

does. "Five years from now, I would like to be focused with a positive direction in my life. This will make me successful."

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PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

by Hiroshi Fukurai

IDENTITY, CULTURAL ADAPTATION, AND ACCOMMODATION OF A JAPANESE FAMILY LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES

When our first son was born five years ago, we felt a great concern about how he could retain a Japanese identity and still integrate within the main culture in the United States. Since then, we have added two daughters to our family. It has been a constant struggle, thinking and wondering whether we have made the right decision to maintain cultural ways and beliefs intact, inculcating them in our children.

We have had to make a number of critical decisions about child raising and specific ways that our family should be designed to feel secure in America. From the first time we discussed child raising, we decided to make our home much like the way we knew it when we grew up in Japan. We felt that any type of unnatural pretension or artificial home atmosphere would affect our children negatively. We also decided to make our home a sanctuary, away from the strains of racism and socioeconomic inequality that permeate U.S. society. And the motto of our revered home was simple: be comfortable and act naturally.

Translating the motto into our daily activities meant that we decided to communicate in the Japanese language, eat Japanese food, watch Japanese television programs, and maintain the Japanese way of life that we understand and are confident in providing to our children. We also thought that it was important to make clear personal and social distinctions between what we do at home (*bonne*) and how we live outside home (*tatema*). Luckily, access to Japanese ways of life is not difficult to come by in California.

Japanese towns are nearby, and ethnic foods are easily accessible. Even television programs from Japan are accessible for almost 24 hours a day, thanks to satellite relays and today's ever-advancing technological innovations in telecommunications (Pollack, 1995).

Another important decision involved our efforts to give our children constant exposure to the Japanese language, people, culture, and tradition. After our son was born, I asked my father to spend at least three months a year with our children in the United States. We also invite my wife's parents to Santa Cruz annually to spend a month with our children. My father-in-law, who suffered a stroke eight years ago, visits us in a wheelchair and enjoys his stay because of the greater accessibility to various public and private facilities. In Japan the physically handicapped are still considered outcasts, and, while great strides have been made in recent years to make public facilities accessible to physically handicapped individuals, the United States offers them greater opportunities and accessibility to both private and public facilities. With both of our parents coming to the United States regularly, they make strong cultural connections with our children, giving them constant exposure to the Japanese language and a Japanese way of life.

We also tried to take advantage of maximizing cultural exchange with Japanese visitors through my university. Since there is always a small group of Japanese visiting scholars and their families in the area, we routinely arrange parties, dinners, and picnics with them. Almost all of them bring small children with them, increasing the opportunity to interact and play with our children. Another benefit of interacting with Japanese visiting scholars and their families is that they often come back to Santa Cruz after their initial appointment is completed. I often end up making necessary accommodation arrangements for them. And every spring, we have a reunion with former visiting scholars and their children in Santa Cruz.

We have also decided to spend a couple of months in Japan every summer. While international travel remains expensive, we find the traveling and staying in Japan very rewarding to our children because the trip gives them an important opportunity to interact with different Japanese adults and children, making them aware that there are a large number of "real" Japanese-speaking people out there who, besides us, the parents, communicate in the Japanese language. Fortunately, our cousins also have children who are at the same age as ours, giving them the opportunity to play, talk, and interact.

In Santa Cruz, we also decided to teach some conversational Japanese to preschool children and teachers because my son is one of a few students, if not the only one, able to speak and understand the Japanese language in class. The preschool is run by the university and often enrolls children of non-English speaking parents. Given the preschool's multicultural environment, many teachers appear to be very sensitive to cultural differences and language difficulties faced by the children.

Several times in the past, we have been invited to teach children and

teachers Japanese children's songs and conversational Japanese. When we take our son to preschool every morning, for example, we say, "*Ohayo-gozaimasu*" ("good morning") and give Japanese greetings to children and teachers, and they often respond to us in Japanese as well. All children and teachers sing a Japanese song several times a week. We were also asked to teach them traditional paper arts called origami. Our involvement in preschool and the teachers' willingness to accept Japanese culture have helped create the preschool's multicultural environment, so that our son feels less isolated culturally and linguistically (Smith, 1995).

