



In today's lecture we think about the movement of people. There is quite a lot of information in the *Statistical Handbook*. This gives you all of the data on domestic modes of transport, and also the levels of international travel. Of course, the corona pandemic affected all of these statistics massively from early 2020. The figures started to recover in 2022 as corona restrictions on movement were effectively abandoned. Now the question is whether we should return to pre-Covid-19 levels of movement given the climate crisis. This is a major point for debate for the decade of the 2020s and beyond.

Characteristics of Domestic Travel

- Japan is the land of the train and the bicycle.
- "My car" as private recreational space vs "My car" as essential for everyday life.
- Airports ... too many of them?
- Peak seasons, peak times: price gouging on planes but not on trains.

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Let's look at some of the social characteristics of domestic travel.

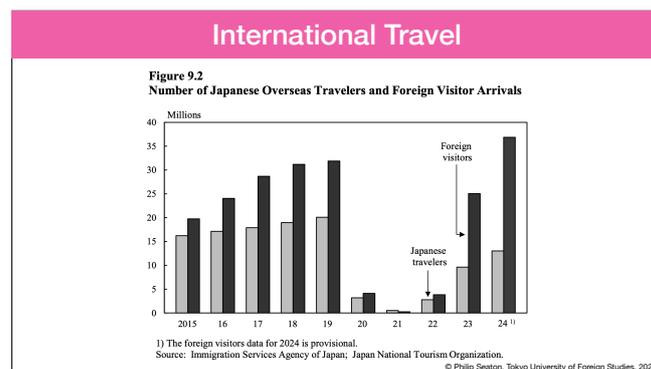
In many ways, Japan is the land of the train and the bicycle. Next time you pass an estate agent, look at the signs in the window advertizing apartments for rent. In the large urban areas like Tokyo, it will always say how many minutes walk the property is from the nearest train station. For commuters, this is the key information. A property close to a station that will get you quickly from your flat in the suburbs into the city centre has long been the ideal for Japan's corporate employees. Within major urban areas, commuting by car is relatively uncommon compared to other countries. Parking spaces are limited and the roads are crowded. For short distances, a bicycle is preferable. Cycling to the station and then taking the train to work or school is the classic Japanese transportation experience.

All of this gives cars quite a different social role in Japan to many other countries. Of course there are many places in the regions of Japan where commuting by car is common. And, in sparsely populated areas, cars are often the only means of getting around. I lived in Hokkaido for 14 years and that was very much a car society, apart from right in the centre of

Sapporo. In Tokyo, a car is just an expensive luxury. In the midst of Japan's crowded cities, cars tend to be more of a personal recreational space than a mode of transport. They are often used on weekends for a *doraibu* (recreational drive). Even a *doraibu* might actually mean being stuck in a traffic jam somewhere for much of the time! But at least it is your personal space, and these days your car navigator doubles up as a television and sound system.

Japan has an extensive air transport network. In fact, one might say it is too extensive. Of course Japan needs its major domestic and international gateways in Tokyo, Osaka and other major cities. But, Japan has almost a hundred airports, or an average of around two per prefecture. Many of these are small airports on isolated islands in places like Okinawa. But most prefectures have a major airport for commercial passenger jets. Many were struggling to survive until Low Cost Carriers became popular in the 2010s. They faced disaster again during the collapse of air travel during the pandemic. And the backlash against frequent flying as the climate crisis unfolds is their next challenge. However, more than any other form of transportation infrastructure except perhaps a Shinkansen station, airports are a status symbol as well as a transportation hub. Local politicians love big construction projects like airports. But, all too often airport construction has been driven by local politics rather than local need.

The final thing to say about domestic travel is that Japanese people have, in my opinion, an unhealthy habit of traveling en masse at the same time. The peak seasons for traveling en masse are new year, golden week and o-bon, when television news reports 30-40 kilometer traffic jams on the motorways. I watch this news and just ask myself why people subject themselves to such a travel nightmare. Often the trains are no better because they are crammed full of commuters or holidaymakers. But, the trains do have an interesting feature. There is no price gouging on Japan's railroads. The price of a ticket from A to B is, for the most part, the same at any time. This is different to many other countries, and indeed to air travel in Japan, where the cost can rise sharply during holiday seasons. Japanese people cannot take long holidays, and when they do have a few days of holiday in a row, very often the travel companies significantly raise their prices. The poor consumer has little option but to pay Golden Week prices because they cannot take their holidays off at any other time.



