

# **JAPANESE AMERICANS IN HAWAI'I: ACCULTURATION AND ASSIMILATION**

**Min Yanagihashi, Ph.D.**

A story developed in the early days of World War II when Japanese Americans from Hawai'i were training with Japanese Americans from the mainland (continental U.S.) in the army unit, the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. It seems a fight started and a mainlander was knocked down and when his head hit the ground, the sound "kotonk" was heard. It sounded like an empty container hitting the ground, the implication being mainlanders' heads are hollow. The mainland Japanese Americans retaliated and called the Hawai'i Japanese Americans "buddaheads," probably referring to the shaven, bald-headed Buddhist priests. This is said to be the origin of the names "kotonks" and "buddhaheads," which became a friendly way of differentiating the mainland from the Hawai'i or "local" Japanese Americans.

Fanciful and amusing as the story seems, it does point out a truism that there is a difference between mainland and local Americans of Japanese Ancestry (AJA). Of course, there are many ways in which they are alike, for they do share the same heritage, culture, and language, and the immigration experience was in some respect similar. Nevertheless, historical and environmental factors helped to make the two groups different in behavioral and attitudinal traits; they developed different values, outlooks, and life styles. This paper explores how the Hawai'i AJAs evolved and emerged as a unique ethnic culture group.

I am a nisei (2<sup>nd</sup> generation) Japanese American born and raised in Honolulu. My perspective comes from living through World War II and experiencing Hawai'i becoming the 50<sup>th</sup> state. The focus is on the issei (1<sup>st</sup> generation) and the nisei. It was the experience of these two generations that resulted in what some consider a "model" of acculturation and assimilation. They were absorbed into the dominant culture and society but still were able to retain a large part of their cultural identity.

## **EARLY IMMIGRATION (1868 – 1924)**

The first group of Japanese brought to Hawai'i was 148 contract laborers to work on the sugar plantations. They were called "gannen mono" (1st year men), for they arrived in 1868, the first year of Emperor Meiji's reign. But most historians cite February 8, 1885 as the beginning of Japanese immigration to Hawai'i. This was the start of sustained immigration, formally recognized by a treaty between the Kingdom of Hawai'i and the Japanese government. In the first boatload were 153

laborers who signed three-year indenture contracts. What followed the next 15 years was the arrival of over 85,000, most of whom were men, and although some returned to Japan, the majority of about 61,000 remained in Hawai'i. Therefore, by 1900, Japanese comprised almost half of the total population of Hawai'i and were the main labor force of the plantations.

Like many immigrants throughout the world, Japanese laborers made their decision to come to Hawai'i for economic reasons. They dreamed of making enough money and returning to Japan wealthy and respected and ready to enjoy the good life. Working temporarily away from your native village or town is called "sojourn" in English and the individual is known as a "sojourner." In Japanese, it is called "dekasegi" and the laborer "dekasegi-nin." The practice of dekasegi was common in rural Japan in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the early stages of industrialization, as many peasants temporarily left their villages to work in rapidly expanding towns and cities. As it turned out, most of the Japanese immigrants who came to Hawai'i could not save enough money to return and their dreams were never fulfilled.

The time was opportune for immigration. On the one hand, rural areas of Japan were suffering severe depression as the deflationary fiscal policy of Matsukata Masayoshi, finance minister, began to be implemented. The agrarian sector was hit hardest by the combination of falling agricultural prices and increased taxation. Until the late 1880s, taxes on farm production accounted for 78 percent of the total national income. Between 1883 and 1890, nearly 368,000 farmers lost their farms for failure to pay taxes and many lost their holdings through mortgage foreclosures. The burden of the Meiji government's modernization program was placed on the backs of the farmers. To escape poverty, many were ready to migrate, and the Japanese government began to look at immigration as a safety valve to release the pressure of economic discontent.

The sugar plantation owners, on the other hand, were eagerly looking for laborers. The contracts of Chinese workers had expired and many returned to China. There was a desperate need for workers. The plantation owners had already established contacts in the southwestern part of Japan, especially in the prefectures of Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Kumamoto, Fukuoka, and Wakayama. King David Kalakaua met with Emperor Meiji in 1881 and an agreement was reached. The Japanese government lifted the ban on immigration in 1885 and the flow of immigrants to Hawai'i began. Each laborer signed a three-year contract, wherein passage to Hawai'i was provided. A glamorous image of Hawai'i was presented with glowing accounts of individual success.

