



Foreign Residents—Current situation and acceptance strategies (Summery)

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This article is transcribed from a lecture I gave at a seminar hosted by Grant Thornton Taiyo at Keidanren Kaikan on January 25, 2017. The subject of the seminar was work style reform and company management, and my lecture was titled “Acceptance of Foreign Residents from the Perspective of Securing Workforce and Corporate Social Responsibility”. I herewith publish the transcription with the permission of the organizer. It has been modified for readability.

I presented the Foreign Residents Policy Study Group’s first and second sets of proposals. I believe no part of my lecture conflicts with the views of the Study Group. However, some of my opinions are based on my personal experiences. Therefore, the responsibility for this article and the lecture lies entirely with the lecturer.

1. Introduction

Japan does not have a comprehensive policy or philosophy for acceptance of foreigners. In contrast, Switzerland has its Foreigners Law, Article 4 of which defines “integration”, the principle of foreigner acceptance, as “enablement of foreigners to participate in the economy, society and culture of Switzerland”.

2. Current increase in foreign residents

The number of *zairyu gaikokujin* (registered foreign residents) has been growing sharply in recent years, reaching 2.23 million as of the end of 2015. The core of this growth is foreign workers.

According to statistics published by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare based on reports from business operators as required by the Employment Measures Act, there were 907,898 foreign workers as of the end of October 2015, 15% more than in the previous year. Particularly, interns in the government Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and exchange students working outside their certified status have been increasing significantly. By nationality, Vietnamese and Nepalese are the fastest growing groups.

3. Basic Japanese government policies

The current Abe administration is pursuing a dualistic policy of actively accepting highly skilled

professionals in specialized and technological fields but other foreigners only in industries where acceptance is truly necessary. However, it has been promoting the acceptance of foreign workers more than any past administration, which has led to the recent increase.

While the Abe administration has clearly stated that Japan will not promulgate specific immigration policies, the number of foreigners who stay in Japan for longer than one year is rising. They are simple immigrants according to international standards. The inconsistency between the stated policy and the reality is difficult to understand.

Considering the often negative emotional connotation of the word “immigrant”, avoidance of the word is, in my opinion, tolerated politically to minimize resistance while implementing necessary measures. However, if the government assertion of not promulgating specific immigration policies is misinterpreted or taken superficially and becomes an obstacle to implementing the measures, this problem must be solved.

4. Inevitability of foreigner acceptance

Our country is entering an era of unprecedented depopulation. While we hope for the success of current government efforts such as production efficiency improvement through innovation and utilization of women and older workers, we must recognize that they will not be enough to compensate for reduced productivity, and that whether we like it or not, we must depend on the contribution of foreign workers.

5. Abuse of current acceptance systems

While the TITP was established for the admirable purpose of international contribution, the system seems to be often abused. There are reports that a considerable number of interns are exploited as expendable manual labor.

It is reasonable if exchange students can engage in part-time jobs as activities outside their certified status, within the limit of 28 hours per week. However, in reality, many are here mainly for illegal outside work, using their academic studies as an excuse and exacerbating the problem of uncontrolled low-wage labor.

The government is aware of this misuse of the systems and has been taking countermeasures. It should continue to study this problem thoroughly and try to recover their original purpose.

At the base of this issue lies the lack of conception that foreigners are residents who should be integrated into our society. Instead, they are seen only as workforce and expected to return home after serving for a specified period. If this current “reflux” concept stems from the government’s avowal of not promulgating immigration policies, we should now stop and reconsider.

Utilization of National Strategic Special Zones is another way to accept foreigners smoothly and effectively.

6. Proposals

(1) Clarification of government policies and principles

If the admission of foreign workers is inevitable in light of our continuing depopulation and consequent tightening of the labor market, we must clarify the principle to accept them as members of our society and provide them with sufficient support.

As we expect fierce competition for foreign workers with countries such as China and Korea, who will also come to promote major immigration policies to deal with their own population decline, we should begin to make our labor market more attractive to foreign workers, considering it an investment in our future.

(2) Clear statement of government responsibility for Japanese language education

To successfully accommodate foreigners in our society, it is essential to enhance our language education system. Leaving this responsibility to municipalities and the private sector has resulted in regional gaps and makes it difficult to improve the quality of education.

The government should bear responsibility for providing enhanced language education to foreign workers and including their school-age children in our compulsory education system.

(3) Establishment of a Foreign Residents Policy Committee

Japan has no government agency tasked with developing and promoting comprehensive foreigners policies. While it is probably premature to propose a full-scale and permanent organization such as Foreigners Agency, we should establish an official government committee such as a Foreign Residents Policy Committee to study and discuss foreign residents policies comprehensively.

(Please read the full text at <https://goo.gl/XmeUNl>)

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Personal history

2013: Chairman, Emergency Medical Network of Helicopters and Hospitals

2003: Director, Emergency Medical Network of Helicopters and Hospitals

1999: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Swiss Confederation and Principality of Liechtenstein

1994: Commissioner General, National Police Agency

1961: Joined National Police Agency and served as Oita and Hyogo Prefectural Police Chief.

Director-General, Criminal Investigation Bureau, National Police Agency 1961.

Graduated from Faculty of Law, Tokyo University

1937: Born in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka

Other roles

Acting Director, Criminal Victim Support Foundation (PIIF)

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Research topics

Measures for nationwide deployment of doctor helicopters, Foreign resident policies.

Your feedback, including validation, advice, constructive criticism and proposals, are most appreciated.

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