

THE TWOFOLD STRATEGY OF TEMPORARINESS IN THE JAPANESE IMMIGRATION CONTROL SYSTEM

The outcomes of a restrictive policy framework for “disguised refugees”, irregular and economic immigrants

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Abstract

Japan has only very recently started to be conceived as a migration destination country, however, since the 1970s, its immigration has shown steadily growing numbers, highlighting the importance for researchers to shed light on the specificities of the Japanese immigration phenomenon. Nevertheless, the Japanese legal immigration framework is still considered inadequate to address such a rise, and even more so when the legal framework on refugees and asylum seekers is taken into account. This contribution wishes to assess the outcomes of the Japanese Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act through the analysis of the Ministry of Justice's legal and administrative regulations, supported by recent sociological reflections. The observation of the phenomenon through the lens of time led to the identification of a twofold strategy grounded on temporariness that exercises its influence on refugees and irregular immigrants, as well as economic immigrants.

Keywords

Immigration control, experimental time, refugee, asylum seeker, Japan

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DOI: [10.13131/unipi/6f16-fc89](https://doi.org/10.13131/unipi/6f16-fc89)

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the widespread discourse supported by politicians and a thinning portion of public opinion that Japan is an ethnically and culturally homogeneous country, even a superficial glimpse into official statistics shows that the Japanese population has finally embarked on the path towards growing diversification (Sugimoto, 2010).

When taking into account the literature of the late 1990s, the lack of mention of immigration policy indicates that Japan is still a relatively recent country of immigration. In 2019, the foreign-citizen resident population corresponded to 2,887,116, that is, 2.3% of the total Japanese population (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2020). There was a surge of foreign citizens registered in the 1940s, followed by a drop in the 1950s (Table 1), which historically is associated with the incoming forced migrants from the colonial territories. Since disaggregated data up to the year 1990 are no longer accessible (as only the last twenty years of datasets are kept in the online databases), it is not possible to discern the breakdown of citizenship origins of the foreign-resident population, and thus understand its nature. Notwithstanding the slow but constant increase of newly admitted foreign-citizen residents, they are not enough to counterbalance the shrinking and ageing Japanese population (Huddleston et al., 2015), which is projected to worsen across the next fifty years (OECD, 2019). In fact, when only considering the Japanese-citizen population, official statistics have shown a decreasing trend: the national census registers 126,209,681 Japanese citizens in 2011; 125,319,299 in 2015; and 123,250,274 in 2020 (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2021). In 2020, the birth rate of Japanese citizens reached its lowest since 2011 (*ibidem*), once again showing a slow but steady downward trend. Moreover, according to Korekawa's (2018) projections, the foreign population in Japan is estimated to reach about 6.5% of the total national population in 2040, and about 12% in 2065, thus filling the gap in the current European scenario.

Table 1. Incidence of foreign-citizen resident population in Japan (1920-2020)

| Year | Total | Foreign residents | % Foreigners |
|------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1920 | 55,963,053 | 78,061 | 0.1 |
| 1930 | 64,450,005 | 477,980 | 0.7 |
| 1940 | 73,114,308 | 1,304,286 | 1.8 |
| 1950 | 84,114,574 | 528,923 | 0.6 |
| 1960 | 94,301,623 | 578,519 | 0.6 |
| 1970 | 104,665,171 | 604,253 | 0.6 |
| 1980 | 117,060,396 | 668,675 | 0.6 |
| 1990 | 123,611,167 | 886,397 | 0.7 |
| 2000 | 126,925,843 | 1,310,545 | 1.0 |
| 2010 | 128,057,352 | 1,648,037 | 1.3 |
| 2020 | 126,226,568 | 2,887,116 | 2.3 |

In 2020, more than a quarter of the foreign-citizen residents in Japan were originally from the Asia region, followed by the Latin American-origin population. The rest of the foreign-citizen residents reached a mere 6% of the total foreign-resident population in the country (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2021).

Considering the relative novelty of the Japanese immigration phenomenon, this paper offers a means of comparing Japan with international panorama of immigrant control regimes. It does so by addressing the Special Issue core element of analysis, which is the dimension of time experienced by asylum seekers, irregular foreign nationals and economic immigrants. In fact, there is virtually no scientific or academic literature dealing with the Japanese immigration control through the analytical lenses of timing and temporariness, despite newspapers and digital news underscoring the alarming outcomes of such a designed reception system.

After delineating the main historical and political elements of the Japanese immigration control policy, this contribution delves into a review of the main theoretical and analytical tools available to understand how immigrants and asylum seeker experience time and its passing. The emerging framework highlights a twofold strategy adopted by Japan to implement its regime of control through a time-oriented perspective. The first concerns asylum seekers and irregular immigrants and taking place

in Immigration Detention Centres, operating on foreign-national detainees' lives and, indirectly, setting an example and preventing future possible inflows. The second regards economic immigrants and permeates the governmental stance by identifying and confirming who is desirable and who is admitted in the country as long as they can contribute to the national economy.

2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE JAPANESE IMMIGRATION POLICY FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Immigration Control Act and the Refugee policy

The postwar period and the 1980s marked a turning point, among other aspects, for the Japanese immigration policy framework. There are in fact a few events that in those years contributed to mold Japan into the political, cultural and social entity it is today. Firstly, the US Allied occupation, which settled in Japan in 1952 right after the end of the Second World War, shaped the immigration system according to the political models of the already existing American and European countries' frameworks, adapting them to the Japanese contingencies.

