

## International Labor Migration to Japan: Current Models and Future Outlook

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### 1. Introduction

A few years ago, the United Nations Population Division (UNPD) estimated that the number of international migrants would be just under 214 million in 2010. This is slightly more than the entire population of Indonesia or Brazil and means that roughly three percent of the world's population moves around the globe (UNPD 2009). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 90 percent of these global migration flows are work-related: People tend to move across borders in order to acquire new skills and qualifications that will make them more competitive on the global job market, in order to earn a higher income while enjoying better living conditions, or in order to accompany a family member who does so (Awad 2008/04/01).<sup>1</sup>

Japan is no longer “immune from the globalization of labor migration” either (Douglass and Roberts 2003: 3). In fact, it has become what migration scholars call a “recent country of immigration” (Tsuda 2006), that is one of the new destination countries of international (labor) migration. While its migration dimension is still marginal compared to other OECD countries,<sup>2</sup> the number of registered foreign residents living in Japan has almost doubled in the course of two decades, rising from 1,075,317 persons in 1990 to 2,134,151 in 2010 (MOJ 2011: 19). Has Japan indeed overcome its status as a state “in denial” (Cornelius and Tsuda 2004: 36) when it comes to accepting foreign workers, as this purely numerical trend might suggest? Has labor migration to Japan reached a level that justifies talk of a “new era” (*shinjidai*), as economist Yasushi Iguchi (2001) has been arguing? Are the migrants looking to enhance their skills and qualifications, or simply to find sound jobs in Japan? What kind of systems and programs are put in place to actively recruit them, and how can we evaluate these? The state of international labor

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<sup>1</sup> According to Ibrahim Awad (2008/04/01), Director of the International Migration Programme at the International Labour Organization, the remaining ten percent of international migration is accounted for by refugees and students, among others.

<sup>2</sup> The number of foreign nationals residing in Japan, for example, is less than one-third of that in Germany and roughly half of that in Italy (OECD 2010). Both of these countries have a significantly smaller overall population.

migration to Japan—and in particular the debate on migrants' skill levels as an independent variable drawing the line between “wanted” and “unwanted” forms of (labor) migration—is the main focus of this paper, which at the same time serves as a predominantly macro-level introduction to the special issue at hand.

## 2. Trends in International Migration

A closer look at the global trends of international labor migration and at the degree to which they are reflected in Japan's case is necessary to allow us to find answers to the questions posed in the paragraph above. Political scientists Stephen Castles and Mark Miller (2009: 10–12) identify six major trends in contemporary international migration: (1) the globalization of migration; (2) the acceleration of migration; (3) the differentiation of migration; (4) the feminization of migration; (5) the growing politicization of migration, and (6) the proliferation of migration transition. The case studies portrayed in the volume at hand present migration stories that each embody one or more of these trends and will thus be valuable in painting the picture of the current models and future outlook of international labor migration to Japan. They will be introduced in the following chapters as part of our reflections on how to situate Japan within these major trends in contemporary international migration.

### 2.1 The Globalization of Migration

Along with the movement of products, investments, and ideas, the cross-border movement of people “constitute[s] a key dynamic within globalization” (Castles and Miller 2003: 1). Sociologist Jan Aart Scholte suggests an understanding of globalization as “deterritorialization” or “the growth of ‘supraterritorial’ relations between people,” thereby stressing “a far-reaching change in the nature of social space” (Scholte 2000: 46). With this concept he transcends the common understanding of globalization as a process of liberalization by creating a “global world [...] without regulatory barriers to transfers of resources between countries” (Scholte 2000: 45). Scholte's concept of people creating border-crossing social spaces beyond territorial boundaries devaluates the capacity of governments to effectively exercise border control, with migrants being “considered among the forces contributing to the understanding of the world as shaped by something else than just territorialized spaces” (Battistella 2009: 199).<sup>3</sup>

Nowhere else in the world has migration taken over this role as ubiquitously as in Asia. 61 million people were likely to be on the move in Asia alone in 2010, the UNPD predicted, a figure up from 49 million in 1995 and 55 million in 2005 (UNPD 2009). Asia is a region of the world where the migration flows are rapidly

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<sup>3</sup> Scholte (2000: 46) argues that an increasing supraterritoriality can be understood as acceleration of “‘transworld’ or ‘transborder’” connections between people.

accelerating.<sup>4</sup> This applies to inflows and outflows as well as to intra-regional flows (cf. section 2.2). Not only has the number of migrants in Asia risen, but migration patterns have also seen significant changes over the past few decades.<sup>5</sup> Asian countries are no longer exclusively countries of emigration, but are also increasingly transit and/or destination countries for global migration flows (cf. the trend of migration transition in section 2.6). This is especially true of the industrialized countries of Northeast Asia, which include Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (Lee 2008; Tsuda 2006). Another trend indicating specific changes in the globalization of migration indicates the increasing diversification of migrants, who now come “from a broad spectrum of economic, social and cultural backgrounds” (Castles and Miller 2009: 10). Probably no other migrant group displays this degree of diversification as clearly as Chinese migrants do in Asia; they comprise farmers and day laborers on the one hand and experts such as computer specialists on the other.<sup>6</sup>

