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Immigrant Integration in Nagoya: Moving towards Local-level Foreign Resident Inclusion

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As the Japanese population begins to rapidly age and concerns grow over the country's continued economic viability, Japan's foreign population has been steadily growing. Seen as a means of at least partially mitigating the economic losses associated with societal aging, Japan's central government has been quietly working to expand the foreign resident population. However, little national guidance or oversight has been provided to the cities actually experiencing marked foreign growth. This is particularly true in the major hub cities, including Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka and Nagoya. Rather, while the national government may be working to bring in more foreign residents, cities and local governments have been left largely to their own devices when dealing with immigrant populations and the variety of issues that accompany them.

This presentation consequently examines the case of Nagoya city in detail, considering local-level policies, services, and activities aimed at addressing its foreign population. Nagoya provides an interesting case study, given its diverse foreign population, the varieties of industries and employers in the area, and its relatively progressive stance in addressing its immigrant population. Nagoya sits comfortably toward the middle of the major Japanese cities: not as large as Tokyo or Yokohama, not as singular as Kyoto in its history, but larger and more diverse than Okayama and Niigata, for example. Although it has its own unique background and circumstances, Nagoya here also acts as a stand-in for Japan's larger cities.

The literature on immigrant incorporation typically considers two primary frameworks: assimilation and integration. Assimilation is the notion that foreign residents must "be like" the native population. It is their responsibility to try and blend in, eschewing their own distinct cultural characteristics in exchange for upward economic and social mobility (Rumbaut 1997). The notion of integration, on the other hand, has been referred to by a number of terms including cultural pluralism (Reitz & Sklar 1997), multiculturalism (Koopmans 2010) and ethnic retention (Gans 1997). Integration implies that the immigrant

may be able to successfully navigate the host society while maintaining significant ties to their home culture. Rather than requiring the sacrifice of unique immigrant characteristics such as language, customs or religion, an integrationist regime is seemingly more open to diverse cultures.

Using Nagoya as an example, we argue that while Japan has long maintained a strictly assimilationist position in regard to its immigrant population, municipal-level efforts and increased exposure to larger numbers of foreign residents have moved local policies further toward an integrationist framework. The old patterns of immigrant incorporation in Japan appear to be slowly changing, with municipal governments being an apparent catalyst. In the absence of over-arching national policy, many Japanese municipalities are forced to handle questions of immigrant and multicultural incorporation on their own. In order to gauge Nagoya's immigrant integration initiatives, we provide a brief review of national-level integration policy, and then consider essential public services including health, safety, and public education services provided to immigrants at the municipal level in Nagoya.

We additionally take Freeman's (2004) position that immigrant integration policies are largely ad-hoc and unintended. The incorporation regime in Japan is neither deliberate nor self-conscious. However, the application of existing institutions in addressing local-level immigration has served the purpose of promoting integration, in some cases to a surprisingly high degree. Of particular interest here is the central role city ward offices are able to play in promoting the integration of foreign residents in Japan.

Given that other developed countries are experiencing similar social aging problems, although perhaps not quite as pronounced as Japan's currently, Japan's pragmatic approach toward immigrant incorporation may serve as an interesting example for heretofore largely homogenous, closed societies gradually opening themselves to increased immigration. As the Nagoya case illustrates, local-level moves toward integration may indeed occur regardless of national preferences for assimilation.

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