by the end of 2020, and wants to double that number to 20.000 just two years after. (Immigration Control Report, Ministry of Justice, 2016, 82)

The latest 'Japan Revitalization Strategy' was revised in June 2016 and reduced the, for highly skilled workers required five-year period of stay in order to apply for Japanese permanent residency, to three years, and in some cases even one year. This policy measure was implemented in 2017. (ibid, 83)

Under the 2019 immigration policy, there are a fair amount of visas available for foreign nationals to enter Japan and work in a specific field, such as agriculture, housekeeping, food industry, and winter sports. (ibid, 84-88) This category is referred to as 'specified skilled worker' (*tokutei ginou*, 特定技能) and foreign workers eligible for a visa under this category must prove that they have a certain amount of knowledge and experience in the specific field they want to work in. This visa expands the field that foreign workers can enter to a total of 14 different work sectors. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019) This visa category has been administrated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in April 2019, and has not been implemented in the Immigration Control Act yet.

Important to note is that, besides opening up another part of the labor market to foreigners, this visa still requires the foreign workers to have proof of a specific skill, as well as to complete some tests such as a Japanese language proficiency test. (ibid)

While highly skilled workers that enter Japan through the point-based system are eligible to bring their family members to Japan with them, foreign workers entering on a 'specified skilled worker' visa are not allowed to do so. (ibid) The other difference between these two visas is that on a highly skilled worker visa you have a chance of being eligible to extend your resident status to an indefinite period. When you enter Japan as a specified foreign worker, you have to get the visa renewed every four or six months into your visa, to be granted another year of stay. However, the maximum years you can stay in Japan on this visa is five. (ibid) Since the implementation of this new visa category in April 2019, only 219 foreign workers have entered Japan on this visa. (Japan Today, Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> 2019) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is still improving this specified skills visa, for example by increasing the availability of language tests in other countries. (ibid)

In an article published in the *Asahi Shimbun* on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2019, the so-called 'designated activities visa' was mentioned to come into effect on May 30<sup>th</sup> 2019. This visa enables foreign graduates to work jobs in sectors that have nothing to do with their degree, such

as the food and retail industry. Due to increased tourism there are large gaps to fill in these sectors. (Asahi Shimbun, 2019) Important to note is that this small adjustment in the policies has not actually been mentioned anywhere else. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has administrated the 'specified skilled worker' visa, the Ministry of Justice is overseeing the 'designated activities visa'. This is an example of the division of Ministries that are involved in the visa processing.

### *Status of residence: foreign workers VS immigrants*

The status of residence in Japan can be divided into three categories: Short-term, long-term and permanent residence status.

Under the 'short-term' residence status, activities and residential terms are restricted. People with this residence status include trainees, cultural activities, and college students. The regulations regarding the hours they can work, depends on the type of visa they hold. (Kondo, A., 2015, 159)

Under the 'long-term' residence status activities are unrestricted. (Kashiwazaki & Akaha, 2006) People with this residence status include refugees, Japanese relatives, children, or spouse of a Japanese national. ('List of Statuses of Residence', MOJ, 2019)

Granting the long-term residence status can only be done through the Ministry of Justice, who can also decide the duration of the stay. The only category that does not have a designated period of stay is that of the permanent resident (*Eijuu ken*, 永住権). (ibid) Besides the permanent residence status, there is a sub-category of 'special permanent resident' (*tokubetsu eijuusha*, 特別永住者), which is reserved for former colonial citizens, such as the Nikkeijin and the Zainichi Koreans. (Kondo, A., 2015, 163)

This thesis is interested in the difference between immigrant and foreign worker, as these are somewhat interchangeable and often misunderstood.

According to the website of the Cabinet Office, the definition of a foreign worker is: "foreign workers include foreigners working in Japan with residential status which permits work, and exclude special permanent residents and permanent residents."

In other words, foreigners who hold a permanent residence status are not considered foreign workers anymore, but instead can be considered immigrants. However, it seems that under its current immigration policy the government has no intention of letting

foreign workers get settled and apply for permanent residency at all, as in most cases this is not allowed.

