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Building bridges, not walls*

## **POSSIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN THE JAPANESE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

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Japan has a small but increasingly visible immigrant population, especially in the context of an aging Japanese population and a declining native cohort of children. Given the lack of a national education policy, integrating immigrant children into the Japanese education system has been a challenge. Nevertheless, while educational problems such as high rates of non-attendance, low progression rates, and high dropout rates among immigrant students have been reported, there has been a gradual improvement in educational attainment as seen in the increase in the numbers of students who graduate from colleges and secure permanent jobs. The purpose of this paper is to examine the Japanese education system and its policies toward immigrant students, and to explore the educational experiences of these students by looking across ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, and educational types and levels. The paper also sheds light on the critical role of local governments, non-mainstream schools, and non-formal educational sites in providing educational support for immigrant children.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

While Japan is often characterized as an ethnically homogenous country, it is an important destination for immigrants, specifically from other Asian countries. Though the Japanese government does not use the term “immigrant”<sup>1</sup> when describing the foreign population in Japan, and does not have a social integration policy, many immigrants are making Japan their permanent home, building communities, forming families, and raising children (Graburn, Ertl, and Tierney 2008; Tsuneyoshi, Okano, and Boocock 2011; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008). As Japan experiences multiculturalization from below, the topic of migration and education has received critical attention. Immigrant children are diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, language, religion, generation, status of residence, place of residence, and family composition. Some were born in their homelands such as China, Brazil, and the Philippines and later migrated to Japan. Others are second generation immigrants, born and raised in Japan; a growing population today. Some grew up in families created by international marriages, such as those consisting of a Filipina or Chinese mother and a Japanese father, while others are raised by immigrant parents. They often struggle with cultural, linguistic, and academic adjustment but are also finding ways to live in a new land.

Though Japanese schools have long served minority children such as *Zainichi* Koreans (who have roots in the Japanese colonization of Korea), Chinese returnees (war-displaced Japanese), and Indo-Chinese refugees (Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians), immigrant children became more visible in public schools in the 1990s (Shimizu and Shimizu 2001; Tsuneyoshi et al. 2011). Amendments to the *Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act* in 1990 allowed *Nikkeijin* (Japanese descendants) up to the third generation to reside and work in Japan without any restrictions by providing them with “long-term” residence status. This change in the law led thousands of *Nikkei* Brazilians and *Nikkei* Peruvians, often with accompanying children,

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term “immigrant” refers to foreigners called the “newcomers” who have arrived in Japan since the 1970s, in contrast to the existing ethnic minorities such as the Koreans and Chinese in Japan who are labeled the “oldcomers.” There is diversity in referring to immigrant children. Though they were initially called “foreign children” (*gaikokujinno kodomo*), recently terms such as “children with foreign roots” (*gaikokuni ru-tsuno aru kodomo*), “children who have connection to foreign countries” (*gaikokuni tsunagaru kodomo*), and “multicultural children” (*tabunkano kodomo*) are often used. This change occurred in order to incorporate the rising population of immigrant children having Japanese nationality, including those who grew up in mixed marriage families.

to “return” to Japan to engage in temporary unskilled jobs in manufacturing industry, a much-needed work force during the economic boom. The number of Korean, Chinese, and Filipina women marrying Japanese men also rose, and their children, including the stepchildren of these women, entered Japanese schools. Recently, there has been a rapid growth of Vietnamese and Nepalese people, many of whom enter Japan as an “international student” or through the “Technical Intern Training Program” (TITP) and are incorporated into the unskilled labor market.<sup>2</sup>

About 28 years after the amendment of the law, the immigrant population has increased in size and diversity.<sup>3</sup> There has been a 25% increase in the number of immigrant children and youth in Japan in the last ten years (Miyajima 2017). In Tokyo, one in eight new adults (who turned or will turn 20 in 2017-2018) have a foreign background (Yoshida 2018). As of December 2015, the number of foreign children under 19 years old was 288,749, or 12.9% of the total registered foreign population (Ministry of Justice 2016). This statistic does not include immigrant children with Japanese nationality such as those who are naturalized or who have a Japanese parent and a foreign parent (called *hafu*), often an invisible group.<sup>4</sup> The nationality of children has become more heterogeneous, and includes those originating from countries in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. In 2015, the top ten foreign nationalities of children under 19 years old were Chinese (90,123), Brazilian (40,727), Korean (38,967), Filipino (31,420), Vietnamese (17,640), Peruvian (11,911), Nepalese (5,940), American [USA] (5,323), Indian (4,575), and Indonesian (4,516) (Ministry of Justice 2016).

