

FOREIGN PARENTS IN TOKYO AND THEIR SCHOOL CHOICE PREFERENCES

Donna M Velliaris
Eynesbury Institute of Business and Technology (EIBT)
AUSTRALIA

Abstract

School choice is centred on parents deciding where and how their children will be educated. Most parents hold a deep concern for their children's education, because childhood opportunities provide the basis for cognitive development. This study involved personally networking with 'foreign' families in Tokyo, in order to collect original data from the 'parents' about their experiences of living and working there, and especially of their preference and/or selection of schooling for their only or eldest child. An extensive literature review traced the ongoing discourse related to the foreign population in Tokyo and this article presents a section of that literature specifically related to three identified types of foreign parents and their school preference(s). Importantly, this study took an interdisciplinary approach that integrated 'educational' and 'sociological' research.

Keywords: foreign parents, international families, school choice, Tokyo

Introduction

As international companies compete for new markets, products, technologies and investors, as well as for the best talent, there is the added demand for cross-border deployment of foreign assignees on short- and long-term placements. According to Bennett, Aston and Colquhoun (2000, p. 239), the reasons underpinning such relocations are varied and include: the development of international skills and knowledge within the workforce; the management of joint ventures; the penetration of new markets through sales and marketing presence; the supervision of operational start-ups; the transfer of technologies; and the transmission of corporate culture.

As stated by Ali (2003, pp. 14-15), the cross-cultural adjustment of trailing spouse (whether male/father or female/mother) and children is more difficult than the adjustment that the international assignee faces. While assignees change physical locations, they stay within the stability of a 'familiar' culture (i.e., culture of the workplace), which largely reflects the 'home' culture. They find continuity in their work life, as well as a network of colleagues for support. During most of week and for a large part of each day, they may not come into direct contact with the 'host' (or new) culture. In contrast, trailing spouse and children have little or no access to such continuity, and will experience greater disruption of their personal lives. They often receive minimal assistance to help them face the daily demands of their new and unfamiliar circumstances.

In chronological order, the following studies made reference to factors affecting international assignees' decision-making processes. Harvey (1995, 1997) found that spousal attitudes and/or predispositions played a significant role in a couple's eagerness to accept foreign assignments. In 1998, Harvey (p. 311) asserted that the vast majority of 'international assignees are male' with women less likely to be willing to move for enhanced job opportunities. Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley and Luk's (2001, p. 100) study estimated that '80% of international assignees are accompanied by a spouse, children or both'. Van Der

Zee, Ali and Haaksma (2007, p. 25) posited that ‘70% of expatriates have children and most of them bring their families with them during their international business assignments’. Tharenou (2008, p. 184) advised that having older children, around ‘high school age’, reduced both men and women’s willingness to accept international assignments. And, Cadden and Kittell (2009, p. 1) reported that ‘two-thirds of employees who turned down an international assignment cited their child’s education as the reason for choosing not to move’.

Background

Employment and visa categories

Foreign passport holders planning to work and live in Japan for more than 90 days are obliged to register themselves at their local *Municipal Ward Office*¹ (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2008b). As required by *Alien Registration Law*², the local ward will issue foreign persons with a residency card to be carried at all times in place of a passport. This card enables access to Japanese social services, but must be renewed with every relocation to a different *ku* [ward] and surrendered to *Immigration Control* when departing Japan for residency abroad. The length of a foreigner’s stay is specified by the dates accompanying their visa status, which is determined by the purpose of their visit to Japan and specifically noted on their residency card.

In Japan, foreign visas are listed under seven distinct categories (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2008a). The first three visas (Diplomatic, Official and Work) require a *Certificate of Eligibility*³ issued by a sponsoring organisation. A certificate from a sponsor is a guarantee that the activity in which the foreigner wishes to engage is valid and indispensable, and that the applicant fulfils conditions as stipulated in the *Immigration Control Act*. The next three visas (Temporary, Transit and General) do not permit employment, while the final visa (Specified⁴) is conditional and may or may not permit employment.

