Hi. This is Stephen. Today I'm releasing a bonus episode. In this episode I'm talking to Tom Wilkinson, the founder and host of the excellent podcast Thinking in English. Our conversation is mostly focussed on migration. Tom lives in Japan, and in the first half of the episode we talk about his experience of moving there and living there. In the second half we talk about migration more generally, particularly concerning Japan. This episode was actually recorded three weeks ago, but, kind of ironically, releasing it was delayed by my own migration. I've just moved to Spain, as you will hear me say in the episode.

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OK, here is Tom...

Stephen: I'm joined by Tom Wilkinson. Tom, thank you for joining me.

Tom: Thank you for having me on, Stephen.

Stephen: I wanted to talk a little bit today about some of your experiences as somebody who has migrated to Japan, and about your experience in Japan, and some other things.

But before we start talking about that, maybe you could tell us a little bit about your background before you started your fantastic podcast, Thinking in English.

Tom: Yeah, sure. So I guess I can go back to 10 years ago, 2016. I graduated from university and I moved to Japan, as part of something called the JET

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Program, which is a Japanese government-funded exchange and teaching program.

So I worked in, Japanese elementary schools and junior high schools as an assistant language teacher. I was not a full homeroom teacher. I was an assistant teacher just helping in English classes, especially pronunciation classes, things like that. I then left Japan and went and did my master's degree in the politics of East Asia, specifically focusing on multiculturalism and immigration, which is something we're going to talk about in a little bit.

I, I then went on to live in Taiwan. I lived in Japan again, and then I left Japan and moved back. So I've moved to Japan three times. So I have, yeah, I have a, quite a lot of experience moving to Japan on different, different, on different visa types. yeah, that's my, my background, I guess.

Stephen: Excellent.

Yeah, that sounds fantastic. I've got a lot of questions to, ask you about that journey. Bt before we started recording, I just... It kind of occurred to me that we've actually got quite a lot in common. Like, we're both English, from England. We're probably about the same age, we both, have histories spending a large part of our life in other countries - migrating.

We both started podcasts around the same time, I think. for me it was 2020. I think for you it was also 2020, right?

Tom: Yeah, six years.

Stephen: Six years. Which

Tom: is today, I think.

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Stephen: Six years today. So maybe. Oh, wow. Happy birthday. I, I, I- Happy birthday Thinking in English ... middle of

Tom: September,

Stephen: yeah. So. Oh, great. Great.

And, and most importantly, we've both become fathers really recently. so how, how are you juggling fatherhood-

Tom: It's, it's difficult. I think we're very privileged to have jobs which allow us to be flexible, and I can spend a lot of time at home. I can... Right now it's 9:00 PM at night here, so after my wife and my daughter have gone to bed, I can do some work in the evenings.

I c- I get up at 5:00 AM and I do work early in the morning as well, so I can spend the day helping out. But it is really difficult, and I had a lot of plans, a lot of, I guess, aspirations for this year, things that I wanted to do, different types of podcast series I wanted to make. I wanted... I mentioned to you before this episode, I wanted to collaborate with more podcasters, and it's been really tough these first eight months of the year to try and do anything because, because I'm so busy with family and just different things happening in, in my life.

So it's, it's difficult to juggle, but I do recognize I'm very privileged in that I don't have to go to the office every morning at 8:00 AM. Instead, I can roll out of bed into my desk chair, which is nice.

Stephen: Are you getting some sleep?

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Tom: Not as much as I would like to get. I'm typically the... I'm the morning, the morning shift, so that's 4:00 AM to 5:00 AM is my, my waking up time at the moment.

Stephen: Wow. Okay. Before we go on, just in case there are some SEND7 listeners who don't know Thinking in English, can you explain your podcast to everybody?

Tom: Yeah. So I host the Thinking in English podcast. It's now also a video podcast as well on YouTube. I've been doing it, like you said, since 2020. I think in total there are 500 public episodes available of Thinking in English and, oh, maybe 300 bonus episodes as well.

And it's based around the concept of learning in English rather than learning English. So kind of like SEND7 in that regard. I'm not teaching English directly. Instead, it's based on interesting conversations delivered in not simple English, but in clear English with vocabulary explanations. So I like to talk about history, politics, economics, philosophy, the things in my, my background.

For example, this week... Well, this, this dates the episode, I guess, but this week's episode that I released was on the history of Singapore. Last week I did an episode on *what is corruption?* My bonus episode this week is a review of a book I recently read by, the anthropologist Graeber. I can't say the title of the book 'cause it has a, a curse word in it.

