Who Deserves Citizenship? An Experimental Study of Japanese Attitudes Toward Immigrant Workers

Tetsuro KOBAYASHI, Christian COLLET, Shanto IYENGAR and Kyu S. HAHN*

Citizenship eligibility has emerged as a salient issue in Japan as population diversity has increased and the political system has aligned around debates over regional security and tabunka kyōsei (‘multicultural co-existence’). A predominantly Western literature suggests that sentiments toward immigrants are driven by economic self-interest and/or cultural identity. Such approaches, we argue, privilege groups as units of analysis when it is the personal attributes of immigrants that have a bearing on critical outcomes, like naturalization. This is particularly the case in Japan, where officials maintain considerable discretionary powers in assessing the worthiness of candidates for naturalization. Drawing upon a nationally representative sample of Japanese adults, we use an experimental design to assess the average citizen’s willingness to grant citizenship to hypothetical applicants. The results indicate that individual applicants are viewed more favorably than their groups or nations of origin, indicating a person-positivity bias. Korean workers are, ceteris paribus, viewed more favorably than workers from China. We also find that socioeconomic status and willingness to assimilate contribute equally to the decision to award citizenship. Yet as there is general support for high-status applicants, affluent Japanese evaluate lower status applicants more negatively, undermining the expectation of labor market competition.

Keywords: immigration; citizenship; naturalization; person-positivity bias; experiment

‘With regard to dealing with the population decline, in addition to working to improve the birth rate, it is important to work on measures such as utilizing the potential workforce of young people, women and elderly people in order to increase productivity. On the other hand, even with these measures, if difficulties or insufficiencies remain, while paying due consideration to the national consensus on issues relating to the daily lives of the people such as the impact on our industries, public safety and the labor market, there is a need to have wide-ranging debate on the future ideal image of Japan.’

From the Basic Plan for Immigration Control, 4th edition, Ministry of Justice (provisional English translation), March 2010, emphasis added

While increases in global migration since the 1970s have made immigration and citizenship potent political issues in many advanced industrial democracies, in Japan, the debate has been sporadic and slower to emerge. Juxtaposed to the cycles of intense conflict over ‘who belongs’ in America since the 19th Century (Zolberg 2009), immigration and citizenship remain relatively ‘new’ issues in the Japanese polity. To speak of either, at least until the 1980s, was to implicitly refer to the status of

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zainichi Koreans (Kashiwazaki 2013). The turning point came, arguably, with the emergence of the ‘japayuki’ phenomenon, followed by the ‘foreign worker problem’ (gaikokujin rōdōsha mondai) later that decade, fueled by domestic labor shortages, relaxed visa regulation and the vast wage differentials between Japan and its neighbors (Yamanaka 1993; Kajita 1995; Morooka 2006). Yet, as the central government began to consider a response, the views of the public remained unclear. Invoked reflexively as a pretext for maintaining order in a notoriously ‘exceptional’ immigration regime, mass opinion toward the newcomers, in actuality, was vague. The few surveys that had been conducted up to that point revealed mixed messages on the one hand and generational divisions on the other (Cornelius 1994; Lie 2001).

It was thus in the midst of rising political anxiety and public ambivalence that Japan was compelled to undertake its first comprehensive efforts since the 1950s at immigration reform. The 1990 Immigration Control and Refugee Act, Kondo (2002) notes, created a variety of new statuses, distinguishing ‘special permanent residents’ (tokubetsu eijūsha) for multiple generations of Koreans and ‘long term residents’ (teijūsha) for refugees from numerous short-term categories for Nikkeijin workers, students, ‘trainees’, and ‘technical interns’, many of whom are from China and Southeast Asia. Derided as a ‘racialized hierarchy’ that favors ‘side door’ and ‘back door’ entry for lesser skilled workers (Tsuda 2006; Shipper 2008), the impact, at least in terms of residential demographics, has been undeniable: not only has the foreign population been on a steady increase, so has the diversity of passports processed at immigration bureaus. Whereas a foreign resident three decades ago was overwhelmingly likely to be of Korean heritage, by 2010, he or she was just as likely to be Chinese—or have a passport from another country among a disparate group of ‘others’ that includes Brazilians, Peruvians, Filipinos, Indians or Vietnamese.

Along with policy reforms, scholars have recognized the broader discursive transition from kokusai to tabunka kyōsei (‘multicultural co-living’) (Chapman 2006; Kashiwazaki 2013) and the efforts that have sprung up in municipalities, such as Kawasaki and Hamamatsu, to engage new residents through ‘local citizenship’ (Pak 2000, 2006; Tsuda 2006). As with education reforms (Okano 2006), the central government has lagged behind in these efforts. In 2006, two significant reports added national urgency to the debate: the first being the Vice Minister of Justice’s ‘The Future of the Acceptance of Foreigners Project’ (Kongo no Gaikokujin no Ukeire ni Tsuite); the second being the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications’ ‘Report of the Working Group on Multicultural Co-Existence Promotion’ (Tabunka Kyōsei no Suishin ni kansuru Kenkyūkai Hōkokusho). While the Hōmusho2 outlines specific policy goals (such as increasing the number and quality of foreign workers in the population and streamlining naturalization procedures), the MIC (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) instead stresses the need for local governments to collaborate, with one another as well as with non-governmental institutions and businesses (Nagy 2008; Aiden 2011).

