

琉球大学学術リポジトリ

沖縄におけるアメラジアン你的生活権・教育権保障

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4. The Goal of the AmerAsian school

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Representative of the AmerAsian school in Okinawa

Why Amerasians?

The Reason for Calling Ourselves "Amerasians"

"Amerasians" means children born to American fathers and Asian mothers. Most Amerasians living in Okinawa are born to a native Okinawan mother and a father who is currently or formerly a U.S. serviceman or civilian personnel. Their nationality varies depending on the circumstances at birth and legal procedures: (American, dual nationality or Japanese). Seventy-five percent of the U.S. military bases in Japan are located in Okinawa.

We deliberately chose to call our children "Amerasians" instead of "international children." International children usually evoke an image of foreign nationals. We wanted to refer to all of them by one name and including those with only Japanese nationalities as well. By calling them Amerasians, we wanted to give them equal rights as people of American and Asian descent.

Everything began with the asking of a simple question: Why must the education of Amerasian children differ so radically solely due to nationality? The right to choose education did not lie with the parents. The school had the right and, because of that, we have seen so many Amerasian children with only Japanese nationality giving up English education.

Enrollment Difficulties for Japanese Amerasians

My first son also had only Japanese nationality. When he was about to move up to elementary school from kindergarten at an international school, the school informed us that he could not stay after September that year. The father of my son had immigrated to Australia when he was three. Since the father had not resided in the United States for more than 10 years, the first-born son could not acquire U.S. citizenship (Later, as a result of the revision of the U.S. nationality law, the requirement was changed from 10 years to 5, allowing my first daughter and second son to get U.S. citizenship).

Thus, to have my son enrolled as a first grader at the international school, I had to go to the Board of Education and acquire the permission for the postponement of Japanese compulsory education. However, the postponement or exemption for school enrollment obligation is premised upon the condition that the dual national student is guaranteed another educational

opportunity. If the child has only Japanese nationality, the procedure becomes very complex. I visited the education board a number of times. Their initial reaction was that my son's chances were so slim it wasn't worth hearing my story. It was only after persistent visits pleading with the person in charge that I finally received permission --- just two days before the entrance day for the school. While I was doing that, my husband and I were also aware our son might not get U.S. citizenship and thus, could not enroll at the international school. When freed from that pressure at last, I was moved to the point of tears.

Not Everybody Can Afford English Education

At the International School, however, Amerasian children with Japanese nationality only are rejected while Japanese children from relatively wealthy families are accepted easily. My husband and I were able to acquire the postponement of compulsory education after making a persistent effort to persuade the officials. But there have been many other parents and their children who had to give up that idea at the Board of Education. In the case of single-parent families, especially "fatherless" families, it is nearly impossible to persuade education board officials about the importance of English education.

Yet, the International School accepts a number of Japanese children whose parents are both Japanese. For a school with financial difficulties donations from "trendy moms," who want to raise their children as an "international child" by focusing on English education, could be too much to refuse. It was mortifying to us since money seemed to make a big difference in ranking children. Against this background, we were opposed to the idea of uniformly offering our children the same education as other Japanese children. Being both American AND Japanese, we felt proud of us being a "double" as opposed to a "half." Thus, we began our search for an education that could help our children build self-esteem.

Amerasians as "Illegitimate Children of the U.S. Base"

There is an expression that means "the base's love child." In the last 55 years of the postwar era, Amerasians have been called by that name. It is true that dictionaries carry that definition. According to Webster's New World Dictionary, "Amerasian" is American + Asian / a person of both American and Asian descent, esp. the child of a U.S. Service man and Asian mother." But, in Okinawan society, the latter definition is overly emphasized, conjuring up the image of U.S. bases. We were once criticized by an adult Amerasian who objected to our use of the term "Amerasian." That person didn't understand why we, for the cause for educational rights, were using the discriminatory term. But we believe that if that term is currently considered negative, then we, the discriminated, have to change that concept.

Four years ago, when our sons were at a gift shop in the middle of Okinawa, the female

shopkeeper refused to service them. On the glass door was a sign that read, "No service to American citizens 18 or under who are not accompanied by their parent(s)." This shop was well known among internationally-married couples. If they did that in the United States, we used to say, they would be sued for racial discrimination.

