

Intercultural Families and Schooling in Japan: Experiences, Issues, and Challenges

Edited by Melodie Lorie Cook and Louise George Kittaka

Foreword by Fred E. Anderson

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All royalties from this book will go to the Japan Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN Japan), an organization dedicated to fighting one of the world's toughest cancers. PanCAN Japan supports patients and caregivers, and advocates for research and medical techniques to improve both treatment for existing cancers and detection for new patients.

About This Book

Intercultural Families and Schooling in Japan: Experiences, Issues, and Challenges

Edited by Melodie Lorie Cook and Louise George Kittaka

From Melodie:

When I was first in Japan between 1993 and 1997, I read everything I could get my hands on to make my new life intelligible to me. At that time, I was single and embarking on my first “real” job on a three-year university teaching contract, after which, I thought, I would return to Canada and spend the rest of my life. While in Japan, however, in order to help me understand the lives of other foreigners living in Japan and about Japanese culture in general, I filled my bookshelves with the same as most of my peers: non-fiction such as “Learning to Bow” (Feiler, 1991), as well as fiction like “Audrey Hepburn’s Neck” (Brown, 1997), anything by Donald Richie, and for fun, titillating things like “Pink Samurai” (Bornoff, 1991). To help me understand the workplace, I read the first edition of “A Handbook for Teaching at Japanese Colleges and Universities” (Wadden, 1993). These were in the pre-Internet days, where books were my only source of information about life and living in Japan.

When I returned to Japan in 2000 with my Japanese husband, things were quite different. I now had my own cultural interpreter, which made life much easier for me, and the Internet, so I could reach out to friends around the world, making me feel less isolated than the first time. In 2005, my husband and I embarked on a journey to become parents. There was no question that we would have to adopt children; medical issues on both sides made that necessary. Our son arrived in 2009, at the same time that I obtained a tenured position at a university in Niigata. After moving, I fed myself on books about adoption and child-raising, ordering them in batches from overseas. Feeling isolated and needing mentors, I created a Yahoo group called “Adoption in Japan” which then became a Facebook group. There, we shared information about adoptive and foster parenting, and the group’s name changed to “Adoption and Fostering in Japan” when we began fostering a daughter in 2016. I

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began to realize that the experiences of adoption and fostering in Japan were very different than they were overseas, and that people were crying out for help and information, especially in English.

A few years before that, however, in my capacity as a researcher, I published a paper on the experiences of intercultural parents and cram schools (Cook, 2013). I had become interested in this topic while doing research on my PhD, which involved the pressures of Japanese teachers of English dealing with preparing students for entrance examinations. This led to my learning more about the prevalence of cram schools and I began to wonder what intercultural parents thought about them and if they availed themselves of such services. While doing research for the project, I realized that parents were raising a number of issues, not only about cram schools, but about the Japanese educational system in general and their families' struggles with it.

In coming up with some ideas for possible books, the first thing that came to my mind was intercultural parents' issues with the Japanese educational system. Louise George Kittaka, whom I knew from many similar online circles and also as a widely published author about various topics including family life in Japan, was the perfect person to ask to co-edit the book with me. We put out a call for chapters and found that there were more issues needing attention than we had expected. This book contains heartfelt and honest accounts from a variety of parents in a variety of situations. Just as each family is unique, so is each story.

From Louise:

I came to Japan for the first time as a teenage student on a working holiday. As a Japanese major at my university in New Zealand, I embraced the language and the culture. Having thoroughly enjoyed my first taste of Japan, I then returned after graduation to work for a company here. It was during this time that I met my Japanese partner. I was still only 20 and very naïve about many things, but I knew that I felt comfortable in Japan and I was happy to settle in this country. After my marriage, I started working for an educational publishing firm, known for being a pioneer in terms of its equal opportunity policies for female employees. Life was good.

In those days, I took it as a compliment when people praised me for fitting in so well and seeming “almost Japanese.”

Things suddenly changed when my husband’s company sent him to the United States on a transfer. I was initially reluctant to give up my job to join him, but the five years we spent in the United States turned out to be a very productive time for our family. Both my husband and I completed graduate degrees and although we went over as a couple, we arrived back in Tokyo with two preschoolers. Within 18 months of our return, our family welcomed our third and final child.

I realized that becoming a mother had altered my relationship with Japan. Although I was eager to help my children flourish and succeed in the system here, I also wanted to support their English language and literacy skills, as well as their awareness of their non-Japanese cultural heritage.

