

**Searching for the Voice of the Other:
A Review of Literature on Japan's Technical Intern Trainees
from the Perspective of Social Inclusion**

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技能実習生に関する文献の再考察：
社会的包摂に着眼して

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Abstract

Japan is experiencing a period of transition to a more openly multicultural society. The shrinking and aging population has driven changes in the country's immigration laws, leading to official acceptance of unskilled foreign workers for the first time. However, with little public debate on the social implications of increases in foreign residents, it seems that social inclusion and social cohesion issues may arise in Japan as they have in other traditional immigration nations. With a view to the role of researchers to indicate areas of policy and practice requiring attention, this paper provides a thematic review of research conducted in the ten-year period from 2010 to 2020 on the subject of the foreign workers in Japan holding the residential status of Technical Intern Trainee (*gino jissbusei*). The review indicates trends found in the literature to date, and identifies areas requiring further investigation. In particular, the review focused on research conducted on the social inclusion of the technical intern trainees, and the presence of the trainees' voice in the papers reviewed. Findings indicated that there is a bias toward research on the agriculture and care industries; that research concerning rural areas currently outweighs research on urban areas; and that there was a relatively small number of papers that incorporated the voice of the trainees through collection of primary data. The paper concludes with recommendations for further research on this topic.

Keywords: technical intern trainees, Multicultural Coexistence policy, unskilled foreign workers, social inclusion, immigration laws

要 旨

日本は、より開かれた多文化社会への移行期にある。出入国管理及び難民認定法が改正され、結果として非熟練外国人労働者が初めて正式に受け入れられるようになった。しかし、在留外国人の増加が社会に与える影響について公の議論が少なく、従来の移民国家同様、日本でも社会的問題が生じる可能性があると思われる。研究者の役割とは、留意すべき政策および実践分野を示すことであるという観点より、「技能実習生」として日本に在留資格を有する外国人労働者を対象に2010年から2020年までの10年間に実施された研究をテーマ別に再考察した。これにより、現在までの研究の傾向を示し、さらなる調査が必要とされる領域を特定した。とりわけ、技能実習生の社会的包摂に関する研究、ならびに対象の論文における実習生の声の有無に注目した。その結果、農業および介護分野の研究に偏りがあること、農村部に関する研究が都市部に関する研究を上回っていること、また、一次データの収集によって実習生の意見を取り入れた論文が比較的少数であることがわかった。

キーワード: 技能実習生、多文化共生政策、非熟練外国人労働者、社会的統合、出入国管理及び難民認定法

1. Introduction

Japan is not typically viewed as a nation of immigrants. With numbers of foreign residents significantly lower than many advanced nations, the image of Japan as a culturally homogenous state has been perpetuated, both at home and abroad. However, as the country faces serious labor shortages resulting from its shrinking and aging population, the import of unskilled foreign labor has shifted from a taboo topic to an act enshrined in law: with the Revised Immigration Act in 2019, the Japanese government openly recognized the need to import unskilled labor for the first time. However, the Act was rushed through with minimal discussion of the impact a higher influx of unskilled foreign workers may have on Japanese society at large. In particular, there has been little public debate on the social inclusion of the new migrants to Japan, both from the viewpoint of the host communities receiving new foreign labor, and the perspective of the migrants making their home in Japan. This paper provides a thematic review of research conducted in the ten-year period from 2010 to 2020 on the subject of the foreign workers in Japan holding the residential status of Technical Intern Trainee (*gino jissbusei*). The review aims to indicate trends found in the literature to date, and identify areas requiring further investigation as Japan faces the challenge of maintaining social cohesion and preventing race-related issues seen elsewhere as its population diversifies.

2. Definitions of Key Terms

Japan is a relatively new immigration nation. Compared with countries where immigration has been a keystone of nation-building, such as the United States or Australia, the concept of openly welcoming immigrants or refugees is not common in Japan. For this reason, it is important to note that terminology such as ‘immigrants’, implying permanent settlement in a second country, is not directly applicable to the Japanese context at this point in time. In particular, the technical intern trainees who are the subject of this review do not currently have the option of permanent settlement in Japan (although with the Revised Immigration Act they may apply for transfer to the new Specific Skill Worker status, enabling possible application for permanent residency). In this way, as the technical intern trainees are not permanent residents in Japan, they are referred to in this paper as ‘migrants’. While there is no common universal definition of migrants, reflecting the importance of contextual considerations in migration studies, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs defines a migrant as: “any person who changes his or her country of usual residence” (International Organization for Migration, 2020, p. 334). In this paper, the term ‘migrant’ is used to refer to the technical intern trainees in accordance with this definition.

