

Coexisting with Foreign Workers in Japan

The “specified skilled worker” status of residence was established following the enactment of the Act for Partial Amendment of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act and the Act for Establishment of the Ministry of Justice in April 2019. As of October 2018, there were about 1.46 million foreign workers in Japan, and the number is projected to increase further in the years ahead. Amid this situation, local communities face the challenge of how to deal with the increasing number of foreign workers and their families.

In this feature, the authors [*Discuss Japan* carries the article by Kawamura Chizuko below], introduce the status of residence system, measures for employing foreign workers, local governments making use of the increasing number of foreigners to revitalize their local communities, efforts made by housing complexes more than half of whose inhabitants are foreigners and the experience and opinion of a third-generation Japanese South American who currently works actively in Japan after coming to the country together with his parents, as well as experts’ opinions on the perspectives necessary for coexistence. We sincerely hope that the information presented will contribute to your thinking about the acceptance of foreign human resources in the future and measures for living in harmony with them.

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The Value of Co-working and Co-creation: Why Is a Life Cycle Perspective Necessary?

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What does it mean to work together?

Work occupies a large portion of our time and mental capacity. Working together with other people sets you free from loneliness and frustration and creates an independent view of life. To immigrants in particular, obtaining a stable work environment in the country where they have settled leads to a positive worldview and a hope for self-realization as well. The author started to work in a British state-owned company immediately after graduating from university, took advantage of a long-term training program in London and worked in a multinational environment in the company of colleagues from the United Kingdom, China and India. As I look back on that time, I strongly feel that simply because the office was a “place where I could feel secure,” or a place where “co-creation through multicultural synergy” could happen, I was able to directly feel the joy of working, avoid being isolated and cultivate a sense of multiculturalism.



Emeritus Prof. Dr. Kawamura Chizuko

Let's think about the value of co-working and co-creation

More than 2.73 million foreigners from 195 countries reside in Japan. This section will consider what value co-working and co-creation have in a multilingual and multicultural society.

In April 2019, the Japanese government enacted the Act for Partial Amendment of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act and the Act for Establishment of the Ministry of Justice with the aim of expanding the acceptance of foreign human resources in domains where there are shortages of labor. The Ministry of Justice's Immigration Bureau was elevated to the Immigration Services Agency, which took over jurisdiction of the immigration issue.

In addition, the Comprehensive Measures for Acceptance and Coexistence of Foreign Nationals were decided upon, and 126 policy measures with a total budget of 21.1 billion yen were presented. Local communities and medical institutions, as well as the Immigration Services Agency, local governments, companies and academic institutions need a warm-hearted attitude rooted in human rights and institutional infrastructure toward foreign men and women coming to Japan to return to their home countries, speak about their relationships of trust during their stay in Japan and open up the path to work actively.

Why is a life cycle perspective necessary?

To coexist with the foreigners who come to Japan, it is necessary to care for each other and adopt a perspective of close involvement in each other's lives. The current substantive immigration policy is about working together as both an immigration control policy and a social integration policy.

A perspective encompassing each stage in the life cycle of immigrants close to them, in addition to analysis by nationality to accurately grasp changes in the increasingly multinational and diverse society, leads to a global, long-term perspective. This is because it is extremely important to put importance on equal access and closing gaps in an era in which the Japanese are becoming increasingly diverse and people in general are becoming highly mobile.

To date, it has been pointed out that there are Japanese children with poor Japanese ability and that some people do not have access to the guarantee of the opportunity for basic education, respect for and education in people's native languages and cultures, information-sharing, the right to receive medical services and the opportunities for residence and employment. In response to this situation, civil groups have worked hard. Going forward, it is anticipated that reciprocally balanced policies will break down institutional barriers and prevent social division.

It is necessary to visualize the secondary effects obtained from the process of co-creation with immigrants throughout their lives — from infancy to youth, adolescence, adulthood and on to old age — as it lays the groundwork for coexistence in the future. Living with family is also crucial for immigrants to feel secure. This wholistic, intergenerational perspective also influences the expectations, knowledge, anxieties and perspectives of the countries from which immigrants come.

The author has conducted surveys of regions where immigrants live in groups since 1989 when the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (the revised Immigration Act) was revised, and, as a result, discovered the reality that the co-creation of “a place where immigrants can feel secure” in the community made for multi-layered intimate and public spheres and had a huge impact on a multicultural society.

