

# Labor Migration from Thailand to Japan:

A Study of Technical Interns' Motivation and Satisfaction

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## Abstract

With Japan's rapidly declining population and shrinking birth rate, small and medium companies in the industrial and agricultural sector are struggling to gain manpower. Such companies commonly obtain low-skilled and cheap labor by hiring foreign temporary workers through the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP 技能実習制度). Over the past decades, foreign workers referred to as *technical interns* (技能実習生) have become an important part of Japan's workforce in the manufacturing, construction, and agricultural sectors. Technical interns comprise about 20% of all foreigners working in Japan. Previous studies have addressed the TITP from various perspectives, examining the program's policies and the impact it has on entrepreneurs as well as human rights and labor issues. Several empirical studies shed light on the interns' working and living conditions. While many studies have focused on Chinese and, later, Vietnamese technical interns, who together comprise about 70% of all interns, this paper focuses on Thai interns. Based on questionnaire surveys conducted from 2019 to 2021, this study examines their motivations for coming to Japan, satisfaction with their work and home life, and income level. It also compares their experience to that of Thai migrant workers who worked in Japan before 2010. The survey reveals significant differences between the two groups including the workers' average age, educational background, and motivations for coming to Japan.

**Keywords:** Technical Intern Training Program, technical intern, migrant workers, Thailand, newcomers

## Introduction

Thailand has been exporting labor to foreign countries for almost half a century. In the 1970s, thousands of male workers left Thailand to work overseas, mainly at construction sites in the Gulf region. Both male and female Thai workers began working in Asian countries such as Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan when they opened their doors to migrant labor in the late 1980s (Supang 2001:3).

According to Supang's 1999 survey of Thai migrant workers in Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan, only 12.4% worked in Japan, the smallest percentage among the four

countries. Yet the number of Thais working in Japan in the 1990s was between 40,000 and 60,000 each year. This number included those coming to work under the *trainee* status. In 1990, over 5,000 trainees came from Thailand, comprising about 15% of all trainees who came to Japan that year. Since then, the number of Thai workers in the Training Program (TP 研修制度) has been between 3,000 and 6,000 each year. To accommodate the country's labor shortage, the Japanese government later launched another guest worker program called the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), increasing the number of trainees (研修生) and technical interns (技能実習生) almost every year since 1993. In this paper, trainees and non-trainee workers who came to Japan in the 1990s and 2000s are referred to as "oldcomers," while technical interns who came after 2010 are referred to as "newcomers."<sup>1)</sup>

This study examines Thai newcomers' motivation for coming to Japan and their working and living conditions in Japan. Income level, satisfaction with work and life, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are discussed. Although the number of Thai interns in Japan is relatively small compared with the number of Vietnamese and Chinese interns, their backgrounds, and their perspectives on the TITP can provide more insights on studies of labor migration in Asia. This is a preliminary study based on a sample questionnaire survey conducted from 2019 to 2021 of 88 Thai technical interns working in different sectors, with the majority working in machine and metal manufacturing. It compares their experience to that of Thai migrant workers who worked in Japan before 2010. In part 1, the Technical Intern Training Program is introduced; in part 2, the background of technical trainees from Thailand is examined; in part 3, the research methodology and the survey results are discussed. Differences between the oldcomers and the newcomers are discussed in the discussion part.

## 1. Technical Intern Training Program

The Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) was established in 1993. It is an extension of the Training Program (TP) for foreigners that the Japanese government initiated in the early 1980s so that small and medium manufacturing companies could accept low-skilled foreign laborers as *trainees*. Trainees under the TP are not regarded as workers: they get an allowance instead of a monthly salary, are not covered by employment insurance, and cannot work overtime. In contrast, intern trainees under the TITP are recognized as non-permanent full-time workers and are thus subject to labor-related laws. The TITP also allows workers to work overtime and offers Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance (Suzuki 2001:134;

Piyada 2021:35).

Following a 2009 immigration law amendment, the Technical Intern Training visa was launched to accommodate Japan's increasing need for workers. Under its terms and conditions, the maximum period of stay is five years, and workers are not allowed to change jobs during their stay in Japan, nor to bring their families with them.<sup>2)</sup> Most technical interns are given hourly-rate contracts and are only eligible for low-skilled jobs in the agriculture, construction, food manufacturing, and machine and metal manufacturing sectors. Following the declaration of the Technical Intern Training Act in 2017, management and supervisory systems were strengthened, and the sectors were broadened to include food service in hospitals and caretaking in elderly homes. The restaurant and hotel sectors were included in 2019.<sup>3)</sup> The top three sectors that hire intern trainees are food manufacturing, machine and metal manufacturing, and construction.<sup>4)</sup> The number of intern trainees in the construction sector has risen particularly quickly, increasing from 6,791 in 2011 to 45,990 in 2018.<sup>5)</sup>

