Introduction

One of the motives for me to write this paper derived from the fact that I had an opportunity of learning of recent developments in sociological research done by younger scholars of ethnic backgrounds in Japan at a symposium in the occasion of the Annual Convention of the Kansai Sociological Association held in May 2002. I was invited to make a comment on the papers to be read at the symposium. I was invited because about ten years ago, Professor Imazu of Nagoya University and I took charge of organizing the same kind of seminars over three consecutive years, dealing with ethnic problems in Japan. Personally, I had been involved in the study of the Indochinese refugee problems, feeling anxious and vexed at delayed and often inappropriate ways the Japanese government was handling these problems. The results of the three consecutive symposia came into a book published in 1992 by Sekaishisosha in Kyoto, entitled Sociology of Ethnicity: the ethnic composition in Japan. The symposium was planned to review the latest developments of the state, and study ethnic relations after our study-project of ten years ago. The organizer of the seminar was Professor Tani of Osaka Municipal University, a young participant of our previous symposium. He invited me this time to make comments, shedding special light on continuities and discontinuities of this problem between now and then.

Race, nation, and ethnicity

Before proceeding to my discussion, I would like to make a brief remark regarding three words: race, nation, and ethnicity. The first two words have been popularly used, one as a biological category and the other as a cultural category of human beings. The former differentiates the human by physical features like skin color, while the latter, by social and cultural traits like language and religion. Today, however, defining the difference between these two words as such is no longer valid. In addition, their derivatives such as racism and nationalism are strappingly related to the modern history of colonial wars and independence movements.

The word ethnicity was introduced into social sciences in the 1950s to refer to ethnic groups in the context of a political community (like American society), which is not easily melted. Glazer and Moynihan, in their book Beyond the Melting Pot (1963), gave concrete examples, by which I am sure the readers could have a better understanding of the term. They enumerate Puerto Rican, Jewish, Italian, and Irish in New York as ethnic groups. Although all of them had American nationality, they had not been melted into American society. Ethnic group is different from race in that it depends less on racial origin and from nation in that it does not necessarily long for an independent nation-state. The term ethnicity is a symbolic abstract of ethnic group, which includes not only biological features but also cultural elements such as language, religion, identity, and lifestyle. Thus, this word seems to be more suitable to the contemporary multicultural social context. Remember, the global society is multicultural, embracing all human differences!

*Key words: internationalization, ethnic group, Japanese society

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Statistical facts about Japanese ethnic groups today

The Ministry of Justice pronounced that as of December 31, 2000, there were nearly 1.68 million legal residents of non-Japanese nationality in Japan, accounting for 1.33 percent of the population (Table 1). Of these, approximately 635,000 were ethnic Koreans, followed by 335,500 Chinese, 254,270 Brazilians, and 144,870 Filipinos. Brazilians were the New Comers and their number increased very quickly in the 1990s (Table 2). Koreans were the typical Old Timers and their number -a record low 37.7 percent of the foreign population in 2000- has been decreasing steadily since 1991 as Korean nationals naturalized or married Japanese, which allows their children to gain Japanese nationality automatically. In fact, during the period between 1952 and 1999, the Koreans who preferred naturalization to being Korean were nearly 230,000 and the number of naturalized Koreans drastically increased in the 1990s. After 1995, roughly 10,000 Koreans

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Estimated number of registered foreign nationals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>782,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>850,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,075,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,362,371</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,686,444</td>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Foreign population by nationality (in thousands) 1990, 1997, and 2000</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990 (%)</td>
<td>687.9 (64) 645.2 (43.5) 635.3 (37.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 (%)</td>
<td>150.3 (14) 252.2 (17) 335.6 (19.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 (%)</td>
<td>66.7 (6.2) 273.7 (18.5) 299.2 (17.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>49.1 (4.6) 93.3 (6.3) 144.9 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>38.4 (3.6) 43.7 (2.9) 46.2 (2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>6.7 (0.6) 20.7 (1.4) na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillipines</td>
<td>10.2 (0.9) 14.4 (1.0) na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>6.2 (0.6) 11.9 (0.8) na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>3.6 (0.3) 11.9 (0.8) na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>na 7.9 (0.5) na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>56.2 (5.2) 78.3 (5.3) 255.3 (13.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1075.3 (100) 1482.7 (100) 1686.4 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