Yet by status of residence in 2018, most of the foreign residents in Japan held a permanent residence status or a special permanent residence status. (Statistics on Foreign National Residents, MOJ, 2018)

As of December 2018, according to the statistics published by the Ministry of Justice, out of the 2.731.093 foreigners residing in Japan, 771.568 of these foreigners hold a permanent residence status. (ibid) This means that of all foreigners residing in Japan, 28.3 percent have acquired a permanent residence status.

Of those holding a permanent resident status, Chinese (260.963), Filipino (129.707) and Korean (71.094) were the largest three groups. (ibid) They make up approximately sixty percent of all the permanent residents in Japan.

Divided by continent, Asia accounts for 72.9 percent of all the permanent residents, with a total number of 562.656 people.

As discussed in the second chapter, there is a specific group that holds a 'special permanent residence status', which is reserved for the Nikkeijin as well as Korean and Chinese colonial migrants that have naturalized. (Kashiwazaki & Akaha, 2006) At first the Nikkeijin were officially granted the status of 'long-term resident'. (Kondo, A., 2015, 160) However, renewal of this residency is in some measure done automatically and after two or three renewals, Nikkeijin were given the possibility to apply for permanent residency. (Goto, J., 2007, 18) The way in which the Nikkeijin and former colonial migrants have obtained this permanent residence status is an exception to the rule, which is why they have their own sub-category of 'special permanent residents.' (Kondo, A., 2015, 163) As of December 2018, there are 321.416 people who have such a special permanent residence status. (Statistics on Foreign National Residents, MOJ, 2018) This number is about half of the total number of foreigners that hold a permanent residence status.

In 2004, the percentage of foreigners residing in Japan who had acquired permanent residency, including people who have a special permanent residence status, was about forty-one percent. (Ministry of Justice, 2004) In 2018, this ebbed to forty percent. (Ministry of Justice, 2018) It seems that this number has been stable over the years.

The other sixty percent accounts for foreigners who hold a long-term resident status, including those who enter under the EPA and TITP, as well as spouses and children of permanent residence status holders. (ibid)

In 2014, foreign residents in Japan accounted for about 1.67 percent of the total population. (Basic Plan for Immigration Control 5<sup>th</sup> edition, MOJ, 2015) In 2018 this percentage rose to about two percent of the total population. (Mizuho Research Institute, 2018)

### *Foreign workers VS highly skilled professional*

The MHLW has published a pamphlet that simplifies categories of foreign workers in Japan. This pamphlet outlines the category of white-collar workers such as that of highly skilled professionals. Besides that, it mentions Trainees under the TITP, care workers under the EPA and college students who could work up to 28 hours a week if given a permit. ('Category of Foreign Workers in Japan', MHLW, 2016)

The last category of 'Foreign Nationals Reside on Status', that includes long-term and permanent residence status holders, are for example the Nikkeijin and the Zainichi Koreans.

This document specifically uses the term 'foreign worker'. When talking about these foreign workers, the government white papers, for instance the 'Basic Plan for Immigration Control' and the 'Immigration Control Report' published by the MOJ, are all focused on one specific group: That of highly skilled workers.

Yet according to the pamphlet published by the MHLW there are three other categories of people who contribute to Japan's economy. That is, the category of the status-based visas holders, the category of trainees and interns, and the category of international students. It is important to note that the status-based visa holders can work any type of job, and this group includes co-ethnic migrants such as the Nikkeijin. (Komine, A., 2018, 112) The trainee and intern visa only qualifies for specific sectors.

It would not make sense to call international students who could potentially work up to 28 hours a week foreign workers. However, according to Komine, both the Nikkeijin and the trainees 'have been structurally embedded as workers in Japanese economy and are perceived as such by employers.' (ibid, 113) In other words, they participate in the labor market and therefore influence the Japanese economy.

While the Japanese government focuses on the highly skilled workers, since 2017, these workers can actually apply for permanent residency. The possibility for this group of foreigners to acquire permanent residency, seems to indicate a transition in the immigration policy. However, the number of highly skilled workers is not that high compared to the other categories of foreign workers in Japan. The number of highly skilled workers is also not nearly as high as the government anticipated for.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, another major change to the immigration policy is the implementation of the 'specified skilled worker' category in April 2019. On the one hand, this signifies the labor market opening up to foreign workers. On the other hand, there are a lot of requirements one has to meet in order to qualify for this visa. Between April and November 2019, a modest number of 219 people have acquired this visa. It is too soon to tell whether or not this visa is going to become more popular in the future. While the number of foreign residents has grown from 1.79 million in 2004, to 2.73 million in 2018, the ratio of residents with or without permanent residency has stayed the same. Not taking into account the number of people who hold a special permanent residence status, the number of foreign residents with a permanent residence status is only 28.3 percent.

