

## Q&amp;A

## For most, adoption option impractical, iffy

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For couples in Japan who can't have a child, adoption is not considered a viable option.

Seiko Noda, 50, a Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker who recently announced she got pregnant by using an egg from a woman in the U.S., wrote in a magazine that she was turned down by a private adoption agency because she works full time and, when she applied, was nearly 50 years old.

Is it difficult to adopt a child in Japan? What are the criteria to be adoptive parents, and how long does it take? Following are questions and answers on adoption in Japan:

### Where can couples apply for adoption?

They can either go to a certified private organization or public child consultation center.

### Who can adopt a child?

The criteria differ by prefecture and organization, but applicants must be considered a healthy married couple with means of support.

In the case of child consultation centers in Tokyo, applicants must be between the ages of 25 and 49. Their residence must exceed 10 tatami mats, or about 16.6 sq. meters, and have more than two rooms.

According to Hideo Hirakura, director of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's division for supporting child-rearing, Tokyo couples who both work full time can adopt, but those who work long hours may be turned down.

## **Can foreigners adopt a child or become foster parents?**

Yes, but Hirakura said they have to be fluent in Japanese to be able to communicate with the organization's staff and with a child. Whether a Japanese child will automatically acquire the adoptive parents' nationality depends on the law of their home country, according to the Justice Ministry. If a child eventually opts for the adoptive parents' nationality, Japanese nationality will be erased.

As for foster parents who take care of children temporarily, they must do so within the community listed on their residency registration.

## **What kind of adoption procedures must couples follow?**

After contacting a private organization or child consultation center, a couple must take classes on being adoptive parents. Then they can apply. Staff from adoption agencies will also visit the couple's home to see if they are suitable for adoption. They go through a six-month trial period with a child, then finally they can make a formal request with a family court, which will examine the situation of both the biological (when they are known) and adoptive parents. If the court approves, the couple can officially adopt.

## **What are the differences between "special" and "general" adoptions?**

Special adoptions are restricted to children less than 6 years old. The child's name is added on the adoptive parents' family registry as a legitimate child.

Under general adoptions, there is no limit on the age of the adoptee, but approval of a legal representative is needed if the child is under 15. The family registry will have the names of both biological and adoptive parents, and the child will be described as "adopted." No trial period is needed for general adoptions. In both systems, couples can't send a child back to a consultation center once the adoption is completed.

## **If a Japanese couple adopt a child from overseas, what nationality would be recognized?**

An infant under the special adoption will still hold the nationality of the nation of birth, according to the Immigration Bureau. Children will not automatically acquire Japanese

citizenship after adoption. To obtain Japanese nationality, they are required to be naturalized.

### **Is the number of adopted children increasing or decreasing?**

According to the Cabinet Office's report for 2003, 1,500 cases of adoption were approved that year. The number remained almost the same in the preceding decade, the Cabinet Office said.

In the United States, about 127,000 children were adopted in 2001, according to Child Welfare Information Gateway under the Department of Health and Human Services. The number of adoptions has been constant in the U.S. since 1987.

In Tokyo, 139 families seeking to adopt are registered in 2010, but only 36 children have been adopted so far. Hirakura said children without parents are small in number, so the chance of adoption remains low.

Meanwhile, families registered to become foster parents in Tokyo doubled, from 215 in 1998 to 419 in 2010. Hirakura said the metropolitan government has been trying to increase the number of foster parents so more children can be taken care of by a family and not by an institution.

The Japan Times: Wednesday, Sept. 8, 2010  
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