

Revitalising and rejuvenating the countryside through foreign workers: a case study of the Technical Intern Trainees working in oyster farming in Hinase (Okayama Prefecture)

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「お一人様 1 点限り」

One package (of eggs) per customer.

A simple message.

However, the sign displaying this information at the local supermarket was all but simple. In addition to Japanese and English, it was written in Chinese and Vietnamese. A sign in a supermarket, in four languages. Would this have been in Tōkyō or Kyōto, I would have probably not even noticed it. However, the supermarket where I spotted this sign was in rural Okayama prefecture, in a town with a population of under 6,500 people: Hinase (since 2005 part of Bizen City). Famous for its oysters and tangerines, the town attracts some tourists who come to eat the local specialty, oyster okonomiyaki, or to self-pick the tangerines at the farms (*mikan gari*). While fresh, local oysters and fruits from the trees sound delicious, I could not believe that it would attract many Western and Asian tourists. And why would they buy eggs?

The secret behind the multilingual sign at the supermarket was not tourists. It was the foreign workers – most of them being technical intern trainees (*ginōjishūsei*) – who were working at around 40 oyster farms in Hinase. Around 130 foreign technical interns from Vietnam and China arrive in Hinase every year to support the local oyster aquaculture.¹⁾ As most of them stay for three years, the local oyster businesses alone employ up to 390 technical trainees. This is a considerable number considering that Hinase itself only

has around 6,394 residents. During the busy harvesting season that begins in November, peaks around the New Year Holiday and ends by May, Asian foreign workers ensure that in Hinase, all the oysters that have been grown can be harvested, shelled, and sold to people all over Japan.

This paper analyses the contribution the technical intern trainees have on rural development in Hinase Town and Bizen City, to which Hinase belongs. It argues that the Vietnamese and Chinese foreign labourers contribute to society and the economy in three ways: First, they play a vital part in keeping the local oyster farming companies in business. As most oyster businesses are unable to recruit Japanese workers for their 3D (dirty, demanding, and dangerous) job, many of them would have had to close or considerably scale down without foreign help. This would not only leave numerous existing Japanese oyster workers unemployed, but would also mean that the local business and tourist attractions that depend on the supply of fresh oysters, such as the local fish market, the oyster BBQ place or the many oyster okonomiyaki restaurants, would suffer economically. Secondly, they contribute to the local economy through a rise in aggregate demand (such as for daily necessities), as well as by renting some of the many vacant houses, thereby alleviating the *akiya mondai* (abandoned house problem) at least temporarily. Third, they

1) Interview with Tatsumi Amakura, Managing Director of the Hinase Fishery Union (日生水産加工事業協同組合), 02/12/2021

increase multiculturalism and social interactions with foreigners in the countryside. Due to the rising number of technical intern trainees arriving in Bizen, the city opened the *Bizenshi kokusaikōryū sentā* (Bizen City International Exchange Centre) directly in Hinase in 2021. There, the foreign trainees do not only receive support for their daily life, but are also encouraged to integrate, learn Japanese and interact with the locals.

While the technical trainees in Hinase only stay for a maximum of three years, this paper concludes that foreign labourers that reside and work in rural areas can contribute to the local economic development and alleviate the impact of the declining, greying population in the rural parts of Japan.

Population decline and the scramble for workers in the oyster farming businesses

Most of rural Japan faces the burden of having a declining birthrate, a greying population, and a severe labour shortage in several industries. Hinase is by far no exception. Its population declined by around 25% since it merged with Bizen City in 2005, from 8,662 citizens in September 2004 to just 6,394 in November 2021.²⁾ As a result of this fast population decline, but also because many women (mostly the wives of the fishermen or local housewives) are not willing to work in the oyster businesses with its unpleasant working conditions anymore, the number of Japanese employees in Hinase's oyster farms has also declined steadily.³⁾

The development in Hinase reflects the situation most fishing as well as oyster and scallop farming businesses all over Japan have been facing. According

to the *Fishery Structural Dynamics Survey Results 2020 (Reiwa Ni-nen Gyogyō kōzō dōtai chōsa kekka)* published in July 2021, Japan's fisheries only employed 135,660 people in 2020.⁴⁾ This equals a 6.2% year-on-year decline and is a whopping 80% lower than 60 years ago (1961), when the number of employees reached nearly 700,000 (699,200 people).⁵⁾ Especially the last years have seen a fast decline of employment in the fisheries, despite the rising number of foreigners working as technical intern trainees in the oyster and scallop farming businesses.