## Chapter 5

### 5.1 Media Analysis

This chapter consists of two different parts of research. The first part focuses on media coverage, while the second part focuses on government papers.

#### *Method*

By analyzing the number of online articles published in two of the largest newspapers in Japan, namely the *Mainichi Shimbun* and the *Asahi Shimbun*, this chapter of the thesis aims to gain insight on the media coverage on foreign workers by Japanese media.

The method of research is discourse analysis, with a focus on the usage of words. This thesis used the data available at the time of this research, which was conducted between October 20 and October 29, 2019. This includes all Japanese articles that came up when using ‘外国人労働者’ (*gaikokujin roudousha*, foreign worker) as the search term. It also takes into account similar words in Japanese to describe foreign workers, such as ‘外国人材’ (*gaikoku jinzai*, foreign human resources), ‘技能実習生’ (*ginou jisshuusei*, technical intern trainee), ‘外国人雇用’ (*gaikokujin koyou*, foreign employment) and ‘移民労働者’ (*imin roudousha*, migrant worker), for the reason that these terms often showed up in the same articles.

#### *Background*

The *Asahi Shimbun* is the second largest newspaper in Japan, founded in 1879. From an East-Asian perspective, the paper is known for its progressive and liberal views. Since they have correspondents all over the world, they have considerably large media coverage on politics and foreign news.

Part of their online database is easily accessible, and traces back to a couple of years ago. There is a difference between articles published on their website, and newspaper articles. The latter is behind a pay wall, and cannot be accessed by non-subscribers. This means that only a select group of people has been exposed to these articles.

The *Mainichi Shimbun* started publishing under this name from 1911 onwards and is one of the ‘daily three’ newspapers of Japan, together with the *Asahi* and *Yomiuri Shimbun*. Its political stance is considered progressive in Japan, it has published a lot of

articles covering foreign news, and holds a favorable reputation worldwide. The newspaper has a large online database, however almost all the articles are only accessible when you pay for this service, which limits the exposure of news articles to people who are subscribed to the *Mainichi*.

### *Research*

For this research, the Japanese websites of the aforementioned newspapers have been used exclusively. Even when articles were not fully accessible, the title and abstract were still available.

When looking for articles with the keyword 'immigrant' (*imin*, 移民), in the *Mainichi Shimbun*, only articles referring to other countries' immigrants showed up. There were no articles related to Japan at all when using the search term immigrant. The same happened when looking at the online database for the *Asahi Shimbun*. The only articles related to Japan were about anti-immigration protests. Not surprisingly, most of the other articles were related to the United States, as well as most of these articles displaying immigrant problems and putting immigration in a negative light.

A reason for this is, as we've seen so far in this thesis, that the term 'imin', even though the actual translation would be 'immigrant', is mainly used to describe Japanese migrants. For example, Japanese people moving to South-America could be referred to as 'imin'. According to the *Kojien* Japanese dictionary, the combination of the words 'imin' and 'roudousha' is used to refer to foreign workers/migrant workers, yet this word combination is not commonly used in Japanese media.

### *Findings*

The *Mainichi Shimbun* displayed a large number of articles related to the term foreign worker, with 290 articles published in 2019. A peak number of articles published on a daily basis showed up after April 1<sup>st</sup>, which is probably related to the implementation of the 'specified skilled worker' category that came into effect on April 1<sup>st</sup>. Another notable peak in articles published about problems related to the TITP, showed up on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2019. The government conducted a survey on foreign trainees, and the results of that survey were released on this day. The peak in articles about the TITP is likely to be



related to the results of that survey, which revealed a variety of problems regarding the TITP.

The *Asahi Shimbun* showed an even larger number of articles related to the term foreign worker, with 407 articles published in 2019. A noticeable peak in articles about foreign workers showed up at the beginning of the year, for an unknown reason. The newspaper published articles about the TITP every week, and in the fourth week of March they published numerous articles a day. In the second half of 2019, the number of articles regarding the TITP seemed to increase. A peak number of articles related to foreign workers appeared on April 1<sup>st</sup>, with 10 publications on this day. The entire month of April publication of articles on foreign workers was on average several articles a day.

