

## Return Migration Intentions of Brazilian Migrants in Japan:

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### 1. Introduction

For the first time after the amendments to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA) <sup>1</sup>in 1990, the number of registered foreign residents in Japan decreased from 2.217 million in 2008 to 2.186 million in 2009. Majority of the decline was attributed to the return of Latin Americans to their mother countries due to the global economic crisis that took place in the late 2000s (Higuchi 2010). A large proportion of Latin American immigrants lost their jobs when the economic crisis hit the export-oriented industries where Brazilians typically worked as unskilled temporary workers. Brazilian population which was the third largest foreign population in 2008 started to decrease in 2008, and continued to decline until 2015. The rate of decrease in Brazilian population was extremely rapid; their population in 2009 decreased by 14.4 % relative to 2008, and that of 2010 decreased by 13.8 % relative to 2009. Although immigrant population of other Latin Americans also decreased (Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay) no other country's population decreased this fast.

While population of Brazilians decreased drastically, Chinese and the Filipinos, the other major new immigrant groups in Japan, increased; Chinese increased by 3.8 % while Filipinos increased by 0.5 % between 2008 and 2009. The second largest group, Koreans decreased by 1.8 % but their population was in decreasing trend from early 1990s because of their age structure. These variations in changes of immigrant population patterns suggest that the impact of global economic crisis were very different across immigrant groups largely due to their labor market status. Moreover, even among Latin American immigrants whose status in the

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<sup>1</sup> The revision included a creation of a new category in status of residence called “long term residents” for descendants of Japanese emigrants (*Nikkeijin*).

labor market were very similar, had different consequences in terms of return migration.

Literature consistently pointed out the precarious and unstable employment status that these Latin Americans were embedded in (Kajita, Tanno and Higuchi 2005; Takenoshita 2013). Immigration scholars generally agree that the global economic crisis took its toll on Latin Americans particularly Brazilians (Higuchi 2010; Inaba and Higuchi 2013) in the form of return migration. However, this is not something unique among Latin American immigrants in Japan. Past research in the US and Europe demonstrate that it is not unusual for immigrants to pay the disproportionate share of economic crisis as in the form of unemployment (Fix et al. 2009; OECD 2009).

What remains unanswered is the extent of Brazilian immigrants' return migration. Even in the time of economic downturn, immigrants do not return as the authorities of receiving countries expect. In Europe, the global economic crisis did not cause massive return migration as initially expected (Fix et al. 2009; Castle, de Haas and Miller 2014). Return migration was highest for EU migrants who have freedom to move, but much lower for immigrants from outside of EU states who must give up residency rights in destination countries once they returned (Castle, de Haas and Miller 2014). A mass flow of return migration also did not take place during the 1973 Oil Crisis. Germany introduced "guest-worker" program in 1950 which was designed to import short-term temporary immigrants from other European countries such as Italy, Spain, and Turkey to fill in temporary labor shortage. It was expected that guest workers return or stay at their home countries during economic downturn. Contrary to German authorities' anticipation, guest workers remained in Germany even during the Oil Crisis (Constant and Massey 2002; Castle, de Haas and Miller 2014).

Drawing on recent developments in theoretical explanations of return migration, I seek to deepen understanding of return migration of Brazilians from Japan to their mother country. I

examine hypotheses drawn from two contrasting economic reasoning from neoclassical economics (NE) and new economics of labor migration (NELM). At the same time, I take social integration in the host country and social ties to both origin and receiving countries into consideration based on the recent literature that revealed the complex relationship between integration, social connectedness and return intention (de Haas and Fokkema 2011; Agadjanian, Gorina, and Menjívar 2014; de Haas, Fokkema, and Fassi Fihri 2015). Although the data set used for the analysis is drawn from the period after the global economic crisis, I believe that the analysis will contribute to fill the lack of empirical studies that test applicability of migration theory on return intentions in immigration contexts other than Europe and the United States.

