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ENGLISH AS A GATEWAY? IMMIGRATION AND PUBLIC OPINION IN JAPAN

David Green
Yoshihiko Kadoya

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The Institute of Social and Economic Research
Osaka University
6-1 Mihogaoka, Ibaraki, Osaka 567-0047, Japan

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David Green† Yoshihiko Kadoya‡

Abstract
Japan, like most of the developed world, faces potentially extreme demographic shortfalls brought on by a rapidly aging society with a long life expectancy and low birthrate. Where other western countries have utilized greater levels of immigration to help fight these tendencies, immigration levels in Japan are comparatively much lower. Increasing immigration to Japan is one suggested solution to the demographic problem, yet research examining public opinion on higher levels of immigration in Japan is surprisingly rare. Rather, public opposition to immigration is often unquestioningly taken as a given. This paper, utilizing nationally-representative data from the Japan General Social Survey, digs deeper into public opinion on immigration at the national and regional levels, considering factors that can influence respondents' perceptions. In addition to some regional variation, we find that English conversation ability is most strongly associated with favorable perceptions of immigrants in Japan.

Key words: immigration, population studies, demographic changes, survey analysis
JEL Cord: F22, O1, R23

* This research uses the Japanese General Social Surveys (JGSS). The Japanese General Social Surveys (JGSS) are designed and carried out by the JGSS Research Center at Osaka University of Commerce (Joint Usage / Research Center for Japanese General Social Surveys accredited by Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), in collaboration with the Institute of Social Science at the University of Tokyo.

† Graduate School of Law, Nagoya University. Address: Furo-cho, Chikusa, Nagoya 4648601 JAPAN. Email: david.green@law.nagoya-u.ac.jp

‡ Graduate School of Economics, Nagoya University. Address: Furo-cho, Chikusa, Nagoya 4648601 JAPAN. Email: yoshi.kadoya@soec.nagoya-u.ac.jp

Japanese opposition to immigration is often taken as a given. Particularly in western scholarship, but even in the Japanese language literature on immigration policy, it is often first assumed that the Japanese remain largely against immigration ahead of any subsequent analysis. Yet to what extent is this in fact the case? Do the Japanese truly oppose immigration? If so, to what degree? What factors influence this opposition? Such questions have been investigated surprisingly rarely. This article seeks to do just that: look at macro-level public opinion on immigration and consider factors that may both positively and negatively influence public opinion toward immigration in Japan. We do this utilizing large-scale, nationally-representative survey data obtained through the Japanese General Social Survey.

Our analysis will consider the various regions of Japan, as well as the country as a whole, arguing that public sentiment toward immigration is more complex than typically ascribed. While the majority of the public may not be in favor of increased immigration, a significant minority is comfortable having a larger foreign population take up residency. We aim here to shed some light on the factors that help contribute to these positive and negative perceptions of immigration, looking to see possible practical actions government can take if it in fact wants to improve public opinion toward immigration.

Theory and Context

Much of the research considering immigration in the developed world looks to the countries that have historically received comparatively large numbers of immigrants, such as the United States (Brader et al 2008; Ha 2010), Canada (Bilodeau et al 2012) and Australia (Mughan & Paxton 2006). To a lesser extent, literature is also available on newer countries of immigration, primarily in Western Europe, including Germany (Martin 2004), France (Fassin 2005) and Italy (Caponio 2008; Trinci 2004). The literature typically identifies "competitive threat" as being one of the main driving forces in public opinion against immigration, where rational actors may perceive threats to their livelihoods, religion, or culture coming from influxes of foreign labor. (Ceobanu & Escandell 2010). These threats, real or imagined, compel a wide-ranging negative public sentiment towards immigrants and immigration.

It is somewhat difficult to apply the notion of "competitive threat" to the Japanese case. The economic argument certainly does not hold up, where the country is experiencing a severely aging society and badly needs additional labor. Religion also plays less of a role, as Japanese citizens typically do not maintain active religious affiliations (Kobayashi 2005). Likely the real underlying threat is the perception of cultural difference and the effect it could have on "homogenous" Japanese society. A recent public opinion survey by the Japanese Government Cabinet Office (2013) on ethnic Japanese residents from Latin America shows that while only a slim majority of respondents are even aware of their existence (52.9%), the vast majority (87%) feel that special immigration policy considerations should be continued or expanded for this group. This likely speaks to the concern over cultural difference, where most people feel if foreigners are brought into Japan, the ideal would be to have someone with a similar cultural background.

In one of the few academic studies of Japanese public opinion on immigration in recent years, Ikeda and Richey (2009) found that homogenous interaction, or interaction

with only Japanese citizens in this context, decreased tolerance for immigration. Indeed, in the Cabinet Office survey cited above, given that most respondents were unaware of ethnic return migration to Japan, few of the respondents likely had any interaction with these immigrants. Diversity of social interactions helped to increase tolerance, a finding consistent with other countries and with another significant school of thought: the "contact hypothesis".

