

Some Problems in the Japanese Foster Care System (1)

Lloyd B. Graham

Historical Background,

Foster care of children has been practised in Japan for centuries. It appears to have had its beginnings as a practice to which the nobility sometimes resorted. The word 'sato' in the Japanese term 'sato-go' for 'foster child' refers to a rural hamlet comprising fifty dwellings, and was an administrative unit established by the Taika Reformation of 464 A.D. The word 'sato-go' appears in writings of the time of Prince Shōtoku (574-621 A.D.), in the *Manyōshū*, and in the *Genji Monogatari*. The term has the connotation of a child placed in the care of a person in a distant hamlet. Legend has it that in the Tenth Century, the daughter of a nobleman, Fujiwara Kimitō, was placed in a foster home in Iwakura district in the northern part Kyōto. It is said also that the daughter of the Emperor Sanjō was enabled to recover from a serious illness while in a foster home in Iwakura. In his "Study of the Foster Parent System," Miyoshi attributes the emergence of this form of care to such circumstances as lack of mother's milk, superstition, disposition of illegitimate offspring, imprisonment of parents, and as a way of preventing mobility of labourers.¹⁾ The "Record of the Five-Family Neighbourhood" (*Go-nin-gumi Sho*) of Kyōto dating from Tokugawa times indicates that it was forbidden to abandon children, and, when a peasant child lost its parents, the relatives, the village headman, and the senior farmer were required to consult with each other and to set aside a field the annual tribute from which was to be used to maintain the dependent child.

In 1905, Ishii Jūji, founder of Okayama Ikuji-in (Child care institution), inaugurated a system of foster placement for infants, and records of Nara Prefecture indicate that about 1907 the village of Kita Yamato in Ikoma County had a concentration of foster parents. After the Russo-Japanese war, official policy decreed that "placements with individuals are preferable to group nurture," and commenced a foster parent system based on charitable persons and religious groups.²⁾ Priest Inoue Noboru of Shōkakuji Temple in Kizu-chō in Nara was noted for his foster home recruiting efforts in Kitawa Village and in the neighbouring village of Yamadasō and Fukenji in Kyōto Prefecture. The Hei-an Gitoku-kai in Kyōto, Kōsai-kai in Ōsaka Prefecture, and Haku-ai-sha in Ōsaka City began placing children in foster homes in these villages at this time. One drawback of the system was the practice of fee-collecting by those responsible for introducing the potential foster parents to the institutions, and it became necessary for women's organizations to undertake protective services and to provide necessary introductions. Between 1919 and 1924, approximately one

1) Miyoshi, Akira, "Sato-Oya Seido no Kenkyū." (*Tōkyō: Nihon Jidō Fukushi Kyōkai*, 1963), pp. 10-12.

2) *Ibid.*

hundred children were placed for the following reasons: lack of mother's milk: 39%, one parent missing: 23%, mother in hotel service: 15%, born out of wedlock: 10%, and other reasons: 13%.³⁾

Beginning in the years after 1910, prefectural authorities provided health examinations for the children, and gave direction to the foster parents. The villages began giving grants in 1935 in aid of the care of the foster children. The discovery of instances of cruelty and inadequate care led to implementation of "Regulations Controlling Foster Parents," such as the 1895 order by the City of Tōkyō, the 1897 order by Kyōto Prefecture, and orders in 1903 and 1914 by Kanagawa and Nara prefectures respectively. In 1924 the Social Bureau of Kyōto Prefecture created a "Foster Children's Guardian Society" (Sato-go Hogo-kai) in the Raku-hoku district. The Haku-ai-sha Home in Ōsaka placed children in foster homes in Nara and Wakayama prefectures with the aid of the Wakayama Prefectural Police. The Shinsei-juku Home in Kōbe placed children in farm homes in the Minō and Akashi districts. In Tōkyō, the Municipal Yōiku-in made placements in Saitama and Chiba prefectures, while the Fukuden-kai placed children in Kanagawa Prefecture and in the vicinity of the Tama River.

With the enactment of the Relief Law in 1932, foster placement of children already in institutional care was forbidden. But, because of opposition from institutions, various pretexts were invented to enable placements of children from institutions to continue not only in Tōkyō but in Nara, Okayama, Ibaragi, Gumma, Aomori, Miyagi, Akita and Shimane prefectures. In those years of rural poverty, however, the interest in placement of children seems to have been based on economic considerations. In the face of the food shortage during World War II, the placement of foster children came to a standstill.

