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# Language Education for Migrant Workers and their Social Integration in Japan

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## **ABSTRACT**

The increase in immigrant populations during the last two decades in Japan has prompted the development of integration policies and practices. Numerous studies have focused on language support for migrant children; however, language support for adult migrants has received less attention. This research aims to reveal how the integration policy and language education for adult immigrants have evolved in Japan and how these have contributed their socioeconomic integration. Policy analysis shows that integration policies have been underdeveloped, especially at the national level. It has been led through the inconsistency between immigration control policy, which does not overtly accept low-skilled immigrants and encourages only the entrance of highly skilled foreign workers, and the reality that there are already foreign populations with variety of backgrounds in Japan. Migrants' equal and sufficient access to language education has been hindered, while local governments and civil society has contributed to immigrants' integration through providing direct assistance and advocating the needs for such support. Differentiated inclusion of immigrants in labor market by nationalities underlines the necessity for building coherent integration policies.

**Key Words:** Integration of immigrants, Language education, Adult migrants, Multicultural coexistence

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Japan has experienced a surge in its foreign-born population in the last two decades, reaching more than two million in 2010, driven in large measure by labor shortages and income gaps with countries of origin. The majority of foreign nationals come from Asian countries, with large proportions originating from China, the Koreas, and the Philippines, as well as Japanese descendants from Brazil and Peru. The categories of immigrants vary from temporary residents, such as students and trainees, to long-term or permanent residents, including the Korean ethnic group. While Japan does not consider itself as a country of immigration, 682,450 foreign nationals were employed in 119,731 firms in Japan as of 2012 (Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2013).

Despite the increase in the foreign-born population, its remains at less than two percent of Japan's population, low in comparison with the majority of other OECD countries. Struggles faced by foreign residents in integrating into Japanese society have repeatedly reported by NGOs, medias as well as international organizations, with the dominance of the majority Japanese population and the monolingual environment. In 2010, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants reported that “racism and discrimination based on nationality are still common in Japan, including in the workplace, schools, housing, the justice system, and private establishments” and urged the Japanese government to take measures to combat this discrimination and to comply with international human rights standards (UN Human Rights Council, 2011: 10).

Public attitudes regarding the immigration of foreign nationals have been divided, despite the promotion of the multiculturalist concept of “*Tabunka Kyosei* (Multicultural coexistence).” Keidanren, Japan's business federation advocates a more favorable environment for accepting migrant workers (Keidanren 2010, 2011). However, public opinion surveys reveal a more mixed reaction among the general population. For example, a 2010 public survey revealed that having Japanese language skills (94 percent) and understanding Japanese customs (89 percent) were considered more important than having technical skills and knowledge (74 percent) (Cabinet Office 2010). This implies that the concept of “multicultural coexistence” has been interpreted differently by each sector—government, employers, and civil society—differing from the more common understanding of multiculturalism in countries like Canada and Australia.

It should be also noted that ability in the local language facilitates integration of immigrants into the host country shown by previous studies. In a country like Japan, where a single language is spoken by an overwhelming majority of population and where the majority has limited knowledge of foreign languages, the ability to use the local language can be expected to have a significant impact on integration of immigrants. Foreign residents without the ability to understand Japanese can be hindered from obtaining information that is easily accessible for Japanese speakers and from interacting with local society. Moreover, foreign residents have experienced inequalities in other socioeconomic aspects, such as education and employment opportunities, based on their ethnicity, immigration status, level of Japanese language proficiency, as well as due to their lack of knowledge and information about Japanese society in general.

Nonetheless, the support and opportunities for immigrants to acquire Japanese language skills have been limited. Tomita (2009, 2010) notes that Japanese language education of immigrants has been largely done by local volunteers due to lack of integration policy planning by the Japanese central government. Despite the effort by volunteers, the situation has led to general insufficient language ability among immigrants (especially among “newcomers,” who immigrated after 1980). The voluntary nature of such education provision and attendance makes it difficult for researchers to examine the effectiveness of language education quantitatively due to lack of indicators.

This research aims to reveal how language education for immigrants has been conducted in Japan and how it has contributed to their socioeconomic integration of immigrants. The analysis takes the following as the main determinants: 1) multiculturalism and Japan’s immigration policy, 2) Japan’s language policy and institutional support by the government, 3) role of volunteers and NGOs, and 4) characteristics of migrants. Academic literature, policy reviews, and interviews with individuals involved in planning and implementing language education will be the main sources used in the analysis of these four factors and their effect with respect to the research topic. In this research, only migrants in regular legal status will be analyzed.

## **2. CONTEXT: JAPAN'S IMMIGRATION POLICY AND LABOR POLICY**

Similar to many emerging and developed economies, shortage of labor has been the main consideration in the discussion of foreign labor immigration policies in Japan. Thus, it is useful to review the interaction between immigration policy and labor policy in the context of immigration and immigrants' integration. Immigration control policy has played a central role in determining the categories of people who may enter into the country, as well as the length and the status of their stay, whereas the integration policy has remained underdeveloped in Japan. In this section, the interplay between immigration policy and labor policy will be reviewed to understand how the Japanese government has responded to the increased labor requirements and the role played by the immigration policy.

### **2.1. Japan's Immigration Policy and Labor Policy**

Japan's immigration policy toward labor migration has been stable: accepting highly skilled professionals, while keeping the door closed for low-skilled migrants, despite vigorous arguments that Japan should accept migrant labor during recent decades, especially in the business sector and during the economic booms in the late 1960s and from the late 1980s to early 1990s (Sano 2008, 37). An early trace of the argument for relaxed immigration policies can be found in discussion of the First Basic Plan for Employment Measures, which was agreed in a cabinet meeting in 1967. In the meeting, then Minister of Labor, Mr. Hayakawa, stated as below.

*“There are voices from a part of the business sector calling to accept foreign labor force since the labor shortage has become significant. However, it is considered that it is unnecessary to accept the immigration of foreign labor at this stage, because there are under-employed populations evidenced in the issue of unemployment among the elderly population.”* (Shimizu 2008, 34)

The government maintained this strict closed policy until the Third Basic Plan for Employment Measures, which was agreed in a cabinet meeting in 1976. It remained unchanged during the post-WWII economic growth, when the unemployment rate hovered at around one to two percent (e-stat, 2013a). Rather than accepting migrant labor, the policy focus to meet labor shortages was to encourage employment of the



elderly and women (See Shimizu (2008) for a historical discussion).

From the Sixth Basic Plan for Employment Measures in 1988 to the Ninth Plan in 1999, it is clearly mentioned that the acceptance of foreign talent is desirable, as it will stimulate Japan's socioeconomic climate. On the other hand, the labor policy has been restrictive regarding the acceptance of low-skilled migrants throughout the same period, mainly due to concerns over negative consequences on Japanese labor market and society in general, as well as on the countries of origins. Expected labor force decline due to the aging society and low fertility rate have been the central concerns for the Japanese labor market, yet this has not prompted any significant increase in immigration to meet the labor shortfalls as of 2013. The magnitude of labor population decline is limited at the moment; it has decreased by about four percent after hitting its peak at 68 million in 1998, and was 65 million at the end of 2012. (e-stat, 2013b)

Those labor policies categorize the foreign population mainly into two categories: high-skilled and low-skilled migrants.<sup>1</sup> However, this does not capture all the foreigners residing and working in Japan. It should be noted that a number of foreign nationals work under some exceptional categories—notably, trainees and Nikkei descendants (Descendants with Japanese origin from Latin America countries, notably Brazil and Peru), as well as those under irregular status.

There is no legal category of “Nikkei descendants from Latin American countries.” However, the 1990 Amendment to the Immigration Act enabled children and grandchildren of Japanese nationals who emigrated from Japan to migrate back to Japan as “Long term residents.”<sup>2</sup> In 1989, registered Brazilian and Peruvian nationals in Japan numbered 14,528 and 4,121 respectively; this figure increased about ten times in three years, reaching 147,803 Brazilians and 31,051 Peruvians residing in Japan by 1992 (Ministry of Justice 2003, 33). It has not been clearly stated that the Japanese authorities permitted their entrance for the purpose of labor migration; rather, the

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<sup>1</sup> Legal status of foreign resident in Japan could be divided into two categories: 1) “the status of residence categories for activities based on civil status or position” and 2) others including “the status of residence for employment”, “students”, “trainees”, and “designated activities”. The residents under the first category can conduct

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that many literatures use term “long term residents” or “Nikkei long term residents” to describe Nikkei descendants, despite the fact that the Long term residents category includes nationals from other countries and there are Brazilians and Peruvians enter Japan under other categories. (Ishida, 2009)

authority defined the objective of the amendment as to allow them to “visit relatives,” at least in official documents, while it is commonly interpreted that the hidden objective was to meet labor shortages (Kitawaki 2008, 13). The consequence of the amendment was temporary economic migration, known as the “*Dekasegi*” phenomena, because the “long term residents” are able to work legally without restrictions, such as limitations in occupation and working hours, unlike foreign nationals under other categories, such as trainees and university students.

Nikkei descendants were gradually recognized as migrant workers and included in labor policies, because the Nikkei workers’ presence became significant in manufacturing industries and in certain prefectures, notably Aichi and Shizuoka, in which automobile manufacturers are concentrated, and as they started to reside in Japan more permanently (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2006, 3,16). The duration of the stays lengthened during the economic stagnation in the 1990s, as it became difficult for migrants to accumulate savings in a short period of time, and they started to bring their families to Japan (Iguchi 2001, 72). The Seventh Basic Plan for Employment Measures (1992) and the Ninth Basic Plan (1999) both stated that the government would enhance Nikkei descendants’ employment opportunities through elimination of brokerage, supports by the public employment office, and improvement of working conditions. The unplanned Nikkei migration as labor force triggered by the 1990 Amendment in Immigration Law has created inconsistency between the reality and the overall immigration and labor policy principles, which deny the entrance of low-skilled migrant labors.

The “Trainee” category has proved exception to such principles. While the original objective of the trainee system was to support developing countries through human capital development and through transfer of knowledge and technology, there have been increasing cases in which trainees were regarded as cheap labor, especially in primary and secondary industries in which labor shortages have been severe (Fifth Basic Plan for Employment Measures 1983; Ministry of Justice 2012b, 1; Yasuda 2010, 58) Under the 1990 Amendment to the Immigration Law, the trainee category was established, and the systematized trainee recruiting system has flourished on top of the previous recruiting system under which individual firms recruit trainees. The number of

trainees has increased significantly, reaching 88,086 in 2007; however, there have been increasing reports of human and labor rights violations, such as non- or under-payment of wages (Ministry of Justice 2012, 20). The authority further amended the immigration law in 2010 and established the category of “Technical Intern Training,” so that the trainees can benefit from protection under the labor law, including minimum wages and other working conditions (Ministry of Justice 2012b, 2). This suggests that the government started to recognize them as “workers.” However, trainees are not regarded as “immigrants” or long-term residents who require social integration, since the maximum period of training is three years. The trainee category provided the government a means to address the labor shortage, especially in primary and secondary industrial sectors, while maintaining the general principle of denial of immigration of low-skilled labors (Yasuda 2010, 59).

Trainees and Nikkei categories are described as “backdoor” or “side-door”, means of accepting low-skilled labor immigrants (Kitajima 2008, 7; Watanabe 2004, 2) in contrast to the employment categories for skilled foreign nationals. Those two categories have been treated as “exceptions” from the general closed-door policy for low-skilled labor; they are granted the status of “trainees” or “long-term residents,” not the status of “residence for employment,” despite the common understating that Nikkei descendants and trainees work as low-skilled laborers (Kitajima 2008, 7; Yasuda 2010, 4). Thus, while Japan has accepted increasing number of low-skilled migrant workers in reality, the government has ostensibly maintained the closed-door policy. It seems to be a natural consequence that socioeconomic integration policies has remain underdeveloped at the national level, since those workers have not been officially regarded as “migrant workers” or categorized as such.

## **2.2. Discussion on Further Immigration**

In 2011, the number of registered foreign nationals residing in Japan reached 2,078,508, accounting for 1.63 percent of the total population. The major ethnic groups are Chinese (32.5 percent, 674,879), South and North Koreans (26.2 percent, 545,401), Brazilians (10.1 percent, 210,032), Filipinos (10.1 percent, 209,376) and Peruvians (2.5 percent, 52,843) (Ministry of Justice, 2012: 18,19). The labor statistics show that 682,450 are employed in 119,731 firms, excluding holders of “Special Permanent Resident” status

(who are predominantly Korean “old-comers” who arrived in Japan before the end-of WWII and their descendants) (Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2013). If we include the 67,065 overstayers,<sup>3</sup> the foreign population working in Japan would be more than 0.7 million. Whether one considers these numbers big or small, if Japan should accept more foreign-born population depends on sector, region, and one’s viewpoints.