International labor migration to Japan exemplifies these trends in the globalization of migration, as sketched above. Once predominantly a country of emigration and later one of forced immigration, Japan has been in a phase of cautious labor immigration since the 1970s (Komai 2001; Shimada 1994). Politicians and other officials have rarely framed it that way, however. In the wake of the 1990 revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA, *Shutsunyūkoku kanri oyobi nanmin nintei-hō*), the size of Japan’s migrant population doubled due to the creation of what might be called semi-official avenues to Japan’s labor market, which particularly enhanced Chinese migration to Japan (Behaghel and Vogt 2006: 122–130). Twenty years later, with 687,156 Chinese living in Japan in 2010 (MOJ 2011: 20), they constitute Japan’s largest migrant group and amount to approximately one-third of the nation’s total foreign population.

Chinese in Japan constitute an outstanding group not only due to their sheer size, but also with regard to their highly diverse composition (cf. section 2.3), a point that both Liu-Farrer and Achenbach take up in empirical studies presented in this volume. Both papers also show how the Chinese migrants in Japan—and in particular the professional choices they make—contribute to the formation of transnational communities, or what Castles and Miller (2009: 3) have referred to as “transnational societies.” While Liu-Farrer introduces cases of Chinese students pursuing careers as transnational entrepreneurs in Japan, Achenbach adds a study to this picture that juxtaposes examples of former Chinese students in Japan choosing employment in Japan with those choosing a path of return migration to China.

<sup>4</sup> In Korea, for example, the number of foreign nationals in 2006 “rose by 21.8 percent compared to the previous year” (Park 2008: 1).

<sup>5</sup> Castles and Miller (2009: 11–12) also refer to changing migration patterns as part of migration differentiation (cf. section 2.3).

<sup>6</sup> Wishnik (2005) and Zha (2005) have both presented in-depth case studies on the Chinese communities and their working lives, Wishnik’s focusing on the Russian Far East and Zha’s on the Japanese prefecture of Niigata.

Achenbach argues that while a macro-level framework can provide favorable or less favorable conditions for migration flows, it is decisions at turning points in the life course made by individuals that shape the actual patterns of migration. Liu-Farrer and Achenbach both implicitly support Scholte's (2000) understanding of globalization as a process beyond territorialized spaces, in other words beyond the realm controlled by government policies.

Thränhardt, on the other hand, stresses the central importance of government policies in his paper, which compares Japanese and German migration policies over the last few decades. He argues that while Germany and other European countries have had difficulty shaping coherent migration policies and controlling immigration, Japan has been remarkably successful in doing so. While the Japanese government is generally seen as a relatively weak political actor (Stockwin 2008), Thränhardt's paper is a case in point contradicting this perception by highlighting the Japanese government's high effectiveness in formulating and implementing its migration policy. Chiavacci, Roberts, and Nagy—all in this volume—are much more reluctant in praising the Japanese government's migration policy, as will be outlined in section 2.5.

## 2.2 The Acceleration of Migration

Explanations of the global acceleration of migration take economic, sociological, and political approaches. Within the realm of economic approaches, the theory of dual labor markets explains the movement of workers with a structural demand for immigrant labor in developed nations (Massey *et al.* 1993: 440). Paired with the approach taken by macro theory in neoclassical economics (Massey *et al.* 1993: 433), which focuses on wage differences, an oversupply of labor in developing countries, and a demand for labor in developed nations, these two economic approaches attempt to explain large-scale migration flows. Applied to the Asian context, this line of thought can explain the growing return migration to China and India, since rising economic opportunities nowadays attract movement to these (formerly) predominantly sending countries of global migration. Also, with rising affluence and technological advancement in many Asian nations, more and more people can actually afford the costs of movement:<sup>7</sup> these include both the economic costs of transportation and the emotional costs of leaving one's network contacts behind. Technology has facilitated access to information about moving to another country and also has simplified communication with family members in the

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<sup>7</sup> As a rule, it is never the poorest that migrate (Skeldon 2003: 4; Castles and Miller 2009: 74). On the one hand, economic development has therefore increased the number of international migrants, while on the other, it has also increased the number of national migrants, as in China's case. Due to the widening economic gap in China, more and more people have been moving to urban areas in search of work (in 2008, for example, approximately ten percent of China's population worked outside of their registered township; NBSC 2009).

migrant's home country, thereby connecting separated families across borders. It is not necessarily families who move, but individual family members. Migrants of all skill levels create transnational social and economic spaces, placing their migratory stories in the focus of sociologists and economists alike. Economically, migrants can initiate and stabilize trade relations and contribute to technology transfer; they create niches of employment, thereby triggering a further demand for foreign workers and, consequently, the acceleration of movement. Also within this economic realm, remittances require further attention, as they can lead not only to economic dependency on the part of sending nations on these cash flows, but also because countries such as the Philippines, a nation that is highly dependent on remittances,<sup>8</sup> develop educational structures (as in the nursing sector) producing an oversupply of workers who cannot find work in their own country and are therefore "produced" for the international labor market.<sup>9</sup>

Sociologists refer to network theory to explain the acceleration of migration. This theory stipulates that contacts between people in the home and destination country "increase the likelihood of international movement" (Massey *et al.* 1993: 448–449), as these connections promise easier access to information, jobs, and housing in the country of destination.