Our sons came home almost crying. It came as a shock to them particularly because it happened in front of their friends. The older son said, "We had money. Why did she kick us out?" "Our friends weren't rejected." "I don't want to even pass that shop again." The younger brother asked me, "I was born in Okinawa and understand Japanese. Am I an American?" "Why can't Americans enter that shop?" "Is it because they can't read Japanese?"

While watching them expressing their anger, I was appalled. It was distressing to our sons being so hurt and upset. That was our first experience of discrimination in Okinawa. Since then, the younger son never went to the grocery store nearby. He said he was afraid of Japanese adults.

Discrimination Based on Looks and Appearances

My daughter isn't built like an average Japanese girl. So, naturally, some Japanese people made such insensitive comments as "American kids are big, aren't they," "You're big. Just like your father," or "You're so fat. What do you eat?" As a result, she stopped talking to Japanese adults. She couldn't stand some Japanese who would ask about her frame even before asking her name. "Why do your friends only ask me about my body?" she asked me once. "Since I'm a double and large, if I go to a Japanese school, they will obviously pick on me. I don't want to go." Insensitive comments and insensitive ways of looking at a child can wound them and gradually lower their self-esteem. Our children began to consider being part American and part Japanese negatively. They said they wanted to move to the United States.

When I cooperated with a private TV station two years ago, they said they needed to interview an adult Amerasian, so I contacted various acquaintances of mine. Finally, a 45-year-old woman volunteered to cooperate with us. What she said in front of the camera was a typical case of the "illegitimate child of the U.S. base" in Okinawan society. She went to a public school for compulsory education. But she always felt bad that she did not look good in the junior high school uniform because of her brown hair and "non-Japanese" facial features. On top of that, since she didn't go to the international school despite being a double, people knew easily that she was from a "fatherless" family. Those who couldn't speak English and couldn't afford to go to the international school were regarded as "the love child of the base." She recalled it was like her family register was always open to the public. Later on, she asked her adoptive mother (foster mother) to send her to an American high

school. Eventually, she went to the United States to study and acquired English.

Establishing the AmerAsian school in Okinawa

80 Dropouts in an Industrial Waste Vacant Lot

In spite of all the trouble regarding the postponement of enrollment obligation, our children were able to enter the Okinawa Christian School International (OCSI). At this school, students could go on to high school without entrance examinations. So, we felt great relief thinking we wouldn't have to be distressed over the entrance exams. That was when private schools started to open in Okinawa as well, and successfully sent students to higher schools. Parents were increasingly focusing on educating their children at younger ages or lower grades at elementary schools. While watching our friends and mothers in the neighborhood "chauffeuring" their children to juku cram schools for entrance examinations, we felt reassured that ours were at the international school. We did not want to impose too much pressure or restraint on our children.

But, one day one incident changed the course of our lives.

In June 1996 the only international school in Okinawa, OCSI, changed its location to Yomitan Village because of the construction of a new school building. The reasons were the deterioration of the old building and an increase in enrollment. The land area increased from 3,000 tsubo (2.45 acre) in Urasoe City to 10,000 tsubo (8.17 acre). The school was at the top of a hill with a great view of East China Sea, plus with a high tech facility and school building. Nobody doubted that great times were ahead for the children at the school.

Then, in April 1997, we learned that the new OCSI site had been a vacant lot of an industrial waste disposal facility. High-temperature foul-smelling gases spewed out at several places on the school premises. Upon hearing this news, media crews, coming from two major TV stations and several newspapers from the mainland of Japan as well as three local TV stations and two local papers, reported the story every day. Some of the out-of-state TV stations had repeatedly reported environmental issues before. They held study meetings on environmental issues before starting their reportage and explained to us in detail what the area had been before OCSI moved there. The more we listened, the more anxious we became. It seemed to be too dangerous to send our children there.

The Okinawa prefecture government, under pressure resulting from the media coverage, conducted an environmental investigation twice. But they ended the investigation issuing a "safety declaration." Those days the general public was unfamiliar with environmental issues such as "environmental hormones," and laws to regulate the handling of industrial waste were not established yet. So, once again the odds were against us mothers in demanding a

second transfer of the school. The Okinawa government passed on the test for dioxin and PCB citing the lack of budget and measuring instruments.

