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Immigration in Japan: The Labour Shortage and Changes in Japanese Society

Abstract

Japan is one of the countries where the population is aging rapidly, and forecasts for the future show a similar trend. Consequently, the population is shrinking, while the labour shortage is increasing, which brings many problems with it. Despite the fact that Japan has been facing a labour shortage for several decades it has not yet been able to tackle this issue, with both politicians and society at large avoiding an open dialogue on solutions. Due to the lack of manpower in the last few decades, and consequently increasing pressure on the labour market, in 2018 the Japanese government was forced to tackle the problem by loosening its strict immigration policies. In this article we examine the migration process in Japan, the related policies and causes, and the attempts to integrate foreigners in Japanese society.

Keywords: immigration, foreign workforce, xenophobia, homogeneity, multiculturalism

Povzetek - Priseljevanje na Japonskem: pomanjkanje delovne sile in družbene spremembe

Japonska je ena izmed držav, kjer se prebivalstvo stara najhitreje, napovedi za prihodnost pa kažejo podoben trend. Posledično se število prebivalstva zmanjšuje, hkrati pa narašča pomanjkanje delovne sile, kar prinaša številne probleme. Kljub temu, da se Japonska s pomanjkanjem delovne sile srečuje že nekaj desetletij, te težave še vedno rešuje precej neuspešno, tako politika kot družba se odprtemu dialogu o rešitvah izogibata v velikem loku. Zaradi nekajdesetletnega pomanjkanja delovne sile, številnih neuspešnih poskusov reševanja te problematike ter posledično vedno večjega pritiska delovnega trga se je bila japonska vlada leta 2018 prisiljena spopasti s težavo in zrahljati nepropustno priseljensko politiko. V prispevku tako spoznamo proces migracij na Japonskem, priseljensko politiko in vzroke zanjo ter poskuse vključevanja tujcev v japonsko družbo.

Ključne besede: priseljevanje, tuja delovna sila, ksenofobija, homogenost, multikulturnost

1 Japan in the process of globalization

In the context of globalization, migration has recently become a very popular research area among academics. World leaders are discussing the integration of markets and the growing interdependence of countries, while easy international travel and communication have contributed to the "globalization" of everyday life. Migration, which includes emigration and immigration, plays a major role in the process of globalization in all areas of society. Immigration, in particular, is often the central topic of intense domestic political debates, while the personal decision to migrate is one that can dramatically alter the lives of those involved. Human migration is more than the sum of many individual decisions to migrate, and migration flows are a manifestation of the economic, social and political realities of globalization.

Migrants often face resentment and being unwelcome in their new environment. Citizens of the destination country often fear changes to their way of life and a draining of state resources for the sake of immigrant newcomers. Issues of language, ethnicity, nationality and culture are often raised as "proof" that newcomers will not integrate. The presence of "foreigners" in schools, hospitals and on the streets causes fears of social conflicts and violence, xenophobia (or fear of foreigners, see Krivic 2004) triggers negative reactions towards foreigners (anti-immigration sentiments), and the "us versus them" dichotomy appears. At the same time, creating fears about "others" is a very effective and dangerous method of political mobilization, which many politicians have used and are continuing to use.

Since the turn of the millennium, and due to an ever-increasing number of immigrants, aging population, lack of labour force and the need to import it from abroad, Japan has also faced similar feelings, which are even stronger in view of the fact that ideas about the homogeneity of the Japanese nation have prevailed for centuries. Japan, long considered to be a homogenous country inhabited by Japanese people with Japanese culture and speaking the Japanese language, has faced increasing pressures, both external and internal, to reject this idea of homogeneity in the last two or three decades. Ideas about multiculturalism and coexistence with other cultures are coming thus to the fore, and this is reflected in the wide range of activities that the Japanese government is implementing with the aim of integrating such diversity into society (see Visočnik 2016).

The paper thus presents an analysis of immigration and immigration policy in Japan, examines the causes and consequences of this policy, and analyses the social changes that promote migration and those changes that are a result of migration. Methodologically, it relies on historical research on Japanese attitudes towards foreigners, reviews sociological and anthropological literature on immigration processes, and analyses political views on the issue of loosening the country's strict immigration policy, focusing on its current state.

2 Ideas about the homogeneity of the Japanese nation and "fear of foreigners"

As a country with a long history of "ethnic citizenship" (Brody 2002), Japan poses major barriers to foreigners immigrating there for various reasons. The idea that only Japanese people live in Japan, making it a homogenous nation, has long been present both among the Japanese themselves and among Japanese and foreign researchers. The seeds of nationalistic ideas in Japan can be found in the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), when scholars of the nativist Kokugaku (National Learning) school, by examining historical and mythological records, concluded that Japan was a special state headed by an emperor whose ancestors were among the deities who were extremely fond of the country, with an emphasis on the pure (that is, non-Chinese) Japanese essence. During this period, scholars of the Kokugaku school of learning such as Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane shifted the study of then-dominant Chinese, Confucian, and Buddhist texts to the study of early Japanese classics such as the *Kojiki* (712 CE) and the *Nihon Shoki* (720 CE), where there were myths about the uniqueness of the people living on the

islands, about their homogeneity, and above all about an unbroken imperial line that descended directly from a deity. In earlier periods these ideas had already been defended by other thinkers in their historical chronicles, but they only crystallized into nationalist ideas in the Tokugawa period (see also Oguma 2002).

