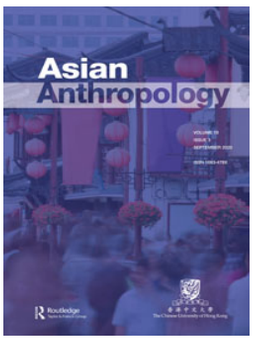

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Multiculturalism in a "homogeneous" society from the perspectives of an intercultural event in Japan

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I demonstrate how long-term multigenerational minorities and Japanese residents engage in the current socio-political discourse of "multicultural coexistence" society (*tabunka-kyōsei shakai*), which had not previously been integral to the vocabulary of national rhetoric in Japan until the 2000s. I argue that the lack of clear definition and goals of multicultural coexistence by the current Japanese government generates obstacles in the attempt to build a multicultural society. While local municipalities' programs, such as multilingual services and lifestyle support, are certainly needed, long-term foreign residents with linguistic and cultural competence are suspicious of the concept of multicultural coexistence due to their own embodied marginalized positions. Taking a local municipality's intercultural event as a point of reference, this paper explores how long-term minority residents perceive their positions at the crossroads of seemingly paradoxical forces of multicultural trends and an ongoing national identity founded upon ethnic homogeneity.

KEYWORDS

Japan; "multicultural coexistence" society; community initiatives; Korean minority

The end of an intercultural event

I have been an organizing committee member of an annual intercultural event in the city of Akahashi for several years,[1] an event that has been held for over two decades. The city is located in the Kansai region in western Japan. The original purpose of the event was "to hold an opportunity for foreign and Japanese residents to interact with each other, to respect each other's cultural or ethnic differences, and to enhance solidarity among residents on equal terms as the members of the local community" (Tomoni 2015, 5). The committee consists of 11 residents with roots in China and the Korean Peninsula, regardless of their citizenship, and Japanese residents. The committee has believed that intercultural events will increase the awareness of Japanese community members towards minority populations, reducing skepticism toward foreign residents and their cultures by the Japanese mainstream (see Yoshitomi 2008). At the event, foreign and Japanese residents interact and present cultural artifacts, food, music, and dance to the public, and various ethnic groups can mingle. The city's

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involvement in this event had been limited to being the primary sponsor of the event, and managing the entire project was entrusted to the organizing committee, which consisted of resident volunteers. Recently, however, the procedure has been closely monitored by the city administration.

The city's effort in promoting a multicultural community was partially motivated by the citizens' wish for reconciliation with its history, particularly related to its long-term Korean residents. During Japan's occupation of Korea (1910 to 1945), many Korean workers were deployed to the city as construction workers for developing the infrastructure of Imperial Japan. Korean ghettos developed from communal kitchens that were placed right next to the construction sites, and these ghettos remained long after the end of the Pacific War. In the 1980s, some residents were moved to public housing, but the city's housing plans were only finalized in the late 2000s, 60 years after the Pacific War ended. Some Korean residents in the city expressed concerns about the disappearance of the ghettos, indicating that the removal of the physical sites would erase the history of Japan's colonization of Korea. Others commented that the housing plan was yet another "way to control Korean residents."

The volunteering spirit for citizens' cooperation and support (see Avenell 2010) was strong in Akahashi-city, especially after the devastation caused by the Great Hanshin Earthquake in Kansai in 1995, which resulted in 6,400 casualties and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of structures. During the recovery phase, ethnic tensions between Japanese and non-Japanese residents eased in many cities in Kansai, as residents supported one another in their efforts to rebuild their towns and neighborhoods (e.g. Takezawa 2008). In the spirit of interethnic cooperation, Akahashi-city started this annual intercultural event in 1996. Due to its historical background, the city regarded this event as a way to improve interethnic relations, and so it embraced this opportunity.

One day, all the committee members were invited to the city hall for a meeting advertised as an "information session." At the meeting, we learned that this meeting was in fact a venue for an official announcement of the city's decision to terminate the event. The head of the organizing committee—Mr. B., a political activist in his sixties and a second-generation Korean resident who had been involved in this city event since its inception—was the first to learn about the city's intent. In the room, the seating was set up as if the city administration was trying to overwhelm the committee members by outnumbering them. All the administrators were lined up at the front of the room in dark suits, presenting an intimidating display to enforce their agenda while the group of city councilors listened to the session at the back of the room. By "reading the atmosphere" (*kūki o yomu*), as the Japanese would say, I saw that the mood was solemn and hostile by design. The committee members soon learned that the city's strategy was to antagonize the committee members. During the session, the committee members, especially Japanese members, repeatedly confronted the city administrators by saying, "This antagonistic mood you are creating is awful! Why does it have to be like this?"

One of the committee members loudly raised his voice at one of the administrators who was presenting the city's decision: "Why, for what purpose, for whom, have you been sponsoring the event?" The administrator replied in a subdued tone: "The city

has no intention to support minority populations … The purpose of the event was to raise awareness … to show Akahashi citizens (*shimin*)[2] that there exist foreign residents." Her statement immediately reminded me of Japanese people's common perception of their own population—"the binary and distinct categories of Japanese and foreigners; everyone is either one or the other" (Lie 2001, 48; cf. Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008). In the administrator's statement, "foreign residents" were not in the definition of "Akahashi citizens," and the event was designed for "Akahashi citizens." The concept of minorities that exist "outside" of Japanese national identity (see Tai 2009) was crystalized in this statement. "Foreign residents" in Akahashi-city are, as in other municipalities in Japan, taxpayers and contributing members of the community. The event's original slogan, "intercultural solidarity," had deteriorated into "the spectacle of foreign cultures for Japanese citizens," as the administrator implied (see Hage 1998, 118).

