

## Introduction

### *The Contradictions of Japan's Immigration and Citizenship Politics*

Achieving greater ethnic diversity within Japan has the potential of broadening the scope of the country's intellectual creativity and enhancing its social vitality and international competitiveness.

– Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century, 2000

Foreigners are all sneaky thieves.

– Kanagawa Governor Matsuzawa Shigefumi, 2 November 2003

On 20 November 2007, Japan reinstated its fingerprinting requirement for foreign residents as part of a counterterrorism measure. The bill had been passed in the Diet with little fanfare and received minimal coverage in the Japanese media. A small group of mostly North Americans, Europeans, and Australians worked with a handful of Japanese activists to organize a campaign against the bill in collaboration with Amnesty International Japan and the Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan (SMJ). Although this group contacted numerous proimmigrant and foreign-resident organizations and human rights activists, surprisingly few showed up for the rallies that the group organized in August and November 2007 to protest the measure. Most significant was the relative lack of participation by the largest foreign-resident groups in Japan: Chinese, Korean, *Nikkei* (ethnic Japanese) Brazilians, and Filipinos.

In many respects, the reinstatement of the fingerprinting requirement, with the stated aim of preventing the entry of potential terrorists

and criminals into Japan, was consistent with developments in other industrial democracies to control their foreign populations following the 11 September 2001 attacks. The new immigration controls are modeled after the U.S.-Visit (United States Visitor and Immigration Status Indicator Technology) Program that was implemented in 2004 to collect and store biometric information on foreigners entering the United States. The anomaly in Japan's case, however, was that the bill exempted one particular group of foreigners: "special permanent residents," the vast majority of whom are prewar Korean immigrants and their descendants.

Lim Young-Ki (Im Yong-ki), a third-generation Korean resident born and raised in Japan and vice president of the Korean Youth Association in Japan, was making plans for a Korean festival when he received an urgent call at Mindan headquarters from an Amnesty International representative in November 2007.<sup>1</sup> The rally to protest the reinstatement of the fingerprinting requirement was scheduled to be held on Tuesday, but not a single Korean organization or activist had made the commitment to show up. In contrast to the decade-long antifingerprinting movement led by Korean activists in the 1980s, which ultimately led to its abolishment for special permanent residents in 1993 and for all foreign residents in 1999, the Korean response to its reinstatement was curiously weak. Although various Korean organizations issued public statements opposing the bill, Korean residents were noticeably absent among the foreign residents and activists who organized protests against the bill.

Lim, who was only a teenager when the fingerprinting requirement for Korean residents had been abolished in 1993 and, thus, had never been fingerprinted, understood the symbolic significance of Korean participation in the newly mobilized antifingerprinting movement. Most of his *senpai* (older colleagues) in Mindan felt that the Korean community did not have a stake in the current antifingerprinting movement because the bill explicitly exempted the Korean-resident community. Lim, however, saw the invitation to participate as an

<sup>1</sup> The Korean Youth Association in Japan (*Cheilbon daehan minkuk ch'öngnyön hoe* in Korean; also known as *Seimenkai* in Japanese) is a subsidiary organization of Mindan, the largest South Korean organization in Japan. I conducted an interview with Lim Young-Ki in Tokyo on 4 September 2008.

opportunity to shift the direction of his political activities in order to reach out to a broader community of foreign residents.

The representative from Amnesty International asked Lim if there was something from the 1980s movement that could be used in the rally. Lim recalled that Mindan headquarters housed the original giant thumbprint balloon used in various antifingerprinting movements during the 1980s, as displayed on the cover of this book. Although inflating the giant balloon would normally require work over an entire week, Lim, with the help of other members of his organization, managed to inflate the balloon in a single day and bring it to the rally. Despite his valiant efforts to demonstrate Korean solidarity with the protestors, Lim estimates that less than two hundred people were present with only a smattering of Korean activists. In contrast, a rally organized by Korean activists the following spring to demand local voting rights for foreign residents brought together nearly six hundred Korean and other foreign residents. When I asked another Korean activist why he and others did not join the renewed antifingerprinting movement, he replied, “It would have been better if more Korean residents supported the protests. But it is not as important as other issues like local voting rights. Anyway, the Japanese government was not stupid enough to include Korean residents [when it reinstated the fingerprinting requirement]. There would have been hell to pay if it did” (interview, 7 September 2008, Osaka).