The questions that linger revolve around what policy changes will come of these recommendations—and whether, as Japan continues past its demographic ‘tipping point’ (Haig 2011), a pathway will emerge for those who seek a full transition from residents to equal members of civic society. For even as immigration policies converge toward international norms (Gurowitz 1999; Surak 2008), Japan’s decentralized approach to incorporation remains, in the words of critics, ‘ambiguous and ambivalent’ (Nakamatsu 2013: 8) and ‘rather negative for prospective immigrants’ (Hein 2012: 183). The citizenship regime itself remains an ‘outlier’, according to Chung (2010a), because of the low

1. Japayuki refers to migrant female workers from Southeast Asian countries who mostly worked in night clubs or show business in Japan.

2. Hōmusho refers to the Ministry of Justice.
numbers of naturalization seekers and the persistence of a large denizen community. While this may be attributed, in part, to the resistance strategies of immigrant groups (Chapman 2006; Tai 2006), there remains in the Nationality Law considerable discretion for the Justice Ministry to determine if applicants fit the ideal of a ‘good Japanese national’—‘unofficial practices’ that, critics allege, effectively discriminate because of the ‘painstaking’ demands they place on non-Japanese to produce ‘cumbersome [family] documentation’ and prove their ‘upright conduct’ (Kashiwazaki 2000: 443; Surak 2008: 564; Chung 2010a: 48–49; see also Chung 2010b).

Because citizenship applications continue to come predominantly from Koreans and Chinese, potential reforms involving the Nationality Law are bound not only by existing legal fragmentation and a theoretical reconceptualization of Japanese identity (Tai 2006; Yamamoto 2012)—the question of future image—but practical considerations for diplomatic relations in the region. As Figure 1 demonstrates, as Korean and Chinese naturalizations alike have diminished since 2009, so has the public’s once profound sense of affinity for Korea and China. This is not to imply a causal mechanism at work between the two variables, but to suggest that the current political context appears to be one in which heightened anxieties over security may be interacting with those over cultural integration to create a climate that does little to inspire a more proactive national campaign for tabunka kyōsei—or encourage permanent residents to sacrifice ethnic identities for improved domestic political status. The emerging discourse of multiculturalism is thus confronting a resurgent political headwind that, since the end of World War II, has often perceived ‘incoming foreign nationals primarily as a problem of public security and social order’ (Kashiwazaki 2000: 441; see also Morris-Suzuki 2010; Kalicki, Murakami, and Fraser 2013).

This places an urgent priority on reconciling where the public stands on immigration and citizenship. A snapshot of available government and academic surveys (Figure 2) sheds some light on the conflicts that linger. It is evident that the public has come to feel the increase in foreign workers in their daily lives and, when situated in the context of population decline, a majority appears to favor an open door—or at least see one as inevitable. More evident, though, are the concerns. Between 1990 and 2004, the proportion opposing the admission of unskilled workers with restrictions rose

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**Figure 1.** Changes in Korean and Chinese Naturalizations and Feelings of Familiarity Toward Korea and China, 1990–2012. Sources: OECD, Cabinet Office.
from 14% to 25%. The support for crackdowns on illegal immigrants also grew in this period as did the belief that immigrants contribute to a decline in public safety. When asked about having non-Japanese residents in their communities, no more than two in five Japanese have, in administrations of the Japanese General Social Survey since 2000, said they are ‘for’ such residential diversity.

We argue that the gap that persists in our understanding of where the Japanese public stands on immigration is not only due to a paucity of data, particularly on naturalization, but to an ongoing reliance upon measuring reactions to abstract groups (e.g., ‘foreigners’, ‘immigrants’, ‘foreign workers’) when, in fact, the day-to-day multicultural encounters of Japanese are with individuals, in some cases persons of multigenerational lineage who otherwise blur the traditional ‘foreigner’/native dichotomy (Kashiwazaki 2013). In this paper, we endeavor to address both problems by specifically assessing the personalized attributes that may influence the Japanese public’s sense that an immigrant is worthy of citizenship. Given that the applicant pool consists disproportionately of individuals of Chinese and Korean descent, our focus is on perceptions of such workers.

This is not the first paper to analyze the determinants of Japanese attitudes toward immigration (e.g. Simon and Lynch 1999; Simon and Sikich 2007) or touch upon feelings toward multiculturalism (e.g. Nagayoshi 2011). However, it does represent, to the best of our knowledge, the first study to examine opinions toward individual foreign workers in Japan and to compare them to related group-level and nation-level factors, with specific reference to China and South Korea. So far as we are aware, this is also one of the first experimental designs administered in an Asian context, building upon previous work by Iyengar and colleagues (e.g. Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2011; Iyengar et al. 2013).

Our paper proceeds in four parts. We begin with a theoretical overview that summarizes what we know to date about how individuals in industrialized countries perceive immigrants. The focus here will be on the two major paradigms in the literature—realistic group conflict and social identity theory—and the unanswered questions left by both. We then provide a description of our methods, including details on our sample and the experimental treatments. We follow with a presentation of
our findings. We conclude by putting the results in the context of current work on public opinion toward immigration and discuss their implications for the evolving debate concerning diversity and multiculturalism in Japan.