Similarly, while the term ‘integration’ is frequently used in migration studies of traditional

immigration nations, the application of this term to the situation of the technical intern trainees in Japan is also problematic, given its inherent implication of permanent residency. The concept of migrant integration typically includes political rights and the possibility of naturalization (OECD & EU, 2018), both of which are currently not available options for the technical intern trainees. For these reasons, the term ‘social inclusion’ is used instead in this paper, as one of the elements that comprise migrants’ integration. The concept of social inclusion also does not have a universal definition. In this paper it is conceptualized in accordance with the definition proposed by the World Bank in 2013: “The process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society” (World Migration Report 2020, p. 592). The importance of the social aspects of migrant integration has been highlighted in numerous studies, both from the perspective of social cohesion (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007), as well as migrant health and wellbeing (Miller, Ong, Choi, Shibamura, & Jimba, 2020; Takenoshita, 2015). Moreover, social connections have frequently been positioned as crucial to the integration process: family and other social networks are often subject to fragmentation in the very act of migration, which means that the formation of social ties in the new country of residence becomes even more crucial (Zhou, 2019). The following thematic analysis of research on the technical intern trainees is based on these definitions.

3. Background

3-1. Foreign Population of Japan

The number of foreign residents in Japan exceeded 2.8 million people in 2019 (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2019). According to the most recent official figures on the number and nationalities of foreign residents in Japan, current at June 2019, the proportion of foreign residents who had obtained permanent residency was around 27% of the total at that time. This number is mainly made up of Korean and Chinese nationals and their descendants who moved to Japan in the wartime or postwar period, as well as the descendants of Japanese emigrants to Brazil and Peru (*nikkeijin*) who were admitted to Japan in the 1990s after they were granted Special Status, giving them the right to settle permanently without restrictions on work activities (Japan Ministry of Justice, 2015; Takenoshita, 2016). The technical intern trainees account for around 13% of the total number of foreign residents, and is now the second-largest group of foreign residents in Japan by status of residence (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2019).

Of the 2.8 million foreign residents in Japan in 2019, 1.6 million were engaged in some form of employment. Looking at the trends in the numbers in the period from 2010 (the start of figures for the Technical Intern Training Program) to 2019, the greatest growth of all categories is shown in the technical intern trainee group, which increased from 1.7% of foreign workers in 2010 to 23.1% in 2019. Once again, the technical intern trainees are the second largest group of foreign workers after those Residents Based on Status (comprising mainly Japanese descendants from

South America, other permanent residents, and spouses and children of permanent residents) (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2019).

Labor shortages resulting from the rapidly aging population and low birthrate are key drivers of increased immigrant numbers: Japan is in a period of population decline, where the total population is forecast to drop from 127 million in 2015 to 88 million by 2065. The high aging rate means that the working-age population will also continue to fall, from 60% in 2015 to around 50% of the total population in 2065 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research). Government projections indicate that the country's ability to maintain the current economic level will be dependent on consistent annual growth in workers imported from other countries (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, n.d.). In this way, Japan is becoming increasingly dependent on the foreign worker population, not only to ensure the survival of small-to-medium size businesses, but also to support regional economies facing depopulation.

3-2. Technical Intern Training Program

The Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) was launched by the Japanese government in 1993. It is a technical transfer scheme whereby foreign citizens from developing nations are permitted entry and paid work in Japan under the visa status of technical intern trainee. The original aim of the program was “to contribute to developing countries by accepting people from these countries for a certain period of time (maximum 5 years) and transferring skills through OJT” (Ministry of Justice, 2017). The program was established under the Japan Ministry of Justice and is promoted and administered by the Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO), a public interest incorporated foundation run under the jurisdiction of the Cabinet Office (JITCO). The program is operated by the Organization for Technical Intern Training (OTIT), a legal entity in charge of the running of the program, including the accreditation of technical intern training plans submitted by prospective trainees, inspection and management of supervising organizations and participating companies, and support measures for the trainees (OTIT, n.d.).

As of 2019, the total number of technical intern trainees in Japan was 366,167. The nationality mix in 2019 was 53.5% from Vietnam, 19.1% from China, 8.9% from Indonesia, 8.1% from the Philippines, and the remainder from Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Mongolia and others (OTIT, 2020). As noted above, technical intern trainees are currently the fastest-growing group of foreign workers in Japan. This growth is attributed to a number of factors. Pull factors driven by Japanese demographics are discussed in further detail below. Other factors include economic circumstances in sending countries. For example, the growth of the Chinese economy and high unemployment in Vietnam have resulted in significant changes in the nationality mix of the trainee group: the number of trainees from China dropped from 108,252 to 79,959 between 2011 and 2017, while trainees from Vietnam increased from 13,789 to 104,800 over the same

period (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan, 2018a). As noted above, Vietnamese trainees now account for the largest portion of all trainees.

