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Asia in the World

Nikkei-jin in Japan

Since Japan has been a homogenous country longer than most, it is still somewhat uncertain what to do when it comes to foreigners and those that seek work in Japan. The government realizes this and is trying to come up with ways to include Nikkei-jin in the Japanese society. Most of the Nikkei-jin in Japan comes from the South-East Asian countries such as the Philippines (209,137), China (648,980), South Korea (519,737), and Vietnam (72,238). If you combine the total from all of Southeast Asia there are 1,676,140 Nikkei-jin in Japan. That is 81% of the foreign workers living in Japan. The other major countries include Brazil (181,268), Peru (48,580), and America (49,979).

I have learned through my various Japanese cultures classes about the problems Japan has with foreign workers. They do not want foreign workers but at the same time they are necessary because of job shortages in Japan. Most of these job shortages come from occupations that the Japanese people themselves do not want to do such as agriculture, construction, or manufacturing. These are the jobs that are now done by the Japanese aging society, and once they begin to dwindle there is no one to replace them. These are the jobs that are considered by Japanese people as dangerous, dirty, or difficult. Most of these hard jobs are manual labor jobs which wouldn't normally require much academic background. The problem is that the immigrant workers who work in these jobs positions are actually overqualified, but because of immigration laws they must have a high education background in order to

get a work permit for Japan. Although it is only a small step, the government has “loosened the Japanese practical training visa rules”. With this loosening foreign nationals are able to work for a maximum of 3 years as construction workers as long as they have acquired the construction skills. The loosening of the visa rules was due to the concerns of shortages in construction workers with the future 2020 Olympics coming soon.

The most common immigrant populations recognized in Japan are the Chinese community, Korean community, and the Brazilian community. Although the Chinese and Korean communities are discriminated against, they are able to blend into the Japanese society better than the Brazilian community is able to. The Brazilian community is the 3rd biggest immigrant group living in Japan because of the ties its people has with Japan since the early 1900s. 2nd and 3rd generation descendants of Japan were allowed to come and live in Japan for a long period of time for work. The reason they are able to get longer work permits is because they are part Japanese and acceptable foreign workers. Even with these strong ties and Japanese blood, they are still thought of as a lower class. Even with their high education they were given the throwaway jobs that the Japanese people didn't want. While I am using the Brazilian community as an example of discrimination many of the other foreign workers go through the same troubles while living in Japan. The economic crisis that befell Japan also had effects on the Brazilian communities in Japan. Many people went back to their home country and those that stayed tried to survive as best as they could. It is very hard for them to survive in Japan because of the language barrier and once you are labeled as different society usually stays away. Even in this day and age it seems like some Japanese people are afraid of foreigners and that is why they are ostracized. I think that this is one of the first things we need to change in order for Japanese and Nikkei-jin to live together harmoniously.

On our study tour to Soja City we got to meet some Nikkei-jin from many different countries such as Brazil, Peru, Philippines, Nepal, and China. One common factor I found in all of them was that although they were trying to integrate within the Japanese society they also were trying to keep the bonds they have to their home countries. I also felt like they were almost segregated to one part of the city because they are different. Some of the things they talked about being difficult for them were to understand the language, understanding a new culture, going to hospitals, and having letters brought home by children from school that can't be read by the parents. These are just some of the difficulties they go through on a daily basis. Since I am also a foreigner I understand to a degree how they suffer sometimes.

Like I said previously, I think the first thing that needs to happen is for the Japanese to have acceptance of foreign people living in their country. Once they are accepted as part of society they should be able to stand toe to toe with Japanese people and not have to only find lowly jobs. I feel that the Nekkei-jin should be able to somehow hold events in their community to teach Japanese people about their culture and let everyone have a good time. I also think that the problem with segregated schools should be changed. As of now I have heard that those that go to Brazilian schools in Japan have a very hard time being accepted into a Japanese college. If schools were no longer segregated those children that were brought up in Japan have a higher chance of blending into the Japanese society and become shakai-jin. Altogether I think that Japanese need to really start thinking about changing the working system for foreign workers seeking work in Japan.