

Life History of A Korean Resident in São Paulo, Brazil

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Introduction

In September 1991, the author interviewed at length in Japanese, Chong-Seuk KIM, a Korean business executive residing in São Paulo, Brazil and published a part of his personal life history in Japanese as a preliminary document for an academic report.¹⁾ In June 1999, furthermore, the author's continuing effort to revise the report into a complete document in Japanese resulted in a sociological article titled "Life-History of a Korean Intellectual in São Paulo."²⁾ The following paper offers a translation of these two articles for readers of English so that they can more easily get access to a first-hand document of how a bilingual, Korean and Japanese-speaking, Korean resident has constituted his own social world of reality.

Chong-Seuk KIM, the narrator, was sixty-eight years old at the time of the interviews and was an executive of a travel agency in Paulista Avenue, or the central business district in São Paulo, run by a Japanese resident in Brazil, Mr. Hashimoto.³⁾ The interviewer, or the author, was thirty-eight years old and was an associate professor of sociology at a Japanese college in Nagoya, Japan. The reason why it took the author more than fourteen years since the interviews to completely publish the outcome in English might be, besides the author's ups and downs in personal life, found in the fact that the narrator himself had tried his best to edit the Japanese manuscript sent from the author.

Although it had brought about a great deal of improvement of the manuscript, the essential part of an oral life history could have been, the author worried, destroyed by the re-writing work itself, even if it were for the purpose of refining or correcting the data. Needless to say, such a concern has made the author try to retain the original document as much as possible. During the author's editing work, some persons' names were changed to pseudonyms in order to avoid any unnecessary interpersonal conflicts deriving from such ethnocentrism as anti-Japanese or pro-Japanese sentiments. Regarding the real ethnic names, in particular, the Korean people in Korea were virtually forced by the Japanese colonial administration to use Japanese family names, even if they wanted to retain their ethnic Korean ones.

As a result, our narrator, Chong-Seuk KIM, once used such a name as NAKAMURA, a common Japanese family name, which was not clearly mentioned, nor expressed during the interviews. It's one of the most delicate issues for Koreans since adopting the Japanese family names could not only mean adjusting to the then ongoing Japanese policy, but it could also mean assimilating to the

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Japanese colonial system, which few people in Korea could stand. On the other hand, as we can see later in the following document, the narrator seems to enjoy telling, or we should say, sharing with the author his own personal, otherwise never mentioned, life history, especially his military experiences in the Japanese army during the War. It's understandable that his fellow and liberal Korean friends would not appreciate it, and it's understandable that he has never had a chance to express in Japanese, nor in Korean, what his personal life history has been like.

1. A Herbal Doctor in Seoul

As the youngest child of the four siblings, I, Chong-Seuk KIM, was born in 1923 in Seoul. Although my father was a medical-herb doctor, ironically enough, a younger sister and a brother died early in their lives due to children's dysentery in that local area. My father, about ten years older than my mother, also died of high blood pressure when I was a junior high school student. Being a doctor of medicine, my father received little medical fee from his patients for their treatment as he had considered medicine was not so much a business as a practice of justice. Including his friends and guests, therefore, people used to get together not only for medical treatment but also for a sort of social-cultural salon, where they enjoyed creating Chinese poems and writing calligraphy over the so-called *Chuansang*⁴⁾ drinks. Sometimes I, too, was invited to learn the Chinese characters.

2. A Five Days Funeral

When my father died, people carried out an overwhelming five days Confucian funeral which was rarely practiced even then. Since my family was a medical doctor's one with a long history, people thought it appropriate. Even good friends instantly turned their backs against us, resulting in a misanthropic sentiment within myself. I was then just fourteen years old. I was always scared of my big brother, who was ten years older than I. He used to show a great deal of authoritarian dominating power over me, which had its roots in the Confucian belief or tradition. I did not like him much.

My oldest sister was already married out of the family, another sister of mine, who was ten years older than I, died due mainly to pneumonia; but, I believe, she really died of the stress created by the drastic transition of our family. For me, it seemed as if all the lights shining upon our life passage ahead were fading out. After all, only my brother and I were left with my mother in the family. However, the father of my brother's wife had, like many other Koreans at that time, attempted to migrate as a family to Manchuria, or Northeast China, which was then under Japanese colonial domination. That decision had made my mother so angry that she roared, "You are no longer my son since you follow your wife's family leaving your little brother with me."

Now, we had to face financial problems as my father left us little fortune. Mother's sister, my aunt, however, was very kind to us and supported most of my school fees so that I could graduate from junior high school and complete studies at the department of commerce at a college, which later became Korea University. At the very beginning, I was not fully aware of my aunt's great deed

to be able to offer such a financial support to one of her cousins when the times were not so easy for anybody to cope with. Without her sincere commitment, however, I am very sure that our life in Korea would have been ruined. Her death in 1969, obviously enough, must have motivated our decision to migrate to South America in 1971. Now I understand that she must have devoted all her efforts and affection to us since she herself had never had children.