China includes Taipei. Latin America includes Brazil and Peru.
na=not available

Source: Sopemi, 1999 Berliner Institut für Vergleichende Sozialforchung, and the Ministry of Justice
living in Japan abandoned Korean nationality to become Japanese each year. In addition, there are still roughly as many as 230,000 foreign nationals staying illegally in Japan. The number of illegal residents peaked in 1993 (299,000) and has been decreasing since then. There are also some ethnic aboriginal minorities such as the Ainu (population about 25,000) and the Okinawans (approximately 1.2 million).

A note on the Ainu and the Okinawans

The Ainu people, Caucasian in racial origin and descendants of the first inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago, have been subjugated to the continuous assimilation policy of the Japanese government. For the last three decades, however, the Ainu and the Hokkaido prefectural government have been striving together to develop a more effective law. Their efforts achieved tangible results when, on May 8, 1997, the Diet (Congress) passed the “Act on the Encouragement of Ainu Culture and the Diffusion and Enlightenment of Knowledge on Ainu Tradition.” This law is Japan’s first legislation acknowledging the existence of an ethnic minority in Japan. Although human rights issues are not specifically addressed, it is expected that the new law will help expand awareness, improve understanding, and lessen discrimination.

The Okinawans mainly live in Okinawa islands, a prefecture of Japan. They are now socially well integrated into the mainstream of Japanese society, maintaining their distinct cultural traits just like other local people in this country. Apart from the contemporary special social situation in Okinawa, where more than seventy percent of the American military bases in Japan concentrate, there seems to be no specific dissatisfaction on the part of the Okinawans. No opinion survey on sensitive ethnic feelings is available, but as far as we know, they are more ‘satisfied’ with the present everyday life than the Japanese people in general, according to the opinion surveys carried out by the Cabinet Office. Satoru Nakasone, the former secretary general of Fukkikyo (Okinawa Repatriation Movement) on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Okinawa’s return to Japan made the following comment; “I feel greatly relieved to see 87% of the Okinawan people said that it was a right choice that Okinawa was returned to Japan in the opinion survey conducted on May 12. The 27 year Movement successfully got rid of Japanese colonialism in Okinawa (including prejudice, discrimination, and suppression), and our inferiority complex towards the Japanese people (Okinawa Times, May 15, 1997).”

Here is one additional final comment. Some international literatures mention the Burakumin (population about 3 million) as an ethnic group in terms of racial discrimination in Japan. In our understanding, the Burakumin, although some of them are still victims of deeply entrenched societal discriminations, such as marriage and employment, are not regarded as a distinct ethnic group. They are ethnically Japanese.

Peculiar characteristics of Japanese ‘ethnic relations’

First of all, some simple questions arise. Do we have ethnic groups in Japan? Who are they if we have? What matters and why? What kind of problems do we have?

It has been widely said that Japan is a typical one-nation-state, reluctant to accept foreigners in this insular country. Historically speaking, however, it is not true. Although it is often said that the Japanese have a natural self-identity which was based on historically generated homogeneity often difficult for foreigners to absorb, it is not necessarily inherent to Japanese people alone. The emphasis on ‘Japanese uniqueness’ functions as an excuse for them to exclude things foreign which could simply deteriorate the Japanese ‘harmony’ (the inner morality of WA 和).