Several oyster farming businesses would have to cease operation if they could not attract foreign workers. As the managing director of the Hinase Fishery Cooperative, Mr. Tatsumi Amakura put it, "the industry is supported by the technical interns. Without them, we would have to downsize our business and reduce our production."⁶⁾ The decline of the Japanese labour force in oyster farming stems from the harsh nature of the work. Amakura explains it with the following words: "It's cold, it's exhausting, it's hard, it's dirty, it's dangerous, and even though it's a good job, there are no Japanese people left to this so-called 3D job."⁷⁾ As aquaculture and fishing usually take place in rural areas, where Japan's general labour shortage is aggravated by internal migration to the cities, it is hardly surprising that the oyster farms in Hinase lack workers.

Due to Japan's labour shortage, part-time jobs can be found all over the county, in all kinds of businesses, which makes oyster farming increasingly unappealing to Japanese nationals. It is not only one of the 3D (or

2) Bizen City (2021), "Gyōsei-ku betsu jinkō setai-sū" [Administrative districts: Population by population / number of households], <https://www.city.bizen.okayama.jp/soshiki/10/4519.html>

3) Asahi Shinbun Digital (2019), "Ginō jishshū-sei/ rakunō gyogyō 'gaikokujindanomi'" [Technical Intern: dairy farming • fishery: relying on foreigners], 25/04/2019, <http://www.asahi.com/area/okayama/articles/MTW20190425340520001.html>

4) Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) (2021a), *Reiwa Ni-nen Gyogyō kōzō dōtai chōsa kekka* [Fishery Structural Dynamics Survey Results 2020], https://www.maff.go.jp/j/tokei/kouhyou/gyogyou_doukou/

5) Kamiyama, Hideko (2019), "Gaikokujin ginō jishshū seido e no toi — Mie ken kaki yōshoku-gyō kara" [Questions about the foreign technical intern training system: Oyster farming in Mie prefecture], http://www.iminseisaku.org/top/conference/conf2020/201212_f1_kamiyama.pdf

6) Asahi Shinbun Digital (2019), 「実習生によって産業が支えられている。実習生がいなければ事業を縮小し、生産量を減らすしかない」

7) Ibid., 「この仕事は寒いし、きついし、つらいし、汚れるし、危ないこともあるし、好待遇であっても、いわゆる3Kであるこの仕事に就く日本人がもういない」

3K, in Japanese) jobs, with people having to stand long hours to open the oysters or pull oysters into the boats in the early morning, but it also entails working in a very cold environment. As oysters can only be harvested from after October, most of the work of pulling the shells onto the boats from 4:30 in the morning takes place in the harsh winter months. But not only the work at sea is cold and windy; once the oysters brought back on land, they need to be opened and deshelled. Due to their delicate nature, this work has to be done without heating, as this would reduce the shelf life of the oysters. In addition, the work is physically tiring. Workers need to carry large boxes with oysters, often weighting over 10 kilos each. What is more, they often stand most of the day to open the oysters. With most work done on the sea and close to the harbour, working in oyster farming could also entail an unpleasant olfactory factor. Making things worse the busiest period is usually around New Year – a time when many workers would like to rest. All these factors contribute to the increasing difficulty to find both full and part-time workers that could support the oyster businesses during the busy harvesting season from November to spring.