3. Path to a Japanese Army Officer

During school training in December 1942, I was in a branch of the Japanese army in Seoul. It's not so easy to explain what had made me to join the army. I would say that a Korean under the Japanese colonial system did not have much chance to make a successful life unless he became a medical doctor, a lawyer, or a bank clerk. What was left in my mind as a dream in the future was to become an army officer who had as high prestige and salary as a principal at a local elementary school. Behind such personal decision-making, however, there was an open secret that Japan had changed its discriminatory policy against Koreans and adopted a new policy to "non-discriminately" accept anyone, Japanese or Korean, since the army needed soldiers badly in the raging and losing war.

My mother was very upset and asked, "Why do Korean people have to fight for Japan? Where on the earth is the cause? Japan is losing anyway. Stop being foolish." My aunt, also, showed her grief by saying, "How can you be so ridiculous to join the Japanese army, betraying your aunt who had supported your mother!" For many years, I have kept this fact as a personal secret from my own kids since I myself regret that I was so stupid to volunteer, without being forced, to become a Japanese soldier.

4. Father's Secret Support for the Independence Movement

I was just nineteen years old and was very good at military training at school, where the half pupils were Japanese. Among others, I was always selected as a model to demonstrate how a soldier should properly behave. When the high-ranking officers gave me big applause, I felt simply happy. Being young, I did not know the fact that there were some underground Korean groups who were trying to recover independence from Japan. As my brother later told me, my father too had secretly supported such an anti-Japan partisan movement.

One day, when a Japanese police officer visited my house for the family census, I was admired as I answered him in fluent Japanese. My father, who was watching this scene from behind, whispered his complex feelings, "My little nine years old son learnt to speak Japanese when our country of Korea has been oppressed by the Japanese military domination." At that time, however, I was too simple and innocent and thought that my Japanese competence must have pleased my father. However, you could not be proud of being able to speak Japanese for everyone in Korea at that time was forced to learn and to use it in school.

5. A Taiwanese Holding a Japanese Name Card

[Q: In school, did you speak Japanese among Koreans?]

Yes, there was even a punishment of downgrading the school records if a pupil was found speaking Korean. Several years ago, my wife and I had a chance to visit Taiwan and were surprised to meet a Taiwanese shopkeeper who handed me over a name card on which, together with his Chinese name, a Japanese name was also printed. I asked why. He answered that he had many Japanese customers. That was why. I continued, “Haven’t you ever had an uneasy feeling when you speak Japanese?” “No,” he replied, “I am proud of being able to speak Japanese fluently.” I was shocked but continued to say, “If you were Korean, you would be criticized half to death, since that language was imposed by force by the Japanese colonial education, which no one in Asia was supposed to appreciate.”

[Q: Could you tell me what was your Japanese name at that time?]

No, I am sorry but I can’t. That’s not a good idea....I was forced, in a way, to use the Japanese name when I was about to join the army. The company which was going to hire me, furthermore, was a Japanese organization that was financed and heavily influenced by the colonial administration. I had, therefore, no choice but to create a Japanese name. When I entered the college, however, I felt ashamed myself to realize that the patriotic movements were traditionally most enhanced on the campus. That college, a former body of Korea University, had been actively promoting political slogans such as “Anti-Japan,” “Against Japanese Imperialism,” and “No Reconciliation.”

You couldn’t just change your family name unless all the family members agreed. So, I wrote to my brother who was a local officer in Manchuria under Japan’s domination. At the beginning, he replied by saying, “No, we can’t. We need to stick to the ethnic Korean name.” But, as I wrote to him again and again, he finally changed his mind to agree with me. I would assume that he himself in his environment must have had some pressure in not-using a Japanese name. If my father had been alive, I am very sure that he would not have allowed us to dispose of our family name no matter under what condition we might have been. As for myself, however, there was a strong belief that I needed to become an army officer by any means, even by changing names.

6. A Small Accident in the Army Changed My Life

[Q: When did you join the army?]

It was in 1943. Around the end of that year, I passed the examination to become a *Gocho*, or corporal (one rank below sergeant). During the training period in Toyohashi, Japan, however, I had an injury to my foot. So, I was released in two weeks to come home and restarted work at the same Toyo Colonial (*Taku-shoku*) company, which had deprived the people of their land in Korea. It had once even shared about seventy percent of the agricultural soil of all Korea. It had such rights as mining and foresting in every inch and ditch of Korea and even in Southeast Asia before Japan’s defeat in 1945. I was assigned to a job in the mining industry. When the US released the company’s

ownership to Korean people, I was reassigned at the same place, where I continued to work for some thirty years.

[Q: Had you already got married at that time?]

