

Structural and Cultural Factors Affecting Japanese Children Temporarily Residing and Receiving Education in the U. S. A. :

A Comparative Study of American and Japanese Educational Systems

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes socio-cultural adjustment problems of Japanese children temporarily residing in the United States. The study adopts two independent data sets: educational environments in the United States and Japan, and an actual case study of Japanese children temporarily residing and receiving education in the U.S.

In the first parts of two sections, this paper discusses major characteristics of educational system of the U.S.A. and Japan. The discussion reveals an extreme contrast between them; the American system is decentralized and diverse, whereas the Japanese is centralized, uniformed and standardized. The next section presents implications and future prospects of education in both nations. The heterogeneity of American society and homogeneity of Japanese society seem to contribute to the emerge of this difference in educational climate in these two countries. As for the future prospects, the educational reformers in both countries should fully consider the unique characteristics inherent in each of their partner. The following section highlights five problem areas which an American local high school and Japanese students there confronted with. Then, the following section presents some suggestions for building better relationships between Americans and Japanese students. Finally, the author comes to the conclusion that both Americans and Japanese should be aware of their educational differences and learn from each other. In doing so they can avoid cultural confrontation, and create a deeper cross-cultural understanding between the two nations.

## INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to analyze socio-cultural problems which both American people and Japanese children temporarily residing in the United States must cope with in the process of their intercultural contacts.

Figure 1. Changing Trends in the Number of Japanese School Age Children Abroad by the type of School They Attend:1971-2004

Notes: Japanese Schools: Those who attend overseas Japanese schools full-time; Supplementary Schools: Those who attend overseas Japanese supplementary education schools; and Local Schools & Others: Those who attend local schools and other types of schooling.

Source: CLARINET (Children Living Abroad and Returnees Internet), especially the information concerning the statistical data on Japanese children abroad, accessed at [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/clarinet/data1.html](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/clarinet/data1.html) on December 10, 2004.

Figure 2. School Attendance by Japanese Children of Compulsory Education Age Residing Abroad by Region (1995)

Source: "Kaigai-shijo Kyouiku," September, 1995 p. 7.

A tremendous increase<sup>2</sup> in Japanese direct investments in late 1980s accounted for the rapid increase in the number of Japanese expatriates<sup>3</sup> all over the world. This, naturally, created the similar increase in the number of Japanese children of compulsory education age temporarily residing abroad (See Figure 1). Compared to Japanese children in other parts of the world, many of those in the United States attend local schools in their respective communities (See Figure 2). The closer people with different cultural backgrounds come into contact, the more difficulties and problems possibly arise. This is more pervasive and serious in the areas like Los Angeles and New York where Japanese families densely concentrate<sup>4</sup>. The author of this paper lived in Scarsdale, New York, from 1985 to 1989. ESL (English as a second language) classes<sup>5</sup> in the local public schools<sup>6</sup> there were full of Japanese children. The author researched conflicts between Japanese children and parents, and American children, teachers and administrators.

This study proposes the impact of differences in the elementary and secondary education of the two countries. By highlighting the differences in educational systems, we will come to a better understanding of the various gaps both parties must bridge.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATE

In unmasking public education in the contemporary U. S. A. , Chapter 1 will discuss its five major characteristics. They are decentralization of the system, diversity of organizational structures, diversity of programs and curriculum, equality in educational opportunity, and transitional dynamics to higher education.

### 1. DECENTRALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Decentralized educational system in the United States will be discussed from the four points of view. They are role of the federal government, role of the states, role of the local school districts, and role of the public finance in education.

#### 1) Role of the Federal Government

The federal government has no powers in the governance of American schools under the Constitution (Callahan, et al., 1983:101).

#### 2) Role of the States

The states share responsibility of education with local school districts. The states formulate educational policies for public schools within the state and implement legislation affecting schools (Callahan, et al., 1983: 141). In terms of direct power over education, the states give great autonomy to local communities (Cummings, et al., 1986:48).

#### 3) Role of the Local School Districts

The local school district is a specific area designated by the state to carry out educational programs on a local level (Callahan, et al., :143). Compared with the states' regulatory power over education, direct operating power is in the hands of school districts. They build and close schools, hire and dismiss teachers and administrators, define the curriculum within the state limits and occasionally determine teaching methods (Cummings, et al., :48). The major source of revenue to support schools in the district is property tax (Callahan, et al., :144). Therefore, the schools are subject to pressures from the local community.

#### 4) Role of the Public Finance in Education

The federal government provides not more than 10 percent of the funding for education. During the Reagan administration, the funding was sharply cut to 6.1 percent. The states and local bodies each raise more than 40 percent of the funding for public primary and secondary education (Cummings, et al., :48).

