

論 文

Social Inclusion and Foreigner Support in the Post-COVID-19 Era: An Interview-based Survey of Highly Educated Foreigners

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Abstract: Japanese society is now gradually resuming various socioeconomic activities. However, the impact of COVID-19 is still far from reaching. Moreover, the COVID-19 outbreak has exposed gaps in various aspects of society, including gaps in income, gender, information, region, and ethnic diversity. Against this backdrop, this study uses the existing literature and official data to analyze the current situation of foreign residents in Japanese society under the policy of multicultural coexistence during the COVID-19 period. It also analyzes the various dilemmas foreigners, who occupy a relatively dominant position in the community, continued to face during the outbreak through interviews with highly educated foreigners. In addition, the significance and impact of creating a multicultural, inclusive society that protects social diversity and the rights of social minorities in the post COVID-19 era are examined.

1. Introduction

Japan, influenced by globalization, declining birth rates and an aging population, has begun to actively promote the admission of foreign nationals to address the labor shortage. It is important to point out that Japan has been cautious about accepting unskilled foreign workers or foreigners for permanent residence (Kondo 2009), and the focus of actively accepting foreign residents is to attract talented international personnel with specialized skills or higher education backgrounds.

In the 1990s, Japan revised the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act and began actively accepting foreign workers in professional and technical fields¹. In 2008, the “300,000 Foreign Students Plan” was implemented², attracting many foreign students to study in Japan. And in 2018, the Immigration Control

1 In the Basic Employment Measures section of the Ninth Basic Plan for Employment Measures (1999), it is stated that “While maintaining Japan’s basic policy regarding the acceptance of foreign workers, which is to actively accept workers in specialized and technical fields, but to be very cautious about accepting so-called simple workers, it is necessary to improve the public employment placement and employment counselling systems that can be used by both foreign workers and employers with peace of mind, as well as to improve employee management.

2 The “300,000 Foreign Students Plan” (July 29, 2008) The “300,000 Foreign Students Plan” aims to accept 300,000 foreign students by 2020 as part of the “Global Strategy” to make Japan more open to the world and to expand the flow of people, goods, money, and information between Asia and the rest of the world.

Act was revised to add a new status of residence, “Specified Technical Skill,” and the government announced an estimate of accepting up to 340,000 foreign nationals for employment over the next five years, with the maximum period of stay set at five years³. Thereafter, in January 2020, the first domestic case of COVID-19 infection was detected in Japan, and the Japanese government enacted and implemented a series of strict measures to control the spread of COVID-19 in Japan.

The outbreak of COVID-19 not only temporarily halted the active policy of importing foreigners, but also changed Japanese society and the lives of foreign residents in a variety of fields, including the economy, education, and labor. It also brought the issue of foreign residents to the forefront of social concerns. As a minority group in the host society, foreign residents are at a relative disadvantage in terms of political, economic, and social security, and the global spread of the coronavirus has highlighted the difficult situation of these vulnerable groups in the face of risk. The protection of basic human rights of foreign residents and the creation of a multicultural society in which foreigners coexist have further become one of the fundamental challenges of Japanese society.

Using existing literature and official data, this study analyzes the current situation of foreign residents in Japanese society under the policy of multicultural coexistence during the COVID-19 period, and through interviews with highly educated foreigners, analyzes the various dilemmas that foreigners, who occupy a relatively advantageous position in the foreigner community, will still face during the epidemic. It also examines the impact and future issues of the Japanese government’s support policy for foreign residents in the context of COVID-19.

2. Literature Review

(1) The Newcomers

In general, Korean, and Chinese residents in Japan in the closed society of post-war Japan are called oldcomers, while new foreign workers, mainly Asian foreigners, have been called newcomers since the 1980s (Mori 2002). The ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1979, the accession to the Refugee Convention in 1981, and the revision of the Immigration Control Law marked a turning point in Japan’s policy toward foreigners. The number of foreign laborers from Asian countries is growing rapidly due to labor shortages and the increasing number of Japanese companies conducting overseas operations.

By the late 1980s, the issue of foreign workers became a focus of public attention, and in 1989, the

3 In December 2018, an act to partially revise the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act and the Act for Establishment of the Ministry of Justice were enacted, and the creation of the “Specified Technical Skills No.1” and “Specified Technical Skills No.2” residence statuses and the establishment of the Immigration and Residence Management Agency were included in the revised law.

Immigration Control Act was again amended. This time, the type of resident status called “Long-term resident” was increased, and the number of people of Japanese descent or South American descent increased rapidly in the 1990s due to the provision that people of Japanese descent could obtain residency status without restrictions on their activities.

The technical internship program⁴ was originally designed to train foreign technicians in Japan for the purpose of transferring Japanese technology to developing countries, since 1993, the program has added a technical internship component in which those who pass the technical certification can continue to work in Japan for 2 years. Many small and medium-sized companies use this program to fill labor shortages, however in practice, technical interns are considered by employers as workers with a fixed term of employment, with workplace harassment, unpaid wages, etc.⁵. Except for some professional and technical workers, rights of numerous foreigners in Japan as employees are not guaranteed.

The Lehman Shock of 2008 has caused huge numbers of unemployed people, especially in the manufacturing industry, as well as those foreign workers and workers of Japanese descent under informal employment. After the Lehman Shock, the Cabinet Office established the Office for the Promotion of Foreign Resident Policy in January 2009⁶. At the same time, the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was enacted, introducing a new residency management system, and the Basic Resident Registration Act was amended to make foreigners eligible for basic resident registration in addition.

