研究ノート

Awareness of a growing diversity:

the educational challenges for ethnic minority children in Kyoto

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Introduction

Kyoto, known as the "Ancient capital" located in western Japan, is internationally known as being one of the most popular tourist destinations in East Asia, and has been receiving wider attention as an important hub for cutting-edge academic research, the Arts and entrepreneurship, being a favorite for expats and their families for having a safe and quiet environment (Kyoto Research Park website, 2016; Kyoto Chamber of Commerce and Industry pamphlet, 2008).

As a result of the city's popularity, the prefecture has experienced a considerable growth in new immigrants coming to live long-term and raise their children in Kyoto city. The majority of these children are enrolled in the local public schools throughout Kyoto City. In the "70th Anniversary Commemorative Proposal" written by the Kyoto Association of Corporate Executives (April 25, 2018, "70th Anniversary Special Committee Commemorative Proposal Working Group, p. 20) the paper mentions that in order to promote the globalization of Kyoto, it is essential that a wide variety of foreigners of different races and nationalities come to Kyoto and settle. It furthers by arguing that though Kyoto is attractive internationally as a city for both history and tourism, simply promoting this appeal will not be sufficient to ensure that skilled foreigners will move and settle down in the city. Kyoto city needs to meet the global standards of living environment and the basic infrastructure essential for foreign families to live comfortably and thrive.

In the past 25 years, research on ethnic minority youth (termed in Japanese as *"Gaikoku ni roots o motsu jidou seito",* or in English, "school-age children with ethnic roots abroad") has been conducted in the Kansai region, particularly in prefectures such as Osaka, Kobe and Shiga, which have dense populations of newcomer immigrant youth (Ishikida, 2005, Shimizu & Bradley, 2014). Compared to other cities in the Kansai region, the number of foreign residents in Kyoto city is considered still few, with its foreign population spread throughout the prefecture. Learning support services offered for ethnic minority children are insufficient at many public elementary schools and as a result, ethnic minority children and their

families in Kyoto largely rely on support from grass-root level organizations, who often lack human resources, educational materials and funding.

The rise of ʻcultural diversificationʼ

Japan has often been described by sociologists as "homogeneously minded", projecting itself as an ethnically and linguistically homogeneous nation (Okano, 2006). However, Japan has recently been experiencing rapid cultural diversification within the past ten years. Increasing diversity comes with it a new formation of new social alignments and the challenges of "the Different" (Tsuneyoshi, 2004, p. 55). Though Japan is diversifying, it is not visibly seen everywhere in this society, ʻwhere patches of visibly diverse districtsʼ, in which Tsuneyoshi (2004) refers to as ʻdiversity pointsʼ are scattered amidst a vast sea of seeming homogeneityʼ (p. 57).

The "new" diversity

Though predominately Asian, some groups of "new foreigners tend to stand out visibly compared to ʻless visibleʼ foreigners in Japan. They speak a different everyday language, have foreign names, foreign customs and some look different (Tsuneyoshi, 2004, p. 61). Japan is seeing a shift from an "invisible" diversity" (for example, many Korean and Chinese nationals in Japan -referred to in Japan the "old comers" - many who have been born and raised in Japan, adopting Japanese names) to more of a "visible" diversity of people coming to Japan as foreign laborers, refugees and spouses of Japanese. Newcomers may include (but are not limited to) individuals such as adult blue-collar labourers, academic educators,

researchers and business professionals.

## Population growth of long-term foreign residents in Kyoto

According to 2017 statistics, there are approximately 56,948 foreign residents in Kyoto Prefecture, (Statistics, Office of International Affairs, Kyoto City, 2017). With the growing number of foreigners who have decided to make Kyoto their long-term home to work and raise families, the issue of where and how their children will receive their education is a major concern for parents. Elementary school aged children in particular make up more than half of the ethnic minority youth population in Japan (See Fig 1). According to the general school survey conducted by the Japan Ministry of Education (MEXT, 2016), out of a total of 80,119 school aged-students recorded to be of foreign nationality, approximately 49,000 students are enrolled at public elementary schools. There is recently a growing number of public schools where school-aged children who hold Japanese passports (returnee students, Japanese nationals, but where Japanese is their second language) need Japanese language support (See Fig 2). This survey shows data collected between 2006–2016. The lighter shaded area at the bottom of each column represents the number of elementary schools. The darker shaded area in the middle of each column represents the number of high schools. The very lightly shaded area at the top of each column represents the number of high schools. The dark solid line at the very top of each column indicate the number or special education support schools. This survey results show that out of 3,611 schools, more than 2,500 elementary schools have students enrolled in

