Social Integration of Migrants in Japan: Role of the Centers for International Exchange in Migrant Integration

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Japan is facing a demographic crisis. Its population peaked between 2007 and 2013 at 128 million (Peng 2016). Its currently stands at 127.1 million (as of 2015) and this is projected to shrink to 107 million by 2050 and to somewhere between 52 and 83 million by the end of this century (Yoshida 2015, Taylor 2016). The population is aging as well, with a median age of 46.9 placing it second behind Monaco. Over a quarter of its population is over the age of 65, and this bulk is expected to grow to over 40% by 2060. The number of children (14 and younger) has declined from roughly 24% of the population in 1974 to only 12.8% in 2014 (Nippon.com 2014; Armstrong 2016). As a result of the aging and declining population, the workforce is also shrinking. The workforce peaked in 1997 and has declined by 10 million workers in the ten years since (Armstrong 2016). It is expected to fall from 66.3 million in 2010 to a range of 57-63 million in 2030, according to government projections (Ganelli and Miake 2015, 3). Another measure, the working age population (ages 15-64), fell below 80 million in 2013 and in 2016 stands at 77 million (Nikkei Asia Review 2016). Peng (2016) states that the working age population will drop to 44 million by the year 2037.

According to a 2014 survey, about one in three companies stated that they were short of workers, regardless of the field. In particular fields, such as healthcare, elderly care, and related human services, only 46% of companies surveyed stated that they were meeting their hiring needs (Tsunemi 2014). It is similar in other fields such as construction, where job openings outnumber applicants by ratios of more than three to one (Nikkei Asian Review 2016). This decline in the workforce will inevitably strain the ability of the government, businesses, and individuals to continue to support current living standards. Facing serious labor shortages due to its rapidly aging society, Japanese policymakers are “pressed to confront the gap between policy prescription and policy outcome” (Vogt and Roberts 2011, 9), by gradually easing the immigration restrictions not only for high-, but also low-skilled foreign workers, and integrating them into the local community. Though the government does not have a blanket policy for allowing lesser skilled and unskilled migrants covering all industries, it does have its much-lambasted trainee program and a patchwork set of bilateral agreements with particular countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand covering different fields, such as Filipina nurses (Shipper 2008, 27). In 2016, Tokyo began to ease regulations in particular lesser-skilled fields, including
elderly care, nursing, housekeeping, and agriculture – some of this deregulation is
aimed at particular prefectures, such as Tokyo, Kanagawa, and Osaka.

With a change in policies resulting in an increase in the number of foreign workers,
one would expect there to be accompanying policies to help foreigners integrate into
Japanese society and to address their needs. But as one critic of Japanese immigration
policy writes, Japan “lacks an active policy to incorporate [foreign workers] into
society or to participate in Japan’s political life” (Shipper 2008, 25). This may be true
of the national government and its overall immigration policy, but local governments
have partially picked up the slack when it comes to migrant integration. Contrary to
much of the English-language literature, we argue in this paper that the Japanese
government does provide resources for migrant integration through municipal-level
centers for international exchange (kokusai kōryū kyōkai/sentā). The purpose of this
study is to discuss what kind of measures Japan has implemented in the recent years
to accommodate and integrate migrants. In particular, it focuses on how Japan’s
government incorporation policies are implemented into practice; the role of local
governments and centers for international exchange in incorporation/integration
process; and, migrants’ individual experience in integration (hereafter, we shall use
“centers” to refer generally to these institutions).

What is Integration and How to Measure It?
Integration is a complex topic, one that can be fraught with controversy. Integration
can often be taken to mean the assimilation of migrants into the national culture of
their new society. We oppose using integration as a stand-in for assimilation, and
instead to a meaning of the term that focuses on equality of opportunity and permits
migrants “to maintain their cultural identity” (Kivisto 2010, 92). Spano and Domecka
(2015) point out, “integration is understood differently by policy makers, who
propose to celebrate new citizens, by researchers, who are surprised that the
‘integrated ones’ do not want to celebrate their new citizenship, and by immigrants
themselves, who develop their own projects and meanings that researchers and policy
makers may not be aware of” (Spano and Domecka 2015, 113).

