

This file is an English translation of section two of chapter ten of the report on the interview survey of foreign residents of the city of Kawasaki in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan. Kawasaki is located immediately to the west of Tokyo, between Tokyo proper and Yokohama, and is part of the Greater Tokyo urban area. The survey was conducted in 2015 and published in 2016, and the Japanese report is available online at <http://www.city.kawasaki.jp/250/page/0000076253.html> as of 2016/11/02.

This translation is entirely unofficial, and in no way endorsed by the city of Kawasaki. However, the translator (David Chart) was also the author of the Japanese section it translates, and served on the committee designing and analysing the survey. I am confident that this translation does not misrepresent the author's intent, but the city of Kawasaki may not agree with some of the choices of phrasing. The footnotes add information that was included in the main report, but is not in this chapter, or background details, where that is necessary to understand the text. This translation must not be distributed without this disclaimer.

David Chart
November 2016

Problems of Discrimination and Human Rights among Foreign Residents of Kawasaki

We can see from the above table¹ that the experiences of foreign residents of Kawasaki concerning discrimination and human rights are varied. In the interviews as well, people spoke of experiences ranging from “No matter where I am, the environment is hostile” (Oceania, male, 25 years in Japan)² to “I’ve never been treated differently because I’m not Japanese. I’ve never encountered any unpleasant remarks” (Vietnam, male, 5 years in Japan).

First, this variety is itself important. It is not possible to speak of “the typical foreign resident’s experience of discrimination”. Rather, precisely because people’s experiences differ, it is important to approach the issue from a variety of angles. It appears that there are few cases where foreign residents face systemic discrimination or disadvantage, but, on the other hand, there are also few who have never experienced any discrimination at all. While these results bring home the importance of education and campaigning against discrimination, they also suggest that the groundwork for such activities has already been laid. This can be seen from the number of interviewees who drew attention to Japanese people who had treated them kindly, or to situations in which their nationality was not a problem.

Nevertheless, there is one field in which many of the interviewees did face discrimination:

- 1 The table gives the percentage of foreign residents who had experienced a particular form of discrimination. Since none are over 50%, we can see that most foreign residents of Kawasaki have experiences that differ from those of other foreign residents.
- 2 Some details are given about each respondent, but in order to preserve anonymity the details are not completely consistent. For example, some countries have very few of their citizens resident in Kawasaki, and in those cases nationality is not given.

renting a place to live. This report will first deal with residential discrimination, and then look at other areas of concern.

Residential Discrimination

Many of the interviewees had faced discrimination in accommodation. In the questionnaire survey conducted last year, only 21.3% of respondents reported that they had been refused rental accommodation because they were foreign, but it is clear from the interview survey that the problem is broader than that. First, people do report being rejected as tenants because the landlord did not accept foreigners. For example, A (Nepal, male, 12 years in Japan) said that it often happened that the estate agent would be turned down when they opened negotiations with the landlord. B (Philippines, female, 18 years in Japan) had already been turned away from two estate agents because she was foreign. She said that she was not even allowed to sit down and look at properties.

However, it seems that there is a still more common problem.

It was tough. I mean, whether a foreigner was OK. Because they had to ask the landlord in advance whether I could rent. It was, well, difficult. ...³ It was hard to find a guarantor. Because, you know, I didn't know anyone. And I didn't want to ask my employer to be my guarantor. ... My private life and my work life are different. I want to keep them separate, you know? ... When I was looking, I was interviewed. By the rental company [estate agent]. I was told that if I couldn't speak Japanese well, they had no confidence in renting to me. (Philippines, female, 8 years in Japan)

Other interviewees also reported experiences that suggested prejudice on the part of landlords.

It happened in Kawasaki as well. ... Anyway, I went to the estate agents, and they show you them, right, flats and things. So, I looked through the properties and said "I want to see this one". Then the estate agent said to me "I'll just ask the landlord whether foreign tenants are OK". ... And then, that landlord, incredible, I don't remember exactly what conditions got set. But the landlord came back with all these strict conditions. Well, I went to look in any case, you know. ... My wife said "I don't like this, I don't want to be talked to like this", so we abandoned that one. So there are still people like that around. That sort of prejudice against foreigners. (Africa, male, 18 years in Japan)

The general problem was the demand for a guarantor. C (South America, female, 25 years in Japan) said that when she tried to rent she had a great deal of trouble finding a guarantor, and in the end had to use a guarantor company. Further, according to D (South America, male, 4 years in Japan), the estate agents charge high key money and demand Japanese guarantors, and there are many difficult problems.

E (India, male, 4 years in Japan) said that he anticipated that it would be difficult to find accommodation by himself because of the guarantor issue and similar problems, so he didn't even look. If a further survey of the foreign residents of Kawasaki is carried out, it may be advisable to ask about the guarantor problem more directly.

Demanding guarantors, or a special kind of guarantor, because the potential tenant is a

3 Ellipses indicate omissions from the quotation, and square brackets indicate modifications necessary to preserve sense. Otherwise, quotations are translated from the transcriptions of the interviews.

foreigner is a clear example of discrimination. Landlords may talk about the risk of the tenant suddenly leaving Japan, but a Zainichi Korean is no more likely to do so than a Japanese, and other foreigners who have stable jobs are also very unlikely to disappear. Landlords should decide whether a foreign resident needs to find a guarantor on the same grounds as are applied to Japanese residents.

