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- The research environment and life at Waseda University

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"The Multicultural Society: Shinjuku City Strategy and Experience"

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Currently there are over 310,000 people living in Shinjuku Ward and about 10% of them are foreign residents. Shinjuku, established as a post station in the Edo period, has been the scene of numerous meetings and various exchanges since then. Especially today, a large number of people from the four corners of Japan and from around the world have come to Shinjuku to make it a truly multicultural place.

As of October 1st, 2008, there were 33,282 foreign residents in Shinjuku, accounting for 10.6% of the population. This proportion of foreigners is one of the highest in Japan, certainly the top in Tokyo. The foreign population is largely Korean (43.9%) and Chinese (29.3%), followed in order by French, Myanmar, and Filipinos. The number of foreign residents is large but the number of nationalities is large too: we host people from 117 countries around the world. It is no exaggeration to say that people from all around the world have come to Shinjuku. Therefore we have to think how the local residents communicate with these people of various nationalities.

When we began our multicultural work, it was necessary to identify the direction of our policy on foreign residents in Shinjuku Ward. We are working to promote the creation of a 'multicultural society' in which a great number of foreigners can live, work and participate. That is intended as one aspect of Shinjuku Ward's proactive nature, to be transmitted as a hearty message. In order to pursue this project, we have committed ourselves to the following three points:

- 1) Establishing an administrative division devoted exclusively to multicultural matters.
- 2) Providing a venue and opportunities for Japanese and non-Japanese to address their cultural differences and establish face-to-face relationships.
- 3) Assisting smooth communication.

The division currently in charge of these multicultural matters is the Culture, Tourism and International Affairs Division, originally established in April 2005. It publicizes the Ward's policies on non-Japanese residents and is the first contact point for requests and opinions related to foreign residents, and also serves as a comprehensive contact point for the addressing of issues which need to be treated as general governmental issues.

To create such a venue and opportunities, Shinjuku Multicultural Plaza was established in September 2005 in Kabuki Cho. The plaza is a facility of some 250 m², consisting of multi-purpose space, a reference and information corner, a Japanese language resource corner and a foreign resident assistance corner. Educational materials for the Japanese language resource corner, suggested by Japanese language teaching volunteers and teachers from the National Institute of Japanese Language, were purchased by Shinjuku Ward. Most afternoons volunteers and foreign residents use this corner freely for Japanese study and instruction. There were initially 700 monthly Plaza users; currently there are more than 2000.

In addition, lately Koreans who are learning Japanese have begun holding classes to teach Korean language and Korean culture. This is a welcome development on the stage of Shinjuku Multicultural Plaza. In such activities, students and teachers of language and culture are showing respect and understanding of each other's culture.

The Plaza is open from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. For clerical work at the Plaza reception desk, Waseda University sends international students, returnees and students who are learning foreign languages to operate the desk in three shifts. This arrangement is based on the Basic Agreement on Collaborative Interaction (協働連携に関する基本協定), concluded in March 2003. The purpose of this system of using Waseda student labor is to publicize the Plaza by word-of-mouth and to promote contact among students.

Working towards smooth communication, Shinjuku Ward provides Japanese language classes for adults in eight locations in the ward, supporting the Japanese language education of more than 300 people per year. In addition, this year we have started an evening Japanese class at the Plaza, at this time only once a week, providing a Japanese study opportunity for those who cannot take morning courses.

Furthermore, lately we are providing educational support for foreign children who need to improve their Japanese proficiency. Some of the children of foreign residents are living in a complicated environment. For example, while their parents are busy working until late in the evening, children who cannot speak Japanese spend a lot of time in game centers. Other children drop out of school because of their lack of Japanese. Still others belittle or fail to respect their parents because of their poor command of Japanese.

We also provide information about administration and lifestyle matters by means of public relations papers, living information papers and websites in foreign languages so as to support foreign residents until they gain a basic understanding of Japanese. Our websites are in Japanese, English, Chinese and Korean. These sites are accessed an average of 100,000 times per month. Even compared to other Shinjuku Ward websites, this number is quite remarkable. We do believe that a considerable number of foreign residents are collecting information in their own language in Shinjuku.

This year, we are in the process of creating a 'Life Start Book' through discussion with Network Liaison (ネットワーク連絡会) which consists of organizations, town assemblies and local residents who use the Plaza. This booklet presents basic guidelines for living in Japan. It will be given out at the foreign resident registration counter.

There is a need to establish means of communication for times of emergencies, disasters such as earthquake and fire, accidents and illness. If disaster should strike in the daytime, it can be expected that foreign residents could find themselves helping elderly Japanese in some areas. For this reason the Network Liaison created safety cards for emergencies. Simple phrases are written in several languages on the cards and people can simply point to phrases to communicate. In order to assist communication, not only government effort, but

also the continuing effort of each person who lives and works in Japan are essential. If foreign residents who have left Japan and gone back home or moved to another country could treat Japanese people outside Japan in the same friendly manner, this will help Japanese feel secure.

In this way we have been promoting the creation of a multicultural society; however, we also have encountered some issues which are rather more local in nature. Of course we must be aware that this is not limited to foreign residents but, for example, complaints about people who do not respect living rules such as those governing garbage disposal have been filed to the Ward. Likewise, there have been a number of complaints about matters such as illegal construction of restaurants, illegal advertising on the streets, and illegally parked bicycles. Such issues tend to be seen as particularly related to short-term foreign residents; after such people have left Japan, people of the same nationality in the area might be criticized, or be the unfortunate victims of ill repute.

On the contrary, there have been cases where some people ignored the rules for garbage disposal and even after posters explaining the rule in several languages were put up, no progress was seen. Some official stood watch, and it turned out that more Japanese people were breaking the garbage rule than foreign residents.

It is important to eliminate misunderstandings or misconceptions resulting from the lack of a common language or from the lack of direct personal contact. Regardless of nationality, it is necessary to take strong measures in response to illegal actions. Ignoring such actions can hinder the healthy lifestyle of the community, or lead to an atmosphere of distrust or discrimination. Since there have been various problematic cases regarding single-person households and transients, we should take a persistent approach to each case to resolve the issues.

In order to understand the nature of this situation, we conducted a fact-finding multicultural society survey in 2007, based on a survey carried out in 2003. This time, we devised ways to get an accurate picture of the real nature and needs of local residents, and to hear from both Japanese and non-Japanese. We compared the survey results with those of the last survey and examined the Ward's past approach. The outcome of this survey will be valuable in future work

to promote a healthy multicultural society.

So far our approach to the creation of a multicultural society has been aimed at foreign residents, but we should also look towards work on the Japanese resident side as well.

Japan is an island society and used to be very sensitive towards non-Japanese. Now it is not at all unusual to spot foreign residents on the streets of Shinjuku, and Japanese people have little sense of discomfort when they see them. However, when we coexist in the same community, there can be difficulties. We should not be hasty in our work to create a multicultural society. Time is needed to understand each other, and to take care of the feelings of Japanese residents who have been living here for a long time.

The basis for the creation of a multicultural society must be the local community. The most important thing is to share feelings of 'resident consciousness' among those living in the community and to foster a wish among all residents to improve their beloved home area.