

Considering Immigrant Incorporation Programs in Japan: A Case of Russian-Speaking Marital Immigrants

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As most countries of recent immigration, Japan has faced new challenges in the last two decades. The migrant population grew by 65 percent in 1990's, and surpassed the 2 million mark by 2005. Although permanent and long-term residents enjoy many extended social welfare and citizenship benefits, the needs of new-comers still have been largely unaddressed.

Although Japan has preserved the closed-door policy for immigration, recent research argue for the necessity of greater incorporation of foreigners. The UN Population Division (2000) estimates that Japan will have to further admit approximately 647,000 immigrants every year simply to maintain the size of the current working population. On the other hand, Liaw et al. (2010) indicate that being a pioneer of aged societies, Japan is burdened not only with the decline of labour force, but also with an even more serious shortage of domestic labour including care labour. In this respect it is important to investigate the new ways of incorporation for immigrants, and marital immigrants, in particular.

My research is based on five-year field study among Russian-speaking immigrant community in Japan, most of who are female marital immigrants. In this paper I propose to reconsider the following aspects of immigrant integration policy.

National Japanese-Language Training Courses: It is important to adopt national-level programs of immigrant incorporation, including professional language training. There are similar programs, institutionalized by local authorities. However, these programs employ only volunteer (not professional) language teachers; they do not provide satisfactory level of training – reading and writing; they do not provide the nationally-acknowledged certificate that can be useful for further employment in Japan.

Employment support: Further, I suggest adopting programs, providing support for foreigners' professional employment. Professional employment is not only related to higher self-esteem and independence, it also helps to extend social networks and provides access to local communities, and therefore, is related to better social incorporation.

Alternative channels for marital migration: The data of my research confirm the fact that contemporary immigration policy accelerates the time of cross-national marriages. Twenty-nine of 109 couples (25%) registered their marriage within 4 months, and other 33 couples within one years after the first encounter. It puts additional risks on cross-national marriage. It is important to institutionalize other channels for marital migration alternative to brokered marriage and the

so-called marriage with entertainers to avoid hasty marriages, for example, longer working contracts for foreign female labourers.

Faster access to long-term resident status: Foreign spouses in Japan have to wait from 3 to 5 years in average to get a long-term resident status. Before that they are dependent on their husbands, who actually guarantee wives' legal status. This results in power imbalance in the family, when women cannot negotiate their life strategies openly.

Dual citizenship for foreign spouses: According to Chung (2010), Japan suffers low naturalization rates of settled foreigners. Of 91 respondents in my study, 62 respondents (66%) stated they do not intend to naturalize. With the extended social rights for permanent residents, most of them do not feel they would benefit from naturalization (29%). The requirement to reject the former citizenship is another obstacle (30%). To fully incorporate marital immigrants it is important to establish the dual-citizenship alternative for foreign spouses.