

Labour Migration from China to Japan

International students, transnational migrants

Gracia Liu-Farrer

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Labour Migration from China to Japan

Chinese students are the largest international student population in the world, and Japan attracts more of them than any other country. Since the mid-1980s when China opened the door to let private citizens out and Japan began to let more foreigners in, over 300,000 Chinese have arrived in Japan as students. Student migrants are the most visible, controversial and active Chinese immigrants in Japan. The majority of them enter Japan's labour market and many have stayed on indefinitely.

Based on the author's original fieldwork data and government statistics, this book gives a comprehensive portrayal of an often neglected group of international migrants in a society that for decades has been considered a non-immigrant country. It introduces Chinese students' diverse mobility trajectories, analyses their career patterns, describes their transnational living arrangements and explores the mechanisms that give rise to their identity as 'new overseas Chinese'. This book contributes to our understanding of international migration and international education in an age of globalization. It points out that student migrants are key to the internationalization of Japanese society, and potentially in other countries where immigration is still considered a challenging reality.

The book will be of interest to students and scholars of Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, Sociology and Labour Studies.

Gracia Liu-Farrer is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Japan.

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To James

Series editors' preface

The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies series – which has now been running for over 25 years and produced over 80 volumes – seeks to foster an informed, balanced, but not uncritical understanding of Japan. As such, it has published extensively on all areas of Japanese social activity, including the position of minority groups in a society where the State still pursues an active policy of disseminating an ideology of social and cultural homogeneity and underplays minority rights issues in the belief that not raising consciousness about them will be the quickest way to see discrimination dissipate.

The series has, over the years, published work that covers the situation of Japan's best-known minority groups – the Ainu, the Burakumin, the Zainichi Kankokujin (Japanese-Koreans) and the Okinawans. The current volume is the first, however, on the situation of Japan's newest, most important and least studied major minority group – the Chinese community in Japan. The Chinese immigrant population in Japan today constitute over 30 per cent of Japan's entire foreign population. A further 100,000 Chinese have become naturalized Japanese citizens. Yet there is virtually nothing written in English about the community at all. Gracia Liu-Farrer's book, therefore, fills a huge gap in the literature.

The Chinese community in Japan are interesting in a large number of ways which differentiate them from other minority groups. To start with, they are part of a large Chinese diaspora and the author, therefore, seeks to analyse them through the lens of 'transnationalism' (drawing heavily on the influential work of Saskia Sassen) rather than the paradigm of minority rights. They are transnational both in terms of seeing Japan as a place to study and as a place to labour. Unlike other groups which are – or have become – indigenous but marginalized, the Chinese new migrants to Japan see it as a land of opportunity. While they may face discrimination, they see this as a challenge to their desire to be cross-border entrepreneurs which they need and can overcome. Second, the Chinese community in Japan is one of the few outsider groups that has identifiably been able to integrate and be upwardly mobile. A large proportion of the naturalized Chinese community in Japan work in professional jobs and many of the new immigrant community have quickly moved into sectors of the economy and the society which have been thought to be impossible to enter for those outside

Japanese mainstream society. The community may be a *minority* in terms of numbers, but they have not been as *marginal* as other self-identified minority groups in Japan. This tells us a great deal not only about the Chinese community in Japan itself, but also about the flexibility and mutability of Japanese social structures. It suggests that Japan's exclusion of minority groups has had more to do with protecting political and economic power than with any cultural phobia about groups coming from outside. Japan is changing fast, and while some of its politicians might still talk about it as a homogeneous country, the speed of immigration into the country from the mid-1980s onwards suggests it is fast moving towards what the author calls an 'immigrant country'.

Gracia Liu-Farrer's detailed account brings to life the experience and activities of the still rapidly growing Chinese community in Japan. But in going beyond that and showing how the immigration patterns of this new community into and out of Japan add to our understanding of broader issues of globalization and international migration, she also brings Japan into the mainstream of debates about human capital movements from which it has generally been excluded. Given the decline in the size of – and the ageing of – the Japanese population, the need to understand the ways in which Japan can be part of such global labour movements is becoming more important than ever.

