

***Culture Adaptation and Employment Situation
-The Case of Foreign Students in Japan-***

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Abstract

Several researches have been conducted to identify factors related to intercultural adjustment. Life across borders needs cross-cultural coping abilities. Evidences from empirical and theoretical research indicate several factors that influence the cross-cultural adaptation process in culturally diverse environment. The continued increase in the number of international students has caused a corresponding increase in a variety of problems and challenges regarding overseas study (Gebhard, 2012). For the last few decades, Japan has been one of the favorite destinations for international students. The increase in the country's foreign student population calls for a system of support that can sustain the emotional and psychological adjustment to the host country. The problem of adjustment, particularly in the tertiary level is of gigantic importance, in order for foreign to achieve their intellectual pursuits. What are the culture adjustment behavior patterns of international students? What major problems confront them, and how do they cope? Do male students adjust better and/or faster compared to female students? This study uses two assessment scale the Index of Life Stress (ILS) and Index of Social Support (ISS) to measure the degree of life stress and social support (Ikeguchi, 2007) available to two groups, the male and female groups. ILS measures four areas of stress, and ISS attempts to measure the degree of four types of social support available to foreign students in Japan. The paper also deals with a second issue. How many foreign students who graduate from Japanese universities choose to work and live in Japan? The truth is that most of the foreign students continue to work in Japan after graduation. But how many female students get a job in Japan after graduation? This paper aims to explore the labor participation of foreign born graduates in Japanese universities.

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Introduction

This paper is part of a series of investigations on the relation between adjustment issues and coping mechanism across different populations in the area of intercultural adaptation. The first survey was conducted on two groups of foreigners working in Japan: the skilled and the unskilled workers (Ikeguchi, 2007). The second survey was conducted on foreign students in the country in relation to gender and employment after graduation (Ikeguchi, 2019). The current investigation is an attempt to validate the previous surveys by adding more respondents to the questionnaire. On the theoretical side it aims to explore the adjustment situation of international students in the country. On the practical side, it aims to highlight the employment situation of international students in relation to gender issues. Do these issues relate? What is the connection? The aim is to find an intersecting point(s) to validate data on intercultural adaptation of foreigners in the country.

Intercultural Adjustment of working group

Several attempts have been conducted to identify factors that influence intercultural adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Measures have been developed to assess constructs that both theoretically and empirically link to intercultural adjustment (Matsumoto, 2003).

The number of foreigners living in Japan, either on a short or long term basis, has dramatically increased since the turn of the 20th century. By 2006, the number is at its record high in the history of the country's international human exchange. In the first investigation, Ikeguchi (2007) reports:

Of the legally visiting foreigners, 38.8% have permanent visas while 38.2% hold temporary visas. At the same time, the number of illegal or overstaying foreigners continues to increase and yet is left unaccounted for. These individuals, who actually form the backbone of the country's economy, choose to overstay and do the country's dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs.

The increase in the country's foreign population calls for a system of support that can sustain the emotional and psychological adjustment to the host country. To say the least, very few academic investigations have been conducted on the patterns of foreigner adjustment in Japan. The first part of this research used a set of indexes that measure life stress and social support adapted from Yang and Clum (1995).

The Index of Life Stress (ILS) measured six areas of life stressors: language, work/career concerns, financial concern, interpersonal relationship, future concerns and overall culture adjustment concerns. The Index of Social Support (ISS) assessed four areas from which the respondents draw some kind of social support: contact with family, friends, and contact with members of the host country and support from one's religion.

The respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statements using a Likert Scale and data obtained were analyzed using principal component method and factor analysis. The findings on Life Stress and Social Support for the two groups are summarized in Tables 1 & 2 and Tables 3 & 4, respectively.

ILS Results for the 1st and 2nd survey (Construct validity & factor analysis)

Constructs under investigation	
1. Language difficulties	.70
2. Interpersonal stress	.68
3. Culture adjustment-related stress	.60
4. Future-related goals	.65
5. Work-related goals	.56

Table 1. Results for skilled workers (significant scores highlighted)

Constructs under investigation	
1. Language difficulties	.67
2. Interpersonal stress	.49
3. Culture adjustment-related stress	.56
4. Future-related goals	.64
5. Work-related goals	.51

Table 2 Results for unskilled workers (significant scores highlighted)

The results indicate that the second group (unskilled workers) report higher levels of stress compared to the first group. At the same time, lower mean scores in the ISS of the “laborer” group indicate lower levels of social support compared to their counterpart.

