Improving intercultural awareness: a challenging task for Japan

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Abstract

Traditionally, mainly due to geographical and historical reasons, the Japanese have regarded their country as an ethnically homogeneous nation. Recently, the Japanese government has begun to show a somewhat more positive attitude towards foreign immigrants. This is in large part due to the increasing pressure on the domestic economy and the society by the forces involved with the promotion of globalization. This study will try to clarify the ambiguity between the concepts of globalization and intercultural awareness. This will be done by highlighting the importance of strengthening intercultural awareness for the Japanese and also by explaining in detail the work which needs to be done to improve the living conditions of minority communities in Japan.

Keywords: Intercultural awareness, cultural identity, globalization, bilingual education, Japan

1. Introduction

What is globalization? An accurate definition is hard to come by because the concept itself is continuously evolving and means different things to different people. In general, though, it refers to a reordering of the global economy. The main focus is to generate a reduction to international trade barriers such as tariffs, export fees and import quotas with the eventual goal of increasing the overall wealth, goods and services of the whole world. Globalization can be seen as the driving force in the process of unifying economic growth making it the main engine of social changes for most of the world's societies. It should be considered as the unavoidable cornerstone upon which development will take place in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. As Eriksen (1999) pointed out, “the present human world is more tightly integrated than at any earlier point in history” and the pervasive effect of globalization is “influencing the lives of people everywhere”.

For Globalization to arrive at full fruition though, time will be required. During the process of globalization, intercultural conflicts will likely appear because of the diversity of ethnic identities coming into collision. With these numerous identities integrated into one world, confrontation between different cultural groups will likely intensify. In fact, there is a contradiction between diversity and unity which will most probably be the responsible agent for such conflicts. On the one hand, globalization appears to be an irreversible trend with individuals and societies depending on it more and more for economic development. On the other hand, there is, of course, resistance and fear that one's individual and societal ethnic identity will be displaced by a more standardized model. Therefore, on an individual and societal level, globalization is an interaction between one’s intercultural awareness.
and the desire to maintain one's own cultural identity. When cultural identity is overly emphasized, it becomes a barrier to the aims of globalization. Therefore, it is of vital significance to help people increase their intercultural awareness in order that the issue of ethnic identities is able to be handled in the proper perspective within the developing globalized world.

Japan is a country which stresses its unique cultural identity. Traditionally, Japanese have regarded their islands as a homogeneous country. A vision of Japan imposed by nationalists within the power elite is that Japan “has been mono-ethnic from the beginning to the present”. (Lie, 2001) This is stressed even though there are ethnic minorities living within the national borders. Ainu and Ryukyuan are two aboriginal ethnic groups which are still in existence even though they have lost many of their customs, traditions and even languages. Residents in Japan of Korean and Chinese descent were abandoned and ignored after the conclusion of the Second World War. The only real option they had was to assimilate without much attention given to their ethnic features (Maher, 1997).

Over the past two decades, this attempt at propagandising a mono ethnic nation-state has come to an end largely because it proved to be unsustainable activity. It became impossible to continue propagating such assumptions while at the same time the population of ethnic minorities in Japan was increasing rapidly. The reason for this increase can be found in the demographics of modern day Japan. The percentage of the population aged 65 or older in Japan is now among the highest in the world while its birth rate is among the lowest. If present trends continue, there will not be enough people in the work force to sustain Japan as funding for the social systems and welfare apparatus dries up. At the same time increasing numbers of retirees force expenses up (Zhang and Mok, 2009). As the severity of this situation became clear the Japanese government was forced to alter some of the restrictions regarding immigration policy in order to boost the number of foreign workers. Such social structure changes in the Japanese society forces to face the challenge of how to enhance its people's intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Conflicts between immigrants and members of the local community are often based on ignorance and misunderstanding of the migrants' native cultures.

This paper will clarify some of the basic concepts regarding intercultural awareness while highlighting some of the problems in establishing effective training programs in Japan and the possible solutions to its current dilemma in coping with migrant issues. It will be argued that Japan should adopt more tolerant policies towards minority cultures rather than a policy of conventional assimilation.