Local communities are given autonomy and powers over education in the United States. The federal government, on the contrary, has no powers in governing schools providing small percentage of educational funding.

## 2. DIVERSITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES IN THE UNITED STATES

Ages for compulsory school attendance vary from state to state; in California, for instance, it is 6–16 years old, but in New York, it is 7–16 years old. The grade span of compulsory education in the United States is basically considered from kindergarten to the 12th grade. Grouping of the grades vary from school district to school district. According to Goodlad, elementary schools include k–5 (from kindergarten through 5th grade) or k–6, junior high schools or middle schools consist of 6–8 or 7–9, and high schools include 9–12 or 10–12.

## 3. DIVERSITY OF PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM

### 1) Elementary Education

Teachers instruct 25 to 30 children who may be divided into three or four groups according to their abilities. Class teaching has been giving way to teaching groups or individuals (Callahan, et al., : 227).

The primary objective of elementary education is teaching communication skills. Reading, writing, listening, speaking and observing are considered as the tools for communication.

### 2) Secondary Education

There are four different types of programs. They are (1) general education, (2) specialized education, (3) guidance services, and (4) programs for the handicapped and immigrants.

#### (1) General Education

The core program is required for all students. Due to the decline in SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores in the 1970s as seen in Figure 3, the curriculum and graduation requirements have been increasingly raised and stiffened (Coleman, et al., 1990:109). Emphasizing the difference in individual potentials, it offers tracking courses in all or three of the four subjects, namely, English, mathematics, social studies and science required for college admission (Goodlad, et al., 1984: 150)

#### (2) Specialized Education

The program for specialized education comprises at least half of the school curriculum. These classes are the electives of the program. There are two kinds. One is for vocational education including courses such as advertising, marketing, computer graphic art, and participating in government. The other is for personal enrichment including such courses as print making, jewelry and art metal, and driving.

### Figure 3

#### Trends in College Entrance Examination Scores

Source: U.S. Department of Education, "American Education," 1988 p. 9.

#### (3) Guidance Services

As the needs of students broaden and the diversity of programs expands, counseling services have become one of the critical factors in secondary education. They may include helping students to adapt to school environments, to achieve their goals, to develop career planning and continuing education, and cope with personal problems (Stiles, et al., 1983: 53).

#### (4) Programs for the Handicapped and Immigrants

##### a. Mainstreaming of the Handicapped

Most secondary schools of moderate to large size have some special programs for physically and mentally disabled students. They usually take classes within regular school programs and spend some part of a day with specially trained teachers and counselors. Through the aid of those programs, handicapped students will be assisted to be placed in the mainstream of the educational program.

##### b. Bilingual education program for immigrants

This program is targeted to students with no or limited English proficiency who have been in the United States for three years or less. Instruction given with appreciation for cultural heritage should involve the student's native language along with English until the student has gained sufficient knowledge of English (McDonnell, et al., 1993:3).

#### 4. EQUALITY IN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

The core principle of public education in the United States is to offer equal opportunity of education to all students. Based on this principle, the measures taken include two different approaches: "integration" and "extra assistance" (Coleman, et al., : 114, 115).

##### 1) Integration of Students from Different Ethnic Backgrounds

Magnet schools have been created to attract students from every race to attend schools with a specialized curriculum, such as special programs in music or foreign languages (Coleman, et al., :233). Minority and lower-class students are given opportunities to attend integrated middle-class schools (Coleman, et al., : 114).

## 2) Extra Assistance for the Disadvantaged

In order to support financially disadvantaged children, the head start project and educational vouchers are provided.

### (1) Head Start Project

This project has been created to give pre-school instruction to disadvantaged children. The purpose of this program is to provide academic readiness for the disadvantaged so that they would not fall behind other children (Leinwand, et al., : 69, 70).

### (2) Voucher Plans

Some districts have adopted vouchers to attend any type of schools, public or private in order to offer equal financial opportunities to children and parents of low income families.

## 5. TRANSITIONAL DYNAMICS TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

As for requirements for higher education, public institutions place importance on the concrete scores and grades, whereas private institutions on not only the scores and grades but also on the applicant's personal potentials and way of thinking.

### 1) Higher Education in Public Institutions

Public institutions for higher education place significant importance on an applicant's high school grades and SAT and ACT (Achievement Test) results.

### 2) Higher Education in Private Institutions

Private colleges and universities usually require GPA (Grade Point Average), Class Rank at high school and scores of SAT and ACT. In addition, they usually require letters of recommendation from high school, the applicant's essay and interview with the advisor or counselor of the institution.