At the same time as the idea of a unified and united Japan, there began to appear the idea of a hierarchical "fatherly state" based on the family (*ie*), where the emperor is the father and rules over his subjects, the children – the so-called *iemoto* system. Many also argue that more than anything else the closure of the country to foreign influences for more than 200 years contributed to the formation of specific practices and attitudes that led the Japanese to reject and separate themselves from things they recognized as "foreign" or "external" (Nakano 1995, 64–65; see also Brody 2002). Ideas that spread during the Tokugawa period, based on the myths that Japan was unique and homogeneous, were thus in later periods responsible for the birth of a strong cultural nationalism and national identity – "one language, one race" (Brody 2002, 2) – such as, for example, the idea that Japan is a homogeneous "natural community" (as distinct from Western "nations formed through treaties") (McCormack 1996, 1–2) that developed on the basis of natural, geographical features. This was also confirmed by many foreign authors, including Edwin O. Reischauer (in Lie 2001, 1), who presented Japan "as one of the most uniform and culturally homogeneous countries in the world". On the other hand, during the time of the opening up of the country, concessions under Western pressure and modernization (Meiji period, 1868-1912), and especially during the period of imperialism (1868-1945), some leading minds and politicians also used the idea of a "multinational state and nation" to justify colonization, although attitudes towards foreigners were diverse and ambiguous. The Asian neighbours the Japanese colonized were considered stupid and limited because their countries were underdeveloped and backward compared to Japan. Although several scholars such as Arai Hakuseki and Tō Teikan[1] tried to highlight certain common elements, especially with Korea, in order to justify its annexation, they still saw the assimilation of Koreans and modernization of the country as the main goal of the imperial project (Oguma 2002, 65). This led to the first major wave of immigration, in truth forced, of foreign workers to Japan, with some remaining in the country even after

1 *Nissen dosoron* – 日鮮同祖論, 일선동조론 (*ilsandong churon*) – the idea that Japanese and Koreans have common ancestors, and that even a branch of the imperial family came from Korea, a claim that was mainly opposed by nativists. Motoori Norinaga dismissed Tō's hypothesis as "the words of a fool" (Oguma 2002, 65).

the end of the Second World War when they had the opportunity to return to their homeland.

Meanwhile, foreigners from the West were more respected because they were more modernized and stronger with regard to the military, economy, science and technology. Although Western societies also developed ideas about democracy and human rights, Japan completely ignored these concepts during the period of imperialism, despite the fact that various movements for the rights of underprivileged groups also appeared there. Later, as the relationship between the Western imperial powers and Japan deteriorated, so did the attitude towards people from America and Great Britain, who began to pose a threat to Japan's ethnic and cultural homogeneity (Nakano 1995, 66). After the war, the idea of homogeneity gained momentum again, although its proponents skilfully avoided any criticism until the turn of the new millennium (Amino 1995; Hankins 2012). Oguma (2002) even says that although the idea of homogeneity has a long history, the real institutionalization of Japanese ethnic homogeneity began after the Second World War, when the Japanese began to rebuild their country and nation after the defeat. After the occupation, the changing political and economic circumstances formed the basis for the emergence of "national identity" (*minzoku ishiki*), where "ethnic homogeneity"[2] (*tan'itsu minzoku*) became the main goal of both the political left and the right (see also Hankins 2012, 2).

It was only in the 1990s, during the economic slowdown, that the Japanese started talking about internationalization and integration into the global economy. However, while they accepted the outside world, they forgot those foreigners already living in Japan, among them Koreans and Chinese as the largest minorities, as well as the Ainu and Okinawans, who were annexed during the formation of the new Japanese state. When South Korea became one of the newly industrialized countries, resident Koreans (*zainichi Koreans*) also became proud of their ethnicity. They began to protest against the way the Japanese government treated them (more in Visočnik 2016). This included registration of foreigners and even fingerprinting. In 1984, the South Korean president visited Japan and also met the emperor; at that time, the protests against the Japanese government became more intense, with the Koreans mainly demanding more appropriate treatment, even though

2 The heavy emphasis on blood and inheritance as the main characteristics of the Japanese nation has made it almost impossible for foreigners to become Japanese (Nagano 1995, 66; see also Brody 2002).

Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro[3] emphasized in his speech at that time that there were no minorities in Japan. These protests were joined by other ethnic groups in Japan, especially the Ainu, who faced similar problems.

As a result of such policies, many Japanese during these periods were unaware in their daily lives that there were nations living among them who differed from them in terms of culture, language, or religion. Amino (1990, 23–27) says that this homogeneity was a side of the country's closed character, preventing the Japanese from becoming aware of the issue of the rights of other ethnic groups and ignoring minority groups. The insensitivity towards other ethnic groups can be seen in the attitude towards foreigners and the institutions that deal with them, because the ideas of homogeneity and the closed character of the country put pressure on groups such as the Ainu, Koreans and Okinawans. The consequence of the conventional understanding of Japanese culture since the Second World War is the emergence of the "discourse on Japaneseness (*nihonjinron*)".[4] *Nihonjinron* thus emphasizes and defends the uniqueness of Japanese culture and people. The discourse with many populist works covers a wide spectrum: the biological image of the Japanese, prehistoric cultural development, national language, literary and aesthetic qualities, interpersonal relations, social organization, philosophy and even the personal character of the Japanese. In some formulations, these features are interconnected; the concepts of the Japanese state, Japanese people and Japanese culture are said to coincide isomorphically (Befu 2009, 26). *Nihonjinron* thus ignores the ethnic, cultural and social heterogeneity of Japan, denies contacts with other countries and external influence on the development of Japanese culture, and defends Japanese essentialism.

3 Yasuhiro Nakasone was the Prime Minister of Japan from 1982 to 1987. He had a very nationalistic approach and encouraged ethnic pride among the Japanese. He was a follower of the "theory of the Japanese" (*nihonjinron*), which claims that the Japanese are a special nation. Influenced by the nationalist philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji, he spoke of the "monsoon culture" of the Japanese and the resulting Japanese compassion that needed to be spread abroad. He visited the Yasukuni Shrine, which, in addition to those who fell during the Second World War, is also dedicated to those responsible for crimes before and during it, which makes visits by politicians to the shrine a stumbling block in relations with China and Korea (Visočnik 2014).

4 Burgess (2010) defines *nihonjinron* in a broader sense as a debate about national identity, the seeds of which can already be found in the Tokugawa period, but especially after the Meiji period, during the formation of the nation state. In a narrower sense, however, it is a post-war construct that fosters the need for the Japanese to express their identity and feelings of pride, since the loss of the empire and the occupation were a bitter experience for them. In the years 1948–1978, as many as 700 books were written in the fields of sociology, linguistics, psychology, biology, chemistry and physics, which focused on Japanese national and cultural identity.

