

Article

Perspectives on Host Society Attitudes Toward Immigrants: A Review of Recent Findings from Japan

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Abstract

Migrant integration has not been a high priority on the national policy agenda in Japan to date. However, as the population shrinks at a rapid rate and the presence of foreign workers and residents becomes a fact of life, the social integration of migrants who select Japan as a destination is becoming an increasingly pressing issue. Research findings from traditional immigration nations have long pointed to public opinion as a key element of migrant integration. However, there is still a lack of research on public attitudes toward immigration and immigrants in Japan. What does recent literature on attitudes toward immigration and immigrants tell us about the feelings and expectations of the Japanese public on these topics? How much do we understand about the factors that may be influencing public attitudes in Japan? This paper provides a review of literature conducted on themes related to attitudes toward immigration and immigrants in Japan from 2019 to the present. Papers reviewed here are categorized according to the factors commonly identified as impacting attitudes toward immigration: cultural, economic, psychological, and environmental. This review finds that there is a pronounced bias toward studies using data from large-scale quantitative opinion surveys; significant variation in factors identified; and some consensus that findings on these topics in traditional immigration countries and regions are not necessarily applicable to the Japanese context. It is emphasized that there is a great need for qualitative studies on the attitudes of the Japanese public towards

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immigration and immigrants. The paper concludes with recommendations for studies targeting multicultural workplaces and communities in Japan, to develop a greater understanding of the thinking behind responses given in large-scale quantitative opinion surveys.

Immigration policy and debate in Japan

Public debate on accepting and integrating migrants has traditionally been limited in Japan. The Japanese government's consistent refusal to acknowledge the existence of an official immigration policy, even while accepting increasingly large numbers of foreign workers, has in fact precluded any such debate (Koido & Kamibayashi, 2018; Komine, 2014; Roberts, 2018). Based on the long-held assumption that the Japanese public is opposed to increases in the number of immigrants accepted into the country, successive administrations are still hesitant to openly announce an official immigration or migrant integration policy (Chin, 2024; Davison & Peng, 2021). Consequently, while the national government's *tabunka kyosei* ('multicultural coexistence') guidelines are forming the ideological foundation for Japanese-style multiculturalism, there is neither an official policy nor common public understanding of how migrant integration should take place in practice.

Despite the lack of an official migrant integration policy or public consensus of what the social integration of migrants might entail, however, the acceptance of unskilled migrants in Japan is accelerating. The introduction of the Revised Immigration Act in April 2019 and subsequent opening of the 'front door' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 2019) to unskilled foreign workers has led to a significant rise in foreign workers, predominantly in the unskilled industries that need them the most, such as the construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and service industries. As of October 2023, there were 2.049 million foreign workers in Japan, an increase of 225,950 from 2022 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2024). The total number of foreign residents in 2023 was a record high 3.41 million, an increase of 281,000, or almost 11%, from 2022 (Immigration Services Agency, 2024b). Inevitably, these foreign workers and residents are becoming a more visible presence in workplaces and communities throughout the country. Most recently, the government is moving to further increase the number of foreign workers and extend their possible

length of stay in Japan. The government announced in November 2023 that the much-criticized Technical Intern Trainee Program (TITP), which has been widely utilized by small-to-medium sized businesses as a labor supply source for unskilled workers, will be abolished (Exum, 2023). The new ‘employment training system’ (*ikusei shuro seido*) that is to replace the TITP will expand both the number of foreign workers in Japan, as well as the opportunities for such workers to apply for permanent residency and bring family members to Japan. Although the new system will take several years to come into effect, it does seem that a new era of more open immigration is now imminent.

Evolving public opinion

As the government makes a major shift to what is an official immigration policy in all but name, how are Japanese attitudes to immigration and immigrants evolving? The lack of an official immigration policy and the unusually small size of the foreign population has led to Japan being called a “closed immigration country” (Komine, 2018, p.107). Findings on public opinion to date have tended to reinforce this image. Research using large-scale public opinion surveys over the past two decades has typically found that the Japanese public has a predominantly negative stance toward increases in the foreign population, driven by concerns about the impact of increased immigration on Japanese culture and public safety, among other factors (Green & Kadoya, 2013; Mazumi, 2015, 2016; Nukaga, 2006). However, such public opinion may be evolving. The demographic and economic drivers of the government’s actions on immigration – the shrinking population and severe labor shortages – are well known to the Japanese public, and it is possible that wide awareness of these two long-term trends is leading to changes in public attitudes toward immigration and immigrants.

