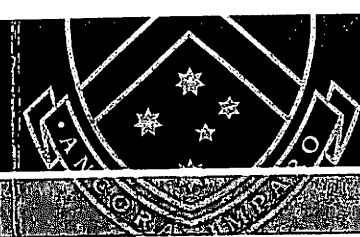


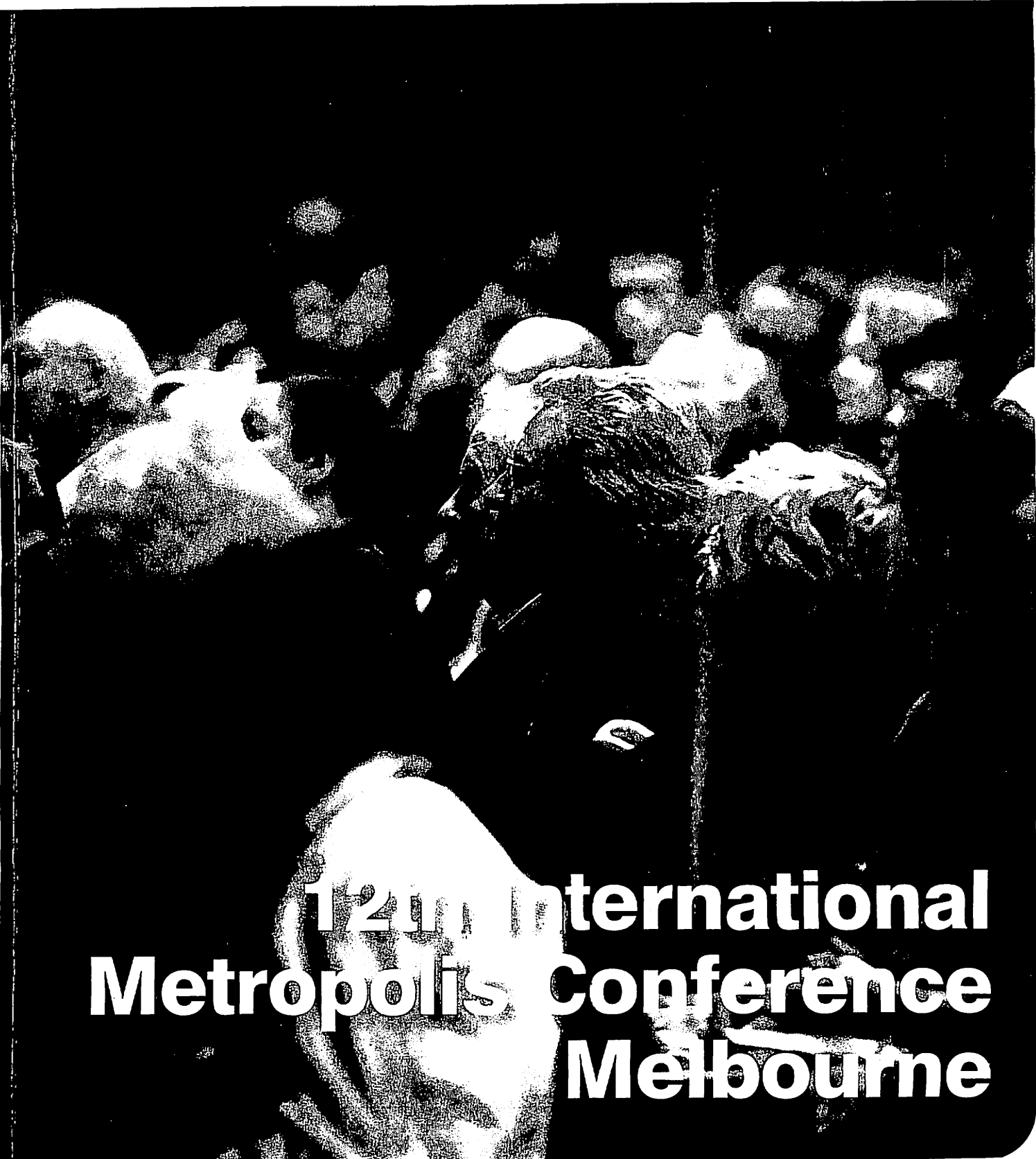
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The term *tabunka kyosei* roughly translates to mean 'multicultural community building' – a concept that is new to Japan's policy-makers. **Yamawaki Keizo** looks at his country's response to foreign residents and what is needed to better integrate them into Japanese communities.

# The challenges for Japanese immigrant integration policy



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### Foreign residents in Japan

At the end of 2006 the number of registered foreigners in Japan reached the highest level ever, at 2,084,919, accounting for 1.6 per cent of the total population. Although this number is still small compared to that in Western countries, its increase is worth noting, since it occurred during a period of decline in the overall Japanese population, which peaked in 2004.

