

## The Second Yao City Foreign Residents' Council Meeting in 2013 [Minutes]

Date & Time: Thu, September 26, 2013, 7:00 p.m. – 8:45 p.m.

Place: Training Room, 6th Floor, Yao City Office

Participants:

(Council members): Ms. Hikaru Toki (Chair), Mr. Tsunehisa Okuno (Vice-chair), Ms. Chin Bin, Ms. Loubet Emmanuelle, Ms. Michika Kozakura, Mr. Paku Yan Hen  
(Secretariat [Culture and International Affairs Department]): Matsushima (Manager), Kawazoe (Assistant Manager), Nishitani (Group Chief), Kinoshita (Section Chief)

### 1. Opening of Council Meeting

### 2. Exchange of Opinions

#### **Theme: Education to Promote Diversity and Establishment of the Support System**

Council Member Schools provide education to promote diversity, as part of their educational program to improve international understanding and human rights awareness. It is important that not only children from all cultural backgrounds but Japanese children learn to respect diversity. Children learn a lot from their teachers' attitude. For example, children can learn from how their teacher interacts with children from different cultures. I think it would be helpful if teachers could attend more training sessions to learn about diversity.

It would also be helpful if teachers could have opportunities to hear experiences of other teachers who have taught foreign pupils, including what types of support schools need to offer and how teachers should interact with these children.

Council Member When I and my children first came to Japan, we didn't speak Japanese at all. It was helpful that we could receive support from volunteers at Yao International Center regarding Japanese lifestyle and customs.

Many foreign parents don't know very much about Japanese schools, and so need a lot of support especially on important issues such as children's school selection and career options.

When my children entered elementary school, I had a lot of trouble preparing school bags and gym uniforms. I didn't speak Japanese but went shopping anyway only to find that the sales period for such school items had already ended. Since each country has its

own school system, it is helpful that foreign residents receive support in understanding the differences.

**Council Member** The Osaka Prefectural Board of Education holds Multilingual Career Guidance sessions as part of its International Students School Life Support program. At these sessions, children and parents can learn about school/career options after graduating from junior high school, and all information was interpreted into multiple languages. The Yao City Study Group on Education for Foreign Residents also informs foreign residents about the Multilingual Career Guidance sessions.

When schools explain to parents what they need to prepare before entering school, it is necessary to explain in an easy-to-understand way, for example, by showing the actual items.

**Council Member** Inadequate Japanese language ability of parents is partly an institutional problem.

Canada, for example, offers language learning programs for new immigrants as part of its national policy. They can join learning programs to prepare themselves to find a job while receiving a salary. (To work in Canada, you need to speak both English and French.) It is Canada's national policy to educate immigrants to become able workers, who will eventually contribute to the national tax revenue. Canada has a national policy to improve immigrants' workforce development.

**Council Member** When I first came to Yao, I was able to get support in learning Japanese language and customs at the Yao International Center. I was really happy to visit the Center, because I also made friends with Japanese people there.

**Council Member** I hope to find ways to let people know about Yao International Center and its' activities through a network of residents.

**Council Member** My opinion is that a society where more people choose not to hide their cultural background is a truly diverse society. It is necessary to educate people to embrace diversity so that foreign residents don't need to worry, for instance, whether their children have to use Japanese names when they enter elementary school or start working.

Education to embrace diversity should be based on the belief that a diversified society not only benefits foreign residents, but also enriches the lives of Japanese residents. I think such an education will deepen Japanese people's understanding of foreign residents.

Unfortunately, Japanese society still doesn't see foreign residents as a valuable

workforce. It is a shame that the Japanese government thinks that it is a waste of tax money to spend it on human resource development programs for foreign residents.

It is also important that the government guarantee some kind of Japanese language learning system for foreign residents. I feel that it is necessary not only to encourage foreign residents to learn Japanese, but also to establish a language-learning system for foreign residents funded by taxes.

**Vice-chair** A society that embraces diversity is one where people are accepted without needing to hide their different backgrounds.

**Chair** It is necessary to establish an environment where foreign residents can express who they are without needing to hide their cultural background.

### **Theme: Human-rights Programs to Eliminate Prejudice against Foreign Residents**

**Council Member** I'd like to comment on the problems of landlords refusing to rent apartments to foreign residents. Even when applying for guaranty service from guaranty companies, we are often asked to find a Japanese guarantor. The services offered by these companies are actually for landlords, not for those who cannot find guarantors.

