



Received: 11 February 2017
Accepted: 12 March 2017
Published: 23 March 2017

*Corresponding author: Liang Morita,
Graduate School of Languages and
Cultures, Nagoya University, Nagoya,
Japan
E-mail: liangchua3@gmail.com

Reviewing editor:
Jamie Halsall, University of
Huddersfield, UK

Additional information is available at
the end of the article

SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Why Japan isn't more attractive to highly-skilled migrants

Liang Morita^{1*}

Abstract: In May 2012, Japan launched the Point-Based Preferential Immigration Treatment for Highly-Skilled Professionals system for highly-skilled migrants. This launch is a culmination of years of interest in attracting highly-skilled migrants. Although the incentives offered to highly-skilled migrants are attractive, incentives alone do not constitute the whole picture. Researchers such as Anthony D'Costa and Oishi Nana have written about why Japan is not attracting as many highly-skilled migrants as it could be. The present paper discusses Japanese exclusionary tendencies which diminish its attraction as a destination for highly-skilled migrants, focusing on its English language education, *Nihonjinron* influences, mistrust of foreigners, inequality between foreigners and the Japanese, and insistence on doing things the Japanese way. These issues need to be addressed if Japan is serious about attracting larger numbers of highly-skilled migrants.

Subjects: Sociology; Social Sciences; Sociology & Social Policy

Keywords: Japan; exclusionism; immigration; highly-skilled migrant

1. Introduction

In May 2012, Japan launched the Point-Based Preferential Immigration Treatment for Highly-Skilled Professionals system for highly-skilled migrants. The point system was first introduced in Canada in 1967, followed by Australia in 1989 and New Zealand in 1991 (Facchini & Lodigiani, 2014). Point-based systems were also introduced in Denmark in 2008 and to a lesser extent in the Netherlands in 2009. The launch of this framework in Japan is a culmination of years of interest in attracting highly-skilled migrants. The points applicants earn are calculated based on their level of education, work experience, income, age and other factors such as Japanese language proficiency. Japanese employment visas are issued according to the type of work performed, and there is no official definition of a highly-skilled migrant. Instead, 13 employment visa categories are usually used to define highly-skilled migrants, including engineer, investor/business manager, intra-company transferee and professor.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liang Morita trained in Britain as a sociolinguist and has taught in Thailand, and currently in Japan. Her research interests include immigration, discrimination, internationalisation, intercultural communication and English language education. This paper is part of her ongoing work on Japanese exclusionism, the role of English and their impact on immigrants.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

With intensified globalisation and internationalisation, more foreigners live in Japan every day. And Japan needs these immigrants, due to its rapidly aging and declining population. Issues such as the how much English is spoken and how open the Japanese are to other ways of thinking and doing things directly impact immigrants. This paper discusses these issues and show that Japan is not as attractive to highly-skilled migrants as it could be.

The incentives used to attract highly-skilled migrants in the point-based system include work permits for spouses, fast family reunification, residency permits for the extended family and maid, and most prominently, expedited track to permanent residency. While it is true that the incentives would be tempting to highly-skilled migrants, other facts suggest that there may be issues beyond what the point-based system addresses. Half of 819 international students in Japan found working for Japanese companies unappealing, citing long working hours, unequal treatment of foreign workers, a different communication style and a slow promotion rate as reasons in a survey conducted by the Japan Association for Promotion of Internationalization (Murai, 2015). In a different survey conducted in 2013 by the Japan Student Service Organization (JASSO), 65% of international students were looking for a job in Japan. However, only 24% of 39,650 international students who graduated from educational institutions in Japan found employment in the country, according to a different JASSO report (Murai, & Oka, 2015).

D'Costa (2013) provided a number of reasons for why Indian IT professionals preferred working in English-speaking countries and other OECD countries to working in the IT industry Japan. He listed language and cultural barriers, the lack of English language usage, the unfamiliar social and business environment (including unfamiliar institutions and business practices), the lack of national receptivity towards foreigners and the lack of affordable international schools.

Oishi (2012a, 2013) analysed both demand-side factors and supply-side factors for the low numbers of highly-skilled migrants employed in science and engineering in Japan. On the demand side, only a limited number of corporations in Japan are willing to hire foreigners, and these are mostly large corporations. Employers are concerned about foreigners' Japanese language skills and their ability to communicate in it. The vast majority of Japanese companies use mostly Japanese, and only a very small minority adopt English as the working language. Employers are also concerned high turnover rates among foreigners, because in contrast, Japanese employees typically stay with the same employers for most of their lives and therefore justify the high costs to train them. Foreigners, on the other hand, may leave soon in spite of the time and money invested in training them.