This paper first introduces the Japanese education system and the national policies on immigrant students and examines their educational challenges and successes by taking into account these students’ differences. Then, it explores the various local responses towards immigrant students, including those of local governments, non-mainstream schools, and non-profit organizations (NPOs) and non-government organizations (NGOs), in providing educational support for immigrant students. Lastly, it concludes with the challenges and possibilities of education for immigrant students in Japan and provides implications for future educational policies and practices.

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<sup>2</sup> In order to compensate for the labor shortages in low-wage, unskilled jobs in the manufacturing and services fields, Japanese society has depended largely on immigrant workers. However, the Japanese government does not officially provide visas for unskilled labor workers. Japanese immigration policy is often criticized for not allowing the entry of immigrant workers from the “front door” but from the “back door” or “side door.”

<sup>3</sup> In 2016, the total number of foreigners was 2.38 million — approximately 1.8% of Japan’s population. The top five foreign nationalities were Chinese (29.2%), Korean (19%), Filipino (10.2%), Vietnamese (8.4%), and Brazilian (7.6%) (Ministry of Justice 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Enoi (2017) estimated that the number of immigrant children (under 19 years old) with Japanese nationality could be above 428,582.

## 2. EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS AND THE EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN JAPAN

### 2.1 The Japanese education system and policies toward immigrant children

As the Constitution and the Basic Act on Education (*kyoiku kihonhou*) state, the national government does not enforce nine-year compulsory education for immigrant students who do not have Japanese nationality.<sup>5</sup> Though Japanese children have the “right” to receive education and their parents are mandated to send their children to schools, education for immigrant children is excluded from this requirement and is only acknowledged as a “favor.” Sometimes, immigrant parents do not receive any notice of their children’s school enrollment from the local board of education, which could result in school non-attendance (*fushugaku*). Based on the principle of equal treatment, if desired, immigrant students can however attend Japanese schools and receive free education (free tuition, free textbooks, and financial support). In 2016, 80,119 registered foreign children attended Japanese public schools (MEXT 2017d). When immigrant students with Japanese nationality are included, this number increases.

In parallel with the long history of an assimilative approach on education for minorities such as *Zainichi* Koreans (Motani 2002), there is a lack of a “multiculturalism” approach, an idea that “diversity is an accepted feature of the society as a whole, including all the various ethnocultural groups” (Berry 2005, 706) in education policies toward immigrant students. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has offered remedial education such as adaptation instruction (*tekiou shidou*) and Japanese language instruction (*nihongo shidou*) to immigrant students since 1989. Education policies were modeled after those of returnees (*kikokushijo*), Japanese children who lived and had education abroad due to their fathers’ job transfers and aimed to assist these students assimilate into Japanese schools. MEXT considers that the educational issues of returnees and immigrants are similar, including difficulties in learning the Japanese language and adapting to Japanese school culture, which has meant that the International Education unit (*kokusai kyoikuka*) under MEXT is in charge of education for these two groups together. Some of their policies are providing funding to place Japanese language teachers in schools with Japanese language learners, offering seminars on Japanese language instruction, developing Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) curricula (integrating Japanese language instruction and subject teaching), creating guidelines and Japanese language textbooks for schools,<sup>6</sup> and offering partial funding to designated local government areas in order to support immigrant students in-and-out of schools (MEXT 2017c). MEXT has emphasized the importance of Japanese language acquisition and enacted a new policy in 2014 on “Japanese language instruction based on the special education curriculum (*tokubetsuno kyoiku katei niyoru nihongo shidou*),” which systematized Japanese language education for immigrants.

The strong focus on Japanese language instruction is driven from the recent rise of immigrant students who need Japanese language support. Since 1991, MEXT has conducted surveys on the demographics and

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<sup>5</sup> Compulsory education for Japanese citizens is six years of elementary school and three years of junior high school. Although high school education is not mandatory, nearly 97 % of the students attend high school.

