THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF "CULTURE SHOCK"

麻田貞雄 著『リベラル・アーツへの道－アメリカ留学とその後』
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（Sadao Asada. *Path to the Liberal Arts: My Student Days in America and After*. Kyoto: Kōyō Shobō, 2008. xi＋258＋11pp.）

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This essay was inspired by my reading of Professor Sadao Asada's *Path to the Liberal Arts: My Student Days in America and After*（『リベラルアーツへの道－アメリカ留学とその後』）(Kyoto: Kōyō Shobō, 2008). It is not a traditional scholarly review. I could not write such, for I am too close to its author. We have been friends, guests in one another's homes, and professional colleagues for more than four decades. We are almost the same age, encountered similar challenges in college and graduate school, and went on to become historians of navies and Japanese-American relations. Thus what follows is a hybrid － part review, part reflection on and comparison of personal experiences, and part exploration of what "culture shock" is.

Asada has not written an ordinary autobiography. Because his principal concerns are the crossing of cultures and the quality of higher education, he barely touches on his early years during the Pacific War in Kyoto. Instead, he takes up the threads of his personal odyssey from Japan to America and back just as he was about to graduate from Dōshisha High School in the spring of 1954. Although he could not know it then, it is clear in retrospect that he was already primed for what lay ahead. He came to maturity in the heady outward-looking years of the Occupation, when command of English and knowledge of things foreign were valued more than at any time since the early Meiji period. He came from a family that prized education as the key to success in life. Both parents had attended Dōshisha schools, and his father

had gone on from the university to a career in business. Asada's high school had a visiting English teacher, Milton L. Bierman, who had graduated from the American college he later attended. To win a scholarship from the foundation established by former ambassador Joseph C. Grew that would send him to the United States, he had to write an essay — in English. And before he boarded the *Atami-maru* bound for San Francisco, he and his fellow Grew scholars took classes in English for several months at the newly established International Christian University located in what was then the outskirts of Tokyo.

His eleven-day crossing of the Pacific took him to a more self-centered and mono-cultural land. The United States was flush with memories of victory in World War II and awash in the prosperity that prompted historian David Potter to conclude that Americans were a distinctive "people of plenty." When Asada arrived, I was midway through University High School, located on the west side of Los Angeles. Although a public school, it was no more ordinary than its Dōshisha counterpart. Several of my teachers had Ph.Ds, and many of the younger ones who came from nearby UCLA were earning their doctorates. They provided me with a superb "classical," that is to say, Euro-centric, secondary education. The foreign language I learned was Latin; the history I studied and the literature I read was European and American. This was the preparation needed to win acceptance at Stanford University in 1956.

Before the social and political turmoil of the 1960s and subsequent emergence of Silicon Valley, Stanford was not the socially and ethnically diverse world-class institution it later became. My class had four times as many men as women, most of whom came from California and the American West. My fraternity brothers and I loved to sing an alternative football fight song that began, "Sons of the wealthy few. . ." We got a good education, for with the exception of a few Nobel Prize laureates in science, the faculty were devoted teachers rather than ambitious research scholars. None of my professors were women. Although two extraordinarily talented East Asian experts taught history, my major subject, and the Hoover Institution housed one of the largest collections of Chinese and Japanese books in the United States, I never even thought of taking a course from them or trying to learn an Asian language. My budding international interests focused exclusively on Europe.

By the time I entered Stanford, young Sadao Asada was midway through his undergraduate years at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. In substance and style, what he learned there was very much like what I studied at Stanford. The classic Euro-American liberal arts formed the core of the curriculum. He struggled to write freshman English essays just as I did. He “discovered” American and European history through inspiring teachers who excited him with courses on “The Expansion of the American People” — across the North American continent and Midwestern immigrant literature. Because he studied extraordinarily hard, he merited his teachers’ personal attention and even came to the notice of the college president. As he makes clear in the second of two chapters devoted to his undergraduate years at Carleton, they drew out the best in him. He won a contest for building the best personal library, wrote a prize-winning senior honors essay in history, and was elected to the prestigious national liberal arts fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa.

In one, obvious and very fundamental respect, however, Asada’s undergraduate years were very different from mine. He was getting a liberal arts education in a foreign tongue, in a small town in a remote rural area half a world a way from his family and the cultural riches of his native Kyoto. He rarely, if ever, spoke his native language, for years passed before only two Japanese visitors came to the Carleton campus. He never lost his Japanese identity — indeed, as a Grew scholar he took great pride in introducing his fellow students to his country’s culture with the few small handicraft items he had brought from home and improvising sukiyaki dinners for the families that hosted him on special occasions. But that identity was immersed in the seemingly endless sea of what was for him a new, different, and, at least for a time, dominant culture.