However, children continued to report headaches, nausea, and irritated eyes. The heat on the ground level floor and on the bathroom walls, not to mention high-temperature steam that gushed out constantly---those were telltale signs of hazardous materials to human beings. There was no way we could accept the government's "safety declaration." The parents who had brought up the issue completely lost trust with the OCSI side. Ultimately, we decided take our children out of the school.

"I Don't Want to Go to a Japanese School."

As I mentioned previously, OCSI was the only international school in Okinawa. Thus, approximately 80 students including my three children who had left the school following the gas incident transferred to Japanese public schools or unauthorized American free schools, or chose home schooling.

I wanted to respect my children's feelings in selecting their own school so, I asked the then fifth, third and second graders what they wanted to do about it.

All three of them said in effect, "I don't mind going to another school, but not a Japanese school. Please, don't send me to one." They had already heard about bullying and that, depending on the academic performance in Japanese, students could be demoted. Especially, Jackie, my daughter, strongly resisted the idea of being demoted, crying, "I've been studying so hard to be a third grader. I don't want to be demoted to the second grade!" The ultimate plea came from the first son, "I don't want anything, not even NIKE shirts or sneakers! I promise I'll behave myself. Please don't make us go to a Japanese school!" In retrospect, looking at the situation from their points of view, there wouldn't be a school to go to from the next day. Their shock must have been enormous.

I didn't expect such strong reactions from my children. I didn't know what to do. Just before the environmental issue at OCSI developed into a major debate, my husband and I had separated due to "irreconcilable differences." Naturally, the departure of their father was a major blow to my children. Their hearts were not yet healed from the divorce. The fact that they had to leave the American school meant a further departure from an English environment. It meant the connection with their father would be severed.

The only alternative was to go to an unauthorized free school for international children. Paying the tuition of 45,000 yen per student was no easy task for a divorced mother. While I went through the enrollment procedure for my children, I was not sure if I would be able to pay the tuition.

The biggest reason I didn't want to send my children to a Japanese school was the lack of English education. I was also keenly aware of the harsh view of Amerasian children and their mothers in Okinawa society. If an Amerasian child goes to a Japanese school and cannot speak English, the child will be labeled an "Illegitimate Base Child." This is not only painful but also mortifying for a mother. But, most of all, I didn't want to cut the tie with their father living in the United States.

Several months had passed since the children enrolled in the free school. They were having a great time and had made friends with other students. But, various problems gradually surfaced such as the financial burden, the content of education, and the guarantee of academic history, the entrance to high school and career options for the future. At the same time, I was beginning to question the direction of the free school in terms of the education for Amerasian children and their futures. Initially, this school was founded based on the efforts of Japanese parents who had hoped to offer English education to their children. It wasn't necessarily meant for Amerasians.

The Founding of the AmerAsian school

The Five Founding Mothers

In November 1997, five mothers of children at this free school formed the "Study Group for Amerasians' Educational Rights." That was the beginning of our battle to win the guarantee of educational rights. We filed a petition with the government for the guarantee of educational rights, specifically, the fact-finding survey on Amerasians' education during school periods, the opening of public international schools and government financial aid. More than anything else, we urged the government to learn more about the reality our children faced in Okinawan society. Initially we didn't even know that Amerasians had educational rights or that rights of minority groups are guaranteed in the U. N. Convention of the Rights of the Child. But, in the process of the educational rights movement, we have learned a great deal about them.

Although we were initially able to use the media's cooperation rather effectively, that was not enough to change government policies. So, we continued to struggle through trial and error. Our final conclusion was to open the "AmerAsian School in Okinawa (AASO)" with the funding of the five mothers. The purpose was to educate doubles and help them nurture a double identity through Japanese and English language education and Japanese and American cultures.

*We positively spell the name of our school "AmerAsian School in Okinawa". The spelling "AmerAsian" refers to our school policy of positive self-esteem with double cultures.

Spreading the Circle of Support

In June 1998, the AASO set out as an unauthorized free school in one room of the prefectural Labor Center building for a monthly rent of 30,000 yen. We probably didn't know exactly where we were going, but there was no time to be wasted. Our children were growing fast while the government was very slow in implementing or even deciding their policies. We could not afford to turn around and go back.