The process of integration is a two-way social interaction between majority
community and immigrants, where the site of institutions (employers, civil society
and the government) of the established society must take the lead (Modood 2007). Writing about integration in a wide-ranging 1997 Council of Europe report, Coussey and Christensen define integration as having, “a common framework of legal rights; active participation in society, on the basis of minimum standards of income, education and accommodation; freedom of choice of religious and political beliefs, cultural and sexual affiliation, within the framework of basic democratic rights and liberties” (Coussey and Christensen 1997, 19). They then list the following ‘objective’ indicators of integration that would serve as a guide to measuring integration: access to the labour market; access to housing and social services and benefits; access to education; participation in political processes; changes in mortality, fertility, and demography; and judicial system indicators, including data on arrest, conviction and acquittal rates, discrimination and harassment, and discriminatory patterns in police or judiciary behaviour (Coussey and Christensen 1997, 23-25). However, most of the researchers discussing an issue of integration (Kearns and Whitley 2015, Home Office 2005, Ager and Strang 2004) agree on the two main areas: public (employment, housing, education and health) and social or personal (networks with their own and other communities, competencies in language, cultural knowledge and security/stability). This paper will focus on how Japan’s migrants’ social integration is organized through local government organizations.

Methods and Variables
The aim of this paper is to analyze current measures in migrant integration into Japanese society. This is a mixed-method project, which includes quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to study the effectiveness of centers for international exchange as resources for migrant social integration. At this point in the research project, the authors have: 1) reviewed migration and integration policies in Japan to identify the gap between policies and needs; 2) conducted interview with centers’ employees in areas accepting large number of migrants, to see how they apply government policy and resources (eleven centers in Tokyo, Osaka, Kanagawa, Aichi, Niigata, Nagano, Ishikawa, Shiga prefectures); and 3) performed a survey of migrants (N = 181) visiting the centers for international exchange to understand their use of and satisfaction with the centers.

The first part discusses Japan’s prototypes of integration policies and how they are
implemented. The second part of the study involved interviewing current or former staff of centers for international exchange. The questions included personal background of each participant, how each of them came to work for the organization, what roles they have, and how their work have changed through these years. And also, there were general questions about the organization of the center, how it functions, its relations and connections with local government, number of Japanese and foreign nationals staff, issues the organization faces in their everyday life, organization’s attempts to attract foreign and local residents, programs that involve participation of local and foreign residents and enhance their communication, and programs aiming at empowering foreign residents. The third part of the study was a questionnaire survey conducted with adults attending Japanese language courses in centers for international exchange. It was written in English and then translated into nine languages (Japanese, Mandarin, Traditional Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Portuguese, Thai, and Russian).

**Integration Policies in Japan**
Currently, according to the Ministry of Justice (2016), there are 2,307,388 foreign nationals residing in Japan. See Table 1 below for a breakdown by country of origin. However, “Japan has no official integration programs at the national level” (Chung 2010, 35). To this day migrant integration in Japan has been based on ad hoc measures, with most situations depending on the discretion and initiatives of local governments and communities.

**Table 1. Migrants in Japan by Country of Origin**

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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,906,689</td>
<td>2,087,261</td>
<td>2,307,388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>501,960</td>
<td>678,391</td>
<td>677,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>586,400</td>
<td>560,799</td>
<td>490,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>163,890</td>
<td>200,208</td>
<td>237,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>298,382</td>
<td>228,702</td>
<td>176,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>27,990</td>
<td>41,354</td>
<td>175,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>48,376</td>
<td>49,821</td>
<td>53,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>52,217</td>
<td>52,385</td>
<td>47,670</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>29,599</td>
<td>38,240</td>
<td>46,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>5,314</td>
<td>17,149</td>
<td>60,689</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>192,561</td>
<td>220,212</td>
<td>248,106</td>
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One prototype for immigrant integration is ‘international exchange (kokusai kōryū)’ program, implemented in 1987 and aiming at foreigners serving “as a medium for internationalizing Japanese citizens” (Kashiwazaki 2011, 47). This so-called “local-level internationalization (chiikino kokusaika)” program aimed to encourage international exchange activities at the prefectural and municipal levels, e.g. sister-city exchanges, inter-cultural understanding for local residents (Ministry of Internal Affairs 1987). In the beginning of 1990s, with a rising number of foreign residents, these programs were expanded to provide information and consultation services to foreigners, and were conducted by centers for international exchange, which “eventually came to play a major role in implementing integration programs” (Kashiwazaki 2011, 47). And, in the beginning of 2000s these centers changed their focus to mostly cater for foreign residents.

