



# OPENING THE DOOR

Immigration, Ethnicity, and Globalization  
in Japan

**Betsy Brody**

**ROUTLEDGE**  
NEW YORK & LONDON

Published in 2002 by  
Routledge  
29 West 35th Street  
New York, NY 10001

Published in Great Britain by  
Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane  
London EC4P 4EE

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.  
Copyright © 2002 by Betsy Brody

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Brody, Betsy Teresa, 1972—

Opening the door : Immigration, ethnicity, and globalization in Japan / Betsy Teresa Brody.  
p. cm. — (East Asia)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-93192-4

1. Aliens—Japan. 2. Immigrants—Japan. 3. Latin Americans—Japan. 4. Japan—Ethnic relations. 5. Labor policy—Japan. 6. Globalization. I. Title. II. East Asia (New York, N.Y.)

DS832.7.A1 B66 2001  
304.8'5208—dc21

2001031764

Printed on acid-free, 250 year-life paper  
Manufactured in the United States of America

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research could not have been completed without the cooperation and assistance of a number of organizations and individuals. The field research in Japan went smoothly and productively largely due to the help of Ms. Tomoko Sekiguchi of Nagoya University. In addition, the hospitality of the Latin American Center at Nanzan University and the cooperation of the faculty and staff there are greatly appreciated. The staff of the Toyota International Association, the Homigaoka International Center, and the Nagoya International Center were also extremely patient and cooperative in facilitating this study. Perhaps most significantly, special acknowledgement must be made of the many *nikkei* Brazilians in Japan who generously shared their time and their experiences as “ethnic returnees” to Japan.

In addition, I would like to thank the faculty of the Department of Government and International Studies at the University of Notre Dame for their support and advice throughout my time there. In particular, special thanks go to my dissertation director, Professor Peter Moody, for his guidance, patience, and good humor.

Finally, I must acknowledge the support of family and friends who, in many ways, encouraged me to carry on despite a variety of obstacles. I am grateful to my parents, George and Fonsa Brody, for their support and encouragement. My sister Salena deserves special appreciation for serving as a mentor, sounding board, and cheerleader. A sincere “thank you” to my husband, Keith, who was extraordinarily patient and lent a sympathetic ear throughout this process. Finally, thanks to Sammy, Oreo, and P.J. for their companionship and cheerful support.



# PREFACE

"Globalization" has become a catchphrase for the new millennium. At the level of "high politics," world leaders discuss the integration of markets and the growing interdependence of states, while, at the same time, easy international travel and communication have contributed to the "globalization" of everyday life. Immigration plays a crucial role in the process of globalization, both "on the ground" and at the highest political levels. Immigration policy is often the focus of intense domestic political debate, while the personal decision to migrate is one that dramatically changes the lives of all those involved. Yet, the movement of people into and out of national territories represents more than just the sum of many individual decisions to migrate; immigration flows are one manifestation of the economic, social, and political realities of globalization.

Unfortunately, migrants have often been met with resentment in their new surroundings. Citizens of receiving states fear a change in their way of life and a drain on national resources in favor of immigrant "outsiders". Issues of language, ethnicity, nationality, and culture are often cited as "proof" that migrants will not integrate. The reality of "foreigners" in the schools, hospitals, and streets of receiving countries has prompted fears of social conflict and violence in many receiving countries. In some cases, anti-immigrant violence has occurred, while in others, political parties have sought to benefit from anti-foreigner sentiment; an "us-versus-them" mentality has emerged in many host societies as a response to immigration.

But, what happens when the "foreigners" are not *completely* foreign? Japan, a state with a long tradition of "ethnic citizenship," recently passed an immigration policy favoring migrants with an ethnic connection to the Japan. Ethnic Japanese, or *nikkeijin*, were granted extensive immigration rights in Japan after the 1990 amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, leading to an influx of *nikkeijin* immigration from Latin America. The experiences of *nikkeijin* in their efforts to integrate into Japanese society are a significant area of study since the challenges to integration faced by *nikkeijin* (even with their ethnic

connection to Japan) highlight the institutional, political, and social dilemmas that multiculturalism and globalization pose in Japan. To what extent have *nikkeijin* been integrated into Japanese society?

The migration of people across national borders highlights questions of homogeneity and cultural difference, race and class, human rights, law and public policy. The case of *nikkeijin* in Japan, though grounded in a particular time and place, clearly encapsulates and addresses many of the more general issues discussed by migration theorists. As such, it is useful to examine it with an eye toward understanding the mechanisms of immigrant integration and the effects of ethnicity, language, and culture on integration.