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- 1 Applicants who are over 16 years of age are required to apply for a Japanese *Certificate of Alien Registration* in person. For applicants who are under 16 years of age, a person who shares the same ‘domicile’ can apply on their behalf (International Communication Committee, 2006).
 - 2 *Alien Registration Law* requires that information related to all non-Japanese residents be officially recorded. Foreign persons are then issued a document called a *Certificate of Alien Registration* and photographic identification that is colloquially referred to as a ‘*gaijin*’ card. All non-Japanese persons in Japan are required to carry their passport or card at all times (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2008a).
 - 3 A Japanese *Certificate of Eligibility* is issued before a visa application by a regional immigration authority under the jurisdiction of the *Ministry of Justice*, as evidence that the applicant fulfils various conditions of the *Immigration Control Act*. This certificate confirms that the activity in which the foreigner wishes to engage in Japan is valid and comes under a recognised *Status of Residence* (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2008a).
 - 4 Specified status – Activities that are specifically designated by the *Minister of Justice* for foreign individuals. This includes: dependent spouse and children; foreigners privately employed by consular representatives; foreigners under bilateral working holiday agreements; foreign athletes in amateur sports; foreign lawyers in international arbitration affairs; and university students engaged in internships (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2008a).

Within the seven distinct categories of foreign visa, the most common is the ‘Work’ visa, which is issued for 14 *Status of Residence* (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2008a). Table 1 provides data from 2007 indicating the population of ‘legal’ foreigners entering Japan according to their work visa status. All foreign nationals who reside in Japan must act according to their *Status of Residence* for the period of stay permitted at the time of their entry. In alphabetical order, they include: artist; engineer; entertainer; instructor; intra-company transferee; investor/business manager; journalist; legal/accounting services; medical services; professor; religious activities; researcher; skilled labour; and specialist in humanities/international services. If the foreigner wishes to renew their period of stay, change their residential status, or to engage in activities other than those permissible by their status, they are required to follow designated procedures at a local office of the Japanese *Immigration Bureau* (International Communication Committee, 2006).

Table 1. Legal foreigners who entered Japan in 2007 by work visa and status of residence (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2009)

14 x Foreign ‘Work’ Visas	Status of Residence	Foreign Population
1	specialist in humanities/international services	142,643
2	engineer	81,121
3	intra-company transferee	60,039
4	investor/business manager	43,264
5	entertainer	42,098
6	professor	18,493
7	skilled labour	18,261
8	instructor	17,785
9	religious activities	6,579
10	researcher	5,155
11	legal/accounting services	1,100
12	artist	1,074
13	journalist	864
14	medical services	217

Foreign children born in Japan are required to have their birth reported to the local *Municipal Ward Office* of the place of birth, together with parents’ registered ‘domicile’ and where their *Certificate of Alien Registration* was issued. This notification must be submitted within 14 days of the birth by either the mother or the father. Foreign couples, therefore, are required to register newborns for their ‘own’ certificate (International Communication Committee, 2006). Children who are born in Japan to non-Japanese parents are considered ‘foreign nationals’ and are not entitled to Japanese citizenship/nationality.

Education spectrum and infrastructure

Tokyo represents an active and dynamic school market and is home to multilingual, multiracial, multinational, multipurpose and globally competitive learning institutions that give foreign parents considerable choice. Barbara (1989, p. 128) noted that ‘the importance and nature of the educational infrastructure in the country of residence will have varied consequences’ on the range of options offered to parents of school age children. Fortunately, Japan’s economic success has been grounded in the nation’s focus on expanding their education and the country enjoys some of the highest literacy rates and other educational benchmarks in the world. As visually depicted in Figure 1, the typology of schools in Tokyo range along a continuum from national to international, and with unlisted variations in between. At one end, are the pure Japanese national schools with an emphasis on a national curriculum and cultural homogeneity. At the opposite end of the continuum are what may be termed ‘fully’⁵ international schools with an international curriculum and the greatest range of cultural diversity (Velliaris & Willis, 2013, p. 229).

