Internationally Mobile Children: The Japanese Kikoku-shijo Experience Reconsidered

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Children who leave their home country and spend a number of years abroad are deeply affected by that experience. Having learned to position themselves according to a broader worldview, they often feel and are perceived to be different from their "home-grown" counterparts.

In Japan, children who lived overseas due to their parents' job requirements are given the label of "Kikoku-shijo" (literally "returnee children") upon coming back to Japan. With their dramatic increase in number during the 1970s and the 1980s, Kikoku-shijos attracted at first the attention of educators, scholars and policy makers, and subsequently the interest of the media and Japanese society at large.

This paper will discuss the process through which Kikoku-shijos emerged as a social phenomenon, and the factors that contributed to the social construction of Kikoku-shijo stereotypes. It will go on to analyze the lingering effects of those stereotypes, and how they impact the current generation of Japanese children who grow up overseas.

It is the aim of this paper to suggest a reconsideration of Kikoku-shijo characteristics, in terms that will hopefully "validate" the experience of as many children as possible.

Keywords : Internationally mobile children, Kaigai/Kikoku-shijo, Third Culture Kids, Stereotypes

国際移動する子どもたち～帰国子女体験の再考

グローバル化時代には珍しくなくなった「国際移動する子どもたち」の中でも、「帰国子女」が注目されるようになって久しい。本稿では1970年代より様々な変遷を経た「帰国子女ステレオタイプ」が2008年現在、どのような影響を依然として及ぼしているのかを分析する。また、帰国子女の体験を枠組の中で捉えなおし、海外で育つ日本人子女の本質的な特徴を従来のステレオタイプから解き放つ形で再考する。

キーワード：国際移動する子ども、海外帰国子女教育、帰国子女の社会的イメージ、サード・カルチャー・キッズ

Introduction

Children who accompany their parents on international postings are neither a new nor a rare phenomenon. Military personnel, missionaries and diplomats have long been deployed to foreign postings with their dependents, while corporations from various countries routinely assign employees and their families to overseas branches.

In the United States, labels such as "Military Brats"（children growing up worldwide on American military bases）and "Missionary Kids"（children who follow their missionary parents to often remote outposts）are quite familiar to the public at large. However, "Third Culture Kids", a term that seeks to encompass a wider array of internationally mobile children, is only slowly gaining recognition.

In Japan, on the other hand, children who grow up abroad due to their parents' job requirement, and return to their home country after a prolonged absence, have been known as "Kikoku-shijos"（literally, "returnee children"）for over 30 years. During this time, Kikoku-shijos have been the target of negative and positive stereotyping, sometimes scorned as "deficient Japanese" for their lack of knowledge of Japanese social norms and cultural patterns, but more often envied and admired for their linguistic skills and life-experience outside of Japan. They became a social phenomenon in their own right, and even achieved the status of a "New Elite".

Much has been said and written on Kikoku-shijos, especially at the height of their "fame" in the 1980s. Unfortunately, an overly simplistic view of Kikoku-shijos became deeply engrained in the Japanese public's mind, and to this day, obfuscates the true essence of the experience of children who grow up overseas.

The aim of this paper is two fold: 1）to provide a historical overview of the emergence of Kikoku-shijos as a social phenomenon in Japan, and 2）to reconsider the Kikoku-shijo experience, by pointing out the flaws and misconceptions of Kikoku-shijo stereotypes, and suggesting a new "Third Culture Kids" framework for a better understanding of these children's characteristics.

1. The emergence of Kikoku-shijos

1.1 Economic growth, social consequence

The emergence of Kikoku-shijos was the logical consequence of Japan's tremendous economic growth after the Second World War.

Japanese corporations, especially trading companies and banks, established overseas branches at an accelerated pace all through the 1960s, and together with the deregulation of foreign exchange

and international travel, caused a sharp increase in the number of Japanese nationals residing overseas.

The Japanese government keeps detailed statistics on the whereabouts of its nationals overseas. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) publishes an *Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas*, for both Permanent Expatriates (who have acquired a permanent resident visa from their host country) and Long Term Expatriates (who reside in the host country for over three months and hold a temporary visa other than a tourist visa). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, previously known as the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Culture, or MESSC) makes available data on Kaigai-shijos (Japanese children living abroad) as well as on Kikoku-shijos through their annual *Basic School Survey* and *White Papers*. The MEXT website also features a special section titled CLARINET (Children Living Abroad and Returnees InterNET), devoted to information on Kaigai/Kikoku-shijo education.[1)]

Table 1 shows the changes in numbers of Long Term Expatriates (LTE), Kaigai-shijos (KGS), and Kikoku-shijos (KKS) during the period of 1971 to 2000. 1971 was the first year data on children coming back from an overseas stay with their parents were collected, 1977 was the first year the term Kikoku-shijo was used as an official category, and 2005 is the most recent data available for the number of KKS..