With a husband who travelled frequently, and even lived apart from the rest of the family for his job for five years, I have been the primary decision maker in anything affecting our children’s education and welfare. I speak, read, and write Japanese, but I have been making my way in an education system that I didn’t experience myself. As any foreign parent soon finds out, there are many aspects of the Japanese system that take time and patience to understand. (A healthy sense of humour doesn’t hurt, either). One of the underlying principles shaping the Japan education system is the concept of fitting in with the group, so it can be tough both for foreign parents and their children.

When our family returned to Japan after our stint in the United States, the Internet didn’t yet play such a large part in daily life as it does today, and social media was still some years away. I used whatever means I could find to connect with other parents and find resources to aid me in my parenting journey. I started a playgroup for English-speaking mothers in my area, a bed town on the western side of Tokyo. The other parents included those in international marriages and Japanese women who had lived abroad. There were also some families here in Japan on work or study assignments. At the time, I thought it would be wonderful if the group lasted for two or three years. While I stepped back after my youngest child “graduated” at the age of four, the playgroup continued for a total of

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19 years, passing from leader to leader. The friends I made in the playgroup are still among my closest allies in Japan today.

This theme has continued for me over the years, through the parents I have met during my involvement with AFWJ (the Association of Foreign Wives of Japanese), my children's Saturday English school and after school activities, and even the Japanese school PTA. Our shared experiences as parents can create strong bonds and a sense of community and support.

As my children grew, I continued to write and edit books and study materials for Japan's English education market. However, I also began writing articles for the English media. I followed the old adage of "write about what you know," frequently using my parenting experiences as a lens for examining various aspects of Japanese society through the eyes of foreign residents. This was how I first got to know my co-editor Melodie Cook. After experiencing the Japanese *juken* (entrance exam) system firsthand, I wrote an article for the *Japan Times* newspaper on the topic. I interviewed Melodie about her aforementioned research on cram schools, and we quickly established a rapport.

I was delighted when Melodie approached me about collaborating as co-editors, and we are confident that this book will be a boon to others raising and educating children in Japan.

About the Chapters in the Book

Our chapter authors come from a variety of backgrounds: Some are from intercultural marriages with a Japanese partner, while in other cases, both partners are from abroad. Moreover, the writers live in various parts of Japan, and their children range in age from those in the early years of elementary education through to young adults who are now working. The topics covered are equally diverse. For ease of reading, we decided to group the chapters by theme into three broad sections, with a concluding chapter to round things off at the end.

Part One: Finding Our Own Way

The four chapters in this section examine the experiences of parents who have forged their own path in navigating the Japanese education system. Jennifer Yphantides uses a duoethnographic-narrative approach as she examines her family's experiences with an unusual bilingual program at a Japanese-English elementary school. Single father Jon Dujmovich writes about being the primary caregiver for his two children in a system where gender roles and expectations for parents are still quite rigid. In her chapter, American mother Marybeth Kamibepu chronicles her efforts to inject doses of her home culture into the daily lives of her three children. Rounding out Part One are Shane Doyle and Fiona Creaser, a married couple writing on the linguistic challenges of raising their third culture children in Japan.

Part Two: Dealing with the Japanese School System

This section focuses on specific aspects of the school experience, starting with Cynthia Smith and Lily Thukral, two mothers who discuss their experiences and offer strategies for coping with Japanese homework. Meredith Stephens draws on her two daughters' experiences in Japan and Australia to examine the transfer of literacy and subject knowledge between two quite different school systems. The section concludes with Charlotte V. T. Murakami's study of Japan's overseas schools, which cater for the children of Japanese families on overseas postings.

Part Three: Coping with Challenges

All the authors in this section have experienced additional challenges in child raising. Suzanne Kamata is the mother of a deaf daughter also coping with cerebral palsy, while Eugene Ryan is the father of a son with autism. Each writes about their parenting journey in Japan, particularly in terms of the education system. As the mother of adopted and foster children, Melodie Lorie Cook draws on her experiences to share strategies and tips for foreign parents of adopted or foster children in navigating the Japanese school system.

Concluding Thoughts and Alternative Choices

The book finishes with a chapter by Louise George Kittaka about her family's journey in removing her three children from the Japanese system and sending them to high school in New Zealand, along with considerations for parents contemplating a similar path.