The Japanese government had its own self-interest in mind when it allowed for immigration. It hoped the remittance from workers abroad would help the national treasury. The Meiji government was also concerned about the prestige of the nation. It had learned the Chinese laborers were mistreated, and this reflected back to the weakness of the Chinese government. Japan did not want the same thing to

happen to its workers, for it would reflect badly on Japan. One of the chief concerns of Meiji foreign policy, and it became an obsession with the leadership, was the projection of Japan as a modern and great power that was to be treated with respect.

Besides the large number of immigrants from the southwestern prefectures, workers also came from Okinawa. Immigrants steadily arrived, but the situation changed with the annexation of Hawai'i by the United States. Congress passed the Organic Act of 1900 invalidating all contract labor. Japanese workers did not have to serve out their contracts; consequently, many began to return to Japan, but over 40,000 decided to move to the West Coast for better job opportunities. But this practice of using Hawai'i as a steppingstone to the mainland was stopped by the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907 between the U.S. and Japanese governments. Japanese plantation workers were no longer able to leave for work on the West Coast, and the Japanese government tightened its emigration policy, stopping the flow of male workers from Japan.

Early on, the immigrants who came to Hawai'i were overwhelmingly men; the ratio of men to women was 7 to 1. Soon the men began to desire the starting of families. From the standpoint of the plantation owners, it made sense to have families, for it would lead to permanent settlement and improve productivity and morale. So with the encouragement of the owners, a movement was started to bring over women and children. Many families were formed by "summoned immigrants" (yobiyose); wives and children left behind in Japan were called to come to Hawai'i.

Included in the "yobiyose" was an unusual group called "picture brides" (shashin kekkon). Couples would exchange photographs and would make the decision to marry sometimes with the help of go-between and the collective decision of families, practices already common in Japan. Large number of picture brides began arriving after 1907, and the total number that arrived was an astonishing 15,000! Photographs can be deceiving, and what you see is not what you get. As the ship arrived, the scene at the dockside was chaotic with men and women armed with photographs frantically trying to find their mate. It was, in most cases, a traumatic and disappointing experience. In one example, the photograph showed a man regally sitting on a horse, wearing a nice business suit, and looking quite wealthy. It turned out, the horse and the suit were borrowed, and he was not rich. Furthermore, he was much shorter than even the prospective bride! A few ladies could not take it and went back to the ship and returned to Japan, but the majority resolutely stuck it out. Women were also shocked by the living quarters. It was not what they were accustomed to in Japan. Nevertheless, the Japanese behavioral norm of "gaman" (endure or bear) made the unbearable at least bearable.

## PRE-WORLD WAR II PERIOD (1924 -1941)

With the introduction of the families, from about 1910, the Japanese population expanded dramatically with high birth and low mortality rates. The Immigration Act of 1924 abrogated the Gentlemen's Agreement and all immigration to the United States from Japan was ended. By this time, those of Japanese ancestry made up 40 percent of Hawai'i total population and became the largest ethnic group. The increase in the Japanese population caused anti-Japanese sentiments to rise and a fear of a Japanese take-over. At the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese population reached 158,000, about 37 percent of the total population. After the war, the percentage of Japanese in the population declined as other racial groups in greater number moved into Hawai'i, especially after statehood. The percentage of Japanese was 28 percent in 1970, and today is about 14 percent.

In the realm of politics, Japanese Americans made little progress in the period leading up to World War II. Few of them held elective and appointive positions in government. Furthermore, Japanese Americans were not prominent socially; only a small number had social status in Hawaiian society, which was dominated by the haoles (Caucasians). It was in the economic world where Japanese Americans had an impact of some consequence. They were the dominant ethnic group in the sugar and pineapple industries. The Japanese demanded higher pay and better working conditions. They emerged as the chief antagonist of the haole elites and led three big strikes, those of 1909, 1920, and 1924. The strike of 1920 was the biggest and had the support of Filipino workers and lasted for six months. All of these strikes were in the end broken by the haole oligarchy. The owners won the confrontations, but eventually the strikers were able to gain better working conditions, and even wages were adjusted. More important, the workers were no longer willing to remain submissive and patient.

By 1940, there were three times more nisei than issei. The nisei realized they could never advance if they stayed in the plantations. They began moving into the urban center, namely Honolulu. Urban life was quite different from rural plantation living, and exposure to the larger Hawaiian community changed their perspective and moved them further away from the traditions and culture of their parents. Greater expectations led to bolder moves, and in the economic arena, the nisei went into truck farming, fishing, and into the skilled and unskilled trades.

### COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY

Plantation life was harsh, and living in a multicultural environment made it difficult to maintain one's cultural traditions, traits, and values. In spite of all, the Japanese were able to retain and continue their ethnic traditions and practices by utilizing certain community institutions and organizations. Five of these will be discussed.

## Japanese Language Schools

The most important institution for integrating, teaching, and disseminating Japanese cultural values and traditions was the Japanese language schools. They taught not only the language skills, but ensured the continuation of traditions and cultural activities. For example, “kendo” (Japanese fencing) was taught and “shushin” (moral training) was part of the curriculum. Unfortunately, nationalistic elements, such as reverence for the emperor, gradually took over a large part of the curriculum.

I went up to the fourth grade level when school was closed because of the war. School was extremely traditional, where status and hierarchy were strictly observed and practiced. Teachers were respected. Heavy in regimentation, school started by lining up in formation in the schoolyard and then marching into the classroom. An important part of the educational system was the examinations, and there was constant pressure to perform better in the examinations. The language schools met in the afternoons and weekends. The school I attended was the Japanese Central Institute of Hawai'i (Hawai'i Chuo Gakkai), which was the first Japanese language school in Honolulu founded April 6, 1896. It ceased after the Pearl Harbor attack, and the closing of the school had an enormous impact on the community, and personally I felt a loss.

Influence of the language schools were recognized by opposition forces in Hawaiian society. The dominant English-speaking Caucasian community tried to regulate and even eliminate the Japanese language schools in the 1920s. The Japanese community fought back, and after a long series of litigations, the Supreme Court of the United States declared in 1927 such restrictions were unconstitutional.

## Kenjinkai

Kenjinkai (prefectural associations) were organized by issei, each association representing a specific “ken” (prefecture). In the early years, they served as benevolent support organizations, helping immigrants with their personal problems and providing social services, and where individuals could come together and socialize. Immigrants found it comforting to associate with people from the same locale. The older nisei continued the kenjinkai activities until the early post-World War II period, but with the passing of the issei and older nisei, kenjinkai slowly faded.

The kenjinkai of the various prefectures came together to promote community-wide activities. When issues arose affecting the entire Japanese community, the kenjinkai became a mobilizing agent. For example, in 1928, a young disturbed nisei kidnapped and murdered the young son of a prominent Caucasian family. This sensational case aggravated the relationship between the Japanese and the Caucasians. Huge meetings were held, and there is a remarkable photograph

showing a hall jam-packed with Japanese. The Japanese came together to fight for their honor.

Some of the kenjinkai activities were especially memorable. The picnics were held at Ala Moana Park and featured lots of food and games. Each family brought their own lunch, and the kenjinkai provided beverages and extras. I remember the games because each child won a prize by just participating, and I usually came home with many prizes. For the adults, it was a time to keep up on the gossips, a time to socialize.

### Tanomoshi

The issei relied on their own community to provide financial stability by using tanomoshi, a mutual financing group. Ten to twenty friends would enter into a tanomoshi as a means of raising money usually from monthly payment for shares. The accumulated fund was used to help pay emergency debts, making loans, and providing start up capital. Instead of using banks, they pooled their money to help one another, all based on mutual obligations and dependency. These mutual financing groups became a common means of economic assistance and investment. The meetings itself served as social gatherings for the members.

Tanomoshi had its antecedent in the traditional “ie” (household), the primary unit of social organization in rural Japan. Traditional ie is primarily a residential body comprised of kin relations, forming an extended family. It is, however, also a form of social group consciousness that becomes a managing body; it is this type of human relationship that tanomoshi represents. But the nisei found little use for such a traditional grouping and with the passing of the issei, the pattern of obligations and community interdependency broke down. By the beginning of World War II, tanomoshi was an institution of the past.

### Religious Organizations

Most Japanese immigrants were nominal Buddhists. Religion, however, did not play an important role when they first arrived. In fact, it was Christianity that first tried to win over the Japanese plantation laborers. Christianity was already pervasive in Hawai'i, being introduced and propagated by Congregationalist missionaries from New England. So it was firmly established by the time the Japanese came to Hawai'i. But Christian missionaries found it challenging converting the Japanese, for they were either passive or they resisted the foreign religion. Thus Christianity made little headway with the Japanese immigrants.

