

The Third Yao City Foreign Residents' Council Meeting in FY 2013 [Minutes]

Date & Time: Jan. 27 (Mon.), 2014, 7:00 pm-8:40 pm

Place: Conference Room No. 602, 6th Floor, Yao City Office

Participants:

(Council members): Ms. TOKI Hikaru (Chairperson), Mr. OKUNO Tsunehisa

(Vice-Chairperson), Ms. CHIN Bin (council member), Ms. PARK Koon-ae (council member), Ms. Emmanuelle LOUBET (council member), Ms. LE THI KIEU Nga (council member), Mr. Ian YATES (council member), Ms. KOZAKURA Michika (council member), Mr. PARK Yanghaeng (council member), Ms. FUJITO Satomi (council member)

(Secretariat - Culture and International Affairs Department): Ms. OTANI (Deputy Director), Mr. MATSUSHIMA (Manager), Mr. KAWAZOE (Assistant Manager), Ms. NISHITANI (Group Chief), Mr. KINOSHITA (Section Member)

1. Opening of the Council Meeting

2. Exchange of Opinions on "Yao City Plan to Promote a Multicultural Society (Draft)"

[Secretariat] The secretariat explained the draft of "Yao City Plan to Promote a Multicultural Society."

[Council member] I had the impression that this draft does not adequately explain the importance of respect for human rights, especially in Chapter 3-1 "Educational Support for Children." I hope the plan could clearly state the importance of strengthening the education of Japanese children, who are in the majority, to raise awareness of the human rights of foreign children.

[Council member] This plan seems to focus on measures to support children with foreign backgrounds, but it is also necessary to include educational programs for Japanese children.

[Council member] I'm not sure what is meant exactly by the expression "with a sense of their own identities" written in the section "Implementation of World Lecture Program" on page 28.

[Council member] World Lecture programs are participated in by not only children with foreign backgrounds, but also Japanese children. Many children with two cultural backgrounds often don't have opportunities to become aware of their own cultural roots and identities in their daily lives. We intend to offer them programs where they can become aware of their cultural roots and identities. This is what the expression "with a sense of their own

identities” means.

Chapter 1-1 “Enhancement of the Multilingual Information Service” on page 19 says that, as a measure to achieve this policy, the City will provide foreign residents with information “in easy-to-understand Japanese.” The plan should explain what “specific measures” are to be taken to achieve this goal at every contact level.

[Council member] I’m also not sure what it means by the expression “improving communication skills to cope with different cultural situations” written in Chapter 3-1 “Educational Support for Children.” The first measure mentioned in the section “Specific Measures” is “to utilize the existing system to deploy additional teachers to teach Japanese to foreign children,” but I’d like to point out that there are also many children studying at schools where no additional teachers have been deployed. It is important to effectively use the current system to deploy additional teachers, but it is also necessary to devise a system that allows teachers to teach Japanese to foreign children at these schools. Schools and teachers need to study how to instruct Japanese to foreign children as well as how to accept them into the schools.

[Council member] This plan as a whole seems to focus on how to support residents who cannot speak Japanese. However, when we think about how we can build a multicultural society, we need to understand the historical and cultural backgrounds of foreign residents. I think this plan needs to mention that foreign residents themselves are diverse and there are many foreign children born in Japan.

I’d also like to comment on Chapter 2-2 “Enhancement of Social Security Services to Live Comfortably” on page 25. This section mentions the necessity to “address the increase in the number of senior foreign residents,” but their situations vary depending on their background and nationality. The plan also needs to mention people with multiple issues such as disabled foreign residents.

[Council member] This plan as a whole seems to give readers the impression that foreign residents need support from Japanese people because they cannot do anything by themselves. Foreign residents are not people who need to be supported for their entire life. The best idea is to support them so that they can become self-reliant and participate in economic activities. It is important to support them learning Japanese as soon as they come to live in Japan. This support must help foreign residents to become self-reliant and participate in society.

I believe the Yao City Foreign Residents’ Council Meetings are a wonderful opportunity for foreign residents, but I have to say that, at the same time, I cannot help but feel we are asked for our opinions only on matters concerning foreign residents. We don’t see our nationality as our identity, and we hope to participate in various fields as an individual citizen of this city.

[Chairperson] Supporting foreign residents to learn Japanese and asking them to adapt their way of thinking are not enough to build a multicultural society. It is also necessary for Japanese people to change their way of thinking. The ideal is that all residents regardless of nationality participate in the process of developing our community. However, this Plan seems to be written on the idea that foreign residents are people who need to be supported, and as a result, emphasizes that they need to change their way of thinking, or at least encourages them to carry out certain act on their part. I think the plan should include the importance of “understanding each other” as well as the equality of Japanese and foreign residents.

[Council member] Can I suggest an idea? How about if the City makes a multilingual calendar on which necessary information, such as phone numbers of the City’s support services, is printed, and sends it to foreign residents? Some foreign residents don’t know the word “*shiyakusho*.” There are people who don’t know that counseling services are available at the City Office. Even if the City publishes such information on the City’s official website, not everyone has a computer. Even if they have a computer, if they don’t know what keyword they should search for, they cannot find necessary information. I think it is necessary to work out effective ways to provide information to foreign residents.

[Council member] How about starting a Yao City official Facebook page? We can then receive any necessary information in a timely manner and free of charge. Yao International Center has a Facebook page.

