
Food, Affect, and Experiments in Care

Constituting a “Household-like” Child Welfare Institution in Japan

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Chestnut House, a small-scale child welfare institution (what would have been called an “orphanage” or “children’s home” in the past), is located on the top of a hill and nestled against a thicket of bamboo, flanked by a chestnut orchard and a neighborhood park, in a suburban part of the greater Tokyo area.¹ “Chestnut” (*kuri*) evokes a cozy and life-sustaining closeness to nature. The city opened the institution in June 2009, responding to a shortage of accommodation for children whose parents, for one reason or other, could not care for them. In their families of origin, many of the children had been maltreated and most were neglected. Staff members and the institution’s director were poignantly aware that many of the children needed a supportive and caring family—or a family substitute.

Institutions like Chestnut House are part of a recent movement in Japan to make child welfare facilities smaller-scale and to provide “household-like care” (*katei-teki yōgo*) to state wards. At the time of my research, Chestnut House contained five different “houses,” each with six children and (on average) two female and one male residential staff. At least half of child welfare institutions in Japan are large, often dormitory-style buildings with meals taken in a large cafeteria, the staff working on a shift system. Chestnut House’s child-staff ratio and small size (thirty total children), the separation into individual houses with discrete dining areas, and the residential staff differentiate it from large-scale residences. In fact, the director, Kitahara Shinobu, conceived of Chestnut House as the antithesis of conventional Japanese child welfare institutions, and emphasized the goal of creating a “household-like atmosphere.”

My involvement with Chestnut House dates from October 2008, when I began attending monthly training sessions for the staff, who were preparing for the



FIGURE 14. Architectural model on display at the opening of Chestnut House, June 2009. Courtesy of the author.

institution's opening in June 2009. Shortly after it opened, I began conducting participant-observation ethnographic research at it between two and three days each week, spending time with the children and staff in all five houses. In the course of my research until the end of my doctoral fieldwork in December of 2010, I visited between one and four days each month and focused on one house, usually arriving around 3 p.m. when the children returned from school and staying until the children went to bed around 8 p.m. I have continued to be in contact with the staff and children, and visit whenever I am in Japan.

My analysis in this chapter is deeply informed by the relationships I built with the children at Chestnut House. While research focusing on children often seeks authentic "children's voices," this chapter (as with all my work) conveys accounts of the children mostly through the lens of their caregivers. While I received research ethics clearance to interview children, their status as state wards made me concerned that their participation in my research would entail an element of coercion. I had planned to obtain permission from the institutional director and use a child-friendly "informed consent" script that I had developed in advance, but I quickly came to worry: Were the children really "free" to decide to participate in an informed way, particularly since I knew that time with me in the institution was

an object of desire and competition among the children? As state wards, whose lives were documented in so many ways beyond their control, was it ethical that I ask their participation in this project whose scope they could not possibly understand? Further, all of the children had experienced trauma of some sort. I feared that discussions with me about their experiences might trigger flashbacks or other problems that the staff would have to negotiate. Despite my desire to more directly convey elements of their experiences to my readers, I judged the risks to the children—and to my relationship with them—to outweigh the research benefits.

My long-term research at Chestnut House has provided a unique opportunity to examine the director's and staff members' efforts to self-consciously work toward making an institution "household-like." While Chestnut House was designed to be as close to a household as possible, the residents of this household were children who were (for the most part) not related to each other, and salaried staff who, although residential, worked in shifts (although their shifts were counted in days, rather than hours) and struggled to balance relationships with other staff, the children, and their own families. According to one staff member, in an effort to create a household community where there was none before, four bodily interactions between children and staff became of central importance: the children and staff slept together, bathed together, brushed their teeth together, and prepared and ate food together. The children and staff had no past together and their future together was circumscribed by a variety of factors, most notably how long the children would actually live at the institution, and how long the staff continued to work there. Thus a few intensely physical and affective practices came to disproportionately constitute and signify the emergent household.

In this chapter, I consider Chestnut House as a social experiment, motivated by normative ideologies surrounding the concepts of "childhood" and "household" or "home," and beliefs about the proper relationship between a household and the surrounding community.² In this experiment, staff members foregrounded the expressive relationships understood to ideally inhere in household membership. National discourses regarding the "proper" care for state wards also informed their work in the institution. Thus, common perceptions about childhood and home articulated with public policy and child welfare scholarship to shape a space in which childhood, itself, was imagined and managed as it is in remedial education facilities (see chapter 11). Concretely, the Chestnut House director and staff engaged with idealized conceptions of childhood and household to create an institution that mimicked but did not actually replicate a household (sometimes to the staff members' great distress). The director's goals were relatively modest, focusing on the material qualities of the institution which was defined in part as a place for the children and staff to eat together, a space for the children to be (re)socialized to learn "ordinary" attitudes toward food and self-expression that would give them embodied and expressive tools as unmarked members of society. The staff embraced these objectives, bringing to bear their own interpretations of what a

“household” should be—particularly, an affect-laden grouping of intimates that is separate from the surrounding community. Throughout, the institution’s director and the staff negotiated institutional constraints as they grappled with the desire to create a “family-like” community for the children. I discovered that changing institutional practices regarding who cooked the main “household” meal challenged the values at the heart of some of these efforts to make an institution into a household.