<sup>6</sup> See MEXT’s website of CLARINET [Children Living Abroad and Returnees Internet]  
[http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/clarinet/main7\\_a2.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/clarinet/main7_a2.htm)

educational support of students who attend public schools and are in need of Japanese language instruction. According to the 2016 survey, 34,335 foreign students (a 17.6% increase from 2014) and 9,612 students with Japanese nationality (a 21.7% increase from 2014) required Japanese language support. The top four native languages of foreign students were Portuguese (25.6%), Chinese (23.9%), Filipino (18.3%), and Spanish (10.5%), 78.2% of the total population of these students. The top four native languages of students with Japanese nationality were Filipino (31.6%), Chinese (21.5%), Japanese (12.7%), and English (10.9%), or 76.6 % of the total in this group. There is geographical difference in the number of these students — the three largest concentrations of students in need of Japanese language instruction are found in Aichi prefecture<sup>7</sup> (9275 students), Kanagawa prefecture (5149 students), and Tokyo (4017 students). Contrary to the image of immigrant populated schools, over 75% of these students attended schools that had fewer than five students who needed Japanese language support. Only 76.9 % of foreign students and 74.3 % of immigrant students with Japanese nationality were able to receive Japanese language education in schools (MEXT 2017d). Though the number of teachers in charge of teaching immigrant students increased by 1.5 times between 2008 and 2015, there is still a shortage of teachers who are trained in Japanese language education and related fields (MEXT 2016). With an absence of teacher training for diversity, many teachers face difficulties in instructing immigrant students. These include as deciding on pedagogy, content, instruction plans, and text books, and warrants further improvement in teacher training programs (The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language 2018).

A number of ethnographic studies have revealed that strong assimilative pressures and the valuing of homogeneity prevent immigrant students from adapting to schools (Ota 2000; Shimizu and Shimizu 2001; Shimizu 2006; Tsuneyoshi 2001). Japanese school culture is often described in terms such as an “ideology of togetherness” or “coordinated communalism” (*issei kyodotai shugi*) (Tsuneyoshi 2001) and “deculturalization” (Ota 2000). Though Western scholars have long shed light on the possibilities of Japanese schools that value equality and egalitarianism, ideas of cooperation and community, and a whole people approach (Cummings 1980; Rohlen and LeTendre 1996), these features could lead schools and teachers to devalue the diversity and differences that immigrant students bring. Shimizu and Shimizu (2001) revealed that elementary school teachers make invisible the cultural and structural differences of immigrant students and “personalize” (*kojinka*) immigrant students’ educational problems, seeing the causes of these problems in family issues and in the students’ personality. “Special treatment” is often discouraged, which could further marginalize these students with various needs. Furthermore, given the absence of multicultural education approach in MEXT policies, most schools do not value notions such as social justice, equity, and diversity in their educational practices towards immigrants (Tokunaga 2017b). Though some schools with a large minority population incorporate the idea of “multicultural co-existence” (*tabunka kyosei*) in school policies (Tsuboya and Kobayashi 2013; Yamawaki and Yokohama city Icho elementary school 2005), it is rare for public mainstream schools to provide education that affirms native languages, cultural traditions, and the ethnic identity of immigrant students.

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<sup>7</sup> *Nikkeijin* from South American countries are concentrated in Aichi prefecture, located near the center of Honshu, where they work in manufacturing factories, such as the automobile industry.

## 2.2 Educational challenges and possibilities of immigrant students

Scholars, policy makers, educators, and community organizers have discussed educational problems of immigrant students since the 1990s. Rather than acknowledging these students as “assets” or “strengths” who could contribute to developing a multicultural society, a “deficit” view of these students is still prevalent (Tokunaga 2017b). In the early years when a number of students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds entered Japanese schools, their adaptation and language problems became critical issues (Shimizu and Shimizu 2001). The Japanese education system was not well prepared to receive these students, and local governments, scholars, and educators reported many cases of intercultural conflict and tensions between immigrant families and schools. There was much focus on how to instruct immigrant students to adapt to Japanese school culture, including learning school rules and mannerisms, and teach them Japanese language, both communication skills and academic language.