Secondly, the economic growth of the 1960s and 1970s set the stage for a growing need for labor forces, which finally in the 1980s encouraged the Japanese government to find ways to open up to foreign labor inflow. Not only did the expansion of the economy and thus industrial sector call for a greater availability of laborers, but it was no longer sufficient to draw from the internal workforce. Among the main factors causing the need for foreign labor there are common trends with the rest of industrialized national contexts, such as: the relentless ageing of society which, in turn, leads to the shrinking of the (native) working-age population; increasing rates of highly educated youths who were (and are) no longer willing to be employed in the so-called 3Ks occupations¹, thus creating a mismatch in the labor market; and the scarce participation of women in the labor market².

¹ The 3Ks (*kitanai, kitsui, kiken*) job are the equivalent to the English 3Ds jobs ("dirty, demanding and dangerous" jobs).

² The ex-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, within his 2013 economic reform package (Abenomics), had envisioned *Womenomics*, a specific set of fiscal and labour programs to ease women's exit from the home and boost their participation in the Japanese occupational market. The current PM, Fumio Kishida, is also promising to make more effort to raise women's presence in the workforce, thus showing how the situation is far from resolved.

Consequently, after World War II, Japan presented no structured immigration policy. The country only displayed an emigration program delineated at the end of the 19th century, officially enacted in 1951 with the Immigration Control Act (from here onward ICA) (Kondo, 2015). It aimed at tackling the underemployment of Japanese citizens by sending them to Australia and Latin American countries, which at the time were in dire need of agricultural laborers (De Carvalho, 2002). It was only in 1989, with the increasing need to attract a labor force, that the government introduced an immigration policy program into its official guidelines. Endoh (2022) identifies three separate phases marking the paces of the three main revisions to the ICA since that moment:

- I. 1989 (thus affecting the 1990s and 2000s): in this first phase of the ICA's evolution, the governmental aim was to allocate foreign workers into the expanding Japanese economic and industrial sector, which struggled to attract internal labor and thus to articulate and better control the low-skilled workers' access to the country. Nevertheless, opening the "gates" to foreign citizens directly collided with the political promise the Liberal Democratic Party (the at-the-time and still ruling party) (henceforth LDP) made to its voters to ensure the blood and racial integrity of the culturally and ethnically homogeneous Japanese people (Murphy-Shigematsu, 1993; Oguma, 2002; Chung, 2020; Endoh, 2022). The issues lay in the fact that the LDP had to keep vastly divergent reins in its hands: on the one hand, to accommodate the national entrepreneurial panorama, expanding and thus in continuous search for laborers; and, on the other, to maintain its "pure-race" and "no-immigration" stance. To cope with such an *impasse*, a new visa was issued allowing easier access and granting a special resident permission to up to third-generation Japanese descendants (the so-called *nikkeijin*). Moreover, under the same revisions to ICA, the Technical Intern Training Program (in short, TITP) visa was introduced in 1993. It was intended as an occupational training opportunity for workers originating from neighboring Asian countries. It allowed them to work as a trainee in a Japanese company and to stay for maximum three years, after which they were required to repatriate. This kind of «strict rotation policy» (Collier, 2013:212) initiated a type of immigration that is very familiar to the North American and European receiving context: circular migration (Basso, 2010).

- II. 2009 (2010s): The TITP was changed into a residence status visa and permission to stay was extended from three to five years. Furthermore, the number of hours that student-visa holders could undertake is extended (up to 28 hours per week). Such provisions further broadened the availability of foreign workers, usually with little legal protection³. It is in such a dynamic that scholars and international policymakers see the so-called “back and side-door” strategy of the Japanese national government (Tsuda, 2006), an intentional agenda to attract a disposable workforce that would nonetheless not threaten the social and ethnic homogeneity of the country.
- III. 2018 (2020s): Such revisions officially opened a “front door”, thus admitting a limited number of low-skilled workers. Two resident status visas were then introduced, the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) I & II, thus holding the course initiated by the TITP program which rather granted easier access to highly skilled foreign nationals (both in terms of education and occupation). Very similar to the Italian “*decreto flussi*” (flow decree) the plan identified given Japanese industrial and economic sectors (such as construction, heavy industry, hospitality, caregiving, etc.) in urgent need of workers (Rehm, 2022). Indeed, rather than considering this as a *détente* of immigration policies, such revisions complied with the country’s economic and demographic necessities. This was more evident when considering that SSW statuses allow for a stay of no longer than five years, while the SSW I does not permit any forms of family reunification⁴.

Despite the institution of a national immigration policy framework in 1951, it was only in 1981, with Japan’s accession to the Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, that amendments to the ICA were implemented to include a statutory basis for refugee protection (Arakaki, 2008) in its immigration policy. It is from such revision that the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA) originated, coming into effect on January 1st, 1982⁵.

Due to its geography, Japan has so far been reached by a limited number of asylum seekers compared to worldwide figures. Despite being

³ It was only in 2016 that TITP workers were covered by the Labor Standard Law legal protection that tutors the rights of the overall national laborer population.

⁴ Such details are available at the official SSW webpage: <https://www.ssw.go.jp/en/about/visa/>

⁵ Ministry of Justice https://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/m_hisho06_00045.html

in the top-ten list of countries providing ODA contributions (UNHCR, 2021), in view of rising numbers of asylum seekers' applications, the acceptance rate – and thus the granting of the refugee status – has always shown quite feeble rates, reaching 0.1% in 2017 and 2018 (Table 2).