Table 1 : Shifts in populations of Long Term Expatriates, Kaigai-shijos, and Kikoku-shijos for the period 1971－2000

	1971	1977	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Long Term Expatriates	84,029	160,511 (+91.0%)	193,820 (+21%)	237,488 (+23%)	374,044 (+58%)	460,522 (+23%)	526,685 (+14%)
Kaigai-shijos	8,662	19,489 (+125%)	27,465 (41%)	38,011 (+38%)	49,336 (+30%)	49,703 (+1%)	49,463 (−1%)
Kikoku-shijos	1,544	5,774 (+274%)	7,504 (+30%)	10,483 (+40%)	13,313 (+27%)	12,997 (−2%)	10,821 (−17%)

Compiled by Kano Podolsky based on data from:
Ministry of Foreign Affairs *Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas 1971－2000*
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology *White Papers 1980－2000*

All three groups show a tremendous increase from 1971 to 1977. The number of LTE rose from 84,029 in 1971 to 160,511 in 1977 (an increase of 91%), KGS from 8,662 to 19,489 (+123%), and KKS from 1,544 to 5,774 (+274%). Further analysis of data on expatriates reveals that over half of all LTE are accounted for by corporate employees and their dependents, this proportion having

remained virtually unchanged over the last three decades. While the number of LTE or KGS for any given year provides a “snapshot” of their total population at the time, KKS numbers are part of a cumulative process: although some KKS may leave Japan for a subsequent overseas mission, the majority will stay to form an ever-growing pool of returnees making their presence felt within the Japanese social system.

The steady increase in the number of KGS in the 1980s（27,465 in 1980, 38,011 in 1985, and 49,336 by 1990）again reflects a boom（or “bubble”）in the Japanese economy, during which the number of LTE almost doubles（from 193,820 in 1980 to 374,044 in 1990）.

The increase is also linked to an improvement in educational environment, for both the children living abroad and those returning to Japan. The Japanese government strived to establish full-time and part-time Japanese Schools around the world in the previous decade: from a total of 20 at the end of the 1970s, the number of full-time Japanese Schools reached 62 a decade later Meanwhile, the number of part-time Japanese Schools jumped from less than 20 in 1971 to over 100 by1982（Sato, 1997: 78－82）. The establishment of such schools around the world were instrumental in reassuring parents that their children could keep up with Japanese School subjects while away from their home country.

Concurrently, school programs and admissions standards were developed to accommodate the special needs of returnee students（such as exams conducted in English or other foreign language）and this in turn encouraged more families to venture out to foreign postings.

1．2 Social construction of Kikoku-shijo image

Economic factors and population flux thus provided the backdrop for the emergence of a conspicuous group of children, the Kikoku-shijos. Let us now examine how the “social construction” of Kikoku-shijo image took place over the years.

Gunei Sato, a leading expert in Kaigai/Kikoku-shijo education, conducted a thorough review of over 88 magazine articles spanning a period of 18 years（starting in 1975, when the search keyword “Kikoku-shijo” first appeared in an article, until 1993）and we will follow his analysis of the process through which stereotypes of Kikoku-shijos were formed, evolved, and came to be shared by the public at large（Sato, 1997）.

1975～1985: Kikoku-shijos as “educational orphans”

As early as 1966, the Japanese government was aware that children who returned from an overseas sojourn presented a challenge to the highly centralized national school system. Sato notes that

according to the first large-scale government survey conducted that year (“Study on Children of Overseas Workers”), close to half of the returnees of middle-school and high-school age were entering a grade below that which they would normally attend, in order to make up for the (Japanese) school years that they had missed. The study also found that only 40% of the minor dependents accompanied their working parent (i.e. the father, in virtually all cases) if he was posted in Africa or Asia, while 70% did so if the overseas mission took place in North America or Europe (1997:54).

Two areas of concern were thus identified, which interestingly overlapped with the geographical location of the overseas posting: 1) children who had accompanied their parents abroad (mainly to the “Western” world such as North America and Europe) had trouble reintegrating the school system upon their return to Japan, and 2) in the case of a posting in less industrialized countries, parents felt there was a need for better schooling opportunities if their children were to accompany them overseas. The Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Culture, in consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, set out to address these concerns based on two separate strategies: establishing a system of re-entry for the Kikoku-shijos, while assisting the Kaigai-shijos by building full-time and part-time Japanese Schools in areas where parents requested them.

The trickle-down effects of these ministerial decisions were not felt immediately however, and the voices of Japanese expatriates who advocated on their children’s behalf began to get louder in the 1970s. Sato found that many concerned parents started to make themselves heard in the media from the middle of the 1970s through to the 1980s (ibid: 206－240).

