A Glimpse into Multicultural Blue-Collar Worksites in Japan:

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Findings from fieldwork exploring attitudes, relationships, and expectations of Japanese workers toward technical intern trainees

A question:

How much do we know about attitudes towards technical trainees held by their Japanese co-workers?

Why is this important for Japanese society?

Background
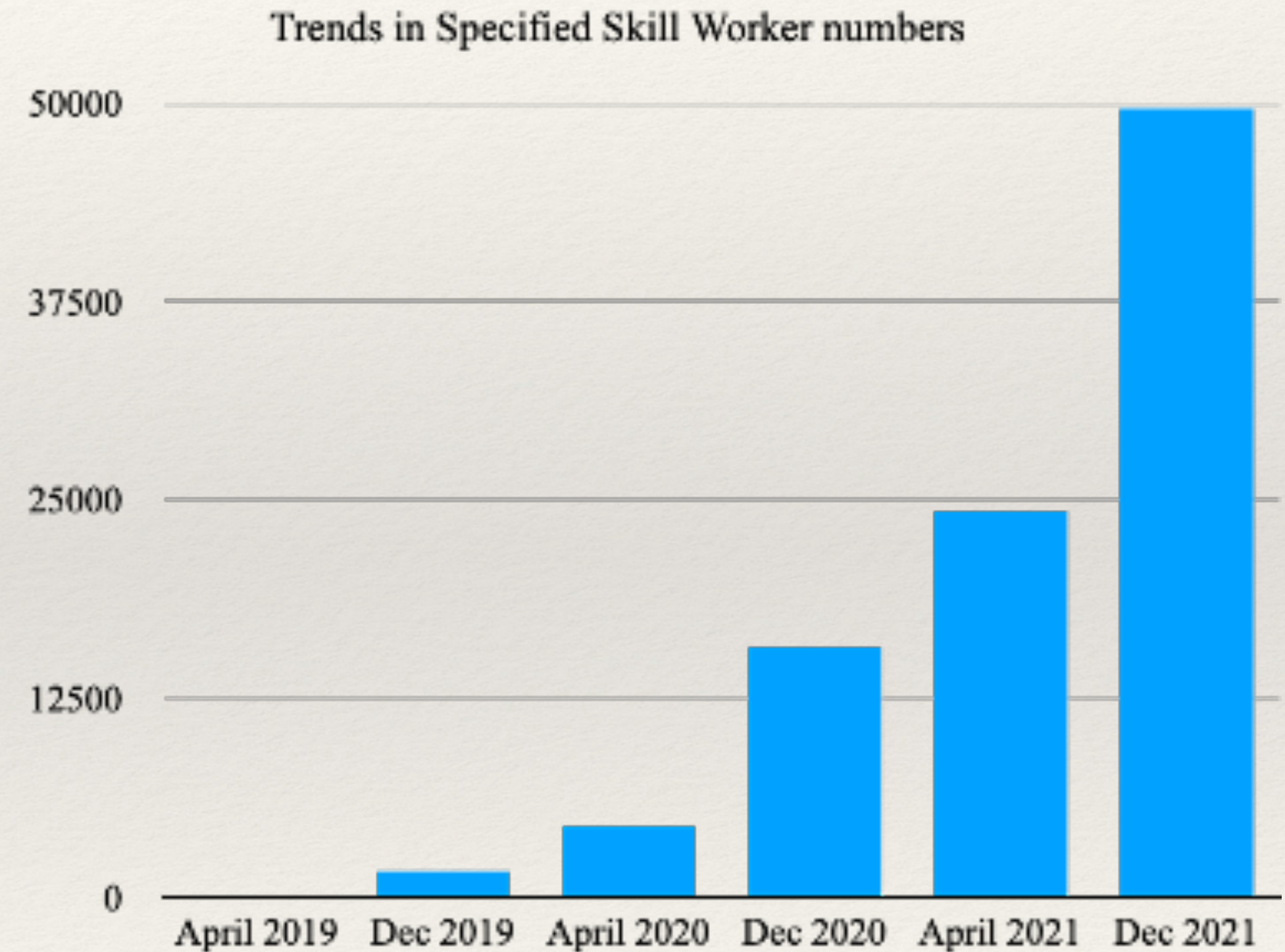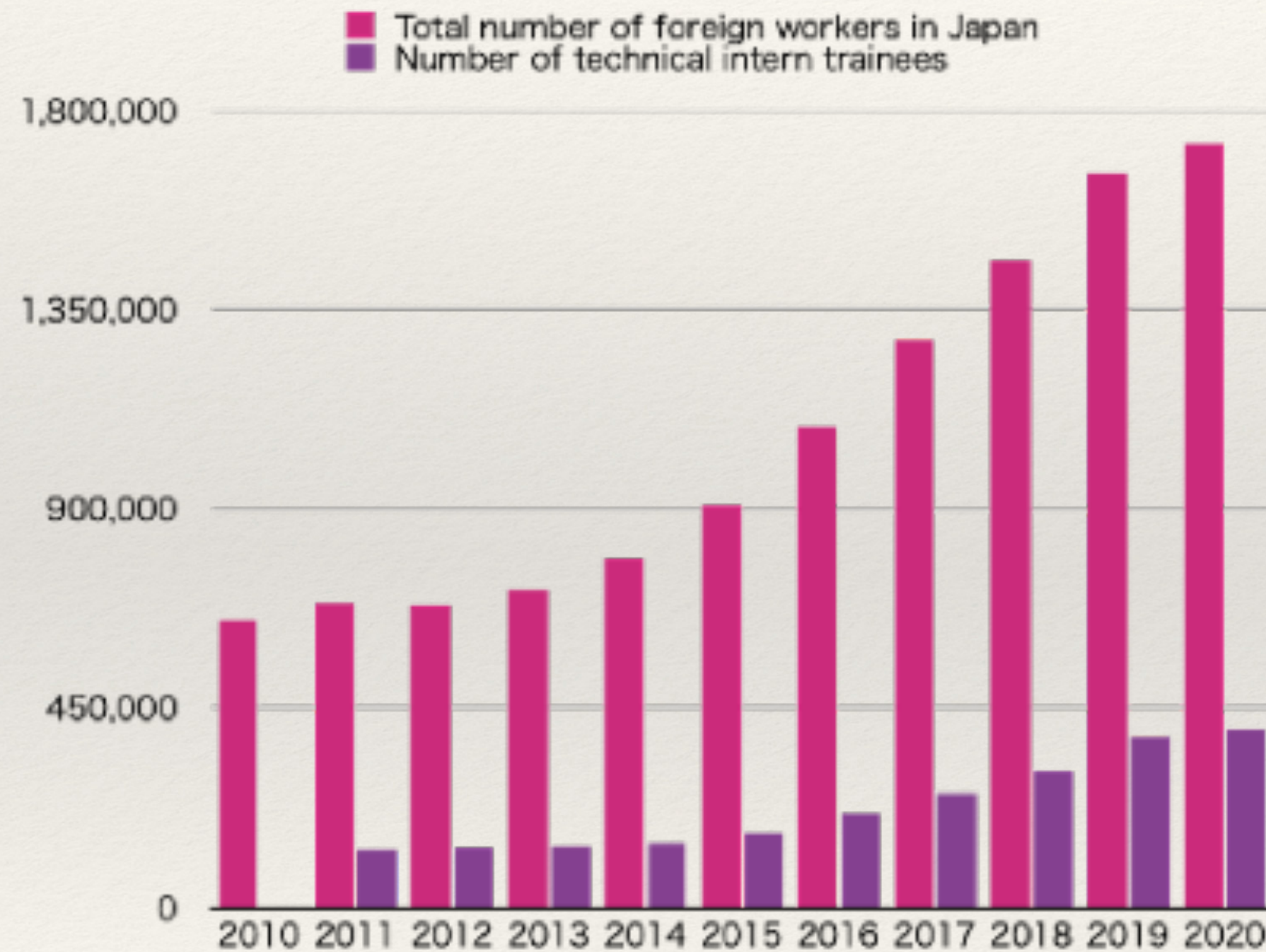
❖ **Territorial conflicts and wage disparities are driving increases in refugees and labor migrants globally**

