

Research Report

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Title of Research: Migration Politics in Aging East Asia: Japan and South Korea Compared

Purpose of Research: (200 words)

This research initially aimed to analyze and assess the role of migration in combating demographic changes. I originally planned to examine whether opening up its door to migrants is a plausible option in contemporary Japan, and understand what kind of policies would be ideal for a better recruitment and integration of migrants into Japanese society. In so doing, I proposed both quantitative and qualitative analyses of perceptions of both the public and political actors, and to use South Korea as a comparable case. Since it was challenging to conduct qualitative analysis (e.g., archival research) in South Korea under the ongoing pandemic circumstance, I decided to focus on solidifying a relationship between public migration sentiment and political messages by conducting online survey experiment. This research aimed to specifically examining the following research question: Do national migration policies impact natives' perception of migrants in Japan and South Korea? By relying on group threat argument and contact argument as a theoretical framework, the core purpose of this research was to test whether the distinctive migration policies in the two countries yield any diverging influences.

Content/Methodology of Research: (400 words)

The survey design is based on framing and conjoint experiments. Since overall structures of migration policies of Japan and Korea are similar, yet with distinctively emphasized migrant groups, we applied framing experiment by creating two treatment groups that emphasize different migrant groups that a government stressed. If national migration policy (and its target) actually holds an explanatory power, we should observe different outcomes, depending on which treatment respondents receive. Furthermore, we also conducted conjoint experiment in order to reduce social desirability bias (SDB). This approach has been widely adopted by many scholars as an effort to accurately clarify public attitudes toward migration. In sum, the combination between framing and conjoint experiments would clarify whether and how national migration policies affect people's favoritism across various migrant types.

For the framing experiment, we divided randomly assigned respondents into three groups: two treatment groups along with a control group. For all the respondents, we presented them short descriptions about the situation revolving around migration issues in the respective country. In addition, for the respondents who are assigned to either one of the two treatment groups, we further showed them different migrant group that the government focuses on. Specifically, those under the first treatment group were expected to read about respective government's emphasis on multicultural families while those under the second treatment group are on labor migrants.

After these stimuli were shown, we conducted conjoint experiment five times. In each task, respondents were asked to choose an acceptable migrant among two profiles. For each profile, a respondent can observe seven attributes which tend to shape individual attitudes toward migrants: gender, age, nationality, educational level, previous job prior to entering the country, purpose of residence, and duration of stay.

We fielded our online survey experiment on nationally representative samples (the age of 18 or older) of the adult population in Japan and South Korea. In Korean side, we conducted the survey using quota sampling during October 2020, gathering 1,991 respondents. The sample was collected online panel of Dynata (formerly Survey Sampling International). In Japanese side, we pursued the survey using quota sampling in August 2021, gathering 2,549 respondents. The sample was collected from the online panel of Rakuten Insight. By omitting responses that were either “I don’t know” or “refuse to answer,” the sample includes 4,442 respondents in total: 2,467 for Japan and 1,975 for Korea respectively.

Conclusion/Observation (200 words)

Marginal means are used in this study, which indicate the probability of one attribute being preferred over another when a certain level of an attribute is presented. Figures 1-2 record estimated marginal means divided into control group, treatment group 1 (multicultural families), and treatment group 2 (labor migrants) in Japanese and Korean samples respectively. Our results yield that the respondents in both countries tend to hold similar preferences over migrants. However, based on the two treatments, we find that the respondents react more strongly and positively to a treatment, in which their government proposes a seemingly “unusual” open policy: promotion of marriage migrants in Japan, and promotion of labor migrants in Korea. While speculating a sturdy power of existing national migration policy regime, we interpret this result as evidence that public attitudes of migrants are influenced by the government.

We compiled this research as a draft, edited and proofread several times, and submitted and presented at the annual meeting held by the American Political Science Association (Fall 2021). We are in a process of revising our draft based on valuable comments by the discussant and participants, and planning to submit to a journal in early 2022.

Figure 1

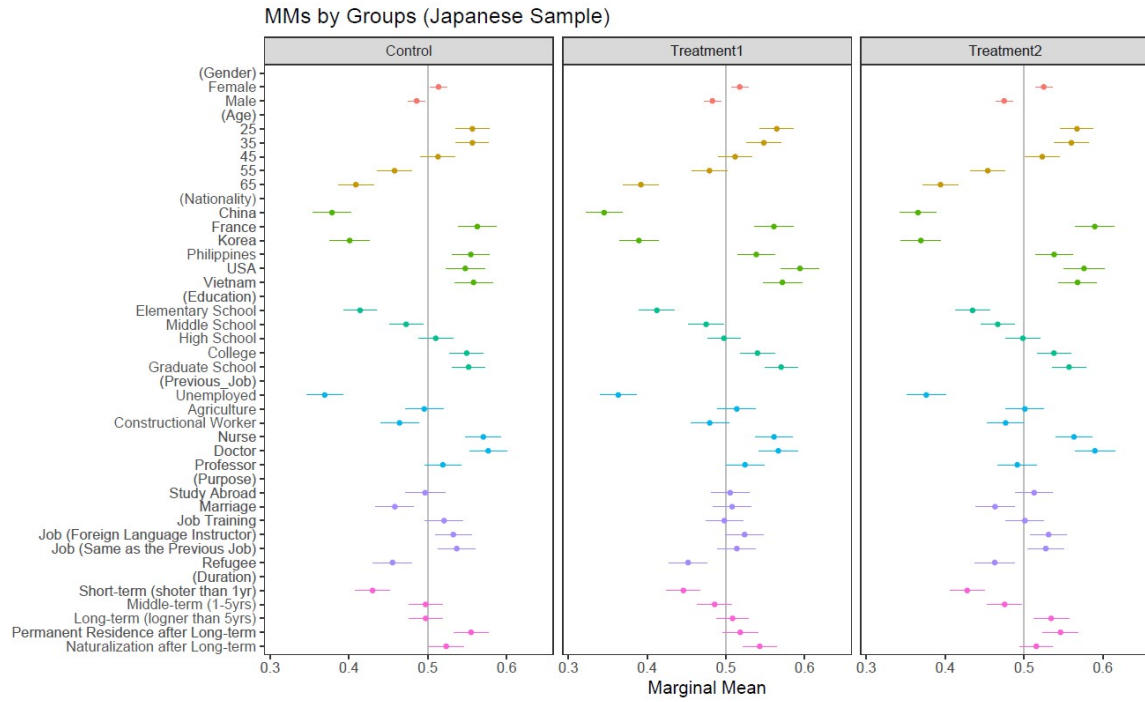


Figure 2