The first of these articles was written by journalist Junji Kitashiro in 1975, an inflammatory “Open letter to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science” in which he claimed that the government had failed their duty toward Kikoku-shijos, making them “educational orphans (***kyouiku kimin***)”[2] (ibid:214). Kitashiro’s complaint was based on three challenges that expatriate children face: 1) adapting to the local school upon the move overseas, 2) keeping up with Japanese school subjects while overseas, and 3) re-adapting to the Japanese school system upon return. Kitashiro’s accusation of “governmental abandonment” referred to the fact that at the time, high-school had already come to be considered “quasi-mandatory” schooling in Japan[3], and yet Kikokushijos had very few options as to what high-schools they could attend upon their return, thus being deprived of an education that should have been rightfully theirs.

Sato argues that Kitashiro’s rhetoric set the tone for a public perception of Kikoku-shijos as “poor children in need of rescuing” (ibid: 217), a perception furthermore shared by educators as well as government officials, and reflected in policies.

1985～1990: Kikoku-shijos as “symbols of Japan’s internationalization”

Sato’s analysis goes on to show that media reports on Kikoku-shijos abruptly changed in the middle of the 1980s: not only the number of articles had increased dramatically, but they were painting a much more positive picture of the returnees. With the historical signing of the Plaza Accord in 1985, the Japanese yen suddenly found itself almost at par with the American dollar, prompting a tremendous enthusiasm among businesses and public alike for overseas expansion. International travel, foreign real-estate buying sprees, establishment of factories and plants outside of Japan, all were manifestations of that enthusiasm which would eventually lead to the wild era of “bubble” economy.

However, it was not enough for the Japanese to venture outside of their borders. There was intense pressure exerted by American politicians on the Japanese government to “open up” and to “internationalize”. Although this pressure was mainly aimed at Japan’s economy to ease its trade barriers in order to help decrease the United States’ huge trade deficit, the term “internationalization” became a country-wide slogan that the Japanese took to heart. It is in this social atmosphere that Kikoku-shijos, with their overseas upbringing, （presupposed） language and intercultural communication skills, came to be seen as the perfect symbol of a future Japan was aspiring to.

One crucial characteristic in media coverage during this period was that Kikoku-shijos themselves, instead of their parents, made appearances and talked about their experiences. The public now saw first-hand those internationalized youths on television, expressing themselves with confidence and maturity, and the perception dramatically shifted from the negative “deficient Japanese” image to that of a “new elite”.

Sato points out that a deliberately skewed sample of returnees was behind the formation of such an image, as the majority were students of prestigious universities, had come back from North America or Europe, and had attended local or international schools （ibid: 225）. Conveniently overlooked was the fact that only a small percentage of actual returnees possessed such a background.

The turnaround in public perception can also be attributed to a much-improved system of reintegration for Kikoku-shijos, a large network of schools all over Japan that accepted them and provided special academic and counselling support. Fewer cases of Kikoku-shijo maladaptation, bullying, or discrimination were heard of, and in an ironic twist, claims were raised that the special treatment Kikoku-shijos enjoyed amounted to “reverse discrimination” toward home-grown Japanese students. It was argued that the otherwise extremely competitive university entrance system was made unduly easy for Kikoku-shijos, who were admitted under separate criteria and therefore

gained unfair advantage over students who had toiled all the while in their home country.

Early 1990s: Trivialization of Kikoku-shijos and stabilization of stereotypes

During the early1990s, the number of Kaigai-shijos reached a plateau and hovered around the 50,000 mark, just as the annual number of returnees also remained relatively constant at about 10,000 per year. The steady stream and resulting pool of Kikoku-shijos made their presence a fact of life in Japan. Kikoku-shijos were by that time highly visible among media reporters and news anchors, in the entertainment business, and ubiquitous in the business and academic community. They were also often used as characters in television dramas and novels. Kikoku-shijos were prominent even among the imperial family: Crown Princess Masako had lived abroad due to the diplomatic career of her father, and her sister-in-law, Princess Kiko, also experienced life overseas as the daughter of an international academic.

Sato points out that the media often used terms such as "typical" or "so-called" in front of the category "Kikoku-shijo", which he argues are proof that the label of Kikoku-shijo had by this time become familiar enough among the public, automatically conjuring up certain characteristics attached to being a returnee (ibid: 230).

Sato cautions that such a "trivialization" of Kikoku-shijos does not necessarily mean that the Japanese public has acquired a deeper knowledge or understanding about the actual experience of these children. Few people realize that approximately one third of all Kaigai-shijos attend a full-time Japanese School and live a secluded life away from the host population, or that a great number of Japanese children in California are classified as "LEP (Limited English Proficiency)" students even after several years of residence. Rather, Kikoku-shijos are almost always perceived as 1) being fluent English speakers, 2) with a profound knowledge of the host society and culture, 3) resulting in some type of "emancipated" personality [4].