Public education in the United States is in the hands of local districts. They offer diverse programs and curricula to meet the needs of the children in the community. As for requirements for higher education, public institutions set criteria for acceptance of applicants by scores and grades, whereas private institutions take personality and potentials into consideration.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN JAPAN

In unveiling public education in the contemporary Japan, Chapter II will discuss its five major characteristics. They are centralization of the system, uniformity of organizational structures, standardized programs and curriculum, and transitional dynamics to higher education.

### 1. CENTRALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Public education in Japan is in the hands of central government setting the guidelines for school curriculum and supporting with the large proportion of the approved subsidy.

#### 1) Authority of the Ministry of Education and Science

Ever since the Meiji era, highly centralized and uniformed school system had been deeply rooted in the Japanese society. Right after World War II, the United States Education Mission to Japan tried to introduce local autonomy to the education system in Japan. The Mission aimed to reduce the enormous powers of the Ministry of Education and Science (then referred as the Ministry of Education) (Simmons, et al., 1990:56). It was, however, difficult to eliminate the traditional rigid system. Accordingly, the Ministry has tremendous authority in setting guidelines, fixing the number of requirements, electives and credits, and approving textbooks for public education. The Ministry gives guidance, advice and assistance to local boards of education (Education in Japan, 1994:28).

#### 2) Role of Public Finance for Education

The Japanese government provides a number of subsidies for educational purposes to local bodies. Basically the proportion of the approved subsidy is 30% to 50% of the total expense.

### 2. UNIFORMITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

A uniform system of 6-3-3-4 (six years in elementary school, three years in junior high school, three years in high school, and four years in college or university) was introduced after World War II (Kouiku-Hakusho, 2002:4).

As for high schools, they have been neither compulsory nor free. The system remains unchanged, although over 96% of Japanese children attend high school today.

### 3. STANDARDIZATION OF PROGRAMS AND CURRICULUM

#### 1) Compulsory Education



During nine years of compulsory education, Japanese students receive a high quality, well-balanced basic education in the core subjects (Japanese, mathematics, science and social studies) (“U. S. Study of Education in Japan”, 1987:Introduction). The Course of Study specifies curriculum content and the sequence for each subject in detail (Shin-Kyouikugaku-Daijiten, vol. 11990: 363). It is released every 10 years by the Ministry of Education and Science. In terms of instruction, it is heavily on lectures which adhere closely to the textbook and the Courses of Study. The teacher’s main concern is to cover the prescribed material thoroughly (“U. S. Study of Education in Japan” :34). Elective study is introduced at the junior high school level. The entire grade level is required to take the same elective. In fact, English is the predominant elective (Education in Japan:58).

## 2) Upper Secondary Education

The curriculum of individual schools must comply with the standards that are specified in the Course of Study (Education in Japan:60). All Japanese public high school students must choose either academic (74%) or vocational (24%) program at the time of entrance examinations (Education in Japan:24). The common requirements are the study of Japanese language in both modern and classical forms, mathematics, science, social studies, a foreign language (most high schools offer only English), health and physical education, home economics, and a choice of either music, fine arts or calligraphy.

The curriculum of Japanese high schools is focused excessively on academic studies providing few electives.

## 3) Hidden Curriculum

There is another characteristic of schooling in Japan. According to “U. S. Study of Education in Japan”, special activities occupy approximately 10 percent of the elementary and secondary program. These activities include ceremony like the opening and closing of every semester, school gatherings a couple of times a week, homeroom meetings before and after class everyday, and excursions.

A classroom for elementary education consists of about 25~30 students and usually divided into several groups with mixed abilities. Group activity is encouraged not only for academic projects but also for serving lunch or cleaning chores. The overall objective of these activities is to cultivate the importance of group cooperation, harmony and perseverance (“U. S. Study of Education in Japan” :32).

# 4. EQUALITY IN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

## 1) Financial Equality of Offering Curriculum

Due to the centralization of the educational system, any Japanese public schools can obtain equal funding from the national government as well as local authorities. In addition, relatively equal distribution of household incomes and homogeneity of the society contribute to the elimination of financial inequality in education.

## 2) Equal Offering of Curricula

Japanese public schools offer standardized curricula based on the Course of Study issued by the Ministry of Education and Science. In addition, the tracking system is not usually adopted and promotion from grade to grade is automatic. Consequently, a class in public schools consists of the students of the same school year (Shin-Kyouikugaku-Daijiten, vol. 3, 1990:193).

## 5. TRANSITIONAL DYNAMICS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutions of higher education are ranked in a hierarchy according to the success of their graduates in securing prestigious employment (Amano, et al., 1997: 146). Each college and university selects its entrants according to own admission policies.