**Council Member** It is necessary to let Japanese residents know more about the situation surrounding foreign residents by using the City's information bulletin, for instance. Many Japanese residents don't seem to understand the difference between permanent residents and temporary visitors, and treat even permanent residents as just temporary visitors, ready to hurry back to their homeland someday. They also think that foreign residents cannot join the national health insurance system. I'll talk about my own experience as an example. My friends confessed to me that they didn't want to socialize with me at first, because they wrongly believed that, if I got injured when we spent time together, they—not me—would have to pay my medical fees because they thought I couldn't join the health insurance system.

I believe that it is a good idea to introduce in the City's information bulletin those foreign residents in Yao City who are active in various fields. I hope the information bulletin will introduce their perspective, abilities and skills and let readers know that foreign residents also provide value through their abilities and do contribute to building a vibrant city.

**Council Member** When a problem happens between Japanese and foreign residents who

live in the same community, many Japanese people tend to always blame the foreign residents rather than treating foreign residents as individuals and looking at everyone equally. Unfortunately, many Japanese people also tend to avoid any communication between foreign residents, believing it is impossible to make themselves understood because of the language barrier. Perhaps they may believe too strongly that foreign residents are people who recently came to Japan. They don't seem to realize that many foreign residents have lived in Japan for a long time and may know some or be fluent in Japanese.

Many foreign residents also do not understand the system of community associations. The leader of my local community association pointed out that it would be helpful if there were more people who can support foreign residents in community association activities. If someone cares for foreign residents in the same community group, then other residents may learn not to differentiate them. It would be helpful if the City offered them information that is useful to support foreign residents in the community.

**Council Member** It is important to foster community leaders. Such community leaders can contribute to communities from the perspective of residents who themselves live in the communities. To increase the opportunities for Japanese and foreign residents to interact with each other, people like community leaders need to encourage the residents to develop such opportunities.

**Council Member** In Yao City, each local community holds human-rights awareness sessions targeting residents in the community. Although the themes of the sessions are selected among issues each community faces, not all themes are necessarily issues relating to foreign residents. Every year, around ten communities hold human-rights awareness sessions.

**Chair** For example, the media widely report the fact that many returnees from China live on social welfare, but does not report the background of the situation. As a result, many viewers are misled to have a biased opinion about them. I think the media need to consider appropriate ways of reporting all the news, not just parts of it.

**Council Member** Not only Japan, but America also has the same problem. In America, though, there are more people who criticize such media reporting, and more systems are established to support foreign residents than in Japan. There are laws that prohibit discrimination, and systems have long been established to protect people who are victims of discrimination.

**Chair** The problems don't seem to surface in Japan, but I think it is because many foreign people living in Japan try to hide their characteristics/problems from other people around them. I think in Japan there isn't even an environment where foreign residents can express their opinions about their own problems.

**Council Member** Foreign residents do not have the right to vote and so cannot vote at elections. They also cannot become local welfare commissioners. Therefore, it seems there are no ways for foreign residents to contribute to the community. Given the current situation where there are few opportunities to listen to the opinions of foreign residents, it is a good idea to hold residents' meetings like this one.

## **Summary**

### **Vice-chair**

- Recently there is an increasing tendency to regard foreign people as “enemies,” partly because of the stressful atmosphere in society influenced by the sluggish economy and partly because of media reporting. It is important to find ways to eliminate this atmosphere.
- A multicultural society is one where every person can express who they are without hesitation. We need to build a society where we can talk freely about who we are and what kind of situation we might be in.
- Japanese society does not think it is important to support education for foreign residents, but it is a great loss for society.
- There should be more training programs to improve awareness among teachers and opportunities for them to share their experiences in supporting foreign children.
- Foreign residents don't know very much about the kinds of support available to them. It is important to let them know the necessary information.
- It might be useful to introduce in the City's information bulletin those foreign residents in Yao City who are active in various fields.
- It is necessary to foster community leaders who will play a central role in supporting foreign residents.
- Foreign residents don't have the right to vote and so cannot become local welfare commissioners. Therefore, many foreign residents feel there are no ways for them to contribute to the community.

**Chair** Given such educational problems and human-rights problems, many foreign residents feel that Japan is a closed society. This is why, like many other foreign residents

living in Japan, I myself have lived trying to hide my characteristics or problems that are different from those of Japanese people. But to build a society that embraces diversity, it is necessary that we foreign residents ourselves determine to solve this problem and encourage Japanese society to work together with us.

### 3. Closing of Council Meeting