And in 2010, the Basic Guidelines on Policies for Foreign Residents of Japanese Descent were issued⁷. The basic policy states that allowing foreign residents of Japanese descent to settle in Japan makes it necessary for the government to take measures to accept them as members of Japanese society and to ensure not to exclude them from Japanese society. Specifically, it includes establishing a system for learning Japanese, ensuring access to Japanese public education, providing employment assistance, and offering training in labor laws and regulations and employment practices. Although this was the first national policy on foreign residents of Japanese descent and was ground-breaking in that it demonstrated the government’s responsibility to accept people of Japanese descent as members of Japanese society and to ensure that they are not excluded from the community,

4 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/koyou_roudou/jinzaikaihatsu/global_cooperation/index.html (2023/3/3)

5 Asahi News

<https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASQBG7KKLQBGUNHB006.html> (2023/3/3)

6 Japan Intercultural Academy of Municipalities

<https://www.jiam.jp/melmaga/kyosei/newcontents22.html> (2023/3/3)

7 Cabinet Office Documents

<https://www.shujutoshi.jp/2010/pdf/naikaku.pdf> (2023/3/3)

since then, the focus of government attention has been on people of Japanese descent rather than on the foreign residents in general.

In 2016, the Japanese government launched the “Council for the Realization of Workplace Reform” and set “the issue of accepting foreign human resources” as one of the themes for discussion in the Diet in 2018⁸. Also, in 2018, the Immigration Control Act was amended to add a new residence status, “specified skill⁹,” and the acceptance of foreign nationals is being actively promoted as part of the solution to labor shortages.

(2) Japanese Multicultural Coexistence Policy

Japan rarely refers to its foreign population as immigrants. Japan has avoided using the term immigrants in its policies, instead using the terms multicultural coexistence policy to express policies related to foreigners, and the term foreign residents to represent foreigners who are long-term residents of Japan. According to Kondo (2011), the goal of Japan’s multicultural coexistence policy is a multiculturalist integration policy. While it includes such connotations, the reason why it is not called an integration policy is that there is strong resistance to the Japanese word integration among foreigners and NGOs, who perceive it as a term with assimilationist and managerialist connotations.

In Japan, the policies for foreign residents refer to the policies of the Immigration Bureau of the Ministry of Justice regarding immigration and residency of foreign residents, and there has been extremely limited attention paid to the perspective of considering foreign residents as residents or members of society, guaranteeing foreigners’ social welfare and human rights, and promoting their social participation (Yamawaki et al., 2002). The basic structure of Japan’s immigration policy was established by the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which was revised and enacted in 1990 and has been maintained to this day. It is characterized by a clear preference for management and a complete absence of policies to accept immigrants or coexist with them in an inclusive manner (Komai 2016).

With the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Refugee Convention, human rights movements, and some legal reforms, social security systems were opened to foreigners. However, huge numbers of foreigners receive unequal treatment, and the civil rights of foreigners with permanent resident status are insufficiently recognized, and the protection and support of various rights and interests of foreigners in Japan were still not given much attention.

8 Prime Minister’s Office, Council for the Realization of Workplace Reform
<https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/headline/ichiokusoukatsuyaku/hatarakikata.html> (2023/3/3)

9 Immigration Services Agency
https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/policies/ssw/nyuukokukanri01_00127.html (2023/3/3)

After the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (1995), many foreigners were among those affected. Lots of volunteers carried out a series of support activities for foreign residents affected by the disaster, the existence of the foreigner community, which had been socially neglected, began to come to public attention. Civil support activities have contributed to the widespread dissemination of the concept of coexistence, and the term multicultural coexistence became widely circulated among people. Also, it played an important role in promoting social concerns and safeguarding the fundamental rights of foreign residents.

The Study Group on the Promotion of Multicultural Conviviality was established to discuss issues related to foreign residents in 2005¹⁰, conducted comprehensive and systematic research on multicultural coexistence for the first time and formulated the Promotion Plan for Multicultural Coexistence in Local Communities. According to the definition by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2006), multicultural coexistence refers to a society in which people of different nationalities and ethnicities recognize each other's cultural differences and strive to establish equal relationships¹¹.

The Promotion Plan for Multicultural Coexistence in Local Communities changed policies that focused on labor and security measures to position foreigners as residents. This has led to the addition of policies that support the lifestyles of foreign residents and promote coexistence with foreigners, going further than the previous foreign policy of management-centered immigration control and foreigner registration. However, the main topics have revolved around improving the Japanese language skills of foreigners and supporting their daily lives, without touching on issues concerning the socio-economic and political status and rights of foreigners.

As the number of foreign residents has increased, issues have arisen regarding employment, social security, Japanese language education, children's schooling, and access to government services. As Komai (2016) argues, the root of the problem of multicultural coexistence lies in how to bridge the gap and inequality. And COVID-19 in highlighting the vulnerable situation of foreigners in Japan, and the need for the government to protect the rights of vulnerable groups and establish a better social support and security system in response to this widespread crisis.

This section collates previous research to shed light on Japan's deficiencies in the protection of foreigners and the problems that need to be overcome in the process of creating a multicultural society. This study analyzes the vulnerable position of foreigners in Japan and the social problems related to foreign residents as revealed by COVID-19. Examine the status and shortcomings of the protection policies provided by the Japanese government for foreign residents.