While the TP co-exists with the TITP, the number of trainees in the TP has sharply dropped since 2010, whereas the number of technical interns has gradually increased in that period. In 2019 there were over 400,000 interns from 23 countries.<sup>6)</sup> The following year, technical interns became the second largest foreign workforce in Japan after permanent residents, a position once occupied by foreign students. The number of interns increased twofold from 2012 but dropped slightly in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most interns come from Asian countries; China was the main source of workers until 2016, when it was surpassed by Vietnam (Piyada 2021:34-7).

Technical interns are recruited through two channels: (1) direct recruitment from individual enterprise, or Japanese companies that accept trainees from their overseas factories or from joint venture companies and (2) recruiting agencies in the trainees' home countries. Currently more than 90% of technical interns are recruited by recruiting agencies. Workers pay recruiting agencies a service fee which includes in-house Japanese language training, visa processing, a medical checkup, job recruitment services, and airfare to and from Japan. Fees vary among agencies and countries. Of the interns from ASEAN countries,<sup>7)</sup> those from Vietnam paid the highest fee—almost ¥1,000,000 (approximately \$9,300) (Yuyama and Shitara 2018:128).

Recruiting agencies sign contracts with receiving or supervising organizations in Japan. There are over 2,000 receiving organizations nationwide. Their jobs are to conduct in-house training upon the trainees' arrival and work as coordinators between the technical interns and Japanese companies.

The extent to which the TITP facilitates interns in acquiring skills while working in Japan is hard to measure, but according to a follow-up survey by the Organization for Technical Intern Training (OTIT), 96% of interns who returned home found the program useful. When asked what they found to be the most useful part of the program, they responded the acquisition of technical skills (77.1%), followed by the acquisition of Japanese language (68.1%) and experience living in Japan (65.4%).<sup>8)</sup>

Both the TP and TITP are state-initiative schemes that aim to transmit Japanese technical knowledge to developing countries by training young foreign workers. However, in reality, they are considered a doorway to illegal work for foreigners since trainees have a tendency to overstay their visa after their training program ends (Suzuki 2001). Many studies have pointed out that the TITP is not fulfilling its initial purpose as it has become a recruitment channel for young and cheap labor from developing countries, and that despite the government's policy to increase the number of technical interns, the TITP cannot tackle Japan's long-term labor shortage problems (Suzuki, 2010; Kamibayashi, 2015; Miyajima and Suzuki, 2019; Murakami, 2019, Sunai 2019; Zhang 2020). Moreover, since workers under the TITP are temporary guest workers, they are easily subject to labor exploitation and human rights violations. The TITP has even been called a modern form of slave labor in reference to the experience of technical interns from Vietnam (Sunai 2019).

Despite these shortcomings, the TITP remains the main channel for receiving low-skilled foreign workers. In 2019, another program called the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW 特定技能) program was created as an extension of the TITP. Those who obtain an SSW (level 1) visa can work for five more years after completing the TITP; if a worker passes certain conditions, they can stay without limits and can bring their families to Japan.

## 2. Technical interns from Thailand

As stated above, labor migration from Thailand to Japan began in the late 1980s. The number peaked in 1991 with about 100,000 Thais working in the service and manufacturing sectors. These oldcomers entered Japan on various types of visas, including the training visa, working visa, tourist visa, and family visa. About half of them overstayed their tourist visas and became illegal migrant workers (Supang 2001:13-15). According to Supang's sample survey of Thai migrant workers in Japan in 1999, outbound migrant workers in the 1990s made a relatively large amount of money in Thailand (10,000-20,000 baht or ¥30,000-60,000 per month) compared to those who went to the Gulf countries in the 1970s, but they still

decided to go to Japan to earn more money. Most of them went by themselves or were assisted by relatives or friends rather than by brokers. Most were in their 30s, and most worked in the service sector as cooks, boxing or language instructors, or sex workers. These non-trainee oldcomers usually worked in the private sector without a formal employment contract, so they tended to stay in Japan for a long time. On average, they stayed for 5 to 10 years and received between 50,000 to 75,000 baht (\$1,500-2,200) per month, which was considered quite a good wage (Supang 2001:14-5).