In theory, as Asada explains, crossing from one culture to another is a painfully stressful experience. For him as an undergraduate, however, the idealism that he imbibed on the idyllic Carleton campus softened that strain. So, too, did the presence of the kindly Milton Bierman, whom he had known at Dōshisha High School, who welcomed him into his family’s home at Christmas, and even gave him money when needed. Asada also exhibited a curious and outgoing nature that balanced his intellectual ambition and smoothed his way into a new culture. He enjoyed the very same kinds of extra-curricular activities there that I did at Stanford. We both wore

freshmen beanies and built bonfires; we both struggled with dating for college dances and teas; and like almost all of our peers, we delighted in the burgeoning folk song craze which brought celebrities like Pete Seeger to campus. I would wager that folk singers in concert commanded far larger and more enthusiastic audiences at Stanford in the late 1950s than presidential candidate John F. Kennedy did in the spring of 1960.

Asada left Carleton College two years earlier determined to earn a Ph.D. at Yale University rather than returning to Japan. His decision to do so worried his parents and reflected a toughness that he had gained through summer work beyond the college campus. Virtually every American college student in the 1950s worked during the summer. We did so in part because our parents who had lived through the depths of the Great Depression valued work as a great prize and in part because we, like today's students, needed money to support our lifestyles. In my last high school summer I had a mind-numbing job in a television factory; but I was luckier in my college vacation work. Through a family connection I got a recurring job at the local post office. That meant getting up very early and doing lots of walking in the seaside Los Angeles suburb where my family lived. But I finished in time to surf, read, and work on my tan at the beach almost every day.

Asada had a much tougher and character-building time of it. Because the Grew Foundation provided funds only for college expenses, he had to work to survive during the summers. Fortunately for him, the government regulations that make it all but impossible for a foreign student to work in the United States today did not exist then. Through the college he got a job for part of his first summer as a counselor for teenagers at a beautiful camp on the shores of Lake Michigan. That was fun. Going off to work in a vegetable cannery and living in a barracks with his fellow workers during his second summer was not. His first exposure to the rough language and tough living conditions of what we would now call migrant workers introduced him to an America that differed radically from the heady and idealistic world of the liberal arts college. But it also toughened him for the challenge of finding work the next summer, when he hoped to earn enough to help his sister with travel expenses that would bring her to study at Carleton on a scholarship. He took the bus to Detroit, only to find workers at the Ford plant laid off during a mild recession. Undaunted, he managed an interview and got hired for night

work at a battery plant in nearby Ypsilanti, where he slept a rented room, scraped by on a meager diet, and read in his spare time.

That experience prepared him for life as a graduate student at Yale, arguably far better than my first sojourn in Japan did me for study at Harvard. America's premier universities were located in gritty Northeastern cities whose living conditions then were as shocking to students as their intellectual training was demanding. In the summer of 1962, I returned from two years' naval service in Yokosuka, where I had relieved boredom with a non-demanding job by experiencing Japan *ala carte* in my free time. That was more "cultural delight" than "culture shock." Thanks to a devoted Japanese language teacher on the naval base there and forays into town to talk with local merchants and restauranteurs, I learned enough spoken Japanese to manage first long bicycle rides on the Miura peninsula and later explorations from Kagoshima in southern Kyushu to Morioka in the then still-impoverished Tohoku region of Honshu. I returned home flush with cash savings and a graduate scholarship to study history at Harvard. My "culture shock" in going from economically booming Los Angeles to culturally rich but physically worn Cambridge, Massachusetts was greater than that in returning from Japan to America. The locals spoke a strange tongue and clustered in ethnic groups. The gap between town and gown was much wider than that between Stanford and Palo Alto. And the dean welcomed first year graduate students by saying, "Look to your right; look to your left; one of you won't be here next year!" I was terrified — and more uncertain of the future than ever before!

Asada had to hitch-hike to New Haven in 1958, and his everyday life there for the next five years was probably a lot tougher than mine in Cambridge. The Connecticut city's industry was dying and its crime rate high. Yale graduate students studied in a magnificent *faux* Gothic library but had to find lodging in slum-like areas. Asada managed to do so — twice. He could not work because his meager first year graduate fellowship forbade such; but by using Grew monies for what would otherwise have been his return fare to Japan, he managed to get by during his first year at Yale. In effect, he bet all he had in the hope that he would impress his professors enough to win funding for the remainder of his graduate study. He succeeded brilliantly, coming to the attention of the man whose photograph graces the first pages of this

book, Professor Samuel Flagg Bemis. The great pioneer historian of American foreign relations was nearing the end of his career, and Asada became one of his very last Ph.Ds.