Aims of this review

In light of such significant and potentially far-reaching social change, this paper aims to provide a review of the latest research findings on public attitudes toward immigration and immigrants in Japan. Host society sentiment toward migrants is commonly defined as one of the key elements of migrant integration, and its importance is well-documented in research findings outside

of Japan (Ager & Strang, 2008; Spoonley & Tolley, 2012). The attitudes of receiving society members toward migrants has been found to exert a significant impact on migrant health and wellbeing (Miller, Ong, Choi, Shibamura, & Jimba, 2020; Takenoshita, 2015), as well as social cohesion (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). The recent rise of nativist political groups in Europe and elsewhere highlight the social disruption caused by anti-migrant sentiment that is based on racist, ultranationalist and xenophobic thinking. Importantly, the social integration of migrants is commonly defined by scholars as a two-way process, where efforts are required not only of the migrant groups but also of the receiving society (OECD & EU, 2018; Klarenbeek, 2024). This means that scholarly attention needs to be directed not only toward the migrants themselves, but to the majority who are receiving the newcomers to their society. It is this majority that has the political, social, and economic power to impact the lives of migrants, the extent of their integration into the host society, and the future cohesion of the host society itself (Esses, 2021).

This review examines research papers on the subject of public opinion or public attitudes toward immigration and/or immigrants in Japan, published in 2019 or after, written in either Japanese or English. The timing of 2019 as a starting point was determined as significant given the revision of the Immigration Act in 2019 and the subsequent changes to immigration-related policy from that time, including the acceptance of larger numbers of foreign workers. This period is positioned as a crucial turning point in the public narrative on immigration, as the Japanese government gradually opens the country to accepting foreign workers, whose presence is becoming more visible to the Japanese public. The paper begins with a review of the most recent public opinion poll data from Japan concerning immigration and immigrants, including surveys conducted by the Japanese national government, local government bodies, and non-governmental organizations. In the literature review that follows, studies are categorized according to the factors identified to impact Japanese attitudes towards immigration/immigrants: cultural, economic, psychological, and environmental (defined here as education, media, and individual experience with foreign people and cultures). The discussion section examines the trends and gaps in the literature reviewed. The paper concludes with recommendations for studies targeting multicultural workplaces

and communities in Japan, to uncover the thinking behind responses given in the large-scale quantitative surveys that have been the main source of data in research to date, and a more proactive role by higher education institutions to facilitate and support Japan's growing multiculturalism.

Recent Surveys on Public Attitudes Toward Immigration and Immigrants in Japan

As the size of Japan's foreign population grows, there is evidence of heightened interest among government and non-governmental bodies in the attitudes of the Japanese public toward the foreign workers and residents who are coming to play an increasingly important role in the Japanese economy, society, and demographics. Findings in past opinion polls have tended to find that the Japanese public is not supportive of increased immigration. As noted above, scholars have postulated that this lack of public support is one of the main reasons for the Japanese government's hesitation toward announcing an official immigration policy (Davison & Peng, 2021). It should also be noted that surveys and research to date have typically measured public opinion on immigration through one or two questions in large-scale surveys on whether or not the respondent agrees with increases to the number of immigrants allowed in the country (Kage, Rosenbluth & Tanaka, 2022). Based on such surveys, around 60% of the Japanese public have been found to hold negative attitudes toward the acceptance of immigrants (Green & Kadoya, 2013).

Recent public opinion polls and surveys on attitudes toward immigration and immigrants have attempted to obtain a more nuanced understanding of how the Japanese public feels towards not only the acceptance of immigrants, but also toward the foreign residents in their own communities. Survey questions are becoming more detailed and as a result, there is greater knowledge of areas requiring further investigation. The Public Opinion Poll on Living Together with Foreign Residents conducted by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute in 2020 found that while 70% of respondents agree with the acceptance of more immigrants in Japan in principle, that number falls to 57% when asked about the acceptance of more foreign residents in their own residential area (NHK, 2020). In 2020, the Cabinet Public Affairs Office conducted the Public Opinion Poll on the Basic Legal System, which included questions about the acceptance of refugees, permanent residency for foreign