Only a small portion of the oldcomers were trainees under the TP and TITP; these trainees were recruited under a state-initiated scheme via different channels.<sup>9)</sup> Their salaries varied depending on their status of residence and the organization that helped them come to Japan. According to Suzuki's 1999 survey, trainees received a monthly training allowance of ¥80,000 to 100,000 (\$727-900). This is relatively low due to their trainee status and because they received free accommodation. On the other hand, technical interns under the TITP received a monthly wage ranging from ¥120,000 to 150,000 (\$1,000-1360). Some interns in their second year received ¥180,000 (\$1,600) (Suzuki 2001:140-155).

The number of technical interns from Thailand has increased year by year, especially after 2010, and has exceeded the number of Thai trainees in the TP. In 2020 the number of these newcomers reached 10,735, while the number of trainees dropped to 33. Table 1 shows that the number of Thai technical interns accepted via receiving organizations in 2020 increased almost three-fold from 2012. That means that of the 50,000 Thais currently working in Japan, about one in five is a technical intern.<sup>10)</sup> However, the number of Thai technical interns is less than 3% of all technical interns. Of all Asian countries that send technical interns to Japan, Thailand ranks sixth after Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Myanmar respectively. From April 2019, those who complete the three-year program can extend their stay and become *specified skilled workers*. In 2020 there were 455 Thais in this category, the smallest group from any ASEAN country (see Table 2).

**Table 1 The number of technical interns from Thailand in 2012 and 2020 by status of residence**

Status of residence	Accepted by Individual Enterprise *			Accepted by Supervising Organization			Total
	Interns in the first year	Interns in the second and third year	Interns in the fourth and fifth year	Interns in the first year	Interns in the second and third year	Interns in the fourth and fifth year	
2012	633	119	0	1055	1657	0	<b>3,464</b>
2020	162	192	30	2,508	6,549	1,294	<b>10,735</b>

Source: Japan International Trainee & Skilled Worker Cooperation Organization

(<https://www.jitco.or.jp/en/regulation/index.html>)

\* Japanese company directly accepting staff from their overseas office, joint-venture or transaction enterprise and conducting training in Japan.

**Table 2 The number of technical interns and specified skilled workers in 2020 by country**

Country of origin	Number of technical interns	Number of specified skilled workers (level 1)
Vietnam	208,879	9,412
China	63,741	1,575
Indonesia	34,459	1,514
The Philippines	31,648	1,059
Myanmar	13,963	674
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>10,735</b>	<b>455</b>
Cambodia	9,970	488
Mongolia	2,310	75
Other countries	N/A	486

Source: Immigration Service Agency of Japan, "Foreign Residents by Nationalities, Area and Visa status (<https://www.e-stat.go.jp>); "Work Statistic" (2019) by Organization for Technical Intern Training ([otit.go.jp/files/user/docs/201002-1-5.pdf](http://otit.go.jp/files/user/docs/201002-1-5.pdf)).

Thai technical interns work in many prefectures of Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa. The prefectures with the most trainees are Aichi, Chiba, Ibaraki, Mie, and Hiroshima. This is because the manufacturing and agriculture industries are concentrated in these prefectures.

There are some major differences between the oldcomers and the newcomers under the training program. In terms of occupation, the oldcomers mainly worked in the garment industry, while the newcomers mainly work in the machinery and steel industries. Many also work in the food-processing industry and in the agriculture and construction industries.<sup>11)</sup>

The workers' motivation for working abroad also differs. Non-trainees' oldcomers in the 1970s went to Saudi Arabia and the UAE because they were poor and needed to make money to support their families. In contrast, those who came to Japan in the 1990s were not motivated by sheer poverty, but by the desire to have an expendable income (Supang 2001:14-15). This is because the growth in Thailand's market-based economy in recent

decades has increased the materialism of its people, pressuring low-income and often rural-dwelling Thais to leave the country to earn more money in foreign countries (Sai 2021:224). While Supang suggests that the oldcomers came to Japan to earn a higher income, Sai reasons that many young people come to Japan now not because jobs are exceptionally well-paid, as those in the Gulf region once were, nor because they are particularly interested in Japan. Rather, it is because the TITP was recommended to them by their friends, families, and direct-sale style recruiting agents who visited their villages to advertise the program (Sai 2021:228).

Regarding the impact of labor migration to Japan on the workers themselves, previous studies have pointed out both positive and negative effects. Money remitted from Japan helped boost the Thai economy (Supang 2001), and the TP and TITP helped Thais' careers upon returning home, especially for those who completed their training program with companies that had a branch or joint venture in Thailand (Budsuen 2011). However, Supang points out that the money sent home was not used productively enough to increase migrant workers' assets or occupational mobility, and that skills required while working abroad were not usually used in Thailand since migrant workers are predominantly agricultural workers (Supang 2001:16). From interviews with Thai interns in the agricultural sector, Sai comes to the similar conclusion that interns may have earned a higher income in Japan, but it was not enough to buy a new house or start a new business, so these interns tend to work in other countries after their program in Japan ends (Sai 2021:218). In other words, Japan might be the first destination for them but not the last.

