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SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

A comparison of co-ethnic migrants in Japan and Singapore

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Abstract: This paper compares co-ethnic migrants in Japan and Singapore, namely: the *Nikkeijin* in Japan and Chinese nationals in Singapore. One striking difference between the two countries is that Singapore refers to migrants, both skilled and unskilled, as valuable human resources, while in Japan, the most influential discourse on migrants portrays them as an internal security threat. The Singaporean Government has made serious efforts in integrating skilled Chinese nationals, but in Japan, little has been done at the national level to integrate the *Nikkeijin*, even though they are potential long-term residents. Although the negative effects of having an ageing and declining population threaten both countries, Singapore has responded by prioritising immigration while Japan has not. Singapore may espouse multiculturalism, but the Singaporean Chinese have rejected Chinese nationals just the same. Singaporeans have rejected co-ethnic migrants primarily because they are outraged by the privileges offered to skilled Chinese nationals in employment, residency and citizenship matters. The Japanese, on the other hand, have rejected the *Nikkeijin* because despite their Japanese descent, they disturb Japanese homogeneity by bringing with them their language and culture from Latin America.

Subjects: Asian Studies - Race & Ethnicity; Ethnicity; Sociology & Social Policy

Keywords: migrant; Japan; Singapore; co-ethnic; *Nikkeijin*

1. Introduction

Japan and Singapore are both high-income and politically stable Asian countries with excellent infrastructure. Apart from that, there are many differences between them such as in their immigration and integration policies, and discourses and the fact that Singapore espouses multiculturalism while Japan emphasises its ethnic homogeneity. What is interesting is that despite co-ethnicity, co-ethnic migrants in both cases are treated as foreigners, rejected and ostracised. This paper compares co-ethnic migrants in the two countries.

In Singapore, one-third of the 2.73 million employed people were foreigners in 2007. In Japan, only 0.51% of the total workforce was made up of foreign nationals in 2006. (Vogt, 2014) According

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Liang Morita's research interests include the internationalisation of higher education, discrimination against foreigners and the *Nikkeijin* in Japan. This paper is part of her work on understanding the *Nikkeijin*'s role in Japanese society.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper is of interest to the general public because it concerns hardships and injustices which directly impact the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of *Nikkeijin* in Japan and Chinese nationals in Singapore. With intensified internationalisation, the numbers of these migrants will increase and their negative experiences will eventually have effects on the host societies.

to more recent figures, more than 40% of the people living in Singapore are foreigners. (Tan, 2012) In Japan, 1.6% of the total population were registered foreign residents at the end of 2012. (Vogt, 2015) Compared to other OECD nations (UK 7.7%, Germany 8.5% and Spain 12.4%) Japan's figure is extremely low.

1.1. Japan

Japan's immigration policy to date has been very restrictive and officially states that it accepts highly skilled workers on a short-term basis only. Ministers of labour have repeatedly made statements in cabinet meetings and obtained cabinet consent to ban foreign labour since the late 1960s. (Iguchi, 2012) The main discourse which supports this policy is the most influential discourse which portrays foreigners as an internal security threat. It was one of the two dominant discourses in the so-called second debate on immigration policy which took place in the late 1990s. (Chiavacci, 2014) This discourse has its origins in the 1980s and has been well-established since the 1990s. According to it, more immigration and an increasing number of foreigners are a serious peril that will lead to higher criminality, social and ethnic conflicts and will destroy the social order. Foreign workers and increasing immigration are an internal security threat which undermines social harmony and public peace. Foreign criminality is the main factor that leads to rising crime rates and brings an end to the exceptional degree of social order and public security in Japan. A more open immigration policy will inevitably result in social conflicts and lead to public riots and destruction of social peace.

Vogt (2014) explains that in this discourse, the potential migrant is perceived as a threat to national security and public safety, and as someone who needs to be controlled. Crime is portrayed as something foreign and public safety as something Japanese. Japaneseness is equated with innocence and safety. Crimes committed by foreigners are interpreted as an attack on Japan by a foreign force. Foreigners are portrayed as security risks and receiving societies as innocent prey.

The foreigner as internal security threat discourse is by far the most influential discourse in favour of a very restrictive immigration policy and non-reliance on foreign workers. It has a very strong impact on the Japanese and has resulted in a feeling of insecurity and a climate of fear in relation to foreign neighbours and co-workers. It is nonetheless a political argument designed to appeal to one's common sense. Despite its distortion of reality and shortcomings concerning empirical validity (Chiavacci, 2014), it is a powerful argument. As Kibe (2014) observes, the campaign against foreigners as potential criminals has been successful in terms of public perception.

The other dominant discourse in the second debate on immigration policy in the late 1990s is about foreign workers as an indispensable future workforce, which was put forward by policy-makers and commentators who identified foreign workers as a key factor for securing Japan's future economic strength and prosperous lifestyle. (Chiavacci, 2014) In view of the rapidly ageing and declining population, a wider opening of the labour market for foreign workers and a proactive immigration policy are regarded as unavoidable in this discourse. Foreign workers are an indispensable future workforce for maintaining the current lifestyle and economic strength of Japan. Because foreign workers will rejuvenate the economy, contribute to the financing of the social welfare system and meet the workforce shortage, Japan must develop a more proactive immigration policy.

Related to the above foreign workers as indispensable future workforce discourse is the integration discourse. (Vogt, 2015) As more Japanese see foreign workers as the answer to the rapidly ageing and declining population, there has been more discussion on integrating foreign workers into Japanese society. Until recently, it had been assumed that foreign workers were temporary and would go home and therefore few efforts had been made to integrate them into the community.

Despite the official ban on foreign labour, small numbers of immigrants arrived in Japan in the late 1970s. This was the first wave of immigrants (who are not colonial subjects of Japan) to arrive in post-war Japan, which included women from the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand on entertainment visas; Indochinese refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos; second- and

third-generation descendants of the Japanese who were left behind in China at the end of the Second World War; and business professionals from Europe and North America. (Vogt, 2015)

The previous policy banning all foreign labour changed in the 1980s when Japan accepted a significant number of unskilled workers. Tsuda (2009) explains that this is due to a combination of factors, including the rapid expansion of the economy and unmet demand for unskilled workers, the ageing and declining population and the unwillingness of generally well-educated and affluent Japanese to perform dirty, dangerous and difficult work. Previously underutilised sources of labour power, namely: women, the elderly and rural workers, were also exhausted and mechanisation and off-shore production had reached their limits. During the period of rapid economic growth in the late 1980s, the strong economy and yen lured unskilled workers from South Asia and Iran, technical trainees and interns from East Asia as well as entertainers or bar hostesses from Southeast Asia. Based on the cabinet decision to accept foreigners with technical skills, the government revised the policy of banning all foreign labour around 1988. (Iguchi, 2012)

