

# 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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## 5 . The Educational Rights of Amerasians

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### My Encounter with the "AmerAsian School"

#### The AmerAsian School --- Born Out of Hope and Frustration

I had not even known of the existence of the AmerAsian School in Okinawa until I read a newspaper article about it in August 1998. By then, four years had passed since I moved to Okinawa from Kyoto, my hometown, to teach sociology at the University of the Ryukyus. I began to develop a keen interest in educational issues surrounding ethnic minorities, especially the issue of Korean residents in Japan. In Kyoto I conducted a number of field studies on those issues, but I had very little knowledge of "Amerasians" back then.

The AmerAsian School, according to the article, is "a school born out of the hopes and frustrations of Amerasians and their parents." The photo in the paper portrayed children studying in a leased conference room at a local labor center --- hardly a dream school by any stretch of the imagination. One of the mothers was quoted in the article: "It is a humble school. But I am so happy because my son has finally found a place he belongs." I felt a strong urge to find out what had driven these mothers to this. Okinawa is said to have a unique culture known as "champurū culture," a symbiotic environment where rich diverse cultures coexist. My automatic question was: Why is this small conference room the only place for Amerasians --- children who are born to Okinawan mothers and American fathers --- to have education in English?

#### Mothers in a Bind Strike Back

Shortly thereafter I contacted Ms. Midori Thayer, Representative of "The Study Group for Amerasians' Educational Rights" and attended their meeting Friday that week. The meeting lasted from 8:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m, for four and a half hours. The marathon discussion went on without a break between the parents of Amerasian students, supporters and adult Amerasians. No one even tried to leave halfway. By the time the meeting ended, I found myself swept up in the enthusiasm and excitement of their cause --- the movement for guaranteeing educational rights for Amerasians.

The meeting was a strange one. No one mediated the proceedings or kept minutes. To us outsiders, it had the appearance of a free-for-all talk session. Yet, they were never really distracted by empty talk or unconstructive opinions, always keeping their focus on core issues.

There were also journalists who had come armed with a barrage of questions on what they considered a 'new species'. But, they soon realized they had been wrong about that and had few questions. The vague impression that Amerasian mothers were unfortunate people driven to the corner evaporated. Although they were faced with enormous difficulties, they were also full of positive energy that kept propelling them forward on an unprecedented journey.

Later, I had an opportunity to feel the same positive power from Amerasian children when I visited the school. By that time, it had moved into a rented house in Ginowan-City. At school there were no such things as opening and closing bells for the classes. The teachers decided when to take a break depending on how focused the students were. The students could continue to study during the break or leave to have a drink of water if they felt tired. The class was filled with lively voices and laughter, loud enough to overwhelm the teachers. There was a child who tried to draw something on my skirt with chalk. All the children there are "Yanawarabas," a word used in Okinawa dialect to describe mischievous children.

#### **"Illegitimate Children of the U.S. Base"-The Gap Between Stereotype and Reality**

Japanese TV reporting on Amerasians almost always includes footage of fences surrounding a U.S. military base. Occasionally, they show Amerasian children walking along the fence. That is the stereotypical image of Amerasians as the "illegitimate children of the U.S. base." In reality, of course, those children grow up just as other children do. Yet, the stigma stays with them. Once taking part in a Study Group meeting or observing their class first hand, one realizes how inappropriate and odd this expression sounds.

In my first Study Group meeting, I was struck by a mother's comment that despite repeated efforts to seek financial support from the Okinawa prefectural government for the AmerAsian School, their requests were always rejected and dismissed as a personal problem shared by women who are married to foreigners. The mother said, "They think we are just a bunch of stupid women fussing over something stupid."

This comment made me realize for the first time that international marriages in Okinawa, especially those between American men and Okinawan women, are stigmatized. Behind this prejudice is the fact that 75% of U.S. military bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa. The strong anti-US sentiment deeply rooted among Okinawans sometimes surfaces as a prejudiced view of the women and children who live with American men. In addition, there is a more universal problem, namely, the coexistence of different languages and cultures. When the mothers called for the establishment of international classes at public schools, it fell on deaf ears: "such a school is outside the realm of our compulsory educational system."

## Language and Self-Esteem for children

I once had the opportunity to hear the life histories of Koreans living in Japan. So, to a certain extent I could imagine what it is like living with a different nationality, language or culture in Japanese society. Some Koreans told me how the learning of their mother county's language had helped them gain self-confidence and free themselves from feeling of inferiority. Their words helped me understand why Amerasian's mothers are very particular about language education. For ethnic minorities, learning their own language gives them a strong power to nurture self-esteem, allowing them to comfortably be themselves. This is the perspective already incorporated into various educational activities such as ethnic Korean education in Japan amid a global trend toward multicultural education. I also realized that the issue of minority education surrounding Amerasians should not stop with the AmerAsian School after beginning where only 16 students were registered. Turning a blind eye to this issue will not only keep the Amerasian children in a predicament, but also result in a big loss to Okinawa and the rest of Japanese society. When foreigners move to Japan to get a job and make a living, it is indispensable to have an environment based on mutual understanding and respect for different languages and cultural backgrounds. The educational rights movement for Amerasians could be a milestone to test whether Japan can really become a borderless society in the true sense.