Among Christian leaders working with Japanese laborers, the most effective and relatable ones were Christian evangelists of Japanese ancestry. An exceptional early Japanese religious leader was Reverend Takie Okumura. Energetic and bold, he founded the first Japanese language school, the aforementioned Japanese Central

Institute of Hawai'i, and the Japanese YMCA. Initially, he depended on Japanese traditional values and culture to correct social abuses of plantation life and to address the economic and social needs of Japanese. But he changed his approach and starting in 1921, he promoted an educational program among plantation workers Americanizing the Japanese. He now believed the Japanese should follow the American lifestyle. His goal was to blend Japanese and American elements, to bring together the two cultures and their values. Christianity, he believed, would work better in such a setting. He even designed and built his church, the Makiki Christian Church, to resemble a Japanese castle. Rev. Okumura wanted the Japanese to be accepted into the Hawaiian social structure and wanted to avoid confrontation with the haoles. He opposed labor strikes because it would antagonize the haoles. Christianity, for Rev. Okumura, became a way to integrate into the Hawaiian community and to become American.

Japanese were to be found in several of the Protestant churches, but there were a few ethnic churches serving only those of Japanese ancestry. One example was the OMS (Oriental Mission Society) Holiness churches, which were meant to reach out to the Japanese people. In 1929, a few lay people formed the Wai'alaie Holiness Church; it was a mission church of the Japanese Holiness Church movement in Japan. Two years later, the Wahiawa Holiness Church was founded and the following year, in 1932, the Honolulu Holiness Church was established. At that time, a split occurred and these churches broke away from the Holiness Church group in Japan and became the OMS Holiness Church of North America. All the Holiness churches were distinctive in having two language ministries – the Japanese language ministry for the issei and the English language ministry for the nisei – thereby serving both generations. When the war began, both the Wai'alaie and Wahiawa Holiness churches were closed and did not open after the war, but the Honolulu Holiness Church did emerge in 1945. Later it changed its name to Honolulu Christian Church (1982) and was joined in this postwar period by two other churches, the Pearl City Highlands Church, now the West Oahu Christian Church, and the Mililani Christian Church.

The Buddhists became concerned about Christianity intruding gradually into the life of the plantation workers. Lacking religious leaders, they petitioned the Honpa Hongwanji headquarters in Japan to send priests to Hawai'i. When the priests arrived, they found it took considerable effort to make Buddhism relevant to the needs of the immigrants. The plantation owners, on their part, tried to help by building temples, for they thought it would create a satisfied labor force.

Buddhism was the mainstay of the issei, although for the most part, they were Buddhist in name only. Buddhism helped relieve loneliness and provided comfort. Traditional celebrations, such as bon festival (honoring the dead), "mochitsuki" (rice pounding), "setsun" (last day of winter), and "hanamatsuri" (flower festival) brought back the traditional customs of the villages back home. It renewed the immigrants bond to his ethnic community. Life patterns, like funerals, were extremely important. Buddhist ceremonies and certain customs, such as "koden,"

the presenting of money envelope to the bereaved, and “otsuya,” the wake service, were part of the lifestyle of the Japanese immigrants.

For the nisei, Buddhism was considered old-fashioned and un-American. Since the young nisei had limited command of the Japanese language, Buddhist priests found it hard to impart Japanese values and to change ways of thinking, and to teach the tenets of Buddhism. Buddhism was made appealing to the nisei by “Americanizing” its institutions and practices. Probably the most outstanding proponent of making Buddhism to be in accord with American values and practices was Bishop Yemyo Imamura. Buddhist “temples” became Buddhist “churches,” and there were even Buddhist “Sunday schools.” Buddhist temples became a socializing institution providing activities for young children and teenagers. The Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) was created, which followed the lines of the Christian YMCA. The “bon odori” (dance festival) became an entertainment and socializing event. It was a time to dance, enjoy special food, and meet friends. The temple, therefore, played a role in the lives of nisei through these socializing events and in key aspects of the life cycle, such as marriages and funerals.

To summarize, for many Japanese, religion was stated or nominal. It was considered a part of the culture, and one participated in its rituals, celebrations, and other events to fulfill socializing needs rather than fulfilling religious beliefs. It was a way to be socially accepted by the larger community and was not a matter of belief.

### Japanese Language Newspapers

The Japanese language press was an important part of the leadership in the Japanese community. It was particularly important for the issei, for it was the channel through which flowed information about happenings in the Japanese community. My parents paid particular attention to the obituary section. The newspapers covered the news and cultural events and had the usual announcements and advertisements. But more important, they also participated in community events and provided a public forum.