In the early 2000s, as immigrant students grew older and increased in size, high rates of non-attendance (*fushugaku*), low progression rates to high school, high dropout rates in high school, and other educational problems received critical attention. In the absence of government-led nationwide surveys on the educational attainment of immigrant students, local governments which were members of the “Council of Cities with a Large Foreigner Population” (*gaikokujin shujyu toshi kaigi*)<sup>8</sup> conducted their own surveys, often with researchers and NPOs, and reported their findings. According to research conducted in Kani city in 2003-2004 (where many *Nikkei* Brazilians reside) in Gifu prefecture led by Yoshimi Kojima, in collaboration with the local government and NPOs, one out of 14 school-aged children were not registered and did not attend any type of schools. The research also revealed that many of the non-attendance students dropped out of Japanese public schools and engaged in unskilled work (Kojima 2016). This finding led MEXT to conduct a survey of non-attendance students (2005 to 2006) in twelve local governments with a large population of *Nikkeijin* from South American countries as part of a project supporting non-attendance students. Sakuma (2006) critically stated that immigrant students are structurally excluded from the society, such as the law that does not mandate compulsory education to non-Japanese citizens.

Low advancement rates to high schools among immigrant students is another critical problem. Though there is no national survey, scholars have noted that the high school advancement rate among immigrant students is estimated to be about 50%, half of Japanese student rate (97%) (Inui 2008). In Japan, students must take an entrance examination to advance to high school, which becomes a barrier for immigrant students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, especially for those who are Japanese language learners. High schools in Japan are selective and have a hierarchical structure, ranging from high-ranked schools to low-ranked schools and academic to vocational, which often determines students’ educational and career paths after graduation. The Socioeconomic Status (SES) of immigrant students has a huge impact on high school advancement rates; immigrant students from working class backgrounds, specifically those who come from single mother families are less likely to advance to high school (Korekawa 2012). Takenoshita, Chitose, Ikegami, and Ishikawa (2014) revealed that the economic instability of Brazilian immigrant parents negatively

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<sup>8</sup> This Council, which initially was formed in 2001 by thirteen municipalities with a large immigrant population such as *Nikkeijin* from South American countries, meets every year to exchange information on various policies and practices on foreign residents, collaboratively solve issues and give suggestions to the government, and aims to promote multicultural co-existence (*tabunka kyosei*) from below (See <http://www.shujutoshi.jp/>).

affected the high school enrolment of their children. Korekawa (2012) stated that educational problems of immigrant students are less of a cultural problem but more of a class issue.

In recent years, there has been an improvement in advancement rates. According to a survey conducted in the 29 cities and towns which participated in the “Council of Cities with a Large Foreigner Population” (*gaikokujin shuju toshi kaigi*), 82.7 % of immigrant students who graduated from public junior high school matriculated to high school in 2012. More specifically, their path after graduation was 52.8 % full-time high school, 22% part-time high school, 2.6% correspondence high school, among other (Gaikokujin shuju toshi kaigi [Council of Cities with a Large Foreigner Population] 2013, 120).<sup>9</sup> As this number indicates, there is high concentration of immigrant students in a part-time high school (both day time and night time), less competitive and academically relaxed space compared to a full-time high school.

Though immigrant students enter high school, many of them face barriers during high school, which lead them to drop out of school. According to Kaji’s (2011) analysis of 2000 national census, the approximate high school retention rate is: Chinese 70-80%, Filipinos 40%, and Brazilians 30%. Though the retention rate of Korean and Chinese students is similar to that of Japanese students, there is a huge disparity among the Filipinos and Brazilians. Compared to Chinese and Koreans who come from countries that use Chinese characters, Filipinos and Brazilians have very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which could be one of the reasons for this gap. However, analysis of the 2010 national census showed improvement of high school retention rates among most ethnic groups, narrowing the gap with Japanese students. Takaya, Omagari, Higuchi, Kaji, and Inaba (2015) studied data from 2010 national census and revealed that the retention rate of 17-year-old students in 2010 had increased by 2 points (Japanese), 4 points (Koreans), 12 points (Chinese), 29 points (Filipinos and Brazilians), and 16 points (Peruvians) from 2000 (2015, 52). There has thus been a significant amount of improvement in the retention rate among Filipinos and Brazilians in the past 10 years.