2. Basic Concepts of Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Identity

There have been many attempts to define globalization. Rosenau (1997) defined it as a process that is “changing humankind’s preoccupation with territoriality and the traditional arrangements of the state system”. Tomlinson (1999) refers to globalization as “a process of accelerating connectivity”. He further explains that modern social life is characterized by an ever densening network of interconnections and inter-dependencies. Massey (1994) describes the idea of globalization as an uneven process, in which concentration, density of flow, neglect or even exclusion might be recorded. All of these definitions reveal the very basic nature of globalization. Globalization has a tendency to accentuate fundamental cultural differences and has the potential to trigger intercultural conflict. This is because the forces of Globalization rely on stable but fluid interactions which ideologically favor similarity over equality (Eriksen, 1999). This makes intercultural awareness and a proper understanding of one's own cultural identity, on a personal as well as a societal level, essential in today's world.

Intercultural awareness is the willingness and ability to realize the need for social changes within an international context as well as to understand the increasing connectivity between different cultural groups. Ideally, this increasing connectivity will be seen as an uneven process of development upon which further efforts to improve the situation will need to be undertaken in order to ensure a more globalized social community. Intercultural awareness is necessary in order to achieve competence in intercultural relations. It is “the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication” and refers to “the understanding of cultural conventions that affect how people think and behave” (Chen, 2007).

In this paper, we would like to adopt the definition proposed by Korzilius, Hooft and Planken (2007) (see also Byram 1997; Matsumoto 2000), because it is more practical and understandable when compared with other more
complex and implicit definitions: “Intercultural awareness is the ability to empathize and to decenter. More specifically, in a communication situation, it is the ability to take on the perspective of a conversational partner from another culture or with another nationality, and of their cultural background and thus, to be able to understand and take into consideration interlocutors’ different perspectives simultaneously”. One can view intercultural competence as “the demonstrated ability to enact a cultural identity in a mutually appropriate and effective manner” (Samovar and Porter, 1994). Actually, the concept of globalization lays the foundation for defining the term intercultural awareness. In this study, the above notions are adopted as the basis for the interpretation of the term.

When one considers cultural identity, though, it becomes apparent that this is perhaps the most crucial issue which needs to be coped with during the process of globalization. Cultural identity refers to “one’s sense of belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group” (Lustig and Koester, 1999). Tomlinson (2003) described cultural identity as a collective treasure of a local community, “an undisturbed existential possession, an inheritance, a benefit of traditional long dwelling, of continuity with the past”. He highlighted the significance of this in an attempt to protect and preserve our various cultural identities because many of them are very fragile and could be easily lost. Obviously, what Tomlinson was talking about refers to all ethnic groups. One of the true tragedies of globalization is that we will be sacrificing immensely valuable memories of our common human past for something that some refer to as progress.

Cultural diversity is an essential feature of globalization during the initial and developing stages. It provides profound information about the context of individual cultures but also points out the variety of interpretations relating to cultural issues. In other words, the core issues in the globalization deal with the question of how to treat people with diverse cultural identities.

3. Historical and Current Situations of Immigration in Japan


When foreigners enter a new country or ethnic region there is always a confrontation about which identity to maintain. Obviously, ethnic groups prefer to be recognized. Recognition allows for assimilation. This is in fact, simply, a process of uniting all resources and making allocations on agreed policies. Nevertheless, generally, all ethnic groups want their efforts to result in a maximum level of mutual benefit. This often engenders conflicts among all parties involved in, what should actually be, cooperation. In actuality, most of the agreements which are negotiated are all about the question of to what extent, a cultural identity is recognized. Actions which negate the existence of cultural identity or put an ethnic group in an insubstantial position lead to conflicts and clashes between people from different cultural backgrounds.

Foreigners coming into Japan are no different. Many undergo a crisis of identity as they perceive loses to their ethnic features. In the 1990s and early 2000s the Japanese government made attempts to recruit Guest Workers from many Asian and Latin American countries. Agreements were drawn up to bring in around 50,000 temporary workers from several South Asian countries, primarily the Philippines and Indonesia. Additionally, arrangements with Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay to bring in over 20,000 workers were established. Most of these workers arrived from Brazil and Peru. Many of these workers, are ethnically Japanese, while culturally fundamentally Latin American,