I'm sure Stephen doesn't want me to curse in his episode. But it would... I guess you could simplify it as pointless jobs. So it's... Yeah, I like to talk about these, these kinds of topics, and I'm very lucky to have an audience of people who listen to me and have, let me make this my job for the past four years.

Three and a half years. Yeah.

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Stephen: Yeah. And I can totally agree that, what you're doing is, is teaching... Or, sorry, not teaching, speaking about topics that are so interesting that it will help people to learn English by accident. Because I have listened to some of your episodes, even though I am a, obviously, a native speaker, just because the topics are so interesting.

I'm trying to think of ones that I've listened to, but, I think I... Did you do one on populism at one point?

Tom: Yes, I did one on, on populism.

Stephen: Yeah, I think it was that.

Tom: I like to do ones or... Recently I've done a lot of historical episodes, but my favourite ones to do are the ones more on political concepts or, or economic concepts because that's what I was really interested in as a student.

I really liked defining things, when I was doing my, my master's degree. And then after my master's degree, I also went on to be a research student in Japan and I was really interested in sort of sociological, political, anthropological, economic concepts and defining them. So things like populism, things like corruption and talking about what these things are.

Because if you look in the dictionary it has a one-sentence definition for these terms, but they're, they're much more complicated and it's nice to... For, for a, for an English learner, a non-native speaker, if s- if I mention the word corruption you might not have... You might know what the simple definition is, but do you know what embezzlement is? Do you know what bribery is? Do you know what, cronyism is?

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And these are the kinds of things I like to introduce in my episodes, to go a bit deeper. It... I would say that originally when I started the idea was to bridge the gap between A broadsheet newspaper or, a magazine like The Economist magazine perhaps and an English textbook.

Right, so it's to be somewhere in the middle because often you get to that point learning a language. Right, Stephen, I think you speak Spanish, right? You get to the point where you're learning a language and the textbook material's a little bit boring.

Stephen: Mm.

Tom: But the native-level material is a little bit difficult and you need something to be in the, in the middle of that, that bridge.

You need something, something needs to be the bridge between those two, the textbook and the newspaper and I think that's where SEND7 fits in. That's where Thinking in English fits in

Stephen: Yeah, actually that's a good point. That's another thing that we have in common that I hadn't thought about, that actually our experiences of learning languages, you for Japanese and me for, for Spanish and a bit of French, have actually kind of helped in the development of the podcasts that we have created.

'Cause you... *Definitely* ... wanted to bridge the gap as you, you say there. And, yeah, and for me, like listening to the news was a, a big reason for me to start, a podcast ab- about the news in a- Yeah... slightly simplified English. Yeah.

Tom: I was... during the COVID pandemic, I was waiting to move to Japan on my... I, I had a scholarship to move to Japan, but I couldn't go because no one was flying anywhere in the world. All the borders were closed. So I had a

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part-time job, at a supermarket working at night and doing the night shift, and I'd put my headphones in and listen to Japanese learning podcasts to try and keep my level high. And I couldn't find a podcast I enjoyed listening to. Mm. I couldn't find... There was a lot of stuff on, on popular culture, music and, Japanese anime, manga, simple topics like travel or food.

But I was, you know, more interested in... I was moving to Japan on a research scholarship to research immigration. I was more interested in complicated topics. I wanted to learn more complex vocabulary. I wanted to listen to the news in, in Japanese. So that's kind of where the inspiration for Thinking in English came from, is that I was listening to so many podcasts in Japanese, and I couldn't find one that I liked.

So I thought, "Why not try and make one in English for people learning English as well?"

Stephen: Excellent.

Tom: And eventually, af- after a while, it, it kind of caught on, I think, so.

Stephen: Yeah, it definitely has. Yeah. And you, and you do a great job in it. well, you're the perfect person to talk about, migration, especially to Japan with, but, still before we get there, let's hear a little bit more about what motivated you to move to Japan in particular.

Have you always been interested in Japan? was there something about Japan that really called you? Why did you want to, to move to Japan?

Tom: It's a good, a good question, why did I move to Japan? And the answer is not what perhaps the people listening are, are thinking. I had zero interest in Japan when I first moved here.