The author’s longitudinal ethnographic study on educational trajectories of Filipino immigrant youth who arrived in Japan as adolescents (conducted since 2005 in urban areas) also revealed the existence of multiple barriers and the struggles of these youth in navigating the Japanese educational system (Tokunaga 2008, 2017a). Though all seven female students who were the main participants in the study were accepted by a public high school (five of them enrolled in a part-time high school), six dropped out of school in one to three years. The study revealed various reasons behind the girls’ dropout: unfamiliarity with the Japanese linguistic system, the difficulty of learning academic subjects in Japanese language, a lack of family resources that forces them to work part-time for long hours, complex family situations in living with a Japanese stepfather and half-siblings, domestic responsibility as a daughter (taking care of younger siblings), and a transnational network such as strong connection with relatives in the Philippines. In addition, there were structural reasons such as a lack of educational support (Japanese language classes, tutoring, career education, and college prep classes) during high school and an absence of financial assistance, which shows the need of systematic support for immigrant high school students (Tokunaga 2017a).

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<sup>9</sup> In Japan, most students enroll in full time high school and only a tiny number of students attend a part-time high school. In 2017 about 2.4% of students who graduated from junior high school entered a part-time high school (MEXT 2017a).

In the past few years, the topic of immigrant students in higher education has received considerable attention. For example, in 2016 the Faculty of International Studies of Utsunomiya University in Tochigi prefecture started an entrance examination for foreign students (*gaikokujin seito nyushi*), the first attempt among national universities in Japan. The university specifically targets immigrant students who have grown up in Japan, differentiating them from international students who enter Japan to study, and values their potential as important members of a multicultural society. Though there is no comprehensive research on the topic of immigrants in higher education, researchers, NPOs/NGOs, and educators have reported the increasing number of immigrant students entering colleges in Japan and securing stable employment. According to Takaya et al. (2015)'s research on the 2010 national census mentioned above, the college retention rates of Korean and Chinese students are almost the same as that of Japanese students (40% to 50%). However, college retention rates for Brazilians, Filipinos, and Peruvians are still under 20%, and this shows a similar trend to immigrant students' high school enrollment and retention rates (2015, 54-55). Many immigrant youth, specifically those who come from working class backgrounds, face economic barriers to higher education, given an absence of income based financial aid and scholarship/fellowships in Japan.

Some recent qualitative research described the educational attainment of Filipino immigrant youth who attended or graduated from a college (mostly in Japan but some in the Philippines), including some who enrolled in a graduate school and who secured a permanent job in a Japanese company (Takahata and Hara 2015; Nukaga and Miura 2017; Yamoto 2016; Tokunaga, Nukaga, and Takahashi forthcoming). The studies indicate that these immigrant young people from the Philippines strategically used their English fluency (gained during their education in the Philippines), maximized their transnational networks, and utilized support from their Japanese stepfathers, which led them to broaden their educational and career opportunities in Japan and abroad.

The next section explores the role of local governments, non-mainstream schools, and non-formal educational sites in offering supportive educational environment for immigrant students.

### **3. LOCAL RESPONSES AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS**

In the absence of a national integration policy toward immigrant students, there is a strong grassroots response from local governments, those schools that have large immigrant populations, concerned teachers, immigrant parents and communities, and NPOs/NGOs, to provide educational assistance for immigrant young people. These local actors directly face the growing number of immigrant students and tackle various educational issues that the students experience. It might be ironic to say that due to a lack of national intervention, a strong grassroots movement exists. However, the quality and quantity of educational assistance varies among municipalities, which means depending on the place of residence, some immigrant students might not have access to adequate support.