Due to the effects of globalization economic migrants and refugees are moving throughout the world. The situation in Japan is no exception. The role of Japan as a major player on the world stage and as a driving force in Asia as a regional economic powerhouse provides the explanation for a major increase in the number of arriving migrants. By the end of 2010, there were 2,134,151 registered foreigners from 191 countries and regions living in Japan. (Fig.1). Though this is a slight decrease from 2009, the trend is for the figure to continue increasing. That this increase is actually quite remarkable can be seen in the fact that within around 20 years the number of foreign residents in Japan has nearly tripled. In 1988, there were only 884,025 foreign residents in Japan. Among all the foreign residents, people from China/Taiwan, Korea (North and South), Brazil, the Philippines and Peru are the five
It needs to be stressed that, particularly in the case of Korean and Chinese residents, the high numbers are not necessarily the result of a large increase in immigration. Although immigration continues to rise, many of these residents were actually born in Japan and a large portion of them are monolingual, speaking Japanese only. Japanese law does not allow for dual nationality. In fact, when one becomes a naturalised Japanese citizen it is obligatory to renounce one's nationality of birth. Further, one is obliged to adopt a Japanese name. For some this is quibbling, but for others it reaches to the heart of their personal existence.
While approximately 10,000 extended generation Koreans become naturalised each year this usually occurs in the third and forth generation cases. These people become Japanese and they are dropped from the roles of foreign residents. Immigration from Korea is now not as high as immigration from China. These are perhaps the reasons for the advance of Chinese immigration numbers.

As in many developed countries, there are also many visa over-stayers and illegal immigrants living within Japan. In 1990, the number was about 100,000 and it grew to 300,000 in 1993. In 2005, the number had been reduced, officially, to 207,000 (Migration Information source, 2011). It is always very difficult to be accurate with statistics for this category but, nonetheless, these people are in Japan and working.

3.2 Historical Background

The government’s assimilation policies towards ethnic minorities are framed within a legislative regime and can be traced back to the Meiji Period. With the Meiji Restoration of 1868 Japan was able to finally break the grip of feudal society on the nation. Officially, the feudal hereditary warlord, or Shogun, put the allegiance of his title under the command of the emperor and quickly resigned his position. This led, ultimately, to all nominal authority resting in the hands of the Emperor who was not affiliated with the feudal Hierarchy. This was the culmination of a long period of struggle for reform led by people who were opposed to the rigidly structured feudal society which offered little opportunity for economic and social advancement for the majority of the Japanese people.

Restoring Imperial rule in Japan was done with the intent of strengthening Japan in the face of the many colonial powers of the day. To do this the establishment of a true nation-state was viewed as the most important objective. Creating patriotism was a natural ingredient in this process. Patriotism flourishes at the nation-state level. In order to encourage this a true national identity was needed. This process was begun by, initially, breaking down the social barriers of society which categorized people as either samurai, farmers, craftspeople or business people. This was further advanced by officially removing designations regarding ethnic minority groups such as the Ainu and Ryukyuan as well as discriminated social minorities such as the Burakumin. Whether or not this new society without official social or ethnic designations was a place without discrimination is unknown, nevertheless everyone was now regarded as Nihonjin or Japanese.

The creation of a true Japanese identity was one of the requirements for the foundation of the modern Japanese state in 1868 (Lie, 2001). A strong emphasis on national integration based on state-making and nationalism has led to a tacit understanding and necessity of uniformity in daily life. No anomalies were to be accepted within the social and cultural context (Lie, 2001; Zhang 2006). In other words, claims of Japan as a homogeneous nation were in reality subjective and these connotations have been used at the Japanese government’s convenience (Scott, 2007).

In fact, the heart of the assimilation policy is an intention to create the ideal Japanese identity. There is very little room for or tolerance of ethnicities in creating a Japanese identity. The roots of this can be found in the nationalistic imperialism that resulted from the turmoil of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. (Lie, 2001; Kohno, 2002). This ideology, perhaps, explains why Japan has poor record welcoming immigrants. Due to “anti-immigrant sentiment until recently, there was, essentially, no immigration policy” (Richey, 2008). These efforts at maintaining a unique Japanese identity helped to shape the current political context for minority and inter-cultural issues.