Since its inception, a large number of significant and persistent issues have arisen regarding the TITP. Systemic issues include the restrictions placed on the trainees: they are not permitted to bring family members to Japan, and do not have the freedom to change their place of employment (Komine, 2018). Exorbitant introduction fees paid to sending agencies in home countries prior to coming to Japan have meant that many of the trainees face great debts, effectively prohibiting them from speaking out against unreasonable and unlawful treatment in the Japanese workplace (Ibusuki, 2020). Workplace issues are numerous. Documents released by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare show that in 2018, there had been infringements of the Labor Standards Act by 5,160 employers of technical intern trainees, a figure that has consistently risen annually. Of this number, working hours infringements accounted for 23.3%, safety standards issues 22.8%, and problems related to overtime payment accounted for 14.8%. Other infringements included issues related to health standards, minimum wage payments, and standards for accommodation (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan, 2018b).

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have further exacerbated the situation of the trainees, as some employers possibly facing economic hardship brought on by the pandemic have terminated trainee contracts¹. Trainees who no longer have a place of employment, no legal right to seek employment elsewhere, and no immediate means to get back to their home country, have been stranded in Japan. In some cases widely reported in the media, such trainees have committed crimes including theft and illegal commercial activities as a means of survival while still in Japan². This is now combined with the issue of disappearing trainees—those who leave their place of work without notice or completion of their traineeship, possibly in response to unlawful employment practices noted above (Ministry of Justice, 2019). Media reporting over the past year on the technical intern trainees has generally focused on such criminal incidents and disappearances, possibly impacting public reception of immigrants in general. This is an area requiring further investigation.

In addition to the issues described above, a common criticism of the program is that the way it functions does not match with the program's original aims. As described above, the stated aim of the TITP is to accept foreign workers for the purpose of technical skills transfer to their home countries. However, a wide range of scholars claim that it has become a *de facto* labor supply network, used to provide under-resourced small-to-medium sized businesses with greatly needed unskilled labor (see for example, Kamibayashi, 2018). It was the recognition of this aspect of the TITP, combined with the pressing need to secure more labor to respond to the country's

1) See for example this article on fraudulent termination practices:

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20200913/k10012615281000.html?utm_int=news_contents_news-main_002

2) For example: <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASNCL6DG9NCLUHNB004.html>

demographic issues, that were factors leading to the establishment of the new Specified Skill Worker system described below.

3-3. Recent Immigration Policy Changes

Discourse on immigration in Japan has been primarily characterized by the denial by successive administrations of the existence of an immigration policy, based on the official prohibition of unskilled foreign labor (Komine, 2018). In fact, unskilled foreign workers have long been a presence in Japanese society: from pre- and post-World War II migrant workers from postcolonial China and Korea, through to second and third generation *nikkeijin* from the 1990s. The latter group, in particular, were admitted to Japan from Brazil and Peru based on their status as Japanese descendants, but consequently employed in unskilled jobs in Japan (Takenoshita, 2016). More recently, the demand for unskilled labor has been met by international students, nominally enrolled Japanese-language schools or universities but predominantly staying in Japan for the purpose of securing work (Sato, 2018). A significant shift in government policy on immigration and unskilled foreign labor occurred in April 2019 with the revision of Japan's Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (referred to below as Revised Immigration Act). Clearly stating its aim as 'the acceptance of and coexistence with foreign human resources' (MOFJ, 2019), the Revised Immigration Act signaled, for the first time, the open acknowledgement by the Japanese government of the need to import foreign labor to address the labor shortages caused by Japan's aging and shrinking population.

In particular, the act introduced a new status for foreign workers (Specified Skill Worker (SSW): *tokutei gino*) that grants applicants a period of stay of up to ten years and the possibility of permanent residency for workers in selected industries (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2020). In addition to new applications from workers outside of Japan, technical intern trainees are also able to apply for transfer to the specified skill worker status. This signifies that for those trainees who chose to do so, there is now a possibility of extending their stay in Japan and applying for permanent residency in the future, should they find employment in the industries that allow such applications (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). In fact, as of September 2020, of the 8,768 people granted the SSW status, 7,348 (84%) had transferred from the technical intern training program (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, n.d.). The new specified skill worker system represents a concrete measure by the Japanese government to resolve the increasingly serious labor shortages resulting from continuous decline in the working-age population. It marks the open acceptance of the fact that the future of the Japanese economy is dependent on its development as a multicultural nation. Significantly, it also opens the door to the import of unskilled foreign labor. This, in turn, has led to developments in the Japanese government's policy for managing increasing numbers of foreign residents, described below.