Yes, it was in 1943 that I got married with my wife, by arrangement, who was back from Osaka, Japan. Her parents, together with her two brothers and two sisters, had a printing business there for years. When she returned to Korea, she entered a girls' school, where Japanese was spoken as it was before Japan's defeat.

7. My Wife Was Called a “Choppari”

Upon Japan's defeat, the educational system was totally changed into the Korean style, in which the Japanese language as a medium was abolished. While all the other pupils had no difficulty in adjusting to the new system, my wife found it difficult to speak fluent Korean for she was born and brought up in Osaka, Japan. Having been called a *Choppari*,⁵⁾ or a human but with two divided toes like pigs and cows, she was made fun of. Such discrimination must have hurt her quite a lot. Upon our marriage, many had made fun of me by saying, “How come you had to marry a Japanese woman?!” Now, she does not usually speak Japanese. But, when she does, I must admit that her pronunciation is much better than mine.

My wife's family came back home just before August 15, 1945, or the end of the War. Up until his death, her father never stopped saying that they shouldn't have come back home to Korea. My eldest son was born in May, right before the Korean War, which broke out on June 25, 1950. If I were to write what happened to us afterward, I have often been told that I could write a whole book with all of my personal memories.

[Q: Didn't you have any mixed feelings toward someone born in Japan?]

No, I didn't for we did not have any communication problems. We both spoke Korean with each other. Once in a while, however, we had to speak Japanese, when we needed to discuss some delicate issues with minute nuances to understand. My understanding was like; this person had no choice but to speak Japanese as she was born and brought up in Japan. She changed herself, however, into a person who spoke less in public as she did not want to be discriminated against by others. Some of my colleagues or friends, for example, almost believed the rumor that she was Japanese was true.

[Q: In the middle of the Korean War you had your eldest son?]

Since we had a long family history in Seoul, we could not move out right away. At the beginning we stayed in Seoul as we had not imagined such a cruel situation as what happened later. On September 28, the South recovered its territory up to Seoul where we stayed. I cannot describe what happened to us during that period. Leaving my son, my wife, and my mother behind, my colleagues and I escaped from Seoul to a suburb as we thought the North might have recruited us to its army if we stayed there. We did not hear of any case of theft or raping incidents at the beginning. They treated us with respect. Toward the end, however, they became violent in order to recruit soldiers and goods.

8. “Inscrutable are the Ways of Heaven”

Under the communist invasion, we tried our best not to cooperate by organizing a mutual support system among the local neighbors. Remember, I had injured my foot. As a proverb goes, “Inscrutable are the ways of Heaven.”⁶⁾ That unhappy accident had ironically helped me twice. The first occasion was when the North did not consider me capable of becoming one of their soldiers. If I were taken as a soldier, I must have been killed due to the disabled foot when they all fled north. The second occasion was when the South Korean army did not recruit me because of my foot problem. You see, they surely knew that I had once joined the Japanese army. I have no idea what would have happened to me if I had been drafted into its army. I might have done exactly what they asked me to. But, I guess, I was right to have been able to escape from them thanks to my injured foot.

[Q: The War halted in 1953....]

Those who had gone south came back to Seoul and started now to look for the persons who had supported the North; they created such new words as *Fugyaku-Bunshi*, or pro-enemy factions. Sanctions had been executed for those who did not move south, and for those who had pro-communist sympathy. I must say, however, that if you criticize people who just did not leave Seoul, how can you not condemn President Chung-Hee PARK, who once was a communist member himself. Because of his cruel behavior he was once sentenced to the death penalty in the case of the Yosu-Sunchon Mutiny.⁷⁾

My second son was born in Pusan on October 31, 1953, when we all were escaping from the invasion of the North Korean and Chinese joint armies. In 1955, we came back home to Seoul. As our house in Seoul had been bombed, we sold it and rebuilt a new one. By that time I was the head of the Pusan branch office of my company. My youngest son was born in 1958. He is the one who is living in Tokyo now. I was in charge of the trading section where we had a great deal of interaction with Japan on importing mining products. I once stayed in Tokyo for three years as the head of the Tokyo branch office. Within the trading business, we used English. Although I was not good at speaking English, I could manage to read and write some patterned invoices in trading.

[Q: Could you tell me why you resigned the company?]

It was when President Chung-Hee PARK of the military government abandoned the anti-Japanese policy and declared a new act, in which Koreans abroad, mainly those in Japan, were encouraged to bring their fortunes back to the homeland. And it was when the Japanese trading companies such as Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Nissho-Iwai, Marubeni, Ito-Chu began to operate branch offices in Korea. A Korean manager, who was a one-year-younger graduate of the same junior high school I attended, came to ask me to become an executive at his new firm, which Nissho-Iwai Trading was supposed to support later.