The anxiety over the foreseen labor shortage, caused by the aging population has been shared by policy makers, media, and the general population for decades. According to the forecast by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (NIPSSR, 2013), labor force population will decrease to 63.3 million in 2020, and 59 million in 2030, compared to 66.3 million in 2010. Miwa (2008) estimates that the labor force population will be 42.8 million if the labor force participation rates remain unchanged. To complement this anticipated population and labor force decline, proponents of large-scale immigration emphasize the economic merits and adaptation for globalization. One of the extreme examples of such arguments is the “Proposal for a Japanese Immigration Policy Model” by a group of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members, which suggests accepting 10 million immigrants over the next 50 years (LDP 2008). Opponents are mainly concerned with 1) employment opportunities for the Japanese labor force, especially underprivileged groups such as the elderly and women, and 2) social friction and disorder (Rengo, 2006).

A few salient points should be noted concerning the prospect of controlling immigration to Japan. As mentioned above, Japanese authorities maintain a policy of welcoming highly skilled foreign workers, while it does not overtly accept low-skilled immigrants. It has been strengthened through the introduction of the “Point System” to facilitate the immigration of highly skilled foreign nationals in 2012. However, in 2011, 1,368,772 or 66 percent of registered foreigners resided under “the status of residence categories for activities based on civil status or position” (Ministry of Justice 2012). Increasing immigration based on marital status or blood relationships makes it hard for

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<sup>3</sup> There had been a significant number of overstayers in Japan until mid-2000s, since hitting its peak in 1993 at 298,646. The major decline occurred after the immigration authority started “*Fuho Taizai-sha Go-nen Hangan Keikaku* (The plan to halve the number of overstayers in five years)” in 2004, with stricter control at entrance, as well as rigorous inspections during their residence in the country.

the immigration authority to control the number of immigrants, as well as limiting the entrance of such immigrants based on individual characteristics, including educational backgrounds, linguistic skills, and income levels. However, several policy proposals and papers continue to claim, “disciplined acceptance” (See, e.g., Keidanren 2004; Cabinet Office 2005). Studies have shown that integration of skilled immigrants tends to be smoother compared to that of low-skilled immigrants; nevertheless, the integration policy and measures for present and future immigration in Japan should be based on the premise that backgrounds of individual immigrants vary and enforcement of selective policy becomes increasingly challenging at the sole responsibility of the immigration authority.

### **3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1. Methodology**

This study focuses on migrant workers’ integration into Japanese society, with particular attention on the relationship between Japanese language ability and socioeconomic integration. The key questions are how and how much degree Japanese society has supported immigrants in enhancing their language skills and social inclusion, and how migrants’ abilities to communicate in Japanese affect the opportunities for and levels of integration.

A qualitative method is employed in this research to capture the dynamics among the government, migrants, employers, and civil society. In addition to literature and policy reviews, semi-structured interviews were conducted with officers of local governments and affiliated bodies, such as public employment security offices and associations which facilitate international exchange within communities and NGOs which conducts Japanese language courses. Interviews were conducted in Hamamatsu city, Yokohama city, and Shinjuku ward in Tokyo. Those cities were selected because all of those cities host large numbers of foreign residents; nevertheless, each has a distinct composition of nationalities of foreign residents. Thus, the comparison between the cities would show different responses and supports offered by local authorities to respond the specific needs of foreign residents in each city.

There are limited quantitative sources available regarding income of migrant

workers in Japan. Notably, foreign resident households are excluded from the Family Income and Expenditure Survey by the Statistics Bureau of Japan. Unavailability of statistics regarding foreign residents, such as poverty rate and the percentage of students to enter higher education by nationalities, allowed the government, to some extent, to conceal and fail to address the socioeconomic issues faced by foreigners (Omagari et al. 2011, 27–28). Nevertheless, some surveys conducted by local governments can help us to grasp the characteristics of migrants and their social inclusion at the local level. Additionally, the 2009 Amendment to the Statistics Act enabled researchers to access part of cross-referenced census data upon requests. Those data will be employed in Chapter six to demonstrate the different characteristics of migrant workers.

## **3.2. Analytical Framework**

### **3.2.1. Integration Theory**

Several theories and terminologies have been applied to explain the state of migrants' socioeconomic integration and to understand the process of incorporation into host societies. In Japan, the term "*Tabunka Kyosei* (multicultural coexistence)" is a widely recognized term, concerning social integration of foreigners, among government, academia, and civil society. However, it is useful to review key concepts relating to the social integration of immigrants, including assimilation, multiculturalism, segregation and integration, to comprehend the complex reality of "multicultural coexistence" in Japan.

According to Castles and Miller (2009), assimilation is the process whereby migrants adopt and merged into the host society by hiding or abandoning their original language, culture, or other characteristics while the majority group in the society remains unchanged or unaffected. (Castles and Miller 2009, 247) In this regime, migrants' rights to maintain their culture, language, and other social practices, especially in the public spaces are rarely considered. O'Reilly (2012) makes an additional clarification to this concept that there are migrants who are willing to assimilate to the majority for the sake of preventing unnecessary bias and discrimination. If migrants try to retain their cultures and other habits in a country with assimilationist policy, they are likely to experience social exclusion and marginalization as ethnic minorities (O'Reilly

2012, 52). Even under the concept of integration, which succeeded the assimilationist policy and is considered as a gradual and mutual process, it is still expected for migrants to be incorporated into the majority group in the long-run (Castles and Miller 2009, 247).

It needs to be mentioned that the assimilationist regime had more relevance in the past when immigration of individuals had more permanent characteristics. With the increase of short term and circular migration, it became difficult for host societies to expect foreign residents to develop the psychological attachment to the host society to an extent that they fully assimilate to the majority group. However, this does not mean that the host states have given up the assimilationist policies and become generous in accepting different cultural expressions. Non-assimilation to the host society can still cause friction between ethnic communities and the majority group, as observed in the debate on the Islamic women's clothing in public spaces in European countries. It is more pragmatic to use the concept of assimilation to assess to what extent the host countries and communities expect immigrants to integrate through one-sided adaptation, and the degree to which the concept is embedded in the immigration and integration policies (O'Reilly 2012, 52-53).

Certain countries, such as Canada and Australia, have a generous attitude in accepting diversity and consider themselves as multicultural societies. O'Reilly (2012) states "*multicultural societies treat their minorities as distinct but equal*" in terms of access to welfare benefits and justice, as well as expression of cultural differences (O'Reilly 2012, 53). In her view of the multicultural society, there is no distinction between passive aspects of non-discrimination, which is protection against discrimination in public spheres when migrants maintain their cultural identities, and in active maintenance of migrants' cultural identities and communities, as well as its tolerance by the majority group. While Castles and Miller (2009) share the idea of equal membership to the host society, they classify two variations in regards to the maintenance and expression of minority cultures. One type of societies simply admits the presence of distinct cultural communities without state support in conservation of minority cultures, while a more progressive type of multicultural society is prepared to accept distinct cultures and to assure equality for minority groups (Castles and Miller

2009, 247-249). An extreme version of the latter type may conflict with the idea of unity as a nation state. In reality, there is a gradation in degree of multiculturalism rather than two distinct approaches. Thus, it is useful to employ the concept of multiculturalism to understand the degree of willingness and tolerance of the host societies toward minority cultures.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs suggests a broader concept of “social inclusion” and urges states to fight against both poverty and social exclusion, given the awareness that social and economic exclusion are inseparable. While this is not a concept specific to migration issues, it is a relevant framework in the present study considering the fact that migrants often experience “*the involuntary exclusion [...] from society’s political, economic and societal processes, which prevents their full participation in the society*” (Atkinson and Marlier 2010, 1). The key assumption here is that minorities experience “involuntary exclusion” due to societal factors, regardless of their intention, and sometimes ability, to become a part of the society.

In this regard, the “Segregation regime” will be considered the polar opposite of social inclusion. This model is typically realized through guest worker programs, and minimizes the contact between the host society and migrants, who often live in the country on a temporary basis. The examples of the model can be found in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and (previously) Germany. While the model is based on the assumption that social integration is unnecessary because those workers eventually go back to their home countries, there is incompatibly with the idea of democratic societies where marriage and freedom of movement are hardly restricted (Nakayama 2009, 147), allowing marriage between local and migrant population, and reunification of family members from home countries. In other words, there are possibilities for democratic states to gradually lose full control over the number of foreign-born population as well as their length of stay and degree of interaction with host the society, regardless of their original restrictive policies.

There is no single ideal model that all host countries can conform to about integration of immigrants. The forms of social integration or non-integration have been varied across countries as well as by time frame in the same country. In this research,



the above concepts will be employed to examine the characteristics of Japanese immigration and integration policies and practices, as well as how these policies and Japanese society have evolved through time. The key question is whether immigrants, a group of people who are often in an economically and socially precarious status, are able to have independent lives in the host society through access to adequate information, public services, decent employment opportunities, as well as a certain level of interaction with the majority group.

### **3.2.2. Language and Human Capital Framework**

Language has a diversity of functions in a society. Among those, two aspects will be focused in this study: language as a communication tool and as a source of identity. At the individual level, the ability to use a language serves to expand socioeconomic opportunities and to demonstrate belonging to the society in general or to a certain social group in the society. Previous studies provide frameworks to comprehend why it is beneficial for immigrants to learn the local language and which factors affect the proficiency of local languages by immigrants.

Lazear (1997) presented a model showing there are incentives for individuals who belong to minority speech communities to acquire language(s) and culture(s) of the majority group, as it allows them a greater access to prospective trading counterparts who belong to the majority community. This economic incentive is bigger for minorities who have fewer colleagues from the same cultural origin in the host community, and thus fewer potential trading partners, and for younger immigrants, who have more years in which to benefit from the investment in the language acquisition. The proficiency in the local language will increase the likelihood of immigrants being employed, as well as gain higher wages, though the details vary between different studies. A study by Dusmann and Fabbri (2003) found that literacy has a greater impact than fluency on the probability of employment, while the opposite applies for wages, meaning speaking fluency has a stronger positive impact on earnings. On the other hand, Chiswick (1991) suggests writing proficiency is more important than fluency in determining wage levels. In any case, these studies agree on the importance of acquiring local language to improve immigrants' economic opportunities in the host countries. In particular, emphasis on written communication shows the necessity for immigrants to intentionally

learn the local language in order to enhance their labor market position, as literacy in the local language is less likely obtained through natural exposure to the local environment than oral communication skill (Dustmann and Fabbri, 2003).

However, acquiring a new language also poses a cost for immigrants, including time, efforts and expense for schooling, which they could spend in gaining other forms of human capital through education (other than language) or professional experience (Pendakur and Pendakur 2002, 149). The cost of acquiring the local language tends to be higher for less educated immigrants, while educated immigrants achieve writing proficiency with relatively smaller costs (Chiswick, 1991). Moreover, it has been observed that proficiency in the local language benefits skilled immigrants to a large extent, making their human capital more useful in the host country, while the effect is limited for those who undertake low-skill jobs (Berman, Lang, and Siniver 2000). These studies suggest that acquisition of the host country language will expand the opportunities for immigrants in the new country, though the benefits need to outweigh the cost of language acquisition to induce immigrants to be proficient in the local language.

There have been extensive studies on which factors affect immigrants' proficiency in the local language. Chiswick and Repetto (2000) categorized those factors into three dimensions: "exposure, efficiency, and economic factors," which are also enriched by other studies. "Exposure" to the language includes contact with the destination countries' language both pre- and post-immigration, including language course attendances and length of residence in the destination country. Greater exposure to the target language with a longer period in the destination country as well as participation in the local language course are proven to have positive impacts on the levels of local immigrants' language skills (Beenstock 2009; Chiswick and Repetto, 2000; Mesch 2003). "Efficiency" represents how easily immigrants' can acquire local language, through closer linguistic distance between native and host languages, being younger at the time of immigration, and being involved in formal education for a longer period of time. (Chiswick and Repetto 2000; Bleakley and Chin 2004) Age at the entrance to the host country and duration in education also work as economic incentives to immigrants to acquire local language skill, along with employment status.

Those who have higher economic incentive—that is to say, younger migrants, highly educated migrants, as well as those who are employed—tend to have higher proficiency in local language, because they can expect higher earnings as a result of local language acquisition (Mesch 2003; Beenstock 2009)

These studies show the possibilities that degree of migrants' socioeconomic can be enhanced through various factors. Although not all of variables can be controlled by policies, some measures have been already implemented by many migrant receiving countries, such as encouraging language acquisition through language courses before and after immigration, giving them economic incentive through enhanced employment opportunities, and selecting immigrants based on their educational level through Point System. In this study, language education for immigrants will be the central consideration, along with its correlations with immigrants' characteristics.