（参考）公立学校に在籍している外国籍の児童生徒数　　（出典：文部科学省「学校基本調査」）

（各年5月1日現在）
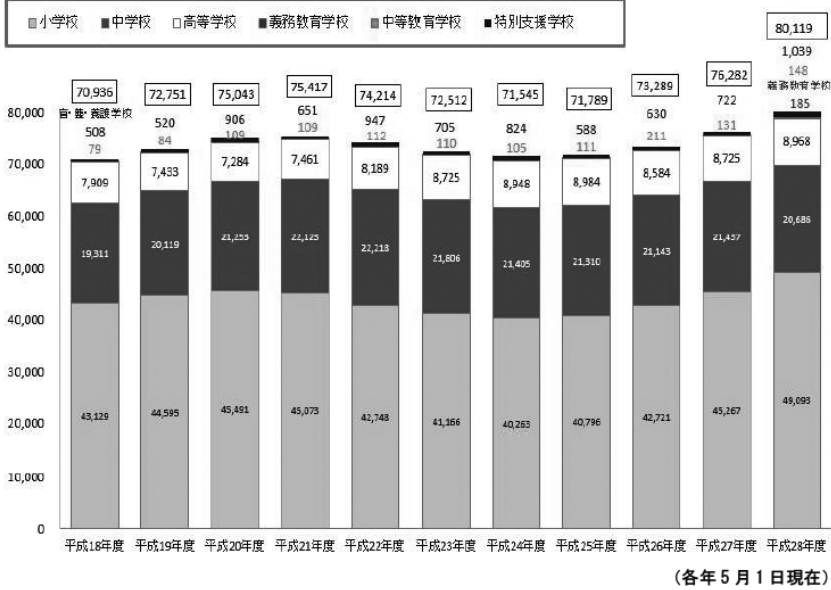
(Fig. 1)

General School Survey conducted by MEXT (The Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2016) showing the number of school-age children with foreign nationality enrolled at public schools (primary, junior and senior) between 2006 to 2016.
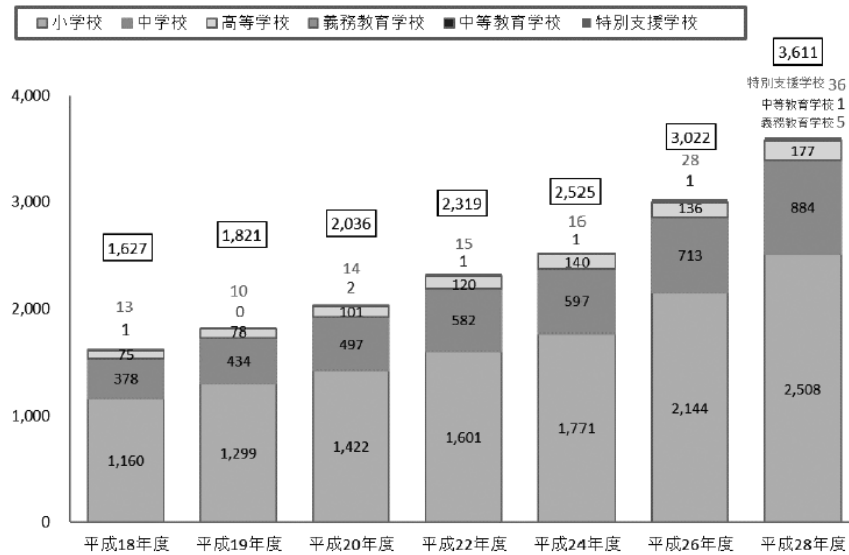
(Fig. 2)

General School Survey by MEXT (The Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2016) showing the number of public schools where school-aged children with Japanese nationality who require Japanese language support. This survey shows data collected between 2006 to 2016.

them in which they require Japanese language learning support.