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I'd never heard Japanese spoken. I'd never eaten Japanese food. I was not someone who watched anime series or really loved Japanese culture. I was in my final year of university, and I didn't know what to do after I graduated. So I was applying for jobs. I applied for the normal graduate scheme jobs at banks and the civil service in the UK.

I also wanted to move abroad. I wanted to go and live somewhere for a while. So I applied for teaching jobs in Thailand and India and Japan, of course. and I then decided I wanted to do a master's degree, but I couldn't afford the tuition fees, so I needed to work somewhere for a year first. And out of all of the The job offers I got, the one in Japan was the best overall package.

It allowed me to, to move abroad for a year. It would give me the chance to, to learn a new language, to teach English, but also it would... It was, yeah, the, the best out of the teaching jobs I applied for in Thailand, India, and Japan. It was the best paid. It had the best, benefits, most job security, because I'd be working for the Japanese government, basically.

And so, yeah, that's why I, that's why I moved to Japan originally 10 years ago, is because it was the best offer I had. But once I arrived in Japan, I... Every day was a learning experience, and I really enjoyed my time living here. but I left. I studied my master's degree in the UK, on the politics of East Asia.

I came back to do some research. I left again, but then I came back when- because my wife is Japanese. So I got married, and we decided to live here. So, and I probably will be here forever now. So my, my background is not, I'm not the, I'm not the person who moved here because I love Japan. I'm the person who moved here 'cause I had a job here.

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And yeah, that's... But I people often assume that I moved to Japan because mayb- maybe I loved Japanese animation, but that's not, that's not why I moved here.

Stephen: Yeah, yeah. I would say that especially because Japan is so far away from the UK, both geographically and also culturally, really, it's, very foreign to the UK.

Yeah, I would expect that most people that would move there, even for a year, would be relatively interested in Japan as a place. So yeah, that is quite surprising to hear that you weren't particularly interested in it before you, arrived there. So you obviously thought that it was gonna be temporary when you first went there.

Tom: Yeah. I was planning to stay for one year. I was actually... My contract was one year. P- In the back of my head, I thought, "What if I can't, if I can't do it, if I can't live in Japan, I'll just leave after a few weeks." I had enough money saved up so I could fly back, right? but I really enjoyed my first few months in Japan, so when it came for contract renewal time, I renewed for a second year to stay in Japan for two years at that point I decided I'd saved up enough money, I could go back to the UK and do my, master's degree.

And originally I was going to go to, King's College London to study security studies in their war studies department. But I had become so interested in Japan, and not just Japan, like, East Asia as well, Taiwan, and South Korea, and China, that I switched completely and I went to a different university in London called SOAS and did, my master's of Asian politics was my speciality.

And then, yeah, I moved back a few years later to, to do some more study and research here. So that's... Yeah, that was... It was only supposed to be

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temporary, but then I, I met a, a Japanese girl and, and I'll be here forever probably, so...

Stephen: And did you teach yourself Japanese? It, it sounds like, when you were at university you were not studying Japanese.

Tom: No. I pushed myself through a really intensive program. So when I first arrived I spoke no Japanese other than a simple introduction I'd memorized, and I'd learned to read, two of Japane- two of Japan's alphabets. So Japan has three alphabet systems, so I'd learned to read the phonetic alphabet, but I hadn't, I'm still learning now after 10 years, still learning the Chinese characters.

Mm. I attended local community Japanese classes that were put on for, foreign residents of the city I lived in. So I attended those classes twice a week. after a few months- maybe after about a year I started attending, a private class as well. So I would do three Japanese classes a week, and every day after I finished work I would get off the bus, go to the cafe next to the bus stop, and study my Japanese textbook for an hour, maybe an hour and a half, every day.

So I really pushed myself and I went from zero to intermediate level Japanese in about a year.

Stephen: Oh, that's fantastic...

Tom: fantastic. I'd say a year, a year and a half I think. but since then my, my level has stagnated. I'm, I'm definitely better than I was then, of course, but the progress has been a lot less smooth because of moving to different places, leaving Japan, not having as much time to study

Stephen: Yeah.

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But getting from zero to intermediate Japanese in a year really shows the power of the combination of immersion and desire, doesn't it? Because...

Tom: Necessity ...

Stephen: and nece- and necessity, of course.

Tom: Yeah. I have a really strong desire to become fluent in Japanese... well, I guess I am functionally fluent in many ways now, but I have a really strong desire to become professionally fluent in Japanese, I guess business Japanese right now, and I have a lot of immersion opportunities, but, my progress is non-existent really at the moment.