As for recent discussions on ethnicity in Japan, as late as the 1980s when the Japanese economy had ranked near the top in the world, people began to talk about the ‘internationalization within.’ Foreign workers flocked to the Japanese shores and so did the ‘boat people’ and other refugees (New Comers). However, we had the Old Timers and even aboriginal peoples as well. The former was the largest ethnic group in Japan and so far the research and discussions have been mainly on this group, the Koreans living
in Japan (Zainichi 在日). The latter, the Ainu and the Okinawan people, could be categorized as Japanese aboriginal people. They, particularly the Ainu, were small in number and always subjugated to forced assimilation policies of the Japanese government until very recently.

The recent concern in ethnicity in Japan was originally evoked by the rapidly increasing number of newcomers; refugees, foreign workers, and illegal inhabitants of foreign nationality, including Brazilians, Chinese, Iranians, and Pakistanis among others. They are usually non-Japanese legally as well as ethnically. On the other hand, the Old Timers, especially Koreans and Chinese, are divided into two categories, those retaining their nationality, and those abandoning it to become naturalized Japanese. Many Koreans in particular are granted a ‘permanent resident status’ because of their special situation in which they came to Japan and continued to live here. We also have more foreign students and trainees predominantly coming from China and Korea. The number of foreign spouses marrying Japanese nationals has been increasing, too.

Having seen all these circumstances, we come to the conclusion that in Japan ethnic groups are mainly composed of (1) newly coming foreigners living here for more than three months and (2) the Old Timers who are completely different from the former in their relationships with Japanese community and government. In this swiftly changing situation, the aboriginal minority problem has attracted less attention and recent sociological studies of ethnic groups have tended to focus upon foreigners living in Japan.

As there is no item concerning ethnic origin in the Japanese population census, it is almost impossible to study the hyphenated Japanese, whose ethnic origin is non-Japanese but whose legal nationality is Japanese. Here is, I think, a great difference in the ethnic situation between, for example, American society and Japan. We do not have an ethnic group like Jews in America and European countries, except the Ainu and the Okinawans. Although they are well-established citizens of each country, their ethnicity is highly distinct and visible, often firmly conserving their religion, language, and strong self-identity.

Old problems still lingering

I do not think that in the study of Japanese ethnic groups the problem of the aboriginal minorities is to be put aside. However, radical changes took place mostly in the past decade, which inevitably directs our attention toward new developments. Needless to say, there are continuities in core problems concerning ethnicity in Japanese society. The United Nation’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practice -2001-, adding to discrimination toward the Ainu and the Burakumin, point to the fact that foreigners in general are still suffering from being targets of discrimination and negative stereotype in residence, employment, and police investigation in local communities. The reports also point to obstacles to naturalization. By law, aliens with five years of continuous residency are eligible for naturalization and the simultaneous acquisition of citizenship rights, including the right to vote, but many eligible foreigners are reluctant to apply for citizenship because adjudicating officers usually have broad discretion and are not hesitant to come into the privacy of the applicants, checking financial status, language ability, and readiness to be assimilated into the Japanese nation. In reality, however, the fact is as follows; during the period between 1952 and 2001, 348,720 foreign nationals were approved to be Japanese citizens through naturalization, of which 254,057 were Koreans (72.8%). Particularly in the 1990s, the number has increased and nearly 10,000 Koreans and 5,000 Chinese obtained Japanese nationality per year these several years. (Table 3)

Voting rights of the permanent foreign residents in local elections is another issue long disputed among pro and con politicians. In 1995 the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution does not bar permanent foreign residents from voting in local elections, but it also ruled that existing laws denying voting rights to foreign residents are not unconstitutional. In March 1999, however, the Osaka Prefectural Assembly passed a measure granting permanent residents local suffrage, becoming the third prefecture to pass such a bill.

In connection to the heritage education of foreign residents, squarely contrasting to some countries
like Canada, the Japanese government has been harsh towards foreign heritage schools. Under the School Education Law, student attending Chinese, Korean, or other non-Japanese language schools are not eligible to take national university entrance examinations. These schools have been deprived of the chance to receive the central government’s subsidies, available to private schools in this country. The United Nations human rights board has frequently urged the Japanese government to officially recognize minority schools, make available to them financial assistance, and recognize their graduate certificates as qualifications to receive Japanese university’s entrance examinations.