ISS Results for the 1st & 2nd study

Constructs under investigation	
1. Contact with one's culture	.67
2. Contact with friends	.77
3. Contact with members of host culture	.59
4. Contact with one's religion	.39

Table 3 Results for skilled workers (significant scores highlighted)

Constructs under investigation	
1. Contact with one's culture	.57
2. Contact with friends	.47
3. Contact with members of host culture	.21
4. Contact with one's religion	.51

Table 4 Results for unskilled workers (significant scores highlighted)

Intercultural adjustment of foreign students

While the first part of the investigation documented a significant difference in life satisfaction between labor workers and professional groups in Japan, it also highlights the importance of personal and situational factors and the interaction of at least three variables: language fluency, work expectations, and host interactions.

For the last few decades, Japan has been one of the favorite destinations for international students. Japanese universities are racing to attract international students to raise competitiveness among their ranks, as well as their global counterparts. Tsukuba University, for instance, reports that students from overseas find many good reasons to study in Japan. While some are attracted by Japan's high educational standards, others choose the country for its rich cultural heritage. The government is also taking steps to achieve this goal. The government has set on course to reach its goal set almost a decade ago to attract some 300,000 foreign students in higher education. As the accompanying graph indicates, the total number of international students has climbed sharply since 2011. JASSO reports that by 2017, the number of international students during the fiscal year 2017 is 336,320.

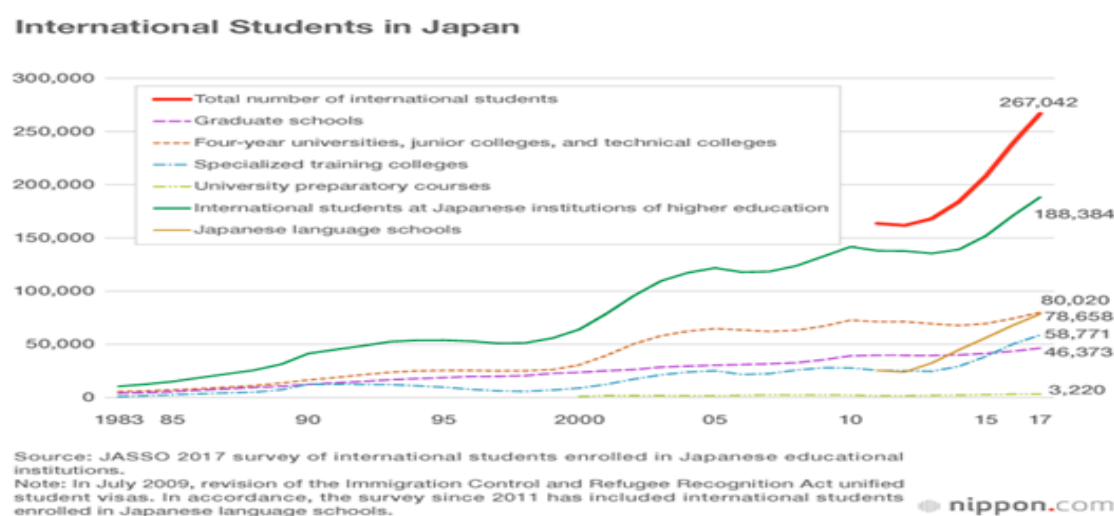


Figure 1 International students enrolled in Japanese educational institutions

The unprecedented rise of international students in the country calls for a system of support that can sustain their emotional and psychological adjustment to the host country. Given the present condition, while prediction of culture adjustment of international students is imperative, few studies have addressed this issue. (Yang & Clum, 1995). Findings of previous research suggest four major challenges: personal psychological issues such as stress, anxiety and loneliness, general living issues such as financial stress, sociocultural issues, and language issues (Lee, 2017). Earlier, Gebhard (2012) looked into the kinds of adjustment problems and adjustment behavior of international students while studying in the United States. Gebhard pointed out challenges related to academics, social interaction, and emotions. The study also indicated that students use coping behaviors that help them meet these challenges, such as using reminders of home culture, talking with friends, and using humor.

As the second part of an exploratory research, the present study aims to continue on with the theme of intercultural adjustment focusing on international students. The aim is to find out life stressors and coping mechanism foreign students use while studying in Japan. The same set of instruments: the Index of Life Stress (ILS) and Index of Social Support (ISS) were used and a questionnaire was administered to a group of international students. Considering the specific life situations that confront foreign students however, the instruments (ILS & ISS) were re-adjusted and tailored to suit the needs of the student population.