### **3.2.3. Sociology of Language**

In a society as a whole, language serves as an important factor of social cohesion. In many countries, there are language requirements for immigration or naturalization, which shows the states' preference for maintaining the language of the current citizenship. A selection of language(s) in policies and their diffusion through education systems can also be understood in the context of maintaining social, economic, and political dominance of the native language-using population in a society (Fukushima 2011, 7).

For minority groups, lack of ability to use the language that is used by the majority group can result in social exclusion, putting them in a disadvantaged position in society. This is due to the existence of “in-group favoritism”; there are tendencies toward distinctions between “us-and-them,” and we favor those who are or seems to be in the same community, indicated through the choice of language, accents and idioms (Edwards 2009, 21, 26). It has been found that those who have protective attitudes toward the use of the local language, and those who fear the increase of non-speakers of the host community's language, have disinclination toward immigration (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Espenshade and Calhoun 1993). On the other hand, the attitude from the public can affect the language proficiency of immigrants as well. If an individual feels

alienated from the local society, rather than perceiving his or herself a part of society, his or her language proficiency tends to be lower (Mesch 2003). Thus, there can be either virtuous or vicious cycles regarding public attitude and immigrants' local language proficiency; if immigrants can build local language proficiency, it will ease the alienation of immigrants and anti-immigration sentiment from the general public, which will positively affect the local language proficiency of immigrants. If not, there would be a vicious cycle between immigrants' willingness to acquire local language and public reaction toward immigration.

To assess the effect of language on immigrants' integration into the host society, the following three points will be considered in this study:

- 1) The status of language selected as a national language and status of other languages at local and national levels (Monolingualism or multilingualism in the public sphere, particularly in information provided by government institutions)
- 2) Policy and public expectation for immigrants to acquire the language as a tool and/or as an identity
- 3) The effect on socioeconomic status of immigrants based on their language ability.

#### **4. JAPAN'S INTEGRATION POLICY AND MUTICULTURAL COEXISTENCE**

Both immigration and immigrant integration policies have roles to play in dealing with immigration upon entry and throughout residence. However, it is often said that there has been no coherent national policy on integration of migrants in Japan, or that it only appeared after the 2000s, to deal with all stages of migration: entrance, initial or temporary stay, permanent residency, and naturalization. (See e.g. Kitawaki 2008; Yamawaki 2006). As demonstrated in Chapter two, immigration control policy has played a major role in determining the categories of people who may enter into the country, as well as the length and the status of their stay in Japan. Nevertheless, recent years have seen a gradual development of integration policy and the concept of "Multicultural Coexistence (*Tabunka Kyosei*).” Integration is a process in which each part of the society has different stake and role to play, including government, the private sector, NGOs, and the general public. In this section, close attention will be paid to how each of these participant groups interprets the concept of multicultural coexistence and how they facilitate or hinder the incorporation of migrants.

#### **4.1. Local and National Governments**

Kitawaki (2008, 23) notes that the government should have established a social integration policy when the immigration policy was amended in 1990. As there has been no comprehensive integration policy at the national level, it has forced local governments with large foreign populations to bear the burden of socioeconomic integration of foreigners in the municipalities, through providing support in education, health care, and other forms of social protection. Yamawaki (2011) classifies local governments that are proactive in developing integration policies into two groups: municipalities with large old-comer population are considered to be in the first group, and are active in mainly promoting human rights of Korean residents and equalities with the Japanese population. On the other hand, municipalities with new-comer residents, mainly Nikkei descendants and those from other Asian countries, focuses not only on human rights protection, but also on daily support provisions for foreign residents and promotion of interaction with local communities (Yamawaki 2011, 32).

Local governments that host a large number of foreign residents, especially new-comers, have been ahead of the national government and have played a key role in shaping and sharing the idea of multicultural coexistence. In 2001, a group of 13 local governments established a conference in Hamamatsu city on the theme of “coexistence with foreign residents at the local level” prior to the publication of the Plan for Promoting Multicultural Coexistence by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIAC) in 2006 (Noyama 2009, 149). In the Hamamatsu declaration and proposal, which was adopted in the conference, it advocates the challenges faced by foreign nationals and local authorities, regarding education for children with foreign background, social protection and administrative procedures for residence and immigration registrations, and proposes improvements to prefecture-level and national-level authorities.

The Hamamatsu declaration is considered progressive in recognizing foreign residents as members of local communities and their socioeconomic contributions, as well as in positioning them as actors who have responsibility and rights in building communities. At the same time, the proposal is limited as it handles only administrative matters and it does not mention the underlying socioeconomic structures (Kitawaki

2008, 20), which have a significant impact on migrants' lives and their integration. For example, Hamamatsu city itself hosts Nikkei newcomers, who are largely affected by the business conditions of manufacturing industries and who tend to live in concentrated areas in the city, with limited interaction with local Japanese population. In such circumstances, public policies on fair employment opportunities, living conditions, and social involvement requires careful attention.

At the national level, the MIAC has been a leading organ in defining the integration policy, notably through the establishment of the Research Committee on the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence in 2005. The committee issued a report in 2006, which is considered as the first comprehensive plan concerning foreign residents' integration. This report provided the first ever definition of "*Tabunka Kyosei* (multicultural coexistence)" as a government approach as follows: "*Residents with different nationalities and ethnic origins live together as members of local society through acknowledging cultural differences and through trying to build equal relationships.*" The phrase "trying to build equal relationship" between Japanese and foreign residents implies that the relationship has not been equal in the past. According to Yamawaki (2011), the report was epoch-making, as it urged the state to position foreigners as "local residents," while they had been only considered as a "work force", a "temporary guest" or a "threat to social security." Furthermore, MIAC emphasized the importance of the integration policy by framing it under the newly-created concept of multicultural coexistence. Previously, policies regarding foreign residents were handled under the promotion of "international (cultural) exchange"; Considering the interaction with foreign population as a part of "international cultural exchange" has made local governments deem foreign residents to be temporary guests and hindered them from being treated as members of local communities (Yamawaki 2011, 26, 33). The needs of the foreign population in the integration process were revealed through this framework shift, including acquisition of Japanese language skill, supports in daily life situations, as well as the need for mutual understanding between foreign and Japanese community members.

However, as Kitawaki (2008) rightly points out, the report only handles "daily living environment" issues, ignoring broader aspects of socio-economic integration due

to the relatively limited authority of the MIAC. If the aim of multiculturalism is not limited to realizing the conservation of original cultures of immigrants, but is also aimed at realizing their socioeconomic equality, it is necessary to involve the Ministry of Justice (MOJ); the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT); and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), since those ministries have greater authorities on legislations regarding immigration, labor market control, and the social security system (Kitawaki 2008, 17).

The MIAC's report in 2006 activated the inter-ministerial discussion after being introduced to the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy in April 2006. The Ministerial Conference on Foreign Workers, established under the Cabinet Office in 1988, released "Comprehensive Measures on Foreigners as Residents" in December 2006. Having ten ministries as members, including the MOJ, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Police Agency, MIAC, MEXT, and MHLW, the plan deals with three pillars: 1) Formation of local societies in which foreigners can be smoothly integrated, 2) education for children with foreign backgrounds and 3) enhancement of employment opportunities and promotion of the membership to social protection (Cabinet Office 2006). This plan is based on the acknowledgement that

*"the state is responsible for treatment of foreigners who work and reside in Japan, and to provide an environment in which those foreigners, as members of society, can receive public services the same as the Japanese population does,"*

which goes beyond the previous views, which treated foreigners under specific fields, such as labor policy and immigration policy.

As shown in this section, the local governments with large foreign populations played a key role in formulating integration policies of foreign residents as well as in urging the state government to consider foreigners as members of Japanese society. While there has been a clear shift from "temporary guests" toward "residents", especially since 2006, the tendency still remains at the state level, which can be observed in continued use of the term 'Gaikokujin-Rodosha (foreign worker)' or 'Gaikokujin (foreign nationals)' in the majority of official documents, rather than 'Imin

(immigrant)' (Gottlieb 2012, 23). The actual measures and their effectiveness will be reviewed in Chapter five, with a focus on Japanese language education for adult migrants.

## 4.2. Private Sector

The Private sector, which provides employment opportunities for migrant workers, is an important actor in considering migrants' and their families' socioeconomic integration as it interacts with migrants on a day-to-day basis and plays a central role in determining migrants economic success.

Keidanren, the Japan Business Federation, issued a brief paper in 2009 entitled "Fostering and securing competitive human resources." As shown in the title of this paper, Keidanren takes a position that promotes the immigration of highly skilled foreign nationals, while showing understanding to the opponents of immigration of low-skilled workers as of 2009. In this paper, the Keidanren asserts that Japan should embrace the concept of multicultural coexistence in order to encourage the settlement of competitive human resources, who are mainly university graduates, trainees who have successfully acquired skills through traineeships in Japan, and other professionals who can add value in the Japanese economy. It also re-emphasized the three principles in accepting "competitive human resources," which were recommended in Keidanren's earlier paper in 2004: 1) Controlled immigration both in quantity and quality, 2) Immigration with respect for human rights and dignity of foreigners, and 3) Immigration that is beneficial for both countries of origin and destination (Keidanren 2009, 8) These principles aim to address to the criticism and fear toward the immigration of foreign nationals, such as concerns over negative effects on the employment opportunities for Japanese nationals, and criticisms for human and labor rights violations, especially for trainees.

The question remains as to the degree to which the private sector is willing to foster a "multicultural coexistence society." While it proposes the government to establish an act for promotion of a multicultural coexistence society, the definition of the term by the Keidanren is not necessarily based on a full degree of multiculturalism: "*the society [which is] based on Japanese culture, yet embrace diversity that foreigners can bring in, and that activates the economy and society*" (Keidanren 2009, 8). The



importance of Japanese language education is also emphasized in the recommendations, urging the state government to bear the cost of Japanese language education for foreign-born residents, so that they can be incorporated into Japanese society on a permanent basis (Keidanren 2009, 10). It can be considered that it is not a fully assimilationist regime, as it values diversity; nonetheless, it is not based on a full degree of multiculturalism either. The concept proposed by the Keidanren shows a strong preference for accepting only those who can be integrated into the society by utilizing their expertise and ability to learn Japanese language.

From the Keidanren's report, it appears that the private sector as a whole has an interest in integrating migrants, especially those who are highly skilled. However, the picture may seem different and reflect the for-profit nature of the sector if the integration progress at the firm level is explored. In one of the interviews, an officer at a public employment security office in Tokyo commented that the word "multicultural coexistence" does not reflect the reality of how the private sector perceives migrant workers, considering that the majority of firms do not accept applications from foreign nationals in reality, even though many of them speak Japanese. (Yabata, Shinjuku public employment security office 2013) Another officer from Hello-work (public employment office) in Hamamatsu city stated, "Employers are not trying to hire foreigners specifically. They seek workers who are capable of filling their needs" (Naiki, Hamamatsu Hello-work 2013). To substantiate those comments, a study by Watanabe (2004) showed that nearly 40 percent of firms responded that they have never hired foreigners in the past and have no plan to do so in the future. Furthermore, 57 percent of firms that have foreign employees responded that they do not take any special measures in order to facilitate their integration in the workplace (Watanabe 2004, 3). Those observations and Watanabe's survey results demonstrate that the concept of multicultural coexistence is limited at the workplace, hindering migrants' economic opportunities, even after they have acquired Japanese language skills.

### **4.3. NGOs**

In the absence of a coherent national integration policy, NGOs have been the central actors in providing daily support for foreign residents, including interpretation, Japanese language education, and day-to-day consultations from the 1980s, when the number of

foreign residents as well as Japanese returnees from China started to increase. While grass-root activities in general had been fragmented and took place on a small scale, the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 and the resulting Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities (Hereafter, the NPO Act) in 1998, stimulated volunteerism and the establishment of numerous NPOs/NGOs in Japan. “Multicultural coexistence” has emerged as a key concept concerning measures supporting foreign residents among local governments after the establishment of “*Tabunka Kyosei Center (Center for Multicultural Society)*,” an NGO that provided the multilingual information to foreign residents in response to the Great Hanshin Earthquake in Western Japan (Kondo 2011, 7; Tamura, Kitamura and Takayanagi 2007, 13).