❖ **Immigration continues to be politically sensitive**

❖ **Anti-immigrant sentiment is reported in many regions**

Turning to Japan…

Rapid growth in foreign worker population

Total number of foreign workers in Japan
Number of technical intern trainees

Trends in Specified Skill Worker numbers

(Source: created by the author using data from *Gaikokujin Koyo Jokyo no Todokede Jokyo Matome (Summary of registration of foreign nationals employment status)*, Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare, 2020; and *Tokutei Gino Seido no Unyo Jokyo (Operation Status of Specified Skill Worker System)*, Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2021.

Changes in immigration policy

❖ 2019: Revised Immigration Act establishes **Specified Skill Worker** status

❖ Nov 2021: Government considers extending **permanent residency rights** to all 14 job types for Specified Skill Worker visa holders (Kyodo News, 2021)

❖ Nov 2022: Government sets up panel to **review Technical Intern Training Program (TITP)** (The Japan Times, 2022)

Limited insight on host society attitudes

❖ **Macro-level data:** opposition to increased immigration in Japan around 60% (Gentry & Branton 2019; Green & Kadoya 2013; Mazumi 2015, 2016; NHK 2019; Nukaga, 2006)

❖ Recent quantitative studies offer valuable data on **trends in Japanese public sentiment** (Kage, Rosenbluth & Tanaka, 2021; Korekawa, 2019; Nagayoshi, 2021; Park, Berry & Joshanloo, 2022)

❖ Host society sentiment toward foreign workers is largely unexamined at the micro-level in Japan ==> **lack of in-depth, qualitative, individual-level studies on intercultural contact and Japanese public attitudes**
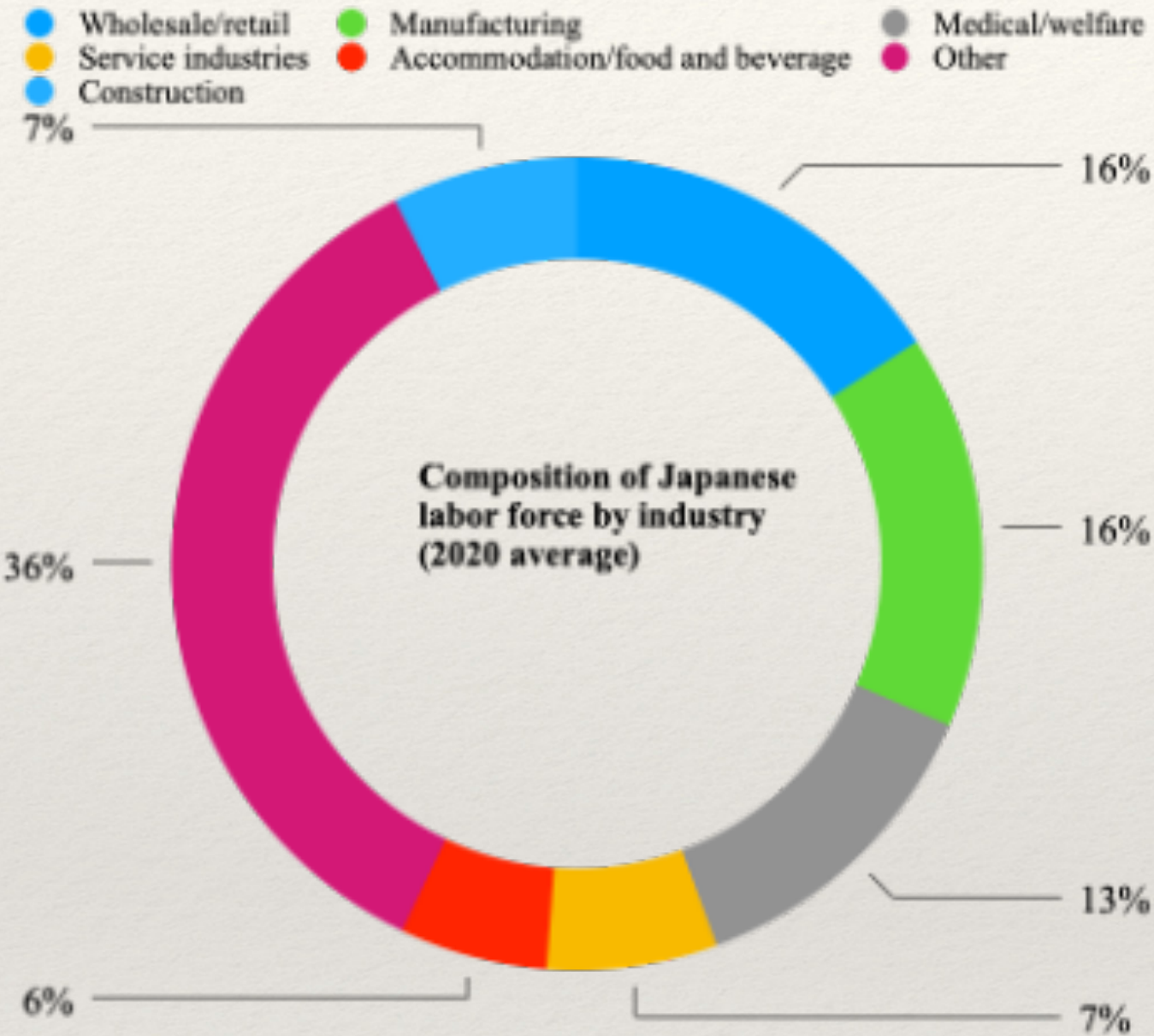
Research gap

❖ Lack of data on <u>intercultural relations</u> in the Japanese context

❖ Lack of micro-level studies on <u>host society sentiment</u> toward technical intern trainees

❖ Little knowledge of how <u>social integration</u> of migrants is understood by receiving communities

Unskilled workplaces: a rich source of contact points

Composition of Japanese labor force by industry (2020 average)

- Wholesale/retail — 16%
- Manufacturing — 16%
- Medical/welfare — 13%
- Service industries — 7%
- Accommodation/food and beverage — 6%
- Other — 36%
- Construction — 7%

Trends in number of foreign workers in Japan by industry (Unit: 1,000 people)

- Wholesale/retail
- Manufacturing
- Other
- Service industries
- Accommodation/food and beverage

45% of the Japanese workforce are employed in the industries with continuous growth in foreign workers

↓

**Manufacturing
Service
Wholesale/retail
Accommodation/food services**

Comparison of Japanese and foreign working populations by industry.