#### **3.1 Local governments and educational policies**

Among various education policies that local governments have developed, educators have discussed the critical role of the high school entrance system for immigrant students and Chinese returnees, which assists

the students' high school enrollment. "Special measurement for entrance examination" (*nyushi tokubetsu sochi*) is an examination accommodation such as providing extended exam time, offering *furigana* (words used next to a *kanji* character, a form of Chinese characters, to show their pronunciation), the use of a dictionary, reducing the number of subjects (three subjects instead of five subjects, which are common for general exams), among others. The "Special entrance quota" system (*tokubetsu nyugaku waku*) provides quotas to designated high schools for immigrant students and Chinese returnee students and allows them to take special examinations such as interviews, essays, and tests in Japanese language, math, and English. Though this system could be an affirmative action policy in a Japanese context, many municipalities have a requirement of "less than three years of arrival," which means the exclusion of a number of immigrant students who are still in the process of learning Japanese and struggle academically (Chugoku Kikokusha Teichaku Sokushin Senta 2017). In addition, as noted earlier there is disparity among local governments; some provide strong support and others have no special treatment. Among 60 designated cities and prefectures, 30 offered "special measurement for entrance examination" and 18 provided "special entrance quota" (full-time high schools) for immigrant students in 2016. Though quota system could be effective in lessening the barriers to high school enrollment among immigrants, 35 out of 60 municipalities had no such system in 2016 (Gaikokujin seito and Chugoku kikoku seitotouno koukou nyushiwou ouensuru yushino kai [Committe that supports high school entrance of foreign students and Chinese returnee students] 2017).

Osaka Prefecture, which has a rich history of Dowa education (education originally to offset Buraku discrimination) and Zainichi Korean education, is a progressive area that implements both systems for immigrant students (Shimizu 2008; Tokunaga 2017b). In 2016, Osaka designated seven full-time public high schools as schools with a "special entrance quota" for immigrant students. Students who arrived in Japan and entered grade 4 or above are eligible for the exam, which is a more lenient requirement than other municipalities. Immigrant students are also allowed to write an essay in a language other than Japanese in addition to taking math and English exam. Designated schools also provide educational support during high school years, including Japanese language classes, native language classes (Chinese language classes taught by Chinese teachers), and extracurricular activities that attempt to affirm ethnic identities and cultures of immigrant students (Shimizu 2008). These special measures resulted in a higher rate of high school entrance for foreign students — 84.5% of foreign students in Osaka advanced to high school in 2005 (Inui 2008).

### 3.2 Non-mainstream schools and schools for foreigners

Shifting the focus on individual schools, it is critical to acknowledge the role of non-mainstream public schools, often marginal spaces in Japanese education, such as night time junior high schools (*yakan chugakko*) and part-time high schools (*teijisei koukou*) that serve immigrant population (Tsuneyoshi et al. 2017). Those public schools that were built after WWII to provide education for Japanese young people who were struggling to come out of poverty are now becoming important educational spaces for immigrant youth. Night time junior high schools are funded by local governments and 31 schools are located in eight prefectures, serving a total of 1687 students in 2017. 80.4 % of the total population (1,356) are foreigners — Chinese (41.9%), Nepalese (16.6%), Koreans (14.9%), Vietnamese (9%), Filipinos (8%), among others (MEXT 2017b). As this number indicates, immigrants are becoming the "majority" in these schools that run during the evening. Students who are above 15 years old and did not finish nine years of compulsory education in their countries of origin commonly attend these schools since they are not eligible to enroll in a full-time junior high school. The age of students is diverse, ranging from teens to those who are over 60. They learn Japanese language and other subjects, and some prepare for high school entrance examinations, often in

small classes. Though night time junior high schools are only located in specific prefectures, they function as critical alternative educational sites for immigrants (Tsuneyoshi et al. 2017).

For post-compulsory education level, part-time high schools function as important safety net for immigrant students and provide them various learning opportunities. Most part-time high schools offer classes during the evening but some provide courses during the day (three shifts — morning, afternoon, and evening). While students in a full-time high school graduate in three years, those who attend a part-time high school spend more than three years, often four years to complete their curriculum. Compared to full-time high schools, part-time high schools have a relaxed curriculum, less rigid school culture, a diverse student population (class, age, nationality), and a close teacher and student relationship (often being a small-sized school). These features allow marginalized students such as immigrants, students with disabilities, students who experienced non-attendance (*futoko*) during compulsory education, and students with working class backgrounds (in need to work and/or under government subsidy) to learn in a safe and comfortable educational setting. As mentioned in the previous section, immigrant students are overrepresented in part-time high schools. In the case of Tokyo, among 1,361 foreign students who attended public high school in 2016, 847 students attended a full-time high school and 514 students attended a part-time high school — about 38% of young people learned in a part-time school (Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education 2016).

