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**AUTHOR** Willis, David B.  
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**ABSTRACT**

This anecdotal ethnography describes the student culture at Columbia Academy, an international school in Kobe, Japan. The paper begins by contrasting the affluence of Columbia Academy and its students with the relative austerity of a nearby Japanese middle school. The paper follows a typical day at Columbia, and describes the nationalities of the students, their attitudes, and their peer relations, both in and out of class. In the next section, the typical experience of newcomers throughout their first year at the school is described. Included are observations on the students' dress codes and musical tastes, supported by direct quotations from various students. The subsequent section, entitled "Joining," is a detailed account of the socialization process at Columbia, including the various cliques based on common interests or traits in evidence among the students. The role of language in defining membership in these groups is then discussed, followed by a description of group dynamics. One group singled out for analysis is the "intensives," Japanese-speaking students who enter Columbia Academy from Japanese schools. The last part is a sampling of direct quotes from students reflecting their values, goals, and sense of purpose. The most interesting finding in this respect, according to the author, is the relative unimportance of nationality in friendships at Columbia Academy. An extensive 24-page bibliography is included. (TE)

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A Search for Transnational Culture:

An Ethnography of Students in An International School in Japan

by David B. Willis

(Soal University, Japan)

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**Introducing Columbia Academy**

The morning sun burns brightly through the haze of the crowded city below as the outline of Osaka Bay, the second most heavily travelled waterway in the world, gradually emerges. Taxi drivers in Kobe, Japan's largest port, call the hill leading up to Columbia Academy ichiban hidoi saka, "the most severe slope around." They should know, for the students of the international school called Columbia Academy (CA) do not usually walk to school like their compatriots at the nearby Japanese middle school, preferring to share taxies from the nearby Hankyu Railway station. The hill itself is somehow symbolic of the incredibly demanding journey that some students of CA undergo. Others find it to be an easy ride to the top.

A fair number of students arrive by private automobile, a few in Toyota Presidents with lace curtains or Mercedes with smoked glass. For CA students it is logical to ride to school in a car, and such symbolism is not lost on the Japanese middle school students, who are only allowed to arrive by car if they have a doctor's permission. CA is a school and a community that is both apart from and a part of the country which surrounds it.

To Japanese, too, used to perhaps one or two staff in even a large school, the presence of many maintenance people may seem surprising. But CA students do not clean their classrooms nor have to shiver through winters in rooms without heat like their counterparts just down the hill at Nagayama Middle School. Instead, teachers like myself frequently

enter our classrooms to find the windows wide open, the curtains blowing out along with the over-heated air.

CA students are downright pampered, not only by central heating, but by spacious showers with copious hot water, a weight training facility, well-maintained buildings, well-groomed grounds, and a lovely vista. All would be alien to the typical Japanese student, whose schools look well-used, plain and even shabby. The emphasis on an attractive physical plant is western.

The uniform of CA students is blue jeans and its attendant variations, prep, punk, and so forth. Some of the Oriental girls dress like cute Japanese pop stars. CA students also display themselves through their lockers, long rows one on top of another along the corridors. Rock 'n Roll stars compete on the inside of locker doors with day-glo signatures, snapshots of current steadies, pop heroes, and far away scenery.

The campus has a pervading sense of uniformity that is reflected in the high regulation of the school day and the school year. The schedule for the year follows the American pattern of four quarters, two semesters, and 180 days. CA begins in September and ends in mid-June. Vacations, those sought-after breaks for students, include Japanese holidays scattered through the year, a three week Christmas break, one week in the spring, and the long summer break.

The daily schedule is based on an eight period day that begins at 8.00 a.m. and finishes at 3:30 p.m. Classes are forty-five to fifty minutes in length with five minute passing times between class periods

and a forty-five minute lunch period. Most students have at least five classes and some as many as eight.

From a student point of view, the school day is highly structured and rigidly controlled, even oppressively so. A favorite game is skipping 'learning center' (study hall) and classes. The principal spends much of his time chasing kids down and reprimanding them for this behavior. The students feel the school year is both too long ("it's boring") and too short ("Mr. Willis, we don't have enough time to study"), and they relish breaks in the routine.

Entering the first class at 8:45 one day early in October, my cheerful 'Good Morning!' acknowledged and responded to by the students, I take a minute to check the attendance and focus attention on the day's lesson. The students did not rise when I entered the room, as they would have for a Japanese teacher, but they did become attentive to the front of the room and my presence. CA has no bells or buzzers, an administrative gesture to those of us who protested Pavlovian stimuli as inappropriate to a college prep atmosphere.

The physical setting of the classroom grates on me, a stark reminder of the vertical command structure which I am participating in and which, if I change it by making a circle or clusters, provokes dismay on the part of the next instructor. Spatial arrangements and body placement send messages which students quickly pick up and act upon.

The class is tenth grade social science and we are studying the basic concepts of psychology this month. For me the class itself is a study in cross-cultural psychology, and particularly in the psychology

of joining the organization that is CA. With twelve nationalities and slightly more girls than boys amongst twenty-six students I have a good setting for the role-playing exercise my book calls for at this point.

This is one of the few classes in my CA career for which I have had to issue a seating chart. Free seating in September resulted in vocal Europeans to my right, bored Americans in the back, quiet mixed kids in the middle, and a cluster of Japanese (who were always whispering to each other) on my left. At least this was the initial appearance of the class to me. Upon closer examination I realized that much more subtle peer groupings existed. The 'Europeans' were the fast crowd - a Japanese boy and some Americans were there, too. Those bored 'Americans' included blonde Scandinavians. The mixed kids, some of whom could pass for Japanese, moved easily between the different groups in the room, at one time speaking English, later Japanese. Only the cluster of Japanese seemed on second glance to be ethnically homogeneous and apart. Later I learned some were naturalized Chinese or Koreans and was told that their stylized Japanese names and mannerisms give them away to 'pure' Japanese.

As yesterday's test is handed back the students are quick to notice or ask those seated near them what marks they get. Some are ebullient, some downcast. All are watching. From about the fifth grade there has been a clear pecking order based on academic performance. The competition for high marks is intense. The students' families have high expectations, as do their teachers, the administration, and their peers. The first thoughts of college flutter across the stage late in ninth grade.

Although there are a number of tracks at CA (fast or slow college, business, slow learner), almost everyone makes an effort. There are few slackers in this school, something I attribute most to peer pressures, secondarily to the expectations of parents and teachers. Classroom assignments are often seen as a group task, and students organize collectively to cope with teacher demands, sometimes deciding together whether to complete or ignore assignments.

