

“Multiculturalism from below” in Japanese society: the dynamism which arises from contacts among Islamic Mosque, Korean school and Japanese community

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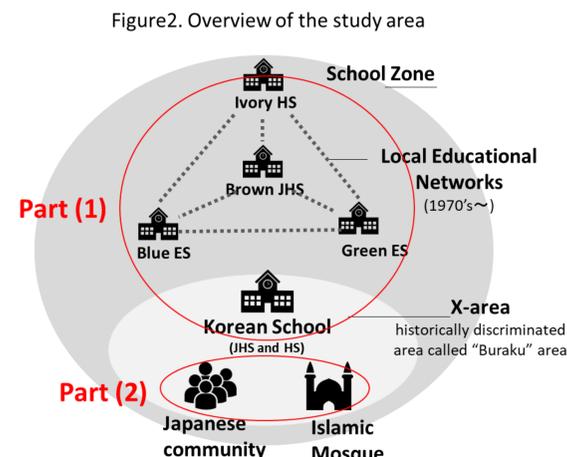
Background

- Although Japan is often characterized as an ethnically homogenous country, Japan is experiencing an increasing number of immigrants especially since 1990 (Revision to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act).
- In 2020, approximately 2.89 million residents of foreign nationality were registered in Japan, making up about 2.3 percent of the population (See Figure 1).
- Meanwhile, the national government has been lacked an integration policy toward immigrants and anti-foreignism has been increasing both in real and internet space especially since the late 2000s.
- Given these social changes, creating a multicultural society has become an unavoidable task for Japan, and in order to do so, it is very important to explore various cases to see how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated in everyday situations (Wise 2009; Harris 2013) and learn from them.
- Ironically, it has been one of the characteristics of today's Japan that due to a lack of national intervention, various grassroots movement conducted by local actors has emerged and played important roles in a variety of local communities.



Objectives and Methods

- To discover how racism and multiculturalism are generated and experienced in everyday situations from micro perspective, we focus on a Japanese local community consisted of diverse actors: the Islamic Mosque, Korean school, and Japanese community including residents from various ethnic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and analyze the relationships among them.
- This study examines the case of area X, known as a ‘Buraku area’, whose residents are categorized as Japanese outcasts and has become increasingly multicultural since the late 2000s, especially with an Islamic Mosque, Korean school, and newcomers mainly from Asian countries who have established there since then (See Figure2). The real-estate value in the area is low due to discrimination and this is one of the reasons why “minority” actors moved here.
- We introduce the encounters and transformations observed in area X and the surrounding area by divided into two parts, Part(1): educational practices that emerged between a Korean school and three Japanese local public schools, Part(2): social interactions between the Muslim community and local Japanese residents.
- As for Part(1), The data is based on participant observations from April 2013 to February 2017 and semi-structured interviews with 48 people, including teachers and students in the Korean school and the Japanese local public schools.
- As for Part(2), The data is based on participant observations from November 2016 to March 2021 and semi-structured interviews with 28 people, including Muslims and local Japanese residents.
- We conducted qualitative inductive analyses and open coding to identify and classify categories based on the fieldnotes and interview data.



Findings for Part (1)

RQ1) What kind of interactions and changes have occurred between the Korean school and the local Japanese public schools since the Korean school was established in 2008?

Encounter: A Campaign against the Korean school

- Some residents prevented its construction in 2007 / Since X area is a historically discriminated locality, some of the Japanese residents feared that the school would bring more discrimination and result in more suffering.

Interactions and Changes

- School interactions
- The Korean school becoming an educational option for the local children
- Student conflicts and reinforced teachers' collaboration
- New educational challenges emerged due to transnational mobility
- The Korean schools' participation in local educational networks

→ Mutually reconfigured and developed educational practices
→ The relationship changed from asymmetrical to more equal
→ This process is compound dynamics of Conviviality and Exclusion



RQ2) Why did these changes occur?

1) The situation of ‘thrown togetherness’ (Massey 2005)

- Unavoidable situation makes them collaborate for common challenges

2) Inclusive local educational culture and infrastructure

- A rich history of Human Right Movement and Dowa education (originally to offset Buraku discrimination) since 70's in X area / the inclusive educational network created by those movement and education played an important role

- 3) The proactivity of the Korean school** - To realize its' school philosophy: ‘Multicultural Coexistence’ and ‘Human Rights and Peace’ / To gain resources and recognition to overcome the challenges they are facing (generally, “schools for foreigners” (gaikokujin gakko) is a “miscellaneous schools” and thus it's not qualified for enough government funding and tax exemptions. Additionally, the qualifications of students graduating aren't officially recognized).

Findings for Part (2)

RQ3) What kind of interactions and changes have occurred between Islamic Mosque and the Japanese residents since the Mosque was established in 2006?

Encounter

- Muslims invited the Japanese residents to visit the mosque to prevent campaigns against the mosque, and introduced the practices of Islam to them.
- First, the Japanese residents thought that Islam is a strict religion because Muslims fast during Ramadan. But, after visiting the Mosque, and getting to know from Imam that fasting Ramadan is to understand the feelings of the poor, and also it is allowed to break the fast during one's illness or travel, their perception towards Islam got changed.

- Interactions and Changes:** While the relationship between Islamic Mosque and Japanese residents is said to be not easy in general (Miki 2017), various interactions were occurred in this case.

- The local Japanese community started to consider the Mosque as a member of X area.
 - ex. It invited the Islamic community leaders to attend their regular local meetings.
- Some schools sent the students to visit the mosque as part of their class to learn about Islam and multiculturalism.
 - After visiting the mosque, Japanese students realized they know nothing and how media distorts the way of understanding Islam and Muslims.
- Muslims in X area participated in the local festivals and events.
 - They collected donations for the victims of the earthquake occurred around the area in 2018.



RQ4) Why did these changes occur?

The key persons who have the following characteristics are important:

- Planning and running exchange events between the parties.
- Attitude to continue to hold those events and relations between the members.
- Designing the events to include some benefits for both Muslims and Japanese to attract to participate since they're busy.
- Providing comfortable and safe places to the two parties.

Discussion

- These two cases reveal how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated in everyday situations in Japan.
 - To sum part (1) up, the relationship between the Korean school and the Japanese public schools was initially asymmetrical, however, over time, it became more equal and each school has mutually reconfigured and developed their educational practices.
 - As for part (2), we identified that both of Japanese residents and Muslims had the will of knowing each other but they did not have the chances to exchange their culture and belief. So that the existence of a key person who organized the local events and participated in them actively played very important roles to connect Muslims with the local Japanese residents.

Our findings above suggest...

- Practical implications** to promote creating conviviality,
 - Through part(1), we found that the school philosophy and each school's proactivity are crucial. Also, it is revealed that “schools for foreigners” (gaikokujin gakko) can enrich the educational resources in a local community, and the community-based educational network played a critical role to facilitate these changes and foster collaboration among the schools. Thus, it is important to re-evaluate them as precious local resources to promote creating conviviality.
 - Through part(2), we found that it is crucial that setting up opportunities for both Japanese and Muslims to meet and do something together in order to gain the knowledge and deepen the understanding with each other. Also the unrelenting efforts of both parties are required to sustain it.
- The importance of promoting policies to support “multiculturalism from below,”** which means positive interactions and practices in the sphere of everyday life potentially leading to foster mutual understandings among people and systematic changes for a more inclusive society.
 - The supports from the aspects of financial, human resources and information to promote community interaction and constructing an inclusive local networks are necessary.

References and Acknowledgement

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