## OTHER BOOKS IN THIS SERIES:

MODERN EDUCATION, TEXTBOOKS, AND THE  
IMAGE OF THE NATION

*Politics and Modernization and  
Nationalism in Korean Education:  
1880-1910*  
Yoonmi Lee

PROBLEMS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN CHINA  
Thomas G. Lum

THE UNKNOWN CULTURAL REVOLUTION  
*Educational Reforms and Their Impact  
on China's Rural Development,  
1966-1976*  
Dongping Han

MAO'S PREY  
*The History of Chen Renbing, Liberal  
Intellectual*  
Jeanette Ford Fernandez

THE ROOTS OF JAPAN'S ENVIRONMENTAL  
POLICIES  
Anny Wong

THE ORIGINS OF THE BILATERAL OKINAWA  
PROBLEM  
*Okinawa in Postwar US-Japan  
Relations, 1945-1952*  
Robert D. Eldridge

SOUTH-SOUTH TRANSFER  
*A Study of Sino-African Exchanges*  
Sandra Gillespie

GENDER, ETHNICITY, MARKET FORCES, AND  
COLLEGE CHOICES  
*Observations of Ethnic Chinese in Korea*  
Sheena Choi

CHINESE FEMINISM FACES GLOBALIZATION  
Sharon Wesoky



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xiii
PREFACE	xv
 <i>CHAPTER 1</i>	
INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Nikkeijin</i> in Japan: An immigration experiment	2
Laying the Groundwork	4
Research Design and Research Methods	7
Overview of the Study	12
 <i>CHAPTER 2</i>	
THEORIES OF LABOR MIGRATION AND IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION	15
Historical Trends in Labor Migration	15
Theories of Labor Migration	18
Immigrant Integration	25
 <i>CHAPTER 3</i>	
JAPANESE IMMIGRATION POLICY AND PERSPECTIVES	31
Japan's Labor Shortage	33
<i>Sakoku</i> vs. <i>Kaikoku</i>	37
1990 Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act	40
 <i>CHAPTER 4</i>	
JAPANESE EMIGRATION TO BRAZIL	45
Japanese Emigration to Brazil	46
<i>Nikkeijin</i> in Brazil	49
Return Migration to Japan after 1990	51

CHAPTER 5

NIKKEIJIN IN JAPAN	53
<i>Nikkeijin</i> "Returnees": Who are they?	54
<i>Nikkeijin</i> in Japan	55
<i>Nikkeijin</i> in Aichi Prefecture	57
<i>Nikkeijin</i> and Labor Market	58
<i>Nikkeijin</i> and Housing	65
<i>Nikkeijin</i> and Education	74

CHAPTER 6

ETHNIC GERMANS IN GERMANY: A SIMILAR CASE	87
Historical Background	88
German Policy	91

CHAPTER 7

PROSPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS	101
Ethnicity, Language, and Culture	102
Immigrant and Immigration Policy	104
Multiculturalism in Japan?	107
Policy Recommendations	109
Future Research on <i>Nikkeijin</i> in Japan	111
Conclusion	112

BIBLIOGRAPHY	115
INDEX	125

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Factors affecting the integration of immigrants	9
Table 2	Authorized occupational statuses for foreigners in Japan (Restricted Activities): 1990–present	42
Table 3	Residence statuses for foreigners in Japan (Unrestricted Activities): 1990–present	43
Table 4	Japanese immigration to Brazil: 1908–1963	47
Table 5	Age distribution of <i>nikkei</i> immigrants to Japan: 1986–1995	55
Table 6	Occupational distribution of <i>nikkei</i> immigrants in Japan: 1992–1995	57
Table 7	Ranking of Japanese prefectures by total population of Latin American <i>nikkeijin</i> : 1990–1996	57
Table 8	Foreign workers in Japanese prefectures: 1995	59
Table 9	Students requiring special Japanese language classrooms: 1991–1997	77
Table 10	Special Japanese language classrooms, selected prefectures: 1997	77
Table 11	<i>Nikkei</i> Brazilian students' anxieties about the future: 1999	82
Table 12	<i>Nikkei</i> Brazilian students' motivation to remain in Japan: 1999	82
Table 13	Ethnic German migration to West Germany: 1950–1994	89
Table 14	Factors affecting integration of <i>nikkeijin</i> and <i>aussiedler</i> in Japan and Germany	95



# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Berry's (1997) multidimensional framework of acculturation	26
Figure 2	Dependency Ratio in Japan, 1950-1997	33
Figure 3	Total Latin American and Total Brazilian Immigration to Japan: 1986-1996	53
Figure 4	Respondents According to Generation	55
Figure 5	<i>Nikkeijin</i> in Aichi Prefecture by Country of Origin	58
Figure 6	Education and Language Concerns among <i>nikkeijin</i> in Japan: (1992-1995)	74
Figure 7	Process of <i>Aussiedler</i> and <i>Nikkei</i> Migration within Globalization Model	89
Figure 8	Ethnic German Immigration to Germany by Country of Origin: 1985-1994	90