### 3. Research methodology and results

Compared to the trainees and non-trainees' oldcomers, what is the average newcomers' motivation for coming to Japan? Is it only to gain a higher income like the oldcomers? For them, is Japan just another destination for making money? This study aims to challenge the finding of previous studies and further explore the lives of these workers, examining their income, satisfaction with life and work, and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives.

This research uses data collected from online and paper surveys distributed to 88 Thai technical interns from August 2019 to August 2021. Using the snowball sampling method, online surveys were distributed to the Thai community in Japan via the messaging application LINE and Facebook, which is the most popular form of social media among Thais.

The paper questionnaires were distributed using snowball sampling and random methods at a sports event in Mie Prefecture in August 2021 where many technical interns attended. The target group was Thai technical interns working in the manufacturing, agricultural, and service sectors. More than half of the respondents work in the manufacturing sector, the most common sector for all Thai interns.

The questionnaire consists of multiple-choice, rating scale, and free text questions. The questions consist of three sections: 1) work, income, and effects of COVID-19; 2) satisfaction of life in Japan and colleague relationships; 3) biodata and motivation for coming to Japan. The relationships of respondents' biodata and other important variables including cross-analysis was conducted using an SPSS program. The survey results are divided in six parts as follows:

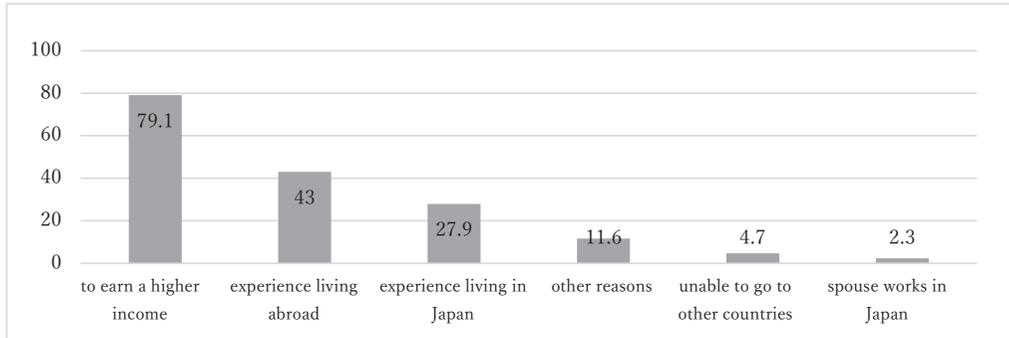
### **(1) General information**

The respondents were technical interns who came to Japan after 2017. 57.1% were male, 41.7% were female and the rest are LGBTQ. 45.3% were aged 20–25; 30.2% were aged 26–30; 16.3% were aged 31–35; 8.2% were aged 36–40. 82.4% of the respondents were single and 79.1% had no children. Regarding the highest level of education, the majority (48.3%) completed upper-level vocational school.<sup>12)</sup> Those who earned a bachelor's degree and who finished senior high school were the same rate (20.7%), followed by those who finished lower vocational school (6.9%). 2.3% finished junior high school and 1.1% had more than bachelor's degree. The result shows that the newcomers have a higher educational level than the oldcomers.<sup>13)</sup> Before coming to Japan, the majority was college students, followed by company employees and factory workers.

### **(2) Motivation for and method of coming to Japan**

When asked how they learned about the TITP, the respondents can give multiple reasons. Most of the respondents (40.2%) reported being recommended by friends and relatives, 25.3% knew from Facebook and other websites and 24.1% knew from job agencies. 81.4% applied to the TITP through a private recruitment agency, while 18.6% applied through a state agency. Almost half of the respondents (44.8%) paid a commission fee from 200,001 to 300,000 baht (approx. \$6,000-9,000), while 36.7% paid from 100,001 to 200,000 baht (approx. \$3,000-6,000). 10.3% did not pay any commission fee. 6.9% paid less than 100,000 baht and the rest paid more than 300,000 baht. Compared with the Vietnamese interns, Thai interns paid less commission fee.

When asked why they came to Japan, the respondents gave multiple reasons. The most common reason given was to earn a higher income, which was also reported in previous studies. However, that is not the only reason Thais come to Japan. The second most common reason was to experience living abroad and to experience living in Japan (see Figure 1).