## **2. Theoretical Explanation of Return Migration Intentions**

In the field of immigration study, there are four categorization of topics that existing theories of immigration try to explain: (1) origin of immigration, (2) the directionality and continuity of migrant flows, (3) the utilization of immigrant labor, and (4) the sociocultural adaptation of immigrants (Portes 1997). The importance of these four dimensions of immigration process is well recognized and studied particularly in the context of the United States and Europe. Migration processes such as return migration and pendulum migration, however, have not received scholarly attention (de Haas and Fokkema 2010). It is crucial to understand how existing theories of immigration explain return migration and return intentions of immigrants as some immigration process is not complete even after immigrants settled in receiving societies (Cassarino 2004; Agadjanian et al. 2014; Saarela and Scott 2017).

Neoclassical economic theory (NE) explains migration as an individual's attempt to maximize their utility by moving to places where they can earn highest expected income (Harris and Todaro 1970; Massey et al. 1998). In this perspective, migration is an investment in own

human capital, and migrants move to places where expected economic returns to their human capital is the highest. Successful integration in receiving society helps immigrants to become more productive and to earn higher expected returns. It makes no sense for successfully integrated immigrants to return to their origin country since expected economic returns will be much lower. Thus, return takes place only when immigrants fail to find jobs that will pay higher income. In terms of integration, return migrants are those whose integration in receiving countries were unsuccessful, since successfully integrated migrants are assumed to find higher paying jobs. In short, NE views are summarized as “successful migrants stay, while failed migrants return.”

Inferences from this perspective concerning social ties with origin countries are that social ties to immigrants’ sending society weaken as the lengths of stay increase, the degree of immigrants’ integration deepens and immigrants’ social ties with receiving society are established. Successful immigrants most likely bring their family to receiving countries because maintaining ties with people in origin raises financial and psychological costs of staying apart. When the family is together, the cost of staying decreases and the cost of returning increases, and the intention of immigrants to return weakens. NE theory of migration is in line with sociological theory of assimilation that suggests that the longer immigrants stay in receiving countries, more they become integrated and social networks with receiving societies are formed, and ties with the country of origin weakens. In other words, social ties with the county of origin are incompatible with the new social ties established at the receiving country.

Recent empirical research on transnationalism and migrant network, however, challenges this line of reasoning. Technical advances in transportation and communication technologies in today’s world have enabled immigrants to maintain intensive connections with their origin society unlike in the past. Today, more and more countries admit to hold dual

citizenship so that it is much easier for today's immigrants to travel back and forth, to invest or do business or maintain their presence in origin societies (de Haas, Fokkema and Fihri 2015). Literature on transnationalism in the United States have shown that well integrated immigrants are highly likely to be involved in home country engagement strengthening transnational migration networks (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002; Tamaki 2011).

In contrast to NE, new economics of labor migration (NELM) provides completely different picture of return migration, of the relationship between integration and return intention of immigrants. NELM explains migration as a household's attempt to diversify risk associated with agriculture and market failures in a developing country context (Taylor 1999). Under such circumstances, a migrant is a best-suited member of a household whose expected income in the destination country is highest. The aim of migrants is to send remittances back to his/her family, and once their targets have been met, they are assumed to go home. In short, return migrants are those whose missions are completed.

NELM also provides very different view concerning the relationship between integration and return migration. A successful integration will enable immigrants to earn higher income, and to remit more money back to their family. Thus, successful integration and human capital that will help immigrants to earn higher income at destination are associated with higher likelihood of return intention. While successful immigrants prolong their stay and may become permanent residents of receiving society in NE perspective, immigrants who cannot achieve targeted amount of savings or remittances prolong their stay in NELM perspective.

In NELM, integration and return intention are positively related because integration in host society is expected to raise the income or increase employment opportunities, thereby enabling immigrants to achieve targeted savings. With respect to social ties with origin, presence of family members in sending societies strongly promotes return intention of

immigrants under NELM, as in NE. With respect to social ties with destination, NELM predicts that presence of family members at destination is associated with higher likelihood of return intention since an increase in working members will help immigrants to reach targeted amount of savings faster. However, NELM does not provide inferences with respect to the relationship between economic ties at destination and return intention, since NELM does not assume immigrants form economic ties with receiving society.