There has been a distinct lack of effort in integrating immigrants in Japan. No systematic measures have been taken to integrate migrants in the way traditional migrant-receiving countries such as the US and some European countries have. (Iguchi, 2012) Many Japanese see migrants as temporary residents who will eventually return to their home countries. (Takenoshita, 2013) Even highly skilled workers are seen by the government as temporary workers who do not need to be integrated into Japanese society, although the influential *Keidanren* (“Japan Business Federation”) emphasised the need to facilitate the settlement of highly skilled workers, thus treating them as prospective permanent residents. Apart from the government’s lack of effort, another reason why migrants are not well-integrated into Japanese society is because the public and political discourse on foreigner crime over the last 20 years has been too prevalent to allow their full integration in their communities. (Vogt, 2015) The Japanese are reluctant to accept migrants as legitimate members of society. (Takenoshita, 2013)

1.2. Singapore

Singapore has had an open policy in immigration for many years, particularly in the last 20 years. The government calls it an open-door policy which invites all categories of workers to work and live in Singapore. This policy is supported by government discourse on how valuable migrants are as human resources. Without natural resources or big domestic markets, the country relies on human resources for economic development. The population has declined steadily over the last two decades and is currently well below replacement level. Senior statesman Lee Kuan Yew emphasised that Singaporeans have to embrace migrants because they help counteract the low fertility rate and prevent the economy from shrinking. According to him:

For Singapore to thrive, we must attract foreign talent and foreign workers. Foreign talent will create more jobs for Singaporeans. Foreign workers will do the jobs that Singaporeans are not willing to do. During a recession, the foreign workers will bear the brunt of retrenchments as in the past, buffering Singaporean workers. The more talent—local and foreign—we have, the more dynamic our economy and the better off Singaporeans will be. The less talent we have, the less our economic vitality with fewer jobs, and more unemployed. (*The Straits Times*, 2007, July 2)

“Foreign talent” in the above context refers to skilled workers while “foreign workers” refer to unskilled workers. Lee argued that both skilled and unskilled workers benefit Singapore by stimulating the economy, creating employment and protecting Singaporeans from economic downturns.

Skilled workers bring skills and expertise that many Singaporeans do not possess but are necessary for economic development. Since the 1970s, the need for highly skilled workers has been quite significant to ensure economic development, counteract the very low population growth rate of 2% and add creativity, competition and dynamism to the labour market. (Montsion, 2012) Highly skilled

workers are offered an employment pass (EP). EP holders are allowed to marry locals or bring their immediate dependents to Singapore. The policy for highly skilled workers is liberal and the government has maintained that an open immigration policy helps fill critical sectors in the economy, especially in the finance, technology and creative industries. EP holders are encouraged to apply for permanent residency or citizenship and settle in Singapore. In fact, skilled workers usually become permanent residents (Gomes, 2014) and they are the primary source of permanent residents and future citizens of Singapore. (Rahman & Kiong, 2013) Elite managers and specialists are at the top of the hierarchy and are eligible for permanent residency and citizenship after only two years.

The policy towards unskilled workers is much less generous. These workers perform the low-paying jobs that Singaporeans are unwilling to do. Unskilled workers are governed by restrictive rules and regulations, and are strictly controlled. They are hired on short-term contracts that make them easy to terminate during economic downturns. There are provisions for family visits at regular intervals, but these workers are not allowed to bring their families to Singapore or marry locals (in case they gain permanent residency through marriage to a Singaporean).

It follows from Singapore's generous residency and citizenship policy towards skilled workers that efforts are made to integrate them into Singaporean society. The government has a well-crafted integration policy and claims that Singapore is a multicultural nation and therefore does not promote assimilation. According to senior statesman Lee Kuan Yew:

it was not the government's policy to "assimilate" but to "integrate our different communities" that is, to build up common attributes, such as one common working language, same loyalties, similar values and attitudes, so as to make the different communities a more cohesive nation. (Rahman & Kiong, 2013, p. 85)

2. Methodology

This study was conducted using the documentary research method, with academic publications as the main source of documents. This method, which uses generated data using documents from the past and present, has a long-standing history in the social sciences, and continues to evolve with hybrid and virtual documentary sources from the Internet and email. (McCulloch, 2004) The basic categories of documents are personal, public and official (Hill, 1993), and academic publications fall under public documents, which typically comprise published and publicly presented documents.

The author initially visited the websites of major publishers of books and journals in the field of social sciences and performed keyword searches using *Japan immigration*, *Japan migrant*, *Singapore immigration* and *Singapore migrant* in order to search for relevant publications to use as data. The reference sections of publications retrieved in this manner were examined and the author noted down further relevant publications and included them in the data. Using this method, an extensive data-set was built.

It is widely understood that in a documentary inquiry, the researcher must assess the documents before extracting content. Whenever possible, the author verified the facts, information and figures presented in the publications with primary sources such as government websites and publications. Only information and figures which have been confirmed in this manner are included in the present paper. The contents of the academic publications in the data were also cross-checked for consistency, and again only those which have passed the consistency test are presented here.

After careful study and analysis of the data, the author proceeded to present, first of all, an introduction to immigration in Japan and in Singapore, respectively (Section 1 Introduction). This is followed by a coherent and comprehensive account of co-ethnic migrants in the two countries (Section 3 The *Nikkeijin* in Japan, and Section 4 Chinese nationals in Singapore). In Section 5, a careful comparison of the *Nikkeijin* and Chinese nationals is made and presented as succinctly as possible; and finally, Section 6 Concluding remarks brings the paper to an end.

3. The *Nikkeijin* in Japan

The *Nikkeijin* constitute the largest and most prominent group among Japan's recent immigrants. They are descendants of Japanese emigrants to Latin America. Among the *Nikkeijin* who have come to Japan, the Brazilians are the largest group. There were 14,000 *Nikkei* Brazilians in Japan in 1989 and the number rose to 100,000 in 1991, 200,000 in 1996 and 316,000 in 2007. It fell during the economic crisis in 2008 as many of them lost their jobs and returned home. In 2013, there were 230,552 Brazilians in Japan. (Takenoshita, 2013, 2015) One reason why large numbers of second- and third-generation *Nikkeijin* have been coming to Japan is economic and political instability in Latin America, especially the economic crisis in Brazil in the 1980s, but they would not have been able to come to Japan without the revision to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990. A new visa category for second- and third-generation *Nikkeijin* was introduced with the revision. This new visa is a long-term residence visa which lasts three years and has no restrictions on employment. *Nikkeijin* with any qualifications may apply for this visa. It is renewable and there are no limits on the number of times of renewal. Spouses and dependants are also covered by this visa, regardless of ethnic origin. Green (2010) observes that the movement of *Nikkei* Brazilians from Brazil to Japan is facilitated by a transnational labour recruitment system which originates in Brazil, where there is a large number of recruitment firms which work with their Japanese counterparts to arrange visas, flights and employment for a large fee.