Political science perspectives are also used to explain the acceleration of migration. Castles and Miller (2009: 11) see political challenges in quickly implementing policies in reaction to an increase in migrants, especially refugees.<sup>10</sup> It is governmental policies that shape international migration, as they can "prevent or reduce" immigration (cf. section 2.5). China and Japan are cases in point in the Asian context: since the opening of China due to Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the 1980s, the number of Chinese legally leaving the country has risen continuously.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Japan, as Thränhardt argues, the government has been extraordinarily successful in guarding its borders and has only allowed specific groups of migrants to cross them. Therefore, contrary to the global trend of migration accelerating, the number of people entering (and leaving) Japan has been declining (cf. section 2.6). In 2011, this was true for migrants of all nationalities (MOJ 2012a), even though the

<sup>8</sup> Asia's nations were among the top recipients of remittances in 2011: India, China, and the Philippines ranked first, second, and fourth respectively (The World Bank 2012). The Philippines is a case in point: in 2009, "remittances [were] equivalent to 11% of the economy" (Banyan 2010/02/09).

<sup>9</sup> This also results in a gendered division of migrants from certain countries, as it is overwhelmingly Filipinas who move. This issue is addressed in section 2.4 and by Vogt/Holdgrün in this volume.

<sup>10</sup> In Japan, the number of refugees is exceptionally low compared with other developed nations, as Thränhardt mentions in his contribution to this volume. In the Asian region, the number of refugees due to war or other forms of violence has dropped, yet floods, erosion, and other environmental catastrophes ascribed to climate change and man-made damage to the environment are expected to lead to an increase in the number of refugees of this type (Kakissis 2010/01/03).

<sup>11</sup> A substantial change in migration policy is often one of the most obvious results following a change of ideology in a totalitarian state system. This is also exemplified in the return migration of ethnic Germans following the collapse of the Soviet Union (IOM n/a).

Chinese were an exception up to 2010. One possible explanation of this trend is to be seen in the worsening recession after the global economic crisis since the Lehman Shock occurred in 2008,<sup>12</sup> and, more recently, in the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011 and the subsequent nuclear disaster that occurred in the Fukushima Dai-ichi power plant.

All three perspectives—the economic, sociological, and political ones—are taken up by authors in this volume to explain increased migratory movements. Liu-Farrer and Achenbach, for instance, both point to Chinese migration to Japan as an example of accelerated transnational movement and of the importance of individual actors in connecting economies. Achenbach focuses on decision-making processes and places emphasis on the role of networks, while Liu-Farrer shows how transnational ties are instrumental in creating Chinese migrants' careers. The latter author also presents the situation in which legal and political issues such as visa regulations prevent migrants from fully realizing their potential as intermediaries between the two nations in spite of these ties. This holds especially true for those migrants who are not seen as “desirable” by Japanese immigration policy, namely the non-highly skilled migrants.

Japan is a country that has dropped behind in the race for the best minds (or, as Chiavacci frames it, the “global war for talent”), and, indeed, in the race for any kind of foreign labor to ease the pressure being exerted on its economy—for example, the burden put on Japan's working-age population by its rapidly aging society. The authors in this volume see a need for a more comprehensive migration-policy scheme in Japan. Since it is one of the most rapidly aging and shrinking nations of the world, Japan particularly needs to develop a strategy to meet the challenges that a declining number of workers supporting a growing number of elderly citizens pose to the nation's social-security systems.<sup>13</sup> Ogawa and Vogt/Holdgrün address the impact of an aging society on migration policy. Their papers take issue with the growing demand for workers in the health-care sector of the labor market. Yet as Ogawa, Vogt/Holdgrün, and Roberts stress, the Japanese government has not actively turned to immigration as a solution to this demand—with the one exception of the Economic Partnership Agreements concluded with the Philippines and Indonesia. It was the sending countries who insisted on including this aspect in their respective treaties, however, as these compacts were not originally migration-related. The demographic change also questions Japan's official policy of solely

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<sup>12</sup> The migrant population of Japan has been hit especially hard by the recession; as Roberts states in her contribution to this volume, *nikkeijin* are often employed in the automobile industry, which has been strongly affected by the global economic crisis triggered by the Lehman Shock in 2008.

<sup>13</sup> In 2005, the first year Japan experienced negative population growth, the ratio of elderly citizens (that is 65 or older) to the overall population stood at 20.2 percent. The proportion of elderly people in relation to the overall population is predicted to more than double by 2055, reaching 40.5 percent. Over the same course of time—fifty years—Japan's old-age dependency ratio (the ratio of people who are 65 or older to the working-age population of 15 to 64 years of age) is predicted to increase from 30.5 percent to 79.4 percent (NIPSSR 2008: 15).

accepting highly skilled workers: in order to meet the economic needs of an aging society and a shrinking workforce, all segments of the labor market are likely to benefit from an increase in the number of migrants with diverse skills. The diversification of migrants who are allowed to enter Japan is addressed in the following section.