Contact hypothesis stipulates that continuous exposure to outside groups will help to reduce tensions and ultimately promote more favorable attitudes between native and immigrant groups (Escandell & Ceobanu 2009; Pettigrew 1998). While perceptions of Japanese homogeneity have been well noted (Burgess 2010; Rosenbluth & Thies 2010), we will see if it is in fact the case here that cultural perceptions form the base of Japanese hesitancy toward immigration, or if any other factors come to the fore based on our analysis of public opinion.

That most of the literature on immigration and public sentiment toward immigration is based around predominantly American or European examples further speaks to our purpose here. The literature available on Japanese immigration policy, especially in English, is surprisingly lacking. Even less research looks at public opinion toward immigration in Japan in any critical way. While some scholars are very much concerned about immigration policy in Japan and the changes it can bring, public sentiment toward immigrants and immigration is at best assumed to be negative, and more typically given only brief mention before moving on to some other topic.

However, the debate on immigration in Japan is an important one, as the country faces significant demographic hurdles. A postwar baby boom in tandem with a very low birthrate and one of the world's longest life expectancies have combined to give Japan the dubious distinction of being one of the world's fastest aging societies (UN Population Division 2001). Compared to other developed countries, the Japanese government acknowledges that it has one of the highest concentrations of elderly residents, with the gap expected to grow in the coming years. Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate this trend. As most other developed countries are experiencing similarly aging societies, it is useful to see the Japanese response, particularly because Japan has not utilized immigration in any way approximating that the US, Australia or Europe thus far.

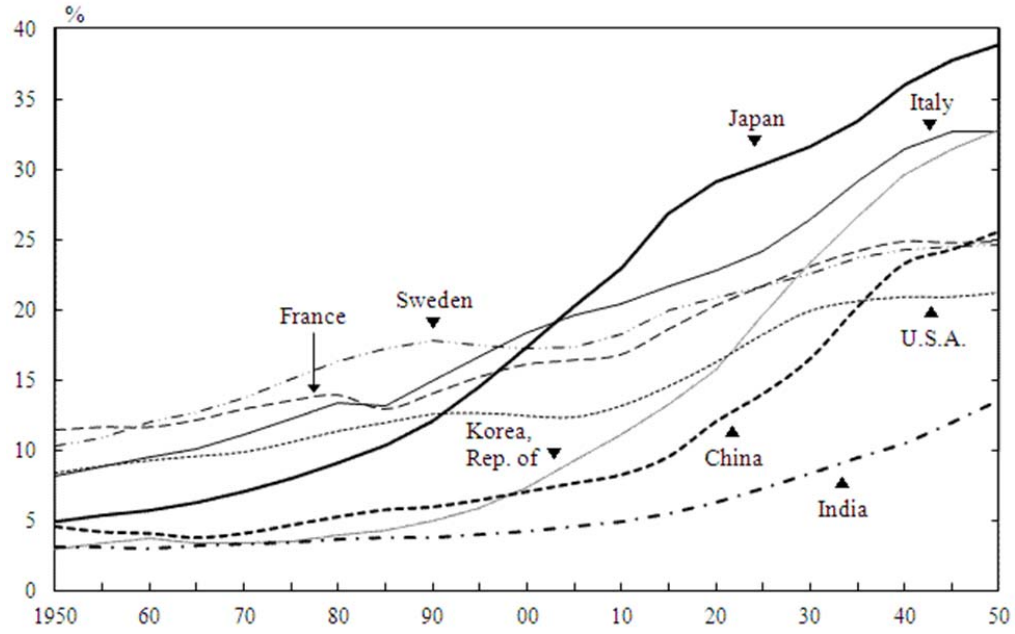
Figure 1: Age Structure of Population by Country

(%)

Country	2010			2050 (projection)		
	0-14 years	15-64	65 and over	0-14 years	15-64	65 and over
Japan	13.2	63.8	23.0	9.7	51.5	38.8
Korea, Rep. of	16.4	72.4	11.1	13.2	54.0	32.8
Italy	14.1	65.6	20.4	14.3	53.0	32.7
Germany	13.5	66.1	20.4	14.5	54.6	30.9
China	19.5	72.4	8.2	13.5	61.0	25.6
France	18.4	64.8	16.8	17.6	57.5	24.9
Canada	16.4	69.5	14.1	16.2	58.9	24.9
Sweden	16.5	65.2	18.2	17.3	58.1	24.6
U.K.	17.4	66.0	16.6	17.2	59.2	23.6
Russia	15.0	72.2	12.8	16.9	60.0	23.1
Brazil	25.5	67.5	7.0	14.7	62.8	22.5
U.S.A.	20.1	66.9	13.1	18.8	60.0	21.2
India	30.6	64.5	4.9	19.0	67.6	13.5

Source: Statistics Bureau, MIC; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; United Nations.