If we break down the above figure according to status of residence, we can see that there are more than 800,000 permanent residents. Among the non-permanent ones, there are many 'long-term residents' and those who fall into the category of 'spouse or child of a Japanese national'. Permanent residents, non-permanent residents in the aforementioned categories, as well as those in the category 'spouse or child of a permanent resident', who together account for two-thirds of the foreign population, are not affected by any legal restrictions concerning the activities they engage in and are, one could argue, *de facto* immigrants.

Foreign residents are concentrated in the Kanto, Tokai and Kansai regions (all of which are on the Pacific coast of Japan's main island, Honshu). A breakdown by prefectures (large administrative units) shows that Tokyo ranks first, with 17.5 per cent of all registered foreigners in Japan (365,000), followed by Osaka, Aichi, Kanagawa and Saitama prefectures; and 10 of the country's 47 prefectures accommodate 70 per cent. In terms of the percentage of the total population represented by foreign residents, Tokyo heads the list with approximately 3 per cent, and other prefectures, mainly in the Tokai region, such as Aichi, Mie, Shizuoka and Gifu, have populations where foreign residents comprise more than 2 per cent. However, there are also prefectures, most notably in the Kyushu and Tohoku regions, where foreign residents account for less than 1 per cent of the overall population.

A breakdown by municipalities shows an even larger contrast in the proportion of the foreign population. In Oizumi town in Gunma prefecture, foreign residents make up 16 per cent of the overall population, while cities, towns and villages with less than 1 per cent of foreign residents are numerous.

If we view the areas where foreigners reside in terms of their nationality, we can see that there are large regional disparities, with Koreans concentrated in the Kansai region and Brazilians in the Tokai region. The municipalities

which have, since the 1990s, seen a steep rise in the number of foreign inhabitants, mostly of Brazilian origin, face various problems in education, labour, medical care and community life. Especially grave is the problem of school education: it is estimated that several thousand, or possibly more, school-age children attend no school at all. This is in part due to the fact that foreign parents are not required by Japanese law to have their children enrolled in school, and that many of those parents find themselves in an unstable employment environment.

### A Japanese integration policy?

In Japan the word 'integration' has not yet taken root as a policy term. The word appears in the second report of the Council for the Promotion of Regulatory Reform (December 2005),<sup>1</sup> which is probably the first time it has been used in an official government document.

'It is essential to promote the social integration policy to encourage them to adjust to the Japanese society while these measures are being taken.' Then in a footnote, the terms were clarified further: 'In this case, "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 fulfil their obligations.'<sup>2</sup>

Policies towards foreigners and immigrants generally consist of admission and integration policies, but in Japan they have meant only admission policies (i.e. those based on the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law and the Alien Registration Law), with little interest in integration policies until recently. This has to do with the fact that the overall number of foreigners living in the country has been small and that the majority of them were Koreans (originally from the former colony) until the 1980s. Thus the concept of integration is new to Japanese policy-makers and they have only recently started to become interested in it. While the Ministry of Justice is in charge of the admission policy, a government body for formulating the overall social integration policy is yet to be formed.

However, at the local government level gradual progress has been made, since the 1970s, in shaping social integration policies with regard to local foreign residents.



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### Local governments' social policy towards foreign residents

Local governments that have been engaged in policy-making related to foreign inhabitants can be broadly divided into two categories: those that have conducted their policy mainly as an extension of their human rights policy (this has been the case since the 1970s in the Kansai region, where there are a lot of Korean residents); and those where the policy has been an extension of their policy for internationalisation (as can be seen in the Tokai region since the 1990s, where many Brazilians reside).

Since around the year 2000 more and more local governments have taken a step beyond human rights and internationalisation policies to systematise their policy-making around the key concept of *tabunka kyosei* (multicultural community building). From 2005 some of those local governments began to make a guideline or plan for the promotion of multicultural community building. In July 2007 Miyagi prefecture made an ordinance to promote multicultural community building, the first one in the country.

Local governments representing the internationalisation approach have been active, creating networks such as the Council of Municipalities with a Large Foreign Resident Population<sup>3</sup> and the Council for the Promotion of Multicultural Community Building.<sup>4</sup> Through these agencies they are exchanging information and submitting policy proposals to the national government for the framing of a social integration policy.

### The national government's social integration policy

Acting on the progress in the development of policies toward foreign residents by local governments, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), which is in charge of local administration, established a Committee for the Promotion of Multicultural Community Building in June 2005. This body gathered examples from all over the country of various measures taken by local governments concerning foreign residents, and submitted a report in March 2006. It became the basis for the MIC's Plan for the Promotion of Multicultural Community Building, issued in the same month, in which it requested that all prefectures and major cities create guidelines or plans for the promotion of multicultural community building. Many prefectural governments are currently working on the formulation of a guideline or plan.



The report by the MIC's committee was taken up during the April debate in the central pillar of the government, the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy. After then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro pointed out the necessity of creating a better living environment for foreigners, with the support of then Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzo, an interministry study of the issue of foreign residents was started.

In December 2006 'Comprehensive measures concerning foreign residents' were formulated, and the need for work in the following fields was cited: the building of local communities that are easy to live in for foreigners, education for foreign children, the improvement of working conditions for foreigners, social insurance schemes, and the revision of the registration system for foreign residents.