### 2.3 The Differentiation of Migration

Asia serves as a sending region of all types of migrants: refugees and settlers as well as highly skilled and low-skilled labor migrants. While Filipino nurses and Indian computer specialists are prominent examples of skilled migrants, Bangladeshi workers on Middle Eastern oil fields and construction sites are often-cited examples of low-skilled labor migrants. Yet as the cases of China and South Korea show, sending nations can turn into destination countries themselves with rising economic development and revised educational systems.<sup>14</sup> This development in sending countries naturally correlates with a change in the migrant population in the receiving countries (even among migrants of the same ethnicity). Castles and Miller (2009: 11–12) see this as a process that is largely influenced by “migration chains:” migration usually starts with one type of migration (mostly temporary labor migrants), but over time, several types of migrants (such as settlers) enter the country as a result of—or even in opposition to—host countries’ government policies.

The issue of migration chains in the form of networks, the transfer from temporary migration to long-term settlement, and the issue of the outcome of government migration policies (that is factual migration to Japan) are all addressed in this volume. Japan has been comparatively successful in guarding its borders and avoiding the immigration of unwanted migrants, as Thränhardt emphasizes in his paper in this volume. This should have alleviated the trend of entry of so-called “unwanted” migrants in the Japanese context to some degree—and the number of irregular immigrants in Japan really is comparatively low.<sup>15</sup> Yet Japan is currently experiencing another kind of differentiation with respect to migration just as other industrialized nations are doing: the differentiation of skills (cf. section 2.5 on the influence of governmental policies).

<sup>14</sup> In the Chinese case, access to education has been less restricted since the reform period under Deng Xiaoping, resulting in higher numbers of high-school graduates who cannot be absorbed by China’s tertiary educational system. In addition, a degree earned abroad is highly valued on the Chinese labor market. Therefore, the types of migrants that China sends today greatly differ from earlier migrants, who were largely active in the low-skilled sector. Also see Giese (2003) on changes in the Chinese migrant population in Germany as one example of this global trend.

<sup>15</sup> In 2012, the number of irregular migrants in Japan is estimated to be 67,065. This is much lower than the 219,418 persons counted in 2004, which reflects the results of an obviously successful long-standing government campaign (entitled *Rūru wo mamotte koku saika!* [Internationalization while Sticking to the Rules!]) conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Justice (MOJ 2004, 2012b).

For some three decades now, awareness has been growing that “immigrant workforces [are] becoming increasingly bipolar, with clustering at the upper and lower levels of the labour market” (Castles and Miller 2003: 184). It is particularly highly skilled and low-skilled workers who embark on the adventure of working abroad, while medium-skilled workers tend to remain in their countries of origin. Workers are generally perceived to be highly skilled once they have obtained a degree after a period of tertiary education (Chaloff and Lemaître 2009: 4).<sup>16</sup> Most industrialized nations, accept—and to some degree actively recruit—the immigration of these highly skilled workers to aid their economies. The consensus on this point spans almost all political parties and the business world. Moreover, it is generally accepted by society. When it comes to a scheme of open-door migration of workers of all skill levels, however, fears of societal agitation, wage-dumping and additional pressure on the social-security systems usually prevent politicians from taking a stand in favor of large-scale immigration.<sup>17</sup>

Although Japan’s immigration policy officially targets highly skilled labor migrants, the country actually hosts migrants with very different skill levels: entertainers on the one hand and trainees on the other, who, as part of Japan’s official development assistance, are supposed to receive training in Japan, but in fact work as low-skilled laborers. Students serve as a bridge between the low-skilled and the highly skilled sector: during their college years, students work in the low-paid sector, only to move up into the highly skilled (and highly welcome) category of skill-based visas after their graduation. At the “high end” within the categories of the migration scheme we find engineers, specialists in humanities/international services, and another dozen or so professional groups. A fair number of non-ethnic Japanese have applied for naturalization or possess a permanent-resident visa, therefore their qualification cannot be assessed on the grounds of their visa status.<sup>18</sup>

Japan has not been successful at attracting the best minds and hosts a large number of non-highly skilled foreign workers. This is not due to the failure of its border-control policy, but simply reflects the actual demands of the labor market and an intentional gap between policy output and policy outcome (Vogt: forthcoming). Also, contrary to official immigration policy, which stipulates that Japan does not allow permanent settlement, the overwhelming number of visa-holders are (special) permanent residents.

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<sup>16</sup> Other definitions of the term “highly skilled workers” are based on the form of employment they have and/or their income level (Chaloff and Lemaître 2009: 4).

<sup>17</sup> See section 2.5 for further analysis of the trend of politicization of migration.

<sup>18</sup> 47.5 percent of all registered foreigners in 2011 were (special) permanent residents, 9.1 percent were students, 8.7 percent spouses of Japanese nationals, and only 7.2 percent were in possession of a visa for highly skilled professionals (MOJ 2012a: chart 2). The most diverse migrant group in Japan is that of the Chinese (including Taiwanese and Hong Kong Chinese), who also account for the largest share in all the visa categories. In 2010, 54 percent of the registered foreign engineers, 50 percent of the specialists in humanities/international services, 60 percent of the trainees, and 67 percent of the international students were Chinese.