Figure 2: Proportion of Elderly Population by Country (Aged 65 years and over)



Source: Statistics Bureau, MIC; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; United Nations.

Immigration has been suggested as one of the means of combating the negative demographic tendency facing Japan (Asakawa & Sakanaka, 2007; Komai, 2001). Additionally, immigration has been presented as at least one way of "internationalizing" the country, where greater exposure to foreign neighbors, for instance, could help foster a more outwardly-focused orientation (Hibino, 2009; Pak, 2000), as well as a means of maintaining

Japanese prosperity in the wake of pronounced labor shortages and two decades of economic stagnation (Vogel, 2005). All of these facets are important, as a major portion of the Japanese economy remains the manufacturing of export goods. Labor is needed, as is the ability to sell products abroad. In any case, immigration is touted by some as one potential way of improving at least some of the problems that Japan faces. Yet in order to seriously consider immigration policy as a means of addressing social and economic shortfalls, two important factors need to be considered: what has already been achieved in terms of policy, and public sentiment toward changes in policy. This will point to future directions the government can ultimately take and how it can get there.

Japanese Immigration Policy

Putting public opinion aside for the moment, we first consider immigration policy developments. It has been well documented that Japanese government policy has, for much of the country's history, been strict with regards to immigration. Although Japan has had foreign residents in some sense for a very long period of time, the country remained largely closed to foreign residents through the Meiji restoration (Akashi 2010; Kashiwazaki 2000).The Tokugawa government made significant efforts to open the country up, passing commercial trade treaties with the US, Russia, the United Kingdom and France in 1858 and foreign settlements were established in designated areas of the country, typically near major ports (Yamawaki, 2000). With Japanese expansion and the annexation of Korea and Taiwan, migrants began flowing into the country as well. At the height of the Japanese empire in 1945, over two million Korean and Taiwanese workers were living in Japan, many of them conscripted laborers. At the time, as Korea and Taiwan were considered Japanese territory, these workers were considered Japanese citizens. However, they were declared foreigners when Japan regained its independence at the end of the US occupation (Tsutusi & Shin, 2008).

Soon after the restoration of Japanese independence, the government passed the Immigration Control Act in 1952, legislation that would serve as the basis for postwar immigration policy. The law was modeled after the American immigration system to some extent, but was not intended to permit immigrants to settle in the country permanently or to acquire Japanese nationality (Kashiwazaki & Akaha, 2006). An alien registration system was also established with the law, which has been one of the primary means used by the Japanese government to track foreign residents. Both long-term and more recent foreign residents have been required to sign up with the alien registration system since its inception (Kondo, 2002). Foreign residents all receive a "residence card" on arrival in the country (previously a foreign resident registration card) and are required to register at their local city office within 90 days of arrival and give notification of any change in address. All foreign residents must do so in order to be eligible to receive benefits like public health insurance and other social services (Ministry of Justice, 2010; Takao, 2003).

Although the Immigration Control Act established Japan's modern immigration system in the 1950s, immigration from other countries did not become a salient political issue until the 1980s with the continued expansion of the economy (Mori 1997; Kingston 2011). Up until this time, Japan was able to account for the increased demand for labor domestically through the combination of internal migration from the countryside to the

cities, automation of production processes, utilizing part time workers such as students, housewives and the elderly, and by keeping famously long working hours. Immigration into Japan remained low for the most part. As the Japanese economy continued to develop, along with the rising yen and more pronounced labor shortages, Japan became an increasingly attractive destination for foreign labor in spite of its restrictive policy. Transnational labor networks developed, with "brokers" responsible for bringing ever more foreign manual labor into the country (Liu-Farrer 2011; Yamanaka 1993). Much of the foreign manual labor entering Japan during the 1980s was technically illegal, although lax enforcement of regulations made it relatively easy to enter and work.

With the rapidly expanding economy and the growing numbers of foreigners already entering the country, some revision to the Immigration Control Act began to appear increasingly necessary. Beginning in the late 1980s Japan started adopting differentiated entry categories for foreign labor, culminating in passage of the revised Immigration Control Act of 1990 (Usui 2006). The Immigration Control Act had two major facets: on the one hand it instituted strict penalties on employers and brokers of illegal immigrants. On the other hand, it opened the door to *Nikkeijin*, Japanese descendants typically from South America, to enter the country freely (Coulmas 2007). Unprecedented numbers of Latin American workers of Japanese descent consequently took up residency in Japan, often concentrating in manufacturing hubs.

Immigration policy has further developed in recent years with revisions to the Immigration Control Act in 2004 and 2009. These revisions were meant to ease the process for skilled labor to enter the country and make it more difficult for unskilled labor to do so (Komai). Newer measures have included more detailed review of residence applicants, a stricter review of employee training programs, scrutiny on entertainment visa applicants, and a revision to the residence management system (Kashiwazaki & Akaha). With the 2009 revisions, the government has also implemented a point-based system for recruiting and retaining "highly skilled" foreign labor. Those who meet the government's threshold are given preferential immigration-related benefits, such as permission to bring a parent under certain conditions, a longer period of residency for their visa, and simplified rules for establishing more long-term residency, among others (Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2012; Le Bail, 2013).