Of the basically three types of students, A-B, B-C, and barely passing, those who barely pass either have family money behind them or have opted out of the system entirely. As might be expected, those in the latter category sometimes become anarchic folk heroes for their peers. They also occupy a disproportionate share of the teachers' and administrators' time. The teachers view themselves as there to challenge their students: such reactions to a game that is supposed to be played to win puzzle them.

Clustering the role-playing into groups of four or five, I assign members likely to have contrasting views, expecting an interesting lesson. There is always the unexpected. Today I have Herman, the punk son of the pompous German consul, together with Eva, a strait-laced Norwegian missionary's daughter, a quiet Japanese girl named Kaeko who wants to be an opera singer, and Idries, a Lebanese Muslim boy whose family are ship chandlers. Their assigned roles for the exercise are as Thais and Americans discussing rules of polite behavior (greetings, punctuality, etc.) in those countries. There is much interest in the assignment.

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In another circle a tall Taiwanese named Jei sits with his mixed American-Japanese friend Billy (with whom he will shoot baskets after a quick lunch today, as every day), an outspoken Korean girl, Soong-Sa, whose father runs pinball parlors, and Kazuko, a Japanese girl from the 'intensive' class which has recently entered CA directly from a Japanese middle school. They can't quite seem to focus on why the behavior of the American in the skirt is so insensitive. The Thai's objection to his wearing shoes indoors seems fully justified to this group.

In the third circle there is a heated argument between two Americans, Rendel and Mike, one a long-term resident and the other an arrival two years before. The latter's father is setting up a disposable diaper factory west of Kobe for a well-known American company from Cincinnati. An Indian girl, Banu, whose father is a banker, and a Swiss boy, Johan, whose father is the local representative for a famous pharmaceutical company, watch in amusement. Rendel and Mike have gotten off the topic and are arguing about the merits of certain foods, a common interest. The long-timer is deriding the other's insistence that the only edible food in Japan is McDonald's hamburgers, that raw fish is only fit for cats.

Other members of the class include a Japanese-American girl who is a cheerleader, a Canadian boy who consistently fails my tests but is a computer hacker/whiz-kid, the American consul's daughter who has just told me she is going to the Philippines next year, a Japanese returnee from England, a Chinese girl whose family exports dry goods to the Middle East, a Norwegian whose father is a ship's pilot, and mixed kids



of Swedish-Japanese, German-Japanese, Indian-Japanese, and Korean-Japanese descent.

The snapshot of class interaction before me reveals the ease with which those who have been in the long-time position of being an 'international person' move into and out of assigned roles. They do not have as much trouble moving apart from their own roles or from those of my assignment as do those who have recently arrived from their home countries. Offering a critique on customs and behavior comes easily.

Later that day in another class there is an attractive new American girl from California whose appearance registers 'surfer girl' in my mind. The boys are giving Sandy more than a once-over, but none approach her, not wanting to appear uncool or, worse, be the first to receive a put-down. There is a testing of the waters here that has a fine-tuned sense about it. Girls in the class are cordial but reserved. The Asians are open-eyed but cautious, as they are in any encounter on unfamiliar territory. American and European girls welcome the new arrival with some basic inquiries, then sit back and wait for my questions. Teachers usually provide the background questions for these situations anyway. If it's a first-period class like this one it is the teacher's job to assign someone to show the new student around to classes for the day. This is also the new student's first exposure to CA's hidden curriculum. I ask leading questions to try and determine a match. The key indicator of the new person's acceptability is later at lunch, whether they are invited to join the table of the 'buddy' I have assigned or are left on their own. The end of the lunch-line can be an excruciating moment for new students at an international school.

Between classes the hallways are a chaotic jumble of books, bodies, and banging locker doors. Shouts in slangy Japanese echo above the din, their tone conveying the message 'isn't it great to be out of the pressure of performing in that alien tongue, even if only for five minutes?' In CA the students are responsible for an hourly dis-assembly/assembly in different contexts. Those in honors classes at the upper levels of high school generally follow each other around from one class to the next.

As one might guess, the lunchroom is where the real culture of the international school makes itself known. The statements made by who sits with whom, who shares food with whom, who stays put, and who moves around among the tables is definitive. Some students do not wish to be a part of this scene and quietly slip into the library or outside to a secluded spot on the grass.

One group, known as the 'backsteps crowd,' wolfs down their lunch so they can head for a secret spot for a smoke and idle talk. CA's reputation amongst Japanese is projected, fairly or not, by groups like this who violate Japanese norms. One of the jobs of a Japanese colleague down the hill at Nagayama Middle School is to drive around after his school is closed at 6 p.m. to check the local coffee shops to make sure none of his students are there. Schools in Japan even forbid their students to buy a Coke in public since it is not in keeping with the image the school uniform projects. CA students, on the other hand, often gather in groups after school at coffee shops with names like 'Groovy' or 'Sugar Shack' to smoke, drink a beer, and discourse on the day, their teachers, their homework, and their lives.

My last class, an I.B. East Asian History Seminar, contains CA's top students, the 'brains.' Of the twenty in the class at least half will attend Ivy League-level universities. Today we are discussing the bombing of Hiroshima, a subject which occasions a lively exchange between Jim, a chauvinistic American boy, and Mayumi, a Japanese girl who usually keeps her comments to herself. Most of the students have been to the Peace Museum in Hiroshima, either during a middle school geography trip or with their parents. I sit back, occasionally guiding the discussion, as the students basically teach themselves about this issue through an examination of American, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, English, German, and Russian interpretations of this great catastrophe. Then there is a rushing sound in the hallway, the banging of doors and lockers, and the shouts of middle school students released from classes. It is 3:30 and the academic school day is over.

### **Newcomers**

The annual cycle for students is geared to certain seasonal activities. One of the most important and most exciting for students is the arrival of newcomers. The experience of newcomers highlights what is the single most important value for CA students: friendship.

How does one find friends and acquaintances at CA if one is totally new? Some may feel there are no alternatives to the expatriate community (often called an American or Western ghetto by those on the scene), but for most newcomers who one makes friends with is a matter of both a search and a choice. As David, an American whose father was transferred by Ford to Japan and who had been in CA a year, said,

Newcomers must look for a place to fit in, like international schools have a lot of social cliques... and newcomers must find on their own where they feel comfortable fitting in and where they're accepted.