The controversial fingerprinting issue has been ameliorated when in 2000 a revised law to end the practice of fingerprinting permanent foreign residents went into effect. Instead of fingerprinting, the Government introduced a family registry system that uses the resident’s picture and signature and contains information on parents and spouses living in the country. This is a system similar to that used for Japanese citizens.

As for jobs in local governments to be (or not to be) open to foreign residents, only 19.8 percent of local governments in this country still forbid hiring noncitizens, according to a 1997 joint survey conducted by the All Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Union and the Korean Residents Association in Japan.

The infamous low achievement of Japan in accepting refugees has also been criticized and it is sometimes referred to as evidence of closedness of this society. In fact, compared to Western nations, Japan accepted only 26 refugees in 2001, while The United States accepted 28,300, England 27,270, Germany 22,720, Canada 13,340, France 9,700, and Italy 1,650 refugees. Although there were 2,179 applications for refugee status between 1982 and 2000, the Ministry of Justice approved only 265 as eligible for refugee status in this country. (Table 4)
Changes and the new development in the 1990s

Coming into the 21st century, the ethnic phenomena in Japan have come to be more diversified and complicated both in objective and subjective aspects. On the one hand, foreigners are coming from more diversified countries and regions, work here in more diversified jobs and companies, and live in more diversified social layers and communities. On the other hand, their purposes, lifestyle, and value system are becoming more diversified. All these things happen in the context of the changing Japanese society, influenced by aging population, information revolution, and globalization.

Under these circumstances, it is neither possible nor appropriate to talk about one ethnic group as if its members were all the same in the above-mentioned objective and subjective aspects. Despite the fact that they belong to the same ethnic group, their self-identity may be radically dissimilar. The class status, among other things, seems to be significant as some sociologists observed a sympathetic relationship among lower class people of different ethnicity (Nishida report). Generation and its accompanying education levels are also important. Young Koreans, who do not share the same feelings toward Japan and the Japanese people with their parental generation, have different self-identity and lifestyles from those cherished by their seniors.

Having had neither direct experiences of serious discrimination and prejudice, nor solid loyalty and commitment to their ethnic group, these young people have a wider choice of alternative life careers with broader prospects for the future. Incidentally, an opinion survey to young Koreans aged 18-30 conducted by the Youth Association of Koreans in Japan in 1993 showed that 30.5% of the respondents had no experience of racial discrimination at all, while only 2.5% responded that they had it many times.

To describe and understand these complicated ethnic phenomena today, I would like to propose a framework composed with two axes: (1) identity continuum - ranging from the original ethnicity (Korea=particularism) to Mankind (universalism), and (2) settlement continuum. The first axis is to distinguish self-identity in terms of ethnic attachment. In the case of Koreans living in Japan, the extreme case on one end is that their commitment is thoroughly to the motherland Korea (South or North), and on the other end is that they consider themselves a global citizen without any particular ethnic attachment at all. Between these two extreme cases, there are those whose identity is a mixture of Korea, Japanese, and the World, with a different balance of these three ingredients. Here we have to realize that ethnic identity is not a fixed substance, but rather a fluid state of mind in which activation depends heavily on circumstances. The second axis, settlement continuum, is to describe their settlement pattern. Are they living in Japan...
permanently, or leaving the country sooner or later, or coming in and out as it is convenient to them? (Integration paradigm versus Transnational paradigm -Kajita Report-

The combination of these two axes makes possible to distinguish different categories of foreigners living in Japan. The Kajita report has already pointed out that this kind of perspective is employed to analyze complicated ethnic situations in Europe. Different relationships between these foreigners and their host country Japan can be observed.

