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Fieldwork in Japan Final Essay

Foreign Influence and Japan

As a foreign exchange student I accept that I will never fully understand Japanese culture in its entirety. That being said this class has given me the opportunity to divulge further into Japanese culture and helped me realize issues that prior to this class I had never really given any thought to. Coming into the class I realized that foreign influence played a role in modern day Japan but it never occurred to me just how different the that role could be depending on whom you talked to. As a foreigner I assumed it was a standard black and white issue. That as a Japanese citizen you either liked/did not mind the foreign population or you disliked them. It was interesting to see how business and communities adapted to foreign populations and how that differed from local community to higher government. In this paper I will be discussing these topics in further detail by relating what I have had the opportunity to see first-hand and using second hand research to further solidify my theories.

While out doing our first few fieldworks I noticed an abundance of signs or menus that offered information in other languages, now at first I assumed this was due to the stores being chains or Machida being a bigger city but even as you move away from the Machida and visit smaller stores and shotengai in Fuchinobe you will not really see a decrease in information available in other languages, perhaps a fewer number of people who can actually speak another language but the initial information is there. This brought up my groups first question, why was this information ready? My initial thought was that there were enough problems with foreign people to warrant multilingual signs and staff. Although through talks with shop owners and hearing testimonials from other groups, the Japanese community members seemed to not only tolerate groups of foreign students, more often than not they seemed eager to chat.

After having the opportunity to interview a worker at the Sagamihara International Lounge it was clear that not only was the community aware of its high population of foreign people it was actively trying to make like easier for them. The international lounge provided numerous services to ease the transition of many foreign residents and parents. These types of services are not required in any way but do wonders to help bridge the gap between two cultures. Studies indicate that communities with higher levels of diversity are healthier and more adapt to change. (The scientific community: Diversity makes the difference) (Easton, Mark ) Although this does tend to work with younger generations the fact that the Sagamihara International Lounge exists shows that the local community is willing to be part of a more global society.

I managed an interview with a local shop owner who’s shop had been around for decades to discuss the changes he had noticed around Fuchinobe, and whether or not he believed it was a good change or not. He was a well of information, as he explained to me about Fuchinobe`s long history with foreign clientele and residents I began to get a clear understanding of what made Fuchinobe and the surrounding area so unique. For a moment I was torn as to whether or not Sagamihara, being so historically affected by foreign presence, truly chose to become “more international” out of a desire to become a part of the global community or was it a compulsory change to accommodate a building presence of foreign community members?

Westernization and modernization tend to used interchangeably but they are two different issues. Where modernization is a movement to the future Westernization is a rewrite and conformation of one society to fit the western mold. (Naofusa, Hirai) With this in mind the acceptance of western culture and abundance of English could be seen in a different light. One hand a global and diverse community is important for human growth. On the other, one language or region is not more important than another and at least while in Japan it is not outrageous to expect tourists and foreign residents alike to try to adapt to a Japanese way of living . This would include language.

In order to further our research spectrum our group interviewed a member of the Sagamihara foreign affairs committee. The most interesting part of this was the sheer difference in reaction to the foreign population from an individual/community level to the city level. The city seemed to think that the foreign foot traffic was nowhere near the levels necessary to actively try to take advantage of the monetary opportunity, unlike the small local businesses who actively try to attract foreign clientele. It was interesting to see how differently a community of people can be perceived if they are only looked at as a number versus on a local level where the Japanese public has an opportunity to interact with the foreign population. (Landis Dan and Richard Brislin) At the start of this fieldwork I actually believed that the opposite would be true and we would find more of a resistance to non-native people on a community level and that it would relax as you moved higher up the chain of government especially considering the current government powers.

In this modern age you cannot escape modernization and to an extent that includes a willingness to become more diverse and globally aware, although I do believe this to be true I also believe that it is important to remember tradition and heritage but it is important to remember that these things are relative and that we start and end change on an individual level. There are people all over the world who would rather live amongst their own people and want nothing to do with the outside world but we can learn so much from each other if we are willing to listen.

Sources

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