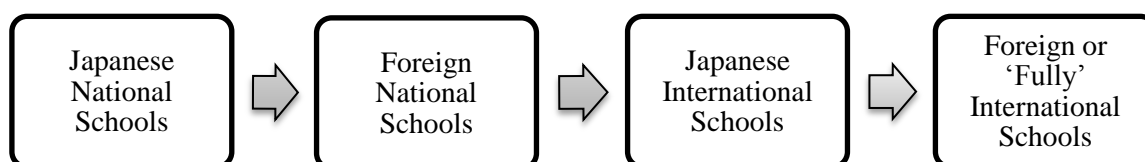


Figure 1. Continuum of school choice from national to international in Tokyo Japan

According to Maddaus (1990, p. 275), schools represent different mixes of educational, compositional, structural and reputational diversity. Researchers have attempted to classify school choice criteria into various thematic categories (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995, 1996; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Gorard, Fitz, & Taylor, 2001; Jeynes, 2000; Reay & Ball, 1998), but Gorard’s (1999, pp. 31-33) study appeared to provide the clearest and most concise classification model:

- *Academic*: parents believe that their children will fare better academically at a particular type of school;
- *Organisational*: parents believe that the reputation, ethos, atmosphere, class size and the physical environment are crucial;
- *Security*: parents believe that discipline, teaching of moral values and respect for others, as well as an avoidance of bullying and therefore, the happiness of children is imperative;
- *Selective*: parents believe that gender, religion and other certain social background(s) are desirable; and
- *Situational*: parents believe that convenience in terms of location and ease of travel are important.

5 This expression has been adopted from Allen (2000, p. 126 & 128) who explained that ‘[f]ully international schools will... have structures to minimise the influence of any one culture. If the school is ‘inclusive’ in its aims, it must strive to involve them all, regardless of cultural traits’.

Research has consistently shown, however, that parents tend to look at a number of the above listed school choice criteria in ‘combination’ (David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Gorard, 1999; Maddaus, 1990; Tomlinson, 1997).

Foreign families in Tokyo

The following section presents literature focused on the school choice preferences of three types of ‘foreign’ parents residing in Tokyo, namely: (1) English speaking; (2) non-English speaking; and (3) self-initiated international parents, addressed in order herein.

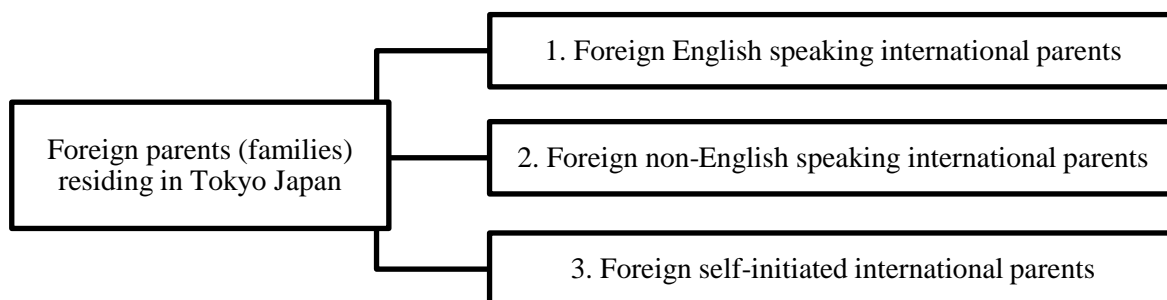


Figure 2. Three distinct groups of foreign parents in Tokyo Japan

(1) Foreign English speaking international parents

The first group are the English speaking international parents. In the Tokyo context, these are predominantly business persons, diplomats, journalists, educators, military and/or missionary personnel who are expected to reside in the host country for several years. The literature advises that what constitutes a short-term international assignment is typically company specific (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007, p. 205). As elucidated by Webb and Wright (1996, p. 43), it is important to consider that business usually takes longer to conduct in a foreign culture, thus ‘[s]hort stints abroad of less than three years are not conducive to high performance as the expatriate barely has time to adjust before being transferred [again]’.