Much of the school's attention the first quarter is focused on integrating students into the new environment. The initiation in the dormitory is the most explicit student ritual here. By the second quarter more serious scrutiny from both sides is being undertaken in an attempt to find the 'right fit.' One clear way of marking out territory is through dress. Dress and other material culture is much in evidence and delimits student behavior. Examples can be found in a note taken one day in a tenth grade class of 28 students:

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almost all wearing trousers, half of them blue jeans  
 very few dresses or skirts  
 sweatshirts, windbreakers (rock star names on some)  
 some girls have purses  
 tennis shoes, some clogs  
 girls have some shoe variety  
 conservative hair styles (but at least once a month this  
 changes)  
 very healthy group  
 some jewelry (mainly nice watches)  
 many pencil cases (decorated with pop stars)  
 Japanese manga (comics)  
 book bags (back and shoulder)

dress likely to overstep boundaries: fishnet shirts, bare  
 midriff on boys, shirt unbuttoned to the navel, shirt off,  
 barefeet

In reference to the last comments, it should be noted that there was a concern on the part of the administration and teachers with offending students from certain cultures with these modes of dress, but wearing such clothing was also a challenge to the control the administrators and teachers exercised over students. When some students wore dress like

this they were sent home, causing the biggest student protest that year, albeit a feeble one. Herman was a principal offender, and the day after the confrontation he appeared back in school - with a fishnet shirt again but this time with a sweatshirt and tie underneath it.

As Mary, an 11th grade American who had lived most of her life overseas and had been in Japan two years, said about dress and deciding what group to join in an interview:

A: The first two months or so I came here I tried a lot of different groups but the main things you could tell was do they dress the same as you. You sort of match with the way you dress and then for me sort of grades and things. Sort of what classes or sports they liked.

Or as Lisa Ann, a Dutch-Japanese 10th grader, in CA from Grade 5, stated:

If you are in an international school, everyone dresses quite individually. Some dresses up, some are casual, and some dresses like a beggar or something, but it shows your group.

Dress indicates the boundaries of CA student behavior, "conservative teen-age" as we might call it being the standard. Blue jeans are a norm. The group that challenges the main-stream affects a punk style (or new-wave), including an earring for boys, many earrings for girls, two-tone hair for girls, fluff haircuts, and leather clothing. The really outrageous is, frowned upon, reserved for 'spirit week," when all sorts of excesses normally taboo are possible including cross-dressing.

When a new student like Marian arrives the mores are unsettled and eventually changed. A lovely young lady with alabaster skin and a striking hair cut that looks like a dairy queen dip-top cone sliced in half, Marian's appearance challenged CA conventions and caused much

comment. The boundary-breaking was palpable in the lunch-room every day for at least a month after she arrived. Later, others followed her lead. These kinds of newcomers daunt other students. Sex comes fast and easy for those in the group she joined, too. Stories of 'musical boyfriends/ girlfriends' are common. Other boundaries that are taboo to cross include wearing blue jeans in school by teachers or administrators.

Another way of defining boundaries for students is musical taste. Exchanging tapes, talking about favorite stars, even sneaking a listen during class are favorite activities that can be observed. Music is a powerful shared symbol for students. Which class one shared is something which might initiate a relationship, too. Here is Mary again:

In homeroom I found another girl who was new and we sat together and stuck together, but after a while that didn't work too well because just getting together on the basis of being new not knowing their interests, etc. But it helped to pass the first week by.

How does it feel to be a newcomer at CA? Here are the comments of a number of students:

Herman, German, 10th grade, in CA two years:

Q: What initiation rituals are there and what are their meanings?

A: First, usually the worst thing is to go the cafeteria on your first day. I hated that. You have to see everybody and they look at you. "Wow, that's the new guy." That's bad. Then it's all right. Then you find your friends and stuff. Good thing is that somebody must be from your culture. If nobody's from your culture, that's bad.

Q: Why? Why do you say that?

A: Because the culture brings you together right away. I came here as a German, all the Germans started gathering around me. It's that easy.

Q: Is that good?

A: It's pretty cool. (N.B., Other students observed that language and dress were more important than nationality).

Luke, American, 10th grade basketball player, in CA two months:

For me, yeah, I was a newcomer, and I was treated really friendly and the people were really nice ...I mean they were patient, you know, waiting for you to get adjusted to a new school and everything ...I mean, they invited you to do things with them, and just made you feel comfortable in your new environment ...in international schools, yeah, social groups they are not really exclusive ...they are always accepting new people and they never really condemn like people who come into their group.

May, Japanese-American, 10th grade, in CA three years:

When I came to CA I felt this warm feeling. These people accept you for who you are ...people right away are wanting to help you.

The loneliness which adolescents experience makes peer contact even more important, and the ties which are made contribute in a major way to the forging of individual and group identities. Student groups can be intense, even overpowering, especially for those who are not granted full membership by the other students. Feelings of isolation, rejection, and inferiority can be more powerful sanctions on behavior than warning notices or a visit to the principal's office.

To put it bluntly, joining a group, or at least making a dyad or triad with others of like mind, is a matter of social survival. Without friends a student is vulnerable, and adolescents can be cruel to 'rejects,' the CA term for loners. This is apparently especially true of girls at CA, if I can judge from comments they gave me as well as an answer to a question posed about friendship in the survey that was conducted. When students were given the statement "Making friends at CA is 1) easy 2) difficult... why?," a significant number of girls stated

that making friends at CA was difficult because of clique or group differences.

May, the Japanese-American 10th grader (above) who had lived in Japan for eight years, responded to this problem as follows:

Friendship in CA is very hard. The first day you set foot on campus people may smile at you and others may come up to you but this is only the first day.

CA has many groups, the group that speaks Japanese, the partiers, the gaijin (foreigners) group and the unwanted group. Most of these groups have a certain amount of people and some may accept new people, and some may not. Getting into one of these groups is probably the most difficult thing. Once you are accepted it's a breeze to make friends from there, but if you're not accepted you end up in the unwanted group.

But you may run into obstacles. For example, a person in the group may not like you and the result will lead to either you or the other person must leave the group.

At CA, trust is one of those things that is hidden. You have to search for a person you can trust, but once you find her/him they leave. Overall CA is a hard place to keep friends.

Friendships are critical for a CA student's life, more important in daily life than academics and certainly on their mind as much or more.

Some student remarks about friendship are appropriate here:

Parveen, Indian, 11th grade, in CA from Grade 7:

Faithfulness among friends in school is a great thing too. It changes the whole life at school. For example, when I'm sick of coming to school to study, the thought of meeting my friends, talking to them, and sharing ideas makes it easier for me to come to school. But at the same time, the thoughts of teachers ponder me.

Ann, American, 11th grade, in CA two years:

When put in a school such as CA I really realize how important friends can mean to each other.



Luke, American, father a university professor, 10th grade:

In CA it was really quick to make friends...Kids in an international school are friendlier than in an American school.

Barbara, American, 12th grade, in CA six months:

It's easy to make friends ...it's hard to make close friends ...Sahar invited me - come sit at our table ...it's also easier if you are a dormie. Friendships come easy there.

A lot of people are just coming and going all the time. You're not sure who's gonna stay and who's gonna go so people are afraid. When I came I didn't want to make close friends because I knew I'd be gone.