The official justification for introducing the new *Nikkeijin* visa was that the *Nikkeijin* should be allowed to visit the country of their ancestors, meet with their family as well as work to pay for their travels. Researchers such as Vogt (2015) have argued that the real reason was the need for low-wage, unskilled workers in manufacturing, particularly the automobile and electronic industries. This manoeuvre has allowed the government to secure a large number of unskilled workers without contradicting the principle of prohibiting foreign unskilled labour. Due to the nature of their jobs, the *Nikkeijin* are concentrated in prefectures dominated by industry and manufacturing such as Aichi, Shizuoka, Kanagawa, Saitama and Gunma.

The *Nikkeijin* have been given preferential treatment in their access to the unskilled labour market in Japan because the government thought that given their common ancestry with the Japanese, the *Nikkeijin* were culturally similar and that despite being born and raised abroad, they would easily assimilate into Japanese society. Many politicians mistakenly believed that the *Nikkeijin* were Japanese and did not require any measures regarding integration. The preferential treatment of the *Nikkeijin* was thus a strategic move to procure unskilled workers without disturbing the perceived Japanese ethnic homogeneity, which is much valued and emphasised. However, it transpired that because they were born and raised in Latin America, most *Nikkeijin* either spoke little Japanese or did not speak it at all and were culturally Latin American. (Takenoshita, 2013)

The following discussion of Japanese ethnic homogeneity provides the context for the preference for the *Nikkeijin*. When the concept of the Japanese nation was developing, it was strongly influenced by the dominant Yamato ethnic group of the Japanese mainland and as a result, Yamato ethnic identity was transformed into the national identity for the entire nation and imposed on indigenous minorities such as the Ainu of Hokkaido and Ryukyuan of Okinawa. (Heinrich, 2012) This meant that the existence of minority ethnicity, language and culture was denied. In the Meiji Period (1868–1913), the Japanese began to characterise themselves as homogeneous, despite the presence of minorities. (Maher & Macdonald, 1995) This homogeneous state consisted of a single Yamato nation, history, language and culture. Subsequently, the Second World War defeat and loss of the Japanese multicultural empire strengthened the Japanese perception of a homogenous nation. This self-perception went unchallenged for a long time, until developments such as the acknowledgement of indigenous minorities and long-standing Korean and Chinese ethnic communities in Japan began to undermine it 20 years ago. Although the present-day government promotes an image of homogeneity and most Japanese see themselves as an ethnically homogeneous society (Akashi, 2014), the homogenous view is under tremendous pressure. (Heinrich, 2012)

The aim of ethnic nationalism is to develop an ethnically exclusive and homogenous nation, in other words, Japan is or should be made up of Japanese people only. There is only room for one ethnicity, language, nationality and identity in ethnic nationalism. Japan's extremely restrictive immigration policy has been strongly influenced by ethnic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism is also an obstacle to the integration of immigrants into Japanese society since immigrants are perceived as agents which disturb the ethnic homogeneity. Japanese ethnic nationalism is not only problematic for indigenous minorities who struggle to maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage; it accentuates the differences which immigrants bring to Japan. Multiculturalism challenges ethnic nationalism because it resembles disorder. Maintaining order in ethnic nationalism requires assimilation or exclusion. (Heinrich, 2012)

As far as assimilation is concerned, immigrants are in a no-win situation. The host society, in this case Japanese society, measures immigrants such as the *Nikkeijin* against the highest standards in Japanese language and culture, which, realistically speaking, few immigrants can measure up to. Immigrants are expected to embrace Japanese language and culture without being accepted or treated as equals by the Japanese. (Hein, 2012) Many *Nikkeijin* are aware of this and opt for exclusion or self-segregation from Japanese society instead. (Tsuda, 2009)

Ancestry is a key defining characteristic of being Japanese, but as we will see later, it is not the only one. The preference for the *Nikkeijin* when Japan needed low-wage, unskilled labour in the 1980s was based on their Japanese descent. Although the Japanese later found out that the *Nikkeijin* were linguistically and culturally Latin American and were therefore not Japanese, most Japanese have some affinity or consciousness of shared descent with the *Nikkeijin*. (Tsuda, 2009) Many Japanese have a sense of familiarity or friendship towards the *Nikkeijin*, in contrast to foreigners of non-Japanese descent. They also claim that ethnic prejudice towards the *Nikkeijin* was much less and that they could understand the *Nikkeijin*, despite their different language and behavioural patterns.

As a result of this Japanese preference for those of the same ancestry, the *Nikkeijin* enjoy significantly better employment and wage conditions than all other foreigners, but only within the limited confines of the non-standard sector of the labour market. (Tsuda, 2011) In Tsuda's Hamamatsu study, *Nikkeijin* wages were 49% higher than those of other foreign workers, which is due to the considerable cultural affinity Japanese employers claim they feel with the *Nikkeijin*. The reasoning is that those of Japanese descent are also culturally Japanese to a certain extent because they have been raised by Japanese parents, which makes them much more desirable as workers because of attributes such as a stronger work ethic when compared to other foreigners.

Japaneseness is defined not only by descent but also by complete linguistic and cultural proficiency. The *Nikkeijin* were initially regarded as Japanese because they are of Japanese descent, but were downgraded to part-Japanese after direct contact. The Japanese believed or expected the *Nikkeijin* to be proficient in the Japanese language and cultural knowledge because of their Japanese ancestry, but they were disappointed. (Heinrich, 2012) Expectations of second- and third-generation *Nikkeijin* who have spent most of their life in Latin America to speak Japanese fluently and follow Japanese behavioural norms were unrealistic to begin with. When *Nikkei* workers were initially hired, they were expected to behave and speak like the Japanese, even though they were linguistically and culturally Brazilian or Peruvian. As the Japanese got to know their *Nikkei* co-workers better, their attitudes changed because of their disappointment. Their linguistic and cultural differences became a stigma because they had failed to live up to Japanese expectations. This disappointment is exacerbated by what Morita (2015) calls Japanese exclusionism, an insistence that things should be done the Japanese way. This insistence explains why Japanese neighbours are unhappy about the way the *Nikkeijin* put out their rubbish, noisy *Nikkei* youth hanging out in the evening and the way they park their cars. (Vogt, 2015) A frequent complaint the Japanese have about foreigners is *ruru manoranai* (“(one) does not follow rules”), that they do not obey Japanese rules.

Turning now to the *Nikkeijin*'s employment, we find that in addition to having to take up the dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs that the Japanese shun and despise, the *Nikkeijin*'s terms of employment are unstable and precarious. While some *Nikkeijin* are employed directly by manufacturers, many are employed by dispatch agencies. These dispatched workers are taken on by manufacturers when there is a surge in demand for the manufacturer's products, and they are let go when demand drops, which means they are highly vulnerable to economic fluctuations.

