



Pre-departure Seminar June 27, 2015

## **Being a Minority in Japan: Asian American**

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1. What you might reasonably encounter
  - a. The Good
    - i. You'll integrate more easily and have more privacy.
    - ii. Compared to other JETs, you might have a better understanding of Asian culture
    - iii. You might be instantly more relatable to your students, teachers, and other Japanese people you meet.
    - iv. You might be more approachable to your students, especially the younger ones because you are more "familiar" to them (it also helps if you can talk about manga and anime).
    - v. You can help break stereotypes of what a "typical" American looks like, and provide an interesting story of what it's like being Asian in America.
  - b. The Bad
    - i. You won't have the same superstar status and attention as non-Asian JETs.
    - ii. You might be held to higher expectations with regards to the language, culture, and personal behavior.
    - iii. In a mixed ethnic group, questions may be directed towards you, even if there is a non-Japanese person with you that is speaking Japanese fluently.
    - iv. Your English might not be viewed as "authentic".
    - v. If you are Asian-American and female, you might be expected to play the traditional Japanese female role at times (e.g. making coffee at school, pouring tea for the men at events).
  - c. The Neutral
    - i. No matter what Asian ethnicity you are, it will likely be assumed that you are Japanese.
    - ii. Being half-Asian/hapa will lead to many confused looks and questions (e.g. "you look Asian but your eyes are green").

## 2. Navigating the Waters

- a. Don't get frustrated if your Japanese isn't fluent or if you know little once you first arrive. Japanese is a tough language, and will come slowly but surely. Just keep practicing!
- b. Don't be afraid to approach other people and start conversations, whether you're at the grocery store, interacting with students and teachers, or meeting random people in public. Once they get to know you, your racial identity isn't important.
- c. Keep an open mind and be prepared to answer many questions (unique & mundane) about your identity. They are just as curious about you as you are of them.
- d. Don't be afraid to reach out to other JETs, particularly Asian-American JETS, to share your experiences or seek their advice. They'll likely be going through the same challenges and situations as you.
- e. When faced with an unexpected challenge, don't let yourself get stuck in a rut.
- f. Put yourself out there. Make new friends, go to local events in town as well as JET-sponsored events, and truly embrace all the JET Program and Japan have to offer.

## 3. Take-aways

- a. You will have unique experiences as an Asian-American in your city, town, or village.
- b. Focus on the good memories more than the bad ones. Don't let a bad experience define your time in Japan.
- c. Don't be disappointed if you're never officially accepted as "Japanese", despite speaking fluently and fully integrating in the culture.
- d. Your individual situations will make for interesting stories to tell for the rest of your life.

## 4. Support

- a. Join the "Asian Pacific Islander AJET (API AJET)" group on Facebook
- b. If you have any questions, concerns, or need advice, you can reach out directly to me at [cdeborja@gmail.com](mailto:cdeborja@gmail.com)

Have a great time on JET! Ganbatte!