In recent decades, due to the lack of labour in the primary (agriculture, fishing, forestry) and secondary (industry, mining, construction) sectors, which in Japan belong to the "3-K" jobs or *kitsui, kiken* and *kitanai,* which means hard, dangerous and dirty, there has been an increasing number of foreign workers (both legal and illegal). But the Japanese government recognizes only the rational-economic aspect and does not pay much attention to other human factors, such as coexistence. Many laws revoked the right for such immigrants to reside or work for a longer period of time, and as early as 1990 the Immigrants and Refugees Act was passed, which rejects unskilled workers who have not arranged visas. This act was then directed against an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 illegal workers by 1993 (Nakano 1995, 68; also Kingston 2013, 137). Nevertheless, the Japanese government has also begun to consider measures to attract foreign workers to Japan, as the low birth rate and aging population require changes in migration policy. The government has thus begun to deal with migration issues in Japan, although after his re-election in 2018 Prime Minister Shinzo Abe confirmed that he would maintain an extremely strict policy with regard to selecting foreign workers. This statement drew a lot of criticism, from concerns about the economy due to an aging population to humanitarian calls for the relaxation of the country's asylum policy (Rochel 2018, 164).

3 Immigration studies and Japanese immigration policy

International migration encompasses various forms of movement of people, both legal and illegal, with hidden and contract workers, "guest worker" programmes, and migrant networks that connect people across borders. Migration studies thus deal with diverse topics such as ways of leaving the country, reception in a new country and integration into society, which is related to different people in diverse political, economic, social and cultural contexts. Migration is not only a demographic movement of people, but also enables the transfer of ideologies, identities, political and cultural practices, and economic resources. Migration thus affects the people who stay behind, those who travel, and those who live in the country people are immigrating to (Gold and Nawyn 2013, 1). A large number of migrants are so-called "economic migrants" or "labour migrants". This phenomenon is often described as a new pattern brought about by the emergence of multinational and transnational corporations, rapid global communication and cheaper international travel, but in truth has a long and varied history. It is often perceived as something

useful, but also as a threat to the economy and autonomy of the nation-state (Brody 2002, 30).

In the context of international migration research, the causes and consequences of such migration have long been of interest to many social scientists, historians, lawyers, political activists and social reformers. This is precisely why there are many definitions, theories, methods and publications that deal with this phenomenon with the help of various approaches, the most common of which are economic, environmental and psychological. The economic approach focuses on labour migration while forgetting other types of migration, such as refugees, it also distinguishes between internal and external migration, and emphasizes the determinants of migration rather than its consequences (Gold and Nawyn 2013, 3, 9). The main area of interest of the psychological approach is research on groups and individuals and their acculturation into the new society. The environmental approach deals with climate, environment and environmental change, including natural disasters, which often cause migration (*ibid*., 10). Reubens (1981, 754) explained migration with the so-called AOM model (*aspiration/opportunities/mobility*), which attributes three main factors to migration: a) increase in economic and social expectations; b) better opportunities in a foreign country compared to the home country, and c) the ability to overcome physical, financial and social barriers to mobility.

In the early 1980s, despite the great desire to improve their lives, not many people from Asia were looking for a better life in Japan as they were well aware of the poor employment conditions and recognized the rigid barriers such as the ocean, Japanese language and society. Most of the studies on foreign workers and their lives in Japan were thus made in the 1990s (Weiner 1996; Shimada 1994), when Japan reopened to the world and when more and more foreigners began to appear in search of work, a higher income and a better life. Abe, Kaneko and Fujiwara (1995) examined the legal system in the 1990s and analysed the situation of foreign workers and practitioners. They predicted that the existence of illegal workers would cause serious problems such as social unrest, racial and class discrimination, injustice, inequality and distrust among people. They went so far as to express concern and even negative opinions about foreign immigration to Japan. They claimed that the presence of foreign workers would be an obstacle to structural changes in industry, as a result of which even the situation in their home countries would not improve. Therefore, unskilled foreign workers must first of all get a good education in order to be able to work in Japan. Nakamura (2010, 67) dealt with similar questions, highlighting three key points: 1) whether the

immigration of foreign labour will mean a decrease in the wages of domestic workers; 2) whether the presence of foreign workers will affect the support of local workers; 3) whether the arrival of foreign workers will affect technological changes in companies. These issues are among the main reasons why Japan avoids accepting unskilled foreign workers.

Rochel (2018) also undertook a study on immigration policy, focusing on one of the key facts on restrictive immigration policy, i.e. the security issue in connection with the increased number of foreigners in Japan, with an emphasis on the ethical dimension (see also Chiavacci 2014, 115). In doing so, he highlighted security issues in several areas, including the preservation of public order (the distinction between individual threats – terrorism – and threats associated with a large number of migrants). The next area is the preservation of culture, where Rochel's main focus was on maintaining cultural stability against rapid cultural change. The author continued by examining the preservation of trust in the smooth operation of institutions and protection against rapid change. The last topic of his research was the preservation of the welfare state and welfare itself, where with a large influx of immigrants questions may arise as to what and who to prioritize in the areas of employment and social support (Rochel 2018, 165).

Some authors have also focused on the qualifications of foreign workers. Reubens (1981, 749) pointed out that in the 1980s Japan somehow avoided importing unskilled foreign labour by encouraging domestic workers to take up such work themselves, namely through the occupational structure and social value system. Because of this, the country did not become dependent on foreign unskilled workers, unlike some other industrialized nations. In doing so, Japan thus avoided many social conflicts arising from competition in the labour market, cultural diversity and, for some, illegal status. The sea as a natural barrier, strict border control, language and culture barriers, and xenophobia among the Japanese further contribute to this (*ibid*., 750), but much has changed in the past thirty years in this area as well. The reasons can be found in the increasingly higher education of young people who enter the labour market and do not want to work as cleaners and garbage collectors, security guards and workers in the manufacturing industry. The number of working people has also decreased, which is why the need to import unskilled foreign labour has increased.