10 Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications document
https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000401039.pdf (2023/3/3)

11 Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Study Group on the Promotion of Multicultural Conviviality Report
~Toward the Promotion of Multicultural Conviviality in the Region~ (2006)
https://www.soumu.go.jp/kokusai/pdf/sonota_b5.pdf (2023/3/3)

3. Current Status of Foreign Residents in Japan under the COVID-19

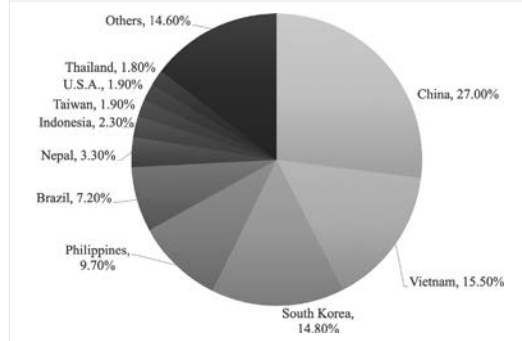
From the discrimination and differential treatment of Koreans in Japan after World War II to the various difficulties faced by South Americans and Chinese, Southeast Asians, and foreigners of Japanese descent who have entered Japan for work or study since the 1990s, these examples demonstrate the inadequate protection of the basic rights of foreign residents in Japanese society. In January 2020, the first domestic case of COVID-19 infection was discovered in Japan, and the difficulties faced by foreigners in Japanese society have been further highlighted since the spread of COVID-19.

(1) Foreign population in Japan 2020-2021

According to data from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan, at the end of 2020, the number of mid-to-long-term residents was 2,582,686, and the number of special permanent residents was 304,430, bringing the total number of foreign residents to 2,887,116¹². And countries/regions of origin of foreign residents in Japan and the status of residence are as follows.

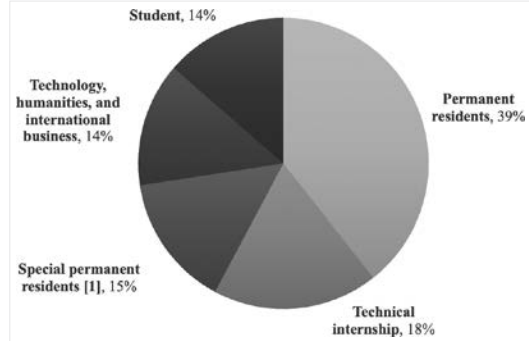
At the end of 2021, the number of foreign residents were 2,760,635, a decrease of 126,481 (4.4%)

Table 1: The origin of foreign residents in Japan 2020 (top 10)



Source: Table compiled by the author based on data from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan

Table 2: Status of Residence 2020 (top 5)



Source: Table compiled by the author based on data from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan

from the end of 2020¹³. The number of mid-to long-term residents was 2,464,219, and the number of special permanent residents was 296,416. Among the top 10 countries/regions, the U.S. has replaced Taiwan in the 8th position since the end of the previous year.

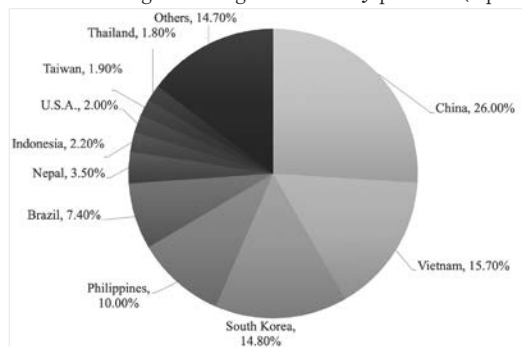
12 Immigration Services Agency of Japan - Statistics on foreign residents 2020.
https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/press/13_00014.html (2023/3/3)

13 Immigration Services Agency of Japan - Statistics on foreign residents 2021.
https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/press/13_00001.html (2023/1/3)

The number of foreign nationals in Japan has decreased due to entry and exit restrictions caused by COVID-19 and the reduction of non-essential international population movements. The number of foreign residents in Japan is mainly composed of those with permanent residency, and the number of those who obtain permanent residency status has increased between 2020 and 2021. The number of technical intern trainees, who were in second place at the end of 2020, will have dropped to third place by the end of 2021 due to a significant decrease in the number of trainees. The number of international students has also decreased significantly because of the entry and exit policy.

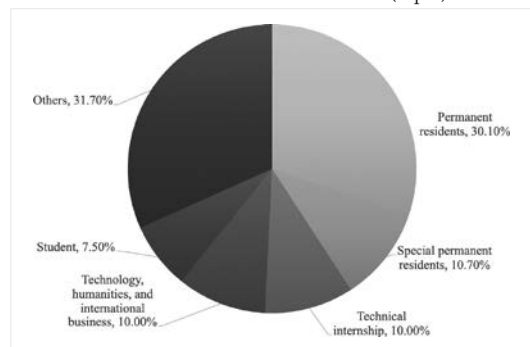
(2) Situation of Foreign Residents in Japan

Table 3: The origin of foreign residents in Japan 2021 (top 10)



Source: Table compiled by the author based on data from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan

Table 4: Status of Residence 2021 (top 5)



Source: Table compiled by the author based on data from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan

From 2020 to April 2022, Japan experienced several major outbreaks of infection¹⁴ and declared a state of emergency several times¹⁵ (Table 5). The impact of COVID-19 is not limited to the medical field; it has long changed the lives of people in all aspects of international mobility, medical care, economy, labor, education, and social security.

