

**RJC Children and Family Webinar**  
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In Japan, when a child is born that child becomes the center of the family, unlike in the U.S. system, where the child is a member of the family but not the center. Here are some ways that core cultural concept affects marital relationship and childraising.

- Decreased intimacy between a husband and wife. Since the relationship changes and the child becomes the focus, less thought is given to the marital relationship. When children are born, many couples stop referring to each other by their names, and start calling each other *mama* and *papa*, or *okaasan* and *otoosan*.
- *Tanshin funin*. This uniquely Asian concept, where the husband goes to live by himself when he is transferred for work, is very common in Japan. The well-being of the children is considered the main reason for this, as moving is seen as too much stress on the children, especially if they are at a crucial time in their academic lives such as preparing for entrance exams.
- Attachment Parenting. The babies and then children's needs are met quickly. Some ways this is manifested is in co-sleeping, nursing on demand, and constant holding the child. Parents often sleep together with their kids, or the mom sleeps with the kids and the father sleeps in another room. The children and their well-being becomes the central focus of the family.
- Total commitment to the kids. Japanese moms totally pour themselves into their kids—their time, their money, their emotions. I respect this more than anything. They feel that when they have kids, for good or bad, they put aside anything they may want and concentrate on their kids. Most don't see it as a sacrifice as Western moms may.

**Seep-Down Parenting (Azuma, 1994, quoted in Davies, *The Japanese Mind*)**

1. How is behavior learned? In Japanese families, the parents imitate proper behavior and keep repeating it until it is learned correctly by the children. American parents tend to explain systematically how something should be done rather than demonstrate it, so they are more verbally analytical.
2. Parental authority. Japanese parents are not as concerned with parental authority as Americans. Japanese children are much more likely to get away with disobedience than American children. Japanese moms give in, but American moms tend to be much more

confrontational and expect respect for parental authority. Japanese parents “rarely discipline their children in an authoritative manner or punish them harshly in order to force them to be obedient.”

On the contrary, American moms see it as a “collapse of parental authority necessary for effective childrearing to concede to their children’s egoism or to show weakness.”

Food---Eat it. You must eat, it. Eat it please (American)  
Eat it. Eat a little. You can eat it tomorrow (Japan)

Japanese mothers emphasize manners; American mothers emphasize self-expression.

Japan—*kimochi shugi*. A feeling based way of thinking, “the tendency to put importance on other people’s feelings, or to try to be sympathetic to other people’s feelings and perceive their intentions”

Kid kicks a door—The door is crying in pain (Japan) You shouldn’t do such a naughty thing (America) Putting such emphasis on adaptability to group and evaluating all things based on the effect on how others feel can lead to indecisive adults who avoid personal responsibility. But of course selfishness and too much self-assertion can be destructive as well and difficult for a Japanese to accept.

Davies says that “It is necessary to establish childrearing practices in Japan that enable children to develop real independence, having their own brand of self assertion, as well as a cooperative spirit, rather than a sense of blind and unthinking obedience.

### **Some personal stories...**

Many couples lose the ability to be intimate with their spouses because they have lost focus after kids are born. Many Japanese couples, because of this, and the lack of a Biblical understanding of marriage, haven’t had sex in months or even years. This phenomenon is called “sexless” marriage in Japanese. Indeed, for many wives, their husbands become mere roommates. This is not true of all couples, of course. I have many friends with good marriages who have a strong affection for their husbands.

Kids can sometimes be seen throwing temper tantrums in the middle of the store.

Many of my friends’ children talk to their parents rudely. My impression is that they are taught proper manners in their interactions with others,

but are allowed free reign at home to talk to their parents as they like. Hence, that is why I often see kids treating their moms poorly.

Kids are not really given a lot of chores or responsibilities.

The idea of family time is not emphasized or prioritized like it is in the U.S. (Sports and other activities suck up most weekends and holidays in Japan)

**Important Points to Consider:**

1. If people are impressed with your marriage or childraising, make sure that they know it is because you are a Christian, not because you are an American (or Canadian, Brit, etc.). We must emphasize our Biblical model for marriage and childraising—the fact that we are acting with how we believe God intended family life to be.

**(Minako)**

**Genesis 2:24-25** “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh. The two of them, the Man and his Wife, were naked, but they felt no shame.”

