Komyunikeshon for Tolerance and Acceptance: In the *Densha*, *Shokuba*, and *Shakai*

Elbert John Honorica
KAFIN Migrant Center

November 2025

Komyunikeshon[1] for Tolerance and Acceptance: In the *Densha*[2], *Shokuba*[3], and *Shakai*[4]

Elbert John Honorica

KAFIN Migrant Center

November 24, 2026

Abstract

In the past year, governments across the world imposed restrictions on immigration. Japan, despite its need for additional labor force amid a declining birthrate and an aging population, has been taking similar steps. In the political background, rightwing politicians have been advocating additional restrictive policies pointed towards foreign residents. Now, foreign residents and migrant workers are facing a possibility of major changes in the country's immigration policy.

This study examines Japanese citizens' perceptions of foreign residents and migrant workers against the background of restrictive policies, rise of xenophobic rhetoric, and fear-driven misinformation through social networking sites (SNS). A 38-item survey was designed to approximate attitudes toward migrants in the workplace, public spaces, and interpersonal domains. The results of the study show generally positive attitudes toward foreign workers especially on role and contribution to the economy though there were contradicting perceptions emerged on scale items pertaining to social and cultural integration. Predictor variables of age, location, and educational attainment comparisons were made.

Overall, the study highlights that simple interactions alone are insufficient to encourage genuine inclusion towards foreign residents and migrant workers. Instead, the quality, reciprocity, and range of interactions are crucial in transforming utilitarian and practical tolerance into meaningful social integration in Japanese society.

Keywords: Migrants, Japanese, perception, attitudes

---

1 Communication in literal Japanese is *renraku* (which also means 'to contact'). *Komyunikeshon* is used to refer to general interaction between people

2 *Densha* means train in Japanese

3 *Shokuba* means workplace in Japanese

4 *Shakai* means society in Japanese

Background of the Research

Japan in the Middle of a Right-wing Tide

Where there are migrants, there is racism and xenophobia. The year 2025 is an exceptional year and it proves how far we are from building a tolerant and accommodating society for migrants.

We have seen how governments across the Global North implement restrictive immigration policies to reduce the number of refugees and immigrants. On the other hand, massive anti-immigrant protests led by right-wing groups were observed across the world. The United States, as it always has been, is the epicenter. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids have shown the public how certain political persuasions can bend the law and weaponize it against minorities. In the United Kingdom, anti-immigration protests evolved into tensions and clashes.

Japan, behind its kawaii aesthetics and neon lights, has its own share of this predicament. Last July 2025, right-wing politicians especially those under the Sanseito Party exploited xenophobia and anti-immigration as a rallying call for voters disgruntled by the country's prolonged economic crisis. According to various news reports (e.g. Associated Press, 2025), this led to a noticeable increase of voter turnout in favor of anti-immigration and right-wing politics.

In 2024, the Immigration and Refugee Control Act was revised towards more restrictions. Sentiments correlating the increased number of refugees and foreign residents with an increased crime rate surrounded the revision and implementation of the policy. But at that time, far-right political entities remained in the margin and the decision was just "a normal day" in an LDP-administered government.

A few months later, Sanae Takaichi, dubbed as "the Iron Lady of Japan" and a Margaret Thatcher admirer herself rose to Prime Minister. She was described as a "warhawk" and a staunch conservative coming from the old guard of the perpetually-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Japanese activists of varying persuasions and advocacies voiced out opposition too and cited what they deemed xenophobic remarks from Takaichi's previous speeches.

Immediately, the Takaichi administration proposed many amendments on policies concerning foreign residency. Among the glaring ones is the increase of visa costs by more than 100% (there is a proposal to increase the application costs of permanent residency from JPY 10,000.00 to JPY 100,000.00). Apart from this, other policies including increase of tax and insurance payments and additional requirements are being looked into.

This is all happening while the disgruntled Japanese public is being swayed by misinformation against foreigners primarily through social media.

Whether we like it or not, social media, or SNS (short for 'social networking sites' in Japanese popular lexicon) has become the main platform for information in the last decade. It has proven beneficial for cultural workers, students, and all sorts of occupations and professions.

But at the same time, it turned into a mish-mash of information—sometimes carefully curated– to promote certain ideas. SNS eventually became an avenue for like-minded people to gather that also includes political ones, even hate groups.