Table 5: "Waves" of new coronavirus cases

Wave 1: January 29~June 13, 2020
Wave 2: June 14~October 9, 2020
Wave 3: October 10, 2020, ~ February 28, 2021
Wave 4: March 1, 2021, to June 20, 2021
Wave 5: June 21, 2021~December 16, 2021
Wave 6: December 17, 2021, and thereafter

Source: Table compiled by the author based on data provided by YAHOO! Japan News

14 YAHOO! Japan News

<https://news.yahoo.co.jp/articles/83b58aeb9f1fe6beb04629925e2e66e1fb127eab?page=1> (2023/1/3)

15 Cabinet Secretariat Report

https://corona.go.jp/news/news_20200421_70.html (2023/1/3)

The spread of COVID-19 has marginalized vulnerable groups in society and placed these groups at a disadvantage economically and in terms of access to medical and social security services. The prevalence of COVID-19, economic shocks, and racism are deeply intertwined, resulting in many of the rights of foreign residents not being fully guaranteed during the crisis.

Due to a variety of factors including economic status, race, gender, and occupation, foreigners are at a relative disadvantage in Japanese society and are more likely to be directly affected by COVID-19. Prejudicial and discriminatory behavior against foreign residents recurs under the influence of COVID-19, such as denial of access, employment discrimination, school bullying, and hate speech.

First, language barriers affect all aspects of the lives of foreign residents in Japan. It is difficult for foreign residents to get enough information quickly due to language limitations, as even Japanese people have difficulty fully understanding the health system, quarantine measures, and daily medical updates. Moreover, the fact that the latest news is first released in Japanese and then translated into other languages results in a time lag in information transmission, which also prevents many foreigners from obtaining the latest COVID-19 information as quickly as Japanese people.

In a study by Sudo et al. (2020), it was noted that foreigners are prone to panic when they are infected due to language limitations and cultural differences. When administrative or hospital staff need to communicate directly with foreigners, especially when it comes to medical terminology or administrative terms, language limitations, such as foreigners do not understand Japanese, or staff do not speak foreign languages, also lead to barriers to communication between them.

Language issues are often the first thing that comes to mind when talking about foreigners. A large amount of academic research has been accumulated on the language problems of foreigners, and the Japanese government has repeatedly mentioned in many important documents the need to solve the language barriers of foreigners. However, in life-threatening crises such as COVID-19, which exposed scenes in the delivery of vital information, administrative and medical services, and communication between doctors and patients, the language problems faced by foreigners in their countries of immigration have not been adequately addressed.

Second, in times of economic downturn, foreign workers are much more vulnerable to unfair treatment and even dismissal. Voluntary restrictions on going out, temporary suspension of economic activities, and shortened business hours have led to the economic downturn. Many employers resorted to paying cuts or layoffs to maintain their operations, resulting in foreigners earning less or losing their jobs and increasing the number of foreigners in financial difficulty.

According to the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare's "Report on the Employment Status of Foreign Nationals" as of the end of October 2021, the number of foreign workers was 1,727,221 (1,724,328 in the previous year). By industry, the "manufacturing" sector had the largest number of foreign workers, accounting for 27.0% of the total. The year-on-year increase in the number of foreign workers was negative in

the “Manufacturing” (-3.4%) and “Wholesale and Retail” (-1.3%) sectors¹⁶. Despite the government’s ongoing policy of actively accepting professional and skilled workers, most foreign workers are in the “manufacturing” and “wholesale and retail” sectors, as the above data shows. Foreign workers in these industries tend to be at the bottom of the labor force and therefore they are more vulnerable to unfair treatment. As Suzuki (2021) notes, employers who accept foreign workers are typically the “weakest part” of the industrial structure and have their hands full when it comes to protecting themselves in times of crisis.

Third, negative feelings have become more prominent under the influence of the COVID-19, leading to attacks, defamation, and discrimination. According to a 2020 report by the Subcommittee on Responses to New Coronavirus Infections (Working Group on Prejudice, Discrimination and Privacy)¹⁷, unfair discrimination and defamation of infected individuals and their families have emerged because of the avoidance of infectious diseases. Some expressed fear that telling a company about an infection could lead to a work stoppage or dismissal.

In addition, there have been many cases of discrimination against healthcare workers and their families throughout Japan, such as bullying, denial of services needed to make ends meet, and refusal to allow their children to attend kindergarten and participate in activities. Also, there have been many cases of reputation damage, inquiries and false rumors in facilities and stores used by infected people. At the same time, exclusion and discrimination against foreigners has become notable, with some restaurants and stores posting signs prohibiting foreigners from entering the premises.

There is also a high incidence of spreading rumors on the Internet, making biased and discriminatory statements, and defaming and slandering foreign residents. For example, according to Toyokeizai news¹⁸, the Itako Public Health Center in Ibaraki Prefecture released a document containing highly offensive and inappropriate advice on preventing COVID-19 infection, for example, do not eat with foreigners, there are many new cases of coronavirus suspected of being contracted by foreigners, and always wear a mask when talking with foreigners.

4. Interview Survey of Highly Educated Foreigners

In the interview survey conducted in July 2023, six highly educated Chinese people living in Japan were selected. They are all from graduate schools of top universities in Japan and are currently studying or have

16 Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, “Report on the Employment Status of Foreign Nationals 2021” https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_23495.html (2023/1/3)

17 Survey results on prejudice and discrimination and efforts to address these issues https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/ful/wg_h_3_6.pdf (2023/1/3)

18 Toyokeizai online <https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/431207> (2023/3/3)

already gotten their degrees to start working in Japan. A total of three males and three females were selected for this survey, four of whom are currently enrolled in school and two of whom have graduated and started working; in addition, three of them are conducting their graduate school studies in Japanese and three in English. Through interviews, these highly educated foreigners were surveyed on 1. mastery of the Japanese language, 2. study/work situation, 3. changes in income, 4. methods of gathering information, 5. changes in countries of entry/exit, and 6. discrimination.

