

ユージン・ハードスターク

異文化の問題を考える

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Cross Cultural Perspectives

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Introduction.

Los Angeles now has the second largest Japanese community outside of Japan. (The first being Sao Paolo, Brazil).

The first wave of Japanese immigrants were small shopkeepers, farmers, and laborers. They settled into communities such as Gardena, and West Los Angeles, opening small businesses to serve their individual communities. I grew up with a friend whose father was a farmer back in Japan and became the resident gardner in our neighborhood.

As Japan has emerged as an economic power, Los Angeles has become the focal point of Japanese business and money investment. With the recent flurry of building activity especially in Downtown L.A. due in large part to Japanese companies wanting to establish a lasting foothold in American commerce, the Japanese population has increased. They're younger, more educated, and for the most part white-collar workers.

On a recent return trip to L.A. I interviewed two Japanese expatriates and one woman who is half Japanese to get their feelings about the differences or similarities between American and Japanese cultures.

First interview: Katsu Yokoyama

Mr. Yokoyama is an accomplished artist and craftsman who came to L.A. during the Vietnam war.

Q. Why did you come to L.A.?

I was curious. I knew I wanted to stay permanently and most of all I couldn't stand the Japanese way of life. I felt I was too individual and crazy to stay in Japan.

Q. When you came to the U.S. you were drafted into the Vietnam war, how did that happen?

If you stay more than six months you had to sign-up at immigration and you could be drafted. The same time I got my green card I received my draft notice. I had no choice. Besides, the way I looked at it, it was a chance to stay in the country and learn English "under fire." You know if you stay in L.A. which has its own Japanese community you don't need to know English, but I wanted to see the other side of America and adapt to the American way of life.

Q. What was the army like?

Interesting, I was surprised how much race discrimination there

was, but also discrimination between the educated and the non-educated. You know in Japan there isn't much class difference. I think Japan is one of the few class-free countries in the world because its homogeneous.

Q. You've lived in each country for 20 years ; what differences do you find?

America is religiously and morally oriented. Japan has no real religion and no morality, but Japanese were forced to do things a certain way by a higher authority. 90% of the Japanese were never citizens, and the other 10% were the educated Samurai and they were responsible to protect the people and run the country. Those 90% followed the 10% into W.W.2. It was only after General McArthur came with democracy that Japanese really became citizens. Even through the Meiji period it was a few governing and making laws for the many and we just followed. Whereas from the start America was founded on individual freedom for all. Japanese have freedom now but they don't take responsibility, don't know how to, because in someways there is still no need to. In America you're responsible for what you do and how you live. One example is the environment, Japanese citizens take very little responsibility for it, whereas Americans are very protective towards it.

Q. How do you see Japan in the world today?

I must say that Japanese have developed their own wisdom of living in the world today. They must take more responsibility as

part of the world community, become more earth oriented.

Q. You've adjusted to living here pretty well ; what problems do you think Japanese have living in this country?

Many Japanese come here only stay within the boundaries of their own culture, friends, and the business they work for, it seems like a waste, they don't know how to socialize with other people. Also there is the problem of race in this country. You can adapt to being "American" but you can't change the color of your skin. I think there might be some sense of inferiority that Japanese might feel living in this country.

Second interview : Anonymous

Is a Japanese man in his 30's with a professional career.

Q. Why did you come to America?

Basically to study English for one year and to see if Americans thought the same as Japanese.

Q. Have you drawn any conclusions since living here?

I think basically all people have the same feelings and emotions. The basic difference is culture. In America you're on your own ; you don't have to worry about what other people think whereas in Japan you have to follow what other people do, you're expected to.

Q. Can you give me an example?

When on a trip Japanese bring back gifts for themselves as well as for friends and family. In other words they're still thinking of "Duty" even while on vacation! Americans take a vacation just to enjoy themselves.

Q. Do you think you'll go back to Japan?

I don't think so. Working for a Japanese company, experience, and the number of years you have worked is given priority. But in America if you're skilled, age isn't a problem. It's the Land of individual opportunity although if you're a minority I think its difficult to move up in a company in America. Being Asian I feel that in working conditions there still is discrimination in America.

Q. What are your impressions of Japan today?

Even though in the news Japan has become a world economic power, I really don't feel that way. The U.S. will always be #1 because of its size. It still is producing twice as much as Japan and Germany and this will not change.

Q. If you went back to Japan what problems might you have readjusting?

What I've heard is that if you've been away for more than two or three years people don't consider you a whole Japanese because you've been influenced too much by foreign culture.

Q. Is there anything you would like to see changed in Japan today?

Yes, not to discriminate against non-Japanese such as the Ainu.

Q. Is there any advice you would give to Japanese coming to the U.S.?

Yes, they must think that when they come to the U.S. they're going to be treated as a minority.

Third interview : Mimi Kroesen

Ms.Kroesen was born in Hollywood, California. Her father was Dutch / German and her mother Japanese. She works at a Japanese Antique store while pursuing a career as a record promoter, and producer.

Q. Being raised most of your childhood by your mother is there any particular "Japanese quality " that she impressed upon you?

Extreme politeness. I expect other people to be more polite than they are. I think the Japanese sense of politeness is quite unique but part of the tradition which includes gift-giving I just can't agree with. I want to give someone a gift because I want to not because I'm obliged to, that as an American feels uncomfortable to me.

Q. How many times have you been back to Japan?

5 or 6 times.

Q. How did you feel?

As a little girl I felt more Japanese, but when I was fourteen I felt

more foreign and realized Japan was a different place. The streets were more narrow, things were done in a very polite, acceptable way. It was like a big amusement park to me and still is, even four months ago when I was last there. Also, the last time I was there I was studying "Nihonbuyo" an old form of Japanese dance and felt sad that the young Japanese are more interested in Western culture and art then they are in their own.

Q. What do you think of Japanese male-female relationships?

The social structure there is to safeguard you and your children. You put together two people who have a similiar educational background, similiar interests, at a proscribed time, early 20's, it's so mechanical. At first I thought I could never marry someone I hardly know and don't love, but my mother said it's all for your protection. You don't have to go through so many relationships as we do in the States. But of course you have to accept it and learn to love in a different way versus immediate attraction.

Q. There isn't much divorce is there?

Yes, but what about all the extra-marital affairs. The hostess bars, red light districts, and "business trips" to other Asian countries.

Q. Why do you think all of that goes on over there?

O.K. here comes the "feminist point of view," because the men think of their women as "doormats," to cook the meals, wash the clothes, and to take care of the financial matters. The woman in

Japanese society isn't allowed as much creativity as an American woman. It's all pretty routine and if you're living with your inlaws like many couples do it's pretty hard to imagine a hot and heavy romance with your inlaws "a Shoji-door-away," which is why I think the Love Hotels are popular. They're also popular with young people who do want to know each other before they get married. But I don't think there is a lot of respect for women. They're sexual objects in Japan, yes, yes, yes, especially the commercials I saw, a naked woman lying on top of the car saying "I'm the object buy me."