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Kikokushijo and Coming Home: The Relevance of Age in the Making of Cultural Identity and its Effect on the Readjustment Phase of Japanese Returnees

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Abstract

The following paper discusses the relevance of age in the formation of cultural identity as it relates to the readjustment phase of Japanese returnees. It attempts to defend Minoura's (1992) claim that a painless or turbulent readjustment phase may be contingent on the age of returnees while abroad. It explores the notion that returnees who live abroad between the ages of 9 and 15 are far more likely to experience struggle when they return to Japan than those who live abroad at an earlier age.

Key words: returnees, *kikokushijo,* sensitive period, readjustment phase

I. Introduction

In the 1960s, the Japanese Ministry of Education fashioned the label *kikokushijo (returnees)* to refer to what was a significantly large number of Japanese youth returning to Japan after having lived abroad for an extended period of time. While in the past *kikokushijo* generally came from upper class families whose parents had been sent out of the country on long-term work assignments (White, 1988; Goodman, 1990), recent trends in the economy have brought about a change in the make-up of returnees. They are now more likely to be members of the middle-class (Yashiro, 1995).

Historically, *kikokushijo* have struggled with issues including but not limited to

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language re-acquisition, re-acculturation, peer-harassment, general discrimination, and what Enloe and Lewin (1987) describe as a “degree of self-imposed isolation, identity confusion, and depression about the meaning of being Japanese” (p.225). Since the 1960s, however, troubles facing returnees have improved. Omori (2001, p.251) even argues that the stigma attached to the word *kikokushijo* may no longer actually exist. Having said that, more recent studies have shown that returnees themselves (Yoshida, Matsumoto, Akiyama, Moriyoshi, Furuiye, Ishii, Franklin, 2002), as well as their peers (Yoshida, Matsumoto, Akiyama, Moriyoshi, Furuiye, Ishii, 2003), still recognize at least some significant readjustment struggles in the lives of *kikokushijo.*

In this paper, I will discuss one possible reason behind the presence of struggle in the readjustment phase that returnees experience upon coming home. I will attempt to defend one researcher’s claim that a painless or turbulent readjustment phase may be contingent on the age of returnees while abroad. According to Minoura (1992), students who live abroad during the age period of 9 through 15, as opposed to an earlier age, are far more likely to experience difficulties like the ones described above when they return to Japan. While this argument naturally does not reflect every returnee case, I have come across academic studies (Kanno, 2003; Minoura, 1992; Muro, 2004), as well as accounts of returnee students in my own research, where it indeed has carried at least some weight and therefore invites further exploration.

This article addresses this issue in four separate sections. First, it presents the basis of Minoura’s (1992) argument, with some discussion on research that presents contrary findings. Next, it discusses the author of this article’s own bicultural narrative followed by experiences of returnees found in related research to further substantiate Minoura’s claim. Finally, it presents primary research by way of interviews with two returnees to further emphasize the plausibility of Minoura’s theory.

II. A sensitive period

Minoura’s (1992) longitudinal study on returnee identity points out a causal connection between the nature of *kikokushijo* readjustment in Japan and the age in which they lived abroad. In a ten-year-long study including seventy-five students, Minoura (1992) found that the greater part of cultural identity formation seems to take place during the age of 9 to 15, what she calls the “sensitive period” (p.305). It is during this period of time, she argues, that children are able to negotiate and incorporate the “cultural meaning systems” surrounding them (Minoura, 1992, p.305). She says, “cultural meaning systems, specifically those that mediate interpersonal relationships among peers outside of a child’s own family,” have a greater impact on children than the cultural learning taking place at a younger age, primarily in the home (Minoura, 1992, p.305). Consequently, it is more likely that Japanese returnees who live abroad during all or the greater part of their sensitive period will develop a stronger attachment to their host country's culture than to that of their own home country. This, in effect, makes their return more difficult than that of returnees who sojourn at an age outside this time period. In a very real sense, the host country will have become the returnee's home country because he/she has lived in it during what Minoura has argued to be their most formative years of cultural identity development.