A further concern, according to Sato, is that such a deeply engrained Kikoku-shijo stereotype ("positive" as it may be) can lead to the oversight of individual differences and actual needs among returnee children. Not least of the serious ill-effects is that teachers and school administrators put unduly high expectations on a returnee student as to their foreign language (i.e. English) or intercultural communication skills. Many cases of students who hide the fact that they lived overseas are testament to the stress caused by such mismatched expectations. Sato points out that this tendency to hide one's Kikoku-shijo background is prevalent among, but not exclusive to, children who attended a full-time Japanese School while abroad. Many children resent the one-dimensional Kikoku-shijo stereotype and the fact that they are expected to fit its characteristics.

1．3 The two-faceted perception of Kikoku-shijos

Why has Japan paid so much attention to Kikoku-shijos, compared to the United States for example, whose organizations arguably send out a larger number of expatriates than any other country in the world ?

Although Japan is becoming gradually more ethnically diverse in the 21st century, it still has the smallest percentage of foreign workers and/or foreign-born people among all industrialized countries（OECD, 2007; Tsuda et al., 2003）. The majority of Japanese thus still cling to the perception that theirs is an ethnically and culturally homogeneous nation, oblivious of ethnic minorities who have lived in Japan for decades（Koreans and Chinese）or longer（the Ainus or the Okinawans）[5].

I have previously suggested the explanation that three decades ago, when Kikoku-shijos' presence became conspicuous, Japanese society was even more ill-equipped than today to deal with the notion of diversity, or how to accommodate that diversity within its institutions. Japan's education system in particular was at a loss what to do with children who had acquired cultural values and behaviour patterns different from those of their "home-grown" counterparts（Kano Podolsky, 2004）.

In contrast, the United States has had a long history of immigration, and values the multi-ethnic/multi-racial nature of its population. Schools are expected to deal with students from various cultural backgrounds, and newcomers are given a chance to adapt into their host society. In such an environment, American children who return after a long absence from their home country may not be paid special attention to, for *any more* attention than is given to all newcomers who are unfamiliar with the American social system.

Another factor which contributed to the intensity of the Kikoku-shijo phenomenon is the Japanese fascination with things "Western", especially English language. It is a well known historical fact that the Japanese were intent on "modernizing" in the late 19th century Meiji Era, and their strategy was to learn from and emulate the West. Subsequent events such as Japan's wartime occupation of neighbouring Asian countries, however, prove that Japan has always maintained a complex balance between nationalistic pride and desire for westernization, and this is reflected in their treatment of Kikoku-shijos.

Based on the life-history analysis of former returnee children, Naomi Horoiwa（1983）noted that Kikoku-shijos often have difficulty forming a self-image, because they are surrounded by (Japanese) people who have radically opposing opinions of them. .Kikoku-shijos can be scorned for their lack of knowledge of Japanese cultural norms, but can also become the subject of envy and admiration for

their life experience outside of Japan, especially their proficiency in foreign languages. In order to manage this discrepancy, Horoiwa argued that Kikoku-shijos resort to "strategies of adaptation", which either push them to "scrape-off" (*kezuritori*) their experience overseas to conform to Japanese social expectations, or "graft" (*tsuketashi*) a layer of Japanese cultural patterns over those acquired while abroad.

Kikoku-shijos, because of their ambiguous status of being Japanese by nationality (and thus not given as much sympathy as foreigners) but foreigner-like by virtue of their life-experience (something many Japanese aspire to have), could not but attract intense scrutiny in their home country.

Studies on Kikoku-shijos written in English often focus on the issue of the "exclusive" nature of Japanese society and how it relates to the treatment of returnee students and their families (White, 1988; Goodman, 1990; Pang, 2000). It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper to address this issue in more detail, and we will move on to the next section, which looks at how decades of Kikoku-shijo stereotyping continues to affect the current generation of Japanese children overseas.

2. Current effects of Kikoku-shijo stereotypes

2.1 The "end" of Kikoku-shijo education

In 2003, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science announced that it was terminating Kikoku-shijo education initiatives such as the designation and support of "returnee reception areas" (*Ukeire Suishin Chiiki*) and the network of schools that participated in research on Kikoku-shijo education (*Kyouiku Kenkyuu Kyouryoku-Kou*). In essence, this move signalled the "end" of the Ministry's intense involvement in Kikoku-shijo education, despite its claim that the care of returnees had only been subsumed under the new label of "International Understanding Education" (*Kokusai Rikai Kyouiku*). Kikoku-shijos were now amalgamated with other students in need of government support, such as children of foreign workers and newly arrived immigrants.

The impact of new government policies was prompt. Kakehashi, an organization which provides support and counselling for Kaigai/Kikoku-shijos in the Kansai (West Japan) area, conducts an extensive annual survey of schools willing to admit returnee students. Akiko Kataoka, director of Kakehashi, found that directors of admissions who were once eager to attract Kikoku-shijos now openly confessed their reluctance to admit returnees (Kataoka, 2007). In the 1990s, financial support from the government was generously granted to schools with high Kikoku-shijo enrolment. Now that government support is no longer available, school administrators say that "high-maintenance" Kikoku-shijos (who require remedial tutoring in Japanese reading and writing) are no

longer welcome. Of course, Kikoku-shijos with high academic skills both in English and Japanese are still sought after, but then, what school would not desire such students, returnee or not ?

