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I. International Labor Migration

According to the ILO (a report of the ILO), there are now about 80 million people around the world living in a country other than their country of birth. Each year, there are a further 10 million people who migrate permanently to another country. In addition, there are more than 18 million refugees who have been driven from their country by natural disasters or political oppression. (Stalker, 1994)

According to the OECD report *Trends in International Migration* (1999), the total number of foreigners living in 16 European countries including Germany, France and England, and Japan amounts to about 21.5 million people and the number of foreigners working in these countries has reached about 8.5 million. Furthermore, since the end of the 1980s, there has been a surge of people of German descent returning to Germany, the so-called *Aussiedler*, and since 1990, of Japanese Brazilians to Japan. This tendency for people who had once left their home country as emigrants and their descendants to return to their home country may be regarded as characteristic of current patterns of migration.

In terms of its causes and the forms it takes, this cross-border movement of people can be explained using a number of concepts such as foreign worker, migrant, and refugee.

1. The Importance of a Historical Perspective

International labor migration cannot be understood without considering its relationship to world history. The European countries which today are receiving large numbers of foreign residents have in the past sent their people abroad as migrants.

In the early stages of capitalism, the usual form of movement was to abandon one's home country and migrate permanently as in the case of Irish emigration to England or North America. If we look at the changing structure of migration to America since the early nineteenth century, we can see that there were three major waves of immigration starting with Ireland, England, Germany and the other countries of Northern Europe, followed by Russia, Italy and the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe and then Mexico, Central America and the countries of Asia, including the Philippines, Vietnam, China, Korea and India. Leaving aside the details of periods and nationality, between 1846 and 1939, 59 million people migrated from Europe to North and South America. (Stalker, 1994)

Historically, the cross-border movement of people has occurred in times of great

social upheaval such as the Irish Famine in the mid-19th century, the Communist Revolution in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 20th century and the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Alternatively, it occurred as a result of the colonization or colonial policies of modern states and the struggle between them to secure colonial territories. Typical examples are the foreign workers (*Fremdarbeiter*) in the wartime economy of Nazi Germany or the Korean workers who were brought from the Korean colonies to wartime Japan and forced to work in military production or in mines and the agricultural migrants (the first emigration group in 1932 and the second group in 1933 were referred to as 'armed migrants') who were sent from Japanese villages to Manchuria as a matter of national policy. (Kuwajima, 1979)

Japan and Germany were both defeated in the Second World War and both experienced a period of high economic growth after the War. However, there was a major difference in the policies the two countries adopted to secure the labor force necessary for high economic growth. That is, in the case of Germany which was a divided country after the War, a necessary condition for economic growth was how to solve the problem of shortage of labor which emerged soon after the War. West Germany signed bilateral agreements for the supply of labor first with Italy in 1955 and then with Spain and Greece (1960), Turkey (1961) and Portugal (1964) and subsequently also with Tunisia (1965) and Morocco (1966). Germany thus secured the labor necessary for economic growth in the 1960s by admitting foreign workers in the form of 'guest workers'.

On the other hand, Japan, which had a vast agricultural labor force, was able to secure the labor force necessary for economic growth from domestic rural areas by means of labor mobility policies. In postwar Japan where there was no necessity to import foreign labor from overseas, except for skilled workers who had skills not available in the country, foreigners were, in principle, forbidden to work. The exclusion of non-specialist foreign workers under this 'closed-door to foreigner' or 'closed society' approach is a long-standing feature of Japanese policy towards foreign workers.

The different historical experience of West Germany which 'admitted' foreign workers and Japan which 'shunned' foreign workers resulted in the differences in the foreign population and policies towards foreigners that are apparent between the two countries today. For example, the foreign resident population and its proportion of the total population or the number of foreign workers and their proportion of the workforce for the two countries are as follows. Whereas, in Germany, the number of foreign residents is about 7.37 million or 9.0% of the population and the number of foreign workers about 2.52 million or 9.1% of the workforce, in Japan, the figures are about 1.48 million or 1.2% of the population and 660,000 or 1.0% of the workforce respectively. (see OECD 1999)

2. The Globalization of International Labor Migration

As already noted, there are more than 20 million foreign residents living in European countries, excluding Eastern Europe. Moreover, America, Canada and Australia, which are still admitting migrants each year, have a combined foreign born population of more than 30 million. A recent feature of migration to these countries is the ever-increasing proportion of migrants from Asian countries.