## On-Site Training at the Amerasian School

I told my students about the hardships facing Amerasian children. In the fall of that year I incorporated on-site training at the AmerAsian School into the course curriculum. The university students were instructed to teach Amerasian children in small groups. While directly interacting with them, students were asked to analyze why there are so many Amerasian children and what their educational needs were. Many of the themes chosen by the students turned out to be hands-on activities designed to teach more about Okinawa as well as other aspects of Japanese culture. Among them were the "History and Culture of Rice Farming and Rice-Cake Making" and "Stage Performance of Eisa (an indigenous Okinawan performing art originating from the Bon dance. It features youths dancing and drumming).

This program couldn't be possible without support from the AmerAsian School. It put an extra burden on the children who had to put up with inexperienced new students each year, but the training has provided university students with an invaluable opportunity to see the "real" classroom, warts and all.

The following anecdote illustrates this point. In a brief conversation I had with a student I was told:

"Our group is going to show how to cook Moochee (steamed rice cake wrapped in Kuba

leaves)."

"Moochee ... What's the purpose?" I asked.

"To let the kids have fun making something traditional to Okinawa and to help them learn the importance of team cooking."

"Sounds nice. Good luck!"

When the students came back from a preliminary class of Amerasian children, however, they all looked troubled. Many of the children reacted negatively: "I hate this." "I can't eat that." The University students seemed genuinely surprised. They couldn't even remotely imagine something as familiar as Moochee could invite negative reactions. "All right, just as I hoped," I said to myself.

"They may like it once they actually eat it." The students discussed.

"You mean force them to eat it? Wouldn't that send them the wrong message like trying to make them assimilate into Okinawan culture?"

Through trial and error, the students moved forward to the experience of creating a playing space through cooperation and support instead of adopting the one-way method of cramming knowledge into children's heads. It is easy to give up and say, "I was rejected" or "It didn't work." They learned to achieve mutual understanding through imagination and ingenuity, although they sometimes ran out of time before achieving that goal.

## Searching for Career Options

### Fight for Eligibility for the High School Entrance Exam

I began to take part regularly in meetings of the Study Group for Amerasians in August 1998 mingling with parents of Amerasian children. However, I honestly did not know what I could do to help them. The study group had established a clear philosophy on Amerasians' educational rights. Education in the AmerAsian School should include English education, American culture as well as Japanese language and culture. But, other than that, the group was still at a loss as to how to design a concrete curriculum and ensure broader career choices for AmerAsian School students after graduation.

My responsibility was to do basic research and identify problems faced by Amerasian students when deciding what to do after graduation. Ms. Thayer, who headed the Study Group, gave me numerous instructions via telephone. She instructed me to find out more about Baccalaureate School and call the Ministry of Education about the official Junior High School Equivalency Test. The fax machine in my university office ran out of paper in just two weeks after the research mission began. When I forgot to replace the fax paper, Ms. Thayer faxed her instructions to my home.

When I went to the AmerAsian School as part of the preparations for the on-site training

program, some children recognized my face, shouting, "It's someone who came to our school before!" (My name Noiri is difficult for them to pronounce or remember). I sometimes ended up playing with the children in the playground, kicking a ball in my pumps. Regular trips to the school livened up my daily life. Yet, my worries grew about the children's future and career options. The older children at the school were looking to graduate in only two and a half years. One of them apparently wanted to go on to an ordinary Japanese high school if possible. However, since their school was a "free school" not officially accredited by the government, they were not even eligible for the high school entrance examination. The clock was ticking fast, but we were still in the dark as to how we can ensure those children a smooth path to state-accredited Japanese high schools.

In our struggle to explore all the possibilities to resolve the issue, we ran into one brick wall after another. One of the possible solutions, for example, was the Junior High School Graduation Equivalency Test authorized by the Ministry of Education. It's a state-run test annually conducted for those without the official junior high school diploma. The passing rate is very high. The test is open to dual national children who have petitioned for the postponement or exemption of the school enrollment obligation. The problem was that the test was conducted only in Japanese and the ministry had no plans to conduct the annual test in foreign languages. Without the foreign language option, the bar was too high for Amerasian children who use English with their parents and to learn school subjects. Just imagine a Japanese citizen having to take exams such as a driver's license in a foreign language. Even reading the questions would be a big challenge.