Not only the government and schools, but scholars also shifted their attention away from Kikoku-shijos. A case in point is the Intercultural Education Society of Japan, founded in 1987. The purpose of IESJ was to be a forum for academics, bureaucrats, as well as Kikoku-shijos and their parents to engage in lively exchange, all for the better future of intercultural communication among Japanese in general, but returnees and the receiving Japanese society in particular. IESJ presentations now mainly focus on children of “Newcomers” from other Asian countries, who understandably have much greater difficulties at adapting to Japanese society and culture than Kikoku-shijos.

This decline in interest from policy makers, schools, as well as scholars, is greatly due to the effect of Kikoku-shijo stereotyping. While returnees were seen as children in need of “rescuing”, they mobilized public sympathy and government support. When they were thought of as the prototype of “internationalized Japanese”, they were promoted through the school system as star students. Ironically, once Kikoku-shijos achieved the status of “privileged children”, they became vulnerable to budget cuts and shifts in school management strategies.

It is interesting, then, that this trend has not been noted by everybody. The aforementioned Kataoka, who conducted information seminars for Kaigai-shijo parents in Asian cities, noted that expatriates are often unaware of（or detached from）the changes taking place in Japanese schools and are still prey to the notion that returnees enjoy a special “leverage” in regards to admissions（2007: 14）.

Let us now examine one area in which this perception held by Kaigai-shijo parents is manifesting itself in a most obvious way.

2．2 The decline of full-time Japanese School attendance

The geographical distribution of Japanese expatriates and Kaigai-shijos has seen significant changes in recent years.

Table 2 shows the shift in numbers of Long Term Expatriates（LTE）and Kaigai-shijos（KGS）in the three largest areas of concentration（namely, Asia, North America and Europe）over the last 30 years: in 1976, when Kikoku-shijos became talked about; in 1986, shortly after the positive Kikoku-shijo stereotype emerged; in 1996, at the height of Kikoku-shijo hype, and in 2006, the most recent data available.

Table 2 ：Shift in geographical distribution of Long Term Expatriates（LTE）and Kaigai-shijos（KGS） 1985－2005

	Asia		North America		Europe	
	LTE	KGS	LTE	KGS	LTE	KGS
1976	40,374	4,287	53,710	5,654	36,750	4,249
1986	60,418	8,927	99,191	16,432	68,702	8,897
1996	150,166	15,023	190,364	18,597	117,754	11,752
2006	267,064	21,954	263,756	20,218	139,774	11,237

Compiled by Kano Podolsky from data in MOFA（2007）*Annual Report on Statistics of Japanese Nationals Overseas*

For both Long Term Expatriates and Kaigai-shijos, the largest areas of concentration used to be North America, but Asia took over in the 21st century. A large proportion（37%） of the total number of current Kaigai-shijos（N＝58,304 as of 2006） now reside in Asia. Furthermore, Kaigai-shijos in Asia are the fastest growing group in the last decade（＋46%), compared to North America（＋8%） or Europe（slight decrease). This is due to the fact that the increase in LTE in Asia took place mainly among “corporate employees”, while the most significant growth in North America was among “students, scholars and educators ” who are less likely to bring their own dependents due to their younger age.

The next table shows the percentage of full-time Japanese School attendance in the three main areas of Kaigai-shijo concentration. As mentioned in the previous section, the school system in Japan underwent a considerable shift in attitude towards returnee students in recent years. In public schools, children of immigrants and foreign workers are a higher priority than Kikoku-shijos for resource allocation, and in private schools, Kikoku-shijos have to meet very demanding conditions in order to be admitted. Under those circumstances, one might assume that attendance of Japanese Schools overseas would rise（Kano, 2006: 237), because of all the options available for a Kaigai-shijo, a full-time Japanese School most closely recreates the Japanese learning environment, thus ensuring a relatively smooth transition upon return.

Contrary to expectation, the data shows a decline in full-time Japanese School attendance in all three geographical areas in the last decade. In North America, Japanese expatriate parents have traditionally been quite content to send their children to local（i.e. American or Canadian） public or private schools, so that they can acquire valuable fluency in English. Although there is a high attendance of Saturday Japanese Schools in most North American cities, parents feel no need for a full-time Japanese School. The rate of decline, although noticeable in percentages（from 4.5% in

Table 3 ：Full-time Japanese school attendance by geographical area

	Asia	North America	Europe
1987	94.3%	4.5%	28.3%
1998	80.2%	3.8%	29.5%
2007	63.3%	2.2%	27.8%

Compiled by Kano Podolsky from MEXT（1987, 1998）*White Papers* and MOFA（2007）*Statistics of Japanese Children Overseas*

1987 to 2.2% in 2007), actually translates into a very small numerical decline（N＝785 and N＝458 respectively).