Lim’s story highlights a defining feature of contemporary immigration and citizenship politics in Japan. Japan is the only advanced industrial democracy with a fourth-generation immigrant problem. While other industrialized countries face the challenges of incorporating *postwar* immigrants, Japan struggles with the repercussions of its failure to incorporate *prewar* immigrants and their descendants. With the recent influx of new immigrants to Japan, the country’s already fragmented, incoherent policies and practices regarding its foreign population developed into a world of extremes. The official stance toward immigrants suggests that non-Japanese do not have the capacity to become Japanese and, therefore, should be excluded. Meanwhile, some Japanese officials have publicly promoted the naturalization of Korean residents throughout the past two decades, arguing that they are *de facto* Japanese. Although immigration policies seek to uphold the commonly accepted idea that Japan is not a country of

immigration, local officials and citizens have created immigrant integration programs based on the notion that foreign residents are local citizens. Public debate on immigration has hinged on either opening (*kaikoku*) or closing (*sakoku*) Japan's borders. Whereas permanent foreign residents have rights that are almost on par with Japanese citizens, permanent-residency status remains elusive for many recent immigrants to Japan.

Despite Japan's official closed-door policy, record numbers of immigrants have entered the country as laborers, students, and, to a lesser extent, refugees. Between 1985 and 2008, the total foreign population more than doubled from about 850,000 to more than 2.2 million (see Table I.1). Although recent immigrants to Japan come from more than 190 countries on every continent in the world, the majority are laborers from other Asian countries including China, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. The Brazilian and Peruvian immigrant population also experienced phenomenal growth after the enactment of state-sponsored recruitment of *Nikkei* workers into the labor market. Finally, there were also an estimated 150,000 immigrants who overstayed their visas or entered Japan illegally in 2008.

The recent wave of immigrants arrived in Japan on the heels of a noncitizen civil rights movement led by prewar Korean immigrants and their descendants. As large numbers of new immigrants became established in their local communities, they found themselves in the middle of the movement's final stages, which have focused on securing local voting rights for foreign residents. In this context, in which the foreign population in Japan encompassed recently arrived immigrants as well as multigenerational permanent residents, foreign-resident claims in the 1990s ranged from proposals for alien suffrage to demands for multicultural education to appeals to gain special permission to stay in Japan among visa overstayers. Japan in the 1990s lacked national immigrant incorporation programs to provide recent immigrants with Japanese-language instruction, information about housing and schools, and other essential skills needed for settlement in Japan; at the same time, many foreign residents could, in principle, exercise many of the same rights as Japanese nationals. On the one hand, this gap has placed a significant burden on local governments that must meet the demands of an increasingly diverse community with insufficient support and guidance from the national government.