3-4. Multicultural Coexistence Policy

'Multicultural coexistence' (*tabunka kyosei*) is the national government's long-standing policy to deal with the growing number of foreign residents living in local communities. The term came into wide use from the 1990s, spurred on particularly by efforts to support foreign residents after the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake in January 1995 (Kashiwazaki, 2016). The policy represents the Japanese contextualization of the concept of multiculturalism, and recognizes the possibility of permanent residency of a growing number of foreign workers and their presence in Japanese communities. In particular, the latest iteration of this policy, released in September 2020, emphasizes the idea that the new migrants are contributing members of Japanese society who should share in the building of multicultural communities (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2019). Diversity and inclusion are the key terms used in the government's recognition of the need to construct communities that facilitate connections and collaboration between community members, who are dealing with common challenges including the post-Coronavirus society. The plan also recommends incorporating the viewpoint of foreign residents in efforts to revitalize and globalize local communities (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan, 2020). In summary, foreign residents are being positioned as key actors in the implementation of the Multicultural Coexistence Policy. For this reason, an important part of the current study is to investigate how the viewpoint of such foreign residents, represented here by technical intern trainees, has been investigated and represented in research work to date.

4. Aims of This Review

Based on an understanding of Japan's policy on foreign workers and trends to date as described above, this paper offers a mainly thematic review of literature on the technical intern trainees. As one of the most recent group of foreign workers in Japan, research on this group promises to provide insight into the state of implementation of governmental policies on foreign workers at the local level. Additionally, the TITP is the structural base upon which the new SSW residential status was introduced. While research on SSW is still in its early stages, a significant volume of literature on the TITP has been accumulated. This review of themes and subjects discussed in the latter literature aims to clarify research trends and identify areas likely to benefit from further academic investigation, as Japan shifts to a more open acceptance of foreign workers as a permanent social presence. More specifically, the review aims to demonstrate the need for further in-depth investigation of the social situation and needs of the latest migrants to Japan, including the collection of primary data from the trainees, to highlight their perspective. As Japan's demographic issues and labor shortages are projected to continue, the growing dependency on foreign workers is likely to intensify. For this reason, it is important to identify the learnings and gaps in literature on this subject to date.

5. Method

Academic papers were selected for this review using CiNii, the online academic database containing primarily Japanese and English research works published in Japan. The search term used was *gino jissbu* (technical intern trainees), and the time frame was defined as 2010–2020. The reason for selecting papers from 2010 is that this marks the start of the period after the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Act in 2009, whereby ‘technical trainee’ was officially established as status of residency in Japanese law (Kamibayashi, 2018). Papers written by non-academic parties including politicians, bureaucrats, other members of government and commercial organizations were excluded from the search results to ensure that the literature reviewed was not work that may have been influenced by political or commercial interests. Non-academic news outlets and bulletins from non-academic organizations such as trade unions were excluded to ensure that the aim of the review—to clarify trends in academic research—would be upheld. Books and book chapters were also excluded as they were not widely available in CiNii. Oral proceedings including seminars and lecture papers were excluded as they were not uniformly present in the CiNii database and could bias the results toward certain academic societies or fields. For these reasons, the selection of literature used in this study is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it is intended to provide an indication of overall trends in academic work during the period selected. It is important to note here that the limitations posed here of excluding research published prior to 2010, as well as book chapters and oral proceedings, will be rectified in more extensive ongoing work by the author. Future work will also include examinations of English-language research, of which there is a growing body of rich findings on this subject.

As stated above, the aim of this review is to clarify research trends on the topic of technical intern trainees, and identify areas likely to benefit from further academic investigation. The selected papers were analyzed according to the main criteria of Research Themes and Research Methods. Research themes were examined from the perspective of common themes and thematic trends over time. Research methods were further divided into the sub-categories of research subjects and case selection. In particular, the aim of the analysis of research subjects was to ascertain whether or not primary data was collected from technical intern trainees in the research reviewed. Primary data here refers to data collected through surveys or interviews with the trainees. As noted under Multicultural Coexistence Policy in Background, the national government is emphasizing the position of foreign residents as contributing members of Japanese society, who have a role to play in building communities (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2019). From this perspective, it seems crucial that the viewpoint of the foreign residents is illuminated and documented, whether their residential status is permanent or temporary. In addition to giving a voice to the trainees, the accumulation of primary data from trainees is also seen as an important way to ensure the validity of research on the trainees, by providing multiple perspectives on their

circumstances. The current study, therefore, is particularly focused on the extent to which the voice of the technical intern trainees is being heard and communicated in both academic work and in communities where the Multicultural Coexistence Policy is being implemented.

