



Title	“Coming to Japan and working has been よかった (good) for me” Vietnamese students in Japan : unrecognized transnational migrants.
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Citation	平成28年度学部学生による自主研究奨励事業研究成果報告書. 2017
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/60342
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平成 28 年度学部学生による自主研究奨励事業研究成果報告書

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研究課題名	“Coming to Japan and working has been よかった (good) for me” Vietnamese students in Japan: unrecognized transnational migrants.				
研究成果の概要	研究目的、研究計画、研究方法、研究経過、研究成果等について記述すること。必要に応じて用紙を追加してもよい。				

I. Research purpose

During the period between 2011 and 2012, the number of Vietnamese students migrating into Japan rose significantly and since then has not shown sign of falling. According to data from 日本語教育振興協会 (Association for the Promotion of Japanese Language Education), within a decade the percentage of Vietnamese students enrolling in Japanese language schools increased ten-fold, from 3.9 percent in 2005 to 30.9 percent in 2015, replacing South Korean students as the second most populous group of international students. The majority of these students also work part-time as a means to self-support financially as well as sending back remittances. On official documents, they are “students”, who are allowed to work in part-time jobs for a maximum of 28 hours a week. In reality, they are participants in a globalized transnational economy, even when their contributions to unskilled jobs are usually glossed over as a matter-of-fact since foreign students coming from developing countries usually are disadvantaged against in terms of currency exchange. Little studies have been done to investigate the implications of this social phenomena. It is important to understand the characteristics of this to curtail proper policy changes and acknowledge the potential changes it might bring to Japanese society. Our research aims to provide a descriptive framework to identify and distinguish this new group of migrants in Japan with dual identities as students and unskilled workers. The main research question is: *what are the factors that characterize the current wave of Vietnamese students coming to Japan?*

The paper is organized into four parts: literature review, research plan and methodology, research outcomes and conclusion. Due to the multifaceted analysis, within the research outcomes sections there is three parts: demographic information, students’ purpose for coming to Japan, and working situation.

II. Literature review

Researches into student migration in Japan, as a subfield of migration control, has only started to pick up pace in the last decade,

resulting from the Nakasone Plan to accept 100000 foreign students into Japan by the end of the 20th century. As a destination for higher education, Japan generously gives out more government scholarships than other developed nations like the US, UK or Australia. At the same time, it also allows a higher working-hours ceiling, in comparison to the UK or Australia where students are only allowed 20 hours a week. Paradoxically, the more Japan aimed to tighten the screening process including scrutinizing students' financial support, the more they were being criticized about workers from developing nations disguised as students and coming to Japan only to work under a lenient visa regime (Nagayama, 1996). Illegal work is rampant among international students in Japan (ibid.). This situation thus questions Japan's ability to disregard the significance labour power that foreign students have, given that they account for 11% of the total foreign workers (Ishikawa, 2006). In an extensive case study into Chinese students in Japan, Liu-Farrier (2011) demonstrated that due to the diversity in motivations and interests that students have prior to migrating abroad, they provide Japan with both skilled and unskilled labor. Discussions on student migration in Japan are critiqued for side-lining a large amount of students' contribution to the host country's economic development, whether it is transnational or domestic (ibid.).

For Vietnamese students, however, the currently visa regime is not necessarily adverse to their self-interests. For young migrants seeking opportunity to enhance their capital and competency in the job market post-graduation, Japan is comparatively more welcoming and 'supportive' than other countries that have already exhausted their resources in accommodating foreign students. For those disguised under the student visa status with little interest in long-term settlement, Japan's ambivalence towards their illegal actions of working over the time limit serves their purpose of working purely for wages. Nonetheless, it remains yet to be seen whether the long-term impact of this immigration policy would be positive or negative upon Japan, Vietnam and their citizens, particularly amidst a rapidly changing global capital market.

III. Research plan and methodology

The subject of the study is working foreign students, so they are heavily concentrated in metropolitan areas such as Kansai or the Tokyo greater area where economic activities are robust, especially the service industry. Recruitment of participants were done by snow-ball method.

In order to gather in-depth data, we adopted qualitative interviews as the main research methodology. Interviews were carried out in Vietnamese and then translated into English for analysis. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, limited time and budget as well as the vulnerability of participants, only a small number of students agreed to be interviewed about their work life. From already established network, we were able to contact seven students in different institutions and one language school's staff. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted from one hour to one hour and a half. Only relevant data was transcribed.