In her study, Minoura (1992) discusses a number of cases where her argument seems to carry a good deal of demonstrative weight. One of her subjects in particular, Jiro, serves as a good example. Jiro left for the United States at the age of 6 and came back to Japan when he was 13 years and 6 months old. He remained in Japan for two years. Then, at the age of 16 and 9 months, he returned to America once again. Using a scale of I-VI to gage the cultural identity of her subjects, "I" being completely Japanese and "VI" being completely American, Minoura assigned Jiro a "VI". Jiro grappled with many things upon returning to Japan. In the end, he returned to America and had the following to say about his experience:

> Coming back to Japan does not mean that I become a Japanese. I don't have any "Japan" to begin with. I had to make a Japanese out of myself . . . I harbored my wish to go back to America in my heart . . . If I go to a Japanese University, I will understand Japan more and know how I can make a career for myself, although it does not mean that I want to be part of a Japanese society. (personal communication, Minoura, 1992, p.320).

His words show an obvious disconnect with his home culture even though he had already spent a large part of his life (at the time of the interview) in Japan. Why does he identify more with the American culture? Why does he demonstrate a sense of resentment toward his own country? Minoura's argument is perhaps one way to account for Jiro's cultural leanings.

Though Minoura (1992) paints a compelling picture, other research provides a completely different perspective. In a sample size of twenty carefully chosen students in their last year of high school, Omori (2002) found that returnees in her study generally experienced very little difficulty in their transition back to Japanese society. What is most interesting for the purposes of this paper is that most of the students in Omori's research lived abroad during roughly the same sensitive period that Minoura's subjects did. One wonders why, then, against the backdrop of Minoura's work, that the readjustment phase of Omori's subjects was not as difficult as one might imagine. Omori (2002) argues that the formation of cultural identity takes place at a much younger age. She claims that the in-Japan training—the training to adjust behavior and wear different faces in different environments—that her subjects received at home and in Japanese elementary schools at an even much younger than 9, provided them with the unique ability to adapt, or conform, to changing environments and therefore re-adapt to the Japanese setting upon their return. This stands in stark contrast to Minoura's research, which tells us that cultural identity is likely internalized during 9 to 15 years of age.

To put it succinctly, Omori's (2002) returnees had not internalized their foreign experience as deeply as Minoura's (1992) model said they might. They relied on much earlier learned "cultural meaning systems" to pull themselves through their readjustment phase. Though Omori's results differ from Minoura's findings, still, the narratives of *kikokushijo* found in other studies, including my own research, seem to support it. From here, this article will present information that lends itself to a defense of Minoura's sensitive period argument.

III. My bicultural narrative and a connection to returnees

Upon reading many of the long-standing difficulties facing Japanese returnees, I felt an instant connection, or sense of empathy, with their narratives; a sort of familiarity that I could not fully place. Consequently, I set out to do research in this particular field of study. With an itching desire to understand the impact their stories had left on me, I found it difficult to pinpoint any single issue to illustrate my connection, if any, with this bicultural group. Nevertheless, a sense of union or kinship, faint though it may have been, fueled my investigation. After reading through a lot of material, I came to recognize that I had experienced something quite similar to some of these returnees.

1. My bicultural narrative

Interestingly, my own experience as a bicultural individual typifies the kind of experience many *kikokushijo* have had. Up until the age of 10, I lived in a lower middle-class, Mexican-American community. I was for all intents and purposes a full-fledged member of that society. However, this all changed when, due to a shift in my parents' economic situation, in addition to their desire to find a better school district for their children, they decided to move our family to a predominately White, upper-middle class neighborhood apart from where I had spent my early childhood. From the age of 10 to 17, then, the vast majority of my peers and their families came from affluent, White, protestant, and politically conservative backgrounds. Without realizing it, I came to fully identify with and embrace my new-found surroundings, more so than I did the community and culture of my early childhood. I realized this when, at the age of 17, I left home to attend a university with a sizeable, not to mention politically and socially vocal, Mexican-American student body. Although one might have expected me to feel at home among people of my own ethnicity and culture in this changed environment, I did not. In fact, until my early twenties, I did everything in my power to avoid people of my own ethnic and cultural background and did what I could to be seen as a member of the White community in which I had spent my sensitive period.

