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TIME



Japan's Open Door

Japan is letting in ever greater numbers of immigrants from China—in the process changing forever the character of both nations

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Chasing the Japanese Dream

Growing numbers of Chinese are migrating to Japan to attend university, work as professionals, or launch businesses—in the process transforming the face of their adopted land

BY HANNAH BEECH/TOKYO

WU TONGTONG HAD AN URGENT NEED TO LEARN Japanese. Growing up in the grimy northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang, his biggest passion was video games. But amping up the onscreen action required Wu to master Japanese commands. Japan's brutal wartime occupation of Shenyang and other parts of China, which continues to stoke Chinese anger today, mattered little in the face of achieving total domination in his favorite video game. Both the computer and linguistic skills have since paid off. Today, Wu, 27, works in Tokyo as a software consultant, part of an influx of highly skilled Chinese labor that is transforming Japan. "Success can come in many places," he says, quietly noting that his overseas salary far outstrips those of his friends back home. "I can live a modern Chinese dream in Japan."

For centuries, East Asia's two great powers took turns trading regional supremacy, each thriving only when the other was at its weakest. More recently, China and Japan have been locked in a political deep freeze, seemingly unable to overcome the legacy of a devastating war more than six decades ago. Yet today, the two countries are both economic juggernauts—and their futures are inextricably linked. Upwards of 20,000 Japanese now live in Shanghai alone. The flood the other way is even more impressive: at half a million strong, Chinese legal immigrants now make up the largest group of recently arrived foreigners in Japan—and, no, they're not just stirring woks or taking the graveyard shift at convenience stores. More than 80,000 Chinese students are studying at Japanese universities, two-thirds of Japan's total foreign college-student population. Upon graduation, they are

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entering the Japanese workforce, crowding lucrative fields such as IT and biotech. Sheer numbers work in China's favor; each year Japan graduates 100,000 science majors, while China pumps out 2.5 million.

Changing Complexion

THIS INFLUX OF CHINESE WHITE-COLLAR workers is forcing Japan to rethink its very national identity. Traditionally, the island nation has been inward-looking and xenophobic. Today, however, grappling with a labor shortage caused by decades of declining birth rates, Japan knows it must import workers if it is to remain the world's second-largest economy. And so the deluge of highly educated Chinese is challenging Japan to re-evaluate its attitude toward foreigners—particularly those who hail from what was once dismissed as a communist backwater but today is crucial to Japan's economic prospects. In 2004, trade between the two countries reached \$205 billion, with China for the first time overtaking the U.S. as

'People like us are building a bridge ... so that political disagreements won't be the only thing between Japan and China.'

—ZHANG LILING, HEAD OF A TELEVISION COMPANY IN TOKYO

Japan's largest trading partner. With their bilingual skills and transnational degrees, Japan's new class of Chinese immigrants is poised to profit from this new East Asian reality. "People like us are building a bridge," says Zhang Liling, a native of the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou who has lived in Japan for 18 years and runs a television company that delivers Chinese programming to her adopted homeland. "We can develop good personal relationships so that political disagreements won't be the only thing that define the situation between Japan and China."

The first visitors from the People's Republic went to Japan in the early 1980s—but they weren't supposed to stay. China, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, had begun renewing contact with the outside world. Thousands of China's brightest scholars were dispatched to the U.S., Germany and Japan to vacuum up the latest scientific knowledge and take new ideas back home to advance the socialist cause. But the world outside proved too alluring for many students. Chen Jianjun, who arrived in the Japanese city of Kobe on a Chinese govern-

ment scholarship in 1982, recalls how alien Japan's orderly society felt to a boy whose formative years were shaped by the anarchy of the Cultural Revolution. "Coming to Japan was like going to the moon," he says. "At Kobe University, the professors asked my opinions about Marx and Lenin. I had no idea that I was allowed to have an opinion on them."

The 1989 Tiananmen crackdown hardened many students' resolve to stay abroad. When the pro-democracy protests escalated in Beijing, Chen joined other expatriate Chinese students in their own demonstrations. After earning his Ph.D. in genetics, he stayed in Japan, developing biotech products for Japanese companies. But three years ago, Chen decided that he, too, should profit from China's economic boom. The possible taint of his Tiananmen activism had worn off; plenty of other former protesters were now striking it rich back home. Today, Chen helms a consulting company that helps Japanese pharmaceutical firms conduct clinical trials in China. "Without us, Japanese companies would be helpless," he says. "They don't know how business is done in China."

Chen's adopted city of Kobe has tied its future to China. Since the mid-19th century, Kobe, like the Japanese cities of Yokohama and Nagasaki, has been home to a small Chinatown, a legacy of the Chinese sailors and merchants who flocked to its once thriving port. By the early 1900s, tens of thousands of Chinese were living in Japan, often running restaurants or traditional Chinese medicine shops. But life wasn't easy. When a killer earthquake leveled Tokyo in 1923, non-Japanese residents were unfairly blamed for poisoning the water supply. Japanese mobs killed thousands of ethnic Chinese and Koreans. The aftermath of the 1995 earthquake in Kobe couldn't have been more different. Eager to revitalize a city that was struggling economically even before the massive tremor, the city government began courting Chinese investment. Today, on Kobe's refurbished Port Island, delegations of Chinese businessmen tour a vast technology park where city officials are offering tax breaks in the hopes of creating a new high-tech Chinatown. Chen's company headquarters are already here, as are dozens of other Chinese firms specializing in everything from scrap metal to biotech.

Many of these Chinese-run companies thrive by acting as cultural interpreters. With slowing sales at home, plenty of Japanese firms are looking to China's growing middle class to sustain profits. Who better than expatriate Chinese engineers to advise researchers, for instance, that Chinese like their cell phones painted gold or



Chen Jianjun, CONSULTANT

Duration of stay: 26 years

Chen got a Ph.D. in genetics and now helps Japanese pharmaceutical firms conduct clinical trials in China