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Mass Unemployment of Japanese Latin  
Americans as a Disaster Made by Humans:  
The Consequences of Labour-Market  
Flexibilisation During the Economic  
Crisis in Japan

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## **Introduction: The Mass Unemployment of Latin Americans in Japan**

Japan's recent economic crisis hit its Latin American migrants the hardest. The rapid decline in Japanese exports dismissed economists' previous optimism that Japan would weather the American financial crisis, and by the last quarter of 2008 migrant Latin American ethnic-Japanese workers became the main target of massive layoffs. Trainees and technical interns from such Asian countries as China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines also had their contracts cancelled and were sent back home, but the rate of their dismissals seemed much lower than that of the Latin Americans from Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, and Paraguay. Although many workers have returned home, most are still looking for new jobs. This mass unemployment has destroyed the basis of Latin American communities in Japan, with many Latin American businesses closing and approximately 100 Brazilian schools being on the verge of bankruptcy.

At the same time, protests by Latin American workers demanding employment opportunities and fighting against dismissals have increased remarkably. One hundred Brazilian demonstrators marched through downtown Tokyo and 300 Brazilians demonstrated in Nagoya in January 2009,<sup>1</sup> the first mass demonstration by Latin Americans in Japan. Membership in Latin American unions also increased as workers sought to protect their jobs. Latin Americans had been indifferent toward engaging in collective action before the economic crisis. Even when fired, most of them thought it better to seek a new job instead of protesting against their ex-employers, but with little hope of finding new jobs many have now begun to protest.

Latin American workers became the sacrificial lambs of Japan's sudden economic downturn. A labour contractor told me in an interview on February 2, 2009 that the situation was a disaster rather than just unemployment, as all that victims of disasters can do is eke out a living, and that this was the case with unemployed Latin Americans in Japan.

The starting point of this paper, therefore, is that the massive dismissal of Latin American workers in Japan has been a disaster made by humans that should have been expected and could have been avoided with proper policies for their social and economic integration into Japanese society. The devastating results stem from the precarious status of Latin Americans in the Japanese labour market. Neither the Japanese government, media, nor academics showed any concern for the instability of Latin American workers' experiences until the mass unemployment occurred. This paper will examine the impact of the economic crisis on Latin Americans in Japan, pointing to two root causes of their predicament, which are the flexibilisation of the labour market in regard to them and the lack of integration policies for including them in society.

## **Impact of the Economic Crisis on Latin Americans in Japan**

Japan had experienced net emigration until the early 1970s, the emigrants' primary destination being North America before World War Two (WWII) and South America in the post-war era. Though most of the pre-WWII migrants to South America settled there, the post-war emigrants were much more likely to return home due to Japan's rapid economic growth and Latin America's struggling economies. The return migration of this generation instigated a boom in communities of Japanese Latin American working in Japan.

Japan's population of Latin Americans has rapidly increased since the late 1980s, reaching nearly 400,000 in 2007, despite the long-term recession during the late 1990s. Japan's revised immigration law introduced a new visa category called *long-term residents* for the third-generation Japanese-Latin Americans, allowing them to work in Japan and providing them with privileged visa status as descendents of Japanese nationals and notably free entry.

Although they became incorporated into the upper end of a loosely structured dualism in the unskilled-migrant-labour market (Inagami et al. 1992), almost all of them entered the secondary labour market, in which migrant workers are the last hired and first fired. Nevertheless, as Table 1 shows, even the collapse of the bubble economy in February 1991

failed to stop the influx of Latin Americans. The rate of increase did slow, but their overall numbers steadily increased during what was known as the Japanese economy's lost decade.