1. Immigrants as Economic or Cultural Threats?

Broadly speaking, efforts to understand public attitudes toward immigrants have followed two theoretical paths: one, focusing on perceptions of economic threat; the other, on perceptions of cultural threat. Realistic group conflict theory views anti-immigrant attitudes as stemming from a conflict of economic interests between newcomers and natives in the host countries over limited resources. For instance, lower status workers in host countries are more likely to prefer limits on immigration because they see immigrants as competitors for their jobs (Quillian 1995; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Mayda 2006). Similarly, the theory predicts that anti-immigrant sentiments will increase in countries with lenient social welfare policies because immigrants are seen as putting an economic strain on the host country’s social welfare system (Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005; O’Rourke and Sinnott 2006; Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007; Facchini and Mayda 2008; Mayda 2008).

The explanatory power of realistic group conflict theory may be limited, however, because what fosters weaker anti-immigrant sentiments among the more educated is not the competition with immigrants, but their social and political tolerance of diversity (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007). Moreover, it has been observed, in the American case, that more are willing to accept skilled over unskilled immigrant workers, regardless of their own socioeconomic status (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2012). The consensual preference for skilled immigrants undercuts the material self-interest argument and would instead seem to favor a more sociotropic economic account in which the native-born respond to immigrants based on perceptions of their economic contribution to the nation as a whole (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2012).

Social identity theory, on the other hand, posits that the distinctive language, practices, and religion of immigrants foster xenophobic attitudes (Citrin et al. 1997; Burns and Gimpel 2000; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Sides and Citrin 2007; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011). Thus, culturally dissimilar immigrants are more likely to be perceived as threats to the traditions of the host country and are more likely to be the target of hostility when they are perceived as refusing to adjust to the host country’s culture (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990; Fetzer 2000; Alba and Nee 2003; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Verkuyten 2005; McLaren and Johnson 2007; Citrin and Sides 2008).

Previous studies have identified several factors that might increase perceptions of cultural dissimilarity, from difficulty with English (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2012; Newman, Hartman, and Taber 2012) to religion or other cultural practices (Citrin and Sides 2008; Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2010; McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011). Specifically, since language is strongly linked to the national identity of native-born residents (Theiss-Morse 2009; Wong 2010), immigrants who speak distinctly different languages tend to be perceived as greater cultural threats by native-born residents, invoking the perception that immigration might harm the national identity (Citrin et al. 1997; Burns and Gimpel 2000; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Wright and Citrin 2011).

1.1. Distinguishing Individuals From Groups: The Role of Person-Positivity

In a recent paper, Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013) argue that the mixed findings that have resulted in the literature are a function of conceptual and methodological design: namely, whereas perceptions
of economic threat vary across competitive sectors, perceptions of cultural threat are more readily perceived by the public at large. Our contention, rather, is that the majority of studies that use realistic group conflict theory and/or social identity theory measure attitudes toward immigrants as groups (e.g. ‘Hispanics’) and overlook attitudes toward individual immigrants. Iyengar et al. (2013) demonstrate that a person-positivity bias toward individuals occurs (Sears 1983) and find that attitudes toward immigrants are affected by personal attributes (such as economic credentials), even after controlling for policy-level attitudes. What this suggests is that immigrants may be perceived more positively when they are presented in a manner that counters negative group stereotypes.

Another limitation of previous research is a predominant focus on immigrants that differ markedly from that of native-born residents. Natives tend to have negative attitudes toward groups whose perceptual distinctiveness, salience, and entitativity are high (Brown 1995; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). Yet this does not explain why in other countries, such as Japan, resistance to immigrants may persist in the face of cosmetic or physiological similarity. Numerous scholars have remarked on the frequent inability of citizens to distinguish Chinese and Korean immigrant workers by appearance alone (e.g. Lie 2001; De Vos and Wagatsuma 2006); the literature on Koreans, in particular, is rife with discussions of efforts at ‘passing’ oneself as a Japanese (e.g. Lie 2008: 18–24). At the same time, it is widely recognized that negative stereotypes and prejudices against Koreans and Chinese persist, irrespective of the workers’ formal status within society (e.g. Yoshino 1992; Shipper 2005; Chung 2010a: 55–56).

Scholars are wont to point out (e.g. Surak 2008; Kashiwazaki 2013) that it has been traditionally problematic to consider foreign workers in Japan ‘immigrants’ in the same sense as in Western democracies. In this sense, we believe an examination of Japanese attitudes toward immigrants and naturalization can provide a useful contrast with previous work and supplement general public opinion theory. ‘Foreigners’ can apply for citizenship only after living and/or working in the host country for a certain period of time (under Japan’s Nationality Law, the requirement is five continuous years). In such cases, the process by which citizens may evaluate applications for naturalization might not be the same as for a newly arrived immigrant. Because foreign workers who apply for naturalization have already been working in the host countries, they may present less of an economic threat to native-born workers.