I'm kind of stuck at my level, and it's because I don't have the necessity- Mm ... to push myself to that higher level because I work for myself, right? I have a one-man business, and I make podcasts in English.

Stephen: Mm.

Tom: And I don't necessarily need to use high-level Japanese with my wife's family, and that's the kind of Japanese I need to become p- professionally business level, academically fluent in Japanese.

So necessity is the key thing always. Pe- people often talk about desire and immersion, but it's... I have a friend whose mom has lived in London for 35 years and doesn't speak any English because immersion does not equal English learning, right? Immersion does not equal learning. It just is... It's a tool that you can use if you use it correctly.

Stephen: Yeah. Good point. do you feel like you've integrated in Japan, in Japanese culture?

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Tom: What do you mi- what do you mean by integration?

Stephen: I suppose I mean if you feel like you are really part of their society. Like for example, when I was working in, Spain, I was working in a primary school as a teacher. I was working within their state education system. all of my friends were Spanish.

I lived with Spanish people. people recognized that I was a foreigner, but only, you know, as a kind of curiosity, rather than, you know, really being, screaming in, in their face that I was something, somebody completely different. I suppose I lived my life in quite a Spanish way during that time.

Tom: Right.

Stephen: I suppose something like that is what I mean by integration. yeah.

Tom: probably not to that extent.

Stephen: Mm-hmm.

Tom: And the reason is that integration- I'm going back to m- my, my studies. I think if you went to the, if you use like the organization The, the UN organiz-, I forget the department's name.

ILO, the International Labor Organization's definition of integration, it, it's a two-way street. Right? So integration is not something that a person can do by themselves. Integration has to be done by the person and the society at the same time.

Stephen: Yeah.

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Tom: And it's a mu- mutual adaptation, two, two people at the same time.

And I think I have done a lot to integrate into Japanese society. I speak Japanese. I have moved all of my business operations completely into Japan. I have a Japanese citizen wife and a Japanese citizen child. So all of those things have been part of... I've integrated into society. you know, when I go outside, I only use Japanese when communicating.

But perhaps I don't have as many Japanese friends as maybe you had Spanish friends. Part of that's just because I, I don't socialize as much as I used to do when I was in my early 20s. I have a child now. and I think it's harder in a country... We'll, we'll get into this later, but it's harder in a country like Japan, which is admittedly not a country of immigration, to integrate, because Japan does not have the same kind of infrastructure or the same kind of policies that a place like Spain or, or the UK or Germany has for integration.

Because Japan is not a country of immigration, and, they don't-- the government doesn't necessarily want immigrants to integrate into Japanese society. They want to... They want a lot of immigrants to stay separate from Japanese society. So it's a, it's a b- it's a balance, I guess. And I, I have- I have integrated to some extent, I would say.

Stephen: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it does sound like it's quite a different case in a place like Japan. Whilst you were speaking there, I was just thinking about how in a place like London, you could say kind of everybody is integrated regardless of even how long they've been there or how well they speak and, and things like that, because it's just such a complete mixture of people.

You know, most of, most of the people in London, especially in like Central London and, and certain areas, most people are not white British. You know? So you kind of-- this kind of way that you just have so much of a mixture of people

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kind of makes the whole idea of integration kind of lost because everybody is just the same.

I don't know whether I'm making much sense there, but...

Tom: Well, there are, there are different models for- W- w- what, what do you, what, as a country, what do you do when people immigrate to your country? What do you do when people come and, and work or, or move to your country? And, different countries have different solutions for this, this issue.

And some countries... I, I guess broadly the, the three different strategies are assimilation. So assimilation is where the, the immigrant must give up their original culture. They must give up their language and, and learn the new language and become that culture. So, the classic example, it's changed a bit now, but the classic example is France, in which everyone becomes French immediately.

Mm-hmm. and France had an as- assimilationary immigration policy for a long time. I don't think they do as much anymore. at the other end, the complete opposite is exclusionary. So somewhere like Qatar or Dubai where a immigrant to that country, can't join, can't get healthcare, or can't send their children to schools, because they're complete- immigrants are completely separate from the native population.

And in the middle you have, I guess, integrationary systems or, or multicultural systems which, you know, you can keep your cultural identity and you can keep your traditions, but you also should learn the local language, and you sh- you should also join in with local life. So it i- keep it keeping a balance.

