

# Anti-Immigrant Sentiments and Job Competition in Contemporary Japan

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## ABSTRACT

Japan recently joined a group of nations hosting a substantial number of international migrants and is also expected to increase the number of immigrants it accepts. Yet little information is available on Japan as an immigrant host country. The first key contribution of this paper is to investigate variations in general anti-immigrant sentiments among the Japanese using the Japanese General Social Survey, 2006. To examine the presence of variation, we test the hypothesis that antagonism towards immigrants is structured by job competition. Is anti-immigrant sentiment spread evenly across all levels of job competition? Or is it higher in industries and occupations with greater job competition in the local labor market? The second contribution of this paper is an investigation of the race/ethnic specificity of antagonistic sentiments. Finally, we provide cross-national comparative statistics from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), 2003.

This Abstract was prepared for a possible presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Dallas, TX.

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### Background and Significance

Japan recently joined a group of nations hosting a substantial number of international migrants. A United Nations report shows that, in 2005, Japan was one of 20 countries with the largest cumulative number of international migrants over 15 years (1990-2005). Japan did not belong to this group in 1990. The number of immigrants accepted into Japan in 2005 was larger than those in some European countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands (United Nations 2006). Immigrants to Japan are expected to increase even further over the next four decades. In order to sustain its economy while overcoming the challenges posed by the rapidly aging society, Japan may have little choice but to accept more immigrants (United Nations 2005). The most recent estimates from the United Nations (2005) demonstrate that, in order to sustain its population, Japan would need 381,000 immigrants per year between 2005 and 2050. When immigrant incorporation is accomplished at this rate, foreign born persons are estimated to compose 17.7 percent of the population in Japan in 2050, a level more than 10 times higher than the current level of 1.2 percent (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2005).

As the role of this immigrant host country expands, concerns over whether Japan provides a welcoming environment for immigrants enters policy debates (e.g. Howell 1996; Murphy-Shigematsu 1993). In stark contrast to these concerns is the suggestive evidence that the Japanese are more “immigrant friendly” than individuals in other Western industrialized countries such as the U.S. Statistics from the ISSP data set (in Table 1) show that Japan has a substantially higher percentage of respondents who agree with the statement that immigrants should have equal rights to nationals.

\*\*\*\*\*Table 1 about here\*\*\*\*\*

The disjuncture between concerns expressed by some scholars and empirical evidence is in part the product of lack of information on the extent of anti-immigrant sentiment among the Japanese and how their perceptions are constructed. The U.S. case demonstrates that the construction of antagonistic race/ethnic perceptions in a population involves intricate relations among historical events, policy arrangements, and class relations that shift over historical time (e.g., Wilson 1978; Ong and Valenzuela 1995). For example, Wilson’s (1978) influential work, which examines black Americans’ positions in the United States, demonstrates the increased salience of competition for higher wages once employment discrimination became outlawed. Other scholars have expanded the concept of economic competition to include job competition (e.g., Mason 1999; Ong and Valenzuela 1995).

Similarly, in recent years, antagonistic racial and ethnic sentiments in Japan may be becoming increasingly driven by economic needs, as opposed to institutionalized exclusionary practices. After the economic bubble burst in the 1990s, firms started to extensively rely on temporary workers to cut costs to compete in the global economy. It is becoming increasingly difficult for workers to get jobs in the so-called lifetime employment system (Ono 2007). Yet fertility decline has limited the supply of Japanese

workers in occupations that are unattractive to the Japanese. Thus, the ample demand for temporary jobs that are unattractive to the Japanese pulled immigrant workers into Japan.<sup>1</sup> These economic and demographic changes make a study of the link between economic competitions and anti-immigrant or -ethnic group sentiment timely.

The first key contribution of this paper is to investigate variations in general anti-immigrant sentiments among the Japanese. Such antagonistic sentiment has been generalized to be strong and invariant in the past (e.g., Howell 1996). To examine the presence of variation, we test the hypothesis that antagonism towards immigrants is structured by job competition. Is anti-immigrant sentiment spread evenly across all levels of job competition? Or is it higher in industries and occupations with greater job competition in the local labor market? We construct a measure of immigrant worker concentration in the prefecture of residence to test this hypothesis.

The second contribution of this paper is an investigation of the race/ethnic specificity of antagonistic sentiments. Foreign workers tend to be concentrated in particular occupations depending on their countries of origin. For example, while more than 70% of Southeast Asian and Latin American immigrants work as laborers, more than 70% or more of the English and Americans work in specialized and technical jobs (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2005). Thus, Japanese respondents who are laborers may exhibit antagonism against Southeast Asians and Latin Americans. Those in professional and technical jobs may express antagonism against the English and Americans.

And third, we provide cross-national statistics related to variations in anti-immigrant/ethnic group sentiments from national representative samples. Comparative statistics are presented across the dimensions of occupation and industry, as well as age, gender, education, and family income. These simple but informative statistics have not been part of Japanese official statistics.

