

SUMMARY

The Development of the Japanese Food Industry in Australia: Focusing on the Role of the Australia-Japan Working Holiday Program

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Since the 1980s, the Japanese food industry in Australia has developed dramatically, and Japanese-style food such as sushi and sashimi has become popular among the Australian population. Although previous research has studied the reasons for this phenomenon, it has overlooked the significance of the recruitment of Japanese to work in the industry. Taking this research trend into consideration, this study examines the process by which Japanese working holiday-makers (WHMs) who work in the Japanese food industry in Australia travel to the country, in addition to their working situation in Australia. In doing so, it attempts to conceptualize the role of the Australia-Japan working holiday program in the development of the industry.

The author conducted fieldwork in Australia as part of this study. This included an interview survey of Japanese WHMs and participant observation of a Japanese restaurant in Melbourne. The data collected through this fieldwork produced the following three findings: 1) Highly-skilled Japanese workers such as chefs and managers tend to travel to Australia on working holiday visas, and change their status of residence to working visas when they are sure of their working and living situations in Australia; 2) Japanese WHMs tend to accept low-paid jobs in the Japanese food industry, for example as kitchen hands and waiters, due mainly to their lack of English skills; 3) Japanese WHMs who take on low-paid jobs in the industry are trying to improve the quality of their working lives through self-help efforts and collective action, for example by seeking complementary rewards, creating original games, enjoying conversation with customers, and receiving informal support from managers. They are attempting to gain a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction through such activities instead of demanding that their employers improve their working conditions.

These findings have led to the conclusion that the Australia-Japan working holiday program plays two roles in the development of the Japanese food industry in Australia. First, it facilitates matching between highly-skilled workers and employers. Second, it provides a pool of cheap and obedient workers for the industry. Employers can take advantage of the program both to recruit highly-skilled workers and to reduce labor costs.