[Chairperson] It is important to find ways to provide information to people who cannot obtain necessary information by themselves. Some municipal governments have started official Facebook pages, but not every resident has a PC. Taking the cases of other municipalities as an example, there is a city whose community service section cooperated with other sections to use the resident registration data to conduct a multilingual questionnaire survey of all foreign residents in the city, as well as provide them with necessary information. But it should be noted that, with the revision of the Residential Basic Book Act, people who have overstayed their visas for various reasons tend to become “invisible” in the community more easily than before. I believe we have to take note of people who are the most vulnerable in society, and I cannot agree with the idea of making these people “invisible.” Of course it is not enough to support only foreign residents who are properly registered, but some municipalities use the revised Residential Basic Book Act effectively to provide them with necessary information.

[Council member] The City can provide a set of necessary documents and leaflets when foreign residents visit the City Office to register themselves as residents of Yao City. How about providing them with a leaflet that contains all information necessary to live in Yao City, and then sending them a calendar containing updated information once a year?

[Chairperson] We are talking about Chapter 1-1 “Enhancement of the Provision of Multilingual Information” on page 19. It may be difficult to provide information to people who already live in Yao City. But if the City provides information to people who have just moved to Yao City and visit the City Office for the first time for their resident registration, it will be possible to provide information to the majority of people who need such information.

[Council member] I think Chapter 1 “Purpose” and Chapter 2 “Understanding the Current Situation” need to explain in more detail that people from various countries with diverse backgrounds live in Yao City. It may also be a good idea to include information such as the number of residents for each resident status category type in Chapter 2, in order to understand the current situation, which is that more permanent residents including special permanent residents than non-permanent residents live in Yao City.

Summary of Opinions on “Yao City Plan to Promote a Multicultural Society (Draft)”

[Vice-Chairperson] Firstly, the principle of a multicultural society is a society where everyone can be proud to be themselves, and where we can use our own ethnic names. It is necessary to teach this to Japanese children.

Secondly, there was the suggestion that we must see foreign residents not only as people who need support and receive various services, but also as self-reliant individuals who can contribute to the community.

Lastly, it was pointed out that several parts of the Plan should be reviewed and rewritten. Here is a summary of the suggestions. Firstly, “with a sense of their own identities” in the third line from the end of page 28 should be replaced by an expression easier to understand.

Next, the expression of “communication skills to cope with different cultural situations” on page 27 should also be replaced by an expression easier to understand. There was also an opinion on the part describing the need to “utilize the existing system to deploy additional teachers.” It was suggested that, considering the current situation, the Plan needs to mention not only the use of the existing system to deploy additional teachers, but also the necessity to work out an effective educational system and instruction methods. An “increase in the number of senior foreign residents” is mentioned on page 25, but this expression also needs to be rewritten in easier-to-understand words.

Other suggestions include the provision of a calendar to foreign residents as an effective tool to provide necessary information, and the opening of a Yao City official Facebook page. Although these may not need to be reflected in this Plan, these suggestions are worthy of note.

3. Other matters

Production of the Guide for Foreign Residents

[Secretariat] The Secretariat explained the purpose and contents of the Guide for Foreign Residents.

[Council member] It is planned to make the leaflet in four languages, but I think a version written only in *kana* is necessary too.

[Council member] As for foreign language versions, I think Spanish and Portuguese versions are necessary, because many Brazilians and Peruvians live in Yao.

[Council member] If the City cannot, for example, prepare a Thai version for Thai people, then the City should prepare a Japanese version as well. There was the opinion that Spanish and Portuguese versions are necessary, but I think there are more people who need Filipino and Thai versions.

[Council member] These leaflets need to clearly explain what issues you can consult the City on.

[Council member] To make a readable leaflet, you should put only one piece of information on each line. But I hope the leaflets will include as much information as possible.

[Council member] These leaflets are not intended to include all contacts for consultation and administrative services, but provide information on where you can receive services or support in foreign languages. The title of the leaflet needs to clearly explain this purpose.

[Chairperson] How about a leaflet title of “Multilingual Telephone Consultation Service”? Are these consultation services available free of charge?

[Council member] Are these phone numbers Free Dial numbers? You need time to use the consultation service. If the services require a fee, some people may choose to consult with someone they know. For the telephone consultation service, information on whether the service is free or not is important.

[Council member] The leaflet needs to explain that the consultation itself is free of charge, but they need to pay the telephone charge. It is also necessary to mention that their calls may be transferred to the appropriate section according to the content of their consultation. Without this explanation, people may think that they have paid a telephone charge to ask for a consultation but felt the service was not useful and only introduced them to another section. This point should be explained clearly.

[Council member] In each section, both the foreign language version and the Japanese version are printed side by side on the same page, but I think it would be more readable if the foreign language version could be printed on one page, and Japanese version on another page. People may want to take this leaflet to a Japanese speaker to ask for an explanation, so the Japanese part is necessary.

[Council member] I think the foreign language parts should be printed in a larger font size, and the Japanese parts in a smaller font size.

[Council member] Leaflets written in both Japanese and foreign languages are helpful, if parents can't read Japanese but the children can read very well. Children can tell their parents where they should contact.

[Council member] I think readability could be improved by better layout.

[Vice-Chairperson] I hope a better leaflet will be made with the help of the suggestions made in today's meeting.

Summary

[Chairperson] Looking back on the regional history of Japan, Japanese society started with a phase of international exchange, and now we are slowly shifting into a multicultural society. However, some municipalities around the country are still in the phase of preparing plans to promote international exchange, and have not prepared plans to promote a multicultural society. Actually, a majority of municipalities are not ready to prepare plans to promote a multicultural society. It is therefore meaningful that the City is preparing this Plan, and we'd like to extend our thanks as foreign residents of Yao City. Since the City has put a lot of effort into preparing this Plan, I hope the City will put the measures into practice based on this Plan.

4. Close of Council Meeting