Ever since the AASO moved to the current location in Ginowan City in late August 1998, public interest in us has gradually grown. Thanks to the establishment of the headquarters of our movement, we have received more support from experts in all sorts of fields including pedagogy, multicultural education, and ethnic issues.

We also launched the AASO Steering Committee. College professors as well as retired teachers have kindly participated in our activities. We are now beginning to see more specific goals in promoting the educational guarantee movement.

Restoring the School Registry

The first action we took was to verify the presence of the "school registers" of our children. The school register of my three children was preserved because I did not complete the exemption process of schooling. But we learned that the school register of other five students had been erased without their parents' consent. The government simply assumed that they were studying at an international school. We submitted to the Ginowan City Board of Education a petition to restore the school registry for eight students living in the city. As a result, all dual national students successfully had their school registers restored at the elementary and junior high schools in the same school district.

Currently, the ASSO is defined as "a private educational institution" for children who refuse to go to school often referred to as truants. Now it is possible for the student with a public school register in the school district to receive the history of compulsory education at the principal's discretion. Of course it is still a bit disappointing that our own children had to be considered "truants." But we had to accept that in order to obtain the guarantee of their educational careers. We had continuously called on the government to open a public international school in place of OCSI. If possible, we wanted to have the AASO graduation certificate approved as official proof of public education. Unfortunately, that's not possible with the current educational policy.

In March 2000, upon receiving the graduation accreditation of public elementary and junior high schools, two students received a graduation diploma. It was one major feat we had accomplished through learning experiences and the movement for educational rights.

Expanding the Content of Education

AASO manages with the tuition of 25,000 yen per student, onetime subsidies and donations to pay for personnel, overhead and educational materials. There is no public financial aid.

As of March 2001, the AASO has 50 enrolled children ranging from kindergartners to junior high school students. Classes are conducted in four different levels: High Grade (5th to 9th graders), Middle Grade (3rd and 4th), Low Grade (1st and 2nd) and Preschoolers. School facilities consist of the classroom building we have renovated from a two-story house and a prefabricated building made possible by donation money. All classes are taught by American teachers. For Japanese language and other Japanese subjects, we have retired Japanese teachers and student volunteers. Japanese education for students whose native tongue is English is one major issue for the future. Our plan is to expand Japanese education and train Japanese language instructors, eventually creating our own curricula in Japanese education.

One of the activities that takes place at our school is conducted by the Ryukyu University seminar of comparative sociology. It also plays the role of training college students and is conducted between December and February next year. This new form of education has been a very valuable activity for the AASO. The students are divided into small groups depending on the subject they choose from Japanese or Okinawan culture. So far, subjects discussed in the class have included Okinawa's agricultural produce and Japan's rice-growing culture. Now that the local "Eisa" (the indigenous performing art in Okinawa originated in the Bon dance) was added to the subject list, children have their first chance to be exposed to Okinawan culture.

Discrimination and Prejudice Children are Subjected To

We asked all High Grade students about their experience at their previous schools in terms of discrimination and prejudice. According to Amerasian students who had transferred from an American school, they never experienced bullying due to their looks or appearances, nor were they particularly aware that they are Amerasians. American schools seemed at least to be a comfortable place for them as Amerasians. But those who transferred from a Japanese public school were always aware they were Amerasians and were treated as "foreign" persons. For example, when the class on peace is taught on the June 23 Memorial Day (the final day of battle of the second world war in Okinawa), if there was the atmosphere of Americans as the perpetrator and Okinawans as the victim in the class, some students may yell at Amerasian students, "Go back to America!" or "It's the fault of your father's country!"

One may not believe such a thing can happen in the classroom of a public school. But

unfortunately this is the reality. Let me share cases of students who were studying at a public school until recently.

"Those Teachers were Ridiculous!"

Teresa (12 years old, 7th grader)

It was during the second term at an elementary school in Shimajiri when then the 6th grader Teresa confided to her parents about her desire to go to the AmerAsian school. Her mother, a native Okinawan, almost immediately understood Teresa's desire to learn English. She was familiar with the fact in Okinawan society that if an Amerasian child could not speak English, he or she was looked down upon by other children.