The pattern is a little more complex in Europe, where parents seem to base their choice of schools on the language spoken in the host society. In countries such as England, France and Italy, most Kaigai-shijos attend a local school, whereas in Germany, Russia or the Czech Republic, Japanese School attendance is high. Furthermore, due to the increase in the KGS population in the area, the decline in the percentage of attendance（from 28.3% in 1987 to 27.8% in 2007）actually translates into a slight numerical increase（from N＝2,730 to N＝3,056).

The most dramatic decline in full-time Japanese School attendance can be seen in Asia, where such schools have long been considered the only acceptable option for Kaigai-shijos, and often became the “hub” of Japanese expatriate communities. Whereas we saw an almost total attendance in the 1980s（94.3%), close to 40% of Kaigai-shijos have opted out of Japanese Schools two decades later（63.3% attendance). International school attendance, conversely, is on a sharp rise among Japanese students in Asia, and this flux causes great concern among Japanese School administrators（Tezuka, 2006).

How can we explain this seemingly paradoxical trend ?

Interviews conducted among Kaigai-shijo parents, Japanese School staff, as well as international school and juku teachers in Asia[6] led us to conclude that in the last decade, international schools had become a more attractive option than the local full-time Japanese School. Practical concerns such as “keeping the family united during the whole course of the overseas posting” were often cited: full-time Japanese Schools only extend to the end of Grade 8, although corporate assignments in Asia are showing a tendency to become longer[7]. Some families reside in one area for over 10 years, and may have to send their older children back to Japan by themselves, or to leave the expatriate worker abroad by himself. International schools give those families a chance to stay together at least until the children reach high-school graduation age.

However, many parents spoke of "a disillusionment with Japanese education in general, and Japanese Schools overseas in particular", and of "a firm belief in international school education". These arguments curiously mirror the explanation given by parents in Japan who choose to send their children to an international school in Japan. I have discussed elsewhere a trend that is allegedly taking place, whereby an increasing number of Japanese parents who have never left Japan nor have any plans of living abroad deliberately choose to enrol their children in international schools (Kano Podolsky, 2003). These parents are typically dissatisfied with the state of Japanese education and its national curriculum, and hope that an international school education will provide their children with not only fluency in English, but also an "international perspective" that will make them better citizens of the world. In a sense, international schools are seen as a way to acquire "quasi-Kikoku-shijo experience" without ever leaving Japan.

A similar hope seems to be present among Japanese expatriates in Asia, coupled with "a desire to maximize the overseas experience": why confine the children to an all-Japanese environment, when they can take advantage of their stay abroad and become "internationalized"? Corporations usually subsidize the education of their employees' children while overseas, making the otherwise prohibitive international school tuition fees affordable. This becomes an added incentive for expatriate parents to choose international schools over the Here too, parents may be caught up in the belief that "full-status" Kikoku-shijo can only be attained if the child has been exposed to a Western-style school environment, and acquires proficiency in English.

It is not our intention to debate the merits of an international school education, but even supposing it can help achieve the types of outcome Japanese parents hope for (i.e. fluency in English and international worldview), we have already seen that very few returnees can claim leverage in the of the Japanese system. Fluency in English only becomes an asset when coupled with high Japanese language skills, and the ability to perform in Japanese school subjects.

Support groups such as Kakehashi consider it their mission to inform expatriate parents as to the realities of the home country, and dispel aspects of the Kikoku-shijo stereotype that no longer hold validity in our time.

2.3 Misconceptions about kaigai-shijo experience

Aside from the outdated perception of "Kikoku-shijo leverage", we feel that there are at least three misconceptions about Japanese children growing up overseas that should be urgently addressed.

Misconception #1: regarding the challenges of language acquisition

One of the unfortunate fallouts of Kikoku-shijo stereotyping is that the Japanese have generally come to believe bilingualism can be easily achieved if only a child is placed in a bilingual environment from an early age. Kikoku-shijos are often envied for having had the opportunity to be exposed to a foreign language while still young, and having thus had an “easy time” acquiring a second language（as if by osmosis）while maintaining their Japanese.

This misconception is prevalent, although studies by linguists emphasize that there is no such thing as a “naturally”（or easily）achieved bilingualism. Even in families where the parents are from two different linguistic backgrounds, the children are not guaranteed to acquire fluency in both those languages（Noguchi, 2001; Yamamoto, 2001）.

An added concern is that linguistic ability is very hard to assess by those who do not have native proficiency in that language. Chikara Ichikawa（2004）, an educator who taught Japanese to Kaigai-shijos over a long period of time in the United States, reports that expatriate parents are often poor judges when it comes to the English skills of their children. Ichikawa distinguishes between “playground” and “classroom” levels of English, and points out that parents are routinely fooled by the “native-like accent” of their children, mistaking it as proof of “native-like proficiency”. Those parents are sometimes dismayed to find their children assessed at a “below grade level” in English and cannot be promoted to the next grade.