All national and local public universities as well as some private universities and colleges require the scores of the standard nation-wide test called NCUEE (National Center for University Entrance Examination) examination held in January. The examination is used as the first stage of administration. As for the second stage, each college or university administers in its own right. An increasing number of private colleges or universities have started employing plural assessment criteria combining the NCUEE and the institutional examination.

Public Education in Japan is in the hands of central governments from setting the guidelines of curriculum to educational funding. As for requirements for higher education, growing number of private and public institutions adopt plural criteria to accept applicants.

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AMERICAN AND JAPANESE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: IMPLICATIONS AND PROSPECTS

### 1. Implications of the Comparison

In analyzing both American and Japanese educational systems, it is revealed that these systems represent polar opposites.

The decentralized American educational system highlights an awareness and increased emphasis on ① individual students and ② local autonomy.

① Given a variety of choices, American students are required to participate in class actively and to take the initiative in educational programs. They must fill their school calendars based on their own programming.

② Local authorities play a major role in educational activities in American schools. The heterogeneity of the nation contributes to this tradition. This tradition, however, generates inequality in educational opportunities. That is, students in affluent communities are advantageous to receive education of good quality, while students in poor communities are deprived of better educational opportunities.

The characteristics of the centralized Japanese education value ① students on a whole level and ② egalitarianism.

① Given a uniformed, standardized curriculum, Japanese students are required to participate passively and cooperatively in educational programs prescribed by the central government.

② The Ministry of Education and Science plays a leading role in educational activities. The homogeneity of the nation contributes to the sense of equality. This concept, however, possibly creates inequality in different way. Not being provided with skipping or tracking system based on abilities of individual students, both high and low achievers must take extra measures to cope with the extraordinarily severe competition in the coming entrance examinations to higher education. This necessity for additional programs accounts for the prevalence of “juku” (cram schools) with extra expenses born by parents.

### 2. Future Prospects

It seems that the United States and Japan are aiming at opposite goals. The report of the Japanese researchers on American education stated that Americans were seeking for greater uniformity, standardization and tougher testing procedures in their schools (New York Times, January 4, 1987).

In Japan, on the other hand, the Central Council of Education<sup>7</sup> recommended that diversity, decentralization, individuality, choice and flexibility be stressed

throughout education. Points to be improved are ① to encourage high schools to adopt a more complete form of credit system so that students could organize their school programs in their own right and graduate by accumulating credits like colleges and universities ② in order to abolish entrance examination for high schools, six-year secondary courses should be provided and ③ to accept gifted students with accelerated graduation.

## CONFLICTS BETWEEN AMERICAN SCHOOL AUTHORITIES AND JAPANESE STUDENTS ENTERING SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY AT SCARSDALE HIGH SCHOOL

### 1. Background of Scarsdale High School

Scarsdale is a suburban residential community of 17,000 people located 40 miles north of Manhattan, New York. Scarsdale is known as an affluent community which consists of predominantly wealthy residents. It also goes by the nickname, "J. J. Community". The first J stands for Jewish and the second J for Japanese.

Along with the economic growth of Japan, more and more Japanese businessmen and their families came to live there temporarily. Since the middle of 1980s, the schools in Scarsdale have swollen with Japanese children. There are two reasons for the sudden influx of Japanese families. First, the community is comparatively safe to live in and still within commuting range. Second, the school district is widely known for providing good education. The United States Office of Education named Scarsdale High School (SHS) as one of the 144 exemplary schools to which others may look to for the patterns of success.

### 2. Five Problem Areas Dealt with by Scarsdale High School and Japanese Students

Data analyzed here were based on four different sources: ① the author's interview with the returnee students, ② a symposium on Japanese students in the United States held in 1992, ③ Scarsdale High School newspaper, "Maroon", and ④ the author's personal observations. The order of the following problems was determined by chronological occurrences.

#### 1) Differences in Expectations

There was a big gap between American local people and Japanese families in terms of expectations.

##### (1) Expectations of American people

The residents of Scarsdale pay high property tax, which helps to support excellence in education in the district. SHS was obliged to increase ESL classes to meet the needs of entering Japanese students. SHS hired another ESL teacher and arranged extra facilities. The ESL program is categorized as a type of traditional Bilingual Education program which is originally designed for new immigrants to the United States who will become American citizens. Accordingly, the local people expect Japanese families to be the members of the community.

##### (2) Expectations of Japanese families

The major concern of Japanese children and parents is usually their readjustment to Japan. They want to find themselves in the mainstream of Japanese society. The

children want to enter prestigious colleges or universities in Japan as tickets to later successful careers. That is, they take their stay in the United States only as a temporary experience.

