

FOSTER CARE IN JAPAN: PAST AND PRESENT

Y. KUMASAKA

AND

H. AIBA

The foster care program in Japan started in 1948 under government subsidy and supervision, following the enactment of the Law of Child Welfare. The scale of the program has been small, and, in fact, both the number of foster homes and of foster children show a decreasing trend in recent years (Table 1). The limited development of foster care in modern Japanese society is in sharp contrast to its popular role in traditional Japanese life. The custom originated at least 600 years ago as a way of child upbringing, and even now many adults who grew up in pre-World War II Japan have memories of time spent in foster homes.

The foster home custom in Japan evolved primarily from the aristocratic class and was fostered by the hierarchical class and family system of Japanese society. The custom lost its *raison d'être* with the changing concept of class and family in post-war Japan, but still exerts its influence upon present foster care practices. This paper deals with the historical background of the foster home custom in Japan, and reports preliminary findings from a field trip to a suburban community of Tokyo, which has been known as a colony of foster homes in the past, and which still plays an active role in the foster care program of today.

TABLE I. FOSTER CARE PROGRAM IN JAPAN

	1950	1954	Year 1958	1962	1965
Registered foster homes (by household unit)	7,429	14,126	18,696	19,275	18,230
Foster homes in use (by household unit)	4,859	7,522	8,526	7,332	6,090
Foster children	5,488	8,367	9,489	8,337	6,909

Source: Section of Child Welfare, Ministry of Welfare and Health, Government of Japan.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND¹

The first recorded Japanese institution for orphaned and abandoned children, "Hiden-In,"² was established in 723, on the grounds of Kofuku Temple in what is now Nara City, under the administration of the court, and actual management by the dominant Fujiwara clan. Seven years later another institution, "Shiyaku-In," was opened for medical indigents near Hiden-In, but it seems that both establishments later accommodated essentially the same type of people; persons displaced from the community. The number of deserted infants at times would exceed the capacity of the two institutions, and their employees were offered financial assistance to take infants home and raise them there. The neglect of the infants became alarming and, in 896, the court ordered close supervision on these "foster" homes. The history of the two institutions after 896 is not clear. However, records exist of similar institutions established under different ruling groups, the latest one being in 1879, which will be discussed later.

Aside from a small number of children handled through institutions, many children were moved from one home to another through professional brokers. In Kyoto, the ancient capital, such brokers would walk through the streets shouting, "I buy babies." They later adopted more discreet ways, the result of public repulsion.

Following and paralleling these rather harsh practices, another type of foster care gradually evolved from the child-rearing custom of the nobles of Kyoto. The nobility usually left the raising of their

children to wet nurses and governesses, but often sent some of their children to families in the surrounding villages. The habit became firmly established during the Muromachi period (1392–1490), the golden era of Kyoto, and three villages, Iwakura, Kitashirakawa and Umegahata, were chosen for placements. The customary explanation of it was that the parents wished to have their children raised in the country rather than in the dusty city. Yet, the eldest son usually remained at home and it was the younger sons who were sent to foster homes. This evidently served the purpose of protecting the clan structure. The parents did not lavish much affection on any child except the eldest male; the younger sons, on their return home, naturally accepted subordinate positions.

Although financial rewards were given to the foster parents, it should be emphasized that the strong loyalty of the farming class to the nobility served as an important motive. It was considered an honor to be chosen as foster parents, and selection greatly depended on the family's reputation and status within the village.

Era of Tokugawa

Shogun (chief feudal lord) Ieyasu Tokugawa's ascendancy, in 1603, signified the power shift from nobility to the samurai (warrior) class. Edo (now Tokyo) was established as the political center of Japan, while Kyoto became the cultural and commercial center. The tradition of foster home care survived, but the patronage shifted from the nobles to the wealthy commoners, usually merchants. The financial motive among the farmers remained. However, the loyalty bond connecting farmers to the noble class became a family bond between individual families of farmers and individual families of patrons. For example, an Iwakura village family would send their daughters as maids to a Kyoto family. This Iwakura family would raise in the village the children of the Kyoto family. Nevertheless, the nature of loyalty was essentially the same, namely that of a master-servant relationship.