residents, and new proposed legislation to cancel permanent residency in some cases. Around 38% of respondents thought that there are too many permanent foreign residents in Japan, with a large portion of remaining respondents unsure. A large majority of respondents expressed agreement with stricter conditions for granting permanent residency, including checking criminal records, payment of taxes, and adequate income (Cabinet Public Affairs Office, 2021). A further survey conducted by NHK in 2022 found that around 44% of respondents were positive about increased numbers of foreign residents in Japan, with 54% expressing a negative opinion (NHK, 2022). A survey by the Japan Center for International Exchange in 2023 found a similar number, with 43% of respondents expressing a positive opinion about larger numbers of foreign residents, 35% negative, and 22% ambivalent about the situation. This survey found that people who welcome foreign residents anticipate the resolution of labor shortage issues and the diversification of Japanese society, while those who oppose increased immigrant numbers are predominantly concerned about crime and public safety (Japan Center for International Exchange, 2023). The findings from the Immigration Services Agency's (ISA) Survey on Attitudes to Living Together with Foreign Residents in 2024 were also mixed: while around 29% of respondents felt positive about increased numbers of foreign residents in the community, 25% expressed negative sentiment, and around 47% did not express a clear opinion either way (Immigration Services Agency, 2024a).

One feature of more detailed polls such as those noted here is that they often reveal contradictory evidence that reflects the complexity of the situation confronting the Japanese public as society becomes more multicultural. For example, in the ISA's survey (2024a), 68% of respondents said that they believe that there is discrimination and prejudice against foreign residents in Japan and 59% believe that interacting more with foreign residents is the best way to combat such prejudice. However, there are consistently low numbers of Japanese respondents who actually interact with foreign residents across surveys. In the ISA survey, 73% of respondents said that they have no interaction with foreigners (Immigration Services Agency, 2024a). There are also seemingly contradictory data on the cultural impact of immigration. In the NHK (2019) survey, 34% of respondents cited 'issues about language and

culture' as their main concern regarding the increase of foreign residents. The number was even larger in the ISA (2024a) survey, with 70% of respondents expressing the same concern. However, 67% of the same respondents also said that that increased numbers of foreigners would provide opportunities to learn about foreign cultures and languages (Immigration Services Agency, 2024a). Such results indicate that the respondents themselves may be still formulating their own opinions as changes in population composition take place. It is evident that polls and surveys of the Japanese public on immigration-related topics in recent years are being adjusted and expanded to address the increasingly complex reality of immigration and immigrants in Japan.

Review of literature: themes, methods, findings

A total of twenty-two research papers were reviewed here, to ascertain recent thematic trends and research method patterns in research on Japanese attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. The review is not exhaustive and does not include the significant number of books published on this topic since 2019, including important work by Nagayoshi (2021), Korekawa (2019), and Menju (2020). Papers that examine Japanese public reception to immigrants without discussing specific factors (such as Zorko & Debnar, 2021), papers that examined attitudes toward foreign tourists rather than foreign residents (such as Maruyama, Keith, & Woosnam, 2019), and those that focused on specific social groups rather than the general public (Akiba, Shima, Hashimoto & Hirata, 2020) were also excluded. The review aims to present the main narratives found in a selection of recent scholarly work to point the way to future research avenues in this field.

Thematic trends

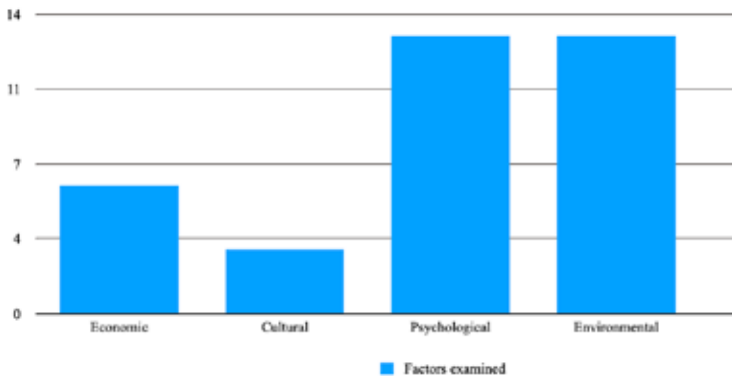
As noted above, scholars outside of Japan in traditional immigration regions have typically identified a large number of variables thought to impact host society attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. For the purposes of this review, variables are categorized into the following four categories: economic, cultural, psychological, and environmental. Scholars investigating these themes in Japan have not reached consensus on the relative significance of each variable (Davison & Peng, 2021) and as government policy continues to evolve

it is to be hoped that work will continue to elucidate how the Japanese public is receiving and reacting to significant demographic and social change.