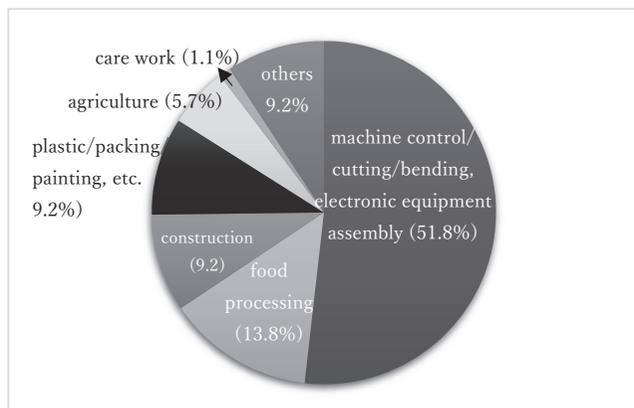


**Figure 1: Reason for coming to Japan**

Source: questionnaire survey by authors

**(3) Type of work and income**

More than half of the respondents work in machine control/cutting/bending, and electronic equipment assembly; followed by food processing, construction, and plastic/packing/furniture/car repair/paint/building cleaning (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Type of current work in Japan**

Source: questionnaire survey by authors

36.7% of the respondents are in their third year of the TITP, while 35.6% are in their second year. 18.3% were in their first year and the rest have stayed for more than three years. Before taxes, health insurance, and housing fees are deducted, the majority have a

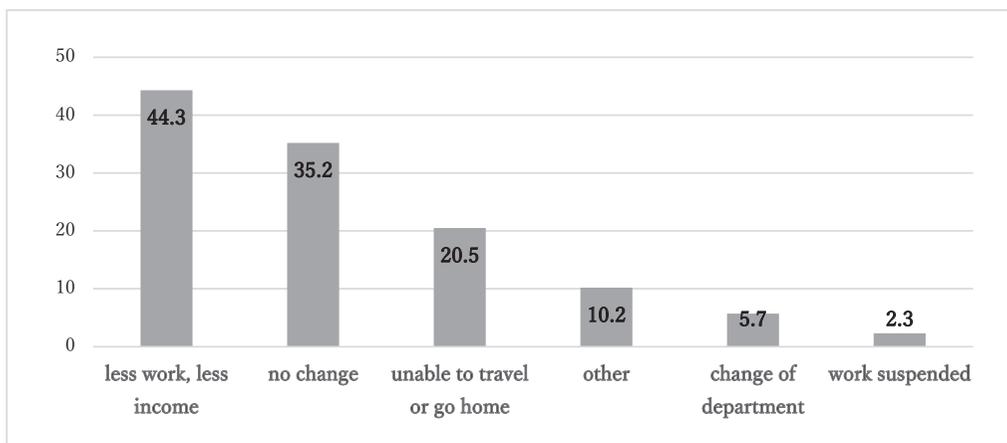
monthly income between ¥120,001-140,000 (approx. \$1,090-1,275) (see Table 3). 84.7% of workers work overtime but not every day. 66 % of workers do not earn an annual bonus. 54.7% of respondents make overseas remittances to their families each month. 43% make overseas remittances less than 12 times throughout the year, while 2.3% do not send money back home.

**Table 3: Distribution of monthly income**

income (¥)	%
More than 200,001	9
180,001-200,000	9
160,001-180,000	10.3
140,001-160,000	26.2
<b>120,001-140,000</b>	<b>29.5</b>
100,001-120,000	12.5
Less than 100,000	3.5

Source: questionnaire survey by authors

When asked whether their income was enough to survive in Japan, 48.9% responded “yes” while 36.4% answered “sometimes enough, sometimes not enough.” The remaining respondents (14.7%) answered “not enough.” Regarding the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of the respondents reported being affected in some way. Effects included less work and less income, an inability to travel within Japan or go home, and transfers to other departments (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Source: questionnaire survey by authors