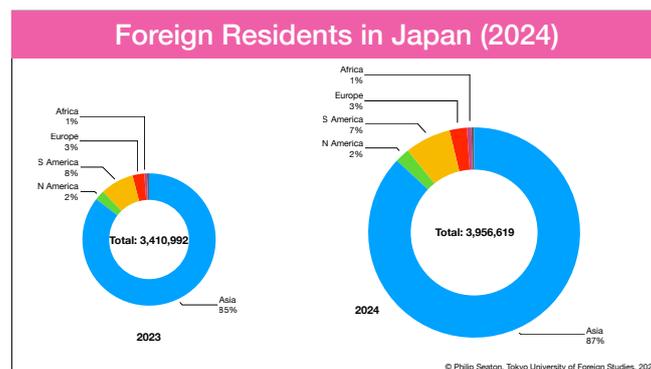
Let's now think about international travel in three main ways. International tourism, foreign residents in Japan, and Japanese living overseas.

Look at the data for international travel into and out of Japan. The key feature is the huge increase in the number of foreign visitors to Japan in the 2010s. This was in response to the heavy promotion of inbound tourism by the government. The vast majority of inbound tourists were from Asian countries. Note how outbound travel by Japanese people remained relatively constant.

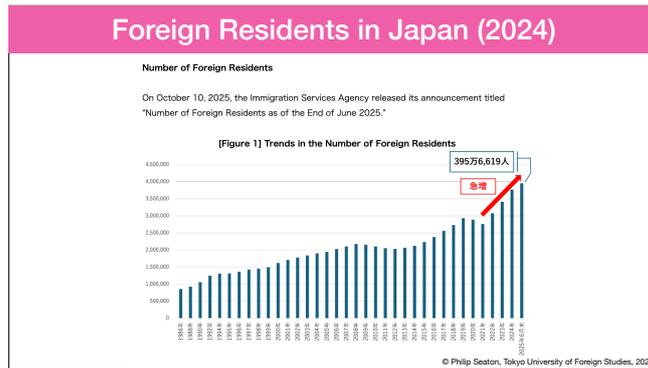
These trends reflect a fundamental change in Japanese government thinking about the movement of people. Up until the 1990s, net outbound tourism was considered as a means of correcting Japan's balance of payments surplus with Western countries. In other words, Japanese tourists spent money abroad as a counterbalance to the large number of Japanese exports bought in America and Europe. In the 2000s, the thinking changed fundamentally. Inbound tourists, particularly from Asia, became a way of ensuring growth and revitalization in regions that have experienced depopulation and

economic stagnation for over two decades. However, as you can see in 2020, Covid-19 wiped out all these calculations. The tourism recovery began slowly in 2022, and proceeded rapidly in 2023. The final data for 2025 isn't yet available, but it will top 40 million. In other words, last year's record has been smashed again. As I said in the previous lecture, this is hardly welcome news from an environmental perspective, but the tourism industry is surely happy. And so are Japan's rightwing political parties, which are seeing a surge in support fuelled by anti-foreigner sentiment.

However, these tourism numbers also reflect Japan's changing position in the global economy. The shift from being a net outbound tourism nation to being a net inbound tourism nation in 2015 is profound. It is a concrete sign of Japan's diminishing wealth compared to other nations. When I first came to Japan in 1994, Japan had an image of being expensive. It was a luxury destination for the wealthy. Three decades later, Japan is cheap. It's a bucket destination where local tourism operators are discussing charging tourists more than locals for entry to attractions because the tourists can afford it. The weak yen means that travel abroad now feels very expensive. We are moving slowly and surely towards an era when travel abroad is for wealthy Japanese only. Perhaps this helps explain some of the anger of people against foreign tourists: they are rich enough to do something that we are not rich enough to do any more ...

