

Global Economic Crisis and the Fate of Brazilian Workers in Japan

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Abstract

Since the late 1980s, the Latin American population in Japan has rapidly increased to nearly 400,000 in 2007, despite the long-term recession in the late 1990s. They were given privileged visa status as descendents of Japanese nationals and incorporated into the upper end of loosely structured secondary labour market. It was these Latin Americans, however, who were hit by far the hardest by the recent economic crisis in Japan. About half of Latin American workers are said to have lost their jobs from September 2008 to March 2009, while the unemployment rate in Japan was below 5% in the same period. In this paper, I will consider the causes of mass unemployment of Japanese-Latin Americans by analyzing the labour market of and integration policies toward them based on my fieldwork and survey research in Japan, Brazil and Argentina since 1997. The constant increase of Latin Americans in Japan was enabled by the changing mode of their incorporation into the Japanese labour market: they were getting incorporated as the more flexible workforce adjusted to a “just-in-time” labour delivery system brokered by labour contractors, which led them extremely precarious conditions. In addition, the lack of economic integration policies kept Latin American workers marginalized in the labour market. In Japan, it was not national but local governments that promptly responded to the increasing number of migrants. However, their integration policies solely paid attention to cultural differences between Japanese and foreign nationals. In fact, Japanese government did not provide such programs as vocational and language trainings necessary for upward mobility,

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ignoring the fact that migrants are socio-economic minorities. The absence of policy response, as well as the deterioration of working conditions of Latin American workers, lies behind the sudden mass unemployment of Latin American workers during the economic crisis.

Keywords: recession, international migration, migration policy, Japanese-Brazilian, foreign workers

1. The Mass Unemployment of Brazilians in Japan

Japan's economic crisis since 2008 hit its Brazilian migrants the hardest. The rapid decline in Japanese exports dismissed economists' previous optimism that Japan would weather the American financial crisis, and by the last quarter of 2008 migrant Brazilian ethnic-Japanese workers became the main target of massive layoffs. Trainees and technical interns from such Asian countries as China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines also had their contracts cancelled and were sent back home, but the rate of their dismissals seemed much lower than that of the Brazilians. In fact, the number of foreign trainees and technical interns fell by about seven percent from 2008 to 2009, while approximately a quarter of Brazilians left Japan.¹

At the same time, protests by Brazilian workers demanding employment opportunities and fighting against dismissals have increased remarkably. One hundred Brazilian demonstrators marched through downtown Tokyo and 300 Brazilians demonstrated in Nagoya in January 2009, the first mass demonstration by Brazilians in Japan. Membership in Latin American unions also increased as workers sought to protect their jobs. Latin Americans had been indifferent toward engaging in collective action before the economic crisis. Even when fired, most of them thought it better to seek a new job instead of protesting against their ex-employers, but now with little hope of finding new jobs many have begun to protest their situation.

Most Brazilian workers had been incorporated as dispatch workers into the automotive and electronics industries, the most competitive among Japanese industries. While their salaries were higher than other migrant workers because of their privileged

visa status as descendants of the Japanese, such an advantageous but unstable position led to them becoming the sacrificial lambs of Japan's sudden economic downturn. A labour contractor stated in an interview on 2 February 2009 that the situation was a disaster rather than mere unemployment, since all that disaster victims can do is eke out a living, and that this was indeed the case with unemployed Latin Americans in Japan. In this paper, I will clarify the root causes of such a disaster by focusing on the case of Brazilians in particular.

2. Impact of the Economic Crisis on Brazilians in Japan

Japan had experienced net emigration until the early 1970s, with the emigrants' primary destination being North America before World War Two (WWII) and South America in the post-war era. Although most of the pre-WWII migrants to South America settled there, the post-war emigrants were much more likely to return home due to Japan's rapid economic growth and Latin America's struggling economies. The return migration of this generation instigated a boom in communities of Japanese Brazilians working in Japan.

Japan's population of Latin Americans has rapidly increased since the late 1980s; this is especially the case with Brazilians, who exceeded 300,000 in 2005 despite a long-term recession during the late 1990s. Japan's revised immigration law introduced a new visa category called *long-term residents* for third-generation Japanese-Latin Americans, allowing them to work in Japan and providing them with privileged visa status as descendants of Japanese nationals and with notably free entry.

Although these Japanese-Latin Americans became incorporated into the upper end of a loosely structured dualism in the unskilled-migrant-labour market (Inagami et al. 1992), almost all of them entered the secondary labour market, in which migrant workers are the last hired and first fired. Nevertheless, as Table 1 shows, even the collapse of the bubble economy in February 1991 failed to stop the influx of Brazilians. The rate of increase did slow, but their overall numbers steadily increased during what is known as the lost decade of the Japanese economy.