On the supply side, not many highly-skilled migrants are willing to work in Japan. The starting salaries are relatively low compared to other countries. Japanese employees typically start low on the salary scale and then work their way up with seniority-based earnings. The long working hours and lack of work-life balance also discourage highly-skilled migrants. In addition, Oishi (2012a, 2013) respondents were concerned about integration barriers at the workplace and female respondents, about the low status of women at the workplace. The decision-making process concerning employees' promotion does not seem to be transparent to highly-skilled migrants. Furthermore, Japanese work practices can be unique, which means that the knowledge and skills acquired in Japan may not be transferable to other countries and therefore hinder highly-skilled migrants' career development. Ageism and the preference for fresh graduates in the Japanese labour market means it is difficult to change jobs within Japan. There are also institutional barriers such as the non-transferability of foreigners' pension contributions to their home country and the relatively low one-time compensation foreigners receive for their pension contributions when they leave Japan. Many of Oishi's respondents were dissatisfied with their children's education in Japan and the integration of family members into Japanese society. The social integration of family members was a crucial factor, and children's education was the most important reason why highly-skilled migrants leave Japan.

Based on a qualitative content analysis of publications on immigration, Japanese exclusionism and English language education in Japan, this paper discusses Japanese exclusionary tendencies which diminish its attraction as a destination for highly-skilled migrants. Although there are other reasons (such as those listed by D'Costa and Oishi above) why Japan is not attracting as many highly-skilled migrants as it could be, an analysis of all of them would require much more space than what a paper offers. This paper focuses on some manifestations of Japanese exclusionism: its

English language education (Section 2), the mistrust of foreigners, inequality between foreigners and the Japanese, and insistence on doing things the Japanese way (Section 3).

One major issue both Japanese employers and highly-skilled migrants are concerned about is the language barrier. The vast majority of Japanese corporations use Japanese as the working language, which is a significant barrier for foreigners. Many international students who attend Japanese university do not attain native-level Japanese language proficiency at the end of their studies, let alone highly-skilled migrants who attempt to learn the language. The reason why English is not widely used in the workplace is partly because of the way English is taught in Japanese schools and partly because of the emphasis on expressing Japaneseness through English and prioritising Japanese language education. In Japanese schools, English is still taught using the out-dated grammar-translation method, neglecting the communicative aspects. In addition, the use of English to articulate Japanese thoughts, values, ideas, attitudes, opinions, identity and points of view is emphasised in government rhetoric on English language education. According to the line of reasoning, English should be used to convey Japaneseness to the world so that Japan is correctly understood. However, Japanese students would not be able to express themselves in English before they master expressing themselves in the Japanese language. In this manner, government rhetoric on English language education actually promotes the study of the Japanese language.

The main reason why the Japanese distrust foreigners is the exaggerated media coverage of crimes committed by foreigners, as well as right-wing politicians' and groups' bashing of foreigners using such exaggerations. According to these media reports, foreigners constitute an internal security threat and having more foreigners in Japan will lead to higher crime rates, ethnic conflicts and riots. These ideas have been very influential on the general public and have resulted in the perception of foreigners as criminals. In addition to being distrusted, foreigners also stand in an unequal relationship with the Japanese. This can be clearly seen in the goal of the government policy to integrate ethnic minority groups into Japanese society, called *tabunka kyosei*, literally "many cultures living together". Although having an integration policy is a major step forward, critics point out that in *tabunka kyosei*, minorities do not have equality in relation to the majority group, and neither do they have the same rights. In Japan, foreigners learn the Japanese language, culture and social norms but not vice versa. Furthermore, Japan has no legislation which protects minorities' rights or protects them from discrimination. One manifestation of this inequality is the insistence on doing things the Japanese way. Examples of such insistence will be provided in Section 3. Before that, Section 2 explains why English is not widely used in Japanese corporations. The paper concludes with Discussion in Section 4.

2. English language education

A director at the career support centre at Waseda University said in an interview that the native-level Japanese employers expect of international students is a major hurdle for them to gain employment in Japan (Murai & Oka, 2015). Employers expect native-level Japanese, especially in business settings, because of concerns about minor slips in the use of the language jeopardising client trust. This raises a question about the language of business: why isn't English, the language of business in many countries, widely used in corporations in the world's third largest economy? This section answers this question in two parts: first, the way English is taught, and second, *Nihonjinron* influences on English language education.

English is practically compulsory for six years in Japanese middle schools and high schools. In 2011, it became a compulsory subject in elementary schools for fifth and sixth graders. Young people who attend university receive a few more years of English language education. However, the average total score on the TOEFL in 2015 is 71 for Japan, the second lowest in Asia after People's Democratic Republic of Lao at 66, while Singapore ranked highest at 97 (Education Testing Service, 2016). This suggests that English language education in Japan may not be as effective as it could be.

