

Foreign Students' Decisions of Full-Time Employment in Japan After Part-Time Experience

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Abstract

This paper studies foreign students' willingness to work full time after part-time experience in Japan.

We investigated major factors which are unfavorable to their decision making for full time employment in Japan. As a sample of this study, regular full-time international students at Kwansei Gakuin University are selected for a survey.

We use questionnaire to investigate if they have part-time jobs and full-time job searching experience while schooling. This study focused on three factors: first, if they are treated unfairly as foreign workers in part-time experience; second, if there are any uniqueness of job searching in Japan as compared to the foreign job market; third, if they can identify any barriers to work full-time in Japan.

The study found the result in which their willingness to work full-time is not so high as those working part-time. The reason is primarily for its unique lengthy, time-consuming job-hunting process rather than for the hostile working environment for foreign workers. Also, we found that the Japanese language proficiency is required for full-time employment.

Key words: Japanese Employment Systems, International Student, Hiring Process, Job Hunting, Part-time Experience

I Introduction

In the past three decades, against the backdrop of working population shortage, Japan has been adjusting the policy towards foreign workers. Starting from a small

base, foreign workers are becoming increasingly important, not only as already 3.04% of total workforce (as of October 2023; by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare); but also, among major alternative sources to supplement labour force shortage, the yearly increase totaled to approximately 254,000 people per year, or “ppls/yr”, just next to women (approximately 310,000 ppls/yr) but higher than senior workers aged 65 and above (approximately 160,000 ppls/yr) (Nikkei, 2025)¹.

Meanwhile, Japan’s higher education institutes admit an increasing number of overseas students. According to Japan Student Services Organization, or “JASSO”, totally 279,274 foreign students register in Japan institutions (as of May 2023). After completing schoolwork, whether to work in Japan on full-time basis serves as a key choice for the future. And given current immigration regulation and workplace practice, the decision has to be made long before full-time work, and is highly impacted by part-time employment and job-hunting experiences while schooling.

On the contrary to conventional “homogeneous” perception, Japan witnesses a thriving social diversity, which sees accelerated pace in recent years. Researchers have contributed considerable works on the workforce diversity, and the major achievements to date concentrate on age and gender issues (Jackson & Debroux 2016), leaving the room for investigation of the foreigner workforce. And as a matter of fact, recruiting foreign students serves as a major initiative to maintain workplace diversity.

There are quite a few research concerning the topic of foreign students’ work in Japan, however, less has been done for collecting data directly from foreign students. Using the online questionnaire survey, this study collects data from 132 respondents in Kwansei Gakuin University, or “KGU”, and conducts analysis accordingly.

Two features of KGU make it an ideal place to conduct this fieldwork. First, its recognized reputation of graduates’ employment, as evidenced by 99.8% of job offer rate, as well as 98% employer satisfaction rate, top among not just peer private

¹ Three sources are not mutually exclusive; double counting may exist.

schools, but also public universities nationwide². Second, in recent years, international admission maintains momentum, as there are 851 regular students and 189 short-term students in registration, respectively (as of May 2023; "KGU Overview").

II Research Questions and Hypothesis

This study investigates the following research questions:

- In part-time experience, do foreign students feel treated differently at workplace?
If so, what are the major treatments?
- During job hunting, what are the unique features of Japanese employers that foreign students think hard to understand and adapt to?
- What is the most critical challenge for foreign students to decide on work in Japan on full-time basis?

To answer those research questions, the study hypothesizes the following:

The hypothesis of this study is that foreign students' perception on Japan workplace, as well as the decision on whether work on full-time basis after graduation, is highly relevant to part-time job and job-hunting experiences. Through part-time employment and job-hunting, students can anticipate how full-time work fits them. If their anticipations are negative, foreign students are likely NOT to work on full-time basis, because they would think that adaptation to workforce, especially outside of their home country, is to be quite challenging (Cooke et al., 2013)

Given Japanese government's VISA policy towards overseas students, as well as the common practice of employers' recruiting, while schooling, undergraduate and graduate students have mainly two exposures to Japan workplace, i.e. the part-time job, and the job-hunting activities.