### The Closed Nature of the Japanese Educational System

This was only the beginning in discovering problems and contradictions in the Japanese educational system. It is undeniable that there are children in Japan who cannot be categorized under conventional headings. There are children living in Japan who study in English, who do not have Japanese nationality, and who are dual nationals straddling two cultures. Although in reality we live in an increasingly borderless society, those children fall between the cracks of the faulty educational system.

By contrast, in the United States, it is possible to acquire the eligibility for the high school entrance examination even if the student is studying at an unauthorized middle school. All they have to do is to score a certain number of points on standardized scholastic tests such as the test of General Education Development. Also, there is no need for the student abroad to travel all the way to the United States. It is possible to take them even in Japan if it is supervised by a qualified teacher such as a person with a U.S. teaching license.

When children in Japan can easily be eligible for a high school entrance exam of America,

then why is it so hard for them to do the same in the Japanese system? This question nagged me day in and day out.

At the same time the Amerasian School's financial situation worsened. Some mothers had to bring toilet paper and garbage bags to school. The deficit was snowballing at the rate of several hundred thousand yen a month. We felt the school might go bankrupt before resolving the issues of high school exams and career options. I cannot imagine how hectic the whole situation was for Ms. Thayer who was paying salaries for American teachers and the rent for the school.

### Supporters' Wisdom and Energy

But, as I have said many times, "when we needed some people, they showed up. And those people gave us what we needed." Among Study Group members, this mysterious law seems to work all the time.

Two months after I joined the Study Group, Mr. Hirotaka Terumoto, an associate professor of the Faculty of Education at the University of the Ryukyus, showed up at the meeting in October 1998. He explained that the research fund granted by the Ministry of Education for free schools has been unsuccessful. Because it was just to study ways of bringing school refusals back to public schools. Mr. Terumoto seemed at first reluctant to help us, repeatedly saying, "I'm a busy man. I can help you very little." But, by the time Christmas arrived, he was taking the minutes at Study Group meetings on a weekly basis. Another strong supporter was Mr. Hiroshi Tanaka, a former professor at Hitotsubashi University. I met him for the first time in Tokyo in October 1998. Though it was the first time for us to talk, within 20 minutes, Mr. Tanaka was flipping through his little notebook, saying, "I'll visit Okinawa sometime. I'm the type who can't say much until actually seeing the situation for myself. Is next month, okay?"

Keeping his word, Professor Tanaka did visit us in December. He came to the AmerAsian school. While watching the children, he noted one of them had broken the lead of a pencil. Mr. Tanaka brought a knife from the kitchen and adeptly sharpened the pencil. He is one of the most distinguished researchers in the field of issues involving foreign residents in Japan, but for me, he looked more like a craftsman. Afterwards, he pointed out that it was necessary to keep the records on the nationality and academic history of our students. I asked the parents who would attend the meeting that night to bring records or documents, if any, such as conversations with the boards of education.

In the meeting while studying those records and documents, Mr. Terumoto made one important discovery that, later on, would greatly influence our policy on Study Group activities. It was the fact that the postponement or exemption procedure for attendance of dual-national

children had been handled quite inappropriately by the municipal boards of education. In some cases, the public school register simply disappeared without parents' knowledge.

## Seeking the Authorization of Educational Career

### School Registers Erased Without the Parents' Knowledge

The December 20th, 1998 meeting was a turning point for the movement of the Study Group.

That night Professor Tanaka explained very specifically how we lived in a borderless society by detailing issues such as the coexistence with Russians in Northern Territories or Korean residents in Japan. He also explained the significance of our movement --- a movement by which we were asking for the guarantee of Amerasians' educational rights.

After that talk was over, Mr. Terumoto, who had been reading the documents, said, "I think I've found something really outrageous." He was talking about the document describing the authorization of the postponement or exemption from the enrollment obligation, which several mothers had received from the Education Board.

The postponement or exemption of the enrollment obligation was a measure based on the notification sent from the Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education called "School Enrollment of Dual Nationals Following the Partial Revision of the Nationality Law."

Until 1984, Japan had adopted the paternal-line *jus sanguinis* ("the right of blood"), meaning that the mother could not grant her child her nationality. The revision of the Nationality Law made it possible to grant a child two nationalities --- one from the foreign father and another from the Japanese mother. Those children are now called dual nationals. The 1984 notification from the Ministry of Education stated that the parent or guardian of a dual national has the obligation to enroll the child in school. However, it is possible to postpone or exempt that obligation. The postponement or exemption is authorized when "the parent or guardian filed a petition for the postponement or exemption of the school enrollment obligation, considering the possibility that the dual citizen may select foreign citizenship in the future. Thus, it is authorized if there are strong and objective reasons that the dual citizen may do so due to his or her family circumstances, and at the same time, he or she has secured another opportunity to receive education."