Roger Goodman
J.A.A. Stockwin

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Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	xii
<i>Series editors' preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
 Introduction: Japan and the educationally channelled international labour migration	 1
1 <i>Fuji Dongying</i> : a century of Chinese student migration to Japan	18
2 Parting at the starting point: visa overstaying as a social process	38
3 Labouring to learn: student migrant life in Japan	63
4 Careers in Japan's transnational economy	85
5 Producing global economies from below: migrants' transnational entrepreneurship	110
6 Life spanned across borders	125
 Conclusion: international students, transnational migrants	 141
 Appendix A: research methodology	 154
 Appendix B: labelling the subjects: Chinese vs immigrants	 162
 Appendix C: demographic profiles of the interviewees	 166
 <i>Notes</i>	 171
<i>References</i>	179
<i>Index</i>	191

Illustrations

Figures

✓ 1.1	Student migration from China to Japan, 1984–2009	25
✓ 1.2	Regional trends of Chinese migration into Japan, 1974–2009	26
✓ 2.1	Number of newly licensed language schools in Tokyo, 1987–2006	44
✓ 4.1	Chinese students who obtained employment visas in Japan, 1983–2009	87
✓ 4.2	Occupations of international student migrants granted employment visas, 2009	97

Tables

2.1	Visa overstayers among the interviewees	39
2.2	Interviewed student visa overstayers from major sending regions who entered Japan before 2002	40
3.1	Types of part-time work among surveyed Chinese students in Japan, 2003	67
5.1	Entry years of the sampled entrepreneurs	111
5.2	Chinese transnational migrant entrepreneurship: types of businesses	112
5.3	Chinese transnational migrant entrepreneurship: firm sizes	113
6.1	Residence of spouses of surveyed Chinese migrants in Japan, 2003	126
6.2	Caregivers of children in surveyed transnational households in China, 2003	126

Introduction

Japan and the educationally channelled international labour migration

The Chinese New Year was around the corner. Pan Ning, the General Manager of UNIQLO International, China, the Fast Retailing Co.'s casual fashion branch, hopped between Beijing, Ningbo and Guangzhou, launching three new retail stores within a week in mid-January. He told the local shop staff, 'Look into the eyes while greeting the customers. Even when you show the same smile, there is a difference between a smile that reaches the customer and one that doesn't.' These basics of customer services are what he learnt himself by working for a Pachinko shop in Mitaka, Tokyo.

In 1987, Pan arrived in Japan as a foreign student. One of the first Japanese words he remembered was a word he continuously heard at his part-time job 'Dame (No!)'. 'Dame! You shouldn't cross you arms!' 'Dame! You should open the door for the customers!' He was warned about the way he talked, the way he held his body, and the way he smiled. Pan tolerated it. He believed that the reason for Japan's economic development lied in such seriousness (*kimajimesa*).

Upon completing the Master's programme in 1995, Pan joined UNIQLO. With the service skills trained through part-time jobs, he became store manager within half a year at its Machida store in Tokyo. Pan said: 'The basics of service are the same for Pachinko parlors and apparel shops.' A year later, he became involved in businesses with China. After being a supervisor to the manufacturing plant in China, he launched the first retail shop in Shanghai in 2002...

Now that the domestic market is shrinking, Fast Retailing Co. plans to set up 100 stores in China in 5 years. From 2007, it started the recruitment of foreigners living in Japan in earnest. At present, they hire about 20 foreign students every year, most of them Chinese.

Appraising Pan Ning, Mr. Aono, the manager of the company's Global Communication Team said: 'He successfully planted UNIQLO's genes into China. It is his experience as 'consumer' in both societies that has really made the difference (*mono wo itta*).' Helping Japanese enterprises break into China while finding values in Japan that China seeks, the Chinese in Japan are actively blending Chinese and Japanese business practices.¹

The story above is taken from an article appearing in Japan's second largest daily newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* on 11 February, 2009. Pan Ning's story is among the first month's reports of Asahi's 18-month-long series on Chinese immigrants in Japan in 2009 and 2010. The series, under the title *Chinese in Japan (zainichi*