English is mostly taught using the grammar-translation method in Japan. In this method, the main activity in class is translation of English texts into Japanese. The teacher provides explanations on English grammar in Japanese and students are required to laboriously translate English texts, word-by-word, into Japanese. This method originated in the second half of the 19th century, when Japan wanted to acquire practices and knowledge from the West for its development. One way of acquiring such knowledge was by reading English documents and translating them into Japanese. The grammar-translation method is still widely used in schools and universities (Nishino, 2008; Stewart & Miyahara, 2011), to the neglect of the development of communicative competences, intercultural awareness and global perspectives (Whitsed & Wright, 2011).

There have been attempts at introducing a communication-based approach to English language education from the 1980s, but with limited success. One reason is because teachers themselves do not speak English and have been taught using the grammar-translation method. Another reason is that university entrance examinations, the *raison d'être* for learning English in the case of many students, continue to test mainly knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Other efforts include the establishment of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme in 1987, which brings young native speakers of English to Japanese schools to work as assistant language teachers (ALT). Although potentially capable of firmly establishing communicative-based teaching, these ALTs have been given only a marginal role to play in the classroom. In 1997, English conversation became an elective in elementary schools. In 2006, an English listening component was added to the *Senta Shiken* ("Central University Entrance Examinations"). No significant improvements on students' communicative abilities due to these last two efforts have been reported so far.

In a survey of part-time instructors of English at Japanese universities who are native speakers of English (Whitsed & Wright, 2011), the subjects revealed that the norm in English language education was "appearance over substance" and universities were more concerned about "impression management" than the education of their students. English communication classes gave an impression of being modern but in reality lacked substance. The availability of these classes satisfies the government, businesses, parents and students but in classrooms, instructors are not expected to teach in a way which maximises teaching outcomes. The instructors in the study reported that the universities they worked in were ambivalent about the development of communicative competencies. In many cases, communication classes lacked coordination, were unstructured or not integrated into the wider curricula. The majority of the instructors believed that learning outcomes were unimportant to most universities. They also felt that their students did not see English as a living language, something beyond a component of university entrance examinations.

According to Whitsed and Wright (2011), English is taught in a de-contextualised way by focusing on grammar and translation and excluding the communicative aspects in order to preserve Japanese values, traditions and cultural independence. This takes us to the second part of the answer to the question why English is not widely used in Japanese corporations. In order to understand how Japan preserves Japanese values and traditions through English language education, a discussion of *Nihonjinron* is necessary, because it is due to *Nihonjinron* influences that English language education becomes a means of reinforcing Japaneseness.

Nihonjinron is a diverse genre of writing discussing Japanese uniqueness. These discussions often emphasise how uniquely unique Japaneseness is. *Nihonjinron* literally means "theories of the Japanese", and is discussed in books and articles which claim to identify the essence of Japaneseness (Sugimoto, 1999). These distinctive characteristics which constitute Japaneseness define Japanese identity (Liddicoat, 2013). Although researchers disagree on the definition of *Nihonjinron* and its influence, what is clear is that *Nihonjinron* is a very popular consumer item, and it has been so widely disseminated, embodied, internalised and regurgitated by the ordinary Japanese that it has contributed to the creation of a particular worldview (Burgess, 2010).

Nihonjinron publications assume that everyone who has Japanese nationality is ethnically Japanese, which ignores the longstanding presence of indigenous minorities such as the Ainu and Ryukyuan. This view privileges the Yamato Japanese, the powerful ethnic majority. Another assumption is that Japan is linguistically and culturally homogeneous (Liddicoat, 2007). In other words, the Japanese are a homogeneous people who speak one language and practise one culture. Of course, this perceived homogeneity is a constructed worldview. In addition, *Nihonjinron* proponents use three concepts—nationality, ethnicity and culture—interchangeably (Sugimoto, 1999), which means that all holders of Japanese nationality are ethnically Japanese and they practise the same Japanese culture. This is of course not the case in reality. Take for example the case of Japanese nationals who are ethnically Japanese but have grown up outside Japan. They would be unfamiliar with Japanese culture.

Nihonjinron is relevant to our discussion of language issues because it shows us why the Japanese language is perceived as inseparable from Japanese nationality and Japanese ethnicity. As Liddicoat (2007) puts it, Japanese race and nationality are *Nihongo* (“the Japanese language”) and *Nihongo* is Japanese race and nationality. In *Nihonjinron*, the Japanese language plays a significant role as one of the fundamental manifestations of uniqueness or distinctiveness. In this worldview, the Japanese person and Japanese language are inseparable. We will see below that this prioritises Japaneseness and the Japanese language over, say, engaging with others outside Japan.

In government rhetoric, the use of globalisation to justify English language education is common. One such example is presented below:

With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, it is essential that our children acquire communication skills in English, which has become a common international language, in order for living in the 21st century. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of our children and the future development of Japan as a nation. (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2002c)

According to the quotation, Japanese children need English communication skills because it is an international language and this is important for the development of Japan.