Current prototype of integration policy in Japan resembles abovementioned public and social areas of integration. On the public level, Japan’s foreign residents have similar welfare rights as Japanese residents, such as health insurance, child care allowances, admission to public housing, and worker pensions. And, recent workforce oriented move (drafted in 2008) based on “human resource development” accepting not only high-skilled workers, but also young workers with specific skills and qualifications with the prospect of future naturalization (Kibe 2011). Another area is social move, culture-oriented (tabunka kyōsei, literally meaning living together multicultural), “aiming to remove cultural barriers and promote intercultural understanding” (Kibe 2011, 60-1), formulated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIAC) in 2006. However, there is no clear vision of these two moves and particular programs on how to achieve their goals, as well as it is not clear, what categories of migrants are the main target, whether these two moves are aimed to intertwine at some point, there is no clear plan of implementation of these two policies and how they will complement each other. This paper mainly aims to fill the gap of knowledge on how Japan’s social integration activities are organized, who are the target migrants, how they evaluate their social integration and the role local governments play in it.
The Tabunka Kyōsei Paradigm and Its Implementation

2006 MIAC report states that in addition to two main pillars of “local-level internationalization” – “international exchange (kokusai kōryū)” and “international cooperation (kokusai kyōryoku)” that were implemented in the second half of 1980s, local governments need to promote “tabunka kyōsei” (MIAC 2006, 2). There are three main points in the Government’s Plan for Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence (tabunka kyōsei suishin puran):

1) support of communication (komyūnikēshyon shien) – multilingual or “easy Japanese” support and support of adults’ Japanese language studies;
2) support of daily life (seikatsu shien) – housing, education, working conditions, healthcare/insurance/welfare, and disaster prevention;
3) multicultural coexistence on regional level (tabunka kyōseino chiiki zukuri) – awareness of multicultural coexistence in the local community, independence of foreign residents and participation in the social planning, and organization of promotion of multicultural coexistence policy.

Finally, there is an additional concept that was formulated as a necessary point in the promotion of multicultural coexistence by local governments (MIAC 2006):

4) maintenance of the organization of promotion of multicultural coexistence policy (tabunka kyōsei shisakuno suishin taiseino seibi). However, in MIAC 2017 report the fourth concept was changed to the regional revitalization and contribution to globalization (chiiki katsuyōkaya gurōbarukaheno kōken) – contribution to regional revitalization and contribution to globalization.

As it was mentioned in previous section, this plan is implemented by local governments, which act as intermediaries between the central government and residents with regard to social welfare services and needs (Shipper 2008, 129). One of the types of organizations that was created to support foreign residents is centers for international exchange. Serving to migrants from the different cultural backgrounds, centers for international exchange have proved to be integral for the integration of migrants into Japanese society, because they offer crucial services and opportunities for interactions with Japanese citizens on a local level. These are measures that cannot be offered on a macro-level by the Government. There are over 100 centers for international exchange across Japan, and well over 200 if one counts the prefectural-level centers as well. This study will focus on the role that municipal centers for
international exchange play in migrant integration. We will analyze the effectiveness and efficiency of provided resources at the local governmental levels and the role of these as ‘multicultural society coordinators’.

While many individual municipalities have improvised measures to attract migrant residents and to help them settle, the most comprehensive approach to helping migrants integrate into Japanese society and the economy comes from centers for international exchange (kokusai kōryū kyōkai/sentā). These centers are often located in city halls and prefectural government buildings, while others share their buildings with municipal libraries and community centers, while some are located on floors of commercial office buildings and department stores in convenient locations, such as near train stations.

Centers for international exchange started appearing around Japan in the 1970s and ‘80s. At first, these centers served to promote trade tourism for their cities and prefectures with other countries. One example of such activity that the centers frequently engaged in are sister city programs. This role started to change at many centers in the 1990s and 2000s, as greater numbers of foreigners were granted foreign resident status. Most of the centers that we visited start to turn to a foreign resident-oriented approach to help with the increasing numbers of migrants.

There are three basic types of centers for international exchange: municipal, prefectural, and non-profit. Municipal international exchange centers are the focus of our study. From our data gathered thus far, we know that there are well over 100 municipal centers for international exchange around the country. The true number could be higher (this project will eventually compile a comprehensive list, or find one on through government channels). Abe conducted a survey of 2049 municipalities, of which 1413 completed surveys were returned. From these completed surveys, 295 indicated that they had a “designated section handling issues related to foreign residents” (Abe 2007). Of course, this is incomplete information: some of these 295 might not be fully-fledged centers for international exchange – they could merely be a staffperson or two or a committee that handles issues related to foreign residents without actually interacting with the foreigners. On the other hand, there might be more centers for international exchange lurking in the 636 municipalities that did not
return the survey. This project considers as a bare minimum that centers for international exchange will accept foreign residents visiting their office to make queries, and that they provide at least one of the basic services we found at many centers, as described next.