Post-war Developments.

The first post-war consideration of foster home care was with the encouragement of the Occupation Forces at the First National Child Welfare Conference held on 18 May, 1947. There followed the enactment of the new Child Welfare Law in January, 1948, according to which jurisdiction over the placement of foster

Table 1
Numbers of Registered Foster Parents. Parents with Foster Children, and Children Involved (October, 1948—September, 1964)⁴⁾

Date	Registered Foster Parents	Parents with Foster Children	Foster Children Involved
October 1948	574	471	536
March ⁵⁾ 1949	1,280	1,162	1,368
October ⁶⁾ 1949	4,153	2,909	3,278
October ⁷⁾ 1950	7,429	4,859	5,488
December 1951	9,471	5,944	6,619
" 1952	11,310	6,736	7,488
" 1953	12,953	7,210	7,979
" 1954	14,419	7,673	8,519
" 1955	16,200	8,283	9,111
" 1956	17,836	8,479	9,348
" 1957	18,498	8,537	9,348
" 1958	18,549	8,646	9,618
" 1959	19,052	8,278	9,231
" 1960	19,914	8,095	8,986
" 1961	18,980	7,638	8,735
" 1962	19,305	7,543	8,631
September 1963	19,225	7,137	8,098
" ⁸⁾ 1964	18,519	6,749	7,709

3) Ibid., p. 13.

Sources:

- 4) Japanese Government, Ministry of Health and Welfare, "Welfare White Paper, 1963," Table 11-18, p. 180.
- 5) Japanese National Council of Social Welfare, "Social Welfare Yearbook, 1960," Table 120, p. 90.
- 6) Japanese Government, Administrative Management Agency, "Survey of Child Welfare," 30 June, 1961.
- 7) Miyoshi, op. cit., p. 95.
- 8) Japanese Government, Ministry of Health and Welfare, "Welfare White Paper, 1964", Table 2-8-2, p. 248.

children was to be exercised by Child Welfare and Guidance Centers (Jidō Sōdan-sho). The phenomenal early growth of the post-war foster care program is indicated by Table 1.

The importance assigned to foster care may be judged from Article 27 (3) of the Child Welfare Law which specified as follows the courses open to a prefectural governor in taking measures "in regard to a child reported to him":

(3) Place such children under the care of foster parents (hereinafter to mean such persons who have been deemed competent by the governor of prefecture and who wish to bring up a child having no guardian or a child whose supervision by his guardian is deemed inadequate), or of vocational guidance parents (hereinafter to mean such persons who have been deemed competent by the governor of prefecture, and who desire to give protection to a child with no guardian, or a child deemed to be inadequately cared for by his guardian, providing such child has completed the course of compulsory education as provided for by the School Education Law, to take the child into his home or to have such child visit his home regularly, to give him protection and to give necessary guidance for self-support according to the abilities of such child), or admit such child into an infant home, a home for dependent, neglected and abused children, a home for mentally retarded children, a mentally retarded children's day-care center, a home for blind, deaf and dumb children, a home for physically weak children, a hospital-home for crippled children, or a home for training and education of juvenile delinquents.⁹⁾

That it was not accidental for "foster parents" to have been given first mention in the above clause is confirmed by the clear expression of intention appearing in Sec. 4 (1) of Chapter 1 of the 1948 Vice Ministerial Instruction, entitled, "Concerning Operation of Family Care by Foster Parents, etc.":

When making a disposition or change of disposition in accordance with Sec. 1 (4) of Article 27 of the Child Welfare Law, the governor of prefecture must endeavour to make the utmost use of foster parents. However, when considering placement of physically weak children with difficulty in bodily function, mentally retarded children, or children with problem behaviour, the placement of such children with severe problems may be made only with foster parents who have a depth of understanding and intensity of purpose.¹⁰⁾

Furthermore, the way to foster care is opened for children in institutions under the provisions of Sec.4(3) of the same chapter:

Superintendents of Child Welfare and Guidance Centers are constantly to maintain close liaison with child welfare institutions in their areas of jurisdiction, are to be familiar with their situation, and, whenever informed of the suitability for foster placement of a child in an institution, must complete the necessary procedure.¹¹⁾

It is not clear to what extent the early success in recruiting foster homes was attributable to the kindling of enthusiasm by the publicity which was conducted as suggested in the

9) Japanese Government, Ministry of Health and Welfare, "Child Welfare Laws of Japan, 1958," p. 18.

