

โอกาสสำหรับคนไทยในฐานะแรงงานทักษะเฉพาะทาง ด้านอุตสาหกรรมบริการอาหาร ในประเทศญี่ปุ่น : ความเป็นไปได้ที่ท้าทาย

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาเกี่ยวกับโอกาสและความท้าทายของการทำงานในประเทศญี่ปุ่นด้วยวีซ่าแรงงานทักษะเฉพาะทางประเภทที่ 1 (SSW-1) และข้อกำหนดเกี่ยวกับการสอบวัดระดับความสามารถทางภาษาญี่ปุ่น (N4/JFT-Basic) และการสอบทักษะความสามารถด้านอุตสาหกรรมบริการอาหาร งานวิจัยนี้พบว่า 1) โอกาสสำหรับคนไทยที่จะทำงานด้านอุตสาหกรรมบริการอาหารที่ประเทศญี่ปุ่นด้วยวีซ่าแรงงานทักษะเฉพาะทางประเภทที่ 1 มีสูง เนื่องจาก จำนวนของแรงงานประเภทนี้ ในปัจจุบันมีเพียงประมาณ ร้อยละ 10 ของจำนวนสูงสุดที่จะรับ 2) ความสามารถทางภาษาญี่ปุ่นมีบทบาทสำคัญสำหรับการสอบผ่าน JFT-Basic/N4 การสอบทักษะความสามารถด้านอุตสาหกรรมบริการอาหาร และการสื่อสารกับบริษัทญี่ปุ่น และ 3) การขาดความสามารถในการสื่อสารภาษาญี่ปุ่น อาจนำไปสู่ความท้าทายด้านการเงินในการจ่ายให้แก่บริษัทจัดหางานเพื่อช่วยในกระบวนการสมัครงานจนกระทั่งเริ่มทำงานในประเทศญี่ปุ่น

คำ

สำคัญ

แรงงานทักษะเฉพาะทาง, การสอบภาษาญี่ปุ่นพื้นฐานของมูลนิธิการศึกษาภาษาญี่ปุ่น, การสอบทักษะความสามารถด้านอุตสาหกรรมบริการอาหาร, ความสามารถทางภาษาญี่ปุ่น

Opportunities for Thai People as Specified Skilled Workers in the Food Service Industry in Japan: Challenging Possibilities

Abstract

This study examines the opportunities and challenges of working in Japan with a Specified Skilled Workers-1 (SSW-1) visa and requirements, including the Japanese language proficiency test (N4/JFT-Basic) and Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test. The study found that: 1) There are a lot of opportunities for Thai people to work in the food service industry in Japan under an SSW-1 visa because the current number of SSW-1 workers in this category is only about 10% of the admitted maximum number; 2) Japanese language proficiency plays a critical role in passing the JFT-Basic, the Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test, and communicating with Japanese companies; and 3) The lack of communicative competence in the Japanese language can lead to financial challenges in paying recruitment agency to support the application process until starting to work in Japan.

Key words

specified skilled workers, JFT-Basic, Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test, Japanese language proficiency

1. Introduction

Thailand has been promoting labor export to foreign countries for several decades. The Japanese labor market has been one of the most significant income sources for Thai workers. Japan launched the guest worker program called the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) in 1993 to solve the country's labor shortage. Although TITP has been criticized for some negative aspects, such as human rights and labor violations, the number of Thai workers under the Technical Intern Training Visa has gradually increased almost every year since the declaration of the law.

Due to the criticism of labor rights violation of the TITP, the Specified Skilled Workers (SSW) Program has been created as another channel to provide labor forces in Japan. The Specified Skilled Worker status of residence was officially introduced in April, 2019. There are two classifications of the SSW Program including the Specified Skilled Worker-1 and the Specified Skilled Worker-2. The SSW-1 applies to 14 industries, but the SSW-2 only applies to construction and shipping and ship-related industries.