CREATING “HOUSEHOLD-LIKE” ENVIRONMENTS:
CONTEXT FOR A CHILD WELFARE POLICY OBJECTIVE

In Chestnut House’s newsletter, the director, Kitahara Shinobu, documented the first month of operation. “The first children to move into Chestnut House were two- and three-year-old babies,” Kitahara wrote. “These children come from baby homes or temporary emergency care at child guidance centers. Up until now they lived in groups of ten or twenty other babies, so at first they were not used to life at Chestnut House, living in little houses with specific staff members . . . but within about a week, they became used to the houses and the staff. From now on, they will form attachment relationships with the staff members that will provide a stable foundation for their lives.” The terms Kitahara used here to describe Chestnut House—particularly, the concepts of “little houses,” “specific staff members,” “attachment relationships,” and “stability”—are the central concepts that motivate Japan’s current child welfare objectives to provide “household-like” care.

In Japan, almost 90 percent of children in out-of-home care are placed in institutions. As of 2015, there were 602 child welfare institutions in Japan, servicing almost twenty-eight thousand children between the ages of two and eighteen, and 134 baby homes, which provide care to around three thousand infants and toddlers. Around forty-six thousand children are in out-of-home care in Japan, approximately 0.2 percent of the child population. Foster care comprises around 10 percent of out-of-home care, servicing about forty-seven hundred children (MHLW 2016: 1). The 2014 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare report on the present state of child welfare in Japan notes that while in 2005, 70 percent of child welfare institutions in Japan were classified as large institutions, serving between 50 and 130 children, the government is working to create smaller institutions. Currently, around 50 percent of institutions are classified as “large” (MHLW 2014: 7).

Those critical of Japan’s system of large institutions—including the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, to which Japan became a signatory in 1994 (UNCRC 2009)—point out that characteristic problems center on the child-to-staff ratio. A few staff members care for many children at a time, especially during the night when only a handful of staff remain on duty (sometimes only one staff member during the night at baby homes). Lack of supervision leads to an increased likelihood of violence between children as well as between children and

staff (Onchōen 2011). Many institutions are overcrowded and daily life is intensely structured by rules, prohibitions, and time schedules. There is often very little privacy, and in many cases the children share items of clothing, shoes, bedding, and eating utensils (Hinata Bokko 2009; Goodman 2000; Hayes and Habu 2006). Critiques often center on the differences between these large institutions and a “typical” household, including attention to the fact that children lack ownership of individual objects like clothing. Material factors articulate with temporal patterns to make institutional living dissimilar to what is “normal” for children who live with their own families.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare specifies a goal to eventually increase foster care placements to one third or more, a rate similar to that of Germany, Belgium, or Hong Kong (MHLW 2014). In this long-term plan, another third of children would be placed in small-scale group homes of around six children administrated by three institutional staff, and the final third would be placed in institutions of forty-five children or fewer, broken up into smaller units of six to eight children each. Regardless of the type of care, the stated goal is to provide a “household-like” environment for children.

In a policy context where child welfare placements take place predominantly *outside* an actual household, what social and political work is enacted by this discourse regarding “household-like” care, and how are the children inside these institutions implicated in adult world-making projects (Castañeda 2002)? Through 2012, government documents and public discourse often described both institutional care *and* family-based foster care under the same rubric of “household-like care,” a slippage that allowed the Japanese government to report that it was increasing household-like care, without specifying whether this care occurred in an institution or a household (Goldfarb 2011). In 2012 these terms were clarified by an advisory committee, which specified that “household-like care” would refer specifically to care occurring in an institution (otherwise identified as institutional care), in which residential groupings approximated, as closely as possible, the physical forms of a household. Family foster care would be called “household care” (MHLW 2012).³ This clarification recognized the ways linguistic manipulation had simultaneously represented children’s “best interests” as at the heart of Ministry policies, while perpetuating frameworks that contravened its stated agreement to decrease institutional placements. Children in care here emerged “both as symbolic figures and as objects of contested forms of socialization” (Stephens 1995: 13). Consistent push-back from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as Japan’s own Federation of Bar Associations, which produced critical alternative reports for the UN, illustrate how care for state wards becomes both an object of international discourse and a reflection on the state itself (UNCRC 2009; JFBA 2009; Goldfarb 2015). “Household-like care” is thus deeply situated within contested ideas surrounding childhood in Japan, particularly the tensions between Western notions of “child rights” and a now ingrained practice of institutional

care for state wards in Japan. These tensions played out within Chestnut House, as the director and staff members grappled with contemporary ideas about proper childhoods and households, and the practices that undergird contemporary child welfare policy in Japan.