2. Method and Hypotheses

Our study is based on an online survey experiment conducted on 23–25 March 2011, with a sample of Japanese aged 20–75 years. The planned sample size was 4,073; 3,480 respondents completed the study. The data were collected by a leading market research company, Cross-Marketing, which has an opt-in panel of more than 1.6 million people who are recruited through banner ads on leading portal and e-commerce sites in Japan. Potential respondents were screened using previously collected demographic data, consumer behavior, and level of political information. The respondents received monetary incentives (e.g. Amazon gift cards) for their participation. The planned sample of 4,073 had completed a prior experiment in October 2010. Matching methodology was used to recruit participants in the earlier experiment to ensure representativeness (see Rivers 2006 for a more detailed description of the matching methodology). The high representativeness of the sample was maintained because no attrition bias was found between the two waves.

Those who lived in seven prefectures severely affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11 March, 2011 were excluded from the study. Poststratification weights, based on census counts
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for age, gender, and region, were applied in our analyses to make the sample comparable to the nationwide adult population aged 20–75, excluding the seven affected prefectures. Altogether, the sample includes 11 residential regions (Hokkaido, Tohoku, Kanto, Hokuriku, Tosan, Tokai, Kinki, Chugoku, Shikoku, Kita-kyushu, and Minami-kyushu) and generation was stratified into five categories (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60 and above). This yielded 110 strata \([i.e. \text{Gender} (2) \times \text{Age} (5) \times \text{Residential region} (11)]\). The poststratification weights were then calculated by using the census information for these 110 strata.

2.1. Experimental Procedure

The survey consisted of two parts. The first sought to measure general attitudes pertinent to Chinese/Korean workers in Japan, including feeling thermometers about the respondent’s warmth toward foreign workers from China and Korea and nation-level feelings toward Japan, China, and Korea. The questionnaire also contained items assessing the respondents’ general posture on immigration policy and their perception of the proportion of all crimes in Japan committed by foreigners. The descriptive results for the feeling thermometers are presented in the findings section below; for the others, the results can be found in the Appendix. Each of the variables employed from the first part of the survey was treated in the subsequent multivariate analyses as a covariate, meaning that we consider them as controls having indirect effects on the dependent variable—the respondent’s willingness to approve a hypothetical applicant for Japan citizenship.

The second section measured respondents’ attitudes toward two hypothetical Chinese/Korean workers using an experiment with a vignette format that manipulated the workers’ personal traits. The vignette descriptions manipulated the candidates’ economic and cultural backgrounds, thus yielding estimates of the independent direct impact of economic and cultural background on the candidate evaluations.

We focused on occupational status as our economic factor. The candidate was described either as a high-status worker (engineer or computer programmer) with a college degree or as a low-status worker (tour guide or language instructor) with only a vocational high school diploma.

Cultural factors included the candidates’ country of origin and willingness to adjust to Japanese society. In the Chinese condition, the birthplace was Beijing, and the candidate was given a non-descript Chinese name (‘Ning Wong’). In the Korean condition, the birthplace was Seoul and the candidate’s name was similarly non-descript (‘Seong-yeong Kim’). We manipulated the candidates’ cultural adjustment by describing their familiarity with the Japanese language and culture. In the high-adjustment condition, the candidate was depicted as being involved in local festivals in Japan and teaching Japanese to Chinese/Koreans in a local public hall to help them adjust to domestic society. To indicate cultural affinity, they were also portrayed as having graduated from a Japanese university in the high-status condition and as having a younger sister who attends a Japanese university in the low-status condition. In the low-adjustment condition, candidates were depicted as having graduated from a Chinese or Korean school, playing soccer on holidays with friends from their home country, and not interacting socially with Japanese.

To maximize experimental realism, each candidate description was accompanied by one of three photographs of a random Asian male (Chinese, Korean, or Japanese). For example, in some cases, a photograph of Chinese male was used for the description of a Korean candidate. An example of a vignette appears in Figure 3.

Following the display of the worker’s photo and vignette, respondents were asked questions about his physical appearance (specifically rating his attractiveness on a 1–7 scale) and how typical he
Ning Wong is a native of China. He is 25 years old and works in Tokyo as a software programmer. Eventually, he would like to settle in Japan and become a Japanese citizen. His father living in Beijing is in poor health and is no longer able to work. Ning helps pay for his parents’ living expenses and for the education of his two younger brothers and one sister. Before coming to Japan, Ning completed his undergraduate degree in computer science at University of Beijing and worked at Polywell Computers as a quality assurance technician. After he came to Japan, following an apprenticeship, he has been working in their design department on bank-account settlement system projects. He likes sports and he often goes to play soccer with his Chinese friends on holidays.

Figure 3. Vignette for High Status, Chinese Immigrant.

seemed relative to his national-ethnic group (Chinese/Korean). They were then told that the candidate wanted to apply for Japanese citizenship and were asked to provide their opinion—should the applicant be approved, rejected, or was the respondent unable to say.