For one, like Charlie Kirk's Turning Point USA, Sanseito was propelled to popularity through its YouTube channel. They started with spreading fake news against vaccines in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Over the years, they gathered hundreds of thousands of followers. This platform became their online campaign machinery to spread and encourage anti-immigrant stances for political support come 2025. As of writing, they have almost 600,000 followers.

But the most intense and bewildering event was the cancellation of Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) 'hometown' exchange in four (4) of Japan's cities. Initially, it intended to foster exchanges between Japan and African countries such as Mozambique, Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania. However, fake news and rumors were spread and stirred the public. This includes the idea that hometowns will be "given away to foreigners". This was followed by demonstrations with slogans such as "Save Japan" being held by protestors. Weeks later, the program was scrapped while some far right nationalists even called for the abolition of JICA.

Thus, the urgency to promote understanding and dialogue between locals and foreigners arises—especially through SNS where misinformation is being circulated.

Purpose of the Research

The research was conceptualized by late 2024. It intended to uncover perceptions of Japanese people towards foreign residents[1] through a 38-item survey which included community, interpersonal, and workplace-related attitudes. The survey was disseminated through online and pen and paper methods. Out of over 100 questionnaires distributed, 71 valid protocols were returned.

Research Respondents

Most of the respondents come from prefectures across the Kanto region with a major concentration in the Saitama prefecture where Migrante - Japan and KAFIN Migrant Center mainly operates.

Table 1

Distribution of Research Respondents

Prefecture	Frequency	Percentage
Tokyo	5	7
Kanagawa	4	5.6
Saitama	43	60.6
Chiba	1	1.4
Gunma	1	1.4
Fukushima	1	1.4
Shizuoka	7	9.9
Osaka	1	1.4
Miyagi	6	8.5
Yamagata	1	1.4
Hiroshima	1	1.4
Total	71	100

Due to the discrepancy between the numbers coming from each prefecture versus Saitama, we collapsed the data for data analysis.

While there is balance in terms of gender distribution of the responses, it is important for us to note the distribution of age groups. At a glance it shows us big disparities in terms of age hence we only made use of the two large groups. Those who are between 20-29 and those who are 50 and above in the data analysis instead of dividing the groups at the midpoint. The reason is that we wanted to have a clearly defined old

1 "Foreign residents" is often used in Japanese English written word over 'migrant' and/or 'immigrant'

and young groups that are at least a generation apart.

Table 2
Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age Group (in years)	Frequency	Percentage
20-29	27	38
30-39	6	8.5
40-49	7	9.9
50-59	12	16.9
60 and above	19	26.8
Total	71	100

The survey questions consisted of items about 1) working with migrants, 2) living close to migrants, and 3) interacting with migrants which vary from transactional to personal relationships. To gauge behaviors we asked the participants to choose an answer on a scale of 1 to 5 according to their level of agreement from strongly disagree to strongly agree with a neutral midpoint. Several questions were negatively phrased to ensure that respondents are focused on answering the questions and not just randomly checking or encircling the number on the scale.

Findings

Eighty percent of the respondents have experienced interacting with foreigners. The form of interaction vary – from transactional to more friendly.

Generally, the respondents expressed positive attitudes toward foreigners. The high mean scores indicate strong agreement that foreign workers are valuable to Japan's economy, deserve fair and equal pay, and should receive proper public and social services.

In terms of everyday interactions at work, transportation, and public spaces, most responses were positive indicating that there is a level of comfort in dealing with foreign residents and/or co-workers.

On the other hand, an opposite trend emerged when it comes to social and cultural integration and acceptance. Even though most agree that foreign workers are integral to the Japanese economy, conflicting attitudes arise. This includes the idea that they should be given jobs that Japanese citizens do not want and an increased number, presence and influence in the community can potentially disrupt cultural norms and values. These contradictions imply that the level of acceptance is rooted more in economic utility and superficial coexistence over full social integration. In a way, we could say that foreign workers and residents are only seen as "necessary" in the social fabric.

Age Does Matter

Comparisons between the younger group (ages 20–29) and the older respondents (50 and above) has shown that age is a major factor in the perception of foreigners. Older respondents tend to be more positive compared to the young ones. Most respondents who have foreign friends and enjoy working with migrant coworkers come from this group. This pattern suggests that consistent and substantial interaction reduces prejudice.

The Cosmopolitan Urban Areas vs The Secluded Inakas[2]

Regional differences were found. Respondents from the Kanto region (where the capital is located and is identified as a migrant-dense area) have consistently shown more positive perceptions toward migrants compared to those from other regions. This is particularly evident in negatively phrased items related to fear, suspicion, and avoidance behaviors, where Kanto respondents show significantly lower agreement.