Although at my own company I had been during thirty years promoted quickly up to the head of managers, I was promised that I could hold an executive post from the very beginning and I was also told that I could later become a shareholder of the firm. That might be why I decided to quit my job at Toyo Colonial. The president of the new firm, however, turned out to be an irresponsible

person whose promises were all untrue. When his plans, for example, to bring back some 20,000 tons of Australian sheep hide as his fortune turned out to be a big lie, I tried to quit the job and tried to move to Sumitomo. But it was too late. I had to stay there for some three years. Being the number two executive of a middle scale firm, where some 1,080 people were employed, I needed to spend my own money for the company's payments because the president hid himself so as to avoid payment requests from the governmental offices and banks. I was just foolish.

Besides, I was also worried about the socio-political condition in Korea. I wondered if we could provide our kids with a good education while remaining. I spent this period in my life full of questions. That was when I heard that an acquaintance of mine had gone to Argentina. So, I tried to talk with him. He encouraged me to migrate out of the country, once I had thought about it. I should say that that was the end of my luck. When I thought it a good idea and asked him for a favor, he became reluctant a little and said that the economic condition in Argentina was not so good now, so why don't I try Brazil instead, where things seemed better than Argentina. I assumed that he just did not want to or he was unable to support us, even if we went there. By that time, however, having prepared the necessary documents, sold the house, gathered our finances, and asked the kids' schools for leave, we were all ready to migrate out. "*Que será será*" must be the best expression of my mind when we left our country.

9. Dignity as a Man

On our way to Brazil, we stopped over in Tokyo where I had some money to collect. My wife tried to persuade me to go back to Korea because this decision, she believed, would not only ruin our life, but would also damage our kids' future. If we went back, I replied, we would surely lose our face since we had done all the farewell greetings necessary. Her sincere appeal, with a cry, that she had no confidence in moving successfully to Brazil made me go to a Varig, or a Brazilian international airline, office at the airport.

I said, "Could you refund the tickets because we would like to cancel our trip to Brazil and go back to Korea?" Introducing himself as a Hawaii-born-Japanese, the manager, who was a little older than I, replied, "You must have had an incredible decision to make so far. As a man, it's not wise to cancel such an attempt. Your three male children would surely grow and prosper there as Brazil holds tremendous possibilities in the future. Trust yourself since many people have already made a success there. I can allow you to carry all your luggage free. If you went back to Korea, you would have to explain to people again your new decision." I was fully convinced by his talking that if we all went back home to Korea, we would have to start everything over from the very beginning. When we were eating lunch at a Korean restaurant in Shimbashi, Tokyo, however, a waitress asked me in poor Korean, "Where are you all from? Where are you going to?" "We are going to Brazil now," we said. With a big surprise she called her husband, who dared to say, "You should not go to such a place. It's not a place for human beings to live." My wife agreed with them and insisted that we should return the tickets immediately.

While we had been there for ten days, I still did not know what to do. I could not go back to the

office again for cancellation as, I felt, it would surely impair my dignity as a man. This is how I made up my mind to come to Brazil on the last allowable day to enter the country. I am sure that I could not finish talking about what followed afterward even if we spent the whole night long together. Here in Brazil, it was not at first so difficult for us all, luckily or unluckily, to change from tourist to permanent residency visas. It took us only three months. It was, however, just the beginning of our miserable life ahead.

10. Attempts to Move to the US

[Q: Was it in the sixties?]

No, it was in 1971. I must have tried to enter the US as a second option of migration, if our plea for the permanent visas in Brazil was rejected. To tell you the truth, in fact, there was a chance for us to enter the US on the way to Brazil when we were given three hours for transfer at a US airport. Once you stepped out of the airport, you were free to take any buses anywhere, for example, to downtown LA, to Las Vegas, to San Diego, and you would be by chance admitted to enter the country. At that moment, however, I had no idea to play such a possibility.

Since then, I have long tried very hard to re-migrate to the US; however my family members did not allow me to. They consider it too much since they all have founded their linen factories here hiring some fifty employees after years of indescribable hardship. Five years ago, nevertheless, I had a plan by myself to obtain an H-1 visa, by which I could get hired by a friend of mine who runs a business in the US. At the beginning they give you three years, then two years upon the renewal. If it is accepted, you are entitled to obtain a permanent residency. As one of the application documents, a college BA diploma equivalent to American standards was needed. So, I submitted a paper in which all my business careers in Korea, Japan, and Brazil were put into words.

[Q: Was it in English?]

That's not so simple, you see. First of all, I wrote it in Japanese, which was translated into Portuguese by a notary public translator, which then was translated into English by another notary public translator at the Japanese Consulate General in São Paulo. Furthermore, as one of the necessary procedures for inviting and hiring personnel from foreign countries, I needed to ask the friend of mine to publicly announce in the newspapers three times his needs for employees who are multi-lingual and capable in the trading section of his firm with such and such salary. No one could qualify to apply to it, of course.