As some committee members noted, the city did not give the real reasons for the termination. However, reading the atmosphere and speculating from interviews I had had with city administrators in the past, I concluded that the city was trying to distance itself from Korean residents' initiatives. As the largest minority group of the city is Korean (over 52% of registered foreigners, not including those Koreans who obtained Japanese citizenship), the presentations of Korean cultural artifacts, food, music, and dance performances occupied half of all the displays and stage performances. However, the committee continued to closely follow the city's minority residents' cultural backgrounds—such as those of Brazilians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Romanians, Nepalese, and Okinawans.[3] I did not know if this sudden decision had anything to do with the central government's influence. While some interpret Prime Minister Abe's political ideology as nationalist (Abe, 2006), others argue against Japan's rightward turn (e.g. Berkshire Miller 2014; Doak 2013). Many Akahashi-city community members and minority residents in the region would associate Akahashi-city's attempt to terminate this event with the political leaning of the Abe administration. One of the committee members, a long-term volunteer, noted tearfully after the meeting: "It's just like the national government. The far-right force is coming here to Akahashi, too."

Background

In this article, I show how long-term multigenerational minorities and Japanese residents engage with the current socio-political discourse of *multicultural coexistence society* (*tabunkakyōsei shakai*) that had not previously been part of the vocabulary of national rhetoric in Japan prior to the 2000s. This article explores how individuals struggle with the ambiguity of concepts such as "multicultural coexistence" and "multiculturalism." Individuals' experiences are affected by not only the intensifying consciousness of multiculturalism (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008) but also by the premature notion of it in the context of contemporary Japan (Nagy 2015b). I argue that the current Japanese government's reluctance to clearly define the goals of multicultural coexistence generates obstacles to building such a society. This is especially problematic since Japan maintains monoethnic homogeneity as its national identity. Historically, the Japanese archipelago witnessed various peoples' movements and racial/ethnic demographics (Lie 2001; Morris-Suzuki 1998; Weiner 2009b). However, the

issue here is not demographic diversity per se but how this diversity has been perceived or ignored by the majority of Japanese people and how the contemporary ideology of multiculturalism can be applied to the Japanese socio-political context.

I am interested in exploring how minority individuals perceive their position at the crossroads of seemingly paradoxical forces of multicultural trends and an ongoing national identity founded upon ethnic homogeneity. Recent scholarly attention has been directed toward Japan's efforts to improve its internationalization process through local communities' initiatives to build what the country labels as a "multicultural coexistence" society (*tabunkakyōsei shakai*) (e.g. Yamaguchi 2013; Yamanaka 2015; Yoshitomi 2008). Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu (2008), however, focus less on policy-makers' perspectives on internationalizing Japan and instead illustrate the day-to-day realities of Japan at transcultural borders of communities that consist of individuals who live in a multicultural context. Studies such as those by Kudo (2015), Ueunten (2015), and Yamashita (2015), demonstrate transcultural experiences and identity transformations of individuals who flow with the diasporic forces from Japan to other places, such as Malaysia, Pakistan, Hawai'i, and South America. The mixes and flows of people and their familiarities, ideals, and imagination are all potential driving forces of Japan in the internationalization process.

The cases presented here are individuals' experiences at the forefront of prescribing a diversity-friendly community in Japan. Despite the positive connotations associated with the concept of liberal multiculturalism, I have observed skepticism surrounding the idea of "multiculturalism in Japan," particularly among multigenerational foreign residents such as oldcomer Koreans.[4] There are numerous studies on the marginalized positions of Korean residents, both in Japanese and English (e.g. Field 1993; Fukuoka and Tsujiyama 1991; Lee and De Vos 1981; Mizuno and Mun 2015; Nakajima 1995; Ryang 2000; Suh 2002); however, studies that explore experiences of the Korean and Japanese residents who directly deal with the paradox of multiculturalism in a "homogenous" Japan in the context of community initiatives are rather scarce. This article examines this missing link that limits residents' anticipation of a symbiotic society.

I present two categories of data based on my ethnographic work as a committee member of Akahashi-city's intercultural event and a volunteer worker/participant in cultural initiatives among Korean communities in the Kansai region. The examples from Akahashi's event are designed to contextualize the environment in which long-term Korean residents have difficulty promoting diversity. The data demonstrate how Koreans observe the mainstream's attachment to ethnic homogeneity, while the government promotes the idea of pluralism. For this reason, I also include the data I collected from my participation in the city's intercultural event. It will be obvious that the residents' efforts to achieve an undefined goal of building a multicultural society is often in the context of an "homogeneous society," and this generates various degrees of confusion, skepticism, and frustration among Japanese and non-Japanese residents about the national government's vision.

Since the 1980s, Japan has been witnessing an increase in the number of foreign workers; however, the proportion of foreign residents is still small. The data published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIAC) and Ministry of Justice

suggest that the foreign population accounted for less than 3% of the total population of Japan in 2018. However, this figure does not include illegal foreign residents. Individuals in the "non-Japanese" category who obtained Japanese citizenship and indigenous minorities such as Ainus and Okinawans are also not included in the figure.