When Teresa was a fourth grader, the vice principal of the school asked her, "Can you speak English?" When she said "No," the teacher said, "What a waste ..." Since then, Teresa could not completely dismiss that remark. She couldn't speak English no matter where she went, even with her father. So, she started to loathe those people who automatically assumed Teresa could speak English. "I was lying every time people asked me if I could speak English."

And then, Teresa began to talk about the experience in the "peace education" class.

"When I was a third grader, we learned about the Battle of Okinawa in the social studies class. The teachers talked about the war. But, they mostly talked about how bad the enemy country was, rather than what Japan was doing during the war--at least their explanations sounded like that. In Japan they always try to hide negative things about themselves. So, when the class was over, other students were making similar comments to us doubles. They were mostly boys. Girls said them behind our backs. I was upset because those teachers didn't teach us the facts. Teachers are supposed to be educators, right? It was like Japan had no skeletons in its closet. We know every country has. Those teachers were ridiculous!"

No Place to Belong at School---A Case of Truancy

Mary (12 years old, 6th grader)

About a month ago, Mary came to the AmerAsian School from a public school. After the one-week learning period, she completed the official paperwork. During the interview, Mary did not speak about bullying. Our talk centered around the necessity of basic English skills since her family was planning to move back to the United States within several years. But, as she got used to the school and the staff members, Mary began to talk about her experience at the public school. As a mother of Amerasians, I was in tremendous shock after

hearing what she had told me.

Mary started slowly while trying to recall what had happened two years ago.

"When I was in the third and fourth grade, we learned about the war. It was in the social studies class in the third grade and we wrote a composition in the fourth-grade Japanese class. Before writing the composition, I went to the library to research the subject. Both Japanese and English history books said the war between Japan and the United States began when Japan first bombed Pearl Harbor.

But the teachers' explanations went like this: First, America violated Japanese people. Learning about it, angry Japanese people attacked Hawaii. Then, angry Americans dropped the atomic bomb in Hiroshima to get even with Japan. America laughed at the defenseless Japan. In Okinawa Americans raped Japanese women. Things like that happened and there are now a lot of cases of an international marriage...

So, naturally, my classmates asked me such questions as 'Was your mother also raped by an American GI?' 'Your mother married an American man just for his looks, right?' I've always felt they didn't like me. It was mostly boys. But girls weren't better. Some consoled me and said, 'Girls don't say such things. Don't worry.' But other girls talked bad about me behind my back. And then the next day, somebody sent me a letter."

The next morning Mary found a pushpin in her "inside-only" shoe at the school entrance. There was also a disparaging note. The student that wrote it criticized her for expressing her own opinions about the war in class.

"The letter was put there by girls. The letter said, 'You deliberately disagreed with the teacher to attract attention from boys, right?' When I showed it the teacher asking what to do, he said, 'Resolve it yourself!' The second time I found a pushpin, the same teacher told me the same thing, 'Resolve it yourself!'"

"In music class, the teacher sometimes told me to sing English songs for the rest of the class. I said it was too embarrassing, but he was so persistent. He would ask me again and again. That teacher was awful!"

"In the class presentation, I once sang in English. I did it because everybody wanted me to do it. But somebody told me, 'We don't understand English. It's meaningless.' The teacher didn't take my for an answer. Sometimes when I said no, he would stop asking me for the day. Then, the next day he would ask again! Those teachers never thought about how I felt."

As Mary felt less and less a part of that school she stopped going. She would leave home every day, pretending to go to school. But after making sure her parents had left, Mary would go back home. She did that for a month. Then, the school contacted her mother.

Mary said there was no way she could talk to her mother about it.

"I didn't want to make her worry. Besides, if I told her, she would have had to take a day off at work and talk to the principal and my class teacher. I couldn't tell her. And also, those teachers would have told my mother, 'this is an excellent school. Something like that cannot happen here,' right?"

Mary's class teacher probably felt that he should showcase Mary's talent in front of the other classmates. That's why he demanded she use English so persistently. But it actually backfired, hurt Mary's feelings, and eventually deprived her of a place where she belonged. Even now he is probably not aware of what have happened.