TABLE I.1. Registered Foreign Residents in Japan by Nationality

Year	North and South Korea		China	Philippines	United States			Brazil	Peru	Other <sup>a</sup>	Total <sup>b</sup>	% <sup>c</sup>
1985	683,313		74,924	12,261	29,044		1,955	N/A	49,115	850,612	0.70	
1986	677,959		84,397	18,897	30,695		2,135	553	54,736	867,237	0.71	
1987	673,687		95,477	25,017	30,836		2,250	615	58,393	884,025	0.72	
1988	677,140		129,269	32,185	32,766		4,159	864	68,781	941,005	0.76	
1989	681,838		137,499	38,925	34,900		14,528	4,121	72,644	984,455	0.80	
1990	687,940		150,339	49,092	38,364		56,429	10,279	82,874	1,075,317	0.87	
1991	693,050		171,071	61,837	42,498		119,333	26,281	104,821	1,218,891	0.98	
1992	688,144		195,334	62,218	42,482		147,803	31,951	114,612	1,281,644	1.03	
1993	682,276		210,138	73,057	42,639		154,650	33,169	124,819	1,320,748	1.06	
1994	676,793		218,585	85,968	43,320		159,619	35,382	134,344	1,354,011	1.08	
1995	666,376		222,991	74,297	43,198		176,440	36,269	142,800	1,362,371	1.08	
1996	657,159		234,264	84,509	44,168		201,795	37,099	156,142	1,415,136	1.12	
1997	645,373		252,164	93,265	43,690		233,254	40,394	174,567	1,482,707	1.17	
1998	638,828		272,230	105,308	42,774		222,217	41,317	189,442	1,512,116	1.19	
1999	636,548		294,201	115,685	42,802		224,299	42,773	199,805	1,556,113	1.23	
2000	635,269		335,575	144,871	44,856		254,394	46,171	225,308	1,686,444	1.33	
2001	632,405		381,225	156,667	46,244		265,962	50,952	245,907	1,778,462	1.40	
2002	625,422		424,282	169,359	47,970		268,332	51,772	264,621	1,851,758	1.46	
2003	613,791		462,396	185,237	47,836		274,700	53,649	277,421	1,915,030	1.50	
2004	607,419		487,570	199,394	48,844		286,557	55,750	288,213	1,973,747	1.55	
2005	598,687		519,561	187,261	49,390		302,080	57,728	296,848	2,011,555	1.57	
2006	598,219		560,741	193,488	51,321		312,979	58,721	309,450	2,084,919	1.63	
2007	593,489		606,889	202,592	51,851		316,967	59,696	321,489	2,152,973	1.69	
2008	589,239		655,377	210,617	52,683		312,582	59,723	337,205	2,217,426	1.74	

<sup>a</sup> The "other" category includes nationals of more than 190 countries in every continent. Among the largest numbers of foreign residents in this category include nationals of Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, India, Canada, Australia, and Bangladesh.  
<sup>b</sup> As of 1 January 2008, there were also an estimated 150,000 illegal immigrants in Japan.  
<sup>c</sup> This column refers to the percentage of the total Japanese population.  
 Source: Ministry of Justice 2003–2009; Japan Statistical Yearbook 2006.

On the other hand, the particular timing of recent immigration to Japan vis-à-vis developments in the Korean civil rights movement has had a profound effect on the ways in which proimmigrant organizations have mobilized foreign residents and how foreign residents, including new immigrants as well as multigenerational residents, are discussed in the public sphere. Rather than focus solely on the immediate needs of new immigrants, numerous advocacy groups, local government offices, and mainstream civil-society organizations put emphasis on the idea that foreign residents are citizens, linking their active engagement in the community with democratic revitalization.

This book seeks to explain the contradictions between policies that exclude foreigners and policies and practices aimed at incorporating foreign residents in contemporary Japan. Based on fieldwork conducted in Tokyo, Kawasaki, and Osaka and in-depth interviews with individual foreign residents, community activists, Japanese policy makers, journalists, and academics from 1998 to 2008, this book examines how traditionally underrepresented actors in Japan negotiate national policies and ideologies in their attempts to bring about social change. The inconsistencies of Japan's immigration and citizenship politics have created a delicate dilemma for Japanese authorities. Because permanent residents have social rights on par with Japanese citizens, officials have a strong incentive to keep permanent-residency status exclusive and maintain the official stance that discourages immigrant permanent settlement. At the same time, the unavoidable, continuing growth of the foreign population has pressured the government to politically assimilate the population of foreigners with the most privileged status in Japan: special permanent residents, the vast majority of whom are prewar Korean immigrants and their descendants. Korean-resident activists, in turn, have persistently contested the conditions of the community's political incorporation and have sought to diversify the meaning of Japanese citizenship from a discourse based on cultural homogeneity to one based on a multicultural, multiethnic society. In this way, Japan's stringent citizenship policies have unintentionally provided Korean residents with unprecedented bargaining power and specific opportunities for negotiating the terms of their political incorporation.