(Source: created by the author using data from *Gaikokujin Koyo Jokyo no Todokede Jokyo Matome (Summary of registration of foreign nationals employment status)*, Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare, 2020; and *Sangyo-betsu shugyoshasu* (Number of persons employed by industry, 2020 average), Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training.

Research question

How are foreign technical trainees being received

in blue-collar workplaces in Japan?

AIM: to understand Japanese workers'

attitudes toward,

relationships with, and

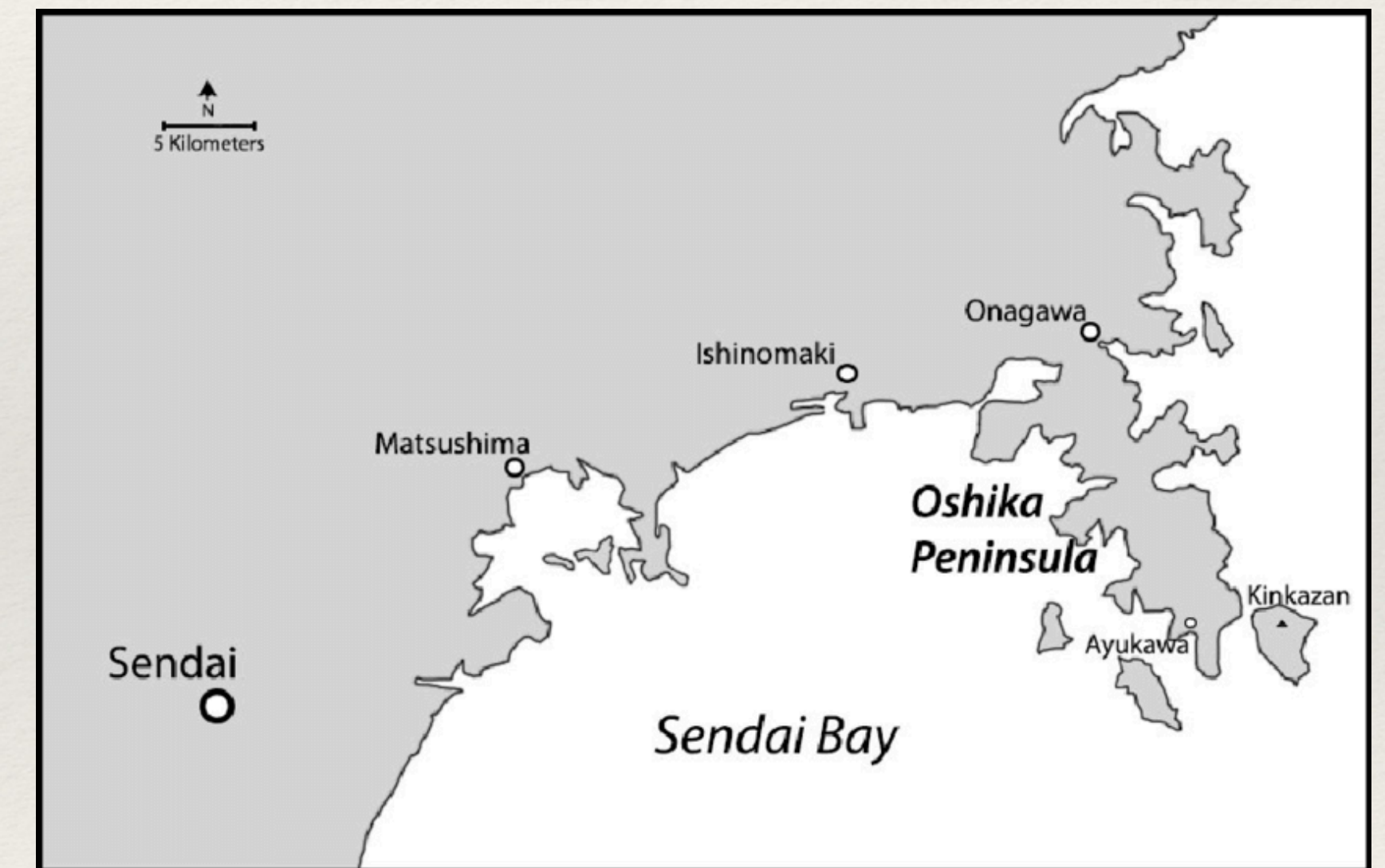*expectations* of their trainee co-workers