Mary, American, 11th grade, in CA two years:

Sometimes you kind of protect yourself, try to guard against friendship, like if you get hurt really badly by having to leave some friends you're a bit more reluctant the next time to form friendships. After a while you just see that as necessary.

Sekar, Indian, lived all his life in Kobe:

Q: What happens to newcomers in an international school?

A: I can only speak for CA. In CA they give them the best treatment and everybody makes a big deal out of them. Because it's such a small school. If we had a couple of students, a new student won't make much difference. At the beginning of the year we have new students, it doesn't make much difference. But if the same student comes in the middle of a year everybody notices.

Q: Does a student always have a meaningful relationship with students from various nations?

A: Friendships here are very hard. Mainly because people are always coming and going. You don't know when the person is really going to leave. They might come up to you the week before they are leaving and say, "Oh, next Monday I'm leaving for Australia," or "next Monday I'm going somewhere else." So, they are meaningful, though, for the time being that you are friends. It's kind of hard to keep in touch with these people.

Friendship and getting along with others ranks higher than academics in terms of personal values for students. A major defining

feature of student social structure is the use of language and the subsequent perceptions of reality which language endorses. In one sense, all groups are formed first around the premise of a common language, but this language is more complex than simply "English" or "Japanese." It is the medium of joining one's own international sub-group and the larger transnational culture that is CA.

### Joining

Joining in at CA means joining both the job of school and a unique adolescent society. The energy which the organization spends on socialization of students has a minimal return compared to the effects of friends and peer groups. There may be escape from the organization, but there is no escape at CA from other students.

There are two dramas occurring at CA at the same time. What a student does with teachers (formal encounters) and what he or she does with other students (informal encounters, daily routines) are very different. The latter is clearly dominant. Here we turn to what students are really joining at school, the small-group interactions carried on throughout classtime, throughout the school day and beyond. Patience on one level (academic) and active participation on another (the student society) are the two levels of discourse which students must somehow maintain in equilibrium.

That CA is a very demanding institution, constantly asking for student work and academic output, makes the second level of discourse coalesce into a solidarity that gets ever stronger as the four years progress. The other key concept besides patience that must be learned

in order to join the formal organization is prudence, being able to fulfill at least the minimal procedural details of what the teachers and the organization expect without offending fellow student's sense of solidarity too much.

Having friends is the most important aspect of being a student at CA. When students find their place in CA, usually by the end of the second quarter, they have really joined, but what they have joined is only secondarily a matter of joining in the organization's task of academic work, the yellow brick road to college.

Membership in CA is defined by the friendship networks that they have entered and been accepted by. Who one hangs around with, goes to class with, eats with, and gossips with, defines a student's identity to a large degree. Other students might as well be invisible. Curiously, teachers and administrators only barely acknowledge these friendship networks, attaching to them nowhere near the importance that students themselves do.

Much of the socialization that goes on at CA for students is thus carried out not by teachers but by other students. Students instruct each other in ways of dressing, acting, studying, and thinking. They also share 'party time' together, those occasions of total abandon often associated with alcohol. Many are happy with this, but some are cynical and unhappy. Adolescence is psychically a very potent time for CA students, filled with the conflicting demands of parents, school, and peers. There are frequent calls for immediate decisions about life and values which determine the slot one will or will not fit into.

For adolescents anywhere, individuality is constantly at war with pressures to join the group, but these feelings are even stronger in a school setting located in an alien culture. In a sense the groups most comfortable with CA are the long-term foreign residents. They know the ropes of intercultural enactment best.

The primary mode of experiencing others in Columbia Academy (CA), is not through nationality but through culture, language, personality, values, and shared interests. Groups in CA define the boundaries of social relationships. They have their own meeting places during and after school, their own language, their own interests, and their own roles.

Brian, an American 11th grader who has been in CA from the first grade, expressed what was happening as follows:

In other areas of social life, there are peer groups. Groups of friends are thoroughly mixed. There is everything from mixing of age groups to the mixing of nationalities and religions and race.

People are usually a member of one small group, maybe ten people. Once you are in a group, you are in for good. Because people are always coming and going groups stay small. You may have few close friends, and your friends may have a few friends and that's it.

On the other hand there are always the people who don't quite fit anywhere. They usually have one or two friends and that's enough because they will probably be moving at the end of the month anyway.

That groups are purposive need hardly be pointed out, but their purpose is two-fold: satisfying individual members' personal needs and maintaining the group as a unit. The latter is difficult in an atmosphere characterized so thoroughly by constant flux. Membership of certain groups may change dramatically from one year to the next. The core members of the power groups on campus, however, usually remain the

same, for these are people with a long history in the school. They have had literally years to build up a network of friendship and understanding.

If we probe into the core elements of culture for comparative study we find a certain poverty in explanations that glibly assert (and end) on a note something along the lines of 'the Japanese do this because they are 'group-oriented' or 'the Americans do that because they are individually-oriented.' Although there were some people who viewed other groups as consisting solely of Americans because they spoke English or solely of Japanese because they spoke Japanese, those holding those perceptions seemed to be strictly monolingual. Most CA students are aware that nationality doesn't necessarily define a person. None of the groups in CA consist of one nationality alone. Even 'Japanese' groups at CA include Koreans, Chinese, whites, and mixed kids (if they could speak Japanese).

A question put to the students on the ethnic background of their friends by nationality shows that 110 (55%) of the students have friends from 'many countries.' Although 55 students reported their friends to be 'mostly Japanese' and 26 students said 'mostly Americans,' observation of these students showed much interaction with many nationalities in reference group contexts. Even the 'intensives,' who were thought to be strictly Japanese by many sojourner students, frequently interacted with Japanese-speaking foreigners.

Friendship is a very important theme for students and appeared often in essays and notebooks which they did for me. Student notebook themes that most frequently appeared were, in order, friendship (the ups

and downs of relationships), complaints about homework, and discussions about sports activities. Christine, a Chinese-Japanese 10th grader, in Japan for two months, put it this way:

The next thing that I changed is the idea of making friends in school. Before in my old school, friendship between students was only limited to a few groups in a class and we fought against each other because of differences in some ideas but in here, even people are divided into different group but the relationship between groups are much more better and everybody wants to be a friend of everyone and so am I. I really want to know as many people as I can in CA so that I can understand them better.