Out of the centers for international exchange that we have researched thus far, we have noticed the regularity of a number of services for both foreign residents as well as Japanese citizens. First and foremost, many centers offer basic introductory or “survival” Japanese language and conversation classes. Additionally, there are often Japanese classes that focus on school-age children.

Other helpful services that many centers offer are related to legal matters. Many centers provide help with filling out bureaucratic documents in Japanese for healthcare, city registration, and other legal matters such as applying for licenses. Many centers provide translation and interpretation help – some even provide a volunteer or staffperson to go to city hall, the hospital, or a public school to help the foreign resident in person. Some centers also offer “legal counseling”, which should not be confused with legal advice from a trained lawyer but rather entails helping foreign residents with documents and answering basic legal questions that are common knowledge or can be searched on the internet. Legal counseling and help with documents are often offered through a drop-in consultation window.

On the cultural side, many centers hold classes to teach about aspects of Japanese culture, such as ikebana classes and many help with local festivals as co-organizers or by organizing get-togethers for foreign residents to enjoy the festivities with local Japanese. Centers that have the facilities may also hold events inside their building, which also brings Japanese and foreign residents together. Centers for international exchange in this manner become like alternative community centers (kōminkan), bringing foreign residents closer to their Japanese neighbors. At many centers, provision of some or most of these services relies of volunteers from the local Japanese community. This is helpful for integration as well, as volunteers may be more likely to strike up and continue friendships with foreign residents than paid employees.
There are often activities that are geared toward bringing Japanese citizens into centers for international exchange. International cafes for instance serve to bring foreign residents and local Japanese together. International cafes serve foreign dishes and often employ foreign residents as servers and cooks. Some centers invite foreign residents to voluntarily serve as the cafe cook to introduce their country’s cuisine to local residents. Those interested will propose a menu based on a foreign cuisine, and if approved, will then arrive in the early morning, prep the kitchen, and serve diners until the case closes in the early evening. Classes in foreign languages, often taught by foreign residents volunteers, also help to bring in Japanese citizens. A strong benefit of this outreach to Japanese locals, on top of their help with foreigner integration, is that this provides a type of investment of social capital by locals in the centers as “alternative kōminkan”, which can help make the centers more sustainable against the looming threat of government cutbacks.

All prefectural-level centers are associated with the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), the governmental agency that manages the JET Program and dorms for foreign university students. The prefectural centers for international exchange primarily serve the foreign residents of their prefecture and the prefectural capital in particular, making them very similar to common type of municipal centers for international exchange as described above. But like the divergence in municipal centers, in which some continue to serve their original purpose of setting up exchange programs with other countries’ cities, some of the prefectural centers set up exchange programs with other countries and promote trade and tourism for their prefecture. For instance, the Hokkaido International Exchange and Cooperation Center, located in Sapporo (www.hiecc.or.jp/index.asp), handles exchange programs with foreign countries, such as facilitating study abroad programs for Korean students, though its website also maintains information for the foreign residents of Hokkaido. The CLAIR website also lists the Sapporo International Communication Plaza Foundation (www.plaza-sapporo.or.jp), which is similar to many municipal centers for international exchange with programs for Sapporo’s foreign resident community. This center employs six foreign Coordinators of International Relations (as of 2016), who are participants in the JET Program.

This project does not intend to cover prefectural centers for international exchange,
since for the most part they mostly focus on providing information on the local support foreign residents can get in the region (but mostly not providing cultural or language programs), on economic exchange, disaster prevention and tourism support programs. Nor will we cover the third type of centers for international exchange, the non-profit centers, for the reason that we are focused solely on the policies of the state in integrating migrants.

**Empirical Research**
To investigate the effectiveness of the centers of international exchange in addressing migrant integration, we are conducting a three-part mixed-method empirical study, which will combine interviews of center staff, quantitative analysis of data gained from a Large N survey of migrant users of the centers, and finally interviews with migrants themselves. We will also conduct a version of the survey with a control group of migrants who do not use the centers (the migrant interviews and control group survey will be completed later in 2017-2018). Thus far, we have conducted interviews with center staff and gained 181 survey responses. Four patterns that the centers more or less follow have emerged from the interviews.

*Interviews*

**Pattern 1**: the center is located in an area with a large amount of foreign residents (such as the Tokyo metropolitan area or Osaka prefecture). The center has a strong connection with local government, a large number of visitors (local Japanese and foreign residents), and foreign residents have diverse visa statuses and purposes of staying in Japan. There is large number of staffpersons, likely more than 10, with several foreign residents who are permanent or temporary staff. There are former or current civil servants among Japanese staff in some cases. The center provides various types of activities, starting from Japanese language courses and support (legal issues, domestic issues, proceedings, etc.), to various cultural activities and even foreign language courses.