Table 1 Foreign and Latin American Population in Japan

	total	Brazil	Peru	Bolivia	Argentine	Paraguay
1985.12	850,612	1,955	480	128	329	110
1990.12	1,075,317	56,429	10,279	496	2,656	672
1991.12	1,218,891	119,333	26,281	1,766	3,366	1,052
1992.12	1,281,644	147,803	31,051	2,387	3,289	1,174
1993.12	1,320,748	154,650	33,169	2,932	2,934	1,080
1994.12	1,354,011	159,619	35,382	2,917	2,796	1,129
1995.12	1,362,371	176,440	36,269	2,765	2,910	1,176
2000.12	1,686,444	254,394	46,171	3,915	3,072	1,678
2005.12	2,011,555	302,080	57,728	6,139	3,834	2,287
2006.12	2,084,919	312,979	58,721	6,327	3,863	2,439
2007.12	2,152,973	316,967	59,696	6,505	3,849	2,556
2008.12	2,217,426	312,582	59,723	6,527	3,777	2,542

Source: Ministry of Justice (1986-2009)

Table 2 Unemployment and Active Opening Ratio

month/year	unemployed person	unemployment rate	active opening ratio
1998	2.79	4.1	0.53
1999	3.17	4.7	0.48
2000	3.20	4.7	0.59
2001	3.40	5.0	0.59
2002	3.59	5.4	0.54
2003	3.50	5.3	0.64
2004	3.13	4.7	0.83
2005	2.94	4.4	0.95
2006	2.75	4.1	1.06
2007	2.57	3.9	1.04
2008.9	2.71	4.1	0.83
2008.10	2.55	3.8	0.80
2008.11	2.56	3.9	0.76
2008.12	2.70	4.1	0.73
2009.1	2.77	4.2	0.67
2009.2	2.99	4.6	0.59
2009.3	3.35	5.1	0.52
2009.4	3.46	5.2	0.46
2009.5	3.47	5.2	0.44
2009.6	3.48	5.2	0.43
2009.7	3.59	5.4	0.42

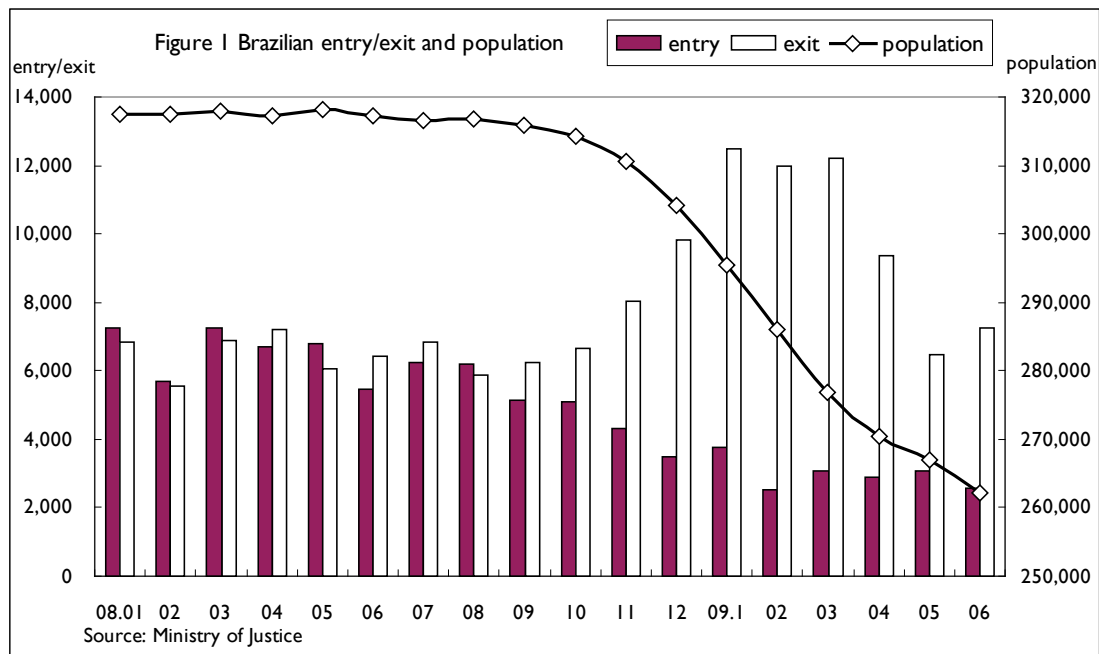
Source: Statistics Bureau, Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunications

The economic crisis in 2008 brought about a contrasting result, however. The number of unemployed workers in Japan increased by 880,000 from September 2008 to July 2009 and the unemployment rate rose from 4.1% to 5.4%, the worst record of since 1953 (see Table 2). Likewise, ratio of job openings to job applicants, known in Japan as the active opening ratio, dropped from 0.83 to 0.42, making it difficult for unemployed workers to find new jobs. The actual employment situation is worse than this seems, as an emergency employment measure subsidises more than two million workers (Sankei Shimbun, August 2, 2009).