It is not often the case that NGOs provide an explicit definition of multicultural coexistence in written form. Nevertheless, a few examples will be provided here to showcase 1) the emphasis on the equality between foreign residents and the majority Japanese and 2) encouragement of mutual change rather than one-sided assimilation of foreign residents into Japanese society. The Center for Multicultural Society noted in its organization establishment prospectus: “*The organization will form projects for both foreign and Japanese residents to realize multicultural coexistence, which is based on mutual respect beyond the boundaries of nationality, culture, and language.*” (Tamura, Kitamura and Takayanagi 2007, 13) Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan (SMJ), an NGO network that advocates for migrants’ rights, also emphasizes the importance of mutual integration processes and equal membership to society in its publications. For example: “*Japanese society will benefit from the diversity if various people with different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds learn from and stimulate each other as members of society.*” (SMJ 2009, 9)

The definition of multiculturalism and activities by NGOs differ according to their areas of focus. Tamura (2011) classifies the activities by NGOs into four categories: 1) support for communication, through both Japanese language education and translation services, 2) provision of daily support, such as in the areas of housing, health care, education, labor-related matters, and disaster prevention and relief, 3) enhancement of the concept of multicultural coexistence through dialogue and participation in local level communities, and 4) lobbying of and cooperation with governments to systematize the

support for foreign residents (see Tamura 2011, 158–164 for details). Among those activities, communication support was, arguably, the most significant, with 20,000 volunteers working in non-for-profit Japanese language education in 1,500 organizations and facilities in 2003 (Yoshitomi 2008, 32). Such active support from NGOs reflects both the needs of immigrants to acquire Japanese language skills, as well as the insufficiency of the governments' supports to meet their needs.

It should be noted that a few proposals and critiques by NGOs go further in terms of the degree of multiculturalism pursued, showing discrepancies with the government's policy. For example, the SMJ considers that the current government's approach to immigrants' language education is based on an assimilationist regime with limited assurance and support for immigrants to maintain their home cultures and languages (SMJ 2009, 16). The SMJ also demonstrates disagreement with the selective immigration policy, stating "*It cannot be called 'multicultural coexistence' if we try to culturally coexist only with 'welcomed foreigners', while eliminating the other foreigners*" (SMJ 2009, 20).

Another example is observed in the Kobe Declaration by the Nihongo Forum National Net, a forum for volunteers and teachers of Japanese language for foreign residents, which recommends governments to protect immigrants' linguistic rights through bilingual language education for immigrants' children as well as offer opportunities for immigrants to learn their mother tongues (Nihongo Forum National Net 2011, para. 31). Those linguistic rights are acknowledged in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities; nevertheless, there is a need to harmonize the ideal state with the reality given the limitation in resources to provide services for immigrants. It may not be feasible for the government to provide bilingual education in all mother tongues of immigrants, given the variety of nationalities of immigrants in Japan, which reached 190 in 2011 (MOJ, 2012c).

These examples show that disparity exists between the state government and NGOs in their interpretation of "multicultural coexistence" in terms of the degree of multiculturalism. Despite the recent dissemination of concept of multicultural

coexistence, as shown is the 2006 MIAC report, and framework shift to treat foreign nationals as part of local communities, the central government keep the idea of 'disciplined acceptance' behind strong preference on highly skilled foreigners over low-skilled ones. Private sector has also shared this tendency, resulting limited support for foreign workers at the firm level. On the other hand, local governments and civil society have pursued the promotion of 1) equality between foreign residents and the majority Japanese and 2) encouragement of mutual change, instead of one-sided assimilation of foreign residents into Japanese society, based on the fact that local communities have already accepted foreign-born population with various backgrounds. Thus, an ongoing dialogue is required among those stakeholders about the responsibility of each sector in accepting foreign-born population as well as the extent of support offered to facilitate immigrants' integration.

## **5. JAPAN'S LANGUAGE POLICY, LANGUAGE SUPPORT BY NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS**

There have been many economic studies that show that local language acquisition facilitates socioeconomic integration of immigrants into the host countries (e.g. Dustmann and Van Soest 2002; Chiswick and Miller 2002). While there has been only few quantitative analysis demonstrating the relationship between Japanese language acquisition and earnings of foreign residents in Japan, acquiring Japanese language skill is an inherently essential factor for the migrants' integration into the local societies, considering the fact that the overwhelming majority of the local population speaks the Japanese language and consider that language is an integral part of their identity and culture (Gottlieb 2012).

Japanese is the de facto sole national language, even though there is no article in the constitution that defines Japanese as an official language. The pride in the language can be observed in statements by high government officials. A member of the House of Representative, Muneo Suzuki, stated that Japan is a country of "One nation, one ethnic group, one language" in 2001, which provoked strong disagreement from Ainu ethnic minorities in the northern part of Japan. However, a similar statement was repeated by the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications, Taro Aso, in 2005, showing the dominance of the Japanese language in spite of the increasing proportion

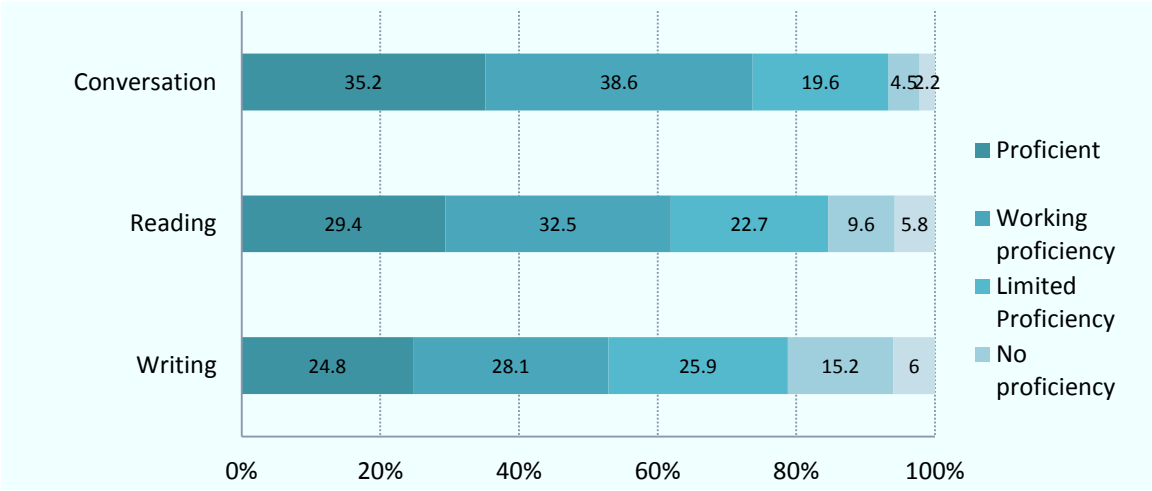
of foreign population (Mainichi Newspaper 2001; Okamoto 2005, 1). Given this dominant circumstance, the language aspect cannot be left out when one considers migrants' integration in Japan. In this chapter, the needs for migrants to acquire Japanese language skill, national and local governments' language policy and their support for immigrants, as well as roles played by NGOs and volunteers will be reviewed.

### **5.1. Needs for Immigrants to Acquire Japanese Language**

Deficiency in the local language can limit migrants' opportunities and interactions with local society, as observed in a survey by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics in which 70 percent of respondents answered that they feel disadvantaged due to their levels of Japanese language. Nonetheless, the need and motivation for migrants to acquire local language skill may vary based on their age, occupation, and life stages, especially once after they acquire survival-level language skills. For example, it is necessary for job seekers to write their curricula vitae and to converse in interviews, while parents with school-age children have occasions in communicating with teachers and undertaking administrative procedures for registrations at schools. Thus, it is necessary to determine in which situations migrants' require language skills and to what extent their language skills need to be augmented in order to have independent lives.

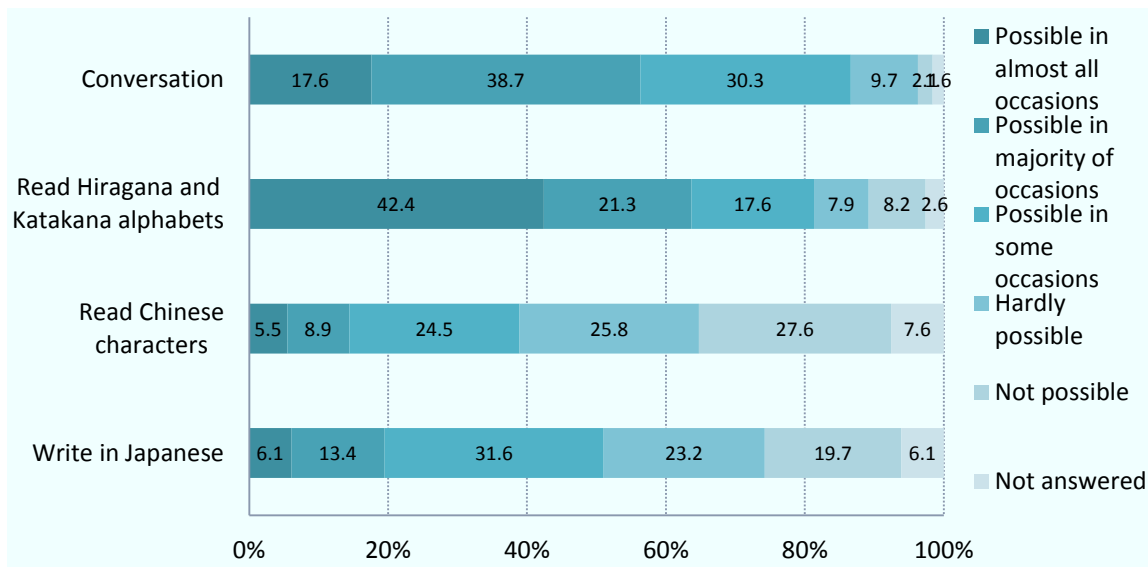
Some surveys conducted by local governments reveal the needs for language acquisition and levels of Japanese language proficiency among foreign residents, though questionnaires in those surveys are not standardized across municipalities. The surveys in Yokohama city and Hamamatsu city both show that foreign residents tend to have higher Japanese proficiency in oral communication compared to reading and writing. In Yokohama city, 73.8 percent of respondents were either proficient or had practical conversation skills, while percentages are lower for reading (61.9 percent) and writing (52.9 percent).

Figure 1: Level of Japanese language proficiency among foreign residents in Yokohama city (Yokohama city 2010, 5)



In Hamamatsu city, 56.3 percent of respondents are proficient enough in verbal communication to deal with the majority of occasions, and another 30.3 percent answered that they can have conversations in some cases. This survey also suggests that the challenge in reading and writing lies in the acquisition of Chinese characters (Kanji): 63.7 percent of respondents are able to read Hiragana and Katakana alphabets (phonetic alphabets) in the majority of occasions; however, the proportion decreases significantly, to 14.4 percent, for proficiency in Chinese characters. It is understandable that less than 20 percent are able to write in Japanese in the majority of occasions, as Japanese writing requires using both phonetic alphabets and Chinese characters.

Figure 2: Level of Japanese language proficiency among Nikkei residents in Hamamatsu city (Hamamatsu city, 2011: 27)



The survey in Shinjuku ward also shows consistent results. There, foreign residents face fewer challenges in reading Hiragana and Katakana alphabets (15.8 percent of respondents among those who answered having difficulties in communication in Japanese), while more complex situations can pose difficulties, such as reading newspaper articles and announcements (54.8 percent) and understanding explanations at hospitals and government offices (49.6 percent) (Shinjuku ward 2012).

The levels of local language skills obviously have impacts in expanding or limiting the foreign population’s accessibility to public services, job markets, and local communities. The National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics surveyed about 105 detailed occasions that foreign residents may encounter in their life in Japan, considering their frequency, respondents’ ability to handle the situation in Japanese, and their desire to be able to handle the situation in Japanese in the future. According to the survey, non-Japanese native speakers who can read only Hiragana and Katakana alphabets struggle in daily situations, such as reading newspapers, as well as work related matters, such as searching for jobs and confirming contracts. On the other hand, those who could also read Chinese characters and those who had reached the level of being able to read sentences about familiar topics reported suffering less in daily situations that foreign residents encounter in the early stage of their stay, including

house searching and making moving arrangements. However, the findings indicate that they continue to face difficulties in dealing with complex administrative procedures at governmental offices, such as nursing and pension application and consultation (National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics 2009, 9). From those results, it can be seen that 1) foreign residents will increase their ability to handle daily situations once they achieve the level to be able to read Chinese characters, while 2) there are continuous needs for support in complex situations, even for advanced speakers.