The most prolific migration researcher in Japan is Gabriele Vogt, who researches many aspects of this issue. She has asked the question of whether immigration is even a solution to the problem of population decline, and

whether Japan should also open itself up to unskilled workers (2007). She and Ruth Achenbach are also concerned with different types of migration and the changes that have taken place in Japan as it changed from a "country of emigration" to a "country of immigration" (Vogt and Achenbach 2012; see also Milly 2014, 2). In an independent paper she presented various policy schemes of the Japanese government that have failed one after the other, and thus demonstrated the gap between the official policy and its actual results (Vogt 2013 and 2014). Her latest monograph was about the history of foreign female health workers in Japan, starting from the problem of population aging and increased care for the elderly provided by foreign health workers (Vogt 2018).

4 Foreigners and foreign workers in Japan

The number of foreigners in Japan was some 2,664,000 at the end of 2013, which was 1.6% of the total population and 1.6% more than the year before, or twice as many as 10 before this. This is still much less compared to Great Britain (5.8%), Germany (8.2%) and Spain (10.3%) at the same time, as quoted by Kingston (2013, 137). The largest group is the Chinese (649,100, as much as 31% of all foreigners), followed by Koreans, who were the largest group of foreigners for many years, but in recent years their numbers have been falling (the lowest figure is 519,700, or 25% of foreigners in 2013).[5] They are followed by Filipinos (209,200), Brazilians (181,300)[6] and Vietnamese (72,300). The number of foreign students who came to study in Japan has also increased by 3% (OECD 2015). It is interesting to note that in 2005 only 17.6% of foreigners were workers who immigrated with the intention of getting a job, whereas in 2006, 46.39% of foreigners aged over 15 and able to work were actually working (Vogt 2007, 12).

In 2013, 8,600 foreigners were naturalized, half of whom were of Korean descent, and one-third of whom had Chinese nationality. In 2013, 3,300 applications for asylum were submitted,[7] which is 720 more than the previous year. The applicants were from Turkey, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan (OECD 2015, 218). In 2015, the Japanese government received a record 7,586 applications for refugee status, but approved only 27

5 Bell (2016) explains the decrease in the number of resident Koreans by their assimilation into Japanese society, marriages with the Japanese and returning to Korea.

6 The number of Brazilians also decreased, so they were overtaken by Filipinos (Vogt 2014).

7 Japan has a reluctance to grant asylum to refugees, even though it has somewhat relaxed its policy towards them. As such, in 2007 it granted asylum to only 41 people (OECD 2015, 258).

(Al Jazeera 2016). Criticized by the international community, the government replied that it would accept 150 refugees from Syria as foreign students in the next five years (Mie 2016). Japan accepted its first refugees from Vietnam (*nanmin*) in 1975, at a time when it had not yet adopted the relevant laws[8] or issued residence permits, so it did not know what to do with them. For this group it created the Ajia Fukushi Kyōiku Zaidan Foundation (Foundation for the Welfare and Education of Asian People), which operated under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and established resettlement centres in the Kansai and Kantō regions where the refugees were educated so that they could integrate and adapt to the new social environment, i.e. "to Japanese society". They were taught the basics of the Japanese language, but only for three months, which is not enough even for everyday communication. Due to poor integration, they could only perform manual and unskilled jobs, although some of them had a higher education in their homeland (Nakano 1995, 61). With the arrival of the refugees, the term "*newcomers*" appeared, since until then the Koreans, who came to the country between 1910 and 1945, dominated as foreigners, so they were called "*oldcomers*".

There are some important factors regarding the integration of foreigners, and these are the changing and flexible labour market, the acquisition of citizenship, naturalization into society and the changeability of society. The willingness of immigration policy to change is also important, because often the policy's attitude towards new arrivals contributes to the creation of a dichotomy between "insiders" and "outsiders", where immigrants are left outside everything – outside the law, outside culture, outside society. This dichotomy, reflected in immigration policy, is only one manifestation of the themes that frequently appear in discussions of Japanese culture, society, and politics: Japan is a country with firmly entrenched ideas about its distinctiveness, homogeneity, and harmony (Brody 2002, 2).

Despite everything, in 2006, due to the increased number of foreigners and demographic conditions, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications published a report on the promotion of "multicultural coexistence" (*tabunka kyōsei*) in local communities. This also caused changes at the local level, as local authorities, in order to deal with the issue of foreigners, started with the so-called "plans for multicultural coexistence". In this, they were ahead of the central government, which did not have a consistent national approach (Aiden 2011, 213).

8 Japan signed the United Nations Refugee Convention in 1981 (Nakano 1995, 61).

The opening up of Japan can be observed since the 1980s, when two phenomena appeared at the same time: internationalization and the purification of the Japanese identity. Internationalization (*kokusaika*)[9] has now been Japan's national goal for several decades. Capital, goods and technology flowed across the border, while essays and books on the subject proliferated. Due to contacts with the outside world, the task of analysing and presenting "Japaneseness" remained complex and sensitive. McCormack (1996, 2) argued that the stronger the belief in Japanese otherness, the deeper the concern about the consequences of internationalization with regard to economic status. The desire to refine and clarify identity is a local manifestation of the global phenomenon of identity politics. *Kokusaika*[10] also means a physical and psychological opening up. It appeared immediately after the opening up of Japan to the world after 1868 and aimed to modernize the country. Burgess (2012) points out that the term *kokusaika* is usually translated as internationalization, but it is problematic because it simultaneously promotes the idea of a mono-ethnic nation (*tan'itsu minzoku kokka*) through the control and ownership of the Other.