Table 1 Foreign and Latin American Population in Japan

	Total	Brazil	Peru	Bolivia	Argentine	Paraguay
1985.12	850,612	1,955	480	128	329	110
1990.12	1,075,317	56,429	10,279	496	2,656	672
1991.12	1,218,891	119,333	26,281	1,766	3,366	1,052
1992.12	1,281,644	147,803	31,051	2,387	3,289	1,174
1993.12	1,320,748	154,650	33,169	2,932	2,934	1,080
1994.12	1,354,011	159,619	35,382	2,917	2,796	1,129
1995.12	1,362,371	176,440	36,269	2,765	2,910	1,176
2000.12	1,686,444	254,394	46,171	3,915	3,072	1,678
2005.12	2,011,555	302,080	57,728	6,139	3,834	2,287
2006.12	2,084,919	312,979	58,721	6,327	3,863	2,439
2007.12	2,152,973	316,967	59,696	6,505	3,849	2,556
2008.12	2,217,426	312,582	59,723	6,527	3,777	2,542
2009.12	2,134,151	230,552	54,636	5,720	3,181	2,098

Source: Ministry of Justice (1986-2011)

Table 2 Unemployment rate in Europe and Japan

		2008			2009		
		Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep
EU 27 countries	Non-EU nationals	14.1	13.6	15.7	19.3	19.2	18.9
	Nationals	6.4	6.4	6.9	8.1	8.2	8.4
EU 12 countries	Non-EU nationals	14.3	13.9	16.0	19.6	19.3	18.8
	Nationals	6.5	6.6	7.1	8.2	8.3	8.5
Germany	Non-EU nationals	18.0	16.9	17.3	19.3	18.4	18.2
	Nationals	7.0	6.4	6.2	7.2	7.0	7.0
Ireland	Non-EU nationals	7.9	10.2	9.2	12.1	15.1	16.0
	Nationals	4.9	6.4	7.1	9.3	11.3	11.8
Spain	Non-EU nationals	17.0	17.5	22.6	30.2	29.7	28.5
	Nationals	9.3	10.2	12.5	15.2	16.0	16.1
France	Non-EU nationals	18.6	17.9	20.4	24.4	22.6	22.6
	Nationals	6.6	6.9	7.6	8.3	8.3	8.5
Italy	Non-EU nationals	9.3	7.3	9.1	10.5	11.2	10.3
	Nationals	6.6	6.0	6.9	7.7	7.0	7.0
UK	Non-EU nationals	8.7	8.8	8.8	9.8	11.6	12.3
	Nationals	5.0	6.0	6.1	7.0	7.5	7.9
Japan	Total	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.5	5.2	5.5

Source: Eurostat, harmonised, seasonally adjusted value.

The economic crisis in 2008 brought about a contrasting result, however. The number of unemployed workers in Japan increased by 880,000 from September 2008 to September 2009 and the unemployment rate rose from 4.1% to 5.6%, the worst record since 1953. Likewise, the ratio of job openings to job applicants dropped from 0.86 to 0.45, making it difficult for unemployed workers to find new jobs.²

These statistics, however, are insufficiently dire to explain the Brazilian workers' predicament in Japan. For comparison, we will examine the situation of EU countries. Table 2 shows the unemployment rate of nationals and non-EU nationals in such countries as the leading EU economies (France, Germany, Italy and UK) and their most severely hit counterparts (Ireland and Spain). The unemployment rates of non-EU nationals are always higher than those of nationals in each country. Whereas the gap between nationals and non-EU nationals was not substantially widened during the economic crisis, all of those countries but Germany and Italy have experienced more serious effects on employment than Japan.

Although no official statistics exist documenting unemployment amongst migrant workers, the 2005 census recorded that the unemployment rate of Brazilians was lower than that of the overall Japanese workforce (Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunications 2008). However, as Brazilians have been the main victims of the layoffs since September 2008, they have become the most unemployed group in Japan. Five surveys, conducted by three local governments and one research institute, found that approximately 40% of Latin American workers were unemployed by the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 (Table 3). Considering the fact that Japan's official unemployment rate rose less than two percent between September 2008 and December 2009, the gap in the unemployment rate between Japanese nationals and Brazilians appears significantly larger than in European countries.

Table 3 Unemployment rate of research results after the economic crisis

Authority	Period	Place	N	Unemployed
Shiga prefecture	2009.1	Shiga prefecture	238	42%
Shiga prefecture	2009.6	Shiga prefecture	283	46%
Hamamatsu city	2009.1-2	Hamamatsu city	2,773	47%
JILPT	2008.12	Six cities in Chubu region	426	44%
Gifu prefecture	2009.7-9	Gifu prefecture	2,343	40%

Japan's Brazilian communities are consequently experiencing massive return migration for the first time in 20 years. Figure 1 illustrates the radical change in the immigration-to-emigration ratio of Japan's Brazilian population since the onset of the economic crisis. Whilst signs of population decline have existed since June 2008, by September of that year a trend of emigration exceeding immigration had begun, a trend that accelerated markedly by November of that year. The number of exits from Japan peaked between January and March 2009, as two types of returnees overlapped in this period. These were those fired between September and December 2008 and unable to find new jobs before the expiration of their unemployment insurance³, and those who decided to return home without applying for unemployment insurance when they were dismissed between January and March 2009. Though the number of exits began to decline in April 2009, a second wave of return migration occurred when unemployment insurance benefits began to expire in June 2009.