When analyzing the online articles from the *Mainichi Shimbun*, there were about just as many pro-immigration articles as neutral and anti-immigration articles. An example of a pro-immigration article would be 'Gaikoku hito ukeire kakudai e zenkoku hatsu, ken to Nagoya nyuukan ga kyoutei' ('First nationwide agreement between prefecture and Nagoya Immigration Bureau on the expansion of the acceptance of foreigners'), published on October 17<sup>th</sup> 2019, writing about the first time a prefectural government has been actively working together with local governments to promote the acceptance of foreigners.

An example of an anti-immigration article would be 'Imin ni kanyou to sareru kuni de no sangeki ni shougeki' ("Shocked by tragedy in a country that is considering to be tolerant towards immigrants"), published on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2019, reporting on the New Zealand shootings, yet putting emphasis on anti-immigration feelings now that such a terrible crime has been committed by immigrants in an immigrant-friendly country.

Besides reporting on the benefits that foreign workers can bring to Japan, there have been many reports on potential problems regarding social security and integration of foreigners.

The *Asahi Shimbun* has published several articles based on government surveys, for example the article 'Tayouna jinzai kakuhō e, mosaku zenkoku shuyō 100-sha keiki ankeeto' ("A nationwide survey of 100 companies on how to secure various human resources"), published on June 18<sup>th</sup> 2019 discuss the results of this survey. The article



*Shimbun*, in 2019. For convenience, the results have been translated from Japanese into English.

Notably, the term multicultural-coexistence has only been associated with Japanese immigration policies, as other countries experienced with immigration have adopted multiculturalism. It can be argued that Japan’s multicultural co-existence discourse differs from multiculturalism in the sense that it is not a policy aimed at actual integration, citizenship or naturalization. (Nagy, S.R., 2015) Instead, it is currently, and has been for the last couple of years, a point of discussion often referred to in Japanese newspapers. Therefore it is not surprising that it is one of the most frequently used terms in the *Mainichi Shimbun*. The term multicultural co-existence has also been used in official government documents published by several Ministries and used in speeches during government debates. (Chung 2010; Kobayashi et al 2014)



The word cloud pictured above demonstrates the frequency of certain words in the 407 articles related to foreign workers, published in the online database of the *Asahi Shimbun*, in 2019. Compared to the *Mainichi Shimbun*, the *Asahi Shimbun* published a significantly higher number of articles related to foreign workers. The *Asahi Shimbun* also covers the topic of the TITP far more often. Overall, the words for acceptance and multicultural co-existence still stand out, but both of these are used less frequently compared to the *Mainichi Shimbun*. While the word for human resources (*jinzai*, 人材) is

one of the most frequently used words in articles about foreign workers, this word was not used as frequently in similar articles published by the *Mainichi Shimbun*.

## 5.2 Analysis of Government Papers

The second part of this chapter focuses on an analysis of primary Japanese sources, which I was able to locate on the website of the Cabinet Office (*Naikaku fu*, 内閣府). The Cabinet Office serves as the administrative agency of the Cabinet of Japan, headed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Members of the various advisory committees put these documents together to be discussed during Cabinet meetings. They give an insight to the political debates that take place, in this case specifically about foreign workers and the immigration policy. These documents were only available in Japanese and have been translated for this thesis.

The debate on foreign workers dates back all the way to 2002. In the ‘annual report on the Japanese economy and public finance 2002-2003’, published in October 2003 and accessed on October 29<sup>th</sup> 2019 on the website of the Japanese Cabinet Office (CAO), the need for foreign workers to help revitalize Japan’s economy has already been stated. In a Japanese paper titled ‘Foreign worker acceptance problem’, submitted by a member of the CAO on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2005, it is said that:

*‘Considering the impact of expansion of acceptance of foreign workers on the entire economy and society, it is appropriate to maintain basic government policy regarding the acceptance of foreign workers for the time being. (...) It is necessary to conduct comprehensive discussions and examinations and obtain national consensus in a way that reflects the opinions of the nation.’*

Two things stand out from this citation: The need for a government policy regarding the acceptance of foreign workers, and the need for a consensus between that policy and the Japanese people. It could be interpreted as a way for the government to postpone taking active measures at this current point in time.