The term *tabunkakyōsei* or multicultural coexistence has been widely used since the central government officially introduced a national program (the Plan) that coordinated regional governments to establish services catering to new foreign residents and to encourage local governments to adopt internationalization initiatives in 2006.[5] In the Plan, multicultural coexistence is defined as "people of different nationalities or ethnicities respecting each other's differences and living on equal terms with Japanese as members of a local community" (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2006). However, the importance of the Plan lies in the negotiations between local governments, which deal with the day-to-day challenges that foreign and Japanese residents face, and the central government, which is reluctant to promote policies related to foreign residents (Aiden 2011, 213). In the case of Akahashi-city, the historical background of the city prompted the municipality to deal with Korean residents long before Japan had even considered the concept of internationalization.

One of the driving forces for the national government's initiative was to "coordinate local government activities" (Aiden 2011, 215) in the area of services provided to deal with new foreign residents. At the same time, such an initiative by the central government was conceptualized and introduced to the nation as being aligned with the consciousness of the globalization phenomenon and with the country's internationalization process. Since the introduction of the Plan, the services provided by local governments—with the help of nonprofit organizations (NPOs), grassroots groups, and volunteering initiatives—have usually focused on a range of support and services for immediate matters. While local municipality programs, such as multilingual services and lifestyle support, are certainly important in the effort to integrate foreign residents, those who are native Japanese speakers, such as pre-Pacific War immigrants and former colonial subjects and their descendants, tend to be suspicious of the concept of multicultural coexistence due to their own embodied marginalized positions.

In April 2019, Japan's new immigration reform began. The most significant aspect of this reform is for Japan to officially open its door to low- and semi-skilled workers. Japan expects 345,000 workers over the next five years. Considering Japan's shrinking population, the number of incoming workers is expected to rise. Despite the significant number of illegal workers in the 1980s, the Japanese government continued to be reluctant to deal with immigration policy until it finally adjusted its strategy to obtain cheap labor under a highly controversial program called the Technical Intern Training Program in the 1990s. By maintaining its façade of stringent immigration policy, Japan let in many foreign workers as "trainees," often without real prospects of training or education, and the country's needs for basic labor was often met by foreign workers whose visas were limited to three years under the former backdoor policy. Today, local communities where legal and illegal workers and immigrants tend to concentrate have been dealing with various issues related to foreign residents, from

day-to-day matters to more complex legal issues related to the education of unregistered children, visa overstayers' social services, and medical care.

As many studies have suggested (e.g. Lee and De Vos 1981; Lie 2001; Ryang 2000; Tai 2009; Weiner 2009b), the very existence of minorities used to be difficult to draw attention to in Japanese society, in which racial homogeneity has been the widely accepted national ideology since 1950s postwar Japan. Weiner (2009a, xvi) succinctly stated, "The social construction of 'self' in Japan has always presumed the existence of its opposite, the excluded 'other,' against whom notions of Japanese homogeneity and purity could be measured." This self-other dichotomy may seem like a cliché as a point of departure. However, the ways in which individuals negotiate the dichotomy illuminate the starting point of co-constructing a multicultural society.

Multiculturalism in a Japanese context

Multiculturalism is a relatively new concept in Japan. Nagy (2014) argues the importance of reinterpreting Western ideology such as multiculturalism within a country's historical context and interests when applying it to East Asia (2014, 161). The Japanese interpretation of multiculturalism corresponds to the country's internationalization process—which began in the 1980s when Japan became increasingly conscious of the globalization phenomenon. The government introduced a series of efforts to "improve the image of Japan overseas" (Graburn and Ertl 2008, 3). The most eloquent forms of this applied multiculturalism might be *tabunkakyōsei* or "many cultures living together" (Graburn and Ertl 2008, 8) and "multicultural coexistence" (Nagy 2008) or "living on equal terms with normal Japanese" (Befu 2006, 7). The intended audience of the 2006 multicultural coexistence plan was both the internal audience (i.e. the local governments) and, to a lesser degree, the general public and the international community, the latter of which has continuously criticized Japan for its closed policies in the areas of trade, immigration, and compromised human rights for its minority populations. Unlike some established multicultural societies—Canada, the US, Australia, and the UK—foreign nationals represent a small proportion of the total population in Japan, and Japanese society's tendency to form a group identity makes it difficult to integrate foreign residents into the society (Nagy 2014, 162).

The Japanese government's 2006 plan has been viewed as "a pragmatic administrative effort to mitigate the growing real and perceived stresses caused by a growing number of foreign residents" (Nagy 2015a, 2). The Plan emerged as a result of some key developments: (1) labor shortages in the unskilled sector in the 1980s and 1990s attracted many foreign workers, such as visa overstayers, despite Japan's closed immigration policy; (2) the reluctance of the central government to address issues raised by the influx of foreign residents pressured the local governments to work on initiatives and policies to handle day-to-day matters affecting foreign residents; and (3) the central government's attempt to regain control of the actions of the local governments by coordinating initiatives and policies pertaining to foreign residents (Aiden 2011, 213–214). Japan's demographic crisis, created by aging and low fecundity, fundamentally advanced the plan. However, Japan officially maintained its position as a state with a stringent immigration policy, particularly in regard to unskilled laborers (Menju

2018). Nevertheless, there was and continues to be much skepticism surrounding this plan. *Oldcomers*, who have been in Japan for generations, feel they are more entitled to public services and benefits than *newcomers*. Oldcomers who were (or still are) excluded from pension funds, medical care, and suffrage distrust this new internationalization attempt by the government. The self-other dualism (Weiner 2009a, xvi) in Japanese society may be manifested in visible examples, such as "the continued disingenuous and acerbic nature of naturalization requirements and the lack of recognition of ethnic schools; numerous cases of 'Japanese only'" (Nagy 2008, 34); a ban from accessing certain positions/occupations, such as managerial positions and public service employment; and difficulties in accessing elderly care and housing. From the central government's perspective, public services that cater to new arrivals are a delicate matter, since oldcomers, who endured discrimination and suffering historically, may raise unresolved matters and demand that the central government compensate them for their past mistreatment.