The experiment used a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design (occupational status $\times$ nationality $\times$ cultural assimilation) applied to two target individuals (Table 1). Participants were randomly assigned to a condition for Candidate 1. Depending upon the outcome of this assignment, the second candidate that respondents saw had the same occupational status but a different level of cultural adjustment and different nationality. We used fixed status conditions for the second candidate to minimize the risk of alerting respondents to the possibility that we were manipulating the status. We also treated nationality as a fixed attribute, ensuring that each respondent saw one Chinese and one Korean candidate. The effects of the experimental manipulations were consistent across the two candidates (although, as we discuss below, the candidate presented second in order tended to elicit lower levels of support).

The survey also collected basic socioeconomic and political information from the respondents, including their left-right ideological self-placement, age, education, and household income. The original question wordings, translations, and codes for all variables in the study appear in the Appendix.

2.2. Expectations

Our hypotheses are derived primarily from the economic and cultural threat literatures, with consideration given to specific factors revealed in studies related to Japanese immigration. Per Hainmueller
Table 1. Experimental Manipulations Conveyed by the Vignettes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Candidate 1</th>
<th>Candidate 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occupational Status</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High (programmer)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High (engineer)</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>High (engineer)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>High (programmer)</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Low (tour guide)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Low (language instructor)</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Low (language instructor)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Low (tour guide)</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and Hiscox (2007) and Hainmueller and Hopkins (2012), we would expect high-status candidates for naturalization to be more favorably evaluated than low-status candidates. Put differently, if there were a consensus among Japanese that high-status foreign workers deserve naturalization more than low-status workers, the positive effect of status should be evident. Realistic group conflict theory, however, would contend that an interaction effect between the candidates’ socioeconomic status and that of the respondents would be significant. If potential competition in specific labor markets matter, as Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013) argue, lower status respondents should evaluate the low-status candidates more negatively than the high-status respondents because they could potentially have competing personal economic interests if the candidates were admitted as Japanese citizens. If concerns about welfare spending and tax hikes matter more than competition in the labor market, we would expect instead that high-status Japanese would evaluate lower status candidates more negatively because their tax burden would be larger (Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007).

With respect to cultural factors, a candidate’s willingness to adjust to Japanese culture is expected to have a positive effect. We expect strong effects to emerge because the experimental manipulation includes fluency in Japanese and language is commonly considered to be a highly salient cultural indicator (Gluszek and Dovidio 2010; Hopkins 2011; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2012; Newman, Hartman, and Taber 2012; in the American case, see Theiss-Morse 2009; Wong 2010). Significant effects from language are also expected because physical factors (such as skin tone), as we discussed above, may be harder for respondents to differentiate in this context. The candidates in the high-cultural adjustment condition are also described as being involved in local festivals, implying that they have affinity for Japanese culture, which we expect will elicit more positive evaluations since it alleviates potential threats to national identity (Citrin et al. 1997; Burns and Gimpel 2000; Wright and Citrin 2011).

Cultural effects may also derive from group stereotypes and national image (Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2010). In the US and Europe, there is substantial variation in support for immigration based on the immigrants’ country of origin (Lee and Fiske 2006; Dustmann and Preston 2007). We expect similar distinctions to be made by the Japanese between Chinese and Korean immigrants, given the differentiation in historical relations and relative power between Japan and the two countries (Alexander, Brewer, and Herrmann 1999). The larger and politically salient group of zainichi Koreans, as well as the enduring public debates that have occurred over their naturalization and political rights (Chung 2010a), may also lead to differential effects on the respondent’s willingness to favor naturalization. Following past research (Kinder and Kam 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2012), we suspect that ethnocentrism (defined as the relative distance between one’s affinity for her own country and affinity for others) may also play a role in the evaluations, both as a covariate and in interaction with the candidate’s nationality and level of cultural adjustment. We anticipate further effects from the respondent’s sense of threat from the group (measured as crime perception), which Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004) find does not moderate the relationship between cultural factors and candidate evaluations.

To summarize,

H1. We expect individual workers applying for Japanese citizenship, regardless of their personal attributes, will be viewed more positively than their groups and countries of origin (i.e. the presence of a person-positivity bias).

H2. We expect the candidate’s economic status to influence the likelihood of approving a worker’s citizenship application, although the direction of the effect vis-a-vis the respondent’s own economic status is uncertain given the tensions in the literature. Japan’s explicit policy preference for high-status workers suggests that such applicants will be considered better candidates for citizenship overall; lower status

3. Note that this is at odds with some recent findings on anti-assimilation sentiments in Japan (e.g. Richey 2010).
workers, conversely, will be viewed less favorably as potential permanent members of Japanese society. If realistic group conflict is at play, we could find interactions between respondent income and the effect of candidate economic status: the direct labor market competition effect would anticipate lower status respondents feeling greater threat from lower status applicants (and hence more likely to decline their citizenship applications); conversely, if concerns over welfare and economic redistribution are at play, we would expect the opposition to lower status naturalizations to come from higher income Japanese.

H3. We expect the candidate’s adjustment to Japanese culture will have positive effects on the willingness to approve. Those effects may be moderated by interactions between the candidate’s nationality and the respondent’s ethnocentrism and perception of xenophobic group threat.

H4. Finally, we expect, ceteris paribus, the candidate’s nationality to influence respondent evaluations, given differential histories, levels of political salience and the potential influence of group stereotypes and national images. Specifically, Korean applicants are expected to be approved with greater frequency than Chinese applicants.