While these are official channels primarily aimed at increasing the number skilled foreign workers in Japan, the government has also quietly been increasing the number of unskilled laborers through less direct means. Perhaps the most apparent of these is the large increase in foreign students studying in Japan. International students are given permission to work, officially part time, as a part of their visa. Many international students, the vast majority from China and other Asian countries, find their way into low-paying service and manufacturing jobs (Liu-Farrer 2011). Along with the efforts of some local governments to recruit Asian brides into depopulated rural areas (Chung & Kim 2012) and the maintenance of foreign "trainee" programs (Coulmas 2007), the size of the unskilled labor pool, while still small compared to other developed countries, has gradually expanded.

What we have thus seen in regards to national immigration policy is a gradual increase in both the skilled and unskilled categories of foreign labor in Japan. The officially registered foreign population of Japan stands at 2.1million people as of 2010, the largest

foreign population on record. While an immigrant population of this size is unprecedented in Japan, it constitutes only 1.25% of the total population (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Statistics Bureau, 2013) and remains the smallest ratio of immigrants in the developed world.

The national government has been making inroads toward increasing the foreign population in recent years, including both skilled and unskilled laborers. Coupled with the increase in foreign residents, there have been ramped up efforts to incorporate foreign residents into Japanese society. These efforts are typically initiated by local governments in combination with NGOs and can involve anything from providing free or low cost Japanese language courses, all the way to granting local voting rights (Chung 2010; Fujimaki 2013). Some localities have indeed taken strong initiative in addressing their foreign resident populations, such as Kawasaki in Kanagawa Prefecture (Green 2013), Hamamatsu in Shizuoka Prefecture (Sharpe 2008) and Oizumi Machi in Gunma Prefecture (Isago 2001), among others.

By the same token, the Ministry of Education Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (abbreviated hereafter as the "Ministry of Education") has made efforts to try and incorporate foreign children into the Japanese education system. It acknowledged the need for Japanese as a second language courses as a consequence of the 1990 revision to the Immigration Control Act and has been actively partnering with municipalities to improve the education programs offered to foreign children (Okano 2006; Suzuki 2009). The intention is to try and integrate foreign residents, as well as their children, more smoothly into Japanese society, hoping to bridge gaps in linguistic and cultural understanding. However, such efforts have not been implemented in a uniform way. Where some regions and municipalities may prove quite progressive in regard to trying to integrate their foreign populations into their new locale, others may be highly exclusionary. If the government truly aims to "internationalize", improve the economy and address demographic problems through increased immigration, immigration-related policies will need to be addressed in a more uniform, national way.

This is where public opinion comes in. To truly change Japan in any sense public opinion matters. Like any democracy, the opinions of the Japanese voting public are paramount to politicians' political futures. National government initiatives require national level support. Government would not able to implement these kinds of uniform policy changes in a highly unfavorable environment. Likewise, a strong public sentiment could induce significant government action. We thus aim to test here whether and to what extent public sentiment is in fact opposed to increases in immigration, and what factors may influence these opinions.

Methodology

To test Japanese public opinion toward immigration, we utilized data from the Japanese General Social Survey (JGSS), the Japanese version of the General Social Survey implemented in the United States by the University of Chicago and the National Opinion Research Center. The Japanese counterpart is conducted annually or semi-annually and asks a nationally representative sample of people their opinions on a broad range of topics. The Japanese survey is conducted by Osaka University of Commerce, with the questions

accredited by the Ministry of Education. Data from the JGSS is deposited in English at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, housed at the University of Michigan, and is available in Japanese from the University of Tokyo's Institute of Social Science. Here, we utilize data from the 2010 survey, the most recently available (ICPSR 2012; Osaka University of Commerce 2012).

The JGSS 2010 consists of visit-placement surveys of individuals throughout Japan from February to April 2010. The respondents were male and female, aged 20 to 89 years old. Two-stage stratified random sampling was applied. First, the prefectures of Japan were divided into five regional blocks: Hokkaido/Tohoku, Kanto, Chubu, Chugoku/Shikoku, and Kyushu. Then, according to the population size, each of the five regions was subdivided into four strata by city type: large city as designated by the central government, city with more than 200,000 residents, city with less than 200,000 residents, and town or village. The response rate was 96.41 percent (2,417 responses out of 2,507 trials). From the data set, we selected the 1,680 respondents who had no missing answers on any of the variables included.

The variables used in this research are shown in Table 1. Our dependent variable was obtained from a question that asks whether the respondent is for or against an increase in the number of foreigners in his or her community. The respondent could choose either "for" or "against." From this, we created a binary variable that takes the value unity if the answer is favorable to the increase in foreigners and zero otherwise. We labeled this variable *acceptance* and applied a probit estimation.