According to Chiavacci (2014), foreign workers, especially the *Nikkeijin*, have become indispensable to the functioning of important, core sectors of the economy. Foreign workers are structurally embedded in leading, renowned export industries such as the automobile and electronics industries. Since foreign workers can be taken on and let go easily depending on the demand for manufacturers' products, they allow a high degree of flexibility to be achieved in industrial production. In the 1990s, the requirement for flexibility in production and responsiveness to demand increased tremendously in many industrial sectors and was of crucial importance to success and competitiveness. In labour management, this increased flexibility was primarily achieved by relying on dispatched workers, who were mostly foreign. Foreign workers, especially the *Nikkeijin*, are a crucial group in this market for dispatched workers and the market developed and became of central importance in the 1990s. They are the most flexible workers who can be hired at dispatch agencies and are ready to work for only a few days as well as work overtime or night shifts at short notice. Ogawa (2011) points out that working for dispatch agencies puts the *Nikkeijin* at an extreme disadvantage because there are no prospects for pay increments or full-time employment.

Takenoshita, Chitose, Ikegami, and Ishikawa (2014) describe the labour market in Japan as being bifurcated into the standard and non-standard sectors. Stable employment characterised by lifetime employment, seniority earnings and union protection is offered in the standard sector only. Global economic competition in the late 1990s and 2000s forced employers to cut costs and manufacturers to be more flexible in production and this led to the rapid growth of the non-standard sector, where unskilled, menial jobs are highly concentrated. Jobs offered by dispatch agencies also fall under the non-standard sector and this type of employment is not covered by the protection offered by labour authorities. During this period, many *Nikkei* Brazilians were employed by dispatch agencies. Although some employers hired Brazilians directly, most manufacturers increasingly relied on dispatch agencies. Today, most Brazilians are employed by dispatch agencies. (Takenoshita, 2013) The *Nikkeijin* are prevented from entering the standard labour sector because they lack Japanese credentials, language skills and the Japanese see them as foreigners who will eventually return to their country of origin. Because of this lack of mobility, the *Nikkeijin* are disadvantaged and marginalised in the labour market and are highly vulnerable to economic fluctuations. (Takenoshita, 2015) Takenoshita (2013) emphasises that the difficulty experienced by the *Nikkei* Brazilians in achieving upward mobility is deeply rooted in the attitudes of the Japanese towards immigrants, in their reluctance to accept immigrants as legitimate members of society.

In Tsuda's (2011) analysis, the underdeveloped nature of the foreign labour market in recent countries of immigration such as Japan means that foreign workers are employed almost exclusively in low-level, unskilled and temporary jobs with very little potential for upward mobility. In other words, most foreign workers are confined to the lowest segment of the labour market. In Tsuda's Hamamatsu study, 91% of the *Nikkeijin* were performing unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Only 9% were employed in higher paid, skilled or technical jobs.

Many researchers, including Hein (2012), have written about how Japan has lagged behind in educating the children of the *Nikkeijin*, which perpetuates the *Nikkeijin*'s socio-economic disadvantage (Takenoshita, 2013) and hinders upward mobility. (Takenoshita et al., 2014) Although the first nine years of education (from elementary to junior high school) are compulsory, foreign children are under no legal obligation to attend school. Most school authorities do not actively seek out foreign children who have failed to show up at school. (Vaipae, 2001) In Japan, the usual difficulties faced by foreign children in an unfamiliar schooling environment are compounded by the writing system

of the Japanese language, which consists of the *hiragana* and *katakana* scripts as well as *kanji* (“Chinese characters”). *Nikkei* children have had pronounced difficulties in recognising and writing the hundreds of *kanji* required in elementary school. Although some progress has been made in recent years in areas where large numbers of *Nikkei* children reside, there is still little language support for them in many public schools. According to Hein (2012), Japan has failed to offer comprehensive language courses or address school absenteeism. Many *Nikkei* children who neither succeeded to master their native language nor Japanese have felt lost and rootless in Japanese society. Few *Nikkei* Brazilian students make it to high school since public high school admissions are strictly based on grades and entrance examinations, which require linguistic adaptation or acculturation. (Takenoshita et al., 2014) Furthermore, Takenoshita (2013) found that the economic uncertainty faced by Brazilian parents discourages them from enrolling their children in high school. Many *Nikkei* Brazilians have taken matters into their own hands and established a large number of schools approved or sponsored by the Brazilian Government. However, these schools require contributions to their operation costs in the form of fees, which discourage Brazilian parents who are cash-strapped from sending their children there. Takenoshita’s study shows that *Nikkei* Brazilians enjoy little upward socio-economic mobility and they remain in their manufacturing jobs. Green (2010) found that many Brazilian teenagers abandon their education in Brazil to travel to Japan with their family and lured by attractive salaries in manufacturing (5 to 10 times more than what professionals in Brazil receive), they work instead of continuing their education.

As for *Nikkei* Brazilian children who do go to school, they suffer from prejudice and discrimination at the hands of their peers and teachers in public schools. Some of them have tried to hide their backgrounds and behave as if they were Japanese to avoid being bullied. This has forced many of them to drop out of school. (Takenoshita et al., 2014)

Adult *Nikkeijin* also suffer from discrimination and social class prejudice in their daily life and at their workplace. They are associated with poor, low-status, backward and crime-ridden nation states in Latin America and perceived as descendants of poor and uneducated Japanese of low social status who could not survive economically in Japan and had to emigrate. (Tsuda, 2009) The “return” migration of second- and third-generation *Nikkeijin* doubles this prejudice because they are thought of as those who could not survive economically in Latin America either. Most *Nikkeijin* are in fact well-educated, of middle-class background and worked as professionals or business owners in Latin America before leaving for Japan. They experience considerable declassing when they come to Japan as they inevitably take up manufacturing jobs that are of low social class status. Although most *Nikkeijin* come to Japan psychologically prepared to take on these jobs and are willing to temporarily endure the loss in social status for the tremendous financial gain, many subjects in Tsuda’s study spoke openly about the demeaning nature of their work and their feelings of damaged pride and even shame.

In addition to the social class prejudice described above, there is also considerable cultural prejudice against the *Nikkeijin* based on negative evaluations of their Latin American behaviour. (Tsuda, 2009) Tsuda’s Japanese interviewees thought little of the *Nikkeijin*’s work ethic and ability, and saw them as lazy, slow, irresponsible and careless at work. Their Japanese neighbours complained about them being a disturbance because of the excessive noise they make.