Parents’ awareness of the relative short-term assignment of their relocation may influence how much of the ‘host’ language and culture or how much of the ‘home’ language and culture they wish to promote (Fry, 2007, p. 142). Cohen (1977, p. 18) suggested that short-term transiency ‘reduces the readiness and even the opportunity for adaptation to, and integration into, the host environment’. In this scenario, cross-cultural exposure and adjustment are seen as intermittent rather than ongoing, so that the ‘extent of their [family] acculturation and the effect on their subsequent development, given their temporary status, is largely unknown’ (Gerner, 1992, p. 199).

Such short-term international assignees tend to be ‘planted’ in certain localities under the auspices of their sponsor organisation (Cohen, 1977, p. 25). Planted communities can be expected to be more oriented to their home language and culture and therefore, socially cohesive and somewhat segregated from the host society. In other words, they may establish a type of ‘environmental bubble’ as epitomised by the following early, yet still pertinent observation:

The manner in which the stranger [foreigner] copes with strangeness [host environment] and especially the extent to which he is willing or capable to expose himself to it, or regresses from it into the shelter of the familiarity of an ‘environmental bubble’ of his home environment... expatriate communities tend to establish quite substantial ‘environmental bubbles’ [sic]. (Cohen, 1977, p. 16)

Greer (2007, pp. 56-57) contended that many of these families experience regular overseas secondments and rely on foreign ‘national’ or ‘[fully] international’ schools within their bubble to maintain their children’s academic continuity between/among countries (refer to Table 2). The foreign community and the children’s school community help to serve as a network, enabling the family to establish—rather quickly—new social ties in the Japanese host-setting. The school is a vital component of the bubble and teachers, parents and students who live within the borders of a tight, insular social group, tend to be dependent on each other for emotional support and in some cases physical safety (Doran, 2004, p. 51).

Table 2. Prominent foreign national and international schools in Tokyo Japan

English-Speaking National Schools	English-Speaking ‘Fully’ International Schools
American School in Japan Canadian International School Tokyo The British School in Tokyo	International School of the Sacred Heart Nishimachi International School St. Mary’s International School

For foreigners who rely heavily on others from a similar background, the ‘environmental’ bubble also constitutes a ‘cultural’ bubble (Joslin, 2002, p. 50). The relatively small size of these bubbles may somewhat force the creation of friendships or alliances in which parents may stay attached to the group whether they like them or not (Doran, 2004, p. 53), thus enlarging the bubble.

In Japan, examples of environmental/cultural bubbles tend to be disproportionately concentrated in the three largest metropolitan cities—Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka (Table 3). In Tokyo, the foreign population predominantly resides in planted or ‘cluster’ locations, such as the central *Minato-ku* [Minato ward], where they are in close proximity to the headquarters of multinational corporations (i.e., the foci of political power and economic activity), embassies, foreign associations and clubs, as well as the majority of international schools.

**Table 3. Major cities in Japan and their approximate populations
(Japanese National Tourism Organization, 2009)**

Japanese City	Population
Tokyo	12,059,000
Yokohama	3,426,000
Osaka	2,598,000
Nagoya	2,171,000
Sapporo	1,822,000
Kobe	1,493,000
Fukuoka	1,290,000
Sendai	1,008,000

NB. Greater Tokyo comprises 23 wards, 26 cities, 5 towns and 8 villages.