The idea of multiculturalism, as such, is integral to the image of an "international Japan" as a significant player in the globalized world. It also gives the impression that diversity is something *new* to Japan, although the reality proves otherwise. What strikes one as *new* is perhaps Japan's slow but sure adjustment to the way of managing *the reality of ever-intensifying diversity*, which is repackaged in the form of "a new international Japan."[6] It is also a process of managing Japan's own skepticism and fear toward the unknown (cf. Sheftall 2015).

The specifics of the program will not be discussed in this paper; extensive discussions of the Plan are available in various scholarly works (e.g. Aiden 2011; Nagy 2008, 2015a). The content of the Plan focuses on the following areas: (1) offering public services and media in multiple languages; (2) helping foreigners in the areas of housing arrangements, everyday know-how of life in local communities, education and language support, labor protection, medical services, and evacuation procedures in case of natural disasters; and (3) helping to build multicultural communities by increasing awareness, cultural sensitivity, and providing opportunities for intercultural exchanges (MIAC 2006). This plan was implemented to create an inclusive society by bridging the chasms between foreign and Japanese residents. However, the roles of foreign and Japanese residents are not discussed in the Plan (Nagy 2008, 23–24). It suffices to state here that the program was built on the concept of "coexistence" or a "symbiotic society" that proves to be highly ambiguous since it embodies the "absence of a clear goal, direction, and policy guidelines" without specifying "what [living on equal terms with Japanese] should mean and accomplish" (Befu 2006, 8).

Some scholars have argued that "cultural pluralism is situational and articulated differentially throughout Japan" (Graburn and Ertl 2008, 9). Indeed, small-scale opportunities for exchange, in which Japanese and foreign residents cross each other's boundaries, are perhaps the most personal and reliable platforms for interethnic dialogues to take place. However, these efforts also prove that persistent prejudice is difficult to eliminate (e.g. Yamaguchi 2013; Yamanaka 2008; Lee and Han 2006; Murphy-Shigematsu 2006b). As part of the initiative that was motivated by the Plan, a municipality takes up a project to "situationally" internationalize its community (i.e. engage in a project that signifies the efforts of international exchange and builds a local

identity through taking part in such projects) (e.g. Ertl 2008). However, in the context of multiculturalism as an ideology built within the long-term context of Japan's historical development, effects, and visions, it is not the multiplicity of international exchange that makes Japan multicultural, inclusive, or international. Rather, what matters is how these individual situations can cumulatively and collectively influence all of society in a coherent and consistent way.

Context through oldcomer Koreans' lenses

The Koreans residing in Japan are predominantly descendants of Korean colonial subjects and prewar immigrants who remained in Japan. Some Koreans I met possessed permanent resident status in Japan, but the vast majority had not obtained Japanese citizenship.[7] The ethnographic data presented in this article are drawn from my fieldwork among Korean communities in the Kansai region, including Osaka and Kobe in 2017 and from 2018 to 2019 on several occasions. The main research intent was to explore how Koreans conceptualize their identities in contemporary Japan. Although my main research focus deals with Korean communities in Kansai, the scope of this paper also includes Akahashi-city's "citizens' initiative" within the frame of a community-level initiative. I examined these Korean communities and the community of Akahashi-city's volunteers through participant observation, semi-structured open-ended interviews, and discussions with individuals with whom I became acquainted through participation in volunteer work, meetings, symposia, events, and seminars.

Many first-generation residents hold a strong sense of belonging to their imagined home, the Korean Peninsula, even though they have no concrete plans to return "home." They are a disappearing generation: many of them are in their 80s and 90s. These Koreans experienced extreme hardship, including starvation, homelessness, exploitation, poverty, assaults, and abuse. The second-generation residents were born and grew up in Japan, and they speak Japanese as their native language. Many of them express their own struggles with divided self-identities. Growing up in poverty in segregated areas, many second-generation Koreans feel bitter about their own ethnicity. The hybridity or fluidity of "Japaneseness" and "Koreanness" as coexisting dispositions within the self do not sit well with the second generation, since they grew up in postwar Japan, where they were identified as "racialized others" who stand outside monoethnic Japanese identity. As a result, many choose to disguise their Korean ethnicity by using Japanese aliases to "pass" as Japanese in everyday life (Fukuoka and Tsujiyama 1991). It is often said that second-generation Koreans represent the most conflicted group in terms of their torn and distorted perceptions of their own ethnic identities (see Kang 2004; Tei 2001). Second-generation youths during the 1960s lived through the torn identities of a divided Korea. This was a period of political change: the Security Treaty between Japan and the United States was being revised, Japan and South Korea were beginning a diplomatic relationship, and North Korea was recruiting Koreans in Japan to join their nation. The rise of socialist movements among youth in Japan in the late 1960s created a sense of volatility. Influenced by the international climate of political movements

supporting minorities and human rights, the second generation also fought against injustice and the unfair treatment imposed upon them in Japan (Mizuno and Mun 2015, 183–84).