And I think that's what the UK has tried to push for a long time, right? The UK, you, you can keep your own culture if you move to the UK, but they also ask you

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to learn British culture. And that's the same in a lot of Europe, is this more multicultural kind of system. Not, not too much of an assi- assimilation, not too much exclusion.

Whereas Japan traditionally was more exclusionary, right? Keep, keep immigrants separate from, Japanese society. and if you were to want to live in Japan more permanently, traditionally they'd want you to assimilate. So at some point, I forget when it was, but if you wanted to become a Japanese citizen, you had to prove you were living a Japanese lifestyle.

And so they stopped, they stopped that requirement, but you did have to prove that you were living a Japanese lifestyle, which w- what does that mean? Does that mean you're, you're sleeping on a futon on a floor? Does that mean you're eating natto and, and rice for breakfast? Mm-hmm. or, or is it a much broader category?

So it's open to interpretation. But yeah, every country has different ways to deal with, with immigration because while immigration is often a net positive for most places, it is an issue. It is a... It, it does cause problems for, for places as well.

Stephen: Yeah. Well, following that, Japan has recently changed some of its rules about immigration, right?

It's made it harder to get permanent residency. do you know about some of those changes? Could you explain those?

Tom: Yeah, there's been changes across a variety of different visas over the past year, and so the, the f- the first thing they changed was the business manager visa. and this is, I guess, the start to all of these changes came from the, the

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business manager visa, which was a, a visa that allowed someone to move to Japan to set up a business.

And originally, it required you to invest 5 million Japanese yen into the Japanese economy as, as a capital investment into your business. So that's about £25,000, which is not too high to have as a business requirement. But it was open to a lot of exploitation, and the Japanese media was constantly talking about fake businesses or paper companies that were set up just to allow someone to move to, to Japan.

So for example, if, if you wanted SEND7 to move to Japan, you could save up £25,000, set up a business in, in Japan, and move to Japan. And yeah, you'd be contributing to the Japanese economy, but you'd, you'd probably still keep your business a one-person business. and that's what kind of Japan wanted to, wanted to control a bit better.

So they've, they increased the capital requirements to 30 million Japanese yen, so that's £150,000 instead. So what's that? Like a five time increase in... Or more than five times increase in, how much money you need to move to Japan, and business owners must also hire Japanese staff as well. And there's also some language requirements, and you have to have experience running a business.

Stephen: Mm-hmm.

Tom: after that, they- Decided to change the fee structure, so the cost of applying for a visa to live and work in Japan. And so it went from... Well, all, all visas are now more expensive, no matter what kind of visa it is. From October 1st, so I don't know when you're releasing this episode, but in a, in a few weeks time, the, every visa, every status of residence will cost more, to , to apply for.

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Or, or you don't pay for applying, you pay for receiving the, the fee. So you- if you're unsuccessful, you don't have to pay. If you're successful, you have to pay. And they've ex- they've, they've increased them a lot. So permanent residency, right now if you apply, it would cost 10,000 Japanese yen, which is 50 pounds.

In two weeks time if you apply, it will cost 200,000 Japanese yen, which is 1,000 pounds. Wow. So that's an, an increase of 20, right? Yeah. 20 times more expensive. And that has caused a lot of issues, because all visas are more expensive, from, from the one-year working visas to five-year working visas to permanent residency visas.

Everything's gone more expensive. And the justification is to make Japan in line with other wealthy economies. The UK has very expensive visas. The US has quite expensive visas. Australia is crazy expensive, I think. I've, I've seen some people... Six to ten thousand dollars, I think it costs to get your permanent residency visa in Australia.

So they're trying to make it more in line with other countries. And then the other update is with permanent residency, like you said, it's become much stricter to, qualify for permanent residency. So applicants now have to earn more than the average Japanese person or Japanese household. pen- you need to have, enough pension, enough opportunity to accrue 30 years' worth of pension, payments, which is a bit complicated.

But basically it makes it quite hard for someone over the age of 35 who's just moved to Japan to qualify for permanent residency unless they earn above average income, because the- just, just the w- the way it works, it's gonna make it difficult for older people to qualify for permanent residency. people must now need to speak intermediate level Japanese, and, people who are...

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There's different routes to permanent residency. You can qualify through work or through marriage, and they've made some of those routes a bit stricter as well. So in, in, in total, everything has become a little bit stricter, more in line with perhaps other wealthy countries' immigration fees and policies. Yeah, I think, I think they're all the changes I can remember.