## 2) Differences in the Administrative System

There are three difficulties which the school faces at the time of Japanese students' enrollment: ① the difference in school calendars, ② the placement of the child's grade level, and ③ conversion of the child's evaluation from the Japanese school regarding his/her educational background:

① Academic calendar in America begins in September and ends in June, whereas in Japan, it begins in April and ends in March. Accordingly, many Japanese students who come to Scarsdale enroll at the beginning of April. April, however, is the first month of the last marking period. It is the busiest period for the administrators and the teachers of the school.

② Due to the difference in academic calendar, it is difficult for the school authority to place the student in the grade level equivalent to the Japanese system. They place one grade lower than what the Japanese parent would prefer.

③ Due to the difference in curriculum and systems, the school administrators face tremendous difficulties in transferring the student's grades to the SHS level. In order to place him/her in a right class of the tracking course, the school needs the student's academic level and background in English.

## 3) Cultural Gaps

There are three descriptions by the Japanese students to attest this existence of cultural gaps.

① An essay written in 1993 by Student A (male), a graduate of SHS, depicts the status of Japanese students at SHS:

I walked into cafeteria. As I turned the corner to enter the room, I was startled to see the room divided. The cafeteria was divided by nationality and/or race. While I was eating my lunch, I witnessed some American students throwing pieces of orange at the group of Japanese. In the following week, I witnessed similar actions between the different groups and felt helpless. I perceived myself as a powerless freshman.

② Student B (female), a SHS graduate, told about "the cafeteria syndrome" during the symposium held in 1992 on Japanese children:

When there were only few Japanese in SHS like in early '80s, they tried to communicate with American students. By the late '80s, the population of Japanese students in SHS had become so large that they occupied two big dining tables in the cafeteria. It was disgusting to Americans that Japanese students spoke a language

which was totally strange to them. They felt as if they were spoken ill of. The Japanese students were also frustrated not to be integrated into the mainstream of the student body. When one Japanese student said that she was going to eat lunch not in the group in order to associate with American students, the group response was “Then, go and join the American group up there! We won’t play with you any more!” When a Japanese student tries to get out of the group, some of them try not to let him/her do so. I think they should be more tolerant.

③ Student C (male), a SHS graduate, talked about “the cafeteria syndrome” in the interview:

At first, I felt secure being in the Japanese group. The Japanese friends helped me a lot. Later, I gradually began to feel bothersome always being with Japanese, speaking Japanese. Japanese students were too interdependent in the small world. If I dared distance myself from them, I was afraid that it might deteriorate human relations in the group.

These three sketches reveal what has been going on in the cafeteria in SHS. The “cafeteria syndrome” indicates three issues:① Japanese tendency to form a group and keep staying in the same group ② Japanese intolerance toward the one who does not cooperate with the harmony of the group, and ③ Americans’ propensity to dislike the students who are inscrutable to them.

These three Japanese students, however, took different actions from other Japanese students. They did not sit and wait in the cafeteria until American students came closer to them. Student A became an active member of NEXUS which was organized in order to bridge gaps between American students and international students at SHS. Student B participated in the interscholastic basketball team and was chosen as one of the three captains of the team. Student C joined the soccer team. He was the only international students in the team and made friends with his American team mates.

It is obvious that their positive efforts to integrate into the mainstream of the student body were welcomed and highly valued. The examples show that even though the Japanese tendency to be passive and group-oriented exists, Americans are likely to value positive attitude and individuality.

#### 4) Miscommunication

Miscommunication is a serious problem when people with a different language background interact with each other. There are two possible causes to hinder Japanese students from communicating with American students. ① One is the fact that Japanese students have few opportunities to come into personal contact with Americans. The students of SHS move from class to class according to individual educational programs.

They are possibly by themselves for the most part of a day. Americans know that they are more successful in the school life when they are involved in extracurricular activities. Virtually all Japanese students in SHS, however, attend Japanese Saturday School in the area. This prevents them from participating in extracurricular activities as Student B and Student C did. ② The other problem is the difference in communication tactics; a) verbal and b) nonverbal. As far as verbal communication tactics are concerned, the following illustrates the underlying problem.

a) Student C told the author of differences in teaching methods between American and Japanese class rooms:

At my high school in Japan, lecture-type and teacher-centered teaching methods were prevalent. I did not feel like asking questions at all. I had never had impression that students were encouraged to participate in classes. At SHS, however, the teachers ask individual opinions on issues. Knowing that I did not speak good English, the teachers encouraged me to speak out. They tried to stimulate my potentials as much as possible.