In a document titled "Petition for the Postponement or Exemption of the School Enrollment Obligation" which Mr. Terumoto was holding, we found "To transfer to the AmerAsian School." written in the box for "Reason for the Authorization." Furthermore, after the conversation between Mr. Terumoto and the mothers, a far more serious problem surfaced.



"The transfer to the AmerAsian School is impossible because it's a free school. It's not even considered a private school. If it is an official transfer, the cumulative student record must be included here. But there's nothing. It is very strange to lose the school register just because you transfer or go to the AmerAsian school."

"What do you mean by 'lose the school register'?"

"If you go to an international school or other private schools, you are exempt from compulsory education. That means your name is not on the public school student record. In other words, your graduation record carries neither elementary school nor junior high school."

"Really!? I thought you could automatically graduate if you have this document?"

"Hold on. What makes you think that? To have compulsory education postponed or exempted, the parent has to make a petition first and receive sufficient explanation from the Board of Education."

"They didn't tell me anything like that. An education board official came to my workplace and said, 'You must do this,' and had me put my "hanko" seal on the paper."

"In my case, the board called and said to me, 'Your child hasn't attended classes.' I said, 'My child goes to the AmerAsian School.' Since then, I've heard nothing from them. Do you think my child is on the postponement of school enrollment?"

### Contradictions and Problems in Japan's Education System

We learned more by further investigating the matter. Of the 17 students who were of age to be required to go to school at that time, seven were authorized for the postponement or exemption of the enrollment obligation. But few parents had received from the board a proper explanation on what that procedure meant.

There were three obvious problems. First, even though the AmerAsian school is a free school without the official graduation qualification, they regard it as "having another educational opportunity," thus disqualifying the student from secondary public education. Second, they hardly explain this fact to the parents. Third, the postponement of school enrollment should be renewed every year by confirming that the student is currently studying at a certain educational institution. Yet, according to the document, the two separate words "postponement" and "exemption" were understood as one combined expression "the postponement or exemption of the school enrollment." Therefore, the procedure for the postponement of school enrollment until the end of school age was already carried out.

To begin with, the notification from the Ministry of Education was contradictory in terms of the education system. The Nationality Law of 1985 states that a child with dual nationality can choose either nationality of his or her own free will after turning 20 and up to the age of 22. In spite of this, the notification practically pressures the parent to decide on the child's nationality, either American or Japanese. This is because once finishing the procedure

for the postponement or exemption of the school enrollment obligation, it would be virtually impossible to go on to the next stage of education in Japan. The Junior High School Equivalency Test, as mentioned previously, is of little use in guaranteeing education for dual national children who have been educated in a foreign language.

### Standing up for Restoring the School Registry

After pinpointing those problems, it became increasingly clear what needed to be done when lobbying to the government for Amerasians' educational rights. The first thing was to have the right to receive compulsory education guaranteed for children with Japanese nationality. The second was to have the Amerasian School in Okinawa authorized as a private educational institution that supplements public education and with a necessary budget. Last but not least is to guarantee the educational rights for foreign national children.

In January of the following year, 1999, mothers of AmerAsian School dual national students who lived in Ginowan City along with Mr. Terumoto and I met with officials of the Ginowan Board of Education. The purpose was to request them to investigate the status of dual national children whose school registry was missing or unknown, and if necessary to go ahead with the procedure for restoring the registry. The Ginowan Board of Education acknowledged the possibility of error in implementing the procedure and promised us that they would study and deal with the matter.

Ginowan-City is the location of the AmerAsian School in Okinawa and the largest number of its students comes from this city. In the middle of this donut-shaped city is the massive U.S. Futenma Base. There are a large number of foreign residents there.

Several days later, we had visitors from the Okinawa Prefectural Education Agency. What they told us sounded strange. They said that even if we were to restore the school register, they would not allow our students to graduate unless they went to public schools. If we still wanted to send our children to the AmerAsian School, they suggested we drop the petition and then have our students take the Secondary Educational Eligibility Test by the Ministry of Education.

There is one simple question: Japanese children who don't go to public school --- where do they go?

Every year we see as many as 103,000 truants in Japan. But they are children qualified to graduate from public schools. In 1992 the Ministry of Education released a flexible policy on truancy. Stating that as it could happen to any child, the ministry decided to authorize the educational career of children learning at private institutions. If the ministry allows Japanese students who refuse to go to school to graduate while it does not allow AmerAsian School students who study at school to do the same, then we cannot help but call it discrimination

against Amerasian children.

### Restoring the School Registry in just One Week

The Ginowan City Board of Education handled the matter realistically. On January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1999, one week after the parents filed a petition to restore the school registry, the board granted it to eight children who lived in Ginowan City.