However, this is not the only type of government rhetoric on English language education. Another type of rhetoric emphasising the expression of Japaneseness through English is also prominent. In this type of rhetoric, engagement with others outside Japan or mediation between Japanese and other perspectives is not the main purpose (Liddicoat, 2007, 2013). English is important for expressing Japanese thoughts, values, ideas, attitudes, opinions, identity and points of view. English is necessary for articulating the above internationally because Japanese is not a language of international communication. It is therefore a tool for developing the understanding of Japan internationally. This is clear below, when the Ministry of Education announced the reformed course of study and stated:

At present, though, the English-speaking abilities of a large percentage of the population are inadequate, and this imposes restrictions on exchanges with foreigners and creates occasions when the ideas and opinions of Japanese people are not appropriately evaluated. (cited in Liddicoat, 2013; MEXT, 2002b)

We saw earlier that *Nihonjinron* emphasises how uniquely unique Japaneseness is. According to this line of reasoning, Japanese uniqueness is a problem for others’ understanding of Japan (Liddicoat, 2007, 2013). English is therefore necessary for communicating this distinctiveness to others to ensure that Japan is correctly understood. Furthermore, a Japanese person needs to master expressing Japaneseness in the Japanese language first before being able to express it in English. Therefore, the study of the Japanese language comes before the study of English. This is clearly expressed below:

It is also necessary for Japanese people to develop their ability to clearly express their own opinions in Japanese first in order to learn English. (MEXT, 2002a)

This use of English language education to reinforce Japaneseness or Japanese language education contrasts sharply with rhetoric elsewhere in the world. Britain, for example, emphasises intercultural understanding and understanding the perspectives of others in foreign language education:

Language competence and intercultural understanding are an essential part of being a citizen. Children develop a greater understanding of their own lives in the context of exploring the lives of others. They learn to look at things from another perspective. (Department for Education, 2005)

In Norway, respect, tolerance and the development of thinking are stressed:

By learning (foreign) languages, pupils have opportunity to become familiar with other cultures. Such insight provides the basis for respect and increased tolerance, and contributes to other ways of thinking and broadens pupils' understanding of their own cultural belonging. In this way pupils' own identity is strengthened. (<http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/dav78FB8D6918.PDF>—January 2005; cited in Byram, 2011)

Japanese government emphasis on using English to express Japaneseness or develop Japan internationally directly impacts the learning of English in schools. In addition, English language education is portrayed as something of secondary importance because students are told to master the Japanese language before attempting to learn English. Earlier in this section, we saw that the grammar-translation method is still widely used and communicative approaches have not gained a foothold. It is therefore not surprising that Yano (2011) described the English language proficiency of the Japanese as insufficient for business negotiations, academic presentations or discussions. This is why English is not widely used in Japanese corporations.

3. The mistrust of foreigners, inequality between foreigners and the Japanese, and insistence on doing things the Japanese way

Using the results of the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 6, Vogt (2016) found that 36.3% of Japanese respondents indicated that they would rather not have immigrants or foreign workers live in their neighbourhood. This is the third highest proportion, after South Korea and Estonia, among the OECD countries that participated in the survey. When asked how much they trusted people of another nationality, only 13.6% of Japanese respondents responded in the affirmative, which is the lowest proportion among the OECD countries (Vogt, 2016).

The main reason why the Japanese distrust foreigners is the exaggerated media coverage of crimes committed by foreigners, as well as right-wing politicians' and groups' bashing of foreigners using such exaggerations. Media reports of foreigner crime is part of what Chiavacci (2014) calls the foreigners as an internal security threat discourse, which originated in the 1980s and has been well-established since the 1990s. According to this discourse, foreigners are an internal security threat and having more foreigners in Japan will lead to higher crime rates, ethnic conflicts and riots. Vogt (2014) explains that foreigners are seen as a threat to national security and public safety, and as people who need to be controlled. Crime is perceived as something originally foreign and public safety as originally Japanese. When foreigners arrive in Japan, they bring with them crimes which attack Japanese public safety. This discourse has been extremely influential. 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 (Vogt, 2014). Kibe (2014) also observes that the discourse has succeeded in the sense that it has shaped Japanese perception of foreigners as criminals.

Foreigners in Japan do commit crimes, but at a relatively low rate compared to what the media, as well as right-wing politicians and groups, have had the general public believe. 1% of all crimes are committed by foreigners, although the public thinks it is 26% (Richey, 2010). Chiavacci (2014)

describes media coverage of crimes committed by foreigners as a distortion of reality and the figures provided on foreigner crime rates as flawed. Richey's (2010) study shows that a majority of the Japanese are hostile towards immigration, particularly focused around exaggerations of immigrant crime.