Furthermore, there is an increasing diversification of patterns of labor migration

in regional terms, among the countries of Africa, between the Middle Eastern oil-producing countries and the surrounding countries or Asian countries, or among the countries of the Asian region. This can, in a real sense, be called the globalization of international labor mobility. Moreover, the movement of people is not limited to movement between two countries but, increasingly, straddles the boundaries of several countries. This phenomenon is referred to as 'stair-step migration'. There is also the phenomenon of 'chain migration' which revolves around personal relationships based on family or relatives, friends and acquaintances, regions or ethnic groups. There are also countries which are both sending and receiving countries; that is, they not only admit foreign workers from other countries but also send their own people abroad as foreign workers. Yet again, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the additional dimension of movement from East to West was added to the cross-border migration of people making it an ever more multi-tiered phenomenon. (see Sato, 1998)

3. Issues associated with International Migration

The diverse forms and patterns of international labor migration which have been evident both historically and are even more evident today raise many issues. For example, there is a need to address such fundamental questions as 'What are the background to and factors behind the phenomenon of foreign workers?'; 'What causes people to migrate across national boundaries?'. It is frequently said that, 'It is a mistake to look for the causes of migration in poverty. Why? Because the fact is that movement is not limited to migration of people from poor countries or regions nor are the people who migrate from the developing to the developed countries, the poorest people in those countries.' However, it is difficult to dispute the view that the cause of migration from Ireland to the New World lay in the poverty that resulted from England's colonial policies. (Miller & Wagner, 1994)

In order to understand the causes and background of contemporary international labor migration, it is necessary to analyze the situation from a global perspective. For example, on the one hand, there is the view that the explanation is to be found in the so-called North-South problem, that is, the economic inequality between the developed and the developing countries, and on the other, there is the view that identifies the international movement of people as movement from the 'periphery' to the 'centre' in the context of the development of the world capitalist market. That is, it looks for the explanation in the process of integration of the third world into the capitalist world economy. (see Morita, 1994)

However, it is also true that international labor mobility is effected by policies such as the policy of the West German government in the 1960s to positively encourage the entry of foreign workers or the present policy of the Philippine and Pakistani governments to encourage their people to go overseas for work. There is a need to identify the common features of the historical phenomenon of migration and the present phenomenon of globalized international labor mobility and, at the same time, the distinctive features of international labor migration in the context of the rapid globalization of the capitalist economy which is occurring as a result of developments in international modes of transport and travel and in communications technology.

Another major issue is to address the actual problems which confront sending and receiving countries and to identify policies to resolve those problems. That

includes, in the case of the receiving countries, the problem of the challenge this poses to the future social fabric of the country. As is frequently pointed out, international labor mobility in economic terms amounts to the movement of 'labor as commodity' but it is also the international movement of 'people'. Or, to put it another way, it is the movement of people who are of different races or ethnicities, have different languages, nationalities, religions and also different cultures and social customs. Consequently, the countries or local communities which receive foreign workers are confronted with issues of social discrimination or prejudice and a myriad of every day social problems associated with these differences.

What starts out as short-term, single, movement of guest workers, changes as the period of stay lengthens and increasing numbers of people bring their families from their home country to join them, or those who go overseas to seek work while still single, marry, have children and start to build a family. The acceptance of foreign workers, the increasing length of their stay and concentration in patterns of residence creates friction with residents of the local community. In addition, family reunion brings problems of housing and problems of education and employment for second and third generation children of migrants.

