

ZPRÁVY Z VÝZKUMU A DISKUZE

Japanese immigration and participation in Czech labor market

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ABSTRACT From 2000 to 2008, Japan along with Germany ranked among the top countries with the number and amount of “greenfield investments” in Czechia. With the increasing number of Japanese companies, the number of Japanese people increased as well. While the overall distribution of Japanese men and women is uniform, the available data show significant gender imbalances, which are unique in comparison with other nationalities in Czechia.

KEY WORDS Japanese – migration – labor market – gender – Czechia

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1. Introduction

After the establishment of the independent Czech state in 1993 Czech-Japanese relations saw a significant positive development, particularly in the economic sphere. The number of Japanese started to grow and this trend was influenced mainly by the development of Japanese foreign investments and the pace of opening of new branches of Japanese companies in Czechia. The share of Japanese investments rapidly increased in past decades, resulting in sharp intensification of cooperation between the two countries. With the increasing number of Japanese companies in Czechia, the number of Japanese people increased as well.

While the overall distribution of Japanese men and women in Czechia is relatively uniform, the available data show significant gender imbalances, which are unique in comparison with other nationalities. The aim of the article is to examine different reasons and motivations of Japanese nationals for coming to Czechia with a special focus on significant gender dynamics in relation to residence status and access to labor market. The presented findings are based on available statistics and monitoring data as part of the author's doctoral thesis and an analysis of interviews with eighteen Japanese respondents who lived in Czechia.

Why are Japanese coming to Czechia? How do the Japanese integrate into work and life in Czechia? So far, a considerable amount of research has explored how people migrate from economically developing countries to industrialized and/or Western countries. This is why theories of international migration seem to focus on economic factors (Fujita 2009; Nagamoto 2014). However, Czechia (a post-communist country) may still not be considered part of the "modern West". Subsequently, it could not be expected that many young Japanese had come to Czechia primarily due to economic (by expectations of higher earnings), political or religious considerations.

To better understand why Czechia has been chosen as a migration destination, this phenomenon had to be investigated from the perspective of the Japanese migrants living in the country. Along with looking at what motivates Japanese migrants to move to Czechia, it is also necessary to look at their migration history. Because a thorough analysis of Japanese migrants had not yet been undertaken in the Czech environment,¹ the author decided to examine their integration practices and to reflect the way Japanese migrants speak about themselves.

¹ With some exceptions: For example, Barešová (2010) conducted a research which focused on the Japanese minority in Czechia. This research was based on correspondence and on interviews (with Czech-Japanese couples and Czech employees of Japanese companies who worked as interpreters or personal assistants of the Japanese). Biryukov (2013) carried out a quite extensive survey for his bachelor thesis "Japanese minority in the Czech Republic". In her bachelor's thesis, Postránecká (2007), referred to the "Integration of Japanese into

The recent flows of Japanese migrants open up a range of new issues within the discourse on international migration. Since the 1990s, Japan has experienced considerable economic and social transformations and radical changes took place in the social structure, lifestyle and values of Japanese society (Nagamoto 2014). These changes are best illustrated by the behavior of the young generation, whose members have begun to retreat from the “stable life course”, often expected of young people in Japan. There are several studies on Japanese migrants (mainly to Western and English-speaking countries) who have been understood as either seeking a particular lifestyle or images of the West rather than economic or educational opportunities for social mobility.²

2. Japanese investments in Czechia

Japanese started to be coming to Czechia in around the mid-1990s. Firstly, their investment was directed to automobile industry facilities around Budapest, Hungary. After the occupation of free localities around Budapest, Japanese companies started to move to Czechia (Barešová 2010). In 1996 the first major investor, the Japanese corporation Matsushita came and other companies followed soon. Japanese investors were attracted, among others, by a favorable geographical position in the center of Europe and forthcoming accession of Czechia to the European Union in 2004, because most of the production was intended for export to European countries. An important role was also played by the low-cost, but relatively skilled workforce and a new system of government investment incentives introduced in 2000 (Barešová 2010). At the end of 2001, Toyota announced a major investment, which grew dramatically in 2002–2003 due to the bound subcontractors that followed Toyota in Czechia.³ Most of the investments at that time went primarily to the automotive and electrical industry, which corresponds with the general trend of investment in Czechia (Businessinfo 2015). The latest

the Western societies, using the example of the Czech Republic”. Last but not least, in her diploma thesis Tlčimuková (2012) inspected the role of religion in the life of Japanese immigrants in Czechia.