The situation of international students in Japan is unique in a sense because the country offers greater opportunities after graduation. There is a strong job market for highly qualified graduates. In a recent survey, around half of the major Japanese companies surveyed expressed a desire to hire foreigners graduating from Japanese institutions. Hence, besides inter-cultural adjustment, the present study aims to explore the employment situation of international students in relation to gender issues.

The Index of Life Stress (ILS)

The Index of Life Stress consists of questions to which students report their agreement.

1. Japanese language is difficult.
2. Japanese people are hard to understand.
3. I find it hard to adjust to Japanese culture.
4. I am uncertain about my life after graduation.

The Index of Social Support (ISS)

The Index of Social Support, aimed to explore life stressors, consists of questions as follows.

1. I have contact with students of same country
2. I have contact with students from Japan
3. I have contact with international friends
4. I have contact with Japanese friends

Responses were scaled on 5 levels of the Likert Scale.

* 5 = strongly agree 4= agree 3= uncertain 2= disagree 1= strongly disagree

The survey was conducted twice. The first was in 2018 using 20 students and the results were reported in SIETAR 2019. Given the limited respondents, it was deemed necessary to validate the results. Hence a second survey was conducted thereafter adding a few more respondents. The results of the 1st and 2nd survey are summarized below.

Results of Life Stress and Social Support

Life Stress Indicators (N=20)			Social Support (N=20)		
	M	F		M	F
Language concern	3.5	4.1	Same country Ss	4.0	3.8
Interpersonal	3.6	3.9	Ss from Japan	2.5	2.8
Culture adjustment	2.8	3.3	International friends	2.9	2.9
Future goals	4.1	4.2	Japanese friends	3.2	3.5
Mean analysis	3.5	3.8			
Significant at	P<.001	P<.002		P<.005	P<.001

Table 5. Results for 1st group of students (significant scores highlighted)

Table 5 indicates that the most major concern of international students was future

goals. For both male and female population, employment after graduation was a major concern. This was supported by high significant results. With regard to source of social support, both groups of respondents (M & F) report overwhelmingly that interaction with students from the same country is an important source of social support. The results seem to reiterate the need for a more inter-cultural mix between international and local students both in school, in the classroom, and outside.

Life Stress Indicators (N=20) (N=30)			Social Support (N=20) (N=30)		
	M	F		M	F
Language concern	3.5	4.1	Same country students	4.0 4.2	3.8 4.5
Interpersonal	3.6	3.9	Students from Japan	2.5	2.8
Culture adjustment	2.8	3.3	International friends	2.8	2.9
Future goals	4.1 4.5	4.2 4.8	Japanese friends	3.2	3.5
Mean analysis	3.51	3.8		3.12	3.25
Significant at	P<.001	P<.002		P<.005	P<.001

Table 6. Results for 1st and 2nd group of students (significant scores highlighted)

Given the limited samples in the 1st survey, it was necessary to conduct the survey adding a few more respondents. Table 6 summarizes the findings for the 1st and 2nd groups of samples. Results indicate that future goal remains to be a major concern for all respondents in the survey, both male and female. With regard to social support, both groups of international students surveyed seem to draw their social support from interaction with students from the same country.

Employment situation of international students

The next task is to explore the employment situation of international students in Japan. This paper hopes to answer the following questions. How many international students choose to stay in Japan after graduation? Is the labor market really open to foreigners who graduate from Japanese universities? Is the situation the same for both male and female international students?

What do international students do after graduating from Japanese schools?

