

Migration/integration policies in Japan from the point of view of "Nikkeijin": A focus on the Voluntary Return Program and the Visa for Fourth generation descendants

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ABSTRACT:

As part of recent policy changes that aim to attract non-skilled foreign workers, the Japanese government has launched the "comprehensive integration policies for migrants". In this presentation, I will conduct a brief evaluation of these policies, with a focus on the lessons that could have been learnt (but, apparently, were not) from the experience of the Nikkeijin (Japanese descendants, mainly from Brazil) migrants. I analyze two policies related to Nikkeijin: the Voluntary Return Program (Kikoku Shien Jigyo) and the visa for Fourth generation descendants (Yonsei).

The controversial Voluntary Return Program (where financial support for travel expenses was provided by the Japanese government) was launched in 2009, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. One lesson from this Voluntary Program is that the new comprehensive integration policies for migrants will be effective only if the national and local governments maintain the quality and accuracy of multilingual information they provide to foreign residents. My research is about how the returnees perceived and evaluated this Program, and how they understood or misread the conditions imposed on the recipients of this financial support: i.e. they would lose their reentry permit for a long time. I combine data from questionnaires and from interviews to show how migrants were "lost in translation". In the light of these findings, I will share my concerns regarding one of the most anticipated programs of the comprehensive integration policies: the provision of information in 11 languages in each municipality. To illustrate my concerns, I will cite a recent, grave incident of incorrect translation that occurred in Hamamatsu (a municipality famous for its large Brazilian Nikkeijin population), during the period when typhoon number 19 was passing over Japanese territory in mid-October of this year.

I also argue that the visa for the 4th generation Nikkeijin could be reinterpreted as a prelude to the new status of residence "Specified Skilled Worker (i)" (Tokutei Ginoo Type 1). Last year, the fourth generation visa was launched, but the conditions were so restrictive that the number of applicants has been (un)surprisingly low. The fourth generation-visa signaled a shift, more than a continuity, in the policy towards Nikkeijin.