

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

Date & Time: Wed, August 21, 2013, 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Place: Conference Room No. 701, 7th Floor, Yao City Office

Participants: Hikaru Toki, Tsunehisa Okuno, Chin Bin, Paku Ku Ne, Loubet Emmanuelle, Le Thi Kieu Nga, Ian Yates, Michika Kozakura, Paku Yan Hen, Satomi Fujito (Titles omitted)

Secretariat (Culture and International Affairs Department): Otani (Deputy Director), Matsushima (Manager), Kawazoe (Assistant Manager), Nishitani (Group Chief), Kinoshita (Section Chief)

1. Opening of Council Meeting

2. Distribution of Letters of Commission

3. Self-introduction of Council Members

4. Selection of Chair and Vice-chair

Ms. Toki was elected as chair, and Mr. Okuno as Vice-Chair.

5. Disclosure of Meetings

It was agreed that conference meetings should be open to the public.

6. Yao City's Measures for Foreign Residents

The Secretariat explained the Yao City Internationalization Measure Promotion Basic Policy, Yao City Internationalization Measure Promotion Plan, and major projects being implemented by the city.

7. Meeting Procedure

It was agreed to exchange opinions regarding three recommended themes in “The Recommendations of Yao City Foreign Residents' Council” submitted in March 2013: “Building a society that can provide a safe and secure environment for foreign

residents,” “Promoting education that embraces diversity, and establishing a support system,” and “Developing educational programs for citizens to eradicate prejudice against non-Japanese residents.”

8. Exchange of Opinions

The participants exchanged opinions on the first theme of “Building a society that can provide a safe and secure environment for foreign residents.” Discussions were conducted in two groups (Group A and Group B).

GROUP A

Council member It is important to let foreign residents know the location of evacuation centers in times of disaster.

Council member In disaster prevention efforts, it is most important that residents in a community know each other. It is important that foreign residents and Japanese residents build a closer relationship in their own community.

Council member Many foreign residents feel that Japanese people treat them as if they will eventually go back to their homeland. They worry that Japanese people may urge them to go back to their homeland when a big earthquake happens.

Council member The colleagues at my workplace often criticize my words and behaviors and say it is the typical way people from my country say or do things. Those kinds of comments hurt me so much.

Council member People using their non-Japanese name are often asked by Japanese people when they will go back to their homeland. On the other hand, if Japanese people find out that these people were born in Japan and speak only Japanese, they tend to say: you’re just like Japanese people. When I hear such comments, I feel as if they don’t admit the existence of foreign residents living in Japan.

Council member Recently, so-called “double” people, who were born in Japan but have two cultural backgrounds, for example Japanese and Italian, and have a career across the two countries, are increasing. This may hopefully change how Japanese people interact with foreign residents living in Japan.

Council member Actually, in Yao City too, people with different cultural backgrounds, such as from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Brazil are increasing their presence.

Council member I wish there were more Japanese learning courses available for foreign residents. I think Yao City can employ language instructors who have a professional teaching certificate to teach Japanese as a second language to foreign residents.

Council member Currently at school, teachers additionally deployed to support Chinese and Vietnamese children also teach Japanese to these children. But not all of them have studied how to teach Japanese as a second language, nor can they speak the children's mother tongues. Some teaching assistants, whose mother tongue is Chinese or Vietnamese, are assisting Japanese teachers. It seems that children can more easily learn Japanese if assisted by teaching assistants who can speak their mother tongue.

Chair Most Japanese language courses are organized with the support of volunteer citizens. It is desirable that the City secures a budget for Japanese language courses where foreign residents can learn Japanese from teachers with professional teaching skills.

Council member For example, in Canada, all newly-arrived immigrants are entitled to join language courses suitable to their language ability. Not only language courses, but also driving lessons, courses for writing a proper resume, and practice for job interviews are available. They can also borrow clothing, telephones and office space for their job hunting activities. For six months of the job-hunting program, new immigrants are paid a salary to support their lives.

The Canadian government seems to regard foreign residents living in Canada as people with valuable skills who can contribute to the country's economic growth.

Council member The Japanese government does not seem to regard them as valuable assets for Japan, as people who can benefit the country.

Council member It may be because a majority of Japanese people have had little opportunity to meet people of foreign origin.

Council member I think many Japanese people tend to think as if Japanese people and foreign residents belong to two different groups. If one foreign person does something wrong,

Japanese people tend to blame all other foreign residents as well. This may be partly caused by administrative problems of the Japanese government, which does not allow foreign residents to join in the process of decision-making. Foreign residents are not recognized as citizens. This may be the reason why people still do not treat foreign residents as people who live on the same planet, but regard them as someone who always temporarily visit Japan and then leave for their home someday.

Ensuring people are safe and secure does not only mean providing measures to protect residents at the moment an earthquake happens. It is important to build friendly relationships in our own community in our daily lives so we can help each other after an earthquake or other disaster.

Chair It is necessary to accept the idea that foreign residents also can contribute to Yao City. I believe it is important to build a friendly relationship among community residents. Even a relationship where you just exchange greetings when you pass each other makes a big difference in times of disaster.

I'd like to know whether the information on disaster drills is actually reaching all foreign residents.

Council member Even if foreign residents are members of a community association, some of them cannot obtain necessary information because of language problems. To encourage more foreign residents to participate in disaster drills, it is necessary to provide information on such activities in a way easily understandable to those who don't understand Japanese very well. Just circulating a notice of an event is not enough.