In addition to being distrusted, foreigners are also in an unequal relationship with the Japanese in society. I will begin this discussion of inequality with the first time the Japanese government set as a policy goal the integration of minority ethnic groups. In 2006, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (MIC) announced the Plan for the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence and its goal of integrating minority ethnic groups, calling it *tabunka kyosei*, literally "many cultures living together" and translated into English as:

People of different nationalities and races live together as members of local societies while recognizing cultural differences and trying to establish equal relationships. (MIC, 2006, p. 5)

Although the plan to integrate minorities is a significant step forward, critics point out that in the Japanese *tabunka kyosei*, minorities do not have equality or the same rights as the Japanese. Among the critics, Oishi (2012b) compared *tabunka kyosei* with Article 9 of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity. (Canada, 1985)

The principles of equal treatment and equal protection stand out above. Minorities' rights are also protected by Canadian law. Standing in sharp contrast, the phrase "trying to establish equal relationships" in *tabunka kyosei* is a far cry from equality. In Oishi's (2012b) opinion, *tabunka kyosei* is closer to assimilative social integration than to multiculturalism because in Japan, foreigners learn the Japanese language, culture and social norms but not vice versa. This contrasts with multiculturalism, because multiculturalism explicitly points to the necessity of change occurring within the majority group, which will need to accept cultural differences, and there has to be state action to secure equal rights for minorities (Vogt, 2016). In multiculturalism, minorities would not be expected to give up their culture but they would be expected to conform to key values of the majority group. Both migrants and members of the majority group will need to adapt to the newly emerging composition of society (Vogt, 2016).

In *tabunka kyosei*, the Japanese are not expected to change or accept cultural differences. Only the minorities are expected to adapt to Japanese society. As for state action to ensure equal rights for minorities, Japan has no laws which protect minorities' rights or protect them from discrimination. Although Japan ratified the International Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1995, the government has not passed any legislation to outlaw discrimination. It has also suspended the provisions of Article 4(a) and (b), which outlaw the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred (Oishi, 2012b).

One manifestation of this inequality between foreigners and the Japanese is the Japanese insistence on doing things the Japanese way. After all, it is the foreigners who are expected to adapt to Japanese ways. Speaking in relation to the provision of multilingual services for foreigners in Tokyo, one of Nagy's (2012) Japanese respondents remarked:

It is natural that foreigners who come to Japan should do things the Japanese way. It's strange that we provide special services for them. We should not give them any special treatment. (Nagy, 2012, p. 133)

In other words, although both foreign and Japanese residents pay municipal taxes, Japanese residents are entitled to services provided in their native language but foreign residents do not have the same right.

A foreign resident in Morita's (2015) study of Japanese exclusionism experienced confrontational behaviour when he did not comply with Japanese norms:

I know that, in Nagoya, when I transgress a system even when that system is simply advisory like the date to pick up at the dry cleaners... they have been very confrontational. I assume this is based on the fact that I am foreign and must comply with Japanese rules to the very letter, but the exact rationale isn't clear to me as I find it hard to see their point of view on this. (Morita, 2015, p. 18)

The respondent above was referring to the pick-up date for his dry-cleaned suits. He felt that, as a paying customer, it should be his right to collect his dry cleaning whenever he wanted. However, some dry cleaners in Japan tell their customers to pick up their dry cleaning as soon as it is ready, sometimes using limited storage space in the shop as justification. In the case of the respondent above, no reason was given for why he had to collect on a particular date.

Another illustration of inequality between foreigners and the Japanese can be found in Nagy's (2012) interview with the managing director of the Shinjuku (a municipality in Tokyo) Foundation for Culture and International Exchange. The interviewee spells out clearly the inequality built into multicultural existence, his translation for *tabunka kyosei*:

Multicultural existence practices are not about creating a municipality that minorities want to come to; rather, it is about maintaining the integrity of the Japanese community, ensuring that the foreigners that do settle temporarily or for the long term don't disrupt the traditional patterns of Japanese life. Multicultural coexistence programs provide foreign residents with knowledge about Japanese customs and manners so they can avoid causing problems with Japanese residents. (Nagy, 2012, p. 132)

It is clear above that only foreigners are expected to adapt to Japanese society. The Japanese are not expected to change. In fact, any change would constitute a disruption to Japanese life. The purpose of *tabunka kyosei* programmes is to equip foreigners with what they need for adapting to Japanese ways so that they do not cause problems or become a liability.