Table 2. Total number of refugee status applications in Japan. Year 1982-2020.

| Year | Number of Applications | Number of Refugee Status Determination Cases | | | Special Permission to Stay ⁶ |
|------|------------------------|--|----------|-------|---|
| | | Granted ⁷ | Rejected | Other | |
| 1982 | 530 | 67 | 40 | 59 | |
| 1983 | 44 | 63 | 177 | 23 | |
| 1984 | 62 | 31 | 114 | 18 | |
| 1985 | 29 | 10 | 28 | 7 | |
| 1986 | 54 | 3 | 5 | 5 | |
| 1987 | 48 | 6 | 35 | 11 | |
| 1988 | 57 | 12 | 62 | 7 | |
| 1989 | 50 | 2 | 23 | 7 | |
| 1990 | 32 | 2 | 31 | 4 | |
| 1991 | 42 | 1 | 13 | 5 | 7 |
| 1992 | 68 | 3 | 40 | 2 | 2 |
| 1993 | 50 | 6 | 33 | 16 | 3 |
| 1994 | 73 | 1 | 41 | 9 | 9 |
| 1995 | 52 | 3 | 32 | 24 | 3 |
| 1996 | 147 | 1 | 43 | 6 | 3 |
| 1997 | 242 | 1 | 80 | 27 | 3 |
| 1998 | 133 | 17 | 293 | 41 | 42 |
| 1999 | 260 | 19 | 177 | 16 | 44 |
| 2000 | 216 | 22 | 138 | 25 | 36 |
| 2001 | 353 | 28 | 138 | 28 | 67 |
| 2002 | 250 | 14 | 316 | 39 | 40 |
| 2003 | 336 | 14 | 211 | 23 | 16 |

⁶ The Special Permission to Stay is a visa (one-year term, renewable) issued on humanitarian grounds. It safeguards the holder from being deported or detained.

⁷ These figures concern the refugee's status granted both in the first instance and on appeal.

| Year | Number of Applications | Number of Refugee Status Determination Cases | | | Special Permission to Stay ⁶ |
|------|------------------------|--|----------|-------|---|
| | | Granted ⁷ | Rejected | Other | |
| 2004 | 426 | 21 | 298 | 41 | 9 |
| 2005 | 384 | 61 | 249 | 32 | 97 |
| 2006 | 954 | 46 | 389 | 48 | 53 |
| 2007 | 816 | 45 | 446 | 61 | 88 |
| 2008 | 1,599 | 74 | 791 | 87 | 360 |
| 2009 | 1,388 | 38 | 1,703 | 123 | 501 |
| 2010 | 1,202 | 52 | 1,336 | 93 | 363 |
| 2011 | 1,867 | 35 | 2,002 | 110 | 248 |
| 2012 | 2,545 | 31 | 2,083 | 110 | 112 |
| 2013 | 3,260 | 9 | 2,499 | 140 | 151 |
| 2014 | 5,000 | 16 | 2,906 | 257 | 110 |
| 2015 | 7,586 | 35 | 3,411 | 468 | 79 |
| 2016 | 10,901 | 30 | 7,492 | 675 | 97 |
| 2017 | 19,629 | 21 | 9,742 | 1,612 | 45 |
| 2018 | 10,493 | 46 | 10,541 | 2,923 | 40 |
| 2019 | 10,375 | 45 | 4,936 | 2,152 | 37 |
| Tot. | 81,543 | 931 | 53,050 | 9,334 | 2,665 |

Source: Arakaki (2008) and Mukae (2022) data.

2.2. Immigration detention facilities

Immigration control in Japan is a matter of the Ministry of Justice (hereinafter MOJ), which operates through the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (ISA)⁸. It is significant to underline the MOJ's jurisdiction over immigration control (as well as migrants' stay and emigration) as this has significant consequences on the understanding how such matters are administered and executed. Immigration services are provided by the eight Immigration Regional Services Bureau, with seven subordinate District Immigration Services offices. Formally, ISA's bureau system further

⁸ Until 2019, the MOJ's relevant body was the Immigration Bureau.

accommodates two Immigration Detention Centers: Higashi-Nihon Immigration Centre, in Ibaraki Prefecture, and Omura Immigration Centre, set in Nagasaki prefecture. These cover the national territory respectively in the Northern and Southern areas. However, although officially only the Higashi-Nihon and Omura centers are referred to by the ISA as detention facilities, all regional, prefectural and district centers act as detention centers, raising the total number to seventeen premises.

The main function of these detention centers is to accommodate foreign individuals that are subject to an order of deportation (Arakaki, 2008), that is, the administrative procedures for enforcing the removal of undesirable subjects from the territory (Endoh, 2022). Deportation thus concerns foreign-citizen individuals who, for instance, have illegally accessed the country (with no valid visa); those foreign nationals who overstayed their legal visa period or who are deemed to be a danger to public safety and order. These detention centers are therefore conceived as a temporary solution to ensure a smooth transit of foreigners found to be “eligible” for deportation. Nevertheless, to be issued a deportation order does not entail being directly subject to it. Once charged and detained, the foreign national remains confined and examined inside the facility until released or removed (deported). Neither information regarding in-progress investigation is disclosed and most often there is no judicial review. A due and objective process is furthermore hindered as the criminal system, until recently, still did not foresee a structured and certified body of interpreters nor cultural mediators (Tsuda, 2002). Not only did this put most detainees at a disadvantage, as many of them are non-Japanese speakers, but it also contributed to making the deportation system obscure and secretive for the subjects of the sentencing (Endoh, 2022; Mukae, 2022).