The groups within CA are bound mainly by mutual interests and language, although factors such as age, sex, and residence are also important. The student society revolves around these interest groups, and, since CA is small, cross-group membership and contact exists. Perhaps more importantly, the common experience of an exotic setting defines all students as members of a unique, transnational society. At CA a number of basic groups can be identified, based on shared symbol systems:

Student Groups (a.ranged by size of group from the largest)

- 1) the burrikko crowd ("good friends")  
(modelled after cute female Japanese pop stars)
- 2) the backsteps crowd ("partiers")  
(parties, smoking/drinking, motorcycles)
- 3) the intensives (by males/females and age)
- 4) the athletes (basketballers, seasonal)
- 5) the coop group  
(gregarious students of both sexes who lounge around the student store)
- 6) the young scholars ("brains")
- 7) dormie girls (three groups divided by language/style)

- 8) the 'rejects'  
(CA language for the 'odd man out', but of many nationalities and both sexes)
- 9) the musicians (one group hard rock, one rock/fusion)
- 10) the 'kakko-ii' group (a Japanese term for being stylish and maintaining a certain disinterested posture toward life: Joe Cool, boys who speak Japanese, but who may be of Japanese, Korean, Chinese and mixed parentage. Subcategories include occasional examples of the so-called surfer-tribe and Yanqi)

In smaller numbers there are also the 'break-dancers,' the 'comedians,' and pockets of dormies. Groups are also determined by age and sex. As observed and as also reported by students, groups in the lower grades are usually male or female, while older students tend to mix more, especially when their common language is English. At the same time, the degree of social maturity is viewed as an important indicator of the level of groups. At the senior level there may still be all-girls' groups, but they are viewed as mature, in contrast with, say, 9th grade girls.

Intensives tend to divide along grade and sex lines. Finally, there are a half dozen or so dyads or triads who sit together in the cafeteria, apart from larger groups. Almost no one sits alone. It is, of course, possible to join more than one group at the same time, but one is usually the locus for a primary identity. What is particularly notable, though, is that in joining a group nationality is not a primary determinant of identity or social association.

#### **The Role of Language**

Perhaps the most critical initial determinant of group membership is language, since it is through language that we understand our world.

CA is an excellent laboratory for observing the ways in which we acquire language since in any one year new students enter, begin, join, work, and then leave. The entire process can be observed. Some of these students do not understand and must learn English, the language of instruction as quickly as possible. It should be noted, though, that this medium only serves to verbally transmit a wide array of rich, complex meaning systems.

Non-verbal transmission of meaning, both in the sense of a universal set of values for the ethos of the CA community, and for sub-group affiliations, plays a very important part in the process. Taboos, for example, are clearly understood, many of them related to the host country. At Columbia Academy, for example, discretion is valued when it comes to public discussions of sex, smoking or drinking. Unless one is within one's own group, secure from the outside world, silence is considered instructive and desirable. Reticence in students is one of the banes of English teachers at CA, but the students' silence is understandable. This, of course, is much like the Japanese community which surrounds CA.

Nagami (1983, p. 3) has stated that "Experience and language are reciprocal in the sense that human beings can experience outside reality only in terms of the meanings disclosed by language." He further notes that it is through this mechanism that we understand reality. The implication is that we understand and interpret our world through pre-conditioned and socially given knowledge. What then of a situation with numerous origins and multiple discourse? It is in situations like these that recourse is made to common meanings, to common symbol sets.



This has special application in CA's cross-cultural setting. At CA the dominant languages are English and Japanese, but one can occasionally hear others. Languages other than Japanese and English which CA students report reasonable fluency in include Italian, Korean, Danish, German, Hebrew, Norwegian, Hindi, Arabic, Thai, Persian, Spanish, Turkish, Dutch, Tagalog, Marathi, Sindhi, Gujarati, Swedish, Taiwanese, and French. It should also be noted that the English one hears comes in at least four varieties: American, British, Indian, Japanese. There is, however, subtle pressure to speak 'American.'

The Japanese that is spoken likewise comes in Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, male/female, and country dialects - with accented versions from Europe and North America thrown in for good measure. Again, there is a standard version: the rough-and-ready Osaka dialect. How does an institution function with such a bewildering variety of pre-conditioned and socially given knowledge sets?

The answer is that the school, like any socio-cultural environment, presupposes an 'intersubjective world' (Nagami, 1983, p. 4) which has historically developed various conceptions of the world as symbolized through language. As newcomers spend more time at CA they become attuned to the 'language' of CA's ethos. Perspectives are shared time and again. 'This affirms and confirms a common 'intersubjective world.'

The fact that international school students later seek each other out in university confirms the commonality of their intersubjective experiences. Within the schools themselves, it is simply taken for granted that the members of the community have much to share with each other. That so many different groups can express themselves to each

other presupposes a common, intersubjective world in which all members are embedded. In a sense, the understanding which is present also presupposes common elements of 'social heritage.' This understanding helps students at CA arrive at what might be called 'objectivity,' certain commonly agreed-upon aspects of reality. These aspects include shared goals and ideas about what is good or bad.

For example, it is commonly agreed at CA that attending university in North America after graduation is desirable. This is now changing. Formerly, it was believed that the only true university education could be had in North America. Today there is a visible growth of acceptability for the idea of attending European or Japanese universities. Other areas where common, 'objective' meaning is found include:

- cooperation within one's group
- dependence on one's group (interdependence)
- personality as the defining feature of individuals,  
not nationality
- affirmation of the value of a plurality of views
- competition for grades (some groups)
- the value of hard work (a Japanese and a Protestant ethic)
- mobility and transition themes
- the value of business or the professions as a career
- moderation in most things (except for those who are the most  
studious or most rebellious and have chosen a particular  
outlet for their energies)
- toleration of linguistic differences and eccentricity of  
thought
- wearing blue jeans

avoiding clothing that is too flashy (no minks: one affluent Japanese student who ended up in a ladies finishing college told me she was relieved when she went to her new college because she could finally wear her minks and not feel funny.), but at the same time at CA there is an assertion that students "can wear" whatever they like

teacher dress and behavior that is relatively clean and conservative

eclectic habits in dining - a willingness to try new foods

The intersubjective meaning which these examples bring to mind is addressed by Christine, a 10th grade Chinese-Japanese girl:

Almost everybody in CA knows Japanese and English. Therefore as a result a new form of language which combines Japanese and English developed. Most of the people including me may not always realize that they are speaking in a language which is combination of two languages. In CA it really doesn't affect much since most of the people know both languages but when people become so use of speaking this new form of languages then they will have some little trouble when they go back to their own society.

In the setting of Columbia Academy there is much room for exploration of the more complex, more subtle aspects of cross-cultural communication. One of the most important findings is the presence of common features which cross national, linguistic and class boundaries.

How else to explain the diversity of membership found in social groups in CA? Nagami (1983) has noted that we compare differences with others through a shared, 'symbolic common denominator.' These shared traits are powerful enough to overcome the supposed barrier of nationality, great enough in their extent to summon what W. Richard Scott (1981) calls 'bridging strategies.' Such strategies basically consist of the creation of a shared language, a language replete with verbal and non-verbal signs of mutual affirmation and purpose.