3. Findings

In Figure 4, as a test of the first hypothesis, we show the distribution of respondent feelings at three levels of analysis: (a) toward ‘China’ and ‘Korea’ (nation-level); (b) toward ‘Chinese workers’ and ‘Korean workers’ (group-level); and (c) toward the hypothetical Chinese and Korean workers in our study. The nation- and group-level measures are feeling thermometers (where 0 represents ‘cold’ and 100 ‘hot’), which are recoded into three categories for analytical purposes: negative (0–49), neutral (50), and positive (51–100). As the darkest bars on the left side of the figure indicate, only 11% had positive feelings toward ‘China’ and only 14% had positive feelings toward ‘Chinese workers’. Warm feelings toward ‘Korea’ and ‘Korean workers’ were 34% and 24%, respectively. The individual evaluations of the individual candidates, by contrast, were more positive: more than 40% of respondents, on average, were willing to approve a Chinese or Korean worker’s application for citizenship.

In Table 2, we display the estimates derived from a series of random-effects ordered logit regression models, used to assess Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4. Because candidate evaluations are nested in respondents,
Table 2. Regression Models Predicting the Approval of Citizenship Application.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: Citizenship</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>0.724</td>
<td>(0.180)**</td>
<td>1.880</td>
<td>(0.651)**</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td>(0.171)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality (Korean)</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>(0.070)**</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>(0.079)**</td>
<td>0.480</td>
<td>(0.139)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural adjustment</td>
<td>0.678</td>
<td>(0.072)**</td>
<td>0.659</td>
<td>(0.081)**</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td>(0.139)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariate effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second candidate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.284</td>
<td>(0.082)**</td>
<td>-0.286</td>
<td>(0.082)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective attractiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.712</td>
<td>(0.383)**</td>
<td>5.744</td>
<td>(0.385)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective typicality (↑ typical)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>(0.306)</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>(0.307)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy preference (↑ favorable to immigration)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.632</td>
<td>(0.621)**</td>
<td>10.640</td>
<td>(0.623)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnocentrism (Japan FT – China/Korea FT)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>(0.003)**</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>(0.004)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective crime rate (↑ more foreign crime)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.992</td>
<td>(0.505)**</td>
<td>-1.993</td>
<td>(0.507)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology (conservative) Sex (female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.472</td>
<td>(0.176)**</td>
<td>-0.475</td>
<td>(0.177)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>(0.141)</td>
<td>-0.130</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>-1.298</td>
<td>(0.480)**</td>
<td>-0.577</td>
<td>(0.348)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariate × Treatment interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status × Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.570</td>
<td>(0.198)**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status × Household income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.528</td>
<td>(0.686)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality × Ethnocentrism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural adjustment × Ethnocentrism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutpoints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κ1</td>
<td>-4.376</td>
<td>(0.173)**</td>
<td>2.142</td>
<td>(0.744)**</td>
<td>1.451</td>
<td>(0.680)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κ2</td>
<td>1.194</td>
<td>(0.142)**</td>
<td>7.769</td>
<td>(0.768)**</td>
<td>7.090</td>
<td>(0.702)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κ3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
we addressed the non-independence of observations by introducing random effects at both the respondent level and evaluation level. An ordered logit model was employed because the dependent variable (i.e. citizenship application) was recoded to a three-point ordered scale (see Appendix).

Model 1 in Table 2 demonstrates the simple difference-in-means estimation. The number of observations (6,960) is larger than the number of respondents because each respondent evaluated two foreign workers (3,480 \times 2 = 6,960). Only the three main effects are presented because there were no interaction effects, which is consistent with previous findings (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2012; Iyengar et al. 2013). Candidates were evaluated more positively when they were portrayed as high status, Korean and willing to adjust culturally to Japanese society. The coefficients of the three main effects did not differ statistically, suggesting that status, nationality, and cultural adjustment contributed equally to the evaluation of the candidates.

In Model 2, we tested the remaining components of Hypothesis 2 by including two interaction terms. The first is between the status of the candidate and the education level of the respondents; the other represents the status of the candidate and the household income of the respondents. To increase the efficiency of the estimation, we included covariates known from prior experimental studies (Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2011; Iyengar et al. 2013) to have an influence on respondent evaluations, including: the order in which the candidates are presented, subjective typicality, and attractiveness of the candidates. Although the facial images of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese males were randomly presented in the vignettes, the attractiveness of the models was not held constant because the images were not pretested. Therefore, it was necessary to control for the respondents’ subjective perceptions of the models to avoid confounding with the manipulations. Subjective typicality measures the degree to which respondents sense that the candidate is ‘typical’ of the nationality group he represents (Chinese or Korean). In general, the attractiveness of a man’s face increases the closer it is to the average or typical male face (Langlois and Roggman 1990). In addition to perceived typicality, perceived attractiveness was also controlled for by taking into account the possibility that non-facial factors such as the skin complexion and hair style affected the evaluations.