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, the very nature of Japanese immigration policy and enforcement contributed to the dichotomy between “insiders” and “outsiders,” with immigrants being outsiders in every sense—outside the law, outside the culture, and outside the race. This dichotomy, evident in Japanese immigration policy, is only one manifestation of enduring themes in Japanese culture, society, and politics; Japan is a country with deeply held ideas about its distinctiveness, its homogeneity, and its harmony. From ancient times, a myth of Japanese homogeneity and uniqueness has been cultivated, contributing to the two hundred year isolation of the country beginning in the 1600s, the birth of a powerful cultural nationalism, and a national identity based upon the notion of “one language, one race.” Yet, Japan has not remained isolated and separate from global society. Japan’s tremendous economic success in the post-war period has made the country a major economic power, engaged in the multiple processes of globalization and international integration. The effects of the globalization of international economies, as well as the globalization of human rights norms, have caused a collision in Japan between traditional conceptions of membership and citizenship on the one hand, and new policy initiatives promoting “internationalization” on the other hand. This study attempts to go beyond the limits imposed by traditional Japanese notions of citizenship and membership by exploring the immigration and integration of ethnic Japanese immigrants from Latin America—a group that is ethnically and legally inside Japan, though outside culturally. What institutional or environmental factors facilitate or challenge the successful integration of this group into Japanese society? Furthermore, what impact do ethnicity and culture have on immigrant integration in Japan?

Ethnic Japanese, or *nikkeijin*, were granted extensive immigration rights in Japan after the 1990 amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (*Shunyūkokukanri oyobi nanmin ninteihō*), leading to an influx of *nikkeijin* immigration from Latin America. The experiences of *nikkeijin* in their efforts to integrate into Japanese society are a significant area of study since the

challenges to integration faced by *nikkeijin* (even with their ethnic connection to Japan) highlight the institutional, political, and social dilemmas that multiculturalism and globalization pose in Japan. To what extent have *nikkeijin* been integrated into Japanese society? Has the incorporation of *nikkeijin* into Japan's workforce led to labor market segmentation, the "ghettoization" of *nikkeijin*, and the creation of a culturally defined underclass? Are the human rights of *nikkeijin* workers and their families respected and protected by the Japanese legal system? What role do the educational system and social service environments play in helping or hindering immigrant integration? Is there any recognition or effort to accommodate the cultural difference of *nikkeijin* immigrants through the practice of their own traditions?

The migration of people across national borders highlights questions of homogeneity and cultural difference, race and class, human rights, law and public policy. This case, though grounded in a particular time and place, clearly encapsulates and addresses many of the more general issues discussed by migration theorists. The research presented here seeks to answer such questions and to explore, more specifically, the future of immigration and multiculturalism in an "internationalized" Japanese political community. This study focusses on the integration of *nikkeijin* in particular in an effort to isolate the broadest challenges to the integration of immigrants in Japan.

### NIKKEIJIN IN JAPAN: AN IMMIGRATION EXPERIMENT

Changes in global migration patterns, the Japanese labor market, and Japanese immigration policy during the last decade belie the prevailing image of Japan as a closed, ethnically homogeneous society. The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act of 1990, passed in response to a persistent demand for workers in some sectors of the Japanese economy, opened Japan's borders to the legal immigration of foreign unskilled labor. Through the creation of a preferred entrance category for *nikkeijin*, unskilled laborers were allowed to enter Japan legally for the first time. The legal admission of *nikkeijin* is a direct outcome of government efforts to curtail illegal immigration while meeting industry's demand for unskilled labor and respecting Japanese concerns about ethnic and "cultural harmony." The policy change reflected in the new law and its ramifications make Japan the "most intriguing and important laboratory in the world for studying the interplay among private market forces, cultural tolerance for immigration, and government attempts to regulate it" (Cornelius 1994:375).

The unprecedented growth and success of Japanese industry in the 1980s created a labor shortage for the first time since the post-war industrialization. Demographic trends like a declining birth rate and a growing elderly population, combined with a distaste among young Japanese workers for "lower status" manufacturing and construction jobs, compelled Japanese corporations to turn to foreign labor. However, this demand for foreign labor was complicated by the Japanese government's official stance on immigration; immigration law allowed only *skilled* labor or professionals to enter and work in Japan legally. This "no

unskilled labor" policy led to a huge increase in the number of economic migrants entering and working in Japan illegally. These illegal workers, many from Iran, Pakistan, and China, found work at factories or construction sites and lived in plain view of both the authorities and Japanese society. Large gatherings of foreigners in parks and public places underscored the gap between official immigration policy and the reality of the demand for foreign labor. Furthermore, the actual presence of foreigners in Japan triggered a national discussion revolving around questions of globalization, multiculturalism, and Japanese national identity.