For instance, there is one center that was established in 1987 in an area that has a large population of migrants. It currently has 14 employees (including five foreign residents), and has strong relations with its city hall. There have been budget cuts and the contracting of certain tasks, but it still enjoys stable financial support. Foreign
residents visiting the center have a variety of visa statuses and, therefore diverse needs in terms of their life in Japan (spouses of Japanese nationals, foreigners working in Japanese corporations, low-skilled laborers, university students, etc.). The center currently has a project on “Linking with Foreigners” (gaikokujin renkei jigyō) that has 14 foreign residents and Japanese resident members plus staff members of the center. Various age groups of local Japanese residents participate in the activities. Starting from 2007 the center switched its focus to the integration issues of foreign residents; however, more recently, there has been a change in focus to temporary visitors. The effect that this will have on the older foreign residents services is currently unknown. There are problems with reaching foreign residents and local residents in the area, which all centers stated they had. There is no good way of promoting or advertising the existence of the center and its services given their limited budget.

**Pattern 2**: Centers following this pattern are mostly situated in residential areas, with a smaller local population and a smaller number of foreign residents. It is situated away from the city hall. Most of the users are long-term foreign residents in the area, who have long lasting connection with the centers. However, there is less support from the local government, constant fear of further budget cuts and anxiety related to future support. There are no former or current civil servants among the staff, so it is more difficult for these places to create networks between the centers and local governments. Similar to the first pattern, the center provides various types of activities, starting from Japanese language courses and support (legal issues, domestic issues, proceedings, etc.), to various cultural activities and foreign language courses. The following case shows a specific example of this.

For instance, there is a center established in 1992 that has 15 employees, of which seven are foreign residents, mixed-heritage or nikkei. There have been deep budget cuts, and contracting of services. All programs are initiated by Japanese volunteers with no foreign residents joining in the planning. As with the first pattern, there is difficulty in getting the word out about the center and its services. In this case, the center has difficulties in reaching younger generations of local Japanese residents and foreign residents. And many centers with this pattern have an increasing number of contract labor migrants and changing needs to meet. The center is situated in a
building separated from the local city hall, therefore there is no immediate link between it and the city hall, even though most of the foreign residents are provided with brochures about its existence.

**Pattern 3:** The third pattern is completely different from the previous two. Centers falling into this pattern are mostly located in remote areas with specific types of foreign residents. Therefore the types of the services are more specific: centers cater to permanent foreign residents married to Japanese nationals, or to temporary (up to 3 years) foreign labor migrants. The centers have stronger bonds with local governments, having former/current civil servant on the staff. These places are run by smaller number of staff, with one or less employees who are foreign residents, however there are stronger bonds between permanent foreign residents and the staff of the centers, due to the small size of the local community. Main activities are Japanese language courses and some cultural programs.

For example, several centers in Aichi, Nagano and Ishikawa prefectures mostly cater for low-paid foreign workers in the local factories. Most of the time these workers do not plan to stay or cannot stay in Japan permanently and the only services they use are Japanese language support and occasional cultural activities. In centers in Nagano and Niigata prefectures, users are mostly spouses of Japanese nationals. Again, their main purpose in using centers are Japanese language, cultural activities, child support and help with daily health, education, legal, marital and other types of issues. Centers catering for Japanese national spouses claim a higher level of social integration, due to the close proximity of foreign residents and their Japanese families; in addition, since these centers are situated in the countryside, there is a higher chance of a feeling of belonging with the local community. The staff in the centers consists mostly of Japanese nationals interested in international exchange or in having experience working in international organizations or working abroad. There is sometimes staff from JET program, but they are not involved in dealing with local foreign residents, but rather with local Japanese citizens.

**Pattern 4:** The fourth pattern resembles pattern three, however there are some differences. Centers in this pattern are situated in the countryside, where these is a small number of Japanese and foreign residents, and less developed infrastructure
There are also specific types of foreign residents: mostly temporary (up to 3 years) foreign labor migrants, and rarely are there permanent foreign residents married to Japanese nationals. There is a very weak connection between local government and this type of centers. The centers are run by one or two staffpersons and volunteers. These centers own only their office areas, and do not own classrooms, therefore they have to rent classrooms used by various local government centers. The main activities are Japanese language courses and occasional cultural programs. Foreign residents mostly work for local factories/plants and they can not attend many cultural activities.