A year later, on April 7<sup>th</sup> 2006, another document was submitted by a member to the CAO that points out others aspects of the acceptance of foreign workers. It states that:

*‘The easy expansion of the scope of “professional/technical fields” may be beneficial, but there are concerns about adverse effects on the labor market, the people’s lives, the entire economy and society.’ (...) Acceptance (of foreign workers) as a countermeasure for labor shortage is ineffective.’*

It further states that there are increased social costs associated with the acceptance of foreign workers, due to 'prolonged periods of stay and potential settlement.' It is important to note that potential settlement implies immigration, which is apparently seen as an option according to this specific document.

Later that year, during a discussion on the reform of foreign policy organized by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), several professors expressed displeasure regarding the 'slow moving reforms'. Below it is shown that professor Iguchi is aware that Japan still has a long way to go.

*'The process of reforming foreign policy is currently in the first of three stages. The first stage is Japan's foreign policy based on immigration control or residence management system at the national level.'*

On May 11<sup>th</sup> 2007, another document was submitted to the CAO regarding the acceptance of foreigners. The document states that:

*'Foreign workers have been steadily increasing in the form of trainees and international students, in addition to workers who have obtained a formal work visa. Formally refusing to accept foreign workers only increases unintended work and illegal stay. The discussion should shift to "what system should be accepted" rather than "whether or not to accept".'*

The concern about the slow-moving reforms of the immigration policy is a recurrent theme in these documents. They seem to be pushing towards a policy that is more in line with the actual situation at that time, namely an increase of foreign workers while not having a system put in place for this. Regarding crime committed by foreigners, the document states the following:

*'Crimes by foreigners are not only personal losses for victims, but also social losses that can lead to prejudices against foreigners. It is necessary to design the system in a way that foreigners will not be committing crimes.'*

They talk about the link between foreigners and crime in the context of foreign workers performing illegal jobs as well as foreigners who overstay their visa. The second sentence seems to acknowledge the responsibility of the government on the

establishment of a functional policy, to ensure integration of foreigners into Japanese society.

Almost one year later, on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2008, another paper was published. The paper makes certain suggestions in regards to the expansion of so-called foreign human resources.

One of these recommendations stated that:

‘The government should, taking a cue from how Canada and other countries have accepted foreign nationals, deliberate on how to accept more foreign nationals with specialized skills, gain knowledge on immigrants, and take more active efforts for granting the right of permanent residence to skilled foreign workers.’

This paper is pressing for the possibility of permanent residency for highly skilled workers, which would indeed be considered immigration. The phrase “gain knowledge on immigrants” also implies allowing immigration to happen.

However, comparing Japan to Canada, which has a fairly long history of highly skilled foreign workers coming into the country and a well-established multicultural society, might have been a rather optimistic way of thinking.

Another important part of this paper is about the improvement of English language education, recognizing the need for communication in English to decrease the language barrier between foreigners and Japanese. Overall, this paper pushes for a more proactive approach of the government, stating that:

‘To address the above challenges, the government should promptly launch “the council on introducing highly skilled human resources” made up of members from industry, academia and the government, and discuss how to invite 300.000 highly skilled workers by 2015.’

According to the MHLW, the number of highly skilled foreign workers in 2015 was about 150.000, so a little over half of what the government was aiming for. (*gaikokujinkoyou joukyou*, “Foreigner Employment Situation”, MHLW, 2018)

However, the council they were aiming to launch was established a year later, according to a report dated May 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, which states that:

‘The government should formulate the comprehensive strategy on foreign human resources by the end of fiscal 2009, giving due consideration to reports from “Council on Introducing Highly Skilled Human Resources.”

On May 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, the point-based system to promote highly skilled professionals working in Japan was mentioned for the first time. In a paper submitted by members of the CAO on a 'strategy for attracting highly skilled foreign human resources' states that:

*'The relevant government ministries, mainly the Ministry of Justice, should closely examine the British point-based system and other similar systems, and work out specific measures to establish preferential treatment of skilled foreign human resources that is, at least, equivalent to those offered by other countries, in order to gain competitive advantage in attracting quality professionals.'*

In this analysis of government papers, this is the second time a comparison to another country that has experience with foreign labor and immigration has been made. From this citation, it seems that Japan is realizing that the country might not be attractive to foreign workers, especially compared to other countries. The point-based system mentioned in this citation was first formulated in 2009 and finally came into effect in 2012. This paper pushes for action on the governments' end as well.