To sum up, there are mainly three grounds upon which a foreign national can be ordered for detainment: 1) asylum seekers filing the refugee status, who are often detained directly upon their arrival at one of the Japanese naval or airport; 2) violation of residency laws (such as those who overstay their visa); 3) and for any other law infringement committed in Japan (Ida 2018; Tanaka and Wattles, 2019; Slater and Barbaran, 2020). Within this framework, asylum seekers who are not recognized refugees and thus not granted nor the refugee status nor temporary accepted in the country on a humanitarian basis and who usually hold no legal documentation for their stay in Japan are also eligible for deportation and thus detained.

In 2005, the MOJ reformed the ICRRA in the refugee policy sphere pushed by internal and international criticism over their strict refugee examination system (Kitamura, 2022). The time interval in which foreign

nationals can apply for the refugee status was extended from sixty days to six months upon their time of arrival, and the role of the so-called Refugee Examination Counsellors (REC – *Namin shinsa san'yoin*) was introduced, which foresees for non-governmental experts to participate in MOJ appeals process (Mukae, 2022). Lastly, a third revision was included, that is the constitution of the Permission for Provisional Stay (PPS – *Kari taizai kyoka* or *karihōmen*). This special permission, which was introduced to protect asylum seekers from detention, allows those who meet the conditions – such as those who can afford to pay the required fee (3,000,000 yen, about 21,300 euro) – to spend their time until deportation out of the Immigration Detention Centres (*ibid.*).

Following the revision of the Refugee Status Determination in 2010, asylum seekers in Japan were allowed to work within the six months during which they could file their application. Given that the final determination is usually reached in about two years, this entailed that asylum seekers could work throughout this time interval (Kitamura, 2022). Such an employment concession is regarded by the central government as appealing to all those “disguised refugees”, thus adopting a jargon already quite widespread in Western receiving contexts (Neumayer, 2005) for those seeking entrance with the ultimate end to work in the country, with no real threatening background in their country of origin (Endoh, 2022). In this regard, an Amendment Bill⁹ to the ICRRA is currently under discussion and, if approved, would make any attempt to apply for the status of refugee in Japan even less desirable.

3. A-TEMPORALITY OF THE PHENOMENON

The nexus between detention, imprisonment or confinement and time might appear quite straightforward. Being detained, thus confined, leads to a status of immobility, both in the spatial and temporal dimensions. Nevertheless, this temporality cannot be reduced the *tout-court* waiting, or to a crude hiatus of one's spatial and temporal possibilities but it entails a much more complicated and multifaceted experience of time. This is especially observed in the emergence of less systematized and legislated detention of asylum seekers and irregular immigrants all around the globe's destination contexts. In fact, there is a difference between what is experienced by foreign-citizen detainees and general criminal prisoners:

⁹ As Kitamura (2022) sums up the Amendment points to the ICRRA in two points: 1) it would expedite the deportation practice and 2) it would be possible to file the asylum applications only to two times.

although both groups experience temporal and spatial confinement, what detainees lack is a sentence and an “expiration time” of their confinement (Brown, 1998). To this end, a still limited but steady literature has so far attempted to discern and systematize how restrained and/or detained asylum seekers and irregular immigrants in most traditional contexts of destination narrate their personal experience of temporality. Moreover, this section attempts to expose how time becomes an instrument of governmental control of the migratory phenomenon.

3.1. *Defining the experimental time*

Positioning his studies at the intersection between border studies and sociological migration studies, Andersson (2014) focalizes on the dimension of time as a form of “stillness” that immigrants find themselves in when crossing borders *sans papiers*, that is without valid documents. He does so by referring to Ceuta’s temporary immigrant facilities, the less-than-a-19-kmq Spanish land located in the northern coasts of Morocco. Officially, this center, also addressed to as *ratonera* and Guantanamo by its inmates thus communicating a clear-cut detention experience, is envisioned for short-term detention only. In reality, its walls have witnessed immigrants’ indefinite permanence. The ill-defined waiting is not only resulting from ever-taking bureaucratic processes but also from occurrences of denied entrance, too, especially if followed by unclear migratory plan or infeasible deportation procedures (Della Puppa and Sanò, 2021). Under these conditions, the resulting experience of time can be depicted in a sense of immobility, embodied in a relentless and detrimental wait, with little or no certainty for future selves of plans.