Fortunately, when I matured, I realized the importance of re-embracing my own cultural background and ethnicity; however, it proved to be a very slow and difficult process. In her studies on Japanese returnees, Kanno (2003) argues that young bi/multi-cultural people gradually and sometimes painfully shift from an attitude of "polarization towards one culture to a balance between two (or more) cultures" (p.16). I experienced this in my own bicultural narrative, albeit minus the large geographic component that Kanno's subjects experienced. As mentioned, I lived in one culture until the age of 10 and moved to another until the age of 17. Upon starting college, I found myself surrounded once again by members of my birth culture. At that point, I entered a long period of identity conflict. During university, I became increasingly aware of the fact that I did not truly belong to the culture that I had come to embrace between the ages of 10 and 17. It was then that I made a conscious effort to reject my ethnic heritage and culture and fought to hold onto everything I had become during my so-called sensitive period. The Mexican-Americans around me often branded me as a trader to my culture ("whitewashed" was the phrase most commonly used) and I struggled deeply whenever I had encounters with them. For years, I dealt with these issues. However, as I grew older, I finally realized, after much introspection, the importance of embracing both cultures as my own. Needless to say, it was a painful journey.

2. My experience in terms of returnees and readjustment

For the purposes of this paper, I would argue that my narrative speaks in testimony of Minoura's (1992) assessment of cultural identity formation. In very much the same way that many of the returnees in her research struggled to become one with their culture of heritage upon returning to Japan, I found it very difficult to re-embrace or readjust to the culture from which my parents had removed me. For me, this personal narrative has always been a painful one. Did I reject my cultural ethnicity simply because I was an ungrateful, self-hating child? Or, were my actions completely normal because, as Minoura (1992) argues, humans tend to form their cultural identity through peer interaction primarily between the ages of 9 and 15, a time when my environment clearly did not match my racial and cultural heritage? If the latter is the case, then both my own narrative and that of many struggling Japanese returnees can be fully appreciated and understood.

IV. A sensitive period and existing returnee literature

A discussion of some existing literature on returnees, aside from Minoura's (1992) work, might serve to better demonstrate the link between said sensitive period and a difficult readjustment phase. In her work on the cultural identity of returnees and its impact on their readjustment in Japan, Muro (2004) also found a strong connection between problems with re-acculturation and returnees who lived abroad during the same critical years of development to which Minoura (1992) refers. Of the forty returnees in her study, Muro discovered that the nine students who spent their sensitive period in Japan, but had lived abroad prior to and following this period of time, identified themselves as Japanese and experienced very little struggle when they returned home. One of the nine students, who happened to be born and raised in America, but lived in Japan during her sensitive period, had this to say:

> I have been wondering why I think of myself as totally Japanese, when I have lived in the United States for most of my life . . . Because the four years I have lived in Japan fit exactly [in] to the critical period, when my cultural identity was built. So even when I went back . . . to where I was raised, I was not able to adapt fully. (Personal communication, Muro, 2004, p.105).

In addition, seventeen of the students who had lived abroad at some point during their sensitive period used words such as "complex" to describe their cultural identity (Muro, 2004, p.107). Interestingly, there were only three students in Muro's study that lived abroad during the greater part of their sensitive period that reported feeling more Japanese when they returned to Japan. However, these same students reported that they had resided in Japanese communities when abroad. So, judging by Minoura and Muro's work, not to mention my own bicultural narrative, it seems plausible to say that young people may, just possibly, become inflexibly attached to the communities that surround them during this sensitive period as opposed to any other time period. This in effect could cause one to struggle a great deal if removed from that cultural community to be placed in one foreign to it. Experiences like the kind found in Muro's research comes across in other research as well.

In a longitudinal study on bicultural identity, Kanno (2000 a; 2000 b; 2002; 2003) documents the detailed narrative of four returnees that she had taught in Toronto, Canada at a Japanese supplementary school for Japanese kids living abroad. Though Kanno's study does not intentionally speak in support of Minoura's (1992) sensitive period theory, one of her subject's (Sawako) narratives appears arguably, to fit into Minoura's model. The following detailed description of Kanno's returnee may perhaps serve to establish this connection.