Table 1: Variable Definition

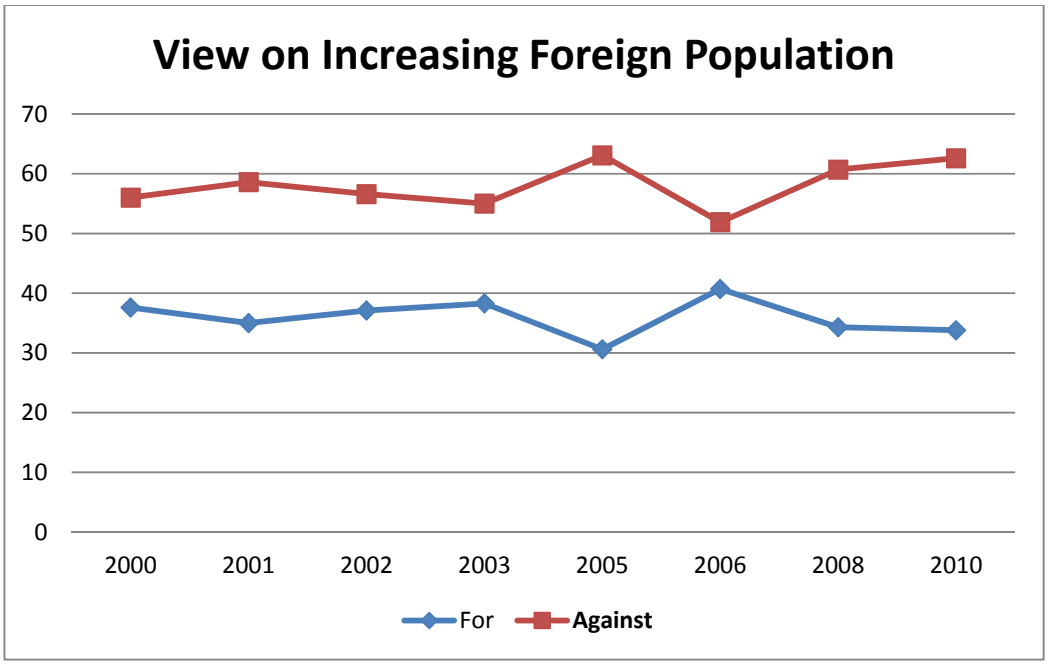
Variable	Definition
Acceptance	View on increasing foreign population (1=positive, 0=negative)
Male	1=male, 0=female
Age	Age
Marriage	1=currently married, 0=otherwise
Educ	Years' of schooling
Hincome	Yearly household income (unit: million yen)
Satisarea	Satisfaction with are of residence (5=satisfied, 4,3,2,1=dissatisfied)
Child	1=have child(ren), 0=otherwise
Hoktohoku	1=Hokkaido/Tohoku, 0=otherwise
Kanto (base)	1=Kanto, 0=otherwise
Chubu	1=Chubu, 0=otherwise
Chushikoku	1=Chugoku/Shikoku, 0=otherwise
Kyushu	1=Kyushu
Larcity (base)	1=Large city, 0=otherwise
City200000	1=city with more than 200,000 population, 0=otherwise
Cityless200000	1= city with less than 200,000 population, 0=otherwise
Townvilla	1=town/ village, 0=otherwise
Engtalk	English conversation proficiency level (5= "I can speak sufficiently for daily life," 4="I can manage to make myself understood for daily life," 3="I can ask for directions or order at restaurants," 2="I can greet," 1="I can hardly speak English."
Engread	English reading comprehension level (5="I can read English books and newspapers without trouble," 4="I can manage to read English books and

	newspapers," 3="I can read short sentences in English," 2="I can understand easy words," 1="I can hardly read English."

Results

First, some consideration of the dependent variable, being "for" or "against" an increase in the number of foreigners in their communities, on its own is warranted. In this survey, 37% of the respondents were "for" an increase in the number of foreign residents, whereas 63% of respondents were "against" it. The respondents thus showed a rather negative view of increasing the foreign population in their communities. This result has been relatively consistent over the last eight JGSS surveys. Figure 3 below shows the breakdown of the same JGSS survey question from 2000 to 2010. We can see that in the case of the 2010 data, respondents tend to be "against" increasing the foreign population in slightly higher numbers, but well within the same general range. Descriptive statistics for all variables are shown below in Table 2.