In official documents, the Ministry's guidelines for "household-like care" portray a continuum from a less- to a more-household-like environment, which the Ministry defines according to particular qualities—both material and affective—that are conventionally understood to index a household (MHLW 2011). On one end of the spectrum is an institution with a merely physical resemblance to a household, and on the other end of the spectrum is an actual household where a family lives. Unit-style care, in which a larger child welfare institution is broken into smaller groups of six to eight children, has "household-like *facilities*," the Ministry document notes: a living room, kitchen, bath, washing machines, bathrooms, et cetera. The physical space looks (and maybe even smells) like a household. Further along the spectrum, group homes that make use of houses in the community, rather than an institutional space, are, by that virtue, considered even more "household-like." According to the Ministry document, a maximally "household-like" quality emerges in a "family home," where the children live in the same location where their caregiver lives, and the caregiver does not work on a shift system. This implies that without a shift system, children have optimal opportunities to develop relationships with their caregivers. As part of the effort to develop a "household-like" atmosphere, Chestnut House's staff members were initially hired to be residential, rather than working in hourly shifts.

The Ministry's report suggests that "household-like" institutions allow deeper attachment relationships between children and staff members. This understanding is echoed in Kitahara's own description of Chestnut House. Signs of a household are understood to index social relationships—a position that does not attend to the banal reality that staff member turnover in child welfare institutions is extremely high, such that staff who have been working for longer than three years are referred to as "veterans" (Goodman 2000). Although many youth maintain connections to the institutions where they were raised (Hinata Bokko 2009), many of my interlocutors—staff members at institutions, foster parents, and people who themselves grew up in state care—note that it is often difficult to develop durable relationships with institutional caregivers.

Having an adult to depend on later in life can be particularly important for young people who experienced state care. Youth may remain in Japanese state care (either institutional care or foster care) until they turn eighteen, at which point they are expected to become independent. However, if a young person does not attend high school, he or she must leave the state care system at age fifteen. In special circumstances—as in the case of developmental disability, or when a youth is pursuing higher education—state care may be extended until age twenty. In 2014 the rate of advancement to high school among young people in child welfare

institutions was 95.2 percent, near the national rate of 98.5 percent. However, child welfare system graduates' average level of attendance in two-year or four-year colleges (approximately 11 percent) or professional school (approximately 12 percent) is much lower than nation-wide averages (almost 55 percent and 23 percent, respectively) (MHLW 2016; see also Hinata Bokko 2009: 83; King 2012). These disparities become more poignant given the marked focus on maximizing childhood education among other demographics in Japan (Field 1995), and in light of historical trends in the twentieth century for parents to advance their own class status through their children's education (Jones 2010). One reason the transition to "independence" can be difficult, my interlocutors reminded me many times, is that institutional care is exceptionally regimented and allows children and youth few opportunities to learn to care for their own daily needs. Although there are institutions created to help youth transition to independent living, there are otherwise no government-organized aftercare systems, and few nongovernmental organizations that provide support to youth from state care. There are generally no such resources outside major urban centers. Many youth who leave institutional care feel that they have no one to turn to (CVV and Nagase 2015; Goldfarb 2016a).

The director and staff members of Chestnut House were not blind to the difficulty and importance of creating durable relationships between children and staff in the institution. However, the focus on external signs of "household-ness" at the institution indicated a certain blurring of distinctions between material instantiations of household-like things and behaviors, and the objective to create lasting, deep relationships between children and staff. The intense focus on creating a "household-like" atmosphere at Chestnut House spoke to the concomitant difficulty—indeed, in many cases, the impossibility—of providing these children an actual family.

EATING THE SAME FOOD TOGETHER: THE MEANING OF "HOME"

"We want the children to feel that Chestnut House is their home, their *furusato*," Kitahara Shinobu, Chestnut House's first director, told me. "We want it to be a place to return for holidays, a place to visit when they are sad or happy or need advice." The term *furusato* can be glossed as hometown or original home, and in contemporary culture entails a sense of nostalgia, longing, and a desire for a return to one's origins (Ivy 1995). Kitahara had the habit of sketching as he explained a concept. He reached for a pen and a piece of paper and wrote the character for *sato*, the second character in the term. Below the character he drew another image (see figure 15).

"In the archaic form of the character," Kitahara told me, "you see that on the left, you have a person, and on the right, you also have a person. In the middle is a platform with food placed on it for the gods. But it is also an image of two people



FIGURE 15. Kitahara's drawing of the archaic meaning of the character *sato*. Photo by the author.

eating a meal. You have one table and two people eating the same food together: that is the meaning of this character, *sato*. In each house at Chestnut House, you have the children and the adults sitting at the table eating together.” For Kitahara, the institution takes on the meaning of “home” through the temporal extension from many moments of eating together that accumulate over time to produce long-term bonds, ties that bind the children to the place and further index the obligation of the institution to maintain long-term connections with them.