However, it is not only the part-time workers that are lacking. Regular employment in oyster farming is not one of the top choices for workers due to the aforementioned factors, but also because the income between the busy winter months and the rather slow summertime, when no oysters can be harvested, varies starkly. This instability and the imbalance of work also contribute to the fact that oyster farming is often not a sought-after job in Japan. As a result, although no special skills are required to harvest and process the oysters, it is getting increasingly hard for oyster farmers to attract workers, as Japan's unemployment

rate has been on historic lows, with 2.2% in 2020, and, notwithstanding Covid-19, with 2.7% in October 2021.⁸⁾

That young people often refrain from working in the fishery industries is highlighted by the following figures: the number of workers aged 15-39 in all of Japan's fishing companies (incl. oyster farming) is less than half of that of the workers aged over 65 (25,380 vs. 51,750) (2020 data).⁹⁾ The employment by age figures published by the Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery (MAFF) reveals that Japan's fisheries have a considerable problem finding successors and attracting younger workers into the business. As nearly half of all workers are over 60 (14,900 aged 60-64 and 51,750 over 65), with over two thirds of the labour force being over 50, it is difficult to keep operation at the current level.¹⁰⁾ Between 2019 and 2020 alone, 3,710 fishing companies – a whopping 5.1% – have ceased business activities.¹¹⁾

Foreign workers in oyster farming

Due to the high seasonal demand for workers in oyster and scallop farming during the winter months (from November to May) and the difficulty to attract Japanese workers, companies engaged in oyster and scallop farming, as the only two aquaculture businesses, have qualified to receive worker under the Technical Intern Trainee Programme (TITP) that was established in 1993 to supply Japanese companies with (relatively cheap) foreign labourers. However, even before oyster aquaculture could receive technical interns in 2010, foreigners have been working in oyster processing companies since the 1990s, as it became increasingly hard for Japanese oyster farms to recruit female part-time workers. In order to replace the retiring elderly and the housewife part-time jobbers, oyster farms started

8) Statistics Bureau of Japan (2021), *Rōdōryokuchōsa (kihon shūkei) 2021nen 10gatsu kekka [Labor Force Survey (Basic tabulation) October 2021 results]*, <https://www.stat.go.jp/data/roudou/sokuhou/tsuki/index.html>

9) MAFF (2021b), *Reiwa Ni-nen Gyogyō kōzō dōtai chōsa kekka, Reiwa Ninen 11gatsu tsuitachi genzai [Fishery Structural Dynamics Survey Results 2020 – as of 1/11/2021]*, https://www.maff.go.jp/j/tokei/kouhyou/gyogyou_doukou/attach/pdf/index-2.pdf

10) Ibid.

11) Ibid.

to hire Brazilians and Filipinos with Japanese roots in the 1990s. However, these foreign workers did often not stay for long in the oyster farming business and were soon replaced by *kenkyūsei* (‘training students’ – the name for the guest worker model preceding the TITP) from China.¹²⁾ Due to rising wages in China, which made Japanese increasingly unattractive to many Chinese, the majority of foreign employees on oyster farms and in oyster-processing food businesses come from Vietnam (in addition to China and the Philippines). The same is true for Hinase, where trainees from China started to work in the local oyster-processing food businesses already in 1996.¹³⁾ By now, nearly two thirds (approx. 80) of the 130 trainees that arrive every year come from Vietnam.¹⁴⁾

Since the TITP system was introduced in 1993, it has helped Japanese companies to secure (in most cases relatively cheap) workers. The idea behind the system, however, was that not only Japanese companies should benefit. The (low-skilled) foreign workers were promised training in Japan, learning new technical skills that they could apply upon return to their home country. They receive training for a whole month in the beginning of their stay, and a visa valid for up to five years (up from initially three years).