In order to conduct the analysis of the items indicated above, the selected papers were first organized by date and then categorized according to main research theme, the existence of primary data collected from technical intern trainees, and the adoption of the case study method. The existence of primary data collected from trainees was used as a sorting criterion in order to confirm whether or not the research in question investigated the perspective of the trainees. The adoption or otherwise of the case study method was monitored to identify trends in particular regions or industries being targeted by researchers. The preliminary selection results were organized in a table that cannot be displayed here because of space restrictions. The data is available upon request.

6. Analysis Results

6-1. Research themes

6-1-1. Overview

As Figure 1 below shows, there has been an increase in academic work produced on the topic of technical intern trainees since 2018 in particular.

The number of the papers on the technical intern trainees increased during the three-year period from 2018-2020, which seems to reflect researcher interest in the Revised Immigration Act enacted in 2019 and residual issues in the Technical Intern Trainee Program, as well as concerns about the hasty introduction of the new Specified Skill Worker status during that period. The number of papers that included primary data gathered from the technical intern trainees was 52 out of 182 papers, or around 29% of the total.

Figure 1: Overview of literature reviewed

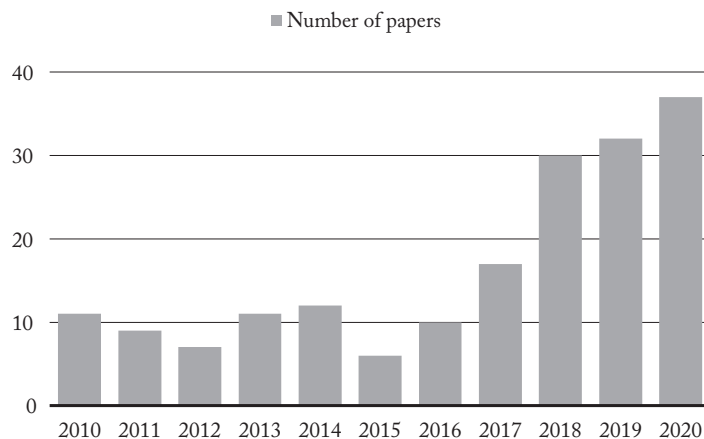


Table 1: Research themes by year

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total (primary data)
Specific industry issues and trends	1	3		3	6	2	4	1	6	7	13	46 (3)
Trainees' perception and attitudes	4	3		4	1		3	4	8	11	5	43 (41)
Legal/systemic issues	4	2	1	3		1	2	4	1	3	4	25 (1)
Japanese language education	1	1		2	2		2	4	3	7	1	23 (11)
Receiving structures and trends	1		2			1		1	3	3	4	15 (3)
Returnees' issues and trends	1		1					2	3	3	3	13 (11)
Sending country/organization issues		1		2			2			1	4	10 (3)
Labor issues				1	2			1	3	1	1	9 (1)
Daily living issues	1		1	1				1		1	2	7 (3)
Immigration policy						1		1	1		3	6 (0)
Health issues									1		4	5 (2)
Overview of TITP					1		1		2	1		5 (1)
Human rights issues	1						1		1	1		4 (1)
Reception by Japanese community	1					1			1		1	4 (2)
Social networks			1	1				1		1		4 (2)
Support measures									1	2	1	4 (3)
Desertion issue									1	1		2 (1)
Trainee nationality trends					1			1				2 (1)
Workplace issues		1	1									2 (1)

6-1-2. Common themes

Table 1 provides an overview of the main research themes of the selected papers. This shows that, during the period of 2010-2020, significant amounts of academic work have been produced on the four themes of ‘specific industry issues and trends’, ‘trainees’ perception and attitudes’, ‘legal/systemic issues’ and ‘Japanese language education’. A number of papers covered more than one of the main themes. For example, some research examined ‘reception by Japanese community’ in combination with ‘trainees’ perception and attitudes’, while other papers looked at ‘trainees’ perception and attitudes’ in relation to ‘Japanese language education’. This reflects the fact that many of the themes indicated here are interconnected and the issues discussed often involve a range of complex factors. The relatively large portion of work on ‘specific industry issues and trends’ was significantly weighted toward particular industries: the agriculture and care sectors featured heavily in the work reviewed. Papers in the ‘sending country/organization issues’ category were predominantly written about issues related to China and Vietnam, reflecting the two largest groups of trainees during the period examined. While research on ‘trainees’ perception and attitudes’ appears to encompass a large portion of the literature examined, on the whole the primary data from trainees accounted for only 29% of the papers reviewed, as mentioned above. The percentage of research that included collection of primary data from trainees is indicated by the number in parentheses in the ‘Total’ column in Table 1. This indicates that, in addition to ‘trainees’ perception and attitudes’, a significant portion of the research that included primary data collected from trainees was on the themes of ‘Japanese language education’ and ‘returnees’ issues and trends’.