More diversified foreigners

Once the dominant subject matter concerning ethnicity in this country was Koreans. Their odd historical background made the matter sensitive, the focus of study was closely associated to prejudice and discrimination on the part of the Japanese government and Japanese people toward them, and research was often intentionally linked to the movement for emancipation and equality for Korean people. In the discriminating-discriminated relationship under structural inequality, Koreans lived in a psychologically remote enclave consolidated around the core family tie among themselves without developing positive and mutual relationships with neighboring Japanese residents, although they were living in physical proximity, like the Ikaino area in Osaka (Tomio Tani). In the 1990s a shift in subject matter in ethnic studies occurred from Old Timers to New Comers, and what mattered in these studies also changed. while prejudice and discrimination, inequality and negative stereotypes are still main concerns of both of activists and researchers, a variety of new issues appear as indicated above. Many newly established NGOs have begun to support various groups of foreign nationals in this country based on the international criteria of human rights and democracy, which Japan, a successfully industrialized democracy, has to accept.

Diversification of foreign residents happened in European countries sometime ago and the Kajita report, which includes the European situation, enumerates different cases such as family reunion, ethnic immigrants and refugees, commuters, illegal residents, students, trainees, contract laborers, and intermarriages. Interesting is that in this region many governments are now vigilant so that foreigners do not settle down in their countries.

Although the number of foreign residents in Japan is still small compared to European countries, its diversification is advancing, particularly among New Comers. A casual look at their geographical distribution reveals that urban areas in general and the Tokyo metropolitan area in particular have the most various ethnic compositions (except Latin Americans) in the country. Naturally one can expect to see varied categories of foreigners in these areas, while one quarter of Koreans live in the Osaka area and more than half of Latin Americans concentrate in the Aichi—Shizuoka area. Let me introduce the detailed surveys of (1) diversified foreigners in urban areas based on the Asano report and (2) Brazilians based on the Tsuzuki report.

Foreign nationals in urban areas

The Asano report sheds light on various aspects of life lived by different categories of foreigners living in urban areas through detailed analysis based on interviews and participant observation done by Professor Asano himself and his students. Basically, his concern is not confined to the conventional problems of prejudice and discrimination. What he is trying to grasp is the reality of life world (Lebenswelt) in which these people strive to survive, sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully. They are Chinese trainees, Asian students, Brazilian workers, Vietnamese families, and so on. Their job and class backgrounds, principal activities in Japan, and direct Japanese associates are scrutinized, and according to the differences in these items they live in different life world, which, in return, mould their value system, future prospect, and identity. Among his findings, here are some, which would be interesting to the readers.

Instead of being the object of discrimination and violation of human rights, these foreigners are the subject of life, having their own strategies to survive. They feel themselves humans socially positioned,
rather than the members of the same ethnic groups. Students and trainees of commerce and management, for example, are aiming at individual success in the global market. Although they go back home to get a job in Japanese subsidiaries there, they are not necessarily committed to their home country. They will be neither permanent residents nor robust elements of ethnic networks in Japan. Vietnamese families, although they are strongly tied with each other through ethnic networks, are divided hierarchically into (1) unstable poor stratum and (2) stable rich class. The former consists of unskilled workers engaged in jobs at the bottom of Japanese labor market such as Pachinko parlors, snack bars, and small-sized restaurants, while the latter includes successful import-export traders sometimes sending their children to the United States or France.

As shown in recent statistics (Ministry of Education, October, 2001), the number of foreign students in this country is at a record high, 78,812 as of May 01, 2001. There are 44,014 Chinese students (55.8% of foreign student population,) followed by Koreans, 14,725 (18.7%), and Taiwanese, 4,252 (5.4%). Compared to the previous year, the drastic increase of Chinese students is a surprising 36.3%. These students attend three different schools; namely, Graduate schools (25,146), Universities and Colleges (including 2 year colleges and Special high schools 39,502), and vocational schools (12,324). When compared to the previous year, the number of students in vocational schools increased by almost 40%. Obviously, they are using Japanese educational institutions as an instrument to learn knowledge and skills for their future careers, and sometimes make money through part time jobs. Except for very few cases of marriage or employment, almost all of them go back home. Noteworthy characteristics are that foreign students are coming mostly from China, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand in that order, and the top three countries occupy 79.9% of the foreign student body in this nation.