Figure 1 below shows the thematic trends in the papers reviewed here. Many of the papers reviewed examined more than one factor, reflecting the complexity of measuring attitudes and the forces that drive them.

Figure 1.

Thematic trends in papers reviewed.



Note. Number of papers reviewed, categorized according to factors studied that may impact Japanese public attitudes toward immigration and/or immigrants.

As may be seen from Fig.1, the large majority of papers reviewed here examined psychological and environmental factors as variables influencing attitudes toward immigration/immigrants. Both of these categories contained a significantly wide variety of sub-topics that were studied. For example, reflecting research trends overseas, many of the papers focusing on the psychological determinants of attitudes referred to the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) or competitive threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). These included Mera's (2020) work on xenophobia, Lawrence, Igarashi and Ishida's (2022) study of how the share of immigrants in a region may influence attitudes toward foreign residents, and Park, Berry & Joshanloo's (2022) examination of how the Japanese public may view the acculturation of migrants. However, psychological factors also included studies on individual and national identity (Davison & Peng, 2021; Kato & Maemura, 2022; Morgan, Zhang, Cichanowicz

& Welser, 2023) and personality traits (Tomiura, Ito, Mukunoki & Wakasugi, 2019; Yoshino & Oshio, 2020; Luo, 2024). Similarly, papers examining factors categorized as ‘environment’ covered a wide variety of sub-factors, ranging from overseas experience and relationships with foreigners (Cho, 2019; Kato & Maemura, 2022; Tomiura et al., 2019), to education (Facchini, Margalit & Nakata, 2022; Mera, 2020), to the social norms in Japan concerning the expression of prejudice (Igarashi & Nagayoshi, 2022), and also the influence of the number and type of foreign residents in one’s residential area (Luo, 2024; Yamagata, 2019; Yoshino & Oshio, 2020).

Traditionally, research on determinants of attitudes toward immigration and immigrants in Japan has tended to focus on how the Japanese public perceives the cultural impact of immigration. As noted in **Recent Surveys on Public Attitudes Toward Immigration and Immigrants in Japan** above, perceptions of cultural impact are still a salient indicator of both the expectations and concerns of the Japanese public regarding immigration. However, only three of the twenty-two papers reviewed here singled out ‘culture’ as a factor (Davison & Peng, 2021; Kage et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2023). The work by Kage et al. (2022), in particular, takes the traditional dichotomy of economic versus cultural effects, and devises a typology through which to categorize Japanese public attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. Compared to papers on cultural factors, there was a slightly higher number of papers that examined Japanese attitudes to immigration from an economic perspective, including Tomiura et al.’s (2019) study of the interplay of behavioral economics with sentiment toward foreign workers, and Shimokubo’s (2021) examination of how fluctuations in the unemployment rate may influence the development of xenophobia.

Research methods

Of the twenty-two papers reviewed here, eighteen adopted quantitative research methods. Appendix A shows the methods used in each study. As may be seen, the majority of the quantitative studies used large-scale opinion polls that contained one or two general questions regarding attitudes to immigration or immigrants. In other words, the quantitative studies involved for the most part secondary analysis of selected responses from opinion polls or awareness

surveys that had been conducted some time prior to the research. On the other hand, the qualitative studies in this review used methods such as media text analysis, in-depth interviews, and text-mining of media content and survey data. Of the four studies adopting qualitative methods, two used interviews to obtain primary data for analysis (Davison & Peng, 2021; Kurokawa, 2022), while two used text-based analysis techniques (Chin, 2024; Yamagata, 2019).

Findings

The wide range of studies reviewed here contain many important findings that provide in turn further questions for ongoing research into this subject. This section offers a brief overview of the major findings, categorized into the factors studied.