² The existing studies of Japanese migrants to Western countries, such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom, describe those Japanese migrants as “cultural migrants” (Fujita 2009), “lifestyle migrants” (Sato 2001), “lifestyle-motivated migrants” (Nagamoto 2014), or “internationalists” (Kelsky 2001).

³ The largest Japanese investment was a joint project of the car makers Toyota Motor Corporation and Peugeot Citroën. The Kolín plant (TPCA) for car production, which was officially opened in 2005, brought investment of over 1 billion euros in one of the largest investment projects in Central Europe and created about 3,000 direct jobs and approximately another 7,000 jobs in related services and subcontractors.

trend in terms of Japanese investment, however, moved away from manufacturing projects towards those focusing on research and development (or similar types of investments) with a high added value (Businessinfo 2015).⁴

The described sharp intensification of economic cooperation resulted in the situation in which Japan became an important partner for Czechia. From 2000 to 2008, Japan along with Germany ranked among the top countries with the number and amount of “greenfield investments” in Czechia and only then followed by such countries as France, United States, United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Businessinfo 2015). “A total of 241 Japanese companies currently employs over 45,000 employees in Czechia and the number of Japanese manufacturing companies in Czechia is the fourth highest of all EU countries” (Businessinfo 2015).⁵

3. Japanese immigration to Czechia

With the increasing number of Japanese companies in Czechia, the number of Japanese people increased as well. From the Figure 1, one can observe a gradual increase in the number of Japanese in Czechia. The number grew from 245 persons in 2000 to 1,661 in 2008, the highest number of Japanese immigrants ever living in Czechia. At the end of 2008, the economic crisis began to affect local economic development and Japanese immigration stopped for a while. The recent data indicate that the total number of Japanese has started to increase again (following the general trend) and in December 2016, the Czech Statistical Office registered a total number of 1,595 Japanese (Czech Statistical Office 2017a).

4. Destinations in Czechia

A distinctive feature of international migration is the concentration of migrants in large cities (Drbohlav et al. 2010). This feature can be explained by low

⁴ In 2006 also one of the largest banking institutions Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi UFJ opened a branch office in Prague.

⁵ In addition to Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) in Czechia, Japan is the 17th most important trading partner in bilateral trade turnover. Recently there have been around 140 Japanese trading companies operating on the Czech domestic market. The main importers of goods from Japan are major trading branches of Japanese manufacturers, for example Bridgestone (tires), Canon (copiers and cameras), Honda Czech Republic (cars, motorcycles), JVC (consumer electronics), Konica Minolta Photo Imaging (technology processing photographic materials), Konica Minolta Business Solutions (fax, copier and photography), Olympus C & S (medical devices and photography), Panasonic (office equipment), Sony English (electronics), Toyota Motor (cars) and others.

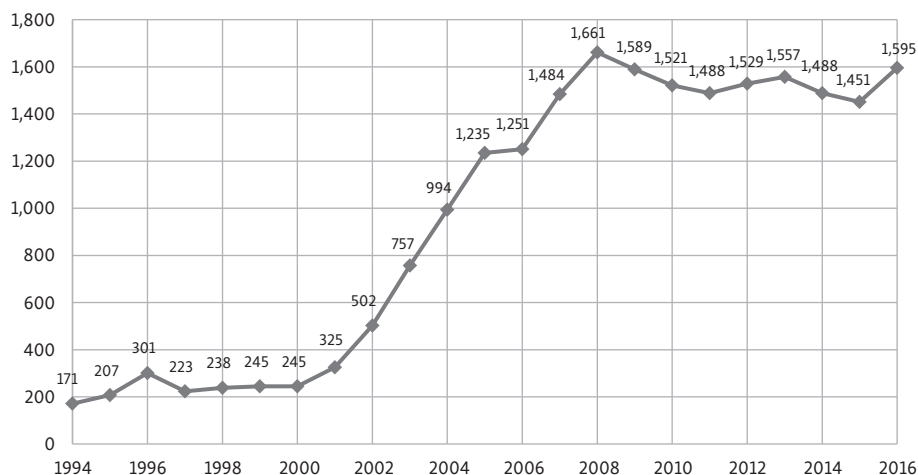


Fig. 1 – Number of Japanese in Czechia 1994–2016

Source: Czech Statistical Office 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2017a

