

More than just a problem child

When I was in elementary school, a boy who couldn't speak Japanese came to our school.

He often punched and kicked me and any classmates, and gave us a pinch. Our teacher scolded him, but he didn't listen what the teacher said, so everyone always thought he was "just a problem child". He moved when he was second grade, but I sometimes thought about him when I met other foreign children.

Years passed and I realized that he might just have wanted to get along with us. I have a brother who is 8 years younger than me, and sometimes my mother explained that children who are slow to develop language, and cannot communicate well through words tend, to punch or kick. I wonder now if maybe that child did not understand Japanese well and acted violently. Why couldn't I ask him to play together at that time? I deeply regret it now, and since realizing it, I have become interested in the issues surrounding foreign children living in Japan.

I've heard that foreign children who are not familiar with Japanese schools are increasing in Japan. In spite of living in Japan and going to Japanese school, there are many children who don't easily adapt to Japanese customs or don't understand the Japanese language well. But Why? The reason is easy. The number of foreign workers are increasing, but sadly there is just not enough support for their children. At the end of October last year, the number of foreign workers was about 1.46 million, the highest ever.

In addition, the Japanese government has launched a new policy. To encourage Japan's growth in its chronic labor shortage, the government decided to accept foreign workers in areas such as construction, agriculture, and nursing care. And the workers in industries especially in need of advanced technology are allowed to be accompanied by their families. The Japanese government has a plan to increase the number of foreign workers by 345000 by 2025, meaning one out of 70 people in Japan will be a foreign national. Naturally, the number of foreign children coming to Japan with their parents will also increase.

But what about their social adaptations to Japanese society and their learning of Japanese? How would I feel if my parents suddenly told me to leave Japan and go to foreign school from tomorrow? Is there anything I can do for foreign children?

I've been thinking about it for a long time, and I concluded that language is very important for children to communicate each other. If the children can communicate with each other, they can play, be included and make friends.

On the other hand, the inability to communicate can cause stress in children, and in some cases they can be dismissed as simply "problem children," like the boy in my school was.

But from my experience, I felt most strongly that there was sense of prejudice and discrimination among us that "all foreigners are like this". We are unconscious of the assumption that "foreign people do bad things", so we might have decided that the child who punched us was a problem child. I felt ashamed of myself, and I decided to change my mind.

Since then, I made it my mission to be friendly and say hello and thank you to foreign staff at convenience stores. After all, their children may be crying at school because they don't understand the pages of textbook.

In the future, I want to be a teacher. I hope to be able to take care of many foreign children at that time. As an educator, I want to raise them to be "treasures of Japan", and I want to tell my students that we are all equal. When I enter university, I plan to set up a volunteer circle to help foreign children get used to Japanese language and culture.

I have changed from my experience with a single foreign child. This experience has made me decide to become an educator who will lead foreign children to a better direction and future, and I want to continue to study and work towards my dream from now on. (699 words)