4.1. Interviewee 1: company employee, English course, MBA degree

Interviewee 1, whose name is HUI, has been working in Japan for more than three years after she obtained her degree from a Japanese national university. First of all, regarding the language situation, HUI said that she passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Test and has the N1 level certificate, and in her daily life and work, the language barrier basically does not exist, but when she encounters some proper nouns she has not learned she still needs the help of others to explain the meaning of the proper nouns.

Second, for the study/work situation, Hui graduated in April 2020 from a student to a company staff. Regarding the difficulties she encountered while studying or working (including job hunting) during the epidemic period (2020-2023), she said that first, in terms of job hunting, the difficulties she encountered were like those encountered by people looking for jobs during the same period, and she did not encounter any special difficulties because she was a foreigner. In terms of her studies, she wanted to continue her doctoral studies while working, but she was unable to do both because she was required to attend school during the epidemic.

Third, regarding the change in her economic situation, she turned from a student to an employee of the company during the epidemic, so her economic situation was basically stable, and her salary was linked to the general social environment and the performance of the company.

Fourth, regarding the method of intelligence gathering, she said that she usually looked up medical information on the Internet herself, and that some hospitals would inform her of policies that she could utilize. For government grants, she searches the Internet herself or reads the latest news on Chinese SNS. Immigration policies are usually researched on the internet by herself, and her company also provides support from lawyers.

Fifth, regarding immigration during the epidemic, she said that so far, she had not been back to China. However, she had been to the UK for work and basically the immigration process was relatively smooth. She is going to China on business next month, and due to changes in Sino-Japanese and Sino-US relations, the company has become very cautious about this matter, but she has not encountered any difficulties with immigration for the time being.

Sixth, regarding the physical and mental health condition during the epidemic, HUI said that she had greater problems with her mental health because she entered the company and started working between 2020-2021, and then basically worked alone at home, and people in the workplace were not prepared to welcome

newcomers during the epidemic. Physically, because she can't go out during the epidemic, she has to stay at home all the time, exercising less, and her body's quality has deteriorated. To solve these problems of physical and mental health, she basically prefers to seek the help of specialists, and the company also has relevant psychologist assistance.

Seventh, regarding xenophobia and prejudice against foreigners, she believes that it is more the service industry's discomfort with foreigners after the epidemic that she feels rather than discrimination and prejudice against foreigners. Since she looks rather un-Japanese, when shopping outside, it can be clearly felt that the waiters hesitate to receive her for fear that she does not speak Japanese.

4.2. Interviewee 2: Japanese course, Master's degree in private university in progress

Interviewee 2, whose name is KIM, is an international student studying at a prestigious private university in Japan. First, regarding his mastery of the Japanese language, he said that he has taken the JLPT N1 level and has basically no difficulty in communicating in daily life. Sometimes he encounters proper nouns that he doesn't understand, but he can understand the meanings just by following up on the meanings.

Second, regarding his study/work situation, he resigned from his company during the epidemic and returned to school to continue his studies. The company he worked for was in the catering industry, and the company was struggling during the epidemic, so he had to find another way out and chose to further his education.

Third, regarding the change in economic situation, he was a salaried employee of the company from 2020 to 2022, so he was financially stable. In 2022, after he left the company, he was not salaried, but he received unemployment insurance and a subsidy from the Japanese government, so he was financially stable during the period of his schooling after he left the company.

Fourth, regarding the method of collecting information, he usually got information about various government policies through his friends, such as government grants.

Fifth, regarding immigration issues, Kim said that he did not leave Japan during the epidemic. He had considered going back to China during the epidemic, but flights were rare, airfare was too expensive, and immigration policies were always changing, so he had to give up.

Sixth, about physical and mental health, he indicated that he had not encountered too many problems. He was in regular contact with friends and did not feel lonely. The Japanese government's livelihood policies, such as sending food to his family during self-quarantine and providing various subsidies, were very effective, so he did not feel too uneasy.

Seventh, regarding xenophobia and prejudice against foreigners, he said that in his daily life and work, he basically dealt with the Chinese people and did not have much contact with the Japanese. Therefore, I didn't feel too much prejudice or discrimination against foreigners.

4.3. Interviewee 3: Japanese course, Master's degree in National University in progress

Interviewee 3, whose name is YUAN, comes from a prestigious national university and has obtained the N1 level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). However, she said that there were language barriers in every aspect of her daily life, such as when reading literature, or in situations where there was a lot of specialized terminology, such as going to the hospital. At the same time, she thought that she felt a decline in her Japanese language ability because she was studying alone at home for a long time during the epidemic and did not have the opportunity to communicate with others or speak Japanese.

Second, regarding the study/work situation, in 2020, YUAN was a spectator student at a national university, and due to the epidemic, many classes began to limit the number of students at that time, resulting in many classes being open only to regular students, and spectators were unable to participate. The school's reading room also began to control the number of students, so that only regular students could utilize it, and auditing students could only study at home. This also resulted in her having very few choices of classes and no opportunity to interact with other students. It was depressing and anxiety-inducing to study alone all the time, and in 2021, she enrolled in her master's program, but all the time she was studying online, with very few opportunities to interact with her classmates.