One of Kanno's (2003) research subjects, Sawako, led an adolescent life torn between two cultures. She left Japan for the United States at the age of 7 and returned at the age of 13. After three years (age 7 to 10) of attending an American school in Los Angeles, Sawako became more and more fluent in the English language, she developed strong relationships with her predominately white peers, and she even took on a western name, Sandy. Through all of this she became increasingly deficient in Japanese and her parents worried that she and her younger brother would not be able to cope with the family's inevitable return to Japan. As a result, her parents arranged for her to attend a *nihonjingakko* ("full-time Japanese schools set up in countries outside of Japan for the education of expatriate students") (Kanno, 2003, p.29). What resulted was a complicated period of life torn between two cultures and two languages. Until her return to Japan at the age of 13, despite her new situation, Sawako remained in contact with the American world via TV, neighbors, friends, magazines, and intensive piano lessons with an American teacher.

At the age of 13, Sawako returned to Japan and lived there until the age of 15, after which she moved to Canada with her family. In Japan, from the age of 13 to 15, she sacrificed her academic studies to pursue a spot in a prestigious music school as a pianist. When that failed she applied to a private high school in high standing. However, her weaknesses in both English and Japanese prevented her from gaining admission. Then, at the age of 15, when Sawako's father received yet another oversees transfer, Sawako decided to accompany her family in hopes of strengthening her English. There, she was able to do so, and upon her final return to Japan at the age of 17, Sawako gained entrance to Kobe University by means of the *kikokushijo* entrance exam.

Upon this final return to Japan, Sawako experienced a very difficult readjustment phase. Kanno (2002) says that despite attempts to fit-in at Kobe University, Sawako was often regarded as an outsider. For example, the members of the rock band to which she belonged would often become irritated when Sawako mixed English with Japanese. Sawako recalled how she once asked a friend who was attempting to park his car, "Are you going to parallel-park (parallel-park *suruno*)?" (personal communication, Kanno 2003, p.40). In doing so, she used both English and Japanese because she did not know the Japanese translation of parallel-park. Her friends in the car responded: "What are you using English for? Say it in Japanese. Show-off (*kakko-tsukenna yo*)!" (personal communication, Kanno, 2003, p.41).

Sawako also struggled with using honorific language (*keigo*) when speaking with her seniors (*senpai*), an important element in Japanese culture, the use of which is essential in everyday life. This was particularly difficult for her because her seniors happened to be very close in age to herself. Things became so problematic in this department that one of her seniors approached her saying, “You know, some of your *senpai* are saying, ‘Who is that stuck-up first-year kid who doesn’t use *keigo*?’ I think you better fix your attitude, for your own sake” (personal communication, Kanno, 2003, p.41).

Situations like this caused Sawako to isolate herself. At first, she tried to reach out to people with whom she could share her struggles. In one of her sessions with Kanno (2003), Sawako spoke of a friend who consoled her in one-on-one conversations but later betrayed her trust and joined the group of people giving her a hard time. She described her situation as such: “If one person speaks ill of you, then the whole group will start looking at you negatively . . . Getting along with others is important here; it’s a strange world, Japan” (personal communication, Kanno, 2003, p.42). Things got so bad that at one point, nearly in tears, she reported to Kanno (2003), “Nobody would care if I disappeared” (personal communication, p.42). Sawako experienced such a turbulent readjustment period that she often felt like withdrawing from her university. While naturally her situation improved over the years, just as in my own bicultural experience, for Sawako, her readjustment period itself was a painful and turbulent time.

How, then, can one account for Sawako’s particularly anguished readjustment? Of the four students that Kanno (2000 a; 2000 b; 2002; 2003) discusses, Sawako is the only subject who spent the greater half (age 7 to 13) of her time abroad during her sensitive period. Aside from a two year break in Japan between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, one year of which she spent in virtual seclusion and highly focused on developing nothing but her skills as a pianist, Sawako was for all intents and purposes a sensitive-period-abroad returnee. As such, and perhaps not coincidentally, Sawako experienced perhaps the most difficult readjustment period of all of Kanno’s interviewees. Again, according to Minoura (1992), and even Muro (2004), to understand turbulent readjustment experiences among some returnees, we need simply consider the possibility that they internalize the culture in which they are immersed during their sensitive period. Because Sawako had internalized her American experience more so than the Japanese culture of her earlier years, arguably it made her readjustment phase, especially when it came to interacting with her peers, all the more complex.