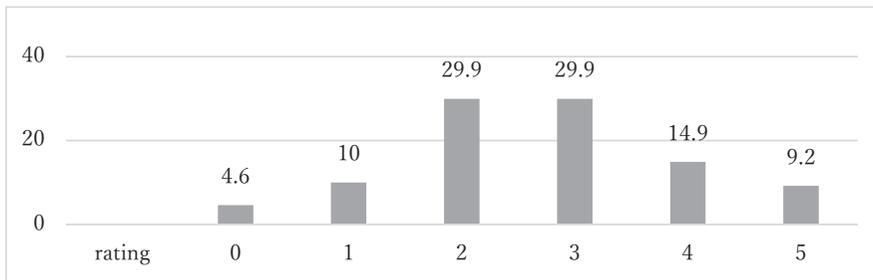
#### (4) Satisfaction

When asked what they like about life in Japan, respondents could choose more than one answer. The top reason, reported by more than half of the respondents, was higher income (65.9%), followed by being able to travel in Japan (46.6%), make new friends (both Thai and Japanese) (44.3%), eat Japanese food (14.8%), and buy things in Japan (12.5%). Other answers included the convenient lifestyle (13 answers), new experience (4 answers), being more disciplined and economical (2 answers), the clean air (2 answers), and beautiful Japanese women (2 answers). However, there are also negative answers which are “made a wrong decision (to come to Japan)” and “don’t like (life in Japan) at all but have to be patient” (one answer each).

Respondents could also choose more than one answer when asked about difficulties and problems of living in Japan. The top response was not being able to communicate in Japanese (57.6%), followed by the high cost of living (49.4%), earning a lower income than expected (37.6%), not being able to read Japanese (27.1%), having problems with Thai and Japanese colleagues and neighbors (18.8%), and dissatisfaction with receiving organizations (10.6%). Other answers in the free text space included pressure from work and unfair bosses (7 answers), hard work and long working hours (7 answers), transportation difficulties (5 answers), communication difficulties (5 answers), and a lack of privacy in dormitories (2 answers).

Regarding their health while living in Japan, half of the respondents reported never having been seriously ill or injured. 38.6% reported having been sick and taking work leave to see a doctor, 8% took medicine without taking leave, and 3.4% did not take medicine or leave. Regarding relations with their co-workers, 72.8% of the respondents reported having never been verbally or physically abused, while 21% had been severely scolded but never physically abused, 4.9% had been both severely scolded and physical abused, and 1.1% had been physically abused but not verbally abused.

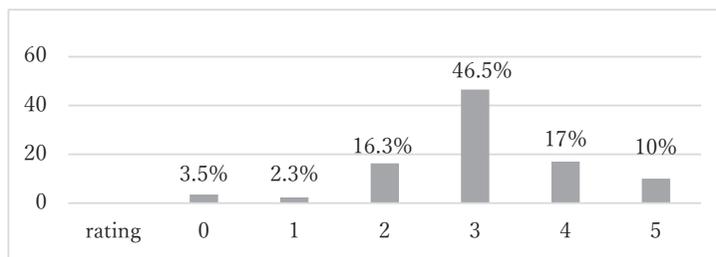
Satisfaction with the supervising organizations (SO) was measured on a scale of zero to five: zero (not satisfied at all), one (a bit satisfied), two (at some point satisfied), three (satisfied), four (quite satisfied), and five (very satisfied). The result is shown in Figure 4. The reasons given for the respondents’ dissatisfaction with their SO were: mixed reasons (44.1%), their SO failed to negotiate their salary for them (32.4%), their SO did not provide sufficient information about working and living in Japan (22.1%), and their SO did not help communicating with the Japanese (1.4%).



**Figure 4: Rating of satisfaction with Supervising Organization**

Source: questionnaire survey by authors

Satisfaction of life in Japan was also rated from zero (not satisfied at all) to five (very satisfied), as shown in Figure 5. The survey results show that the majority of respondents were satisfied with their lives in Japan.



**Figure 5: Rating of satisfaction of life in Japan**

Source: questionnaire survey by authors

### (5) Future plans

When asked whether they think they can apply their experience and skills in Japan after they return to their home country, 58.2% answered yes while 30.2% answered not sure, and 11.6% answered no. When asked if coming to Japan was the right decision, the majority (62.5%) said yes, 33% said they were not sure, and 4.5% said they made the wrong decision. Even though more than half of the respondents said they made the right decision, less than half (41.4%) reported wanting to continue working as Specified Skilled workers, while 36.8% were not sure and 21.8% have no plan to continue working. When asked if they would recommend the same program to others, the responses were equally divided between yes (40.5%) and no (42.9%). The rest responded that they were reluctant to recommend the program.

## (6) Relationship of variables

To discover the relationships of respondent biodata with other important variables, cross-analysis was conducted using an SPSS program, a computer program used for statistical analysis. The respondent biodata variables were gender, age, and child possession, while the important variables were satisfaction with life in Japan, satisfaction with income, satisfaction with supervising organizations, opinion on the decision to come to Japan, level of recommendation to others, and decision to extend the contract.