Contrary to the negative sentiment that Andersson’s experimental time displays, Lakha (2009) objects to the assumption that a sole negative connotation to the “waiting” exists. While drawing from Corcoran’s (1989) interpretation of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, the author underlines that respondents concerned in her study have rather shown a “proactive” experience of waiting (more specifically, to return home), far from the mostly found passive and corrosive stickiness of time. Griffiths (2014) furtherly elaborates on this by systematizing the plural modalities of time experience. In her field research on the narratives of asylum seekers and immigrant detainees over their experience of time identifies four «experimental temporalities» (ibidem: 1994): 1) *Sticky time*: being ascribable to Andersson’ (2014) stillness (see also Hage, 2009; Lucht, 2012; Della Puppa and Sanò, 2021), Griffiths imbues it with a slow and sticky experience of temporality, where immigrants and asylum seekers

find themselves looking for ways to “waste” time, to make it to pass more quickly. Nevertheless, for some of Griffiths’ respondents, the waiting was not necessarily meaningless: waiting, and more specifically waiting without causing any ruckus or without posing any objections or demonstration to the authorities (both administrative and executive, such as the police) progressively became a way not to interact with them and thus not to awaken the anger of the bodies in charge of the refugee status decision-making process. It translates into an obedient waiting that stirs up no negative response; 2) *Suspended time*, not too distant from *sticky time*, is found in the meaningless and “directionless” waiting experienced by both detainees and refused asylum seekers. This relentless waiting is usually juxtaposed with how the lives of those around the respondents proceed and thus assumes an even worse acceptance; 3) *Frenzied time*: it is experienced with the occurrence of sudden events that mostly take place out of control. For instance, the moment one receives a deportation order and is suddenly detained; and lastly 4) *Temporal ruptures*: when a dislocation on both the temporal and spatial dimension is found (i.e., deportation or sudden detainment), thus causing a rupture between the experience before and after the sudden event. What awaits a temporal rupture is neither a sticky nor a suspended time, but “utterly unknown”. Although temporal ruptures do not entail a necessarily bad turn, «when out of one’s control, dramatic reconfigurations of one’s immediate and long-term future tend to be experienced as profoundly distressing, especially when it arrives without expectation or preparation» (Griffiths, 2014: 2001).

Stretching to a more socio-psychological branch of study, it is then possible to comprehensively grasp the different facts of such a temporal event by acknowledging its consequences. In this regard, the health-related aftermaths for asylum seekers and irregular immigrants who find themselves in the so-far depicted situations have been furtherly explored and unveiled (Mansouri and Cauchi, 2007; Robjant et al., 2009). When approaching and observing the psychological and physical well-being of asylum seekers, one has to consider personal pre-migration histories, thus the original context of the individual which is often permeated by traumatic, dangerous or even near-death experiences. Nevertheless, to such life-threatening occurrences are added what the Australasian Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ASTSS, 2003) refers to as «threats to what makes life meaningful». These threats are *de facto* identifiable in the less optimistic experiences of waiting, both in or out of detainment, where one finds him or herself in a debilitating situation in which both the ending time is unknown and in which the individual has no power nor control. In

support of this argument, Martin (2003) found not only that the trauma experienced by asylum seekers lead to the disruption of their identity, with associated health disorders, but that it also impacts their «loss of trust, meaning, identity and a sense of future» (ibidem:187).

3.2. *Time as a tangible instrument for border control regimes*

Having addressed the subjectivities of time experiences and their consequences, it is critical to look at the institutions that produce them. Is the temporal limbo an unintended effect of international border control regimes? Or is it a clear strategy to both hinder current immigration and to deter future migratory inflows, as partly suggested by Pijpers (2011) in his analysis of international border control systems?

Drawing from research conducted on border control literature, an overarching argument underlines how the appropriation of migrants' time is systematically used, contributing to a boost in the economics of illegality (Bigo, 1998; Foucher, 1998; Basso, 2010). While framing it within a broader dissertation on the power exerted by governments to screen and filter migratory inflows, Pijpers (2011) introduces what he refers to as a "political economy of waiting". Regarding the aforementioned questions, he claims that border controls' waiting techniques are not to be considered a mere by-product but rather the key element of a very specific strategy. Making people *queue*, to use Crowley's (2005) expression¹⁰, has led to two main identifiable national gains. Firstly, the time tactic allows controlling whom to accept in the country and who is not to be admitted, thus categorizing the desirable and undesirable immigrants. Secondly, the experienced *stuckness*, stillness and disempowerment of current immigrants become an admonition for future entrants, thus becoming a means of deterrence and discouraging prospect migratory inflows (Pijpers, 2011; Della Puppa and Sandò, 2021).

Although drawing from a micro-level analysis, Lucht (2012) enriches this undergoing thesis and sheds light on how controlling one's time can be directly ascribable to a *de facto* control of others. "Waiting", "being stuck", "wasting" and "killing time" are among the temporal expressions that frequently punctuate the author's writings when describing the daily lives of African-origin immigrants in Castelvoturno, Italy. More

¹⁰ Crowley's *queue* representative imaginary, when addressing to matters of states' border control, more specifically refers to the queue for a nightclub (or similar forms of entertainment), to underline the arbitrary characteristic of gatekeeping modalities that distinguish it. In this queue, some individuals are granted prompt access to the facility by virtue of their privileged status, whereas others (the majority and socially subordinate) are delayed or end up stuck in the waiting.

specifically, the anthropologist relates to Bourdieu's understanding of how time, or better, time conceived as a form of capital, is used to affirm individuals' positioning in the contemporary societal order. The power to decide the use of someone else's time, to waste it, make them wait, or even negate their time, is decisive in relegating immigrants into subordination. In an alternative reading, those who cannot freely dispose of their time, who thus cannot freely decide what to do with it, must abide by others' rules and dominating structure.