10) "Sato-Oya-tō, Katei Yōiku no Un-ei ni kan shite." (Instruction No. 50, Vice Minister of Health and Welfare to Prefectural Governors, 4 Oct. 1948.) Author's translation.

11) Ibid. Author's translation.

1948 Vice Ministerial Instruction. Section 4 of the Preamble, entitled "Extension of the Family Care System," opens by emphasizing publicity :

- (a) To heighten general understanding of the family care system by the production of posters, pamphlets and leaflets, and by obtaining the cooperation of the press, radio, and women's journals ;¹²⁾

The cooperation of voluntary "child welfare committeemen" in an "each-one-teach-one" campaign was another method suggested :

- (b) To gain complete understanding of the family care system by Child Welfare and Guidance Centers, by Child Welfare Officers, guidance personnel, and voluntary child welfare committeemen, and to exert utmost efforts for the extension of family care in the areas of their jurisdiction ; particularly, to have each child welfare committeeman endeavour to recommend from his district more than one family deemed suitable as foster parents, thus creating first a supply of foster families in which children may be placed, and providing a basis for further extension of foster care.¹³⁾

Other methods suggested were :

- (c) To create model "Foster-child villages," to draw attention to good existing villages or foster parents, thus heightening general interest ;
 (d) To obtain the cooperation of women's organizations, young people's groups, alumnae associations of girls' schools, Medical Associations, Midwives' Branch Groups, etc., in endeavouring to discover and popularize foster parents ;
 (e) To direct child welfare committeemen to notify Child Welfare and Guidance Centers whenever they discover a family suited for providing foster care to children in their area of jurisdiction ;
 (f) To solicit the cooperation of police and physicians, etc., in reporting to Child Welfare and Guidance Centers any children discovered needing care.¹⁴⁾

Subsequent Trends.

It is evident from Table 1 that, in spite of the nominal availability of many "registered" foster parents, less and less of them actually have had children in their care since the peak year of 1948. Children in need of care have been sent in increasing numbers for care in infant homes or in homes for dependent, neglected and abused children. The demand for such services has resulted in an increase in the capacity of the latter type of institution from 11,091 to 37,398 during the period 1948-1964. A comparison is made in Table 2 of the combined capacity of infant homes and homes for dependent, neglected and abused children with the numbers of children in foster homes during the years 1951-1962. This table shows that only in 1955 did the number of foster children reach a level which was even one quarter of the capacity of congregate care institutions for children. The proportion has been decreasing steadily since 1955. Only in certain few localities, such as Gumma

12) Ibid. Author's translation.

13) Ibid. Author's translation.

14) Ibid. Author's translation.

Table 2
Comparison of Numbers of Children in Foster Homes with Capacities of
Congregate Care Institutions, 1951-1962

	Year								
	1951	1953	1955	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
Congregate Care Capacity (A)	28,825	32,845	35,699	39,117	39,436	40,259	40,540	41,365	40,950
Foster Children (B)	6,619	7,979	9,111	9,348	9,618	9,231	8,986	8,735	8,631
(B) as % of (A)	22.9	24.3	25.5	23.8	24.4	22.9	22.1	21.1	21.0

Sources : Table 1, supra ; Welfare White Papers, 1956-63.

Prefecture, has the opposite trend been noted.¹⁵⁾

Discussion of Reasons for Under-development of Foster Care.

While the Welfare Ministry's annual White Papers have been consistent in extolling the merits of foster home care for children, a thorough analysis has been lacking of the reasons for failure of the foster care system to develop. The comments made in White Papers for the years 1958 to 1964 follow :

1958 The reasons for the decrease in placements of foster children in spite of an increase in the number of registered foster parents are :

- (1) The demands made by foster parents as to the children are too difficult ;
- (2) The low amount of the allowance.¹⁶⁾

1959 The reasons for the decline in the proportion of foster families caring for foster children are :

- (1) Exaggerated expectations concerning foster children ;
- (2) Low allowance ;
- (3) Confusion between the concepts of foster parenthood and adoption, etc.¹⁷⁾

1960 The reasons for lack of development of foster care are :

- (1) Requirements of foster parents as to foster children are too difficult ;
- (2) Allowance paid is too small ;
- (3) Many registered foster parents actually are in search of an adopted child.¹⁸⁾

