

2020

Mid-Term Report



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Language School & Japans
challenges with its
immigration policy and its
effect

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Introduction

This mid-term report is divided in two sections. First, I provide information about the special schooling offer of JSL provided to SJCC Scholarship Participants. Since their course offers a few interesting advantages for SJCC members and my friend and I were the first participants on this program, it might be interesting to learn more about before deciding which school to choose.

In the second part, immigration of work force in Japan and Switzerland is discussed. As this report shows, language schooling and immigration is closely linked in Japan and it is interesting to observe how Japan deals with immigration rather different to Switzerland.

Language School JSL

JSL is a relatively small school. In the last 30 years it was motely focusing on attracting students from South-East Asia, so that it remained relatively unknown to western students. Therefore, roughly 90 percent of all students are Asians.

Nowadays, the school management attempts to increase the amount of students from Europe. That is why the school is seeking collaborations with organizations such as the SJCC. With limited success of actually attracting students in the last few months, JSL has managed to conclude a few contracts with European organizations. Thus, it can be assumed that more western students will enroll to JSL in the years to come.

Next to the normal school program, which is designed to pass the JLPT examination from N5 to N1, the school also wants to educate its students about Japanese culture. Starting from following usual schooling practices like greeting the teacher correctly in the morning over visits of cultural events and practice calligraphy, there are indeed many leanings which can be made besides studying Japanese. However, those activities are often copied from elementary and high school of Japan, and do not always meet the expectations of adults.

The school is relatively small and the class size is set at max. 8 participants. Thus, the teachers can focus on each student's progress more carefully. The teachers are encouraging their students to study hard and provide a better service to those who are willing to put more effort into their studies than usual. During my stay, the amount of students was that low that it was even possible to have private lessons next to the normal class free of charge. This was especially helpful for learning Japanese in a faster pace. However, it reduces the amount of time which can be spend on job hunting, socializing, traveling and so forth as the amount of studies doubles from 4 to 8 hours a day (besides homework).

Locations

JSL has two locations, one in Tokyo and one in Okinawa. The special offer which they provide is that SJCC Scholarship participants can perform their schooling 5 months in Tokyo and one in Okinawa, while covering the flight expenses and accommodation in Okinawa. For details, please find the information provided by the chairman of SJCC Scholarship Program.

Tokyo

The school in Tokyo is located close to Asakusabashi in an office building. There are 3 class rooms and an office only. While this area is convenient for eating, the opportunities to find an affordable place to stay are limited. As Asakusabashi is part of the "city center" of Tokyo, rooms and apartments are harder to find and high priced. Also, take into consideration that if you choose to commute every day that train and subway is costly. For more information about Tokyo itself, please refer to one of the hundreds of travel web pages.



Figure 1 - Classroom Tokyo

Okinawa

JSL Okinawa is in the suburb of Naha City next to a military base. This location is not very attractive as there is literally nothing except for apartments around the school. If you want to go sightseeing or going out with friends, you have to take the bus which is expensive and does not run on schedule.

The school provides dormitories for its Asian students and apartments for “western students” with limited comfort. While the housing is next to the school, the apartment itself provides only very basic furniture and tools for cooking.



Figure 2 - Provided Apartment in Okinawa

The school itself in Okinawa is far bigger than the one in Tokyo. It has about 20 class rooms and over 300 students. Therefore, the educational system differs greatly between Tokyo and Okinawa. Here, you will most likely experience not much of personal interaction with the teachers and just “study hard”. Also, the school treats its western students special. The classes are divided by origin (Asians and Westerns are separated), and there are special sightseeing trips organized by the teachers free of charge and only for westerners. Therefore, you might find it difficult to get in touch with the other students and it gives sometimes an uneasy feeling to be treated differently.



Figure 3 - School Building in Okinawa

Special offer for SJCC Scholarship Participants Insights

As mentioned above, JSL is aiming to attract more students outside of Asia. Therefore, they have implemented the special offer of 5 months Tokyo and one month Okinawa. To further promote this school, the teachers and the administration workers are encouraged to treat 'Westerners' rather special. For instance, I have been invited to Dinner parties with the school management; the administration officers are extremely helpful regarding opening bank accounts and so forth.

The special treatment can lead to uncomfortable situations when talking to the Asian students. However, there are reasons why the school makes much more efforts for us. As the report underneath explains, most of the Asian students have a different goals by going to school.