These statistics, however, are insufficiently dire to explain the Latin American workers' predicament in Japan. Although no official statistics exist documenting unemployment amongst migrant workers, the 2005 census recorded that only 5.2% of the migrants from Brazil and Peru were unemployed, which is slightly higher than that of the overall Japanese workforce (Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunications 2008). However, as they have been the main victims of the layoffs since September 2008, they have become the most unemployed group in Japan. Four surveys, conducted by two local governments and one research institute, found that approximately 40% of Latin American workers were unemployed by the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 (Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training 2009; Shiga Prefecture 2009a, 2009b; Tokyo Shimbun February 2, 2009).

Japan's Latin American communities are consequently experiencing massive return migration for the first time in 20 years. Figure 1 illustrates the radical change in the immigration-to-emigration ratio of Japan's Brazilian population since the economic crisis's onset. Whilst signs of population decline have existed since June 2008, by September of that year a trend of emigration exceeding immigration had begun, a trend that accelerated markedly by that November. The number of exits from Japan peaked between January and March 2009, as two types of returnees overlapped in this period. These were those fired between September and December 2008 and who were unable to find new jobs before the expiration of their unemployment insurance, which was officially up to 330 days, depending upon age and length of employment, but was mostly 90 days in the case of Latin Americans, and those who decided to return home without applying for unemployment insurance when they were dismissed between January and March 2009. Though the number of exits began to decline in April 2009, a second wave of return migration occurred when unemployment insurance benefits began to expire in June 2009.

Therefore, more than 50,000 Brazilians, or about 17%, left Japan between September 2008 and June 2009. Taking additional return migrants into account, Japan's Brazilian population is likely to decrease by roughly 20% to 25% as a result of the economic crisis. This raises the question of the reasons for the difference between the impact of the recession in the 1990s and the current economic crisis, to which I will return later.



## **Data and Method**

The principal source of data for this paper comes from studies of Latin American labour-market and integration policies.<sup>2</sup>

The data from the first study are based on a survey of 740 manufacturing firms in Toyota City in September 2000, to which this study will refer as the Toyota data. It compiled a list of manufacturers from the directory of the Toyota Chamber of Commerce. From a population of 1,471 eligible firms, 740 participated in the survey, yielding a response rate of 50.5%. Among the 740 participating firms, 102 had employed or were employing foreign, mostly Latin American, workers.

The second set of data is from the guidelines on integration policies for migrants published by 18 prefectures with more than 20,000 foreigners, and 13 cities with more than 10,000 foreigners as of 2000, to which this study will refer as the policy data. These local governments issued a total of 72 guidelines from 1990 to 2008. This study uses these to analyse the principles behind local governmental policies toward migrants, as they can be considered to be 'amateur political theories' that inform migrant integration policies (Favell 2001: 15).

## **What Has Changed in the Labour Market for Japan's Latin Americans?**

The changing labour market for Latin American workers is the source of their steady increase in numbers and subsequent mass dismissals during the long-term recession.<sup>3</sup> As is the case with other industrialised countries, Japan experienced an increase in casual employment during the past two decades. Since 1992, when 80% of workers were permanent full-time employees, known in Japan as regular employees, the casualisation of the labour market has resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of part-time employees and such casuals as temporary, day-labour, and temporary-agency workers, known in Japan as non-regular employees, to one-third of the workforce (see Table 3).

As Piore (1979: 35–6) argued, migrants are entirely in Japan's secondary labour market, as jobs in the primary labour market are reserved for natives, and ethnic-Japanese Latin Americans are no exception. Japan also has a dual labour-market structure due to a disparity between large and small firms (Odaka 1984). Labour productivity differs between large and small companies in Japan much more than it does in other industrialised countries, and wages therefore rise in proportion to firms' numbers of employees.