In concrete terms, more than 70,000 Brazilians, or about one quarter of the Japanese Brazilian population in Japan, left the country between September 2008 and December 2009. Taking additional return migrants into account, Japan's Brazilian population is likely to decrease by roughly 30% as a result of the economic crisis. This raises the question of the reasons for the difference between the impact of the recession in the 1990s and the current economic crisis, to which I will return later.

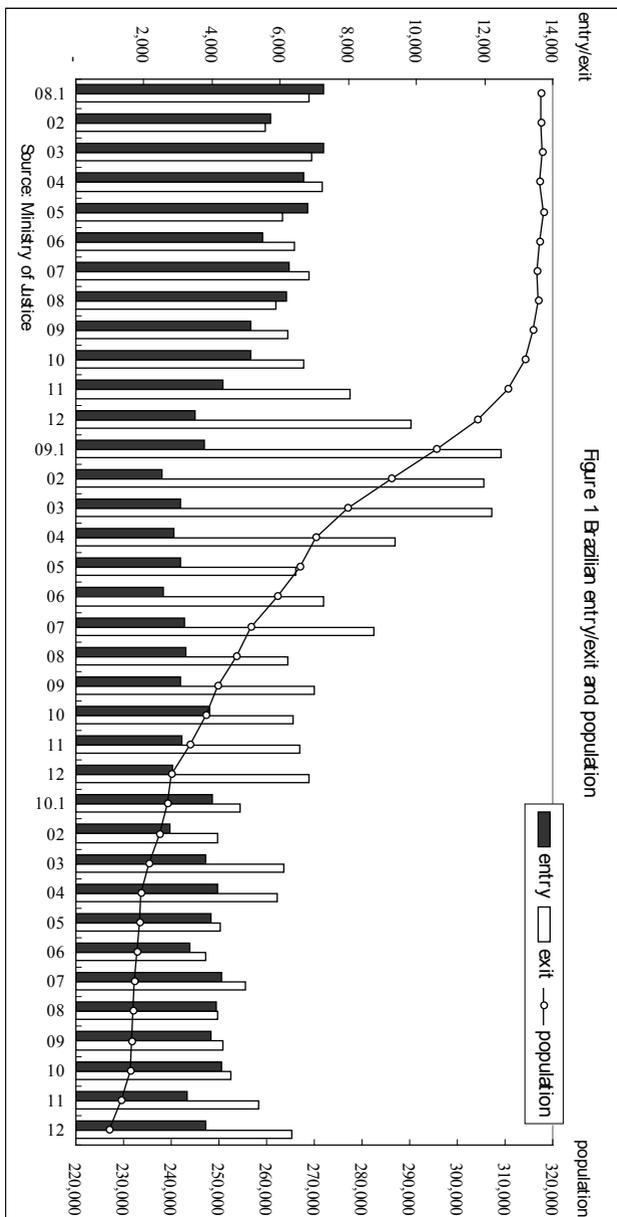


Figure 1 Brazilian entry/exit and population

3. Research Question

Following the previous section, I will answer the question raised in the title of this paper: what's behind the mass unemployment of Japanese Brazilians in Japan? The starting point of my argument is that the massive dismissal of Brazilian workers in Japan has been a man-made disaster which should have been expected and could have been avoided with proper policies for the social and economic integration of such workers into Japanese society. The devastating results stem from the precarious status of Brazilians in the Japanese labour market. Neither the Japanese government nor the media, nor academics, for that matter, showed any concern for the instability of Brazilian workers' experiences until the mass unemployment occurred.

However, there are two structural conditions for the mass unemployment which previous studies have overlooked. First, the mass dismissal of Brazilians was brought about by the heightened instability of their labour market throughout the 1990s. It has been pointed out by previous studies on Brazilians in Japan that they were incorporated into the Japanese labour market as temporary workers employed by labour contractors (Roth 2002; Tsuda 2003). But the arguments of these studies are based on their respective authors' fieldwork conducted in the mid-1990s, which makes it difficult to analyze diachronic changes to the Brazilian labour market. As I will analyze later, the niche of Brazilian workers moved toward a more unstable segment of the labour market after Roth and Tsuda completed their fieldwork projects. Thus the problem lies not in the fact that Brazilians are employed as temporary workers but that their niche was remade to respond to highly fluctuating labour demands.