The *Nikkeijin* also experience social marginalisation. Takenoshita (2013) found that many *Nikkei* Brazilians have no social contact with the Japanese because they do not speak Japanese well. They have significant difficulties in forming ties with the Japanese partly because of the language barrier and partly because of the social boundaries between host and migrant and Japanese prejudice and discrimination against foreigners. (Takenoshita, 2015) Although the *Nikkeijin* are of Japanese descent, they do not speak Japanese very well and are culturally Latin American. As a result, they are treated as foreigners. Takenoshita goes so far as to say that the *Nikkei* Brazilians are segregated from the Japanese.

The *Nikkeijin* respond to their exclusion in Japan by withdrawing into their social groups as an act of self-segregation. (Tsuda, 2009) Most of them do not actively seek out relationships with the Japanese because the Japanese do not seek out relationships with them. Many of them think of themselves as short-term settlers who will return to their home countries after building up sufficient savings. As a result, they have little incentive to integrate into Japanese society or establish long-term, meaningful relationships with the Japanese. Despite their self-perceived temporary status, they have created very extensive communities in various parts of Japan which enable them to conduct their lives exclusively within their communities without interacting with the Japanese.

The *Nikkeijin* have not yet become part of Japanese society due to the lack of systematic effort to integrate them. Although several local governments and NGOs have provided programmes to facilitate integration, little has been done at the national level. (Takenoshita, 2013) The government's priority has clearly been immigration control and border enforcement. As far as foreigners are concerned, the authorities' agenda is usually about how to control them rather than how to integrate them. Public discussion has also focused on immigration control, and integration has been neglected. (Kibe, 2014) This is partly because of the discourse that associates foreigners with crime and partly because of the view that foreigners are only in Japan temporarily and will eventually go home. Although many *Nikkeijin* are target earners who will return to their home countries in the near future, a large proportion of them are settling long term or permanently in Japan. (Tsuda, 2009) There is an urgent need for systematic integration measures at the national level.

4. Chinese nationals in Singapore

There has been a sharp increase in the number of immigrants in Singapore in the last 20 years as Singapore liberalises its immigration policy. Non-citizens made up 14% of the total population at the beginning of the 1990s and that rose to over 25% in 2000 and more than 36% in 2010. (Yeoh & Lin, 2013) The total population grew from 3.5 million in 1990 to over 5.4 million in 2015. (Ren & Liu, 2015) This increase is due to government ambitions to transform Singapore into a global knowledge hub and therefore its efforts to attract skilled workers as well as measures to counteract the negative effects of the falling fertility rates. The strategy to attract foreign workers enables the Singaporean economy to grow beyond what its indigenous resources can bring about. The size of the foreign workforce increased rapidly from 16.1% of the total workforce in 1990 to 29.6% in 2000 and nearly 34% in 2008. (Ong, 2014)

Chinese nationals make up one of the largest and most visible groups among the immigrants. Their number has grown quickly from several thousands in the 1990s to close to one million in 2008 (Yeoh & Lin, 2013) or as Ren and Liu (2015) estimate, from 300,000 in 2004 to 700,000-800,000 in 2011. China is a popular source of labour partly because of the availability of a large workforce and partly because the Singaporean Government assumed that Chinese nationals would fit in well, seeing as the local population is made up of over 70% Singaporean Chinese. The Singaporean Chinese are descendants of earlier immigrants from China, so it is often assumed that they would embrace the newcomers. The government had not foreseen the tension that would develop between Chinese nationals and Singaporeans. Most Chinese nationals arrived after 1990, when China and Singapore established diplomatic relations. The large numbers of Chinese nationals leaving China were made possible by the loosening of emigration controls in the mid-1980s.

We saw earlier that the Japanese labour market is bifurcated into the standard and non-standard sectors. Bifurcation is also found in the labour market in Singapore, but it is the bifurcation into the skilled and unskilled sectors which is striking. Yeoh and Lin (2013) refer to it as a sharp skills divide that keeps migrants in separate sectors. Workers in the skilled sector are rewarded with residency and citizenship privileges designed to integrate them into society and the workforce, while those in the unskilled sector are on temporary contracts and governed by a mire of rules and regulations to make them easily disposable in economic downturns. Chinese nationals are increasingly found in both sectors.

At the top of the hierarchy in the skilled sector are foreign elite managers and specialists who belong to the business and professional classes. They hold S passes and are eligible for permanent residency and citizenship after a minimum of only two years. Chinese skilled workers are not necessarily top elites. They occupy a broader middle-class range and may be of modest financial means. They tend to be well-educated, enterprising and speak good English. They are in a variety of fields including law, banking, public relations, arts and food and retail industries. They are seen as potential citizens and hence the active measures to ensure their integration, such as the four associations for new migrants which were established to support the settlement of Chinese professionals and their families.

Foreign unskilled workers play an indispensable role in augmenting Singapore's workforce and keeping business costs down. (Ong, 2014) Construction, manufacturing and shipbuilding costs would be much higher, rendering these businesses less competitive if it wasn't for the low wages of foreign unskilled workers. Not only are these workers denied residency rights, they are restricted by rules and regulations that ensure that their stay in the country is temporary. An example is the authoritarian rule that they are not allowed to marry Singaporeans, in case they become eligible for permanent residency. In this way, the government maintains a controlled and revolving pool of unskilled workers. The majority of Chinese nationals in Singapore are unskilled workers. They basically take up low-paying shift work in labour-intensive industries, which is shunned by Singaporeans. Unlike skilled workers, unskilled workers are only allowed into the country when there are vacant positions unfilled by citizens. Chinese unskilled workers work as sales assistants, hotel maids, cleaners, postal workers, bus drivers and in food courts, restaurants, petrol stations and convenience stores. They also work in construction, manufacturing and shipbuilding. These workers often pay recruitment agencies in China which arrange their employment hefty fees to move to Singapore. Unskilled workers are usually employed on a short-term basis, earn low and irregular salaries and made to work long hours. A majority of them are unhappy and lonely. (Yeoh & Lin, 2013) Although their intention is to earn money to improve the lives of family members in China, they themselves live in extremely poor conditions such as in unsanitary makeshift buildings and shipping containers perched on the edge of construction sites. Unskilled workers are one of the most vulnerable migrant groups, who are kept temporary by the government and are susceptible to exploitation by recruitment agencies and employers. Most of them do as they are told because they fear having their employment terminated, which means they will be sent back to their home countries. Most unskilled workers need to work for a significant length of time in Singapore in order to offset the debt incurred to pay the fees demanded by recruitment agencies. Being sent home prematurely would be a financial disaster.

The government has put in place control mechanisms to make sure employers do not over-hire foreign unskilled workers because their wages are lower than those of Singaporeans. These are precautions to make sure citizens are not deprived of employment opportunities. Employers of foreign unskilled workers are subject to the foreign worker levy and dependency ceiling. The foreign worker levy is a monthly duty on employers which narrows the wage differentials between foreign unskilled workers and Singaporeans and hence encourages employers to hire citizens. The dependency ceiling sets a limit to the number of foreign unskilled workers in relation to Singaporeans in businesses, which prevents the number of foreign unskilled workers from rising above a certain proportion in relation to citizens.