The difference in teaching methods in American and Japanese classrooms indicates how different their communication tactics are. That is, in the United States, students are encouraged to be involved in classes expressing their opinions, whereas in Japan, students are usually expected to listen to the teacher's lecture, take notes, and memorize facts written in the textbooks, maintaining silence.

b) In terms of nonverbal communication, some teachers at SHS who attended the workshop on cross-cultural understanding between the United States and Japan pointed out the Japanese students did not make eye-contact while conversing. This lack of eye-contact by Japanese students made Americans uncomfortable. If a person does not look at the other's eyes while conversing, American people think that he has no confidence in what he is saying, he is hiding something or he is even lying. In Japan, however, when a person is talking to someone superior, it is considered impolite to look the other person straight in the eyes. In Japanese classrooms, students are not usually required to respond individually to the teacher. They do not need face-to-face communication with their teachers.

##### 5) Tension

There are two types of tension; (1) economic and (2) academic tensions.

(1) From the middle of 1980s to the end of the decade, Japanese economy was booming, while American economy was in decline. Unfriendly relations between Americans and Japanese societies in the United States mainly stemmed from economic conditions of both countries. In fact, the relationship of American and Japanese students at SHS



reflected these socio-economic relations of these two nations. New York Times reported resentment by some parents in the district: "The basic prejudice comes out when people are dealing with their pocketbooks." (December 7, 1991).

(2) Another source of Americans' resentment was plain. "They are smarter than us," said one American student pointing with his chin to some nearby Japanese (Widdison, et al., 1993: 170). John Wheeler, vice president of the Japan Society in New York told that in Scarsdale, students were worrying that the Japanese were taking their places in terms of test scores (New York Times, December 7, 1991). And actually, as far as math and science were concerned, most Japanese students took advanced placement courses at SHS. Class Rank at high school matters a great deal to Americans in making their applications to colleges or universities.

### 3. Solutions Developed by Scarsdale High School

#### 1) ESL (English as a Second Language) Classes

The school offers ESL classes. All ESL students undergo a language proficiency assessment by ESL teachers, administrators, or counselors at the time of registration. At this time a decision is made whether the student will be placed into regular English and social studies or an ESL class and ESL social studies. This program, however, has both positive and negative aspects. In terms of enhancing students' understanding of the subjects, it is obviously a benefit. On the contrary, however, in terms of increasing opportunities to associate with American students, it turns out an obstacle. ESL students are isolated from the mainstream of the student body spending their time in the ESL class rooms. If the duration of the classes is long, the system may become a double-edged sword.

#### 2) Cultural Workshops

SHS tried hard to promote harmony and understanding not only among students but also teachers. SHS planned workshops for the understanding of Japan and her culture. A series of video tapes "Faces of Japan" was used to introduce Japanese culture.

#### 3) Japanese Language Course

The year '93~'94 was the first year that an accredited course related to Japan was offered in order to raise awareness of differences and similarities of both cultures.

### 4. Solutions Developed by Japanese Interest Groups

#### ) The Japan Festival

In 1993, "Scarsdale Japan Festival", sponsored by Japanese companies was held

to enhance social contact and improve social relations between American and Japanese nationals. As a part of the project, an essay contest was planned whose prize was a two-week trip to Japan. The essays by three teachers and six students were awarded the prize. During the trip to Japan, they visited Japanese schools and factories, experienced home stay and attended a reunion party. One of the American SHS students wrote an essay titled "Reflections on Japan Trip, June 1993" :

For me, the most meaningful part of the trip was meeting with my contemporaries in Japanese high schools. Most of these students had never spoken to a non-Japanese before, and they were as anxious to learn about me as I was to learn about them. My relationship with Japanese students in SHS has changed as a result of my trip. I remember how bewildered I felt by all the different Japanese customs, even though we were accompanied by a Japanese-American leader. I am now keenly aware of the culture shock that Japanese students confront with at Scarsdale, and I am better able to work with them. My experiences have taught me that one can learn much from people of different cultures.

## 2) Japan Education Center

The Japan Education Center is an organization established in 1993 to support educational and cultural exchanges for schools and communities in the New York area. Three major activities are ① to serve the community by offering a Japanese culture program, ② to support newly arrived Japanese parents by offering orientations, and ③ to assist American schools and related professionals who work with Japanese students.

## 3) Educational Alternatives

A Japanese School organized on the basis of an identical program to compulsory school system at home has been available in the district. It is, however, only open to junior high school students. Since 1990, Keio Academy of New York, a prestigious Japanese private school, has been opened accepting high school students. Basically, graduates of this school can advance to Keio University in Japan with the recommendation of the principal.