The diversity of the issues which emerge as a result of international labor migration require multi-disciplinary analysis and research that extends across many fields including economics, politics, sociology, anthropology and education. At the same time, international labor migration is a phenomenon which requires of existing disciplines new analytical approaches and a broadening of research horizons. (see Yamashita, 1996)

II. International Labor Migration: the Japanese Experience

1. The Pre-War and Wartime Period

Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan has not been a stranger to the international movement of people either in terms of sending its people overseas as migrants or of receiving foreign workers. Overseas migration by Japanese prior to the War can be divided broadly into three periods. That is, the first period until 1924 when the main migration destinations were Hawaii and North America; the period up to 1937 when most Japanese migrants went to South America, particularly Brazil and Peru; and finally the period up to 1945, under the full wartime economic mobilization, when migration centred on Manchuria as part of the invasion of China.

On the other hand, the history of receiving foreign workers can be divided into two main periods. That is, the first is the period from 1868 to the annexation of Korea in 1910. This was the period that centred on foreigners of European and American origin who had high-level, specialist knowledge and skills and who were admitted for the contribution they could make to the modernization of the country and the development of capitalism under the slogan of 'abandon Asia and embrace Europe' adopted from Meiji onwards. So this can be called 'the period of hired foreigners'. (see Shimada, 1987) The second period is the period from the annexation of Korea to the end of the Second World War in 1945—the period during which, under Japan's colonial policy, many Korean workers were brought to Japan from the debilitated Korean Peninsula. By the end of the War, if the people who were forcibly

brought to Japan in the last stages of the War are included, there were over 2 million Korean workers in the country.

Japanese policy towards foreigners prior to the War that, on the one hand, gave privileged treatment to European and American foreigners and, on the other, despise Asian foreigners, cast a deep shadow over Japan's postwar policy towards foreigners.

2. Postwar Japan

As mentioned, after the end of the War in 1945, foreigners were, in principle, forbidden to work in the country and for many years, Japan maintained a stance of a 'society closed to foreigners'. Most of the Koreans who had come to Japan before and during the war returned to Korea after the War. Those Koreans who for one reason or another did not return but continued to live in Japan constituted the vast majority of foreigners living in Japan for several decades after the War. For example, the number of Korean residents in Japan in 1950 was about 540,000; that is, about 90 % of the total registered foreign population of 600,000. Even though they constituted the greater part of the foreign population in Japan, for a long time, most Koreans were not acknowledged as foreign workers or residents and suffered social discrimination. For example, many of their children concealed their Korean identity in order to avoid discrimination and had no option but to use Japanese names. Moreover, the many Koreans who were excluded by Japanese companies started their own businesses as grocers, restauranteurs, taxi drivers and as managers of small factories. In 1970, 610,000 or 87% of the total registered foreign population of 710,000 were Koreans. But, in the closed social system of Japan, the foreign worker problem was treated as a special Korean problem and was not acknowledged as a foreign worker or resident problem as in other countries. It was not until after 1970 that the first signs of improvement in employment discrimination by nationality began to be seen.

The Japanese economy which went through a period of high growth in the 1960s without having to admit foreign workers, began to experience labor shortages in the 1970s. However, in the wake of the Oil Crisis in 1973, Japan entered a period of low growth and consequently the need to admit foreign workers in significant numbers did not arise. The unwaivering policy of the Japanese government in the 1960s and 1970s was that 'Japan does not need to admit foreign workers'.

3. A New Stage

As the internationalization of the Japanese economy proceeded in the 1980s, the foreign worker problem in Japan entered a new phase. The overseas expansion of Japanese companies led to a need for foreign workers as the business of domestic firms was internationalized and consequently saw an increase in the employment of foreign workers mainly Europeans and Americans. On the other hand, the majority of foreign workers from Asia between 1980 and 1985 were women from the Philippines and Thailand. They entered on entertainer or tourist visas and worked but their employment was basically limited to the sex industry. Again these women workers were treated as a special problem referred to as the '*Japayuki-san*' [1] problem and not acknowledged as part of a general foreign worker problem.

The foreign worker problem in Japan finally came to light with the increase in male migrant workers from Asia following the rising value of the yen after the Plaza Accord in 1985. Japan had finally reached a stage in its internationalization where

it could no longer avoid the kinds of foreign worker problems experienced by other countries.