The foster home practice spread to other parts of Japan. In Edo, it became popular among wealthy town dwellers, with the neighbor-

ing farmers providing the foster homes. The custom was adopted only to a small extent among samurai families, who preferred to rely on wet nurses and governesses at home. One reason for this was that the relationship between samurai and farmers was often inharmonious and riots by the farmers were frequent. However, in the latter half of the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), the custom became more frequent among samurai, who used both farmers and merchants as foster parents.

In the highly feudalized system prevalent under Tokugawa ruling, primogeniture became deeply instituted on all levels of Japanese social structure; this included inheritance of the family property, and of the leadership position within the family hierarchy in which the remaining members became subordinate “subjects.” The role of the later-born children was quite limited. In every detail of daily life the younger children learned the proper distance from and obedience to the eldest. The younger sons, however, still had their chances of becoming family heads by being adopted by a childless family or by marrying the daughter of a family who had no son. A childless couple obtained a “son” through the marriage of the adopted daughter. Having a son was particularly important to members of the samurai class since, after his death, a childless samurai’s property reverted to the feudal lord and his family name was terminated.

While foster home care was an inter-class affair, adoption was primarily one of intra-class. At times, however, the distinction between adoption and foster care is difficult to discern. During the later part of the Tokugawa period, for example, a century-long peace produced only a modest need for warriors. “Excess” children, especially among low-ranking samurai, were shifted to another class, usually the merchant class. Adoption between the classes was not socially acceptable and potentially was detrimental to the feudal system; the foster home custom provided the excuse. The foster children could be gradually adopted. Foster homes also solved the problem of illegitimate mixed-class children. The village of Yamauchi, on the outskirts of Tokyo, can trace the origin of foster

homes that raised the children born to single female servants of Edo castle.

The Era of Meiji to the Second World War

Following the collapse of Tokugawa ruling and the restoration of power to the emperor in the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan entered the so-called “Meiji Revolution” period. Local feudal lords returned sovereignty to the emperor who in turn appointed them to government posts and/or knighthood. This allowed the lords to remain a privileged group. A similar reward went to distinguished patriots of the revolution, many of whom were low-ranking samurai. Other than these who survived in transition, the majority of samurai were thrown into the streets—the possession of an army by a local lord was outlawed under the new system. Some of the disenfranchised warriors sought careers in the new military or police forces and some diffused into other classes. The hierarchical social structure, which was at first disrupted, was rapidly reorganized with the bureaucracy and the military replacing the samurai. The bureaucracy, together with the military, became the executors and defenders of the modern nobility regime. On the whole, the Meiji Revolution largely eliminated the hereditary aspects in the class system and replaced them with education.

As Japan approached the twentieth century, her agriculturally oriented economy shifted to that of an industrial one. Industrialization and a strengthened military were two major policies that the governments of the Meiji period initiated to “catch up with Western countries” in national development; and these factors facilitated population growth and migration into urban areas. Industrialization generates new occupations, but early industry in Japan, comparatively primitive, relied heavily on skilled and unskilled labor forces. Thus, the low status of the bonded craftsman and apprentice persisted among the majority of industrial workers.

The extensive use of foster homes continued during this period. Among well-to-do families, it was an accepted way of child rearing. Children, particularly weak ones, were sent to farmers for a short

or long period of time. It is also important to mention the disciplinary motive in foster home placement. Children in Kyoto who wet their beds often were warned by their parents, "You will be sent to Iwakura!," which is one of the traditional colonies of foster homes. The practice continued to be used to dispose of children whose parents for one reason or another found them difficult to keep as was often the case. These parents evaded financial responsibility and left the children to the mercy of the foster parents.

In 1881, Japan entered a serious depression, coupled with subsequent famine and plague. Throughout the 1890's, Japanese cities faced numerous riots by the poor. In the later part of the decade, 8.9 per cent of the total population of 44 million was estimated to be indigent.⁴ Incidences of deserted children rapidly increased in Tokyo (changed from "Edo" under the Meiji regime), and in the face of that emergency, citizens organized several voluntary organizations. One of them, involving Fukuden-Kai² (established in 1879), was partly subsidized by Imperial household funds; volunteers included members of the noble families. Fukuden-Kai provided an infant home, childrens' shelter and a day-care center, extending help to deserted children and also to children of indigent parents who so requested. The latter accounted for three-fourths of the total number of children involved. More than 60 per cent of the children were under the age of two at the time of the rescue.⁵

Fukuden-Kai was basically a transitional shelter and its children were eventually placed in voluntary homes. Half of these children were already receiving relief from the municipal government, which continued after they were resettled. The remaining half relied on either private donations or on the charity of the foster parents. Infants from Fukuden-Kai were exclusively sent to Yamauchi Village, the farming community that had raised many illegitimate children of the samurai and servants of Edo castle.