## Data

The *Japanese General Social Survey* is an annual cross-sectional survey of a nationally representative sample of men and women age 20 and older. It provides information on respondents such as their attitudes, household structure, occupational mobility, family values, religion, and leisure activities. A total of 4,254 respondents were interviewed in 2006. JGSS provides an opportunity to obtain valuable insights into the link between job competition and antagonism against immigrant or ethnic groups in Japan. Working age respondents, namely those age 60 and below are used in the

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<sup>1</sup> As a note, some ethnic groups, such as the Koreans, may only be part of this dynamic. Many Koreans, and to a lesser extent Taiwanese and mainland Chinese, migrated to Japan and remained in Japan during and after Japan colonized their countries (Kashiwazaki and Akaha 2006). These immigrants were given the “option” to “fully” assimilate into Japanese society—changing names and identities—and hence may be regarded as being more similar to the Japanese. Kim (2007) notes that class differentiation is present among the Koreans—evidence that is interpreted as weakened ethnic oppression (Kim 2007).

It is also useful to note that visa categories allowed by the Japanese government discourage the entrance of unskilled workers into Japan. However, unskilled workers enter Japan through two mechanisms: a) the trainee system; and b) hiring of descendants of Japanese emigrants (Kashiwazaki and Akaha 2006).

analytic sample, who were approximately 65% of the original sample. Patterns in the missing responses are also analyzed.

Supplementary analyses are conducted with the National Identity module of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), 2003. These data enable us to conduct cross-national comparisons relating to respondents' national identities and perceptions of foreign workers and immigrants. The ISSP data contains 43 countries, with a total sample size of 33,696 respondents between the ages of 20 and 60, of which 624 are Japanese.

## **Variables**

Two dependent variables from the JGSS are used. The first dependent variable is anti-immigrant sentiment. The questionnaire asks: "are you for or against an increase in the number of foreigners in your community?" The response is provided in two levels: "for" or "against." The second dependent variable is antagonism against countries or regions. The respondents are asked "how do you feel about the following countries and regions?" The respondents are asked to rate their perceptions of: South Korea, North Korea, China, Mongolia, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Russia, and U.S.A. The responses range from more favorable (+3) to less favorable (-3), with 0 indicating indifference.

A covariate of interest is immigrant job competition in the respondents' local job market. This covariate is measured in two ways: a) % of immigrant workers (versus Japanese workers) in the respondent's industry in the respondent's prefecture; and b) % of immigrant workers (versus Japanese workers) in the respondent's occupation in the respondent's prefecture. The former assigns to each respondent's prefecture-occupation the aggregate % of foreign workers in his or her prefecture-occupation. These data are obtained from aggregated tables provided by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2005), and are merged onto the JGSS. These measures allow us to capture the effect of high immigrant competition in respondents' job category on their level of antagonism against immigrants. We predict that respondents who work in jobs with high concentration of immigrants in their prefecture of residence have higher levels of antagonism towards immigrants.

We also include an interaction effect between respondents' occupation X job competition to assess whether the effect of competition on antagonism against ethnic groups is especially large among agricultural/forestry/fishery workers or laborers (e.g., Thailand, Indonesia, and India). We expect that job competition is more intense among these workers than among professional or technical workers because they are more easily "replaced" due to the temporary and unskilled nature of their work.

Control variables in multivariate models include: % of foreigners versus Japanese nationals in the prefecture of residence, respondents' gender and age, city size, marital status, number of children, family income, and education, and the extent to which the respondent understood the survey question, as reported by the interviewer.

## **Analytic Strategy and Preliminary Results**

Table 2, estimated from the JGSS, contains the percentages of respondents who are against an increase in immigrants among 20-60 year olds in selected occupations. Nearly 60% of the respondents who are in agricultural/forestry/fishery, or are laborers/operators express anti-immigrant sentiments. In contrast, more than 60% of the respondents in service occupations express pro-immigrant sentiments. Multivariate analyses will clarify these contrasting occupational tendencies by incorporating prefectural concentration of immigrant workers in specific occupations.

\*\*\*\*\*Table 2 about here\*\*\*\*\*

The multivariate analyses employ logistic regression (for dependent variable=anti-immigrant sentiment), and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and ordered logit regression techniques (for dependent variable=perception of countries and regions). The primary goal of the multivariate analysis is to build on, and better understand, the descriptive results by attempting to refine the differentials by prefecture. In addition to the basic set of control variables described above, the JGSS contains a rich set of measures, including some that could plausibly mediate the relationship between occupation/industry and anti-immigrant sentiment. Examples of such measures include conservative attitudes (e.g., should a child born between a woman from the imperial family and a commoner be able to become an emperor?), and frequency of coming across foreigners in the locale of residence.

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Table 1. % of respondents who agree with the statement that legal immigrants should have equal rights to nationals for respondents from 6 selected countries.

Occupation	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Total (%)
Japan	73.1	16.4	10.5	100
United States	42.1	15.1	42.7	100
West Germany	49.1	14.5	36.4	100
France	52.3	13.4	34.2	100
Netherlands	43.8	16.1	40.1	100
Switzerland	42.1	15.8	42.0	100

Source: ISSP 2003, authors' own calculations.

Table 2. % of respondents who oppose increases in immigration, by selected occupation.

Occupation	%
Service	36
Agricultural, forestry, and fishery	58
Laborers and Operators	57
Student	33

Source: JGSS 2006.

Note: To obtain % of respondents who are for-immigration, subtract % anti-immigrant views from 100.