

Sasha: a Jackson-course old-timer

Sasha started JJLS in preschool. She moved from *hoshuko* to Jackson course in 2004 when she entered 3rd grade. In April 2007, she moved from Level-3 to Level-4 Jackson course. She chose English as a medium of interview.

Sasha considers herself as ‘American’ because she was born in the United States, but also ‘Asian’ because her parents are Asian and she could speak Chinese and Japanese besides English. Sasha told us that her mother is ‘Chinese/Malaysian’ and her father is ‘Japanese’. Sasha said she attends JJLS in order to learn how to write and speak in Japanese so that she can go around in Japan by herself and interact with her grandparents there. Sasha also has been going to Chinese-language school on Friday nights for about eight years.

She remembered *hoshuko* was hard.

Author: What do you think about *hoshuko* class? . . .

Sasha: Actually, I think theirs is a bit harder and it sort of challenges you more and I couldn’t exactly keep up and that’s why my dad put me in the Jackson course so that I can enjoy it better.

Author: Uh huh.

Sasha: So that I can keep up and stuff.

Author: Do you have a same image about it still? . . .

Sasha: Yeah. I still remember some parts of it.

Author: Okay.

Sasha: Sometimes I didn’t understand what teachers were saying when they called on me and I am like one of the people who didn’t know a lot of the *kanji*.

Sasha’s father, Yoshihiko, came to the United States from Japan in 1984 to attend a business school. He recalls, ‘I was not comfortable in the Japanese society’. He feels that he is in-between ‘Japanese’ and ‘American’. He feels his children are ‘American, or really, Asian American’, he said.

He decided to send his children to JJLS because, he explained, ‘I did not have time to teach them Japanese myself’. Seeing his children struggled with the workload in the *hoshuko* class, he moved them to the Jackson course, because, he said, ‘I just wanted them to be able to communicate in Japanese with me’. He found the Jackson course ‘wonderful’ – if it were not for the Jackson course, he added, ‘my children would have stopped coming to JJLS’. He described the Jackson course as ‘less demanding’ as the teacher teaches at a level appropriate to students’ and classmates having ‘similar background and goals’ in learning Japanese. ‘It is great that Sasha is in the multicultural [not just Japanese] environment, as Sasha has much in common with them’, he added.

Mayumi: moved from Hoshuko to Jackson course after 6th grade

Mayumi was one of three 6th-grade students who moved from *hoshuko* to Jackson course when Level-4 class was first offered in April 2007. Mayumi started coming to JJLS in preschool. The interview was done in English one month before she moved to Jackson course.

Mayumi said she is ‘half Japanese’ and ‘half Russian’. Her mother’s ethnicity, attending Japanese-language school, visiting Japan often, and having *kimono* all make her ‘Japanese’, she said. According to her, what makes one ‘Japanese’ is parentage, not language, but she added that she feels she is more ‘Japanese’ than ‘Russian’ because she speaks the language.

Mayumi began JJLS because her mother wanted her to speak Japanese to her grandparents. Mayumi now enjoys learning about her ‘own culture’ and wants to be bilingual. Mayumi described her experience in *hoshuko* with diverse students as follows: ‘It is fast-paced because we have to do a week-worth of work in one day. So, they don’t take time to explain and it is hard for me to understand because I’m not advanced in Japanese . . . Some find it just right speed because they came from Japan and are here for a short time. Japanese is their native language and it comes naturally to them. For me, Japanese is my second language and it takes a while to think in Japanese . . . I cannot understand things sometimes. It is frustrating. When I give up, it becomes boring. In regular school, I know all the language and I can form questions better.’¹⁶

Mayumi used to think that ‘Jackson course is like JFL but with Japanese as a medium of instruction’. Her mother introduced the idea that she move there. Before she was in 6th grade, she always felt ‘why change now’ because she came all the way in *hoshuko*. But, graduating from the elementary school after 6th grade was an opportunity to think about changing a course. Mayumi thought, ‘teachers in Jackson course might explain things better’ and went to the trial class. There, she could understand everything the teacher said. Mayumi decided to move to Jackson course from 7th grade.

During our observation in both *hoshuko* and Jackson-course classes, there was a striking difference in the way Mayumi behaved in class. In *hoshuko* class, she was very quiet, although she gave correct answers whenever teacher called on her. It looked as though the talkative *chuzai* students who dominated casual conversation marginalized her. In Jackson course, however, Mayumi was very active and talkative, initiating discussions and even teasing the teacher.

Mayumi’s mother, Naoko, came to the United States in the 1980s in order to attend a university. She said, ‘I disliked the expectation in Japan that everyone has to act the same way’. She married ‘a [Russian-] American’ and stayed in the United States. Naoko said, ‘I might have forgotten about Japan if Mayumi was not born’.