Foreword

Fred E. Anderson, Kansai University, Osaka, Japan

Since most of the contributions to this important volume are built around personal stories, I, too, will begin by presenting a part of my own story. I arrived in Japan for the first time in 1977, a few years out of university, to teach English at a language school in Sapporo. Like many of my generation, including my expatriate colleagues at the school, I was looking for adventure first, and had little real idea of where my life was headed or in what direction I wanted to steer it. Something interesting, I assumed, would follow from the adventure. Initially I was expecting my stay in Japan to last a year, or maybe two if the first year worked out well. But, as popular Japanese author Murakami Haruki has written in his novel *Kafka by the Shore*, “whatever you’re seeking won’t come in the form you’re expecting.”

Little did I know that I would still be in Japan 43 years later, despite diversions at various points along the way: a short time back in my native US state of Oregon, a number of years as a graduate student in Hawaii, and a few years as a university lecturer/researcher in my ancestors’ country of Sweden. And now, in 2020, following residencies of various lengths in the Hokkaido, Kyushu and Kanto areas of Japan, I live and teach university in the Kansai area. I have a Japanese wife of 37 years, and two sons (and a young grandson) who live and work in Tokyo. In a country where, in my experience, Westerners, while generally treated well, are never much encouraged to integrate into the society, I sometimes wonder how I made it this far. But at this point, unless my sons decided to move abroad with their families, it looks like I am here for the duration.

Knowing that our sons were raised mainly in Japan and attended Japanese schools here, younger members of the expat community, or those who started families later than we did, have sometimes asked me about how to best manage child-rearing as a mixed Japanese-Westerner couple. Unfortunately, this is not a request to which I have been able to provide much advice. My normal answer would be to say that “child rearing is mostly hindsight.” Indeed, although in the end I feel that things turned out well, there

are many things that we would have done differently had we known what we know now, or if we had known at the beginning that we were ultimately going to remain in Japan rather than live in the United States or elsewhere. Raising children, it seems to me, is largely situational—there is no one formula that fits every family—and this is probably even more true for international couples than for couples who share a cultural background. There are all sorts of variables that may complicate the process: the spouses' individual values; the nature and history of their relationship; the language(s) that they use for communication at home; whether the couple chooses to raise their children in an urban, rural, or suburban area; and the degree with which they are able to garner support from relatives outside of their country of residence. Of course, the personalities and particular needs of the children are at the center of the child-raising activity, and so they are also bound to influence the parents' actions. This would include the parents' decisions about whether or not to send their children to local schools, as opposed to other options, such as international schools. The situation surrounding each family, and for each child within the family, will therefore have its own particularities, and parents inevitably will have to adapt to changing conditions along the way.

Indeed, the situational nature of child rearing and the process of adapting and accommodating in education are implicit in the 11 chapters that comprise the present collection. These are all qualitative research studies that provide insights into different aspects of an interesting communicative setting: non-Japanese parents in Japan interacting with an unfamiliar school system, and sometimes navigating a course between the Japanese system and schools in other countries. At the same time, most of the chapters are also personal accounts of the experiences of the parents and their children, and as such they describe the highs and lows of their interactions with the schools.

While our own children were growing up and going to Japanese schools, I often thought of myself as being in a challenging situation: I was the non-Japanese half of a mixed couple, and my views about learning and socialization were often counter to what I saw happening in the schools. But in retrospect, and especially after reading the accounts in this volume, I have come to realize that my situation was in fact a common and easy one. Although I was a

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foreigner, our marriage fit the expected norm in Japan: I was the male working parent, and my female spouse (who was Japanese) the primary caregiver in the home. She was obviously able to interact with the school system in a way that I would never have been able to do with my incomplete knowledge of Japanese and without having gone through the system myself. The various chapters in this book describe situations that are more unusual, and hence more challenging, than my own was. Chapters 1 and 4 describe the efforts of non-Japanese couples to raise their children multiculturally and multilingually within the Japanese school system, despite the bias of the system toward separation of languages and cultures—even in courses that allegedly support multiculturalism. Chapter 3 similarly addresses the theme of multilingualism and multiculturalism—specifically how one might leave “room for the minority culture” within the context of Japanese education—but in families where the parents are mixed Japanese-foreign couples. Some chapters are primarily concerned with how expat parents experience non-traditional or traditional gender roles with regard to their children’s education. For example, Chapter 2 documents the struggles of an expat single father to find “common ground” with his binational children’s school through adopting the role of *okaasan* (“mother”) expected by the school. Chapter 5, on the other hand, explores the plight of expat females who, having adopted the traditional role of caregiver in the home, are confronted with the necessity of helping their children with homework assignments despite their limited literacy in Japanese. Other chapters take account of the dual struggles experienced by expat parents who have to interact with the Japanese school system while simultaneously attending to their children’s special needs, such as deafness (Chapter 8), autism (Chapter 9), or trauma due to the children’s early separation from their biological parents (Chapter 10). Still other chapters provide windows of comparison across school systems, by documenting bicultural children’s transitions from Japanese school environments to local schools in other countries (Chapters 6 and 11) or by examining the “hidden” system of Japanese schools abroad for children who will later return to Japanese schools in Japan (Chapter 7).