While a real technology transfer between Japan and the east and southeast Asian countries where most interns are from is not guaranteed – in many cases, the interns are only engaged in repetitive manual labour with little prospect of acquiring state-of-the-art technical skills –, the workers receive a salary that is

often substantially higher than what they would make in their home country. Despite the debate surrounding the generally low wages for technical interns – on average, they received 136,224 yen per month in 2016¹⁵⁾ – numerous foreign trainees in oyster farming report a considerable income. In interviews conducted by Kamiyama (2019), all 62 Chinese technical interns in oyster aquaculture in Mie prefecture mention that they are satisfied with their job, with 98.5% of them expressing satisfaction with their salary.¹⁶⁾ While for 89.7% of them, the previous monthly salary in China was below 50,000 yen, about half (51.4%) of them now make between 200,000 and 300,000 yen, with the remaining 48.5% making between 100,000 yen and 200,000 yen per month.¹⁷⁾ Although this is below the average Japanese salary, it is a considerable sum for the often unskilled, temporary workers. That oyster farming does not have to be a low-income job is revealed by figures from the *Business Journal*: during the busy winter months, when there is plenty of overtime work, some foreign oyster farm interns earn over 400,000 yen.¹⁸⁾ Others, however, report that even if they work from 4:30 am to 8 pm, their take-home salary is just 120,000 yen, showing a great inequality among the companies, and highlighting that not all employers pay their foreign workers for their overtime work.¹⁹⁾

The number of technical interns in Japan has been growing steadily over the past decades. Especially the five years before the Covid-19 pandemic has seen

12) Akihiro Sawada (2021), Ginō jissū-sei no ‘henkei rōdōsei’ o ninka — kakoku demo kasegeru kaki to hotate no yōshoku [Approved “transformed labor system” for technical intern trainees: cultivation of oysters and scallops, making a living even in harsh conditions], *Business Journal* 07/11/2021, https://biz-journal.jp/2021/11/post_260788.html

13) Interview with Mr. Amakura

14) Ibid.

15) JITCO (Japan International Training Cooperation Organization) (2017), Gaikokujin Ginō Jissū, Kenshū Jigyō Jisshi Jōkyō Hōkoku: JITCO Hakusho [Fiscal report of the state of implementation of the technical intern training program and the training program: JITCO white paper], Tokyo: JITCO

16) Kamiyama (2019)

17) Ibid.

18) Sawada (2021), However, there have also been media reports where Vietnamese workers claim that their take-home salary was a mere 120,000 yen, even in the busy winter months where they often worked from 4:30 am to 8 pm

19) Ibid.

record growth rates of nearly +250% between 2015 and 2019 (from around 168,000 to 410,972 technical trainees).²⁰⁾ Out of the 1,724,328 foreign nationals working in Japan at the end of October 2020, 23.3% – or 402,356 people – were technical interns, so data from the Ministry of Justice/Ministry for Health, Labour and Welfare.²¹⁾ Despite severe limitations on migration into Japan that were put in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic after March 2020, the number of technical interns has remained high. Although when the programme started in the 1990s, most *kenkyūsei* (training students) were Chinese, Vietnam has now replaced China as the major sending country and accounts for 57.1% of all technical interns. The Chinese as the second largest group still provide 15.7% of all TITP participants, followed by Indonesia (8.7%) and the Philippines (7.95%). Nearly all of them (98.5%) are recruited and come to Japan through an agency and remain under the supervision of that (*dantai kanri gata*).²²⁾

For the fishery, aquaculture, and seafood processing industries, foreign workers from the TITP have become indispensable. Already in FY 2016, 6.6% of the labour force in fishing and 9.9% of the labour force in food manufacturing were employees that have come to Japan as technical interns.²³⁾ Especially the seafood processing industries – which also included deshelling oysters – are highly dependent on foreign trainees, with 42% (6,174 people) of all foreign trainees in the food industry working in seafood processing.²⁴⁾ Especially municipalities where a large number of people (500+) work in the seafood processing industry have a high

share of foreign workers.²⁵⁾ Mazumi (2019) revealed that in several municipalities the share of foreign trainees in the seafood processing industries surpassed 20% of the labour force. In other words, the more advanced and the more important the seafood processing industry is, the higher the share of foreign workers tends to be. Mazumi highlights this in the following sentence: “the larger the employment size of the seafood processing industry in the local labor market, and the higher the productivity of the industry, the higher the share of migrants in the local labor force.”²⁶⁾

