

SUMMARY

Factors behind the Increase and the Unfocused Narratives on Motivation of Japanese Working Holiday Makers in Australia

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Since the 1980s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of Japanese working holiday makers (WHMs) in Australia. In fact, the proportion of WHMs to the total Japanese population in Australia has also risen, and as a result their contribution to the Japanese community in Australia has started to receive attention. At the same time, however, there has been criticism that the motivation of WHMs is so unfocused that they do not maximize the opportunities for personal development associated with staying in a foreign country.

The present study reflects on the reasons for the rapid increase in the number of Japanese WHMs in Australia, and also why their narratives on motivation have tended to become unfocused. In particular, it examines “push factors” that encourage young Japanese people to go abroad, “pull factors” that attract them to Australia, and “mediating factors” that facilitate their travel from Japan to Australia.

In relation to the increase in WHMs, previous research on Japanese youth as well as various statistics, surveys, and announcements by the Australian and Japanese governments suggest it is due to a wide range of changes in and characteristics of the two societies. First, in Japan, unstable youth employment, a tendency to marry later, the advancement of a consumer society, and the individualization of the life course seem to operate as push factors. Second, the chance of an extended stay overseas, plenty of opportunities for employment, travel, and English-language acquisition, and the Australian government’s commitment to the working holiday program appear to function as pull factors. Third, travel agencies, language schools, the media, and informal networks seem to operate as mediating factors.

In terms of the unfocused narratives on motivation of WHMs, three possible explanations are raised. First, it is likely that many WHMs have and mention more than one objective, such as work, study, and travel, which may convey the image that their motivation is not specific. Second, there is a possibility that WHMs are not able to succinctly explain their motivation due to the complexity of their own situations arising from the changes in society. Third, as a result of the difficulty of explaining their motivation to become WHMs, they may use cliches gleaned from the media and travel agencies.

In order to investigate the validity of these hypotheses, the paper suggests further research is needed to give an emic account of the situations of Japanese WHMs.