Japans challenges with its immigration policies and its effects

Japan is considered a rather developed nation compared with its Asian neighbors such as China and Vietnam. Therefore, Japan attracts people from those countries for work. Moreover, Japan is seeking highly skilled workers from abroad, since the birth rate is decreasing in the recent decades (Sawa, 2019).

Thus, Japan has introduced policies to promote the inflow of young professionals from abroad. For example, there are several types of visa which can be issued by companies which want to employ a foreign resident in their company in Japan. Also, Japan promotes its schools to foreigners who would like to study in Japan. Special scholarships are given to those students so that the tuition fee becomes more affordable. Simultaneously, the students are allowed to work up to 28 hours a day beside their studies (Baseel, 2018).

In the recent years, those policies have shown effects as the number of foreign workers and students has increased drastically. In 2019, for example, were nearly 300'000 foreign students registered. This was an increase of 12% from 2018. Most of those students are from the surrounding countries such as China, Vietnam or Nepal. As mentioned above, studying and working in Japan seems to be lucrative for them, as the salary and living standard is considerably higher (Baseel, 2018).

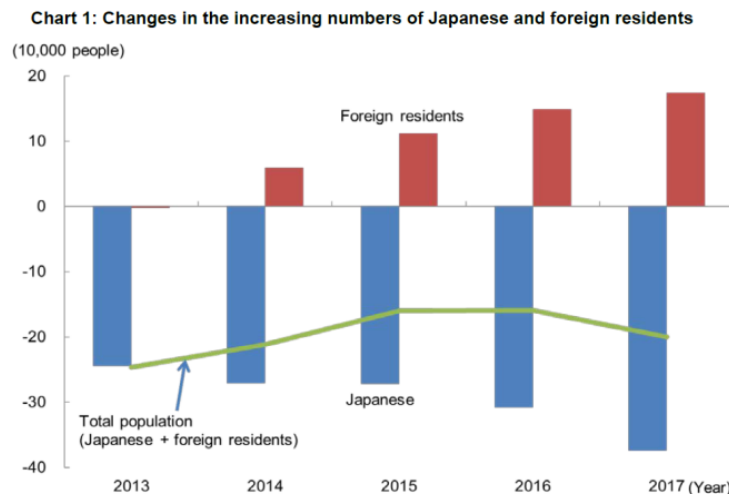


Figure 4 - Foreign Residents in Japan (Mizuho, 2018)

The rising number of foreign students also seems to find suitable employment after graduation from University (Kyodo, 2019). Most of the students find a job related to engineering, accounting or in the language teaching sector. Again, the largest number of students is Chinese, Vietnamese or Nepalese. Therefore, it can be argued that not only the government promotes the inflow of foreign students, there is also a demand on both sites, foreigner students and companies in Japan, to employ immigrants.

Difference between Japanese Governments its Aim and Reality

While the statistics discussed above seem to work sound towards the goal of the Japanese government to attract foreign professionals, the reality might look slightly different. Besides the vocational schools and Universities, also language schools are promoted to attract foreigners. Clearly, a decent level of the Japanese language is a must to work in Japan. However, to enroll in a language school does not require any educational success beforehand. Therefore, language schools do not only attract individuals which can be considered highly skilled or which want to further study at a University afterwards. It also attracts people which have rather limited education and which are looking for low-skilled jobs. This can easily be recognized in daily life, as many service personnel in shops and restaurants are not Japanese.

Nationals of countries with a rather low income level have observed the opportunity to easily require a long-term visa for Japan by joining a 2 years course at a language school. Therefore, most Asian students in language schools are not necessarily aiming to learn Japanese or to obtain a higher education for working as a long-term employee in a Japanese business. In several discussions with those students, it is stated that they actually prefer to do part-time jobs (baito). Besides covering the living costs with those part-time jobs, they also save money which is then sent back to their families (many are married and have children) in the country of origin.

On the other hand, there are also other cases where foreigners come to Japan with the aim to get a good start in their career, as discussed above. Those people are, however, most likely enrolling at a University and not a Language School, and show therefore the willingness to truly integrate themselves in Japan. Moreover, the amount of students enrolled at Language or college is greater (60%) than those enrolled at University (Kakuchi, 2019). After graduation of those schools, it is very unlikely to find an employment which is considered 'highly skilled'. Most of those students end up doing low-wage jobs.

It must also be stated that this report shall not discredit those individuals. Clearly, the circumstances in their home country must be serious so that they leave their family back home and come to Japan for doing low-paid jobs such as cleaning or working as a kitchen staff. However, this report aims to shade a light on this issue from a Japanese perspective.