As one of the most developed cities in the world, Tokyo provides the infrastructure for the lifestyle these foreign parents desire. In order to cope, they often receive assistance from their sponsoring organisation in the form of:

...compensations for the alleged hardships and extra expenses actually or supposedly incurred by their stay abroad. These 'compensations' often represent a major financial incentive and raise considerably the disposable income of the expatriate [international assignee]... there are baggage allowances, expatriate allowances, children's education allowances, mileage allowances, subsidized housing... The expatriate has all these rewards together with a distinct knowledge that no one will bother him [sic]. (Cohen, 1977, p. 21)

While these parents/families are not materially disadvantaged, their relative affluence should not disguise the cultural challenges that they themselves and their children may face (Nette & Hayden, 2007, p. 443). Concerned with maintaining a comfortable lifestyle, these parents prefer to relocate when their children are young and not bound by academic demands such as senior secondary examinations. In other words:

...[s]ince parents serve as the primary anchors for these age groups, most agreed that it was the easiest time to move children internationally... Kids who are not yet in school are the easiest to deal with in an internationally-mobile lifestyle... Even in the most stable of environments, adolescence is often a traumatic time, both for the teenager and the parents. (McCluskey, 1994, pp. 14-16)

These international families tend to relocate more than once, suggesting that it is possible for children to have been '[b]orn in Japan, weaned in Greece, and toilet trained in Taiwan' (Taber, 2004, p. 28) and for there to be 'Japanese children growing up in Australia, British kids raised in China, and Turkish youth reared in Germany' (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 5).

(2) Foreign non-English speaking international parents

The second group are the Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) international parents. Similar to the international assignees described above, they tend to be business persons, diplomats, journalists, and educators for example, who are expected to reside in the host country for several years, and are functionally fluent in English. Regardless of whether there are foreign national schools available in the host country or not, many of these parents prefer to send their children to international schools to acquire English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL). They value the affluence and exclusivity associated with an internationally transferable education (Greer, 2007, p. 57). It could be said that:

...such families hold their own language and culture in high esteem, take steps to preserve these, and therefore do not feel threatened by the assimilation of an Anglophone cultural identity. Instead, for them, the 'élite bilingualism' offered by an international school education is a pragmatic choice that will open doors to a transnational lifestyle. (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008, p. 268)

The chosen school may be seen as providing a higher quality product, reinforcing privilege or promoting 'élite separateness' (Allen, 2002), while providing for the global *lingua franca* of English.

Certain international schools may not discourage this view of elite separateness, recognising that it as their strongest marketing tool (Cambridge, 2002). That is, internationally-oriented products and

services—such as global certification of educational qualifications—can facilitate ‘educational continuity for the children of a globally mobile clientele, as well as for the children of the host country clientele with aspirations towards social mobility in a global context’ (Cambridge, 2002, p. 228). Developed by the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) are: (a) the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IBPYP); (b) the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP); and (c) the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP). Similar programs developed by the University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) are: (a) the International General Certificate of Education (IGCSE); and (b) the Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE).

Both organisations—IBO and CIE—offer their ‘products for sale in a single unitary world market’ (Cambridge, 2002, p. 241). When applying to send their children to such select schools, these parents often make choices based on the notion that the benefits of an internationally-oriented education will outweigh the costs, despite the exorbitant tuition fees. For these parents, such an education is a long-term investment.

Universities around the world recognize the IB [International Baccalaureate] as an indicator of a top-quality education. Some will give university credit or advanced placement to students with the IB, depending on the score the students earned on the IB exams. And some will waive the requirement to take entrance exams for students with the IB. (Copeland, 2009, p. 1)

This choice of schooling provides not only fluency in English, but also ‘reputational capital’ (Potter & Hayden, 2004, p. 90) as a result of the prestige accorded to their programs and especially the possibility they offer for children to enter universities worldwide.

In Tokyo, because of the high numbers of foreign residents, the availability of schools providing instruction in foreign languages has steadily increased. There may be NESB international parents who wish to maintain their family’s cultural and linguistic plurality, and privileged circumstances. There are networks of non-English speaking foreign national schools (e.g., Tokyo Chinese School, Lycée Franco-Japonais de Tokyo, Tokyo Indonesian School, and Tokyo Korean School) catering to parents who prefer their children to maintain the educational qualifications of their home country for the duration of the family’s sojourn (Velliaris & Willis, 2013, p. 232). These foreign parents may prefer for their children to stay in their own national system because it provides reassurance that their children will be able to readily re-integrate into the same system upon returning home. And, from an institutional perspective, the atmosphere may be virtually the same as attending a national school in the home country. Students usually find it easier to create friendships within their own cultural and linguistic group, and this choice can also provide the student with a sense of solidarity as part of a minority group in the host country.