A *chi*-square test was used to analyze the relationships among these variables. If the *p*-value is greater than .05, the variables are independent and there is not a significant relationship among the variables. In contrast, if the *p*-value is less than .05, the variables are dependent and there is a significant relationship among them. After the coding was completed, less than 5 cells contained less than five observations in each analysis. Therefore, all cases were meaningful data for *chi*-square testing in all cross-analysis.

From the analysis results, there is not any significant relationship between the biodata of the respondents (gender, age, and child possession) and the other variables (satisfaction with life in Japan, satisfaction with income, satisfaction with supervising organizations, level of recommendation to others, and decision to extend the contract), except regarding the respondents' opinions on their decision to come to Japan. In terms of gender, males (67.3%) reported that it was the right decision more than females did (57.1%). In contrast, females (11.4%) reported that it was the wrong decision more than males did (0.0%).

Age was also a factor. Respondents aged 36 to 40 reported that it was the right decision (85.7%), while respondents aged 31 to 35 reported that it was the wrong decision (21.4%). Respondents aged 20-25 (35.0%) and respondents aged 26-30 (38.5%) were not sure whether it was the right decision.

Parenting was another factor. The respondents without children reported that they made the right decision (66.7%) more than those who have children did (50.0%), while the respondents who have children reported that they made the wrong decision (16.7%) more than those without children did (1.4%). There is also a significant relationship between satisfaction with income and some variables. The respondents who reported being satisfied with their income were more likely to report that they made the right decision (74.4%) and have a high level of satisfaction with the supervising organizations.

In conclusion, the respondents who reported that coming to Japan was the right decision are: male (67.3%), aged 36-40 (85.7%), without children (66.7%), and satisfied with their income (74.4%).

## Discussion

The main reason for Thai oldcomers and newcomers in coming to work in Japan is to earn a higher income. However, we can see from the sample survey in this study that the newcomers were younger and had a higher education than the oldcomers, and that earning a higher income was not their only reason for coming to Japan. The desire to experience living abroad, particularly in Japan, was one driving factor; the chance to live independently was another. Most newcomers are young, single, and often don't have to support their families at home, so earning money is not their only priority. Japan is a popular destination for young Thais because they have been familiar with aspects of Japanese pop culture such as *manga* and *anime* since high school.

Regarding income, the result of the survey shows that most technical interns earn less than the oldcomers did. This is partly due to the deflation of the Japanese economy and the stagnation of wage rise during the past thirty years and to the difference in working status between the old and newcomers. Unlike the oldcomers, newcomers are formal migrant laborers placed under the systematic control of the TITP and have less freedom to change jobs or extend their stay. Furthermore, COVID-19 affected the income of those who came most recently. As Supang points out, migrant workers in the 1990s did not increase their assets or occupational mobility after working in Japan. If that is the case, the newcomers are even less fortunate, given the fact that they had to pay higher commission fees to come to Japan but earned less money once there.

All in all, despite some shortcomings such as the language barrier and earning lower wages than expected, newcomers seem to be satisfied with their lives in Japan as they do not face serious problems at work such as physical harassment or bullying, and about 60% said that coming to Japan was the right decision. So, although the number of Thai migrant workers in Japan is small compared with the number of migrant workers from other ASEAN countries, it can be inferred that they will continue coming to Japan to work for years to come. Based on the findings in this paper, in-depth interview with interns working in different sectors will be conducted in the future.