The dividing line between Japan's primary and secondary labour markets, therefore, has not just been between regular and non-regular employees, but also between regular employees employed by large and small firms. The long-term recession and the increased flexibility of the labour market made Japan's dualism become more like other countries', the difference between regular and non-regular employees becoming more salient. Table 3 illustrates the extent to which the 2008 economic crisis resulted in the massive dismissal of non-regular employees.<sup>4</sup>

Table 3: Number of Non-Regular Employees

	regular employees		non-regular employees	
	No	%	No	%
1992.2	3705	79.5	958	20.5
1993.2	3756	79.2	986	20.8
1994.2	3805	79.7	971	20.3
1995.2	3779	79.1	1001	20.9
1996.2	3800	78.5	1043	21.5
1997.2	3812	76.8	1152	23.2
1998.2	3794	76.4	1173	23.6
1999.2	3688	75.1	1225	24.9
2000.2	3630	74.0	1273	26.0
2001.2	3640	72.8	1360	27.2
2002 average	3489	70.6	1451	29.4
2003 average	3444	69.6	1504	30.4
2004 average	3410	68.6	1564	31.4
2005 average	3374	67.4	1633	32.6
2006 average	3411	67.0	1677	33.0
2007 average	3441	66.5	1732	33.5
2008 average	3399	65.9	1760	34.1
2009 Jan-Mar average	3386	66.6	1699	33.4
2009 Mar-Jun average	3420	67.0	1685	33.0

Source: Statistics Bureau, Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunications

Note: Data source is "The Special Survey of the Labour Force" from 1984 to 2001 and the "Labour Force Survey (Detailed Tabulation)" since 2002. These have such differences as in survey methods and reference periods.

This, however, is inadequate for explaining the increasing number of Latin American migrants in Japan before 2008, as the changing mode of their incorporation into the Japanese labour market also facilitated this phenomenon. When the massive influx of Latin Americans began in the late 1980s, their employment was a solution to an acute labour shortage during an economic boom period and also supplemented a decreasing number of Japanese seasonal labourers from peripheral areas in the automobile and electronics industries.

At that time Japanese industry de facto welcomed irregular migrants as a precious resource. Table 4 illustrates the results of three studies conducted in the early 1990s (Inagami et al. 1992; Tezuka et al. 1992; Tokyo Institute of Labour 1991). Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of the employers in the samples responded that they employed migrant workers because of an absolute labour shortage. Fewer than 10% responded that they preferred migrant workers because they worked for low wages. At that time many Latin American workers became labour contractors in response to their employers' demands and recruited their compatriots for factory work, and Latin Americans worked under relatively better conditions despite their status as temporary-agency workers.

Table 4: Reasons for Employing Foreign Workers

	Inagami (N=172)		Tezuka (N=152)		Tokyo (N=223)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Labour shortage	132	76.7	96	63.2	139	62.3
Cheap labour	13	7.6	15	9.9	16	7.2

Though migrants from Latin America were at first substitutes for seasonal workers from rural Japan, they became increasingly integrated into different segments of the secondary labour market. Manufacturers used to employ most seasonal workers directly, with contracts of from three to six months. Such short-term contracts were compatible with fluctuations in production, enabling the manufacturers to coordinate a workforce on short notice by using labour contractors. This tendency strengthened throughout the 1990s, steadily expanding the labour-contractor sector (Kajita, Tanno and Higuchi 2005).

Table 5 shows that most foreign workers are employed by large or medium-sized firms, 994 of the 1,464 foreigners in the sample, or 67.9%, working for firms with a regular staff of 100 or more. Smaller firms depend more on direct employment. Of the 470 foreigners in the sample who worked for smaller firms, 250, or 53.2%, were employed directly. In contrast, larger companies prefer agency workers, with 797, or 80.2%, of the sample working for larger companies having been hired through labour contractors. Furthermore, 78.4% of the agency-hired workers were concentrated in firms with a regular staff of 100 or more, whilst 55.9% of the directly employed workers were working for firms with a regular staff of fewer than 100.

In general, the percentage of agency-hired workers increases in proportion to company size. This is not because larger firms are without the know-how to hire directly, but ironically those with the best knowledge in regard to managing foreign workers avoid doing so. It is clear that most foreign workers work in larger factories, but as agency workers. Most of them are members of a convenience workforce and are disposable at any time. Those working for small-sized firms, however, are there to solve the chronic labour shortage. The opportunities for labour contractors to recruit Latin American workers are therefore much greater with large firms, but they have to deliver and to take the workers back as soon as their clients request that they do so.