Although the Japanese government has been promoting the SSW-1 by admitting a large number of foreign workers under the SSW-1 visa, the current number of SSW-1 workers is still far less than the expected goal. For example, by the end of 2022, there were 2,580 Thai nationals with SSW-1 visa working in Japan, but this was only 1.97% of the total number (130,915) (出入国在留管理庁, 2022).

The Food Service Industry is one of the 14 industries and it ranks as second following the Elderly Care Industry in terms of the maximum number of migrants to be admitted into Japan. However, the former requires fewer test than the latter to apply for the visa. In addition, the number of the SSWs in the Food Service Industry in 2022 was less than 10% of the targeted number. Therefore, there is huge demand and great opportunities for migrant workers in this area. This is demonstrated by Thai workers with SSW-1 status in the Food Service Industry, which has increased significantly between 2019-2022. However, the number was still very minimal considering the admitted numbers.

This paper aims to explore the opportunity of working in food service industries in Japan under the SSW-1 category for Thai people. However, in order to obtain the SSW-1 visa for working in Japan, the process of application and other requirements, including the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N4 or JFT-Basic Test and the passing of the Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test, is quite challenging for Thai workers newly entering Japan. The opportunity and the challenges are discussed in detail in the following sections.

2. Previous studies and research methodology

No study has explored the opportunities and challenges of Thai applicants for SSW-1 status newly entering Japan, especially in the Food Service Industry. The reason for the absence of such studies is perhaps that a significant volume of research has been focusing on negative aspects of TITP and labor issues (Ruth Imam, 2022). Many studies indicated that TITP became the channel for recruiting young and cheap labor from developing countries and was unable to solve Japan's long-term labor shortage problems (巢内, 2019; 宮島・鈴木, 2019; 村上, 2019).

Sunai (巢内, 2019) pointed out that the TITP has even been referred to as a modern form of slave labor based on the experiences of technical interns from Vietnam. Chonlaworn (2021) explored deficiencies of the TITP including law violations, workplace abuses, illegal recruitment aboard, and denial of reproductive rights experienced by trainees from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand working in the manufacturing sector. The study found that the trainees faced many hardships including their works, finances, and daily communication.

Chonlaworn & Pongsapitaksanti (2022) examined Thai technical interns in TITP from 2019-2021, focusing on their motivations for working in Japan, satisfaction toward their works and their life in Japan, and their income levels. The researchers found that despite some deficiencies such as the language barrier and earning lower wages than expected, the Thai interns were satisfied with their lives in Japan. The study pointed out that more Thai workers would continue coming to work in Japan in the future.

As the Japanese government implements new immigration policies by promoting SSW, there is a need to examine the opportunities and challenges for those Thai applying for SSW-1, especially as studies continue to suggest that Thai workers are still interested in working in Japan. Moreover, there is still a lack of study in Thai workers under SSW-1 status in Food Service Industry.

Therefore, this pioneer study examines the aspects that are still underrepresented in previous studies which are the opportunities and challenges of the Thai applicants for SSW-1 in Food Service Industry. The data consisted of statistics and content about SSW-1, from three main sources including official websites of Japanese government organizations, reliable private organizations, previous research, and non-academic sources such as articles relating to SSW-1. The analysis was both descriptive statistic and content analysis.

3. Technical Intern Trainee and Specified Skilled Workers

Technical interns are recruited from 2 major sources: (1) Japanese companies that have their factories overseas or from their joint venture companies, and (2) recruiting agencies in the interns' home countries. However, almost 90% of the technical interns in Japan rely on recruiting agencies, and the total service fee is quite high. The cost includes in-house Japanese language training, visa

processing, a medical checkup, job recruitment services, and airfare to and from Japan. Although the service fees vary among the countries, the cost to pay for recruiting agencies in Vietnam is the highest, almost 1 million Yen (湯山・設樂, 2018).

Among Asian countries that send technical interns to Japan, Thailand ranks sixth after Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Myanmar, respectively. Since 2019, the technical interns who have completed the 3-year TITP (a second level of training under the TITP) are eligible to extend their stay by applying for a Specified Skilled Worker Visa. In 2020 there were 455 Thais in this visa category, the smallest number from ASEAN countries.

