

David Green
Associate Professor
Meijo University
dgreen@meijo-u.ac.jp

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Charting *Tabunka Kyōsei*: Municipal Efforts in Integrating Foreign Residents

The question of how to incorporate immigrants is an old one. For countries like the United States, Canada and Australia with long histories of immigration, the absorption of immigrant groups into society has been fundamental to the formation of their national identities. However, newer countries of immigration are facing largely unprecedented questions of how to integrate growing foreign populations. What actions can national and local governments take to ensure foreign residents are able to positively contribute to their new country of residence? How can government ensure harmonious relations between immigrant and native populations? Such notions of immigrant integration are where this presentation focuses its attention, looking at city-level efforts in Japan.

Japan is a new country of immigration, well-noted for its homogeneity and traditional isolation (Dale, 1986). However, economic realities have forced an opening, initially small but steadily growing, in Japan's immigration regime since the early 1990s. To say that the Japanese response to an increased foreign presence is still evolving is perhaps an understatement, as the pros and cons of increased immigration are often debated and policy continues to evolve as the foreign population grows increasingly larger.

Demographic factors appear to be forcing further changes in the Japanese immigration system. With long life expectancies and a very low birthrate, Japan is experiencing significant population aging. Immigration has been touted as a means of mitigating some of the problems associated with a rapidly aging population, such as contributing tax revenue, propping up the pension system, filling in labor shortages and potentially increasing the birth rate. Still, the public remains generally unreceptive to large-scale increases in immigration (Nagayoshi, 2008) and the national government notes that it has no official "immigration policy" in place (Murai, 2016).

Despite public hesitancy and no official immigration plan, the national government has been actively recruiting foreign students, trainees and highly skilled workers, and has worked to reduce barriers to acquiring long term residency (Oishi, 2012). Upcoming changes in Japan's visa regime, expected in April 2019, will likely further increase both the numbers and duration of residency of new immigrants to Japan (Murakami, 2018). As Japan's foreign population grows, it is necessary to consider how immigrants have been incorporated into Japanese society thus far, and what immigrant integration efforts may look like going forward.

Although foreign residents currently make up only approximately 2% of the total population, rates of concentration vary considerably across cities, with foreign residents typically concentrated in Japan's urban areas. This study will look to Japan's largest cities, specifically the "ordinance designated" (*serei shitei toshi*) and "core" (*chūkakushi*) cities: the

69 largest municipalities in the country which house approximately 60% of Japan's foreign population as of 2016.

In order to attain a better understanding of exactly what actions these large municipalities are taking in regard to immigrant integration, this study will analyze city-level "multicultural cooperation" (*tabunka kyōsei*) plans. Multicultural cooperation plans serve as useful documents highlighting city-level policies and priorities, illustrating points of convergence and divergence in addressing foreign populations across the country. By conducting a content analysis of city plans, this study will provide a much more comprehensive overview of exactly what immigrant integration looks like in Japan. Not only can we understand municipal integration priorities and activities, but we can also compare such actions to city demographic data, such as foreign population size, rate or foreign population growth compared to that of the native population, different nationalities, and ultimately against local economic factors as well.

I tentatively argue in this presentation that city plans are often inconsistent, although most seem to emphasize multilingual information provision and Japanese linguistic competency. The presentation will also attempt to address broader questions of how truly integrative Japan's efforts have been thus far, and make initial steps in finding associations between demographic factors and different types of integration policy efforts.

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