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Since the latter half of the 1980s, a large number of Muslims have come to Japan from countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh in order to work. In the 1990s there was an increase in the number of Muslims marrying Japanese women and forming families in Japan. The children of these families are now reaching school age and educational problems among second-generation Muslims are emerging.

## Muslim Transnational Families:

# Pakistani husbands and Japanese wives

SHUKO TAKESHITA

I conducted a case study analysis of families comprising Pakistani husbands and Japanese wives. These families, faced with the difficulties of bringing up their children with Islamic values in Japan, chose instead to relocate the wife and children to Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Japanese schools have an atmosphere of conformity in which pupils generally eat the same lunch and wear similar clothing. Elementary schools and junior high schools provide school lunches using (processed) pork. Many Muslim mothers obtain lunch menus from the school in advance, and prepare lunches that look similar to those provided by the schools. However, some children say they don't want to be the only ones eating a boxed lunch from home when all the other children are eating the lunch provided by the school. Equally, some parents worry about their child being isolated or bullied, so they let their child eat the lunches provided by the school, the same as the other children.

Japanese junior high school regulations do not permit girls to wear a veil, because students are required to wear a specific school uniform at both public and private schools. More than 30 mosques throughout Japan provide some classes teaching the Koran and Arabic to Muslim children in the evenings and at weekends. It remains difficult, however, for Muslim children, who are subjected to the problems of school lunches and clothing and spend most of the day at Japanese schools where it is hard to pray, to form a Muslim identity from the social, cultural and systematic perspectives. Therefore, when the first children of 'mixed' marriages reach school age, we observe an increase in the number of transnational families – cases where the Japanese wife and children relocate to an Islamic country for the Islamic education of the children while the non-Japanese father remains in Japan to work.

I conducted a survey through interviews during August and September 2005, targeting 23 Japanese wives living in Sharjah. Their husbands are Pakistani, and are used vehicle exporters in Japan, with offices in Sharjah and Dubai.

The majority of husbands in the study were aged 30-39 and 40-49, with 11 cases in each age group (47.8% each). The major-

ity of wives were aged 30-39, with 12 cases (54.5%), followed by 40-49, with 7 cases (31.8%). The total number of children in the study was 58, with an average age of 8.8 years. The average duration of the marriages was 12.4 years, and the average length of residence in Sharjah was 3.8 years.

### Relocation to Sharjah

UAE, and Sharjah in particular, is the most popular third-country location for Japanese wives and children relocating to Islamic countries. In about one third of the cases in this study, the wife said, "I wanted to come to Sharjah rather than go to Pakistan." Among the reasons noted were: "Sharjah is safer than Pakistan"; "I'm free to go out on my own"; and "I don't have to live with my husband's family." It appears, then, that the wives feel some resistance to relocating to Pakistan. Although initially, many of the husbands wanted to raise their children in Pakistan, their wives disagreed with the idea, and eventually, relocation to Sharjah came about as a compromise.

With regard to living with the husband's kin, several wives who returned to Japan after relocating to Pakistan noted an inability to adapt to the local lifestyle. They also mentioned other factors such as the family's refusal to respect Japanese customs when it comes to child raising, even if it is permitted by Islam, or excessive interference from the husband's kin. Women are expected to bear the major burden of child-care, but at the same time, because of their position as a foreigner and as a woman, they receive considerable intervention from the husband's family with regard to the way they raise their children. These women therefore experience conflicts in Pakistan as a result of being a complex minority with the dual factors of gender and ethnicity. This problem is alleviated, however, in the case of a nuclear family living in Sharjah.

The husbands in this study had established used vehicle export businesses in Japan, and relocated their brothers living in Pakistan to operate offices in Dubai or Sharjah. These offices acted as bases for their business of importing used vehicles from Japan. The husbands' kinship networks can be seen not only as an extension of Pakistani society, where kinship ties are very strong, but also influential in terms of life strategy and business strategy: The husbands have developed life and business strategies which enable them to provide work for their brothers living in

Pakistan. In turn, this allows them to leave the operation of used vehicle imports from Japan to their brothers, whom they trust. In terms of the relocation of the wife and children, the husband's kinship network provides a place to live upon arrival, and also a valuable support system helping the family settle into their new environment. In this way, the kinship network reduces both the costs and the risks involved in relocation. Furthermore, by entrusting his wife and children to a brother, the husband is able to remain in Japan with peace of mind.