3.1 Transition of residence status: TITP to SSW-1

TITP and SSW are the major legal platform for Japan to solve the domestic labor shortage. The number of foreign migrant workers in Japan has expanded tremendously due to the institutionalization of the TITP since 1993. In 2021, 12.5% of foreign residents in Japan had Technical Intern Training Status (Ministry of Justice, 2022a). On the other hand, migrant workers under SSW visas constituted only 1 percent of the overall total of foreign residents in Japan (出入国在留管理庁, 2021a).

The Japanese government has announced plans to increase foreign workers under the SSW Program to a total of 345,150 by 2022. However, 3 years after the establishment of SSW status, only 13% of the targeted number of specified skilled workers were admitted to the country (Ministry of Justice, 2022b). This means the number of foreign workers with SSW visas is still far smaller than the country's goal, and there is a huge space to fill. This could be a new opportunity for Thai workers who want to work in Japan. However, the huge difference in the number of foreign migrants of SSW Status between those who are former TITP and those who are newcomers from their home countries may suggest that there are both great opportunities and huge challenges for prospective migrant workers from Thailand (Ruth Imam, 2022, p.28).

3.2 Application process for SSW-1

The employment of a Specified Skilled Worker follows two methods: 1) foreign nationals apply from their countries of origin, and 2) foreign workers reside in Japan. The first method requires the passing of language and skills exams from overseas. The exams are conducted by government agencies in their countries, but only ones that have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with Japan. Foreign nationals may directly apply for jobs in Japan by themselves or pay private recruitment agencies to provide the service, which is quite expensive.

For Thai workers directly applying for jobs from Thailand, 135 Thai recruitment agencies are approved by the Ministry of Labor to provide the service (Central Employment Registration and Workers Protection Division, 2023). Some of these recruitment agencies have implemented online

marketing to offer the services on their Facebook Pages. However, most of them have not explicitly shown the service fee. Some agencies claim on their Facebook pages that they provide Japanese language training and skills exam tutoring, get the signed contract for the applicants, and support all the processes until the applicants start working in Japan. The total expenses were different among industries sectors, from 100,000 to 300,000 bath.

The second method includes foreign students within Japan and migrant workers that completed the TITP (2). Those who have completed TITP (2) and want to change to an SSW-1 visa are exempted from language and skills tests. However, foreign students in Japan who apply for a Specified Skilled Worker visa are required to pass the language and the skills test. At the end of May 2021, 33.39% of Specified Skilled Workers Visa were issued a new Certificate of Eligibility for foreign nationals, while 66.60% were granted permission to change their resident status. In other words, almost 70% of the Specified Skilled Workers in Japan are from TITP (2) or migrant workers who applied domestically. The SSW Program employed more candidates domestically than those from overseas (Ruth Imam, 2022, p.28).

4. Opportunities and challenges for SSW-1 applicants in the Food Service Industry

Comparing the skilled sector and the maximum number of migrants to be admitted in 2019-2024 (Cabinet Office, 2018), 53,000 migrants were admitted to the food service industry, the second highest number following the Elderly care job sector (60,000). However, the food service industry does not require special training and an additional Japanese language test like the Elderly care, which requires health care training, JFT-Basic Test or N4, a Skilled Test, and Japanese for Eldercare test.

The statistics of the year 2022 of Specified Skilled Workers in this industry from each country indicate that the total was still less than 10% of the targeted number. Thailand ranked sixth in South East Asia, following Vietnam, Indonesia, The Philippines, and Myanmar in this sector (see table 1).

Table 1 Number of Specified Skilled Workers in the Food Service Industry by Country in 2022

Country	2022
Vietnam	3,241
Indonesia	208
The Philippines	185
China	312
Myanmar	389
Cambodia	18
Thailand	49
Nepal	374
Others	383
Total	5,159

Source: 特定技能在留外国人数 (令和4年12月末現在) (出入国在留管理庁, 2022)

Statistics show that the number of Specified Skilled workers in the food service industry from Thailand increased consistently from 1 worker in 2019 to 49 workers in 2022. The increasing rates from 2019 to 2022 were 1,100%, 1,700%, and 4,900% respectively (see table 2). However, the number of workers was still minimal, considering the maximum number needed in the industry.

