Increasing Migration and Diversity in Japan: The Need for Dialogue and Collaboration in Education, Language and Identity Policies

Julian Chapple
Mission of the Afrasian Centre for Peace and Development Studies

Poverty and other issues associated with development are commonly found in many Asian and African countries. These problems are interwoven with ethnic, religious and political issues, and often lead to incessant conflicts with violence. In order to find an appropriate framework for conflict resolution, we need to develop a perspective which will fully take into account the wisdom of relevant disciplines such as economics, politics and international relations, as well as that fostered in area studies. Building on the following expertise and networks that have been accumulated in Ryukoku University in the past (listed below), the Centre organises research projects to tackle new and emerging issues in the age of globalisation. We aim to disseminate the results of our research internationally, through academic publications and engagement in public discourse.

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Introduction

The increased movement of people\(^1\) around the globe today reflects the fact that we are now living in what some refer to as an “age of migration” (Castles and Miller 1998). Migrants from different backgrounds illuminate differences and pose dilemmas that test the grounds of sovereignty and a nation’s maturity. While many countries struggle to come to terms with such challenges, Japan – as a result of historical and cultural norms – perhaps has more difficulty than others. The time is fast approaching, however, for Japan to make important decisions, regarding issues of migration and diversity, which will have far-reaching repercussions for its society and future.

Japan has long been portrayed as a homogenous state with practically no ethnic, cultural or linguistic diversity (Smith 1994; Itoh 1996; Befu 2001; Kagawa 2001). This so-called ‘myth of homogeneity’ has remained the dominant ideology in Japan for almost its entire modern history. It has been deliberately and painstakingly propagated by the government through the education system and remains – to this day – a powerful undercurrent of the nation’s psyche.\(^2\) So successful has the policy of inculcating people to believe they are somehow inherently different and ‘unique’ (the discourse known as *nihonjinron*) that today discussions pertaining to numerous issues are still oftentimes reduced to a simplistic “us” versus “them” dichotomy.

As a result of this perceived homogeneity, Japanese have a tendency to exclude foreigners. A society constructed around similarity and conformity is not conducive to accepting difference and, as a consequence, accepting difference in Japan has become a difficult process.

In the past couple of decades or so, however, the situation has begun to change markedly. Japan’s foreign population has continued to rise steadily (now at roughly two percent of the population) coupled with a corresponding and equally dramatic rise in the number of international marriages and families in Japan (accounting for approximately one in every 19

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* Lecturer, Faculty of Intercultural Communications, Ryukoku University.
\(^1\) According to the United Nations, about 191 million are now living outside their country of birth and that international migration has now become a major feature of international life. Nearly half of all immigrants are women, and in developing countries they outnumber men. See *The Daily Yomiuri* (2006). This trend is also reflected in Japan’s immigrant statistics.
\(^2\) Even as recently as 2005, Aso Taro, Japan’s prime minister at time of writing (then Minister of Internal Affairs and Communication) referred to Japanese as “one race.”
marriages). Further, due to a dramatically low birthrate\(^3\) and a rapidly aging society,\(^4\) calls for greater immigration have begun to be voiced in earnest – at times even by the country’s leaders – as one serious alternative to alleviate the nation’s already visible population decline. Such challenges and debates have further illuminated the numerous inequalities and discrepancies presently experienced by the nation’s immigrant minority community and called into question the government’s sincerity with regard to such issues. While the number of immigrants to Japan has been steadily increasing, the government has continued to hide behind the façade of the empty slogan “internationalisation”.

This paper proceeds as follows. First it examines the Japanese Government’s, until recent, ad hoc response to immigration and the issues that have arisen as a result, primarily those of social integration examined from two differing points of view: top down and bottom up. The national government’s top down policies of multiculturalism involves an examination of a recent report concerning the creation of a new immigration policy for Japan and its ramifications. The grassroots (bottom up) aspect looks at steps undertaken at the local level. Finally, it examines the roles of education, language policy, and identity, and the need for greater thought, dialogue and collaboration to both alleviate urgent problems at present as well as prepare for the possibility of a more diverse future. Education, language policy and identity are issues oftentimes overlooked in debate in Japan (as a result of the country’s cultural and historical background) but ones which are essential to a successful integration policy.