At home, we have made efforts to celebrate many Japanese festivities and conduct cultural rituals. In appreciating a festive occasion for Japanese girls, for instance, my wife's parents helped celebrate Girls Day (a Japanese national holiday celebrated with special dolls that remain in the family for years) on March 3 by sending us the decorative dolls, called *Obinasama*. On May 5 we also celebrate Boys Day by making large carp flags (three-dimensional flags containing the emblem of a fish, the symbol of strength and endurance) to pray for our son's health and life's success. As well, we have built a small shrine at home where my wife and I make a daily offering of a fresh glass of water and a small rice dish to the spirit of our ancestors to pray for the good health of our family and loved ones. Our children also participate in this brief morning ceremony by clapping their hands and meditating for a brief moment, a practice of belief that is part of the spiritual ritual in Japanese custom and tradition.

Because small children's stories and Japanese songs are an important part of raising children at home, we also brought with us from Japan both books and audiocassettes of most major Japanese small children's stories and songs. We play them almost daily and read the stories before they take a daily nap or go to bed in the evening. We also frequently play Japanese small children's songs and traditional music. Not only do our children enjoy listening to traditional Japanese songs and small children's stories, but we the parents also enjoy them. We feel that it is important to let our children know that we as parents also enjoy the traditional songs and stories. After all, living the motto, we must feel comfortable and be natural at home.

All these measures to make sure that our children have constant exposure to Japanese culture and a Japanese way of life come directly from my own personal experience in the United States as a foreign student and then a professional scholar. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to meet a large variety of people from different parts of the United States, as well as the world, carefully observe their experiences and methods of coping, and examine their strategies in dealing with differences between their own cultures and those of the United States. I have also experienced racism, and such experiences have made me aware of my ignorance of racism at home and the effect it has had on Japan's racial minorities and their children. While I considered myself a member of Japan's racial majority, I found

myself and my family as members of a racial minority in the United States, and such an identity shift and racial awareness made me more sensitive toward racial and gender inequality and how these influence children and affect family and the social environment where children are brought up.

In order to understand my approaches, cultural adaptation, and efforts to create Japanese-conscious domestic and social environments for our children, it is important to disclose something about my personal background.

I was born as a son of a working-class family in 1954 in Sendai, a city of a half million population, located approximately 200 miles north of Tokyo. After completing a study in metallurgical engineering, I came to the United States in 1976 and completed a doctoral degree in sociology at the University of California, Riverside, in 1985. I first taught at Texas A&M University for two years, then moved to Santa Cruz, California. My decision to return to California was prompted by my desire to be close to Japanese communities, cultures, and a way of life where I could easily meet and share ideas with people of Japanese backgrounds. The fact that I was still single and in search of a lifelong partner also played an important part in my decision to return to California.

During 1990 and 1992 I returned to Japan and served as a senior policy adviser at a Japanese branch campus of Texas A&M University. Texas A&M University, one of three government-sponsored, American universities that launched their first international campuses in Japan, opened its branch campus in 1990 in Koriyama, a town of 320,000 population. Koriyama is located near Sendai, where my parents were still living, and the geographical proximity to Sendai was another important factor for taking the advisory position at the branch campus.

While taking a leave of absence from my university and working as an adviser in Koriyama, I met and married a then 32-year-old former television reporter in 1992. The encounter was set up according to a Japanese traditional, arranged way, called *omiai* in Japanese, in which a go-between makes a reservation at a respectable restaurant for a couple to meet and talk. We then fell in love and married five months later. The following year, our son was born, followed by two daughters.

Once in the United States, our decision and plan to act naturally and comfortably at home and maintain the Japanese way of life were also closely related to my wife's limited language skills and her lack of international experiences. As a college graduate, despite having taken English courses since junior high school for a total of ten years, she could barely engage in English conversation. The greater part of her failure to communicate in English stems from the Japanese educational system's emphasis on learning the grammatical structure of the English language, rather than on teaching students to express their ideas and thoughts through conversation and communication. Given her very limited language skills, I felt that it was imperative to create and maintain a family environment where she feels safe

and comfortable so that, despite living in a foreign land, she does not feel pressured to act pretentiously at home or in social settings.