Secondly, conventional integration policies have hardly considered the fact that Brazilians were temporary workers who were socio-economically disadvantaged. Previous studies often focused on the development of local integration policies, contrasting them with the neglect which Brazilians experienced at the hands of the national government (Pak 2000; Shipper 2008; Tsuda 2006). But these studies overlooked the culturalist bias of local integration policies that solely regarded migrants as cultural minorities, ignoring the fact that they were also socio-economic minorities in need of

labour policies for better jobs. Again, the problem comes not from a lack of national integration policies but from ignorance of the socio-economic disadvantages of Brazilians. I will instead focus on the causes that brought about the lack of socio-economic integration policies, preventing Brazilians from escaping their worsening employment conditions.

4. Data and Method

The principal source of data for this paper comes from studies of Brazilian labour-market and integration policies. The data from the first study are based on a survey of 740 manufacturing firms in Toyota City in September 2000, to which this study will refer as the Toyota data. This study compiled a list of manufacturers from the directory of the Toyota Chamber of Commerce. From a population of 1,471 eligible firms, 740 participated in the survey, yielding a response rate of 50.5%. Among the 740 participating firms, 102 had employed or were employing foreign, mostly Brazilian, workers.

The second set of data is from local and regional guidelines on integration policies for migrants. Referred to in this study as the policy data, these guidelines were published by 18 prefectures with more than 20,000 foreigners as of 2000, and 13 cities with more than 10,000 foreigners. These local and regional governments issued a total of 72 guidelines from 1990 to 2008. This study uses these guidelines to analyse the principles behind local governmental policies toward migrants, as they can be considered to be ‘amateur political theories’ that inform migrant integration policies (Favell, 2001: 15).

5. What Has Changed in the Labour Market for Brazilians in Japan?

The changing labour market for Brazilian workers is the source of both their steady increase in numbers and their subsequent mass dismissals during the long-term recession. As Piore has argued, most migrants are incorporated into the secondary labour market (Piore 1979: 35-6), since jobs in the primary labour market are reserved for natives, and Japanese Brazilians are no exception.⁴ From the beginnings of their migration, they found

jobs through labour contractors who constructed recruitment networks that spread throughout Japanese migrant communities in Latin America.

As is the case with other industrialised countries, Japan experienced an increase in casual employment during the past two decades. Since 1992, when 80% of workers were permanent full-time employees, known in Japan as regular employees, the casualisation of the labour market has resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of part-time employees and such casuals as temporary, day-labour, and temporary-agency workers, known in Japan as non-regular employees, to one-third of the workforce. The long-term recession and the increased flexibility of the labour market transformed Japan's dualism into something more closely resembling that of other countries, with the result that the difference between regular and non-regular employees became more salient.

This change, however, is inadequate for explaining the increasing number of Brazilian migrants in Japan before 2008, since the changing mode of their incorporation into the Japanese labour market also facilitated this phenomenon. When the massive influx of Brazilians began in the late 1980s, their employment was a solution to an acute labour shortage during an economic boom period and also supplemented a decreasing number of Japanese seasonal labourers from peripheral areas in the automotive and electronics industries.

Table 4 illustrates the results of three studies conducted in the early 1990s (Inagami et al. 1992; Tezuka et al. 1992; Tokyo Institute of Labor 1991). Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of the employers in the samples responded that they employed migrant workers because of an absolute labour shortage. Fewer than 10% responded that they preferred migrant workers because they worked for low wages. At that time many Brazilian workers became labour contractors in response to their employers' demands and recruited their compatriots for factory work. Despite their status as temporary-agency workers, these Brazilians worked under relatively better conditions.

Though migrants from Brazil were at first substitutes for seasonal workers from rural Japan, they became increasingly integrated into different segments of the secondary labour market. Manufacturers used to employ most seasonal workers directly, with

contracts of from three to six months. Such short-term contracts were compatible with fluctuations in production, enabling the manufacturers to coordinate a workforce on short notice by using labour contractors. This tendency strengthened throughout the 1990s, steadily expanding the labour-contractor sector (Kajita et al. 2005).

Table 4: Reasons for Employing Foreign Workers

	Inagami (N=172)		Tezuka (N=152)		Tokyo (N=223)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Labour shortage	132	76.7	96	63.2	139	62.3
Cheap labour	13	7.6	15	9.9	16	7.2

Table 5: Foreign Workers' Employment Patterns

Number of regular employees		Fewer than 10	10 to 29	30 to 99	100 to 299	300 to 999	1000 or more	Small firms	Large firms	Total
		Number of foreign workers	Indirect	13	40	167	156	262	379	
	Direct	26	20	204	92	60	45	250	197	447
	Total	39	60	371	248	322	424	470	994	1464
Number of firms with foreign workers	Indirect	4	7	11	6	4	5	22	15	37
	Direct	12	6	21	8	4	3	39	15	54
	Total	481	106	70	21	14	17	657	52	709

Source: Toyota data, chi-square test $p < .01$

Note: Smaller firms are those with fewer than 100 employees and large firms with 100 or more employees.