When I added this information to the already submitted documents, they turned it down. But again, I tried to get through by hiring a lawyer to help me out. There was little feed back. It seemed that they had their own reasons not to take some sixty-five-year-old immigrant who would be dependent on the taxpayer's money, for example. It was the last year that I met that lawyer in the US and expressed my feeling that I did not want to bother him any more, as I was getting older, and as I was going to give it up.

11. Sewing Machines

[Q: Did anybody come to pick you up at the airport?]

I had asked one of my colleagues at Toyo Colonial, who was then the president of the Korean Cultural Association in São Paulo. We had worked together for thirty years. When he drove us downtown, however, he seemed somehow unwilling to welcome us. Rather, I felt that he was just anxious for the money that I was supposed to collect in Tokyo. He took us to his home at Dom Pedro Segundo in the downtown of the city of São Paulo. A few days later, we were taken to a place like a haunted mansion, where we, before sleeping, had all by ourselves to clean the rooms covered with dust. I was completely at a loss when my youngest son told me that his usually strong mother cried all day long. A few days later, we received worse news from Korea. When I came home, I was told that my wife's father in Seoul had died. Before the migration, I had never imagined that such misfortune was awaiting us. In other words, we had been pretty successful by that time. Since then, however, we were suddenly going downhill in a way.

To attend the funeral was impossible. It was too far away. Besides, we could not afford it. Several years later, therefore, my wife and I visited the graveyard separately. That's one of the most regrettable experiences I have ever had.

[Q: After Dom Pedro Segundo, where did you live?]

Our home was right in front of the Paulista Newspaper head office run by the Japanese Brazilians. You could say it one of the most notorious places to live in São Paulo now, and so it was then. The Korean immigrants, however, started to reside around that region because they needed their community information useful for their living. We engaged in making products produced by sewing machine. Although we were not experts in sewing, our products, or simple casual jackets with convenient zippers, were very popular. We must admit that the Koreans have, to a great extent, contributed to the improvement and to the prosperity of the clothing industry in South America. Everyone, including my sons, had to do that job. We could not stop operating the high-speed machines even when the neighbors complained about the noises they made at night.

12. Yang-Sung Junior High in Seoul

[Q: Did your children begin to attend schools there?]

My eldest son, who was a sophomore at Seoul National University when we left, had no place to go. My second son tried a preparatory school, but he quit it within a few months. My youngest son tried out all by himself....

What my kids used to observe in Seoul was that I, their father, came home late from work everyday, and the company's chauffeur would come to pick me up every morning. When I invited some men in the company to my house, they all showed a sense of respect to me. In school, the teachers changed their attitudes toward my kids after I visited the school with some gift-money for them. Here in Brazil, however, they were surprised to realize that I, their father, had nothing positive or productive to offer for their life. I had little money to spend. I couldn't speak the

language. All I could do for them was grumbling. Their mother, instead, was working hard all day long with the sewing machines. Once I tried to help them, I would ruin the materials by mistakes. Sometimes I would get angry over a trifle. They used to show their father, me, a high respect, but they now realized that they could no longer depend on me. I was considered “deadwood.”

Not depending on me, therefore, the youngest son tried all by himself, to find schools to attend. First of all, he chose the São Paulo Junior High, which, we all had expected, should be a good place for him to study. When he came home from the school, however, he said to me, “I am not going there anymore.” I asked, “Why not?” One of the episodes he described surprised us all; “I can’t study at such a place where some eight-year-old kid asks the teacher for tobacco and matches for the kid to smoke.”

He had attended Yang-Sung Junior High, which is one of the top ranking schools in Seoul, having more than ninety years of outstanding history. The teachers there were greatly surprised when I expressed our attempt to migrate. They insisted, “Please leave him here alone in Seoul, since he is outstandingly smart. In the English class, he is number one; in other subjects, he is within the top five.” We said, “If it were just a few months, it might be all right. But, we can’t leave him here alone for years since he hasn’t grown up that much yet.” They continued, “Please try as much as you can to provide him with the best environment for study because he will be the top of the top students in school.”

13. Way to the University of São Paulo

In a while, he all by himself found another school called “Nossa Senhora,” a private Catholic school. We just paid the school fees for registration. Upon graduation two years later, he expressed his wish to enter a university this time. Before entering the university, he went to a preparatory school called “Objetivo” on Paulista Avenue for a year or so. But, he was not satisfied with the education there. From the second year, therefore, he continued his study at a better school called “Bandeirante.”

What I had in my mind was the Korean system, in which the teachers expected to receive gift money from the parents whose children were being taught by them. What turned out, however, was that they used computers at that school to file the students’ school records, so it was not possible for teachers to change the marks of certain subjects even though the parents had given teachers gift money under the table. He was again within the top five out of 48 students at the end of the term. I am satisfied, on the other hand, with the reputation that school had among the people around me. People said, “It’s a difficult school to enter; however, once you are ranked within the five top students, you will surely be admitted to enter USP.”⁸⁾ In the third term of the second year, he scored as high as number two in the class, whereas the number one was an outstanding Jewish student. Both in the second term of the third year and at graduation, my son finally ranked at the top of his class. One day, the school sent me a letter to grant him a scholarship. It was almost half the amount of the total yearly payment for school. I signed the paper from the school as my son asked me to. He used all his scholarship money to go drinking with his friends.

