

***A Proposal for Information Dissemination of Regional Culture for the Purpose of  
Multicultural Coexistence: Based on Japanese Local Government Plans***

Noriko Kurata, Tokyo University of Science, Japan  
Yuko Kurata, Kansai Gaidai University, Japan

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**Abstract**

Japan has witnessed a considerable increase in the population of residents with multicultural backgrounds (here after MCR), especially around urban areas. A majority of these MCR have nationalities of other Asian countries, many of whom, although an integral part of the Japanese labor force, do not speak the Japanese language. The aim of this study is to propose necessary policies for the promotion of coexistence with MCR in Japanese local governments. This study examined the current provisions made toward multicultural coexistence in the cultural plans put forward by local governments, as well as the regulation status of multilingual information and dissemination status of ordinances under such plans. The results indicated that none of local governments actually used other languages when publishing regulations on websites, despite claiming to be local governments that recognize the necessity for multicultural coexistence and multilingual information dissemination in their plans. A common ground of cultural understanding must be reached between local residents and MCR to ensure successful integration. Especially with regulations, which are the rules made by local governments that also help define regional culture. In this regard, policies toward making these less obviously culturally-based rules more readily accessible to MRC is largely insufficient. Therefore, this study proposed an approach of conducting daily cultural negotiations and understanding of others upon having established the basis for common cultural understanding by translating not only fixed information regarding daily living divided into each task but also ordinances that indicate concept of living habits into multiple languages.

Keywords: Japanese local government, multicultural coexistence, multilingual information dissemination, multiple languages, plans, regulations.

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## Introduction

Japan has witnessed a considerable increase in the population of residents with multicultural backgrounds (here after MCR). For example, according to the data of Ministry of Justice in 2013, until 2004, foreign registers in Japan was a million and 90 hundred thousand or less, after 2007, more than 2 million people every year.

A survey of “national census 2010” on “total basic population” items said that the largest number of foreigners living in Tokyo Prefecture, more than 30 hundred thousand people, as shown in table1. The next largest number was approximately 16 hundred thousand people in both Osaka Prefecture and Aichi Prefecture.

In the municipalities, the largest number of foreigners live in Osaka City (more than 9 hundred thousand people), followed by Yokohama City and Nagoya City (approximately 5 hundred thousand people). These cities have large scale of total citizen population. For instance, 9 hundred thousand foreigners living in Osaka City, are limited 3.6% of total citizen population in Osaka City. As well in Yokohama City, foreigners live in 5 hundred thousand, which consist of only 1.4% of total citizen population in Yokohama City. 5 hundred thousand foreigners live in Nagoya City are consisted of 2.3% on total population in Nagoya City. Although, in these cities, many foreigners lives, the component ratio of foreigners are not high on total citizen population.

Local government with the highest component ratio of foreigners in a municipality is Kawakami Village in Nagano prefecture at 15.7%. Next is Oizumi Town in Gunma prefecture at 13.0%, followed by Minaminaki Village in Nagano prefecture at 11.4%, Shinjyuku special ward in Tokyo prefecture at 7.9%, and Minokamo City in Gifu prefecture at 7.7%.

Table1. Local governments having large number of foreign registers in Japan.

Nationality except Japan (total number)	Prefecture	Total population
318,829	Tokyo	13,159,388
164,704	Osaka	8,865,245
160,228	Aichi	7,410,719
Nationality except Japan (total number)	City/Special ward	Total population
96,675	Osaka city	2,665,314
53,029	Yokohama city	3,688,773
52,485	Nagoya city	2,263,894

Data from “national census 2010”.

## **Background of Multicultural Coexistence**

The coexistence with MCR will consist of mutual understanding both foreigners to reach culture in their living town and Japanese residents to reach multi culture. Mutual understanding of culture among foreigners and Japanese residents is often designed by city events. Systematically understanding of culture is difficult via the events, although the events can be given attendees to experience culture.

One of the systematically culture is the local ordinances. The ordinances are established after the decision of the city council. That is to say, the ordinances are the ways of the city based on the democratic agreement of local inhabitants.

With having the multiple culture, MCR has to act under the regulations of the city, as a habitant in the city. To that end, interpreting the ordinances should become necessary to MCR.