In particular, is there any differentiate treatment received by foreign students

² Source: <https://www2.kwansei.ac.jp/admissions/gimon/career.html>

that contributes to the lower willingness? If so, what are these treatments? As some research argues that there is a tendency to dispatch unfavored works to foreign workers, i.e. the “3D jobs: dirty, dangerous and demanding”. (Shaden, 2024).

During job-hunting activities, is there any problem especially challenging for foreign students that are hard to understand and adapt to?

III Literature Review

1 Japanese Society

In his representative work “An Introduction to Japanese Society”, Sugimoto, reveals the diversified social texture masked by the conventional perception of a “homogeneous” structure (Sugimoto, 2020). In contrast, although under criticism of outdated cultural anthropology, Benedict, a researcher never be in Japan in person, points out that spirit serves as “first principle” of Japanese nation; while material things, which are deemed also crucial but must be subordinate (Benedict, 2020).

2 Labour Shortage and Foreign Workers

Next to conventional supplementing sources, i.e., the involvement of women workers, the delayed retirement age of senior workers, the rising importance of foreign workers is also on agenda of Japanese government, as this group is perceived to be conducive to boosting “skill premium and fiscal sustainability” of the country (Kitao & Yamada, 2021). From an outside-in perspective with a neutral standpoint, OECD publishes a dedicate volume on the status of immigrant workers in Japan (OECD, 2024).

3 Prospect of Full-Time Employment After Schooling

For future plans after graduation, in recent years, the willingness of work in Japan sees continuous declining (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2021). And as a result, the actual employment of foreign students of higher education institutes stood at 46.5%, which is lower than average level (JASSO, 2021). The relatively lower willingness of

full-time work compared to part-time job is also evidenced by the result of this study.

4 Japanese Government Policy

According to Japanese regulation, long-term stay foreigners should hold a certain "status" of visa, and the legal status for students are "student" visa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). But as a special case, students are entitled to work on part-time basis, which is deemed as "permission to engage in activities other than permitted under the status of residence" (Immigration Service Agency of Japan). This regulation aims at improving financial sustainability of foreign students, and also set clear limitations such as weekly 28-hour limit and banning certain industries, especially adult entertainment (Japan Naturalization Application Support, or "JNA", 2023).

5 Practice of Japanese Recruiting

Major Japanese employers favor recruiting of students without full-time work experience and start the process in an early but unified schedule, and the full process is recognized as complex. This practice has long history believed to be derived from Japan Business Federation (Okunishi, 2018).

IV Sample

The study selected those participants from Chinese students registered in KGU. Given Chinese Mainland alone serves as the single largest original country, with 445 registered students (as of May 2023), or 52.3% of all regular international students, target population can be regarded as sufficiently representative of undergraduate and graduate students in the school.

The second reason lies in personal proximity to the target group. In social studies, given a major research tool is supposed to be the researcher him/herself, the "researcher-research target interaction" serves as the most meaningful data collection

channel. The group is ideally sharing highly similar daily experience with the researcher, or in the same “speech community” (Wardhaugh, 2006).

The questions are created and disclosed through an online survey tool, in total 132 students answered. All participants were offered anonymity and the use of academic purposes solely. Also, transparency and reusability are also afforded to all participants.

V Questionnaire and Results

The following questions are asked:

Question 1 (Required question; single choice)

Your age?

- A. 24 and below
- B. 25-29
- C. 30-34
- D. 35-39
- E. 40 and over
- F. Cannot tell

In total 132 responses, three most selected options in sequence: 62 of “under 24”, or 46.97%; 57 of “25-29”, or 43.18%; and 6 of “30-34”, or 4.55%.

Question 2 (Required question; single choice)

Do you have any part-time job experience in Japan?