unemployment rates in urban areas. The highest concentration is in the capital city of Prague, both in absolute terms and in the percentage of total population within the territorial unit (Drbohlav et al. 2010). The Japanese confirm this distinctive trend of migrants in Czechia; they mainly move to the large cities, while two-thirds of the total number of Japanese lives in Prague.⁶ Their other areas of residence logically correspond with those of Japanese companies' investments (see Barešová 2010). According to the latest statistics, most of Japanese live in Prague (1,007) and in the South Moravian Region (96). This is followed by the Plzeň (67)⁷, Ústí nad Labem (63)⁸, and Pardubice regions (54) (Czech Statistical Office 2012).

5. Statistics by gender

The foreign population residing in Czechia is generally dominated by men. In the long run, the female representation among all foreigners has been stable, reaching around 40% of the immigrants. However, fewer women are among the foreigners who have permanent residence and also among foreigners who are referred to as

⁶ Among others, Japanese employees from TPCA Kolín and other businesses surrounding Prague live in the capital with their families.

⁷ Daikin has a branch in Plzeň, another in Brno.

⁸ Due to investments in the strategic industrial zone Triangle, surrounded by the towns of Chomutov, Most, Louny and Žatec.

part of temporary labor (manual, either unskilled or highly skilled) workforce (Drbohlav et al. 2010). Within the category of foreigners with permanent residence permits, the share of women is about 50%. However, among the immigrants with long-term residence permits (the majority of whom consists of short-term labor migrants) the proportion of women is below 35% (Drbohlav et al. 2010).⁹

If we look at the statistics about Japanese migrants, a fascinating tendency emerges. While the overall distribution of Japanese men and women in Czechia is relatively uniform (the total number of 791 men and 804 women), we can see a significant proportion of women with permanent residence (almost 75%).¹⁰ According to the latest data in Table 1, it is 246 women out of the total number of 330 persons who have been granted permanent residence permits.

According to the data, Japanese women, unlike their male counterparts, are more likely to have permanent residence in Czechia. The low numbers of permanent residence permits obtained by Japanese men suggest that they do not stay here forever. When compared with the situation of other nationalities, this gender imbalance is unique.¹¹ The situation can be explained by the fact that the men who work for Japanese companies, the “*sarariman*”¹², are temporarily sent to work abroad. They usually return within a few years and the company replaces them with other workers. The above-mentioned data thus suggest different reasons and motivations of Japanese males and females for coming to Czechia.¹³

On the contrary, one of the reasons for the high number of women with permanent residence permits seems to be a somewhat high number of Japanese women who have found a Czech partner. Based on Biryukov’s survey (2013) the number of Japanese women with a Czech partner outweighs that of Japanese men with a Czech female partner. In addition, Barešová’s research (2010) has revealed that the Czech partner is often a Japanologist or has some professional interest in Japan. Additionally, author’s interviews show that the couples often

⁹ The highest female representation is among the citizens of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Mongolia, from 50–60%. In contrast, low shares can be found with respect to those from several Western European countries – Germany, United Kingdom, Austria and the Netherlands, between 20–30% (Drbohlav et al. 2010).

¹⁰ In comparison with data from previous years, the proportion of women with permanent residence slightly increased from 70–75%.

¹¹ With the exception of Mongolia and Poland (Poles, however, strongly dominate the number of men in other types of temporary residence).

¹² “*Sarariman*” (salaryman in English) is typically a white-collar businessman who works for a large Japanese corporation.