6-1-3. Trends over time

Table 1 also indicates the overall trends in the literature over time. In terms of research periods, the large number of papers published since 2018 on ‘specific industry issues and trends’ and ‘trainees’ perception and attitudes’ seems to reflect the increased public prominence of immigration in general and technical intern trainees in particular, and a growing interest by researchers from a range of fields in issues pertaining to changes in Japan’s social makeup and possible solutions to labor shortages. This increase has likely been driven by the Revised Immigration Act, as noted above. Other topics that have seen increases in research papers since 2018 are ‘receiving structures and trends’, ‘returnees’ issues and trends’, and ‘health issues’. ‘Legal/systemic issues’, while relatively small in number in comparison to the two most popular topics, have been the subject of consistent research over the ten-year period. Another promising feature of the literature reviewed is that, rather than one-time research projects, a number of scholars have published multiple works over a significant period of time on various aspects of the situation of the technical intern trainees: for example, Saito (legal/systemic and labor issues), Gunji (sending country/organization issues, receiving structures and trends, specific industry issues and

trends), Feng (social networks, Japanese education issues) and Yuyama (support measures, daily living issues) (data available upon request). ‘Social networks’, a possible indicator of the social inclusion and social participation of the trainees, was the subject of a small number of the papers surveyed, at four in total.

6-2. Research methods

6-2-1. Research subjects

As noted above, the ratio of the literature that incorporated data collected from the technical intern trainees using surveys or interviews was 29% of the total. This small proportion is also shown in annual numbers in Figure 2 below. The papers that did collect primary data, such as Nakajima (2010), Saka (2014), and Imai (2016) for example, offered insight into trainees’ perspectives on unreasonable work practices, viewpoints on long-term stays in Japan, and the trainees’ views on Japanese dialect learning.

Research by Feng (2011, 2012, 2013), in particular, provided valuable information on the way the trainees perceive their social situation and connections with Japanese society. However, the majority of the literature reviewed did not incorporate primary data collected from the trainees.

6-2-2. Case selection

The case study method was adopted in 71 out of the total of 182 papers. The trends in numbers of case studies is shown in Figure 3 below.

A breakdown of the content of the case studies, from the perspective of case selection, is shown below in Figure 4. Case studies on the textile, fishing, seafood processing and dairy industries are not shown in Figure 4, as there was only one case study for each of these industries respectively over the ten-year period examined.

Figure 2: Proportion of research that included collection of primary data from technical intern trainees