The key term in policy-making regarding foreign residents, both in local government and in the MIC, is *tabunka kyosei*. This new term is difficult to translate into English. First used by civic groups in the mid-1990s, it later spread to local governments and has now come to be used at the national level. The framework of the policy for *tabunka kyosei* as defined by the MIC's committee is basically equivalent to the integration policy promoted in the European Union in recent years. Although *tabunka kyosei* is sometimes equated with multiculturalism, it should be noted that it does not necessarily coincide with the Canadian or Australian multicultural policies.

The concept of integration is new to Japanese policy-makers and they have only recently started to become interested in it.



## 12th International Metropolis Conference

### Challenges ahead

Here I would first like to examine the challenges for the national government. The government needs to establish an organ that will integrate and co-ordinate the policies of different ministries and agencies, and lay out the basic principles for social integration.<sup>5</sup> There is also a need for the establishment of a policy on Japanese language education for foreign residents. Furthermore, the government should take a clear stance on foreign children's education and set basic guidelines in conjunction with the current educational reform.<sup>6</sup> While the issue of an increase in 'the working poor' is being brought to the public's attention, improving conditions for non-permanent employees is also an important task for the Cabinet. A large number of foreign workers in the manufacturing industry are employed indirectly as contract-based or dispatched workers; they find themselves with short-term contracts in an unstable working environment and many of them are without insurance coverage. Steps should be taken to improve such labour conditions. Also, concerning the reform of the registration system for foreign residents, along with securing the accuracy of registration data, provisions should be made so that foreign residents are offered proper administrative service by municipalities.

Secondly, there are emerging challenges for local governments too. An increasing number of prefectures and cities have a basic guideline or plan for their policy toward foreigners and an administrative section for dealing with related matters. Their task now should be to further develop ties with non-profit organisations (NPOs), including foreign residents' self-support groups, and corporations. Co-operating with schools is also important; it would be an effective approach to make schools the base for multicultural community building. In short, it is vital that the local governments, while offering support to foreign residents, promote self-reliance and social participation by foreign residents and also strive to inform Japanese residents of the importance of multicultural community building.

Thirdly, the role of NPOs is also significant. As they operate closest to the people, these organisations are best suited for the task of the promotion of exchange among residents at the grassroots level. Their challenge, first of all, is to develop ties and joint operations with local governments. Secondly, most NPOs consist of Japanese people; there are only a few with a foreign resident membership or that are organised by foreign residents. An

important question is to what degree foreign residents will participate in civic activities from now on. Furthermore, as is the case with local governments, NPOs are expected to work on networking with their counterparts in other regions, as well as to present policy proposals to the local and national governments that reflect the views of citizens.

Finally, corporations are also important actors in promoting social integration. There are many big corporations, mainly manufacturers, which do not directly employ foreigners but whose foreign workforce has been hired indirectly through subcontractors and labour dispatch services. They have shown little interest in the issues arising from the increase of foreign workers in local communities, thus evoking growing public criticism concerning corporate social responsibility. Corporations need to not only follow the labour-related laws and regulations, such as those concerning social insurance enrolment and the minimum wage payment, but also to co-operate with local governments and NPOs in implementing projects for multicultural community building. Their participation in establishing funds for the promotion of such local projects would also be very helpful.

### Notes:

1. The Council for the Promotion of Regulatory Reform, an advisory body to the Prime Minister, promotes reform of outdated regulations which are hindering economic growth and innovation
2. The Council for the Promotion of Regulatory Reform, 'Second Report on the Promotion of Regulatory Reform and the Opening Up of Government-driven Markets for Entry into the Private Sector,' 21 December 2005 p. 107. [http://www8.cao.go.jp/kiseikaikaku/old/publication/2005/1221/item051221\\_03e.pdf](http://www8.cao.go.jp/kiseikaikaku/old/publication/2005/1221/item051221_03e.pdf) By the way, 'a foreign country' in the quotation is a wrong translation from the Japanese text made by the Council, and should read 'a host country'
3. The Council of Municipalities with a Large Foreign Resident Population, founded in 2001, currently consists of 22 cities and one town. Its headquarters is at present in Minokamo city, Gifu prefecture
4. The Council for Multicultural Community Building, founded in 2004, currently consists of Aichi, Mie, Gifu, Shizuoka, Gunma and Nagano prefectures and Nagoya city. Its headquarters is in Aichi prefecture
5. I have been proposing establishment of a law for social integration. See Yamawaki Keizo, 'New legislation needed for a multicultural Japan' *The Asahi Shimbun*, 17 December 2002 <http://www.kisc.meiji.ac.jp/~yamawaki/etc/view0212.pdf>
6. See Yamawaki Keizo, 'Too many foreign kids falling through the cracks' *The Asahi Shimbun*, 20-21 January 2007 <http://www.kisc.meiji.ac.jp/~yamawaki/etc/asahi0701.pdf>