

## **Factors Responsible for *Fushugaku* among Foreign National Children: An Analysis of the Attendance/"Non-Attendance" Process in Municipalities with Many Foreign Residents**

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### **I. Definition of *Fushugaku***

This paper seeks to investigate the process that gives rise to school attendance/"non-school attendance" among children of foreign nationalities. Learning difficulties, frequent absences, long periods of absence, dropping out of school, and the pursuit of unskilled labor among this group has recently been on the increase. Owing to this, it will be necessary to provide a broad interpretation of the term *Fushugaku* as the problem of children not attending any educational institution, despite being of the compulsory education age (this is inclusive of those who are above the compulsory education age<sup>1</sup>).

Considering the question regarding the number of children who are actually "non-school attending," the authors wish to focus on the gap between the number of registered students and number of registered foreign residents. The table X shows a comparison of the number of foreigners enrolled in national public and private elementary and middle schools and schools for non-Japanese children current as of May 1, 2003 with the number of registered foreign residents as of year-end 2002. First, it should be noted that these statistics pertain to foreign children/students aged

6 to 14 who are enrolled in national public and private schools; these statistics are not valid for registered foreign residents in the compulsory education age group, i. e., 5 to 14. Further, since schools for non-Japanese children, recognized as “miscellaneous schools,” have not been separated into elementary and middle schools, the ages corresponding to the numbers of students cannot be established. Further, children attending schools that have not been recognized as “miscellaneous schools” have not been included in this study. However, even within statistical error, the rate of “non-attendance” can be estimated as approximately 30%.

**Table X. Gap between the enrollment of foreign students  
and the number of foreign resident registration**

Enrollment of foreign students in national/municipal /private schools	Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	Total
	41,981	22,558	64,539
Schools for non- Japanese Children	24,590		
Total (May 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2003)	89,461		
Number of foreign resident registration (age of 5 – 14, Dec 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2002)	118,930		

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and Ministry of Justice.

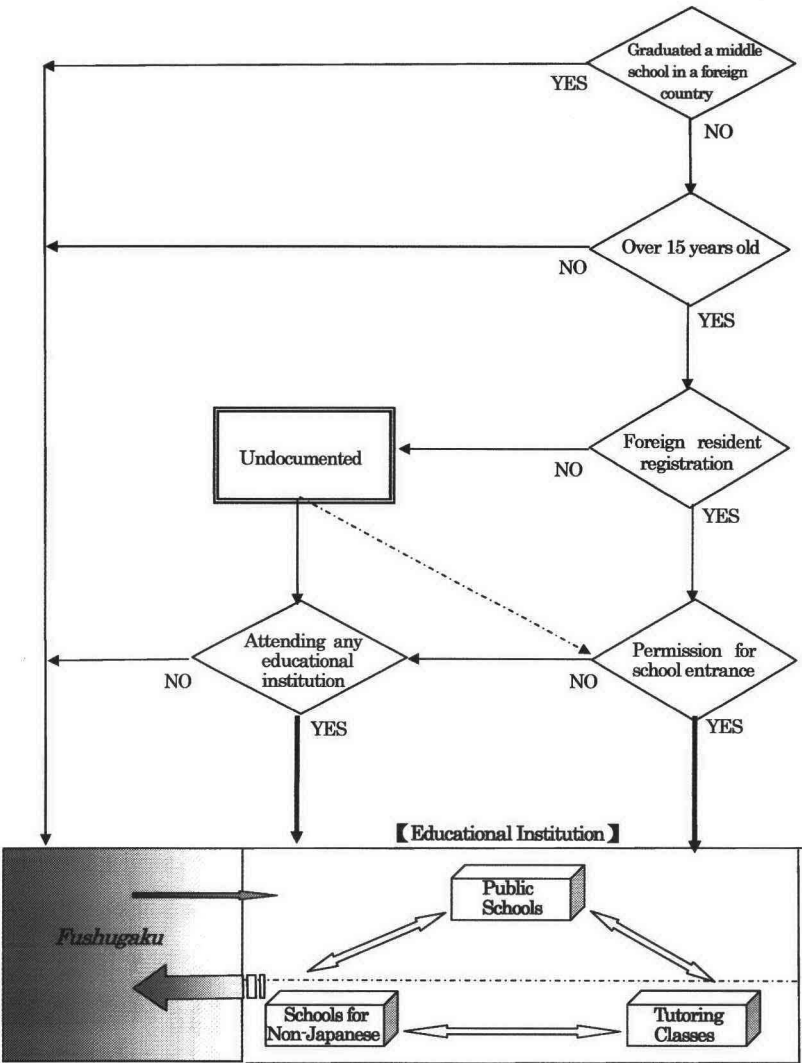
School attendance is a prerequisite for children to obtain a visa in many countries that accept large numbers of immigrants, such as Europe and America. In Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, America, and so on, the foreign guardian is responsible for a child’s obligation to attend school (Tezuka, 1999: 300). However, according to Article 26 of the Japanese Constitution, “all people shall have the right