- A. Yes
- B. Yes, but cannot tell related questions (redirect to Question 8 if selected)
- C. No (redirect to Question 8 if selected)

In total 132 responses, among them, 100 confirmed part-time experience. However, 9 refused to disclose further details, leaving 91 more informative answers.

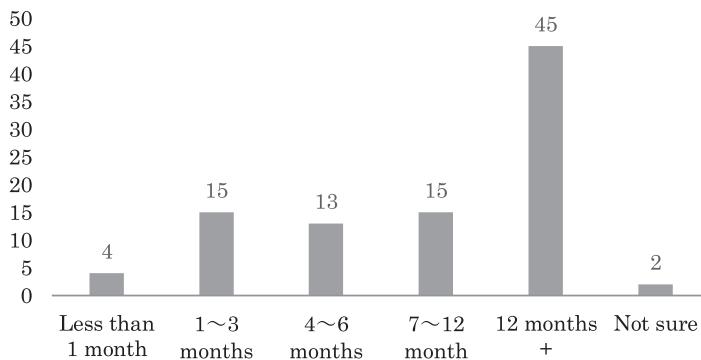
Question 3 (Optional question: single choice)

Total length of your part-time job in Japan?

- A. Less than 1 month
- B. 1~3 months
- C. 4~6 months
- D. 7~12 months
- E. 12 months +
- F. Not sure

In total 94 responses, three most selected options in sequence: 45 of “12 months +”, or 47.87%; 15 of “1-3 months”, or 15.96%; and equally 15 of “6-12 months”, or 15.96%.

Figure 1: Bar-chart of Answers to Question 3
Total Length of Part-time Job



Question 4 (Optional question: multiple choices, up to 3 options)

Industries of the companies?

- A. Convenience store
- B. Drug store
- C. Other retailing
- D. Food & beverage
- E. Tourism (guide, local service, accommodation etc.)

F. Others

In total 164 options from 95 respondents, three most selected options in sequence: 47 of “food & beverage”, or response rate of 28.66% and popularity rate of 49.47%; 38 of “convenience store”, or response rate of 23.17% and popularity rate of 40.00%; 36 of “others”, or response rate of 21.95% and popularity rate of 37.89%. Average number of industries per capita is 1.73.

Question 5 (Optional question: single choice)

Are there other non-Japanese workers in your part-time job location?

- A. No others (redirect to Question 7 if selected)
- B. 2~3 ppls
- C. Approx. 5 ppls
- D. 6~10 ppls
- E. 10+ ppls
- F. Not sure

In total 93 responses, three most selected options in sequence: 35 of “2-3 ppls”, or 37.63%; 18 of “approx. 5ppls”, or 19.35%; and equally 18 of “no others”, or 19.35%.

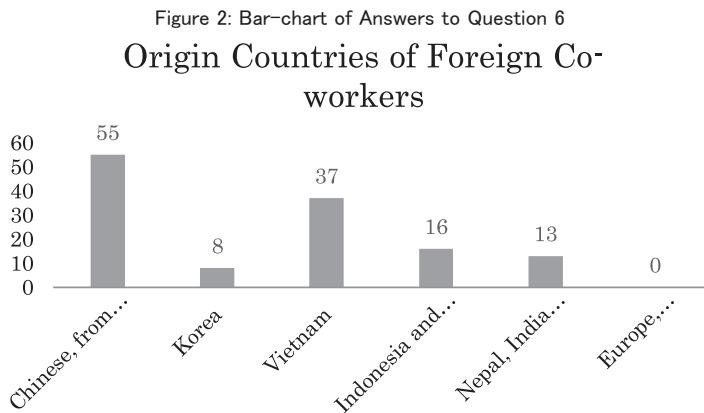
Question 6 (Optional question: multiple choices, up to 3 options)

Main original countries of non-Japanese workers as far as you know?