*'We would like the Prime Minister and his administration to show leadership in promptly establishing an administrative structure that plans and implements a national strategy for introducing highly skilled foreign human resources into Japan.'*

From the analysis of documents that were submitted as early as 2003, by members of various advisory committees to the CAO, with the purpose of being discussed during Cabinet meetings, these papers do not really reflect a serious commitment from the government and its administration to implement any of these suggestions and recommendations, let alone hold a proactive approach to foreign labor in general. By analyzing these documents it can be seen that some people are definitely concerned with the foreign labor situation, however, there seems to be a gap between what is being talked about in these papers and the actual situation.

If we go to April of this year, we can find a document that is very similar to the one submitted in 2009. The Regulation Reform Promotion Council, whose purpose is to serve as an advisory body to the Prime Minister, and came into effect in 2013, has formulated this document. Its main subject is Japanese language education for foreign human resources, as can be seen from the citation below:



*'The country does not have a system to learn the Japanese language necessary for employment. In addition, it is hard to say that sufficient information is provided to local governments and companies regarding these points.'*

It suggests the establishment of a so-called Centre to offer Japanese language education support for foreign workers:

*'The "Multicultural Coexistence General Consultation One Stop Centre" has a Japanese language education function that encourages local governments to interact with companies, Japanese language education professionals, residents' associations and foreign workers.'*

This Centre was established a couple of months later in July and serves as one of the first initiatives of local governments getting involved in the social integration of foreign workers living in their prefectures. This marks the beginning of a shifting debate from improving English language education to that of Japanese language education. With the implementation of the new category of 'specified skilled worker', foreign workers who want to come to Japan on that visa are required to have sufficient Japanese language skills. Is it realistic to push foreign workers to take on Japanese language lessons? Whether it is improving English language education or developing Japanese language lessons, the discussion seems to demonstrate the need for a solution regarding the communication problem.

Another question this analysis raises is that of foreign workers being seen as merely a possible solution to a growing labor shortage. There might be a difference in how the governments refers to foreign workers and how the Japanese people view these foreign workers coming into the country. This concern is reflected in a Japanese paper written by Okamura and published online on the website of the National Diet Library on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2018. The translation reads:

*'As has been pointed out so far, including the First Basic Plan for Immigration Control, it is important for foreign workers to be seen as "people", rather than just "workforce". In Japan, there is a lack of so-called integration policies, under the policy of not having immigration policies. (...) In the future, it will be necessary to have sincere discussions on how we will accept foreign workers, including on what our society will be like.'*

To sum up, this analysis seems to show two conflicting interests at play. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe mentioned to the House of Representatives on October 29<sup>th</sup> 2018, that:

*'We have no intention of taking a so-called immigration policy.'*

The analysis of these papers submitted to the CAO reflect an ongoing debate on the topic of foreign workers and the immigration policy, which includes an array of recommendations to open up further discussion. It shows that minor changes have been made in accordance with these recommendations. Yet what is missing in these debates is the establishment of a clear and realistic goal, a consensus within the political parties, and the results to show that these debates are efficient in reforming the immigration policies.

It is also important to note that while looking at these papers on foreign workers published on the CAO's website, there are not that many sources available in the first place. From the 591 PDF documents that are published on the website of the CAO that turn up when searching for the term 'gaikokuroudousha' (foreign worker), only about thirty of them had the topic of foreign workers as their main focus. This is excluding all the transcripts of Cabinet Meetings. Some of the other documents mention foreign workers, but do not reflect a discussion on this topic. Most of the documents are related to statistics and economic analysis. The documents date back all the way to 2002, with the oldest publication dates in 2007. This is a long period of time in which not many documents have been submitted to the Cabinet Office, regarding the issue of foreign workers.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to identify the political sentiments behind the current immigration policy in Japan. Based on a detailed examination of the background and the effects of the various developments in the immigration policies, it can be concluded that the government takes a cautious approach towards immigration. Past and present immigration policies put a strong emphasis on foreign workers, which is in line with the *Abenomics* policies that is first and foremost focused on Japan's economy. From the results of the analysis of the Basic Plan for Immigration Control, as well as the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act and the definitions described in there, it can be said that it should not be referred to as an actual 'immigration policy'. The avoidance of the word 'imin', the name 'Immigration Control Act' and Abe's own position regarding the policy all serve as proof to this argument. With some exceptions, the policy does not take into account settlement of foreign workers or students, nor does it have integration policies in place for this to happen. Compared to the reported number of foreigners who hold a short-term or long-term residence status, the number of foreigners who hold a permanent residence status is fairly low.