1961 The reasons for decrease in foster care are :

- (1) Adoption-motivated foster parents are numerous ;
- (2) Foster parents have expectations which are difficult to meet ;
- (3) Japanese national character has difficulty in feeling comfortable with this system.¹⁹⁾

1962 No mention.

1963 Measures are necessary to promote the foster care system.²⁰⁾

1964 It is necessary both to deepen the awareness of the nation as a whole concerning the foster parent system and to strengthen the quality by measures to raise the level of foster parents' child care technique.²¹⁾

15) Miyoshi, op. cit., p. 100. A Gumma survey for 1948-56 found institutional population had increased from 46 to 359, while foster children had shown an increase from 8 to 255, with a high point in 1955 when the number of foster children was 77 per cent of the number in institutions.

16) Ministry of Health and Welfare, "White Paper, 1958," p. 227.

17) Ministry of Health and Welfare, "White Paper, 1959," p. 273.

18) Ministry of Health and Welfare, "White Paper, 1960," p. 202.

19) Ministry of Health and Welfare, "White Paper, 1961," p. 259.

20) Ministry of Health and Welfare, "White Paper, 1963," p. 190.

21) Ministry of Health and Welfare, "White Paper, 1964," p. 247.

A 1961 Ministry survey of foster parents discovered that of 18,930 registered foster parents, 29 per cent (5,483 families) had once cared for foster children but were not doing so when surveyed, 40 per cent (7,598 families) were caring for foster children, and 31 per cent (5,849 families) had never had children placed in their care. The survey indicated further that 33.5 per cent of the total families were motivated by a desire to obtain an adoptive child.²²⁾ It would seem from these data that there is some justification for stating in the White Papers for 1959–1961 that one reason for the lack of development of foster care in Japan is the tendency of some of those registered as foster parents to consider foster care as only a step in arranging to adopt children. An examination of the following passages from the Vice Ministerial Instruction of 1948 suggests a similar lack of differentiation:

Sec. 4(2) When placing a child with foster parents, a prefectural governor shall endeavour to select foster parents best suited to that child.²³⁾

Sec. 9(2) When, in his own area of jurisdiction, there is no child suitable for placement with foster parents living in the area, a prefectural governor shall inform the governors of other prefectures by sending documents related to such foster parents, and the foster parents must be notified to this effect.²⁴⁾

Sec. 8 When foster parents desire to adopt foster children in their care, the Superintendent of the Child Welfare and Guidance Center shall make an adequate investigation of the situation and endeavour to bring it to completion.²⁵⁾

The tendency of some foster parent applicants to stipulate that in order for a child to be acceptable for placement, the child must meet certain exaggerated standards established by the foster parents may be seen as one more manifestation of the confusion which has been unwittingly the result of having foster care and adoption so closely interwoven under the child welfare provisions which have been in effect since 1948.

With reference to the insufficient monetary recognition of the services of foster parents, this problem has received some attention from the government. Foster parents, in addition to the foster child's board rate, now receive ¥ 500 monthly honorarium, and provision of equipment for foster care of a child is enabled to some extent by a grant of ¥ 2,000 per foster child, payable at the time of placement. A monthly sum of ¥ 100 per Grade IV or older foster child is another recently inaugurated payment designed to aid foster parents in meeting the expenses of "guidance and training in living". Foster parents receive a payment of ¥ 450. per foster child at the year-end to pay for New Year's treats.

The point concerning the Japanese national character would seem to require an extensive program of interpretation as suggested by the 1964 White Paper.

An obstacle which received no attention in the various White Papers is that posed by the handling of foster care and adoption on an undifferentiated basis by over-worked, understaffed Child Welfare and Guidance Centers.

22) Children's Bureau, Ministry of Health and Welfare, "Child Welfare White Paper, 1963," p. 100.

23) "Sato-Oya-tō, Katei Yōiku no Un-ei ni kan shite," (Instruction No. 50, 4 Oct. 1948) Chapter 1, Author's translation.

24) Ibid.

25) Ibid.

Conclusion.

After an early period of considerable activity, foster home care in Japan has been in a "plateau" phase for some years. Various difficulties seem to prevent an extension of the benefits of this form of child care, and some thought is being given to measures needed to cope with these obstacles. In a subsequent paper the question of a possible role for the voluntary agency will be discussed, and an interim report on the recruiting service being provided by one such agency under contract to two municipalities and one prefecture will be presented.