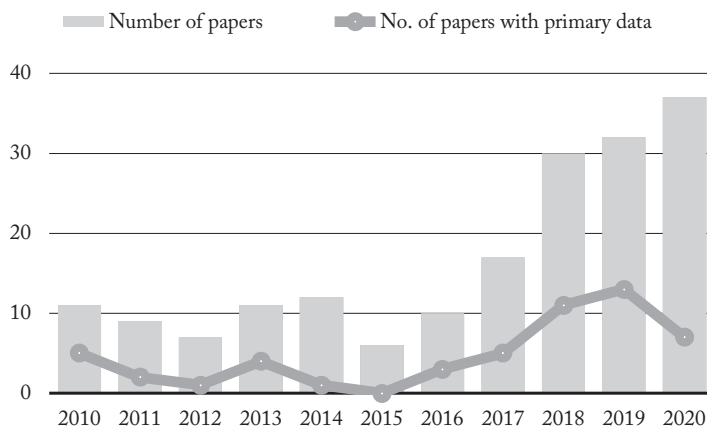


Figure 3: Trends in numbers of case studies from 2010-2020

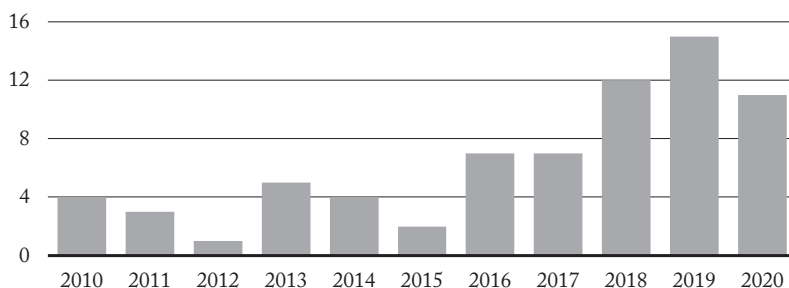
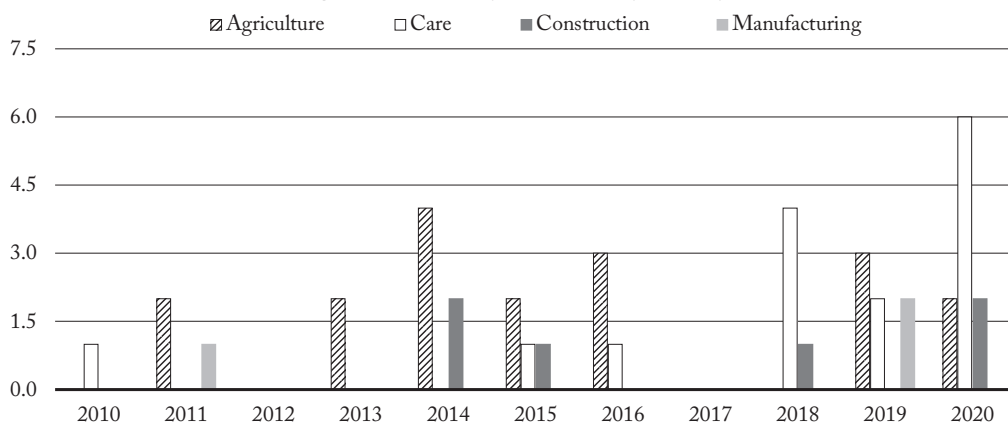


Figure 4: Case study breakdown by industry



As the data shows, there was a concentration of case studies on the agriculture and care industries: the total number for agriculture was seventeen, with fourteen case studies on the care industry.

Notably, case studies on the care industry have increased significantly since 2018. This seems to reflect the high numbers of care worker candidates in Japan at that time from Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam under bilateral economic partnership agreements (EPA) with those countries (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, n.d.). In comparison, there have been a relatively consistent number of case studies on the agricultural industry since 2011.

6-3. Limitations of the Analysis

In total, 182 academic papers on the topic of ‘technical intern trainees’ were included in the review. It must be noted that it was not possible to access 87 of the papers, due to access restrictions and lack of availability. For these papers, which account for 48% of the papers selected, the content of the research could not be assessed in detail. For such papers that could not be reviewed, the existence of primary data collected from trainees is unknown (unless indicated in the

research paper abstract), as is the adoption or otherwise of the case study method. Lack of access to such papers was unfortunate, and represents a limitation of this study. It is for this reason that this review is mainly focused on analysis of the main themes and subjects of the research reviewed.

It is also important to note here that a large volume of non-academic information (not included in this review) has been produced and disseminated on many of the topics on this list and will be analyzed in ongoing work on this topic.

7. Discussion: Features of the Literature

The discussion below of the salient features and trends found in the papers reviewed is divided into two sections, in accordance with the framework of analysis described in Method above. The first section, on research themes, highlights tendencies found in the research to focus on certain regions and industries. The second section, on research subjects, proposes that the lack of primary data collected from the technical intern trainees has created a crucial gap in knowledge of the trainees, which consequently may be impacting the way that the Multicultural Coexistence Policy is implemented at the local level.

7-1. Research themes: Predominance of the rural over the urban

The analysis of the selected literature shows that there is a growing body of rich academic work on various aspects of the technical intern trainee system and its implementation at the local level. The large number of papers on issues and initiatives in specific industries and regions indicates that many local municipalities are gaining valuable and meaningful experience and knowhow in the actual implementation of the Japanese government's multicultural coexistence policy. In terms of thematic trends, it is also encouraging to see that the second largest category of papers, 'trainees' perception and attitudes', contained a high proportion of research that involved collection of primary data from the trainees through surveys or interviews. It seems that a significant number of researchers are concerned with the way that the trainees are experiencing their time in Japan.

It was also clear that the papers reviewed here present a bias toward studies conducted in rural areas, with a relatively small amount of research concerning the situation or issues for trainees living and working in urban areas. The large number of case studies related to the agricultural sector reflects this trend (discussed in greater detail below). In actual fact, the most recent statistics published by the Organization for Technical Intern Training (OTIT) on the number of technical intern training plans accredited by prefecture and by job category show that numbers in non-agricultural jobs in relatively urban prefectures such as Saitama, Tokyo, Chiba, Kanagawa, Aichi, Osaka and Hyogo are as high as or higher than training plans accredited in traditionally rural prefectures such as Hokkaido, Miyagi, Niigata or Shimane, for example (OTIT, 2018). Moreover, the strong focus on the agriculture and care sectors in the literature reviewed does not reflect the

reality that of the total number of technical intern trainee plans accredited in 2018, only 10% were in the agricultural sector and a mere 0.5% in the care worker sector. Construction (18.3%), food manufacturing (18.1%) and machinery (18.7%) were the sectors with the highest numbers (OTIT, 2018).