This research was initiated as a response to factors emerging due to an increase in the social awareness of problems and issues associated with migration growth in Japan and the population decline, and recent discussion about increasing immigration as a future option; in particular calls for radical immigration legislation reform. My thesis is that much wider, deeper debate must be initiated into the issues of diversity, identity, and language policies before there is any possibility of beginning to create a multicultural society in Japan by substantially increasing the number of immigrants in the coming decades. This paper, it should be cautioned, acknowledges that multiculturalism is not necessarily a panacea for Japan and may not even be an officially-sanctioned governmental goal. If, however, it is (as recent rhetoric seems to indicate), a wide range of issues need to be examined carefully before proceeding.

\(^3\) The latest figures put Japan’s Total Fertility Rate (the average number of children a woman will have in her lifetime) at 1.32. Since it has been determined that to ensure stability requires a rate of 2.1 it is no surprise that Japan’s total population dropped by about 10,000 in 2005. This was the first time since records began in 1899 that Japan has suffered a natural decrease in the population (a change caused solely by births and deaths). In some areas, Tokyo for example (with 0.98 children per women, a figure below 1.0 for the first time ever), the situation was even more severe. See Sakakibara (2006).

\(^4\) The proportion of people aged over 65 has now reached 20% for the first time making Japan the country with the oldest population.
Immigration in Japan Today: Top Down Historic ‘Multiculturalism’

While Japan is not usually looked upon as being a nation of migrants, this is a deliberately misleading image used by protagonists to portray the danger immigration poses to the maintenance of pure Japanese ethnicity (Denoon et al. 1996). Since ancient times, Japan has accepted people from other Asian countries who have transferred their culture and skills. Further, since the country opened itself to the world in 1868, it has been deeply involved with migration, albeit predominantly as a net sender state. This ‘multicultural’ background belies presently-held common notions. In this section I wish to outline the background factors that have played, or continue to play, a significant role influencing immigration to Japan today. These factors include the presence and experiences of so-called “old” and “new” comers, the move away from certain labour markets by Japanese youth, Japan’s declining/aging population and the corresponding economic ramifications.

No country can have an effective immigration and integration strategy until they have answered the fundamental question of what kind of migration they want. In order to provide useful terms of reference, a brief outline of the four main models of migrant interface with a host society seems useful here. The first is assimilation, which came to be the norm of the United States’ “melting pot” philosophy. This is a one-way approach which encourages migrants to adapt to the local culture to the extent that they became indistinguishable from the majority. Segregation, the second model, is that typically applied to temporary migrants (for example, the short-term contract employees in the Gulf States) who are not expected to adapt to the host country, but rather retain their own culture within their own segregated network. The third model, integration, requires a two-way exchange whereby both migrant and host contribute to the development of a common culture. The final model, multiculturalism, is similar to the integration model but rather than aiming for a common culture shared by both groups, it leads to a diversity of cultures existing side by side. Further, it differs from other models in assuring equal rights and opportunities without migrants being required to forfeit cultural norms. It is this final type that Japan is arguably aiming for, but as will be outlined, there are unique factors involved.

Japan’s initial policy towards foreigners focused solely on “admission”, merely because the number of foreigners residing in Japan was small and the majority were “old comers”. The expression “old comers” refers to those (predominantly Korean or Taiwanese) residents in Japan at the conclusion of World War II who decided – or had no option but – to remain. While for many decades they suffered indifferent treatment at times, today they have obtained a certain level of social security. Classed nowadays as ‘Special Permanent Residents’, they have essentially the same rights as Japanese nationals, with the exception of suffrage. While

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5 See also Douglas and Roberts (2000), Chapter 1.
still a large group, the number of old comers is decreasing with attrition and naturalization.