Findings on psychological factors

Cho (2019) found that while the level of a person's positive feelings toward a foreign country weakened xenophobic sentiment, experience with foreign people had little impact. In an analysis of attitudes toward different nationalities of foreigner groups living in Japan, Cho found that xenophobia was strongest toward Chinese and Korean residents, and weakest toward Americans, with America found to be the country with the highest likeability level among respondents. Cho also indicates that patriotism, as a component of nationalism, tends to strengthen these tendencies. Cho suggests that efforts to promote intercultural interaction with nationalities whose countries are not 'likeable' (against the backdrop of diplomatic tensions, for example) may be counterproductive in efforts to reduce or prevent xenophobic sentiment (Cho, 2019). Mera (2020) also investigated determinants of xenophobic sentiment, finding that such sentiment is heightened among those who are lacking a social support network, and identifies a psychological structure whereby authoritarianism has a mediating impact on nationalism and perceptions of threat, in both cases leading to heightened xenophobic sentiment. Mera recommends that authoritarian sentiment needs to be addressed to counter or suppress xenophobic sentiment (Mera, 2020). Shimokubo (2021) uses Blumer's (1958) group threat theory to examine whether increased unemployment leads to heightened xenophobic sentiment, finding that while an association is

confirmed, the heightened xenophobic sentiment observed did not translate to a statistically meaningful effect at the regional level (Shimokubo, 2021).

The interplay between the perceived threat posed by foreign residents and the positive impact of interaction with outgroup members is examined in a number of studies here, and as seen outside of Japan, results are mixed. For example, Lawrence et al. (2022) find that while an increased immigration presence at the prefectural and municipal level is associated with negative feelings toward immigrants seen as a threat, increased contact with foreign residents in such areas also works to mitigate such negative sentiment, reflecting findings in traditional immigration nations (Lawrence et al., 2022). Conversely, Park et al. (2022) found that the positive impact on sentiment posited by intergroup contact theory was not supported in their study of Japanese attitudes toward foreign residents. In other words, contact with foreign residents was not seen to have an impact on Japanese respondents' attitudes toward multiculturalism or tolerance toward migrants (Park et al., 2022).

Identity was another key theme in the literature examining the psychological factors behind attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. Morgan et al. (2023), focusing on the *Nihonjinron* conceptualization of Japanese national identity, found that identity exercises considerable impact in regulating how Japanese respondents feel toward the psychological assimilation of foreign residents. Importantly, they posit that identity is a key element in understanding how forgiving or non-forgiving the Japanese public may be toward how foreign residents adjust in Japanese society, and in particular, how 'Japanese' (ie. 'acceptable') they are perceived to be (Morgan et al., 2023). Identity also emerges as a significant factor in Kato and Maemura's (2022) study of factors that may determine attitudes in Okinawa, finding that Okinawan identity plays a positive role in acceptance of foreign residents.

Findings on environmental factors

Environmental factors, as defined here, cover a broad range of variables, and as such, were found as key themes in a large number of papers. Themes related to education were examined from various perspectives. Kato and Lu (2023) conducted an analysis of two surveys in 2009 and 2022 to explore whether or

not higher education does consistently lead to pro-immigrant attitudes in Japan, as has been found elsewhere. Their findings show inconsistency in the Japanese context and find that education policy at the time, rather than increased exposure to foreign cultures on campus, may exert considerable influence over attitudes toward foreign residents in Japan (Kato & Lu, 2023). An experimental study conducted by Facchini et al. (2022) indicates that in terms of using education to positively impact attitudes to immigrants, proactive intervention may be effective. They found that providing participants with information that explains the benefits of immigration leads to more accepting attitudes toward immigration (Facchini et al., 2022). These findings are corroborated by Igarashi and Ono (2022) in their study in the United States of the efficacy of exposure to positive information on immigration-related matters (Igarashi & Ono, 2022). In other important research exploring the impact of environment, Igarashi and Nagayoshi (2022) compared a list experiment with direct questions to investigate whether or not the expression of prejudice toward immigrants is socially acceptable in Japan. Contrasting with finding overseas, their results showed that in Japan, expressing prejudice toward immigrants is not seen to be socially undesirable, and suggest that Japan's relatively homogenous demographic composition to date has played a role in the lack of development of social norms against prejudice (Igarashi & Nagayoshi, 2022).