The focus on the rural over the urban may reflect relative ease of conducting research in rural areas and accessibility to trainees and/or their employers. Some scholars commented on the difficulty of gaining access to trainees, and the need to turn to former trainees after they had returned to their home countries in an attempt to obtain primary data. Is it easier to approach farm cooperatives in rural areas than construction unions in large cities? Are there organizational barriers that inhibit research on trainees in large cities? These may be factors contributing to the dearth of research—particularly primary-data based research—on the situation of trainees in urban settings. This is important because living and working in a large city can be a very different experience from life in a small rural community. In future research on the needs and social inclusion of migrants in Japan—whether they be permanent settlers or temporary foreign workers—it seems that a consideration of both types of environment will be required in order to ascertain and develop models that may be applicable to each one.

7-2. Research methods: a need for a more well-rounded picture of trainees

As indicated above, only 29% of the research reviewed incorporated primary data collected from technical intern trainees through methods such as surveys or interviews. In other words, the majority of research on the technical intern trainees has been conducted from the perspective of the Japanese actors in the migrant integration process: national government, local municipalities, and other organizations involved in facilitating migrant integration. This means, in effect, that the actual views of the trainees on their working and living conditions, community relations and Japan in general are largely missing from the picture painted in the research. Fortunately, organizations such as JITCO and local bodies are developing creative and fruitful methods to give the trainees a face and portray them as members of Japanese society with customs and needs (JITCO, n.d.). Nonetheless, the trainees themselves do not feature greatly as subjects with a voice in the literature reviewed. Combined with the fact that many of the papers are focused on specific industries or regions, it is difficult to understand what kind of social inclusion issues the technical intern trainees may be facing as a whole, and what kind of initiatives may be effective to address social inclusion and integration in the Japanese context. A number of questions remain unanswered: What kind of people are the trainees? What are the positive and negative aspects of their life in Japan? Are they experiencing racist or discriminatory treatment? What aspects of their own culture are they able to preserve while here and what aspects are they missing? What is their perception of the initiatives and measures being taken for their social inclusion at the local level?

As noted above, the Japanese government's Multicultural Coexistence Policy recommends

working together with foreign residents for joint community-building activities. These plans are promising and seem to send a diversity-friendly message to local communities. However, the research reviewed here does not provide a complete picture of the foreign community members that the government refers to in its plan. It may be the case that the non-permanent status of the technical intern trainees is precluding them from full participation in community social activities. They are possibly not viewed as contributing members of Japanese society because of their status, and there is evidence that many of the trainees themselves do not view themselves as long-term members of their local communities. Unfortunately, recent portrayals of the technical intern trainees in the media have been negative and tend to emphasize a one-sided view of the trainees as a group prone to criminal activities (see Background 2. Technical Intern Training Program). For this reason, it seems that there is a pressing need to collect data that helps to fill in gaps about the trainees as people, and provide a more complete picture about their diverse cultural backgrounds, needs and aspirations. Whether residential status is long or short, permanent or temporary, the fact is that Japan is likely to be dependent on foreign labor for the foreseeable future. Given the importance of social inclusion and the social connections of migrants demonstrated in much research to date, it would seem that further academic studies are required on the social needs and connections of technical intern trainees and other foreign workers, to contribute to a more well-rounded picture of the trainees as contributing members of Japanese society.

8. Conclusion : prospects for future research

As described above, there is as yet inadequate knowledge of Japan's most recent migrants' perception of their own social inclusion and the relevance of social networks to them. If Japan is to acquire the foreign labor it needs and at the same time ensure the smooth integration of the recent migrants into Japanese social life, there is an urgent need to investigate these aspects of integration. One possible research path could be to focus on the role of social connections in the trainees' perception of their social inclusion. The social capital concept theorized by Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986) could be utilized as a framework to examine the nature of the subjects' social connections in their community of residence in Japan, and the usefulness of such connections in their perception of social inclusion. As discussed above, field studies in urban areas of Japan would help to redress the current imbalance between urban and rural areas, and provide a more well-rounded picture of life in Japan as a migrant.

The other area identified in this review as a significant field for future research is studies on conditions that facilitate and inhibit the social inclusion (and overall integration) of the trainees, as part of more holistic research aiming to generate social inclusion models that may be applied to the Japanese context. It is true that the definition of immigrant or migrant used in other regions in the world is not currently directly applicable to the situation in Japan. Nonetheless, it seems that the wealth of experience, positive and negative, gained in traditional immigration nations could

provide valuable reference points for Japan as the nation navigates its way to a more openly multicultural society.

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