Ginowan City began to lead other cities and Okinawa Prefecture in guaranteeing Amerasians' educational rights. In September 1999 the Ginowan Board of Education notified the principals of public elementary and junior high schools that should certain requirements be met, the board must accept the educational career of children including dual national children who had attended private institutions. The AmerAsian School sent the students' school records (monthly attendance and grades in the term) to the public schools where the child's school registry belonged. We would protect the children's educational rights to learn in cooperation with public schools. In November of the same year the Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education sent a similar notification to municipal education boards. At least we had a prospect that AmerAsian school children could acquire the graduation eligibility of public schools, if the principal of the public school where the student's education registry deemed the AmerAsian school an appropriate educational institution or facility for the student.

### Acquiring the Junior High School Graduation Eligibility for the First Time

Four months later, for the first time, one student at the AmerAsian school acquired the graduation eligibility for public junior high school. He was born and educated in the United States and, since he had moved to Okinawa, had been learning at either an international school or a free school. His parents are Japanese citizens with permanent resident status in the U.S. Asked by the journalist who came to interview him: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" he immediately replied with enthusiasm, "a skateboarder!" We don't know yet whether he will live in America or in Japan.

We learned that when he heard his mother was going to a public school to enroll him there, he desperately tried to stop her fearing he would be forced to go there. Even after enrollment was completed, he hardly went to the public school. He continued to study at the AmerAsian School. One day, to his surprise, the public school's principal visited the school to see him. The principal said, "You can come to our school whenever you feel like it. Everybody will be glad to see you. You never have to think that you will be forced to do things you don't want to do. So, don't worry. You can focus on studying." How relieved he must have felt!

The core of the movement for Amerasian educational rights has been the parents. Yet, there have been also a number of supporters with big hearts such as this principal, without whom we could not make progress in this movement. They truly understand that the educational needs of individual children have to be dealt with in diverse ways. Are you Japanese? Are you American? Do you study Japanese or English? They know how simplistic and unrealistic questions such as these are. The reality of Amerasians is that they simultaneously live in two cultures. What's badly needed are different means of learning that can accommodate that reality.

## Expansion of Civic Movements

### Petition to the National Government and Prefecture

The main activity of the Study Group for Amerasian Children's Educational Rights is to support the school and its students. We also plan to seek the guarantee of educational and subsistence rights of other children who don't attend the AmerAsian School or who are other types of "international" children. So far, we filed a petition to Okinawa Prefecture and the national government for the guarantee of educational and welfare rights of international children including Amerasian children. Other activities include lectures held by the Educational Issues Study Group for International Children, the research organization of the Study Group,

Midori Thayer

Representative of the Study Group for Amerasians' Educational Rights

Petition Regarding the Substantial Guarantee of Educational Rights of International Children

1

We strongly request that you kindly listen to the stories of the parties involved by visiting the site to learn of the difficult circumstances our "international" children are currently in, the hardships they have endured being discriminated against and bullied at local public schools, and how necessary the AmerAsian School in Okinawa is for them as an educational institution and as a shelter.

2

We request that you pass a relief measure for dual nationals who have already passed school age and for students without careers of compulsory education. The existing "Test for Junior High School Graduation Equivalency" is unfavorable to dual nationals for it is written in Japanese only.

3

We request that you revise the notification dated December 6, 1984 by the Secondary

Education Bureau of the Education Ministry, "The Postponement or Exemption of the School Enrollment Obligation for Dual Nationals."

This notification in effect pressures parents or guardians to choose the nationality of the child at the school age of 6 or less. Therefore, it contradicts the Nationality Law, which guarantees the postponement of choosing nationality until the age 22, and that the children themselves, upon reaching the age 15, can acquire Japanese nationality irrespective of the intention of the person with parental authority.

For this reason, we request that you modify the said notification to be consistent with the Nationality Law and instruct Okinawa Prefecture to carry out the notification more appropriately.

4

Lastly, international children have the background of plural languages and cultures. Accordingly, please help create an educational environment in which these children are not discriminated against or bullied simply because they look different. Please help create an environment where they can truly enjoy learning and interacting with other children. And please make this an important issue for the public educational system to resolve. More specifically, we request you introduce multicultural education, which is common in Western countries, provide special staff and develop budgetary measures such as the development of curricula and educational materials.

#### Soliciting for Supporting Members of the Study Group

While continuing the petition movement to the government, as of February 1999, the Study Group was reorganized into a civic group. Although it still consists predominantly of AmerAsian School mothers, an increasingly larger number of people began to show interest in the cause, thus requiring a larger organization to work with all the supporters for the Study Group. Ms. Midori Thayer remained as Representative and Mr. Terumoto assumed the post of Executive Director. I was in charge of the Executive Office of the Educational Issue Study Group for International Children.