**Ephesians 5:22** “Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands. Husbands, go all out in your live for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ’s love makes the church whole.”

**Psalms 127:3** “Don’t you see that children are God’s best gift, the fruit of the womb his generous legacy? Life a warrior’s fistful of arrows are the children of a vigorous youth. Oh how blessed are you parents, with your quivers full of children.”

**Psalms 139:13** “Oh yes, you shaped me first inside and then out; you formed me in my mother’s womb. I thank you, High God—you’re breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made!”

**Proverbs 13:24** “A refusal to correct is a refusal to love; love your children by disciplining them.”

**Ephesians 1:1-4** “Children, do what your parents tell you. This is only right. “Honor your father and mother” is the first commandment that has a promise attached to it, namely, “so you will live well and have a long life.” Fathers, don’t exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.”

2. While we may tend to want to criticize many aspects of childraising, that is counterproductive and will possibly turn off your friends. Make sure to call the differing viewpoints “different” not “better” or “worse” No matter how you may personally feel, you must be culturally sensitive and not criticize the marriages or childraising practices of the Japanese, but model a Biblical one that leaves them wondering if there is not a better way.
3. Talking about children and marriage is a perfect way to share the Gospel. Our Japanese friends will see the difference in how we do things, and it will appeal to them.

### **Some Ways to Serve**

- Get to know the Japanese women in your community by inviting them into your homes and offering simple cooking or baking classes, have a Japanese/English language exchange, or meet other women by taking Japanese culture classes at a local community center.
- Japanese couples rarely go out on dates after their children are born. Like I said earlier, the kids become the center of the family. One of my best friends told me that her mother will watch the kids if she has to work, but not for her to go on a date. It is almost like there is a feeling in the culture that going on dates is selfish and there is guilt that accompanies that. Plus, they don't have the courage to ask someone to take the kids, as that would be a big bother or *meiwaku* to friends. A couple of years ago, one of my best friends had her ten- year wedding anniversary. I told her she should go away with her hubby and that we would watch her kids. She was so touched, and then told me that she hadn't been out alone overnight with her hubby since her oldest was born nine years earlier. This weekend strengthened her marriage tremendously. We can serve our friends by offering to help them in this way, if not overnight then for an evening out.
- Make your friend's family a meal if she is tired or overwhelmed or sick. Although the Japanese are extremely hospitable, they rarely take entire meals to a family that needs a break. It will touch them. But make sure you explain what you are doing because you don't want them to feel burdened with *giri*. I made an overwhelmed and sick friend's family dinner recently and it really touched her heart.
- Offer to babysit. Going on dates doesn't even enter into the minds of most Japanese couples because once children are born, the focus becomes the kids.
- If you want to give gifts, give them something they would never buy themselves like a gift card for a massage. Many Japanese moms feel guilty spending so extravagantly on themselves.
- Pray for them. I have met few Japanese who resist prayer. Most of them welcome it and appreciate it, even if they don't believe in Christianity.

They will see your genuine hearts and respect you and your Jesus, even if they don't believe it.

- For those serving the Japanese community in America, be there for them for comfort when they encounter the inevitable culture shock and loneliness. Be both a listening ear and a practical help, serving and helping with cultural issues she may not understand.
- **(Minako)** Allow your Japanese friends to see your family life. How we as Christians relate to our spouses and children through ups and downs will have a big impact on our Japanese friends. This is tied to what we talked about in the previous webinar regarding vulnerability. We are letting them into our lives to see our “messes” and in the process being vulnerable. My friends are impressed with my marriage to my husband, and we do have a good marriage and are very blessed, but I am transparent with them that we are not perfect, that yes, we do fight, and that we have gone through our share of hard times. But we committed to each other and our marriage on our wedding day, and that commitment to our marriage and to God, has always brought us through and made us stronger. Often times seeing how Christians deal with their own weaknesses, sins hurts, disappointments, etc. can be more powerful in the minds of non-Christians than seeing a ‘perfect’ Christian family.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any further questions or comments. You can find me (Anne) at the following cyber locations., I have also written ten books (books on Japanese culture, textbooks, guide to living in Japan, memoirs, etc) and they are all available on Amazon. Please check out my blog, too, at my website.

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I (Minako) am in the process of publishing a devotional for secular Japanese people in Japanese. Those interested in receiving a sample, please contact me at the following address.

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