A majority of these MCR have nationalities of other Asian countries, many of whom, although an integral part of the Japanese labor force, do not speak or read the Japanese language. As the legitimate expression used in the ordinances has a special phrasing, proper understanding is difficult even for a Japanese. The foreigners who can understand only an everyday Japanese conversation, might not understand the ordinances in Japanese. Hence, to make the ordinances public in multilingual becomes necessary. Therein the aim of this study is to propose necessary policies for the promotion of coexistence with MCR in Japanese local governments.

## **Methods**

Local governments in Japan have already started to revise cultural plans from the standpoint of multicultural coexistence in order to encourage acceptance of other cultural conventions, which define the identity of an individual, by local Japanese residents. This study examined the current provisions made toward multicultural coexistence in the cultural plans put forward by local governments, as well as the regulation status of multilingual information and dissemination status of ordinances under such plans.

### **(1) Survey Period**

A survey was conducted November 2015 and additionally in May 2016, to following subjects.

### **(2) Subjects**

A survey was conducted to the basic local governments which the composition ratio of the foreigners were high. As mentioned above, Kawakami village is the highest composition ratio of the foreigners, followed by Ooizumi town.

The towns and the villages are smaller scale of local governments than cities or special wards. The smaller local governments cannot afford sufficiently administrative services that they have few staffs with low budget. Hence, in this survey, at cities and special wards were targeted except towns and villages. At this time, only cities and special wards with more than 4% in the population composition ratio of the foreigners were chosen.

## Results

The cities and the special wards that met the above-mentioned condition were 15, as shown in table 2. Within these cities, the largest ratio of foreigners living was Shinjyuku special ward at 7.9%.

Table 2 Cities and special wards with more than 4% in the population composition ratio of the foreigners.

City/Special ward(-ku)	Prefecture	Composition ratio of foreigners	Nationality except Japan (total number)	Total population
Shinjyuku-ku	Tokyo	7.9%	25,742	326,309
Minokamo City	Gifu	7.7%	4,189	54,729
Minato-ku	Tokyo	6.3%	12,999	205,131
Toshima-ku	Tokyo	6.3%	17,888	284,678
Arakawa-ku	Tokyo	5.7%	11,625	203,296
Kikugawa City	Shizuoka	5.1%	2,413	47,041
Chiryu City	Aichi	5.1%	3,466	68,398
Chuo City	Yamanashi	4.7%	1,484	31,322
Taito-ku	Tokyo	4.5%	7,886	175,928
Joso City	Ibaraki	4.4%	2,890	65,320
Kani City	Gifu	4.2%	4,094	97,436
Moka City	Tochigi	4.1%	3,410	82,289
Iga City	Mie	4.1%	3,978	97,207
Isesaki City	Gunma	4.1%	8,419	207,221
Kosai City	Shizuoka	4.0%	2,375	60,107

Data from “national census 2010”.

Regarding these 15 local governments, having culture plan or not was studied. As shown in table 3, 6 cities at 40% devised culture plans.

In table 4, the results were shown regarding whether multicultural coexistence and multilingual information dissemination were prescribed in their culture plans. Moreover, general plans which is comprehensive basic plans of the local governments, were investigated if the culture plan did not have these prescriptions or the local governments without culture plans. As a result, multicultural coexistence were prescribed in the culture plans were 4 local governments, and in the general plans were 8 local governments. In total, 12 local governments provided that in either plans. This was approximately 80% of 15 local governments.

To disseminate multilingual information prescribed in the culture plans were 3 local governments, and in the general plans were 5 local governments. In total, 8 local governments prescribed it in one of the culture plan or the general plan.

In table 5, the results were shown regarding whether the local government disseminate multilingual information especially about the ordinances on their website. As a result, almost all the local governments disseminate multilingual information on their website, on the other hand, no local government gave multilingual ordinances. The results indicated that none of local governments actually used other languages when publishing ordinances on websites, despite claiming to be local governments that recognize the necessity for multicultural coexistence and multilingual information dissemination in their plans.

A common ground of cultural understanding must be reached between local residents and MCR to ensure successful integration. Especially with ordinances, which are the rules made by city council that also help define regional culture. In this regard, policies toward making these less obviously culturally-based rules more readily accessible to MRC are largely insufficient.