4. HOW IS ASIA FARING? JAPAN AS A VALUABLE OUT-OF-THE-WEST CASE STUDY

As Andersson (2014) argues, time and its waiting, juxtaposed to the spatial circumscription, are another dimension employed by local and national administrative bodies for border control and thereby immigration regulation. Spatial confinement allows for the creation of individuals' time control. But having one's time affected exacerbates the *stuckness* arising from detention (Jefferson et al., 2019). After spatiality, time becomes another way to think about migration control. Temporal violence – the top-bottom exercise of power manifested in stealing, pausing, affecting and distorting one's time – is a more patent expression that denotes this recently identified type of «state surveillance» (Heidbrink, 2022: 485. See also Hicks and Mallet, 2019). These so-produced *zones d'attente* contribute to supporting the power exercised by barriers and borders. In other words, time becomes the next dimension of states' demarcation line, mainly used to keep the undesired out. This, as the author underlines, is true for the North American, European and Australian contexts, that are considered traditional contexts of destination. In this stance, it is interesting to approach Japan as a case study to test whether time capital and immigration control policy align with Western orientation and thus whether it is also used as a means of implementing national immigration policies. Considering the Japanese spatial isolation (an island nation, with its strictly patrolled coasts due to the constant peril presented by the North Korean neighbor - consider the cases of abduction of Megumi and Japanese nationals, which is still under the spotlight) (Moscatello 2017), the question is whether and how Japan adopts and implements tight immigration control by observing the temporal dimension. Furthermore, it would be interesting to observe whether Japan – with its inconspicuous immigration figures, yet very visible both to the political bodies and the general public – also adopts similar methods to discourage and prevent Japanese immigration.

5. TEMPORARINESS AND ITS SOCIO-SPATIAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL (IM)MOBILITY

There is virtually no academic research juxtaposing an analysis of the temporal dimension and the Japanese immigration phenomenon. Nevertheless, time-related wordings and expressions, such as “temporary” or “provisional”, permeate Japanese acts and bills, as well as international written research and news articles delving into the system of the Japanese immigration reception facilities and overall, its immigration control system (see Miyazaki et al., 2016; Tanaka and Wattles, 2019¹¹; Kitamura, 2020; Endoh, 2022; among others).

Having delineated both the Japanese immigration and immigration control system, the following sections further elaborate on the temporariness of border control and immigration by focusing on two main spheres: immigration detention facilities and the overall design of the economic visa panorama.

5.1. *The temporality of the detention centers’ system*

Clearly there is a discrepancy between the legal texts and what occurs in reality. However, it is also evident that certain room for (arbitrary) maneuver emerges by the way how such legal texts are structured. Article 41 of ICRRRA¹² stipulates that once a foreign national is issued a detention order, he or she shall be detained for 30 days. If applicable, the detention period can be extended for another 30 days. However, once the deportation order is issued, no maximum detention time is ruled¹³. For instance, among the detainees held at the Higashi-Nihon Immigration Detention Centre, by the time such data were gathered by a local attorney-at-law in 2019, about 80 detainees were being detained from about two to two and a half years, 51 from about two and a half to three years, and 49 detainees had been held for more than three years (Slater and Barbaran

¹¹ For detailed information about Ushiku no kai’s activities in Immigration Detention Centers see: <http://ushikunokai.org/>.

¹² The English version of the ICRRRA is available in the Japanese Cabinet Secretariat webpage: <https://www.cas.go.jp/>.

¹³ In fact, Article 52-2 of ICRRRA specifies that “if the immigration control officer cannot immediately send the foreign national to be deported outside Japan, the officer may detain [the] person in an immigration detention center, detention house, or any other place designated by the Commissioner of the Immigration Services Agency [ISA] or by the supervising immigration inspector entrusted by the Commissioner, until the time deportation becomes possible”.

2000), significantly exceeding the 60-day limit envisioned by Article 41. Such figures acquire an even more severe meaning if considered that, as underlined by the authors, these periods are the time spent in the detention facility *up to that day*, and not the total amount of time they will eventually experience (see also Ida, 2018; Kishitsu, 2019; Suzuki, 2020). As depicted by Della Puppa and Sanò (2021) in the Italian receiving scenario, the loop created by the Japanese legal arrangement leads to an experience of waiting with an unknown end, in a perpetual state of uncertainty of when and whether the situation will take a turn for the better or worse. This uncertainty is further aggravated by the fact that, conversely from the criminal system, foreign nationals in detention centers are not informed about any period of the sentencing, as no sentence is issued (Kitamura, 2020), thus immigrant detainees do not receive the official hearing that characterizes an ordinary legal process.

The indefinite waiting that foreign-citizen detainees must come to terms with is ascribable to forms of stillness and thus related to a sharply negative *stickiness*. The unforeseeable end of the detainment period exacerbates the burden of the passing of time. The resulting uncertainty in turn fosters the realization of not being in control or of escaping the time loop, in both physical and legal terms.

A stickiness modality of experimental temporality, to use Griffith's words, is further emphasized if juxtaposed with two specific spatial dimensions characterizing the detention facilities. Firstly, the reports by Ushiku no kai, a non-profit and non-governmental association with the aim to support (particularly emotionally) detainees through regular visits at the Higashi-Nihon Centre, depicts the alienating daily routine resulting from how the facilities are structured:

At present, the holding cells are locked up for eighteen hours and ten minutes a day — from 4:30pm to 9:20am and 11:40am to 1pm. Detainees must eat their cold bento in their holding cells. TV is allowed from 7am to 10pm. They have just forty minutes a day to be out in the open during exercise time (if it is not raining). Cells vary in size and type but are typically ten tatami mats¹⁴ for five people. Guards pass by the windows to the hallway; in most rooms it is impossible to see through to the outside. (Tanaka and Wattles, 2019:13. See also Suzuki, 2020).