Debates on internationalization also brought about the concept of "different cultures" (*ibunka*), namely with the aim of labelling the cultures of others (*aite no bunka*). In recent years, the discourse on *kokusaika* began to recede under an avalanche of criticism, while the word *ibunka* has not undergone a wider critical analysis and is still present in popular and official writings. For

9 *Kokusaika* or internationalization means connecting and cooperating with the outside world, while internationalism is a political direction that strives for cooperation between nations and states based on the recognition of independence and equality (McCormack 1996, 3).

10 Japan joined the Western countries with regard to its military and international power towards the end of the First World War. After the end of the Second World War, it was the most competitive in the years until 1979, as it wanted to catch up with the world in other areas, and the term kokusaika then most often appeared in international trade and in the context of the economic development of Japanese society. It became firmly established during the time of the aforementioned Prime Minister Nakasone, when a lot of effort was put into the idea of Japan becoming an "international country". According to Ivy (in Burgess 2012), the word *kokusaika* is supposed to express the other side of the feeling of Japanese national pride, if not exactly nationalism, so it tried to Japanize everything that is foreign to Japan and spread its influence around the world. As such, this term also contained ideas that were strongly opposed to each other: assimilation, suppression and celebration of diversity. However, in the case of the "international" communities, it was mainly about "integrating into" and "adapting" to Japanese culture. However, the frequent use of the word "international" – such as "international family" or "international children" – actually caused cultural differences to disappear and become homogenized, and foreign things became exotic and were shown at "international festivals" where the Japanese were able to enjoy internationality or difference (Burgess 2012).

example, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Science emphasizes the need to maintain an "international feeling" (*kokukaisei*) through experience (*taiken*) and understanding (*rikai*) of different cultures (*ibunka*) (Burgess 2012).

A similar term, which is slightly more common and appeared in the late 1990s, is *tabunka* or "many cultures/multicultural". In the past, during the period of economic internationalization, it was sometimes used to describe the relations between Japan and other (mainly Asian) countries, while in recent years, due to the more intensive immigration, it is increasingly used to describe different cultures in Japan. Here, Burgess (2012) points out that *tabunka shugi* (multiculturalism) is used in the sense of celebrating diversity "only within limited prescribed conditions". This Japanese style of multiculturalism is the successor to the term *kokusaika*, an ideological tool for maintaining a homogenous discourse on national identity. The present idea of multiculturalism is limited to "cultural exchange"[11] and "international exchange".

In the same context as the previous terms, the concept of *kyōsei* is also often used, supposedly to express coexistence.[12] In the early 1990s *kyōsei* became a key term in discussions about the improvement of economic relations between Asian countries and it refers to "Japanese" and "foreigners" living harmoniously together in Japan. This term also often appears in government campaigns to influence foreign residents to integrate into society. Today, the term is also used by residents and volunteer groups. The goal of various workshops and seminars around the country is a smooth transition to a *tabunka kyōsei shakai* (a multicultural society of coexistence). Although the term envisages equal partners, in practice it means a hierarchical relationship between superior Japanese and subordinate foreigners, whereby the former consolidate their difference, separateness and power. *Kyōsei* thus also creates boundaries that reinforce the non-membership of foreigners in Japanese society, as they remain without access to resources and power (Burgess 2008, 2012).

One of the reasons why debates about Japan's "multiculturalism", and with it words such as *kokusaika, ibunka, kyōsei* and *tabunka*, have come to the fore in Japanese society is the fact that the idea of a homogeneous Japa-

11 It is very popular to name associations, cultural centres, organizations and events using the term *kokusai kōryū*, which means international exchange. Foreigners, including foreign students, are often invited to these exchanges.

12 Literally, the term means "to live together in a certain place".

nese identity has become threatened due to the greater influx of people and pressure from minorities. This also started discussions and research on minorities, which meant a critique of the "discourse about the Japanese" (*nihonjinron*) (Amino 1990; Befu 2009; Burgess 2008, 2012; Weiner 2009; etc.) and many discussions about Japanese uniqueness. Thus, Weiner (2009) in his book disputed the "dominant paradigm" of homogeneity by emphasizing the diversity that exists in Japanese society. He was supported by Lie (2001) in his book on multi-ethnic Japan, Denoon et al. in their compendium (see McCormack 1996) and Maher and Macdonald (1995) in a compendium on diversity in Japanese culture and language. All these books were created with the aim of emphasizing the diversity that has always been present in Japan, but also always denied. Sugimoto (2009, 3) presents the paradigm shift in academia, "a transformation from the monocultural framework to the multicultural framework that analyses Japanese society from multiethnic and multiclass perspectives" and "highlights the ways in which Japanese culture is diversified and stratified along class, regional, generational and gender lines, among others (Sugimoto 2009, 3). In doing so, Burgess (2008) questions what role the term "multiculturalism" plays in the "new" Japan, as it is not about diversity per se, but rather about which group is labelled as "different" relative to the majority population. Joseph Hankins (2012, 1) added the idea that multiculturalism also means an economic and social threat, seeing it not only as a simple reflection of demographic facts, but especially as a historically derived way of accepting and acting on diversity. Multiculturalism thus establishes the criteria and values by which social inclusion or exclusion is determined, which is also conditioned by the individual's desire to transform their way of life according to the requirements of multiculturalism in an individual society.

The first wave of "newcomers" began in the 1970s, and the sociologist Komai Hiroshi (2001, 16-17) divided them into four groups: migrant women from the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, employed mainly in the entertainment industry (*kogyo*), the aforementioned Indochinese refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, second and third generation Japanese descendants who remained in China after the Second World War, and businessmen from Europe and North America.