Stephen: Yeah, it's quite a lot. And, yeah, all just making it generally more difficult for people to migrate to Japan, m- more expensive. One thing that I was quite surprised about when hearing about these changes in general was that I just thought that Japan has quite a low level of migration anyway, so is this a sign that they want it to be even lower than what it already is?

Or, or maybe there are more people migrating to Japan than I think?

Tom: Yeah. I guess the, the, the important thing to remember is that Japan's immigration policy is fundamentally different to Europe or the Americas or Australia. Japan is, is not a country of immigration, and has never, has never claimed to be a country of immigration.

I think the government never uses the word immigration, right? Japan... In, in govern- in laws and government policy, they never use the word immigration. and yeah, they... The, the idea of people working in Japan is, is more temporary labour rather than... future population growth, right? That's the kind of... The, the idea is that people come to Japan to work, not to settle and live.

That's what the Japanese government wants, people to come, work, leave. And so it's always important to keep that in the back of your mind. But yes, Japan has a relatively low number of people living here, from foreign countries. I think it's... It hit the record last year of 4.1 million people, I think, living in Japan are foreign-born.

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But that's less than 3.5%. So less than 3.5% of Japanese residents are, foreign citizens, compared at to, to 19% in the UK or, or 20% in Germany.

Stephen: Yeah. So it's, it's- Yeah, it's very small. Far less Also, I

Tom: s-

Stephen: I suppose most of the migrants to Japan are from other East Asian countries- Yeah ... right?

Tom: Yes. Off the top of my head, China is the number one country, then Vietnam, South Korea, and I think places like Myanmar and Indonesia are also growing recently in terms of immigration.

Yeah. Of Western countries, the USA is the highest, I think.

Stephen: Yeah... have these rule changes affected you personally?

Tom: Yes. I'm not the most affected by any means. but yeah, I have been affected. I, I currently have an application for permanent residency, being processed. Hopefully, I'll, I'll hear at some point in the next few months or so if I've been successful or not.

The reason I have my application submitted now is to, to, to get ahead of the new requirements. so the one requirement that will affect me negatively is that, you need to have... To, to apply for permanent residency, you need to... Currently, I need to have a three-year, a status of residence valid for three years.

From next month, I need to have a status of residence valid for five years. So that kind of thing will affect me. I'm not the most affected by some of the other changes. but if I, if I'm unsuccessful, if my permanent residency application is

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unsuccessful this time, and I reapply next year or the year after, yeah, I will be much more affected.

I'll have to pay the higher fee, which is, yeah, I guess if we move, if we move to the UK, my wife and I move to the UK, we'd also have to pay the high fees for her to move there as well. Yeah. But I guess y- you can kind of feel a slightly more tense atmosphere regarding, foreigners, I guess, is... to say it in that way, on social media in Japan and on TV as well.

I think obviously there's, there's echo chambers and vocal minorities on, on the internet, and most people don't think about these kinds of topics. But a lot of these changes in immigration are, are Yeah, I guess serving, Basically, there aren't many Jap- there aren't many foreigners in Japan, so when you're making changes to immigration policy on such a large scale, which Japan has done in the past six months... Is it really going to make a big difference to Japan? Probably not. Japan already had quite strict permanent residency requirements, one of the strictest in, the developed world. The, the UK has just changed theirs as well, but to qualify for ILR in the UK, you needed to live in the UK for five years.

Japan's always been 10 years. Mm. and is it gonna change much else? No, people are still gonna come here and work temporarily, because majority of people working in Japan will never be able to qualify for permanent residency anyway. If you're an English teacher in Japan, like I used to be, it's very unlikely you will be given a five-year working visa.

Stephen: Mm.

Tom: And it's unlikely... Almost, almost none of those people will qualify based on income requirements, and they wouldn't have qualified on the previous income requirements either. And most of the immigrants from places like Vietnam or Myanmar or Indonesia, they move to Japan through a visa system

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called the skill- semi-skilled worker visa, which explicitly is not a pathway to permanent residency.

It does not count towards your years required for permanent residency. So it's not going to change too much. It's more for optics, I think. It's to make the government seem stronger perhaps.

Stephen: Right. Right. So do you have any advice for someone who is thinking about moving to Japan?

Tom: Specifically about Japan, I- I'm, I'm not sure. Everyone has different reasons for moving to places, and if your goal is to live somewhere, experience culture, learn new things, and then move on, go back to your own country or move to another country, then Japan is an amazing place to do that. Japan is...