Table 5 shows that most foreign workers are employed by large or medium-sized firms; 994 of the 1,464 foreigners in the sample (mostly Brazilians), or 67.9%, work for firms with a regular staff of 100 or more. Smaller firms depend more on direct employment. Of the 470 foreigners in the sample who worked for smaller firms, 250, or 53.2%, were employed directly. In contrast, larger companies prefer agency workers, with 797, or 80.2%, of the sample employed by larger companies having been hired through labour contractors. Furthermore, 78.4% (N=797) of the agency-hired workers were concentrated in firms with a regular staff of 100 or more, whilst 55.9% (N=250) of the directly employed workers were working for firms with a regular staff of fewer than 100. In general, the percentage of agency-hired workers increases in proportion to company size. This is not because larger firms are without the know-how to hire directly, but ironically those with the best knowledge in regard to managing foreign workers avoid

doing so. It is clear that most foreign workers work in larger factories, but as agency workers. Most of them are members of a convenience workforce and are disposable at any time. Those working for small-sized firms, however, are there to solve the chronic labour shortage. The opportunities for labour contractors to recruit Brazilian workers are therefore much greater with large firms, but they must deliver and take back the workers as soon as their clients request that they do so.

At the time of the survey, most of the firms responding neither considered it difficult to recruit Japanese workers nor regarded foreign workers as cheap labour. Instead, they employed foreign workers to respond to fluctuations in production or to replace full-time employees. Table 6 illustrates the Toyota City data on migrant-employing firms' reasons for employing foreign workers. Firms with fewer than 100 employees responded more in regard to labour shortages, although to a lesser extent than those surveyed in the studies detailed in Table 4, with small- and medium-sized firms still suffering from labour shortages. However, fewer than 20% of those employing 100 or more employees responded that they faced labour shortages. Furthermore, small- and medium-sized firms were less likely than large ones to regard foreign workers as a flexible and disposable workforce, with more than 70% of large firms employing them for that reason.

Table 6: Reasons For Employing Foreign Workers

	10 or below		11 to 100		101 or more		total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Cheap labour	3	17.6	24	55.8	19	50	46	46.9 *
To replace regular employees	7	43.8	25	56.8	24	63.2	56	57.1
For more flexible labour	8	47.1	33	70.2	26	68.4	67	65.7
Shortage of part-time employee	10	62.5	17	39.5	5	13.2	32	33 **
Shortage of regular employees	6	35.3	24	52.2	2	5.3	32	31.7 **

Source: Toyota Data. Chi-square test * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Manufacturers usually employ Brazilian workers using labour contractors through a just-in-time labour-delivery system. The Toyota Motor Company is well known for its lean production system, in which suppliers deliver parts just before they are assembled. It has applied the same system to workers. Manufacturers tell labour contractors to increase

or decrease workers in a matter of days. This means that workers are often dispatched from one factory to another and are the first fired when production slows. Job opportunities for Brazilian workers have thus expanded at the price of their being relegated to an extremely precarious status.

Most Brazilians have been recruited to work in automotive and electronics factories, which are highly export-oriented and amongst the most competitive Japanese industries. This competitiveness, however, is at least partly due to flexible staffing, for which the Brazilians have been in the vanguard. These export-oriented industries have also been the most affected by the 2008-2009 economic downturn, which is why Brazilians have suffered the most by far in Japan. Moreover, because of their precarious status, many Brazilians had no unemployment insurance.

In contrast, those employed in food manufacturing, the third-largest sector within the Brazilian labour market, have experienced only a small amount of unemployment resulting from the economic crisis. Food-manufacturing factories make lunch boxes and other daily dishes sold in convenience stores. Since food manufacturing is solely for domestic consumption, the sudden shrink of exports had little influence on Brazilians working in the industry.

To summarise, Brazilians were “discovered” as a new source of labour around 1990. They were enthusiastically recruited to Japan and filled the vacancy once occupied by internal migrants. This is exactly what dual labour market theory predicted. But this is not the whole story. Their position *within* the secondary labour market changed and was polarized into two segments in the late 1990s. Though they were employed as temporary workers, they were expected to work for relatively long periods at one workplace.

Then, Brazilians came to be incorporated into highly unstable jobs or relatively stable but less privileged jobs. As a result of competition between peripheral labour forces (Kajita et al. 2005), the position of Brazilian workers became marginalized in the late 1990s. Going up the supplier chain, Brazilian workers were replaced by Japanese peripheral workers. Brazilians moved into two less favourable segments. A smaller number was incorporated into segment (1), composed of medium- and large-sized firms

that need highly flexible staffing, such as the automotive and electronics industries, and segment (2), relatively stable but low-paid jobs in medium- and small-sized factories suffering from chronic labour shortages, such as food manufacturing. Many of these workers found highly unstable jobs in segment (1). Labour contractors and their connections with recruiting agencies in Brazil enabled them to adjust to the situation. Many recruiting agencies referred in interviews to the shortened cycle of labour dispatch from Brazil to Japan in the late 1990s: they would lose business opportunities unless they “delivered” workers in a short period.