There are of course similarities between the four patterns. Most centers for international exchange are facing budget cuts, and they all have trouble promoting their services and bringing in new users. The differences between the four patterns are significant and raise a quandary for the centers’ utility in integrating foreign residents: the centers with the bigger budget cuts are rural, they are relying more on older Japanese volunteers or housewives, and they are in areas that are seeing increases in contract migrant labor which will have greater needs, particularly in Japanese language services. Most of the services provided are not organized systematically, and are based on ad hoc needs of foreign residents or the availability of particular persons, which means that there is no constant organized support, and it fluctuates depending on the flow of foreign and local visitors; which, on the opposite hand, gives centers more flexibility in organizing their short term support plans. Another issue is promotion of the services overall, in rural areas with smaller foreign community in particular. In addition, there is lack of feedback in the centers from foreign residents, and those who are particularly articulate, in general have more time to enjoy various services and courses, and have a more stable life in Japan. On the opposite, those foreign residents who face some issues in their life can get consultations related to their questions, but not any particular support; most of the time they are readdressed to local NGOs/NPOs dealing with that particular issue, or deal with it on their own with the help of local foreign community. And, finally, there are differences between staffpersons in most of the organizations. On the one hand, those organizations that have former or current civil servants have a better position due to the ability of its staff to navigate through bureaucratic proceedings necessary to operate. However, most of these civil servants do not have much experience working with foreign
residents and have less understanding of their needs, therefore they have to depend on the regular staff (if there are any) who are more familiar with daily issues. On the other hand, those centers which do not have civil servants on staff have to go through the various difficulties of bureaucratic system, which makes it difficult to conduct many of their activities.

As it is clear from this comparison, even though Japan's government created a general framework, tabunka kyōsei, to integrate foreign residents, and local governments provide a lot of financial support to these organizations, there is no professional coordination of activities among these centers that would make them more functional and useful for foreign residents.

**Survey of International Exchange Centers Usage**

As part of our research, we also conducted a survey of migrant users of the International Exchange Centers. The questionnaire consists of 19 questions. Please see the Appendix for the full two-page survey. The purpose of the survey is to get respondents to evaluate the centers for international exchange and to self-evaluate their own social integration and Japanese language ability. We realize that self-evaluation is subjective and therefore problematic, so we ask respondents to self-evaluate their integration and language ability before and after using the centers, in the hope that the difference is a more reliable measure of the effectiveness of the centers. We ask about Japanese language ability in addition to integration because we believe that language ability is a good proxy for integration, and because the centers’ Japanese language lessons are the most used service.

The questionnaire asks respondents for simple demographic data, including age, education, years living in Japan, and whether they are married to a Japanese citizen. We thought of asking about employment and visa status, but judged that this would be too sensitive and so we refrained from doing so. The questionnaire then moves on to asking respondents about their experience with the center, their ratings for the services they use, and then it asks them to rate the integration and language ability before and after using the center. We also ask about whether they would pay the center for the services they use, and how much they would pay. Center services typically are free or require only a ¥1000 a year membership. This is an important
question for the centers themselves to know, since many are facing budgetary issues and are wondering about how to raise money to continue their services. The questionnaire ends by asking respondents if they would consent to an interview.

Our method of conducting the surveys, at the request of the staffpersons at the centers, has been to have the surveys conducted by the center staff and/or volunteer teachers during Japanese lessons. These are the times at which there is the greatest concentration of center visitors. Survey respondents were also provided an explanation of the purpose of the survey, translated into the same languages. This was the most efficient manner of conducting the survey, but it also resulted in a survey that was heavily biased toward the users of the Japanese language services, at the cost of losing representation of those who exclusively use the other services, such as legal consultations, translations, school children support, and cultural events. However, most users of the centers are also attending the Japanese language classes, so we do not feel that this bias greatly affects the results.

Survey Results. The survey has thus far netted 181 responses. As expected, the respondents are well-educated given the lack of a national low-skilled laborer migration policy, with an average education level of a bachelor's degree. The average age is 32. Respondents are almost evenly split between male and female. The average respondent has been living in Japan for a little over two years and has an introductory level of Japanese with some knowledge of kanji, but less than the JLPT N3 level.