Due to the lack of labour force, foreign workers (*gaikokujin rōdōsha*) from the Philippines, Vietnam and India, followed by those from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iran (after the global oil crisis) began to arrive in the country from the mid-1980s on. They were willing to do dirty (*kitanai*), dangerous (*kiken*) and hard (*kitsui*) jobs (3-K), and so these jobs were soon given another

designation of 3-Ks, which stood for *kyūryō ga yasui* (poorly paid), *kyūka ga sukunai* (little rest) and *kakkō ga warui* (bad image) (Vogt 2014, 569). Soon after, still during the 1980s, there were many discussions about whether to invite foreign workers to Japan, as there was a clear need for a new workforce, which was being lost due to a rapidly aging population. One of the largest groups of foreign workers are the *Nikkei*, who were brought into the country up until the great economic crisis, and although many of them returned after this period, many of them also remained in Japan, albeit without a visa. Although the Japanese government does not officially allow the entry of foreign workers, it does allow their employment, precisely because of the large number of workers who have remained even after their visas have expired. The only ones formally allowed to stay are the *Nikkei* – people of Japanese descent who were born abroad – while foreign students can work part-time, and some foreign workers are permitted to work with internship visas, whereby Japan allows foreign workers to come, but more through the "back or side" rather than the "front" door (Kajita 1998, 121). In the early 1990s, there was also a group of 33,000 Iranian workers in Japan, mainly employed in the construction industry, until they were suddenly sent home in 1992 when the government decided to cancel their visas. A similar fate befell foreign workers who helped build infrastructure for the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics (see Kingston 2013, 137). In recent years, the demand for foreign workers has decreased slightly, but their inflow has not decreased significantly. In 2008, Japan even had to revise its Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act of 2004, as it was found that as many as 150,000 migrants remained in the country with expired visas (Kingston 2013, 137).

Kajita (1998, 121) roughly divides foreigners in Japan into three groups. The first group are those foreigners who have lived in Japan for three or four generations, such as the Koreans. The second group is the *Nikkei*, who were officially allowed to work in Japan by a change in Japan's emigration law. The third group consists of newcomers from Asia who are not officially allowed to work and are living in Japan illegally. Each group has specific characteristics, and there are also differences between individuals within groups. All these differences have caused various social tensions. In addition to the above, there is another group of foreigners, mainly Europeans and Americans, who live and work in Japan. They usually live in Japan temporarily and have no intention of settling down, although there are exceptions.

In order to enhance integration, many support centres for foreigners coming to Japan began to appear in the 1990s. The Centre for Multicultural Society in Kyoto is a non-profit organization (NPO) that has been operating since

1998 with the "purpose of realizing a multicultural society where people can live together". The centre works in multiple languages (English, Portuguese, Chinese and Korean) and implements many projects for both Japanese and non-Japanese residents to overcome inequalities related to nationality, cultural background, identities and languages, to value diversity and ensure basic human rights. In this way, foreign residents can be better connected with the Japanese in order to create a multicultural society together.

The main goal of these centres is to offer medical support, and above all to learn the Japanese language. Foreigners in Japan learn "*nihongo*", while the Japanese themselves speak "*kokugo*", which means that there exist two different concepts of the Japanese language. *Kokugo* is connected to the Japanese concept of nationalism and is understood as the national language for Japanese people. *Nihongo* is the Japanese language for foreigners, but Japanese people believe that foreigners can never truly master it (Qi 2008; see also Lee 1996). The language is thus the basis for learning about the Japanese culture and norms, which all foreign students at Japanese universities study in the introductory courses of "Japanese language and culture".

In addition, Japan also differentiates its problems with foreigners according to the length of their stay in the country. Foreigners who have already settled in Japan and have the status of *zainichi* and those who have arrived anew (*newcomers*) are quite different from each other, not only in their knowledge of Japanese, but also in the field of employment and in their way of life, which is why political measures must be adjusted according to each foreign community. Today, the largest group of foreigners is the Chinese, who have been immigrating to Japan for the past decade as newcomers. They have thus come to outnumber the Koreans who immigrated to Japan as oldcomers between 1910 and 1945, and later as newcomers from the 1960s onwards. Until 2011, the *Nikkei* were in third place, and since 2012 it has been the Filipinos (Vogt 2014, 360). The first three communities of foreigners are briefly presented below.

4.1 Koreans

Today, Koreans are the second largest "foreign" community with permanent residence in Japan. They were the first group of workers to immigrate *en masse* to Japan to work in factories and mines and to do other hard work. Even today, despite the similarity in appearance and considerable acculturation and integration into Japanese society, fourth and fifth generation Koreans still experience discrimination at the level of both the state and society,

although their organizations have been quite successful in their struggles for rights (see Inadsugi 2002). Most of them have Korean citizenship,[13] since Japan only recognizes *jus sanguinis* (right by blood) and not *jus soli* (right by place of birth), which means that at least one of the parents must have Japanese citizenship. Some individuals can fully integrate into society and become "naturalized". This process has in fact become much simpler for Koreans in recent years, but it is still a very complex and bureaucratic procedure, which can also include changing a Korean name to a Japanese one. Additionally, Japan does not recognize dual citizenship, so those seeking naturalization must renounce their Korean citizenship (see Brown 2015). In Japan, resident Koreans have the status of "special permanent resident (*tokubetsu eijūsha*)", which gives them access to the Japanese social welfare system and pension and health insurance. However, as foreigners they do not have the right to vote, and there are certain pension and social security provisions that do not apply to them. In addition, they cannot be employed in some public services (Visočnik 2016).

In research on the Korean minority, we can roughly highlight three periods,[14] when the most changes took place in the Korean community in terms of social and legal status: 1. from the end of the Second World War to 1965, when Japan and South Korea signed an agreement on the normalization of relations; 2. from 1965 to 1991, when Korean immigrants were granted "special permanent residence" (*tokubetsu eijū*) status, which unified the conditions of residence for all ex-colonized groups living in Japan and their descendants; 3. from 1991 to the present day – this is the period of increased naturalization, there are more movements for local elections, and the number of marriages between Japanese and Koreans and the number of children of mixed parents have increased. Hester (2008, 140) calls the first period "repartitism", when most Koreans returned to Korea, the second period is the time of "stabilization" of living conditions, and the third is the time of "domestication approach" (*denizenship*),[15] which in modern Japan is most prevalent among young Koreans.