In the same interview, the managing director of the foundation for culture and international exchange explained that one of the reasons why Japanese language classes, cultural classes, as well as multilingual advisory services and publications are provided is so that foreigners do not cause any intercultural friction or become a burden to the local government and Japanese residents (Nagy, 2012). He added that Shinjuku's multicultural coexistence practices have a strong focus on preventing intercultural friction between the Japanese and foreign residents. We can see in the comments above that inequality between foreigners and the Japanese also exists in assigning responsibility for intercultural friction. Foreigners are solely to blame should intercultural friction arise. In addition, foreigners who do not adapt to Japanese society are considered as burdens.

Illustrations of how the mistrust of foreigners, inequality and insistence on doing things the Japanese way impact foreigners in the workplace will be provided in the next section with the help of the experiences of health professionals in the EPA programme.

4. Discussion

The Point-based Preferential Immigration Treatment for Highly-Skilled Professionals system was launched five years ago, in 2012. To the best of my knowledge, there hasn't been any systematic study of highly-skilled migrants who have entered Japan via the system. The experiences of nurses and care workers who have entered Japan via Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), on the other

hand, have been well-documented. Although they are not classified as highly-skilled migrants in Japan and they have entered the country through a different route, valuable lessons can be learned from their experiences, especially in relation to the aspects of Japanese exclusionism discussed in this paper.

Japan signed EPAs with the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and India between 2006 and 2011 to facilitate temporary entry of health professionals, mostly nurses and care workers (Ford & Kawashima, 2016). The condition they must fulfill in order to have access to the Japanese labour market as fully-certified health professionals is that they must pass the Japanese national examination. These professionals may work for up to three years as assistants while preparing for the examination. Those who pass the examination are given renewable resident status and may continue to work in Japan. Those who fail must return to their respective countries, although they may re-enter Japan to re-sit the examination.

The EPA programme is unattractive to foreign health professionals for a number of reasons. Even though they are graduates of nursing schools in their respective countries, they must work as assistant nurses or assistant caregivers in Japan before they pass the national examination. In other words, the skills and knowledge they have acquired in their respective countries are not fully acknowledged (Vogt, 2013). This shows Japanese mistrust of the skills and knowledge foreigners acquired in their countries. These health professionals are assistants in Japan regardless of their work status in their respective countries, which is a severe downgrading of their status and leads to their gradual deskilling (Vogt, 2013). In addition, although they will be paid at an equal level with Japanese health professionals once they pass the national examination, while preparing for the examination, they are paid as assistant nurses and assistant caregivers. This is an inequality in salary between graduates of foreign nursing schools and graduates of Japanese nursing schools. The EPA programme requires participants to acquire additional skills and knowledge, particularly Japanese language proficiency, which is no mean feat. This requirement shows that unless foreign health professionals are trained the Japanese way and speak the Japanese language, they are not accepted as professionals. For those who received their training in English, such as nurses from the Philippines, going to an English-speaking country is easier and quicker. Japan is not the only country with a shortage of health professionals. Many other industrialised countries also have aging and declining populations and are actively recruiting these professionals. The Japanese government needs to improve the terms of their employment if it does not want to lose out in the global competition for them.

From the point of view of Japanese employers, hiring foreign health professionals is not an attractive option. The time and money spent on their training is a risky investment because it is not clear if they will pass the national examination or how long they will stay in Japan. In addition, whenever a foreigner is on duty, there has to be a Japanese staff member on call, which is a significant extra burden (Vogt, 2013). This again shows mistrust of foreigners.

An Indonesian nurse who worked in the Kansai region of Japan shared her experiences with Vogt (2013). This nurse had failed in her first attempt of the Japanese national examination. She passed the second time, but only because a Japanese doctor helped her study her medical vocabulary and 10 pages of medical writing for two hours, every evening, for a year. This shows how challenging the Japanese language aspects of the examination can be for foreigners. However, far from finding her job fulfilling after she had passed the examination, she reported she was bullied by Japanese nurses, who felt she was more of a burden than an equal co-worker. This points to the Japanese perception of foreigners as non-equals, perhaps even as inferiors, even though the foreigner in question had fulfilled the terms specified by the Japanese in passing the national examination.

The passing rate of foreign health professionals taking the national examination is improving. For Indonesian nurses for example, 2% of the candidates passed in 2010, 14.3% in 2011 and 29.6% in 2012 (Ford & Kawashima, 2016). This is partly due to more support provided for candidates and partly due to efforts to make the examination more foreigner-friendly (Akashi, 2014). *Kanji* (“Chinese characters”) in the examination is supplemented with *furigana*, a less complex Japanese script, and names of diseases are given in both English and Japanese. The Japanese expressions used in the examination also tend to be simpler, and a longer test time is offered to foreigners. From 2015, a one-year visa extension for re-sitting the examination was made available (Ford & Kawashima, 2016). It would be interesting to see if the other aspects of the EPA programme would be adjusted in a direction away from Japanese exclusionary tendencies in the near future to facilitate the entry of these much-needed health professionals as well as encourage them to stay.