According to the Kyoto Prefecture 2018 School Basic Survey Results *(Heisei 30 Nendo Gakko Kihon Chosa Kekka)* approximately 500 children of foreign nationality are enrolled in elementary schools (both public and private). However, the accuracy and reliability of this statistic may be questionable as the recorded survey results did not specify nor classify particular numbers for children with dual citizenship, nor children who were born and raised in Japan but Japanese being their second language.

Newcomer immigrant children

More children in the world are growing up immigrant or in transnational households. Like their immigrant parents, these children are highly diverse origins and socioeconomic backgrounds. 'Their economic situations, educational attainment and health will shape their own future while significantly influencing the futures of their host countries' (Zhou & Bankston, 2016, p. 1). As for Japan, its national minority populations which were seen as "invisible" many decades ago are now becoming visible with increased ethnic diversity being more evident within our communities (Lee, Murphy-Shigematsu, Befu, 2007, p. xix). Other than the category of newcomer immigrant children who were born and partly raised abroad, Murphy-Shigematsu (2006), categorizes ethnic minority youth in various groups (but not limited to these particular categories): 1) children who hold more than one passport with dual or multiple nationalities; 2) children who are native to Japan but legally are a national of another country or

foreigners in Japan 3) Nikkeijin of South America (p. 136).

Ethnic minority children, minority groups, cultural diversity and learning

In understanding different minority groups, their cultures and languages and the reasons why acculturalization and school learning are challenges for some, we may wish to refer to how Ogbu (1994) categorizes different types of minority groups in one of his comparative studies in classify minority groups (a) autonomous (defined as people who are minorities in a numerical sense), (b) immigrant or voluntary(defined as people who have moved more or less voluntarily due to a pull-factors such as better socio-economical opportunities or political freedom), and (c) castelike or involuntary minorities(defined as people who are forced to leave their country against their will) . As the main minority group focused on this present study are voluntary minorities and this paper will focus on this category of minority group. According to Ogbu (1994), voluntary minorities usually experience initial problems in school due to cultural and language differences as well as a lack of understanding of how the education system works (p. 363).

Ogbu further argues that voluntary minorities can be characterized by something that he explains as "primary and secondary cultural differences'. He defines "primary cultural differences" as a characteristic which existed before the two different cultural groups came in contact, such as before immigrant minorities came to in school, primary cultural differences may initially cause problems in interpersonal and intergroup relations as well as difficulties in

academic work for several reasons. One is that children from different cultural backgrounds may begin school with different cultural assumptions about the world and human relations. Another is that the minorities may come to school lacking certain concepts necessary to learn math and science, for instance, because their own culture do not have or use such concepts. Still another problem is that the children may be non-English-speaking. Finally, there may be differences in teaching and learning styles (p. 366). 'Secondary cultural differences' on the other hand are said to cause many of the cultural problems that are seen to be on the surface such as conflicts in interpersonal/intergroup relations due to cultural misunderstandings, conceptual problems due to absence of certain concepts in ethnic-group cultures, lack of fluency in the mainstream or majority language of the country and conflicts in teaching and learning style (p. 368).

Japanese-as a-Second-Language education at public schools

The Ministry of Education started to compile data from 1991 on "foreign pupils and children who need Japanese language instruction", one year after the revised immigration law. The definition of a student who required instruction in the Japanese language is as follows: "Pupils or students who have not mastered everyday conversation, or who can manage everyday conversation, but who lack terms necessary for study at the grade level, and thus have trouble participating in learning activities, and who require instruction in the Japanese language" (MEXT, 2009 cited by Murphy-Shigematsu, p. 137). Gottlieb (2012) argues

that the quality of Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) education provided in public schools is low or even non-existent. Without a recognized tradition of multilingualism and without the teaching resources needed in terms of staff and materials, much remains to be done. There are a lack of specialist Japanese-language teachers in schools, few to zero teacher training courses for JSL teachers offered at universities, no government-endorsed scales for measuring the Japanese-language teachers in schools, no government-endorsed scales for measuring the Japanese-language proficiency of JSL students and no overarching language educational policy which take into account the needs of both JSL and native Japanese students. It is up to each local Board of Education to decide what to offer its non-Japanese students in the way of support, and those schools which to make substantial provision for such students often have to rely on a considerable degree of community support. According to a 2017 survey conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Education, 'the number of non-Japanese children at public schools who are lacking in Japanese language skills and who need remedial lessons hit a record of 34,335. The number, up 17.6 percent from the previous biennial survey conducted in 2014, accounted for 42.9 percent of the 80,119 non-Japanese children at public elementary schools, high schools and other public facilities across Japan. Among most of those children with difficulties in the Japanese language were the ones who possess Japanese citizenship but who were having difficulty speaking the language, either one or both parents are non-Japanese or they had lived overseas and recently moved back to Japan.' (Yoshida,