Data and methods

❖ **4 seafood processing companies in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture**

❖ **In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 13 Japanese workers working with technical intern trainees**

   - age range: 38 - 59 years of age

   - 10 male, 3 female (including 3 owner/managers)

❖ **Questionnaire surveys on <u>acculturation expectations</u> toward foreign residents**
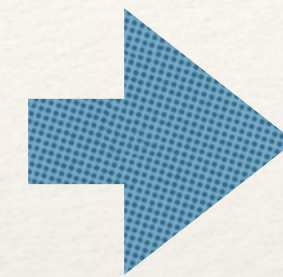
Theoretical framework
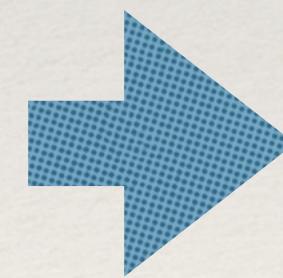
Intercultural _attitudes_ → **Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence**

Expectations of foreign residents in Japan → **Bourhis et al's (1997) Interactive Acculturation Model**

Findings

1. Attitudes toward trainees

❖ Large individual differences in **level of interest** in trainees' language, country, and culture

❖ Uniform **respect and tolerance** for trainees' religious customs

❖ **Creative measures** taken for communication challenges in the workplace

❖ **Sympathy and protective stance** against negative attitudes to trainees in the community and the media

1. Attitudes toward trainee co-workers

❖ **Large individual differences in level of interest in trainees' language, country, and culture**

"I wanted to know what kind of place they come from, so [when I was in Indonesia] I asked if there was a mosque nearby that I could visit, even though I'm not Muslim. And someone took me to a mosque. I just really wanted to experience the local culture." (male, 43)

(When asked if he had learned anything about the trainees' country)

"No. I went to Indonesia to select them. So I don't really have anything else that I want to know about Indonesia." (male, 52)

1. Attitudes toward trainee co-workers

❖ **Respect for religious customs**

"I don't really know anything about Islam, or religion. But I can tell that it's important to (the trainees), so I would never tell them that they can't do it." (male, 43)

"The biggest thing is religion […] They have to say prayers, and they fast […] I didn't know about any of that, so working together with them, that was surprising […] Japanese people aren't very religious, so it made me realize that it's different in different countries" (male, 41)

1. Attitudes toward trainee co-workers

❖ **Creative measures to handle communication challenges**

"When they first come, we communicate using gestures. We just show them how to do the work." (male, 45)

"I think the foreigners are watching the expression on the Japanese people's faces. Because they can't understand what we're saying […] So I try to always have a smile on my face" (male, 38)

"They couldn't understand at first, so I would do things like write it in *katakana,* or use gestures, or actually show them what I was trying to say. I'd bring it to them and say "This is dirty" […] Now they know the Japanese word for 'dirty' very well [laughing] (female, 50)

1. Attitudes toward trainee co-workers

❖ **Sympathy and protective stance toward trainees**

(On negative media reports) "I think it's really unfortunate that those news stories give people the impression that the trainees are all bad. Because actually they're not. It's because of the way that the Japanese employers are treating them that the Vietnamese, the foreign trainees had no choice but to do things like that." (female, 50)

"There's really only a small number of trainees who actually do anything wrong. Other than that, I feel like there are a lot of cases where the Japanese side are misunderstanding the situation" (male, 43)

"I think it's natural to develop affection for the trainees. So I just cannot understand how those people [in media reports] could treat the trainees like that. I just don't get it." (male, 52)

1. Attitudes: challenges

❖ **Valuing other cultures**

==> <u>individual differences</u> are significant

❖ **Withholding judgment**

==> judgment of trainees becomes <u>harsher outside of work</u>

❖ **Tolerating ambiguity**

==> comfortable with trainees but not with other Western foreign residents

==> accepting of trainees at work but <u>less tolerant outside of work</u>

2. Relationships with trainees

❖ Trainees **highly valued as labor**

==> positive and respectful workplace relationships observed

❖ **Limited social interaction** outside of the workplace

==> different lifestyles

==> age gap

==> pandemic

2. Relationships with trainees

❖ **Positive and respectful workplace relationships**

"If you teach them, they'll do any job. They're better workers than the Japanese. Seriously. The smart ones are really smart" (male, 45)

"Japanese employees have to take days off for various reasons. They might have to look after elderly parents or attend some family event […] But the trainees are basically here to work. So personally, that's been really helpful" (female, 59)

"Japan doesn't have enough workers, and it's convenient in that way because the trainees pay tax, so they help the economy" (male, 45)