Anybody can join the Study Group by paying the annual membership fee of 3,000 yen (per person) by Japanese postal transfer. Once registered as a supporting member, the newsletter "DOUBLE COMMUNICATION" will be mailed to the new member -- a quarterly that introduces the children and staff members at the Amerasian School and describing Study Group activities. The annual membership fee is used as a financial resource for the school.

Since the Study Group became a civic organization, not only mothers but also a wide range of citizens have participated in our activities, especially when we petition the government to guarantee educational and welfare rights for Amerasians. The individual members are so strong as supporters that it gives more power to the educational rights movement than does

the financial support.

The supporting members participated in various activities of the Study Group.

In September 1999, school children went on a tour sponsored by the Asahi Newspaper Public Welfare Organization. The tour, designed for the children to "experience" life in the Kansai (Kyoto-Osaka) area, also included a barbecue party with Kansai area Study Group members.

This exchange party provided our children an opportunity to express their appreciation to the many supporting members. The party turned out to be such a valuable meeting between them that the children felt they were not separate from Japanese society.

As of March 2001, the supporting membership totaled 439. One Kyoto couple that had visited the children a number of times ended up moving to Okinawa. There is a businessman who kindly sends us hot-selling company products for the school bazaar. There are people who give anonymous donations and those who volunteer to give lectures. When we need help, people show up to help us get what we need. It's uncanny, but that's because the Amerasian movement never ceases to stir the interest of people in diverse fields.

Still, we could use a lot more manpower. Each of the individuals in our 439-person membership is a "mighty warrior," but when it comes to negotiating with government officials, explaining, "this many people are seeking guaranteed educational rights," we need three-digit membership.

In addition to supporting and connecting with each other by various means, we want to see an increasing number of members enjoying that activity.

## Okinawan Society and Amerasians

### Foreigner equals American and American equals U.S. Serviceman

Though there are many out-of-prefecture Study Group supporters, Okinawan residents are the dominant force behind our activities. Even non-members drop by the school to make contributions. When asked for an estimate on a blackboard, one generous Santa-like dealer gave it to us as a present. Many, many local people have been participating in our activities in their own ways. On the other hand, the Amerasians' struggle to survive in Okinawa continues. I feel that if Okinawa were like Kanagawa Prefecture where there are not only servicemen on U.S. bases but also all sorts of foreign workers and students, things would have been different. Amerasians would not have attracted as much attention by which the U.S. base is directly connected to the AmerAsian school.

The multi-ethnic balance of Okinawan society has been greatly affected by the concentration of U.S. bases. The number of U.S. servicemen and civilian personnel and their families is

approximately six times that of registered foreign residents. Of the approximately 1.3 million Okinawans, foreign residents total 7,700. By country, the U.S. and China account for 26% each, followed by the Philippines 20%, which include entertainers who work near U.S. bases. Area-by-area comparison clearly shows the influence of the U.S. base. Particularly in the Mid-Northern area of the main island of Okinawa where U.S. bases are commonly seen, the number of foreigners is rapidly growing.

There are approximately only 400 Korean residents in Okinawa. Most of them came to Okinawa during the war. At that time there were soldiers and foreign women forced to serve as "comfort women" for Japanese soldiers. After the war, though, the manufacturing industry began to stagnate offering fewer and fewer employment opportunities. Most left Okinawa and went to the Japanese mainland. For the same reason, there are few foreign workers besides the female Philippine performers.

In Okinawa if the word "foreigner" is mentioned, it usually means "American", which is in turn interpreted as a U. S. serviceman. Thus, Amerasians who reside there are often automatically looked at as being connected to the U.S. base.

This kind of look is not just intended to scorn or attack. It's also about envy and stereotyped assumptions such as "Doubles can speak English, they can buy things on the U.S. base and they can go to the United States." This mentality can sometimes pressure Amerasians. The expression "Island Double" (doubles who cannot even speak English) can develop into more derogatory remarks such as "a kid abandoned by an American father," "fatherless family" or "a child with no ties to America." Amerasians get lumped into two categories depending on whether they have a good command of English, "a Double to emulate" and a native "Island" Double.

The reason the AmerAsian School has been particular about teaching both Japanese and English is that proficiency in either language can help ensure their ability to make a living in either society with confidence. This is a sort of countermeasure against the background of Okinawan society wherein the number of foreigners grows in a very lopsided manner.

## Worldwide Expansion of the Network

### An Amerasian School in South Korea!

Let us look at other countries and see how Amerasians there are coping with similar issues.

When we wished to know about them, once again just like magic, we have encountered just the people we were looking for. First, we met with people from a civic group in South Korea who have supported permanent foreign residents there. They kindly informed us of another group with "interesting activities" in South Korea. One after another, we met people

who introduced us to other people we wanted to talk with. Finally we made a great discovery, a school for Amerasians in South Korea! On top of that, we learned the principal is also an adult Amerasian!