Another crucial element of the environment is the role played by the media in the formation of attitudes. Yamagata (2019) analyzed media texts to explore the way Muslim residents in Japan are portrayed and perceived. He finds little negative sentiment toward Muslims in Japan; rather, he suggests that such residents are in general received positively with interest in their culture, linking this sentiment with Japanese pride in the spirit of *omotenashi* (Japanese-style hospitality) (Yamagata, 2019). Chin (2024) notes the fact that Japan's mainstream media has tended to reflect the stance of the Japanese government and avoid the use of terms such as 'immigrant' (*imin*) or 'immigration policy' (*imin seisaku*). Chin uses text mining of media databases and public opinion polls to investigate the way immigration-related matters are reported in Japan's major media outlets, and the impact that this may have on Japanese attitudes toward immigrants. Chin raises the issue that immigration itself is still treated as a taboo in the media, while at the same time there are increasingly numerous

reports on matters related to foreign workers and the situation in the Japanese labor market (Chin, 2024). It seems clear that this contradiction faced by media outlets and disjunct between the political narrative and the reality of media reports inevitably leads to confusion amongst the general public.

Findings on economic and cultural factors

Setting aside the actual cultural or economic effects of increased immigration, which are the subject of both political unrest (‘The hard right is getting closer to power all over Europe’, 2023) and scholarly debate (Peri, 2015), the way the host society perceives such effects has been examined in a large body of research outside of Japan. In this review of selected recent papers on the Japanese context, while the majority of papers investigated psychological variables or a wide range of environmental factors, a number of researchers have aimed to illuminate cultural and economic concerns as determinants of Japanese attitudes toward immigrants. Shimokubo (2021), reviewed above, looked specifically at the impact of higher unemployment on attitudes. Other papers explored feelings about economic concerns conceptualized more generally. Tomiura et al. (2019) turned to behavioral economics and found that behavioral biases such as a proclivity toward maintaining the status quo may inhibit support for foreign workers, even when such workers are temporary (Tomiura et al., 2019). Given that a large number of the foreign workers in Japan currently hold temporary working visas, this finding holds important implications when considering strategies to increase public support for much-needed foreign labor in Japan. Igarashi et al.’s (2022) online survey experiment found that Japanese respondents had higher expectations of the economic contribution of high-skilled migrants compared to low-skilled migrants and recommend that this preference for migrants who are seen to contribute economically should be utilized, by widely disseminating information to the host society on the potential economic contribution of immigrants (Igarashi et al., 2022).

In comparison, papers focusing on cultural factors influencing attitudes toward migrants were few. Davison and Peng’s (2021) qualitative study of attitudes to immigration contained important findings related to culture, defined broadly to include social norms, common understandings, and core values. In

this context, participants in Davison and Peng’s interviews were uncertain of the meaning of the term ‘immigrant’, perhaps reflecting confusion of the political narrative and media reporting, as noted above. Importantly, they found that all participants were opposed to immigration for its perceived adverse impact on core Japanese values. This opposition, however, was not evident when discussing foreign care workers, who were seen as acceptable and needed. Davison and Peng refer to this contradiction as “pragmatic divergence” (p.2588) on the part of the participants, where opposition to immigration in principle disappears when there are perceived material concerns or benefits from immigration (Davison & Peng, 2021). Kage et al.’s (2022) important work on a typology of different attitudes toward immigration further corroborates this dichotomy between cultural and economic concerns. They found that a significantly larger number of Japanese respondents place importance on the economic value of immigrants, rather than their cultural contribution, and define this group as ‘exploiters’ (Kage et al., 2022). Their findings seem to suggest that cultural threat, rather than economic threat, may be an important avenue for future studies of Japanese attitudes toward immigration.

Discussion

The emergence of a growing number of studies on Japanese attitudes to immigration and immigrants that delve into the complexities of the subject is welcome and helps to develop a more nuanced perspective on how the Japanese public is responding to the social change brought about by higher numbers of foreign workers and residents. Here I discuss the implications of the thematic trends and methodological issues identified in this limited review of recent literature.

Ongoing work to identify dominant factors in the Japanese context

As noted by Davison and Peng (2021), scholars in Japan are still working to identify what may be the dominant determinants of attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. It seems evident from findings here and elsewhere that assumptions adopted by scholars in this field outside of Japan, such as those regarding social norms on the expression of prejudice, and concerns about material economic threat, are not necessarily valid in the Japanese context.

On the other hand, the ongoing debate on the benefit of intercultural contact, originating in Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, is also salient in Japan. Mixed results in this field, combined with the growing opportunities for contact with foreign residents in Japan, point the way to further opportunities to explore this area of research through not only analysis of existing data, but also field studies that explore the impact of intergroup contact in real-world settings. Such field studies are also lacking outside of Japan (Vezzali & Stathi, 2017). As Japan moves toward a more multicultural society, there should be increasing opportunities for researchers to offer valuable insights into the changing situation in Japan.

