

Cultural gap at home

Toyama National College of Maritime Technology 2nd grade
Haruna Kusajima

Have you ever felt out of place when talking with local people while were you traveling abroad or even in Japan? I had such a feeling very often at home when I was small. Family members usually share the same sense of value and feeling. That's why we feel safe and relaxed at home. But I sometimes felt uncomfortable and irritated. I felt as if I was living with someone from another planet.

My mother is Japanese, but she was born and brought up in Brazil. After coming to Japan, she got to know my father, married him, and started family in Toyama. // I love my mother and my life very much, but when I was in a kindergarten, I began to realize that our home was somewhat strange and different from other families. Maybe it was because my mother didn't know Japanese customs and couldn't read or write Japanese very well. This made me disappointed, upset and often irritated.

When I was small, if I did something wrong, my mother never hesitated to scold me even in front of others. She said, "Stop it! That's bad." But Japanese mothers usually say to their children, "Don't do that. It's shameful." I think this shows that Japanese mothers care about what others think of them. In other words, they care about others judgment, while my mother tried to teach her children what is right and what is wrong, or to implant sound judgment in her children. That's why she scolded us anywhere, anytime.

My mother and my grandmother also had some trouble, too. They often argued over many things. As a custom, our relatives visit my house on New Year's Day. Then my mother and my grandmother prepare all the food and treat the guests all day long. My mother thinks it is strange that only women should do all the work. She'd rather celebrate the day with her family. Once, she complained to my grandmother about such work. My grandmother was offended and sharply replied, "Who else are expecting to do this work?" Then an argument started.

I think my mother just tries to be honest to others, as well as to herself, even if others may disagree. On the other hand, Japanese people usually don't speak so frankly, in order not to offend others. And of course, my grandmother doesn't like to hear straight comments from a young woman.

When I was small, I couldn't understand my mother. I thought it was wrong to be different from others. So I tended to ignore her words and sometimes blamed her and spoke badly to her. I was also teased some of my classmates because of my mother.

One day I asked my mother about her life. She told me how she felt when she began to live in Japan and how hard it was to get used to living here. After talking with her, I came to understand her somewhat and empathized with her. I began to realize that she grew up in a different culture and the trouble we had with her wasn't caused by her. But it was caused by the gap of the two cultures.

When I complained to her, she would say, "We CAN'T do anything about WHO WE ARE or WHERE WE ARE FROM. People are people, so you should find their good points as well." At that time I didn't care about her words very much. But through meeting and knowing many different people, I came to understand the meaning very well. Now I KEEP mother's words in my heart.

Next year, I'm going to Canada to study at high school for one year. What motivated me was my mother. Thanks to my mother, I learned something about her culture and got interested in other cultures, too. I want to know about many different cultures and many different people while I'm abroad. I think it's the best way to broaden my knowledge and experience.

My mother has found her own way of existing between two cultures. I've loved my mother, but now, I also respect my mother and want to be a broad-minded person like her.

Thank you for listening.