The average respondent has been attending the center weekly for about 10 months. Our (biased) method of getting responses by relying on the language courses has had the following results: 97% of respondents report that they use the centers' Japanese language lessons service, and 60% use only the Japanese language lessons (they use no other services). The centers' services are rated quite highly: 4.5 out of 5 points for the Japanese language services; and 3.8 points for the other services. But we would like to obtain responses from foreign residents who come in to use the centers’ other services in the future, in order to balance out this heavy reliance on users of the Japanese lessons.

Our survey finds that 78% of users would pay for the center's services. Many services
are currently free or require a trivial yearly membership of ¥1000-2000. Our responses indicate that the average amount that users would pay is about ¥5000 annually (the options for the survey question “How much would you pay per year?” were ¥1000, ¥2000, ¥3000, ¥4000, ¥5000, and ¥10,000). Therefore, centers have a chance of possibly quintupling the portion of the budget that comes from the users.

As far as integration goes, from the responses, we can ascertain that the average respondent reports a 40% increase in Japanese language ability and a 21% increase in integration. These self-reported scores are based on differences between the before and after self-ratings of Japanese ability and integration. Integration is ordered on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Not at all, 3 = Moderately, and 5 = Very much.

Japanese ability is also ordered on a five-point scale as follows:
1 = Basic Intro level with no kanji
2 = Intro level with some kanji
3 = Basic conversation with kanji (JLPT level N3)
4 = Intermediate (JLPT level N2)
5 = Advanced (JLPT level N1)

We performed a regression and correlation analysis with the independent variables, How Long Visiting and How Often Visiting the international exchange centers, and the dependent variables, Improvement in Japanese and Integrated More Now? Both of the dependent variables are the differences in the self-ratings of Japanese ability and integration as described above. Tables 2-5 present the frequency distribution tables and descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3 months</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 mos.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9 mos.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 mos.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15 mos.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18 mos.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21 mos.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24 mos.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+ mos.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>.817</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>1.194</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Frequency Distribution & Descriptive Stats, How Often Visiting Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times/week</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times/month</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than monthly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum</strong></td>
<td><strong>164</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.78</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>St. Dev.</strong></td>
<td><strong>.692</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Frequency Distribution & Descriptive Stats, Improvement in Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum</strong></td>
<td><strong>161</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>.57</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>St. Dev.</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.273</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Freq. Distribution & Descriptive Stats, Improvement in Language Ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum</strong></td>
<td><strong>158</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>.79</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>St. Dev.</strong></td>
<td><strong>.799</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Negative values in Tables 4 and 5 indicate a deterioration of integration and language skills, while 0 indicates no improvement, and the positive values indicate progression of integration and language ability. It is good to see but that they are very few responses for the negative values, but perhaps worrisome that there are any at all!
Table 6 presents the results of the regression and correlation analysis. From Table 6, we can see that the length of time that a migrant has been using a center has positive, statistically significant effect on improvement in Japanese and on feelings of being more integrated. The frequency of visitations to a center has a positive, statistically significant effect on improvement in Japanese, but the sign turns negative and it loses statistical significance when the dependent variable is Integrated More Now?. This could be because people who feel the need to visit often are also the ones that feel that they are not integrating. Overall, both models are statistically significant and have a weak-to-medium ranged positive correlation. This means that the centers are indeed helping migrants to integrate into Japanese society.

Of course, there are issues with the survey that need to be addressed. Self-reporting integration is problematic, as we have described above. Self-reporting the difference in integration or adaptation is better, but still lacks an objective measure by which the respondent can say that they have improved. This is why we use the improvement in language ability as a proxy. The breakdown of our language ability variable (Basic Intro level with no kanji, Intro level with some kanji, JLPT level N3, etc...) provides a more structured and objective measure that will be more similar across respondents.

With funding in the new fiscal year, we hope to continue conducting the survey at more centers for international exchange. In addition to increasing the number of respondents that are use the centers, we plan on conducting the control group survey of foreign residents who do not use the centers for the purpose of comparison. This survey will be shorter after removing the questions related to usage of the center and its services. The control group survey will focus on questions regarding length of time
in Japan, whether the respondent attends any language classes, self-evaluation of improvement of Japanese, self-evaluation of improvement in integration since arriving in Japan and beginning language classes (if applicable), and other associated topics such as marriage and friendship with Japanese residents.

**Conclusion**

The project is still unfinished and we are awaiting the results of applications for further funding, yet we believe that the project is already beginning to generate interesting results. We need to consider more complex task of how to measure integration. This is no easy feat, but we can consider proxy measures – other variables that one could argue are strongly correlated with integration. One such proxy is language skills in the host country’s language. If we can use language skills to measure integration, then we can see that the centers for international exchange are making a positive impact. Pursuing the line of argument – that language can be used as a proxy for integration, similar to the way that Song (2009) uses intermarriage – requires a more thorough review of the theoretical and empirical literature in future iterations of this paper. But though the survey shows positive responses from foreign residents regarding the influence of the language courses on their social integration, it is also important to put these subjective measurements into a more objective reality.