The third-generation residents are said to have the widest age span: some are closer to second-generation Koreans. This group was born and grew up when Japan was expanding economically and positioning itself as one of the largest economies in the world. Despite the system of exclusion, the benefits of economic growth extended to some Koreans in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s. This was a time when Japan searched for its national identity, and mainstream Japan indulged itself with a popular discourse on its typological "Japaneseness" (*Nihonjinron*) that dominated mass media.[8] This essentialization of Japanese ethnicity furthered the creation of ethnic others, and discrimination against Koreans and other newly arrived foreign workers intensified. Different challenges confronted the third generation. The self-nihilistic practice of "passing" as a Japanese person often became a topic of conflict with their parents' generation. The ideological characterizations of their ethnicities became sources of struggle, as this was also the period in which Cold War tensions strengthened.[9] At the same time, this generation seemed to be more pragmatic about its existing hybridity and fluidity than previous generations.

Considering the issues related to community-level activism and initiatives from the perspectives of oldcomer Koreans provides some important insights. This article's focus is not *on* Korean communities but *from* Korean communities' perspectives on the aspect of what Japan is still cultivating in the process of its internationalization. This also entails the positioning of Korean communities within a diverse minority group in Japan. Koreans are the largest minority group in Japan. In some municipalities in the Kansai region, which already has an above average proportion of Korean residents, Koreans account for 80% of registered foreign residents.[10] Because of oldcomer Koreans' familiarity with Japan, as a Korean resident stated, they are "ahead of everybody else among the minority populations, and [they] know how to deal with the Japanese." This is not to say that Korean communities are homogenous—quite the contrary. Chapman (2008) conducted a comprehensive analysis of Korean communities in Japan. He stated that the complexity of Korean identities in Japan is not clearly understood when powerful binaries, such as "Korea and Japan, North and South Korea, colonizer and colonized," generational differences, and gender tend to essentialize them (Chapman 2008, 5). My observations indicated that Korean communities in Japan are also diversifying just as Japanese society is. Notably, their focus is not only on their own communities. Koreans with whom I worked were aware of their positions within the larger context of minority populations in Japan, and they seemed to acknowledge an embodied distinction between oldcomer Koreans and newcomers of various ethnic backgrounds.

Oldcomer Koreans are native Japanese speakers and are highly aware of the codes of conduct in Japan. This gives them an important edge in negotiating and working with Japanese residents in the project directed toward building a multicultural society. If the meaning of coexistence is specifically interpreted in the symbiotic sense, rather than in the sense of parallel existence, as in the cases of the UK and the Netherlands

(Phillips 2007, 6–8), oldcomer Koreans' skills and knowledge of Japan are vital in co-constructing a community with Japanese residents.

Also, oldcomers' perspectives and reflections on the concepts of nationality, ethnicity, and identity represent important insights that can be shared with the general public since this knowledge stimulates a reflection on the aforementioned concepts by the Japanese mainstream—which may not be ill-intended but remains uninformed about these concepts. Since Koreans in Japan constantly occupy themselves with these issues, they also understand their complexity. Due to the consciousness of their ethnicity in a marginalized position, they realize the incongruity of their own Japanese familiarity and Korean foreignness within themselves. This incongruity does not necessarily match with their nationality and legal status or their family members' political orientation. Many average Japanese citizens are unaware that many Korean residents still do not have access to pension funds and some social benefits and that they have limited access in the areas of employment, housing, and education, despite their long-term residence and history in Japan. The attempt to raise awareness and share historical knowledge with the mainstream—which is often censored in Japanese mainstream media, social platforms, and education—would contribute to reducing discrimination against Koreans in Japanese society (cf. Itagaki 2015; Suk 2002). While taking ownership of their ethnicity by holding onto their nationality, oldcomers also wish to have equal status with their Japanese counterparts, and some people cynically describe their lives in Japan as a "comfortable inconvenience."

In addition, as some Korean residents say, their "accumulated knowledge as a survival guide over many years through many societal phases of Japan" is considerable, and this also applies to activism or politically driven initiatives. Because of their multigenerational sojourn in Japan, they have observed generational shifts within their communities, as well as the Japanese mainstream's reduced fear of Koreanness. Socialist movements both in the Korean Peninsula and Japan in the 1960s, the Cold War, the economic growth in Japan in the 1980s, the financial crisis in the 1990s, the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, the arrival of newcomer minority workers, and the growing conservative nationalist sentiment in recent decades—all have influenced their socio-political positions in Japan. Each event and period were different, but Korean residents reflected on their positions in relation to matters that confronted them in Japanese society and beyond. This is what they refer to as "knowledge and experience" that can potentially reveal what Japan has not dealt with in its aspiration for internationalization.

Culturally "well-integrated" oldcomers often observe the hybridity of Japaneseness and Koreanness within themselves, but the notion of hybridity as a valuable asset is still to be cultivated in contemporary Japan. The either-or discourse (Lie 2001, 48) persists, and an individual's hybridity remains difficult to be accepted at face value (e.g. Evanoff 2010; Osanami Tömgren 2017; Seiger 2019) by the Japanese mainstream. However, in this phase of ever-increasing diversity, there is a potential for oldcomers to gradually eliminate this rigid duality in the future. If such a day were to come, Japan would adjust to accommodating hybridity and diversity in its national identity.