We also include policy preference, ethnocentrism, sex, age, ideology, and a subjective assessment of the amount of crime committed by foreigners in Japan as covariates. Policy preference (i.e. a generally favorable posture toward immigration) was expected to positively predict candidate evaluations, whereas ethnocentrism was expected to have a depressive impact. Women have been known to be more favorable toward individual immigrants (Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2011; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2012). We did not have a specific expectation with regard to age, but we expected education to have a positive impact since it is presumed to nourish tolerance through interactions with heterogeneous people. Conservative ideology and subjective assessment of the crime rate by foreign people in Japan were anticipated to reduce the likelihood of approving the candidate’s citizenship application.

### Table 2. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel variance component</th>
<th>$\sigma^2_\mu$</th>
<th>(1.200)</th>
<th>14.539</th>
<th>(1.048)</th>
<th>14.699</th>
<th>(1.060)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-5574.205</td>
<td>-4204.000</td>
<td>-4207.542</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>11148.410</td>
<td>8408.001</td>
<td>8415.084</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>11160.410</td>
<td>8446.001</td>
<td>8453.084</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>11201.500</td>
<td>8572.966</td>
<td>8580.049</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>6,960</td>
<td>5,898</td>
<td>5,898</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
<td>3,480</td>
<td>2,949</td>
<td>2,949</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AIC, Akaike’s Information Criterion; BIC, Bayesian Information Criterion; FT, Feeling Thermometer. Note: *P < 0.05, **P < 0.01.
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Turing to the results of Model 2, the first point to be made is that the \( N \) is smaller than the \( N \) in Model 1. This is because education and household income have missing values.

The second point is that the three treatment effects remain influential, thus providing additional support to Hypotheses 2–4. The covariates appear in the expected directions, with the exception of age, whose coefficient does not reach a standard level of statistical significance (we devote less discussion to the effects of covariates because their coefficients are not causal but correlational, and they might be biased because of endogeneity.)

The final point sheds further light on Hypothesis 2. The interaction between the status of the candidate and the household income of the respondents was significant, whereas the interaction between the status of the candidate and education was not. To illustrate the heterogeneous effects across household income, the predicted values are presented in Figure 5.

Put another way, when the status of the candidates is high, respondents evaluate them in a positive manner. That is, Japanese are willing to accept high-status foreign workers regardless of their own economic situation. On the other hand, when candidates are of low status, respondents from higher income strata tend to evaluate the candidates more negatively than those from lower income strata. This is at odds with the prediction of realistic group conflict theory offered by Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013), which stresses competition over jobs. This result here is consistent, rather, with the argument that stresses the potential increase to the cost of the welfare system and the additional tax burden represented by low-status foreign workers.

Model 3 in Table 2 tests the moderating effects of ethnocentrism on the cultural factors, but neither of the interactions was significant. This indicates that cultural factors broadly mobilize opposition to foreign workers, which is consistent with the findings of Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004). Ethnocentrism was negatively correlated with candidate evaluation, as expected, but the effects of cultural factors are homogeneous across the respondents’ level of ethnocentrism.

4. Discussion

Three decades ago, the question of who belongs in Japan may have seemed purely philosophical—an academic query whose potential answer was seemingly so obvious that it was subsumed by higher

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**Figure 5.** Predicted Values of Candidate Evaluations by Status and Household Income.
Who Deserves Citizenship?

order priorities, namely maintaining the country’s economic prominence and practicing the prevailing civic zeitgeist of ‘outward kokusaika’. Today, the question of ‘belongingness’ is at the heart of a wide-ranging debate about the country’s future. The central government’s response, thus far, has been paradoxical: recognizing, on one hand, the imminent decline in the working age population and its impact on tax revenues, it encourages the public to consider the ‘future ideal image of Japan’ and takes steps to increase the residency of elites who can contribute without placing disproportionate burdens on the social welfare system. On the other hand, it defers the real work of creating a sense of belonging—tabunka kyōsei—to localities, preferring to serve as a facilitator, rather than innovator, of policies that will add substance to that ‘future image’. Administrative decentralization may be one factor behind the sluggish response. But it is undeniable that public opinion—namely, the fear of a xenophobic or nationalistic backlash toward immigrants—is playing a pivotal role.

Our contention is not only that public opinion is more unsettled on these issues than is often acknowledged, but that fears of anti-foreigner sentiment may be exaggerated. In the midst of conflicting signals sent by previous academic and government surveys, and a lack of individual-level studies on foreign workers, we undertook what we believe is the first experimental study to examine the feelings of average citizens toward the idea of extending membership to Japanese society to others, namely Korean and Chinese workers, through naturalization. What we find challenges the standard assumptions of exclusivity and reflexive nationalism among Japanese, suggesting that, in the presence of certain economic and cultural conditions, the public may be more flexible in its impressions of immigrants, their contributions and their access to political rights, than has been realized.

