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国際児童文庫とは、海外帰国子女、外国人子女、国際家庭子女のためのバイリンガル・グループである。文庫の中心は図書であり、メンバーは定期的に図書を相互利用しつつ、言語活動をくつろいだ雰囲気を楽しむ。本稿では国際児童文庫の発展経緯を述べ、それが日本を越えて広くバイリンガルの人たちに応用可能かを問う。具体例としてコアラ文庫（東京の英語文庫）の活動を取り上げ、メンバーの英語能力を維持向上させる目標を達成しているところ、必ずしも達成していないところを検討する。また文庫グループが幼児教育や生涯教育にも貴重な貢献をなしていることも指摘する。

## Promotion of Bilingualism in Bunko

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*International children's bunko are bilingual groups established for the benefit of returnees, expatriate children and the offspring of international marriages. Their nucleus is their library, and members meet regularly to share books and enjoy linguistic activities in an informal setting. This paper traces the development of international children's bunko, and questions whether they can move beyond their Japanese origins to be of wider significance to bilingualism. Then the paper focuses on the activities of Koala Bunko (an English language bunko in Tokyo), in order to consider the inherent strengths and weaknesses of bunko in their attempt to fulfill their objective of maintaining, and preferably also actively developing their members' proficiency in the target language. It is also suggested that bunko groups may be able to make valuable contributions to both early and lifelong education.*

### Promotion of bilingualism in bunko

Studies of bilingualism tend to concentrate on two sites: the classroom and the home. This paper introduces bilingual children's bunko groups, which represent a third site of considerable potential in the development of bilingualism. The impetus for this paper came from the discovery that bunko have been almost completely overlooked in the academic literature on bilingual children in Japan<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore hoped that this paper, which will confine itself to an introductory description of the origin and the typical activities of bunko, and to a brief examination of the potential of bunko, will encourage other scholars to start to pay attention to bunko.

Bunko groups are neither school nor home, although they have affinities with both, but are a conveniently accessible resource in the local community. A bunko group offers the stimulus of encounters and experiences that would not occur within the family circle, but, in contrast with school, provides an informal arena where language activities are fun-based and never graded. A bunko has some similarities with bilingual

playgroups or Saturday morning schools set up for the purpose of maintaining children's other languages, yet a bunko group's defining characteristic is its library (see *Asahi Shimbun*, 1989). Children are in addition given regular assignments to complete at home, so that language progress is perceived in members who participate regularly.

Moreover, bunko groups encourage the bilingualism of both their child and adult members. These groups exist primarily for the benefit of their child members, and thus contribute to the early education of bilingual children. However, bunko membership also requires a commitment to bilingualism by the parents or other adult volunteers, which has as a fortuitous by-product the enrichment of their lifelong education – the majority of bunko adults are not professional educators, but in organizing bunko activities they come to use various resources to stimulate the children's bilingual development, and in so doing they develop their own creative, linguistic and pedagogical skills.

Bunko groups have a Japanese genesis, and at present their membership is predominantly Japanese. However, I believe they deserve to be better known because they may provide a model, or at least some helpful ideas, for the increasing number of bilingual families worldwide who wish to maximize their sources of support, information and practical courses of action as they respond to the challenges encountered in developing family members' bilingualism. In passing it should be noted that, although they do not mention bunko, Cunningham-Andersson and Andersson (1999) provide helpful advice on establishing various kinds of children's bilingual support groups, ranging from playgroups to more formal learning-centred groups.