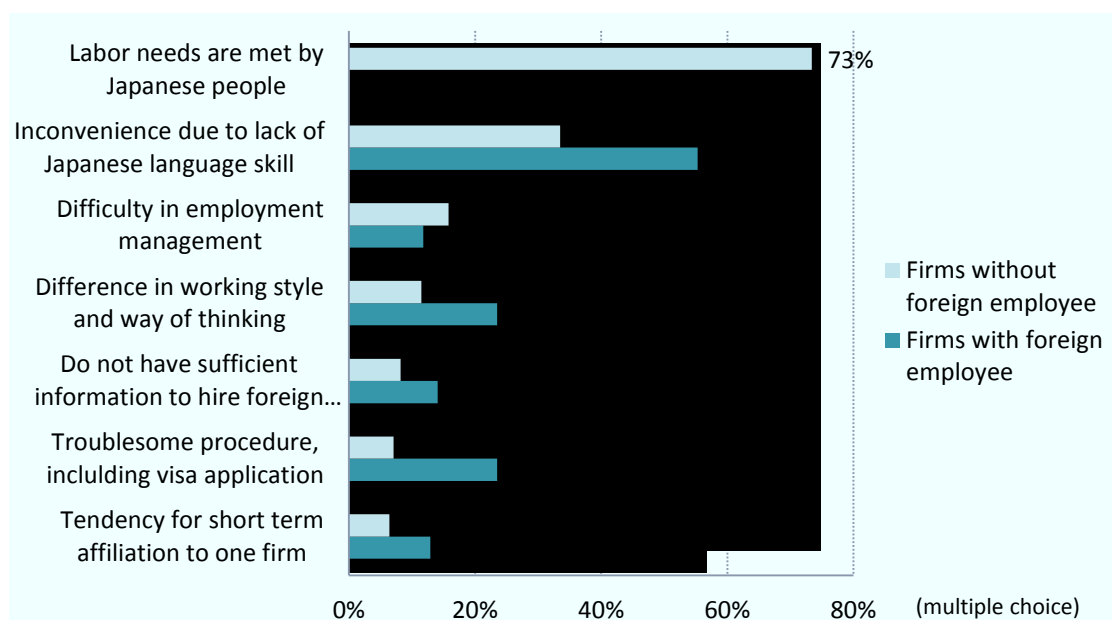
As shown in Figure 2, a limited proportion of foreign residents achieve mastery of reading and writing Chinese characters (Kanji). Lack of ability to read and write Chinese characters can cause difficulty in practical communication, but can also involve emotional friction between foreign populations and the Japanese-speaking majority in the view of cultural integration. In the survey targeting Japanese nationals by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (1999), only 3.7 percent of respondents consider that the use of Chinese characters should be limited since it is a factor which makes Japanese writing difficult. Instead, 61.7 percent considers using Chinese characters is practical at it instantly convey the meaning of phrases in reading, and 72.8 percent of respondents reported that Chinese characters are an integral part of Japanese writing, showing the pride in the cultural tradition that Chinese characters represent (Gottlieb 2012, 13). This result emphasizes the importance of having a mastery of Chinese characters for immigrants in both practical and cultural terms in order to have smooth communication and to facilitate their sociocultural inclusion.

To continue with the expectations of the Japanese-speaking majority, there is pressure from the general public and expectation from employers that migrants acquire Japanese language skill, the latter of which can work as an incentive for migrants to learn the language. A public opinion poll on cross-border movement of labor in 2010 by the Cabinet Office revealed that the overwhelming majority of the public considered that having Japanese language skills is important in accepting foreign labor (69 percent answered “important” and 25.2 percent chose “relatively important”). These percentages far exceed those for perceived importance of possession of technical skills and knowledge, which only 35.7 percent answered as “important” and 38.6 percent considered as “relatively important” (Cabinet Office 2010). Watanabe (2004) provided a



detailed analysis of the survey by The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2004), including of difficulties in hiring and managing foreign employees faced by private firms with foreign employees and without foreign employees. He reported that 55 percent of the firms with a foreign employee and 34 percent of the firms without foreign employees considered that they face inconveniences in communication in Japanese (Figure 3). Moreover, the fact that 73 percent of firms without foreign employees responded that their “labor needs are met by Japanese people” shows the reluctance of Japanese firms to hire foreign workers. It might be a natural consequence that the potential foreign employees are expected to have at least working knowledge of Japanese language or to have some other competitive edge to compete with Japanese nationals in the labor market, given the principle of non-discrimination under the labor law, which obliges firms to pay equivalent wages regardless of employees’ nationalities. In other words, the prospects for foreign workers in labor market will be limited if they have limited Japanese language proficiency and have no other competitive skills to offer, considering potential additional costs for firms to provide formal and informal support for foreign employees to enhance their performance in the workplace on top of the equal wage with local workers.

Figure 3: Challenges in hiring and managing foreign employees (Watanabe, 2004: 4)



As shown in this section, there is a persistent pressure from the majority

Japanese for migrants to acquire Japanese language skills, though there is no general language requirement at the entrance to the country. Deficiency in Japanese language can cause inconveniences in living in Japan, especially in complex settings, as well as disadvantages in labor market. As Kawamori from the Multicultural Affairs Division in Shizuoka Prefectural Government points out,

*“It is often misunderstood that learning Japanese is the process of assimilation. However, from my personal point of view, foreign residents need to acquire Japanese language skill as a ‘tool’ to live in Japanese local societies, regardless of the identity aspect of languages. It would be better that the government make it clear that language skill is necessary in order that foreign residents can have better lives in local community.”* (Kawamori 2013)

Despite the gradual penetration of the concept of multicultural coexistence at both local and national level, the dominance of Japanese language still entails the necessity for immigrants to acquire Japanese language skill as a practical tool to smooth the process of integration. In the following sections, how and to what extent the language acquisition needs of migrants are fulfilled.

## **5.2. Language Policy and Support for Immigrants**

There are two potential ways to meet the language needs of immigrants and to facilitate their socioeconomic integration: Japanese language education for immigrants, and provision of information in multiple languages. There is increased acknowledgement for the need of providing opportunities for immigrants to acquire Japanese language skill to enable them to have independent lives in local communities, alongside of the penetration of the idea of “multicultural coexistence” and “foreign population as local residents,” especially after the MIAC’s announcement in 2006. On the other hand, there will remain a demand among immigrants to have essential and complex information in their mother tongues. As demonstrated in the previous section, immigrants who acquired intermediate levels of Japanese language skill still face difficulties in unfamiliar and complex occasions. It may be beyond the public authorities’ responsibilities to provide all the public information in immigrants’ mother tongues, and it is unfeasible for authorities to cover all of the immigrants’ languages. However, at the same time, there is a necessity to provide multilingual information in at least certain areas to respond to

fundamental needs, such as health care and education for children, as well as in emergency situations. In the following subsections, we will see how the state and local governments respond (or do not respond) to the needs of immigrants through their language policies and practices.

### **5.2.1. Policy and Practice at the National Level**

Unlike in countries that are homes of more than one speech community, such as Canada, Switzerland, and India, there has been no active discussion on the status of each language in Japan.<sup>4</sup> It has been an evident premise that the sole target population of national level language policy and planning is the population whose mother tongue is Japanese, putting aside the language planning for non-Japanese speakers (Tomita 2009, 32). As demonstrated above, there is an increased demand from immigrants, especially from newcomers, for learning Japanese as a second language; therefore, the government has increasing incentive to establish language policy for non-Japanese speakers.

According to the definition of Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), language planning can engender an intentional change in the use of a language in a society or speech communities.

*Language planning is a body of ideas, laws and regulations (language policy) change rules, beliefs and practices intended to achieve planned change (or to stop change from happening) in language use in one or more communities.*  
(Kaplan, and Baldauf 1997, 3)

Language planning is composed of three processes: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning (Tomita 2009, 31; Hirataka 2005, 7). It is a process in which one or more languages are given a specific status, role, and function in society (status planning), controlled for necessary transformation (e.g. standardization of scripts) so that it can play the defined function and roles (corpus planning), and disseminate the new status and changes of the language in the society or among the target population (acquisition planning).

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<sup>4</sup> There are minority speech communities in Japan: notably, the Ainu in the northern part of the country and Okinawan in the southern islands. However, those speech communities are limited in both number of speakers and in geographical areas; thus, they have not been considered as candidates for official languages.

In the Japanese context, language planning has been heavily focused on corpus planning, including standardization of vocabulary and use of Kanji (Chinese characters), while the status planning has been given limited attention (Tomita 2009; Hirataka 2005); for example, which language should be used in public administrations has not been overtly discussed. Moreover, two concepts *Koku-go* (National language) and *Nihon-go* (Japanese language) have not given clear boundaries, because the overwhelming majority speaks Japanese as their mother tongue, making it difficult to separate two aspects of language. The fact that the concept of *Koku-go* involves two aspects—language as a tool for communication and a basis of national identity—may have hindered Japanese language education for foreign residents to be classified under this concept. Katsuragi (2009) contends that the concept of *Nihon-go* should be considered as an overarching concept, so that it can contain two sub-concepts: “national language policy,” which handles the aspects of culture and identity associated with Japanese language, and “standardized language policy,” which deals with the functional aspect, that is, Japanese language as a tool for communication (Katsuragi 2009, 29, 40).

The national-level policy discussion on the provisions of Japanese language education for immigrants accelerated in the mid-2000s, with the issuance of the report on promotion of multicultural coexistence by MIAC in 2006, and with the establishment of the Committee on Japanese Language Education in the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 2007. Until that point, public support for Japanese language acquisition has targeted a very limited range of groups, such as refugees and Japanese diaspora who had left behind in China after World War II and returned to Japan in the 1980s. The 2006 MIAC report provided the basis for the discussion that the communication support for foreign residents should have two components: provision of multilingual information at municipality level and support for acquisition of Japanese language and knowledge about the Japanese society. While the report was mainly focused on measurements taken at local level, it also urged the state government to provide language and integration courses on state responsibility with potential connections with immigration policy, with reference to the example of Germany (MIAC 2006, 14-15).

The Committee on Japanese Language Education (2009) issued a brief paper on Japanese education for “foreign population as local residents” and a system for its promotion. This paper has a significant meaning as it provides a set of goals of Japanese language education for foreign population as local residents as follows:

- *To be able to live a healthy and safe life using the Japanese language*
- *To be able to live an independent life using the Japanese language*
- *To be able to live as a member of the society and to have mutual understanding by using the Japanese language*
- *To be able to have a cultured life using the Japanese language*

(Agency for Cultural Affairs 2009, 6-7)

It also included a detailed proposal about the contents of Japanese language education to meet the above goals. The contents cover daily life situations that immigrants will encounter in Japan, such as opening bank accounts, consulting with doctors, seeking employment opportunities, and paying taxes; this shows the governments’ acknowledgement that foreign residents are a part of local communities, unlike the previous approach, which treated foreigners as “guests.”

In addition, the report illustrates that the main roles of the state government are to provide guidelines for the language education system for local governments and institutions, rather than providing direct educational support for immigrants. This would involve development of course contents, an evaluation method of Japanese language skills, and evaluation of effectiveness of trainers and training of Japanese language teachers (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2009b, 2-3).

However, as the Agency for Cultural Affairs itself mentions, this proposal only applies to the measurements targeting “Foreign population as local residents” (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2009b, 2), neglecting the needs for other language-related support for foreign populations arriving Japan under specific schemes, such as trainees, university students, and healthcare workers. Responsibility for the actual schemes to support language education for immigrants in Japan, each targeting different audiences, are spread across national level ministries and local governments at the moment, as listed below.

- *Foreign population as local residents: Agency for Cultural Affairs, MIAC, local governments*
- *Children of school age and university students: MEXT*
- *Trainees and Students under the “Career Development Program for Foreign Students in Japan (Kodo Jinzai Shikin Koso)”: METI*
- *Nikkei descendants (for the purpose of increasing their employability): MHLW, MIAC, local governments*
- *Health care workers (prospective nurse and care-givers) under Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA): METI, MOFA, MHLW*
- *Overseas Japanese Language Education: MOFA*

Under such circumstances, it is difficult to have comprehensive and coherent policies without having an overarching organization that effectively coordinates measures taken by each governmental body. As a result, it became the normal state that the government took measures to address urgent matters when they arose (Working Group for Enactment for Promotion of Japanese Language Education 2012, 16). In January 2012, the Conference for Japanese Language Education attended by ministries and other institutions involved in Japanese language education for foreign population, took place in order to exchange information about activities in each institution and to grasp the current conditions and challenges (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2012). Nonetheless, the conference did not have the authority to control and coordinate the measurements in different ministries. Involvement of many governmental bodies themselves should not be criticized as it also has the advantage in responding to specific needs of foreign populations under different categories; however, there remains a question as to which body should have the function of developing an integrated vision and policy for Japanese language education for all foreign residents.