The limitations of "situational internationalization"

I argue that the notion of multicultural coexistence in Japan is often too narrowly focused on situational internationalization (see Graburn and Ertl 2008, 9) in the forms of projects and events such as the intercultural event in Akahashi-city. This type of "intercultural exchange" is precisely what the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2006) stipulated in the Plan as one of the undertakings that local governments should support. Including communication assistance and lifestyle guidance that municipalities are supposed to offer, there is plentiful information on the type of services that would help foreign residents, from self-help initiatives to emergency evacuation in case of a disaster. However, this is accompanied by a noticeable absence of information on municipality-led initiatives that encourage residents to question and co-construct the ideology of multiculturalism in the context of Japanese society. This situationality of internationalization manifests itself in the form of manageable projects or events within a confined context that has a specific venue, time, and performativity. It is as if these services are commoditized into consumables without questioning the true purpose behind the services offered. This tendency has resulted in some residents thinking that multiculturalism is about providing services and undertaking projects without giving much thought to their impact.

The Ministry's definition of multicultural coexistence is so highly abstract that it is difficult for residents to grasp what a multicultural coexistence society would look like. Thus, this ambitious yet obscure ideal is transformed into smaller compartmentalized projects without being measured against the grand objective. Take the example of Akahashi-city's intercultural event—an event established in the post-earthquake spirit in Kansai in 1995–1996, where the interests of the residents were clearly defined as the rebuilding and recovery of the city with a clear idea of cooperation between minorities and Japanese residents (Tomoni 2015). However, it took more than 20 years for the central government to begin to coordinate and regulate the type of intercultural exchange to be provided. Since the nature of involvement and the roles of foreign and Japanese residents in the process of making a multicultural coexistence society remain undefined (Nagy 2008, 23–24), it creates a confusing picture for participants. Mrs. E., an Akahashi resident and a Japanese national who has been active in various intercultural projects sponsored by the city, is a well-meaning active citizen who would like to work toward a "multicultural coexistence" society. Due to the history of the city that involved colonial laborers, Korean ghettos, and ethnic tensions, it is her wish to contribute to various city events as a responsible citizen. After she learned about the city's decision to eliminate the intercultural event, she shared her reflection:

> I had to ask myself again: "What is the meaning of a 'multicultural coexistence' society?" I haven't thought about it carefully until now. It's because [the city's idea of the intercultural event] sounded like the main players of the event were *Japanese* citizens. It made me feel very confused. I thought it was meant for minority people.

Since the organizing committee's involvement is limited to the tasks related to the implementation of the event but not to the extent of discussing and promoting the idea of multiculturalism in different scenes in daily life, she realized that the city had a

great degree of control in regard to the content of the event. On the same note, the committee head, Mr. B., also shared the difficulties he experienced in past years:

> We tried a few times to politicize minority issues, especially from historical perspectives. But we immediately got a complaint from the city administration. We were told, "You should make it apolitical." We prepared panel displays to show some stories, comments, and photos. But they told us to remove them at once. Their explanation was, "Some people might get offended." That's why the event is held completely free of the historical context. But we are allowed to distribute flyers for other multicultural events or symposia related to some minority issues.

As the above comments and anecdotal example suggest, the city has been very careful not to politicize the event itself or cultivate any political activism that could result from the event. As the administrator's comment implied, after a few decades, the event indeed seemed to have changed into a spectacle of multicultural food and dance for the entertainment of Japanese citizens.

A situational interethnic encounter could theoretically influence a community in a positive way. Mr. S., a third-generation Korean who works at a North Korean affiliated school, survived the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. The damage caused to the neighborhood surrounding his school made a once familiar neighborhood unrecognizable. The school building was one of the few structures in the neighborhood left intact. As the school was pro-North Korea, the city government did not designate the school as a local residents' evacuation point. Out of courtesy, Mr. S. announced that his school would open its doors to the neighborhood, and people in need of shelter, food, and water slowly accepted the school's hospitality. Takezawa (2008) presented examples of person-to-person contacts during the recovery phase after the earthquake. Japanese and Koreans reached out and opened up to each other. As Mr. S. explained, it was quite unthinkable for many Japanese residents to set foot in the premises of a pro-North Korean school. After the initial contact, the school and the neighborhood organized neighborhood fairs for a few years. He regretted that the situation had not improved, as the distance between Japanese and Koreans resurfaced as time passed. After a while, the school began to receive threats and offensive remarks and was subjected to violent actions. As he stated, "It went back to where we earlier were." Thus, situational cooperation among individuals may not evolve into a spirit of multicultural coexistence, especially if the authorities or the local government do not persistently support such cooperation.

In the case of Akahashi-city, it seems that the city administration has gradually been attempting to censor the activities and contents of various initiatives, including this intercultural event. Since 2014, any form of "citizens' initiatives for the good of Akahashi citizens' lives" must first be submitted as an official proposal to the city, and each case must be approved by the administration. In cases where approval is granted, the city will advertise the proposed project and event to recruit volunteers, and each volunteer must sign a formal contract with the city, according to the city's regulations related to volunteering for activities. This cumbersome process prompted a comment from one of the committee members: "How can we secure the spontaneity of our activism?" This new requirement for an "application for initiative proposals"

implies that the city has begun to create a system with a high degree of scrutiny over its residents' political activities.