2. Relationships with trainees

❖ **Some feeling of potential threat?**

"I tell young people that if they keep working like they have been then they'll lose their jobs. I'm not sure if it gets through to them though […] If you have one Japanese worker and one Vietnamese worker who are both in their first year, I think probably [the Vietnamese] are young and they work hard. In the case of Japanese workers, once working hours are over they just go home […] So when you compare them, I think the company owner would think that the Vietnamese are better. Because they're cheaper too" (male, 45)

2. Relationships with trainees

❖ **Limited social interaction outside of the workplace**

"I don't really see the trainees outside of work […] Sometimes I take them shopping in my car, but not very often. Or I might ask them to go fishing on our day off […] because I feel sorry for them […] I'm sure they thought they'd make lots of Japanese friends. But Japanese people aren't really like that, are they? They kind of keep to themselves" (male, 45)

"Say I want to go shopping, and say I invite one of the trainees because she's easy to talk to, if I ask just one of them to go with me, in the end all the other trainees might end up bullying that one trainee that I invited. So, sometimes I really want to ask one of them to come shopping with me, but I try not to do that" (female, 59)

2. Relationships with trainees

❖ **Trainees want more social interaction with Japanese people**

"It's important for trainees to talk a lot with Japanese people outside of work, so that we can improve our Japanese" (Vietnamese trainee)
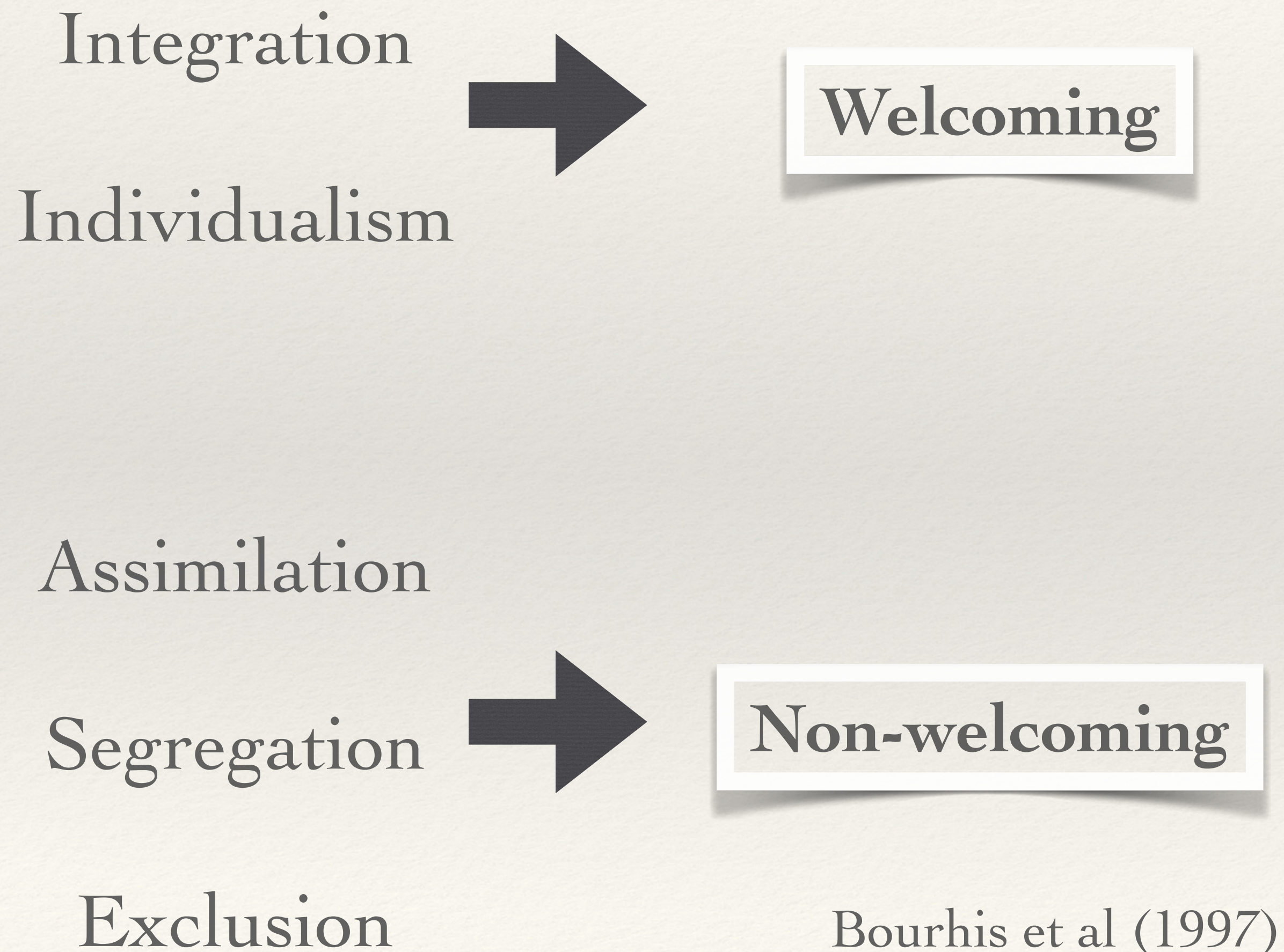
"Our work is at sea, and we rarely get to go to other places. We're a little far away from everywhere. When we're at work we speak in Japanese, but when we come home from work we speak in Indonesian, and only see Indonesians" (Indonesian trainee)