Kitahara's description harkens back to early twentieth-century notions of the “household” (*katei*) that emerged in Meiji-era reform movements to democratize and rationalize a properly “modern” family, in contrast to the older, official concept of the extended family (*ie*) (Nishikawa 1995). The imperative to eat the same food at the same time at the same table—a phrase that was repeated to me many times in discussions at Chestnut House—echoes these turn-of-the-century reform movements that advocated the production of convivial “modern” households and families precisely through dining practices (Sand 2003; Muta 1994). Kitahara's connection of eating with ancestor worship is also historically apropos: Jordan Sand cites a magazine on moral instruction and household management, from 1907, that describes “the house as foundation of the state,” including chapters focusing “on ancestor worship and the role of the patriarch,” that also “instructed that ‘houses of the middle level of society . . . should make a custom whenever possible of gathering the whole family for meals’” (Sand 2003: 34). Sand analyzes images of the dining table to explore the historical specificity of the “family circle,” which performed the family as a bounded group, in contrast to previous images of the extended family able to incorporate others (see chapters 2 and 3). While past use of individual dining trays (rather than one single table), with the family arrayed

before the patriarch “manifested a strict hierarchy of authority,” Sand writes, “it was an open structure, since the ring could be expanded to accommodate any number of participants. A common table, on the other hand, created a focus of limited size for a closed and intimate family circle, delineating inside from out at the same time that it implied greater equality within. Peripheral household members, particularly servants, were placed on the outside” (35; also Nishikawa 1995: 8). Thus early twentieth-century commentaries described how Japanese citizens might constitute this new notion of a household precisely through eating practices, simultaneously delimiting inside from outside and narrowing possible group membership. Kitahara reproduced many of these same concepts in both his belief in the performative power of dining practices to create a feeling of “household,” and—as will become clear—in the ways that boundaries between inside and outside were themselves key household characteristics (Makino 2003).

From Kitahara’s perspective, eating together did much more than produce a home out of the bonds of shared activity. Kitahara and many of his staff viewed food practices as central to the institution’s goal to produce community and a fictive kin network for children who had none, and to resocialize the children as “normal” or “ordinary” members of Japanese society. The notion of middle-class status in Japan is often taken as a gloss for being “normal” or average (Vogel 2013), even as the socioeconomic measures that would mark a person as “middle class” often go undefined. Thus, when the director consistently highlighted the notion of “ordinariness,” I interpreted this objective to be classed in a particular way. Children in state care are already at an extreme economic disadvantage, and, as discussed above, a large percentage of young people from institutional care do not go on to secondary education. While Kitahara and his staff might not be able to dramatically influence these two factors, they could help shape the children’s social and embodied practices to align more closely with values that could be understood as “ordinary” and of unmarked class status.

In lieu of actually *providing* a family for the children, Kitahara brought together the physical layout of the “household-like” institution and its furniture with the objective of eating together to train the children in proper self-expression. The materiality of the institution cultivated an affect-laden environment that would shape children as “ordinary.” Specifically, he depicted daily life at Chestnut House as providing the foundation for positive and future-oriented relationships between staff and children. Kitahara argued that the children who first come to Chestnut House are unable to express themselves positively and have little empathy for other people, a result of problematic relationships with parents or a lack of connection to caregivers. For Kitahara and the other staff members, these children enter the institution far from “innocent,” and staff members have to be constantly aware of the ways that children’s pasts impacted their present and future lives (Stephens 1994: 7, Jenkins 1998). However, Kitahara believed that by eating home-cooked meals with the staff and exchanging affect-laden interaction, these children would

become able to positively express themselves verbally; Chestnut House would become a potent “emotional community” with certain agreed-upon norms about proper emotional communication (Rosenwein 2002). The food that the staff members personally prepared for the children conveys the staff’s emotion, Kitahara said, which is then transferred to the children. The children in turn reply with positive, not negative, verbalizations. What goes into a child’s mouth, Kitahara seemed to believe, is what comes out.

Kitahara told me, “Through eating together, conversation is born, facial expressions are born. A certain atmosphere is born. Within all that, of course you preserve life, but at the same time the meal itself, the dining table itself, create connections between people. . . . It’s about something done together, you know, each connection brings about a huge effect.”⁴ Although it would be nice if the staff made delicious food for dinner, the taste is less important, he said, than the greater goal of the children coming to understand the feelings of other people through the food and the process of eating together. “While they eat together with the staff, the children and the staff talk, the kids are scolded, praised, and through that process, the children come to understand joy, anger, pathos, and humor,” he explained. Kitahara’s primary focus was on the children’s socioemotional development as part of a community (Lewis 2003), particularly the relationships that emerged out of these reciprocal connections.⁵

Many of the children at Chestnut House have histories of maltreatment and neglect, Kitahara continued, and “because of that trauma their verbal expressions to the staff are unpleasant.” He mentioned the siblings in the house where I conducted research, a six-year-old girl, Maiko, and her three-year-old brother, Noriaki. “When those kids came to Chestnut House, their greetings were, you know, not ‘*ohayo gozaimasu*’ (good morning) but instead ‘*baka*’ (stupid), ‘*unchi*’ (poop), and ‘*oppai*’ (boobs).” From Kitahara’s perspective, these negative expressions were reflections of the patterns within their past lives. Kitahara suggested that it was thus necessary to retrain them, to give them new patterns to form the base of social interactions. He traced out this pattern:

They wake up in the morning, wash their face, brush their teeth, they begin this way. Then they go to the toilet, eat breakfast, prepare for school, go to school, and when they come back from school, they play, they take a bath Those daily experiences weren’t ordinary for them before, but when this comes to be commonsense for them, then they will be able to say “good morning” and “good day.” These kids are Japanese, and they should be able to do those greetings. It is at the dinner table where they will learn to express themselves, to express sadness, anger, and they will become ordinary people that way.