Due to the sudden increase of Japanese children enrolling the local schools in Scarsdale, New York, American students, teachers and administrators have to face problems generated from the swollen numbers of non-English speakers with different cultural and educational backgrounds. Both Americans and Japanese have taken as many measures as possible to solve them. In the process of bridging gaps, interactive effects have created.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR BRIDGING GAPS BETWEEN U. S. NATIONALS AND JAPANESE CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

In filling gaps between Americans and Japanese, Chapter V will present suggestions on personal, corporate and governmental levels.

### 1. Personal Level

#### 1) Before leaving Japan

(1) Discuss carefully in the family whether the children accompany their parents to the United States. If so, discuss which school the children will attend, a Japanese school in the area, a public school, or a private school in the host country. In the United States, the educational environment is totally different from one school district to the other. Therefore, the decision must be based on detailed information of the district where the family is going to reside.

(2) If the family chooses a local school for their children, the best time to go to the United States is during the summer vacation. Summer camps with the ESL programs are available, and subsequently children can pursue their American schoolings from September.

(3) Take the child's transcripts and a description of the subjects, both in English, which the child has taken at his/her school in Japan.

#### 2) Upon Arrival in the United States

(1) Inform the local school as soon as possible that the child is going to enroll in.

(2) At the time of registration, have a person accompany you who is able to communicate with school administrators.

(3) Let your children participate in school activities as much as possible.

(4) Make efforts to participate in or contribute to the community life. For instance, commit oneself to volunteer work. It will be welcomed if Japanese people introduce their culture.

### 2. Corporate Level

#### 1) For the employees

(1) Issue a foreign assignment notice well in advance. Then, the employee's family is able to prepare for and adjust to the new environment properly. It is usually the case that Japanese businessmen receive short notice only from three to six months prior to the foreign assignment from their companies. The longer advance notice should be issued not only for the assignment to the United States but also for the

reassignment back to Japan.

(2) Provide the detailed information of the community where the family is going to live in. Such information as security, educational climate, and demographic outlook of the area should be provided.

(3) In deciding the residential location, conduct careful research to find an area where Japanese families are not densely concentrated.

## 2) For the community

Monetary contributions and donations by Japanese companies in the United States increased tenfold between 1986 and 1990. Many Japanese companies have extended financial assistance to higher educational institutions by either supporting academic programs at the college level or offering scholarships. It is vital for Japanese companies to take community-relations into consideration. There are two possible ways to contribute to communities.

### (1) Financial Aid

In order to meet the specific needs of a given community, it is essential for each Japanese company to set up a "community relations" section. This section should conduct careful research of the community environment and offer hands-on supporting programs. The company can support the ESL programs, vocational programs, or "adopt" an entire class at a local school and offer scholarships for higher education. The company can establish specialized schools by using their expertise.

### (2) Volunteer Work

Encourage employees to become "good corporate citizens" by participating in local school activities or volunteer work. Mitsui Trading Company, for instance, supports "Junior Achievement Program". The employees of the company volunteered to teach courses in business, social science and culture at public schools.

## 3. Governmental Level

### 1) In the short range perspective

(1) Set up an office and send personnel to diminish conflicts between the Americans and Japanese students. Let the local schools and administrators know how to access information on the Japanese educational system and culture.

(2) The Japanese government should suggest Japanese schools overseas that they avail themselves to local people: to offer such courses as international exchange, Japanese language, and/or Japanese culture.

### 2) In the long range perspective

(1) Reduce the maximum number of students in one class in public education from

40 to 20~25 students. This will make two things possible. First, a smaller class size will enable teachers to pay attention to an individual student. Second, through a better personal contact, teachers can encourage students to be involved in class activities more actively and to express opinions more freely. Without enhancing communication skills in the mother tongue, how could the skills in foreign languages be improved?

(2) Reduce the extent of supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science over public education. Instead, encourage local governments to develop individualized curriculum to meet the specific needs of the community. Employing the complete credit system and six-year secondary education combining three years for junior high school with three years for high school will be one possibility to alleviate the rigidity of the Japanese educational system.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study discusses structural and cultural differences in education between the United States and Japan. The differences in turn affect both American educational authorities of local communities and the children of Japanese businessmen who have been assigned to work there. These contrasts and differences led Japanese children to experience various difficulties in adjusting to the new educational environment. Having faced problems, at Scarsdale High School, the administrators, the teachers, the American students as well as Japanese students have taken various measures to derive some possible solutions. It is reported that gaps between American and Japanese sides still remain and student separation has not been diminished completely. These continued efforts by both groups, however, are essential to bridge gaps and are likely to achieve cross-cultural understanding in the long run. And furthermore, it is urgent for Japanese interest groups at the personal, corporate and governmental level to take as many measures as possible to avoid anticipated problems.