to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided for by law.” In the Japanese translation, this is only applicable to people with Japanese citizenship and does not apply to foreigners.

Although there is limited accumulated research on the topic of “non-school attendance” among foreigners, this issue has been gaining attention in the fields of modern sociology and pedagogy. Research has been conducted on “non-school attendance” from the broader perspective of teaching practices in their regional settings (Shinkai, Katō, Matsumoto, 2001) as well as the causes and problem of “non-school attendance” from the perspective of the life-world of children (Nozaki, 2003). On the other hand, there are those who argue, from a legal perspective, in favor of making the education of foreign students compulsory while quoting social environmental factors such as the uncertainty of the parents’ plans of residence in Japan (Miyajima, 2003). Several earlier researchers have approached the issue of “non-school attendance” in addition to the immediate issue of this “army” of children being left behind; the process leading to the above issues, however, has not yet been clarified.

This paper will investigate the various types of problems that are encountered at each level on the systemic front from procedures within the municipal boards of education to the educational institutions, such as public schools and schools for non-Japanese children. The figure X shows an ideal type of process leading up to the attendance/"non-school attendance" in order to clarify the possible factors of *Fushugaku*. Following the process chart, the authors shall attempt to formulate a hypothesis of the structure that gives rise to “non-school-attendance” among foreign children<sup>1</sup>.

Figure X. Attendance/ "Non-Attendance" Process for Foreign Children in Japan



## **II. Attendance procedures and initiatives directed at "non-school attending" students**

The authors will first provide an explanation of attendance procedures for foreign children. In the case of Japanese citizens, based on the basic residential register, the board of education of each local government creates a register of school-aged children. Using this, the board of education mails notifications of school attendance to households with school-aged children; however, in the case of foreign children, information on school attendance is often sent based on foreigner registration. Foreigner registration is the key for initiating school entrance procedures. Fundamentally, foreign residents are under no obligation to attend school; however, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has stated that information on school attendance should be provided to Koreans and other foreigners residing in Japan if they desire to enter public compulsory educational institutions (Monbusho Shotochuto Kyoikukyoku, 1991).

However, households with foreign national children approaching the school age encounter several problems with the enrollment process. First, since this information is directly delivered by post to families who have undergone foreigner registration, those who have not registered or those who have relocated without submitting a change of address form do not receive this information. Further, it is possible that the level of parental recognition of the Japanese educational system has an impact on this process. In the Tōkai and Kantō regions, the enrollment information is returned to some of the boards of education; this is a reminder that some families do not receive this information. The language in which the enrollment information is offered also plays a large role, and while some

municipalities offer information in English and other languages, others only offer information in Japanese. Thus, people who are unfamiliar with any of the available languages cannot obtain information on the Japanese educational system.

The second issue concerns access to enrollment for undocumented newcomer children. During the enrollment process, many boards of education require that the student's guardians present their foreigner registration cards, which provide basic information such as their name, gender, birth date, nationality, and address as well as their visa type and duration of stay. Consequently, it is possible that the children of undocumented foreigners are prevented from enrolling even if they wish to do so for fear that the Immigration Bureau will be notified during the application process.