These results suggest that frequent exposure to migrants in everyday life familiarizes Japanese citizens to a diverse community and reduces the effect of fear-mongering of right-wing, racist, and anti-immigrant social entities. In contrast, respondents from less urbanized prefectures tend to agree that migrants are associated with social discomfort, cultural disruption, and personal anxiety. However, it is important to cautiously note at this point that these differences may have appeared due to unequal sample sizes.

Educational Background and Social Hierarchies

Surprisingly, the data have shown counterintuitive findings related to educational attainment. Respondents with bachelor's or graduate degrees displayed more negative perceptions of migrants compared to those who come from lower educational backgrounds (aside from items related to personal comfort). The same respondents are likely to concur with statements insinuating xenophobia. These included items related to cultural disruption, suspicions toward migrants, and restrictions on migrant labor.

Being privileged may be a factor to explain this finding. . For one, higher education usually gives individuals an idea of occupying higher posts in social or economic hierarchy. Such can be the reason for comfort in interpersonal encounters while resisting or opposing the idea of structural equality. Following this logic, we can say that migrants are perceived as non-threatening on a personal level but may be problematic in the bigger picture especially when we talk about the idea of culture, norms, and the society at large.

Mainichi, Mainichi… Chotto Dake (Just a little everyday)

Although there are high levels of reported interaction with migrants, these are mostly transactional or situational over personal. Business transactions, brief assistance, and casual acknowledgments are in place, while the exchange of personal stories is found wanting.

Women and residents from prefectures in the Kanto region are less likely to report being acknowledged or greeted by foreigners which may be explained by social indifference in the urban setting and not intentional avoidance. These results reinforce the idea that mere contact is not sufficient; the quality and reciprocity of interaction matter in fostering deeper relationships.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of the study show that Japan is accommodating to foreigners and migrants in general but still struggle when it comes to questions of belonging, equality, and social integration. Acceptance and tolerance are strongest where migrants are visible, necessary, and familiar especially in urban regions and among older respondents who have prolonged contact and interaction.

As Japan's necessity for migrant labor persists, these nuanced perceptions underscore the importance of policies and social programs that go beyond the question of economic value. Communication is key. Meaningful social interaction, promoting cultural exchange, and improving public discourse around migration can be the key to transforming this conditional acceptance into genuine inclusion—and all of this requires different levels of communication in all possible platforms.

2 *Inaka* means countryside in Japan; it is important to note that most migrant workers and foreign residents are concentrated in big cities where there are more economic opportunities

References

Fackler, M. (2025, July 21). Young Voters Are Pulling Japan to the Right. But How Far? https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/21/world/asia/japan-election-analysis.html

Kuroda, K. (2025, May 13). Survey: 48% of online viewers believe false rumors, fake info. https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15760620

NHK World (2025, September 26). Why did JICA withdraw from its Japan-Africa 'hometown' exchange initiative. https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/backstories/4273/

Sen, S. (2025, December 5). Xenophobia runs the world. https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/12/5/xenophobia-runs-the-world

Suzuki, H. (2025, November 4). Takaichi eager to outline policies on foreigners in January. https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/16134834

The Associated Press. (2025, July 23). Why a far-right party in Japan made big gains. The Asahi Shimbun. https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15921827.

The Mainichi (2024, June 10). Editorial: Foreigners' rights must be protected as Japan's new refugee rules take effect. https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20240610/p2a/00m/0op/012000c

The Mainichi (2025, December 29). 2025 Rewind: 'Foreigner policy' -- and xenophobia -- takes over Japan's national conversation. https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20260101/p2g/00m/0bu/010000c

The Mainichi (2026, January 1). As Japan's labor shortage deepens, businesses fear losing foreign workers. https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20260101/p2g/00m/0bu/010000c

Yamguchi, M. (2025, July 23). How a far-right 'Japanese First' party made big election gains. https://apnews.com/article/japan-election-sanseito-gains-f1bb2244164db57c75c4086e274c2b98

Yamaguchi M. (2025, October 5). Japan's ruling party elects Sanae Takaichi as new leader, likely to become first female PM. https://apnews.com/article/japan-ldp-ishiba-prime-minister-election-787216c7c780cbc39bc76bb3fb0e17ef

Yomiuri Shimbun (2025, November 20). Japan to Charge Foreigners More for Residence Permits, Looking to Align with Western Countries. https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/politics-government/20251120-293890/