Table 2 Number of Specified Skilled Workers in the Food Service Industry from Thailand in 2019-2022

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022
Workers from Thailand	1	11	17	49

Source: Summarized by the author from 「特定技能在留外国人数」(出入国在留管理庁, 2019, 2020, 2021b, 2022)

Despite less demanding criteria in terms of the number of tests than in the elderly care sector, there are still certain challenges for the prospective workers to apply for the job in the Food service industry as SSW-1. The next section addresses the challenges, including the JFT-Basic test, the Skilled test, and the process of getting a job for Thai workers newly entering Japan as SSW-1 in the Food Service industry.

4.1 JFT-Basic: The test, the resource, and Thai examinees’ JFT-Basic achievement

Starting from April 1, 2019, workers who want to obtain the residency status of SSW-1 need to pass the JFT-Basic, acquiring 80% of the total score of JFT-Basic or passing the N4 (JLPT) level. While the language proficiency test is exempted for those who completed the TITP (2) with at least 3 years of living and working experience in Japan, the passing of JFT-Basic may not guarantee that Japanese learners who have no living and working experience in Japan can pass the Skilled Test. In addition, JFT-Basic is a different kind of proficiency in terms of linguistic aspects and skills compared to the Skilled Test.

The former test is a language test for communicative purpose while the latter test is the integration of language for specific purposes and work-related skills and knowledge. Therefore, workers with TITP (2) background who want to change their work field, despite being exempt from the JFT-Basic, are required to take the Skilled test.

JFT-Basic can determine if the Japanese learners (the test takers) have sufficient proficiency in Japanese at the A2 level. The A2 is an indicator suggesting that the test takers have the necessary “ability to engage in everyday conversation to a certain extent and handle daily life without difficulties” for working in Japan (Japan Foundation, 2023a).

As the passing certificate of JFT-Basic is required of foreign nationals to be eligible for SSW-1 residency status, the Japanese government has provided useful resources for Non-Japanese speakers to be able to pass the test. It could be said that the Japan Foundation, the main Japanese agent

responsible for the implementation of JFT-Basic, has created highly supportive learning resources and access to pass the test. The Japanese learning material was provided in several forms: online courses conveniently accessible through multiple platforms and course books titled Irodori: Japanese for Life in Japan. The courses aim to promote acquiring basic Japanese language communication skills that foreign nationals need to live and work in Japan.

The JFT-Basic began in April 2019 and is carried out six times a year. According to Japan Foundation reports on JFT-Basic’s percentage of examinees on its website, Thai examinees took the test on November 2020 for the first time (Japan Foundation, 2023b). The percentage of examinees who passed in Thailand was 50%. The most current report when this study was conducted, was February-March 2023 report. The percentage of Thai examinees who passed the JFT-Basic during this period was 42.7%. Between November 2020 and February – March 2023, the percentage of Thai examinees who passed the test decreased slightly, from 50% to 42.7% (see table 3). This trend indicates a low pass rate.

Table 3 JFT-Basic: Percentage of Examinees Who Passed in Thailand in 2020-2023

Test Period	Percentage
November 2020	50%
Jan-Feb 2022	47.7
Feb-March 2022	43.7%
May-June 2022	44.9%
July-Aug. 2022	62.2%
Aug – Sept. 2022	52.6%
Oct.-Nov. 2022	56.1%
Dec 2022- Jan 2023	46.9%
Feb-March 2023	42.7%

Source: Summarized by the author from Test Implementation Report (Japan Foundation, 2023b)

4.2 The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test: The test, the resource, and the test content

Mizuho Research Institute (2020, p.1-2) pointed out that at the end of February 2020, 10,212 examinees out of 17,308 passed the skilled tests and Japanese language proficiency tests, constituting only 59% of all applicants. The institute confirmed that the low Japanese language proficiency of prospective Specified Skilled Workers partially contributed to the low rate of successful applicants. The JFT-Basic has been conducted in several countries where Chinese characters (Kanji) are not used, including Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Mongolia, and the Philippines. The JFT-Basic pass rate in these countries was as low as 33% at the end of February 2020