At the time of the survey, most of the firms responding neither considered it difficult to recruit Japanese workers nor regarded foreign workers as cheap labour. Instead, they employed foreign workers to respond to fluctuations in production or to replace full-time employees. Table 6 illustrates the Toyota data on migrant-employing firms' reasons for employing foreign workers. Firms with fewer than 100 employees responded more in regard to labour shortages, although to a lesser extent than those surveyed in the studies detailed in Table 4, with small- and medium-sized firms still suffering from labour shortages. However, fewer than 20% of those employing 100 or more employees responded that they faced labour shortages. Furthermore, small- and medium-sized firms tended to regard foreign workers as a flexible and disposable workforce less than large ones, with more than 70% of large firms employing them for that reason. This shows that employing Latin American workers for flexible staffing at least partly enabled the rise of the Toyota Motor Company.

Manufacturers usually employ Latin American workers through labour contractors through a just-in-time labour-delivery system. Toyota is well known for its lean production system, in which suppliers deliver parts just before they are assembled. It has applied the same system to workers. Manufacturers tell labour contractors to increase or decrease workers in a few days. This means that workers are often dispatched from one factory to another and are the first fired when production slows. Job opportunities for Latin American workers have expanded at the price of their having an extremely precarious status.

Table 5: Foreign Workers' Employment Patterns

Number of regular employees		fewer than 10	10 to 29	30 to 99	100 to 299	300 to 999	1000 or more	Total
Number of foreign workers	Indirect	13	40	167	156	262	379	1017
	Direct	26	20	204	92	60	45	447
	Total	39	60	371	248	322	424	1464
Number of firms with foreign workers	Indirect	4	7	11	6	4	5	37
	Direct	12	6	21	8	4	3	54
Total		481	106	70	21	14	17	709

Source: Toyota data, chi-square test  $p < .01$

Table 6: Reasons For Employing Foreign Workers

	10 or below		11 to 100		101 or more		total		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Cheap labour	3	17.6	24	55.8	19	50.0	46	46.9	*
To replace regular employees	7	43.8	25	56.8	24	63.2	56	57.1	
For more flexible labour	8	47.1	33	70.2	26	68.4	67	65.7	
Shortage of part-time employees	10	62.5	17	39.5	5	13.2	32	33.0	**
Shortage of regular employees	6	35.3	24	52.2	2	5.3	32	31.7	**

Source: Toyota Data. Chi-square test \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Most Latin Americans have been recruited to work in car and electronics factories, which are highly export-oriented and amongst the most competitive Japanese industries. This competitiveness, however, is at least partly due to flexible staffing, for which the Latin Americans have been in the vanguard. These export-oriented industries have also been the most affected by the 2008-2009 economic downturn, which is why Latin Americans have suffered the most by far in Japan. Moreover, because of their precarious status, many Latin Americans had no unemployment insurance.

In contrast, those employed in food manufacturing, the third-largest sector within the Latin American labour market, have experienced only a small amount of unemployment resulting from the economic crisis. Food-manufacturing factories make lunch boxes and other daily dishes sold in convenience stores. Since food manufacturing is solely for domestic consumption, the sudden shrink of exports had little influence on Latin Americans working in the industry.

### Path Dependency in Integration Policies

Because the proportion of the workforce employed part-time increased from one-fifth in 1990 to one-third in 2008, the flexibilisation of the labour market has become a problem for native workers as well as for migrants. What has made the matter worse for migrants, however, has been the absence of any policies to correct the serious gap between migrants and natives. Though it has been 20 years since the massive influx of Latin Americans began, more than 95% of them remain part-time employees. In addition, most of them remain agency workers, who are also more likely to be fired. This is partly a result of their self-definition as temporary migrants with a weak orientation toward upward mobility. However, the government's ignorance of their precarious situation has facilitated this.