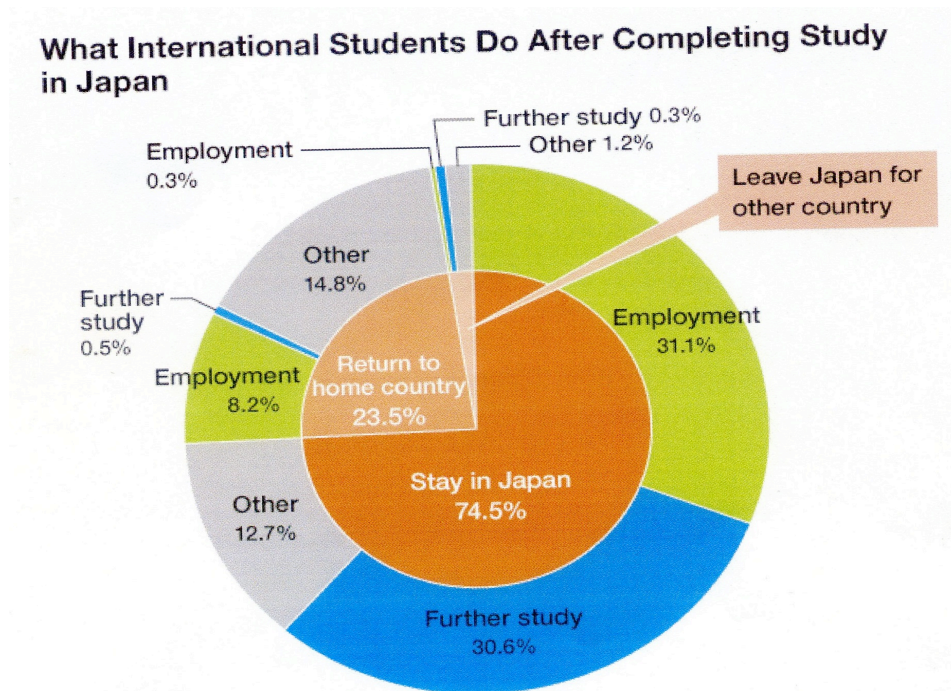


Figure 2 International Students after Graduating from Japanese Schools

The data above shows that majority of students choose to stay in the country after graduating from Japanese educational institutions. About half of the number of those who stay work in Japan while others continue with further studies. The next question this paper aims to answer is: What is the employment situation of those who choose to stay in Japan? What are the employment opportunities for international students?

Is the situation the same for male and female students?



Figure 3 Foreign Workers in Japan

The first task was to find out the population of foreign workers in Japan. Fig 3 above shows the trend in the dramatic increase of foreign workers in the country, based on the data of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare as of 2018. A lot of periodic data have been published by different Ministries of the government regarding the distribution of skilled and unskilled workers in the labor market. Unfortunately, there seems to be a dearth of data related to this research that aims to explore the situation on student employment. The information such as that shown in Table 7 below provides the closest link to this investigation.

	2000					2010		
AGE	TOTAL	Labor force			TOTAL	Labor force		
		Total	Employed	%		Total	Employed	%
MALE (1,000 persons)								
15 & over	543	419	395	77	618	423	385	68
15-19	34	11	10	32	30	6	5	21
20-24	63	44	41	69	85	48	45	56
25-29	83	67	63	79	98	67	62	68
30-34	82	70	66	84	84	64	60	75
35-39	71	63	60	88	70	55	51	79
40-44	51	46	44	90	60	48	44	80
45-49	42	38	36	90	50	41	37	82
50-54	36	32	30	88	37	30	27	82
55-59	26	22	21	85	31	25	22	81
60-64	18	13	12	72	26	19	17	73
65 & over	36	14	11	38	47	19	16	39
	1,091			74	1,236			67
FEMALE (1,000 persons)								
15 & over	614	307	290	50	797	406	374	50
15-19	34	10	9	29	32	8	7	25
20-24	74	47	44	63	108	62	59	57
25-29	99	54	51	54	114	62	58	54
30-34	92	48	46	47	107	57	53	53
35-39	81	40	38	49	97	51	47	53
40-44	57	32	30	55	91	51	46	55
45-49	44	26	25	58	71	41	37	57
50-54	34	20	19	59	50	28	26	56
55-59	26	14	13	54	37	20	18	53
60-64	20	8	8	41	28	13	12	46
64 & over	43	8	7	17	62	12	11	19
	1,218			48	1,594			49

Population Census of Japan, Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs

Table 7. Labor force distribution of foreigners by age and gender

What can be surmised from the report is that data is updated and published in 10 years. We suspect the next update will be published within this year. For the meantime, it is interesting to note from Fig 3 below that male international students continue to outgrow female students.

5. Number of International Students by Gender				
(Unit: person)				
Gender	Number of students		% of total	
Male	167,269	(149,920)	55.9%	(56.1)
Female	131,711	(117,122)	44.1%	(43.9)
Total	298,980	(267,042)	100.0%	(100.0)

() indicates figures as of May 1, 2017

Figure 3 Gender distribution of international students

Drivers of an Aging Society

1. Employment of Foreign Students in Japan

The participation of foreign students in the Japanese labor market has to be understood against the social, economic and political background the country has undergone for the past several decades.