The rising value of the yen pushed up Japanese wage levels in international terms and increased the earnings differentials and the economic gap between Japan and other Asian countries. In addition, the economic slowdown in the oil-producing countries of the Middle East which had taken large numbers of migrant workers from the Asian countries was one of the factors which redirected the flow of these migrant workers towards Japan. On the other hand, the growth of the services sector in the domestic economy saw a fundamental change in the industrial structure. At the same time, with the increasing trend towards small families and aging of the population, the problem of the shortage of labor for jobs with low wages and poor working conditions—the so-called 3 K (or 3D; dirty, dangerous and difficult) jobs—became increasingly apparent. The people who took on the jobs in the subcontract parts makers in the automotive and electrical industries and in other small-medium and very small enterprises which were short of labor were male foreign workers from Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Korea and other Asian countries. But they entered in a situation where foreign workers were still prohibited from working in Japan and therefore became illegal migrant workers. To put it simply, the demand for foreign workers in Japan matched with the supply of labor in the Asian countries in disregard of the artificial limitations posed by national boundaries. This was the beginning of the problem of the admission of foreign workers. It saw a growing voice from business circles seeking the acceptance of foreign workers; in other words, opening of Japan's domestic labor market.

The internationalization of the Japanese economy was forcing a change in the Japanese government's policy of prohibiting foreigners from working in Japan. In particular, at the end of the 1980s, the problem of the acceptance of unskilled foreign workers from Asian countries began to attract attention as a social issue. As a result, in December, 1989, the 'Immigration Control and Refugees Recognition Act' was amended and came into force on the 1st of June the following year. Against the background of these changes in the problem of foreign workers, the trends in the foreign population in Japan have been included in the OECD's annual report: *Trends in International Migration* (see SOPEMI) from 1991.

4. After the Amendment of the 'Immigration Law'

Under the new 'Immigration Law', the categories of legal status of employment for foreigners were expanded. However, they were still limited to occupational areas of specialist knowledge, medicine, education and international business required for the internationalization of the economy. Consequently, the unskilled foreign workers (the vast majority of whom are from Asian countries) who had been the focus of the problem are still prohibited from working in Japan.

The result was that, while continuing to ignore the social problems of the lengthening residence of foreign workers and of exclusion and discrimination against foreigners, the issue of solving the problem of labor shortage remained. One of the ways of addressing this issue was the relaxation of the conditions for the acceptance of foreign trainees in August, 1990. This change meant that very small firms employing less than 20 people that had not been permitted to take trainees in the past were now allowed to take up to three trainees. Secondly, there was the creation of a new system

of 'Technical Intern Trainees' which was implemented in April, 1993. This was a system by which foreigners, after completing a period of training, could acquire skills while working. However, the period of practical application after the initial training period, in reality, meant work. Initially, the period of residence under this scheme was set at two years but in April, 1997, this was extended to three years. The third measure to address the problem of labor shortage was to grant people of Japanese descent, mainly Japanese Brazilians and Japanese Peruvians, long term residence visas and allow them to work freely in Japan.

Foreigners resident in Japan can broadly be divided into two groups. On the one hand, there is the group consisting of foreigners who entered Japan before 1945, as represented by the Koreans, and their descendants. On the other, there is the group of relatively new foreigners who entered Japan after 1980, or particularly after 1985. The proportion of Koreans resident in Japan relative to the total foreign population has gradually declined—a decline which accelerated markedly particularly after 1990. The proportion declined from about 87% (approximately 610,000) in 1970 to 64% (690,000) in 1990, 50% (680,000) in 1994 and 41% (640,000) in 1999. Most Koreans hold permanent residence visas and there are no restrictions on their work in Japan. Therefore, to this extent, they should be distinguished from new foreign workers who entered Japan since the 1980s.

According to figures for 1997, the total number of foreigners presently working in Japan is about 660,000. This consists of (i)about 110,000 (16.2%) regular foreign workers who hold working visas; (ii)about 230,000 (35.3%) former Japanese emigrants and their descendants such as Japanese Brazilians; and (iii)about 280,000 (41.8%) overstayers who are working illegally.