The public sphere in the illustration below shows various public spaces, such as maternity hospitals, nursery schools, kindergartens, elementary schools, libraries, museums, junior high schools, vocational schools, Japanese-language schools, night middle schools, hospitals, companies, workplaces, universities, civil groups, religious facilities, nursing care facilities, nursing homes, funeral homes and multi-faith cemeteries. Public facilities become “places where immigrants can feel secure” and also become a place for mutual caring that prevents social division through multicultural and multilingual experiences and co-creation. In another words, these are the “secure place/s for co-creation.” The results of this cooperation and the trust it builds expand to the overseas regions to which immigrants return, like a chain reaction.

The universality and limitedness of human beings: life and death

It is important for both the national and local governments to pay attention to the life and death of human beings and consider multicultural coexistence measures from the long-term perspective of continuity from one generation to the next. As more and more immigrants settle in Japanese communities, it will not only add to the elderly population but also will involve the possibility of people becoming sick or unemployed through the diverse hazards of life. It is important for all people, including the elderly and those with disabilities, to have knowledge of the safety nets for living productive and healthy lives. How well do we understand the application of the Public Assistance Act, the Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance Act and other laws concerning public services to foreigners and the issues involved? You should keep in mind that foreign care workers who supplement the domestic labor shortage in nursing care will also reach old age in due course. It is critical that an appropriate environment is in place, including a pension system, nursing care insurance system, health insurance system and medical insurance system, for the future. Previously, only people from countries with an applicable Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) or the “nursing care” status of residence were able to take on roles in the nursing care field. But currently, this has been expanded to include more people engage in activities outside qualifications, such as those with technical intern training or specified skilled worker statuses of residence, or those studying in Japan. It is necessary to interview workers to examine if these efforts are producing results.

When immigrants “feel secure” and attempt to realize a “co-creation through multicultural synergy” in the workplace

The employment of foreigners often involves cases in which they are employed by Japanese companies via brokers from the immigrants’ home countries or travel agencies. In these cases, there were a mountain of problems, such as brokers collecting unreasonable commissions and employers taking passports from foreign workers.

In the employment of Japanese-South Americans, there were cases of indirect employment, such as through staffing agencies and contractors. Unstable employment becomes a social problem with an increasing number of cases in which foreigners become unemployed because they were laid off or fired. It is natural that corporate managers actively acquire knowledge about the status of residence system and the legal procedures that they should be familiar with when employing foreigners and the obligations that go along with it. Managers are required to manage based on a perspective of co-creation to ensure that foreign workers are well informed of the Japanese employment systems that support their lives and communications, to help them adapt and work without anxiety.