One final point of discussion might further substantiate Minoura’s (1992) sensitive period claim. As mentioned before, the use of honorific language (*keigo*) is essential in everyday Japanese life. It is a system by which the Japanese demonstrate their respect to their seniors through the use of deferential language. According to Kanno (2003), “in Japanese schools, as in Japanese society at large, paying respect to one's seniors (determined by age, rank, and often—unfortunately—gender) is an integral part of social interaction" (p.59). Students begin learning how to use this honorific language toward the latter stages of elementary school, and finally start using it in full force in junior high school when they partake in club activities (Kanno, 2003, p.41). It is during this time, somewhere roughly between the ages of nine and fifteen, that kids learn and internalize this essential element of Japanese culture. If a returnee happens to live abroad during this time in their life, much like Sawako, he/she may miss out on this very important part of the Japanese education process thereby conceivably making the process of reintegration difficult. This kind of point makes Minoura's (1992) sensitive period argument all the more persuasive. What is more, my own research, by way of interviews with two returnees, demonstrates the same thing.

V. Interviews with two returnees

1. The purpose of interviewing

I am not looking for absolute answers. In conducting interviews with returnees, I have not set out to prove that Minoura's (1992) sensitive period conceptualization is the number one key to understanding why Japanese returnees experience struggle or not when they return to Japan. Seidman (2006) tells us that finding answers to questions and testing hypotheses is not the purpose of in-depth interviewing. It is, rather, a chance for researchers to try and understand "the lived experience of other people and the meaning that they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2006, p.9). In other words, I do not believe that these interviews are representative all of returnee cases. Regardless of my findings, Minoura's idea does not ring true in every returnee's narrative. However, because her theory does seem to carry weight in the case of some, I wanted to know if the narratives of returnees that I have known corroborate or contradict her work.

2. The participants

I interviewed two Japanese high school students, both in their first year of high school. One, Student A, lived in the United States from the age of 6 to 13. The other, Student B, lived in the United States from the age of 8 to 15. At the time of the interview with Student A, he had been back in Japan for nearly three years; and at the time of the interview with Student B, she had been back in Japan for nearly one year.

3. The selection of participants

Finding returnees that matched those in Minoura's work proved difficult. I searched for students between the ages of fifteen and seventeen that had lived abroad for all or at least part of their sensitive period, as Minoura defines it, and also for students who lived abroad before but not during their sensitive period (so as to compare the readjustment phase of the students). At the time of interviewing, I was acquainted with a number of returnee students. I searched for students from this population. While it was not difficult to find sensitive-period-abroad returnees, I was unable to find students matching the pre-sensitive-period-abroad-only criterion. In the end, I focused my research on two sensitive-period-abroad returnees.

4. The interview

I conducted in-depth, unstructured, conversational interviews with two students. So as to give the students my undivided attention at the time of the interview, I did not take notes but recorded each session and later transcribed and analyzed our discussion. My interview with Student A lasted two hours while the one with Student B, due to her own time restraints, lasted slightly over an hour. Although I did not come to the interview table with a list of specific questions, I guided the students to share their feelings about returning to Japan. On their own accord, both interviewees decided to focus primarily on their school life and peer-relations. After a few minutes into each interview, the students became visibly relaxed and willing to share their honest feelings about their returnee experience. Because I decided to conduct the interview informally, it provided for the kind of atmosphere that Patton (2002) describes as the informal conversational interview's strongest point: an opportunity for "flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness to individual differences and situational changes" (p.343). Both Students A and B seemed to be comfortable with this approach.

5. Student A

Student A lived with his family in the United States for six years (from the age of 6 to 13), on account of his father's overseas job transfer. He described his life in America with a sense of pride, occasionally comparing it to his present life in Japan with a trace of nostalgia: "I felt like America was the best country. America was like good. I felt like, you know, English is the best." He spoke of learning the English language from scratch, describing his introduction to the alphabet beyond the letter "E" as an "awesome" experience. He reminisced fondly of his father coming home around 6:00 p.m. every evening and how they spent weekends together. Then, he went on to say, "Dad had a lot of energy back then. He used to play catch with me and my brother. Now he comes home around 10 or 11 every night." As for his relationship with his peers, Student A boasted his ability to make friends while in the United States and professed how difficult it was to do so in Japan:

> For me, I had a really easy time getting friends in the states because I was like really open minded, I guess. I would talk to people even though I wasn't good at speaking English. There was like a person sitting next to me, I would talk to them or try to at least. That's why I could just like make friends but if I did that here [in Japan], if I did that, they looked at me funny.