The central government acknowledges the need for supporting foreign residents in acquiring Japanese language and provides support in immigrants’ mother tongues, given the dominant language environment in Japan. In 2013, 1.8 billion Yen (1.8 million USD) were allocated for the purpose of 1) building local communities in which foreigners can be smoothly integrated (180 million Yen), 2) supporting education for children with foreign background (110 million Yen) and 3) enhancing employment opportunities and promotion of the membership to social protection (1.5 billion Yen)

(Cabinet secretariat, 2013). Japanese language education for foreign-born adults is placed under the first and third pillars. The systematization of Japanese education, such as development of Japanese textbooks and evaluation systems for language teachers and learners, are classified under the first pillar. Language training for Nikkei job-seekers is categorized under the third pillar. This language training, mainly targeting Nikkei descendants to prepare them for employment, is held in the Nikkei-concentrated areas,<sup>5</sup> and is carried by MHLW and the government-affiliated institution, the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) (MHLW, 2013). According to officers at Hello-work (public employment office) and Hamamatsu local government institutions, non-Nikkei foreign job seekers are allowed to attend such language courses only when seats remain after the registration of Nikkei job seekers (Naiki, 2013).

It is assumed that language acquisition support for non-Nikkei foreigners depends on either the budget of local governments or voluntary educational courses by NGOs, as the budget under the first pillar is not directly used for provisions of language courses. The language education support, with its focus on Nikkei descendants, can be understood in two ways. In Gottlieb's (2012: 144) view, it shows "official recognition of the language-related difficulties faced by non-Japanese people already in the country," given that such a tailor-made policy is designed to respond to "the specific needs of a specified population in defined areas and to the circumstances of specific needs." On the other hand, the disparities in public support amongst foreign population can also be understood negatively as a result of lack of comprehensive policy at the national level to cover the overall foreign population, considering the fact that the Nikkei population accounts for less than 15 percent in the total foreign-born population in Japan (MOJ 2012, 20). In the next subsection, it will be analyzed how local governments complement and lead the state government in making and implementing language policy in order to respond to the needs of foreign residents.

### **5.2.2. Policy and Practice at the Local Level**

Actors in other levels also plays a role in language planning, including local governments, educational institutions, NGOs, and other organizations, while it is often

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<sup>5</sup> The possible reasons for greater support for Nikkei descendants compared to non-Nikkei foreigners are 1) Nikkei descendants mainly enter under the "long-term residents" category, and 2) they are eligible for social security benefits – thus the state has more incentive to support them in securing employment opportunities.

considered that the primary actor of language planning is the national government, which respond to social issues through intentional changes in the use of language(s) (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997, 3-5). Gottlieb (2012) mentions that, in the Japanese context, local governments and civil society groups have been central in advocating for multilingualism and in responding flexibly to the language needs of foreign residents, behind the absence of or underdevelopment of top-down approach at the national level (Gottlieb 2012, 124-125), especially during the early years of entrance of newcomer Asian and Nikkei migrants. Hirataka (2005) notes that determining the language policy for multicultural and multi-lingual coexistence society is a process in which the society as a whole, including NGOs and academia, seeks a consensus on language usage, choice, and its penetration through problem finding and solving. It contrasts with the conventional approach, which seeks unification and standardization of language at the national level (Hirataka 2005, 7,13).

MIAC requested local governments to develop guidelines and plans to promote multicultural coexistence at the local level in 2006, based on the 2006 MIAC's Plan for the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence in Local Society and with reflections on regional realities. However, some local governments and civil societies had already faced challenges in hosting foreign residents and started to take measures at the local level before the instruction from the national level. For example, an organization affiliated to Hamamatsu city started Japanese language courses as early as 1983 and opened a consultation office for foreign residents in 1991 (HICE, 2013b). The Great Hanshin Earthquake in Western Japan in 1995, in which 199 foreign residents lost their lives, showed the vulnerability of foreign residents in irregular and unforeseeable situations. After the disaster, on top of an ad-hoc, emergency support by local police to provide information and consultation in six languages, two schemes were built at the prefectural level: *Gaikokujin Kenmin Fukko Kaigi* (the Conference of Foreign Residents in the Prefecture for Reconstruction) and *GONGO* (the Conference between Government and NGOs) for mid-term policy planning. The former was designed to reflect the viewpoints of foreign residents in the process of post-disaster reconstruction, and the latter aimed to facilitate the discussion between local authorities and NGOs, which support foreign residents and advocate for their rights to access to health care and relief donations (Yoshitomi 2008, 90–91). Those activities were ad-hoc in nature at



the beginning, responding to the specific occasions and needs of foreign residents; however, they soon became the basis for the enduring scheme and holistic vision to facilitate the coexistence of local and foreign population (Takezawa, 2005).

Accumulation of such local activities to solve social issues in relation to the inflow of foreign-born population led some progressive local governments to form visions and guidelines to deal with this topic. A good example of such bottom-up policy making is the “Hamamatsu Declaration” issued by *the Gaikokujin Shujyu Toshi Kaigi* (the Conference of Local Governments with Concentration of Foreign Residents) in 2001, the forum of 13 municipalities with large foreign populations.<sup>6</sup> It advocated the needs for Japanese language education for children in public elementary and junior high schools, translators in medical care, and the provision of multilingual information for registration procedures for foreign residents; however, language education for adults was not discussed in this paper (Gaikokujin Shujyu Toshi Kaigi, 2001).

Hamamatsu city, which was a member of the above conference, also unilaterally announced *Sekai-toshi-ka Vision* (Vision for becoming a Global City) in 2001, which includes provisions for both adult and children, such as support for acquiring Japanese language skill as a tool to live in the local society, and support at schools for children with foreign backgrounds. It is notable that every resident, including foreign residents, was seen as an agent in the process of making a global city (Hamamatsu city, 2013). In other words, the city considers that promoting the idea of coexistence between local and foreign population, and assisting in the acquisition of Japanese language skill among foreign residents, contributes to achieving this objective. A similar vision is also observed in Yokohama city, where the city aims to make itself an international city, actively embracing foreign residents, and attracting foreign guests for business and tourism (Yokohama city, 2007). These are just a few among numerous examples of local governments’ attempts at integration policy planning based on the idea of coexistence and reflecting regional realities.

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<sup>6</sup> As the leading forum for local governments on the topic of foreign residents, the membership of *Gaikokujin Shujyu Toshi Kaigi* (the Conference of local governments with concentration of foreign residents) had expanded to 29 municipalities as of 2012.

In line with those policies, there are an increasing number of local governments that autonomously conduct Japanese language education projects, sometimes with the cooperation of local government affiliated institutions and local volunteers. According to the survey by MIAC, the number of such projects reached to 134 in 2008, which includes provision of Japanese language courses, cultural integration courses, and training of volunteer JSL (Japanese as a Second Language) teachers (CLAIR, 2008).

Nonetheless, the number of attendees in language courses provided by local government and government-affiliated institutions is limited in comparison to the foreign population in the municipalities. For example, in Shinjuku ward, about 700 foreign-born adults and children attended public-sponsored Japanese language courses, a tiny proportion of the 35,743 foreign residents (Shinjuku Mirai Sozo Zaidan, 2010; Shinjuku ward, 2010). In Hamamatsu city, the number of participants in the Japanese language course in the first semester of 2012 was 2,491,<sup>7</sup> less than 10 percent of foreign population in the city (HICE, 2013; Hamamatsu city, 2011b). It should be noted that there is a necessity to understand the volume of demand for Japanese language trainings, especially because the number of foreign residents does not reflect the length or purpose of their stay, their pre-existing language skills, or the number of newly arrived foreign-born individuals.

There are three main barriers for potential students in entering and continuing their studies, which are 1) physical accessibility, 2) the lack of information about courses, and 3) limited course offers, especially for intermediate and advanced learners. First, the number of venues of local governments' courses is not sufficient, making them, on average, far from migrants' residences or work places. Furthermore, the courses often take place during the daytime, and there are limited courses available during weekends and after work times, which also makes it difficult for migrants with daytime work to undertake studies (Uchiyama, 2013).

Secondly, it should be noted that not all potential students are even aware of the language courses, knowledge of which is mainly transmitted through institutions'

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<sup>7</sup> The cumulative total number of the attendees in the fiscal year of 2012 is available; however, I only employed the number of attendees in the first semester because of the potential overlap across semesters.

websites and leaflets in public libraries or town halls. Officers from the Hamamatsu Foundation for International Communication and Exchange (HICE) and the Hamamatsu Foreign Resident Study Support Center both show that those who have access to such information are not those who are most in need and most marginalized. (Matsuoka, 2013). In the survey in the Shinjuku ward, nearly 60 percent of respondents answered that it is necessary to publicize the information about Japanese language course more broadly in order to make the courses more accessible for foreign residents (Shinjuku ward 2012, 26).

Lastly, a limited course offering is another barrier for foreign residents who wish to improve their Japanese skills through public courses. In the Shinjuku ward survey, 36.5 percent of respondents considers increasing the availability of courses for learners at intermediate level or above will help them with learning Japanese language through public courses (Shinjuku ward 2012, 26). A similar result is observed in the survey by the National Institute for Japanese Language (2009. 7), where 20 percent responded that there is no course which offers satisfactory course contents. These results reflect the fact that public institutions' support puts emphasis on acquiring basic level Japanese language skill, and immigrants' needs may, thus, not be sufficiently met to reach the level at which that they can have an independent life in Japan.

As we have seen in earlier sections, another form of support to ease language-oriented challenges faced by foreign residents is provision of administrative information in multilingual formats. Miyazaki (2009) found that 23 municipalities out of 30 local governments, which are the members of *Gaikokujin Shujyu Toshi Kaigi* (the Conference of Local Governments with Concentration of Foreign Residents), provide support and information in multiple languages. Among those local governments, the majority provide: 1) a general guide explaining life in Japan and the area, 2) a public relations magazine produced by local governments, 3) instructions for garbage disposal (which often cause daily frictions between local population and immigrants), and 4) information about the prevention and mitigation of damages from (natural) disasters; however, only few local governments provide multilingual support in health care and public transportation (Miyazaki 2009, 192–195). Another good example can be found in Shinjuku ward, where the municipality office developed a 65-page guideline concerning

the provision of information for foreign population, including the venue of providing translated materials, principles on the translation of proper nouns, as well as a list of public facilities in English, Korean, and Chinese, in order to provide consistent information and to reach a broader foreign population (Shinjuku ward, 2010b). Local governments have enhanced their measures by providing information in multiple languages, which is in line with the 2006 MIAC's Plan for the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence in Local Society, which list the provision of information in multilingual format at the top of the communication support components.

However, this does not automatically mean that foreign residents have access to information shared by public authorities when it is necessary. Informal channels are important sources of information for foreign residents, such as religious groups, ethnic communities, friends, and teachers at (language) schools. While those communities and informal channels generally support migrants' life in Japan for a large extent, lack of sufficient information from formal channels can sometimes lead to spread of incorrect or misinterpreted information through informal channels. It may also result in a lack of acknowledgment by local governments of the existence of social issues, since those problems are solved through informal channels.

A good attempt is underway in Hamamatsu city to provide information, where the government-affiliated institution tries to reach foreign residents through churches and influential persons in the ethnic communities (Matsuoka, 2013). While it is still at the experimental stage, it would be a leading example for local governments in expanding their capability to reach and support a broader population through utilizing informal yet reliable information channels for foreign residents.

In relation to language and employment, public employment offices in 32 prefectures have interpreters to provide support in Portuguese, Spanish, English, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Korean depending the needs of the area (MHLW, 2013b). While the scheme is run under the direct supervision of MHLW, the provision of support shows a variation in provided languages and contents. For example, Portuguese interpretation is provided in 23 prefectures, whereas Korean and Vietnamese support is provided in only one prefecture each. In regard to the contents,

the officer at the public employment office in Hamamatsu commented that the office supports foreign job-seekers in giving advice in writing job applications and for job interviews, providing bilingual CV formats (Naiki, 2013), indicating the existence of a portion of the foreign population with very limited Japanese proficiency. On the other hand, the Tokyo Employment Center for Foreigners, which mainly targets skilled immigrants, including university students, puts emphasis on timely provision of information, rather than direct translation support. This is because the foreign university students often possess near-native Japanese proficiency; however, they tend to miss the critical timing requirements for job-hunting due to limited knowledge of the Japanese recruiting process, such as knowledge of the specific season for job-hunting among fresh graduates<sup>8</sup> (Sakaguchi and Yabata, 2013).

