

In Our Town

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I live in Koishikawa, a town of many small printing houses and bookbinderies. The people from Southeast Asia work there. At lunch time I can find some of them having buns and milk, seated in front of the factories. Some chatter with smiles. Some discuss something serious. Some play catch with the Japanese workers. It's very nice to have such views in my town.

But some of their neighbors did not like it and complained to the police. Several Immigration officers came to one of the factories and caught every foreign worker who worked there. The arrested foreign workers obeyed the officers quietly. Their Japanese co-workers seemed to be very sorry for them. Their employer cried out, "Why do you arrest them? They did nothing wrong. They help us a lot."

Recently, more and more people from the Philippines, Bangladesh, and other Asian developing countries have come to work in Japan. Presently, the Immigration Bureau estimates the number of such workers to be more than 10,000. They come to work in Japan, because of the poverty in their home countries. According to Yomiuri Shin-bun issued in last August, 70% of the total population in the Philippines are classified as poor. Poor families earn only 20,000 yen a month. If they work in Japan for a few months they can earn enough to live in their home countries for a year. It is natural that they try to work in Japan by all means.

At the same time, small factories in short of workers are eager to employ them. Most Japanese workers hate to work for small factories with hard working conditions and low payments.

On the contrary, the foreign workers work very hard without any complaints. They are really patient and well minded. Their employers and their Japanese coworkers say they really welcome the foreign workers.

But the Government restricts the entrance and stay of foreign workers, since the Immigration Control Act Article 4th excludes unskilled foreign laborer from status of residence. So it is on the right track to arrest the illegal foreign workers but I feel something is wrong.

Since the foreign workers and the small factories need each other but the Government restricts it, some people act underground to let them work in Japan. According to Mainichi Daily News issued in last November, more than 80% of the foreign workers are recruited by job brokers. The brokers who are connected with Yakuza help the foreign workers work in Japan but take a large cut off their wages. In case of the female, Yakuza even force them to work as prostitutes. The illegal foreign workers can't complain to the police. If only we accept them legally they can get out of the slave conditions and can enjoy the full of their benefits.

Accepting foreign workers is also good for the developing nations. Those who cannot get any jobs in their home countries work very hard in Japan and return to their home countries with a lot of money. It has an effect similar to the Governmental assistance. However, it is even better than that because it is not just giving. When the Government gives the money as assistance we don't even see the face of the people. But when we pay money for their labour we do something together, we can know each other better, and if we become comrades in this way we can be considerate of the people in their home countries in a real sense. Then, I believe, our cooperation will be much better.

Don't you think we should accept the foreign workers? Yes, but some of may still hesitate to nod because it seems to be difficult to accept them in a good shape. Actually, I heard one of the neighbors who complained to the police say, "There are many Southeast Asian workers these days. I'm afraid they will make up the slums in our town someday." But is it true? It is the foreign workers who have anxieties about living in Japan because of language barriers and cultural differences. So we should welcome them so that they can get rid of their anxiety and can mix with us. Their anxiety about Yakuza will go away if we accept them legally. But their anxiety about living in Japan will not go away until we, their neighbors, welcome them as their Japanese co-workers do in the factories. We must welcome them as comrades not only in the factories but also in our towns. If we fail to do this our relations with the Asian countries will not improve at all.

The existence of the foreign workers is a fact. So we cannot stand still. We must step forward to be a real good neighbor to Asia. Now is the time to welcome the foreign workers as comrades in our towns.