

An Ethnography of International Student Service Workers

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1. Aim:

To understand international students as migrant workers who come to Japan to fill up labor shortages on service industry.

2. Data & Methods:

Discourse Analysis, semi-structured interviews for 15 international student workers who are working in Japan as part time service workers. In order to gather interviewees, snow ball sampling was applied. There were 8 women and 6 men from various prefectures. Their average age was 24.8. The interview questions were consisted of several parts: labor conditions (wage, working time, type of occupation, etc.), life style (residential type, school, friends), and one's subjective interpretation about the experience living and working in Japan

3. Results:

Most of interviewees got paid for their work in the level of minimum wage. The premium wages for working after midnight and working over 40 hours a week tend not to be applied properly for them. In addition, regarding working hours, many of them violated the maximum working hours for international students. Some of them were living in dormitory or share house, because they could not afford to the high house rent in Japan. They have an identity crisis, because they should perform several social roles such as student, worker and foreigner at the same time. These three main identities sometimes crash each other, as well as merging together into something new. Understanding this complexity helps us to analyze why international student workers have suffered adaptation problem while living in Japan.

4. Conclusion:

"Studying in Japan" enabled international student workers to have long working hours, compared to other countries. At the same time, they expected that it is the chance to earn the educational capital and grab the opportunity to be a regular worker after graduation. Came to Japan while paying a high cost, they have dream to improve Japanese language skill by working and studying. In this sense, living in Japan means "investment for the future" for them. Labor is also a test for the students, to see if they can adapt to the Japanese society. In other words, if they are dissatisfied with or resisted by the norms imposed at their work, that negative experience would trigger them to make a decision to give up and return to home country. Most of them accept labor as daily life. They treat labor as an inseparable component from their daily lives. "Dailiness" is part of a common life, but continuously repeated and internalized without the actors being conscious. In this sense, it is useful to analyze them having a complex meaning to understand Japanese society throughout attending school and working.