The variety of support in different areas, on one hand, indicates that local authorities tailor their services in order to respond to the needs in each area; however, it should also be noted that there is 1) limited availability of resources to cover all the foreign-born population, and thus minor speech communities amongst foreign residents benefit less compared to major speech communities, such as Portuguese and English; and 2) there exists a large demand for supporting Nikkei population, who tend to have limited Japanese proficiency, even though the 1990 amendment to the Immigration law led the surge of Nikkei descendants based on their ethnic connection to Japan.

### **5.3. Role of NGOs and Volunteers**

NGOs and volunteers have played a significant role in fulfilling the needs of Japanese language education by foreign-born population. Formal education, including public schools and private language schools, provides courses mainly for immigrants' children at school age, trainees, exchange students, and recognized refugees. However, very limited opportunities have been available through those formal channels for adult immigrants who do not fall into one of these categories. NGOs and volunteers have organized language courses, sometimes with collaboration with local government institutions, providing opportunities for adult migrants, compensating for the lack of state

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<sup>8</sup> Recruiting process for fresh graduates in Japan, especially that of large firms, is heavily concentrated in the latter half of the third year to the first half of the fourth year in the university; unlike the employment process through internships or on ad-hoc basis in other countries, missing this recruiting period can lead critical disadvantages in obtaining employment in Japan.

support for language acquisition (Noyama 2009, 156; Yoshitomi 2008, 32).

According to the survey conducted by the National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics in 2008, 48 percent of respondents study Japanese in courses run by volunteers, which is greater than the figure of school education, at 22 percent<sup>9</sup> (NIJLL 2009, 5). The proportion of volunteer teachers accounts for 60 percent of JSL teachers in Japan, far exceeding part-time professional teachers (28 percent) and full-time teachers (12 percent). The language courses run by local governments and affiliated institutions, notably International Exchange Associations in municipalities, cannot be run without volunteer teachers, of whom 12,639 work voluntarily in those institutions. NGOs and private associations (i.e., non-registered NGOs) also depend heavily on volunteers, where 5,761 or 90 percent of teachers are volunteers<sup>10</sup> (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2012b, 8–9).

The aims and qualities of Japanese language courses run by NGOs and volunteers vary to a large extent, from the basic courses with the objective of cultural exchange to intensive courses by qualified<sup>11</sup> teachers (Yoshitomi 2008, 32; Tamura 2011, 159; Kawai, 2013). Local language courses would perform their functions with two pillars to fully support the integration of foreign residents: offering venues for interaction between local community and foreign residents, as well as improving foreign residents' Japanese proficiency through language training by professional teachers to improve accessibility to information to facilitate integration (The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language 2009, 30). For foreign residents with limited Japanese proficiency, local Japanese language courses are often the gateway or single venue that connects them with their local communities (Yoshitomi 2008, 32). In this regard, local language courses have played a key role in providing interfaces for local communities and foreign residents, representing the concept of multicultural coexistence, which aims at the promotion of mutual understanding and transformation

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that this survey was distributed by staff working in Japanese language education industries and Regional International Exchange Organizations, which are affiliated with local government and which organize volunteer-run courses. This could be a reason for the reported predominance of volunteer-run courses in the survey.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that this figure might seem different in reality, especially for NGOs and private associations, as the study only counted the number of teachers and institutions that returned the survey to the Agency of Cultural Affairs.

<sup>11</sup> "Qualified teachers" here means those who have passed the Japanese Language Teaching Competency Test, attended 420 hour training courses, or majored Japanese language education in university.

of local communities.

However, challenges have been observed by practitioners and researchers to increase the effectiveness of the volunteer-run language courses in improving language skills, as well as its reachability to potential students. Firstly, it has become increasingly difficult for volunteer teachers with limited training and teaching experiences to handle classes with the increased varieties of attendees, in regard to age, mother tongues, levels of their Japanese proficiency, immigration categories, and length of stay in Japan. Volunteer teachers are not necessarily trained through uniformed courses to become JSL teachers – some undergo virtually no training, some are trained in brief courses for volunteer teachers run by local governments and affiliated institutions, and some are qualified through either taking the Japanese Language Teaching Competency Test, attending 420-hour training courses, or majoring in Japanese language education in universities. It has been found in the Hamamatsu Foundation for International Communications and Exchanges (HICE) that introductory conversation and grammar courses are especially difficult to handle for volunteer teachers who only attended brief training courses, and they decided to allocate qualified teachers for those courses (Uchiyama, 2013). The majority of volunteer teachers are housewives aged 40–60 and retired males who are relatively affluent and who can devote their time to volunteering. Because of the volunteer nature of courses, ‘teachers’ have ‘freedom’ to decide their degree of involvement to language courses, including class times and the levels of preparation to the courses (Tomoya 2010, 65–66). Thus, foreign residents are subject to inequality of language education provisions, due to the lack of standardization of teacher qualifications and course contents.

Regional disparities also exist in terms of equal access to the courses, as there is no formal system to ensure the foreign residents’ access to Japanese language education and there is no obligation for volunteers to visit and provide classes in the remote areas from their residences. There are areas with several options to acquire Japanese language skills through courses run by an International Exchange Association, volunteers-run courses in community centers, or even in public nighttime schools, while there are other areas with no such options, despite the demand for such courses (The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language 2009, 23).

Despite their advantage over areas offering no courses, areas with numerous volunteer teachers are not issue-free in running Japanese language courses. Kawai from JAVOLU, an NPO in Hamamatsu City that provides Japanese language courses, commented that there are currently too many JSL teachers in the city compared to the demand, while the quality of teachers varies from volunteer teachers who just finished elementary teaching courses by the local government to qualified professional teachers with extensive teaching experience. Due to this oversupply of JSL teachers, including volunteer teachers, JSL teacher has become an increasingly less viable occupation in the city, and private firms with foreign employees, which employed professional JSL teachers for in-firm courses before, became reluctant to pay for educational services, replacing professional teachers with volunteers or teachers with limited teaching experiences (Kawai 2013). In such circumstances, it is difficult to maintain the quality of courses with well-experienced and qualified teachers. Sato et al. (2004) finds that it becomes difficult for volunteer teachers to maintain their motivation, when there is an oversupply of volunteers compare to the number of students (Sato et al. 2004, 74). It tends to demotivate volunteers with high commitment to contribute to their local communities if there are not sufficient numbers of students when they want to give classes. A Nation-wide survey shows that the number of volunteer teachers have increased during the past decade by about 57 percent while teachers with full-time and part-time contracts have slightly decreased (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2012b, 11). The increase of volunteer teachers should be welcomed as an enhanced demonstration of multicultural coexistence at the grass-root level, as well as to meet the added demand for Japanese language education behind the increasing number of foreign-born population; however, the examples above show the importance of paying attention to the quality and distribution of the volunteer teachers in order to facilitate equal access to Japanese language course among immigrants.

The limited effectiveness of local language education, including both classes by local governments and NGOs, can be exacerbated by the low commitment by migrants themselves. Unlike obligatory integration courses in some migrant-receiving countries, such as Germany, participation in Japanese language courses by foreign residents is not mandatory in Japan. Although it is necessary to acquire Japanese language skills to



integrate in local society, there are many cases in which migrants drop out from language courses either after they have acquired minimal language skill for daily situations or after finding employment opportunities that do not require language skills (Tomoya 2010, 68; Uchiyama 2013). The employment opportunities for those with no or limited Japanese proficiency tend to be unstable and/or temporary. Nonetheless, migrants, especially newcomers, often lack awareness of how their limited language proficiency would marginalize themselves in society in the long-run through precarious employment opportunities and insufficient access to information (Tomoya 2010, 69). As volunteer-run language courses are free of charge or inexpensive, typically a few US dollar per session, the reason for quitting courses can be deemed to be 1) immigrants' unwillingness to make long-term investment for language education or 2) existence of non-financial barriers, such as physical accessibility as mentioned in the earlier section.

The present chapter has demonstrated that language needs for foreign residents vary according to their current levels and life stages, and immigrants face difficulties in daily life, especially in complex occasions, even after they acquire basic or intermediate levels of Japanese language proficiency. According to Tomiya (2009), language planning for immigrants in Japan has been a bottom-up process where civil society and local governments support immigrants based on what they can offer, lacking the view point of protection of linguistic rights. Lack of national-level planning has led disparities between municipalities in the degree of support (Tomiya 2009, 43- 44). As noted in previous chapters, the national government is reluctant to provide uniform integration courses for newly arrived foreign-born population, or unified policies to respond to the language needs of present and future immigrants. Instead, the government approach for language acquisition support is fragmented in several governmental bodies, according to the categories of foreign population (e.g. refugees, trainees, and Nikkei descendants). State government's efforts can be observed in establishing guidelines for Japanese language education and its evaluation system; however, direct support for immigrants has been dependent on the effort of local governments. As a result, local governments have played a key role in advocating the necessity for language support for immigrants, as well as providing language courses and information in multiple languages.

The role of volunteer-run courses by NGOs and local government-affiliated institutions has been significant in Japan in facilitating the interaction between foreign residents and local communities and the study of Japanese language in the absence of state-run courses. The voluntary nature of these courses gives freedom to both foreign residents and volunteers in terms of their degrees of involvement, which can lead to limitations in the current language education system for foreign residents in terms of availability, quality and attendances. Recent years have brought expanding networks among Japanese volunteer teachers and NGOs for the purpose of sharing their experiences, challenges, and locally-developed teaching curriculums, as well as the national government's efforts in developing uniform guidelines for Japanese language education and its evaluation system. These developments are expected to complement the current system by increasing the capability of volunteer JSL teachers and organizations, as well as the effectiveness of locally-run Japanese language educations.

## **6. CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS**

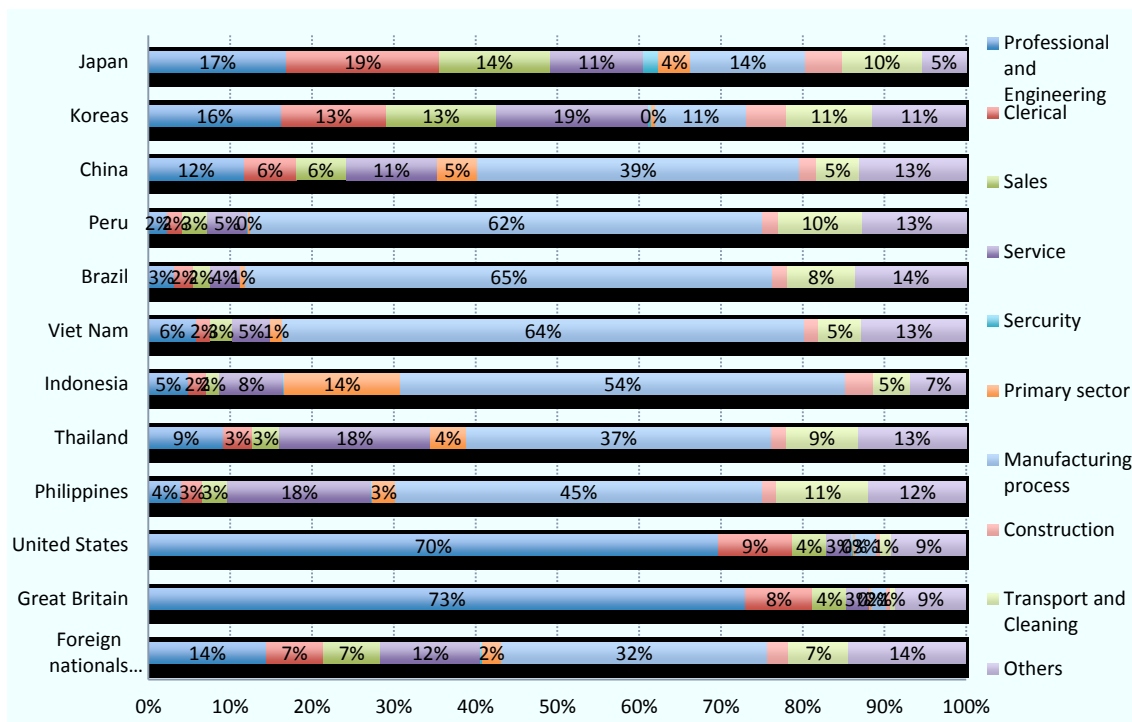
In 2012, 682,450 foreign nationals were employed in 119,731 firms, excluding holders of Special Permanent Resident status, who are predominantly Korean 'old-comers' (MHLW 2013). Labor laws apply to all workers regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, and immigration status once they are employed. However, as mentioned earlier, disparities exist at the entrance, based on immigration status, human capital (including language skills), and social capital – that is to say, knowledge about Japanese labor markets and acclimatization to Japanese mannerism – which are largely affected by their nationalities and areas of residences. In areas with migrant-concentrated communities with the same country of origin, migrants' Japanese language skills tend to be less developed, and their access to information would be more dependent on informal channels. While it is not allowed to discriminate against potential employees based on their nationalities, it is allowed to filter applicants through their levels of language, which can result in differences in occupations and wages. The present chapter offers a brief review of how immigrants' occupational achievements differ by nationality while also taking account of other factors listed above.