"Helplessness" and a defined "otherness"

I argue there is a hidden but inherent power relationship between the local government and minority groups, between local communities and minority groups, and between different minorities. It is as if the status within a power structure is evaluated on the degree of "helplessness" that an ethnicity represents. If Japan envisions a society that allows various peripheral groups to advocate for their interests and challenge the dominant hegemonic power structures (Turner 1993, 424–427), incorporating the "knowledge and experience" of long-term Korean residents seems to be an effective way for local governments to achieve this. However, oldcomers' familiarity with Japan—from many individuals' perspectives, including that of the local government—does not display enough "helplessness," as the following example suggests. Mrs. G., a third-generation Korean woman who is active in Korean women's initiatives, when I asked her about her thoughts on the Japanese government's multicultural plan, commented: "That type of initiative doesn't really apply to us [oldcomers]. Also, we have been here for a lot longer [than newcomers]. We should have more rights than these people … We are, in that sense, like the Japanese."

Growing up in Japan with her fellow Koreans and having camaraderie with Japanese, she is, as she described, "like the Japanese." To my question of whether she would be interested in helping new foreign immigrants advocate for their rights, she simply answered, "No." For her, advocating for her own people made sense, but she did not see the point in acting on behalf of communities that emerged from newcomers. In her statement, there is a sense of dualism between newcomers and oldcomers within a large scope of minority populations and between those who are "like the Japanese" and those who clearly display "helplessness" and "otherness" due to their short stay in Japan. The precarious notion of essentialized Japanese ethnicity is profound here, as she assumes "an inherently unequal social order where everyone theoretically occupied a place in an intricate galaxy of statuses … " (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 83). Considering her demonstration of convincingly "Japanese" features in a cultural, linguistic, and even phenotypical sense, I realized that multicultural interactions and cooperation require far more than various policies and superficial adjustments. There are many Japanese citizens who would support oldcomers' integration, and there are oldcomers who would advocate for other minority populations. Examples here are meant to indicate instances of such power structures that occasionally surface. As is the case in Yoshitomi's study, in which Brazilians' gradual financial independence and success increasingly alienated the host community's hospitality (2008, 78–79), in this research too there is evidence of a power structure that holds back multicultural coexistence. For example, the city administration of Akahashi enforced its power over Mr. B. to censor his attempts to raise historical awareness, as we saw.

If the aspiration for multicultural coexistence was simply a political scheme to obtain foreign workers to compensate for the labor shortage in Japan, then the concept of multiculturalism might indeed be no more than a political tool for managing

diversity (Phillips 2007, 19–20; see also Kymlicka 2015). Although multiculturalism originated as an attempt to decenter the hegemonic power that reproduces the existing institutional system (Turner 1993, 425), many states around the world maintain their political and institutional structures. Mr. Y., a Korean resident in his 40s who is active in promoting minorities' rights in the area of education in local communities, shared his frustration in this regard:

> I have nothing against newcomers … but honestly, I feel that we [oldcomer Koreans] are sidelined … It's as if they had solved the problems related to oldcomers. I talk all the time to the city's office [that deals with educational matters] … Every time, I get a new person in charge. These new guys don't have a clue about all the work we've been doing all these years. They shuffle around administrators. The last one I talked to was transferred from the department of waterworks. I know they do it on purpose. So, it slows down the process.

Japan's municipalities and government offices do not employ foreign residents. Foreign nationals do not have the right to vote in Japan, except for a very few local municipalities that allow their political participation. Therefore, from the point of view of influencing policies, it is quasi-impossible for foreign residents to have any tangible impact. The imbalance between the Japanese government's reluctance to incorporate minorities into the developmental process of an inclusive society and the eagerness of the government in offering infrastructures to attract new foreign workers triggers suspicions among oldcomer residents. This alludes to Ghassan Hage's analysis of Australian political rhetoric in which he compares multiculturalism in the Australian context to a socio-politically motivated international food and wine fair (Hage 1998). He demonstrates the unchanged power structure in which food samples from migrant cultures were neatly presented to indulge dominant white Australians (Hage 1998, 118). Hage (1998, 118) states that migrants were "[i]nitially securely positioned in the role of 'feeder' [in a host society]," but "migrants have increasingly become willing to be enriched themselves … It is this reality of the 'ethnic eater' that White multicultural fantasy tries to 'block.'" Similarly, I argue that the Japanese government perhaps perceives oldcomer Koreans' familiarity with Japan and their competence in making their way within Japanese society as a threat to the existing power structure and the national ideology.

Do we or do we not draw a line?

Considering Japanese colonial history, the debates between "assimilation" and "coexistence" complicate the credibility of the multicultural coexistence plan since they directly question the notions of citizenship, ethnicity, and nationality, especially in the context of a homogeneous national identity (see Oguma 2003; Chapman 2006; Lee et al. 2006; Murphy-Shigematsu 2006a; Tai 2004; Willis 2006). While many individuals in Japan are aware of the society's existing diversity, others show an expression of surprise when confronted by their own conceptualization of Japaneseness. One day, when the committee was finalizing its list of performances and food stands for Akahashi-city's event, the city administration raised a red flag: "If your goal is to let the citizens experience different cultures, we don't believe that Okinawan dance is 'foreign' dance. Okinawa is part of Japan; thus, Okinawan dance is Japanese …" In