Singaporeans were concerned about the rapid growth in the number of immigrants in the last 20 years and tension developed between citizens and immigrants. Based on comments posted by Singaporeans on the Internet during the pre-election period of the 2011 General Elections, Gomes (2014) found that they were critical of immigrants, especially skilled workers from China, South Asia and the Philippines, because of their large numbers and visibility. Among the three groups, Chinese nationals are the most numerous. Liu (2014) observes that not all the discontent about immigrants is targeted at Chinese nationals, but most is.

Singaporeans have been frustrated by the seemingly unchecked influx of immigrants which makes Singapore overcrowded and causes severe congestion on public transportation. They complained of feeling like strangers in their own country, rising property prices and intensified competition for school places. (Yeoh & Lin, 2013) Singaporeans feel that immigrants compete with citizens for amenities, causing shortages in housing and hospital beds, as well as drive up the cost of living. Immigrants are also blamed for economic issues such as low wages, widening income gaps and unemployment. They compete with Singaporeans for jobs and threaten their livelihood. Singaporeans were outraged by the government's immigration policy which conferred more residency and citizenship privileges on foreign skilled workers than on citizens. They felt that these foreigners encroached on their space as rightful citizens of Singapore. After all, Singaporean males serve the country by putting in two years of compulsory national (i.e. military) service but immigrants do not. Immigrants are also unwilling or unable to integrate and they threaten the Singaporean way of life. Singaporeans claim that they cannot identify with Singapore anymore because of the changing ethnographic landscape.

Singaporeans target Chinese nationals in their criticisms of immigrants because the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of them in the small city state makes them highly visible. The most vocal complaints have come from the Singaporean Chinese. (Yeoh & Lin, 2013) The government had not anticipated this because they thought Chinese nationals were a good fit for Singapore precisely because over 70% of Singaporeans are Chinese. Liu (2014) analyses the criticisms into three categories: Chinese nationals being culturally different, they compete with Singaporeans and they remain loyal to China. These perceptions differ significantly from the government rhetoric of foreign workers as valuable human resources. Despite strict government censorship of the media, these views are expressed in mainstream media from time to time.

The Singaporean Chinese accentuate the differences between themselves and Chinese nationals. They see Chinese nationals as country bumpkins and people who belong to a different culture and exhibit different social behaviour and they insist that they themselves are the rightful citizens of an independent Singapore. They emphasise a national identity based on a shared Singaporean history, values and beliefs. Chinese nationals, on the other hand, look down on Singaporeans because they cannot speak Chinese "properly" and they see themselves as invited guests of a country ancestrally related to theirs. Most of the China-born grandparents or great-grandparents of current Singaporean Chinese arrived in Singapore when it was a British colony and over time, the linguistic and cultural behaviour of their descendants diverged from that of their peers in China. The widely reported curry incident in 2011 illustrates this point and shows how a food item enjoyed by many Singaporean Chinese can be offensive to Chinese nationals. The incident started with Chinese nationals complaining about the foul curry smells originating from their Singaporean Indian neighbours' flat. After some mediation, the Singaporean neighbours agreed to cook curry only on the days the Chinese family was out. This outcome angered many Singaporeans, who felt that Chinese nationals should adapt to Singaporean ways and not vice versa. To make their point, some Singaporeans then organised a special day to celebrate the Singaporean curry by inviting Singaporeans living all over the world to cook curry on that particular day. Another example of how linguistic and cultural behaviour of the Singaporean Chinese has developed differently from that of their peers in China is the way Chinese varieties are spoken. Mandarin spoken by the Singaporean Chinese is distinctly different from that spoken by Chinese nationals. Over the years, Mandarin in Singapore has been influenced by other languages it has been in contact with, including English, Malay and Tamil. The Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals mostly understand each other when speaking Mandarin, but miscommunication sometimes takes place due to unfamiliar pronunciation, words and phrases or grammatical patterns.

The government responded to Singaporeans' concerns by reducing immigration and setting more stringent criteria for permanent residency and citizenship but mostly remained firm in its liberal immigration policy. Another response was accelerating plans to integrate immigrants. The National Integration Council was established in 2009 to promote stronger bonds between Singaporeans and

permanent residents and new citizens. Community centres and other social organisations are encouraged to host activities to facilitate contact and communication between Singaporeans and immigrants. Grass-roots organisations also deploy volunteers to foster greater understanding and tolerance between Singaporeans and immigrants. Furthermore, the government attempts to bridge ethnic and cultural differences between Singaporeans and immigrants by emphasising the common Singaporean identity. Immigrants are urged to integrate and develop a shared identity by learning English, interacting with Singaporeans, taking part in community activities and adopting the four key values of the Singaporean identity: dedication to national service, upholding law and order and embracing multiculturalism and meritocracy. (Ren & Liu, 2015)

The government also responded with measures to differentiate between citizens and non-citizens in terms of benefits, subsidies and access to public services from the mid-2000s. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong promised to treat citizens better, although he also emphasised that permanent residents should not be made to feel unwelcome. (Thompson, 2014) From late 2009, the government launched an aggressive campaign of differentiation. Over the period of a year, differentiation or the withdrawal of benefits, subsidies and general public service from non-citizens became a policy which was applied across all sectors of the civil service. The intensified differentiation policy sharpens the distinction between the privileges of the 60–65% of the population who are citizens and the 35–40% who are non-citizens. More Singaporeans were admitted to local universities, and given priority in access to health care and primary school admissions. In addressing competition in employment, a new regulation was put into place which forced employers to advertise job vacancies to Singaporeans for at least 14 days before employing foreigners.

Despite government efforts to address their concerns about excessive immigration, Singaporeans blamed the government for their immigration-related grievances and held it responsible. This was expressed in the greatest withdrawal of electoral support in history for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in the 2011 General Elections. The opposition parties had their greatest success ever and won almost 40% of the votes, as the PAP suffered its greatest defeat since independence.

Singaporeans' rejection of Chinese nationals is surprising in the sense that this rejection has taken place in the context of multiculturalism and state favouritism towards the Chinese. Multiculturalism in Singapore predates independence from Britain in 1965. During colonial times, large numbers of Chinese, Indians and those of many other ethnicities flocked to Singapore to work as labourers or for business opportunities. There were of course Britons who governed the colony, as well as Europeans and Americans who were there for commercial purposes or missionary work. There was diversity and multiculturalism in Singapore from the early days. The Britons governed the population based on the "divide and rule" principle, dividing the population into four ethnic categories: Malays (the indigenous people), Chinese, Indians and Others. The post-independence government retained this categorisation. Singapore has emphasised its multiculturalism policy since independence, with the English language, which is both official language and working language, serving as a cultural glue to hold together the diverse population of Singaporeans.