Recent scholarship by a new generation of Japan specialists analyzes how state and social actors have negotiated international norms, democratic ideals, and local pressures in an increasingly unstable social,

political, and economic climate (Chan-Tiberghien 2004; Leheny 2006; Schoppa 2006). Unlike much of the earlier literature that questioned whether Japan is a democracy, these works ask why certain actors are able to influence public debate and successfully advance democratic reforms and why others fail at specific historical junctures. In particular, the events of the last two decades – including the economic recession, increasing voter discontent, large-scale immigration, and the looming demographic crisis – have led to significant shifts in Japan’s political and social landscape for traditionally underrepresented social actors. Building on this scholarship, this book aims to further our understanding of democratic inclusion in Japan by analyzing how those who are formally excluded from the political process voice their interests and what factors contribute to the effective representation of those interests in public debate and policy. As Japan grapples with the issues of immigration, multiculturalism, and national identity, the political incorporation of the foreign community has important implications for understanding the quality of democracy in contemporary Japan.

This book is also about the dilemmas that Japan shares with other democracies in accommodating diversity. The recent wave of immigration to industrialized societies has placed the question of immigrant incorporation at the center of scholarship on immigration and citizenship. Although the problem of immigrant incorporation encompasses a variety of issues, such as cultural, linguistic, religious, and educational concerns, scholars as well as policy makers have given particular attention to the issue of political incorporation and political participation in recent years because of what many have identified as a troubling trend among the current wave of immigrants. That is, foreign communities are growing in size; at the same time, many immigrants and their descendants remain politically unincorporated. Scholarship on immigrant incorporation tends to focus on the role of structural, state-level variables or on individual-level variables to explain this paradox. In contrast, this book analyzes contextual factors and intermediate organizations in order to identify the unintended consequences of immigrant incorporation regimes and the political opportunities for noncitizens to engage in the polity.

The portrayal of immigrant incorporation as a two-way relationship between the state and immigrants does not reflect on-the-ground practices in which intermediary organizations and civil-society groups

play central roles in shaping paths for immigrant political empowerment. Immigration and immigrant policy outcomes often do not reflect their objectives. States are then forced to revise their policies and, in cases in which international and domestic actors – including immigrant groups – exert pressure on the state, enact significant reforms. These revisions and reforms further institutionalize the limits and possibilities of immigrant politics by expanding (or constricting) alien rights, stabilizing (or destabilizing) foreign legal status, and shaping incentives for political engagement that can affirm or contest the official model of immigrant incorporation.

Intermediary organizations – in the forms of local state and nonstate institutions as well as mainstream and coethnic civil-society organizations – shape the political learning environment for immigrants and the paths for their political engagement in three central ways. First, prior activism by immigrant advocacy groups establishes the blueprint for subsequent movements by demonstrating the strengths and weaknesses of specific political strategies, such as lobbying, litigation, and protests, and by prioritizing the issues concerning immigrant communities. Established advocacy groups, furthermore, create networks of central actors who continue to play important roles in subsequent movements. These groups are also often the “training ground” for future generations of immigrant activists. Second, immigrant advocacy groups and local institutions provide resources that influence the direction of immigrant political engagement. Mainstream and coethnic civil-society organizations, for example, often provide immigrants with consultation services that shape the ways in which immigrants act on their grievances. Advocacy organizations can play a pivotal role in an immigrant’s decision to either privatize social conflict – through prayer or mediation, for instance – or make public claims in the courts or on the streets. Likewise, state and nonstate institutions may influence an immigrant’s decision to naturalize by providing information and assistance in the naturalization process, or they may encourage immigrants to voice their interests specifically as foreign residents through the establishment of foreign-resident assemblies and councils. Finally, the ideas that emerge out of early immigrant advocacy shape the ways that subsequent generations of immigrants, civil-society actors, and, at times, state officials approach immigrant political empowerment. These ideas form the basis for an immigrant group’s collective identity,



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Erin Aeran Chung

Excerpt

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9

including the ways that they represent themselves in the public sphere, as immigrants, hyphenated minorities, or foreign-resident citizens, for example, and may set the agenda for immigrant claims making as well as state policies regarding immigrants. Accordingly, by examining the interactive relationship between state policies, intermediary organizations, and immigrant groups, this book aims to provide insights into the gaps among immigrant policy intent, interpretation, and outcomes.