the late 19th century, Japan annexed the Ryūkyū Kingdom and renamed the islands Okinawa. Okinawa has suffered culturally, economically, and socio-politically, and its complex history manifests in Okinawa's torn identities between its own ethnicity and Japan proper. After I suggested that the city administrator's comment had a colonialist connotation and briefly explained Okinawa's history, a Japanese woman stated, "I've never thought about Okinawa being a distinct culture as such." I expressed my thought that it would be fine to include Okinawan dance in the event as a distinct culture's performance, and I added, "I think there are many different ethnicities and cultures in Japanese society … Okinawa is just one of them." Then, she displayed a facial expression indicating her realization of the contradiction in her thoughts. The intercultural event's main purpose is to celebrate many cultures in Japanese society, yet those cultures were obviously separated from her idea of "Japaneseness." The cultural differences *within* Japanese society and the reality of diversity do not fit comfortably within the minds of those in the Japanese mainstream. A Korean resident commented about this: "I think that nationality as the base of categorization is the problem. People tend to think that nationality is ethnicity. But it's not like that…. People with Japanese nationality are not necessarily of the same ethnicity."

As discussed above, Japan's vague notions of race, nationhood, and ethnicity (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 87) still coexist with its homogeneous identity, even in its efforts to promote cultural diversity. The definition of "Japanese society," especially in light of multiculturalism, requires further exploration.

The value of preserving a minority's cultural identity is often countered by its potential for isolation (e.g. Menju 2017, 117; Phillips 2007, 6–8, 12; Turner 1993, 417). Yoshitomi (2008, 155) addressed the importance of building an inclusive community without isolating immigrants through the process of ghettoization by establishing self-help organizations. However, many third- to fourth-generation Korean women want to protect their children from being bullied or isolated in the mainstream school environment in which Japanese homogeneous ideology is openly taught (Apeuro 2018; Befu 2006). Many also believe that international or ethnic schools allow children to use their ethnic names and that their children are able to develop healthy self-esteem about their ethnicities in an environment that expects diversity. "Celebrating the differences" in the Japanese homogeneous context thus remains situational, and the public will only easily digest this if it is in a small dose.

Conclusion: "situational" to "enduring"?

As argued above, individuals' perceptions of the aspiration for a "multicultural coexistence" society still vary. Working within the opaque framework of the Japanese government's idea of multicultural coexistence generates confusion and frustration. However, the ambiguity of the definition also allows for the negotiation of who could benefit from a multicultural society. If community members were proud of the existing diversity and its unique potential for cultivating new values, communities might promote diversity as a positive asset of the community (cf. Yoshitomi 2008, 79).

Especially for newcomers, there are volunteers and NPOs that work with municipalities to offer language services in the areas of medical care, child education, and daily

life matters (e.g. Yamanaka 2008, 2015; Yoshitomi 2008). These citizens' efforts, which consist of volunteering and grassroots initiatives (Avenell 2010; Graburn, Ertl, and Tierney 2008; Kingston 2014), are readily praised as a sign of Japan's visible progress toward multiculturalism. However, initiatives alone do not change the consciousness of the Japanese mainstream toward multiculturalism. While the compartmentalized forms of support services tend to occupy a municipality's attention and volunteers' interests, multicultural initiatives are as relevant for minorities as for the mainstream. As demonstrated above, there is still a deep-rooted Japanese-versus-non-Japanese binary. This may mean that both the general public and minority populations should take part in the process of reflecting on the ideas of "coexistence," "communities," and "citizens." As one of my informants noted, "The concept of 'pure Korean' will not exist in the future. And we [Koreans] also must think about how to teach the concept of mixed ethnicities to our future generations." When and if minorities change their positions from being the recipients of services to becoming the contributors who influence norms from within, residents of Japan might finally carve out a vital and vibrant definition of "coexistence."

Notes

1. I employ pseudonyms for the city, individuals, and the event name to protect the identities of research participants.
2. The term *shimin* (civic members, or citizens) developed from postwar civic movements in Japan. It means politically conscious active membership in civic movements for the public good (see Avenell 2010). In Akahashi-city administrators' use, "citizens" often refer to "Japanese ethnic residents" who are Japanese nationals. The concepts of ethnicity and nationality are often perceived to be the same in Japan (see also endnote 4; Lie 2001, 48).
3. Okinawans are Japanese nationals; however, Akahashi-city had been honoring and celebrating Okinawa's distinct cultural artifacts in the intercultural event since its inception based on the wishes of the Okinawan community in the city.
4. The term "oldcomer" refers to Koreans, Taiwanese, and Chinese who have been living in Japan since the time of the Japanese imperialist expansion into neighboring regions. Indigenous minorities—such as Ainu, Okinawans, and Burakumin—are excluded from the term oldcomers, and are considered to be Japanese based on their nationality.
5. Alongside a 10-year review, regional cases of language services and successful projects based on nonprofit organizations (NPOs) initiatives were collected and published in 2017 (see Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2017).
6. See Lie (2001) and Menju (2017).
7. Lie's (2001, 45) description succinctly expressed the Japanese perspective of "Japaneseness": "The equation between the state, nation, and ethnicity (as well as class and culture) means that Japan is a distinctively homogeneous country."
8. *Nihonjinron* is a discourse on the Japanese and "Japaneseness" that became highly popular after the translation of Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* sold many copies in Japan.
9. A family's ideological orientation does not necessarily reflect the third or fourth generation's orientation. For example, parents may have a pro-North Korean orientation and their children may not. The Cold War and post-Cold War periods also differentiated individuals' ideological choices and the degree of fluidity among many possibilities.
10. This does not include people of Korean ethnic background who obtained Japanese citizenship.

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