

Wants, Problems and Solutions:  
A survey of foreign residents about attitudes towards working in Japan <sup>1</sup>

Kazuya TAMURA (Japan Association for Promotion of Internationalization (JAPI))

Daichi ISHII (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Austin ZENG (MEXT Scholars Association)

Abstract

This report details and analyzes the results of a survey conducted regarding how foreigners view working in Japan. The survey's objectives are to quantify the issues facing the expansion of the mainly white-collar numbers of highly skilled foreign workers, in particular highly skilled foreign workers (defined as those possessing a Bachelor's degree or higher). This quantification aims to assist in the development of further policies in the future.

Survey respondents were members of three groups: foreign students (including exchange students), foreigners currently working full time in Japan and foreigners who have left Japan after having previously studied or worked in Japan. The survey was conducted in English and in Japanese through the internet using a tool called SurveyMonkey. Some questions were answered by all respondents whereas some questions were only displayed if the respondent belonged to an applicable group. The survey received more than 2,200 responses.

In this report, the authors first examine the responses to the question "To what extent would you recommend working in Japan to your friends in your home country?" in order to examine how attractive Japan is as a location for work. Excluding students who graduated from university but left Japan without working full time, in all other groups, around 80% of respondents provided positive responses to the question. The results of this question were categorized into three groups – current students, current full-time workers in Japan and those who have left Japan after studying and/or working.

The authors also observed a preference to work in foreign companies over working in Japanese companies among current students in Japan. This tendency was particularly strong among students studying in English. Also, we discovered that for respondents, the most important factor when deciding one's first place of work was whether they could learn something at their first workplace. In addition, experience working in a part-time position with heavy use of Japanese was positively correlated with knowledge about working in Japan.

Among the group currently working in Japan, the authors discovered that respondents were the least satisfied with career progression, with no significant variation observed depending on company size and number of years the employee has worked. The authors therefore conclude that providing foreigners attractive career paths after entering companies is one area where Japanese companies as a whole face challenges. Furthermore, while many companies hire foreigners directly from overseas, these respondents tended to have lower satisfaction scores compared to respondents hired after graduating from a school in Japan.

The authors observed that the most reported reason for leaving Japan among those who have previously studied or worked in Japan was the availability of better work opportunities overseas. This suggests that the presence of attractive work opportunities could affect how long a foreigner will stay in Japan and therefore providing opportunities to change jobs within Japan may be a point of improvement within Japan.

Another question which the authors examined was the extent to which those who had left Japan functioned as bridges between Japan and external countries. For those who had left Japan after a period of work, the authors observe that 70% had positive attitudes towards working in Japanese companies even outside Japan, and subsequently this group may be a resource for Japan and Japanese companies outside Japan. However,

---

<sup>1</sup>This study is conducted as a part of the Project "Empirical Studies on Employment, Migration, and Family Issues of Foreigners in Japan" undertaken at Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (RIETI). This piece of research was conducted by JAPI and is part of a joint initiative by JAPI and RIETI to investigate the working and living experiences of foreigners in Japan.

students who left Japan without working showed lower interest in working at Japanese companies. In light of this, the authors highlight the importance of efforts to facilitate job-seeking efforts of foreign students in Japan after graduation.