Though high schools commonly lack language, academic and career support for immigrants compared to the compulsory education levels, scholars and educators have reported various educational practices developed in part-time high schools. Koyamadai part-time high, a small-sized school located in Tokyo, is known as a pioneering school that has developed citizenship education and human rights education in an attempt to promote multicultural co-existence. In 2014, about 19% of immigrant students from 16 different nationalities were enrolled. The school conducted curriculum reform (offer multicultural understanding and citizenship course, Chinese and Korean language classes), provided Japanese language support, developed after-school club activity for immigrants, strengthened network and received support from local communities, universities, and NPOs to accommodate diverse needs of immigrant students, among others (Tsunoda 2015). The school was appointed as one of MEXT's Designated Schools for Human Rights Education (*jinken kyoiku kenkyu shiteikou*) and has offered inclusive and affirmative educational environment for minority students.

Hitotsubashi high school, another part-time high school in Tokyo which also has a number of immigrants such as Chinese and Filipinos, has run an afterschool extracurricular activity (*bukatsu*) called “One World,” a multilingual exchange club (*tagengo koryubu*) since 2015. The teacher in charge was concerned about immigrant students not having *ibasho*<sup>10</sup> (places, spaces, and communities where one feels comfortable, safe, and accepted) at school, which also led to high dropout rates. Thus, the school collaborated with *kuriya*, an NPO that aims to empower migrant youth through arts and culture, and the author, a university faculty member, to create an affirmative and supportive space within the school. Through the coordination of *kuriya*, high school students (immigrant students and Japanese students) and college students, most of whom are exchange students from various countries, took part in intercultural and language exchanges such as communicating in English language, engaged in various activities, and collectively created *ibasho*. This club activity led immigrant high school students, specifically Filipino students who speak English, to become proud

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<sup>10</sup> See Tokunaga (2018) for detailed discussion on the importance of *ibasho* for immigrant children and youth.

of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, nurture capacity as cultural and linguistic mediators, and develop leadership skills. It also became a multicultural space where students from various cultural backgrounds developed a sense of belonging. Given the difficult background of immigrant students such as a lack of resources and network and feeling of non-belonging, part-time high schools emphasize the importance of developing *ibasho* within a school space and collaborating with local governments and communities to meet diverse needs of marginalized students. Some schools with a large minority population have developed an *ibasho café* in a school space where students can eat and drink while interacting with local supporters and friends, to help them to connect with local resources, provide guidance, and share a sense of community.

There are also “schools for foreigners” (*gaikokujin gakko*), such as international schools, Western schools, South American schools (Brazilian and Peruvian), Chinese schools, North Korean schools, and South Korean schools that provide important educational support for immigrants. Most of these schools are not “clause-1 schools” (*ichijoko*) but “miscellaneous schools” (*kakushu gakko*) or schools without legal status and are thus not qualified for government funding and tax exemptions. In 2016, 25,948 students attended 125 “schools for foreigners” that were categorized as miscellaneous schools (Aramaki et al. 2017). When schools that are not recognized by the government are included, this number is about 200 (Shimizu, Nakajima, and Kaji 2014). Though the students have to face expensive tuition and accreditation issues, they can learn their native language, the culture of their homeland, affirm their ethnic identity, avoid the bullying that often occurs in Japanese public schools, prepare to return back to their countries of origin, and develop a transnational life (Okano 2013; Shimizu 2013). Given the absence of a multicultural education approach in most Japanese schools, these schools for foreigners play critical role in affirming ethnic culture and ethnic identity of immigrants.

### 3.3 Non-formal educational sites

With the rise of immigrant students in the 1990s, the number of non-formal educational sites such as NPOs and NGOs that provide educational support to these students has increased rapidly. Since mainstream schools in Japan primarily serve Japanese students, pockets of out-of-school sites have responded to the diverse needs of students with various cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds and have played an important role in providing language, academic, and career support for them (Tokunaga, Nukaga, and Takahashi, forthcoming).

Unlike many Western countries that have a long history of grassroots movement and public support of community organizations, many organizations in Japan are volunteer-run and have relatively unstable funding, resources, and structures. Some are informal clubs, groups, and programs while others have status as NPO or social welfare service corporation. Some are completely volunteer-based while others receive subsidies by local governments, organizations, and companies. Founders and staff also vary, ranging from community residents (both Japanese and immigrants themselves), Japanese teachers, immigrant parents and youth, researchers, college students, among others.