Now, they say, “It is extraordinary difficult to enter USP, especially the departments of Engineering and Medicine.” When my son was in the second year of high school, he tried it. But, he could not pass the exam as he scored only 50%, where at least 63 to 64% marks were needed to get accepted. He himself felt that he must have scored at least 80% when he checked his answers at home for the exam with the correct answers printed in the newspaper afterward. A friend of his who was a USP student consulted one of the professors about this issue. Despite the severe restriction, the professor tried hard to re-examine the outcome of the test and found out that my son did not write down anything for the last 25 questions. I asked my son, “What did you write down there?”

He was satisfied, on the other hand, with that finding as he now remembered that he forgot to write down the last 25 answers because he had had a bad cold with a runny nose and a fever on that day. All he wanted to do at the exam was to leave for home as soon as he could. He seemed to have been satisfied once he wrote down the answers on the extra papers. He just forgot to re-write them on the mark sheets, I guess. On that night, therefore, I gave him strong advice to make sure to write his name first of all, to stay as late as the last person who leaves, and to check all the answers again and again, because he was so reckless. In the third year of high school, he passed the exam without trouble.

During the five years at USP, he, luckily enough, never had sickness. He earned some money for necessary expenses such as purchasing chemistry books by teaching kids at home. The tuition was covered by the state budget as it was a state run university. It was his brothers that presented him a car, and it was his mother who paid the gas. I would say that I was able to support his two elder brothers in Korea more than expected, but with the youngest son I was unable to give him a hand even though I wanted to. He did it all by himself. What was lucky for him was the fact that we moved to Galvão Bueno, where he met Korean friends who all later entered USP. He must have been greatly influenced by the good atmosphere they had for study.

14. Toward an Executive at a Tourist Agency

[Q: How many years did you live in the Paulista region?]

For about one year. We moved once within the same area, and then to Bom Retiro.⁹⁾ Finally, we settled down here at Aclimação. It's been already eleven years. It may seem simple to talk about our life here, but it's in fact far beyond your imagination. I couldn't possibly have put into words what had happened to us so far if I didn't resign myself to my fate. Serving as an executive of the tourist office, however, I am still looking for a chance to move to Spain or Portugal since the economic condition here is so unstable. By presenting my prospective plan to my kids and my wife, I try to persuade them that there is little hope here for our kids in the future, but no one shows interest in it. I insist that I can't go back to Korea. I don't want to go to the US. Spain would be a better place for us to live. Even if we all agreed to move out, we have to face a dilemma as to how to sell our own factories at a good price when the economy is down. This year, therefore, on the way to Seoul and Tokyo, I decided to take a look at Spain and Portugal as marketing research. I might be able to find a better conclusion.

[Q: Could you tell me how you found the new job at the tourist office, stepping out of the clothing industry?]

Before jumping to that topic, I have lots more to say. For example, I took care of my wife, who developed gout in her hip because of hard work and who had been in bed for two months. We took her for a Korean acupuncture treatment everyday. When she recovered, therefore, we made up our minds to give up that sewing work. We opened, instead, a “*mercearia*,” or a small-scale food store, at Prestes Maia, where there is a high rate of robbery. As my kids were “*vendedor*,” or outdoor salesmen, my wife alone had to keep the store. Robbers often broke into the store. When the shoplifting damages exceeded more than the profit, we decided to give it up.

Through the classified ads of a newspaper, I myself applied for a job at a Japanese Brazilian company called “Brain General Advertising,” which soon went bankrupt with some fifty employees. Then, I moved to work at a Japanese Brazilian optical company. Anyone could recognize who I am if I mention the name of the company as I am the only Korean employee of the company. I found it in the Japanese newspapers such as “*São Paulo*,” “*Paulista*,” and “*Nippaku (Japan-Brazil)*.” The Brazilian advertising industry at that time was one of the top three in the world. In the course of my work, I met by chance Mr. Hashimoto, who was the president of the tourist office at Paulita Avenue. For his office, Mr. Hashimoto had wanted to hire Mr. Takeyama, who instead recommended me to the post as he could not quit his own job. Mr. Takeyama was a graduate of Waseda University in Tokyo and was engaged in the health foods business here in São Paulo. Since Waseda University and Korea University had long-established exchange programs in academics and gymnastics, we had sometimes had friendship meetings and parties here in São Paulo too. I met him on such an occasion. Since then, I have been with Mr. Hashimoto for eleven years. By now, I know him well, and he must know me thoroughly.