- A. Chinese, from Greater China and overseas
- B. Korea
- C. Vietnam
- D. Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries
- E. Nepal, India and other Subcontinental countries
- F. Europe, Americas and others

In total 129 options from 77 respondents, three most selected options in sequence:

55 of "Chinese (Greater China and overseas)", or response rate of 42.64% and popularity rate of 71.43%; 37 of "Vietnamese", or response rate of 28.68% and popularity rate of 48.05%; 16 of "Indonesian and other Southeast Asian", or response rate of 12.40% and popularity rate of 20.78%.

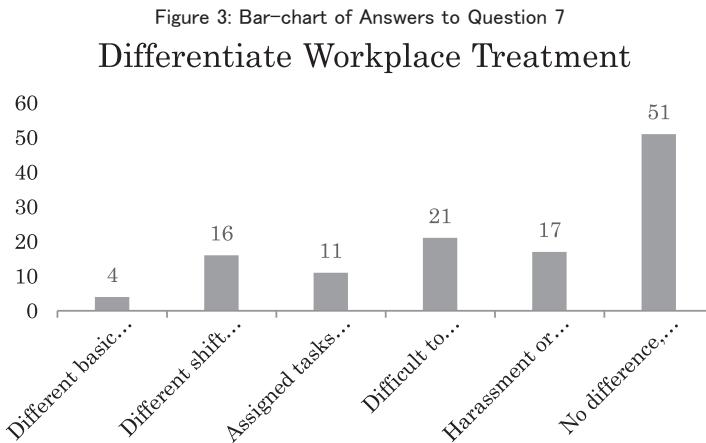


Question 7 (Optional question: multiple choices, up to 3 options)

Are there any different treatments to you because of the foreigner identity?

- A. Different basic pay/allowance
- B. Different shift time scheduling
- C. Assigned tasks irrelevant to job responsibility
- D. Difficult to understand Japanese language and workplace culture (e.g. unable to read air "KY" etc.)
- E. Harassment or unfriendly treatment (e.g. "*power harassment*" etc.)
- F. No difference, absolutely equal

In total 120 options from 90 respondents, three most selected options in sequence: 51 of "no difference, absolutely equal", or response rate of 42.50% and popularity rate of 56.67%; 21 of "Japanese language and cultural barrier (e.g. 'KY')", or response rate of 17.50% and popularity rate of 23.33%; 17 of "power harassment or unfriendly treatment", or response of rate 14.17% and popularity rate of 18.89%.

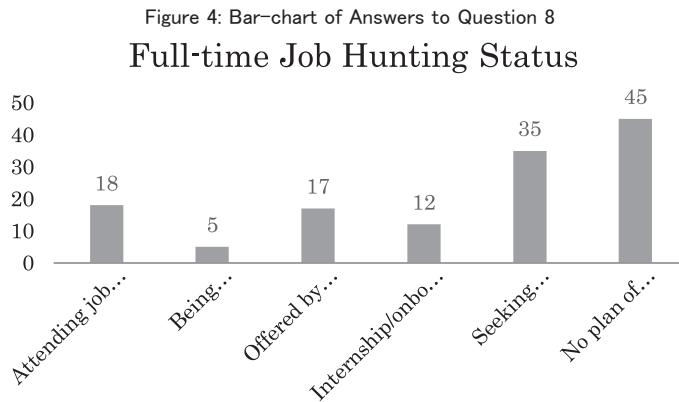


Question 8 (Required question; single choice)

The status of your full-time job planning?

- A. Attending job hunting events
- B. Being interviewed, from Round 1 to Round N
- C. Offered by employer
- D. Internship/onboarding orientation started
- E. Seeking information/about to start (redirect to Question 10 if selected)
- F. No plan of “work in Japan” on full-time basis (redirect to Question 10 if selected)

In total 132 responses, three most selected options in sequence: 45 of “no plan of ‘work in Japan’ after graduation”, or 34.09%; 35 of “seeking information/about to start”, or 26.52%; and 18 of “attending job hunting events”, or 13.64%.



Question 9 (Optional question; multiple choices, up to 3 options)

Your intended industries of full-time job planning?