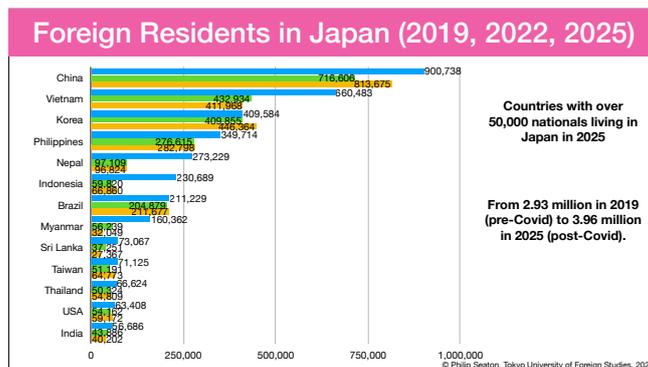


In addition to short term visitors to Japan, there are long-term visitors too. In 2023 there were 3.41 million foreign residents in Japan. The vast majority were from Asia. Up until the 1990s, there was a strong image of the *gaijin* as a white westerner. But that stereotype is well out of date now. Note also the rate of increase. Numbers of foreign residents have risen by about 10 percent per year.



Here is the long-term trend. The foreigner population has quadrupled since the 1980s. The Japanese population peaked in 2010. Since then, a rapid rise in foreign residents has combined with a decline of about 5 million people overall.

https://ippjapan.org/en_ichi/en/archives/1468



Here are the statistics broken down by nationality for the years 2019, 2022 and 2025. Many foreign residents repatriated during the Covid-19 pandemic, but now there is a definite post-pandemic rebound. China, Vietnam, South Korea and the Philippines are the big four in Asia. There have been massive rises in the past 2 years of people from Nepal and Indonesia.

Notice also how Brazilians are in seventh place. This is because there were various schemes from the 1980s onwards to encourage the return migration to Japan of the descendants of Japanese Brazilians, who emigrated to South America from early in the 20th century. This population is relatively stable in number, but it is a long-term minority grouping, particularly in places like Shizuoka. There is lots more information about Japanese Brazilians in the on-demand materials on the webpage.

Overall, the most noticeable recent trend is the rapid rise in Asian migration. This is led by countries like Vietnam. Back in 2011 there were only 44,690 Vietnamese residents in Japan. Now there are over 660 thousand. In other words, over the past decade their numbers have increased almost fifteen-fold. Much of this is due to high Vietnamese participation in the

Japanese government's Technical Intern Training programme. More generally, Vietnam is considered to be one of Japan's closest friends in Asia, so educational, business, and other links are flourishing, too.

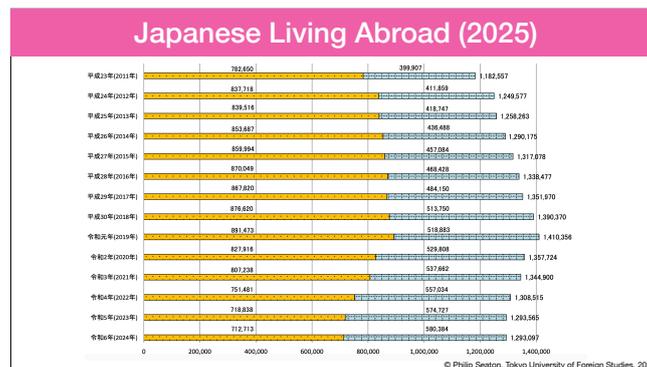
Looking at the other countries from which migrants are rapidly increasing, such as the Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand, it is clear that migration from Southeast Asia is the key driver behind Japanese immigration at present. Foreign residents have increased from 2.93 million in 2019 to 3.96 million in 2025. Many of these workers are coming to Japan on the Technical Intern Training programme. They are filling the jobs in manufacturing, construction, agriculture and other sectors where Japanese young people cannot be hired in sufficient numbers.

The Japanese government avoids saying that it has an immigration policy, but it clearly has one. It wants mass labour from other countries in sectors suffering from *hitode busoku*, or labour shortages. But the government also wants to make sure it's a revolving door. So it calls it a "training programme" rather than a "work visa" programme. Those who want to stay beyond their 5-year term are expected to assimilate, in other words, pass stringent Japanese language requirements and gain Japanese qualifications. Sometimes the system works well and foreigners become long-term skilled labourers in the Japanese economy. At other times, the situation becomes hellish as foreigners get trapped in almost slave-like conditions earning below minimum wage because they are supposedly receiving training.

Of course, the need to import labour in this way comes from the government's insistence on GDP growth amidst a shrinking population. Unless there are extraordinary productivity gains, you cannot have growing GDP with fewer people. But the Japanese government is facing another problem.