In her paper in this volume, Achenbach analyzes the decision-making processes of Chinese migrants concerning settlement or remigration. She and Liu-Farrer both present case studies of Chinese who originally came to Japan with the sole intention of staying there temporarily, yet some of them stayed on and turned into settlers. Taking a political-science point of view, Nagy touches upon the issue of integration, an essential precondition for settlement. The various authors of this volume all mention the gaps between the demands of the labor market in Japan, immigration policy, and actual immigration. The feminization of migration—it is mainly female workers who migrate, especially in the care industry—also serves as an example of these gaps, since Japan fails to provide attractive policies to ensure sustainable health care for its aging population despite the severe (and ever-growing) labor shortages in this sector.

## 2.4 The Feminization of Migration

While the number of female migrants worldwide stood at 35 million in 1960, it had risen to 105 million by 2010. Today, women account for 49.0 percent of the world's migrants, while in Asia their share is 44.6 percent (Oishi 2005; UNPD 2009). Besides this numerical rise, we can also observe a shift in the pattern of women's migration: as sociologist Nana Oishi (2005: 2) says, "more and more women are migrating not as dependents of a father or husband but as autonomous workers." With women increasingly taking over this active role in international labor migration, the "awareness of the specificity of women in contemporary migrations" has grown among scholars, too (Castles and Miller 2009: 12). While "women were generally ignored in the study of migration until quite recently" (Brettell 2000: 109), researchers today aim at distinguishing women's migration experiences from those of men.

Labor-market structures are the focus of many of the studies on the feminization of migration, since the main reason for the rise in numbers and the change in women's migration patterns is a global surge in the demand for "cheap and docile migrant female labor" (Oishi 2005: 2). This trend is most obvious in service-sector jobs such as domestic helpers or health-caregivers. Two major global trends are behind this rising demand for female labor migrants. The "global restructuring of [the] economy" (Oishi 2005: 2) is one of them. Growing economic insecurities and pressures of work—as well as women's preferences and choices to some degree—lead to an increase in the number of dual-income families in wealthy countries and boost the demand for nannies and housekeepers. The second global trend that spurs the rising demand for female labor migrants is the aging of many of the wealthy nations' populations and the lack of health-caregivers on the domestic labor market, which is often due to the unattractive working conditions and comparatively low wages prevalent in this profession. A "care gap between state welfare services and the actual needs of working families" (Oishi 2005: 3) evolves as a combined result

of both trends. This is the starting point of the well-known concept of the “global care chain,” a term which refers to “a series of personal links across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring” (Hochschild 2000: 131).

The first group of health-caregivers from Indonesia and the Philippines entered Japan in 2008 and 2009 respectively under bilateral Economic Partnership Agreements that allow for migration of up to 1,000 health-caregivers per nation per year. Japan jumped onto the bandwagon of the global care chain by taking this step, albeit reluctantly. It is commonly agreed that the scale of this avenue of labor migration is much too small to have any significant impact on the labor shortage in Japan’s health-care sector. Moreover, the new migration system itself is designed in a way that makes it very unattractive for potential migrants to choose Japan over Canada, the U.S., or another possible destination (Vogt 2011). The need to have a high level of proficiency in the Japanese language—a basic requirement for obtaining a long-term work permit—is a prime example of such a hurdle.

Since this new migration avenue constitutes the latest step in Japan’s ongoing migration-policy reforms despite all its shortcomings, it is addressed in two papers in this volume. In her study, Ogawa draws on rich empirical data and critically points to the evaluation of this migration system by migrants themselves. She demonstrates how migrants not only face hardships in their daily lives and work in Japan, but also find themselves trapped in the ambiguous status of a profession that ranges between highly skilled and medium-skilled levels. The skills debate has dominated scholarly work on the global migration of health-caregivers for many years and places a particular focus on the role played by women in this globalizing labor-market segment (Kingma 2006). Ogawa argues that the unresolved debate on skills in the profession itself and the lack of a clear stance on the matter by the Japanese authorities are the main reasons for what so far must be classified as a failed avenue of migration. Ogawa urges the Japanese government to take a stance in this debate in order to improve not only the standing of Japan’s migration policy, but also its labor and social-welfare policies.

The paper by Vogt and Holdgrün in this volume frames the new migration avenue for health-caregivers moving to Japan as a labor-market study at the intersection of gender and ethnicity. It takes a macro-level approach and addresses structures and institutions when juxtaposing long-time foreign residents of Japan entering the health-care business as a second career path and newly arrived health-caregivers from Southeast Asia. Vogt/Holdgrün argue that studying both groups reveals a division in age structures and workplaces, with middle-aged women with medium skills predominantly working as home helpers and the young professionals being employed in health-care facilities. The same age and employment patterns can be observed among the non-migrant health-caregivers as well. Not only do migrants’ employment patterns parallel those of the native population, but they actually reinforce the prevailing patterns, as Vogt/Holdgrün argue. Japan’s new migration

avenue for health-caregivers does not challenge the predominantly female global care chain. On the contrary, the categories of gender and ethnicity are currently strongly connected to each other in the sector of health-care work in Japan and will presumably remain that way for some time.