In our own investigation among international school administrators and teachers, we were told of tragic cases of Japanese students who had started attending at the kindergarten level, but never quite caught up academically to their native English-speaking peers. Some of them, as well as their parents, were quite unaware that they had been placed in an ESOL（English for Speakers of Other Languages）program for several years and were incredulous when told.

Ichikawa cautions against a naïve conception of the process of language acquisition, but his advice is unfortunately not always taken. Some Kaigai-shijo parents do not have any other choice but to send their children to a local school and have them learn the host language. However, parents who deliberately enrol their children in an international school, whether overseas or in Japan, should be fully aware of the challenges of language acquisition, even if the process is started at a young age.

Misconception #2: regarding children’s capacity for cultural adaptation

A related issue to the above is the often underestimated trauma caused by an international reloca-

tion and resulting cultural dislocation. From a different angle, we could also say that there is a tendency among adults to overestimate children's capacity to adapt to a totally different cultural environment.

Research shows that even very young children are affected by international moves, and that parents should pay great attention to the impact of such an experience (Settles et al, 1993; Nathanson and Marcenko, 1995). In our study of Kaigai-shijos in Toronto (Podolsky, 1994), we found reactions to transfers such as "facial ticks" and bedwetting, as well as loss of speech and psychological instability can occur among young children. Older children react differently, by withdrawing or detaching themselves, or experience "identity crises" in regards to their sense of cultural belonging.

In view of these potential side-effects, there seems to be a casual attitude among some Japanese expatriate parents toward repeated transitions. Enrolling a child in an international school when a full-time Japanese School option is available is, in our opinion, one manifestation of that attitude. Again, the stereotype of Kikoku-shijos who seamlessly maneuver between different cultural contexts may be at the root of this misconception.

It is important to remember that one of the most important characteristics of Kikoku-shijo experience is the "involuntary" nature of the child's departure from and re-entry to Japan. It should be distinguished in this sense from the experience of an "international student", who chooses to study abroad of their own volition. The parents' primary concern, then, should be not to give their child a cross-cultural experience while on overseas assignment, but to minimize the trauma of geographical relocation and cultural dislocation.

Misconception #3: regarding the Japanese School students' experience

One final and serious misconception which must be dispelled is that Kaigai-shijos who attend full-time Japanese Schools do not undergo a "significant" cross-cultural experience. Because they were educated in Japanese according to the national curriculum, surrounded by Japanese classmates and teachers, these children are often assumed to be not as affected by their overseas upbringing as Kaigai-shijos who attend local or international schools.

Such a misconception can be harmful in many ways.

As we saw from Sato's remarks earlier, children who grew up in Asia and/or attended Japanese Schools do not feel "worthy" of the Kikoku-shijo label and often hide the fact that they lived overseas. Parents may also choose to avoid a Japanese School education in favour of an international school, in order to "maximize" the benefits of their stay overseas. On the receiving end, teachers in

Japan may not be attuned to the needs of these returnees, because it is expected that they will have little trouble adapting to the school environment in Japan.

A student thesis written by Shingu and Ooiwa（2008）confirms that Japanese School graduates do encounter difficulties in readapting to Japanese society upon their return. Shingu, herself a returnee student from Malaysia, interviewed former classmates and shared their feelings of resentment towards and alienation from the "Kikoku-shijo label". Most of the subjects（as well as Shingu）confess that they did not like to be known as returnees, because they were embarrassed by their "inferior" English skills and their Japanese School attendance which did not fit the stereotype of Kikoku-shijos. However, the study reveals that all subjects share certain characteristics, i.e. a willingness to help people who are new to their environment, a maturity beyond their years which comes from a sense of "resignation" that their experience will never be completely understood, and a heightened awareness of interpersonal relationships which may come from their concern to "fit in".

It is important to make the public aware of such studies, and to reconceptualize the characteristics of Kikoku-shijos so as to include all types of returnees without alienating some, or forcing others to fit a misconstrued stereotype.

Conclusion: Kikoku-shijo reconsidered

We have already noted that organizations such as Kakehashi can directly work with parents and children, providing them with useful information and opening their eyes to the realities of life in Japan. What contribution can we, as academics, make for the future of Kaigai-shijos and Kikoku-shijos ?

The role of academic researchers, in our opinion, is to produce studies and empirical data that will help deconstruct the stubborn Kikoku-shijo stereotypes which plague real-life expatriates and returnee children. We would like to suggest the Third Culture Kids framework as a starting point for reconsidering the essence of Kaigai-shijo and Kikoku-shijo experience.

Definition and characteristics of a Third Culture Kid

"Third Culture Kid" is a term that was first coined by American scholars John Useem and Ruth Hill Useem. The Useems became interested in "people who cross societal borders under the aegis of an organized endeavor and whose work or occupational roles are involved in relating two or more societies, or sections thereof, to each other"（Useem, 1999［1993］）.