Many studies have highly praised the development of local initiatives in regard to Japanese policies towards migrants (Ebashi 1993; Komai and Watado 1997; Miyajima and Kajita 1996; Pak 2000a, 2000b; Watado 1995), whilst criticising the national government as a reluctant host (Cornelius 1992), and it was local governments that promptly responded to the increasing number of migrants, not the national one. However, as my aim is to clarify the

reasons for the lack of economic integration policies, this study will consider their principles rather than examine the development of individual policies.

Favell's (2001) analysis of French and British migration policies is particularly useful for this purpose. The study first examined the paths of migration policies in each country rather than the policies themselves and found path dependency to be a common feature with them. Depending on a certain policy framework can lead to suboptimal solutions because doing so obscures problems that are beyond the framework's reach. Favell's research method is also suitable to the analysis of the Japanese case, as it analyses policies' paths by treating official documents as "a kind of 'official' public theory." (Favell 2001: 15). As Japan has plenty of official guidelines concerning policies toward migrants, examining their frameworks should lead to the clarification their characteristics.

Local policies in regard to migrants began in the 1980s. Curiously, they were part of what were called *international* policies controlled by the local bodies' international or international exchange sections.<sup>5</sup> The idea of local governments having international policies dates back to the Kanagawa prefecture's *grassroots diplomacy* initiative in 1978. Following the initiative, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced the international-exchange project plan in 1986 and urged local governments to publish their own guidelines for international policies. With the tide turning toward local internationalisation in general, local governments began to consider migrant issues as a means of facilitating internal internationalisation (Hatsuse 1988).

Table 7 Reference to Migrant Policies in Official Guidelines

	Pages related to migrants		Political participation by migrants		Gap in advancement rate		Disadvantages in socio-economic status		Total	
	pages	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	pages	No. of documents
	1987-1994	33	6.2	2	8.3	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	535
1995-2000	158	16.7	10	45.5	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	946	22
2001-2008	432	57.8	9	34.6	7	26.9	1.0	3.8	747	26
Total	623	28.0	26	29.2	7	9.7	1.0	1.4	2228	72

Source: Policy data

Table 7 shows remarkable progress for a country that has been notorious for its exclusionary policies toward migrants. As it indicates, migration issues occupied only 6.2% of the guidelines published between 1987 and 1994, which means they were but a minor concern during the internationalisation policies' initial stage. However, the weight accorded to migration issues has steadily increased since then. Between 1995 and 2000 nearly half of the guidelines pointed out the necessity of developing migrants' institutional participation in local politics, which has been reflected by a rapid increase in foreigners establishing consultative institutions.

Nevertheless, many still regarded policies towards migrants to be part of the internationalisation policies. The logic of internationalisation policy is to promote international exchange with foreign countries and foreigners, which includes warm hospitality to foreign guests. In the same vein, the concept of internal internationalisation has the tendency to treat migrants as honourable guests rather than as a minority population in Japan. However, migrants have actually been a socioeconomic minority in need of integration policies to improve their disadvantaged status, but the internationalisation frame prevented policymakers from recognising this situation.

The proportion of pages devoted to migration issues then reached more than half between 2001 and 2008, reflecting the publication in this period of guidelines to be applied specifically to migrants. Whilst still using the internationalisation framework, policies towards migrants during this period were characterised by the rise of a new key concept called

*tabunka kyosei*, or multicultural symbiosis. Migrant support groups and academics had been using the term multicultural symbiosis since the late 1990s, and the term's use spread to governmental bodies after the turn of the century. In 2006, the Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunication published a report to promote multicultural symbiosis, requesting local governments to formulate official guidelines for it. Unlike the notion of internationalisation, multicultural symbiosis is solely related to migrants, which resulted in the increasing number of guidelines specific to migration issues.

Although the concept of multicultural symbiosis is superior to that of internationalisation because it assumes that migrants are minorities living in Japan rather than guests, it still includes serious defects that constitute obstacles to combating the migrants' disadvantaged status in general, and that of Latin Americans in particular. The ministry's report defined multicultural symbiosis as 'people with different national and ethnic backgrounds living together as members of local communities, recognising mutual cultural differences, and trying to be on equal terms' (Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunication 2006: 5, translation mine). Here we can point out two problems in terms of this paper's theme, which is the Latin Americans' vulnerability.