When I asked Student A if he could think of any negative things to say about his experience in America, he could come up with very little to say.

When it came to discussing his first year back in Japan, Student A had a lot to share. He started off by saying, "I didn't make a lot of friends, and I definitely felt like an outsider. The people in Japan, if you don't know them, and you strike up a conversation, they look at you like you're strange." He described that even though he had some friends he felt that there were a lot of people at his school that did not like him because he "stuck out like a sore thumb." He shared:

> Most returnees go to private schools for a reason. Because if they go to a public school they're going to be hated by the other students . . . My *kikokushijo* friend, he went to a public school. He started raising his hand in class and volunteering in English class in perfect English. Then the guys at the school, they started calling him names like 'show-off' and everything like that . . . He felt like everyone hated him. So my friend went to another public school right next to that public school and stopped talking in English. At the new school the students knew he could speak English and hated him because he pretended not to understand English. So, he couldn't win either way. So he went to a private school.

Even at a private school, Student A discussed how in his own situation, in English class, the students would harass him for speaking English fluently. So, he stopped speaking English. Then his English teachers would get angry because he would not speak in English authentically. He described also how his seniors would scold him for not using honorific language (*keigo*), and some even despised him on account of it. And, finally, as far as his Japanese ability was concerned, he was given no extra tutorial assistance to help him improve. "The teachers," he said, "just told me to deal with it and get used to it." In so many situations he felt that, like his friend, he too could not win. In order to make friends and live a good life he had to completely adapt to his environment and fast. He decided to stop using English altogether at school and to keep his distance from both the foreign teachers and other returnee students there.

After a year and half, Student A still did not feel like he fit into his environment. So, with the help of his parents, he found a place of refuge where, as he put it, “I can be myself.” He began working a part-time job as a teacher’s assistant at an international school. There he met with peers from all over the world, all of whom could speak English. At this school, he said, “They are all friends and English is a good thing . . . if I didn’t speak English here, that’d be weird. I like that.” Two or so years after first returning to his home country, things became a lot better for Student A at his regular school. He attributed this to his job at the international school. He felt much more willing to embrace his Japanese world during the weekdays because he could “be myself on the weekends.”

5.1 Evaluating Student A’s experience

Because he lived in America from the age of 6 to 13, it is hard to say that Student A’s situation is completely in league with Minoura’s (1992) findings. In the end, who can say that he did not internalize his American identity between the ages of 6 and 8, as opposed to 9 and 13? Nevertheless, perhaps it is possible to argue that he may have spent the first two to three years of his time in America developing his English and his grasp of the American world around him, and later began to internalize that information between the ages of 9 and 13. As Muro (2002) mentions, “although children before this period [9-15] perceive behavioral differences between cultures, they are not really aware of differences in ‘cultural grammar’, or the rules that govern behavior and thinking in a particular culture” (p.104). Regardless of when Student A actually internalized that information, the fact remains that he did indeed internalize his American identity far more than he ever did his Japanese identity. This became quite apparent to me when he shared how difficult it was for him to readjust to Japanese culture. So, in the end, perhaps it is not so radical an idea to use Minoura’s findings to shed at least some light on Student A’s difficult phase of readjustment. In so doing, we might say that Student A struggled upon returning to Japan because his cultural identity had essentially become American as a result of spending most of his sensitive period in America. This made it difficult for him to cope with what the Japanese world would have expected from him on a daily basis.

6. Student B

Student B moved with her family to the United States, also on account of her father’s job, when she was 8 years old and returned to Japan when she was 15. Over the course of our interview, it became obvious to me that her experience in America had a much larger impact on her identity than her experience in Japan. She made this abundantly clear when she said, “I do not feel like I am Japanese.” On top of that, her comparisons of Japan and America spoke none too friendly of the former:

> In [city name deleted], everyone's the same. We are all equal. No one cared that I was Japanese . . . Also, you can't smoke in restaurants and the beaches are nice. But in Japan, they're so dirty. Right now, I'm starting to hate Japan. The early morning trains: I hate how crowded they become . . . I don't really like the Japanese school system. I notice that everyone is the same. I mean like the clothes and the hairstyle. Everyone is the same. They all copy each other. And if someone is different, they treat that person very mean.