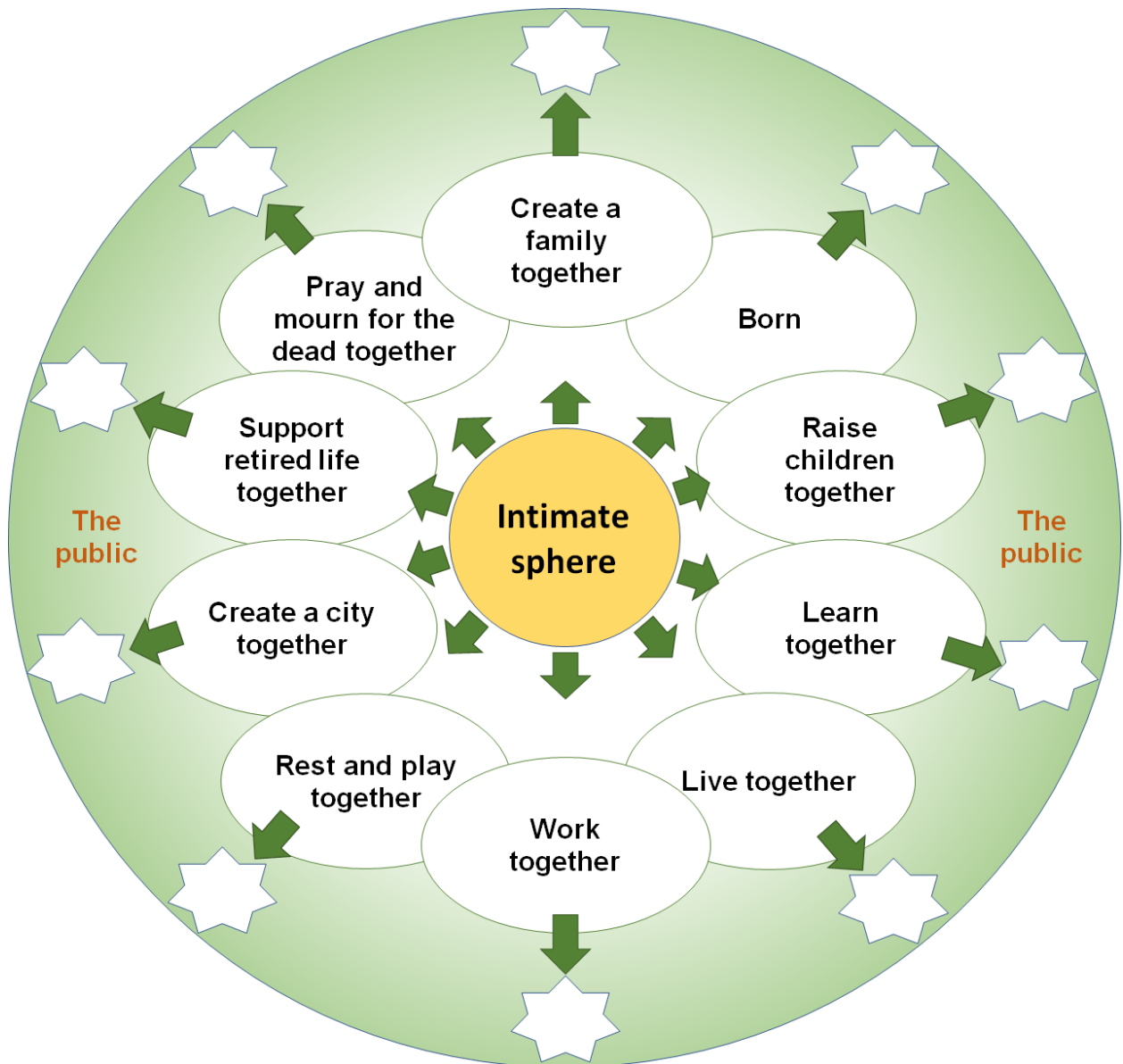


Illustration 1: A life cycle perspective, encompassing the expansion of the intimate sphere and connections with the public sphere (“The expansion of the intimate sphere seen in ‘places where immigrants feel secure’ and its connections with the public sphere” [Kawamura 2015])

“Places where immigrants feel secure” refers to places where people can freely communicate, speak their true feelings, overcome difficulties and laugh together. Sharing information is the foundation of a multicultural society in which information networks are promoted and the rapid movement of global information surfaces. Information that improves the quality of life is distributed by local governments, NGOs, NPOs, medical facilities, companies and religious facilities as well as the press. It has been seen that local governments with few deaths in disaster-affected areas and local governments with many deaths differed in their distribution of accurate information.

What change did the Technical Intern Training Program bring to the employment of technical intern trainees after their return to their home countries? The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has conducted follow-up surveys of the technical intern trainees after their return home every year. The results from fiscal 2018 show that 96.9% of the 5,359 valid responses said that the things the trainees had learned in Japan turned out to be useful. In addition, at a presentation for the technical intern trainees' Japanese language contest, many trainees expressed their joy at experiencing stable employment conditions and their gratitude to Japan, their second home. A quarter of a century has passed since the Technical Intern Training Program was established. This program has repeatedly been revised and improved, with an emphasis on follow-up support for trainees after their return to their home countries. For specified skilled workers to contribute to alleviating shortages of labor, it is important to review the guidelines for managing the employment of foreign workers, to facilitate “workplaces where immigrants can feel secure,” be caring, actively interact, share information, and to share the time and space for learning, co-working and co-creation through multicultural synergy.