In Kawasaki, there is a “Kawasaki Residential Support” scheme that handles negotiations with guarantor companies, but it seems that even that would be insufficient in some cases.

There’s this guarantor company. ... The agent for that apartment. I pay them the money. Then, they kinda say we’ll handle it at this company. But then, when I go to sign the contract, they’re like “You’re a foreigner, so please find a second guarantor”. Even though I’ve paid, their story is that I need two guarantors. (China, male, 15 years in Japan)

A home is a fundamental part of anyone’s life, and as discrimination in this field is widespread and undeniable, steps should be taken to address it. In the “Kawasaki Basic Residential Ordinance”, discrimination against potential tenants is forbidden, but this appears to have had little effect. It is necessary to look into further measures.

Hate Speech

Recently, hate speech, particularly that directed at Zainichi Koreans, has become a problem. None of the interviewees had experienced it directly, but F (female, born in Japan) reported her feelings and past experiences as follows.

Well, I think they say those things because people have their own opinions and ideas. ... I don’t like it, but they’re not the sort of people who’ll stop because you tell them to, right? So, I don’t pay attention to it, you know “Whatever, go ahead”, that sort of thing.

...

When I was in high school, I was in the Korean Classical Dance club. When we went to Shinjuku for a, well, performance or event with Japanese people, some of the hate speech people came and were like “Stop it!”. Some of them were carrying, I don’t know, it looked like weapons of some kind. We had to go somewhere safe. I’d really rather they didn’t do that sort of thing. Targeting high school students. They shouldn’t go that far, right. The police and the authorities weren’t there, and I thought it was a bit dangerous.

At the same time, F reported that the older Japanese people around her were kind without paying any attention to nationality, and it could be that this is in part responsible for her relatively calm attitude. It seems that because F feels that hate speech does not reflect the opinions of the majority of Japanese, she feels able to just keep out of it.

On the other hand, F reported that there are differences in opinion between the generations.

How to put it? Recently, it seems that there are more young people who don’t know their own country’s history, and South Korea is the same. Personally, I think that that may be part of the reason why there are more young people who don’t care about hate speech. You know, if I ask my mother or grandmother, they have really, what,

much stronger opinions than me. ... They can't do that, they say. Or "It's dreadful". Or "I wish they would stop".

Similarly, G, a Zainichi Korean in his 60s (male, born in Japan), said that such things happening in Japan made his blood run cold.

There are many opinions about hate speech and it is a difficult problem, but Kawasaki City should certainly take appropriate steps to deal with the problem, whether educational or by pressing the central government to act.

Workplace Discrimination

Experience in the workplace or while looking for work varies greatly from one individual to another. H (Vietnam, male, 5 years in Japan) reported that he had never been treated differently because he was not Japanese, and had never faced unpleasant remarks. He said that his workmates just treated him normally. A also said that he basically faced no discrimination at work or in everyday life.

On the other hand, there are also cases in which people did meet with discrimination in the workplace, or when looking for work. I (Oceania, male, 25 years in Japan) had worked at various large companies and their subsidiaries, but he reported facing various kinds of bullying and discrimination, and said that "companies are hell". Further, J (Asia, male, 30 years in Japan) said that when he recommended his acquaintances for jobs, some employers would hesitate on hearing their nationality.

There are also complex cases. The following is K's experience (Vietnam-born, but naturalised Japanese, male).

A few months after I start work, pretty much everyone else leaves. That's happened three times. I don't know why. ... [The company president] doesn't praise me, but, well, I'm really a foreigner, right. ... For example, attitude to work. It's the same number, same things, but they [Japanese] take a long time, but I'm fast. And then, I don't have a welder's license, but they do, but even so my work is obviously cleaner. So, you know, I think they get embarrassed and run away. Well, I don't really know what's going on.

It seems that, because the foreign-born K is a skilled welder, and treated as a valuable worker by the boss, the other Japanese co-workers find the environment uncomfortable and quit. In this sort of situation, majority Japanese are leaving their jobs because they cannot properly accept people from a different background, and thus ultimately damage themselves.

Attitude of the Police

There were not so many mentions of the police, but there were a few.

There was this one thing that was really unpleasant. When I was a high school student, we'd been studying and it had got late, and on the way home from Kawasaki station we were stopped by the police. When this happens to Japanese people, they just get warned and then go home, right? Show us some ID, that sort of thing. When I showed them my Foreigner's Registration Card, they said "You're Korean?". "Call your mother." I was, like, why just me? I felt really bad about that. "So this is what discrimination is really like," I thought. (Korean, female, born in Japan)

When I picked up a cell phone that someone had dropped, even though I was worried that taking it to the police might cause trouble, I took it to the police box next to Muza⁴. As expected, they asked me to show my Foreigner's Registration Card, and asked me all kinds of things; it wasn't pleasant. (Asia, male, 30 years in Japan) [Quoted from the notes on the interview⁵]

This sort of incident could grow into a serious problem. That is, if foreign residents feel that they cannot trust the police, they will not cooperate, and will not go to the police even if there is a problem. The police are under the control of the prefecture⁶, but this shows the need to educate them so that their actions and attitudes do not breed mistrust.

Note: Discrimination and bullying at school are dealt with in chapter 7 of the full report, which is not translated here.

4 A municipal concert hall complex near Kawasaki station.

5 Some interviews have no transcript.

6 Kanagawa prefecture, rather than Kawasaki city. The city, which commissioned this survey, has no direct authority over the police.