There is obviously the risk of diminished nuances and distorted objectivity as the data get translated; Vietnamese is a language that shows clear hierarchy between speakers, thus consequently change the formality as well as comfortability of participants in dialogues, whereas English indicates little social roles. However, since not all data is translated, it lessens the likelihood that specific socio-linguistic differences could affect the overall meaning substantially. If the terms used are untranslatable or the available translation does not adequately express distinctive implications, footnotes will be provided to better the understandings of the original meaning. Another important methodological issue is ethical concerns. Legally, foreign students are allowed to work up to 28 hours a week. Most of the participants work over this limit, therefore they run a risk of being deported home should the officials find out about their activities, especially through this study. Social researches into similar topics as a whole are

required to preserve ethic integrity and protect participants by concealing identifiable information and preserve anonymity throughout the written report.

IV. Research outcome

1. Demographic

Demographic varies among our participants. There are two male students, five female students and one male teacher. Most are between 19 to 25 year olds, except for one who is in their early 30s. Three students are studying in language schools, one in technical college (専門学校) and the other three in universities. Duration of living in Japan ranges from one to five years. None of the participants stated explicitly their socioeconomic class in Vietnam, so it can only be deduced speculatively that only one interviewee originated from a working class background, while the majority are from lower-to-middle class families in populated urban cities in Vietnam.

2. Purpose of coming to Japan

The main purpose for most participants in coming to Japan is to acquire education degrees while improving on unique skill sets that are favorable on the job market such as Japanese language skills or social-networking. Each interviewee are at different phase in achieving their personal goal; two were preparing for job search (就活) upon graduation, one decided to return to Vietnam and the rest had just started their lives in Japan.

Japan has done relatively well in exporting education into developing countries with close economic ties like Vietnam. Comparatively, Japan has a lower tuition fee and a higher allowance for working hours for foreign students. There is also a history of modern migration between Vietnam and Japan, notably the controversial Tech Intern Training program that laid the foundation for chain migration to Japan. Contrary to the assumptions we had prior to the study, most students in the sample did not migrate to Japan exclusively because of higher wages in the unskilled sector - there was only one that stated explicitly that they migrate for money.

3. Working situation and social integration

Regardless, almost all participants work beyond the legal limit of 28 hours per week. On average, respondents work from 40 to 50 hours a week. On the two ends of the spectrum, one works about 70 hours and another works exactly 28 hours. Except for one person working in newspaper delivery business, all the interviewees work in the service industry, which includes kitchen staff, factory assembly lines, waiting tables. Even though the sample is small, such consistency of traits suggest a predictable trend among self-funded Vietnamese students in Japan: working long hours in low-skilled part-time jobs in order to financially support themselves.

Generally, respondents acknowledge that by working over the 28 hours limit, they are committing illegal action. However, through various tactics of normalization, the illegality nature of their activity came to be ignored and sidelined in day-to-day life. A commonly mentioned evidence is the failure of the “My Number” system implemented by Japanese government in 2015 to effectively control taxes, incomes and other personal information. During that period, the Vietnamese students community experienced extreme anxiety and instability since they believed that if the system can successfully monitor residents’ economic and civic activities, working over the legal limit would no longer be feasible, and consequently many would be deported or having

to go back mid-school. However, the system is now behind its official schedule in implementation, leading to some believing that it would no longer be active:

I was really worried when they started the My Number system. It was not just me, all my friends were. But you see, all those time and nothing happened. I do think that if they really do it to that extent, a lot of people would be affected. There was a time when they said that even when you make payments at the convenient store, the staffs can know everything through your My Number card. Those kind of rumors, and I never see anything happen. (university student)

A lot of people mentioned the My Number system. Everyone was afraid, but they kept going to work, and they were fine, still able to renew their visa, so no one really mention that anymore (language school student)

Another factor is peer influences. While generally the amount of part-time work one does is closely related to personal financial needs, some of the data shows that respondents compare their salary and work hours with friends, thus incentivizing themselves to keep working at the same rate or work harder. In this aspect, there is a clear difference between two groups: those in the latter period of schooling, on their path to searching for full-time jobs, and those who have just arrived. The first group is less prone to outside influences; instead the work hours they set is more likely to align with personal goals rather than to fulfill an arbitrary common rule. The second group is yet to have a consolidated vision of their future settlement in Japan, and whether they would be able to achieve the degree or not. The uncertainty might have led to their tendency to work in a comparative fashion with their peers.

(Group 1)

Q: are you afraid when you see your friends got arrested due to working over the limit?

A: No, because I felt like I'm not working a lot hours. 70 hours is still minimal. (student in technical school)

I don't really need that much money, but then I look at my friends, and since they work so much and have more money, I also want to do that, I was envious of them. (language school student)

(Group 2)

I only worked really hard during the time when I had to pay for my entrance fee to university, a whole block of 50man. Now I'm working at a Chinese restaurant and doing internship at the same time, but at most in total only 19 hours a week. Because I'm a 3rd year student now, I'm planning to do job hunting next year so I need to fill in the missing credits. (university student)

Since I got into college I had to work less to earn enough credit at school, 4 days a week, so I did (university student, 4th year)

Given the similarity in background, it is rather unusual that there is a disparity in financial needs for two groups. We can only speculate that the *attitude* towards raising or decreasing working hours is connected with personal needs and the concreteness of their plans in Japan or which stage of achieving their goals are the respondents in, whereas the 28 hours limit has little to no impact on restricting the work hours.