Individuals who have experienced CA report a set of basic universal symbols that are held in common, a set of values which newcomers who enter the system become socialized to and long-term members take for granted. Tolerance of others, an abhorrence of ethnocentrism, flexibility, patience, prudence, resilience, and the value of knowing more than one language are all examples in addition to those listed above. But at a deeper level for each individual is a specific set of symbols which deliver shared meaning to a group's members. We now turn to the inner dynamics of groups and how they experience the reality of Columbia Academy.

### Group Dynamics

Winter is a time for self-introspection, a time when the weather outside and the weariness of work inside combine to produce the blues. The middle of the school year is 'down' time - a doldrums when suspensions, sickness and sloppy work can be expected. The Third Quarter at Columbia Academy has this feel about it. In a sense, it provides moments for reflection on one's values and goals. By the Third Quarter one has settled into a routine and hopefully found a place. It is time now to reflect on what it means to be one who has joined, what it is like to be a student at Columbia Academy.

Those in the same group at CA will study together, eat together, play together, party together, and sometimes sleep together. These friendship networks and groups constitute everyday living for CA students. In the context of an international school like CA one question which arises concerns what larger social model there is to

conform to. In this case there are many accepted models, but certain common characteristics exist that lead us to identify an international class consciousness.

Group behavior could best be observed at CA through watching what close friends did together during the day. The most obvious place to look was, as was noted earlier, the lunch-room, where groups got together around one or two tables, but beyond that they could be seen moving through the halls or sitting next to each other in classes in pairs or small groups. Someone who observed the CA lunchroom for the first time might notice three major patterns: the tight cliques sitting together, the 'floaters' moving around, and the dyads and triads by themselves.

Students who are different, or, more to the point, who think differently, are left out in the cold, though less so at CA than in boarding schools of mostly one nationality. At CA everybody is in a sense different. One type of student who exists in CA and every school is the person CA students call a 'reject.' For teachers who are sensitive to their plight, watching what happens to rejects can be heart-rending, for rejects are excluded whenever they so much as try to voice an opinion or idea. A reject does not have the benefit of the protection, nurturance, and guidance of the group. These students are to be distinguished, it should be added, from those who are truly disliked.

Another type of student is the 'floater,' someone who moves easily between groups. Usually this person has facility in at least English

and Japanese, as well as having an extroverted personality. They are articulate, well-mannered, and political.

What group members talk about reveals what is important to them. Usually the conversation centers on parties, boyfriends or girlfriends, homework, teachers, athletic events, and travel. Academics is a surprisingly frequent topic of conversation for some groups, while for others it is almost taboo.

The groups are not evenly or communally organized. Like the larger societies around them, there are hierarchical distinctions based on history and the complex networks of those who are closest to each other. These networks function as dyads, triads, or larger units which devote much time to each other. In these networks, close friendships and an unofficial hierarchy has been set up. The leader or leaders of the group then determine its direction. Sometimes those who might logically be leaders are not interested in this position, in which case the group becomes a loose collection of close friendships. Group collapse was most quickly revealed in changes in seating patterns in classrooms and the cafeteria and in who walked home together after school.

Everyone in the group is on the lookout for fights or hurt feelings which might shatter the group. This seems to be especially the case when the group is composed completely of girls. Maintenance of the group structure is an over-riding goal and to do this the group needs to avoid emotional issues. On the other hand, those who are best friends often discuss such matters, and for them emotional issues serve as a bond.

Because CA is a demanding academic institution, there are certain opinions about teachers that are commonly-held by groups. Sometimes representatives of certain groups will mobilize class opinion regarding a particular teacher (usually over the issue of there being too much homework) and represent the class directly in negotiations with Mr. Jensen.

The usual pattern, though, is an on-going functioning of social groups that are small, isolated units, units with occasional contact with other groups, thus precluding any sort of collective action. Most groups seem largely unaware of the internal dynamics of other groups. The major cross-group communication that occurs is when boyfriend-girlfriend relationships develop.

The major groups which comprise the friendship networks of CA are based on what Kim, a mixed Thai-German student whose citizenship is American, told me is "finding people who have your own way of thinking." The primary defining features of one's group are shared interests and like minds.

Extracurricular activities define some groups, particularly basketballers. Sports or working on the yearbook together inspire a feeling of togetherness. In each group, too, there are those who are the leaders and those who are the followers: the star athletes and their cheerleader girlfriends, the best musicians and their younger proteges. Yet these leader-follower relationships are less along the lines of the western idea of top-down hierarchy expressed by titles and positions and more like the Japanese concept of sempai-kohai, senior-junior, where one

is equally responsible and equally receptive to the other, albeit in a dependency relationship (or, to put it better, interdependence).

Boys and girls bring different approaches to CA student culture. A look at the lunchroom shows that girls verbalize and act out their social rituals more than boys, leaving little notes or presents for each other and so on, huddling closer together and for longer periods of time. The burrikko group (cute young Asian girls who modelled themselves after Japanese pop stars), for instance, would usually be left sitting together in the lunchroom long after others had left to go outside or up to the library.

Valentine's Day is one of the most fascinating occasions with regard to relations between the sexes. Japanese chocolate companies introduced the custom after World War II with a slight twist: girls are supposed to give sweets to the boys they like. A stroke of marketing genius, the custom took off like gangbusters. Now women are expected to give 'obligation chocolates' not only to their boyfriends but to any important males who are hierarchically above them in the workplace or peer group. The social rituals associated with Valentine's Day are well-established at Columbia Academy, too.

On top of this at CA is the volleyball teams' sponsorship of Valentine's Day messages and carnations which are read out loud and distributed during class. Participation by boys appears to be limited to teasing those who are vulnerable (class clowns, unpopular students, rejects) while girls are entirely serious about the process. Valentine's Day is a good time to see group interaction at work.



Group dynamics at Columbia Academy are thus mediated by a complex network of customs, languages, and individual preferences. Individuals choose and are chosen. The inner workings of groups can perhaps best be illustrated next by looking closely at one particular group as an example.

### The Intensives

One of the most interesting groups at CA are the so-called 'intensives', Japanese-speaking students who enter CA directly from Japanese schools in the ninth grade in a special program. Because of their unique position we will spend some time examining them as an example of one of CA's groups.

The intensives' presence is clearly felt in CA. It is also controversial. Usually numbering between twelve and seventeen, of both sexes and from varied class backgrounds, these students are tracked into an intensive English language program for three and a half months from April. In September they join the regular curriculum as a part of the student body at the ninth grade level, yet they usually stick very closely together, in fact 'stick out' together - eating together, socializing together, and studying together. Their presence is controversial, and they usually divide themselves into male and female groups. Before long they are joined by non-intensives (Japanese returnees, Koreans, Chinese) with similar cultural backgrounds.