Government rescue activities soon followed those of the voluntary groups. In 1895, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Headquarters issued a regulation stating that each precinct was to send displaced children to the Tokyo Municipal Foundling Hospital, from where they would be settled, following the pattern of Fukuden-Kai. How-

ever, no supervision was included in the government plan and incidents of child abuse at foster homes became so frequent that the central government discouraged foster care arrangements and began increasing institutional facilities. The real modernization of the foster care system was delayed, however, until 1948, when the current Law of Child Welfare was enacted.

Post World War II

The Law of Child Welfare laid the legal groundwork for the current private and public activities relating to children. Regarding foster care, the Law acknowledged the usefulness of such a program for the reintegration of displaced children in the community, but also emphasized the need of supervision and inspection by the proper authorities. The result has been to eliminate some of the disadvantages of the foster home system, and also to precipitate the rapid cessation of this traditional practice. For example, at Iwakura Village, foster home practices that had lasted for centuries ceased to exist after the enactment of the Law. The sentiment of the villagers was expressed by one elderly farmer who asked, "Why should we get government approval for the things which we have been doing as a favor?"³ Actually, the only requirement for the practice between private homes is to report it to the prefectural government, but the pride of the villagers seems to have been damaged. Aside from pride, the urbanization and economic improvement of Iwakura's farmers are other factors that strongly contributed to the practice's termination.

The industrialization of post-war Japan differed both qualitatively and quantitatively from that of the Meiji era. Expanding industry improved the chance for economic independence of the individual. Post-war political reform, changing the country from a military dictatorship to a democracy, initiated the welfare system. These factors made the traditional family system obsolete. The traditional system, in its way, provided security for family members. The military was denied its existence under the new constitution, which renounced national armaments. The increasing number and need of professionals and white collar workers amplified the value

of education, which, in turn, emphasized the principle of individuality. In the traditional family the individual was merely a component of a tightly-knit group, the family. Finally, the emancipated Japanese woman has shown a strong desire to raise her own children, rather than trust their upbringing to others.

The foster home custom in Japan largely has ended, yet it is still reflected in the modern foster care program. The majority of registered foster-home parents, indicated in Table 1, eventually expect to adopt their foster child. In Kanagawa prefecture, three-fourths of registered foster homes are classified as "foster homes with interest in adoption" and only one-fourth are "foster homes without interest in adoption."⁶ The large gap between the number of registered foster homes and that of foster homes in use is due largely to the selectivity among the foster parents. No shortage exists of foster children, who mainly come from "homes for infants" and "children's shelters" indicated in Table 2. Generally, these children are the products of broken homes. Interestingly, in post-war Japan, more children of broken homes remain with the father than with the mother (Table 3). This situation was reversed in the pre-war era.

FIELD STUDY

A preliminary survey of Yamauchi Village⁷ was made in the early summer of 1967. The village has served as a traditional colony of foster homes and again is active in the present program. Yamauchi—located almost half way between Tokyo and Yokohama, which is the metropolis of Kanagawa prefecture—is about one and one-half hours by the local trains from either city. The farming village with a population of 3,000 persons and 500 households prior to 1939, now is inhabited by 7,300 residents and 1,700 households. Out of these 1,700, 500 are families of farmers and 1,200 are mainly families of city commuters. A turnpike, connecting Tokyo with Osaka, is under construction, and will bring Tokyo to within half an hour by car. Thus, although the area is still dominantly rural, with rice fields surrounding the houses, it is rapidly becoming a suburban community. Numerous housing projects are under way and farming is becoming a trade of the past. Among the present

TABLE 2. BED CAPACITY OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ESTABLISHMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN JAPAN