Third, regarding the change in economic situation, she stated that she had to reduce the frequency of her part-time job after the start of the epidemic to ensure her safety, which led to a decrease in her income.

Fourth, regarding the method of collecting information, she usually gets the latest information from Chinese SNS. At the same time, to learn Japanese, she basically reads NHK news every day, so she knows a lot of policy trends through this channel.

Fifth, regarding immigration issues, she indicated that she did not leave Japan during the epidemic. Sixth, about physical and mental health, she felt that she was both physically and mentally unhealthy during this period. She was infected with the coronavirus, and her symptoms were so severe that she had no energy to buy supplies and medicine. However, fortunately, because she lived in the international student dormitory, there were many students in the neighborhood who helped her. Mentally, she was under a lot of stress because she was staying at home alone and had to prepare for the graduate school entrance exams, so she was in a state of anxiety and depression.

Seventh, regarding prejudice and discrimination against foreigners, she said that she had hardly ever experienced it. But she still felt offended when she saw a sign at a drugstore that said only one mask per person in Chinese.

4.4. Interviewee 4: university lecturer, Japanese course, Doctoral Degree in National University

Interviewee 4, whose name is HE, has earned her doctorate and started working as a university lecturer. First, she said that she has no difficulty in mastering the Japanese language in most cases, but when she hears

some proper nouns in hospitals and other places, she needs further explanation from the staff.

Second, regarding her study/work situation, she started her doctoral studies in 2020, which coincided with the outbreak of the epidemic, resulting in almost no face-to-face lectures. She also had no family in Japan, leaving her in a mentally and physically isolated situation. During her job search, she lacked the network with her school, classmates, and seniors due to the outbreak, which prevented her from gathering enough information about the recruitment process.

After joining the university, the covid had ended, but due to the lack of socialization for such a long period of time, she had a certain degree of difficulty in communicating in the workplace.

Third, regarding the change in economic situation, the epidemic did not affect her income, and the part-time job was changed from offline to online, eliminating the time spent on commuting and allowing her to receive more jobs instead.

Fourth, on intelligence gathering, she thinks that in many cases, people have to take the initiative to search for information on government policies. It would be difficult for foreigners to find out the information on these subsidies if they had not been notified accordingly. In addition to the subsidies provided by the state, there are many support policies that exist, but it is difficult for foreigners to get the latest information as easily as Japanese people. Another hidden difficulty is that there are some policies with ambiguous conditions, and when foreigners go to negotiate on their own, they are often told by government employees that they are unable to apply for them, but once they entrust the matter to a professional such as an administrative scrivener, these problems are solved smoothly.

Fifth, on the issue of entry and exit, she said that there was no opportunity to see family members during the epidemic. And even for those who were in the process of entering Japan from China, there was a need to submit some additional documents, which led to uncertainty about whether it was possible to enter the country.

Sixth, regarding discrimination and prejudice against foreigners, she said that she did not feel any prejudice or discrimination against foreigners as a result of the epidemic. There are prejudices that are always there, like if you have an Asian face, they default that you have to speak Japanese well. But if you are of another skin color, you will not be treated so strictly.

4.5. Interviewee 5: English course, Master's degree in progress

Interviewee 5, whose name is MA, is a student studying for a master's degree at a prestigious national university. First, regarding his mastery of the Japanese language, he said that he does not have a certificate of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, and he does not speak Japanese very well. He usually uses English to communicate with his teachers and classmates at school. When he went to the hospital, he was accompanied by a Japanese-speaking classmate.

Second, regarding the study/work situation, he said that his research topic required interaction with people, but it was difficult to advance his research when the epidemic was severe. Third, regarding the change in financial situation, he said that his life in Japan was relatively stable because he had a scholarship from his school.

Fourth, regarding information gathering methods, MA said that he got most of his information from teachers and classmates, and that he seldom took the initiative to search for information on Japanese websites. Fifth, regarding the issue of entering and leaving the country, he said that when he came to Japan there were still very few flights, expensive airfare, and extra documents to submit, but it was already in the late stage of the epidemic, so he didn't feel too much distress.

Sixth, regarding physical and mental health, he said that when he came to Japan the government no longer restricted people's mobility, so he didn't have a lot of mental stress. At the end of last year, when the epidemic broke out again in Japan and many people around him started to get infected, he was more worried about his own safety and felt the psychological pressure of the epidemic, but it was not serious.

Seventh, regarding the prejudice against foreigners, he said that he did not feel any prejudice at the moment, because he could not speak Japanese, so he could not understand the Japanese people's comments about him, but he had heard from other students that there was xenophobia against foreigners in the school as well. However, his lab mates are very sincere and friendly, so he doesn't have many feelings about it.

4.6. Interviewee 6: English course, Master's degree in progress

Interviewee 6, whose name is RUI, has less than 3 years of work experience in Japan and has returned to the university for his MBA. First, RUI has a Japanese Language Proficiency Test N2 level certificate, and has no difficulty in daily communication, or in the administrative contents of the ward office in general. In the hospital, there may be some obstacles when it comes to medical terms, but the staff explains slowly or through an interpreter, and it is not a problem.

Second, regarding the study/work situation, RUI left the company and went back to school around 2021. When RUI decided to quit the company to pursue studies, the epidemic provided convenience instead. For example, usually foreigners with work visas face forced departure once they lose their jobs for more than three months, but because of the difficulty of leaving the country due to the epidemic, the policy is not strictly enforced, and exceptions can be made. After enrolling in the school, the classes are mainly online, but RUI thinks that it is good because it saves time spent on transportation and allows them to spend their time better.