While the accounts of the various authors cover a wide range of situations and experiences, a few common threads jumped out at me as I read them. The first takeout was the concern, expressed by

most of the authors, about how they could bring up their children bilingually and biculturally (or in some cases, multiculturally) within an education system that places little value on multiculturalism and even implicitly discourages it. As I suggested earlier, this was in fact the central theme for some of the authors. But for other authors as well, it was an obvious concern if less explicitly stated. This emphasis on bilingualism/multiculturalism stuck out so prominently in my reading of the various chapters that I wondered whether the initial call for submissions had asked for papers specifically related to this theme. However, when I reviewed the call for papers, I found no mention at all of “bi(multi)lingualism” or “bi(multi)culturalism” as areas of interest. Yet, the fact that most of the authors expressed a concern with bringing up their children with at least some degree of bilingual or multilingual competence suggests that this is indeed central to the *thinking* of expat parents in Japan – or at least for those from majority English-speaking countries, who account for most of the contributors to this book. It is easy to see why this would be a concern: As frequently documented, in this volume and elsewhere, children who are not ethnically Japanese, or only partially so, often find it difficult to gain acceptance as full members of the society, even if they themselves *feel* Japanese. This marginalization is sometimes manifested in the form of surprise, or even disbelief, when people find that Japanese is the native language of a child who is ethnically different from other Japanese; and one can imagine how further marginalization might occur if the child did not have another part of their identity to fall back on. So from this point of view, acquiring a degree of proficiency in a foreign language and culture—whether it be English, Hebrew, French, etc.—may in fact be more important as a tool for the identity development of non-ethnically Japanese children than as a tool for oral or written communication.

Moreover, as suggested by several of the chapters, bilingualism (or multilingualism) itself is a slippery concept, and one that requires close examination when trying to raise one’s children with two or more languages. While many of us may start with the lofty goal of raising our children as “balanced bilinguals” with equal competence in two languages, at some point we realize that there are limitations to what we can do within a society and a school system that has other priorities. In fact, researchers now widely recognize that even people who are highly accomplished users of two or more

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languages will tend to have differential proficiencies in their languages depending on the situations and purposes of use. Belgian sociolinguist Jan Blommaert, for example, has astutely pointed out that no one knows all of any language, even one's so-called "native language," but that we all develop specific "partial competence" in one or more languages depending on our needs:

Our real 'language' is very much a biographical given, the structure of which reflects our own histories and those of the communities in which we spent our lives (Blommaert, 2010, p. 103).

It is difficult to say, therefore, that there is such a thing as a perfectly balanced bilingual, a fact that is not lost on the authors represented in the present book. Many of the authors came to encourage particular aspects of their children's bi/multilingual development—for example, spoken language, literacy, or using different languages according to the purpose—rather than overloading the children with more of the minority language or culture than they would be able to deal with psychologically. This is a wise move in my view, but one that requires a good deal of reflection and adaptation.

A second thread that I have found running through this book is the importance of developing a community as a part of the children's education. I am reminded here of the traditional African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," which has also become somewhat of a truism in English. In considering the situations of expatriate parents in Japan, however, this is more easily said than applied. In the present studies, the geographical "villages" in which most of the parents live do not include other expat parents who can be called on for support as they struggle with an unfamiliar school system, or have their children do things that may conflict with school values and policies. And while some of these parents have indicated that they were, in fact, able to find support within their local schools, others describe how the schools proved to be indifferent or even antagonistic to their needs. All of the parents seem to have realized, however, that they needed to reach out beyond their physical village for support, and to create their own communities within the global village. The good news is that modern telecommunications has made

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it increasingly easy to connect with relatives in Japan or abroad, as well as to create online support systems with families that have similar needs. This expanded possibility for community building is a major difference, I find, between my own generation of expats raising children in Japan and the current one.