<i>Nature of Establishment</i>	<i>Year</i>			
	<i>1958</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1962</i>	<i>1964</i>
Infant homes	3,619	3,744	3,768	3,760
Residences for unattached mothers and their dependent children	13,775	13,776	13,621	12,842
Nurseries	703,786	733,645	778,701	841,863
Children's shelters	35,817	36,796	37,182	37,178
Institutions for the mentally retarded	6,533	8,396	10,281	13,313
Vocational schools for the mentally retarded	420	1,040	1,680	2,260
Homes for blind children	1,734	1,814	1,766	1,802
Homes for deaf and mute children	3,058	3,140	3,067	2,992
Rest homes for physically weak children	1,422	1,739	1,829	1,918
Homes for physically disabled children	2,384	3,577	4,921	6,253
Correction schools	5,524	5,848	6,096	6,169
Population (million)	92.0	93.9	95.6	97.5

Source: Section of Child Welfare, Ministry of Welfare and Health, Government of Japan.

TABLE 3. HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING CHILDREN'S ALLOWANCE IN JAPAN, MARCH 31, 1966

<i>Family Composition of Household</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Households in which children live only with the father because of divorce or separation of parents	70,590	41.4
Households in which children live only with the mother because of divorce or separation of parents	25,979	15.3
Households in which the family head is a widower	25,382	14.9
Households in which the family head is an unattached mother	21,609	12.7
Households in which the family head is disabled	16,443	9.6
Other households	10,343	6.1
Total	170,346	100.0

Source: Section of Child Welfare, Ministry of Welfare and Health, Government of Japan.

farming families, most of the younger generation is working for business and industry in one of the big cities, leaving the farming to the elders. The financial condition of the community, especially among the farmers, is extremely good. Compensation for farms by the turnpike interests was generous; and the price of land is soaring daily because of increased demands for building space.

In the days of Fukuden-Kai, the main source of income of the village came from modest farming and the financial aid brought in by the foster children was hard to disregard. An average of 20 infants⁸ were sent to the village every year and at one time over 80 children were cared for in a village of 500 households. Distribution of the infants in the village and their subsequent supervision was materialized by the voluntary work of the village physician, S. Yokoyama, and later by his son, K. Yokoyama.

Village participation in foster care practices had lapsed when Japan entered the Manchurian War and World War II in succession. Revival of community care of needy children, under the 1948 Law of Child Welfare, was initiated in Yamauchi by K. Matsumoto, the current president of the Foster Parents Association in the community. Matsumoto, a clerical worker in the prefectural government, encouraged the villagers to revive the custom and became the liaison between the community and the Department of Child Welfare. The movement of foster children in Yamauchi since 1953 is shown in Table 4. The figure does not include children who have been adopted or who have reached the age of 19 and remained in the community. Approximately 150 residents are said to be former foster children.

A total of 32 foster children currently are placed in 23 homes in the community. The majority of the children arrive in the community at ages between three and five. The mean age of foster children in 1967 was 10.3; the male to female ratio was 1:2 (Table 5). Among the 23 foster homes, 15 homes, or 65 per cent, engage in farming; farmers comprise 36 per cent of the community. Eight of the 23 families are childless, but four of these already have adopted children. Thus, only four families potentially might adopt their foster children. That is in sharp contrast to the number of

TABLE 4. MOVEMENT OF FOSTER CHILDREN AT YAMAUCHI COMMUNITY

	<i>Year</i>					
	1953*	1957*	1960*	1963*	1966*	1967**
Foster children	17	25	33	39	31	32

* December 31.

** May 1.

Source: Hayabuchi Foster Parents Association, Yokohama, Japan.

TABLE 5. AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER CHILDREN AT YAMAUCHI COMMUNITY, MAY 1, 1967

<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
3-5	4	5
6-8	0	2
9-11	2	3
12-14	1	6
15-17	3	5
18	1	0
Total*	11	21

* The total of 32 foster children contain seven pairs of siblings.

Source: Hayabuchi Foster Parents Association.

adoption-oriented homes of Kanagawa prefecture, which, as was cited, amount to three-quarters of the registered foster homes.

Upon notification by the Child Welfare Department, the Foster Parents Association of Yamauchi selects a possible match from the registered homes. Subsequent supervision is left almost completely to the Foster Parents Association. This is somewhat unusual, for in other communities supervision is carried out by a welfare officer who visits the foster home periodically. Apparently the interest in and the success of the Yamauchi foster home system has convinced the government of the adequacy of the self-governing association.