The two case studies of newly emerging health-caregiver migration to Japan show that while the number of female migrants worldwide may be on the rise and women may be migrating as “autonomous workers” (Oishi 2005: 2), they by no means find their skills acknowledged in their professions; nor are women able to overcome the predominant gendered divisions within the Japanese labor market. The level and quality of their labor-market participation is yet to be changed. While this shortcoming is surely part of the politicized debate on global migration, macro-level perspectives are still dominant in this debate, as will be shown in the next section.

## 2.5 The Growing Politicization of Migration

Nation states establish the “rules of entry and exit” (Hollifield 2000: 137). Border control is the central prerogative of sovereign nation states,<sup>19</sup> and when it comes to deciding whom to grant access to one’s territory to and who to ban from it, states execute their most original right. In this context, it comes as no surprise that countries that are predominantly the destination of international labor migration tend to understand migration policy merely as policies *controlling* migration, and thus designed to make the nation state securer. There is, however, another political dimension to migration, namely “the impact of immigration on citizenship, political behavior, and the polity itself” (Hollifield 2000: 138). Viewing international migration from this angle, “issue[s] of incorporation” (Hollifield 2000: 138) such as sociopolitical and economic changes within a society that experiences international migration become the focus of interest.

While numerous destination countries experience a convergence in immigration-control policies, incorporation policies are to a large degree still handled individually (Sassen 2006: 281–286). A growing politicization (Castles and Miller 2009: 12) emerges as a general trend in international labor migration. Not only are the political actors increasingly called upon to regulate both the domestic and foreign-policy dimensions of international migration, but in response to growing interdependencies, they also increasingly need to cooperate with each other in terms of global and multi-level governance approaches. From time to time, this cooperation beyond transnational and national borders leads to some unusual coalitions that span from civil-society organizations to national business federations, conservative political parties, and/or international organizations (Vogt 2007 and Roberts in this volume).

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<sup>19</sup> To be more precise, border control *was* the central prerogative of nation states until the introduction of supranational institutions such as the European Union.

The volume at hand takes issue with both the domestic and foreign-policy dimensions of international migration. Representing a domestic-level approach, Nagy's paper introduces local initiatives taken by two wards within the Tokyo Metropolis (Shinjuku and Adachi) that are directed toward the social integration of foreign residents. Drawing from his own long-standing empirical research and sociologist Hartmut Esser's concepts of acculturation integration, interactive integration, and identificational and placement integration, Nagy argues that current integration policies are primarily service-based and are not integrative in nature. He points out that integration measures in Shinjuku and Adachi differ in many respects, with Shinjuku falling short of Adachi in terms of successful integration outcomes. Nagy argues that differences in the degree to which identificational integration measures are being initiated are the reason for disparity in integration outcomes in the two wards. Another feature characteristic of Shinjuku is the omnipresence of the discourse of foreign criminality. This contributes to a general feeling of fear among the Japanese population, which leads to the community sealing itself off rather than openly accepting any new foreign members.

In his paper, Chiavacci agrees with Nagy's point about the political power inherent in public discourses on issues generating fear, such as the discourse on crime caused by foreigners in Japan. Chiavacci's paper spans a period of three decades and provides a comprehensive overview of Japan's public discourse on various types of migration and migration patterns. He identifies three reform periods in Japan's migration policy, with the first one situated in the debate in the 1980s on internationalizing Japan by inviting large numbers of students from abroad to study there. The 1990s saw a debate on irregular immigration, possibly as an immediate reaction to an economic downturn at the time. Thirdly, migration policy has reappeared as a topic in public discourse in recent years. This time it is being framed against the backdrop of Japan's demographic change and the fear of an ever-declining workforce. Deliberations on the criteria that desirable migrants need to fulfill are an underlying theme in all these discourses. Chiavacci argues that the official rhetoric has evolved around the "global war for talent." While the government exclusively promotes the immigration of highly skilled foreigners, the reality is vastly different, with the majority of migrants in Japan acquiring visas that are not bound to any professional skill level at all.<sup>20</sup> This reveals the gaping discrepancy between the prevailing policy output and actual policy outcomes.

At this point, Roberts picks up the story of reforming Japan's migration policy in her study, which is based on intensive media research and interviews with various experts. She asks which issues Japan's migration-policy discourse generated after the change in national-level administration in August 2009 when the Liberal Democratic Party—which has almost continuously been in power in post-war times—made way for the Democratic Party of Japan. Roberts demonstrates that,

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<sup>20</sup> See footnote 18 on the share of migrants in various visa categories.

surprisingly, the Democratic Party of Japan, while thought to be more progressive than its predecessor, actually puts forward migration-policy proposals that are less tolerant than those of the Liberal Democrats, such as stressing language proficiency as a precondition for visa issuance. In fact, it is the Liberal Democrats in coalition with the think-tank of Hidenori Sakanaka, a former bureaucrat at the Ministry of Justice, who are calling for a large-scale reform of Japanese migration policy, including the acceptance of ten million migrants by 2050—five times as many as are currently residing in Japan. Yet Roberts also makes it clear that international labor migration has basically dropped off the radar of mainstream political and public discourse in Japan since the economic downturn took place after the Lehman Shock, and the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.