For these students, coming to CA for the acquisition of language is only a partial goal. What they really want to acquire, to share, is a new meaning system. For them this system is one glamorized, even

mythologized by the Japanese media. It is the life and culture of white American youth: more specifically, an image something along the lines of white, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Californians. Coca-cola culture. This idealized, if ephemeral, culture is considered highly desirable by Japanese youth because it plays on certain powerful symbols.

First of all, it appeals to a notion that has been held since at least the Meiji Revolution of the superiority of white-skinned barbarians in matters of modern technology and (by extension) modern culture. May, a Japanese-American, recognized this influence on the intensives in an interview:

Q: Has the United States an overwhelming effect and influence in international schools?

A: Probably, yes. It is the so-called "akogare no mato" (the source of dreams or the 'target of attraction'). Wow, you really admire the United States. If you come from the United States, people probably say "kakko ii" (cool, man). People brag about being from the U.S.

Second, attending any private school is also a mark of upper middle class status in Japan. Columbia Academy is considered to be in the upper ranks in this category, not only because of its cost, but because of the currency of its international character. The parents of these students range in age from their mid-30s to early 50s. As people born after the war, they have a tendency to think that western civilization somehow has a higher status than Japanese civilization. It is important to notice that, although much information about the outside world comes to Japan, it is also selective.

As a naturally curious people the Japanese want to take the best from outside, to have and enjoy new, better ideas and things.

Throughout Japan's long history there has been a penchant for things international. This is especially so today, when internationalism (kokusai-ka) has assumed the unusual characteristics of both a fad and a long-term phenomenon.

Frequently maligned by those who enjoy English as a first language, the intensives have made a decision to try out, and perhaps even acquire a new cultural, or at least a new linguistic identity. How do these students learn this new culture?

In one sense, it is only through conscious acts expressed through language that we are able to present ourselves with meaning. Thus, for intensives, what begins as a hyped version of the reality of western culture derived from television and magazines is gradually transformed into a new reality that is in some ways a cold or bitter disappointment, in other ways a liberating venture away from a conservative, strait-laced society.

The initiation of the intensives into the CA ethos begins with their English teachers and sempai's, older intensive students who have already completed these rites of passage. But it is in their classmates, the group they enter with, and more particularly with those of the same sex, that meaning is shared. Paradoxically, it is with this group that English is seemingly prohibited in normal social encounters. Instead, the Japanese language they are all so familiar with is utilized to try to elicit the meaning of their new environment.

Part of their fear of using English is cultural, the idea that one should not publicly attempt anything until they have mastered it. Luke, an American dormie with an intensive roommate commented that "the

Japanese kids seem like they are almost afraid to use their English... so they can't make friends with some people... "

Comprising anywhere from 15-25% of a given high school class at CA, the intensives soon discover that well over half of the rest of the students at the school speak Japanese anyway, many with the fluency of native speakers. The real meaning of the international school and its special culture gradually emerges for the intensives, especially through their contact with non-Japanese who speak their language.

The following are extracts of essays written by intensives about their experiences in Columbia Academy:

Ryuta, Japanese intensive, boy, 10th grade, in CA one year:

I think the students will change if he live in international school, because many changes of environment are there. I changed, too. Before I entered CA I thought foreigner strange. But now I don't feel strange about foreign people.

I think there are many other reasons that prove the advantage of international school and students will change. However, it's not easy to adapt in American school for Japanese because Japanese character and American character are different very much. American people usually say everything clearly like "I hate it!!" Japanese people don't say so clearly.

So when I began to study here, I had been so scared about everything. I was surprised many thing like life styles. After studying for one year, I could adapt in international life. During first year, I had many experiences which are very interesting. Because my English is not good, I caused many misunderstanding. After causing many misunderstanding, I could adapt and change.

Taro, Japanese intensive student, boy, 10th grade, in CA 5 months:

At first I didn't know what to do, and also I didn't know how to communicate with the intensive students and the old dormies. My personality was not light. I thought all of the things that related to me so seriously, so I didn't want to talk with the students day by day. When I was an intensive student, my personality was very bad. At first I was sad because I left my family. It was the first time to leave my family and live on my

own. In fact, the age of my intensive year was worst in my school life.

For the half of September my personality didn't change; however, my personality became as same as my real persoanlity at last. I understood how to communicate with the other students. I was really happy.

I am still not good at talking with the foreigners. I am a little bit worried, what to talk with them. I don't know how good or bad the personality of foreigners is, so it is a little bit complicated problem. My speaking is not good. I sometimes worry that I can really speak Japanese as same as the foreigners. I can't find the answer. When I become to speak English very well, I can see my accomplishment firstly.

I thought it was good for me that my personality changed in this school. My future life will be more interesting.

Soonok, Korean resident of Japan, intensive student, girl, 10th grade, in CA five months:

When I came to CA, I was very confused and bewildered because people were very friendly but cool. Why I felt so was just because of my English ability. When people were talking something in English, I worried they might speak ill of me or something like that. I was afraid of going to school for a while.

Actually, my friends, who entered to CA as intensive students as I did, and I became international. I don't know how to prove it but if I compared one of us to one who isn't a student of international school, I'm sure that one, who is in international school, is more flexible to other countries people.

As the intensives spend more and more time in the school, they come in contact with those students, mainly Americans but some Europeans, who speak no Japanese. Given time, even these foreign students seem to become acculturated to the ethos that is CA. I remember, for instance, one super-patriotic American student, Rob, who had come to Japan unwillingly from northern California because his father's company (a famous American discount store) had entered a joint marketing venture with a similar Japanese firm.

For the better part of his first semester at CA this young man carried an American flag on a six inch stand around to classes, placing it on the corner of his desk in whatever class he happened to find himself. Whenever a chance would come to discuss world politics, he would be the first to jump in with an almost caricatured response, jingoistic enough to inflame most of the rest of the class. On occasion he would even wave the flag around his head to punctuate a point for America. He also claimed that Japanese food was disgusting and that the only edible food in Japan was McDonald's and maybe Shakey's Pizza, although he was suspicious of the latter because they put squid on the pizza.

I was rather amused at his brave attempt to assert his identity in the midst of an alien setting, a setting that he really did not want to be a part of, but my other students, those who had spent a long time in CA (including Americans), had only one word for this behavior: "disgusting." They frequently mentioned to me, out of his earshot naturally, how offended they were by his insistent, chauvinistic displays. It reminded me somewhat of the hushed tones which my small town neighbors in Iowa used to use when someone became pregnant who shouldn't have. The tone was of the sort described by the phrase "One just doesn't do such things in polite company, you know."