Table 3. Current status of devising culture plan on 15 local governments more than 4 % in the population composition ratio of the foreigners.

City/Special ward(-ku)	Culture plan	
	Found on the Web	Cannot be found on the Web
Sinjyuku-ku		1
Minokamo city		1
Minato city	1	
Toshima-ku	1	
Arakawa-ku	1	
Kikugawa city	1	
Chiryu city		1
Chuo City		1
Taito-ku		1
Joso city		1
Kani city	1	
Moka city		1
Iga city		1
Isesaki city		1
Kosai city	1	
Total	6	9

Table 4. Current status of prescription on multicultural coexistence and multilingual information dissemination of 15 local governments more than 4 % in the population composition ratio of the foreigners.

	Multicultural coexistence	Multilingual information dissemination
Prescribed in culture plan	4	3
Prescribed in general plan	8	5
Total	12	8

Table 5. Current status on multilingual Web and multilingual ordinances on the Web of 15 local governments more than 4 % in the population composition ratio of the foreigners.

	Having multilingual Web	Having multilingual ordinance on Web
With multilingual information dissemination prescription	8	0
Without multilingual information dissemination prescription	7	0
Total	15	0

## Discussion and Conclusion

Coexistence with MCR in Japan is said to be first promoted, not by the central government, but by local governments of municipalities in which South Americans of Japanese descent have congregated (Sugisawa, 2013). Spurred by this movement, the Japanese central government set forth a guideline to aid development plan of multicultural coexistence facilities for local authorities in March 2006. Each local government was then notified accordingly (Ministry of internal affairs and communications, 2006).

This notification exemplified specific policies for the promotion of multicultural coexistence in municipalities, as well as providing communication support required. In a bid to encourage multi-lingual communication, government regulations and daily information were distributed in a number of different languages through a variety of media. Furthermore, as supplementary measures, the dissemination of information regarding local rules and customs, as well as community events were also carried out in a multi-lingual manner. This paper particularly finds the dissemination of information regarding local rules and customs to be severely lacking.

In addition, the use of "easy Japanese" when distributing such information is proposed to aid communication with MCR (Tokunaga, 2009; Mori, 2005). Other initiatives, such as the training and appointment of a specialized "multicultural society coordinator" in local government to serve as a guide in Japanese language education (Ishikawa, 2011) and local lifestyle for MCR, are also suggested (Sugisawa, 2016). These are important measures for familiarizing MCR with Japanese culture in everyday life and for teaching Japanese language to MCR who have exceeded age limit for compulsory education.

For instance, rules and regulations are often written in legal terminologies which are difficult to understand even for a Japanese person if no prior knowledge was obtained. Therefore, even if a MCR wishes to learn these regulations, which are the most specific form of local culture, it would be near impossible to do so as they are communicated in a more complicated Japanese language without any other multi-lingual options. Hence, just as daily information, it is essential for information related to rules and regulations to be conveyed and disseminated in "easy Japanese".

Besides using "easy Japanese, it is also pivotal for information regarding rules and regulations to be translated into languages most used by MCR living in that region. This is due to the fact that regulations not only act as a cultural indicator, but they map out rights and obligations of a resident, stipulating a fine upon violation. Hence, in an effort to protect MCR from unforeseen disadvantage within the community, it is crucial that the majority of MCR understand their rights and obligations correctly.

However, converting rules and regulations into "easy Japanese is not without obstacles and limitations (Kamei, 2013). To make sure that regulations written in "easy Japanese" are disseminated without misunderstanding and to complement sections which cannot be converted into "easy Japanese", the "multicultural society coordinator" must apply more comprehensive communication methods, such as incorporating these regulations into their educational material, when dealing with MCR.

Furthermore, both conversion into "easy Japanese" and translation into multi-lingual material must be done responsibly by the authority, which is most familiar with the contents of these regulations.

Therefore, this study proposed an approach of conducting daily cultural negotiations and understanding of others upon having established the basis for common cultural understanding by translating not only fixed information regarding daily living divided into each task but also ordinances that indicate concept of living habits into multiple languages.

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