Many of the technical trainees working in the seafood processing industries are found in rural areas, since the countryside not only has a high share of seafood-related businesses, but often also a severe shortage of both stable (non-seasonal) and seasonal workers. In oyster farming, technical interns have become indispensable. In 2018, 1,471 technical trainees were employed in oyster aquaculture, a number four times higher than for scallop farming. In addition, the increase of foreigners in oyster farming has been remarkable, up by nearly 1,000% between 2011 and 2018 (from a mere 150 in 2011 to nearly 1,500 in 2018).²⁷⁾ As a result, several thousand foreign interns nowadays work in oyster farming or oyster processing companies all over Japan, with Hinase receiving around 130 new interns every year – at least as long no Covid-19 related restrictions are put in place.

Foreign workers in Hinase

Okayama is by no means the number one destination for foreigners in Japan. Out of the 2,887,116 foreign

20) Ministry of Justice & Ministry for Health, Labour and Welfare (2021), *Gaikokujin ginō jissū seido ni tsuite* [About the foreign technical intern training system], <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000752687.pdf>

21) Ibid.

22) Ibid.

23) Yusuke Mazumi (2019), What shapes local demand for ‘guest worker’ migrants in Japan? The case of the seafood processing industry, *Contemporary Japan* 31:1, pp. 2-20

24) Ibid.

25) Ibid.

26) Ibid.

27) Takafumi Sasaki (2020), “Suisangyō ni okeru gaikokujin rōdō-ryoku no dōnyū jittai to kōgo no tenbō” [Introduction of foreign labor force in fishery and future prospects], *Suisan Shinkō* 625, <https://lib.suisan-shinkou.or.jp/ssw625/ssw625-05.html>

residents in Japan, only 31,313 – or a mere 1.1% – live in Okayama prefecture.²⁸⁾ However, when it comes to technical interns, Okayama prefecture is an interesting case study, as 30% of all foreign residents are technical interns (a figure over 2.5 times higher than the 13% technical interns on the national level).²⁹⁾ In 2019, there were 10,564 technical interns in Okayama prefecture. Bizen City stands out for its relatively high proportion of foreigners, which, at 2.15% is the 5th highest in the prefecture, surpassing the prefectural capital Okayama (1.99%).³⁰⁾ In 2018, the Vietnamese overtook the Chinese as the largest foreign minority in Okayama prefecture, and around one third (10,368) of all foreigners residing in the prefecture in 2020 were from Vietnam.³¹⁾ Bizen City and Hinase, are particularly interesting because, with 350 Vietnamese citizens, they have the highest share of Vietnamese residents among the population in the whole of Okayama prefecture, followed by Setouchi City, which is another oyster harvesting area. While there is no exact data on the number of foreign technical interns in Bizen, this shows that hundreds of Vietnamese workers alone work in the oyster farms and oyster-processing businesses in Hinase and Setouchi.³²⁾

Foreign technical interns in oyster farming in Hinase

Most of the 1,860 companies that were engaged in oyster aquaculture in 2020 are located in Hiroshima prefecture, which produce around 57% of oysters in Japan alone. However, also Okayama prefecture, where Hinase is located, has several oyster-farming and oyster-processing companies. The thirteen islands off

the coast, which soften the (tidal) waves, make Hinase ideal for oyster farming, as the calm sea provides the oysters with abundant plankton. As a result, oyster farming – which is said to have been practiced in Japan since the Tenbun Era (1532-1555) – has prospered in the Hiroshima and Okayama areas since the Edo period.

Hinase – formerly known as Hinase Senken Ryōshichō (日生千軒漁師町) – has a long history of fishing and oyster farming and is Okayama’s prime location for oysters. Its fresh oysters are known well beyond the borders of the prefecture, and a considerable share of the 1,600 tons of shelled oysters harvested every year is sold all around Japan. Around 400,000 people visit the local fish market ‘Gomi no ichi’ (五味の市) to try fresh oysters, with several thousand coming in February alone to attend the annual oyster festival to grill their own oysters on the open fire or try them at one of the many stalls selling them at the market.³³⁾ These figures show how important fishing and oyster farming is for the area, as they provide employment and income, and attract a considerable number of tourists to the sleepy town of Hinase.