We had to go there. Mr. Terumoto and I learned of the school in August 2000 and the *next* month we were on a Seoul-bound flight. Our interpreter Ms. Hon Ji-son who accompanied us was the first graduate from the class of comparative sociology on site. At that time she explained Korean culture in a *ch'ima chogori* (the native costume) at the AmerAsian School.

The Amerasian Christian Academy (ACA) was located in Tongduchon, a two-hour bus ride from Seoul, South Korea. The first thing that caught my eye when we arrived was that the children on the grounds --- whether with black hair or light-colored eyes --- looked so much like those at the AmerAsian School in Okinawa. How surprised and overjoyed they would be if they met!

Standing and waiting for us in front of a small brick building was the Principal, James Kang-McCann. He was young, in his early thirties, and I felt strange when I heard Korean words from this man with an African American face. He smiled and said, "I'm often told I look like Tiger Woods." James said he had spent his teenage years in the United States, and then later returned to South Korea to establish a school for Amerasians. He had no real estate, no assets, and no fellow teachers, yet having lived as an Amerasian himself, experience was his strong suit. He had a strong hope to live neither as a Korean nor as an American; he wanted to live just the way he was --- as an Amerasian. He was also convinced there had to be a school to support people like him. A Christian group lent him a building for free and in 1999 the Amerasian Christian Academy opened. There are 26 preschool and elementary students and classes are conducted 90% in English.

### Uniting Two Cultures Into One

The ACA Founder said with a smile, "I'm just a teacher. I'm always with the children." I was too moved to finish asking my prepared questions. And then the principal showed us around the school. When I saw their slogan, tacked up in the middle of the classroom, I was stunned. It said,

"DURIHANA" --- two cultures into one.

This is exactly what the AmerAsian School in Okinawa had been searching for: Double Education.

James said, "We put emphasis on English education. Several students have already moved to the United States. But we are not trying to make an American citizen here, or a Korean either, of course. These children are Amerasians. Our goal is to educate them so that they can grow up with a positive attitude about being Amerasian. We educate them to have self-



esteem and the power to live with pride.”

It's so true. How many times have we answered the criticism, “the AmerAsian School in Okinawa is preoccupied with America,” by saying, “this education is for Amerasians.”

He continued,

“There is a big U.S. military base in this city. It's famous for that in South Korea. When people think about this city, they often connect it to crimes by U.S. servicemen or prostitution by Korean women. But, I separate the U.S. base issue and the educational issue. It's more important to discuss how our education can support Amerasians' possibilities, futures, and their positive energy to live in a unified cultural environment. And that is a totally different issue from the U.S. base-related damage.”

I couldn't wait to get back to Okinawa and tell Midori Thayer and others all about this meeting. When TV stations have special programs on Amerasians, they almost always show a clip of fighter jets and use the expression “illegitimate children of the U.S. base” as if they are the products of some unfortunate incidents. We used to be very upset over this and questioned the station's intentions. But we were not alone.

But, how strange and how uncanny! The AmerAsian School in Okinawa and the Amerasian Christian Academy were founded in 1998 and 1999, respectively, without knowing of each other's presence. On one side were mothers and on the other side were adult Amerasians. Both blazed their own trails based on their experiences and the conviction that the school was truly necessary for the children. Both used the expression “Amerasian,” a word unfamiliar in both Japan and in South Korea, for the name of their schools wishing to encourage and accept their children as they are. And there was a hope embedded in two cultures.

Principal James said,

“Let's make an exchange program. I'll visit Okinawa next spring. I think this relationship between the two schools could be the first step towards networking among Amerasians in other Asian countries.”

On our way back home in the plane, even the cool Miss Hon couldn't hide her excitement, “I'm going to go to graduate school and study Amerasians in Okinawa and South Korea!” The meeting with James was truly an eye-opening experience. We felt we could see all sorts of possibilities before us.

After we came back, Ms. Midori Thayer and even the children at the school soon began to correspond with the school in South Korea via the Internet. And, true to his word, Principal James came to visit us in Okinawa in February 2001.

The activity of “connecting and supporting each other” was about to cross borders.

## Counsel Institute Regarding International Relationships

In December 1999 when I was about to take to the podium to speak about the Amerasian issue at a training session held by the Okinawa Bar Association, I spotted Annette Callagain. Ms. Callagain is an American lawyer specializing in foreign law. She has successfully developed the route for Amerasians' mothers to demand child support from the fathers of their children. After finishing the speech, I went to see her. Ms. Callagain was surrounded by other Japanese lawyers, such as Yutaka Kato and Masanori Takeda. I had asked Mr. Kato for advice on the acquisition of Japanese nationality for school children. These men were saying, "We all need to have a study meeting with Ms. Callagain." This is how we established the "Counsel Institute Regarding International Relationships (CIRIR)." I was in charge of taking phone calls and office work. We conducted free legal counseling several times a month on this hotline. Once every other month we held a case-example meeting with volunteer workers from women's counseling services and family courts. Though this meeting cooperates with the Study Group, it is basically a different organization.