Mary managed to move up to the sixth grade. She was lucky to have an understanding fifth grade class teacher. But when she became a sixth grader, the verbal abuse began once again. Citing Mary's chestnut-colored hair, some said she "dyed her hair." Also, she was "too timid for a tall girl." If she was not good at writing Chinese characters, it was because "she was speaking English all the time at home." Mary was "good at math for an American." Those abusive words were thrown at Mary endlessly.

Mary's father is nearly 2 meters (6 feet 7 inches). Since Mary was also tall for a sixth grader, she stood out. Her teacher made various remarks about her in the class, "I know Mary's father is tall. So is Mary. So, she could be a model in the future." "She's also good at speaking English. She may become the interpreter for the President." After school, everybody picked on her saying, "How can you possibly be those things? You must have bragged about your father to the teacher so he would gush over you in the class."

This teacher probably wanted to respect Mary's personality and thus talked about the possibilities of her becoming an interpreter or a model as a suitable profession. However, children nowadays don't appreciate it. If a child stands out, he or she is quite likely to be a target of bullying. So, kids make sure not to stand out. Japanese girls can behave without standing out. But Amerasian children like Mary cannot avoid attention due to their foreign appearance. As a result, the child gradually keeps to himself or herself more and more.

At any rate, Mary had told her parents that she didn't want to go to a public school and expressed her desire to move to the United States. She said, "Take me to America!" Mary said with a smile that when her mother had found the AmerAsian school, she was very happy. After hearing about it from her mother, "I wanted to visit the school and I did. When I saw people of different heights, different facial features and different skin colors, I immediately felt I wouldn't stand out there."

Any School But a Japanese School

Kay (11 years old, 6th grader)

Kay is a Japanese American who was born in the United States. Three years ago she came to Japan because of her father's work. Her parents had no doubts that Kay would fit into the public school class since she looks just like a Japanese national. She studied hard and reached the same academic level in reading and writing as that of other students. Then she was admitted to a hospital for a stomachache for ten days. The cause of the stomachache was not clearly known, but actually it was caused by stress from bullying. One day Kay had to read in Japanese class and had trouble pronouncing certain words. Somebody laughed at that and saying, 'Strange Japanese!' She was too affected to speak in front of other classmates. Kay also did not consult with her parents until the situation had become much worse.

Kay explains now:

"When I answered, 'America' to the question, 'Where were you born?' everybody started chanting "American, American!" I didn't want to go to school after that. The teacher did nothing to help me. I was at the hospital for one week with a stress-induced stomachache. I sometimes avoided going to school citing a stomachache or headache. When I spoke in Japanese, they laughed at my funny pronunciation."

After being discharged from the hospital, Kate's class teacher and her mother had a meeting. The teacher suggested Kay could be an ALT (assistant language teacher) for the English class. This idea actually tormented Kay further. She knew from her experience that Japanese classmates didn't welcome fluent English speakers in the class. Thus, Kay never spoke English in the class. But that didn't help her condition. Soon she started throwing up and couldn't stop the stomachaches. Kay was hospitalized again. In the hospital bed she pleaded her mother, "Let me transfer to any school but a Japanese school!"

Kay's mother said she noticed that, "though Kay looks Japanese, she has been growing inside as an American." At an American school there is no group responsibility for serving school meals or cleaning the classrooms, while at Japanese public schools those chores are unavoidable. It seemed that Kay had been stressed out due to the straightjacket school rules and regulations.

Although the experience of each was different, the above three children shared a common problem: all three were hurt because people around them had treated them differently from other children just because they looked different or they came from different places.

I asked the three children: What was the most terrible comment they had heard from their Japanese friends? They invariably answered, "Go back to America!"

Mary said, "I may have two nationalities and my mother is Japanese. But they look at me only as an American, never as a Japanese."

The Movement for Amerasians' Educational Rights as a Bridge Between Japan and the United States

It has been two years since we formed the "Study Group for Amerasians' Educational Rights." Thanks mainly to the continuous media coverage we have made steady progress in implementing the movement. Yet things have not always gone so smoothly. There were times when we struggled to bridge the gap between the media images of Amerasians and the views of Amerasians' mothers. We loathed the derogatory expressions used in newspaper articles such as "bullying," "fatherless families," "people without nationality," or "the U.S. military base." We hated the label of "the illegitimate children of the base" in Okinawan society. We were sometimes criticized by other Amerasians' mothers. The AASO was misunderstood as being a school for children of single mothers who cannot speak English. Some people may still think so. In fact, almost all of our students are transfers from international schools. Some just came back from the United States and hardly understood Japanese. Our students are not all "bullied transfers" from Japanese schools.