In the municipalities that were actually surveyed, while many had not experienced this problem, some responded that they had denied enrollment to undocumented children. As public officials, they have an obligation to notify the Immigration Bureau; however, it is not up to the municipal boards of education to determine whether a foreigner is "illegal." With regard to this, the following opinion has been expressed: until a foreigner is confirmed to be "illegal" and thus obliged to leave the country, even if s/he has not undergone foreigner registration, the enrollment of his/her child at a public elementary/middle school "must be recognized." Further, as long as his/her address is verifiable, the municipal board of education should supply enrollment information (Shugaku Jimu Kenkyu-kai, 1993 : 69). Thus, hypothetically, even if the parents were not formally registered or had overstayed their visa, their child would be eligible to attend school. In the interview survey, some municipalities were found to "have a policy of accepting anyone who wants to attend school, even if their period of residence has expired." Instead of demanding the foreigner registration certificate, they accepted any documents that verified the applicant's personal identity, such as a passport, which substituted for

a certificate of residence from a district social worker or the maternal and child health handbook.

Next, we address the issue regarding the manner in which municipalities perceive the gap between the number of enrollment information brochures shipped and the number of students that actually enroll. The perception that this gap was not very large was relatively common. In general, this is linked to the fact that there are people who move to other regions or leave the country without notification. When a foreign national changes his/her residence, s/he is required to submit notification of the same. However, this is not widely known and many people move without notice; thus, their precise whereabouts often cannot be determined. As mentioned earlier, the mailed enrollment information is sometimes returned. In the Kantō region, approximately 10% of the enrollment information is returned due to either a change of address or an unknown address. In the Tōkai region, some municipalities attributed this to the addressees returning to their home countries; however, this could not be confirmed. It is also difficult to ascertain student attendance at schools for non-Japanese children. The municipalities therefore consider these students to be at home or working while they are not attending school.

What steps are the education boards taking with regard to families that do not respond to enrollment information? Surprisingly, a large number of boards answered that they have not taken any concrete steps toward resolving this issue. The main reasons for this are an aversion to the idea of spending time looking for data on "non-school attending" children and a lack of a sense of urgency due to the large number of "non-school attendants." Some boards were very busy dealing with the foreign national students already enrolled in the schools. Understanding these children's situations is next to impossible, adding yet another layer of difficulty in obtaining the exact number of school attending/"non-school attending"

students. Municipalities and NGOs are conducting independent surveys; however, the only way to precisely determine each individual's situation is through house-by-house visitations (Suzuki, 2002 : 82). The difficulties involved in surveying/understanding these children's situations in addition to the fact that compulsory education is not applicable to them has resulted in the current state of "abandonment" of the *Fushugaku* problem of foreign children.

### **III. School attendance/"non-school attendance" in various educational institutions**

(1) Attending school : public schools, schools for non-Japanese children, and regional tutoring classes

Since a foreign national is not subject to compulsory education when s/he applies for enrollment in a school, the board of education either grants or denies permission to enroll. This is well known owing to the 1992 media coverage of Zentsūji City, Kagawa Prefecture, in which a child of *Nikkei-jin*<sup>2</sup> was denied enrollment on the grounds that the education board was unable to meet their needs. Cases similar to this one are believed to exist, wherein children are refused enrollment (Miyajima, 2003: 184).

When a foreign national child enters a Japanese school, most boards of education place the child in a school grade strictly in keeping with the child's age. During interviews with local governments, parents were consulted on the desired grade in some cases, and the children were placed in lower grades in accordance with their Japanese abilities. However, the majority placed children on the basis of age, providing the explanation that physical build and chronological age should be



considered while determining their grade. It may thus be necessary to provide flexible assistance, such as provisionally placing foreign children in lower grades in keeping with their Japanese abilities and then moving them to the appropriate grade based on their performance (Shugaku Jimu Kenkyu-kai, 1993: 65).

Middle-school classes, in particular, are rather demanding compared to those of elementary school, resulting in foreign children discontinuing attending Japanese public schools. Further, the overall tendency toward "non-school attendance," as seen by frequent absences, long-term absence, and withdrawal from school, is striking. In particular, frequent cases of absenteeism can be observed after summer vacation, during which students are separated from school for a long period. In cases where a student forges strong ties with other students of the same nationality, if his/her friends or boyfriend/girlfriend drops out or transfers to a non-Japanese school, the student will sometimes follow suit and stop attending school. With regard to the guardians of children who are absent for long periods, since the child is not subject to compulsory education, the school and board of education cannot demand that the child attend. In contrast, in the case of Japanese students, in addition to the number of days of attendance and the grade, the principal authorizes the students' overall advancement and graduation. Furthermore, in cases where the student appears to have a remarkably poor understanding of course material due to long-term absences, the so-called "fail" and "repeat" system comes into place (Shugaku Jimu Kenkyu-kai, 1993: 28-29). In the case of foreign students, even in the process of withdrawal notification or expulsion, the level of consideration is not on par with that given in cases of truancy among Japanese students, and there is a tendency to accept this as a matter of course.