Although the views of Hyodo Nisohachi, a writer, are not representative of all Japanese, he does command a certain readership, and his criticism of the EPAs gives us some idea of what those with more extreme exclusionary views think. He feels that instead of hiring foreign health professionals, Japanese NEETs (those Not in Employment, Education or Training) and the homeless should be encouraged to join the health profession because of their Japanese ethnicity (Hyodo, 2009). According to Hyodo, “The idea that it is OK to shift the responsibility for Japan to cheap foreign labor power is only held by people who have not thought at all about Japanese society or Japanese civilization.” (Hyodo, 2009, p. 27; cited in Strausz, 2010, p. 256). This emphasis on Japanese ethnicity is closely related to *Nihonjinron*, and the description of foreign health professions as “cheap foreign labor” shows how strongly exclusionary his views are.

5. Conclusion

The Japanese Point-based Preferential Immigration Treatment for Highly-Skilled Professionals system is certainly attractive to highly-skilled migrants. However, the framework and incentives alone do not constitute the whole picture. The issues raised by D’Costa (2013), Oishi (2012a, 2013) (see Introduction) and myself in this paper need to be addressed before large numbers of highly-skilled migrants would be willing to come to Japan and more Japanese corporations would be willing to hire them.

There is no doubt that English needs to be more widely-used in the workplace. This should begin with a shift of emphasis away from the grammar-translation method and to communicative approaches. It may take some time to accomplish this since English language teachers will have to be retrained in communication-based methods. Government rhetoric on English language education also needs to move away from *Nihonjinron* tendencies to focus on using English to engage with others outside Japan and understand their perspectives. As a discussion of national identity, *Nihonjinron* is not unique to Japan. It is a type of cultural nationalism which is found everywhere in the world (Burgess, 2010). What is crucial is that students also grasp the importance of engaging with others and understanding them and their points of view.

As for the mistrust of foreigners, legislation needs to be passed to outlaw discrimination. This would be a fulfillment of the terms of ratifying the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which took place more than 20 years ago in 1995. The Japanese suspension of the provisions of Article 4(a) and (b), which outlaw the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, also needs to be reversed. This will reduce exaggerated media reports of crimes committed by foreigners and reports on how foreigners pose as an internal security threat. It will also cut down the number of right-wing politicians’ and groups’ public bashings of foreigners. Only then can Japan be on its way to achieving equality for its ethnic minorities and more highly-skilled migrants will be attracted to live and work in Japan.

Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

Author details

Liang Morita¹
E-mail: liangchua3@gmail.com

¹ Graduate School of Languages and Cultures, Nagoya University, Nagoya, Japan.

Citation information

Cite this article as: Why Japan isn't more attractive to highly-skilled migrants, Liang Morita, *Cogent Social Sciences* (2017), 3: 1306952.