## THE PROBLEM OF IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION

Although the Japan case is unique in some ways, it is also emblematic of most immigrant incorporation regimes in contemporary democracies. None have actually resolved the so-called immigrant incorporation problem, which is evident in low naturalization rates, vast economic disparities, and racial and ethnic tensions. Given the history of Germany's restrictive citizenship policies until the implementation of major reforms in 2000, it should not come as a surprise that foreign residents in Germany have exhibited low rates of naturalization. Five years after the 2000 reform, the rate of naturalization in Germany was less than 2 percent of the total foreign population (SOPEMI 2007). Even in Britain, however, where immigrants are seemingly well integrated politically, immigrants and minorities engaged in violent forms of protest as often and sometimes even more than those in Germany between 1990 and 1995 (Koopmans and Statham 2000). Similarly, Jane Junn's (1999) study of racial minority political participation in the United States found that protesting was the only pattern of political activity in which racial minority groups outpaced whites. Although many have heralded the Swedish system of immigrant incorporation as an ideal model of multiculturalism, those with an immigrant background – regardless of nationality – are most at risk of unemployment and least likely to engage in active citizenship (Soininen 1999).

Scholars of immigration commonly describe immigrant incorporation as a necessary process for social and political stability. First, there is the real and imagined connection between the alien and the subversive. We generally assume that the more integrated the immigrant, the less likely that he or she will commit an act that threatens national security and public tranquillity (despite evidence that contradicts this assumption). Second, the rapid influx of immigrants from

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diverse ethnocultural backgrounds can be perceived as a potential threat to notions of a stable national identity and way of life (Rudolph 2003; Weiner 1993). Public resentment based on this perception is reflected in discriminatory policies and practices toward immigrants, community tensions, and violence. Likewise, the effects of political and social marginalization on the immigrant population – in areas such as education, employment, criminal justice, legal rights, health, living conditions, and civic participation – are potentially destabilizing for the receiving society. Finally, for putatively democratic states, the long-term exclusion of a significant fraction of the population from the rights and duties of full citizenship is untenable. The contradictions inherent in having a population of permanent residents who pay taxes, benefit from social services, and otherwise participate in the host civil society but remain disenfranchised threaten the political stability of liberal democracies.

The concept of immigrant incorporation has undergone significant changes in the scholarship on immigration and citizenship. Straight-line assimilation theory in early twentieth-century U.S. social scientific scholarship assumed that immigrant assimilation into the dominant society was inevitable. The current conception of incorporation implies a mutually constitutive relationship between the immigrant and the receiving society. Although immigrants adapt to the receiving societies, they also have a significant impact through a type of give-and-take process that ultimately results in the remaking of the immigrants and the receiving societies (DeWind and Kasinitz 1997: 1098). Rather than complete absorption, then, incorporation as it is used in the contemporary sense refers to a process of “becoming similar,” “or treating as similar” (Brubaker 2001: 534). Hence, the emphasis is on mutual acceptance and inclusion.

The failure of immigrant incorporation in contemporary democracies, however, suggests that this interactive model of immigrant incorporation has yet to emerge in practice. The French republican model of immigrant incorporation is contingent on a type of ethnic privatization that requires immigrants and their descendants to contain, sanitize, and, at times, neutralize their differences in the public sphere in a type of “color-blind integration” (Bleich 2001, 2003). Although the model’s stated aim is to assimilate immigrants into a nationally