## Background of bilingual children's bunko

One definition of the Japanese word bunko is a small private library or book collection for the benefit of a specific group of users, rather than the general public. There are various genres of bunko; the Oya Soichi Bunko, to take but one example, is a collection most likely to be accessed by journalists. This paper is concerned with bilingual children's bunko, which have as their parent organization the International Children's Bunko Association/ *Kokusai Jido Bunko Kyokai* (ICBA). ICBA took as its inspiration the children's bunko movement of Japan. This began in 1951 when the author Muraoka Hanako opened her deceased son's collection of books to neighbourhood children as a library, and many children's bunko were subsequently established throughout Japan, to promote a love of reading among children. This aim is shared by ICBA, but ICBA was set up in response to the perceived needs of bilingual/bicultural children who have lived overseas for more than a year, and return to Japan to become pupils in the public school system (see *The Daily Yomiuri*, 1980). This category includes both expatriates and returnees; children of international marriages also qualify as members of bilingual children's bunko<sup>2</sup>. Children from such backgrounds in Japan tend to be from the prestigious bilingual families identified by Baker and Jones (1998) as those who unquestioningly believe in the advantages conferred by bilingualism, and disregard any purported disadvantages in cognition or academic achievement<sup>3</sup>.

Bunko in Japan affiliated to ICBA are organized by Japanese women who have lived overseas, working together with native speakers of the bunko's target language. All adult bunko members are unpaid volunteers. Activities for child members are principally designed for children of elementary school age, although in practice pre-school siblings frequently also attend

bunko meetings (see Lewis (1995) for general information concerning preschool and primary education in Japan). Members of junior high school age are rare, as they are usually busy with club activities and extra studies. In Japan bunko organize regular meetings with the objectives of:

1. Reading good books to children in the target language.
2. Doing activities using the target language in a social and cultural atmosphere similar to that in which the children originally acquired the target language.
3. Lending out books, magazines and videos.
4. Creating a sympathetic and encouraging environment in which members can discuss the difficulties they have encountered in entering or reentering life in Japan.

To join a bunko it is necessary to pay an entrance fee for each child, and thereafter a regular fee of about 500 yen monthly per child. This income is used to buy snacks for the children, buy new books for the bunko's library, and fund other bunko activities. The bunko as a whole pays an annual fee to ICBA, and in return can participate in ICBA events and use ICBA services.

In Japan there are at present 15 ICBA-affiliated bunko, all in Tokyo or in the Kanto region with easy access to Tokyo. Of these 11 have English as their target language, 2 French, one German and one Korean. Elsewhere bunko with Japanese as their target language number 12 in the UK, 4 in Australia, 3 in the USA, 2 in China and one in Italy. Lastly, there is one bunko in Mexico with Spanish as its target language. The first international children's bunko opened in 1977 in Tokyo, and ICBA records up until 1997 list a total of 72 bunko.

### **Limitations of existing bunko, and the desirability of increasing the scope of their internationality**

The above details concerning international children's bunko call for four comments. Firstly, ICBA records show that a surprising number of bunko have closed or withdrawn from their affiliation with ICBA (see Nagamori, 1999). As for bunko within Japan, it seems that some bunko, particularly those which used to exist outside Tokyo (for example in Kobe, Nagoya and Fukuoka) chose to continue independently, not wishing to adhere to ICBA's code of practice. Others, not being able to cater to prospective members' wishes at the same time as keeping to ICBA's code, instead metamorphosed into commercial English language classes for children. Yet, if bunko are to be fertile sites for the promotion of bilingualism, it is necessary for new bunko to open throughout Japan rather than be concentrated in the Tokyo region as they are at present.

My second comment is that the internationality of ICBA is rather restricted. English-Japanese or Japanese-English language bunko predominate, and there is as yet no bunko without Japanese as one of its paired languages. To be truly international bunko based on two languages, neither of which is Japanese, should be established. This is not likely to happen at present, as ICBA and its affiliated bunko do not publicise themselves widely; new members and new groups result from word-of-mouth publicity. One way to expand the geographical and linguistic range of bilingual bunko would be to publicise them in media and fora accessed by people interested in bilingualism, whether for personal or for academic reasons. A second generation of bilingual bunko would not necessarily be affiliated with the Japan-based ICBA, but would adopt what was useful in the original Japanese concept of bilingual bunko for their own purposes. This flexibility would also be in the bunko



tradition: each ICBA-affiliated bunko adheres to a minimal ICBA code of practice, but is otherwise free to organize itself completely according to its members' wishes.