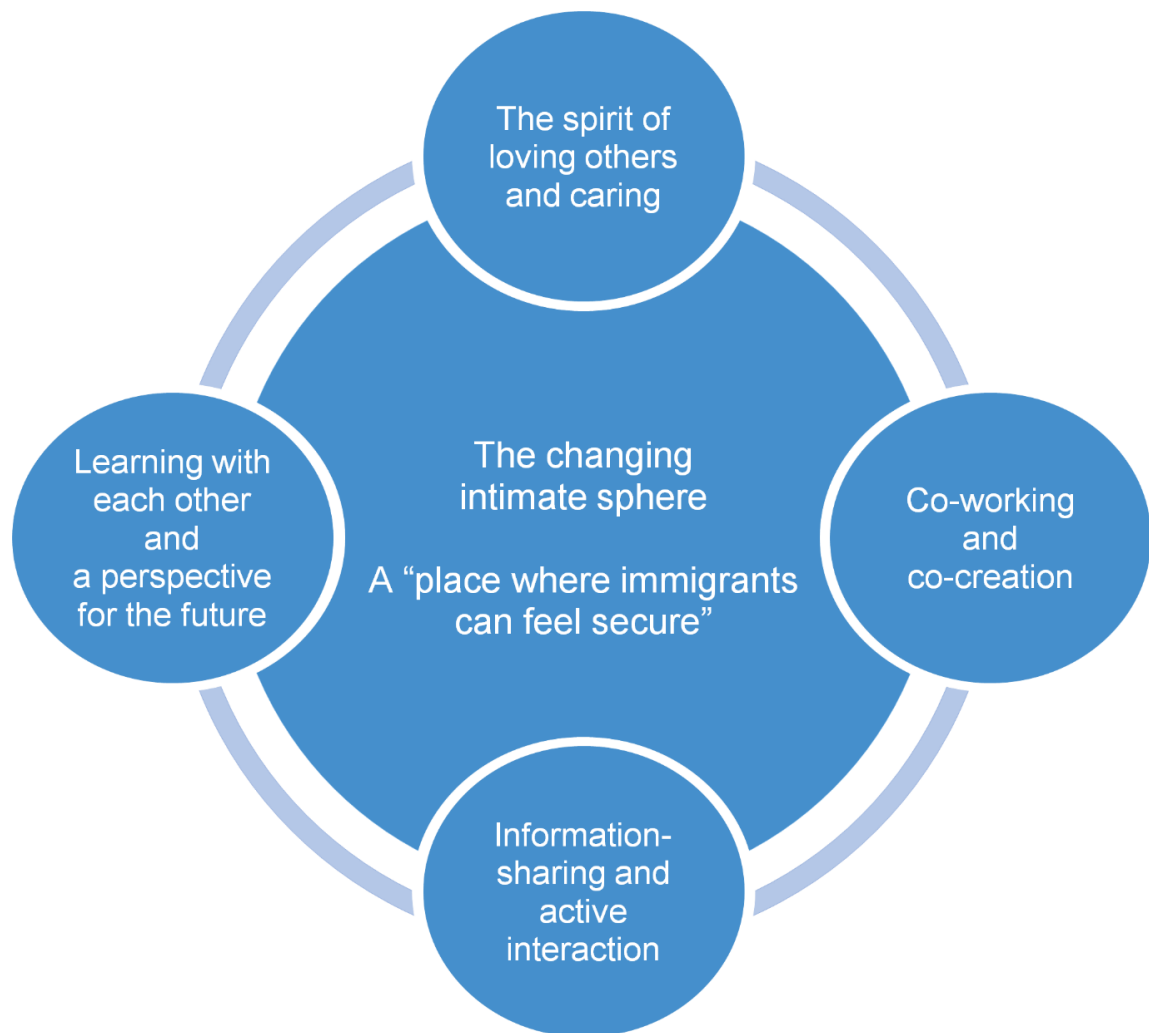


Illustration 2: Synergetic effects created by “places where immigrants feel secure” (*Social Education in a Multicultural Society* Chapter 1: “Places where immigrants can feel secure” support co-working and co-creation: Start a spontaneous social integration policy [Kawamura 2019])

Learning an immigration control policy and co-created value

Corporate training and curriculum reform

As a future challenge, corporate training and curriculum reforms in educational institutions are necessary. For foreigners to work together, they need to acquire a status of residence that enables them to work, understand the legal position of foreign residents in Japan, including restrictions on their vocational choice according to their status of residence, and have correct knowledge about status of residence. The active learning of directly experiencing the precious experience of working together is also necessary. Projects to support foreigners in their job searches and Japanese-language classes have been held in many parts of the country. For the employment of foreigners, it is necessary to implement training programs that encourage considerations for helping them work without anxiety, paying attention to the fact that they are not used to the Japanese language or Japanese employment systems. In addition, it is also necessary to establish a system which nurtures experienced local government officials with much expertise on social security, enabling them to work within the system for a long period of time.