We received a lot more telephone calls for counseling than we had expected. 201 people used this hotline for two years. Their concerns ranged from international marriage to the acquisition of Japanese nationality for Amerasian children. I took calls and recorded the content. After being advised by the legal staff, I called them back to give advice.

Here are some case examples:

"My baby will be born in a week. The baby's American father, a civilian personnel stationed at a U.S. base, says he will go back to America."

"The American father is an ex-soldier. Now he's a civilian. He's trying to take my children away to the United States. He has a history of physical abuse of children. What should I do?"

"The father sometimes calls us from America, but he never pays child support. I mentioned that at the city office by a slip of the tongue, and I'm being turned down for child care allowance. The office told me that if we had any ties with the father, we couldn't get the child care allowance, but we've never received money from him."

"The child was born in the United States. He has only American nationality. Do you think the child has to be naturalized?"

I would like to make a couple of comments on the last case. Even if an Amerasian child has a Japanese mother, the child may not have Japanese nationality. If the child was born outside of Japan and the parent failed to file a petition for retention to the Japanese Embassy within three months, the child loses Japanese nationality even if the mother is Japanese. After the parents have divorced, if the Japanese mother returns to Japan with the child and

applies for the acquisition of Japanese nationality for the child at the Regional Legal Affairs Bureau, she is told, "Both parents must appear in person." In some cases, people abandon the idea of acquiring Japanese nationality right there. In some states in America, parental custody is shared by both parents. Therefore, the mother alone cannot depute the parental authority. But how many American fathers would take time off from work and fly to Okinawa to go to the Regional Legal Affairs Bureau? Saying, "both parents must appear in person" is realistically equivalent to saying "give up" to the mother. A more practical procedure for the acquisition of Japanese nationality is urgently needed.

### Suppressed Voices

While taking phone calls for counseling, I sometimes feel it's not only problems over divorce or child rearing that are tormenting the women. Rather, it's the unfortunate or cruel words thrown at women by people around them or the way they look at the women.

"It's been over 20 years since I divorced my husband in the United States and came back to Okinawa. My siblings still call me the "American Woman" and never invite me for Buddhist memorial services. If this continues, I may not be put in the family grave when I die. What can I do?"

This was a very difficult case. The legal staff members and I could do nothing about this person.

In Okinawa there are certain words or thoughts a person keeps to herself for a long time, even for life. Those are the "suppressed" voices or the words that cannot be spoken. Those words can suddenly gush out once the conversation starts in hotline counseling.

"I can't tell my parents. I'm sure they would say: 'We told you so. That's why we objected to the marriage in the first place. It's your own fault for marrying an American GI.' I'm absolutely sure that's what they would say to me even though it's no use saying it now."

The women who marry a GI are to blame? Is it their fault?

I feel it could happen to any young woman who lives in an area with a concentration of U.S. bases as in Okinawa. That's what Okinawa is, that's Okinawa's nature. Okinawan women did not choose that environment, and besides, not all international marriages end in disaster.

Statistically, international marriages in Okinawa appear to be totally different from those in other parts of Japan. Nationally, marriages between foreign women and Japanese men account for 70% or more, while in Okinawa it is the reverse: marriages between foreign men and Japanese women account for 70%. And most of the men are American. There are 250 cases of this type of international marriage in Okinawa every year. Needless to say, the concentration of U.S. bases is a major contributing factor.

Of course, if a person meets someone, unites with him in marriage, and bears his child, it is a totally personal experience. But, so long as there is a structural pattern influenced by U.S. bases that is so conspicuous and clear-cut, it is unreasonable to dismiss those women's difficulties as their personal responsibility. I believe the responsibility lies also with the Japanese government that allows 75% of U.S. bases in Japan to be concentrated in Okinawa as well as with Japanese citizens.

And once again, while doing hotline counseling, I was mysteriously able to meet people I had been seeking. The interesting thing about this volunteer activity of lawyers is that it is not necessarily a relationship between "the helper" and "the helped". A lady who told us, "My daughter is married to a foreigner" is doing a publicity campaign for us on the Internet. A double student of Taiwanese and Okinawan descent does volunteer work for us as an interpreter and a researcher.

How far will this activity of "connecting with and supporting one another" spread?

How long and how far can we go? How many new people are we going to meet and how much can we accomplish? Our adventure has just begun.