Three respondents mentioned sending remittance back home. Contrary to common beliefs, only one incurred debts to finance their trip to Japan, and correspondingly they work the longest hours out of all participants. The other two send money as an act of voluntarily assist the family's economic situation, even when the family stated that they had no need to do so. Sending remittance appears to not be a major economic incentive to work overtime in Japan.

The workplace plays a significant role in stimulating cultural understandings of how Japanese society operates. Most Vietnamese students, especially those just arrived, usually socialize among groups with other Vietnamese, even in language schools where the amount of Vietnamese students is increasing. Therefore, their working place is the only social scene that provide direct contact with Japanese people, placing them in relations with other workers, bosses, furthermore the Japanese legal system and cultural appropriateness. Some expressed dissatisfaction when their workplace started to be filled with other Vietnamese students, diminishing their own chances of developing interactions with Japanese people.

*Comparing to 2 years ago, my Japanese has gotten worse. I use to work with Japanese people, study with them too, now I work with Vietnamese, study with Vietnamese. My school doesn't have a lot of Vietnamese, but if we see together we always speak Vietnamese. Same at work, all Vietnamese. I have to speak Japanese to the guests, but from kitchen to hall staffs it's all Vietnamese. I'm surrounded by Vietnamese so I feel like I'm getting worse, language reflex is slower.
(university 4th year student)*

Patterns of socializing within or outside of the Vietnamese community varied among participants. Generally, self-guided individuals are more likely to acknowledge a stigma of being associated solely with foreigners, thus they make conscious effort to integrate and mingle with Japanese people.

A particularly important social relationship mentioned in the interviews is between the students and their bosses. Traditionally, Japanese culture emphasizes strict hierarchy between superiors and workers whereas it is less so in Vietnamese culture. The boss is also an intermediaries between the abstract legal system and the foreign workers' immediate life; he can either enforce the law strictly or violate it, he can appear to be protecting workers or dispatching them in a dehumanizing manner and thus undermining the necessity that workers have on the business output. A commonly reported trait in this relation is how respondents perceive the *punishment* upon the bosses about hiring workers working illegally over the limit is partially related to their attitude towards labour law violation. The students relied on this major cue of following legal practices to guide and justify their own activities.

Actually they would suffer more, the 店長 (restaurant manager) would be affected more. For each illegal worker they are fined about 2-300man. There have been lots of arrests. Just the moment you clock in, police got you, got the 店長 too. (technical college student)

There would be issues, but they are just a small business, I don't think.... for example a big company, I think there would be much more issues, but for my bosses, I think...the X place [that I work at], if they find out [that I work over the limit], the manager would be punished the heaviest. There are a lot of companies like those fish companies, bento companies that got caught; all the workers were deported and the bosses went bankrupt due to the fines. (university 3rd year student)

The boss-workers relations also imply a wider perception of the students about their labour value within the Japanese society. Most literature concurs that migrants, foreign students included, work in 3D (Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning) occupations, so while it is not yet sure how significant this perception indirectly shaped their behavior, the way participants weigh their value within the system could play a role in motivating them to keep working as hard. The respondents emphasized on the significant economic contribution they had on Japanese economical and societal development, yet none acknowledged the high turn-out rates that foreign students face within the unskilled work industry.

On another level, Vietnamese students in Japan seek not just instant economic gratification, but also cultural capital gains. Students in the study frequently mention Japanese language ability and cultural experiences as major advantages of studying and working in Japan. Interestingly, one noted a cultural capital loss as their communication ability in Vietnamese became impaired due to the lengthy time they spend in Japan, leading to uncertainty feelings towards their chances to fully re-enter Vietnamese society.

V. Conclusion

Our research concludes that Vietnamese students in Japan is a heterogenous group with diverse purposes and motivations. Consequently, it affects their attitude towards working part-time and how they assign meanings to their work. The difference in wage level, a common cursor in neoclassical economic theories, proved to be inadequate in directly explain the students' activities; for some more than other, working part-time is less of a means to earn a lot money than a tool to help them achieve the ultimate goal of gaining official degrees and enter the Japanese workforce as full-time workers.

However, our study is certainly incomplete. Assessment of phenomenas related to migration requires an extensive period of time, since social changes resulting from migration are slow, complex and unpredictable. The time limit in our study presents important questions for further researches, such as the eventual outcomes of the students' time in Japan and the continuity of current migration trends. Comparative researches that look into different foreign student groups in Japan and their working patterns would be essential in acknowledging potential bias we could have produced in this present study.

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