## Acknowledgment

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## notes

- 1) This categorization is slightly different from the general categorization of newcomers and oldcomers among foreign residents in Japan before and after 1945.
- 2) The TITP has three levels: Level 1 is for first year studying and training. When trainees finish level 1, they must take an examination to obtain Level 2, which allows them to stay for another two years. Upon finishing Level 2, trainees are required to return to their home country for at least one month before applying for Level 3. If they obtain Level 3, they can come back to Japan and work for another two years in the same sector. (Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, "About Technical Intern Training Program", 2020, <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000633348.pdf>)
- 3) However, trainees working in hotel and linen supply cannot work for more than three years. (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, "Technical Intern Training Program" [otit.go.jp/files/user/19725.pdf](http://otit.go.jp/files/user/19725.pdf) (English 2018).
- 4) Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, "About Technical Intern Training Program", 2020, (<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000633348.pdf>), p.6.
- 5) Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, "Current situation of Technical Intern Training Program, 18 February 2019 (Document no. 5, p.3)" (<https://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001273509.pdf>)
- 6) Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, "About Technical Intern Training Program", 8 January 2021 (<http://www.moj.go.jp/content/001318235.pdf>)
- 7) The Association of Southeast Asian Nations consists of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar.
- 8) Organization for Technical Intern Training, "FY2019 Technical Intern Trainees Follow-up Survey (Summary) Attachment 1" (<https://www.otit.go.jp/files/user/statistics/201206-01.pdf>), 2019.
- 9) Such as individual enterprise, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (now Japan International Trainee & Skilled Worker Cooperation Organization-JITCO), The Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship (AOTS).
- 10) As of 2020, 53,379 Thais officially reside in Japan; including those overstaying their visas, the number is closer to 60,000. Nearly 50,000 are considered either full-time or part-time workers; the rest are on family or student visas. (Foreign residents in Japan by nationality, area, and visa category, December 2020 「国籍・地域別 在留資格（在留目的）別 在留外国人 2020年12月」 (<https://www.e-stat.go.jp>)
- 11) "Work Statistic" (2019) by Organization for Technical Intern Training ([otit.go.jp/files/user/docs/201002-1-6.pdf](http://otit.go.jp/files/user/docs/201002-1-6.pdf))
- 12) There are two levels of vocational schools in Thailand: the lower levels, Vocational Certificate and Certificate of Technical Vocation, are equivalent to senior high school; the upper level, High Vocational Certificate, is equivalent to college. Those who finish either Vocational Certificate or Certificate of Technical Vocation can go on to High Vocational Certificate for two years and get a diploma.
- 13) The majority of the workers who came to Japan before 2000 graduated from high school, while 21.6% completed upper-level vocational school, and 7% earned bachelor's degrees (Supang 2001:14)

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**Appendix:** key questions in the questionnaire survey

## Type of your work

- Agriculture
- Fishery
- Construction
- Food processing
- Garment
- Metal and machinery
- Plastic and packaging
- Care nursing
- Others (please specify)

## Type of your visa

- Technical intern training level 1
- Technical intern training level 2
- Technical intern training level 3
- Others (please specify)

## Your monthly salary

- More than ¥200,001
- ¥180,001-200,000
- ¥160,001-180,000
- ¥140,001-160,000
- ¥120,001-140,000
- ¥100,001-120,000
- ¥Less than 100,000

## The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic (you can choose more than one answer)

- no effect
- unable to travel within and outside Japan
- less work and less income
- more work and more income
- change of department
- work suspended
- Others (please specify)

## What do you like about living in Japan (you can choose more than one answer)

- Able to do the job that I want
- Better income
- Travel
- Shopping
- Japanese food
- Independent life
- New friends
- Others (please specify)

## Difficulties in living in Japan (you can choose more than one answer)

- Communication with the Japanese
- Unable to read Japanese
- High cost of living

Lower wage than expected

Bullying at work

Trouble with the neighbor

Trouble with Thais

Trouble with employers and supervising organization

Others (please specify)

The reason of working in Japan (you can choose more than one answer)

Better income than working in Thailand

Spouse work in Japan

Want to live abroad

Want to live in Japan because of interest in Japan

Want to go to other countries but could not

Others (please specify)

Bio data such as gender, age, educational background, marital status, recruiting channel

# タイから日本への労働移民

——技能実習生の来日動機と満足度の一考察——

Piyada CHONLAWORN  
Piya PONGSAPITAKSANTI

## 要 旨

日本の人口減少と少子化が進む中、産業・農業の中小企業は人材獲得に苦戦している。このような企業は通常、技能実習制度（TITP）を通じて外国人の一時労働者を雇用することにより、低スキルで安価な労働力を獲得している。過去数十年にわたり、技能実習生と呼ばれる外国人労働者は、製造、建設、および農業部門における日本の労働力の重要な部分になっている。技能実習生は、日本で働く外国人の約2割を占めている。これまでの研究では、技能実習制度をさまざまな観点から取り上げ、プログラムのポリシーと、それが起業家に与える影響、および人権と労働の問題を調査してきた。いくつかの実証的研究は、実習生の労働条件と生活条件に光を当てている。多くの研究が主に中国人およびベトナム人の技能実習生に焦点を当ててきたが、これらは合わせて全実習生の約7割を占めているが、本研究ではタイ人の技能実習生に焦点を当てている。2019年から2021年にかけて実施されたアンケート調査に基づき、本研究では、日本に来る動機、仕事と家庭生活の満足度、および収入レベルに関する調査を行う。また、2010年以前に日本で働いていたタイの移民労働者の経験と比較している。本研究では、労働者の平均年齢、学歴、日本に来る動機など、2つのグループの間に大きな違いが明らかになっている。このように本研究は、これまであまり検討されてこなかったタイ人技能実習生に関する研究の蓄積に貢献できるだろう。

キーワード：技能実習制度、技能実習生、移民労働者、タイ、ニューカマーズ