13 Koreans were granted Japanese citizenship when they arrived in Japan, but in 1952 the Japanese government forcibly took it away from them, even though this was against international law. So they were forced to regain Korean citizenship, which changed again after the political division of the Koreas, when they had to decide which Korea they belonged to. This was an ideologically supported decision, as most Koreans came from the South of Korea, but quite a few also decided to choose North Korean citizenship.

14 For a more detailed review of the situation of Koreans in Japan, see Fukuoka (2000), Ryang (2005), Visočnik (2013), Weiner (2009) and other others.

15 With permanent residence, but without citizenship.

4.2 The Chinese

In the mid-1980s, a large number of Chinese immigrated to Japan, and in recent years they have become the largest foreign group in the country. Many Chinese acquire Japanese citizenship, and marriages with the Japanese are also the most numerous compared to with other groups of foreigners. Compared to the *Nikkei*, the Chinese have greater language skills and fewer problems integrating into Japanese society and the workplace. Nevertheless, like other foreigners they face discrimination. Most of them start working in Japanese companies, but soon leave and try their luck on their own, because the working conditions in Japanese companies are restrictive. Women face extra restrictions due to their gender and therefore choose other jobs that do not hinder them in their careers. According to Kingston (2013, 144), Chinese immigrants are aware that they cannot fully assimilate into Japanese society, but they also do not want to. Instead, they seek profitable niches as transnational entrepreneurs by exploiting China's economic progress, namely as intermediaries between the two countries.

Many Chinese students are enrolled in Japanese universities, thus ensuring a strong inflow of educated labour (*white-collar*), as they are often employed in Japanese companies after completing their studies. As a result, the xenophobic attitude towards foreigners should slowly begin to loosen, at least in political circles and among employers, if not in the wider masses. Prejudice against the Chinese is still widespread in Japan, and the government is especially concerned about their criminal activity (Kingston 2013, 45). They face discrimination especially when looking for an apartment, and they are often stopped by the police for identification. They are often exploited in workplaces, and many of them are included in only three- to five-year programs,[16] after which they rarely get regular employment. Those who have been employed for five years can apply for "permanent residence", and most have visas of various categories (Vogt 2014, 571).

16 Ever since 1999, the Ministry of Justice has been issuing permits for the implementation of the internship program in small companies with 20 employees. Since then, the number of foreign workers has grown exponentially. In 2009, their number increased further with changes to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which allowed companies to hire workers for an additional year after completing a two-year internship. Unfortunately, violations of labour and human rights often occurred in this system, and there was also non-compliance with the statutory minimum wage. Despite everything, these programmes were very attractive for young Chinese men and women (Vogt 2014, 572).

4.3 Nikkei

The *Nikkei*, or *Nikkeijin*, are Japanese emigrants displaced around the world, but most often this term is used for newcomers from Brazil, and some from Peru, who came to Japan to perform mainly unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in the 1980s. These workers got permanent residence a few decades later, but they still face the problem of integration into society, mainly due to their lack of language skills and a different, non-Japanese culture. In 2009, around 370,000 of them were employed, mostly in factories or workshops, often automotive. In 2008-2009, many workers lost their jobs due to the economic crisis. At a time when they were losing their jobs, and in some cases their homes, the Japanese government introduced a controversial initiative to give each Japanese-born worker from Brazil ¥300,000 for a plane ticket and another ¥200,000 for their dependents if they returned home. This would, of course, be a one-way ticket with no possibility of return.[17] Due to mass opposition and condemnation of this proposal, the government tried to soften it by allowing them to return after three years, but they would have to reapply for a long-term visa that allows them to work indefinitely (Brody 2002, 30; Kingston 2013, 141).

It is interesting to observe the attitude of the government and politicians who made this possible, as they were convinced that the arrival of these Brazilians in Japan would not require any measures to integrate them, since they were "Japanese". Such thinking was soon proven wrong. Indeed, many ethnographic studies (see Tsuda 2003) shed light on discrimination in everyday life. They show disputes with the Japanese community over littering, young people walking outside in the evening and parking all over the place, as happened in the prefectures of Aichi, Shizuoka, Mie and Gunma, which had the largest Brazilian communities. Although most of these immigrants had a permit for "long-term residence", "permanent residence" or a "child or spouse" visa, they soon became undesirable in society.

5 Laws and regulations

After examining the three groups of foreigners, it is clear that immigration took place under different circumstances, accompanied by different measures and legal regulations. Since 1990, the number of registered foreign workers in Japan has increased significantly, which can also be attributed to

17 Kingston (2013, 141) noted that Spain came up with a similar initiative, which sent foreign workers home, but they were allowed to return at any time or at least after three years.

the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (*shutsunyukoku kanri oyobi nanmin ninteiho*). This law is based on the original Migration Control Ordinance (*shutsunyukoku kanri rei*) of 1951, which came into force in 1981. Its main purpose was to regulate the entry and residence of foreign nationals in Japan. It defines 27 visa categories, but only four allow unconditional work, five do not allow work, and one visa allows work only for specialist interns. Seventeen visa categories allow work for certain professions, such as managers or professors for a certain period of time, ranging from three to five years (Vogt 2014, 569).

As mentioned above, the Japanese government has recently started to give in to internal and external pressures and to loosen its strict immigration policy. In 2018, it presented a plan to attract more manual workers to the country. As the population ages the third strongest economy in the world is increasingly facing a labour shortage. New workers are most eagerly sought in agriculture, construction, shipbuilding and nursing. Under the proposed new legislation, foreigners with relevant skills will be offered a work visa for a period of five years. Those with more competencies and a certain level of knowledge of Japanese will be able to bring family members with them and obtain a permanent residence permit (A.P.J. 2018).

The government forwarded the proposal to parliament, which adopted a draft of the new law in November 2018, with the aim that the new legislation would enter into force in April 2019. As Prime Minister Shinzo Abe emphasized, the goal of the measure is not to drastically change Japan's immigration policy, so mass immigration is not expected. Despite this, the draft has already faced many criticisms from politicians, while business owners claim that it is absolutely necessary. Critics of the proposal warn of the danger of increasing the crime rate in the country and the negative impact on wages, while the opposition accuses the government of unnecessary haste without first taking care to legislate the rights of foreign workers (Obe 2019).