It is obvious that Japanese language proficiency affects the achievement of the skilled test. Passing the skilled exams require a certain level of Japanese language proficiency, especially for foreign nationals from non-kanji countries. This informed the regulation that those who completed the TITP (2) are eligible to change their residency status to Specified Skilled Worker-1 without taking any tests as they are recognized as having acquired the knowledge, skills, and Japanese language proficiency sufficient to work in their fields.

Foreigners who want to apply for SSW-1 and work in the Food Service industry have to pass the JFT-Basic and The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test operated by The Organization for Technical Skill Assessment of Foreign Workers in the Food Industry (外国人食品産業技能評価機構, 2023a). The test takers will be assessed in 3 operational categories: cleanliness management, food preparation, and customer service.

The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test aims to measure the ability required to work in Japan under the “Specified Skilled Worker” status of residence and perform the tasks of preparing food and drink, serving customers, and engaging in shop management in Japan’s food service industry. The Organization for Technical Skill Assessment of Foreign Workers in the Food Industry provides all important information about the test on its website with multilingual resources, including the application for the test and for the SSW-1 residency status for the food service industry. In addition, the Japan Food Service Association provides textbooks for test preparation in multiple languages, including Thai.

The test consists of a subject test (30 questions) and a practical skills test (15 questions) in hygiene control, preparation of food and drink, and customer service. The test is administered in Japanese. The pass score is 65% (外国人食品産業技能評価機構, 2023b). The subject test assesses the knowledge regarding hygiene control, preparation of food and drink, and customer service, as well as the level of Japanese proficiency to carry out these tasks. Each subject (hygiene control, preparation of food and drink, and customer service) consist of 10 questions in Japanese.

The practical skill test measures the applicant’s ability to demonstrate appropriate behaviors in different situations using figures and illustrations, etc. It also assesses the level of technical skill required for planning necessary tasks using a certain formula for calculation. Each skill (hygiene control, preparation of food and customer service) consists of five questions in Japanese.

Considering the above details of The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test, further investigation is needed on the percentage of the applicants passing the JFT-Basic/N4 who can pass the Test. The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test was first launched in April 2019 in Japan and then in other countries, such as the Philippines, Cambodia, and Myanmar. By June 2020, the total number of test takers both in Japan and internationally was 8,923, and 5,453 passed the test. The passing rate was 61% (PRTIMES, 2023).

4.3 Japanese language proficiency and The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test

It is obvious that Japanese language proficiency plays a critical role in test achievement because the Skilled Test is administered in Japanese. However, it is unclear which Japanese language proficiency level is sufficient to pass the test. Below are Japanese linguistic aspects, including Chinese characters, vocabulary, and expressions presented in the study materials for The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test provided by the Japan Food Service Association. Most of these samples are quite challenging for applicants with JFT-Basic/N4 level, and some are beyond that level (see table 4). It is necessary to acquire a large vocabulary knowledge specifically related to food service industry and Japanese service culture.

Table 4: Samples of Chinese characters in The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test

Test content	Chinese characters
Hygiene control	一般的衛生管理 塩素系殺菌剤 科学性食中毒 危害要因分析 芽胞 寄生虫食中毒 健康被害 硬質異物 細菌性食中毒 廃棄物 食中毒予防3原則 清潔 鮮度 腸管出血性大腸菌 軟質異物
Preparation of food and drink	揚げ鍋 回転動力機 解凍方法 喫煙 軽量カップ 小型洗浄機 五目煮 西京焼き 刺身包丁 殺菌庫
Customer service	笑顔 解釈 介助用車椅子 快適性 完全採食主義者 期待感 苦情 記録用紙 敬礼 高齢者 接客 提供禁止 床の間 配膳 配慮 満足 身分証明証 礼儀

Source: Summarized by the author from 「外食業技能測定試験学習用テキスト」
(外国人食品産業技能評価機構, 2023c)

The food service industry (restaurants, etc.) is one type of hospitality business, like hotels, passenger ships, theme parks, etc. “Omotenashi” (hospitality) is characteristic of customer service in Japan and was also used as one of the keywords in the bid for the Tokyo Olympics. Therefore, “omotenashi-no-kokoro” (service mind) in the food service industry is highly emphasized in customer service practice which is clearly shown in the study material and the Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test.