With a large and well-educated population, accepting foreign immigrants was, in post-WWII Japan, unnecessary. Neither was there an immigration policy per se, as Japan was not a seeker of fresh immigrants in the hue of multicultural states like Canada, Australia or New Zealand. However, around the late 1980s, the situation began changing. With an increasing worker shortage and reluctance of young Japanese to accept ‘three ‘K’ jobs’ – *kitsu* (difficult), *kitanai* (dirty), and *kiken* (dangerous) – Japan revised its immigration laws beginning in 1989 and refined it further in following years so that Visas could be offered to Nikkeijin (mainly Brazilians and Peruvians of Japanese descent) to come and work in Japanese factories. This heralded the beginning of an increase of “new comers” to Japan to take advantage of high wages and employment opportunities. In spite of an absence of a clear immigration policy, the influx of new comers continues and their make-up is diversifying rapidly. Further, while initially the government envisaged such labour migrants – particularly the Nikkeijin – would stay for just two or three years, the trend today is for much longer, and oftentimes permanent, residence with their families (*teijyuka*). Consequently, some claim therefore, that Japan has approached a turning point, or so-called “critical mass”, whereby the number of immigrants has reached a level of visibility capable of instigating a transition to multiculturalism (Mouer 2002, cited in Burgess 2008).

Perhaps the strongest impetus for increasing immigration in Japan has come from the double impact of both an aging population and a declining birthrate. In 2005, Japan’s population began declining and this trend is set to continue in the immediate future with no clear end in sight. According to statistics released by the Government at the end of 2006, in fifty years from now Japan’s present population of 127 million people will have fallen to around 90 million and could drop to one third of its present number within one hundred years’ time. As mentioned, Japan today has the unenviable title of possessing the oldest population of all developed nations (in terms of median age) with one of the lowest birthrates. Experts claim that even if these issues are resolved, it will take decades to recover the population loss and will require thousands of migrants to merely offset it.

At present Japan’s policy regarding migrants, therefore, centers upon the small scale acceptance of skilled workers, the acceptance of Nikkeijin and temporary foreign labourers, a refusal to accept unskilled workers and reluctance to accept refugees. Thus we can identify

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6 Interestingly, in spite of this being the first ever revision of immigration laws in Japan and the implications it presented, there was almost no debate held on the issue in the Diet. (Personal information from Sakanaka Hidenori at ‘Japanese Styled Immigration Policy’ symposium. Tokyo, July 29, 2008).

7 It is estimated that by 2025, 27.3%, or 33.2 million people, will be aged over 60.

8 While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the complex situation regarding refugees, it should suffice to say that Japan has been less than proactive and welcoming. On average a mere 40 refugees are recognised annually by the Ministry of Justice and the application and screening process is far from transparent.
both aspects of assimilation and segregation. The term “integration” (tōgō), vital to immigration policies in other states, has only recently been used with regards to migrants in Japan, appearing for the first time in an official government document as recently as 2005. In the second report from the Council for the Promotion of Regulatory Reform (December 2005), it stated:

Foreigners, too, are members of the local communities… Information regarding their residence, employment, education and participation in social insurance should be obtained so that a precise and timely administrative service could be offered. In this manner, as well as by the provision for the support of learning Japanese, a social integration policy encouraging them to adapt to our society… should be conducted and arrangements should be made so that foreigners who are legally residing in Japan could fully exercise their abilities.⁹ (Italics added)

Following this, in June 2008, a proposal was submitted to then Prime Minister Fukuda entitled “A Japanese Styled Immigration Policy” (nihon gata imin seisaku no teigen). The ramifications of this proposal (outlined below) would be monumental if even partially implemented. However, the mere fact that such a proposal was commissioned in the first place reflects enormous momentum forward for Japan’s lawmakers and a show of official recognition of the severity the situation Japan faces. It also introduces the possibility of creating an equitable immigration policy which acknowledges integration and its requirements.