Figure 3: View on Increasing the Foreign Population, 2000-2010



Source: compiled from JGSS Surveys, 2000-2010

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Obs
Acceptance	0.37	0.48	0	1	1680
Male	0.47	0.50	0	1	1680
Age	52.95	15.40	20	89	1680
Marriage	0.78	0.42	0	1	1680

Educ	12.67	2.47	6	18	1680
Hincome	55.73	32.66	0	168	1680
Satisarea	3.78	1.02	1	5	1680
Child	0.82	0.39	0	1	1680
Hoktohoku	0.13	0.34	0	1	1680
Kanto (base)	0.29	0.45	0	1	1680
Chubu	0.21	0.40	0	1	1680
Chushikoku	0.09	0.28	0	1	1680
Kyushu	0.13	0.33	0	1	1680
Larcity (base)	0.24	0.43	0	1	1680
City200000	0.25	0.43	0	1	1680
Cityless200000	0.41	0.50	0	1	1680
Townvilla	0.11	0.31	0	1	1680
Engtalk	1.71	0.86	1	5	1680
Engread	1.95	0.88	1	5	1680

In order to minimize the possibility of sampling bias, we organized the sample using a sampling weight provided by the JGSS. By dividing the Japanese population into 14 universes according to sex (two categories) and10-year age groups (seven categories), this study calculated the sampling weight based on the national census of 2009.

The estimation results are illustrated in Table 3. Model 1 shows the result with no sampling weight, whereas Model 2 shows the result with the sampling weight.

Table 3: Estimation Results (Overall)

	(1) Acceptance (not weighted)	(2) Acceptance (weighted)
age	-0.00757***	-0.00766***
	(-3.06)	(-3.08)
male	0.0188	0.0150
	(0.29)	(0.22)
marriage	-0.0573	-0.0367
	(-0.62)	(-0.38)
educ	0.0251	0.0283
	(1.48)	(1.61)
hincome	0.000155	-0.000443
	(0.14)	(-0.39)
satisarea	0.00884	0.00346
	(0.28)	(0.11)
child	-0.176*	-0.185*
	(-1.75)	(-1.83)
hoktohoku	0.221**	0.197*
	(2.08)	(1.83)
chubu	-0.243**	-0.233**
	(-2.56)	(-2.38)

kinki	-0.0717	-0.0948
	(-0.72)	(-0.93)
chushikoku	-0.304**	-0.327**
	(-2.39)	(-2.51)
kyushu	0.0680	0.0639
	(0.63)	(0.58)
city200000	0.102	0.102
	(1.11)	(1.10)
cityless200000	0.0119	-0.0227
	(0.14)	(-0.26)
townvilla	-0.0332	-0.0427
	(-0.27)	(-0.35)
engtalk	0.145***	0.133**
	(2.60)	(2.40)
engread	0.0272	0.0338
	(0.47)	(0.58)
_cons	-0.406	-0.373
	(-1.35)	(-1.21)
N	1680	1680

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Based on the results, we find that *age* and *child* are significantly associated with the likelihood of the respondent holding a negative view on increasing the foreign population, whereas *engtalk* is significantly associated with a positive perception. As for regional differences, compared with respondents from Kanto, those from Chubu and Chigoku/Shikoku held significantly negative views, whereas people from Hokkaido/Tohoku held significantly positive views. The results differed little between Model 1 and Model 2.

Table 4 further indicates the factors that make people view an increase of foreign population positively or negatively by region. In Hokkaido/Tohoku, *engtalk* positively affects peoples' views. In Kanto, *engtalk* also positively affects their views, while *age* negatively affects their views. In Chubu, *city20000* has a positive effect, whereas *marriage* has a negative effect, and in Kinki, *educ* and *townvilla* have positive effects, whereas *child* has a negative effect. In Chugoku/Shikoku, *engtalk* has a positive effect, while in Kyushu, *age* has a negative effect.

Table 4: Estimation Results by Region

	(1) Hokkaido-Tohoku acceptance	(2) Kanto acceptance	(3) Chubu acceptance	(4) Kinki acceptance	(5) Chugoku-Shikoku acceptance	(6) Kyushu acceptance
age	0.00261	-0.0149***	-0.00224	-0.00549	-0.00948	-0.0177***
	(0.37)	(-3.17)	(-0.38)	(-0.83)	(-1.03)	(-2.62)