The Minister of Justice Yamashita Takashi said the government would not set a cap on immigration, and Japanese media reported that half a million manual workers could eventually enter the country, a 40% increase. Japan has been gradually opening the doors to its labour market in recent years, but until now it has mostly welcomed highly skilled individuals and professionals from certain fields, and this shows Japan's caution in immigration law (Dasgupta 2019). The exception were immigrants from South America with Japanese roots. After many warnings from companies in recent years that it

is becoming increasingly difficult to find staff, the government has apparently decided to ease the pressure and relax the rules.

The new draft law proposes the creation of two new visa categories for foreigners, suitable for working in those industrial sectors where there is the greatest labour shortage. It is not known what these sectors are, but there are said to be more than a dozen of them, ranging from agriculture and construction to hotel and nursing jobs. Foreigners applying for the first visa category will need to have certain work experience in their field and demonstrate the ability to learn the Japanese language. They will be able to get a job for a maximum of five years, but family members will not be allowed to come with them. Those more qualified, who will fall into the second visa category, will be able to stay in the country with family members, and after a certain period they will be able to apply for permanent residence (A.P.J. 2018).

6 Conclusions

By examining the various historical and social backgrounds that are the cause of the current state of ethnic relations in modern Japan, we can see that it is difficult for Japanese people to change their attitudes and social structures in order to establish a kinder and more just society for themselves and foreigners. Of course, there is no recipe for how to solve these problems, but according to the latest data and newspaper reports, things are changing. Although the Japanese have long looked through their country's half-open (or half-closed) doors with doubt, social and economic conditions are forcing them to slowly open those doors.

Even today, Japan is not as ethnically diverse as, for example, the United States of America, and despite changes in immigration policy, it persists in denying its growing multi-ethnicity. The idea of mono-ethnicity and a homogeneous nation continues to dominate the collective consciousness, although the number of international marriages and children from ethnically mixed families and the influx of foreigners into the country are also increasing. Thus Japan, which has long been considered to be a homogenous country inhabited by Japanese people with Japanese culture and speaking the Japanese language, has faced increasing pressure over the past two or three decades to reject this idea. Ideas about multiculturalism and coexistence with other cultures are coming to the fore, which is reflected in the wide range of activities that the Japanese government and also non-governmental organizations now carry out mostly with the aim of integrating such diversity into society. The focus is primarily on learning the Japanese language, which should enable foreigners to integrate into society more

easily. They can also take part in various events and groups, where Japanese volunteers enthusiastically present their country and culture to them.

However, we can quickly find that while learning the Japanese language and culture together with the presentation of Japanese culture and norms can help people to integrate into society more easily, it also serve rather to Japanize foreigners. As such, in the Japanese political context "multiculturalism" – as used by Japanese institutions – rather conceptualizes the idea of "anti-multiculturalism" (Burgess 2008). When following the literal meaning of the words there is a danger of being misled, because we can quickly find that multiculturalism and multicultural education simultaneously cause inclusion and exclusion, especially when it comes to the education of immigrant children. This type of multiculturalism is not intended for cultural minorities, but primarily for the social and cultural majority. In the context of Japanese politics, the main approach is to overcome cultural friction, and for the Japanese to spread their culture around the world, rather than to better understand foreign cultures. The idea of multiculturalism as present in Japan today is limited to "cultural exchange" and "international exchange". It is especially interesting that the application of the idea of multiculturalism to Japanese society only works for newcomers, while it does not apply to the same extent for already existing minorities. Therefore, a great deal of scepticism and critical attitude is required when exploring contemporary ideas about "multicultural" Japan.

Immigration is a very sensitive topic that divides the Japanese, who keep avoiding agreements on this topic. Various questions arise: which workers should be allowed to enter, only the skilled or also the unskilled, what their number should be and where should they come from, how long should they stay and under what conditions (Kingston 2012, 138). This discourse is often influenced by notions that foreigners are often responsible for criminal acts, although this has not been proven statistically, and their offenses are most commonly due to visa-related offenses rather than anything more serious.

Advocates of opening the doors point to a shrinking population, imminent and looming labour shortages, and the need for more taxpayers to sustain the nation's health and pension systems. Opponents, however, insist that the current level of homogeneity should be maintained and warn of the pitfalls of accepting more foreign residents as there is a concern that until Japan legislates the protection of the human rights of foreign workers, it should not accept them either. This situation is expected to be regulated to a large

extent with the adoption of a new law in April 2019, and only time will tell whether for foreign workers the situation will improve[18].

These situations show that not only public opinion but also a government continues to be negative. Like in other countries, immigration has not elicited positive responses from Japan's politicians, bureaucrats, media, employers, police, or the general populace, and significant changes in attitude are unlikely. A remarkable level of cognitive dissonance has led to inaction, as denial is the easiest route.

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18 The crisis caused by Covid-19 in 2019 and 2020 delayed the execution of the law, as the borders were closed. On April 3rd, 2020, the Japanese government banned the entry of all foreigners into Japan, including re-entry for foreign workers and long-term foreign residents who had been living in Japan for many years. All countries tried to prevent the spread of the pandemic by restricting the movement of people. However, Japan was the only one among the G7 and OECD countries that prohibited not only short-term visitors, like tourists and people on short-term business trips, but also the re-entry of foreign middle- and long-term residents. These restrictions affected those who work in Japan, such as businesspeople, university professors, researchers in institutes, students, interns, spouses of Japanese citizens, and residents with permanent residence status. Exceptions were made only for so-called 'special permanent residents' or Zainichi Koreans and Chinese, who could re-enter the country under the condition that they be tested and, if positive, either quarantine for two weeks or go to a hospital in Japan. The consequences varied according to each person's situation, but in many cases, they placed people in unbearable circumstances.

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