

## Japanese People Should Learn from Filipinos

By Miro KASAI

Comment based on the  
"Culture" page in the previous issue, titled  
"Japanese Desire a Big Family"



"You have only one kid!" "Did you say you had no kid?" "How come?"

These are phrases popularly flowing from Filipinos surprised that Japanese families do not try to have more children. In the Philippines, a family having only one or two children looks unusual as the standard family size is regarded as seven to eight persons. It means a couple has five to six children regardless of their social status. The Philippines is a well-known Roman Catholic country. Nearly 85% of the population is Catholic, and the church strictly prohibits birth control. Naturally, the population grows year by year. Currently, they say the national population is approximately 85 million. Quite possibly the Philippine population will exceed that of Japan some time in the first part of the 21st century.

The Philippines is generally regarded as one of the poor countries in the world. Partly it is correct, but we should not miss out the fact that the people get daily food and something to wear and find somewhere to live in. Therefore, unlike some other economically poor countries in the world, Filipinos can somehow get along, though not rich. This is a very important fact to know why the Philippines can hold such a big population which is growing still.

In prewar days, the size of a Japanese family was just like that of the Philippines today. Regardless of economic or social status, the family consisted of parents and five or six children together with grandparents. In those days, Japan was not wealthy enough for poor people to enjoy such daily life as the Japanese nowadays relish. The well-known TV drama story of "Oshin" depicted people's actual life of several decades ago in the prewar days. Why many people were impressed by "Oshin" was mainly that it was not a fake story, but it could happen to anybody in Japan. The important thing is that in the past, family members helped each other under very difficult circumstances. After the war, Japan got widespread influence from the United States. There is a big difference in cultural backgrounds between Japan and the United States.

In the United States, one was required to be individually independent from childhood and children are allowed to take an opposite attitude to their parents. In Japan, however, children are supposed to follow the parents without protest. What young Japanese generations learned from Americans was it would be more significant to be independent rather than just saying yes to the parents. In school, such a concept has come to be adopted. So-called American-style education has gradually been accepted here and there. Consequently it caused a generation gap inside the family. Old generations complained that young children would not listen to their parents and grandparents. They are sad

to lose the position of family educator. In addition to such a tendency, Japanese society has come to forget about having a big family in a single house, which used to be commonly done in prewar days. The size of residence has been a problem. Due to economic reasons, people had to live in a restricted space like a condominium unit. Because of the law of succession, a large percentage of assets, namely the estate, could not be wholly succeeded to by the next generation. The new generation had to look for a limited new space after paying off a considerable amount of tax by selling what they succeeded to from their parents. Then the limited space could allow only a few family members to live together. Naturally, it becomes hard to have a big family of many children or with grandparents.

It is said that Japanese families had created a warm and humane lifestyle. Unfortunately, however, it can no longer be expected. The young generation in Japan no longer has any complaint about such a situation because from their birth they grew up in a small residential area, without knowing how the life of their parents or grandparents was in the past. Recently, it is often pointed out that the American occupation after the war collapsed the traditional Japanese lifestyle and forced Japanese people to follow their style. It may not be true that Americans broke traditional Japanese ways of living by force because Americans and Japanese are fundamentally different. It is not necessary for Japanese to follow American ways. A lot of factors are so different from each other – historical backgrounds, culture, space of land, natural resources, etc.

The Philippines was occupied by the United States for over half a century when American culture was brought in even to make English a national common language. Japan was occupied for eight years, while the Philippines was once colonized and totally governed under an American regime. And yet, the Filipino people did not lose their own lifestyle. Though English became the common language, a variety of Filipino local tongues are still alive. Traditional culture was less well maintained. Protestantism brought in by the United States is a minority, unlike Catholicism introduced by the Spaniards, the previous occupier, and the latter is still the most influential religious power over the people.

Some Filipinos wonder why the Japanese like to accept anything that Americans introduce, while another person wonders why Japan did not try to take its own way as an independent nation. Over 50 years, the Filipino people were forced to follow Americans without getting any beneficial results, and learned that the Philippines must take their own way without following the former occupier. The history of the Philippines is short, and yet the people maintain their tradition proudly.