15. A “Galaxy”

To my regret, I used to administer a chastisement upon my eldest and second sons. They know how cruel I could be if they behaved wrong. Without hesitation, therefore, they express that there is no need for corporal punishment for their own kids’ education. Because of my unique way of instruction, they tended to stay away from me. They must have thought that I was doing very well at work in Seoul, as I could invite some foreign guests to my home, which was then not a usual case. For them, it must have seemed that I was fluently speaking both Japanese and English, about which they had no idea. As the head manager, I earned some money to spend and I had such a prestigious status. When I was in bed at hospital, for example, my kids must have been surprised to see how many people came to visit me day and night. But, as you see, here I have nothing to do but read books. I have no jobs to do; I make lots of complaints to the family members. As I can’t speak Portuguese, my kids no longer depended upon me, even when they had trouble in schools.

My second son came here when he was in the third year of high school. We let him attend a prep school. But, he met a Korean immigrant man and started to work with him. He said he was a university graduate of Meijo University in Japan, and also claimed to have once taught at school.

My son for his living cooked “*churrasco*,” or a Brazilian style of baked meats, at some simple and small shops called “*bar*” on the streets. It wasn’t so bad as it is today. There were many customers including Japanese overseas businessmen. They worked hard up to two or three o’clock in the morning.

That man began to drop by my home, a while later, and began to show me a great sense of respect. I came to admire in a way that he must be a great person since he could engage himself in such a humble job, despite the fact he was a university graduate. My second son, who was, among others, most sensitive and vulnerable to such a belief, agreed with my observation and followed him right away. He must have a similar sentiment to mine, in a way. When he started his own “*churrasco*” stand in a shady area, however, a friend of mine came to give me advice, “You should not let your son work like that at night. To tell you the truth, that man was a cop, you know.” He was a cop of the Seoul City Police Department. He came here with his wife, who kicked him out of the house because he could not get along with the family. So, he ran into a Brazilian woman eventually. When we realized his situation, it was too late for us to bring back our son. That man was very clever to buy our son a Galaxy, a used Ford car, and let him drive. He used our son as a chauffer. My son wouldn’t listen to us for he himself got excited about such a showy life. My wife, who tended to hide what she felt most of the time, burst out to complain to me, “It’s you who are responsible for this son’s bad behavior.”

But these days, both of them are doing all right. During prep school, my second son met a girl, with whom he kept good terms, and stopped attending the school. He once was a “*vendedor*,” but things have been so tough for him due to the economic condition. He must have had a hard time so far. He and his wife bought two high-speed sewing machines, rented a house, and started doing subcontracted work. They began to little by little earn profits out of their business, and they had a baby. They moved to Santos, a small town by the sea shore, where for four or five years they ran a dress shop their friend used to own. Then, they bought a factory from the big brother, who was, instead, interested in buying a bigger one himself. They are now manufacturing dresses with some twenty employees and doing wholesale there. Although they kept in the black until last year, they were put in the red this year.

16. A Confucian style

[Q: It seems that he kept, on the one hand, good terms with the big brother, setting a distance from the father on the other?]

Well, that’s one of the most delicate issues. Brothers can have a good relationship with each other before marriage. But, once married, they tend to shun each other when their wives do not get along. On the first of January and on the fifteenth of August, which are the most important days of worshipping ancestors, however, they do come visit our house. It is done according to Korean Confucian style. They are also supposed to visit us here twice a year under no special condition, even if it were in the middle of the night, for anniversary services of grandparents. I would say that they are in a way influenced by my own way of education.

This evening, I am going to introduce you to my eldest son's family at his apartment that cost about 300,000 US-dollars. I hear that they have some investments in Seoul, too. Although my wife must have known what their investments were like, I wasn't told anything about them. They would not let me know. I only hope their life becomes better and better, no matter what they may be doing. If I have ever served my family since coming here, it was only when my wife suffered gout in her hip for three or four months, and I cooked for her and for the kids. I felt as if I were an army sergeant in charge of cooking. That's the best I could have ever contributed to them. As I often talk about this episode, which is one of many past memories, my kids and even I can no longer enjoy recalling it.

Last year in Tokyo, I met a man who was one of my eldest son's friends and a high-school classmate. He was in charge of guarding the Korean president at that time. With or without my request, he recalled a memory, in which my son had, right in front of him, confessed how severe it had been for him at the beginning of migration. He said, "You will never be able to imagine how tough it was. I could not listen to his whole story without tears."