In February 1999 we were able to restore the school register of AASO students with Japanese nationality. We continued to call for the authorization of the AASO attendance. At the same time we have seen expressions such as "fatherless families," "without educational career" or "the U.S. military base" used with less frequency in the media. Some media focus on the closed nature of Japanese public education and the education issue in the age of internationalization, not just the issue stemming from the American military bases. The interest level has been boosted not only in Okinawa but also nationwide as scholars and researchers joined the movement for educational rights, and college professors and experts in various fields started to address the issue in newspaper articles. Boards of education have been compelled to investigate these issues as experts have covered legal matters such as enrollment obligation or school registers.

We don't believe that every Amerasian longs for the double education at the AASO. We cannot deny the life of Amerasians who would live as "a Japanese" at Japanese schools or live as "an American" at American schools. Just as there are two types of nationality, we hope individuals will be entitled to the right to choose a Japanese school, an American school, or the AASO.

We founded the AASO to make a base for nurturing double identity and pride to be both a Japanese and an American. Our utmost hope is that Amerasian children will have higher standards in self-evaluation and will ultimately bridge the gap between the two nations.

Educational Rights and Choice of Nationality

"Why Can't I Have Both?"

In May 1984 part of the Nationality Law and Family Register Law were revised and took effect from January 1, 1985. Up until then, children whose fathers were not Japanese could not acquire Japanese nationality. The revision made it possible for children of a Japanese mother to become a Japanese national. Also, if either of the parents has a foreign nationality, the law allows the Japanese child to keep that foreign nationality, making the child "a dual national." The Nationality Law prescribes that, "A Japanese national having a foreign nationality shall choose either of the nationalities before he or she reaches twenty two years of age."

The Amerasian children currently registered at the AmerAsian school were all born after 1985, meaning that as children born within a bicultural marriage they have dual nationality. Thus, when they turn twenty, they will have to make a choice according to Japanese law.

I once asked some older high school students, "When you turn 22 and have to choose your nationality, which one will you pick?" 70% of them without hesitation picked American nationality. Some didn't know about the choice of nationality. One of them said to me, "Why can't I have both?"

Those who transferred from a Japanese public school also picked American nationality immediately. As I expected their reason was that, "in the United States we wouldn't have to go through unpleasant stuff just because we were Amerasians. I remember it was nice being in America when I was there. And America is so big. It seems to accept anybody or any nationality." Some had the misconception that if they chose to live in the States, they would not be able to live in Japan. The discussion made at least one children worry: "If I pick America, it's not good for my mother. If I pick Japan, it will make my father sad." To those children, having to pick one nationality seemed to be to pick one parent over the other.

Legally, the choice of nationality can wait until they turn twenty-two. But, in reality, it is probably impossible to live in Japan, learn its culture and go to a public school while at the same time being educated as an American national.

Though the Japanese government acknowledges the presence of dual nationals, it is not very concerned about the guarantee of their education. They are much more concerned about the guarantee of education that can foster "a fine Japanese citizen." To be educated as an American national, one has to pay a high tuition and go to an international school in Japan. And, doing so virtually requires the abandonment of Japan's compulsory education because the child, when he or she turns seven, has to complete the procedures for the postponement or exemption of school enrollment obligation. If the child chose to live in Japan, since Japan

has not authorized the academic history of international schools, his or her future career options will be narrowed. Looking at the whole long-term situation, one has to say the education the child has received greatly influences his or her decision on the choice of nationality.

"The Study Group for Amerasians' Educational Rights" has strived towards the ideal of "double education" in the hopes that Amerasian children upon turning twenty-two can make their own decisions on the choice of nationality. Since their chance of remaining in Okinawa is relatively large, one may say they don't need English education as an American national. On the other hand, living continuously in Okinawa does not necessarily mean they will acquire Japanese nationality. Even if they may choose to be a Japanese national, the tie with their father cannot be severed.