Attracting labourers to the oyster farms is not an easy task – no matter whether they are Japanese or foreign. Among the applicants for the TITP, there is a clear tendency to choose manufacturing work over fishery and aquaculture. In several interviews, technical interns working in aquaculture reveal that they had failed their interviews for a job in manufacturing and that aquaculture was their last resort to work in Japan.³⁴⁾ Even among the foreign workers, 3D/3K jobs like oyster farming receive the least interest. Yet the 130 trainees that arrive in Hinase every year are happy with

28) Okayama Prefecture (2021), “Okayama ken ni okeru zairyū gaikokujin no jōkyō Reiwa 2nenmatsu genzai” [Status of foreign residents in Okayama Prefecture, as of the end of Reiwa 2 (2020)],

https://www.pref.okayama.jp/uploaded/life/739629_6764178_misc.pdf

29) Ibid.

30) Ibid.

31) Ibid.

32) Okayama Prefecture (2021), “4. Shichōson betsu zairyū gaikoku ninzū” [4. Number of foreign residents by municipality],

https://www.pref.okayama.jp/uploaded/life/739629_6764182_misc.pdf

33) Interview with Mr. Amano

34) Sawada (2021)

their work, so Amano. Their working hours are from 7:30 am to 3:30 pm, and all overtime work is paid. The Hinase Fisheries Cooperative oversees the companies that hire the Vietnamese and Chinese trainees, making sure all are treated according to Japanese labour standards.³⁵⁾

In contrary to many other locations, where the technical interns are often housed in dormitories, most foreign trainees in Hinase reside in some of the many abandoned houses, which are provided by their employer. Considering that nearly a quarter (22.8%, equaling 3,840 units) of all houses in Bizen City are vacant, having foreign workers reside there helps alleviate the vacant housing problem at least slightly.³⁶⁾ With a rate of vacant housing that is about 80% higher than the national average of 13.55% (2018), inviting foreign technical interns to Hinase to work on the oyster farms and to reside in the vacant houses is a double win for the local oyster companies and property owners.

Considering the language barriers between the technical interns, who often arrive without speaking (much) Japanese, and who often only receive the bare minimum of Japanese classes to be able to understand the instructions at work, real social interaction between them and the local residents is limited. In addition, there exists a considerable time difference between the mostly younger workers in their 30s, and the elderly population of Hinase. Nevertheless, the technical interns are noticed by the population and they shape the cityscape. They can be found at Hinase Port, waiting for the ferry to take them to the islands, hanging around the fish market, running errands at the supermarket, and strolling around town. Since most trainees do not own a car, they are often more visible on the streets than the local population, who drive around town or to nearby locations.

In many respects, the Asian trainees contribute to cultural diversity and make people in the sleepy town of Hinase more open towards foreigners. Also in their

companies, the technical interns contribute to a more multicultural environment, and Amakura from the Hinase Fishing Cooperative acknowledges that the interns perform well at work and interact regularly with their Japanese peers.³⁷⁾ Also representatives from the newly opened Bizen City International Exchange Centre, which was built to support the rising number of foreign trainees in Hinase, point out that Hinase only started to become international with the arrival of the technical interns.