Japan is preoccupied with immigration-control policies much more than with incorporation policies. It was the first country that followed suit when the United States introduced biometric data as part of its standard border-control procedures following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Also, while the domestic boundaries between different levels of policy makers have started to soften in the wake of Japan's decentralization efforts (Mochida 2008; Nakano 2010), migration policy formulation—still perceived as predominantly an issue of national security—is largely being kept at a national level, with the local level only gaining relevance at the stage of policy implementation.

## 2.6 The Proliferation of Migration Transition

Japan and South Korea have already completed what Castles and Miller (2009: 12) term “migration transition.” The other large regional actor, China, is in the middle of this transition phase. After experiencing periods of industrialization and increased outflows of emigrants, wages and the demand for labor both started to rise in Japan (at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example) and in Korea (in the 1970s). Due to this change, labor immigration was initiated, and the countries gradually turned from being senders of migrants to receiving nations (Castles and Miller 2009: 74). However, Castles and Miller (2009: 74–75) argue against a causal relationship *per se* that says migration naturally leads to economic growth. They cite the Philippines as a counterexample: although migration has been on the rise for several years, there has been little national economic growth and also little immigration from other countries.

In this volume, Achenbach touches upon the transition of Chinese migration. Despite it seeing growing economic development, China is still experiencing large outflows of manpower. The stream of return migrants is also on the rise, however. This double trend can partly be explained by the country's economic development (cf. section 2.2), but it is also accompanied by the political determination to change the structure of the Chinese economy from labor-intensive to technology-intensive production. It remains to be seen whether China will follow the example of Japan,

which experiences little emigration today, or whether it will become an example of “continuous brain circulation.”

Japan has gone through quite distinct phases of emigration, migration transition, and immigration. Its focus on skills as the primary criterion entitling migrants to enter the country is a relatively recent phenomenon. After the country opened up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese went overseas in search of work, first heading for North America. After the so-called Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 was made—the discriminatory legislation that closed the doors to migrants from Asia—Japanese also increasingly migrated to countries in South America, the region of origin of most *nikkeijin* (ethnic Japanese) who have returned to Japan in the course of the last three decades. Japan entered a phase of transition with its rapidly developing economy and colonization of Taiwan and Korea. Fewer Japanese left the country, and a number of colonial subjects came to work in Japan, although many of them were forced laborers. The *zainichi* Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese population in Japan traces its roots back to these workers, who came to Japan before the country regained its sovereignty in 1952.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1980s, when Japan was experiencing unprecedented economic growth, foreign workers of all skill levels were welcomed to Japan to ease the labor demand especially in the low-paid sectors. Immigration since the turn of the century, however, has turned out to be quite different in character. While the debates of the 1980s and 1990s were marked by pragmatism and aimed at alleviating the labor shortage, the debate that has taken place in the first few years of the current century has focused on easing the demographic situation and therefore harbored a more emotional aspect, as migration has become linked to the “survival” not only of the Japanese economy but also that of its society (Iguchi 2001: 21–46).

Today, Japan is witnessing a phase in which there is little migratory movement. One point of concern in Japan and abroad is the decrease of in- and out-migration on the part of highly skilled young people. The number of Japanese students going to the U.S., for example, has steadily decreased over the past two decades,<sup>22</sup> and the number of students and other migrants going to Japan has also been declining—in fact, it fell for three years in a row prior to 2011 (MOJ 2012a; Tanikawa 2011/02/20).

Touching upon a different level of transition, Thränhardt adds a comparative perspective by examining the cases of Japan and Germany in this volume—two

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<sup>21</sup> These former Japanese citizens lost their citizenship when the San Francisco Peace Treaty came into effect.

<sup>22</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), the growth rate of Japanese in the U.S. stood at 20.9 percent in the decade from 1980–1990, but experienced negative growth from 1990–2000, dropping by 9.4 percent.

countries that have turned into countries of immigration.<sup>23</sup> Germany openly acknowledged as much only very late in the game, while Japan has yet to accept its status as a country of immigration. Both countries have expressed the desirability of attracting highly skilled migrants. Thränhardt compares the Japanese case to European developments and argues that the means of efficient immigration control can be studied from the Japanese case. Yet Germany and Japan have both largely failed to attract the number and quality of migrants they aimed to draw.<sup>24</sup> Also, even though Japan has attracted *nikkeijin* who are often well-educated, it has failed to make efficient provisions to enable these migrants to apply their skills to the Japanese labor market. Thränhardt criticizes this as “brain waste.” Along with the other authors in this volume, he calls for a more comprehensive migration scheme that will include foreigners with all kinds of skill levels, not just the highly skilled.

