Residential Ethnic Segregation and Housing Issues in Various Societies: The Case of Japan

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Introduction

The papers presented here focus on housing problems faced by Hispanics in the United States, including homelessness and ethnic residential segregation. Policies to assist households to rent or acquire a house or use shelters in an emergency cannot necessarily mitigate the disadvantages those households face due to their limited English proficiency and migrant status. Those disadvantages include not only their current lower socioeconomic status but also future poverty through mechanisms such as school segregation. Ethnic residential segregation and other related housing problems are concerns in U.S. society, as has been revealed in the academic literature.

Ethnic residential segregation and other related housing problems always affect migrant integration into the host society, but have they always affected other countries in the same way they do in the United States? For instance, ethnic residential segregation is a known problem in U.S. society, but it is not as apparent in other societies, such as in Europe (Arbaci and Malheiros, 2010; Bolt and Kempen, 2010; Maloutas, 2004, 195). According to Massey and Denton (1993), White apprehension about racial mixing is associated with the belief, for instance, that having African-American neighbors undermines property values and reduces neighborhood safety. Such a belief is enhanced by the availability of flexible, speculative mortgage loans in the United States, which allow a homeowner to cash out the increase of the housing price directly by a remortgage set to a new price.

How liquid the housing market is affects ethnic residential segregation. The more people relocate their residence (depending on their socioeconomic status) through reselling in a liquid housing market, the higher the ethnic residential segregation would be—an outcome that is exemplified in "White flight" from an ethnically diversified community to a more White-dominant community.

City structure is also important because any kind of segregation assumes a certain degree of stable city structure that represents its socioeconomic disparities, such as income inequality and economic segregation. In a society in which people can change their residence easily but in which the structure is more neutral to socioeconomic disparities, the residential pattern should be less salient.

In other words, the richest and the poorest people living next to each other in the same district would not be unusual—in other words, the city structure would be more economically integrated.

To summarize, a different society may experience a different ethnic residential or housing pattern in the course of immigrant incorporation. To underscore that point, the author would like to introduce a few examples from Japan, where people are as mobile as people in U.S. society, but residential segregation is less salient due to more egalitarian city structures.

Japan as an Emerging Destination

First of all, Japan is becoming an emerging destination for international migration, accepting approximately 200,000 net migration of foreign citizens per year (Ministry of Justice, 2020), which is one-fifth the size of U.S. net immigration (OECD, 2020). The population of foreign citizens in Japan is now approximately 3 million, which is 2.3 percent of the total population. Its small percentage of the total population reflects Japan's short history as a migration destination, but the pace has accelerated almost every year since the 1990s.

Japan had been known as an emigration country to the United States and South American countries until 1945, and afterward, until recently, it had been a static country of immigration/emigration. However, in the 1990s, Japan experienced a migration transition and changed into an immigration country, similar to Southern European countries in the same period (Korekawa, 2019).

Ethnic Residential Segregation in the Japanese Context

In the course of Japan's transition, its immigrant residents have also experienced housing problems in the form of discrimination in rental and housing markets and social conflicts due to a gap in their lifestyle between Japanese residents in some immigrant-concentrated areas (Tsuzuki, 2003). Recently, some have argued that immigrant residents are being concentrated in certain public housing, which run the risk of becoming a slum or ghetto, as has been seen in other developed countries (Yasuda, 2019).

However, Japanese society is known as a society in which socioeconomic disparities are not large: its people recognize little geographical or ethnic residential segregation. Indeed, Japan also has a mechanism exemplifying its socioeconomic disparities in a residential context, but it is different from those of the United States and other developed countries.

How are ethnic residential segregation and other related problems seen in Japanese society? Following is an overview of their characteristics.

Discussions

The number of immigrants in Japan has increased since the 1990s, and ethnic residential segregation has been intensively studied (e.g., Hirota, 2003). The spatial assimilation hypothesis initiated by Massey (1985) has been the main theoretical framework for understanding ethnic

residential segregation, but few studies have applied that hypothesis to ethnic residential segregation in Japan.

One of the author's studies (Korekawa, 2021) aimed to reveal how migrants such as Chinese and Brazilians choose to live in an ethnic community and investigated how immigrants are spatially assimilated into the society. As a result, the study clarified that spatial assimilation is attained only through an individual home-acquisition process—in other words, through the process of becoming a homeowner rather than through a collective preference for a certain location, as seen, for instance, in the United States—reflecting the structure and practices of the Japanese housing market.

Moreover, although the propensity for home acquisition among immigrants is generally more constrained than that of Japanese citizens, a motive to own high-rise apartments among highly educated Chinese immigrants often boosts their propensity for home acquisition higher than that of Japanese citizens, which leads to Chinese immigrants being less segregated from Japanese citizens.

This study is the first to address how immigrants exit from their ethnic community rather than how they form it, which has been intensively discussed in Japan (e.g., Hirota, 2003).

Those results mean that, in Japan, ethnic residential segregation is not seen geographically—in other words, in the form of an ethnic ghetto or slum formation—but in terms of differences in preferences for home acquisition, quality of housing, and so on, over the life course. Moreover, immigrants are also changing Japanese society through their preference for high-rise condominiums with high asset value and liquidity; they are less segregated in such dwellings. Although that propensity is still seen only among highly educated Chinese people, it will spread to other immigrant groups, such as Vietnamese and even to Japanese citizens in the near future because other immigrant groups will also experience economic attainment through, for instance, more diversified countries of origin of international students studying in Japan. (Korekawa, 2019).

In conclusion, different societies experience different types of segregation and housing-related issues, which affect the integration and assimilation of immigrants into the host society. Further research from a different perspective will shed light on a new aspect of this issue and find new solutions to it in both the Japanese and U.S. contexts.

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