Apart from Japanese public schools, foreign children have the option of attending schools especially for non-Japanese children as well as regional tutoring

classes.

On May 1, 2002, by the School Education Law, MEXT recognized some schools for non-Japanese children as “miscellaneous schools”; there are 123 of these schools, the overwhelming majority of them being Korean or North Korean schools. This recognition of the schools as “miscellaneous,” that is, educational institutions other than the so-called “Article 1 Schools” and vocational schools, hinders their progress in that they are not granted the qualifications necessary for taking Japanese college entrance exams<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, many schools for non-Japanese children are not designated as “miscellaneous schools,” and therefore, the School Education Law does not apply to them. The Japanese government neither understands nor assists their situation ; these schools thus face severe financial difficulties. We will examine Brazilian schools by way of an example of a miscellaneous non-Japanese school. Although the general term “Brazilian schools” is used to cover all schools, each school has different policies. Currently, although 33 Brazilian schools are recognized by the Brazilian government (Mainichi Shimbun, Shizuoka Edition, Dec. 23, 2003), there are some among these that dispense credentials that do not facilitate academic promotion in Brazil.

Why do parents send their children to Brazilian schools? Many parents assume that their child will return to Brazil within a few years and send them to Brazilian schools because they do not want them to experience hardships upon returning to Brazil. However, the monthly tuition at these schools is between approximately 39,000 and 49,000 yen, placing a heavy economic burden on the parents. While some children transfer to Japanese public schools to evade this burden, others transfer out of Japanese public schools to Brazilian schools to escape bullying by peers. Moreover, there are some children who undergo “double schooling,” i.e., they attend both schools ; there are numerous concerns regarding this practice.

According to the hearings of NGOs, there are cases in which children who attend a Brazilian school in the morning and a Japanese public school in the afternoon are considered to be attending public school. However, attending two schools appears to be taxing on the student, who finally drops out of both schools. Although the economic burden of schools for non-Japanese children is considerable from the perspective of the guardians and the completion of the curricula may not be recognized in their home country, these schools function to distance those children from "non-school attendance" children who find it difficult to adjust to Japanese public schools and whose parents desire a comfortable transition for their children on returning to their home country.

Tutoring classes, operated by volunteers for children in areas with high foreign national populations, can be largely divided into two types: tutoring classes for children attending public schools and those for "non-school attending" children. Tutoring classes for children who attend school primarily conduct lessons that supplement the children's classes at school. However, due to differences in the children's cultural/historical background, these lessons differ slightly from supplementary lessons for Japanese children. On the other hand, there are fewer classes that are directed at "non-school attending" students as compared with the number of supplementary classes, and these usually function as a "home away from home" for the children. One classroom in Aichi Prefecture is open for two hours in the morning, Monday through Friday; however, there are more applicants than can be accepted, and some children are waitlisted. At the time of the survey, which was conducted in the afternoon on a weekday, we observed several uninterested children, probably "non-school attending," in the vicinity of the classroom. However, the very presence of these children near the classroom signifies that it is, in a broad sense, a place that creates opportunities for "learning."

Regarding supplementary classes in relation to “non-school attending” children, children who regularly attend classes occasionally bring “non-school attending” children with them. These classes provide the “non-school attending” children with an opportunity to become involved in study/education and possibly act as a bridge between these children and the educational institutions. Further, from the point of view of access to educational activities for foreign national children, these classes serve another purpose? since they provide free learning assistance, they impose no economic burden, making them readily accessible. Further, since the classroom instructors often reside in the same area as the children, they can obtain information on the region and educational system and build strong relationships with them.