Therefore it is not a sufficient explanation to refer solely to the expansion of the secondary labour market and the incorporation of Brazilians into it. It is true that Japanese manufacturers require a more flexible workforce, but we need to clarify the nature of a flexible workforce. Tsuda and Cornelius stress the effect of ‘casualisation’ of the Japanese labour market on foreign workers (Tsuda 2003; Tsuda and Cornelius 2002), but their explanation is inadequate. The secondary labour market is not a unitary entity but is highly stratified and segmented. I use the term *more flexible staffing* in addition to casualisation because I posit that we must focus not only on the increasing number of temporary workers but also on the increasingly fluctuating demand for workers in the secondary labour market. Japanese workers also suffered from flexibilisation of the labour market, because the proportion of the workforce employed part-time increased from one-fifth in 1990 to one-third in 2008. However, the most remarkable difference between natives and migrants was that a great majority of Brazilians have failed to improve their positions in the labour market even after working longer than a decade in Japan, a tendency I will examine in the next section.

6. Culturalist Bias of Integration Policies

Although it has been 20 years since the massive influx of Brazilians began, recent surveys by municipalities show that nearly 90% of them still remain part-time employees.⁵ In addition, most of them remain agency workers, who are also more likely to be fired. This is partly a result of their self-definition as temporary migrants with a weak orientation

toward upward mobility. However, the government's lack of attention to their precarious situation has facilitated this circumstance. There has been no labour policy to correct the serious gap between migrants and natives.

Many studies both in the USA and Japan have highly praised the development of local initiatives in regard to Japanese policies towards migrants (Pak 2000; Shipper 2008), whilst criticising the national government as a reluctant host (Cornelius et al. 1992). For these researchers, it was local governments that promptly responded to the increasing number of migrants, not the national one; Tsuda asserts, for example, that, "in stark contrast to Japan's national government, a number of localities have been quite proactive in incorporating foreign workers into their communities as local citizens" (Tsuda 2006: 13). However, none of these studies recognized the 'culturalist' bias of these integration policies. Here I will clarify how the needs of migrants were reduced to cultural differences and what particular effects were brought about by the culturalist policies.

For this purpose, I will consider the principles underlying these policies rather than examine the development of individual policies. Favell's analysis of French and British migration policies is particularly useful for this purpose (Favell 2001). The study first examined the paths of migration policies in each country rather than the policies themselves and found path dependency to be a common feature with them. Depending on a certain policy framework can lead to suboptimal solutions because doing so obscures problems that are beyond the framework's reach. Favell's research method is also suitable to the analysis of the Japanese case, as it analyses the paths of such policies by treating official documents as "a kind of 'official' public theory" (Favell 2001: 15). As Japan has plenty of official guidelines concerning policies toward migrants, examining their frameworks should lead to a clarification of their characteristics.

Local policies in regard to migrants were first implemented in the 1980s. Curiously, they were part of what were called *international* policies controlled by the local bodies' national or international exchange sections (Jain 2006).⁶ The idea of local governments having international policies dates back to Kanagawa prefecture's *grassroots diplomacy* initiative in 1978. Following the initiative, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced an

international-exchange project plan in 1986 and urged local governments to publish their own guidelines for international policies. With the tide turning toward local internationalisation in general, local governments began to consider migrant issues as a means of facilitating internal internationalisation.

Table 7 shows remarkable progress for a country that has been notorious for its exclusionary policies toward migrants. As it indicates, migration issues occupied only 6.2% of the guidelines published between 1987 and 1994, which means they were but a minor concern during the internationalisation policies' initial stage. However, the weight accorded to migration issues has steadily increased since then. Between 1995 and 2000 nearly half of the guidelines pointed out the necessity of developing migrants' institutional participation in local politics, which has been reflected by a rapid increase in foreigners establishing consultative institutions.

Table 7 Reference to Migrant Policies in Official Guidelines

	Pages related to migrants		participation by migrants		Gap in advancement rate		socio-economic status		Total	
	Pages	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	pages	No. of documents
1987-1994	33	6.2	2	8.3	0	0	0	0	535	24
1995-2000	158	16.7	10	45.5	0	0	0	0	946	22
2001-2008	432	57.8	9	34.6	7	26.9	1	3.8	747	26
Total	623	28	26	29.2	7	9.7	1	1.4	2228	72

Source: Policy data

Nevertheless, many still regarded policies towards migrants to be part of the internationalisation policies. The logic of internationalisation policy is to promote international exchange with foreign countries and foreigners, which includes warm hospitality to foreign guests. In the same vein, the concept of internal internationalisation has a tendency to treat migrants as honourable guests rather than as a minority population in Japan. Although migrants comprise a socioeconomic minority in need of integration policies to improve their disadvantaged status, the internationalisation frame prevented policymakers from recognising this situation.