Bunko are established primarily for the benefit of their locally resident members, but if there was a denser network of bunko in Japan they would have some contribution to make to raising the generally lamentable levels of English in Japan. McCurry's article, "Is Japan ready to start talking?" (2003), notes that in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's 2002 English Strategy Initiative there is a grand total of 30 action programmes aiming to raise standards of English in schools, and recommendations to improve proficiency levels so that high school graduates are capable of holding everyday conversations in English and university graduates are able to use English for work or research. The Ministry will also ask local education authorities to take English skills into account when hiring new staff, and more training is also to be offered to all of the country's 60,000 English teachers. These kinds of initiatives are not new, but McCurry suggests that the previous comfortable acceptance of non-competence in English really is about to face its nemesis, because now "English proficiency is less a matter of individual cosmopolitan pretensions (though they remain) than of survival in a harsher economic climate." Bunko members have all successfully acquired another language, and could (at the very least) serve as role models, as well as providing a pool of competent (and culturally aware) foreign language speakers in various fields for Japan.

My last comment is that there is no shortage of potential bunko members. Gordenker's article, "Language help lets foreign students fit in" (2002), states that there are about 78,000 *gaikokujin jido* (foreign pupils) enrolled in the Japanese public school system. Moreover, according to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's statistics,

in the academic year 1999-2000 there were 12,241 *kikoku shijo* (returnees) enrolled in Japanese schools, of which 7,248 were in elementary schools.

### Focusing on a particular bunko: Koala Bunko

I will describe the bunko that I know best, to give some idea of the scope and atmosphere of a bunko, although it should be noted that what is true of Koala Bunko may vary in other bunko. Active since 1980, Koala Bunko is an English language bunko whose children are pupils of local, Japanese-medium elementary schools in Musashino, west Tokyo (see *Musashino Kikan*, 2001, and *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 1987). Koala's 16 children and 8 adults assemble twice a month during term time on Wednesday afternoons after school from 3.20-5.20 p.m. In its early days Koala members took turns to host meetings in their homes, and the book collection was transported from house to house by bicycle. Now that the library consists of more than 1,500 books Koala is fortunate to be able to hold meetings and have permanent book shelving space on the premises of the *Musashino-shi Kyoiku-iinkai Shidoshitsu; Kikoku/ Gaikokujin Kyoiku Sodanshitsu* (Musashino City Multicultural Educational Assistance Office)<sup>4</sup>, located in the city's Number 4 Junior High School. I attend Koala both as a parent volunteer and as a native speaker of English volunteer. At present I am the only native speaker, as over the past two years one Australian and two American volunteers returned to their countries, but this kind of fluctuation in membership is typical of bunko. All bunko and each bunko over time will vary in size, language proficiency of members, and age range of children. Activities will also depend on the talents and inclinations of current members: for example, Koala's emphasis on book reports gives it an academic flavour, whereas other bunko concentrate on writing and performing

their own dramas. At every regular Koala meeting the schedule will include the following:

- 1a. Library time (children check books and videos in and out of the library).
- 1b. Book reports (children read aloud book reports they have written and illustrated to an adult who will praise, discuss and criticize as is appropriate for each child).
- 1c. Reading check (each child reads aloud a book from a graded reader series to an adult, who notes the book in the child's personal reading record file; the series is Hunt and Brychta's *Oxford Reading Tree*).
- 1d. Questions and Answers (now based on the *Brain Quest* (Feder, 1992) series of boxed questions).
2. Game or other active linguistic activity (games can be academic style, eg. word puzzles, or more physically oriented, eg. Fruit Basket).
3. Story time (a native speaker reads aloud to the children).
4. Snack time.