The first Japanese newspaper in Hawai’i appeared in 1892 and was the Nippon Shuho or Japanese Weekly. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were two major Japanese newspapers in Honolulu, the Nippu Jiji and the Hawai’i Shimpo. In 1912, Fred Makino founded the Hawai’i Hochi. Makino was one of the key leaders in the labor strikes against the sugar plantations. As editor, he was outspoken and was noted for his aggressive editorials. Makino attacked the injustices of the haole oligarchy. The Hochi was known for taking strong positions on many community issues. In particular, the Hochi led the fight in the courts against the language school control bill passed by the territorial legislature. The Japanese language school supporters won in the end, and in the forefront of this protracted political and legal battle was the Hochi.



In summary, the prewar press had enormous influence on the molding of public opinion and it guided and stimulated discussion on many issues. The Japanese community depended on it for much of the information about community events. The papers were temporarily curtailed by the war, but the *Hochi* and *Nippu Jiji* reappeared after the war. However, they never recovered their prewar dominance.

## WORLD WAR II (THE PACIFIC WAR) 1941-1945

The Pearl Harbor attack on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, was a surprise, but it was not totally unexpected. Relations between the United States and Japan had been deteriorating in the 1920s and in the 1930s, and several writers and analysts were predicting some sort of conflict between the two countries. Even earlier, Homer Lea in his book, *The Valor of Ignorance*, published in 1909, predicted a war in the Pacific. By the 1940s, relations had worsened to a degree where both sides began to take defensive measures.

The U.S. Army prepared by undertaking training maneuvers on the island and the navy fleet at Pearl Harbor was augmented. From time to time, I noticed black ack-ack smoke in the sky as anti-aircraft batteries shot at targets towed by planes. The U.S. government took other precautions. The FBI, headed by Robert Shivers, with the aid of Army and Navy intelligence, compiled a list of Japanese community leaders and individuals having possible links with and sympathy for the Japanese government. There were serious concerns about sabotage by the large Japanese population, and if invasion should occur, possible support for Japanese forces. Japanese Americans were worried about the suspicion, fear, and anxiety spreading throughout the community. A patriotic rally sponsored by the Oahu Citizen Committee for Home Defense was held at McKinley High School and was chaired by Dr. Shunzo Sakamaki. Dr. Sakamaki was Japanese history professor and my mentor at the University of Hawaii. Held on June 13, 1941, it was attended by a large crowd of about 2,000 people. One speaker, an army general, promised to protect the Japanese Americans if they would demonstrate their loyalty, thus helping to calm the fears of the Japanese community.

When the attack came, the Japanese community was stunned. Why would Japan jeopardize the safety of the local Japanese population? Why are they bombing us? Actually no Japanese bombs fell in Honolulu, but there were civilian casualties within the city. These were caused by U.S. anti-aircraft shells failing to explode in the air due to faulty proximity fuses; instead the shells fell to the ground and exploded. Luckily that Sunday I did not go to the Japanese Central Institute of Hawaii, the Japanese language school. A shell exploded in the schoolyard and sent shrapnel into the auditorium where children were gathered for a special Sunday morning class. An eight-year old girl was killed and a boy lost one arm. Another shell landed at the corner of King and McCully streets and killed a woman, and a shell fell on a noodle

stand, killing three family members and several customers. In all, about 39 shells felled in the city, and the casualties were all civilians.

A more personal tragic event occurred out at sea. My next door neighbors, the Kidos, lost their father and son. They were fishermen returning from their fishing trip when an American P-40 fighter plane strafed the boat killing both father and son. In the confusion and stress of the Pearl Harbor attack, several incidents occurred, but these incidents were never publicized, and even among friends and acquaintances, we never talked about them. It was wartime and such incidents were not discussed. Today, the blurring and the dismissing of details are called the “fog of war,” and the casualties and suffering inflicted on noncombatants is referred to as “collateral damages.”

The Japanese Americans in Hawai'i did not suffer the experience of mass deportation to concentration camps. Those Japanese living on the West Coast were forcefully relocated with loss of property and other assets, whereas, the Japanese population in Hawai'i of about 158,000 (37 percent of the total population) was too large, and it would have been logistically impossible to move out of the islands, and it would have been cost prohibitive. Moreover, the economy would have been drastically affected. Finally, prominent community leaders played a role in advising on the treatment of Japanese and on the question of loyalty. Shigeo Yoshida, an educator, and Hung Wai Ching, YMCA executive, both of whom had influence in haole and Japanese circles, were instrumental in persuading the authorities to forgo mass evacuation and to allow nisei to serve in the U.S. military. It is not to say that authorities did not give some thoughts about relocating the Japanese Americans. One proposal was to move the Japanese to Moloka'i, the island next to O'ahu, which had no military installations. Cooler heads prevailed, and the plan was quickly dropped.