Due to the economic prosperity in Japan, a vast number of Japanese products<sup>9</sup> have been exported to the United States. Nevertheless, as far as human contact at the grass root level is concerned, it has been unfortunately limited because of language barrier. Therefore, we must make the best use of these human contacts between ordinary people in both nations. American educational authorities in the New York area, for instance, have access to get information on the Japanese educational environment. One reason is they want to find hints for solutions to their immediate problems ranging from curriculum to transcripts. Another reason is that American educators have become interested in Japanese education after they have come in contact with Japanese children. They have learned that Japanese children, in general, are well disciplined, hard working, and far more advanced in mathematics and science. Therefore, American educators would think that Japanese education has achieved what American education is lacking. It is a good opportunity for the Americans to understand Japanese educational climate and learn from it. Japanese students in the United States are, without question, a mirror image of good students that American education longs for.

Japanese children in the United States gain valuable experiences while receiving American education. Individuality, creativity, explicit communication skills and self-assertiveness are what they usually acquire in the United States. These valuable traits are in fact what Japanese education lacks. When they return to Japan, they can be incredibly useful mirrors reflecting future perspectives in Japanese education. The reality, however, is opposite. Returnee students are usually obliged to conform to the Japanese educational environment. Bullying cases have been reported. The major

cause of bullying returnees is that they are different from other students in the mainstream school system. They are reportedly called “Hen-Japa” meaning “strange Japanese”. Returnees, therefore, try to conceal the very trace of overseas experience. According to the latest report of the National Council on Educational Reform, creativity, individuality and diversity are the factors to be emphasized for education in the 21st century. It is so wasteful not to learn from living examples of the future of Japanese education. Therefore, what is needed most is a flexible educational environment in Japan to accept returnees as they are. Some new educational reforms have already begun at the high school level as a breakthrough in the rigidity of the Japanese system. Moreover, if this principle of flexible education helps create new criteria for entrance examinations for higher education, Japanese students overseas would not worry about reentry into Japan.

Conclusively, one thing is certain. In the 21st century, Japan increasingly needs human resources who are able to communicate with people of different cultures. Therefore, it is strongly hoped that Japanese children, who have cross-cultural experiences and are exposed to different educational environments, will play integral roles, such as being diplomats or lawyers, in the era of our global society in the foreseeable future.

## ENDNOTES

1. According to the Ministry of Education and Finance, Japanese children overseas are “those who are staying abroad with their parents, while the parents are there for their business, studies, at mandatory education age and are registered at the local embassies and consulates as living in a foreign country for more than three months. “Monbu-kagakushou-hakusho” states the total number of the Japanese children overseas is approximately 50,000 in 2003.
2. Japan’s total value of direct investment abroad increased eleven fold between 1983 ~1994. The share of the direct investment to the U.S. turns 42% of the total value. Accessed at <http://www.keidanren.or.jp> on December, 11, 2004.
3. “The Survey of the Japanese Expatriates 2004” by the Ministry of Education and Finance states “They are Japan nationals who have been living abroad more than three months for their businesses, studies, etc.
4. Ibid., 28. New York and Los Angeles are ranked No1 and No2 most densely populated areas by Japanese expatriates and their families. The total number of Japanese expatriates in New York area is 49,748 and that of those in Los Angeles is 29,809.
5. One of the educational programs which is targeted to students with no or limited English proficiency who have been in the United States for three years or less. In New York, service requirement is “if there a district wishes to receive state funding, it must provide bilingual program if 20 or more students speak the same language at a grade level in a school building. If less than 20, only ESL is required.” McDonnell, *New Commers in American Schools* 38, 39.
6. An elementary or secondary school (from kindergarten through 12th grade) in the United States supported by public fund and providing free education for children of a community or district. Accessed at <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/public+school> on December 11, 2004.
7. The Council consists of 20 members with the approval of the Japanese government to discuss education in Japan. It is summoned by the Minister of Education and Science. Accessed at [http://mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/shingi/chuuou/toushin/960701a.html](http://mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chuuou/toushin/960701a.html) on December 12, 2004.
8. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, they are the children of Japanese expatriates who have stayed overseas more than one year with their families. The number of returnees who came back to Japan in 2002 was 10,778 Accessed at [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/clarinet/data2.html](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/clarinet/data2.html) on December 12, 2004. Most of these children have the experience of living abroad for 3~5 years.



9. Foreign Press Center/Japan states in “Japan 2004 Edition” that Japan’s trade surplus with the US in 2002 jumped to ¥7,636 billion. p.67

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