Finally, as a researcher, I would like to commend the editors and the authors for putting together this fine collection of qualitative studies, although I do hope that it is only the beginning and not a final statement. As I suggested earlier, the studies in this volume mainly address the struggles of Western (English-speaking) parents, including those with Japanese spouses. The studies do make me wonder whether other prominent groups of immigrants and sojourners in Japan—such as Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipinos and Brazilians—would experience Japanese education in the same way. My own suspicion is that they would not, but this is a question that will have to be left for a future volume.

And as a parent, I expect that these studies, when read as “stories,” will serve as a valuable reference for younger expatriate parents attempting to assess their own situations and make educated decisions based on what others have experienced. Fortunately, the authors do not attempt to prescribe “right ways” of doing things, but rather offer their stories as windows into the types of dilemmas faced by expat parents and the accommodations that they ultimately make. Certainly, I wish that such a reference had been available when our own children were beginning school.

Reference

Blommaert, J. (2010). *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge University Press.

Introduction

Melodie Lorie Cook, University of Niigata Prefecture, Niigata, Japan
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The Purpose and Rationale of This Book

From Melodie:

As a Canadian parent of adopted and foster children who were born in Japan, I found myself struggling with teachers' lack of knowledge about such children and their belief that children's problems stem from their home lives and can be cured through medication. Because I am in an intercultural marriage, I find that the general Japanese public, as well as teachers, make assumptions about my children's language abilities, among other things. Putting my training in doing research to the service of my family and others like mine, I conducted a study (Cook, 2018) and learned that my experiences were not unique. For example, not only did many schools insist on children taking medication long past the time when children needed it, they were also asked to do activities in class which may have been difficult to do (e.g. family trees) or downright upsetting (Mother's/Father's Day projects). As I mentioned in "About This Book," there is a great need for intercultural parents to tell their stories and share what they have learned with others who may benefit from their research.

Although there is information about the experiences of intercultural parents living in Japan in fiction (Kamata, 2019, Lowitz, 2015) and in news articles (Kittaka, n.d.), there seems to be little or perhaps no researched work of this kind in English covering a variety of intercultural family experiences with schooling in Japan. It is our hope to fill this gap with much-needed information. In this book, we seek to explore a variety of issues affecting long-term intercultural families. Some questions our chapter authors have attempted to answer include the following:

- How can non-Japanese or mixed-race Japanese children navigate their identities in school?

- How can a single father fit into the predominantly mother-dominated culture of schools?
- How do children fare in Japanese schools overseas?
- What issues exist for parents whose children have challenges?
- How can third-culture children navigate family culture, religion, and different school cultures?
- How can intercultural parents cope with the demands of homework when they are not fluent users of Japanese?
- How can intercultural parents cope with minority culture and language?
- What can intercultural parents do when schooling in Japan is not the best fit for their children?

Readers are invited, of course, to read the entire volume, but they may also benefit from reading those chapters that are of immediate and particular relevance to them. Those intercultural parents schooling their children in Japan will likely find much that resonates with their own experiences, from struggling to help their children study, to understanding their children's identities as they navigate schools themselves.

From Louise:

I have always been interested in connecting with parents in a similar situation. When my three children were small, I eagerly listened to those with older children and more parenting experience. Now that my youngest is heading to university, recently I often find myself in the position of sharing my own stories to encourage parents of younger children.

While Japan is still generally seen as being culturally homogeneous, international marriage between a Japanese and non-Japanese partner accounts for 3 to 4 percent of the total number of marriages (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2016), and many of the bicultural children from these marriages are being educated in the Japanese system. In recent years, a small but growing cohort of families in which neither partner is Japanese are choosing to live long-

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term in Japan and educate their children at Japanese schools. There are a wide range of international schools in Japan, but tuition charges and the fact that they are mostly concentrated in the bigger cities puts such schools out of the reach of many intercultural families, both financially and geographically.

As a writer for the English media, I was seeing a dearth of articles about intercultural families who have chosen to raise and educate children in Japan, so I began writing the kind of articles I longed to read myself. I have examined various aspects of the international parenting experience in Japan for the *Japan Times*, from pregnancy and giving birth, through to the quintessentially Japanese experiences of *bukatsu* (after school clubs) and *juken* (school entrance exams). I have also covered more niche topics such as coping with a child's learning difference in the Japanese system, and sending teenage offspring abroad for school while the rest of the family remain in Japan. The latter is a topic that I am often asked about by other international parents and which inspired my chapter at the end of this book.