The proposal was authorized by the Liberal Democratic Party’s National Strategy Office which was established in 2001 by then Prime Minister Koizumi to map out a medium- to long-term vision for future policies. Stressing the need for Japan to become a country of immigration (imin kokka), the proposal recommends Japan accept up to a maximum of 10 million immigrants, which would bring their percentage of the total population up to around 10%. In order to achieve such a target, the proposal calls for the establishment of a department of immigration as well as the writing of a fundamental law for immigration and a law banning racial discrimination.

This proposal also calls for Japan’s immigration policy to be one which trains future migrants. While this on the surface appears a very generous proposal, the task in reality requires a mammoth overhaul of present teaching and training philosophies. Given the serious problems that have surfaced after the introduction of the existing internship and training programme in

⁹ The expression was specifically defined in the text such: “Social integration” means approving various rights to live in the socio-economic environment of a foreign country, taking into account human rights, and cultural and social backgrounds of the foreigners and their families, and at the same time, ensuring that they fulfill their obligations.
1990, it is difficult not to be skeptical. The present system, labeled a “disgrace to Japanese society” (Kamata 2008: 6) appears almost as a front for the “human trafficking”\(^\text{10}\) of cheap Asian labour with little – or in extreme cases – no training provided. In 2007, for example, 449 companies and organisations which hosted foreign trainees were found to have abused them, double the previous year’s number (The Daily Yomiuri 2008a).

The ‘human resource development style’ immigration proposal tabled with the report calls for new immigrants to attend schools in Japan where they will be taught Japanese and the latest skills and then given employment assistance. Yet proponents of the plan recommend the search and development of future migrant human resources actually be initiated earlier overseas. For instance, by creating Japanese cultural centres in major overseas cities where the Japanese language could be taught for free to those who show an interest. Through this process select individuals deemed appropriate could be offered scholarships to Japan (Sakanaka and Asakawa 2007). While the authors reflect on the fact that Japan has failed in the past with similar recruitment schemes (such as the acceptance of large numbers of foreign students and the Nikkeijin), this time, they claim, would be different due to the complete teaching of language and proper creation of laws and supports.

However, is Japan really ready for such a bold and radical proposal? Is the government even really serious about this plan and is it possible to obtain the support of lawmakers – let alone the general population? These questions all end with significant question marks. Even today, professional white collar migrants struggle to obtain conditions on a par with their Japanese coworkers. And while there is little doubt Japan could recreate itself into a society capable of accepting large numbers of new ‘Japanese’, there has been almost no dialogue on this to date. The need for debate and some of the impediments to this radical proposal will be looked at below.

**Bottom up**

In many respects, with a lack of national direction, until now the national government has left the task of dealing with migrants up to local authorities. In recent years, a number of local governments have developed policies to accommodate or alleviate problems afflicting migrants – oftentimes out of desperation. Yamawaki (2007) points out two sources of motivation: policies for migrants employed as a part of overall human rights policies, or those aimed at stimulating internationalisation. For example, a growing number of municipalities have established foreign resident committees to provide a platform to hear and debate issues affecting the daily lives of migrants in their jurisdiction. Such actions culminated in the formation of the Council of Cities with Large Foreign Populations in 2001 to which 23 cities

\(^{10}\) Ippei Torii, quoted in Reynolds (2007).
and towns now belong. In 2006, this Council issued the so-called ‘Yokkaichi Declaration’ calling on the national government to provide more support for schools for foreigners as well as for foreigners in Japanese schools.

More recently the word in vogue is *tabunka kyosei*, (multicultural co-existence or multicultural community building) which emerged from the bottom up (introduced by civic groups in the 1990s) in response to growing calls for action to support and protect Japan’s growing migrant population after the Great Hanshin earthquake in 1995 (which marked the beginning of the volunteer movement in Japan). The term basically equates to the integration policies promoted in the EU in recent years (and hence should be contrasted with the aforementioned term “togo”, used by the national government). In response to the proactive approach taken at the local level, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, which oversees local administration, established a committee for the Promotion of Multicultural Communities in 2005. The next year it required all prefectures and major cities throughout Japan to create guidelines for the promotion of multicultural communities (although no funding for this has been allocated)\(^\text{11}\). It is within this constructive framework that collaboration and dialogue are taking place and positive changes are slowly appearing. However, much more collaboration will be required from now if widespread migration is considered.