## (2) Students who do not attend school and their families

What do children who do not attend Japanese schools, schools for non-Japanese children, or volunteer tutoring classes do? Based on the responses to the interview survey, it appears that many of these students spend their time in groups or with friends in their housing project parks, supermarkets, convenience stores, or game arcades. The “non-school attendance” problem was first detected by teachers, welfare officers, area residents, and Japanese in their workplaces, who noticed children in such places on weekday afternoons. They contacted their ward offices, community centers, and child welfare centers. The number of so-called “delinquent” children involved in crimes such as thinner abuse, smoking, extortion, and theft is not small. Further, some children live at home as shut-ins, with only their televisions and video games for recreation. On the other hand, the problem of children quitting school at the ages of 13 or 14 to pursue unskilled labor is even more severe. This is particularly prevalent among children who are forced to

support themselves because their parents have either returned to their home countries for long periods or have remarried and no longer take care of them as well as among children from Brazil, where compulsory education is not provided to children above the age of 14.

The frequency with which foreign children discontinue attending school is thought to be due to lack of information regarding "school attendance," including information for parents, and an insufficient support system. With respect to foreign guardians, it is feared that they lack sufficient information on their children's education or that this information is not being offered to them. Interviews with the local governments highlighted that there were some that simply do not provide advanced notifications regarding the enrollment assistance system. In some cases, problems faced by guardians, such as low income, unstable employment, repeated changes of address, etc., pose obstacles to their children's education. For example, some students discontinued attending school because they temporarily returned to their home countries soon after coming to Japan, which prevented them from attending some classes. On the other hand, some students quit school claiming they were returning to their home countries, but in fact neither left the country, nor attended school. There were also students who transferred from Japanese schools to Brazilian ones, but quit because they were unable to pay the high tuition fees; as a consequence, they are currently not enrolled anywhere.

This is not to say the guardians have low expectations of their children, but it appears that they do not have the time to consider their children's educational plans because, in reality, they do not understand Japanese and are fatigued from their long working hours. In addition, due to a strong sense of "Dekasegi" (a target earner) and uncertainty about future plans (Miyajima, 2003: 152-155), they tend to view school as a "substitute for daycare" and "neglect" the educational aspect. In sharp

contrast to this, the Chinese seem to closely observe the link between Japanese economic development and the Japanese level of education and have immoderately high expectations for schooling. They may find the amount of study matter to be low compared with their home country, where education fever is on the rise, and constantly pressure their children to study harder. This phenomenon is caused by the gap in awareness regarding home education among international migrants or, in other words, the differences in educational cultures.

#### **IV. Eliminating the structural causes of *Fushugaku***

On the basis of the analysis performed using the attendance/“non-school attendance” process chart, it was learned that in each of the various stages in accessing entrance to public schools, children receive unequal (in some cases arbitrary) treatment depending on the local government (board of education/schools). In particular, the majority of the children of undocumented foreigners are, in essence, “barred” from the Japanese educational system.

As argued in II, there are problems with local government statistics in that students attending only schools for non-Japanese children or volunteer classes may possibly be counted as “non-school attending.” There are also many children who fall into the category of “non-school attendance” because of relocation (a comparatively common occurrence in newcomer foreign national households) within Japan (sometimes without notification), temporarily returning to their home countries, or pursuing work as unskilled laborers, despite being school-aged. These “on-record non-school attendance” problems, which cannot be tracked by the municipalities, persist.

As discussed in III (1), even in cases in which enrollment applications are "permitted," one can observe symptoms of the entrenchment of truancy, leading to long-term absence, and finally, children dropping out. Compared with truancy among Japanese students, there has been no consideration or discussion of the possibility of viewing attendance by foreign children at schools for non-Japanese children or tutoring classes as equivalent to school attendance<sup>5</sup>. In some cases, a child's diminishing desire to attend school as well as his/her family's economic considerations distance the child from public schools. If students develop "gaps" in their education owing to long-term absence, dropping out of school, and "repetition of grades", i.e., children who frequently return to their home country or leave school to pursue unskilled labor, the chances that they will return to or re-enroll in school to resume their education is bleak.

