

## **Transnationalism and Foreign Workers in Japan: Between State Policies and Market Forces**

David Chiavacci, University of Zurich

Japan is for over two decades a new immigration country with a continuous and significant inflow of immigrants, which allows us to analyze the long-term effects of new immigration. This paper discusses comparatively the socio-economic integration of the three major groups of new foreign workers in Japan: Chinese students, Chinese interns, and Nikkeijin (Japanese emigrants and their descendants). Our analysis reveals as main result a striking degree of structural diversity. Patterns of integration and exclusion differ fundamentally between the three major groups. Whilst the Chinese entering as students are successful overall, achieving middle class positions, the Chinese entering as interns are fully marginalized and have no chance of becoming part of Japan's mainstream society. The Nikkeijin are an ambivalent case. On the one hand, they have decent incomes. On the other hand, they are not integrated into Japan's social security system and are highly vulnerable to unemployment as the economic crisis in the late 2000s has exemplified. In view of the educational record of their children, they might even constitute a new ethnic underclass in the making.

Transnationalism is a crucial structural factor for Chinese immigrants but has completely different effects on the two groups. Chinese entering as students are empowered by transnationalism and have successfully used the opportunities granted them through transnationalism. Through their agency they have had a structural effect on transnational links by significantly enlarging business relations between China and Japan. Chinese interns, however, are structurally embedded into a transnational total institution which marginalizes them. The functioning of the foreign intern system depends on their transnational mind-set. Transnationalism is, in the case of Nikkeijin not such an important factor but has a negative impact. Empirical studies show that transnational behavior, such as travelling back and forth between Japan and South America, has a negative influence on the socio-economic integration of first-generation immigrants and on the educational attainments of the second generation. Whilst the odds of non-enrolment in school doubles for Brazilian school children who five years earlier lived outside of Japan, this factor has no influence on the enrolment of Chinese school children.

Overall, the socio-economic integration of new immigrants in Japan is a mixed bag and shows a complex interplay between state policies and market forces. Among the three major groups of immigrants, one is successfully integrating (Chinese entering as students), one is fully marginalized (Chinese entering as interns), and one has achieved a short-term stable position but might become an ethnic underclass in the long-term (Nikkeijin). Based on this conclusion, the paper will also discuss the potential future impact of recent changes in immigration policy (2019 immigration law reform) and immigration flows (sharp increase of Vietnamese interns) as well as ongoing discussion on the reform of the foreign intern system on the socio-economic integration of foreign workers in Japan.