The buzzword *kokusaika* (internationalisation) has been tossed around by Japan’s leaders for several decades now to the extent that it has become almost a national mantra. Yet, in spite of all the hype, there is scant little to show for it in terms of concrete progress. Such lack of progress is perhaps hardly surprising when we consider that there has really been little impetus for anything more than cosmetic changes and that the term *kokusaika* itself really has no fixed meaning whatsoever (Chapple 2003). *Kokusaika*, was more like window-dressing, lip-service, a decoy or distraction that became entangled with the propensity to set slogan-based goals in a similar vein as phrases like *wakon yōsai* (Western Learning with Japanese Spirit), *bunmei kaika* (Civilization, Enlightenment), *fukoku kyōhei* (Rich Country and Strong Army), and *kindaika* (Modernization) were to the state in earlier centuries. *Tabunka kyosei* may perhaps be merely a similar slogan.

Appadurai (2001: 3) uses the interesting term “grassroots globalization” which allows for a different viewpoint and therefore opens up other ways of seeing. This view, provides a beneficial antithesis to the often biased discourse of *tabunka kyosei*, which, when used by people in power, is both inclusive and exclusive, serving to protect cultural homogeneity and national boundaries (Tai 2007: 17). It is this contradiction that appears at the root of the issue Japan is facing; wanting to preserve homogeneity while embracing diversity.

\(^{11}\) Presentation by Iguchi Yasushi at International Symposium: Issues Surrounding Foreign Residents in Japan
Before aspects of education, language policy and identity are examined in detail, first a brief example of the complexities of the twin forces of top down and bottom up intervention in the example of a new international school should help to illuminate the difficulties as well as potential involved.

Japan, as a member of the ITER fusion energy joint international research and development project, is responsible for accommodating a number of international scientists and their families. The research base for this project in Japan is in Rokkasho Village, Aomori prefecture in the northwest of Honshu. In this remote area, a new international school has been commissioned to provide international education for the school-age children of the resident international scientists. Originally, the Japanese authorities planned to merely ‘integrate’ the students into the local primary school. However, not only was this option unacceptable to the families concerned it would have proved extremely unsettling for the school and teachers and created enormous language-related difficulties.

The Aomori officials had no experience in creating international schools so commissioned a private education company to undertake the task. However, after several months the company withdrew, stating that they were unable to deliver the standard and services required. The standard required was that present in Europe for similar families; international-standard education, conducted in English by qualified teachers and based on the International Baccalaureate programme – a truly non-nation specific education. The authorities eventually contracted another private international school in Japan to set up the school, which opened in 2008 with a handful of students. While not without considerable teething problems, the case of the Aomori school experiment reflects a useful model for integration and pathways to fostering multicultural coexistence in the most homogenous developed nation in the world. It also demonstrates the exponential benefits of collaboration.

**Education**

There is little debate that education is the most important factor for fostering successful economic, social, and political integration of migrants (Özdemir 2006). Unfortunately, Japan’s policies in this regard are still woefully inadequate and if the Government is truly determined to create a more multicultural-respecting society, multicultural education and education for diversity require considerable attention.

Just as the image of Japan as a nation of non-migration has been created, so too has the notion that multicultural education is non-existent in Japan. However, as Nakajima (1995) points out,
certain forms of multicultural education have been employed in Japan in the past\(^{12}\) and the lessons they offer should be recognised along with the dangers inherent in them. For example, Tai (2008) warns of the need to learn from past struggles so as to avoid a reproduction of colonial hierarchy within the framework of the emerging *tabunka kyosei* discourse. We must be wary also, that educators involved with multicultural students and aspects of the curriculum emphasize the idea of *kyosei* (living together) between Japanese and newcomers. Otherwise, “multicultural education may end up functioning to exclude newcomers as foreign and different and thereby solidify, not destabilise, Japanese national borders” (Tai 2008: 3). Likewise, employing terms such as diversity and marginalization can at times be counterproductive as they obscure the historic and specificity of the discrimination and oppression each group has experienced. Again, this implies that past experiences have not been utilized (or even perhaps, recognised).