3.3 Current Situation

The people of Japan can expect to live long lives. Presently, Japan has the longest life expectancy of anywhere in the world. Life expectancy in Japan is 82.6 years. With this long life expectancy, though, comes a very large per cent of the population who are elderly citizens and beyond their economically productive years. Currently, 23.2 per cent of the population is 65 years old or older. This statistic places Japan in the number 1 position in the world. (Fig.3). This number does not offer an optimistic appraisal for Japan’s future and it is further complicated by the per cent of the population aged 15 or under (Table 1). This demographic group is 13 per cent. With the current fertility rate of 1.37 (Table 2), there are estimates that the population of Japan will fall from 128 million now to 90 million
within 50 years. At that point over one third of the population will be aged 65 or older and the size of the workforce will have been reduced to 52 million.

Table 1 Ratio of Population under 15
(Data Source: World Health Statistics 2010, World Health Organization)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ratio (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Because of this situation it is imperative for Japan to find a means to increase its workforce. There are labour shortages in many areas and these jobs need to be filled. Due to the aging society government outlays for social benefits and health care will need to increase as will incoming revenues to pay for these increases. Without a workforce that can accept this burden Japan will fall into economic disarray. It is imperative for Japan to find a means to increase its workforce.

To do this, the evidence shows, Japan will need to find a way to incorporate more foreign labourers into the workforce. Many in Japan are concerned about this. In 2005 former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi spoke out on this saying that he expected some form of backlash when foreign labour exceeded a certain level. Although he was not specific in explaining what a certain level meant, it is to be expected that without attempts to foster inter-cultural understanding and awareness among not just the Japanese, but also the immigrants, these efforts will end, eventually, in cultural clashes. It is necessary to begin preparations now.

Table 2 Fertility Rates in 2010
(Data Source: World Health Statistics 2010, World Health Organization)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Birth Rate (children per female)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Training of Intercultural Awareness For a Real

4.1. Difficulties

Globalization is a term which encompasses political, economic and cultural features (Gopinatch, 2008). When globalization is discussed, rather than focusing specifically on economics, it is important to keep in mind a multidimensional perspective. Generally speaking Japanese society is organised around principals of coexistence and accordance with the collective environment. Therefore individual desires are expected to be subordinate to the common good. Until recently, the approach taken to different ethnic groups in Japan has been, essentially, to assimilate them as quickly and thoroughly as possible in order not to cause any cultural clashes. This means that intercultural communication has been simplified on the basis of self-culture consciousness with no regard to the cultures of immigrants or ethnic groups (Zhang, 2006).

The reason for this situation is quite simply a fundamental lack of intercultural awareness. Certainly, not enough understanding and empathy towards other cultures is shown. This leads to a general lack of respect for other cultures. Intercultural communication has not been well integrated into the educational system, or for that matter, the society in general. Obviously, if Japan is going to commit itself to a large influx of foreign workers, these issues will need to be addressed in the very near future. It is time for the Japanese government to make a decision as to whether Japan wants to “cling to its relatively monolingual linguistic identity” or produce citizens who “can interact freely in the global context” (Gottlieb, 2005).

If social environments encourage the coexistence of more than one culture, children tend to show enthusiasm and generally have positive attitudes towards these combinations. In this way, two cultures can create a more balanced harmony and establish a logical behavioural paradigm. On the contrary, if there is difficulty integrating two cultures or even hostility between ethnic groups, children are usually put in a position where they need to choose one culture over the other. This often leads to hesitancy in choosing one's own cultural identity. The optimum outcome of integrating two cultures is that the individuals are allowed to and respected for making their own decisions without “having to deny the existence of one of the cultures” (Chen, 2007). Chen commented on this issue when he wrote,
“unless a person shows a positive emotion towards learning, understanding, recognising, and respecting the cultural similarities and differences, inter-cultural awareness is unreachable” (Chen, 2007).