The model of migration transition thus needs to be extended to include a political perspective and a differentiation of skill levels. While Germany and Japan were very successful at attracting low-skilled laborers in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, both countries have now fallen behind in the “global war for talent.” They both need to complete the transition from being countries of immigration to countries of integration in which migrants can make full use of the skills they have acquired.

### 3. Concluding Thoughts

Studying international (labor) migration to Japan in terms of the six major global trends in international migration identified by Castles and Miller (2009: 10–12) allows us to conclude this introduction by arguing that Japan is neither “immune from the globalization of labor migration” (Douglass and Roberts 2003: 3), nor has it fully abandoned its state of “denial” (Cornelius and Tsuda 2004: 36) when it comes to accepting foreign workers. While we do see relatively stable—until quite recently even increasing—numbers of labor migrants to Japan, their numbers are nowhere near the proportion of migrants living in the main countries of Western Europe, for example. Moreover, while Japanese government policy still sticks to internationally recruiting highly skilled human resources and temporarily allowing them to enter the national labor market, the on-the-ground reality of Japan’s migrant population paints quite a different picture of the situation. Most international migrants—some two-thirds of them, in fact (MOJ 2012a)—enter Japan on visas that are not based on their professional skill levels or allow long-term or permanent

<sup>23</sup> See Tsuda (2006) for studies on Japan as a recent country of immigration in comparison to South Korea, Italy, and Spain. See Vogt and Roberts (2011) for a comparative study on migration structures and patterns in Japan and Germany.

<sup>24</sup> The intention of attracting highly skilled workers is not necessarily a reflection of the demands of the labor market. As Chiavacci points out in this volume, both the low-paid sector and Japan’s export industries are structurally dependent on migrant workers.

settlement there. Yet government rhetoric remains focused on recruiting a highly skilled international workforce.

Given the consensus on the desirability of attracting highly skilled workers to Japan among Japanese stakeholders, this deliberate thematic focus allows the volume at hand to introduce sector-specific and nation-specific patterns of international labor migration to Japan that might serve as examples of migration moves by migrants who possess other skill levels, too. The assumption behind this approach is that it is possible to extrapolate acknowledged migration schemes, to juxtapose them with the on-the-ground reality of international labor migration to Japan, and to develop general policy suggestions. As the authors in this volume criticize, in its efforts to keep “unwanted” migrants beyond its borders and only temporarily admit the highly qualified and a small number of non-highly skilled workers (through side doors), Japan is failing to do a number of things: (a) to fulfill the demands of the labor market, as there is actually a demand for low-skilled workers in the light of Japan’s aging society and the lack of attractiveness that low-paid jobs have in the eyes of the native workforce (Chiavacci); (b) to accept the importance of recruiting migrants with various skill levels in transnational economies. It is not necessarily the top-level university graduates and managers of large companies that connect markets, but migrants of all skill levels who have been trained in small and medium-sized companies (Liu-Farrer); and (c) to bind even highly skilled migrants to itself, such as care workers who are badly needed on the labor market (Vogt/Holdgrün). Entrepreneurs with novel ideas who could revive the Japanese economy and other highly skilled who could help Japanese companies to become international operations often do not see any long-term prospects for themselves or their families in Japan (Achenbach).

Ways to ease these shortcomings and thereby guarantee what the Japan Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren 2003: 8) called a successful revitalization of Japan through internationalization almost a decade ago are needed to boost Japan’s attractiveness to foreign workers. This requires changes not only in business structures and work environments, but also in political frameworks and social structures. Some of the authors in this volume suggest generally improving integration policies at the workplace (Ogawa) and in local communities (Nagy). Equal and adequate emphasis should be given to both aspects. One practical example of a policy change in favor of social integration would be to facilitate family unification (Achenbach), thereby sending a strong signal to resident foreigners and acknowledging them as members of the community rather than solely as members of the workforce. At any rate, a bold discourse on Japan’s future migration policy (Roberts) is needed to potentially trigger a policy change and create a new migration philosophy that might turn out to be feasible for industrialized nations in general (Thränhardt).



This volume aims to contribute to the current discourse on Japan's future migration policy by outlining the discourses that have dominated the debate so far and have been led by politicians, bureaucrats, scholars, and representatives of the business world and civil-society organizations (Chiavacci, Roberts). Secondly, Japan's most recent migration policy change, namely the opening of its health-care labor market via bilateral agreements, will be studied on a macro-level that places emphasis on the labor market and the gender roles prevalent in this sector (Vogt/Holdgrün), and via a micro-level approach introducing migrants' work and lives in general within this new migration scheme (Ogawa). The micro-level of migration continues to be the center of interest and is reflected by a paper on integration policies in two Tokyo communities (Nagy). Japan's largest ethnic minority, the Chinese, are studied in depth in this volume, firstly by bridging the micro- and meso-levels of migration decisions in a study on the course of individuals' lives and private and professional networks (Achenbach), and secondly by focusing on professional success stories of Chinese migrants who have crossed the boundaries between skill levels in their individual migration experiences (Liu-Farrer). The volume closes by introducing a comparative perspective to the Japanese case, including Germany as a point of reference (Thränhardt), a country possibly close to home for many of its readers.

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