Third, regarding the change in economic situation, RUI indicated that the income was very unstable after coming back to study. Fourth, regarding the method of intelligence gathering, the policy of entering and leaving the country basically relies on the government's official website and news pushes. Medical care is also a matter of searching when you encounter problems. Vaccine and subsidy information is mainly based on passive

reading of mailboxes.

Fifth, regarding immigration, RUI said that I traveled between China and Japan in 2021 and 2022. Comparing to now, the biggest difference is that the procedures are cumbersome, and the airfare is very expensive. There are also differentiated and discriminatory immigration controls.

Sixth, regarding physical and mental health, RUI said that online learning did not bring about feelings of loneliness and anxiety, but rather discomfort after gradually resuming face-to-face classes. Seventh, regarding discrimination and prejudice against foreigners, during the epidemic, RUI encountered Japanese people who said, "Wuhan virus". But generally, have not seen the Japanese government staff to show discrimination.

5. Foreign Resident Support and the Social Inclusion

As stated in the interview findings, foreigners face various difficulties under the influence of COVID-19, such as economic, labor, medical, administrative services, and discrimination. Even these highly talented individuals who possess high educational qualifications and are welcomed by the Japanese society, they face a variety of difficulties. For example, they still have some language barriers in hospitals and other settings where specialized vocabulary is required. As foreigners, they also find it difficult to have their own social networks and communities for exchanging various types of information, as Japanese people do, when it comes to gathering various types of up-to-date information. In response to these problems, the Japanese government has provided a series of support measures to address the difficulties faced by foreign residents to keep them from being excluded from Japanese society.

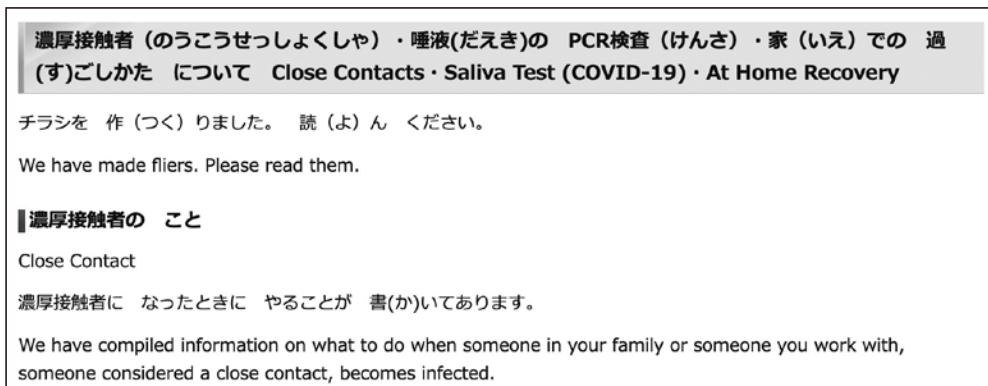
First, regarding linguistic barriers and the communication of information during emergencies. As one of the support measures for foreigners, each prefectural and municipal government provided telephone support, easy Japanese, multilingual information on websites and SNS, and established multilingual consultation services. Easy Japanese refers to Japanese that makes it easier for children as well as foreigners to understand by replacing difficult kanji with hiragana and simpler words. Regarding the communication of information during emergencies such as disasters and COVID-19, Long (2012) noted that multilingual broadcasts during disasters can cause problems in terms of immediacy, applicability, the number of languages that can be handled, and regional characteristics, and also that since many foreigners living in Japan are from non-English speaking countries, in times of emergency, use Easy Japanese is easier to convey information for foreigners than to provide information in English. To communicate information to foreigners that may be difficult for the Japanese to understand, such as policies, new systems, and medical terminology updated as needed in emergencies, it is necessary to provide multilingual support and to use "easy Japanese".

In the case of the Tokyo Metropolitan Minato City Government, when browsing the official website, people have the option to choose from Japanese, Easy Japanese, English, Chinese and Korean. And when

providing information related to COVID-19 on their website (Figure 1)¹⁹, the Minato City Government added hiragana after the kanji and marked the English translation to make the more difficult and specialized medical terms easier to understand. For beginners in Japanese and children, it is easier to understand using hiragana labels than kanji.

According to Table 1 and Table 3, the top five countries in terms of the number of foreign residents by region are China, Vietnam, South Korea, Philippines, and Brazil, with only a few countries where English is the first language. In this case, it would be ideal to provide information in the language of each country individually, but there are limits to its implementation. Therefore, “easy Japanese” is much easier to communicate with than unfamiliar English.

Easy Japanese is also useful for Japanese people who do not understand English. In some cases, the meaning of the text is completely lost or changed by using translation software. And by using simple Japanese words to express the meaning, it not only saves the step of translation, but also prevents misunderstanding caused by translation errors. Especially in the case of disasters, diseases, and other situations where people’s lives and property are at risk, the spread and promotion of easy Japanese becomes even more important.