Secondly, the Ushiku no kai volunteers stress how these centers, especially the Ibaraki Detention Center, near Tokyo, are strategically positioned out of time and out of space. It is not well connected by

¹⁴ One tatami mat is on average about 1.62m², therefore a ten-tatami-mat room equates to 16m².

transport, isolated or at least difficult to access for people who do not have a private vehicle at their disposal. In this way, relatives and acquaintances have a hard time visiting the Centre, creating an additional veil of separation from outside life for the detainees.

The palpable exasperation finds its worst manifestation in the widely reported worsening health conditions of detainees. There are numerous and worrisome reported cases of poor physical and psychological conditions of detainees in Japanese immigrant detention facilities, some of which have resulted in casualties. This was the case of Niculas Fernando, a Sinhalese-origin man who died in 2014 in the Tokyo detention center (Suzuki, 2020). Since 2006, in the same facility, twelve detainees had already died, and since 2015, other fourteen had attempted suicide and/or forms of self-harm (Miyazaki et al., 2016). In 2019, a Nigerian man died in the detention center of Nagasaki prefecture as a result of a hunger strike (Itabashi, 2019). In 2021, in Nagoya Detention Center, the Sri-Lankan woman in her thirties Wishma Sandamali died following a months of health complications. The footage released on how she was treated in her most critical moments prior to her death fomented public anger and protests, alongside demands for the abolition of the ICA revision bill (aiming at more restrictions) pending at the 204th Diet (Fuji, 2023). Reports of heavy medication prescriptions issued by medical personnel to detainees to calm psychological distress are also quite common (Funakoshi et al., 2016; Suzuki, 2020).

Some of these casualties are eventually attributable to a lack of the appropriate and timely medical care and intervention. Yet, they are mostly ascribable to the consequences of what is conceived as an unjust and deleterious waiting. Cases where reported acts of self-harm are preferable as a last resort to escape detention are common. «I have no choice but to hurt my body because only sick detainees can be paroled» (Kishitsu, 2019). These is the statement of an Iranian man who has been detained in the Higashi-Nihon Detention Center for two years and five months and was eventually granted provisional release in 2019, when his health conditions deteriorated due to a prolonged hunger strike. Another detainee confessed his perception of the way the detention structure works: «We will not be heard unless we endanger our health» (Suzuki, 2020). This is the sentiment that hovers over the detention cells, coming from detainees facing long-term detention and seeking, at least, to be granted provisional release. In these extreme cases, what could have been identified as a *sticky* or a more negative *suspended* experience of time, the high levels of emotional and mental distress that Mansour and Cauchi (2007) refer to

while describing the high levels of depression and trauma of asylum seekers transforms the waiting into a *harmful* or even *deadly* one.

Whilst at the conceptual level the *sticky* time and the *suspended* time are discerned, in this case the latter could be assessed as the direct consequence of the former. It emerges vividly from Suzuki's (2020) interview with a 21-year-old Iranian-origin detainee, who had been detained for thirteen months. He pleaded «Please, [...] give back to me the two years of my life. Two years during your youth are happy years, aren't they? When I think about it [...] my heartaches.» (ibidem). Although it is not possible to objectively measure the degree of the impact of years spent in confinement depending on one's stage of life, the interviewee intensely conveys his waiting in detainment as suspended time. He depicts it even as *lost* time of a supposedly joyful and fruitful stage of his life which is not possible to amend.

According to these narrations, *karihōmen*, or provisional release, is the coveted means of escaping these *sticky* and *suspended* experiences of time. The reason most detainees give for starting and pursuing hunger strikes is to obtain if not absolute, then at least parole. Provisional release would in fact offer the (temporary) chance to return to a routine and to control one's own time. Nevertheless, *karihōmen* could risk being insidious, creating the illusion of regaining freedom. Provisional release must be renewed every two months, with a compulsory visit to the immigration center. On the one hand, there are cases where granting release has been used by officials to pose a solution to the most critical cases, but as Suzuki (2020) reports, the common practice of ISA officials is to call foreign nationals on parole back to detention after just a two-week period. On the other hand, there are instances where it is used as a long-term provision. Although it is also envisioned to be a temporary measure, there have been cases of people leaving in its embrace for fifteen years, turning this renewal reiteration into their new reality (Ida, 2018; Tanaka and Wattles, 2019). Furthermore, provisional release does not allow the individual to work, rent a house, open a bank account or even buy a cell phone and pay for its monthly usage. Being able to purchase health insurance¹⁵ is also out of question, an issue which was particularly critical during the Covid-19 pandemic as taking a test proved impossible for detainees or those in *karihōmen* (Slater and Barbaran, 2020). In turn, the fact that life is *halted* but not at the same time. That is, in order to make ends meet, an individual is forced to work in the shadow economy,

¹⁵ The Japanese health system is semi-private, thus non-Japanese nationals need to purchase medical insurance if they wish to access any sanitary service.

leading these migrants to become irregular – falling into a double illegality (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2014). Thus, the way the system is designed, migrants find themselves attracted, although unwillingly, towards an irregular condition.