Another issue to investigate further is the uneven distribution of support across all centers. Even though there are a lot of support programs provided at the local level, this support is not organized evenly in all areas, which creates issues with the growing number of foreign residents in rural areas in particular. In addition, most of the support is aimed to help migrants to integrate socially, and it is not clear how much centers help foreign residents to integrate in the public spheres. So we are also considering a comprehensive listing of the services provided at all centers nationwide, should future funding be made available.
Appendix

This is the English version of the questionnaire we handed out to migrant users of the international exchange centers:

Questionnaire for Osaka University

This project aims to analyze how international exchange centers help foreign residents to integrate into Japanese society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Age</th>
<th>2. How long have you lived in Japan? ___________ years ___________ months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Sex</td>
<td>Male □ Female □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Nationality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Are you married to a Japanese person? Yes □ No □</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is your highest education level? □ Elementary □ Jr. High □ High School □ Vocational □ 2 year degree □ Bachelors □ Masters □ PhD/ID/MD □ Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. How did you find out about this Center? □ City Hall □ Friends □ Internet □ Other □

8. How long have you been visiting? ___________ years ___________ months

9. How often do you visit? □ 2-3 times a week □ Once a week □ 1-2 times/month □ Less than monthly

10. How adapted were you to life in Japan before coming to this Center?

   Not at all □ Moderately □ Fully Adapted □

11. What services of the center do you use? Please mark all that apply. (Note: some services might not be provided by this Center)

   □ Japanese lessons □ Japanese cultural activities □ Consultations □ Interpretation/translation □ Foreign cultures activities □ Child care □ School children support/activities □ International café □ Other, please specify

12. On a scale of 1 (Not useful) to 5 (Very useful), how would you evaluate the Center's services?

   a) Japanese language courses

   □ 5 □ 4 □ 3 □ 2 □ 1

   b) Consultations (legal counseling, document application, etc.)

   □ 5 □ 4 □ 3 □ 2 □ 1

   c) Japanese cultural activities (ikebana, tea ceremony, Japanese festivals, etc.)

   □ 5 □ 4 □ 3 □ 2 □ 1

   d) Foreign cultures activities (cooking, languages, yoga, etc.)

   □ 5 □ 4 □ 3 □ 2 □ 1

   e) School children support

   □ 5 □ 4 □ 3 □ 2 □ 1

   f) Child care

   □ 5 □ 4 □ 3 □ 2 □ 1

   g) Interpretation/translation

   □ 5 □ 4 □ 3 □ 2 □ 1

   h) International café/common space/lounge

   □ 5 □ 4 □ 3 □ 2 □ 1

Next page ➔
Questionnaire for Osaka University

13. Has your Japanese language ability improved from visiting the Center?  
   Not at all  2  3  4  5
   Moderately  
   Very much  

14a) What level of Japanese did you have before coming to the center?  
   Basic Intro level  1  2  3  4  5  
   Intro level w/ some kanji  
   Basic conversation w/ kanji (JLPT level N3)  
   Intermediate (JLPT level N2)  
   Advanced (JLPT level N1)  

b) What level of Japanese do you have now?  
   1  2  3  4  5  

15. On a scale of 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very much), please answer the following questions:  
   Not at all  2  3  4  5
   Moderately  
   Very much  

   a) Do you think the Center’s services helped you adapt to life in Japan?  
   b) How integrated into Japanese society do you consider yourself now?  

16. Paying to use the Center  
   a) Would you pay for the services you use?  
   □ Yes  □ No  
   b) Which services would you pay for?  
   c) How much annually would you be willing to pay?  
   □ JPY 1,000  □ JPY 2,000  
   □ JPY 3,000  □ JPY 4,000  □ JPY 5,000  □ JPY 10,000 or more  

17. Do you often hold conversations with Japanese people?  
   Not at all  2  3  4  5  
   Moderately  
   Very Often  

   a) …inside the Center?  
   b) …outside the Center?  

18. How have your conversations with Japanese people improved after taking lessons at the center?  
   Not at all  2  3  4  5  
   Moderately  
   Really Improved  

19. Would you like to participate in an interview? If so, please write down your e-mail address or cell number and the language you would like to communicate in.  
   contact:  
   language:  

Thank you for your participation!
References


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