At the turn of the 21st century, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare addressed the issues of foreign workers in Japan (Yamada, 2010). In his paper “The Current Issues of Foreign Workers in Japan” Yamada reports that on Dec. 30, 2009, the government released its decision to address the issue of population decline and its impact on the labor market. The low birthrate and an aging population were expected to weaken the potential output of Japan’s growth engine. Thus, the New Growth Strategy is part of the government effort to cope with this crisis by expanding the right of foreign nationals to participate in the labor market, and encouraging active support and acceptance of international students in specialized fields. For several decades since then, the number of international students who want to work in Japan after graduation has steadily increased. At the same time, many companies had expressed desire to hire students with international experience.

In 2018 Japan opened up a wider path to residency *status* for *international students* allowing them to *work* in any related field of their specialization. The policy allowed foreign graduates to gain wider job options after graduating from Japanese school. Consequentially, the number of foreign students who changed their visa status in 2018 to work in the country after graduation hit a record high. According to the Immigration Services Agency, a total of 25,942 students switched their status of residence. The figure more than doubled from 2013, apparently reflecting an overall growth in the number of overseas students. The overall growth of foreign workers mirrors the surging demand from companies for foreign workers to deal with a labor crunch caused by Japan’s aging population. Unfortunately, these raw figures do not provide hints as to what percentage of foreign graduates join the labor market. More importantly, it is not clear what these figures mean in terms of gender differences in labor participation after graduation.

2. Female foreign graduates in the labor market

Gender inequality is greater in Japan than in other developed countries (Abe, 2016). The labor situation of female foreign students need to be examined in the background of the following issues: the “Abenomics” policy, the “Womenomics” Policy, the changing women’s outlook on work and family both in the local and international context.

In response to the demographic and social changes, the country has implemented steps towards improving female employment. In his speech to the United Nations in 2014, Prime Minister Abe addressed the issue on women labor situation in Japan. He reiterated that “Japan will create a society where women can shine and show their potential. This economic policy of the government is widely known as “Abenomics”. The greatest structural issue facing Japanese economy is the aging population and the shrinking population. On this Japan is committed to achieving sustainable growth and

becoming a pioneer in the establishment of a new social model.

In 2015, Prime Minister Abe stated in the World Assembly for Women in Tokyo that “Abenomics is Womenomics”. The aim was to give way to 530,000 women in the workplace by 2014. In August of the same year, the Japanese diet enacted a new law “An Act for the Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement”.

The following year, a law was passed mandating private and government organization to allocate a certain number of top positions (managerial and administrative) to women. Inui (2015) made a study on female labor supply and its relation to the recent high unemployment rate in Japan. Inui developed a model that attempts to understand issues of productivity growth and female labor market participation behavior in Japan compared to other developed countries. The study concludes that these laws are important in creating employment and professional advancement of opportunities for women to fully exploit their skills in the labor market.

Summary and Conclusion

This research sheds light on the seriousness of the demographic situation in Japan. It has shown the national efforts and new laws developed to cope with the problems. This research has shown that although there is sufficient data on the increasing number of foreign students in Japan there is a gap on the number of those who join the labor market. In particular, there is a need for data collection that reflect gender differences in labor participation of foreign graduates.

With regard to the initial question posed at the onset of this study: what is the relation between culture adjustment and employment in Japan? There is an increased need to collect sufficient data on the emotional and psychological well-being of the increasing number of foreign students who choose to study and work in Japan after graduation. It has become imperative to define and refine measures that assess different aspects of adjustment according to the nature of stay in the country. For instance, difficulties with the language, as well as lack of contact with the host culture, have been shown to be an important source of anxiety. For a future task, a refinement of the measures used in the study is necessary to assist further in the prediction of successful cultural adjustment. For this to be done, assessment scales can be further validated against existing ones, or new measures can be developed. For instance, incremental validity and regression analyses of the two measures can be applied with other scales such as the Life Experience Scale (LES), Self-Rating Depressions Scale (ZDS), Hopelessness Scale (BHS), and the like. Empirical and field studies have implications for helping foreign nationals improve their adjustment during their stay in Japan. To this end, both empirical and field studies have to be conducted to establish between both the theories on culture adjustment across different foreign population groups and the realities of employment of international students in the country.

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