



At the Bus Stop

On those occasions when I need to go into central Tokyo for some reason, I of course use the train. I'm about a twenty-minute walk from the nearest station, and the route is quite pleasant, passing through a nice park, and over a pedestrian footbridge over the Tama river. Sometimes though, I cheat a bit and take a bus to the station. That doesn't actually save me much time, because the bus stop is about eight minutes away, I have to get there a bit early to make sure of catching one, and then the bus itself takes time to get across the river, so it takes around 20 minutes anyway ...

One day around a month ago, when I arrived at the bus stop there were a few other people already there waiting, a business-man with his overcoat and briefcase, an elderly lady leaning on a cane, and a middle-aged woman with a shopping bag. Japanese strangers never talk to each other at a bus stop, unlike other places I have lived, so we all just stood there silently, waiting for the bus.

This was early morning, shortly after eight, and the sidewalk across the road was quite busy, with a steady stream of children making their way towards the nearby elementary school. The students at each end of the grade spectrum are easy to pick out; some of them - they must have been in grade six - were so tall and mature looking that it seemed hard to believe they were elementary school students. They wore tiny small satchels that rode high up on their backs ... At the other end of the scale were the little tykes who wore great heavy looking satchels that banged against the back of their legs as they walked, they were so oversized.

Directly across from us there was a driveway to a house, where a little boy - a toddler, really - was playing, watched over by his grandfather. The boy was wearing a small toy satchel, the same bright yellow colour as those worn by the first graders, and as each group of children passed by his house, he walked along with them for a few yards, obviously playing 'I'm off to school, too!' As he got to the end of their property - apparently the limit of how far he could go - he ran back to the driveway to await the next group to come along. He was so eager to join them!

Watching the stream of children move along the street was just like watching the flow of a river - always changing, yet always the same. The individual 'droplets' change constantly, as each group of children pass by, but the overall flow is constant ... And I suppose you could think of the years passing by in just the same way - this stream of children must have been passing along here for many many years, always changing, yet always the same. Seven years from now, that little toddler will be striding out of his driveway with one of those tiny satchels perched on his back, and I suppose there will be yet another little tyke sitting in his driveway watching the stream flow along the sidewalk ...

Then our bus came, and the group of us - myself, the others, and the elderly lady with the cane - boarded one by one, leaving *our* side of the sidewalk empty. I wonder if anybody was watching us, thinking about streams of life ...

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