Implication for Japan due to inflow of unskilled workforce

The inflow of the unskilled workforce has undoubtedly an effect on Japan. Most obvious, the outflow of money from Japan to other countries has an impact on the economy. Also, those foreigners have lower salary expectations compared to Japanese, what lowers the overall payment for those part-time jobs. Thus, it becomes more difficult for Japanese to find rewarding positions, which are often performed by University students to cover their tuition fees and living expenses. Overall, it can be stated that the competition on the labor market for "baito" rises.

It has also an impact on the system of language schools. As stated earlier, it is only possible to work with a visa in Japan. Also, the easiest way to obtain a visa is to apply for a Language school. Thus, there are schools which have created a business model which promotes the inflow of foreigners to Japan to do baito. Clearly, this would not be stated officially as this would lead to issues with the government most likely. However, by attending such schools it becomes most obvious, since the students will most of the

time be sleeping on their desk and do not pay attention to the class. It can therefore be stated that a few schools take advantage of those foreigners.

While the student visa allows only 28 hours of work so that the language school can be attended besides, it is doubtful whether all students follow this guideline. The fact that those students do sleep most of the time in class leads to the conclusion that they do not have enough rest beside work. Also, as they pointed out by themselves, 28 hours' work a week is not enough to cover all living expenses in Japan (including tuition fees) plus having idle money to send back home. Therefore, many of them perform several part-time jobs next to schooling, thus having not enough spare time for sleep.

On the contrary, the teachers are of course aware of this issue. Clearly, having two-third of students sleeping during class demotivates teachers to give class. Thus, the overall quality of language education decreases as teachers might find it 'unnecessary' to prepare well. Meanwhile, the schools are also aware that their students perform work illegally. In discussions with teachers, I personally got to know that they would like to report those students to the police; however, by doing so they also would drastically decrease the amount of students in their school. This would then likely lead to bankruptcy of their own business. Thus, there is a great tension among schools by dealing with those issues.

In the case of my own language school, those circumstances are the reasons why western students are treated better. Also, seeking collaborations with organizations such as the SJCC may increase the number of students from developed nations, so that the school is not dependent on Asian students anymore.

In conclusion, it is stated that Japan truly is in need of workers. However, it is not limited to 'highly-skilled workforce'. As many foreigner students graduating from college or language school do find a low paid job opportunity, it becomes obvious that there is a demand from the Japanese side. Also, there is the willingness of immigrants from surrounding countries to work in those positions. However, the system which only allows immigration either highly skilled people or students might be unsuitable to satisfy the demand.

Change in regulation

The Japanese government is aware of the misuse of Student visas. Therefore, it is aiming to change its regulations so that it becomes more difficult for people from certain countries to enter Japan with a student visa (Baseel, 2018). Moreover, the government made new regulations for banks, so that the money outflow can be lowered. For instance, it is not allowed for students to open a regular bank account if they cannot prove that they will stay in Japan for more than half a year. This policy is already enforced and makes it difficult for all foreigners coming to Japan for living.

However, in the short term it is unlikely that this situation will change. Japan is in high need of foreign residents' inflow. Its demographic shows that in the near future Japan will face a shortage in its workforce. Not only in sectors where highly skilled people work. Especially in rural areas where the age gap is the highest, young workers are in demand. While Japanese prefer to live in bigger cities and work in higher positions, many foreign residents from Asia do not mind living in rural areas and are willing to

take on any kind of job. Thus, while the inflow of unskilled people might not be appreciated, there is also a demand for them (Mizuho, 2018).

I therefore argue that the regulations aim into the wrong direction. It is unclear if the Japanese government is aware of the unfortunate situation for those language or college school students, the schools itself and the companies which are seeking low-paid foreigner employees, but with thightening the regulations it is obvious that the situation will not improve.

