

Giving Voice to Third Culture Kids

新島学園高等学校 2年 小 幡 理 愛

Have you ever heard of the expression, “Third Culture Kids”? According to American sociologist David Pollock, a third culture kid is “a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture.” Third culture kids can easily relate to the parents’ culture and another culture in which they lived, but they don’t have the full sense of belonging in any culture. For example, I myself am a third culture kid. I first grew up in a Japanese culture, which is my first culture. Then I lived in the US between the ages of 7 and 13 and learned my second culture. Finally, when I came back to Japan I found myself in another space, a third culture, which is a blend of the two cultures but not a simple sum of both. I often find myself easier to relate to others who live in a third culture, regardless of what their first and second cultures may be. If you look around, there might be an increasing number of third culture kids in today’s Japan. As we are talking about the new challenge of living harmoniously with people of diverse cultural backgrounds, I believe it is important to recognize the presence of third culture kids and effectively utilize them in ways that benefit all.

When talking about third culture kids, it is significant for us to know what makes a third culture kid so unique. How are they different from returnees, or who are commonly called “kikoku-shijo” in Japan? Returnees and third culture kids can be similar, but they are often different. Being a returnee does not necessarily mean that one would develop the three distinct cultures. The children of many Japanese families tend to attend Japanese schools and live within Japanese communities when living in foreign countries for a limited period of time. Under such circumstances, Japanese children would mostly retain their Japanese cultural identities. Third culture kids would immerse themselves in several cultures for an extended amount of time during their developmental years. As a result, they would cultivate their own unique and unstable sense of identity that is the third culture.

Third culture kids have advantages. The advantages include their ability to view the world more differently and more globally. Also, because third culture kids are not tied to just one identity, they're typically non-judgmental of others. They don't just base their thoughts off of their home culture but incorporate another culture with it, so that they could have a wider view of what the world really looks like. Another precious merit of being a third culture kid is the ability to communicate information globally. Since third culture kids are used to moving and familiar with handling difficulties at each place they visit, intercultural communications can go smoothly with the global knowledge and experience inside them.

Of course, being a third culture kid can involve difficulties in several ways. Most of all, there is an identity issue. Third culture kids would have a hard time fitting in anywhere because of their lack of solid cultural identity. This identity issue can result in a more serious psychological issue of restlessness, which in turn diminishes the advantages of third culture kids. I too, am still having such problems, even after living in Japan for three years since I came back from the US. I didn't feel like I completely fit in with my friends in the US. After moving back to Japan and talking with my Japanese friends, I still feel uncomfortable at times. Sometimes I start to question myself, "Where is my place in this world? What will my role be?" I believe this world would feel much more secure for third culture kids like me if more people start realizing the advantages and challenges that a third culture kid holds within themselves. Their merits cannot become effective unless both third culture kids and the society recognize these identity and psychological issues.

In Japan we are anticipating to have more foreigners coming to live in the country. At least some of them would bring their children. Our society needs to find ways to live harmoniously with foreigners, and we must not forget that their children have their own unique issues. It's not just about Japan. With the mounting globalism in today's world, it is expected that the number of third culture kids will continue to increase rapidly. Third culture kids who are already in Japan can provide a new avenue of connecting with third culture kids who will be coming to Japan. As such, third culture kids can be

great assets in the global community. But first, you must recognize the concept and the presence of third culture kids. Furthermore, it is important to understand their challenges so that there will be a better environment for them to display their full potential. So, give voice to third culture kids.