Curiously, Rob's behavior had moderated considerably by the middle of the second semester. Not only had the flag disappeared, but he was actually speaking some Japanese and seen dating ninth grade Japanese girls ...at McDonald's.

### Students: Values, Goals, and Direction

Many students made statements during the research regarding the relative unimportance of nationality in friendships at CA. Some even seemed offended at such a question. Although a few Japanese-speakers would talk of an 'American group' and some English-speakers of a 'Japanese group,' no groups that were observed were exclusively of one nationality. The most conspicuous group, the "all-Japanese group," was found on closer examination to consist of many sub-groups, most of which included Koreans, Chinese, and mixed nationality students.

It appeared, instead, that what was being talked about were groups far apart from one's own who spoke almost exclusively in one or the other of these languages, thus appearing on the surface to embody a particular cultural style. There was considerable variation within these broad categorizations which suggests that even the division of language was of only initial relevance in group formation.

The value placed on nationality by CA students was instead expressed in the following ways:

Luke, American, Grade 10:

...in CA, yeah, I mean they have ...the culture is not so important as the individual, like, people don't wonder first what your nationality is before they want to know, like, know your personality. If you look at the world, people are all screwed-up just because of nationality and stuff ...I mean, they don't care about individual feelings or anything like this. Here the personality is more important than the nationality.

I really don't see any difference in cultures anymore ...I feel good about being American, yeah, but ...they're (international school students) more open ...less biased ...when they meet people of other cultures they won't see them with a closed mind.

Sekar, Indian, Grade 11:

In CA I never look at their nationality or their background. If you are friends, you are friends.

Nobumi, Japanese-American, tenth grade, in CA five years:

Being able to accept people from different places and being aware of the world you know... not only like, a lot of Americans are so self-centered, you know, I'm not trying to stereotype, but, they always talk like that.

Rendel, Dutch-Japanese, 12th grade, in CA from Grade 1:

People that have gone to an international school for a long time don't have very strong feeling about their country any more because they have interacted with people from many different countries. In a public school in the U.S. the Americans think their country is the best. But since you get to meet people from so many different countries in an international school, one learns not to be prejudiced against any country. He or she can observe that people from many different countries are pretty much the same.

Rachel, Israeli-Japanese, Grade 10, in CA from kindergarten:

Being international, I am proud. I have two kinds of blood in my body. One is Japanese and the other one is Israeli. It's not that I am half Japanese and half Israeli, but I am double.

Herman, German, 10th grade, break-dancer:

Q: How is the international school different?

A: Cause there're a lot of different people that you have to know how to handle them. Usually they, like in CA everybody learns how to be CA student, not a person from this country or that country. In the school, everybody is like a CA student, not like an African, an American, an Australian and a German.

Another student, Liza, an American-Japanese 12th grader in CA from Grade Six, expressed her thoughts on nationalism in an essay:

As many diverse cultures mingle in an international school, it is rare to find conflicts rooted in heritage, very different from the majority of public schools with racial or cultural prejudices. In other words, students of an international school learn to accept



different cultures and people and respect their beliefs. It is amazing to see how understanding and mature students can be in these circumstances.

Now at CA, I am increasingly finding a trend toward cultural growth. No longer is the school American but really international, a melting pot of cultures.

As a student of an international school, and from my experiences, I have learned that no one culture is better than others, but that they are all good. I have also learned to respect and admire these cultures and people, however different they are from me. Not until I stop and think about it do I really realize how advantaged and privileged I am to be in an international school.

All of the above information regarding nationality would suggest certain behavior as appropriate or inappropriate, depending on the membership of one's group, yet it is clear that there are other defining factors for CA students besides nationality.

Questions of identity are important for all adolescents, but self-perceptions and the first halting attempts to focus life goals make identity in an international school like CA more problematic. Questions related to self-esteem and a 'sense of efficacy' or power begin to be explored in the context of school social relationships. These appear rather removed from the institution's goals of college entrance, hierarchy, and competition.

Linda, the U.S. consul's daughter, a 10th grader in Japan 2 years, expressed the process of development in the international school setting in an essay:

Schools are a vital factor in an individual's history. It is there that he will acquire the attitude toward life that he will live by. His goals and ambitions may be disrupted, but his basic tenets will undergo little revision. International schooling introduces concepts of tolerance, concern, and understanding. The student also becomes independent and more individualistic.

The situation was no different in Montego Bay, Jamaica, where in 1977-78, I attended Osiel Academy. Racial considerations were not considered in choosing friends. If during recess we played "war" I did not care if I was chosen to be American, German, French or Japanese.

I was not sorry to come to Japan in 1983. Columbia Academy's international flavor, and the very real concern I feel here about world affairs is refreshing. I love the independent atmosphere and the homogeneity of this heterogeneous culture. CA smooths down the sharp points of nationalism and superiority. Students are more equal and friendly, there are groups of friends, but no cliques.

That is what is so important, and unique, about attending an international school. It breaks down barriers and fosters unity. I do not speak from my experiences solely, but from observations as well as from conversations between friends in similar situations.

Studying at an international school changes people, definitely. For the better, I think. Youths become aware of the world as a small planet, spinning in the midst of black space, much like the famous photograph taken from space in 1969, the year I was born. Perhaps it is symbolic. Nationalism is reduced, patriotism is diminished. An international school system is a good idea, it has affected me favorably. I am thankful.

The purpose of education, where one plans to live and work, and job goals (dream and realistic) all begin to assume significance and affect relations with one's friends as one gets older. How effective CA's education will be for the future, for getting a job and for personal goals, is subjected to scrutiny. This is a time for personal decisions about the most important aspects of life for students, yet many of the important aspects are barely considered by the institution, for which maintenance of the organization is a primary concern. Students are only central to the organization insofar as they contribute to the ongoing maintenance of the system.

'Working' at CA for students means something very different than what 'working' for the organization is. This is their context, a

context that is predominantly international. Some of the unintended effects of this context are

- Maintenance of the self
- Social Preparation
- Mobile and transitory relationships
- Group and friendship values (in-group, out-group)
- Cooperative values
- Interdependence
- Emphasis on the group rather than on individuals
- Personality as the defining feature of students
- Attention to whether CA is really an international school
- A picture of students closer to reality
- Lots of coping with linguistic and cultural backgrounds
- Cross-cultural encounters highlighted

The concerns of the students and the concerns of the institution often diverge, coming together only when the students need to satisfy family and peer group pressures. The more immediate, more important goals for students are related to peer group, not institutional, approval. It is only when commencement is about to take place that students realize that parting, independence, and transition are imminent features of not only a particular moment but of the rest of their lives, that their experience of a transnational culture has meant a profound and indelible personal transformation.

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