The "foreign worker problem," as it came to be called in media and policy circles, stemmed from the contradiction between Japan's official policies concerning unskilled foreign labor and the strong demand for factory and construction workers in Japan. If Japanese industry hoped to operate at its current pace, it needed workers to take the low-level jobs at parts factories and building projects. Given the unwillingness of Japanese workers to take the so-called 3K jobs ("*kitanai*" or dirty, "*kiken*" or dangerous, and "*kitsui*" or demanding), the "back door" had been opened to illegal immigration. The result, the sudden influx of foreigners to Japanese cities, prompted demands from all sides for a rethinking of Japan's immigration policy. Conservatives, attributing Japan's phenomenal economic success to the nation's homogeneity and natural "harmony," cautioned against opening the country to foreigners for fear of the social conflict and disharmony which, they believed, would surely follow. Human rights organizations pointed to the vulnerability of illegal workers to exploitation at the hands of corporations and unscrupulous labor brokering agencies. Proponents of "internationalization" (*kokusaika*) argued that opening Japan to foreigners could only enhance the richness of Japanese culture and improve Japan's international reputation. This debate dominated Japanese political discussion during the late 1980s and culminated in the introduction of a new Japanese immigration policy in 1989.

The revised Immigration Law, which took effect in June 1990, preserves the "no unskilled labor" rule, but opens several "side doors" which allow the de facto admission of unskilled labor. The most significant "side door" is the creation of a new entrance category for ethnic Japanese. This "*teijū*" (settler) entrance category applies to the descendants (up to the third generation) of Japanese emigrants, their spouses, and children and has resulted in an influx of *nikkeijin* immigration from Brazil, Peru, and other Latin American countries. The admission of ethnic Japanese from Latin America was seen by policy makers as a way to reconcile the need for foreign unskilled labor with concerns about the risk of diluting the "cultural integrity" of Japan. However, this effort is complicated by the fact that *nikkeijin* have been subject to and influenced by Latin American culture and have limited knowledge of the Japanese language or heritage (Tsuchida 1998). Furthermore, as the number of *nikkeijin* in Latin America who want to migrate to Japan is limited, Japan may still be forced to face the prospect of (legally) admitting non-Japanese foreign workers into the country to ease labor market demands. Thus, the challenges faced by *nikkeijin* and their families in their efforts to live and work in Japan are a window into the future experiences of minorities in Japan should the nation ease immigration restrictions for other foreign workers in the future. This



dimension of the new law presents researchers and policy-makers with a unique opening; this is one of the rare opportunities afforded to social scientists to observe the institutional, political, and social adaptation to the entrance and integration of foreign workers and their families.

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Immigrant integration has long been an issue of fundamental interest to both scholars and policy makers but has assumed a new practical and political urgency as ethnicity and cultural differences have re-emerged as sources of violence and social conflict. What is meant by “integration” or “acculturation” when used in the context of immigration? The literature on the subject offers a broad range of meanings for the term, ranging from the assimilation of immigrants to the acceptance of cultural pluralism and diversity as immigrant populations grow and settle in host societies. Indeed, a broad array of integration strategies have been employed “on the ground,” varying in the degree to which immigrant groups maintain their cultural difference or adopt the characteristics of the dominant society. In general, integration “has been seen broadly as the *binding together* of discrete social groups in a manner aimed at removing conflicts and inequalities” (Barbieri 1998:48). At the very least, the integration of immigrants implies that immigrants and their families are *absorbed* into the host society (Weiner 1996). The “guestworker” policies adopted by many European countries in the post-war period attempted to circumvent the problem of immigrant integration by recruiting and employing foreign labor on a strictly temporary basis, making immigrant absorption unnecessary and theoretically incompatible with the strict rotation and return policies officially in effect (Weiner 1996). However, even these calculated policies of non-integration and non-absorption failed in the context of the rights-based liberal regimes in which they were adopted<sup>1</sup>, and some form of immigrant integration followed as “temporary rotations” turned into permanent settlement as a result of family reunification policies and the establishment of social networks.

The integration literature describes the “integration models” adopted by different states as dependent on several factors for both their suitability and success. One factor identified in the literature as influencing immigrant integration is the structure and character of the host society’s labor market. Smooth immigrant integration is thought to be facilitated by an expanding “host society economy [that]...provid[es] opportunities for migrants as well as reduc[es] competition between those of migrant and those of native origin” (Weiner 1996:59). On the other hand, if immigration is stimulated initially by a “structural demand for labor” (Cornelius 1994; Piore 1979) in host economies, the jobs available to immigrants tend to be concentrated in low-status, dead-end sectors that have been abandoned by the native labor force (Piore 1979). This condition has been found to lead to the stigmatization of certain types of jobs as “immigrant work” and contributes to a further separation between immigrants and native residents. This structural circumstance can also reduce the range of “acceptable” occupations for foreigners (Cornelius 1994; Piore 1979). Likewise characteristics of the immigrants recruit-