

The Acceptance of Japanese-Brazilians in Japan

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During the bubble economy young Japanese workers began to shun the so-called 3K workplace and because of this fact a lack developed in the number of unskilled workers in Japan in the 1980s. As labor provided by foreigners was limited to a uniform number of skilled professions, a canvassing of Japanese people and the offspring of those people who had migrated to Central and Southern American and who had maintained Japanese nationality as dual nationality holders took place. These people, unhappy at the state of the Brazilian economy, gradually began to come to Japan and many of their offspring (who came to Japan first on holiday visas), due to a decision made by the Minister of Justice, became eligible to work under a special visa system intended for visiting relatives in Japan. Beginning in 1988 the number of Brazilians in Japan began to rise and, after the reform of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (hereinafter the “Immigration Control Act”) in June 1990, large numbers of Brazilian Nikkeijin nationals entered Japan. Residential status was also granted to the non-Nikkeijin spouses of these Nikkeijin. In December 2007 the total population of Nikkeijin in Japan was around 317,000.

The majority of those Nikkeijin and their spouses who came to Japan from the late 1980s to early 1990s gained employment in the automobile industry and related industries in the Northern Kanto and Tokai regions and a large number of them were either temporary workers or engaged in work on the production line. The Brazilian community came to face all kinds of problems including those involving social welfare and their children’s education, as well as an escalation in crime and misconduct. Today, as Japan, like the rest of the world, enters into recession, many Brazilians in Japan have been dismissed from their jobs and the payment of unemployment insurance, applications for social security and their children’s continuing education have become serious problems. Since the Autumn of 2008, the number of Brazilians returning to Brazil has increased significantly.

Over the last 20 years the presence of Brazilians in Japan made rapid progress centered on the 26 cities in which they were concentrated. Television in Portuguese, newspapers, magazines and Brazilian goods circulated in Japan through ethnic businesses, and the presence of Brazilians in the music industry and sports led to a wider awareness among the Japanese public at large – an important step from the point of view of multicultural coexistence and eradicating discrimination. Brazilians in Japan are a model case for the establishment of immigration policy towards foreigners as Japan becomes an aging society with a declining birth rate and an indispensable topic for any discussion of multicultural coexistence in Japan. In Japan I would like to ask all people involved for their continued warm support as debates are now taking place in the Nikkeijin communities of San Paulo as to how to deal with returnees and as we watch on at the ways in which the Nikkei Brazilian community tackles the difficult issues it will face from now on.