A further useful means of analysis of multicultural education policies in Japan can be found in some of the areas of concern outlined by Grant and Lei (2001); namely: (1) the conceptualization and realization of difference and diversity; and (2) the inclusion and exclusion of social groups in a definition of multicultural education. Based on these criteria, certain aspects in Japan’s present situation become clear.

For the first area, typically the majority Japanese students would be exposed to diverse cultures performed and displayed by ‘foreigners’ as if they were some kind of object in a museum. The result often enhances reluctance amongst newcomers to express their difference for fear of looking out of place. Countries of Immigration create common civic cultures which act as a form of social glue for creating national cohesion. Since Japan has had comparatively less immigration since 1945 such an idea of a unifying civic culture is anathema and at total odds to present trends in education to stress uniqueness or at least difference. Again, it is the idea of ‘living together’ and not national unity or equality that in fact separates rather than joins newcomers into Japanese society. This problem is similar to the idea of ‘banal cosmopolitanism’ referred to by Matthews and Sidhu (2005) in which brands, icons, foreign travel and food, etc. are accepted by a society but they alone do not necessarily equate to ethical and moral commitments to a global community.

In the second area, that pertaining to the question of which groups to include, traditionally in Japan the focus is on culturally distinct “foreigners” in Japan and not – as in the case of Germany, for example, – nationals or future nationals. While the issue of Japan’s own ethnic minorities (Ainu and Okinawans) has been all but absent from the debate on multicultural education in Japan (as so doing would refute the claim that such diversity is non-existent), they too should be acknowledged within a similar framework.

\(^{12}\) These past experiences refer to the educational approaches taken for “old comers”.

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Another issue related to education is the difficulty of accommodating and positioning topics pertaining to human rights and difference within the national curriculum. Japan’s curriculum is adhered to rigidly by educators and is presently not well suited to non-Japanese. Just how to address the issue of human rights, is a testing problem. Concern with human rights is central to multicultural educational policies (Okano 2006). Multicultural education involving foreign children needs to deal with issues of rights differently; it needs to draw on international human rights laws, as in the case of multicultural education in Germany. While the government maintains that access to Japanese public schools is not restricted to foreign nationals, nevertheless problems exist, preventing smooth acceptance. Further, as there is no legal requirement for children of non-Japanese to attend school in Japan, the Ministry’s reactive stance has in fact created numerous problems.  

In 2006 there were a total of 70,936 foreign students enrolled in Japan’s public primary, middle and high schools. Of these, 22,413 at 5,475 schools lacked sufficient Japanese language skills to sufficiently understand lessons. This number represented an increase of 8.3% over the previous year and further increases can be expected henceforth. Therefore, if alternative educational options were available, some of these problems could be alleviated. It is here that greater use could be made of existing international schools. There are presently more than 100 international schools in Japan ranging from large full-scale ethnic or country-based schools to small, truly ‘international’ non-country specific educational ones. The majority are unrecognised by the Japanese government and therefore are forced to charge significant fees and/or reduce options available to students.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) made a recommendation to Japan in 2001 to “undertake appropriate measures to eliminate the discriminatory treatment of minorities… and to ensure access to education in minority languages in public Japanese schools” (UNCERD 2001: 16). It is debatable to what extent other nations confer similar rights to migrant children, yet the benefits appear exponential in Japan’s case – given its penchant for English language education of its own students – and warrant serious debate.