Under these circumstances, in which even the "schooling" of foreign national children is not guaranteed, the roles of understanding on the part of their guardians, regional society public schools, schools for non-Japanese children, and volunteer learning classes become relatively demanding. It is necessary for local governments and NGOs to hold frequent briefings offering guidance on furthering education and provide information that would benefit guardians. On the other hand, it is also important to provide flexible learning, in keeping with their education history and language, to foreign national children who attend Japanese public schools. Although schools for non-Japanese children and volunteer learning classes provide valuable education within regional societies, their legal positions and financial foundations are limited; therefore, they require support from the government and schools. In addition, many local governments lack adequate knowledge on regional tutoring classes and some responded that although they wanted to implement classes, they had not been able to do so. Further, differences

between foreign and domestic educational systems have made it difficult to establish connections between Japanese public schools and schools for non-Japanese children. In order to guarantee substantial education for foreign children, cooperation and connections at various levels within the region will be of critical importance.

It should be noted that certain personal situations must be handled with care and discretion; however, the differences in accessing education should not depend on the area of residence, and the situation demands the creation of nationwide guidelines for the enrollment of foreign children. In this sense, the “Foreign-national City Residents’ Meeting (Gaikokujin Shuju Toshi Kaigi)” movement aiming at cooperation between local governments in dealing with “non-school attendance” is worthy of attention<sup>6</sup>. However, an aspect that requires caution is the possibility that the “cost benefit” approach will be employed in *Fushugaku* policies. The following question arises in the midst of financial difficulties in local governments — will Japanese people easily accept the human rights argument for the educational rights of foreign children? In areas where “non-school attending” children stand out, it is natural that concern will grow regarding the maintenance of the surrounding environment. Further, given that regional industries cannot function without foreign labor, the education of foreign children will probably be perceived as a “cost that should be paid” so long as its “benefits” are recognized. However, overemphasizing this point could lead to the undesirable consequence of propagating the belief that “non-school attending” foreign children are “future criminals.” Therefore, the manner in which the problem of *Fushugaku* is approached as a local government policy requires much circumspection.

As mentioned above, by considering the school-attendance/“non-school attendance” process, this paper has elucidated that there is a high probability that



these children will fall into the "non-school attendance" category ; this can be attributed to "structured" causes. This problem, however, should not go unaddressed owing to the fact that the government cannot systematically investigate it, as they are unable to conduct home visitations. The essential questions that must be squarely addressed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as well as each local government, are why foreign children find it difficult to attend school and why they are not intercepted after quitting. It is strongly urged that schools and volunteer groups cooperate to promptly assess the current situation and plan new policies toward ensuring every child's "right to an education."

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to Article 4 of the Fundamental Law of Education, children aged 6 to 15 ("school-age") are required to attend school, while those aged over 15 are considered "above school-age." Regarding the latter, even if these students submit enrollment applications, their board of education is under no obligation to accept them. Furthermore, children who have graduated from a middle school in a foreign country may not enroll in a Japanese middle school (Shugaku Jimu Kenkyu-kai, 1993: 26).

<sup>2</sup> Data crucial to this paper was obtained between 2001 and 2003, through interview surveys with boards of education, schools, and persons connected with regional tutoring classes for the "sociological research on foreign children/student non-school attendance" project under the MEXT Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (Foundation Research B, Representative : Takashi Miyajima, Rikkyo Univ.), in which the authors were participants. In particular, many surveys were conducted with regard to local governments in the Kanto and Tokai regions since they have high concentrations of newcomer resident foreign children. We are deeply grateful

to the people involved from the various institutions for their cooperation with the survey and the research group members and for permitting the use of the data in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Nikkei-jin are the grandchildren and later descendants of Japanese emigrants to South America. This category was introduced in 1990.

<sup>4</sup> In 2004, MEXT announced that 19 Brazilian schools would be awarded the qualification to take Japanese university entrance exams under the condition that students complete a preparatory Japanese curriculum to compensate for the missing one year of the 12-year requirement of Japanese universities (Kyoto Shimbun, January 19, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> In some cases, the time spent by Japanese students in receiving guidance/counseling at acclimatization guidance centers or private institutions is counted as school attendance days (Shugaku Jimu Kenkyu-kai, 1993: 26).

<sup>6</sup> In the "Hamamatsu Declaration and Proposals" adopted in the conference, the following are raised as items that should be considered: (1) support for the establishment and operation of schools (classrooms) for non-school-attending and truant children, (2) stronger cooperation with schools for non-Japanese children and exceptions for school incorporation, and (3) improvement of Japanese learning support and guidance for "non-school attending" children (Gaikoku-jin Shuju Toshi Kaigi, , 2001).

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