Council member Since strong tremors were felt when the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake hit, many foreign residents in Yao understand the danger of earthquakes. This is why a group of Vietnamese residents raised donations to support the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Chair I engaged in support activities at a support center in the area affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. I noticed that local governments were not aware that non-Japanese people were also among those seeking shelter at evacuation centers. They didn't realize the necessity of providing information in languages other than Japanese. It is important to provide information in multiple languages.

GROUP B

Council member I worry that children may get bullied at school as a negative result of diplomatic disputes between Japan and China or Korea.

I'd also like to comment on the interpretation support service. Currently, foreign residents can use language support services at the International Center and elementary schools. Consultation service in some foreign languages and interpretation services are available at Yao City Office from Monday to Friday. However, many foreign residents still encounter difficulties in Japanese, especially in technical terms, and need support when they are involved in an accident, when they go to hospital, or when they deal with health insurance.

As for the education of children, many foreign residents don't know the Japanese education system very much. It is important to make such information available in several languages.

Council member My neighbor is Chinese and lives alone. Partly because he can't speak Japanese, he has few opportunities to interact with other residents in the community. If you don't maintain friendly relationships with your neighbors, you will tend to have more difficulties in times of disaster.

Council member Some foreign residents who have lived in Japan for a long time still cannot speak Japanese at all, because these people have lived in areas where a majority of residents are non-Japanese, or worked in a business where more than 80% of the workers are non-Japanese, and as such they speak their mother tongue only in their daily lives. If some trouble occurs, they ask their own children who go to Japanese school and speak Japanese to interpret for them. Many foreign residents are not very good at speaking Japanese even after 10 or 20 years after they came to Japan.

Council member I work around children, and I have witnessed bullying among children. I think, in Japan, teachers and grown-ups are slow to react to bullying.

Council member Many foreign children feel isolated at school, even after they learn to speak fluent Japanese. Some children find it difficult to make friends at school because of cultural differences. Others feel guilty toward their friends who care about them.

These children need a place outside school where they can gather to study or play together in a comfortable atmosphere.

Council member The number of senior foreign residents is increasing in Yao. A majority of

such senior foreign residents are of Korean origin. Many of them have unfortunately experienced severe discrimination directed toward them. They have little experience of friendly relationships between Japanese people, and still find it difficult to build friendly relationships with them. I hope there is a place where these people can spend their time comfortably.

I understand that the problem regarding pensions should be dealt with by the Japanese government rather than Yao City, but I hope the City will urge the government to solve this problem.

Council member Non-Japanese teachers who I'd like to work with do not know very much about the activities of the International Center. It is necessary to find a way to let foreign residents know about volunteer activities available at the International Center.

Council member I heard of a problem of some landlords in Kyoto refusing to rent apartments for overseas students because of their nationality. Have similar problems happened in Yao City?

Vice-Chair If such a problem occurs in Yao City, it is necessary to cooperate with the City and its citizens to solve the problem.

Council member I'd like to comment on how to provide information to foreign residents. Sometimes a literal translation of information published in Japanese doesn't convey the necessary message. It is important to add information or rewrite in an easily understandable way, taking into account the differences in cultures and customs.

Council member I'd like to express my opinion on the use of foreign resident's ethnic names and Japanese names. I am very sorry to hear of foreign residents who were advised to change their children's names to Japanese names before entering elementary school in order to avoid bullying.

Summary

The Chair and Vice-Chair summarized the opinions exchanged in each group.

GROUP A

- It was pointed out that many foreign residents find it difficult to obtain necessary information in times of disaster, and it is important to build friendly relationships and

establish various kinds of communication among community residents. It is important to encourage opportunities where Japanese residents and foreign residents can interact with each other.

- In daily lives in our own community, many Japanese people tend to think as if foreign residents and Japanese residents belong to two different groups, and don't look at foreign residents also as members of the same community. If foreign people express their own opinions, Japanese people tend to react as if their opinions are typical ways people of their country talk. There was an opinion that Japanese people need to learn to accept different people with different ways of thinking, and foreign residents need to make further efforts to become acclimated to life in Japan.

- There was an opinion that the City needs to offer more opportunities for foreign residents to learn Japanese. It was also pointed out that currently most Japanese courses for foreign residents are taught by volunteers, and that the City should hire Japanese instructors who have professional skills to teach Japanese.

- Japanese society in general does not consider foreign residents also as members of the community who can support the lives of other people in the same community. It is true that some foreign residents receive support, but it is necessary to plan programs and activities from the perspective that foreign residents are also members of the community who can also support other people in the community.

GROUP B

- A concern was expressed over school bullying triggered by Japan's political or diplomatic disputes with neighboring countries. It was also pointed out that Japanese teachers and other adults are slower to react to children than teachers and adults in other countries. It is important to understand that many foreign children feel isolated and that it is necessary to give them support.

- As for the problems of landlords refusing to rent apartments for foreign residents, it is necessary to investigate what kinds of problems are actually happening, if any; then the City government and citizens must cooperate in solving the situation.

- Local communities play vital roles in disaster prevention efforts. However, some foreign residents cannot obtain the necessary information on what they should do in times of disaster because of their lack of participation in the community. It is necessary to find ways that enable them to build closer relationships within their communities.

- The pension problems should be dealt with at the national level, but the City needs to urge the government to solve the problems.

- As for the education of children, many foreign residents do not have enough information

about the Japanese educational system. Schools need to offer appropriate support for such parents.

- It was pointed out that many foreign residents who are willing to support other residents in the community don't know very much about activities carried out at the International Center. It is necessary to find ways to let residents know about available volunteer activities.