Bemis saw intellectual opportunity in his young, and now bicultural, Japanese student. Thanks to the "old boy" network that linked Ivy League academics and Washington officials, he got Asada access to retired diplomats (including Ambassador Joseph C. Grew) and still officially closed Navy papers concerning the Washington Naval Arms Limitation Conference of 1921–1922. Unlike virtually any other historian in the United States at that time, Asada could read what Japanese scholars had written about the conference and survey the official Japanese documents then accessible in America. Therein lay the promise of a path-breaking dissertation. That prospect prompted Professor Bemis to use his not inconsiderable influence within the graduate school to assure Asada financial support through fellowships and teaching assistantships. The kindly professor also offered him emotional support through good counsel and repeated invitations to his home. In time a warm friendship developed between *doktor vater* and *deshi* that continued until the great man's death.

Asada could not have known it then, but he was experiencing something akin to the norm in Ivy League graduate schools a half century ago. Great professors, who were alternatively kindly or brutal, single-handedly determined the fate of graduate students. Just when Asada was finishing a brilliant graduate career at Yale. I was floundering in my first year at Harvard. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to study American or Japanese history, and my first seminar paper did not impress my putative dissertation director, Ernest R. May, then the brightest young light teaching American international history. He splattered it with red ink, then departed on sabbatical. I might have dropped out at the end of that year had it not been for the great pioneering European diplomatic historian, William L. Langer. I signed up for his last graduate course, which he taught in true Germanic style in his own home. His critiques of student papers were devastating during the seminar, but they were almost always softened by encouraging words during the informal exchanges over beer and sandwiches that followed. Despite my submission of yet another indifferent seminar paper, Langer saw something in me that prompted him to give me a second chance. In Professor May's

absence, he served as inspiring mentor and senior member on the examining committee that passed me on to full Ph.D. candidate status the following year.

Langer championed the use of foreign languages in one's research and helped me realize that I might build upon my limited knowledge of Japanese to become a historian of American-East Asian relations. To that end, I applied for and got a National Defense Education Act fellowship that in the fall of 1965 took me and my new bride to Japan for a year of intensive language training at the recently established Inter-University Center for Japanese Studies in Tokyo. That was when I first experienced the full force of "culture shock." Living in the capital just after the Tokyo Olympics on a student budget was very different from sampling Japan now and again from the comfort of the Yokosuka Naval Base. The Japanese I had known then were wonderful hosts who treated me more like a guest than a uniformed member of the foreign force defending both our countries. The Japanese I encountered now were in charge. My Japanese teachers were much more demanding than Harvard language instructors. When the school moved to drafty, cold classrooms at the very same International Christian University where Asada had prepared to go to the United States, they refused to turn up the heat. When we students begged a teacher whom we nick-named "Machine-gun sensei" to slow down in speaking to us, she quite properly refused. I went to lectures, just as Asada had years earlier, in a foreign tongue. Hitotsubashi University Professor Hosoya Chihiro's brilliant discourses on European international history invariably continued well beyond their Saturday morning limits, and I returned home complaining to my wife of headaches.

I learned even more about "culture shock" through her experiences that year. She suffered from it far more than I, and through her I came to see, as never before, the joys, frustrations, and limits of entering into a different culture. Alone and without any knowledge of Japanese while I was away in class, she determined to get a job. As a recent UCLA graduate in English literature, she had a highly marketable skill, and before long she landed a position at a very traditional private girls' high school in nearby Setagaya-ku. At first she returned home with tales of woe. The only other native English speaker there was a poorly educated, unfriendly American soldier who had stayed on to teach. He saw her more as threat than colleague. The students

did their best to resist her efforts to get them to utter a few words of English. One evening I returned home to find her in tears. When I asked why, she thrust into my hand a letter from the Home Ministry directing her to report to a distant office where she must register as an alien and change her visa status so as to permit work. “I am not an alien,” she wailed. But, of course, she was, and we had to comply with the order.