Tellingly, Kitahara did not seem to consider that a three-year-old boy yelling “stupid!” and “poop!” is, perhaps, an age-specific behavior common to three-year-olds in general or that this behavior was an expression of frustration or anger at being

removed from family. His understanding of verbalizations as indexing concrete past actions and behavior patterns can be seen as a linguistic ideology (Schieffelin, Wollard, and Kroskrity 1998) that informs a coherent theory of child development and guides a program for resocialization. Further, this resocialization program focused on verbal signs of problematic relationships, which were reshaped into socially acceptable modes of affective communication, a process that was intended to reshape the child's relationship with the world (Jenkins 1998: 25).

The topic of greetings upon returning home is one that many people mentioned to me in connection with life in child welfare institutions. In small-scale institutions with residential staff, the same staff member may both send a child off to school and greet him upon his return, as a parent might. In larger institutions, however, there are so many rotating staff that the notion of announcing one's return is nonsensical. Children from larger institutions often do not have the awareness that a greeting upon return is considered normal in Japan. All these routines at Chestnut House were intended to train the children to embody the disciplines and skills characteristic of an "ordinary" Japanese person.

From the perspective of Kitahara and many of his staff members, cooking and exchanging these cooked foods activated the staff and children's senses through smells, sounds, sights, and tastes, all of which formed the basis for interpersonal communication. Acts of evaluation—"It's salty today, isn't it!"—offered the perception that the intersubjective divide had been transcended, that the children and staff, with their individual and sometimes traumatic pasts, could find a meeting point in the banality of everyday commentary about food, and that children who were as yet unable to express their emotions could speak, instead, about eating. Preparing and then eating the same food at the same time linked their individual embodied experiences, and provided a basis for further communicative acts such as normative greetings. This physical set of senses and the exchanges that emerged had the potential to produce community where there was not one. However, for some of the staff members this was only the case if the staff were properly situated as the creators of the food, ideally with the children's participation. If these stipulations were not met, the fragile sense of "home" threatened to give way.

"THERE'S NO SMOKE, THERE'S NO SMELL": THE PROBLEM OF A FIRELESS KITCHEN

Chestnut House staff members knew all too well how little they were able to provide for the children in their care. After all, staff members had homes and families elsewhere, and they knew they were caring for these children for only a limited amount of time. Being able to prepare food with the children, and knowing about and incorporating children's food preferences into meal preparation, mattered to the staff. To maintain the affective and emotionally laden dinner table, many of the staff members felt strongly that the staff themselves must prepare the food and

eat together with the children, such that food preparation and dining practices mapped out the boundaries of the “household.”

However, the constraints of the institutional form often conflicted with the staff’s ideals. At any given time, there were fifteen residential staff, and within a year of opening in June 2009, seven original staff members had quit with new members replacing them. This was probably to be expected given the emotional intensity of the work and the fact that the staff were required to live onsite during their shifts, which lasted between three and five days at a time. In order to comply with labor laws, the staff were considered off duty while the children were at school or sleeping, but in reality they might end up caring for a sick child, helping with administrative work, attending trainings, and meeting with the children’s social workers in their off duty time. Further, some staff came to the Kanto area from hometowns elsewhere and had no nearby home to return to on days off, so they were effectively always at their work site. For Kitahara, creating an institution that made the children’s well-being and happiness the top priority meant that the staff’s well-being was often sacrificed. Almost every staff member with whom I spoke at length expressed concern about his or her ability to stay at Chestnut House long-term.⁶

Facing these issues, Kitahara and the other administrators decided to hire part-time workers to prepare evening meals on weekdays. Despite understanding Kitahara’s difficulties with staff retention, I was surprised by this new policy, given the importance Kitahara himself attached to food practices. However, he pointed out that the most important thing was for the children and staff to eat together: the staff did not have to be the ones preparing the meal. Further, the staff could spend more time with the children, particularly helping them study, if they were not responsible for food preparation. Finally, the staff members were still expected to cook rice and make the miso soup for dinner, and they still made breakfast and prepared lunchboxes.

After this change in policy, I conducted in-depth interviews with two of the staff members in the house where I focused my research.⁷ Both women, Miyazaki Yūko and Sakai Marina, felt strongly that the use of part-time cooks was not the solution to staffing issues. As Miyazaki said to me, with a wrinkled brow, “What kind of household doesn’t *cook*?” Their narratives express an ideal of intensely physical and emotional exchanges made possible only by way of the staff’s labor preparing homemade food, a perspective that aligns ideologically with gendered expectations regarding food preparation and care in Japan (Allison 1991). Of course there was diversity among staff perspectives, and other staff members expressed gratitude for the release from an additional daily obligation. Notably, I felt that age was a more significant factor than gender, as staff who focused on the benefits of doing their own food preparation tended to be older. Enjoyment played a role as well: both Miyazaki and Sakai mentioned that cooking offered relief from the pressure of constantly interacting with the children, and was a chance to relax and reflect on the day.