Everyone talks feeling at home

No longer anyone else's business

As is widely known, Japan will be able to employ foreigners as specified skilled workers (i) in 14 job categories. The government has decided to accept up to 345,000 foreign workers in the next five years in industries facing serious shortages of labor, such as nursing care, construction, janitorial services, agriculture, food and drink and manufacturing. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism will dispatch Japanese engineers to Southeast Asian nations to increase the number of foreign specified skilled workers in the manufacturing industry. Those engineers will teach Japanese construction methods with the aim of realizing more successful applicants for specified skilled workers' qualification examinations. The government will first dispatch Japanese engineers to Vietnam in October and then to the Philippines and Indonesia (according to the August 12 edition of the *Yomiuri shimbun*). Local trainees will learn Japanese construction techniques and engage in construction. The construction industry will accept up to 40,000 foreign workers with specified skilled workers' qualifications in the next five years, beginning from the current fiscal year. Local citizens, companies, local governments, educational and medical institutes, religious facilities and civil groups will work in collaboration and the practice of co-working and co-creation will help revitalize local regions.

Long-term measures based on the management of diversity and co-creation have begun. Academic institutions, such as many Japanese-language schools and vocational schools, are promoting curriculum reforms in collaboration with local regions. Medical institutions have launched medical interpreter training courses. People have come to recognize the necessity of specific institutional infrastructure, such as consultation counters for stateless persons, support for the protection of applicants, granting of citizenship to second-generation refugees, statistical surveys of children with ethnic roots in foreign countries and education in their mother tongues. It is also important to bring in the energy and eagerness of growing Asia through the group-supervised acceptance of technical intern trainees that started from 2010, to develop through the globalization of companies from inside and to understand the practice of employment, spreading circles of trust. An accumulation of learning and co-created value leads to a better

understanding of the revised Immigration Act and the discovering of issues. When foreigners build self-confidence in their home countries, hand down stories of their own precious experiences in Japan from generation to generation and remain strongly committed to contributing to their home countries, I am sure that local technical cooperation will create synergy.

I believe that the economic development we hope for is to have a management philosophy of working together, to mutually improve the quality of life and to contribute to building a global society with a high degree of happiness instead of just making up for the exhaustion of workforce.

A multicultural synergetic society is a society that aims to realize a society with a high degree of happiness through a caring, diverse population, including foreign students, immigrants, refugees, persons with disabilities, elderly people, LGBT individuals, single-parent families, stateless persons and persons without family registration. The spontaneous collaboration between national and local governments, companies, academic and medical institutions and the civil sector produces synergy and its trust constitutes co-created value. (Kawamura: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018)

Lastly, if examples of good practices in which efforts to employ and co-work with foreign human resources with emphasis placed on their human rights contributes to local revitalization and international contribution become known more widely both inside and outside of the country, it will lead to more people understanding the potential of diversity, which will contribute to cross-border collaboration and people adopting long-term perspectives. If successful cases of the new “specified skilled worker” status of residence in particular are produced one after another from now, I expect that the relationships of trust created from that process will be recognized as the value of a better multicultural society instead of only aiming for the alleviation of the increasingly serious labor shortage.

Translated from “ZOOM UP ‘Nihon de shurosuru gaikokujin tonō kyōsei ni mukete’: Tomoni hataraku kyōdo-kyōso no kachi—naze raifusaikuru no shiza ga hitsuyo nanoka— (ZOOM UP ‘Coexisting with Foreign Workers in Japan’: The Value of Co-working and Co-creation: Why Is a Life Cycle Perspective Necessary?),” CLAIR FORUM, Nov. 2019 Vol. 361 (Courtesy of Council of Local Authorities for International Relations) [February 2020]

Note: ZOOM UP <http://www.clair.or.jp/j/forum/forum/articles/index-361.html> (Japanese only)

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