First, in line with recent work in Western contexts (Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2011; Iyengar et al. 2013), our findings illustrate the separation between group-level and individual-level attitudes in evaluating foreign workers; that is, person-positivity bias. Individual foreign workers in Japan are viewed more positively than the groups or categories that they embody. This indicates that personalized information suppresses information processing based on negative stereotypes (Krueger and Rothbart 1988; Fiske, Lin, and Neuberg 1999). One implication of the person-positivity bias reported here is that individual evaluations of citizenship applications do not operate completely in tandem with deteriorating nation- and group-level sentiments. Even as the sense of affinity with China and, more recently, Korea, has declined precipitously, a noteworthy proportion of Japanese are willing to extend citizenship to Chinese and Koreans. With citizenship applications from both groups in apparent decline since 2009, our findings should offer encouragement to both government and immigrant groups that policy measures to further facilitate naturalizations will be met with favor by the average Japanese citizen.

Second, by experimentally manipulating individual background information, we isolated the effects of nationality, status, and cultural adjustment. Koreans, as we anticipated, appear to be more acceptable as naturalized Japanese citizens. While we cannot fully dismiss the potential influence of Korea’s better image (relatively speaking) on this effect, we presume that this effect is related more closely to the long-term presence of Koreans within Japanese society and the ongoing discussion about extending their political rights. That nationality plays a significant role in the average citizen’s determination of citizenship worthiness does little to depress the criticism of Japan’s immigration system as hierarchical and potentially discriminatory, although, in the case of Koreans and Chinese, it does raise questions about the extent to which such discrimination may be racially based. That the Japanese public should exhibit a preference for one nationality over another, in and of itself, does not make it unique from other publics (Lee and Fiske 2006).

Third, the effect of status differed depending upon the income level of the respondents, whereas the effects of nationality and cultural adjustment did not vary with the respondents’ ethnocentrism. The interaction between candidates’ status and the respondents’ household incomes was at odds with realistic group conflict theory. Rather, Japanese citizens agree in their acceptance of high-status workers from China and Korea. This broad acceptance is not only consistent with Hainmueller and Hopkins (2012), who argue that sociotropic benefits to the whole country rather than personal economic benefits are...
crucial in evaluating immigrant worthiness, but with the prevailing approach by the Hōmusho in facilitating admissions of the highly skilled who can make immediate contributions to Japanese society.

What these findings suggest ultimately is that the politics of immigration and belonging at the mass level in Japan are at least as much about economic concerns as the alleged threat that immigrants may pose to ethno-national identity. When placed in the position of arbitrating individual naturalization applications, the average citizen is more inclined to extend political membership to Japanese society than deny it—assuming the applicant possesses capital and undertakes an effort to socially integrate. As the debate over Japan’s ‘future image’ continues to unfold, our findings can be taken as recognition that ‘public opinion’ on such matters not be equated, as is often the case, with the nationalism (or fears) of elites, but be considered, empirically, in its own right. Future research that is directed toward understanding Japanese feelings about multiculturalism, societal membership, and the extension of political rights would benefit from greater consideration of the distinctions that citizens often make between individuals and the groups they represent.

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Trans-disciplinary Research Integration Center in the Research Organization of Information and Systems (ROIS), Japan.

References


Appendix: Measurement and Scale Construction

Citizenship Application
Candidate 1 Ning Wong/Seong-yeong Kim wants to apply for Japanese citizenship. What is your opinion? (recoded as 1: Should be approved, 0: Should be rejected, 0.5: Can’t say).

Subjective Typicality
How typical of Chinese/Korean people is his appearance? (measured in a seven-point scale and recoded as 1: Very typical, … 0: Very atypical, 0.5: Can’t say).

Subjective Attractiveness
How attractive is he? (measured in a seven-point scale and recoded as 1: Very attractive, … 0: Very unattractive, 0.5: Can’t say).

Policy Preference
Policy preference was measured by five items: ‘Our laws make it too difficult for foreign nationals to acquire Japanese citizenship (Reversed)’, ‘Right now, Japan is taking in too many foreign workers (Reversed)’, ‘On the whole, the increasing cultural diversity in Japan due to foreign workers has been good for the country’, ‘Generally speaking, foreign workers have a very favorable effect on the country’, and ‘One of the reasons foreign workers come to Japan is to take advantage of Japanese government benefits (Reversed)’. These items were measured with five-point scales ($\alpha = 0.69$) and summed score was rescaled to the range of 0–1.

Ethnocentrism
Ethnocentrism was computed as the feeling score for the respondent’s country (i.e. Japan) minus the average feeling score across the countries of origin of foreign workers (i.e. China and Korea).
The feeling scores for each country were: Japan (mean = 77.26, SD = 23.03), China (mean = 29.15, SD = 22.72), Korea (mean = 45.42, SD = 24.63).

Sex: 0. Male, 1. Female
Age: Range: 20–75
Education: 1. Junior high school, 2. High school, 3. Some college, 4. Bachelor’s degree or higher
Ideology (Conservative): 0. Left, … 1. Right. ‘Don’t know’ responses were recoded to 0.5.

Subjective Crime Rate
The population of foreigners in Japan is about 1%. Of all the crimes that take place in Japan, what percentage do you think are committed by foreigners? Range 0–1 (mean = 0.17, SD = 0.18).

Household Income
What was your total pretax household income for the last year (from January to December 2010)? Please include bonuses and casual income. (measured in a 12-point scale and rescaled as 1: 20 million yen or above, … 0: Less than 2 million yen).