The case of Brazilians

As already shown, the Japanese government is very reluctant to accept unskilled foreign workers. The 1990 new law of immigration and naturalization officially makes clear the basic principle that this nation refuses the entry of unskilled workers and their settlement in this country. Latin Americans (especially Brazilians and Peruvians) of Japanese ancestry are exceptions. Although there was no official statement, they were accepted as unskilled laborers presumably because they shared Japanese blood (and hopefully culture, too) with the Japanese people. They contributed to the sudden increase of foreign workers in the 1990s, although before that the body of foreign workers in Japan consisted mainly of Koreans, Chinese, and some South Asians like the Philippines. (Table 5) According to the statistics of the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, there were nearly 130,000 foreign workers (direct employment) as of June 01, 2001, of which Latin Americans were 58,624, or 44.9%. (Among them, the ratio of those having Japanese ancestry was 87.5%). The Tsuzuki report is a survey research of Brazilian-Japanese relationship in a community in Toyota city, Aichi Prefecture.

Professor Tsuzuki’s research has been conducted over ten years in a collective residential area (population 9,504, of which Brazilians 5,396. 37%), where researchers found various conflicts and troubles taking place in this period. The report is based on the recent opinion survey of Japanese residents conducted in October 2001.

Facing the unexpected and abrupt entry of Brazilians into the community, it was the residents’ organization (the new type of traditional neighborhood organizations=Chonaikai) that began to tackle the problems. It tried to find the way of accepting the newcomers and creating a co-habitating community with them in cooperation with NGOs and local governments.

Generally speaking, people in this community do not seek intimate relationships among themselves, but they are ready to help each other on rainy days. This is basically true with foreigners. Half of the respondents say that they should understand better their newly arrived foreign neighbors and live in harmony with them, but the underlying feeling is somewhat negative to the increase of foreigners living in this country.
On the part of Japanese residents, complaints and anxiety toward foreigners come from direct experiences of every day life, which are mainly caused by different customs and lifestyles; noises, inappropriate disposal of litter, and so on.

On the other hand, positive measures have been realized by voluntary organizations and local government agencies, including the establishment of “Multicultural Co-habitating Committee” with the mayor of Toyota city as chairperson, Japanese language classes for Brazilian children, and more Portuguese guidebooks, etc.

Ten years of experiences of Japanese residents in this community give us lessons on how Japanese people should cope with the new age of ethnicity in Japan. I insisted ten years ago that accepting foreigners is a school of internationalization for Japanese people. To be sure, people may change through new experiences of living with foreigners, so may the governmental agencies and NGOs. However, some residents lament nostalgically for the old days when there were no foreigners. The outflow of these people from this community has been continuous. In fact, the above-mentioned residents’ organization appealed to the Mayor not to accept foreigners to over 40% of the population, the ideal target being 30%.

The problems of language and social customs seem to be the principal bottleneck of co-habitation of Japanese and Brazilian residents. In addition, Japanese tend to feel that foreigners living in Japan should adapt themselves to Japanese customs.

Concluding remarks

To conclude this paper, I would like to show the Japanese response to foreign workers based on a recent survey done by the Cabinet Office (Opinion Survey on the problems of foreign workers in Japan, 2000).

Responding to the rapid increase of foreign workers (as of FY 1998 the total number of legal and illegal foreign workers was estimated to be about 670,000, equivalent to more than 1% of all the employed workers in Japan), the Ministry of Labor (now Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare) is saying: The basic
policy of the Japanese Government is to accept foreign workers in professional and technical fields as much as possible, but to deal cautiously with the matter of accepting so-called ‘unskilled workers’ with thorough deliberation, because such acceptance might have a far-reaching impact on our country’s economy and society.