Notable bias toward quantitative studies

As described above, the great majority of papers reviewed here adopted quantitative data analysis methods, often using data that has been collected in large-scale surveys on a variety of topics some years prior to the analysis. The use of simple questions such as whether respondents agree or disagree with increases to immigration intake, or whether or not the respondent has foreign friends, has been noted by scholars as "insufficient for understanding specific contexts and relationships" (Park et al., 2022; p.12) and based on a problematic assumption that such methods "adequately capture the full depth and range of respondents' views" (Davison & Peng, 2021; p.2580). This review has indicated that while opinion polls and awareness surveys conducted by government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and local government bodies are expanding in depth and increasing in frequency, more qualitative research work is required to fully explore and understanding the thinking behind the responses given.

Limitations of this review

This is not an exhaustive review and the time period examined is limited to the six years from 2019 to 2024. As such, observations offered here do not provide a complete view of current findings. Nonetheless, papers have been selected as representative of common themes and methods, and from this perspective it is hoped that the recommendations offered here are of value.

Future recommendations

The body of research on Japanese attitudes to immigration and immigrants is small but growing in number and depth. Findings described here offer valuable insights into the current situation in Japan, yet a number of important themes remain unaddressed.

- (1) The interplay between the impact of intercultural contact and host society expectations toward migrant acculturation (Park et al., 2022) is an area with great potential for research in the field, as the Japanese public comes into greater contact with foreign residents in workplaces and residential communities. In addition to host society expectations of migrant acculturation, scholars outside of Japan are investigating how host society members themselves acculturate to the presence of immigrants. It seems too early to progress to this point in Japan, but future work in this field may be fruitful.
- (2) In the same way, there is little research in Japan targeting unskilled workplaces employing foreign workers. As a large majority of foreign workers in Japan are employed in unskilled workplaces through schemes such as the Technical Intern Trainee Program, and as these are the workplaces that are likely to continue their dependence on foreign workers to address labor shortages, public reception to such workers, both as co-workers and as residents, promises to be a rich field for uncovering Japanese attitudes to and relationships with immigrants. Field studies in communities receiving foreign residents are also particularly needed.
- (3) The role of education cannot be underestimated. Studies reviewed here showed the significance of positive information campaigns in developing positive attitudes toward immigrants. Higher education institutions (HEIs) need to address the ‘third mission’ of higher education, to contribute to and engage with society (Jones, Leask, Brandenburg & de Wit, 2021). Rather than assuming that students will automatically be positively impacted through exposure to foreign cultures and knowledge on campus, the literature indicates that proactive intervention is required. In this light, HEIs have

an important role to play in not only supporting the development of students' intercultural competence, but also in implementing outreach programs that connect students with communities and facilitate a smooth transition to a more culturally diverse society.

The majority in any society plays a crucial role in how migrants are received as well as their subsequent employment, social inclusion, life satisfaction, and mental health. Japan needs people and must make efforts to remain an attractive destination to the foreign workers who are in such great demand. Research in this field has the potential to contribute to the development of positive and constructive intercultural relations as Japan's society continues to change.

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Appendix: Literature on sentiment toward immigration or immigrants in Japan (2019–2024)