male	0.302	-0.0909	0.103	-0.196	-0.173	0.0979
	(1.64)	(-0.74)	(0.68)	(-1.09)	(-0.72)	(0.53)
marriage	0.216	-0.151	-0.456**	0.225	0.130	-0.0565
	(0.86)	(-0.91)	(-2.15)	(0.82)	(0.39)	(-0.21)
educ	0.0575	0.00619	0.0225	0.0936**	-0.00304	-0.00222
	(1.25)	(0.20)	(0.54)	(2.16)	(-0.05)	(-0.04)
hincome	-0.000780	-0.00233	0.00263	0.00141	-0.00700	0.00355
	(-0.24)	(-1.15)	(1.13)	(0.52)	(-1.55)	(1.09)
satisarea	-0.0655	0.0105	-0.0316	0.118	-0.0474	0.0106
	(-0.76)	(0.17)	(-0.44)	(1.39)	(-0.45)	(0.12)
child	-0.105	-0.0705	0.0308	-0.634**	-0.0367	-0.198
	(-0.40)	(-0.39)	(0.13)	(-2.21)	(-0.10)	(-0.64)
city200000	-0.193	-0.0138	0.401*	0.166	0.206	0.181
	(-0.71)	(-0.09)	(1.72)	(0.74)	(0.58)	(0.60)
cityless200000	-0.199	-0.0396	0.0826	0.342	-0.165	0.0321
	(-0.78)	(-0.28)	(0.40)	(1.59)	(-0.47)	(0.11)
townvilla	-0.236	-0.131	-0.0707	0.590*	-0.311	-0.146
	(-0.84)	(-0.47)	(-0.24)	(1.68)	(-0.75)	(-0.40)
engtalk	0.329**	0.220**	-0.0735	0.110	0.401*	0.00480
	(2.07)	(2.21)	(-0.51)	(0.80)	(1.83)	(0.03)
engread	0.0506	0.0143	0.151	-0.103	-0.279	0.0717
	(0.30)	(0.14)	(1.01)	(-0.67)	(-1.26)	(0.45)
_cons	-1.378	0.336	-0.776	-1.579**	0.368	0.470
	(-1.60)	(0.62)	(-1.07)	(-2.24)	(0.32)	(0.54)
N	226	482	346	262	153	211

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Discussion – English Ability?

Based on the preceding results, we can see that public perception of immigrants in Japan indeed remains negative overall. Explanations for this perception are unfortunately less clear, although a number of the variables that we considered do provide associations. Of these, English conversation ability seems to have the greatest impact. Individuals who self-assess at higher proficiency levels of English appear to have a more positive disposition to increasing the foreign population in their communities. This is arguably the most important result of the analysis and should ideally induce further research. If English conversation ability can increase the positive perceptions of immigrants, the government may want to pursue additional English language education programs, either in schools or in

the community, should future policy preferences continue to support increased immigration

It is interesting that the strongest of associations in the data are oriented around English conversation ability alone, rather than also including English reading ability, another of the variables we examined. While English reading ability is also positively associated with perceptions of immigrants, the relationship is not a statistically significant one. The Japanese public education system offers English language instruction to students, although the curriculum is typically concentrated around English reading in order to prepare for college entrance examinations. Coursework is typically light, with only an hour of class time devoted to English each week as of 2011 (Fukuda 2010). The result is that while most Japanese residents are at least minimally proficient in reading English, they tend to be much less proficient at English conversation (Aiga 1990). Perhaps this at least partially explains why someone with reading proficiency alone may not be as favorable to increased immigration: they do not feel comfortable communicating in another language and have more limited exposure non-Japanese language and experiences.

Ahead of the next round of planned revisions to public school curriculum guidelines in 2017, the Ministry of Education has begun considering increasing the amount of English language instruction offered to primary school students and starting English lessons from an earlier age (Ishii & Asakuno 2013). This could represent a shift toward a greater emphasis on English conversation, or at least comprehension, and among other more explicitly stated goals could potentially influence Japanese perceptions of foreigners. These changes in English education policy do represent, at least to some extent, the national government's desire to extend Japan's internationalization, either as a part of domestic policy in being able to better integrate the foreign born population, or foreign policy in improving Japanese communicative abilities with the rest of the world.

In lieu of interaction with actual foreign residents, emphasis on English competency in schools may work as a substitute. As immigration levels to Japan remain relatively low for the time being, the "contact" necessary for the contact hypothesis can be relatively difficult for many Japanese to obtain, particularly those outside of the urban areas where immigrants tend to concentrate. Based on our results, English language proficiency instead seems to be a means of inducing a more favorable sentiment toward immigrants in Japan. Currently low English proficiency levels also seem to be associated with the generally unfavorable perception of immigrants in Japan.

Regional Differences, Other Associations and Limitations

There do appear to be significant regional differences in favorability to immigration as well. With the Kanto (greater Tokyo) area as a baseline, Chubu and Chugoku/Shikoku have overall more negative perceptions, while Hokkaido and Tohoku are more positive and Kinki and Kyushu show no significant differences. This result may be interesting in and of itself, but it also merits further research. There is no discernible trend based on this data as to why these regions maintain positive or negative views toward the foreign population. Kanto and Kinki tend to be the major stores of immigrants in Japan and it is understandable that they would have similar levels of approval. Yet Chubu is also a major manufacturing center and an immigrant hub, but maintains a more negative opinion. One may also consider the size of the municipality, as immigrants in Japan tend to congregate in the

larger cities. Looking at the regions individually, we can see that the smallest municipalities (townvilla) are almost universally against increased levels of immigration. Using the major cities (largecity) as a baseline, it also appears that the larger cities (largecity and City200000) are the most favorable to increased immigration, while mid-sized cities (cityless200000) are somewhere in the middle. However, these results are for the most part not statistically significant.