As for the matter of accepting so-called unskilled workers, although 21.1% of the above-mentioned survey respondents support the official government policy, a little bit more than half admit foreign workers to work in Japan with certain conditions. Those who are younger, living in urban areas, and engaging in professional-managerial white-collar jobs, support this opinion. Interesting is the reason why not to accept unskilled foreign workers; 63% of the respondents who do not admit the entry of unskilled workers say that it would make the social order vulnerable and 45% say that it would increase trouble in local communities.

Unskilled foreign workers may call their family in and stay in Japan permanently. About 26% of the respondents allow this, and particularly among 20s, the ratio is high. But 31% of the respondents insist that only workers themselves can stay for a fixed period. This opinion is supported most by housewives.

Generally speaking, Japanese attitude towards foreign residents has been changing in a positive way. As the Asano report reveals, roughly three quarters of Japanese people think that fundamental human rights of foreigners living in Japan should be equal to those of Japanese nationals. This impression is proved by the changing results of longitudinal opinion surveys conducted by the Cabinet Office. The occasion of the last World Cup co-sponsored by Japan and Korea witnessed newly developing trends of friendship between the two peoples, especially among youth. The two governments are still in diplomatic troubles when it comes to problems concerning “history textbooks” or “Yasukuni shrine,” but these seem to be problems exclusively concerning Old Timers of both countries.

The Japanese closedness might have been slightly exaggerated. Without any monotheistic principle, the Japanese may accept things foreign (including people) more easily than it was once thought, although it is true that some fear the possible appearance of discrimination and ultra-right movements due to the increase of foreigners in this country.

It seems, however, that the truth lies in the fact that there has been no systematic and ideology-based racism in this country except the artificially constructed “Tennosei 天皇制 ideology,” a mere ethnocentrism needed to mobilize human resources to achieve the national goal of the time, to wage the imperialistic wars. Unlike European and American experiences, Japanese reaction to things foreign (including people) is completely contextual. As the inhabitants of a remote village, the Japanese have sometimes accepted foreigners nicely as a token of good fortune and sometimes hated them as an omen of evils. Now, it is time for the Japanese to treat foreigners on the basis of modern enlightened philosophy, human rights and democracy.

Four Reports read at the symposium
Nishida Report
“The Relationship between Koreans and the Burakumin”
(Professor Yoshimasa Nishida, Osaka Prefectural University)

Tsuduki Report
(Professor Kurumi Tsuduki, Aichi Gakusen University)

Asano Report
“Class Structure and Acculturation in a Multiethnic Society Japan”
(Professor Shin’ichi Asano, Kobe University)

Kajita Report
“Changes in the Problems of Foreigners in Japan”
(Professor Takamichi Kajita, Hitotsubashi University)
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国民生活に関する世論調査 平成11年12月 内閣広報室
沖縄県民の意識に関する世論調査 平成13年2月 内閣広報室
The Present State of Ethnic Groups in Japan
—A view into ‘internationalization within’—

ABSTRACT

The state of ethnic groups in Japanese society has drastically changed, particularly during the past decade, quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The number of registered foreign residents (who completed foreign registration) has increased to over 1.5 times more than ten years ago and the ratio of those coming from Latin America, China, and South Asian countries has risen rapidly. The number of working foreigners has also risen 1.6 times during this period. Consequently, their relations with the host society have also changed and numerous sociological studies have revealed the new dimensions of ethnic relations in this once firmly closed society. This paper aims, among other things, at depicting a clear picture of the state of ethnic groups in Japan today and assessing whether the Japanese have successfully attained (or failed to attain) a multiethnic Japanese society. The author is grateful to the participants of the symposium organized at the 53rd Kansai Sociological Association Annual Convention held on May 26, 2002 for their academic stimuli and insightful reports and discussions on this topic.

Key Words: internationalization, ethnic group, Japanese society