According to Tsuboya (2005), there are six types of support that these local actors provide: 1) Japanese language instruction; 2) academic support (supplement the learning of school subjects); 3) guidance and support to enter high school; 4) *ibasho* creation (such as through offering opportunities to engage in non-academic experiential activities); 5) support non-attendance (*fushugaku*) students; and 6) native language instruction. Given educational problems such as the high non-attendance rates and low high school

advancement rates among immigrants, there are many NPOs, NGOs, and community programs that provide Japanese language instruction and academic support, primarily targeting immigrant students in elementary school and junior high school. Since high school entrance examination is a huge barrier for immigrant students, many programs support students to prepare for high school entrance. Furthermore, these sites attempt to create *ibasho* for immigrant students who are often isolated from the society, feeling alienated at school, local community, and family home where their parents work long hours and are often absent. They often become cultural bridge between schools and immigrant families. In recent years, some organizations attempt to empower immigrant youth using art such as photography, video-making, theater performance, and dance performance, which could be a new type of support emerging in Japan. While these local actors have played a significant role, disparity of the number of programs among municipalities exists, resulting in a lack of access for some immigrants, specifically those who reside in areas with a small immigrant population (Tokunaga, Nukaga, and Takahashi, forthcoming).

To strengthen support system for immigrant students, multiple educational actors including NPOs and NGOs, researchers, schools, teachers, and immigrant communities have developed networks, furthered collaboration, and made policy recommendations. For example, in many areas, these actors have collaborated to organize “high school admission guidance” (*shinro gaidansu*) for immigrant students and families. They provide explanation on various topics such as Japanese educational system, high school entrance exams, and types of high schools in the students’ native language to assist their high school enrollment. The guidance started in Kanagawa prefecture in 1995 and spread to other municipalities. Organizers from each area meet once a year to share information, network, and make policy recommendations. As seen in these examples, there are strong grassroots efforts, often in coalition among diverse educational actors, attempting to assist immigrant students and impact education policies.

## 4. CONCLUSION

As Japan experiences multiculturalization from below, an increasing number of immigrant students from various ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds are entering the Japanese education system and diversifying the school population. Though the national government lacks an integration policy on immigrant students, there has been a gradual improvement in educational attainment of these students since 1990 when a large immigrant population entered Japanese schools. In the early 2000s, issues of high rates of non-attendance, low progression rates to high school, and high dropout rates in high school were problematized. In the 2010s, though these problems remain, and ethnic and class differences exist, more immigrant students advance to high school and enroll in colleges. It is important to acknowledge the role of local educational actors such as local governments, non-main stream schools, concerned teachers, NPOs/NGOs, immigrant youth, parents, communities, and researchers that have responded to diverse educational needs of immigrant students often in collaboration. These actors have attempted to build support network, voice their needs, and collectively impact the policymaking process.

While this paper shed light on recent positive changes in immigrant education in Japan, many challenges yet remain. The basic stance of the government towards immigrant students has not changed —foreign students are not mandated to receive compulsory education and their education is considered as supplementary with an assimilative approach. There is a lack of systematic educational support system for immigrant students at a national level, which results in high dependency on local actors. There is no nation-wide statistics on

education for immigrant students, which prevents evidence-based policymaking. This paper suggests policy makers to conduct comprehensive research to investigate demographics and educational reality of immigrant students such as high school enrollment rates and dropout rates and college advancement rates, taking into account their attributes. Furthermore, given the absence of educational support for immigrants in high schools, specifically in mainstream schools, developing education policies and practices at high school level is critical. In addition to Japanese language and academic support, schools could collaborate with local governments, NPOs/NGOs, universities, and companies to provide career education and college preparation programs, create *ibasho* for immigrants such as developing club activities, and offer multicultural education. Lastly, since many immigrant students from working class backgrounds struggle to enroll in colleges due to socio-economic disadvantages and linguistic barriers, more attempts are needed to develop income-based scholarship programs and quota system and support system in higher education in an attempt to achieve educational equity.

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