Although preliminary and requiring further research, these results also seem to support the contact hypothesis. Immigrants in Japan tend to congregate in cities and city residents, being the most likely to have had contact with them, generally seem to have more favorable dispositions toward immigrants. The smallest towns, with typically less exposure to immigrants, rate them more negatively. A major exception here is the Kinki area, where all municipal classifications show a more positive orientation to immigrants compared to the major cities – in this case Osaka and Kobe. It would be worthwhile for future research to consider factors that may influence such opinions in this region, for example if the Kinki area's distinction of being the base of some of Japan's largest organized crime organizations plays a role, or if the general conservatism of the area or the region's unique history as an early designated locale of immigration in Japan provide some influence.

Where we did not find an association also merits some discussion. For the most part, demographic variables including income, education and gender did not have any relation to perceptions of immigrants in this case. Typically studies of immigration attribute differences in favorability to demographic factors like education and income (Burns & Gimpel 2000; Espenshade & Calhoun 1993). This does not appear to apply in our analysis of Japan. Additionally, there is no association with one's satisfaction with their area of residence, and marriage is significant only in the case of Chubu. The only demographic variable that seems to play any factor is whether or not the respondent has children. Perhaps concerns over crime or security induce those with children to be less favorable to increased immigration in their communities. That the vast majority of demographic indicators are not associated with perceptions of immigrants is a result not commonly considered or expected in Japan.

One demographic variable that does remain strongly significant and almost universally negatively associated is age. In this survey, older individuals tend to be less favorable to increases in immigration. This finding does coincide with the conventional wisdom on immigration and age in that older individuals are generally more conservative and favorable to a stricter immigration regime (Dunaway et al 2010; Quillian 1995).

While we have considered the connections between immigration and these explanatory variables, we should also discuss the limitations to this study. The data we have utilized is representative of Japan at both the national and regional levels, with great pains being taken to provide accurate, unbiased results. However, we are limited by the types of questions asked, particularly on the dependent variable. In this survey, the question as to whether or not the respondent is favorable to an increase in the foreign population of their community elicits only a yes or no response. We are limited in the types of analyses available when the dependent variable only has a binary answer. Something like a "feeling thermometer", where the respondent rates their opinion on a 0 to 100 scale, could have potentially been more useful. Although feeling thermometer ratings are subjective, we

could better gauge the degree to which respondents support or oppose increased immigration in Japan.

Additionally, the wording on our dependent variable question is vague. When one thinks of "increased immigration" it is unclear what sorts of immigrants are being referred to. The interpretation is left to the respondent, where one may be more favorable to increased levels of highly skilled immigrants, for example, but more hesitant to bring in more unskilled manual laborers. In the case of Japan, the nationality of potential immigrants may also play a role. Some respondents may be more accepting of, say, larger numbers of Americans but more strongly against increased levels of Chinese immigrants. The interpretation of what constitutes "immigrants" may also vary by region. For example, Latin Americans of Japanese descent are much more prevalent in the Chubu area, while the immigrant population in Kanto is much more diverse. These sorts of distinctions are not explicitly stated and in so doing an important opportunity for additional clarification and distinction is not available. Further research on public opinion toward immigration in Japan, perhaps along with analysis of other representative surveys, can help to clarify these points.

Conclusions

Immigration in Japan remains a somewhat elusive topic in the English language scholarship, and quantitative analysis on the subject is rare even in the Japanese literature. Rather than taking public opposition to immigration in Japan as a given, this article has endeavored to examine some of the factors influencing public opinion toward immigration. With historic changes occurring within Japan and the country slowly opening itself up to increased levels of immigration, the time is ripe to look at what factors influence public sentiment.

We have found that while the perception of immigrants in Japan is still generally negative, a number of variables are associated. Of the variables that we considered, English conversation ability appears to have the greatest effect. Those with higher levels of English conversation skills are significantly more favorable to having more foreign residents in their communities. Should the government be interested in eliciting more favorable attitudes toward immigrants in Japan, further examination of this connection should be undertaken. As the government ponders increased English language education in primary schools, will a more proficient spoken English ability work to change domestic attitudes toward more immigration? This is important to consider given the low birthrate and long life expectancy Japan is currently grappling with.

There is also regional variation in favorability toward increased immigration, as well as differences according to the size of municipality. Our findings generally support the contact hypothesis of immigration, which stipulates that as native residents have actual contact with immigrants they will become more favorably disposed to them. Japanese cities tend to have greater numbers of immigrants and are more favorably disposed to them in this survey. Likewise, if one uses English conversation ability as a substitute for actual immigrant interaction, given that immigrant numbers in Japan remain low, those with a higher ability also tend to be more favorable.

These findings represent an early attempt to apply quantitative analysis to Japanese survey data on immigration. While the results may inspire more questions than they answer,

it provides a path for future research on the topic. It is worthwhile to consider where the public actually stands on this controversial policy and what factors influence this perception.

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