Subsequent research took the Useems to India, where they started to use the term "third cul-

ture", as a "generic term to cover the styles of life created, shared, and learned by persons who are in the process of relating their societies, or sections thereof, to each other", and that of "Third Culture Kids" (TCKs) to describe "children who accompany their parents to another society" (ibid: 2). The Useems are careful to point out that the term *third* is not used in reference to the "Third World": the *first* culture is that of a person's country of origin, the *second* culture that of the host country, and thus a *third* culture is one that develops among expatriates in any given overseas posting location. The Useems called this an *interstitial* culture, because it seemed to them "a culture between cultures", shared by the expatriate community but not quite the same as the culture of their home country of that of their host country.

Not all expatriates nowadays live in well defined communities, at a distance from the host social systems. A more recent definition by David Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken (1999) describes TCKs as follows:

> A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her develpmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background (ibid:19).

Pollock and Van Reken report that the label "Third Culture Kid" (ibid: 271) allows many people to finally put a name on what they had considered to be personal psychological issues (such as feelings of rootlessness, restlessness, alienation from their parents' culture, or of not being able to commit to a long-term relationship), and to instead see those issues as by-products of their earlier transnational/transcultural lifestyle.

Ruth Hill Useem and Ann Baker-Cottrell (1996) conducted a survey analysis of over 700 adult TCKs (ATCKs), and their preliminary findings show that ATCKs 1) are internationally experienced and continue their international involvement, 2) are adaptable and easily relate to a diversity of people, 3) are helpers and problem solvers, 4) feel different but not isolated (1996: 31－35). There are also drawbacks to an international upbringing: the study shows that although ATCKs are often high-achievers both at school and in their professional lives, they can also display a "delayed adolescence", and have to cope with the process of "fitting in" wherever they go, even in their parents' home country (ibid: 26－28).

Kikoku-shijo reconceptualized as a variation of Third Culture Kids

The most serious problem with current Kikoku-shijo stereotypes is their emphasis on language (mainly English) proficiency and intercultural communication skills. In order to "validate" the experiences of as many children as possible, we should instead focus on how these children have learned to view the world around them.

Most children who experience international mobility acquire a (literally) "Global Positioning System" and learn to locate themselves in relation to other cultures and societies in a way that cannot easily be achieved by children who never left their home country. This ability can be acquired regardless of how much exposure the child had to the host society's culture or how much of the local language he/she learned while overseas.

As can be seen from the literature on Third Culture Kids, it is precisely this sense of Global Positioning that should be considered as the main characteristic of Kikoku-shijo experience.

Not all Third Culture Kids return to their home (passport) country. Kikoku-shijos are, in that sense, TCKs who are offered the chance to refamiliarize themselves with the society and culture their parents came from. Not only will this double process of departure and return strengthen their ability to navigate through various social systems; it will also present them with the unique opportunity to become an "insider/outsider" in more than one country.

Conceptualized in this manner, Kaigai/Kikoku-shijo experience can indeed become a tremendous asset, but only if handled carefully. Parents have a heavy responsibility in this process, and should be concerned first and foremost by the emotional stability of their children, rather than by their own nebulous yearning for an "internationalized" offspring. In fact, it is our belief that a child is better off "*not regarded international* but *feeling an insider* in their own country", than the other way around.

There are many Japanese children who currently live overseas, and there are many more to come. We hope that all Kaigai-shijos and Kikoku-shijos can enjoy the best available educational opportunities, and can be freed from the constraints of outdated stereotypes. This hope will be our motivation to continue research on this subject matter.

脚注

1）All tables and figures presented in this paper were compiled on the basis of those ministry sources, unless otherwise specified.

2）Strictly speaking, Kimin refers to “abandoned nationals overseas”, for example the Japanese（including a large number of children）left behind in Manchuria who did not manage to participate in the mass repatriations at the end of World War II. In the context of this paper, we are suggesting “orphan” as a translation in order to emphasize the abandonment of children.

3）According to MEXT Basic School Survey data, the percentage of students in Japan who go on to attend high-school after mandatory schooling surpassed 90％ for the first time in 1971（for a graph on post-war high-school attendance see:
http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/siryo/001/06060509.htm）.

4）In a study published in 1990, Roger Goodman also alluded to the prevalence of a similar one-dimensional stereotype. Kikoku-shijos, Goodman found, were often assumed to have “spent fifteen years in the United States and（to）know only a few words of Japanese on their return”（Goodman, 1990: 228）.

5）For a detailed discussion on how the “myth” of Japanese ethnic/cultural homogeneity arose, see Goebel Noguchi’（2001）

6）Based on “The Cross-cultural experience of Japanese School students in Asia”, a fieldwork project conducted between April 2005 to October 2006 in Hong Kong, under the Kyoto Women’s University Research Grant program（Kano Podolsky）.

7）Corporations tend to leave their employees in one foreign posting for a longer period of time, in order to keep the costs of relocating and training new employees at a minimum.

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