### **3. Data**

The data used in the analysis are drawn from two different sources: (1) a survey of foreign residents in Shizuoka Prefecture conducted by Shizuoka Prefectural Government (SPG) in 2016 (SPG 2017), and (2) a survey of foreign residents in Iwata-city, Shizuoka Prefecture, conducted by Iwata Municipal Government (IPG) in 2015 (IPG 2016). The aim of the surveys were to investigate the challenges and needs faced by foreign residents and the Shizuoka survey was also aimed to provide basic information for drafting Shizuoka Prefecture Multiculturalism Promotion Comprehensive Plan. Both surveys were conducted by the same research team and questionnaire designs were almost identical.<sup>2</sup> For the Shizuoka survey, a random sample of 5,000 foreign residents (aged 16+) including Brazilians, Filipinos, Chinese, Korean, Peruvian, Vietnamese, and Indonesian was extracted from the Basic Resident Registration of five most populous cities<sup>3</sup> with respect to foreign population in Shizuoka Prefecture. Note that the sample was not drawn from Iwata-city even though the city ranked third in terms of foreign population. It was because IPG conducted independent survey targeted at foreign residents in 2015, and I used this data set to supplement the Shizuoka survey. For Brazilians the sample size was set to

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<sup>2</sup> The author was a member of survey team in both studies.

<sup>3</sup> These cities include Hamamatsu, Kakegawa, Shizuoka, Fuji and Numazu.

2,000<sup>4</sup> which accounted for 10% of Brazilian population aged 16 or over in Shizuoka Prefecture in 2016. Questionnaires were translated into respective languages and sent by mail from the SPG. In total, 1,197 questionnaires were returned with the overall response rate of 24.5% (SPG 2017). Among these, 501 were returned from Brazilians with the response rate of 25.7 %.

The 2015 Iwata survey randomly sampled 1,500 foreign residents (aged 16+) including 820 Brazilians, 410 Filipinos, and 270 Chinese, the three largest foreign population in Iwata city. The sample size of Brazilians accounted for 29.8 % of total Brazilian population aged 16 and over in Iwata in 2015. In total, 465 questionnaires were returned. A response rate of Brazilians was 27.6 % (IMG 2016).

For this study, the two data sets were incorporated together because by increasing the sample size, I considered that the harmonized data quite accurately reflect the Brazilian population in Japan. Brazilians are heavily concentrated in Tokai area in central Japan (consists of Shizuoka, Gifu, Aichi and Mie prefectures), where export-oriented manufacturing industries represented by automobiles, motorcycles and electrical appliances predominate. Actually, Brazilians are the most unevenly distributed foreign population in Japan – roughly 55% of Brazilians lived in Tokai area and 15 % were in Shizuoka prefecture alone in 2015 (Nakagawa 2019). Typically, Brazilians work as unskilled temporary labors employed by labor recruiting agencies dispatched to manufacturing plants regardless of their education or occupation in Brazil (Takaya et al. 2013). Given the level of geographical concentration, similarities of the industrial structures in Tokai area, it is highly likely that the harmonized data set is representative of Brazilians in Japan. Moreover, the harmonized 2016 Shizuoka data with the sample size of 721 Brazilians offer best possible opportunity to explore the determinants of future migration intentions because randomly sampled data of Brazilians in Japan this size is

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<sup>4</sup> Of 2,000 questionnaires sent out, 43 were undelivered due to changes in respondent's address.

simply not available. In addition, the data set contains rich information regarding immigrants' life and degree of integration in Japan such as duration of stay, status of residence, Japanese proficiency, work status, remittances, housing, social contacts with Japanese, future prospects and family related characteristics including marital status, and presence of coresiding children, that are highly relevant in studying migrant's future migration intentions.