¹³ The author also attempted to find out data about Japanese nationals in Visegrad Four countries (V4), but the information was unavailable or could not be compared with the data for Czechia. For this reason, this article does not offer a comparison with other post-communist countries that have a similar historical and socio-economic development.

Tab. 1 – Japanese nationals by type of residence on 31st December 2016

Citizenship	Total	Permanent residence			Other types of residency		
		Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
Japan	1,595	330	84	246	1,265	707	558

Source: Czech Statistical Office 2017a

got acquainted outside Japan, while one of the partners was studying or working in an English-speaking country (United Kingdom, Australia or New Zealand). Indeed, these young Japanese women tended to have similar backgrounds and lifestyles. After finishing high school or college or quitting their jobs in Japan, they moved to an English-speaking country. Some had followed a conventional path by studying (*ryūgaku*), others had worked abroad or participated in programs such as working holiday programs. There they were acquainted with a Czech partner, usually younger than them, and after some time – due to various reasons – they had decided to move to Czechia. Some of the respondents from author’s research also cited dissatisfaction with life in Japan and Japanese society as a reason to stay in Czechia. Generally, Japanese women have chosen Czechia as their new home for social, cultural and personal reasons and their migration may not be primarily due to expectations of higher earnings.

As Japan achieved a high economic level, Japanese people’s basic values and goals shifted from giving top priority to economic growth to placing an increasing emphasis on the quality of life. Many people in Japan have begun to attach importance not only to “having” (or occupation, income, and/or education), but also to “being”, or identities and lifestyle (Imada in Fujita 2009). Today, many young Japanese who can financially depend on their parents tend to think that it is more meaningful to become successful in other fields or sectors than to become a *sarariman* (Japanese company employee) or *OL* (office ladies) only for the purpose of getting a stable income (Imada in Fujita 2009). Since parents allow their grown-up children to live rent-free in their house or apartment, to do “*hontou ni yaritai koto*” (what they really want to do), this option becomes available for them (Fujita 2009). When some of them recognize that there are only few opportunities to live a “fulfilling life” in Japan, they begin to plan to migrate to the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand or Europe, which appears to provide them with “more options” (Fujita 2009). The fundamental characteristic of this migrant type is the primary importance of lifestyle factors in their decision to migrate, as opposed to the pursuit of improved economic conditions and employment opportunities (Kelsky 2001; Sato 2001; Fujita 2009; Nagamoto 2014).

6. Participation of Japanese in labor market

The 2000s caused significant changes to the Czech labor market and the profile of migrants coming to the country. Despite the fact that the proportion of migrants is still lower than in most western EU countries, the influx of immigrants has changed the Czech labor market. The economic growth experienced over the last decade, especially between 2006 and 2008, was accompanied by a rising participation of foreigners in the Czech labor market (Münich 2014). According to the Czech Statistical Office, the total employment of foreigners at the end of 2015 was more than 400,000 persons, which means that more than 80% of all foreigners living in Czechia were economically active (Czech Statistical Office 2017b). Immigrants in Czechia thus can be characterized by their high level of economic activity.

There was a significant increase in immigrants since 2004 (EU accession), a surge associated with an economic growth and with an increased demand for a new labor force.¹⁴ On the other hand, since 2008, the economic crisis and restrictions on the arrival of new foreign workers interrupted the trend towards a growing share of foreign workers on the Czech labor market.

The latest available statistics about the employment of the Japanese registered at labor offices and trade license holders is from 2015 (Table 2). According to it, a total of 649 Japanese (483 men and 166 women) were economically active. The records include the data from the labor offices (580 people) and for the people with a trade license (only 69 people).

If we compare these data against the background of the residence permits numbers, we find that almost two-thirds of the Japanese men in Czechia in 2015 were economically active (483 out of the total Japanese male population consisting of 749 persons)¹⁵ and that the vast majority of them were employed (455 out of 483 – the rest were 28 trade license holders). Their migration was mainly connected with jobs in the primary labor market, which was stimulated by Japanese companies' demands. Considering that 241 Japanese companies operate in Czechia, it is logical that Japanese men typically work in leadership positions. Similar findings are reported by the research study "Employment of foreigners in the Czech Republic" conducted by the Ministry of Finance (Pavel, Turková 2007).