Koala's annual schedule (starting in spring) usually includes the following:

- (a) June: Poetry Day (all children recite poems they have learnt, using costumes, props and special effects according to their taste).
- (b) July: Summer party.
- (c) Autumn: Performance by Covenant Players (small American educational theatre group).
- (d) late October: Halloween party.
- (e) December: ICBA Christmas party (non-religious, organized by ICBA for all bunko, in a central Tokyo venue, at which each bunko gives a short performance to entertain the others).
- (f) March: Easter egg hunting/decorating in Inokashira Park.

## Some merits of bunko membership

Next, using Koala as an example, I will indicate some of the advantages of bunko membership. Firstly, a bunko is a source of valuable information, psychological support, and friendship for adults and children alike. A bunko counteracts the anomie or "feeling of disorientation, social isolation and anxiety" (Arnberg, 1987) that may arise when an individual is moving out of one linguistic and cultural group and (back) into another. Secondly, bilingual children attending a monolingual school may resent it if they are given an extra study load at home for their additional language, and meeting others in the same situation somehow lightens their burden. Thirdly, regular bunko attendance and completion of assignments ensures that English usage becomes a habit rather than an unfulfilled good intention. Fourthly, members' common concern with promoting English creates an atmosphere of increased motivation, so much so that younger siblings who have not had their elders' experience of natural acquisition of English overseas want to emulate the latter's bilingualism, and start to read and write English of their own volition. Fifthly, the disparity in age and or language proficiency of children becomes a strength rather than a liability when children with greater proficiency mentor those less fluent: a situation which promotes confidence, and increased motivation and understanding, for both parties.

Sixthly, bunko promote biculturalism, which, as Harding and Riley (1986) pointed out, is not at all the same as bilingualism. The children themselves are aware from an early age of the wider access they have to the world through their bilingualism and biculturalism. Sh (6<sup>th</sup> grader, spent 5 years in the USA) said that his primary identity is as a Japanese boy, but "I change to an English boy sometimes. When I speak English I don't feel very Japanese." He also said that, in comparison with his monolingual

and monocultural schoolmates, he felt he had much more interest in international events, particularly in USA news. Some of the children's attitudes are influenced by their parents, but, as in Sh's case, children are capable of developing their own reasoning concerning the desirability of their other language: Y (2<sup>nd</sup> grader, spent 2 years in Canada) said she liked knowing English because "I could talk to my *yochien* (kindergarten) friends in Canada", and M (5<sup>th</sup> grader, spent 1 year in the USA and 16 months in the UK) said, "We need English for holidays and going to other countries and talking to people there." Parents' views echo their children's, and add some extra dimensions: W (mother of Y) gave a long and impassioned answer when asked why she wanted to maintain her children's English language skills: "Japan can't stand alone in future—we need relationships with other countries...English will be good for the kids' jobs...they will be able to relate to people from other countries...in the future one language will not be enough...another language enhances your point of view of the world, and it's a good experience to live abroad... English was part of the children's experience abroad, and I want them to keep it..."

Seventhly, the greatest merit of bunko is the cooperative learning that stems from pooling the resources of members with diverse interests and talents. At its best adults are learning alongside the children. An example of this is Koala's work on *Zero Landmine*, a song from a CD campaigning against landmines produced by Sakamoto Ryuichi (2001), in collaboration with celebrity singers worldwide, and ordinary people living in danger from landmines. A Koala member heard about this appropriately multilingual/multicultural project when her brother worked on televising it. *Zero Landmine* required a lot of language work to understand its complex lyrics, and ICBA's music director came to coach everyone on singing it. Members researched the facts of landmine production, then the damage

they cause. The bunko children's attention was gripped when they learnt that casualties are often children because they play or are left in charge of grazing animals in mined areas. Eventually Koala gave a presentation on landmines and sang the *Zero Landmine* song as its contribution to the 2001 ICBA Christmas gathering, thus transmitting Koala's knowledge to many other bunko. Some adults had worried at the project's outset that the topic would be too difficult and distressing for young children, but were impressed by the children's compassionate response and quick comprehension of the ugly consequences of political, economic and military strategy in the adult, globalised world.