Customer service, which is one part of the study materials for The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test provided by the Japan Food Service Association, includes 5 sections of customer service knowledge, including knowledge of customer services, knowledge of foods, knowledge of restaurant management, knowledge of handling complaints, and knowledge of emergency responses. Below are samples of basic customer service terms under the section on customer service knowledge

お料理は以上でよろしいでしょうか。お水はいくつおもちましょうか。
 こちらがレジ—とでございます。5000円お預かりします。
 はい、さようでございます。
 また、起こしくださませ。また、お立ち寄り願います。
 はい、そうさせていただきます。はい、存じ上げております。
 申し訳ございません。満席となっております。ただ今、お伺いします。
 どの席になさいますか。お決まりでございますか。店長に申し伝えます。
 申し訳ございません。ただ今、切らせております。代わりに〇〇はいかがですか。
 店長に申し伝えます。
 ただ今、お伺いします。
 また、起こしくださませ。また、お立ち寄り願います。

Source: Summarized by the author from 「特定技能1号外食業技能測定試験学習用テキスト」
 【接客全般】令和3年4月15日改訂版（外国人食品産業技能評価機構, 2023d）

As the Food Service industry Proficiency Test requires specific knowledge and skills, it is necessary to acquire the background knowledge and skill related to the work, and Japanese language proficiency. Fortunately, the study material was also provided in Thai edition for Thai applicants for the SSW-1 visa in the food service industry so that they can comprehend the test content. Therefore, the content knowledge and sufficient Japanese language proficiency are key factors to pass the test. The next section is a discussion about the test sample and the analysis.

The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test Samples

がいしよくぎょうとくていぎのう ごうぎのうそくていしけん もんだい 外食業特定技能1号技能測定試験（サンプル問題）

えいせいかんり 〈衛生管理〉

もんだい 問題 次の中で、野菜を消毒するときに使うものはどれですか。正しいものを一つ選びなさい。
 つぎ なか やさい しょうどく つか ただ えら
 のうやく
 1 農薬
 えきたいせつけん
 2 液体石鹸
 じゃえんそさん
 3 次亜塩素酸ナトリウム

もんだい 問題 次の中で、サルモネラ属菌に汚染されている可能性が高いものはどれですか。正しいものを一つ選びなさい。
 つぎ なか ぞくきん おせん かのうせい たか ただ えら
 こめ
 1 米
 とりにく
 2 鶏肉
 ぎよかいりい
 3 魚介類

いんしょくぶつちょうり 〈飲食物調理〉

もんだい 問題 次の中で、野菜はどれですか。正しいものを一つ選びなさい。
 つぎ なか やさい ただ えら
 1 なし
 2 イワシ
 3 にんじん

もんだい 問題 包丁で怪我をしないための行動について、正しいものを一つ選びなさい。
 ほうちょう け が こうどう ただ えら
 ほうちょう も いどう ひと こえ いどう
 1 包丁を持つて移動するときは、まわりの人に声をかけながら移動します。
 ほうちょう しょう てもと つね ひと うご ちゅうい
 2 包丁を使用しているときは、手元ではなく、常にまわりの人の動きを注意します。
 しょう ほうちょう つか さぎょうだい お
 3 使用した包丁は、いつもすぐに使えるようにするため、作業台に置いたままにします。

せつきやくぜんぱん
接客全般

もんだい きやくさま らいてん つか せつきやくようご ただ えら
問題 お客様が来店したときに使う接客用語はどれですか。正しいものを一つ選びなさい。
1 おそれいます
2 いらっしやいませ
3 かしこまりました