There have been accusations of racism and the Chinese being favoured within the context of multiculturalism. One example is the government-established special elite schools which promote Chinese language and culture, which have no Malay or Indian equivalent. Another example is the emphasis on the importance of maintaining the racial composition of Singapore, in which the Chinese constitute 75% of the population. It has been rumoured that the preference for Chinese nationals in immigration is due to the fact that they will help maintain the 75% Chinese majority. (Montsion, 2015) The Singaporean Chinese have a slightly lower fertility rate compared to the Malays and Indians. Further examples of favouritism towards the Chinese include senior statesman Lee Kuan Yew's openly expressed view that Singapore is not ready for a non-Chinese prime minister. (Tan, 2012) Some researchers have also described multiculturalism in Singapore as being steeped in racism with the Chinese dominating in politics, economy, culture and society. (Gomes, 2014)

It seems that Singaporeans' rejection of Chinese nationals is primarily about their sense of entitlement as citizens being challenged. In Singaporean eyes, migrants, no matter what contribution they may bring to the economy, should be given second-rate treatment compared to citizens. Their dissatisfaction with the privileges the government is offering to deserving migrants is exacerbated by over-crowdedness, rising costs of living and intensified competition in the job market. The fact that Singapore is a multicultural society and Chinese nationals are co-ethnics does little to mitigate their sense of outrage at the injustice of migrants encroaching on their territory.

5. Comparing the *Nikkeijin* with Chinese nationals

One of the most striking characteristics of the *Nikkeijin* in Japan is that they have few rights, despite *jus sanguinis*. In terms of equal opportunities, employment, legal status, language skills, education achievements, participation and acculturation, the *Nikkeijin* have been excluded. (Hein, 2012) I will begin this comparison of co-ethnic migrants with employment.

Although many *Nikkeijin* are well-educated and worked as professionals in Latin America, they inevitably take a step down and end up in unskilled, manufacturing jobs in Japan because of the lack of Japanese language skills and their qualifications and credentials are not recognised. As we saw earlier, Tsuda (2011) explains this as a result of the foreign labour market in Japan being underdeveloped. Educated, middle-class Chinese nationals in Singapore, on the other hand, take up skilled or highly skilled positions comparable to what they did in China. Their English and Chinese language skills are both useful at the workplace and in their daily life, and their qualifications and credentials are recognised. In contrast to the Japanese labour market in which most foreign workers are confined to the lowest segment and employed almost exclusively in low-level, unskilled and temporary jobs with very little potential for upward mobility, Chinese nationals are employed in both skilled and unskilled sectors in Singapore.

While some *Nikkeijin* are directly employed by automobile and electronics manufacturers, many are hired by dispatch agencies, which assign them temporary work lasting as short as a few days and at short notice. The reason for this is that *Nikkei* workers are taken on and let go as demand for manufacturers' products fluctuates. The fact that these workers are available at a moment's notice for a few days' work enables manufacturers to respond swiftly to economic conditions and this is one of the reasons why Japan has managed to stay competitive. However, this also means that the nature of the *Nikkeijin*'s employment is highly unstable and precarious. They could go for long periods of time without being assigned any work, as they are at the mercy of market conditions. This practice of taking on and letting go of unskilled workers depending on economic conditions has its counterpart in Singapore. Although foreign unskilled workers, including Chinese nationals, are hired directly by employers and are paid monthly salaries most of the time, some employers deliberately hire an excessive number of workers and then loan them out at a profitable rate. (Ong, 2014) Hiring in excess of business needs and loaning out workers are both illegal practices, but as Ong points out, the pro-business Singaporean Government often turns a blind eye to them. Employers thus benefit from kickbacks from hiring more foreign unskilled workers, usually paid out of the workers' pockets in the form of large fees demanded by recruitment agencies in their home countries, as well as from the profit made by loaning out the workers.

In Japan, the dispatch agencies the *Nikkeijin* work for belong to the non-standard sector of the labour market, which means the *Nikkeijin*'s rights as workers are not protected and they are entitled to few benefits. Due to their lack of Japanese language skills, qualifications and credentials, and the general perception that their stay in Japan is temporary and they will eventually go back to their home countries, they have little upward mobility and few chances of making it to the standard sector. This is exacerbated by the fact that few *Nikkei* children make it to high school to achieve the necessary mobility to move away from manufacturing jobs. Foreign unskilled workers in Singapore, including Chinese nationals, are not in a position to be envied either. Although their employers are legally responsible for their medical bills, accommodation and meals, there are many infractions of these obligations and ill workers go without medical treatment while others are put up in

overcrowded and unsanitary accommodation. (Ong, 2014) The legal requirements are often not enforced due to, again, the government's pro-business stance. Low business costs make Singapore competitive, although at foreign unskilled workers' expense. These workers are afraid to report infractions because they fear having their employment terminated prematurely, which would mean they have no means of repaying the huge debts they incurred in order to pay the fees demanded by recruitment agencies in their home countries. Ong observes that this fear has made foreign unskilled workers more submissive to their employers compared to Singaporeans but has also made them vulnerable to exploitation.

One advantage the *Nikkeijin* have over unskilled Chinese nationals is that their three-year visa carries no restriction on employment or limit on renewals, and their spouses and dependants are covered by the visa, regardless of ethnic origin. The work permits of foreign unskilled workers in Singapore are usually short and tied to a specific employer, and these workers are not allowed to bring family. In practice, this means that they cannot change employers without being sent home first, and if they want to seek work in Singapore again, they will have to repeat the process from scratch and pay the large fees to the recruitment agencies again. Relatively speaking, the *Nikkeijin* have more freedom because foreign unskilled workers in Singapore are governed by a mire of authoritarian rules and regulations. The rules and regulations are designed to maintain a revolving pool of unskilled workers and prevent them from putting down roots in Singapore.

Another advantage the *Nikkeijin* enjoy is that they are preferred in employment and paid higher wages compared to other foreigners, but only within the non-standard sector of the labour market. On the other hand, such preference for Chinese nationals in Singapore and wage differentials have not been reported. This advantage, together with the preferential treatment they have been given by the Japanese Government in their access to the unskilled labour market over other foreigners, suggests that co-ethnicity is valued more in Japan than in Singapore.

The next point of comparison is integration. It is ironic that although the *Nikkeijin* are potentially long-term residents in Japan because there is no limit on the number of times their visa can be renewed, little has been done at the national level to help them integrate into Japanese society. Chinese skilled workers, on the other hand, benefit from the Singaporean Government's integration policy. The National Integration Council, grass-roots organisations and social organisations such as community centres are all involved in efforts to integrate immigrants.