The dependent variable in this analysis is migrant's return intention. Independent variables were listed in Table 1. A multi-nominal logistic regression is employed to test hypotheses on the effects of immigrant's structural and sociocultural integration in Japan, ties with Brazil, and Japan on immigrants' intention to stay or return. The base outcome was set to "intend to stay." Some observations were deleted if the needed information was missing, reducing the final data set to 508 Brazilians.

#### **4. Results**

Table 1 displays the results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis in the form of odds ratios. Return intentions are not significantly affected by age and gender. Status of residence, a form of civil integration, do not seem to be significantly affect return intentions. Contrary to expectations, length of stay has no impact at all on the likelihood of intending to return.

Effect of education is not significant but there is a tendency for university educated to have higher intention to return relative to those finished junior high school. In NE, better educated immigrants are expected to have better opportunities to find attractive jobs and are less likely to have return intentions. For Brazilians in Japan, the result is more in line with NELM. For them, university education is not associated with higher paying attractive jobs, and thus, it

Table 1 Relative Risk Ratios from Multinomial Logistic Regression of



## Return Migration Intention

Covariates	Return	Don't Know
<b>Background Characteristics</b>		
Age	0.984	1.004
Female (ref. male)	1.528	1.460
Status of Residence		
Permanent resident	0.595	1.053
Length of stay	0.987	1.031
<b>Human Capital Variables</b>		
Educational Attainment (ref. jr. high)		
High school	1.125	1.248
Jr. College	1.305	0.999
University	2.464	2.132
Last school in Japan (ref. other than Japan)	0.248 **	0.485
<b>Integration Indicators</b>		
Working Status (ref. not employed)		
Non-standard	0.506	0.783
Standard	0.674	0.576
Income (ref. no income)		
Less than 100,000 yen/month	2.973 *	0.797
More than 100,000 yen/month	3.023 *	1.465
Japanese fluency	0.955	0.893 **
Have Japanese friend (ref. have no Japanese friend)	0.600	0.565 **
<b>Ties with Origin Country</b>		
Remittances		
Less than 50,000 yen/month	1.900 *	1.238
More than 50,000 yen/month	4.013 **	1.930
<b>Ties with Receiving Country</b>		
Own a house	0.167 ***	0.273 ***
# of Children ( 0-15) in same household	0.543 **	0.579 ***
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married - spouse not coresiding	1.685	1.349
Married - spouse coresiding	0.866	0.749
Divorced/Widowed	0.335	0.500

\*p<0.1, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01

makes sense for highly educated individuals to return as soon as they attained targeted amount of savings. When the last school that he/she attended is in Japan, then the intention to return significantly weakens. School attendance is more of an indicator of integration rather than the indicator of human capital, if the school level is elementary or junior high school. From this perspective, the result indicates that sociocultural integration is negatively associated with return intentions.

In line with NELM, there is a clear positive association between income and return intentions. Immigrants earning higher income are significantly more likely to have intention to return. The result strongly support NELM reasoning that immigrants are targeted earners. Other integration indicators such as Japanese fluency and whether respondents have a Japanese friend

or not turned out to be not significant. Effects of these aspects may have been absorbed by “last school in Japan.” Also, there is a clear positive relationship between remittances and return intentions. Higher the amount remitted, higher the likelihood of return intentions. These results present strong evidence to support NELM. Ties with receiving country, do decrease return intentions. Those who owns a house in Japan are less likely to have return intentions. Also, number of coresiding children aged 0-15 is negatively associated with return intentions.

## **5. Conclusion**

The findings support both NE and NELM. These results suggest that some immigrants are target earners; they come to Japan solely to earn income and remit money back to their family, and return as soon as they accomplish their missions. On the other hand, there are some immigrants who establish a family and buy a house to live permanently in Japan. As confirmed in this analysis and other empirical work (Constant and Massey 2002; de Haas and Fokkema 2011; de Haas, Fokkema and Fihri 2015), immigrants are indeed heterogeneous group, and hence, future research need to clarify under what circumstances immigrants choose which strategy – NE or NELM. And under what circumstances, immigrants change their strategy from their initial motivation.

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