The majority of staff at Chestnut House were in their mid- to late twenties, and Miyazaki, in her late forties with three children of her own, was perceived by the other staff as motherly and experienced. She was also a certified nurse. I was always impressed by her ability to laugh in the face of stressful situations, and she struck me as pragmatic and not overly emotional. I perceived her as maintaining a healthy balance between her work and home life, and on her days off she commonly took camping trips with her daughter, who was in her early twenties. At the same time, I knew that she was emotionally invested in her work at Chestnut House and had become very close to the children, even as she found the work physically and emotionally taxing.

I interviewed Miyazaki a week after the part-time cooks began preparing the evening meals and asked her how she felt about the change. She replied:

It's like the kids feel there is no connection between them and the meal anymore. We're just pretending to make food, we just dump it onto a plate. When you're actually cooking, the kids come up and say, "I want to do it!" and such, which is communication. Then when we're eating that food at the table they say, "Mmm, yummy," or "We put in too much sugar, didn't we" or something, and that kind of conversation at the table is fun. It's just, I don't know, if the person who made the food isn't there at the table, it feels weird to talk about the food that way. Well, we're all eating the same food at the same table, so there's meaning in that, but . . . there's no smell or noise of food preparation, there's no sense of anticipation for the food, and then none of that communication, the kids wanting to help . . .

For Miyazaki, if the food was not made by a house resident, who also took part in the meal, there was no point in commenting on it: there was no real exchange of time and labor for emotion, no point in evaluating or complimenting food when the person who made it was not there.

Sakai Marina told me that having an "outsider" do the cooking seemed strange because Chestnut House was supposed to be a home, and preparing food while watching the kids is normal in a normal household. The children were initially confused by the change, and would ask, "Why is this person coming to cook here?" and "I don't want to eat it, it's not made by one of the adults that belong here." Sakai noted that Noriaki, the little boy with the penchant for rude greetings, would always ask, "Who made breakfast today?" and she would say, "I made it today," which would prompt a happy, "Mmmm, Mari-chan's breakfast is *yummy!!!*" Sakai told me, "I know he'd say the same thing if I said that today Miyazaki-san made breakfast. . . . I don't know, I think there's meaning in it being someone who lives with you, who spends time with you, who cooks the food." Sakai sensed that there were boundaries between people who belonged inside the house and people who didn't, and that her understanding of those boundaries was the same as that of the children. Further, if Chestnut House was to be experienced as a home, like any other home it too should draw clear distinctions between interior and exterior.

Miyazaki and Sakai's sentiments, that the affect associated with meals changed after the meal policies changed, accorded with my own experiences eating dinner with the children and staff. When the staff were still cooking for the children, dinner conversations were lively with discussion of each dish's qualities, joking about dishes that did not turn out so well, and loud expressions of appreciation from the children. I myself always made sure to thank the staff member who cooked that night. After the part-time workers started preparing the food, however, food was often served lukewarm, which made it less delicious, and conversation about the food itself all but stopped. The children came to be familiar with the part-time cooking staff, but the children in this particular house were uninvolved in food preparation, and the cooks departed as soon as they prepared the meal.

Miyazaki described the recent changes in food preparation as "a little lonely these days." She reminded me of an event that had occurred one time when I was visiting. Maiko, Noriaki's older sister, threw a tantrum about where I was going to sit as we were setting the table for dinner. She had been positioning everyone's chopsticks at their places when she realized I was not going to be sitting next to her. She began screaming, threw all the chopsticks on the floor, and then sank to the floor herself, her legs splayed indignantly as she grabbed the dinner table and pushed it away from her, sloshing the bowls of soup on the table. Miyazaki picked her up and carried her upstairs, and we could hear Maiko's screaming until it was finally quiet. After twenty minutes or so, the two returned to the table to eat after everyone else had finished. We were having *udon* noodles that had been prepared and then delivered by the cook.

I took her upstairs until she stopped crying and then once she was quiet, we talked. I said, "You know, it was really a shame tonight that dinner became not delicious anymore. Because you had a tantrum, it made us all feel really bad, even though we had yummy *udon* to eat." Then Maiko-chan said, "There's not any *udon*. There's no smoke." [Miyazaki paused and looked at me, significantly.] Then I said, "But the soup looked really yummy, didn't it?" and Maiko-chan said, "It doesn't smell like anything! There's no smoke." And that's when I thought, wow, the kids really get it, don't they. Because when you boil *udon*, when you make the soup and prepare the broth, if maybe the kids are fighting and everyone's kind of mad or something, if they're in a bad mood, the kids still come up and say, "What are we having today?" The fact that there isn't food preparation right before their eyes anymore, it's incomplete, isn't it. . . . It's just . . . There's no fire in the kitchen, you don't feel any warmth . . . The kitchen isn't living, it's that kind of loneliness.

There are several significant moments in Miyazaki's recollection of this incident. It was actually an isolated event—it was not as though Maiko was constantly complaining about the food lacking a smell or not being delicious. However, for Miyazaki, it held meaning. When Miyazaki reproachfully told the little girl that her behavior had made the food less "delicious" for everyone else, Maiko was able to refute Miyazaki's argument by claiming that the food wasn't "delicious" to begin

with. If communication and mutual understanding of another's emotions emerge through the process of cooking and eating together, Maiko seemed to be saying that food brought in from the outside cannot function as this medium, and her statements struck Miyazaki, who appeared to agree, as poignant.