### Social Networks

In Sharjah, there is a support network composed of about 30 Japanese Muslimas. Homogeneous networks give individuals a feeling of security and belonging, and assist the individual in maintaining their Japanese identity as a part of a complex self-definition. This network also functions as a source of mutual support – for example in terms of exchanging information and advice on schools and education, medical facilities, and providing assistance when problems arise – and this ties into a sense of empowerment. Because the husbands visit Sharjah an average of once every three months and the wives' kin do not live nearby, these Japanese Muslimas use the practical and mental support obtained through this network to assist one another in their daily lives.

In the case of the children as well, and particularly when the period of residence in Sharjah is short, gathering with other children in the park or in private homes and playing while speaking in Japanese provides a release valve for the stress that even young children experience. It functions as a venue for maintaining their Japanese as a conversational language.

### Semilingualism

By relocating to Sharjah, the parents fulfil their initial goal of raising their children in an Islamic environment. However, because this involves relocation of school age children the problem of language must be faced. As public schools in Sharjah are limited to children with UAE citizenship, all of the children covered in this study were attending international schools and receiving education in English. The Koran and Arabic are both required studies at these international schools, and Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, is an elective subject, so children are able to learn their father's native tongue. After three to

five years of living in Sharjah, there is a tendency for the language used among siblings to shift from Japanese to English, but in all of the families covered in this study, the mother and children communicated in Japanese. Up until the fourth year of residence in Sharjah, about half of the mothers interviewed were teaching their children to read and write Japanese. Japanese language education is not only undertaken to ensure a means of communication between the mother and children, but also as a means of maintaining the identity of being Japanese, as part of a complex self-definition.

After five years of living in Sharjah, all cases of home study in Japanese reading and writing disappear. A number of reasons are cited: (1) As the children move into the upper grades in school, they are busier with their schoolwork, and have less time for extra studies; (2) It is difficult for mother and child to keep the relationship of teacher and student; and (3) As the stay in Sharjah grows longer, the possibility of returning to Japan becomes less likely. As a result, the children find it difficult to maintain the academic level of Japanese they possessed on leaving Japan, although they do maintain their conversational language.

The development of proficiency in primary language can promote the development of second- or even third-language proficiency. Therefore, Japanese plays an important role as a primary language when the child acquires English as a bilingual, or yet another language as a trilingual. However, the development of this primary language is hindered by relocation and an abrupt encounter with the language of the host country before the primary language is sufficiently acquired. Moreover, it takes about five years for children to reach the level where they can study effectively using their second language. When a child growing up in a bilingual environment is unable to supplement their primary language with reading and writing skills before acquiring an academic level in a second language, the child may not achieve a level typical of his or her peers in either language. This is referred to as a 'temporary semilingual phenomenon'. If relocation of the child takes place during infancy, then the overall development of language is delayed. If relocation takes place at about 10 years of age, there is a delay in the development of abstract vocabulary and the ability to think abstractly. Children suffer psychological stress and frustration, albeit temporarily,

and become unstable emotionally. The end result is that as the stay in Sharjah grows longer, an increasing number of parents come to see it as acceptable for Japanese to be learned solely as a conversational language, and instead place an emphasis on the child's ability to acquire English as an academic language.

Among the subjects in this study, there were families that wanted to live together in the near future, but had not determined when and where that would be. Muslims operating used vehicle export businesses in Japan do not necessarily have bases only in Japan; in many cases, these businessmen have extensive worldwide networks, with business activities spanning several countries. It is clear however, that in relation to forming a family, these businessmen are more likely to relocate to a country where they can apply their transnational networks more advantageously to their educational and life strategies. The parents willingly invest in their children's English education, seeing it as an invaluable resource – no matter where the family lives in the future. They have selected an educational strategy which they believe will assist the children in attaining a higher social position.

Children acquire the internal conditions appropriate to the society of their host country through relocation. Although it is possible to predict that they will form a Muslim identity, they may end up with the problem of being semilingual if the relocation takes place during their school years. The first priority in the educational strategies of the families in this survey is the formation of a Muslim identity, and the second is their English education. The longer a family lives in Sharjah, the more likely the parents are to acquiesce in the loss of Japanese as an academic language. More attention should be focused on the possibility that the loss of Japanese as an academic language could trigger chronic semilingualism. I intend to conduct a follow-up study to examine how living locations and the structure of the family changes for these families, and how the children's identities are formed as a result of these changes. ■

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