The fact that she had never lived outside Japan played an important part in creating the Japanese-specific cultural environment at home for our children. Her limited international experience also forced both of us to make certain personal sacrifices and collective decisions. When she was seven months pregnant, for instance, we both decided and agreed that she should return to Japan to have our first baby. She had been taking private English conversation courses in Japan and attended adult school in the United States. However, her language skills were still quite limited. So, when we discovered that she was pregnant, she became concerned about her limited language ability and felt that she might not be able to communicate effectively with hospital personnel when going through the last, critical moments of childbirth. The practice of a Japanese woman to return to her hometown is neither new nor an anomaly but is still considered a traditional part of Japanese culture in which daughters often return to their parents to have babies. My younger sister, for example, returned to Sendai and had her first two sons there. For her third baby, she decided not to return, only because our mother passed away the previous year, and my sister did not feel comfortable in the absence of our mother.

My wife's limited language skills ultimately led to different approaches to cultural adaptation, leading to my increased involvement with the daily activities of my wife and our children. Ever since the beginning of our marriage, for example, I always had to accompany her and our children practically everywhere, due to her and my children's lack of language skills. Such daily activities included shopping, doctor's visits, preschool, and counseling. While my wife's language began to improve significantly, going places together still remains the routine and integral part of our daily activities. It is still my responsibility, for instance, to take our children to see doctors. I go with my wife and children on most shopping expeditions. For academic conventions or conference presentations, the entire family travels with me. Even for a routine physical checkup for my wife, I go along and take our three children with us. All doctors and nurses at the clinic know every member of our family and play with our children in a waiting room or in the doctor's office.

So my place is different from that of most Japanese men. The gendered role of Japanese male is that of "sarari-man," devoting his life to work and spending almost no time with his family. Well, the changing environment and planned strategy to adapt in a new environment with my Japanese wife and children have led to my greater involvement in family affairs and daily activities, contrary to the stereotypic image of a work-crazed Japanese husband (Krooth and Fukurai, 1990).

While I feel that I succeeded in creating a much kinder and friendlier family atmosphere and culturally robust domestic and social environment,

there are always some areas that I may have overlooked. For instance, the most difficult part of carefully thought-out strategies to make a homey and soul-resting environment for my wife and our children comes from my dealing with people who do not share the Japanese language or culture. With respect to preschool teachers and children, we have made a conscious effort through our greater involvement at preschool to make sure that our son does not feel physically and intellectually isolated from other children. However, with respect to my colleagues and students, most of whom do not share the Japanese language or culture, I often find myself communicating with them in English in the presence of our children. I always wonder how our children view my interaction with people in English and their assessment of my dealings with English-speaking strangers. They may see me with a double personality—one at home speaking Japanese and the other, outside home, speaking a foreign language.

My decision to communicate in the Japanese language at home and speak English only when children ask English-related questions comes from my assumption that children will eventually acquire English-language skills at school (Wright and Taylor, 1995). For example, I often overhear my son communicating with his sister in English, though she has yet to attend preschool. The English language, I assume, can be acquired through my children's continued process of socialization at school and interaction with their friends.

My decision to speak Japanese at home is also based on the suggestions given by a large number of Japanese American friends who indicated that their parents pushed them to learn the Japanese language and a Japanese way of life when they were young. However, their frustration in dealing with two separate languages and cultures forced most of them to reject and abandon the cultural learning experience. The irony is that when they grew older, they felt remorseful and even angry because their parents failed to push them hard enough to keep up with the Japanese language and culture.

Another major concern or fear that I have is that because of my children's demarcated lifestyles between home and outside, they may end up developing no true identity (Hobsbawm, 1996). Development of no ethnic or strong racial identity is a true worry for us as parents. We call it *nenashigusa*, the duckweed of the grass without its roots. No matter how much we try to impose on them a Japanese way of life at home or create a domestic and social environment promoting the understanding of Japanese culture and language, there is a certain limit to what we can do as parents. Though racial identity is an integral part of American life, they may fail to develop a strong sense of social or racialized identity, perceiving themselves as neither Japanese nor American. Once they grow up, they may feel alienated and even become angry that we as parents failed to make them feel either Japanese enough or American enough.

The only hope that my wife and I have is that when they grow up, they

read these words and try to understand the struggles that we their parents had to go through to create the "right" and "comfortable" environment for them and their future.

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