"If it was the city, there are lots of people, so there would be more chances to communicate with Japanese people" (Vietnamese trainee)

3. Expectations of foreign residents

Interactive Acculturation Model

Integration

Individualism

Assimilation

Segregation

Exclusion

Welcoming

Non-welcoming

Bourhis et al (1997)

Do Japanese workers have welcoming or non-welcoming attitudes to foreign residents?

Drawing on prior research investigating impact of intercultural contact on acculturation expectations (Brown & Zagefka, 2011; Gonzalez & Brown, 2017)

3. Expectations of foreign residents

Q1: Language use (Japanese vs home language)

- Integration 7人
- Assimilation 3人
- Segregation 0人
- Individualism 2人
- Exclusion 2人

Q2: Public vs private use of ~~home language~~

- Integration 3人
- Assimilation 4
- Segregation 0人
- Individualism 7人
- Exclusion 0人

Q3: ~~religion/culture (Japan~~

- Exclusion 0人

> *Majority (64-92%) have welcoming attitudes for all questions*

Q4: Public vs private practice of religion/culture

- Integration 2人
- Assimilation 5人
- Segregation 0人
- Individualism 7人
- Exclusion 0人

- Individualism
- Exclusion 人

> *Non-welcoming attitudes highest for <u>language use</u> and <u>public practice of religion/culture</u> (36%)*

3. Expectations of foreign residents

❖ **Use of language ==> strong concern about Japanese language ability, some discomfort with use of home languages**

"(I think they shouldn't use their home language) because I don't understand them. I can't speak Indonesian. And I want them to speak in Japanese." (male, 59)

"I think it's impossible (for the trainees to become fluent in Japanese). It might be possible if they lived in the same dorm as the Japanese workers […] but they live together in the Indonesian dorm, and speak in Indonesian. And we don't understand Indonesian." (male, 52)

❖ **Practice of religious and cultural customs ==> inconsistent opinions, hard to imagine?**

(In response to a hypothetical question about a mosque being built in the neighborhood)

"Sure, I don't see why not, as long as it's not hurting anyone" (male, 45)

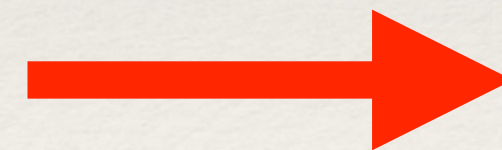"I think it's fine. I don't think we'd discriminate against that" (male, 38)

3. Expectations of foreign residents

❖ Expectations of trainees as **labor** ==> expectations being met

❖ Expectations of trainees as **residents** ==> dissatisfaction with trainee behavior

Assimilation seen as desirable?

Possible that trainees are being 'excused' because they are temporary

Limitations and further questions

❖ **Bias toward companies experiencing positive relations with trainees**

➡️ Access to wide range of companies employing trainees is an issue

❖ **Unclear definition of <u>technical intern trainees</u> - are they 'migrants'?**

➡️ Ongoing research will investigate how the trainees are conceptualized

❖ **Small sample size, rural area**

➡️ Need similar surveys in urban settings and larger companies

Key themes & implications

- **Trainees: warmly welcomed as guest workers - but for how long?** ➜ **How will attitudes change as more trainees become permanent residents?**

- **Belonging in Japan: assimilation as a valid choice?** ➜ **Community assumptions vs. migrant needs**

- **Social ties: an ongoing challenge for foreign workers** ➜ **Key element of an 'attractive' migrant destination**

Greater understanding of what social integration means in the Japanese context is urgent