Nevertheless, a little over 1,000 Japanese residents, both issei and nisei were sent to various relocation camps on the mainland. They included Buddhist and Shinto priests, journalists, volunteer consul officials, principals and teachers of language schools, businessmen involved with trade with Japan, “kibei” (those who went to school in Japan), and all others with close ties with Japan. The FBI used the “custodial detention list” it had compiled with the help of military intelligence and a few individuals knowledgeable about the Japanese community.

It is not widely known, but there were other Japanese who were taken from their homes. More than 450 were interned at Sand Island, which is located at the entrance to Honolulu Harbor. The camp was officially called the Sand Island Internment Camp; today it is a State Recreation Area. The army administered it, but it only lasted fifteen months, closing on March 1, 1943. The camp held local residents of Japanese descent, both citizens and non-citizens, and when it was closed, all civilian detainees were transferred to relocation camps on the mainland or to Honouliuli. The Sand Island camp turned out to be a temporary transfer and

holding site. For example, 600 residents were rounded up from the other islands and were passed through Sand Island on their way to mainland relocation camps.

### Honouliuli Internment Camp

Long forgotten, Honouliuli Internment Camp is now a National Monument under the National Park Service. It is located in the Honouliuli Gulch northwest of Waipahu at the foot of the Wai'anae Mountains. Operated by the U.S. Army, it was the largest civilian confinement camp in Hawai'i during the war. Opened in March 1943, at its peak it held 300 inmates, most of them American citizens. It also served as a large POW camp, prisoners coming mainly from the war in the Pacific. The Japanese detainees referred to the camp as "jigoku dani" (hell valley) because of the oppressive heat of the gulch. Many of the Japanese civilians were released on parole in 1943 and many more were transferred to mainland relocation camps. However, twenty-one civilians remained in camp until it was closed on September 1945.

The site was hidden from view by thick overgrowth of weeds, bushes and trees. It was not until 2002 when a staff worker of the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i (JCCH) noticed the remains of a viaduct in a photograph. Presently, JCCH handles the dissemination of information and the conducting of tours because it is not open to the public. Why did the detainees not talk about it? Typical of internees, they did not want to talk because it was painful to recall the experiences. Besides, the Japanese way was to internalize suffering by resorting to the behavioral norm of "shikata ga nai" (it cannot be helped). But by not sharing their experiences, the story was almost lost. How easy it is to be forgotten!

The biggest concern at the start of the war, as has been discussed, was the loyalty of the Japanese Americans in Hawai'i. There was the fear of sabotage and the local Japanese helping the Japanese army if they were to invade. These fear and concern were swept aside when the men of Japanese ancestry volunteered to serve their country. Initially, the army was hesitant about using Japanese Americans, and those already in uniform before Pearl Harbor were asked to leave. But seeing how the Japanese population in Hawai'i was behaving, the army realized they could use the help of the Japanese Americans. The army, at first, accepted 170 nisei volunteers as a non-combat labor battalion, what became known as the "Varsity Victory Volunteers," because several of the volunteers were university students. Needing more volunteers, the army decided to gather together from various army units, all Japanese Americans to form an all-nisei combat unit, the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion. In January 1943, the call went out for more volunteers. To the surprise of everyone, over 10,000 volunteered! This was an amazing 38 percent of all the eligible male Japanese in Hawai'i. The army took 2,500 volunteers, and the mainland contingent was 1,000, much smaller than the response in Hawai'i. A new unit made-up of all-nisei volunteers from Hawai'i and the mainland was formed and became the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which included the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion.

It was an impressive sight on March 28, 1943 when a large contingent of 442<sup>nd</sup> volunteers in uniform and wearing paper leis marched up King Street and assembled on the ground of Iolani Palace. It was the send-off ceremony as the unit prepared to leave the islands for training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. I was moved witnessing this awesome patriotic event. The 442<sup>nd</sup> emerged as the most decorated army unit in World War II. Their exploits were written-up and even made into a movie. In the Pacific War, many nisei served as Japanese language interpreters and worked with the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). In addition, nisei served as interpreters and translators in the American Occupation of Japan. The military accomplishments of the nisei proved convincingly the loyalty of the Japanese.