More recently I have been contributing occasional columns to *Savvy Tokyo* of a more reflective nature; looking back at the school-age and teen years as a “seasoned” mother, while also thinking about issues with young adults who are entering the university stage and beyond. I am constantly humbled by feedback from other parents who say they have found the articles helpful and interesting, or who thank me for providing a launching point for deeper conversations about the issues and challenges we face in our lives here.

As my co-editor Melodie notes, there is great value in allowing intercultural parents to tell their stories and share what they have learned, and we are delighted this book has come to fruition. We have been impressed by the willingness of the chapter authors to share their stories within an academic framework, and we hope parents and researchers alike will find much to interest them in this volume.

About Our Contributors

From Melodie

Our authors come from a variety of backgrounds. While all are themselves educators, some have also published fiction or non-fiction, and some regularly write for online news sources. However, what they have in common is that they are all intercultural parents, raising their children in Japan and thus confronting a number of challenges. While many of these things are common to most other intercultural parents, such as making decisions about bilingualism, dealing with schools, etc., others have an extra layer of difficulty. Not only are they trying to navigate the Japanese public school system but are also doing so with children who are hearing impaired, autistic, or adopted/fostered; in other words, they are schooling children with challenges, which may be done differently in their own home countries. Here, they are sharing their personal experiences, but in an academic way.

Research Methods

Doing research about oneself and one's family requires sensitivity and thus, we have left our authors to choose the best methodologies for their purposes. Although we did insist on researched work, as Romney and Curtis (2010) did in *Color, Race and English Language Teaching: Shades of Meaning*, we allowed authors to use a number of different methodologies for their studies. While some chose "traditional" methods such as document analysis (see Chapter 7), the majority of researchers have chosen qualitative approaches. Below is a table adapted from Hughes and Pennington (2017), which compares and contrasts the three primary methods used by the researchers in this volume:

Table 1.

Research Methods Used in This Volume

Approach	Disciplinary Roots	Possible Questions
Autoethnography	Literary Arts Anthropology Communication Studies	What am I learning by examining my identities, power, privileges, and penalties within one or more cultural contexts?
Ethnography	Anthropology Sociology	What are the culture characteristics of “others”? What can be learned from the cultural contexts of “others”?
Narrative inquiry: Autobiography (life history)	Literary Arts Sociology Theology Anthropology History	What story or stories should I write about myself (or others) that can serve to document, justify, and/or atone for my (or their) experiences?

Because narrative and human experience are intertwined, “traditional” empirical research methods, such as quantitative methods, may not lend themselves to the kind of research presented in this volume. Rather than gathering statistics with the view of making generalizations, the authors in this volume share stories, with the hope that these stories will resonate with you, the reader. In this case, we hope and believe that non-Japanese parents in Japan will feel less isolated in their experiences and, at the same time, get insights that will help them with their own families.

Whither the Men?

Readers will notice the imbalance in gender representation in this book. When we put out the call for chapters, almost all the proposals came from female authors. Conscious of redressing this

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issue, we invited more male contributors, but still more female than male voices will be heard. This may not be surprising, however, as in Japan more mothers are engaged in their children's school lives than their full-time working husbands. As Nagatomo and Cook (2018) found, intercultural working men generally felt they had less time to devote to their families and left that to their Japanese wives. On the other hand, intercultural mothers tended to be more involved, whether they worked full-time or not, and were willing to share their experiences.

About the Spelling

As our contributors come from different countries, in order to hono(u)r their voices, we have accepted their using the spelling conventions of their own countries.

About the Editors

Melodie Lorie Cook is a Professor at the University of Niigata Prefecture in Niigata, Japan. She has been teaching and researching in Japan since 1993 and in addition to her paid work, is also an advocate for adoption and fostering by intercultural parents. She holds a PhD from Macquarie University and is a past editor of the Japan Association for Language Teaching flagship journal, *JALT Journal*. Melodie also has a regular column in the online news and information community *Savvy Tokyo* writing about her experiences as a foster and adoptive parent.

Louise George Kittaka is a bilingual writer, university lecturer and cross-cultural specialist from New Zealand. She writes for various English media platforms, including as a regular columnist and features writer for the *Japan Times* newspaper and the *Savvy Tokyo* online community. She has contributed to numerous EFL textbooks and study materials for the Japanese market, and conducts cross-cultural training programs for families leaving or arriving in Japan on corporate assignments. She lectures at Shirayuri Women's University in Tokyo. Louise has also been a long-time member of AFWJ (the Association of Foreign Wives of Japanese) and held various leadership positions over the years.

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