Miyazaki herself elaborated her own sense of "loneliness" associated with a fire-less kitchen. When she was a child, her mother was hospitalized for a long period of time and there were many days when no cooking was done. During those times, her family brought in food from the outside. "That feeling of the mother being in the hospital, the mother being out of the house, that lack of warmth—and then the image of no fire in the kitchen, somehow they're connected in my mind. Meals are just really important. . . . It's not like we make anything so gorgeous when we cook, or anything!" she said, laughing.

I earlier noted that in order to produce a "household-like" atmosphere in the institution, some physical, daily practices were understood to produce intimacy and shape the children's bodies and minds. Sleeping on the same *tatami* mats on adjoining futons. Keeping toothbrushes lined up on the same sink and brushing teeth together. With the little children, stripping off clothing and bathing together. Eating the same food, at the same table, at the same time. However, these practices lacked something that Miyazaki and Sakai perceived to be inherent in the process of preparing the food. The process of creating food, flavoring it according to one's own preference and one's knowledge of the children's preference, adding a touch of something leftover from a previous meal, making the room smoky with the richness of sesame oil and soy sauce which tempts the children to come see what is on the stove, asking a child to stir the contents of a pan and taste the dish for flavor, and then serving the dishes, placing them on the table, telling the person who made the food that it is delicious, thanking a child for his help. These exchanges of food and words produced a sense of obligation and intimacy that endured over time, long after the food had been given and consumed. The children at Chestnut House may never have experienced exchanges with caregivers that yielded positive emotional bonds, a sense of stability and the possibility to imagine a secure future. To that degree, Miyazaki and Sakai understood the acts of exchange that occurred in the kitchen and at the table to have unique power to shape a child's subjectivity for a future that transcended a particular meal and a particular dining table.

NOT QUITE A HOUSEHOLD, NOT QUITE A COMMUNITY

The staff at Chestnut House were in a difficult position from the start. The institution was supposed to be as "household-like" as possible, but the "household" was composed of paid staff, most of whom did not know each other before they lived together, and who did not consider Chestnut House their own home. The majority of the children had not met before and most were unrelated. Further, the

children's very existence at Chestnut House was in many cases considered liminal, since it was hoped that some of the children would reunite with their parents or move into foster care (although to my knowledge, this latter objective has only been met in the case of one child). Despite Kitahara's desire to retain his staff, the staff's involvement at Chestnut House was even more temporary. Takada Hitoshi, a forty-year-old, unmarried male staff member whose narrative I introduce below, noted that the continued entrance and exit of staff members in the institution, while the children themselves remained, was one of the main reasons Chestnut House would not, indeed could not, be a "household" or a "family." Recall that within child welfare circles, a staff member who has worked continuously for three years is generally considered a "veteran." At Chestnut House, each "house" was defined by the children who lived there, not the adults. The staff might rotate in and out and change postings, but the children stayed.⁸

Delineating the staff's relationship with the children was a constant topic of concern. Sakai told me that she would like to take the role of the noisy older sister in the children's lives, by coming by to say hello and check if their rooms were clean. Miyazaki, on the other hand, had to remind herself never to compare the Chestnut House children with her own, because their behaviors, abilities, and ways of self-expression were shaped by pasts entirely different from those of her own children. Further, as much as the job called for intimacy, she was constantly aware of the need to maintain a professional distance.

Takada repeatedly described his role as a staff member not as a "substitute" for the child's parent but, particularly at first, as essentially *other*, not the child's parent and not the child's kin. His relationship with the staff with whom he lived and worked was similarly strange: "We're not the children's mother and father, we're not a couple, we're not married. We are unrelated, we are strangers to each other. We're careful around each other. But otherwise, living at Chestnut House together, everything is as if we *were* a couple. The children may not notice now, but as they grow older, it will come to them: Those people, they're strangers to each other, aren't they?" Takada described small moments of alterity when the children's desire for intimacy or lack of self-consciousness came into tension with his own sense of proper distance. "In the bath, it's always like, 'Close the curtain, okay!' If we were a family, closing the curtain would be irrelevant. But it's the same with the other female staff members. I am not married to one of them, I have to explain to the kids, so we close the curtain too. We don't see each other naked." Takada thought that, if they all lived together for many years, they would become *like* family, but the staff members' real family sphere, with their children and spouses if they had them, would reinforce the fact that Chestnut House itself was the only space where they came together. It was the space where staff members worked, and staff members were not there during their vacation days. The children, of course, were always there.

Takada's perspective, however, suggests another interpretation of the expressive role of food at the institution. Takada himself loved to eat, and he didn't mind not

being the one cooking. He thought it important for the children to be involved in the cooking process, however, and described how he welcomed the part-time cooks so the children got to know them and felt interested in cooking with them. “It doesn’t matter that the cooks aren’t part of the house,” he told me. “The children receive things from all sorts of people, and I want them to understand that the cooks have made this food for them. We talk about the food at the dinner table and the children tell the cooks when they next see them that the food was delicious, or that they liked such-and-such a dish. That is reciprocity.” Takada knew that other members of the staff disliked the changes to the food preparation policy, but he took up Kitahara’s argument, saying that he had more time to spend with the children during the day and he was less burdened with extraneous duties.