5.2. Temporality in the permission to stay: Pausing immigrants' lives

A last consideration must be addressed the macro level, that is the implications and effects of immigration control over the general national migratory phenomenon. This means that it should be deemed necessary to observe what happens, besides the most patently undesired immigrants – (rejected) asylum seekers and irregular immigrants – to the overall foreign incoming population.

Since the 1980s, the Japanese immigration control policy has been guided by the manifest intent to filter specific categories of immigrants, in a clear-cut view of those who are welcome and those who are not. The former group comprised of skilled immigrants (mainly originating from the Western geographical context and culture) and descendants of Japanese ancestors, who had eased access and visa to the country¹⁶. Into the latter category fall unskilled immigrants, mostly coming from neighboring Asian countries, who until very recently saw their chances of entering restricted or completely denied. The “nightclub queue scheme” is an appropriate tool to represent the Japanese border control, where the arbitrariness of the gatekeeper openly differentiates who gets in and who stays waiting – or simply out of the club. The dynamics of such queue catered for the national ideological imperatives: the preservation of a monoethnic society, with the preferential lane for the Westerners and disdain for the (rest of the) Asians (Arakaki, 2008).

An apparent rupture with this course of action was the 2019 revision of the ICRR. Finally, with the introduced bill, specific quotas and categories of foreign workers were also allowed access under a regular visa and policy framework. However, they are granted entry in accordance with specific national economic and occupational needs and

¹⁶ Although it is correct to state that Japanese descendants are in a favorable position in terms of accessing the country, it is nevertheless true that they are not exempt from negative integration experiences. MIPEX 2020 (see Solano and Huddleston 2020), an international comparative study focusing on indexing and evaluating immigrant integration policies within national contexts, has assessed that Japan displays “migration without integration”. The country scored particularly poorly in almost all areas where policies for immigrants’ integration are implemented, such as housing, employment, education, and access to nationality. The policy framework for anti-discriminatory behaviors against foreign nationals are deemed very negative.

the conditions of their admission, once again, mirror the logics of Crowley's queue. The newly introduced visa lasts for a total of five years and, although renewable, the SSW I visa does not allow for any family reunification. This policy orientation leads back to a governmental time control which recalls *suspended* time: while the lives of people around economic immigrants keep flowing, their own life is paused and lies almost motionless. The impossibility of obtaining any right to reunification with one's family entails pausing the sphere concerning familial and relational affections, excluding those in this temporal experience from what Griffiths (2014) refers to as "social ageing". Those who have left their families behind might even face a sense of *loss*, as they might miss their children growing up or their parents growing old. Those who have yet to start their own family might not be encouraged to do so, held back by the thought that their presence in the country and in the Japanese society is supposed to be temporary and therefore any associated private or social plans. To this point of temporal residency, Endoh (2022) adds that «[t]he State assumes (and expects) that migrants' stay in Japan is temporary and thus unworthy of special attention or excessive care.» (p.18) (for a relevant assessment of the governmental stance, see also Tsuda, 2006; Tanaka and Wattles, 2019; Slater and Barbaran, 2020).

It is nevertheless true that as working life progresses, the temporal violence experienced by asylum seekers and irregular immigrants is not present. As long as they do not overstay nor commit other migrant-related irregularities, working immigrants are not subject to fears of potential detention and/or removal.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Exercising control on immigrants' temporality, as envisioned in Lucht's (2012) interpretation of Bourdieu's capital of time, proves to be one of the Japanese measures for gatekeeping its borders. The emerging framework highlights a twofold consequence resulting from the implementation of the immigration control regime through a time-oriented perspective.

The first unfolds in Immigration Detention Centres and concerns asylum seekers and irregular immigrants. It operates on foreign-national detainees' lives who experience a *relentless*, *sticky* and *suspended* waiting, characterized by the uncertainty of an unforeseeable end of their detention time and a monotonous and regulated daily routine. Detainees'

waiting experience is imbued by a quasi-total negative perception as the alarming general physical and psychological conditions reflect a diffuse sense of threat towards one's meaningful present and future. This is a sentiment that finds its extreme manifestation in reported cases of suicide among detained foreign nationals. Similarly, self-harm and hunger strike become drastic tactics to draw attention to unbearable levels of endurance in face of the waiting in detainment and as a dire way to aim for provisional release, an illusory instrument to escape time suspension. Lastly, this first modality of time control does not just impact directly individuals' daily lives and futures, it also indirectly sets an example and attempts to deter future possible inflows in order to avoid living through the "deportation regime" (Gibney, 2008; De Genova and Peutz, 2010) permeating the staying of the Japanese immigrant.

The second form of time control affects economic immigrants, and its most patent materialization was put in place by the 2018 revisions to the ICRRA. It suspends immigrants' time and, more accurately, contributes to their social exclusion by halting their private, familial and relational lives. The course of action delineated by these last revisions on the Japanese immigration control permeates the governmental stance by distinguishing and confirming who is desirable and who is admitted in the country only as long as they can contribute to the national economy.

One last note wishes to address the possible and time-sensitive policy implications of the issues analyzed in this paper. This is particularly true as, by the time these lines are written, the Japanese political elites are opting to tighten up the refugee control regime. This includes putting more stringent conditions on the number of applications asylum seekers can file and reducing the maximum number of years an immigrant can be detained after which they will be forcibly deported (Takahara and Nanivaggi, 2023). Considering the current exiguous immigratory figures, Japan would still be in time to act to enhance its reception system, avoiding the faults that characterize immigration control regimes of North American, European and other traditional contexts of destination.

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