17. The New Family

Speaking about my eldest son's marriage, there were few happy moments as far as I am concerned. First of all, my eldest son was sort of forced to get married by his two aunts, my wife's sisters, when he went back to Korea for the first time. They had selected for him a particular woman because they had thought she was energetic and smart enough. Over the overseas' phone-call from Korea, my son expressed similar opinions. It was my strong belief, however, that without her having come to meet us, we should not let them get married. What they insisted, however, was that they could take any responsibility for this arrangement. They sent her to Brazil as a bride. When the bride came to us, I at once realized that the way she behaved in daily life was quite different from what I had expected. I wondered and was confused why her parents raised her as she was. If I were a Buddha-like person with a generous mind, it could have been easier for me to get along with someone who shows unacceptable attitudes toward seniors like me in daily life. As you can see it, human beings are endowed with emotions. The bride soon realized that she could not get along with me, her husband's father.

These days, however, my eldest son's wife is tending to her husband's mother as well as she can, raising babies and earning money for their daily life. Their mother, or, my wife, is getting along together with them fairly well. I reckon it a happy life, even if I am the only odd figure who does not adjust himself to the new family system. Perhaps, as I will die first in the family, I would expect them, without me, to take good care of their mother, or my wife. It's her routine task to take the mother to their shop in the morning, and to prepare meals for the kids when they are home from school in the afternoon, and then take them to the classes of *KUMON*,¹⁰⁾ pianos, and English in the town. In the evening, it's her routine to take the kids back home. As it is, I no longer regret my life with the kids, with their wives, and with my grandchildren as much as I used to.

I don't know exactly how they have so far put up with things around them, but it seems that they

have been wise enough to get through. My son's wife goes abroad once a year, and my son a few times a year in order to get the new fashion information of Korea or Europe, by which they can develop some Brazilian designs. Once it becomes popular and sells well, they can make money. My eldest son's wife seems to have an excellent sense of fashion, whereas my eldest son is good at counting materials and at financing. As a pair, they have been so far successful, but today they are screaming for help in a way, for things are all going down here.

Once in a while, therefore, they think of re-migrating to the US, but what they hear is that it's no different from things over here. In the US, there are at least 1,200,000 Korean immigrants who have moved from Korea during the past thirty years. We do have acquaintances and relatives there. But, when my son and his wife go to the US or Canada, they always get disappointed to see how severe the situation is over there. Sometimes, they think of Australia as a possibility. I myself am eager to migrate to Spain or Portugal because Brazil is not a good place for our kids' education. I am recommending them to visit there when they have time in the coming new year, for example....

Notes

- 1) Takashi MAEYAMA, 1993, "Ethnicity and National Integration of the Asian-Latin-Americans: A Study on Inter-ethnic Cohesion and Cleavage," written in Japanese, 94 pages, published by the Department of Cultural Anthropology, Shizuoka University.
- 2) Sumikazu TAGUCHI (The author's former name), 1999, "Chi no dai bouken: aru zai haku kankokujin no life-history," *Journal of Culture & Information*, No. 2, pp. 41-74, Sugiyama Women's College, Nagoya.
- 3) According to the narrator, the president of this agency, Mr. Hashimoto, was born in Korea. His grandparents had moved to Cholla-bukdo, Korea. When he was three years old, after World War II, he came back to Japan. After studying at an agricultural school in Fukui prefecture, he came over to Brazil. He doesn't speak Korean.
- 4) *Chuansang* is a traditional Korean meal described as "Alcoholic drinks and accompanying side dishes set on the table. The dishes vary depending on the kinds of liquor or wine." (Cited from "Food in Korea," www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/korea, the date of access: September 24, 2004).
- 5) This stereotypic term was often used to downgrade Japanese people in general.
- 6) Deriving from classic Chinese literature, this proverb goes as "*Ningen banji saiou ga uma*" in Japanese. It can be translated as: "An evil sometimes turns out a blessing in disguise." The narrator seems to find little difficulty in understanding such refined Oriental culture.
- 7) In their coauthored book *The American Captain Who Managed the Korean President* (published in Korean by Mun-Won Publishing, Seoul, Korea, 1995), James HAUSMAN and Jung-Il WHA illustrate this incident as follows:
On April 3, 1948, the people of Chejudo rose up against the corrupt police and American occupation troops. US-led troops and right-wing youth gangs killed at least 30,000 Cheju civilians. Many Korean soldiers and police refused to obey their American "advisors'" commands to kill their fellow countrymen and joined the nationalist rebels. The best known of these rebellions is the Yosu Mutiny of 1948. (Cited from an English abstract of the book, kimsoft.com/2000/yosux, the date of access: September 21, 2004.)

- 8) USP, pronounced as Oo-Soo-Pee, is an abbreviation for “Universidade de São Paulo,” which is one of the most prestigious universities in Brazil.
- 9) Bom Retiro and Brás are said to be the two areas most highly populated by Korean residents in the city of São Paulo, where a lot of ethnic food stores and restaurants have been opened.
- 10) *KUMON* is a learning method for kids originated in Japan. Established in July 1958, it has 1.48 million students in Japan, and 2.12 million students overseas, as of March 2004. (Cited from its corporate profile in English, www.kumon.ne.jp/english, the date of access: September 21, 2004.)