もんだい きやくさま ていきよう りょうり むし はい なに ただ えら
問題 お客様に提供した料理に虫が入っていました。まずは何をすべきですか。正しいものを一つ選びなさい。
1 お客様にお詫びをします。
2 お客様に自分で虫をとってもらうようお願いします。
3 料理に虫が入っても、料理は安心して食べられることをお客様に伝えます。

※ は正解です。

Source: 「外食業特定技能1号技能測定試験『サンプル問題』」(外国人食品産業技能評価機構, 2023e)

The test analysis shows that most questions require content knowledge and a certain level of Japanese proficiency, including specific vocabulary knowledge and Japanese honorific forms, to understand the meaning so that the correct answers can be made. However, the fact that Furigana is provided for all Chinese characters in the test items and the questions tend to be a pattern (〇〇はどれですか。正(ただ)しいものを一つ選(えら)びなさい。), gaining 65% of the total score to pass the skilled test is doable but challenging. This may contribute to the 61% passing rate of The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test by June 2020.

4.4 Challenging processes for new entrants to Japan under the SSW-1 status of residence

For foreign nationals newly entering Japan under SSW-1 visa, passing the JFT-Basic and the Skilled Test are just the beginning of the process to apply for the visa. They need to apply for jobs in Japan and get the jobs offered, then sign a contract with a company so that the company can submit a status of residence application to the immigration office for them. Although the Japanese government provides several support websites for the Specified Skilled Worker Program in multilingual versions to promote the current immigrant policy, getting work permits from Japanese companies is difficult for prospective workers from abroad.

For example, www.ssw.go.jp is a great platform to communicate with Japanese companies during job fairs because many Japanese companies send their representatives to explain the jobs. However, all explanations from the representatives are conducted in Japanese, and questions must be asked in Japanese only. This job-related Japanese proficiency for communication with Japanese companies is rather higher than JFT-Basic or N4 proficiency. These unseen barriers may contribute to the fact that most foreign nationals newly entering Japan under SSW-1 visa need to rely on recruitment agencies and pay expensive fees to complete the process.

For Thai people interested in applying for an SSW-1 visa in the Food Service Industry, if they are newly entering applicants to Japan and cannot afford to pay recruitment agencies, they need to acquire Japanese language proficiency higher than the N4 level. The reason is that the competence will support them in passing JFT-Basic/N4, The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test, and communicative competence to interact with Japanese companies.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this study is to explore the opportunities and challenges for Thai people to work in Japan under SSW-1 status in the food service industry. The following are conclusions and recommendations drawn from this research.

1) There are a lot of opportunities for Thai people to work under SSW-1 in the food service industry in Japan.

The current number of SSW-1 in the food service industry is still far smaller than the government's target maximum number, just about 10% of the target. Therefore, there is a need for another 90% to solve the labor shortage in the industry.

2) There are challenges for SSW-1 new entrants in the food service industry for Thai people.

Japanese language proficiency plays a critical role in passing JFT-Basic/N4, The Food Service Industry Skills Proficiency Test, and communicating with Japanese companies to get a signed contract. If the applicants acquire sufficient Japanese language proficiency to complete the process to obtain the SSW-1 visa, the other challenge is the financial aspect of paying recruitment agencies to support them until they can start working in Japan.

3) Recommendations for Japanese education in Thailand and the approach.

The Thai government needs to be more active and implement effective language policies in promoting Japanese education in Thailand, both formal and non-formal education, through multimedia and all kinds of social media platforms. Communicative competence in a foreign language takes time and great effort, which is applied to Japanese learning in Thailand as well. Since SSW-1 does not require a bachelor's degree, Thai high school or vocational school graduates with communicative competence in Japanese have a great chance of working in Japan under SSW-1 status. The more Thai migrant workers in Japan, the more income is sent to the country. However, Japanese language education for general communication may not be sufficient to pass the Skilled Test, communicate with companies, and effectively perform in the real workplace. The approach needs to be work-related Japanese education with the integration of subject knowledge, skills, and Japanese.



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