### **An example of the merits and demerits that derive from the ad hoc nature of bunko**

The ad hoc learning experiences of bunko—because they are contingent on the unique contributions of the leaders who happen to be members at a particular time—are a delight, and sometimes a disadvantage. As an example, in 2000 S set up the Koala website, to fulfill a requirement for her distance learning M.A. course. She was responsible for introducing computer skills to several Koala Japanese mothers, who at that time had computers in their homes, but were not at all confident about using them, and tended to rely on their husbands for any task involving information technology. S's computer coaching was an empowering experience for these mothers, and both children and adults found bilingual profit and pleasure in exploring this new online world.

However, S left Koala before anyone had sufficient computer skills to take over maintenance of the website. The website is now petrified; it still contains useful information, but is no longer an interactive resource for Koala children. I don't regard

the website as a failure because it provided members with a valuable learning experience, and it could be revitalized if a new member with the requisite computer skills and dedication chose to take on its maintenance. Incidentally, S is now back in the US preparing to work as a liaison officer between immigrant children and the school system in California. S is an example of how bunko membership may have beneficial consequences for an individual's education or career that are not envisaged when that person first joins a bunko.

## Conclusion

This paper has concentrated on the positive aspects of bunko. Bunko have some undeniable weaknesses. Bilingual families not in a privileged income/leisure time bracket will not be able to supply adult volunteers to establish and maintain a bunko. Once up and running the bunko may not achieve its full language development potential because the amateur status of its leaders prevents them from setting suitable goals, or their volunteer status means that they may not wish to commit themselves to activities that are perceived as demanding.

Nevertheless, I believe bunko are an asset for bilingual families as they value other linguistic and cultural experiences, and help, at least, to preserve acquired language skills, and, at best, to develop these language skills. This is important when a bunko child may be in an otherwise monolingual environment at school, with friends, and in most cases at home as well. Bunko also counteract attrition of the target language in non-native speaker adults. Bunko have a flexible structure and are able to provide a stimulating environment because they can draw upon the diverse experiences and talents of their members.

Members invariably have a positive attitude to the bunko's

target language (as they are under no compunction to continue membership if they have negative feelings) so that if they subsequently proceed to study that language academically they will have the advantages of enhanced motivation as well as prior knowledge to draw on. At a time when traditional school systems are coming under increasing strain, and individuals can no longer expect school and university to equip them once and for all with sufficient education to last through a career and retirement bunko have the potential to make valuable contributions to early and lifelong education. A bunko, at its best, concurs with Dewey's concept of a progressive (versus traditional) education (1938):

To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning from experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world ... there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education.

Bunko demonstrate that taking the initiative in one's own education can be exciting and empowering for children and adults alike. Gaining responsibility for one's own education and acquisition of skills may be more of a necessity than a luxury in meeting the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Kolb (1984) points out, "We are ... the learning species, and our survival depends

on our ability to adapt not only in the reactive sense of fitting into the physical and social worlds, but in the proactive sense of creating and shaping those worlds.” In the developed world in 2003 the insistence on competitiveness in the economic sphere has spread to the educational sphere, with consequences for good and bad that we as yet do not see completely clearly. The best models for learning in a bunko equip bunko members to cope in a competitive world, while also providing models of cooperative learning which can suggest ways of muting the harsh edges of competitiveness, while not detracting from its educational stimulus.