Source: by the author based on Tokyo Metropolitan Minato City Government Website

Figure 1: Example of easy Japanese

Second, about economic problems faced by foreign nationals, the Japanese government has launched measures to support for mid-to long-term foreign residents against the effects of the COVID-19²⁰. And prefectures and private organizations were providing support such as aid money, provision of food and daily necessities, and short-term employment to foreigners suffering from sudden economic changes caused by the new corona-

19 Tokyo Metropolitan Minato City Government Website

<https://www.city.minato.tokyo.jp/hokenyobou/yasanichi.html> (2023/3/10)

20 Support Measures for Foreign Nationals and Receiving Institutions in Response to the Impact of the COVID-19 (1) 2022/5/1

<https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001322500.pdf> (2023/3/10)

virus infection, which enabled them to alleviate their poverty.

In terms of employment, in addition to the support policies provided by the Japanese government in the table above, for foreigners who are unemployed or have difficulty finding employment, cooperation between public institutions and educational institutions provides employment support for foreign students, and private organizations also provide employment support for foreign residents. The infection situation in Japan is still severe and it will take time for the economy to recover, so it is necessary to develop a support system for foreigners from a long-term perspective. However, this attempt to include foreigners in the public support system should be considered worthwhile.

Third, regarding prejudice and discrimination, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the spread of violence and discrimination based on racism and xenophobia. One of the factors that contribute to xenophobia is the negative reporting of foreigners in the mass media. For example, there is a deliberate emphasis on nationality, associating the attribute nationality with negative information and emphasizing the attributes of certain people, such as that foreigners would pose a threat to public safety and health in their home countries. Such oriented reporting promotes popular prejudice against foreigner groups and leads to the rejection of certain foreign groups. Yamazaki and Nishitane (2021) stated that Japanese residents do not have many opportunities to interact with foreigners, and because the media only reports bad news about foreigners committing crimes, there is little awareness that foreign residents are also members of the local community.

Some infected people's nationalities, schools or workplaces have been reported in the media, resulting in the infected persons and related persons have suffered defamation and discrimination on the Internet. To prevent the spread of discriminatory practices due to the infection of foreigners and the outbreak of clusters, municipalities opened consultation services, set up support networks of doctors and lawyers, and called for the prevention of discrimination at press conferences and on the Internet. Lawyers are available at the Tokyo Human Rights Plaza to provide legal advice and the Kyoto Legal Rescue Team advises those who have had their human rights violated, focusing on judicial remedies.

6. Reflections on the difficulties faced by foreign residents and the government's response

First, on the issue of language, communication barriers have arisen in many cases due to a certain degree of language proficiency limitations on the part of both Japanese and foreigners. As a countermeasure to this problem, the Government has been promoting the publication of multilingual information on its website and the popularization of simple Japanese. However, this alone is not enough. For example, most of the application procedures for various subsidies, including the Unified Subsidy, are only available in Japanese. For foreign residents who lack Japanese language skills, they generally face difficulties in reading these administrative documents, obtaining information, and receiving administrative services.

Secondly, in terms of labor and economic issues, many industries have been severely hit by COVID-19,

and the economic income of foreigners (manual workers, foreign students working in service industries or living part-time) mentioned in the previous section has also been severely affected. In addition to foreign workers in various industries, foreign operators have also been affected. Although the national and regional governments have been actively providing subsidies to support the restaurant industry and other severely affected industries, the types of government subsidies and the application procedures are very complicated, which is a great challenge for foreigners.

Thirdly, regarding discrimination and prejudice against foreigners exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19, discriminatory remarks, and offensive behaviors against foreigners, as well as hatred against Asians, occur frequently not only in Japan but also in other parts of the world. Every activity within a community takes place in the context of the relationships between the residents of the community. Both Japanese and foreigners are equal members of the community and live on a common social basis. In addition to administrative support in emergency situations, social security policies and other institutional measures in peacetime can be used to support any individual or group. No individual or group should be excluded from social security. The creation of a multicultural coexistence, the equal protection of the rights and interests of every member of society, and the elimination of discrimination remain important themes for the future.

7. Conclusion

From the increase of new residents and naturalized citizens after the 1980s, the relationship between Japanese society and foreigners has become closer and complicated. With declining birth rates, an aging population and labor shortages, the attitude of Japan toward accepting foreign residents has also become more aggressive. In this context, immigration policy is certainly going to become a major issue that Japan must face in the future.

In recent years, the government level has finally had some discussions on how to promote multicultural integration and how to accept foreign nationals, however, comprehensive policy development is still insufficient. Due to the long-standing lack of a systematic integration policy at the central government level to provide a comprehensive vision of how to accommodate foreign residents, policies, and countermeasures to support foreign residents have been left entirely to local governments and communities. Communities with concentrations of foreign residents work with civil society organizations and the government to promote their own support measures for foreign residents. Through the continuous efforts of the Japanese government, civil society organizations and foreign residents, the protection of foreign residents in Japan is gradually being improved. However, COVID-19 still reveals the fact that some of the policies in COVID-19 also bring to the fore the shallowness of the government's daily advocacy of "coexistence with foreign nationals," those foreign residents are still in a vulnerable position, and that the social security system remains inadequate.

Although many industries currently rely on foreigners, when faced with economic fluctuations, illness, or major social changes (such as disasters), foreigners are far less resilient to risk than Japanese people. Therefore,

given the experience of COVID-19, it is necessary to strengthen various social security systems to help foreigners improve their risk tolerance and protect their rights and interests. In addition, to supporting foreigners to learn Japanese and develop their professional skills, there is a need to build ties between Japanese residents and foreigners through various activities and exchanges in the local community to integrate foreigners into Japanese society. It is also necessary for local governments and civil society organizations to have a general understanding of the situation of foreigners in the community. To deepen their understanding of their culture and characteristics when responding to emergencies such as disasters or COVID-19.

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