Year	Author(s)	Title	Methods / Factors examined
2019	Cho, K.	A Study of Attitudes Toward Foreign Countries and People in Japan	Quantitative secondary analysis / Psychological (contact), environment (overseas experience)
2019	Tomiura, E. Ito, B. Mukunoki, H. Wakasugi, R.	Individual characteristics, behavioral biases, and attitudes toward foreign workers: Evidence from a survey in Japan	Quantitative analysis of large-scale survey / Psychological (personality traits), economic (behavioral economics), environmental (relationships with foreigners)
2019	Yamagata, A.	Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Contemporary Japan	Qualitative content analysis of media texts / Environment (Muslims as tourists in Japan)
2020	Mera, A.	Xenophobia in Japan: Focusing on Nationalism, Authoritarianism and Social Capital	Quantitative analysis of opinion poll / Psychological (personality traits, threat) and environmental (education, social support network)
2020	Okada, M.	外国人増加への期待と不安 ～「外国人との共生社会に関する世論調査」から～ [Expectations and concerns about the increasing foreign population: from the Public Opinion Poll on Living Together with Foreign Residents]	Qualitative analysis of NHK survey / Psychological (physical threat)
2020	Yoshino, S. Oshio, A.	Associations between tolerance toward foreign residents and the Big Five personality traits in Japan: The moderating effect of socioecological variable	Quantitative analysis of large-scale survey data / Psychological (personality traits), environmental (increase of foreign residents in area)
2021	Davison, J. Peng, I.	Views on immigration: identities, interests, and pragmatic divergence	Qualitative in-depth interviews / Psychological (identity) / cultural (immigrants threaten cultural identity of host society) / economic (perception of migrants as a material threat)
2021	Okubo, T.	Public preferences on immigration in Japan	Quantitative analysis of panel survey / Environment (socioeconomic factors, education, overseas experience)
2021	Shimokubo, T.	Analysis of the Effects of the Unemployment Rate on Xenophobia in Japan Based on Cumulative Social Survey Data	Quantitative analysis of national identity surveys / Economic, psychological
2022	Facchini, G. Margalit, Y. Nakata, H.	Countering public opposition to immigration: The impact of information campaigns	Quantitative large-scale randomized experiment / environment
2022	Igarashi, A. Miwa, H. Ono, Y.	Why do citizens prefer high-skilled immigrants to low-skilled immigrants? Identifying causal mechanisms of immigration preferences with a survey experiment	Quantitative survey experiment (online survey) / Economic

Year	Author(s)	Title	Methods / Factors examined
2022	Igarashi, A. Nagayoshi, K.	Norms to be prejudiced: List experiments on attitudes towards immigrants in Japan	Quantitative list experiments using online surveys, direct questioning / Environment (social norms around prejudice)
2022	Kage, R. Rosenbluth, F.M. Tanaka, S.	Varieties of Public Attitudes toward Immigration: Evidence from Survey Experiments in Japan	Quantitative opt-in online panel survey / Economic and cultural
2022	Kato, J. Maemura, N.	An Examination of the Acceptance Attitude of Okinawan Residents toward Okinawan Immigrants, and its Determinants	Quantitative analysis of independent survey / Psychological (identity), environmental (knowledge)
2022	Kurokawa, C.	Including Muslim Immigrants in the Public School Lunch Program in Higashihiroshima, Japan: A Migrant Integration Perspective	Qualitative interviews / environment
2022	Lawrence, J. Igarashi, A. Ishida, K.	The Dynamics of Immigration and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in Japan: How and Why Changes in Immigrant Share Affect Attitudes toward Immigration in a Newly Diversifying Society	Quantitative analysis of longitudinal panel data / Psychological (perceived threat, contact)
2022	Park, J. Berry, J.W. Joshnloo, M.	Japanese people's attitudes toward acculturation and intercultural relations	Quantitative analysis of online survey / Psychological (perceived security, perceived threat, contact, acculturation expectations, national identity)
2023	Kato, G. Lu, F.	The Relationship Between University Education and Pro-Immigrant Attitudes Varied by Generation: Insights from Japan	Quantitative analysis of public opinion polls / Environment (education)
2023	Morgan, C.V. Zhang, J. Cichanowicz, T. Welser, H.T.	How Anti-Assimilationist Beliefs are Shaping the Context of Reception of Immigrants in Japan	Quantitative analysis of public opinion poll / Cultural, economic, psychological (identity)
2023	Nagayoshi, K. Shiomura, K. Tanabe, S. Saito, R. Takikawa, H.	Expression of Prejudice against South Koreans and Social Norms: Measurement of Implicit Prejudice by Implicit Association Test and Investigations of Its Associations with Explicit Prejudice	Quantitative analysis of independent questionnaire survey and Implicit Association Test / Psychological
2024	Chin, S.	A Study on the Possibility of Japan's Immigration Policy: From the Perspective of Newspaper Reports and Public Opinion	Qualitative content analysis (text mining) of media databases and public opinion surveys / Environment (media)
2024	Luo, X.	Attitudes of Japanese Residents towards Chinese Residents in Chinatown Areas and Its Determining Factors: A Comparative Study across 3 Regions	Quantitative analysis of online surveys / Psychological (contact, personal characteristic, perceived threat), environmental (ethnic town effect)