During our conversation, she embarked on three critiques like the one above. At the end of the interview, she told me how she is trying to convince her parents to allow her to return to America to live with her friends. So far, she said "I am fighting a losing battle."

As for her readjustment phase in Japan, Student B went through some very tough times. A number of the incidents that she discussed paint a difficult readjustment phase. Student B came back to Japan during her final year of junior high school. After enrolling in a public school, she soon experienced difficulties. This had mainly to do with her struggle developing good relationships not only with her peers but with her teachers as well. She described how the students of her new school treated her after it was announced that she had lived in America for the past seven years: "The kids poked me with their fingers when I walked through the hallway and said 'Oh! She is human.' Once they even poured water over me when I was sitting in class eating my lunch. They treated me as if I weren't human." Then she mentioned how one of the girls at her school told her that she could never be considered a true Japanese citizen:

> She told me that 'students who come from abroad are not really Japanese because they can't write Japanese. They are not Japanese. They are bad for us because in Japanese society a lot of people can't read kanji, and with students coming from abroad the ability to speak and read Japanese will become worse.'

Then, she had this to say of her teachers:

> They never did anything to help me. They only cared about themselves. They wouldn't even help me with my Japanese . . . The only teacher that I got along with was the foreign English teacher. The students would stand around and watch us talk like we were animals. Then the Japanese English teacher told me to give the other students a chance to talk to her. So, I stopped talking to her.

When recalling these memories, Student B looked upset. It was obvious to me that she was experiencing a lot of struggle.

At the end of our interview, Student A shared that life had become a little bit easier since her parents agreed to enroll her in an international high school where half of her courses were taught in English and the other half in Japanese. “But,” she qualified her admission, “I don’t really like this school. The English level here is still too low for me.” Student B made it abundantly clear that her return to Japan had not been easy or comfortable.

6.1 Evaluating Student B’s experience

Student B’s situation, even more so than Student A’s experience, fits Minoura’s (1992) model of cultural identity formation. Student B left Japan at the age of eight and returned at the age of fifteen. Every year she spent in America, save the first year, fell exactly within the time period that Minoura speaks about in her study on cultural identity. And in very much the same way that Minoura would have postulated, Student B experienced a great deal of problems when she returned to Japan. Student B, because of her cultural identity, had, at least up until the time of our interview, been unable to compromise what she knew to be culturally acceptable in America with what the Japanese people around her believe to be acceptable. Her strong desire to be amongst her peers in America, the ones that possibly informed her cultural identity, was all too evident. Her road has clearly not been without struggle.

VI. Conclusion

In the end, I would suggest that the problems experienced by the returnees I have discussed in this paper are not brought on by any fault of their own. It would be a rather harsh way to look at things if we were to say that somehow they are the authors of their own struggles. Nor would it be right to place blame on the people of Japan. One of the good points about Minoura’s (1992) model is that it does not place blame on the actors involved. It simply says that because of the inopportune timing of the returnees’ sojourn, it is far more likely that they will experience a greater degree of issues when coming home than those returnees who live abroad at a different, perhaps younger, period of time. In other words, Minoura is simply calling our attention to the fact that a good deal of culture clash is to be expected, and understood, in situations such as the ones discussed here.

In the end, perhaps one could argue that returnees of the kind that Minoura (1992) describes would be better understood as first-time sojourners. Instead of experiencing what is sometimes called reverse culture shock, perhaps they are experiencing culture shock itself. Church (1982) says that symptoms of culture shock include "anxiety, helplessness, irritability, and a longing for more predictable and gratifying environments" (p.540). Also, Oberg (1960, cited in Church, 1982) describes culture shock as having a number of qualities, some of which include an emotionally hostile attitude against the host culture and the need to associate with other nationals or other sojourners, as well as a sense of superiority toward the people of the host country. Oberg says these feelings are "precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (cited in Church, 1982, p.540). In readings and in my own research, I found that a number of sensitive-period-abroad returnees exhibited these very symptoms. If we look at these students as first-time sojourners, then, perhaps we might better understand their situations. Perhaps such an approach would help the Japanese people and returnees themselves find productive ways to embrace and ease the struggles of future returnees.

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