On the contrary, the number of economically active Japanese women in Czechia is low (only 166 women are employed or hold a valid trade license). The above-mentioned statistics indicates substantial gender dynamics with the following

¹⁴ The overall proportion of migrants in the domestic labor market before the onset of the recent economic crisis reached 6.4% (Horáková 2008). However, in some regions, the proportion was even higher. In Prague, foreigners were involved in 15% of the number of employed people, in Mladá Boleslav approximately in 17%, in Plzeň in 16% and in Brno in 11%.

¹⁵ All the available data were compared only for 2015.

Tab. 2 – Employment of Japanese registered at labor offices and trade license holders

Country (Year 2015)	Number of Japanese		Labor offices		Trade license holders	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Japan	749	734	455	125	28	41
	Total	1,483	Total	580	Total	69

Source: Czech Statistical Office 2015b; 2016

findings: the majority of Japanese migrants who are economically active are men who have a position in the primary labor market. In contrast, more than three-quarters of Japanese women in Czechia are economically inactive according to the statistics (568 persons out of the total Japanese female population of 734 persons in 2015).

7. Discussion and conclusions

The Japanese have brought huge financial investments to Czechia and significantly influenced the Czech economy. From the economic point of view, there is a significant presence of Japanese companies, mainly factories with ties to the automotive and electronics industry. With the increasing number of Japanese companies in Czechia, the number of Japanese people increased as well.

A high socio-economic advancement is typical of Japanese migrants, which is one of the factors influencing their status. Certainly, available data and literature indicate that Japanese in Czechia in any case do not form a group of low-paid manual workers or unskilled labor force. In fact, a specific group of Japanese males as Japanese company employees (with their senior and executive positions) dominate on the primary labor market in Czechia. These are usually expats (and their families) who were moved here for a certain period of time, usually for several years. They are considered migrants in the long term, but only temporarily residing. Unemployed wives of Japanese managers then contribute to the statistically high unemployment of Japanese women in Czechia (75%).

Considering the socio-economic advancement and life course of other respondents (than those of Japanese managers and their families), their migration may not be seen as motivated primarily by economic reasons. Along with economic factors, also the personal, social and cultural ones are the primary force that induces their migration. Various circumstances were involved when talking about their decision to migrate to Czechia. Migration due to personal life circumstances (marriage, partnership), study, and/or professional interest in specific (often artistic) jobs or qualification were mentioned in most cases. The parts of the interviews related to

their participation in the Czech labor market revealed that if they are economically active, their work is usually linked to the added value of their specific linguistic and cultural competences.

Japanese migrants in Czechia form a heterogeneous group with diverse integration needs. In relation to social integration, most of Japanese migrants can be divided into two different types, which differ from each other in the way of life and degree of contact with the Czech majority.

The first specific group consists of those who traveled to Czechia for a limited period. These are typically employees of Japanese companies and their families. In terms of integration, their life can be characterized by little need for social interaction with Czech people outside their work environment. Their financial independence and the well-developed company support system enable them to live in the country without the necessity of developing any in-depth understanding of the Czech language or culture. Therefore, unlike those who stay in the country permanently, they are not interested or do not need to integrate into Czech society.

A second, significantly smaller group consists of Japanese long-term residents. The distinction as residents claims that their migration leads to a long, more or less permanent relocation to Czechia, while “their behavior may be generally seen as being characterized by residence and settlement” (Scott, Marshall 2009, p. 470). People from this group have chosen Czechia as their new home voluntarily, often being interested in art, the country itself, or immigrated due to personal reasons. Czechia became a target country typically either by a specific purpose or due to various circumstances (also Barešová 2010). Teachers of Japanese language (e.g. teachers at universities or language schools), translators, small entrepreneurs (some of them linked with popular food business or Japanese tourism in Czechia), students, or independent artists are in this group. It is difficult to determine the overall number of these migrants. According to the latest data, there were only 306 Japanese holding a permanent residence permit. However, there is a number of Japanese who live in the country for long, although they have not obtained permanent residence yet.

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