The proportion of pages devoted to migration issues then rose to more than half between 2001 and 2008, reflecting the publication in this period of guidelines to be

applied specifically to migrants. Whilst still using the internationalisation framework, policies towards migrants during this period were characterised by the rise of a new key concept called *tabunka kyosei*, or multicultural symbiosis. Migrant support groups and academics had been using the term multicultural symbiosis since the late 1990s, and the term's use spread to governmental bodies after the turn of the century. In 2006, the Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunication published a report to promote multicultural symbiosis, requesting local governments to formulate official guidelines for it. Unlike the notion of internationalisation, multicultural symbiosis is solely related to migrants, which resulted in an increasing number of guidelines specific to migration issues.

Although the concept of multicultural symbiosis is superior to that of internationalisation because it assumes that migrants are minorities living in Japan rather than guests, it still includes serious defects that constitute obstacles to combating the migrants' disadvantaged status in general, and that of Brazilians in particular. The ministry's report defined multicultural symbiosis as 'people with different national and ethnic backgrounds living together as members of local communities, recognising mutual cultural differences, and trying to be on equal terms' (Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunication 2006: 5, translation mine). Here we can point out two problems in terms of this paper's theme, which is the Brazilians' vulnerability.

To begin with, the concept lacks a view of social structure. The report regards multicultural symbiosis as a matter of interpersonal or intergroup relations. Although it expects Japanese Person A and non-Japanese Person B 'to be on equal terms,' it is individuals A and B and not the government who are responsible for achieving multicultural symbiosis. Such a sociopsychological understanding of migrant issues exempts the government from a responsibility to correct the situation. In reality, it is difficult for A and B to be on equal terms if serious gaps in socioeconomic status are present between them. The notion of multicultural symbiosis therefore ignores migrants' vulnerability by trivialising the very social-structural factors that have caused their predicament.

For example, many public housing projects experience conflicts between Brazilians and Japanese involving rubbish disposal, serving on the boards of residents' associations, and teenage delinquency that people often attribute to differences in culture. However, most of these problems are the result of the Brazilians' precarious status rather than cultural differences. Brazilians often move from one place to another due to their status as casual labour, and conflicts within these housing complexes between those who live in them on a temporary basis, that is to say, who are Brazilian, and long-term residents, who are Japanese, are to be expected. Although caused by the structure of the labour market, the framework of multicultural symbiosis personalises the problem by diagnosing the situation as involving interpersonal or intergroup conflicts.

Moreover, the notion of multicultural symbiosis has a strong orientation toward cultural reductionism. Considering that Brazilians have been relegated into a highly specialised segment of the labour market, we are clearly witnessing an *ethclass* condition, a term that Gordon used to express the overlap between class and ethnicity (Gordon 1964). However, the ministry regards the differences between Japanese and non-Japanese as being solely cultural. The government has therefore used the notion of multicultural symbiosis to reduce the migrants' problems to ones of cultural difference.

Table 7 shows that a quarter of the guidelines began to point to a serious gap between Japanese and foreign students in their rate of advancement in the last decade. Some prefectures have established small quotas for foreign students for high-school entry. Although still far from adequate for narrowing the gap, this is remarkable progress, as it means that local governments have officially recognised foreign students' disadvantages. This, however, is a matter within the scope of the multicultural symbiosis policy, portraying the migrant children's difficulties as stemming from cultural differences in general and language barriers in particular.

In contrast, neither the national nor local governments have been concerned with Brazilians' occupational status, leaving their precarious conditions unchanged. Only one guideline referred to the concentration of Brazilian workers in part-time jobs (see table 7). This guideline, published in 2008 by Aichi prefecture, which has the largest number of

Brazilians, specified the implementation of vocational training for migrant workers (Aichi Prefecture 2008: 52). Unfortunately, it was too late to avoid their mass unemployment. Ignorance of relevant social-structural factors and cultural reductionism prevented local governments from facing up to the actual situation of migrant workers.

Two official public theories—internationalisation and multicultural symbiosis—have legitimised Japan’s policies toward migrants. Multicultural symbiosis is the better suited for formulating policies towards migrants, as internationalisation policies consider migrants to be guests rather than a minority. I assert, however, that as a result of the official view of Brazilians as *cultural* minorities, neither theory has addressed the socioeconomic disadvantages they experience in Japan.

Bearing in mind their precarious grip on survival as a flexible workforce, the greatest need has been for such labour policies as the regulation of the labour market and the provision of vocational and language training. Insistence on internationalisation and multicultural symbiosis did nothing more than to produce a path-dependent situation that refused to see Brazilian migrants as workers, although many of their problems stem from their very working conditions.