For all we've talked, Japan is one of the easiest countries to move to if you have a job, right? It's, if you have a job offer, Japan is pretty easy to, to get the visa for, as long as you have a degree. y- you can k- you can kind of move to Japan. It's not too difficult. It's much harder to move to somewhere like the UK... or like, the UK, USA, Australia are now hard to move to. Japan is, is still relatively easy if you can find a job that's willing to hire you. but if your goal is to find somewhere to settle down and live for the rest of your life, you have to... You'd, you'd want to be very careful about choosing a country, wherever you choose in the world.

You'd want to choose somewhere where, where you're going to be able to learn the language to a high enough level, where you're going to feel secure in the future. You're going to be able to, to earn enough money to support yourself or your family into the future as well. So yeah, I'd, I'd be careful choosing Japan in that situation, unless you have a Japanese spouse or Japanese family, or you're just really, really keen on moving to Japan.

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But it's the same, same with moving anywhere, I'm sure. When you moved to different countries when you were younger, Stephen, you perhaps you weren't thinking about the, the future too much. You were thinking in the present, and that was the same as me when I moved 10 years ago. I was not imagining I'd end up living in Japan for the rest of my life and, you know, my wife and I are now, we're building a house at the moment and yeah, it, it means I c- I'm, I'm probably going to be here forever.

Stephen: Yeah.

Tom: Which is, is a scary thought sometimes...

Stephen: Yeah, I suppose it is. Yeah, yeah. I'm, I'm actually about to move back to Spain, for a, a year to start with, *Amazing* ... because my, yeah, my wife is, is Spanish. and, we made the decision recently. She was offered a job there, and we're about to go back next week.

So, but it's still unclear whether this is a long-term thing or just for the school year or, or something like that. But, yeah, all of the rest of the times that I've been moving around in my life, it's not seemed permanent. No... so quite a different experience for you now fully realizing that you are, you know, highly likely gonna spend the rest of your life in Japan.

Tom: Yeah. It's, it's when, when you... Well, even when I got married and three years ago, I moved to this city I live in now... Even then, you know, in the back of my head I thought, "Yeah, I, I'm probably going to end up living here for forever perhaps." But it, that was not a main thought for me. It was more of, "Okay, I'm gonna move, I'm gonna get married.

We're going to see where life takes us. Maybe we move to Tokyo in the future. Maybe we, we go to the UK." but, even the idea of moving back to the... May-

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maybe your, your wife might, you and your wife might have this as well, if, to move back to the UK becomes quite expensive because visas are expensive to live in the UK if you don't already have, a status there.

And, we're setting up a life, right? And I now, I'm setting up my pension here. I'm setting up my brokerage account here. I'm building a house here. It's, I have a, a daughter who's entering to the Japanese education system, and, well, she's only, she'll, she'll only be one year old, but she'll be entering, start entering kindergarten, I guess, or like, daycare, and then slowly progressing through education.

And at some point you can't easily move back because at some point it's too difficult for, you know, maybe a child to move from Japanese high school to English high school wouldn't work. So yeah, it's def... every day it gets more permanent.

Stephen: Absolutely. Okay. Tell us some of your favourite things about, living in Japan.

Tom: Favourite things. I love Japanese cafes, so I spend a lot of time going to cafes and drinking coffee. the scenery here is beautiful, mountains behind my house, and just a short drive away there is, you know, spectacular scenery, great lakes, opportunities to go hiking. Food's good. Of course, the food is good.

And in, in general, the, the quality of life is pretty good for what I get. I, I... Japan has quite high taxation, right? Which is perhaps some people would say that was a negative. but I often feel like my tax money is working for me better here than it was working in the UK. So, you know, the quality of, support for my daughter when-- and my wife when sh- she was pregnant, and the quality of, of healthcare and all of these things I think are pretty good here.

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And yeah, it's, it, it's nice, so generally.

Stephen: Excellent. Okay. do you wanna tell people where to find you? Where to find Thinking in English?

Tom: Yeah. If you, if you've never listened to Thinking in English before, please go and, and give it a try. you can listen on all, all podcasting platforms, Thinking in English.

You can also, watch the video podcasts on YouTube, at Thinking in English again. And, yeah, hopefully some of you come over and, and watch a few episodes.

Stephen: I highly recommend it. Thank you, Tom, for joining me.

Tom: Thank you so much.

Stephen: Bye.

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