The census in 2010 has revealed that the proportions of each occupation differ

between foreign nationals and Japanese, where 32 percent of foreign nationals undertake “manufacturing processing jobs”, which usually taken by low-skilled workers, while the same proportion for Japanese nationals accounts for only 14 percent. This suggests that a significant proportion of migrant workers are incorporated to the occupations that Japanese nationals are no longer willing to take. More importantly, there are large disparities among foreign nationals, as depicted in Figure 4.

Koreans show the most similar pattern to that of Japanese nationals; although it seems that discrimination still exists based on nationality at the entrance to the labor market, evidenced by a higher self-employment rate among Koreans than Japanese, the gap between the two groups has closed over the decades (Takaya et al., 2013). The economic achievement by Koreans can be explained by two reasons. First, it has been more than 60 years since the immigration of the first generation Koreans around the WWII era, and third or fourth generations today tend to assimilate with Japanese society in terms of language skills and educational backgrounds. The proportion of Korean students who proceed to senior high schools was 93 percent as of 2011, which is almost close to that of Japanese students (97 percent) (Korekawa 2012, 11). Second, ‘old-comer’ Koreans who possess Special Permanent Residence status are not legally limited in their occupational choices or in the length of the employment contracts.

Figure 4: Occupation of Foreign Workers by Nationalities, (e-stat, 2010)



A question arises when one compares the situations between Koreans and the Nikkei population, which consists of Brazilians and Peruvians who immigrate under “long-term residence” status with no limitations in occupational choices. As shown in Figure 4, more than 60 percent of Brazilians and Peruvian are employed in the manufacturing sector, while the proportion that takes professional, clerical, service sector jobs is low, around 10 percent. This prompts the question of why there is a significant skew to the industrial sector among Brazilians and Peruvians compared to Koreans while neither group is subject to the legal restrictions in occupational choices.

One of the reasons is limited Japanese proficiency among the Nikkei population, which hinders their incorporation into management, clerical, sales, and service jobs that generally requires decent levels of Japanese language proficiency. There had been favorable labor market conditions in the manufacturing sector, where Nikkei descendants without Japanese language proficiency could find employment opportunities, until 2008 financial crisis and the resulting economic recession, which greatly affected the manufacturing sector in Japan and the employment conditions in the sector. Previously, it had been possible for Nikkei workers to work in factories

without understanding Japanese, because factories owners or contractors – employer of subcontracting Nikkei workers – placed translators in the productions lines. Thus, there had been limited incentives for them to acquire Japanese language skills. However, the severer business conditions during the economic recession made employers unable or unwilling to hire translators. Nikkei workers were increasingly required to have ability to communicate in Japanese, and they only started to learn Japanese language for better employment opportunities in recent years (Naiki, 2013; Kawai, 2013). In addition to levels of language skills, relatively higher wages in the manufacturing sector can explain their concentration in industries. There are inclinations among Nikkei worker to maximize short-term wages to achieve their saving goals as quickly as possible (Hashimoto 2009, 56); thus, it might be a rational choice for Nikkei population to stay in the manufacturing sector to accumulate savings in a short period of time, despite the long-run instability in employment conditions.

The occupations of Americans and British show a clear skew to the category of “Professional and Engineering”, reflecting the fact that the majority come as expatriates or undertake educational professions, notably as English language teachers (Korekawa 2012, 9). Their occupational achievements even exceed those of Japanese nationals, with more than 70 percent of migrants from either country classified under the professional category. Although the data for their detailed occupations is not available, it can be hypothesized that the large market size for English language education in Japan has facilitated their integration into educational sector. It appears to be an exceptional pattern that the proportion of people classified under the “Professional” categories rises as they move from their countries of origins to Japan, compared with the pattern of foreign nationals from other regions, where there are increases in manual jobs and decreases in professional jobs, as shown in Figure 5.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The figures in Figure 5 differ from those in Figure 4, because the former, by Takeshita (2006), concern only foreign nationals in Kanagawa and Shizuoka Prefecture due to the availability of the data, while the latter are national-wide statistics.

Figure 5: Distribution of Occupation of Foreign Workers in Japan and their Countries of Origin (Takenoshita 2006, 65)

		Manag erial	Profess ional	Clerical	Sales	Manual	Total
East Asians Countries	Countries of origin	10.4	57.1	14.9	5.8	11.7	100
	Japan	10.3	36.2	7.6	23.8	22.2	100
Southeast Asian Countries	Countries of origin	13.7	27.5	31.4	15.7	11.8	100
	Japan	4.5	10.6	3.0	12.1	69.7	100
Other Asian and African Countries	Countries of origin	21.7	30.4	21.7	13	13	100
	Japan	10.8	16.2	2.7	21.6	48.6	100
Latin American Countries	Countries of origin	18.5	30.9	29.6	16	4.9	100
	Japan	3.0	5.0	3.0	5.9	83.2	100
Western Countries	Countries of origin	8.7	58.7	15.2	13	4.3	100
	Japan	6.6	80.3	3.3	6.6	3.3	100
Total	Countries of origin	13.4	45.7	21.1	10.9	8.9	100
	Japan	7.3	29.8	4.9	15.6	42.4	100

(Percentages, n=450, Based on the surveys in Kanagawa and Shizuoka Prefecture)

Chinese nationals, the largest ethnic group of immigrants in Japan, show a higher occupational achievement than the other newcomers, notably compared with, the Nikkei population; the sum of proportions in professional and engineering, clerical, sales, and service reaches 35 percent (Figure 4). Korekawa (2012) observed that human capital accumulation, measured by educational background, has positive impacts in increasing white-collar jobs across nationalities, with the largest impact among Chinese nationals and smaller impacts among Brazilians Filipinos. This is in-line with the current pattern of Chinese immigration in Japan, in which graduates from

Japanese universities and colleges are hired by large firms as highly skilled bilingual workers, given the deepening economic relationship between two countries and the growth of the Chinese market. On the other hand, 39 percent in manufacturing and 5 percent in the primary sector indicates that large numbers of trainees are incorporated in those sectors, with limited prospect to climb up the occupational ladder. Such occupational control through trainee status is also observed among Vietnamese and Indonesians, where the proportion in those sectors each exceed 60 percent.

In summary, it has been demonstrated that there are disparities in the distribution of occupations between foreign residents and Japanese nationals, as well as among the foreign nationals, driven by several factors. The pattern of Koreans suggest that if there is no legal restrictions on occupational choice, foreign-born population can assimilate in the labor market through generations by means of human capital accumulation to a similar level of education attainment in the host country. The incorporation of highly skilled Chinese migrants into professional work and service sectors shows also underlines the effectiveness of human capital accumulation. On the other hand, segregated incorporation of Asian trainees in the manufacturing sector shows the effect of policy-induced immigration and integration practices reflecting the domestic labor shortages in manual jobs. In addition, the situation for the Nikkei population shows that individual characteristic, such as Japanese language proficiency and preference for the maximization of short-term income, would induce segregated integration into the manufacturing sector, even without the legal limitation on occupational choices.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The increase in immigrant populations during the last two decades in Japan has prompted the development of integration policies and practices. There are studies focused on language support for migrant children; however, language support for adult migrants has received less attention. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to reveal how language education for immigrants has evolved in Japan and how it has contributed their socioeconomic integration to Japanese society. This study has led to several important findings on the (non-) formation of integration policy, with the focus on language-related support in Japan based on policy analysis, interviews, and qualitative

and quantitative consideration of past studies.

First, integration policy has been underdeveloped compared to immigration policy at the state level, because of the rigid immigration policy that welcomes highly skilled migrants but (ostensibly) not low-skilled migrants despite the fact that the country has already accepted low-skilled migrants, such as trainees and Nikkei descendants, through the 'back-door'. The inconsistency between the immigration principle and the reality has hindered the development of an integration policy at the national level, especially until mid-2000s, when MIAC began publicizing the concepts of 'multicultural coexistence' and 'foreign population as local residents'. Instead, local governments and civil society have led the grass-root policy making and actual support for foreign nationals with the promotion of 1) equality between foreign residents and the majority Japanese and 2) encouragement of mutual change, instead of one-sided assimilation of foreign residents into Japanese society.

Second, there are persistent needs among migrants for the acquisition of Japanese language skills in order to have independent lives in Japan, as well as necessities for the provision of multilingual information to cope with complex occasions that require relatively high levels of Japanese language comprehension. In 2013, the national government allocated 1.8 billion yen for the purpose of integration of both child and adult immigrants, showing their acknowledgement of the need to address social issues faced by immigrants, while the programs are scattered across ministries, hindering the government from forming overarching integration policies. Local governments and volunteer JSL teachers have played a significant role in providing language related support, notably in translation services and Japanese language education, in the absence of comprehensive support by the state government. However, it should also be noted that there are challenges in the local language education provision caused by the predominance of volunteer staffing, especially in unequal provisions of such services in terms of reachability to those who are in need as well as in the quality of the classes.

Finally, there is highly differentiated inclusion of immigrants into Japanese labor market across nationalities; some of those differentiated patterns are induced by



immigration policy, notably the trainee system (mainly for Asian nationals), while the high concentration of Nikkei population in the manufacturing sector, even without legal limitations in occupational choices, suggests a negative impact of limited Japanese proficiency in entering the service sector, as well as Nikkei migrants' preference for short-term wage maximization. It is expected that the migrants' occupational pattern may assimilate with that of Japanese over time, as evidenced by the similar distribution between Japanese and Koreans, who have similar educational attainment and Japanese proficiency after almost 60 years of their presence in Japan. However, it appears that the state government does not consider the differential inclusion is problematic at present, as the issue has not been mentioned in policy documents to the best of the present author's knowledge.

The findings of this study suggest a number of important implications for future policy development and its implementation. First, there is clear scope for the state government in increasing its involvement to form an overarching integration policy, as well as to address the current inconsistency between the immigration principle and the reality in which low-skilled migrants are already playing an important role in the Japanese labor market. Although the 2006 report by MIAC enhanced the state involvement to treat foreign nationals as part of local societies, the ministry does not possess the authority to coordinate the policies and projects conducted under different ministries, further entrenching the absence of overarching policies. Second, the importance of incorporating the insights from the local level in policy-making should be also emphasized, given the large contribution made by local governments and civil society in forming and implementing integration measures, as well as their increasingly robust network and advocacy for improved Japanese language education for immigrants. Third, disparities across municipalities in terms of level of supports need to be carefully handled. On one hand, the language support for immigrants has been formed through a bottom-up process, addressing specific needs in each region. On the other hand, the lack of coordination at the higher level, as well as the dependence on volunteers, has led to unequal access to and quality of such services across municipalities. Moreover, divergences in occupational achievements between Japanese and foreign nationals, and among the latter, suggest the necessity for the state government to intervene in the issue to promote equitable socioeconomic attainments.

Finally, an important limitations of this study needs to be considered. This study is largely dependent on a qualitative method, making it difficult to assess the degree of influence of policies and immigrants' characteristics on their socioeconomic integration due to limited availability of quantitative data. Some local governments with large foreign-born populations have conducted immigrant-specific surveys; however, the questionnaires vary for a large extent across municipalities, and much of the data is not publicly available for cross-referencing, which making it hard to analyze the survey results across regions or generalize them on a national level. For the state-level data, the census data became partly available for cross-referencing at the request by researchers after the 2009 Amendment to the Statistics Act. However, access to census data is still limited due to the high tabulation fees. In regards to labor migration, it would greatly help researchers if foreign resident households were included in the Family Income and Expenditure Survey, which is the essential source of information for income level.

In light of these inevitable limitations, there is clear scope for the future research to quantitatively assess the impacts of the migrants' other characteristics, including their levels of language proficiency, on the levels of migrants' socioeconomic integration. Japan is set to experience further decline in native labor forces; therefore, the immigration of foreign-born population is expected to continue. This means that further, more detailed, and quantifiable research is necessary to form appropriate polices for smoother and more equal socioeconomic integration of immigrants in Japan.

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