Just as was illustrated above with regards to national policies for migrants, the push for educational support has also been very bottom-up driven. The Ministry of Education does claim to incorporate several aspects of education for multicultural citizenship within the national curriculum. However, the explicit aim of these generally is to develop Japanese citizens with a sense of patriotism, willing to act cordially with people of other cultures but not to develop intercultural citizens (Parmenter 2004), hardly policies aimed at integrating

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13 The Government has recently reviewed its policies and now allows foreign nationals access to Japanese middle schools regardless of whether they have completed Japanese elementary education or not. This same right is not given to Japanese nationals. See The Daily Yomiuri (2008b).
Related to the issue of education is the role and position of languages within a society. Today linguistic rights are coming to be viewed more and more as a fundamental part of human rights. However, the degree of protection and application of such rights depends greatly on the ideological philosophy of the state, the democratic consciousness of the people as well as factors like economic and technical feasibility. Generally speaking, European countries provide considerable protection of linguistic rights which have yet to be realized in Japan.

The Japanese language has been used as a tool of the state in various ways in different periods, namely; defining the borders of the nation-state, propagating a militarist ideology and post-war cultural nationalism (Gottlieb 2007). Of these, the latter still today provides an enormous barrier to the acceptance of diversity. Linguist Roy Miller has referred to Japan’s modern language myth which has created a mystic aura (kotodama) around the language making it seemingly inadmissible to all but the very brightest. Debunking this theory will surely take some time. Yet, contrastingly, the Japan Foundation has been strengthening efforts to promote the proliferation of Japanese language teaching overseas. However, this is perhaps not so surprising when we consider that language policies are actually cultural policies because they are concerned with what can be achieved culturally through language (Pennycook 2002).

Japan’s only language policy is ‘Japanese only’. Along with the concerted effort aimed at mystifying the Japanese language, a lot of effort has been given over to promulgating the notion that there is no language diversity in Japan. The idea of the monolingual state has all but excluded access to the numerous small community languages present and growing in Japanese society (Korean, Chinese, Portuguese, English, etc.). Moreover, the benefit that these strategic assets can bring is also officially unrecognised. The only exception to the “one language” policy is the extensive and compulsory teaching of English at junior and senior high schools. However, Hashimoto (2007) argues that even the teaching of English in Japan is in fact a part of the process of “Japanisation” and is done deliberately in such a way as to avoid transferring any of the individualistic empowerment imbedded in English and without any damage to Japanese culture. In other words, “efforts to make Japanese learners of English maintain their Japanese identity has shaped the way TEFL [Teaching English as a Foreign Language] is structured in education” (Hashimoto 2007: 28). Against this background, again, the enormity of the task of altering to accept diversity becomes apparent.

There is no provision for education in students’ native languages because the relationship between first and second language literacy is not recognised at policy level in Japan (Gottlieb
Special instruction in Japanese language for foreign students is provided on a voluntary basis by taking students aside and giving them private Japanese language assistance, a system termed by Ruiz (cited in Vaipae 2001: 198) as ‘language as problem’. Yet, there are other options that may work effectively. For example, Brunn (1999) reported findings in which the use of L1 and L2 combined assisted students better – not only with educational learning but with social adaption as well.

For Japan to successfully open itself to migrants, a two-pronged language policy would seem to be necessary. On the one hand, recognising minority language rights and providing teaching assistance – perhaps even official recognition and support for non-Japanese based schooling for minorities would be beneficial. On the other hand, the teaching of Japanese for migrants would need to be intensified and made more accessible. This too would require financial and human investment as well as social and cultural adjustments to breakdown myths related to Japan’s native language. Clearly, though, language ability is essential for successful integration of migrants and studies have shown clear correlations between language ability and career options.¹⁴

Identity

Of all the tasks required in advance preparation for a multicultural society, surely that of identity is the most fraught with difficulties. Due to its far-reaching influence and impact on a country’s social and cultural milieu, defining both legally and ‘culturally’ what comprises a nation’s identity is important and complex. In countries of greater homogeneity, the complexities are compounded. However, as Soysal (1995) explains, recent changes in the world order (in particular the development and growing recognition of international rules and norms) are evidence that the role of the nation-state vis-à-vis the individual migrant is evolving rapidly. Migrants today, therefore, reflect the fact that representing multiple identities in a variety of societies has become acceptable which in turn comes with “intersecting complexities of rights, duties and loyalties”. Japan’s leaders need to be aware of the importance of international conventions and the rights of migrants to exercise these.