Takada’s ideal image of childcare was one in which children are raised by a community. In contrast to contemporary perspectives of a household as distinctly separated from surrounding families, Takada had a different understanding. “When I was growing up,” he told me, “you’d go to the next house and ask to borrow some soy sauce. No matter who was around, they would scold you, there would be an adult to look after you. If we don’t return in some way to that era, nothing about institutional care will change,” he asserted. Chestnut House would never be truly “household-like” unless it embraced this precept of community-based care. He had felt frustrated many times when he offered to help staff members from other households by watching children from those households, only to be refused. There was the sense at Chestnut House, he said, that the staff from one house would take care of only that house’s children. Similarly, many staff members were reluctant for nonhouse staff members to enter the houses. Takada argued that Kitahara’s main objective with the part-time cooks was to open up the houses, to give the staff time to play outside with the children from all of the houses, and to create a community.⁹ Takada felt that the staff members’ resistance to opening their kitchens to outside workers was an expression of this tendency to self-isolate.

The tensions surrounding food preparation at Chestnut House were, I suggest, expressions of the ways the staff members conceptualized “household.” Takada’s own welcoming of the cooks meant that they became one more node in a network of individuals who were helping to care for the children, one more resource for the children and one more opportunity for an affective relationship. A particular ideology of a proper household, in which the caregiver prepares food that is eaten at the same time in the same place, is an ideology surrounding boundary production and maintenance. These boundary lines are shifting, shiftable—they move depending on the ways “household” is continuously redefined. The affective importance of these boundaries was expressed in the anxiety and frustration of some of the staff when part-time workers took over the emotional labor of cooking. But I must emphasize that my own involvement with Chestnut House was made possible by the inherent flexibility of these affect-laden boundaries. Miyazaki and Sakai’s willingness to welcome me into their house illustrated a generosity of spirit

that could incorporate the “other” and motivate a shifting of boundaries within the institutional household.

CONCLUSION

I close here by returning to a question posed at the start of this chapter: what sort of social and political work is enacted in discourses and practices regarding “household-like care” in the Japanese child welfare system? I view Chestnut House as a social experiment, because it distilled indices of “household” that the staff were able to enact (with variable efficacy) in an institutional context. The staff remained perennially frustrated by the little they were able to do to give the children a sense of “home.” At the same time, policy makers take up the concept of “household-like care” as a call to action for the child welfare world in a way that still does too little to provide children with long-term interpersonal resources. Signs of a household, like a dining room table, took on outsized meaning as staff members invested in meals their hopes for affectively loaded and emotionally potent interactions with children, whom they taught to express feelings in socially normative ways through daily routines like eating. Bodily interactions were ways for staff members to create a “household” atmosphere, but they were also a source of consternation, as in Takada’s analysis of how physical intimacies highlighted the stranger status of staff and children. The children’s own pasts constantly reemerged in their verbalizations and problematic behaviors. Their behaviors bumped up against the micropractices within institutional life that in turn articulated with national and international discourses regarding proper care for state wards. The often-closed space of the Japanese child welfare institution is, thus, a window into the ways that the proper management of childhood emerges as a vexed aspirational project for those charged with providing a “household” to children without one.

NOTES

1. All names of institutions and interlocutors in this chapter are pseudonyms.
2. In this chapter, I generally use the word “household,” but the Japanese word *katei* can be translated as either “household” or “home,” and sometimes also “family.”
3. For a transcript of these deliberations, see www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/shingi/2r9852000002226q.html. I was told that this policy change occurred in response to critiques raised in Goldfarb 2011.
4. Kitahara’s focus on “connection” articulates with the contemporary emphasis on interpersonal ties as crucial bases for sociality in Japan, in part through anxious representations of increasing social isolation (*Muen Shakai* 2010; for analysis, see Nozawa 2015). See Goldfarb 2016b for discussion of the ways Japanese concepts of “connection” are used in adoption and fostering discourses.
5. Connectedness is often a focus for education in Japan outside of child welfare settings, and is in fact a core element of what Shimahara and Sakai (1995) call Japanese “ethnopedagogy,” or a cultural theory of teaching. One of their interlocutors describes the connectedness between teacher and student as “a relationship that reinforces the reciprocity of the emotional commitment to one another” (171).

6. By the summer of 2012, only one residential staff member of the originally hired staff remained as a caregiver at Chestnut House (two staff members had moved to exclusively administrative roles). Within the next year, the caregiver shift requirements were changed and none of the staff members were considered “residential.”

7. Sakai Marina, the nutritionist, was placed in this house for most of the first year, then moved into the office to focus on her work as the nutritionist, and then began filling in at another house after a staff member quit. Miyazaki Yūko was the only staff member who had been in this house for the entirety of the children’s time at Chestnut House, from June 2009. However, Miyazaki left her job around when I left the field, December 2010.

8. In recent changes to institution policy, children, too, have been moved between houses to alleviate interpersonal or other problems between household members.

9. This perspective mirrors understandings of children as threatened by decreasing connections to community more broadly, and concomitant diminished state support for children (Giroux 1998: 268).

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