See the stats for yourself here:

<https://www.e-stat.go.jp/dbview?sid=0004019020>



Here is a graph from the Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas produced by the Japanese government. As you can see, numbers peaked at 1.41 million Japanese living abroad in 2019. Yellow is for long-term stays, for example long study abroad experiences. Blue is for permanent residents. Up until 2019 the number of both was steadily rising. Then Covid hit in 2020. Since 2022 there has been the Ukraine War and a very weak yen. Long-term stays abroad have fallen back, indicating that it is more difficult for Japanese to get abroad for study and short-term work. But the numbers of permanent overseas residents keep rising.

Why do you think that the number of Japanese people who are permanent residents overseas increased by over 180,000 between 2011 to 2025, with no reverse in the trend because of Covid 19? Individuals' reasons for living overseas will be diverse, primarily family, career, or lifestyle choice. But the number of Japanese who want to live outside Japanese society has grown steadily in the past decade or two. Ironically, while the Japanese population is shrinking in Japan, it is growing outside of Japan.

Whatever the reason, in addition to natural population decline caused by greater mortality than fertility, there is also a phenomenon of drip drip emigration, with 10,000 to 20,000 leaving the country permanently each year. Add this to the increased numbers of foreigners in Japan and you can see clearly the statistical evidence for Japan becoming ever more multicultural as a society.

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/tokei/hojin/index.html>



And this is where they are going. Note how they are concentrated in Western countries such as the US and Australia, neighboring Asian countries like China, and again Brazil, which has those important historical links with Japan.

Crime & Detention

- Crime - the quickest way to lose all freedom of movement in Japan.
- Japan's crime rate has been dropping since 2002, but some crimes are under-reported. See the White Paper on Crime for statistics.
- Crimes that grab media attention: random knife attacks, child abuse, abduction, deaths caused by elderly drivers, train gropers, telephone/computer fraud, crimes by foreigners ...
- Issues that stir international media debate: the death penalty and "hostage justice" (e.g. Carlos Ghosn case).
- Detention of refugees ... a hidden scandal.
- And a Japanese media scandal ... the reporting of crimes by foreigners.

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Finally, let's briefly mention crime, which is the quickest way for you to lose all freedom of movement in Japan because you end up in detention, or prison.

Japan has a reputation as a low crime society and reported crime is falling. However, it is suspected that many crimes, particularly those like rape, are underreported. Japan, therefore, is certainly not a crime free society. Look at the White Paper on Crime linked from the class webpage to see all the statistics.

Crimes that gain particular attention in Japan include random knife attacks, child abuse, abduction, deaths caused by elderly drivers, train gropers, telephone/computer fraud, and crimes by foreigners ...

There are two main issues in Japan that stir international media debate. The first is the death penalty. Japan continues to execute people for certain crimes. The death penalty is controversial wherever it exists, but in Japan's case there is significant concern about the safety of many convictions.

This is due to the second issue, what is known as "hostage justice", by which the police have extensive powers to detain people until they make a confession. Rather than deal with these complicated issues in this short lecture, I encourage you to read the materials linked from the class webpage. The issue of "hostage justice" was the subject of intense international media attention after the escape of Nissan's former CEO Carlos Ghosn in December 2019.

And there is one other form of detention that gets very little attention in the Japanese media: the detention of refugees. From 2022, the media has been cultivating an image of Japan as a welcoming place for Ukrainian refugees. But others are not nearly so fortunate in terms of their welcome in Japan, even if their home countries face serious unrest. Read the pages of the Global Detention Project website to see some of the important human rights issues that are mostly hidden from view in supposedly peaceful, low-crime Japanese society. People who flee war, violence or danger in their own countries sometimes come to Japan seeking a safe refuge. Despite Japan basically being a very safe society, many refugees find little hope and safety here.

There is also an important article linked from the class homepage which shows comprehensively that levels of crime by foreigners do not justify the level of attention they are given by the Japanese media. As Japan welcomes more and more tourists and long-term residents, it is the responsibility of the media to present accurate information. Please see that article for details.

However, as levels of immigration receive ever more political attention, please everyone do what you can to help Japan transition to being a friendly, multicultural place. We are in Japan, so we respect Japanese society and ways of doing things; we learn the language and blend in; we must always be conscious that we are contributing something positive to this society, whether it be our labour, economic consumption and taxes, or as friends, good neighbours, or family. At the same time, we must not be silent if faced with discrimination or misinformation. It's very simple really: respect for others and respect for the evidence. That's not a lesson about Japan. It's simply a lesson about life.