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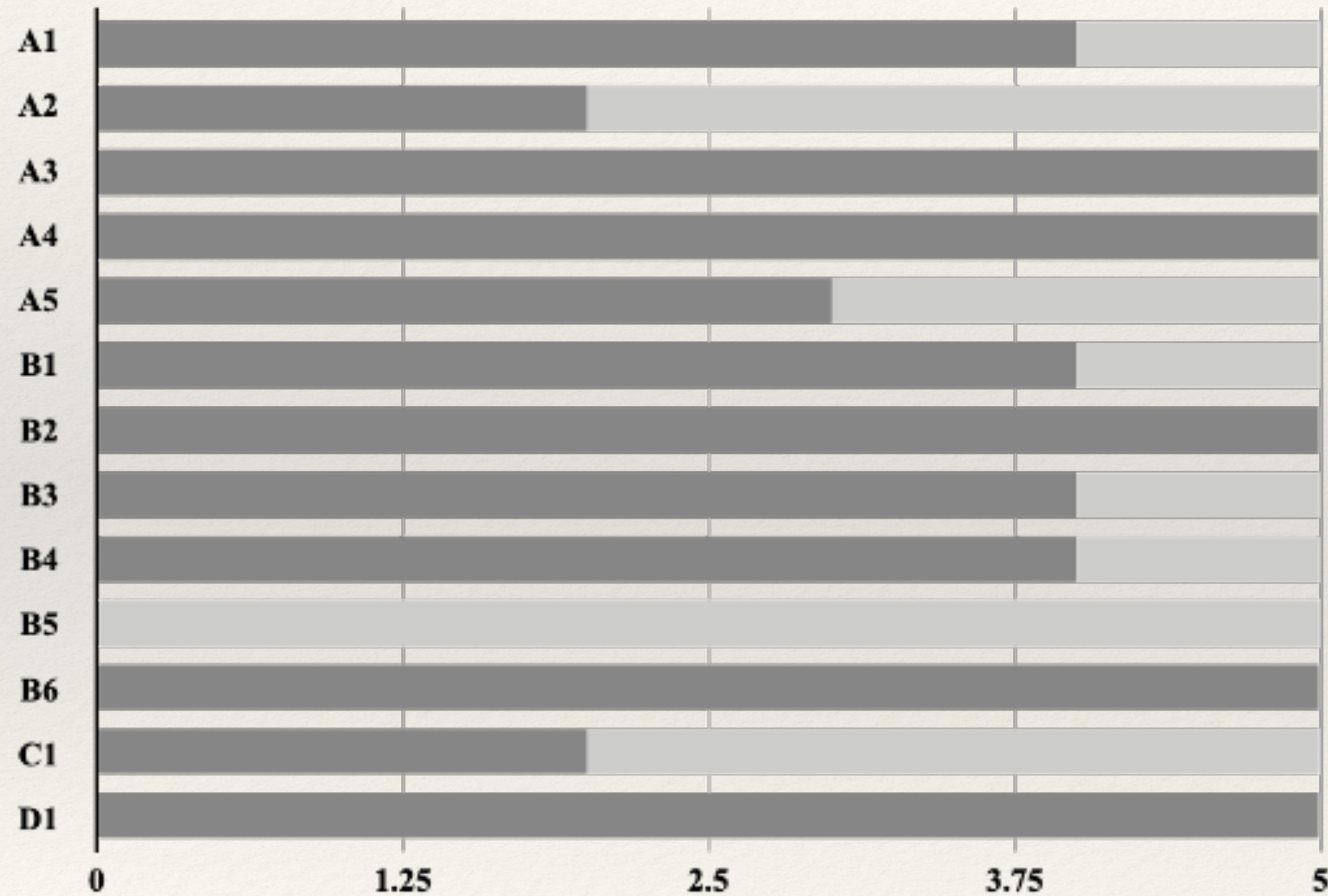
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Appendix

3. Expectations of foreign residents

Legend:
- Welcoming (Integration/Individualism)
- Non-welcoming (Assimilation/Segregation/Exclusionism)

Contradictions between survey and interview data:

A4: all welcoming responses

B5: all non-welcoming responses

Research participants

Japanese research participants

Company	Participant	Gender	Age	Years of employment	Position
A	A1	M	52	38	Owner/manager
A	A2	F	56	10	Dining hall and dormitory management
A	A3	M	41	13	Fishing and seafood processing work
A	A4	M	50	15	Fishing and seafood processing work
A	A5	M	59	16	Fishing and seafood processing work
B	B1	M	49	30	Owner/manager
B	B2	M	45	26	Owner/manager
B	B3	F	50	4	Office administration
B	B4	M	45	3	Fishing and seafood processing work
B	B5	M	38	5	Fishing and seafood processing work
B	B6	M	45	6	Fishing and seafood processing work
C	C1	F	50s	2	Seafood processing work
D	D1	M	43	10	Fishing and seafood processing work Trainee instruction and

Technical trainee research participants

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D
No. of trainees interviewed	4	6	8	2
Nationality of trainees	Indonesian	Vietnamese	Chinese (5), Myanmar (3)	Indonesian
Interview location	Company cafeteria	Company office	Community center	Company office
Interview style	Group interview	Individual interviews	Group interviews	Group interview
Language used	Indonesian	Vietnamese	Japanese	Indonesian
Interpreter present	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Management present	No	Yes	No	No