From the beginning of the war, the allegiance and loyalty of the vast majority of the people of Japanese descent was clearly with the United States. Among the issei, there were some who were loyal to the Japanese Emperor but none participated in any subversive activities. For the issei, they had emotional and nostalgic attachment to the mother country that made it difficult for them to renounce their loyalty to Japan. My parents, although having family ties in Japan, remained loyal to the United States, for they had two sons in the U.S. Army and had made Hawai'i their home. Grandmother, however, held on to her allegiance to the Emperor and her love for Japan. Occasionally, she would get-together with other elderly issei and gossip and talk about the war. She strongly believed Japan would win the war. The group was known as "katta-gumi" (Won the War Group). She was visibly crushed when the war ended, and she finally had to accept reality. The nisei had no problem with the question of loyalty; majority of them had been so Americanized they totally accepted American values and beliefs. Even those who underwent internment, although questioning why as American citizens they were being detained, still remained loyal to the United States.

Because the majority of Japanese Americans in Hawai'i did not suffer the trauma of losing their possessions and property, and being deported to a strange, desolate place, and placed behind barbed wire, our impression of the war years are quite different. Moreover, as a teenager, I did not feel an imminent threat or worried about security and survival. Living in wartime conditions was to me more a matter of inconvenience. Martial law was immediately declared, and Hawai'i was under a military government headed by a lieutenant general. It was not terminated until October 24, 1944; this overreaction had gone on much longer than necessary. There were, consequently, many regulations and restrictions, which caused a great deal of inconvenience.

Panic and confusion ensued after the Pearl Harbor attack as rumor of a possible Japanese invasion circulated, causing all kinds of defensive preparations to be undertaken. Curfew was instituted and blackout was ordered, whereby all windows were covered so lights would not show at night. Bomb shelters had to be built, which turned out to be a waste of effort because they were never used. We were issued gas masks, and had to bring them to school, where we practiced putting them on. The fear of an invasion was so pervasive that an anti-aircraft battery, fenced off

by barbed wire, was stationed right in our neighborhood. It seemed excessive to me to have an anti-aircraft battery in a residential neighborhood. Several of the defensive measures, including the carrying of gas masks, were dropped after the American victory in the Battle of Midway, June 4-6, 1942, the turning point in the Pacific War. The threat of a Japanese invasion vanished.

Generally speaking, there was adequate supply of food during the war, but occasionally there were food shortages but no rationing. One food in short supply was meat. The only meat readily available was spam. We got used to eating it regularly, so much so that today it is popular in Hawai'i! It did not take long for Japanese ingenuity to come up with spam musubi.

Schooling was affected by the war. Science class became a time to work on the school "victory garden" growing vegetables, and what was produced was used in the school cafeteria. There was a labor shortage in the islands when the men went to war, so the authorities, ignoring child labor laws, had middle school students work in the pineapple fields, picking pineapples and "slips." Slips are plantlets found at the base of the fruit and are a faster way to grow pineapple than planting the crown. We would be at school at 5:00 A.M. when it was still dark, load onto trucks, and be taken to the pineapple fields. After working all day, we would return late in the afternoon. Valuable class time was lost, but at that time, I thought it was adventuresome to be away from school.

There was shortage in some things, such as comics. To my way of thinking as a teenager, this was a valuable thing. I remember standing in line early in the morning before Rainbow Sweetshop opened, and as soon as the door opened, I would rush in with the crowd and scoop all my favorite comics. My only regret is I did not keep any of these comics. They could be valuable today on e-bay! I also regret not having kept some of the currencies, which were imprinted with "HAWAII" in big, capital letters on the backside. Since the territory was under martial law, the military government controlled the currency. The imprinted currency would be worth more today. If I only kept them!

## POST-WORLD WAR II (1945 – 1970)

In prewar days, the issei were ineligible for naturalization and, as a result, could not be citizens and could not vote or hold political office or government jobs. The nisei were too young to vote, hence the Japanese lacked political leverage. After the war, the nisei began to participate actively in politics – voting, running for public office, and seeking government employment. Especially notable were the returning veterans. They took advantage of the GI Bill of Rights, and many acquired college degrees, which helped to prepare them for leadership positions. The watershed or turning point was the general election of November 1954, when the nisei veterans, who were Democrats, won seats in the territorial legislature. The legislature had

been up to this time dominated by the Republicans, which represented the conservative policies of the haole oligarchy. With this election, both houses of the legislature came under the control of the Democrats. By late 1970s, about half of the state legislators were nisei and sansei.