7. Conclusion

Beck used the term the *Brazilianisation of the West* to describe new employment schemes in which a small number of workers enjoy full-time status while most have to work under insecure conditions (Beck 2000). Ironically, it was Brazilians who became the vanguard promoting the Brazilianisation of Japan. They have enjoyed a privileged visa status as the descendents of Japanese nationals, but again ironically, their employers have taken advantage of their privileges of being able to work without restrictions and with relatively free entry (Kajita et al. 2005). Supposedly free foreign workers have been more convenient than others, as they can be easily dispatched from one place to another. As a result, they have been relegated into the most unstable segment of the Japanese labour market, at the mercy of fluctuating labour demand. The mass unemployment of Brazilians has thus occurred inevitably as a corollary of the labour market’s flexibilisation.

This is only part of the story, however. National and local governments have ignored the reality of the extreme concentration of Brazilians in the temporary labour market, addressing their problems as if they were not workers. Because the frameworks of internationalisation and multicultural symbiosis have never linked work and integration policies, the Brazilians' socioeconomic conditions have depended solely on market forces. If governments had implemented efficient programmes to heighten their competitiveness in the labour market the impact of the economic crisis would indisputably have been much milder.

Brazilian mass unemployment is a disaster made by humans. Whilst governments and employers are responsible for the migrant workers' predicament, its being caused by humans means it can be solved by humans. The economic crisis can thus be an opportunity to turn misfortune into a blessing. That is to say, without the mass unemployment, the deficiencies of the conventional frameworks might not have been recognised, leaving the status quo unchanged. As the Japanese media's tone seems to have been particularly sympathetic toward Brazilians for the past 20 years, the current situation might constitute a chance to undertake drastic actions to improve their conditions.

The mass unemployment of Brazilians has caused many to urge the government to take action. Considering the 20-year lack of effective integration policies, this in and of itself can be regarded as a form of progress. The Cabinet Office has launched a taskforce to address the issues involving migrants, publishing in October 2010 a basic guideline for policies toward Japanese Brazilians. It recognized the predicament of Brazilian workers and emphasized the importance of access to steady work. Whilst we can regard such a policy change as the first step for emerging from the path-dependent integration policies, it is far from adequate. On the one hand, it is necessary to provide language training with Brazilian workers so that they can get better jobs. On the other hand, it is still true that the majority of them will continue to be dispatch workers. Some labour protection measures are essential for these workers to put a stop to further flexibilisation of their labour market.

In terms of vocational training for Brazilian workers, the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare has spent 1.08 billion yen (US\$13 million) to implement a Japanese-

language programme for unemployed Brazilians for the first time, offering a form of unemployment insurance and 181 hours of language training over two to three months. However, 181 hours of language training is too little for mastering Japanese for business use.

In addition, the guideline never referred to labour market regulation to avoid massive layoffs of Brazilian workers. Without effective measures to halt further flexibilisation of the labour market, a majority of them would have no choice but to return to insecure jobs again when the economy recovers. If the government is to change the path-dependent integration policies that have ignored the socioeconomic disadvantages of Brazilian migrants, it should have allocated more funds to the language course and placed more restrictions on their labour market. The government has thus lost out on the best opportunity for transforming its policies to avoid the man-made disaster of mass unemployment.

¹ Many Japanese dispatched workers were also fired: their numbers decreased from 1.46 million as of October 2008 to 1.02 million as of September 2009. But many more Brazilians were fired in the same period, as the following sections show.

² Ministry of Welfare and Labor, labor force survey (<http://www.stat.go.jp/data/roudou/>) and employment statistics (<http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/NewList.do?tid=000001020327>). Last accessed [13 October 2010]. The actual employment situation is worse than this seems, as an emergency employment measure subsidises more than two million workers.

³ The insurance was officially viable for up to 330 days, depending upon age and length of employment, but was mostly provided for 90 days in the case of Brazilians.

⁴ It should be noted that Japan also has a dual labour-market structure due to a disparity between large and small firms (Odaka 1984). Labour productivity differs between large and small companies in Japan much more than it does in other industrialised countries, and wages therefore rise in proportion to the number of employees at firms. The dividing line between Japan's primary and secondary labour markets, therefore, has not simply been between regular and non-regular employees, but also between regular employees employed by large and small firms.

⁵ Recent studies by local governments are as follows: the proportion of regular staff was 12.4% among 660 respondents in Toyohashi (2003), 15.4% among 1,922 respondents in Shizuoka (2008), 10.4% among 1,252 respondents in Hamamatsu (2007) and 13.2% among 349 respondents in Yokkaichi (2010).

⁶ The exception is Osaka and its neighbouring municipalities. Due to the great number of resident Koreans and the strong influence of the *burakumin* association there, its human-rights

sections has long dealt with *buraku* and migrant issues.

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