The negation of a person’s original language can have detrimental effects. “Few things do more to destabilise a people’s sense of cultural identity than to forbid the use of their native language and impose the language of another” (Gottlieb, 2005). But just this policy was implemented in Japan. For the Ainu people and the Korean people the use of Japanese was made mandatory. While the harshness of these types of policies has been moderated, these attitudes, nevertheless, are still visible in today's Japan. The manner in which the Japanese census records are reported is a good example. The actual number of newly naturalised citizens in Japan is greater than 15,000 each year and, as mentioned before around 10,000 of these are extended generation Koreans. Many of the Koreans are monolingual Japanese speakers but the remainder of the new citizens are not. In many countries, census statistics reflect the ethnicity of the people being recorded. This is not the case in Japan. Japanese statistics do not have a question regarding ethnicity even though 1.5% of the total population are not ethnic Japanese (Nationmaster.com, 2011). The Japanese census only asks a person’s nationality and they only record the nationality of all legally residing foreigners. But when it comes to naturalised citizens, they are systematically categorised as Japanese. Obviously, the Japanese census advances the assumption then that all Japanese speak Japanese and are fully culturally homogenised. The convenient implication is that there are no ethnic minority Japanese within the country, which is not the truth.

Further insights can be gained when looking at the concept of language policy within Japan. The heart of language education for the entire nation is a language policy established within the Ministry of Education which has a set of strict regulations and guidelines (Gottlieb, 2005). The language policy was closely related to the historical and cultural development of the nation. It was viewed as having been a major component in “the make-up of its population”. The Japanese language has been regarded as the tool which established and helps to maintain and promote a national identity. It has been viewed as “the subject of cultural policy promotion” since the mid-1970s (Gottlieb, 2005). Actually, the foreign ministry established the Japan Foundation within its own jurisdiction in 1972 for the purpose of promoting Japanese culture overseas. The Japan Foundation devotes major portions of its efforts to the teaching of the Japanese language because it was perceived that a major part of international cultural exchange would be the teaching of the Japanese language.

Hamers and Blanc described the relationship between language and culture when they stated, “A balanced biculturalism often goes hand in hand with a balanced bilinguality” (Hamers and Blanc, 2005). Bilingual learners often achieve better results than their monolingual counterparts in verbal abilities (Swain and Lapkin, 1982). In Japan, while acknowledging that there may be benefits found in acquiring another language, bilingualism is not embraced by the educational establishment. This should be seen as a national policy failure in the field of curriculum development. On one hand, in order to graduate from a high school, students need a total of six years of English instruction. If these students then go on to a university, a minimum of another two years of English instruction is required in most cases. Yet, over 90% of Japanese are incapable of producing elementary phrases in English or reading basic texts while a very small per cent are actually capable of using another language. Moreover, Japan is among the countries with the lowest average score in TOEFL (ETS, 2010). This should be seen as a national policy failure in the field of curriculum development. On the other hand, the absence of any serious attempt at fostering bilingualism in immigrant children offers further evidence of the inward looking nature of language education in Japan. Children from the many ethnic minorities residing in Japan are offered no opportunity to maintain and develop their original languages. Japanese children, who received education abroad and returned with their parents from overseas postings, are simply placed back into the appropriate age level within the educational system and offered no assistance in maintaining their abilities in other languages. Throughout the world, “bilinguals already outnumber monolinguals, [and] it can be expected that this trend will continue in the twenty-first century” (Hamers and Blanc, 2000). Japan’s linguistic policy continues to lag behind the world trend.
4.2. Key to Improving Intercultural Awareness

Chen commented on this issue when he wrote that “unless a person shows a positive emotion towards learning, understanding, recognizing, and respecting the cultural similarities and differences, intercultural awareness is unreachable” (Chen, 2007). He further points out that “to be successful in intercultural interactions, we must first show the ability of intercultural awareness by learning the similarities and differences of each other’s culture” (Chen, 2007). It is of crucial significance to increase “informed intellectual appreciation of and engagement with cultural and individual differences, which presupposes recognition and acceptance, in principle, of the existence and inevitability of cultural diversity” (Meier, 2007). To integrate two cultures harmoniously into one's individual identity requires a society which does not favour one culture or ethnicity over the other. In order to avoid this type of discriminatory practice, it is necessary for societies to integrate multiculturalism as a core value (Hamers and Blanc, 2000).

According to Hamers and Blanc (2000), four characteristics are proposed to describe a balanced bicultural identity: (1) Feel positive with both of one's cultural/ethnic communities; (2) Achieve a certain linguistic competence in both languages; (3) Perceive both of one's cultural/ethnic groups as dynamic; (4) Have self-confidence in one's ability to overcome the contradictions brought about by membership in two cultural groups. These characteristics are applicable in all cases of biculturalism. It may be instructive to look at the work of Ishii (2005) when trying to relate some of these concepts to Japan. She made detailed investigations into the lives of immigrants and the challenge of how to develop an awareness of diversity.