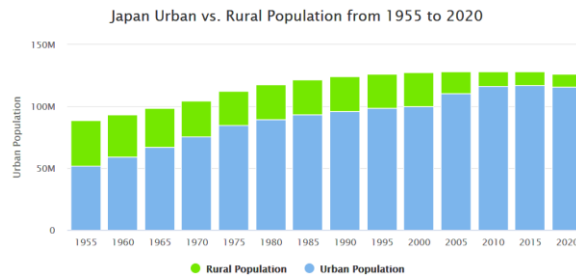


Figure 5 - Urban/Rural Population Japan (Worldometer, 2020)

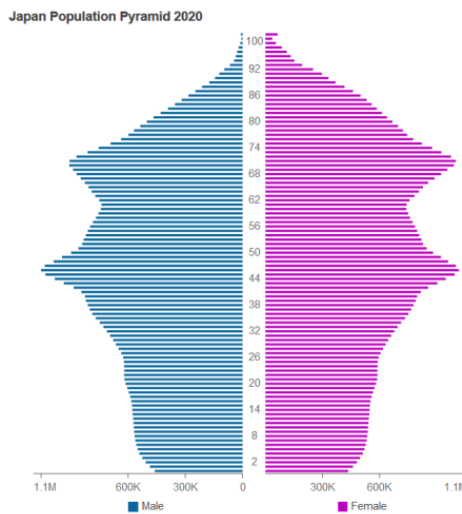


Figure 6 - Population Pyramid 2020 Japan (World Population Review, 2020)

Similarities in Switzerland?

Alike Japan, Switzerland is also in need of highly skilled workers from abroad. Both countries show similar patterns regarding birth rate and aging population, eventually leading to a shortage of workforce in the near future.

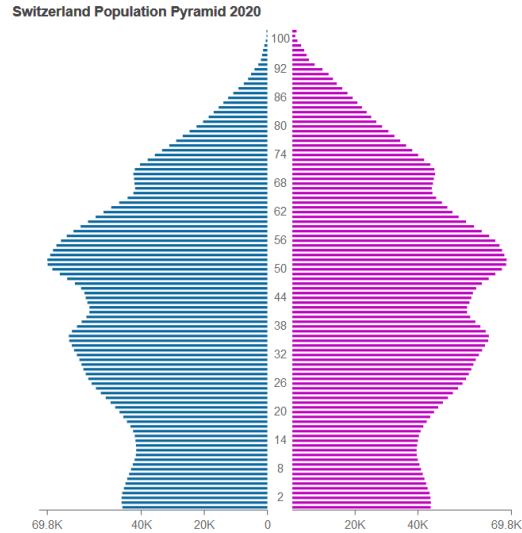


Figure 7 - Population Pyramid 2020 Switzerland (World Population Review, 2020)

However, the immigration in those two countries works rather different. Out of my experience and also by searching online, I could not assess that there are foreigners who try to obtain a student visa in Switzerland to do part-time jobs. Clearly, there are foreign students who enroll in Swiss Universities, but those students most likely show already a high education background and do not seek part-time jobs.

However, other than Japan (1.6% per of total population), Switzerland has a higher inflow of immigrants (29% of total population) (Macrotrends, 2015). It can also be argued that many of those individuals are coming from developing countries. But whether they are really “economic refugees” or rather flee due to different circumstances can only be assumed.

Also the way of immigration works different. While Japan has a student visa option which allows to work part-time, Switzerland does not. Therefore, there are only two possibilities to immigrate in Switzerland. Firstly, a company hires a foreigner due to lack of national human resources, or the foreigner is aiming for asylum.

Also, the geographic situation of Japan and Switzerland is different. While Switzerland is part of the “Schengen-Area” and has economic ties to its surrounding economies, Japan as an island is rather isolated. Due to the fact that Japan is surrounded by ocean, the movement of people (in case of refugees) cannot reach the same extend like in Switzerland or Europe. In addition, Japan its neighbors are nowadays considered save, what makes it unreasonable for most citizens from the surrounding nations to apply for asylum.

Conclusion

While both Switzerland and Japan are facing similar issues regarding the demographic factor and the need of highly skilled work-force, similarities in management of this issue cannot be found. Both nations allow the inflow of foreigners for work with special visas and have had success with this system in recent years. However, while Japan faces issues of immigrants which are not considered highly skilled, Switzerland deals with alyssum on a far greater scale. Thus, while both countries record a high immigration, the approach and circumstances are rather different. Moreover, as Switzerland's immigration is not aiming to restrict the inflow of 'low-skilled' people with its asylum, there is less of a shortage compared with Japan.

Personally, I found it interesting to observe this issue here in Japan. While it does not affect my life to a great extent, I have gained insight into challenges which will shape Japan considerably. Since Japan is well known as being rather closed for too much influence from abroad, it seems to me that this nation is gradually becoming more 'international'. This will surely shape its culture in the coming years and might even lead to a more open minded society which tolerates different cultures in its own nation or migrates new ideas from abroad more willingly.

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