(3) Foreign self-initiated international parents

The third group are the self-initiated internationally-mobile assignees (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Tharenou, 2003). Suutari and Brewster (2000, p. 434) identified six (sub)groups of people who may fall into this category, namely: (1) young opportunists; (2) jobseekers; (3) officials; (4) domestic professionals; (5) international professionals; and (6) dual-career couples. They often experience the same privileged standards of living as other foreign families in this grouping.

In the 21st Century, the reality for most individuals is that they will change employers several times over the course of their working life. ‘With the frequent occurrence of reorganizing, downsizing, rightsizing,

delaying, pyramid flattening, teaming, and outsourcing, traditional career ladders are vanishing fast for many jobs' (Selmer, 1999, p. 56). Thus, ever more, a 'boundaryless career' that crosses national borders has become an alternative among highly educated or skilled individuals (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Thomas, Lazarova, & Inkson, 2005). This stems from the fact that:

...[o]rganizational careers have been traditionally conceptualized as linear trajectories where individuals advance hierarchically within a single organization over the course of their career... Given today's more volatile and unstable organizational environment, individuals can no longer expect lifetime employment within one organization or a steady climb up the corporate ladder... (Eby, et al., 2003, p. 689)

In a study, Richardson and Mallon (2005, p. 412) learned that many self-initiated international participants had not actively sought overseas employment, but rather the opportunity to become an expatriate arose 'serendipitously' through unexpected chance meetings, such as at conferences. Once the opportunity to travel abroad and work had arisen, other factors such as a lack of job prospects or high taxation levels in their home country may have raised the level of attractiveness of the foreign job market. Then, without the constraints of a fixed-term expatriate contract, Yang (2007, p. 3) suggested that these assignees have 'more time to adjust to a foreign environment, but the longer they stay overseas, the more difficulty they and their family members are likely to encounter as they return home'.

Depending on their employment status and conditions, parents in this group may choose any of the schooling options available in the Tokyo context from free local Japanese national schools to exclusive foreign international institutions. International schools are often viewed as elitist as they can cost up to US\$25,000 per annum per student (Jenckes, 2006, p. 75), although generally, high educational costs do not create a barrier for these parents who have usually accounted for such factors prior to initiating their own relocation (Velliari, 2010).

Conclusion

Presumably, parents have intimate knowledge of their children and their specific abilities, habits, interests and desires. In making a choice of schools, international parents need to complement their knowledge about their children with their knowledge of educational programs that will offer the best results for their children. Parents' educational decisions are based on what they have come to understand as being potentially optimal for their children in both familiar and unfamiliar environments. Certainly, school choice may be more complicated than in other contexts as satisfying preferences (e.g., academic, organisation, security, selective and situational likings as presented on page 4), as well as fulfilling varied admissions criteria, may restrict the range of schools from which these parents feel that they can make a high-quality choice. Indeed, for 'matching' to be effective, schools in Tokyo should have a clear view of what foreign parents desire and how factors may influence their final decision. By better identifying their target populations, schools in Tokyo will be in a stronger position to cater more effectively for their particular market and to ensure that they remain a credible choice for future generations of foreign assignees/parents and their international/transnational children/students.

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Biography

Dr Donna Velliaris is Academic Advisor at the *Eynesbury Institute of Business and Technology (EIBT)*. EIBT is a specialist pre-university institution where international students work towards the goal of Australian tertiary entrance. Donna holds a Graduate Diploma in (Secondary) Education, and three Master of Education in: (1) Educational Sociology; (2) Studies of Asia; and (3) Special Education. She graduated with a PhD in Education in 2010. Her research interests and expertise include: academic literacies; transnational students/Third Culture Kids (TCKs); and schools as cultural systems. Donna is first-author of more than 10 book chapters to be published in 2014-2015.

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