The revision of the Immigration Law in 1990 broadened the categories which allowed foreigners to work but nonetheless the number of foreign workers who hold regular employment visas in accordance with this law is still only slightly over 100,000. On the other hand, the number of Japanese Brazilians and Japanese Peruvians and so on who hold long term residence visas and do not have any restrictions on their employment increased rapidly after 1990. For example, the number of Brazilians increased from about 60,000 in 1990 to 200,000 in 1996 and about 220,000 in 1998. Their numbers continued to increase despite the bursting of the bubble economy in 1992 and the subsequent protracted recession. The reduction in overtime and decline in wages of these *Nikkeijin*[2] workers caused by the recession shattered their dreams of making money in a short time and resulted in the extension of their period of work and residence in Japan and thus saw an increasing tendency towards family reunion and permanent settlement.

A major characteristic of foreign workers in Japan is the fact that over 40% are overstayers engaged in illegal work. Most of them are foreign workers from Asian countries including Korea, the Philippines, China, Thailand, Malaysia and Iran. Since the amendment of the Immigration Law in 1990, the apprehension of foreigners who are living or working illegally in Japan has been stepped up. For example, in the five years from 1995 to 1999, the number of foreign workers arrested for working illegally was about 230,000. Nevertheless, the number of overstayers, which was about 300,000 in 1993, is still about 280,000. In other words, the number has hardly changed.

Despite the recession in the Japanese economy, the numbers of Japanese

Brazilians continues to grow and the number of Asian foreign workers working illegally has declined only marginally. The factors which lie behind this present situation would appear to be that there is a deep-seated domestic demand for *Nikkeijin* and Asian foreign workers; that there are agents and dispatching companies which supply foreign workers; and the various personal and social networks that have been formed amongst the foreigners living in the country.

III. Conclusion

The 'International Labor Mobility' Project undertaken by the Institute of Comparative Economic Studies is composed of people from a variety of disciplines including history, economics, sociology, geography and anthropology. The analytical approach of the project was to take 'overseas/domestic' as the horizontal axis and 'historical/contemporary' as the vertical axis. It is possible to categorize foreign workers in Japan according to a number of criteria such as legal/illegal, visa status, nationality or region of origin. The approach adopted by the project to research and analyze the circumstances of foreign workers in Japan was to categorize resident foreigners into *Nikkeijin* and non-*Nikkeijin*. The reason for adopting this approach is that, in terms of numbers, these two groups cover most of the foreign workers who have entered Japan since the 1980s. *Nikkeijin* refers particularly to Japanese Brazilians and Japanese Peruvians. Non-*Nikkeijin* refers to the overstayers—the foreign workers and residents from Asia. Quantitatively this group constitutes the major part of the foreign worker population in Japan and, qualitatively, is subject to a wide range of problems.

The research involved directly visiting companies and on-site subcontractors which employ *Nikkeijin* and self-employed *Nikkeijin* operating restaurants or grocery stores in areas of residential concentration of Japanese Brazilians. For example, the main findings of the survey of companies employing *Nikkeijin* were as follows. It was found that subcontractors making parts for the automotive and electrical industries, in the past, had been able to find the necessary labor in rural areas of Japan but, during the expansionary period at the end of the 1980s, they were no longer able to secure the labor force they required due to the aging of this group of workers. This was one of the main reasons for the employment of *Nikkeijin* and other foreign workers. On the other hand, research into the circumstances of Asian foreign workers—most of whom have overstayed their visas and are working illegally—was conducted by holding interviews with district labor unions and various support groups which assist these foreign workers and also by directly interviewing individual foreign workers where possible.

Notes

1 From the end of the Tokugawa period (*bakumatsu*) and through the Meiji and Taisho periods, Japanese prostitutes, who went overseas to the Chinese mainland, South-East Asia and further afield to India and Africa, were referred to as '*Karayuki-san*'. The term '*Japayuki-san*' used for Asian women workers who came to Japan from South-East Asia from the 1980s and were often forced into prostitution, has its origins in the earlier

term, '*Karayuki-san*'.

2 *Nikkeijin* is the term used to refer to Japanese who emigrated to South America before the Second World War. These people together with their descendants have returned to Japan as migrant workers since the end of the 1980s.

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