To begin with, the concept lacks a view of social structure. The report regards multicultural symbiosis as a matter of interpersonal or intergroup relations. Although it expects Japanese Person A and non-Japanese Person B 'to be on equal terms,' it is individuals A and B and not the government who are responsible for achieving multicultural symbiosis. Such a sociopsychological understanding of migrant issues exempts the government from the responsibility to correct the situation. In reality, it is difficult for A and B to be on equal terms if serious gaps in socioeconomic status are present between them. The notion of multicultural symbiosis therefore ignores migrants' vulnerability by trivialising the social-structural factors that have caused their predicament.

For example, many public housing projects experience conflicts between Latin Americans and Japanese involving rubbish disposal, serving on the boards of residents' associations, and teenage delinquency that people often attribute to differences in culture. However, most of these problems are the result of the Latin Americans' precarious status rather than cultural differences. Latin Americans often move from one place to another due to their status as casual labour, and conflicts within these housing complexes between those who live in them on a temporary basis, who are Latin Americans, and long-term residents, who are Japanese, are to be expected. Although caused by the structure of the labour market, the multicultural symbiosis framework personalises the problem by diagnosing the situation as involving interpersonal or intergroup conflicts.

Moreover, the notion of multicultural symbiosis has a strong orientation toward cultural reductionism. Considering that Latin Americans have been relegated into a highly specialised segment of the labour market, we are clearly witnessing an *ethclass* condition, a term that Gordon (1964) used to express the overlap between class and ethnicity. However, the ministry regards the differences between Japanese and non-Japanese as being solely cultural. The government has therefore used the notion of multicultural symbiosis to reduce the migrants' problems to ones of cultural difference.

Table 7 shows that a quarter of the guidelines have pointed to a serious gap between Japanese and foreign students in their rate of advancement. Some prefectures have established small quotas for foreign students for high-school entry. Although still far from adequate for narrowing the gap, this is remarkable progress, as it means that local governments have officially recognised foreign students' disadvantages.<sup>6</sup> This, however, is a matter within the scope of the multicultural symbiosis policy, portraying the migrant children's difficulties as coming from cultural differences in general and language barriers in particular.

In contrast, neither the national nor local governments have been concerned with Latin Americans' occupational status, leaving their precarious conditions unchanged. Only one guideline referred to the concentration of Latin American workers in part-time jobs (see table 7), having been published in 2008 by Aichi prefecture, which has the largest number of

Latin Americans, specifying the implementation of vocational training for migrant workers (Aichi Prefecture 2008: 52). Unfortunately, it was too late to avoid their mass unemployment. Ignorance of relevant social-structural factors and cultural reductionism prevented the governments from facing up to their actual situation.

As is the case with race relations and multiculturalism in Britain and citizenship and integration in France, two official public theories, internationalisation and multicultural symbiosis, have legitimised Japan's policies toward migrants. Multicultural symbiosis is the better suited for formulating policies towards migrants, as internationalisation policies consider migrants to be guests rather than a minority. However, neither of them has addressed the Latin Americans' socioeconomic disadvantages as a result of treating them as cultural minorities.

Bearing their precarious grip on survival as a flexible workforce in mind, the greatest need has been for such labour policies as the regulation of the labour market and the provision of vocational and language training. Insistence on internationalisation and multicultural symbiosis produced a path-dependent situation that refused to see Latin American migrants as workers, although many of their problems stem from their working conditions.

## **Conclusion**

Beck (2000) used the term the *Brazilianisation of the West* to describe new employment schemes in which a small number of workers enjoy full-time status and most have to work under insecure conditions. Ironically, it was Brazilians and other Latin Americans who became the vanguard promoting the Brazilianisation of Japan. They have enjoyed a privileged visa status as the descendents of Japanese nationals, but again ironically, their employers have taken advantage of the privileges of being able to work with no restrictions and relatively free entry (Higuchi 2005). Supposedly free foreign workers have been more convenient than others, as they can be easily dispatched from one place to another. They have been relegated into the most unstable segment of the Japanese labour market, at the mercy of fluctuating labour demand. The mass unemployment of Latin Americans has occurred inevitably as a corollary of the labour market's flexibilisation.