References

- Akashi, J. (2014). New aspects of Japan's immigration policies: Is population decline opening the doors? *Contemporary Japan*, 26, 175–196.
- Burgess, C. (2010). The illusion of homogeneous Japan and national character: Discourse as a tool to transcend the 'myth' vs. 'reality' binary. *The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 8, 1–23.
- Byram, M. (2011). From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship. *Intercultural Communication Review*, 9, 17–35.
- Canada. (1985). *Canadian multiculturalism act*. Retrieved February 11, 2017, from <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-18.7/page-1.html>
- Chiavacci, D. (2014). Indispensable future workforce or internal security threat? Securing Japan's future and immigration. In W. Vosse, R. Driete, & V. Blechinger-Talcott (Eds.), *Governing insecurity in Japan: The domestic discourse and policy response* (pp. 115–140). London: Routledge.
- D'Costa, A. P. (2013). Positioning Indian emigration to Japan: The case of the IT industry. *Migration and Development*, 2, 16–36. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2013.773153>
- Department for Education. (2005). *The key stage 2 framework for languages*. Retrieved February 11, 2017, from <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES%201721%202005>
- Education Testing Service. (2016). *Test and score data summary for TOEFL iBT Tests*. Princeton, NJ: Author.
- Facchini, G., & Lodigiani, E. (2014). Attracting skilled immigrants: An overview of recent policy developments in advanced countries. *National Institute Economic Review*, 229, R3–R21.
- Ford, M., & Kawashima, K. (2016). Regulatory approaches to managing skilled migration: Indonesian nurses in Japan. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 27, 231–247. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1035304616629580>
- Hyodo, N. (2009). *Imin ukeire wa kyoki no sata* [Admission of immigrants is an act of madness]. *Seiron*, 9(438).
- Kibe, T. (2014). Can *tabunkakyosei* be a public philosophy of integration? Immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism in Japan. In W. Vosse, R. Driete, & V. Blechinger-Talcott (Eds.), *Governing insecurity in Japan: The domestic discourse and policy response* (pp. 71–91). London: Routledge.
- Liddicoat, A. J. (2007). Internationalising Japan: Nihonjinron and the intercultural in Japanese language-in-education policy. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 2, 32–46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2167/md043.0>
- Liddicoat, A. J. (2013). *Language-in-education policies: The discursive construction of intercultural relations*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2002a). *Developing a strategic plan to cultivate Japanese with English Abilities' to improve English and Japanese abilities*. Retrieved February 11, 2017, from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/shotou/020/sesaku/020702.htm
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2002b). *The course of study for lower secondary school: Foreign languages*. Retrieved August 12, 2004, from <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/shotou/030301.htm>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2002c). *Towards advancement of "Academic Ability": Increased efforts for the secure improvement of academic ability: Efforts by the ministry of education, culture, sports, science and technology*. Retrieved July 23, 2012, from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/hpac200201/hpac200201_2_015.html
- Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication. (2006). *Chiiki ni Okeru Tabunka Kyosei Suishin Puran*. Retrieved February 11, 2017, from http://www.soumu.go.jp/kokusai/pdf/sonota_b6.pdf
- Morita, L. (2015). Some manifestations of Japanese exclusionism. *Sage Open*, 1–6. doi:10.1177/2158244015600036.
- Murai, S. (2015, December 10). Foreign students and workers back life in Japan, but say work for local firms 'unappealing'. *The Japan Times*.
- Murai, S., & Oka, Y. (2015, June 10). International students face job hunting hurdles in Japan. *The Japan Times*.
- Nagy, S. R. (2012). From temporary migrant to integrated resident: Local government approaches to migrant integration in the Tokyo metropolis. *Asien*, 124, 115–136.
- Nishino, T. (2008). Japanese secondary school teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching: An exploratory survey. *JALT Journal*, 30, 27–50.
- Oishi, N. (2012a). Immigration and social integration in Japan. In J. Frideres & J. Biles (Eds.), *International perspectives: Integration and inclusion* (pp. 165–184). Montreal: School of Policy Studies, Queen's University.
- Oishi, N. (2012b). Social cohesion as a double-edged sword: Ethnic diversity and migrant incorporation in Japan. In P. Spoonley & E. Tolley (Eds.), *Diverse nations, diverse responses: Approaches to social cohesion in immigrant societies* (pp. 169–192). Montreal: School of Policy Studies, Queen's University.
- Oishi, N. (2013). Migration and competitiveness in science and engineering in Japan. *Migration Letters*, 10, 228–244.
- Richey, S. (2010). The impact of anti-assimilationist beliefs on attitudes toward immigration. *International Studies Quarterly*, 54, 197–212. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/isqu.2010.54.issue-1>
- Stewart, A., & Miyahara, M. (2011). Parallel universes: Globalization and identity in English language teaching at a Japanese university. In P. Seargeant (Ed.), *English in Japan in the era of globalization* (pp. 60–79). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230306196>
- Strausz, M. (2010). Japanese conservatism and the integration of foreign residents. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 11, 245–264. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1468109910000034>
- Sugimoto, Y. (1999). Making sense of Nihonjinron. *Thesis Eleven*, 57, 81–96. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0725513699057000007>
- Vogt, G. (2013). When the leading goose gets lost: Japan's demographic change and the non-reform of its migration policy. *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia*, 49, 14–44.

- Vogt, G. (2014). Friend and foe: Juxtaposing Japan's migration discourses. In W. Vosse, R. Drifte, & V. Blechinger-Talcott (Eds.), *Governing insecurity in Japan: The domestic discourse and policy response* (pp. 50–70). London: Routledge.
- Vogt, G. (2016). Multiculturalism and trust in Japan: Educational policies and schooling practices. *Japan Forum*, 29, 77–99.
- Whitsed, C., & Wright, P. (2011). Perspectives from within: Adjunct, foreign, English-language teachers in the internationalization of Japanese universities. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 10, 28–45. doi:10.1177/1475240910396332
- Yano, Y. (2011). English as an international language and 'Japanese English'. In P. Seargeant (Ed.), *English in Japan in the era of globalization* (pp. 125–142). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230306196>



© 2017 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions

You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.



Cogent Social Sciences (ISSN: 2331-1886) is published by Cogent OA, part of Taylor & Francis Group.

Publishing with Cogent OA ensures:

- Immediate, universal access to your article on publication
- High visibility and discoverability via the Cogent OA website as well as Taylor & Francis Online
- Download and citation statistics for your article
- Rapid online publication
- Input from, and dialog with, expert editors and editorial boards
- Retention of full copyright of your article
- Guaranteed legacy preservation of your article
- Discounts and waivers for authors in developing regions

Submit your manuscript to a Cogent OA journal at www.CogentOA.com