The lack of effort at the national level to integrate the *Nikkeijin*, despite their long-term residence status, shows how little coordination and cooperation there is between the various ministries within the Japanese Government. Despite warning signs of the negative effects of the rapidly ageing and declining population, little has been done to augment the existing workforce. The propositions put forward so far have been: the return of married women to the workplace, delaying the retirement age and immigration. Immigration is usually presented as the last option, even though it is the most practical and efficient answer for the situation. In a study Vogt (2013) conducted of much-needed Southeast Asian nurses in Japan to potentially augment the current pool of Japanese nurses, she describes the progress made in migration as one step forward two steps back due to the lack of coordination and cooperation between institutions. In comparison, the level of coordination between ministries in Singapore is commendable. The Singaporean Government has also responded swiftly and efficiently to citizens' complaints about excessive immigration with integration measures and efforts to differentiate between citizens' and non-citizens' entitlements and privileges.

The Singaporean Government's openness in acknowledging the nation's need for foreign human resources, both skilled and unskilled, is also commendable. We saw earlier in the Singaporean discourse of migrants as valuable human resources that the government does not hold back in expressing its needs and migrants' contribution to the economy. The Japanese Government is reticent, in comparison, although both countries face similar challenges in having ageing and declining populations, and foreign unskilled workers in both countries play an important role in the economy. In

Singapore, low-wage, foreign unskilled workers lower business costs, hence making businesses more competitive. In Japan, they also make businesses more competitive by allowing manufacturers to respond to fluctuations in economic conditions. The 1990 revision to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was made because of the need for low-wage, unskilled workers; yet, the official justification offered to the public was that the revision allowed the *Nikkeijin* to visit the country of their ancestors, meet with extended family members and cover the costs of their travels. There is some injustice here, as the *Nikkeijin* work in Japan at great personal costs. An example of such costs is the sacrificing of their children's education. The Japanese Government has been slow to respond to the educational needs of *Nikkei* children, which means that children who come to Japan with their working parents often do not receive an education. Few *Nikkei* students make it to high school, which means that they will probably follow their parents' footsteps, working in manufacturing with little chance of upward socio-economic mobility. A further injustice is that although the *Nikkeijin* make an important contribution to the Japanese economy, they are portrayed as criminals in the foreigner as internal security threat discourse, which is the most influential discourse concerning foreigners and has convinced many Japanese.

Despite the positive portrayal of foreign unskilled workers, including Chinese nationals, as valuable human resources, the Singaporean Government has been lax in enforcing employers' obligations towards these workers because of its pro-business stance. (Ong, 2014) Various NPOs are actively working to protect these workers' rights but there are still frequent cases of exploitation. The Japanese Government also needs to do more to protect the *Nikkeijin*'s rights as workers in the non-standard labour sector. There are many cases of work-related injuries of these workers going untreated because they are not covered by insurance and of their employers not stepping up to foot their medical bills.

Singaporeans' rejection of Chinese nationals is primarily about their sense of entitlement as citizens being challenged and because they felt Chinese nationals were encroaching on their space as rightful citizens. In their view, the government was treating Chinese nationals better than citizens in employment, residency and citizenship matters. The Japanese, on the other hand, are far from feeling challenged by the *Nikkeijin*, seeing as the latter have few rights in Japanese society. (Hein, 2012) Singaporeans were also unhappy about immigrants taking up space and making the city state overcrowded, driving up the cost of living and making the job market more competitive. Although the *Nikkeijin* are relatively visible in Japan compared to other Asians such as the Koreans and Chinese, their numbers are not high enough to cause congestion or threaten the Japanese. They are in no position to drive up the cost of living either and they take up manufacturing jobs that the Japanese do not want, and are therefore not in direct competition with the Japanese.

In both cases, co-ethnic migrants are seen as foreigners because they are seen as linguistically and culturally different and both the Japanese and Singaporean Chinese accentuate these differences. The *Nikkeijin* are rejected because they are from a low-income country and have brought with them their language and culture which disturb the homogeneity of Japan. When Japan needed low-wage, unskilled workers in the 1980s, the *Nikkeijin* were preferred because they were thought to be essentially Japanese, in which case the ethnic homogeneity would be preserved. It transpired that although the *Nikkeijin* were of Japanese descent, they were linguistically and culturally Latin American. For Japanese ethnic homogeneity to be preserved and the *Nikkeijin* to be accepted as Japanese, they would have to measure up to perfectionist standards in their Japanese language and behaviour, which is of course unrealistic. Many *Nikkeijin* are aware of this and opt for exclusion instead of assimilation. Liu (2014) suggests that Chinese nationals in Singapore may also be reluctant to assimilate due to China's recent success and status as the second largest economy in the world.

The fact that Singapore is multicultural and Chinese nationals are co-ethnics does little to mitigate the dissatisfaction of the Singaporean Chinese. On the Japanese side, the *Nikkeijin*'s Japanese ancestry matters little when the Japanese are offended by their language and behaviour. In both cases, co-ethnicity has not translated into acceptance.

6. Concluding remarks

The socio-economic future of the *Nikkeijin* in Japan is gloomy. Tsuda (2011) observes in his study that the *Nikkeijin* remain dependent on dispatch agencies for their livelihood and very few have been given permanent jobs with the possibility of regular promotion. Even those who have moved on from manufacturing jobs have been restricted to jobs as mini-supervisors in factories, liaisons in local company and government offices and owners of small businesses. Tsuda predicts that in the near future, foreign workers will continue to be confined to the lowest segment of the job market. In factories, it is unlikely that a promotion ladder for foreign workers will emerge as long as they are regarded as temporary workers and utilised as a disposable reserve labour force through dispatch agencies. In addition, the need for temporary workers will continue to increase rather than decrease. Manufacturers increasingly rely on foreign workers in order to cut production costs as they face intense competition from low-income countries with lower production costs.

We have seen that although the *Nikkeijin* and Chinese nationals engage in the dirty, dangerous and difficult work that the Japanese and Singaporean Chinese do not want to do, they receive little credit for the important contribution they make to the economy. This is the case with foreign unskilled workers in many parts of the world. These workers do not have a voice in their host societies to speak of their exploitation, appalling work and living conditions, violation of their rights and other injustices.

As far as migrants are concerned, rejection rather than acceptance by the host society seems to be the norm. Even with coordinated efforts to integrate Chinese nationals, the Singaporean Government is making little progress. Japan needs to start with discrediting the discourse of foreigner as internal security threat by pointing out that many reports of foreigner crime are exaggerated and inaccurate and then proceed to coordinate efforts between government ministries to integrate the *Nikkeijin*, provide an education for their children and improve the terms of their employment. In Singapore, the government needs to pay more attention to the welfare of unskilled Chinese nationals. Both the *Nikkeijin* and Chinese nationals deserve no less.

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