After that, her life improved considerably. An older female faculty member took pity on her, introduced her to the school’s norms, and formed a women’s English study group that my wife taught in the evening. Frustrated by archaic ways of teaching English conversation, my wife decided that putting on production of the musical “The Sound of Music” might greatly improve the students’ English-speaking skills. The senior faculty frowned — but let her try; the students became braver, if still limited, English-speakers; and everyone’s morale soared — for a time. When the term ended, one girl invited us to visit her family in distant Matsue, which proved to be a wonderful cross-cultural experience. But as we later learned, once my wife was gone, the teaching of English reverted to the old ineffective ways.

During our “honeymoon year” of 1965–1966 in Japan, my wife and I tasted the joys and sorrows of “culture shock” — together. Unlike Asada, who was alone in America, we spoke our own language daily and commiserated with one another when things got rough. We saw how different Japanese and American ways of doing things could be. We gained a greater appreciation for both and an abiding affection for Japan and its people. Not least, we learned that there were limits to how much cultures could cross.

We learned that last lesson with far less pain and shock than newly minted Yale Ph.D. Sadao Asada did when he returned to Japan in 1963. He chose to come home rather than starting a teaching career in America for patriotic and idealistic reasons. He felt that his long stay overseas ought, like those of *ryūgakusei* before him, to benefit the next generation of Japanese. But getting a college or university position that would give him access to students proved unexpectedly difficult. He suffered isolation and depression — even in his own “home town,” Kyoto. An American doctorate, he found, carried no special cachet with those who hired faculty. Prospective colleagues were less impressed by his command of English than by the fact that his Japanese at that time did not match the sophistication of their spoken and

written words. Indeed, even at Dōshisha, the path toward a regular academic position was long and tortuous, winding through a position that was more librarian than historian. This "reverse culture shock" proved far more painful to him than anything he had experienced in the United States.

In time, he overcame it and took up the challenge of trying to make undergraduate instruction at Dōshisha more like the liberal arts-centered education he gained at Carleton College. What he achieved in that regard never matched his expectations, and he compensated for less than complete success in that endeavor by devoting himself to building a superb library for what became an outstanding graduate American Studies program at Dōshisha. More important still, Asada went on to become the pre-eminent naval historian of his generation in Japan. That took persistence, dedication to often painfully slow archival research, and yet another sojourn in 1970–1971 in the United States, this time as a visiting research fellow at Harvard.

That second stay proved bittersweet. It was professionally rewarding, in that he researched American archives, renewed old friendships, and made new acquaintances who respected what he had written and urged him to enlighten us still further about the history of Japan's foreign and naval policies. But it was personally disenchanting. Richard Nixon's America was not the warm and welcoming place he had known at Carleton in the Eisenhower years. Americans were divided against one another in the midst of the Vietnam War and less certain that Japan, by now a potent economic competitor, was really a friend and ally. Life for the mature foreign scholar, even though purged of the economic uncertainties he had known as undergraduate and graduate student, lacked the comraderie and emotional support from his hosts that Asada had enjoyed earlier. He had to live in shabby and dangerous Somerville, and, with rare exceptions, the senior Harvard faculty paid no attention to him. "Culture shock," albeit in different ways, returned to trouble his second sojourn in the United States. But it never diminished the love for the liberal arts that he had gained at Carleton College during his first stay.

What, then, does Asada's story of his experiences over the last half century have to tell today's readers? He may have intended it as a clarion call for reform in a Japanese higher educational system that some observers insist is in unprecedented crisis. I am not any more certain than he that this book will move the bureaucrats and politicians who control that system to change it

fundamentally. But he most certainly has written an inspiring tale for young would-be scholars. Writ large, Asada's story is one of determination, persistence through joys and sufferings, and growth in character as well as knowledge. It draws to a close with appropriate rewards: prize-winning publication in Japanese, international recognition of stellar scholarship published in English, and, in 2008, the year this book was published, designation as a distinguished alumnus of his *alma mater,* Carleton College.

Beyond that, Asada through this book encourages all of his readers to ponder more carefully just what cultures are and consider how easily we can become prisoners of our own. Cultures are not fixed in time, as he discovered during his second stay in the United States. They can, in fact or in our imaginations, lock us into a small, local world. To leave one's own and enter into another is both painful and exhilarating − in varying degrees. "Culture shock" is not a singular phenomenon, and the particular ways in which it occurs, as I have tried to suggest by comparing some of Asada's experiences with my own, varies with individual circumstance. The same can be said to be true for the "reverse culture shock" that he so vividly and candidly describes. The person who has stepped outside his or her own culture for a significant length of time inevitably returns home changed forever by that experience.

I suspect, however, that Asada would agree with me: to have experienced "culture shock" wherever, and whenever, and in whatever form, is far better than never to have known it at all.