The media analysis has shown that the two largest newspapers in Japan report on the same issues related to foreign workers as Western newspapers, with little bias or difference in given information. There is no lack of provided information on the topic of foreign workers, nor is it promoting a negative stance on immigration as a whole. However, these newspapers do seem to promote the discourse of 'multicultural co-existence' that is pushing for a temporary symbiotic society. This media analysis also confirms the lack of consistency in terminology, since the terms 'foreign worker', 'foreigners', 'human resources', 'highly skilled worker' etcetera, are virtually all used interchangeably.

From the government papers analysis it can be concluded that, even though there is an ongoing debate on the topic of foreign workers, few changes have been made. Over the course of about ten years, it appears to be that there is no consensus reached within this political debate, and based on the small number of sources available, it seems that the government does not appear to be eager to make immigration a political issue. The percentage of foreigners residing and working in Japan is only about two percent of the total working population, and therefore problems related to immigration are not visible

on a large scale yet. Based on several secondary sources that provided a economic analysis of Japan's current situation, it gives the impression of being that policy-makers have not fully assessed the impact that increasing numbers of foreign workers could have on Japan's economy or society. Considering the fact that Japan is demographically changing due to their ageing society, such an assessment is necessary to develop an immigration policy that enables fundamental changes in Japan's workforce.

Considering the second part of the research question, this thesis has shown a significant difference between policy-making and policy-outcome.

Firstly, while the immigration policy does not allow for blue-collar workers to come to Japan, these blue-collar workers are well represented in Japan's foreign population. The exceptions to the highly skilled worker rule are the Nikkeijin and other co-ethnic migrants. Another part of economic migration took place in the form of interns and trainees that since its inception remains controversial. The TITP program is currently under scrutiny, as described in secondary sources as well as in the newspaper reports analyzed in this thesis.

Secondly, the government has set unrealistic goals for the future. The goal to reach 10.000 highly skilled foreign workers, as well as to reach 300.000 foreign students, both need to be attained by the end of next year. From the statistics discussed in this thesis, it is beyond a doubt impossible to reach these goals by that time.

This is related to the third point, namely the policy itself lacking the efficiency to enable such growth of foreign workers in Japan. Even though the government has been expanding the visa categories, the overall immigration policy is still too restricted to allow for large numbers of foreign workers to come to Japan. The highly skilled worker visa can only be granted to foreign workers that reach a set amount of points, and only 8515 people have entered Japan on this visa up to June 2017. The newest visa category of 'specified skills' has been implemented since April this year, with only 219 people entering Japan on that visa as of November this year. With numbers this low, the effect of the visa expansion is negligible. Every time the immigration policy is revised, it is often discussed by scholars and in media in terms of 'opening up' the country. This thesis' analysis implies that there is no 'opening up the country' in that sense. What can be seen from the policy analysis are attempts to expand the acceptance of foreign

worker, but with little success. The country might be opening its doors to foreign labor, but not to immigration.

This thesis has given a comprehensive overview of the development of immigration policies in Japan, as well as provided new insights into the current political debate revolving around the issue of foreign workers. It has identified the main political sentiments behind the current immigration policy and demonstrated a significant difference between policy-making and policy-outcome.

Based on this research, future studies could consider doing in-depth research on the reason behind these political sentiments. This thesis has used a limited number of primary Japanese sources, however, future research can build on the conclusions presented in this thesis.

Considering the development of the immigration policy and the revisions up to now, it cannot be ruled out that these changes will eventually lead to a turning point in Japan's foreign worker policy. The government has made a valiant effort by expanding the visa categories and improving the current ones, together with enabling highly skilled workers to apply for permanent residency under certain conditions.

Further research is needed to closely examine the upcoming changes and its impact on Japan's society and economy.

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