
Viva Brasil

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“Seguinte!”

Thirteen years ago I was at the post office in Brazil with my father, who was holding hands with me. When the receptionist called for the next customer, the customers who were waiting in line in front of us smiled at us and stepped aside to let us go ahead. This was the reason my father always took me to crowded places; — such as the post office and supermarkets — he could make the waiting time shorter.

Because my father had been transferred to Brazil due to his job, I lived in Sao Paulo for four years, since I was an infant. The residents there were very kind-hearted, especially to young children, and we would always hear them say “que linda” — meaning adorable —, to them on a daily basis. In Brazil, where large crowds at public places are inevitable, customers had to wait in line for a considerably long time, but people with infants or young children were invariably given precedence.

In general, most Japanese people tend to imagine Sao Paulo as a treacherous city, which is true to some point. Disparity in wealth is dramatic, there are favelas on the outskirts of the Brazilian city, which even the police are afraid to enter, and the crimes are unstoppable. My father also had a dangerous experience in which a man broke the windshield of his car at the traffic lights when he was driving. However, the residents, with the exception of some, are generally very courteous and considerate. Those people are very far from the “dangerous” image that Japanese people have today.

My father had always told me that although many Brazilians are poor, they are affluent in the heart; that they make the best out of their lives that they can just manage to have, that they put others before themselves, that they take every opportunity to enjoy life with other people, and most importantly, that they have more humane emotions than anyone who lives in Japan. My mother once told me that when I was an infant riding on a plane for a temporary return to Japan, I was crying through the entire flight. I thought that that must have been absolutely obnoxious for everyone, but what she said next surprised me. She had said that the people sitting around us — who were mostly Brazilians — had gotten up and started to play with me and amuse me by making silly faces, trying to make me smile. I don't know if it was to actually make me happy or to make me quit crying — for everyone's sake —, but the fact that nobody snapped at me or my mother, or even frowned at us shows how much patience and kindness they have for other people.

On the other hand, Japanese people may have a comparatively prosperous life, but

are we really affluent in our hearts? Will we really be able to enjoy life for what it is? I ride trains to school, which is usually crowded in the mornings. Not long ago, I was in the same vehicle with a group of small children, who looked to be five or six years old. They were excited about something and were talking to each other with voices that were louder than necessary. Then suddenly, a man interrupted the chattering by clicking his tongue and yelling at the children. The children were being loud at a public place, which they should not have been doing, but yelling at a bunch of small children who were learning to control themselves seemed highly immature of the man. I know that there are other people who would have done the same thing in his place. I also hear about disastrous crimes that Japanese people have committed, on TV, almost every day. Could it be that some of the affluency in our lives are stolen from the affluency in our hearts? What does it mean that people with poorer lives have more affluency in the heart than those who don't?

There are times when I think that Japan is lacking the friendly atmosphere that foreign countries have. However, I wish for Japan to become a country that will be admired by others, not just because there are great sightseeing places, but because of the respectable atmosphere that Japanese citizens create, and I want to become one of those people who can create that atmosphere that we are missing. Most foreigners are kind enough to say that Japanese people are wonderful people, even though they must have at least once encountered someone who was not. I want to make it so that every person they encounter is in fact a wonderful person. I am a fifteen year old girl, who is too young to change all of Japan. But starting with people like me who care, we can start changing Japan, and leave a truly admirable country for the next generation.