One of the most important issues in Japan in need of urgent attention is how to deal with multi-ethnic children who are Japanese nationals. This requires a serious reassessment of national identity and homogeneity, tasks which again require society-wide discussion and collaboration for ideas to truly take root and be effective. Naturalized children and Japanese children born of international marriages are treated as rutsu no ko (children with foreign roots), i.e., as foreign and different. As Tai (2007) continues, while their difference is made visible, their Japaneseness, or the changing content of Japaneseness, is not addressed.

¹⁴ See, for example, Dustman (2002).
Multiculturalism has emerged as a critique of the ideology of monoethnicity, but the myth of homogeneity among people within national boundaries is not effectively debunked, leaving the position of *rutsu no ko* suspended in relation to Japanese nation and ethnicity (Tai 2007).

Therefore, what is required now in Japan is the opening of debate into the reconstitution of national identity from a nationalist to a post-nationalist paradigm (Gottlieb 2007); a challenging task indeed. Acceptance of the possibility of multiple identities beyond the nation has to be recognised either implicitly or explicitly in Japan (Parmenter 2004). Again the necessity of dialogue in questions of identity is paramount. For Japan’s leaders to make laws and regulations without consultation with the immigrants concerned would undoubtedly lead to serious flaws.

**Conclusion**

Immigration today is not so much a choice but a necessity for developed nations. In today’s Japan, while the word “integration” has not yet gained popular acceptance or been given any clear definition or parameters, the Government has initiated early stage discussion into the possibility of creating a multicultural nation. Countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden formulated integration policies which assured stable employment, suitable housing, child education and social security as well as participation in medical and nursing insurance and pension schemes. If Japan is serious about recreating itself in a more multiethnic image, it too must formulate similar encompassing policies to allow diversity and find appropriate solutions to accommodate it. Such policies, if they are to be successful, must address aspects of identity, education and language policies.

Education offers an excellent opportunity to create the groundwork required for accepting greater diversity provided educators can bypass traditional ways of imagining and constructing the other (Matthews and Sidhu 2005). Such changes would allow for far-reaching reform to other necessary aspects such as language policy and in particular the concept of identity.

And, if Japan is able to create a system that enables fair and equitable acceptance and integration, as the leading developed nation in Asia, it could become a new regional leader of sorts as well as obtain the human resources capable of playing a much greater global leadership role. Japan should also utilize its past or more recent experiences with multiculturalism to create a coherent strategy which reflects both Japan’s unique situation while recognising the value and benefits of migrants (past and present) to its society. Another benefit of this would be avoiding the danger that the Western experience with multiculturalism becomes “falsely universalized”, to borrow May’s expression (1999: 5). Finally, it should be emphasized that policies are not just for the benefit of immigrants and
should be put together jointly through dialogue and collaboration with immigrants and members of the host society. In this way, such policies help create a greater awareness of the difficulties migrants face in the minds of nationals as well as to foster a sense of belonging and respect in the minds of migrants.

It is true, as Burgess (2008) points out, that Japan may not actually be set on a course of multiculturalism as many recent scholars want to believe. However, what can be said with some certainty is that for numerous reasons, discussion has been initiated and more discussion is needed not only by academics and lawmakers but also by ordinary Japanese themselves. This discussion, which must begin with the question: what kind of future does Japan see for itself in the coming years, should be expedited as global labour markets will not wait for late starters. As Castles (2000: 4) posits, there seems to be good reason to question the dominant belief of the ‘controllability of difference’. For how much longer can Japan resist the pressures of internationalisation? How much longer can global norms be considered alien to “us” when the “us” has now itself become more and more alien? The proposal for creating a migration nation is a fascinating advance step. What happens next will be even more fascinating.

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