2017). While public schools in prefectures such as Aichi, Shizuoka, Tokyo and have a large number of foreign children with poor Japanese skills, support and services may be more accessible, while in many other areas, such as Kyoto, the majority of public schools have only a few ethnic minority children enrolled in their schools who in fact need Japanese language support, and therefore services and support are difficult to access. These public schools have no choice but to seek assistance from the local community to assist these children with their Japanese language skills. It is nearly impossible for schools to deal with this problem in a uniform manner nationwide. While there are a various language schools in Kyoto for international students, the prefecture does not have a well-established system to train teachers who can teach fundamenal Japanese to elementary and junior high school children. Such a system is not yet established. Depending where one lives in Kyoto, the few elementary schools who have a number of ethnic minority children enrolled in them may have years of experience with providing Japanese language support and access to these services is relatively straight forward for them. However, with the growing number of students who require language support in Japanese, teachers and parents who have never used this support do not clearly know or understand the process or system for accessing this type of support (Saki, 2018).

Language Support: awareness, quality and accessibility

Language support services–who to ask, how to access them and how much to expect from these services is somewhat vague and uncertain for many ethnic minority children and their families in Kyoto Prefecture. For instance, schools with principals who have an awareness or understanding of the needs of foreign children tend make efforts to inform their teacher staff of such services and, make such support available for students. Some schools even develop a special curriculum for students in need. However, this is not the case at many schools. 'It's up to each principal's own judgment.... principals and senior teachers are the ones who often lack such understanding, so they need to learn the reality' (Aoki, 2017). Language skills is something particularly crucial for learning at schools. Without the right academic support, these children will be deprived of a chance to gain solid academic abilities. The quantity, quality and consistency of language services and support are varied according to each area, each district and each public school in Kyoto Prefecture. Public school teachers in Japan are known for their extremely long working hours and responsibility overload. Due to overwork, many teachers do not have the time nor energy to be able to tend to each individual student in a 30 to 35-student classroom (Saki, 2018).

Non-governmental language support groups

Japanese language lessons provided by NPOs or citizens' groups are often the only resources children have to build the language skills they need to become part of the school community. The number of foreign students in need of Japanese instruction in public schools hit a record 34,335, up from 22,413 in 2006, according to the ministry's latest study in 2017. 'About 77 percent, or 26,410, were

receiving language support, according to the survey. This may show that the remaining 7,925 children may not be receiving any type of language support. Even at schools that reportedly provide language support, some children struggle because of the uneven quality, which varies greatly between schools' (Aoki, 2017).

While many schools and organizations within Kyoto Prefecture and Kyoto city currently seem to not have the capacity to provide sufficient support ethnic minority communities, Kyoto needs to rely on local grassroots language support groups in running training sessions, and doing joint-projects with universities in helping them advertise the study support groups that they offer, and help them disseminate information to the foreign resident community. Still, information about these NPO and NGO is inaccessible for many ethnic minority youth due to lack of awareness and ignorance of parents, caregivers, educational authorities, public schools, and local communities.

Future research

The author plans to further explore what systems are in place to insure the trends and challenges for both governmental and non-governmental organizations are who support both the academic and well-being of ethnic minority youth in Japan. In particular the future research examination of the following:

- Types of support needed for newcomer immigrant children vs. multicultural Japanese children
- experiences of language support teachers, volunteer learning support groups and government affiliated organizations

Conclusion

The literature examined in this paper suggest that the current supply of learning support services and resources does not meet the growing demand. Significant disparities are found in the quantity, quality and accessibility of services for both JSL support and mother tongue language support. Second, there is a lack of awareness and acknowledgement of not only the identity of the ethnic minority youth, inside and outside school communities. In following this present study, research will be continued to further analyze the experiences of ethnic minority youth and their families, as well as individuals, groups and organizations who try to support them in the hopes of increasing awareness about the urgent need to improve services and support for this diverse generation of Japanese.

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