

Migration and minorities in contemporary Japan

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OBJECTIVES

Japan has been perceived as a negative case in terms of allowing immigration among the highly developed countries for a long time, which oftentimes went hand-in-hand with perception of Japan as a mono-ethnic, mono-cultural society. While Japan and its political elites are still clearly opposing open door immigration policy especially towards low-skilled migrants there has been a number of significant changes in past three decades that led to increasing numbers of foreign nationals living in Japan and opening further possibilities to legally enter and settle in Japan. Especially, after lifting the COVID-19 restrictions, the growth in foreign nationals residing in Japan started to surge and breaking previous records.

This course will provide students with a better understanding of the contemporary migration and fallacy of the mono-ethnic Japan perception. It will address the issues related to historical minorities, pre-war migration to Japan and a detailed overview of the contemporary migration patterns and integration of migrants into the fabrics of the Japanese society since 1990s. Furthermore, the course aims to deepen students' understanding of the Japanese society through looking at its minorities and international mobility of people in recent years. Thus, we will briefly address issues related to a surge in inbound tourism in the last decade or Japan's out-migration as well. This should provide us with further and more complex understanding of contemporary meanings of Japan for people who choose it as their destination and those who leave it behind in search for better lives.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

The course will start with an overview of the history and social position of the major historical minorities in the Japanese society, such as *burakumin* and *Zainichi* (or Korean residents). Discussions of a struggle for recognition and inclusion of these minorities in the structures of the Japanese society should serve us as a basis for understanding some of the issues concerning the present-day minorities in Japan.

The second (core) part of the course will be dedicated to discussions of contemporary migration that have emerged since the late 1980s in various forms – ranging from the 'ethnic' migration of *Nikkei* Brazilians, through 'Asian brides' or women entertainers from the Philippines to high-skilled workers, international students, low-skilled workers disguised in

various forms such as technical trainees (TITP) and the most recent special skilled workers (SSW) scheme. Exploring these different patterns will lead us to important issues related to migration such as integration or the notion of multi-cultural coexistence (*tabunka kyōsei*), meanings of (national) belonging, the myth of Japanese ethno-cultural homogeneity, racism and xenophobia as well as it will provide us with an opportunity to address broader topics such as demographic changes and a shrinking labor force, social and gender inequalities, individualization or globalization, its meanings and manifestations in the contemporary Japan.

FORMAT

Regular classes will consist of short lectures and student-led discussion based on reading assignments. Part of the classes will be dedicated to other activities such as field trips, or discussion with long-term residents.

REQUIREMENTS

Critical reading summary (short presentation), two short papers on fieldtrips/other activities, research project group presentation, final paper

SAMPLE REQUIRED READING (selected chapters)

Holbrow, H.J., 2025, *The Future is Foreign: Women and Immigrants in Corporate Japan*.

Strausz, M., ed., 2025, *No Islands is an Island: Perspectives on Immigration to Japan*.

Liu-Farrer, G., 2020, *Immigrant Japan: Mobility and Belonging in an Ethno-nationalist Society*.

Oguma, E., 2014, *The Boundaries of 'the Japanese': Okinawa 1818-1972, Inclusion and Exclusion*