4.3. Training of Intercultural Awareness

Intercultural awareness training is considered crucial for finding a solution to bicultural identity problems as well as improving intercultural competence for all involved. Chaney and Martin (2004) even proposed a cultural awareness model as the basis for a training program. It emphasizes cultural insights and it is effective because the experimental process makes comparisons about social values between different cultures. It provides room for the development of each culture with no regard for and without placing priorities on the national culture.

In fact, the essence of any effort to promote intercultural awareness lies in the attitude towards immigrants’ native languages, because “a language standard is also often associated with a particular national identity” (Garrido, 2005). This statement suggests that other languages are often not acceptable by default to host countries, needless to say other cultures. This often leads to discrimination and conflict with regard to the objective of establishing mutual understanding among diverse cultures. There is a positive relationship between foreign language acquisition and the promotion of intercultural awareness, though it has not been stressed sufficiently (Byram, 1997; the Council of Europe, 2002; Van Ek and Trim, 1991). By enhancing bilingual education, a more favorable environment for intercultural communication may begin to develop in Japan. Exposure to cultures with other languages can further the intercultural awareness of the Japanese people. If the Japanese government is actually serious about deepening the intercultural awareness of the Japanese people a framework for bilingual education on a national level will prove to be above all the foundation upon which they can establish such programs.

Efforts at the governmental level will also be needed in the training of program organizers and planners. Japanese society has a tradition of over-emphasizing its own culture while neglecting to pay enough attention to others (Aoki, 2001, 2003). Zhang (2006) reported her experience with a Japanese host family and was astonished to know that the host family drove a 15-year-old Italian boy away because he refused to learn how to use chopsticks and how to read Japanese characters. This is very typical Japanese thinking when relating to cultural exchanges. It seems to be a one-way street with Japanese language and culture the only things needed to be learned while aspects of other cultures are hardly ever touched on. Most events or programs held by officials in the name of intercultural communication focus on these themes instead of helping Japanese people to get a better understanding of foreign cultures. It should be the responsibility of those government administrators who make decisions based on national guidelines to give priority to the understanding of other cultures and not to focus only on the dissemination of their
own culture. Therefore, the training of qualified program organizers and planners is urgently needed so that training programs for intercultural communication are carried out from new perspectives.

Evaluation of training programs is another barrier which has prevented cultural awareness training from developing smoothly. Fair assessment serves not only as a summary of contemporary programs, but also throws lights on future work. Gudykunst (1979) pointed out that an important point to stress in multicultural training is to be aware that there may be many situations where friendship between participants in intercultural events may take place without any perceivable change in attitude toward the idea of intercultural communication. In Japan, where quite often superficiality is preferred over substance, this type of situation is common in programs to promote intercultural communication. Most intercultural training programs in Japan follow this pattern. The most common type of event is international cooking. Many intercultural communication workshops are held only to provide chances for Japanese citizens to learn how to cook foreign food. Information about the other culture is scarce. At the conclusion of the event, the participants go home with good impressions about the food but with very little substantive knowledge about other cultures. It is imperative that cultural objectives be taken into account when developing assessment schemes for training programs (Alvarez and Garrido, 2001).

5. Conclusions

Solutions to issues related to identity and intercultural communication can be found in improvements to the educational system. With an increase in immigration to Japan, it will be extremely helpful if the educational system can adopt features of multilingualism in order to assist the children of immigrants adjust to a natural biculturalism. Additionally, efforts at various governmental levels will be needed to help foster a true sense of multiculturalism in the population. This coupled with active foreign language study may help to bridge cultural gaps between Japanese people and immigrants. As we see now increasing levels of immigration into Japan and expect higher levels in the future, one would hope that support from the Japanese government for multi-lingual and multi-cultural education might function as a lubricant in maintaining good relations between the new immigrants and the Japanese population. If Japan intends to be a better member of the global community, it must show responsibility and obligation as a host country for these workers. “Japan must learn how to treat outsiders not only with the respect and recognition they deserve (as contributors to Japanese society), but also must cease depicting foreigners as a social bane"(Debito, 2006).

References