Economic impact of the technical interns

In addition to their impacts on society, the technical interns coming since 1996 have brought some tangible economic benefits. The foreign trainees do not only purchase goods at local businesses such as the supermarket, but also pay rent to the mostly local landlords for their accommodation. The biggest economic impact, however, is their contribution to keeping the many oyster farmers in business in Hinase. Without the oyster and fishing business, there would be not much economic activity in Hinase, as there is little manufacturing in the area. Most of the existing service businesses such as the over a dozen oyster okonomiyaki restaurants, the hotels, cafes, and restaurants are targeting tourists that mostly come to savour the oysters. In other words, would there be no oyster farming anymore, many of the existing businesses in the service sector would probably cease to exist. While of course it is not the case that all oyster farming companies would stop operation without foreign workers, there is no doubt that many of them would have to considerably scale down operations. Without the help of foreign labourers, hundreds of thousands oysters would probably remain unshelled and unsold. Thus, it can be argued that the foreign trainees from Vietnam and China play a big role in supporting local oyster businesses, often protecting them from the effect of population decline.

35) Interview with Mr. Amano

36) Bizen City (2017), "Bizenshi no tōkei" [Statistics of Bizen City], <https://www.city.bizen.okayama.jp/uploaded/attachment/11110.pdf>

37) Interview with Mr. Amano

In contrast to many coastal finishing boat fishermen, who often live on an income of around two million yen per year, individual sea-farming businesses, like oyster farming, are relatively well off. According to data from the newspaper *Suisan Shinkō*, individual fishermen running a sea-farming company earn beyond 11 million yen per year.³⁸⁾ For oyster farming, profits tend to be even higher, revealing that the economic loss of an oyster business going bankrupt would be considerable.³⁹⁾ Thus, technical interns also contribute to keeping some of the often most prosperous fisheries in rural areas profitable or even in businesses. As Amakura (2021) pointed out, this is also the case for Hinase, where the foreign trainees, although they are often unskilled and not trained in oyster farming, have their share in keeping Hinase's oyster farms profitable so that the whole network of oyster production, wholesale, fish market, restaurants and hotels remains active and in business.

Conclusion

This paper analysed the impact foreign technical internship trainees from Vietnam and China have on Hinase town in terms of the economy and society. It was highlighted that the about 130 technical intern trainees, who arrive in Hinase in a regular year, when travel restrictions regarding newly entering Japan are not in place, contribute to the local economy, but also to society in several ways.

Similar to several other fishing or agricultural businesses, oyster farming depends on foreign workers due to the decline in domestic labour supply. While until the 1990s, housewives, family members of the fishers and farmers, or even high school students worked part-time on farms and in fishing to support the business owners during the busiest time of the year (mostly winter in oyster fishing, and summer in agriculture), it has been increasingly hard to secure workers that could help with the harvest or processing, such as opening and deshellings the oysters. Due to the

low unemployment rate and the abundance of (part-time) jobs, the number of people willing to work in the 3D professions, such as oyster farming, where one has to stand for hours deshellings oysters in the cold, often olfactory unpleasant environment in the countryside, is declining rapidly. As a result, oyster businesses such as the roughly forty companies in Hinase, have been recruiting foreign labourers through the Technical Internship Trainee Program. Since 1993, seafood processing companies (including those in the oyster business) and since 2010, aquaculture of oyster and scallop farming, have been allowed to receive such foreign workers, and many oyster farms, predominantly in Hiroshima and Okayama prefecture, have benefitted from the workforce coming from Vietnam and China. Without the thousands of foreign technical interns that work in aquaculture and seafood processing, it would not have been possible for many companies to keep the same level of business activities and output. In other words, thanks to foreign interns, aquaculture businesses such as oyster farming in Hinase, could supply a stable volume of oysters. In some cases, foreign workers even helped oyster farms that were suffering from severe labour shortage stay in business. Foreign workers, however, did not only support business activities and, often as relatively cheap labourers, the profitability, but also contributed to rural economic development by renting and utilising vacant houses. In Hinase and Bizen City, where nearly one quarter of all properties are vacant, the new foreign tenants provide income to the property owners. While the interns' spending on consumer goods tend to be low as most of the trainees try to save as much of their salary to send it back to their families in their home country, they still have a small impact on the rise of consumption in local areas.

It is concluded that the thousands of foreign technical interns that have worked on Hinase's oyster farms and oyster processing companies since 1996 have contributed to rural revitalisation and economic development.

38) Sasaki (2020)

39) Ibid.