This is only part of the story, however. National and local governments have ignored the reality of the extreme concentration of Latin Americans in the temporary labour market, addressing their problems as if they were not workers. Because the frameworks of internationalisation and multicultural symbiosis have never linked work and integration policies, the Latin Americans' socioeconomic conditions have depended solely on market forces. If governments had implemented efficient programmes to heighten their competitiveness in the labour market the impact of the economic crisis would have been much milder.

Mass unemployment is a disaster made by humans. Whilst governments and employers are responsible for the migrant workers' predicament, its being caused by humans means it can be solved by humans, albeit by using drastic measures. The economic crisis can be an opportunity to turn misfortune into a blessing. Without the mass unemployment, the deficiencies of the conventional frameworks might not have been recognised, leaving the status quo unchanged. As the media's tone seems to have been particularly sympathetic toward Latin Americans for the past 20 years, the current situation might constitute a chance to undertake drastic actions to improve their conditions.

The mass unemployment of Latin Americans has caused many to urge the government to take action. Considering the 20-year lack of effective integration policies, this can be regarded as a form of progress. The Cabinet Office has launched a taskforce to address the issues involving migrants, but the policy package it has suggested so far is a poor one.<sup>7</sup> Also, the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare has implemented a Japanese-language programme for unemployed Latin Americans, offering a form of unemployment insurance and 181 hours of language training over two to three months.<sup>8</sup>

The government, however, underestimated the number of unemployed Latin Americans, and set the programme up to provide language courses for 5,000 workers, based on an estimate that 10,000 would be unemployed. Numerous sources suggest, however, that the real number is likely to be nearly ten times the government's estimate, which means that the programme is overwhelmingly likely to fail to cover most unemployed Latin Americans. Furthermore, 181 hours of language training is too little for mastering Japanese for business use. Considering the high level of difficulty involved in learning to read and write Japanese, such a short-term course would have limited effectiveness. A one-year course with unemployment insurance is essential to ensure graduating from unstable non-regular employment to regular employment. Otherwise, Latin American workers are likely to return to insecure jobs again when the economy recovers (Higuchi 2009). What is crucially necessary is not a short-term remedy to the economic crisis. The root cause of the problem lies not in the sudden economic downturn but in the government's lack of policies for broadening Latin Americans' and other migrant workers' work choices.

Moreover, the government subsidises unemployed Latin Americans' and their families' airfare to return home.<sup>9</sup> For the sake of what it calls equity the government forbids those who have been so subsidised from returning to Japan for three years.<sup>10</sup> This is a de facto deportation policy, considering that they are poorly covered by other unemployment policies. Another of this policy's problems is the expected predicament of those returnees who cannot pay for the airfare, they being the most disadvantaged after returning to Latin America. For these people, it is crucially necessary to prepare comprehensive programmes to establish stable lives in Japan instead of subsidising their leaving.

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<sup>1</sup> In regard to the Brazilian organiser, see: <http://www.100plus20.com/index.php>.

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<sup>3</sup> Arguments in this session are based on Higuchi and Tanno (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Because new graduates begin to work in April in Japan, the number of regular employees from April to June 2009 greatly increased, whilst non-regular employment continued to decrease during the same period.

<sup>5</sup> The exception is Osaka and its neighbouring municipalities. Due to the great number of resident Koreans and the strong influence of the *burakumin* association there, its human-rights sections dealt with *buraku* and migrant issues.

<sup>6</sup> Unlike the local-government guidelines, the ministry's report fails to recognise the predicament of migrant children. It did mention that few foreign children go on to higher education, but held that the focus of the problem should be the low advancement rate to high school (Ministry of General Affairs and Telecommunication 2006: 19). Whilst 97% of Japanese children go to high schools, half of the Latin American children seem to drop out of high school.

<sup>7</sup> For details see the taskforce's webpage:

<http://www8.cao.go.jp/teiju/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2009/03/dl/h0331-9a.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> For details, see the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's webpage (in Japanese): <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2009/03/dl/h0331-10a.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> The unemployed received ¥300,000 (£1,975; US\$3,000), and their dependents ¥200,000 (£1,316; US\$2,000). Following criticism of the policy the government changed to allow reentry after three years.

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