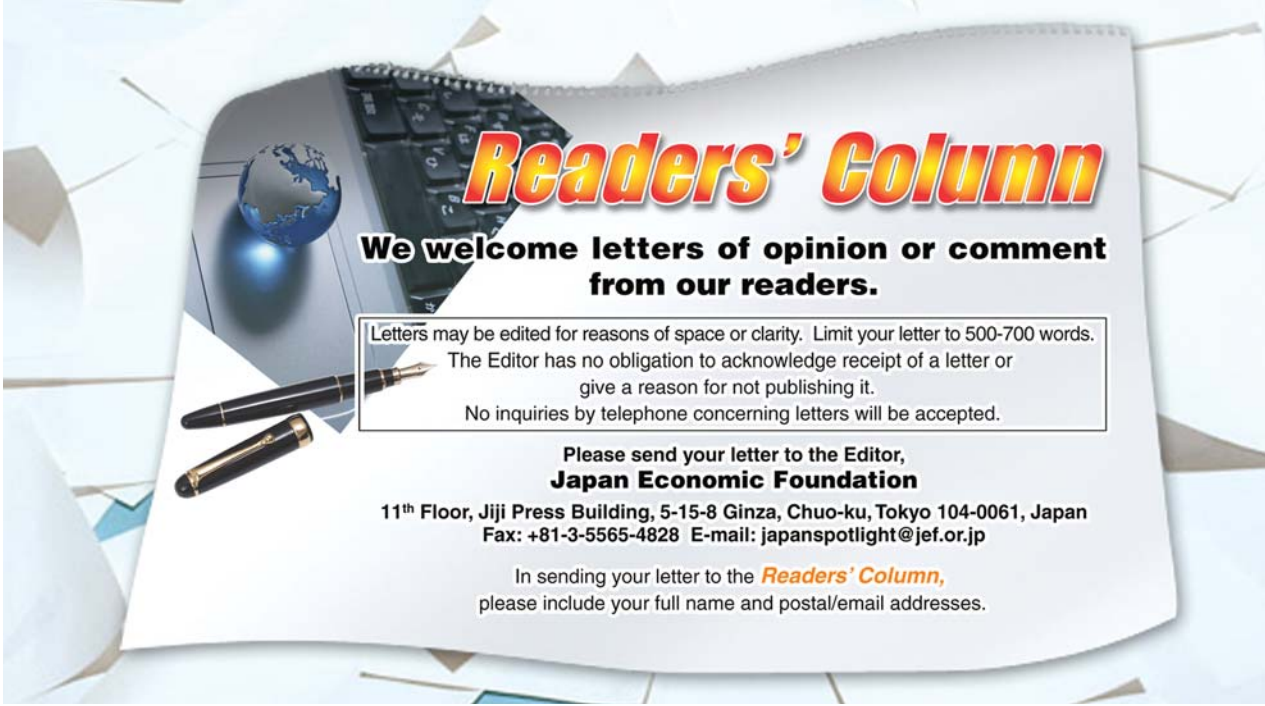
Japan, though once occupied by America, should not forget history and traditional culture, which had been kept over several centuries. A typical American family consists of a few members who are independent from – sometimes ignorant of – each other. Japanese families have become similar to American ones, though subconsciously. Today the Japanese government is looking for efficient countermeasures against the falling birthrate in view of its decreasing population. The decreasing birthrate is not a sudden phenomenon. This situation has been brought in since the period when Japan looked for a better standard of living as in the United States, with families trying to have fewer children. It was different in the Philippines. Firstly, because of the spiritual background of people supported by Catholicism, people had families consisting of many children, rather than having a small family in favor of economic happiness. Eventually, the Philippines scarcely sees murder or homicide inside the family or among lineal ascendants, which often arises in Japan. The Filipinos know family members must help each other no matter how the situation might be critical to them. Or, the Filipinos might have learned it is wise to take another way of living, different from the American lifestyle, to seek real happiness.

It will be hard for Japanese today to take the same step as the Filipinos, but at least they should learn that the Filipinos have chosen a different course from their occupier.

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