In Yamauchi, the problems that arise in the foster homes usually are handled by group discussions among the members. They try to provide equal treatment toward foster children and natural children, and in regard to this, the association generally avoids placing a foster child in a home with a natural child of the same age group. The

precaution is most often unnecessary, however, since nearly 90 percent of the foster parents are over 40 years old and the majority of their children are grown. In fact, the foster parents often comment that they participated in the program because their children no longer needed their care and that they felt "lonely" and "empty at home." Many foster parents have become "professionals;" one couple has raised 12 foster children in addition to their four natural children. Legal guardianship of a foster child remains with the natural parents or with the governor of the prefecture. The children are returned when their parents wish it. The average stay of a foster child in the community is about five years.

Although foster children are psychiatrically screened before placement, the majority of children come from broken homes or disturbed backgrounds and frequently present behavioral and mental problems. The community classifies such problems into three categories in order of frequency; mild mental retardation, bedwetting and rebellious attitudes. Its policy for management problems is to change the foster home within the community before returning the foster child to the department. The eventual return of a child occurs in two or three cases a year.

A foster child who reaches adolescence and is intellectually capable of pursuing a high school education (grade 7-12) can receive a government scholarship, but that is rather exceptional, and the education of the majority of foster children ends at the end or middle of elementary school. The community school is planning to open a special class in 1968. Severely mentally retarded children are screened out by the Department of Child Welfare and sent to institutions; it is not clear at this time whether the intelligence problem of so many foster children is due to limited capacity or to emotional disturbance. This needs to be clarified by further studies.

SUMMARY

The foster care practice in Japan evolved from the aristocracy of the fourteenth century and has survived until recently as a way of child upbringing. Although the custom underwent various modifica-

tions subject to sociocultural changes in Japan, it was fostered by the rigid and autocratic class and family structure of Japanese society. The custom is rapidly disappearing but some traditional aspects are still present in the current foster care programs. This paper has reported the historical background of the practice and preliminary findings from a field trip to a suburban community of Tokyo, which has been known as a colony of foster homes in the past and still plays an active role in the foster care program.

REFERENCES

¹ Particularly relevant sections concerning this aspect of Japanese history and folklore are found in the *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAPANESE FOLKLORE*, vol. 2, Tokyo, Seibun-Do Publishing Co., 1954, pp. 503-504; and in the *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAPANESE HISTORY*, vol. 9, p. 81, vol. 11, p. 175, vol. 15, p. 268, vol. 19, p. 9, Tokyo, Kawaide Publishing Co., 1958.

² The literal translation of "Hiden" is "field of compassion." A similar establishment, which will be discussed in the course of the paper, "Fukuden-Kai," is translated as "field of happiness." Both "Hiden" and "Fukuden" have their origin in Buddhism and connote "the poor, the sick and the troubled." Buddhism teaches that the human mind is like a field that needs constant plowing and cultivation. Such feelings as compassion or happiness are only obtainable through the cultivation of one's mind by helping the poor, the sick and the troubled.

³ Iwakura was also known as the place where the nobility of ancient Kyoto entrusted farmers to take care of their relatives who became mentally ill. Kumasaka, Y., Iwakura: Early Community Care of the Mentally Ill in Japan, *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 22, 666-676, 1967.

⁴ Kure, B., Indigents in Japan, *Shakai (Society)*, 1, 26-30, 1899.

⁵ *Annual Report of Fukuden-Kai*, 1934.

⁶ Kobayashi, H., Problems Involved in the Foster Care Program, *Shakaigaku and Fukushigaku (Sociology and Social Service)*, 1, 102-105, 1966.

⁷ Yamauchi Village was incorporated into Yokohama City in 1939, and is now called Motoishikawa, Kohokuku, Yokohama.

⁸ This figure was obtained from the Registry Book of Foster Infants, recorded by K. Yokoyama, made available through the courtesy of the Yokoyama family. The entries in the book covered the period 1907-1919. The data prior to 1907 and after 1919, pertaining to the history of the Yamauchi Village's care of displaced children, relied on the memories of the villagers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors express their appreciation to S. Ohi and C. Nishii, both from the Department of Psychology, Waseda University, who assisted with the field study.