## Notes

1. Bunko are mentioned in a few (rather outdated) newspaper articles (see *The Daily Yomiuri* (1980), *Yomiuri Shimbun* (1987) and *Asahi Shimbun* (1989) but the sole mention of bunko in an academic context that I have been able to locate is in an article by Yashiro (1995), “The Right to Speak: Language Maintenance in Japan.” In contrast, the phenomenon of *kikoku shijo* (returnees, or Japanese children who have lived for a period overseas because of their fathers’ jobs, and who subsequently return to reside in Japan), has received plenty of academic attention: in English predominantly by Goodman (1990), and in Japanese by, to take one example, Minami (2000). However, *kikoku shijo* studies tend to take an anthropological approach towards the question of the children’s reintegration in Japanese society, and do not take up the issue of these children’s maintenance of the language skills they learned overseas in any detail. Some academic attention has also been paid to the international schools in Japan, for example by Baker and Jones (1998). It should be noted that bunko children include, but are not limited to *kikoku shijo*, and attend bunko precisely because they are attending Japanese schools rather than international schools, without, however, wishing to lose their other language proficiency. The publications (monographs and the bimonthly newsletter *Bilingual Japan* (バイリンガル通信) and membership of JALT’s Special Interest Group on Bilingualism provide a mine of information for parents and researchers of bilingual children in Japan. Likewise, useful information on bilingual children, with a global reach, can be gleaned from *The Bilingual Family Newsletter*. However, during the years I have been subscribing to these newsletters they have not mentioned bunko. Therefore, although issues relevant to bunko can be found in the academic literature relating to returnees, international schools and bilingualism in a Japanese context, bunko are entities that need examining in their own right.
2. Children without a bilingual background cannot enroll as their foreign language learning requirements are beyond the capacity of a bunko, and they will be better catered for in fee-paying classes taught by qualified professionals.
3. In other countries the issue of bilingual children and their education can be sensitive as it is often related to issues of class/ racial discrimination/integration. Such examples would include refugee children in the UK or Latino children in the US. Returnees and other bunko children in Japan are in a completely different situation as, with very few exceptions, they



are in a high socio-economic bracket. The difficulties faced by these children in coping with their double linguistic and cultural status are very real, but in one sense they are fortunate, as their parents are likely to have access to educational and financial resources that can go some way to meeting their needs.

Akiko Kowatari's experience (as detailed in "A Non-Japanese Japanese: On Being a Returnee", her interview with Macdonald) and Hall's *Cartels of the Mind* (1998) give some idea of the difficulties they encounter, and it is indeed surprising that official Japan neglects them as a resource despite constant rhetoric on the desirability of internationalisation. Again, further scholarly examination of the curious mixture of positive and negative discrimination accorded these children would be welcome. There is of course a considerable number of other bilingual and bicultural children in schools in Japan in a less privileged position, namely the children of foreign manual workers, mainly *nikkei* (Japanese origin) Latin-Americans. As far as I know none of these children belong to a bunko, although Portuguese-Japanese and Spanish-Japanese language bunko would reinforce their languages and place extra value on their native languages.

- 4) The authorities of Musashino City are fairly progressive in their recognition of both the advantages conferred and the challenges posed by a multilingual/multicultural society. Musashino's Multicultural Educational Assistance Office runs English and Chinese language classes for returnees, expatriate children and the offspring of international marriages attending the district's public

elementary and junior high schools. It also provides supplementary Japanese coaching for any children belonging to the above groups whose Japanese is insufficient to cope with the academic content of school lessons, plus assistance for parents who are not proficient enough in Japanese to read documents issued by their children's schools. These useful services (for full details of the office's activities see the 2001 pamphlet issued by Musashino-shi Kyoiku-iinkai, Gakko-bu, Shidoshitsu), and indeed the office itself, came about as a consequence of local educational officials observing Koala Bunko's activities after it had been given space in the city's *Gakushu Senta* (Learning Centre), also located in the city's Number 4 Junior High School. Although this paper does not afford room to discuss the benefits for bilingual development ensuing from such cooperation between public and private entities I include this note because some readers may wish to suggest similar initiatives to their local authorities, and point to the precedents established by Musashino City.

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