- A. Information technology
- B. Accounting/auditing/finance/consulting
- C. Manufacturing
- D. Commerce/trade/logistics
- E. Tourism and hospitality
- F. Others

In total 104 options from 68 respondents, three most selected options in sequence: 23 of “information technology”, or response rate of 22.12% and popularity rate of 33.82%; equally 23 of “accounting/consulting”, or response rate of 22.12% and popularity rate of 33.82%; 22 of “others”, or response rate of 21.15% and popularity rate of 32.35%. Average intended industries per capita is 1.53.

Question 10, short answers (Required question)

Any comments concerning work in Japan, either part-time experience or full-time job planning/hunting?

In total 75 responses, according to key word frequency statistics, all words

mentioned by over 5 times, in sequence, as: “Japanese language”, 15 times; “lengthy job hunting”, 8 times; “diversity”, 7 times; “power harassment”, 7 times; “read the air”, 5 times; and “need special support for foreign students”, 5 times.

Figure 5: Question 10 Word Frequency Cloud



VI Discussions

First, it is identified that “equal workplace environment” is in fact maintained by the companies, which is confirmed by the respondents.

Through research, a key principle is found to be maintained in Japan, i.e., the treatment to an employee, is determined by the job responsibility, other than the personal attribute of the person to assume, i.e., the principle is neutral to employees regardless of nationalities. This is evidenced by the question on differentiated treatment, the most selected answer is “no difference, absolutely equal” (details in Chapter V).

For “unfair” treatment received, from the view of subjective judgments, respondents attribute that to interpersonal relation conflicts, i.e., relate to certain individual on a certain role, rather than the role itself.

Second, the study found that expectation on job-hunting activities by employing side is different from the students'. The employers want the students to be future

“members” of the organization while the students seek for their respective “position” in the organization.

If comparing part-time employment to intention of work-in-Japan on full-time basis, a lower intention is mainly due to the lengthy process of job-hunting process. In the short answer question, 8 respondents claimed that the job-hunting events are “lengthy”.

A possible reason is different expectations on recruiting, between Japanese employers and Chinese students. It can be inducted that, Japanese employers are basically following “membership first” principle (Nomakuchi, 2024); while students consider “what role to play” as priority. While recruiting undergraduate and graduate students, Japanese employers tend to recruit a group of homogeneous candidates in one year’s operation, and details of positions offered are often not available to candidates (Okunishi, 2019). This is evidenced by the result from the survey that, the most common position offered is “general staff”.

VII Conclusions

This study aims at exploring the major factors affecting foreign students’ plan of “work-in-Japan” after graduation, from the dimensions of part-time employment and job-hunting while schooling, using Chinese students in KGU as major sample group. The major questions in data collection touch on the experience during part-time employment, as well as the process of job-hunting activities, and the attitude towards work-in-Japan as future plan after undergraduate and graduate programs. Takeaways from this project include three key points as, first of all, foreign students basically believe Japan workplace is equal to foreign employees; second, the uniqueness of the Japanese language and workplace culture is a major barrier to work on full-time basis; third, the lengthy job-hunting serves as an unexpected obstacle for foreign students.

VIII Limitations and Future Research

In summary, there are three limitations preventing the research from further insights, in detail, as first, the limitation of sample diversity: all respondents are Chinese. This limited respondent coverage means confinement to a single origin country, thus unable to reflect viewpoints from a diversified group.

Second, the study has limitations in statistical technology. 1) The key word frequency of short answer question is calculated by manual statistics, which is easier to result in a wrong number; 2) Some quantitative numbers are collected from choice questions with options of number intervals (e.g. age; months of part-time job; number of foreign co-workers, etc.), rather than accurate numbers. This limits the possibility of statistic distribution analysis.

Third, the study does not cover salary issues. Salary is a key consideration in finding full-time job, however, as data collection is expected to be hard given the sensitivity, the study excluded it from study.

To cover more diversified foreign student sample, a new version of questionnaire should be available, in the English or Japanese language if condition allows. And if possible, number collection would become more accurate, i.e., asking correspondents to fill in the number directly, making advanced analytics possible.

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