Naoko feels that coming to JJLS and learning Japanese language and culture helped Mayumi realize that she is ‘Japanese’. However, Naoko found the homework to be too much and *kanji* too difficult. Naoko said ‘the diversity of students in *hoshuko* [some *chuzai* and some *eiju*] is natural’. In the past, however, she said, ‘Some *chuzai* students misbehaved, letting the steam off their frustration in English environment at regular school. Some of them even teased mistakes made by some *eiju* students. The problem ended when such *chuzai* students went back to Japan’.

When the Jackson course began, Naoko suggested Mayumi to join. But, Mayumi felt that the ‘Jackson course was for dropouts’ and did not want to join, Naoko reported. The trial class Mayumi attended recently changed her view, Naoko explained. In Naoko’s views, ‘the Jackson course prepares students for an Advanced Placement Japanese course in the US high schools’ and uses ‘real’ Japanese with an experienced teacher.

Anne: staying in Hoshuko

Anne had come to JJLS since preschool. She went to *hoshuko* throughout elementary school and stayed in *hoshuko* when she entered 7th grade. She chose Japanese as a medium of interview, but we shifted to English at times. Anne said her father is ‘Japanese’ and mother is ‘American’. She said she herself is ‘mixture of Japanese and American’.

What she wants from the Japanese-language school is to learn Japanese language and culture so that she can say ‘I can speak Japanese’ and ‘I have two cultures’, she said. She further commented, ‘When I go somewhere and say I am Japanese . . . if I didn’t go to Japanese-language school, it feels strange. It’s strange to say I cannot speak Japanese but I am Japanese’.

While she liked school events such as field day, she did not like homework and *kanji* in *hoshuko* class, which she found difficult. She was critical about *chuzai* students, who, she felt, had arrogant attitude because they could speak Japanese very well. However, Anne never thought about joining Jackson course because she felt it would be too easy for her.

Author:	Have you ever thought about moving to Jackson course? . . .
Anne:	No, I haven’t.
Author:	You haven’t. Why?
Anne:	Because to go to Japanese-language school is . . . to go to school and speak Japanese, so, because I feel people mix Japanese and English in Jackson course, it is a little too easy, I feel.

Lois and Takeshi, Anne’s parents, met in Japan and came to the United States in 1995 because Takeshi decided to attend a business school here. Lois said she is ‘American’, born in the United States, but lived in Japan for several years. Anne’s father, Takeshi, said he is ‘Japanese’, but wonders if he is not as much ‘Japanese’ as he thinks when he compares himself to *chuzai* parents who just arrived from Japan.

Both Lois and Takeshi wanted their children to be bilingual and had been sending them to JJLS. Lois and Takeshi felt that ‘*chuzai* students use Japanese-language school as a place to let off steam from the stress of regular school’, thus ‘acting up in the classroom’, as Naoko also pointed out. Takeshi never thought about sending Anne to the Jackson course because, according to him, ‘we wanted her to be 100% bilingual’. He felt that the Jackson course has ‘a different goal’.

Martin: starting in Jackson course

Martin began attending JJLS when he was in 4th grade in September 2005 because Martin's parents thought he should learn reading and writing in Japanese. The interview was done in Japanese.

Martin's father is 'American' and his mother is 'Japanese', he said. Martin said he is 'Japanese' because he was born in Japan, although he came to the United States when he was one-year old. Coming to JJLS and learning Japanese makes him feel more 'Japanese' because, for him, what makes a person 'Japanese' is being born in Japan and speaking Japanese, he explained. When he plays with his American friends, however, he feels that he is American, he said.

Martin had attended schools in Japan for at least four weeks in summer whenever he and his family went there in past several years. Martin joined Jackson course from the beginning at JJLS. It is difficult to join *hoshuko* unless the student has been learning *kokugo* since 1st grade because of the way certain content, especially *kanji*, is assigned to each grade. Martin was the top student in Level-3 class, actively participating in class discussion, and seeming to be comfortable with class content and materials.

Martin expressed his view of *hoshuko* and Jackson course as follows:

- Author: If you compare Jackson course and *hoshuko*, what's the difference in the image you have about them? The image of *hoshuko* and that of Jackson course . . .
- Martin: *Hoshuko* seems a little more 'Japanese' and a little more difficult.
- Author: It seems difficult. How about Jackson course?
- Martin: Um, a little easier.

Martin's mother, Satoko, came to the United States 'to learn English'. She met her husband in the United States and got married. She said 'my children would live as American, . . . but I am Japanese because my parents are Japanese and I was born in Japan'. She added, 'sending my children to JJLS and making my own Japanese friends there makes me feel closer to Japan'.

She likes the Jackson course because 'Martin can have friends with a similar background to speak Japanese with'. There is 'no pressure because it is more about exposing the children to Japanese language than test scores'. She feels that the Jackson course deepened Martin's confidence, especially because he can visualize his progress through 'learning more *kanji* and compare his Japanese to other students of his age'. She is happy that teachers use teaching materials besides *kokugo* textbooks.

Satoko did not realize that Jackson course was considered 'a drop-out class' until her children began attending. But, 'I feel that such perception is changing', she said.