The Democrats stood for social and economic changes. Led by Daniel Inouye, the young Democrats pushed for tax and land reforms, education funds, and better wages, and increased social benefits. Although nisei could be found in both Democratic and Republican parties, the majority were Democrats. The roots of the Democratic Party go back to the emergence of the labor unions as a major political and economic force at the beginning of the postwar period. The ILWU (International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union) led the union movement and by late 1946, the ILWU controlled the Democratic Party. But the following year, the ILWU was accused of being infiltrated by the Communists. Nationally, during this period, there was a Red Scare and Communism was viewed as a serious threat to national security. The top leaders of the ILWU, including four nisei, were arrested on August 28, 1951. They were all found guilty, but eventually the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the convictions. The ILWU was able to hold on to its control of the Democratic Party in the aftermath of the six-month dock strike in 1949, which nearly devastated the island economy highly dependent on shipping.

In the meantime, the young nisei politicians were gaining confidence. In 1948, Daniel Inouye, then a territorial legislature leader, formed a political alliance with John Burns, a policeman, running for the office of Delegate to the Congress. Winning support of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Veteran Club, the Burns-Inouye alliance now had the base to slowly take control of the Democratic Party from the ILWU. Furthermore, the Japanese voting bloc was enlarged by the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 with issei becoming eligible for citizenship and could exercise the right to vote. Japanese Americans became the largest component of the Democratic Party. In addition, the issue of statehood brought the Japanese community firmly into the Democratic Party; of all the ethnic communities, it was the only one in which a majority favored Hawai'i becoming a state. Statehood, which was achieved in 1959, was for many Japanese a sign they had been accepted formally as legal American citizens.

The nisei politicians played an increasingly important role in Hawaiian politics in the ensuing decades and extended their influence nationally. The young nisei, initially, won seats in the territorial legislature and after statehood became a dominant force in the state legislature. Among the political leaders achieving national prominence were the following: Daniel Inouye, Medal of Honor winner and member of the 442<sup>nd</sup>, first member of U.S. House of Representatives from Hawai'i, and U.S. Senator from 1963 until his death in 2012; Spark Matsunaga, member of 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, Congressman from 1962-1976, and U.S. Senator from 1977 until his death in 1990. At the state level, George Ariyoshi, a protégé of John Burns, was elected Governor with Nelson Doi, a nisei, as Lieutenant Governor in 1974. Japanese women broke from the traditional role of nisei women when Patsy Mink, a

sansei (3<sup>rd</sup> generation), served as U.S. Congresswoman from 1966-1977 and again from 1990-2002. On the Republican side, Pat Saiki, another sansei, served as Congresswoman from 1987-1991. The Japanese politicians had reached the high point of their influence.

Although the breakthrough for the nisei came rather quickly in the political arena, the Japanese progress was slower in the Hawaiian economic scene. In prewar days, the “Big Five,” a consortium of corporations originating in the sugar industry, dominated the economy. It was comprised of the oldest and well-established haole families and became known as the haole oligarchy and included Alexander and Baldwin, C. Brewer & Co., Castle and Cooke (Dole), Theo. H. Davies & Co., and Amfac (American Factors). They controlled the economy until statehood, but with statehood and the expansion of tourism, many mainlanders and mainland companies came and undermined the power of the “Big Five.”

Managerial positions in the “Big Five” companies were always held by Caucasians. Japanese held few executive positions in businesses. But changes began to take place and education was the key factor. In Japanese families, education was highly valued, and the attainment of high educational level was encouraged, for it would open new opportunities. Japanese left the plantation jobs and took on white-collar positions and employment in technical fields and in skilled trades. Tourism industry took in many Japanese. Nisei and sansei began entering professional fields, such as medicine, law, engineering, etc. Many nisei women became teachers, and by the 1970s, they made-up about two-thirds of the total number of teachers. Japanese were well represented in virtually all areas of the economy. They had come a long way from the subservient and paternalistic roles of prewar days.

Advances in social status took longer. It really meant being Americanized or “haolefied,” taking on the style of the larger community. But most nisei were tied to their family – family security, needs, and unity came first. Self-restraint norms persisted, such as not bringing “haji” (shame) on the family, subordinating individual behavior for the good of the family, and honoring the family. Traditional values had to undergo some changes for individual concerns to take hold.

Traditional values and practices were weakened by the demise of prewar organizations and institutions. All of them were weakened or disappeared. Japanese language schools and Japanese language press lost much of their power and influence. Kenjinkai and tanomoshi were no longer needed and disappeared. The religious organizations became Americanized and were used to transition to a new style. It was easier for Japanese Americans to take on American values and practices and thereby increased their chances for social advancement.

A way to be “haolefied” was to avoid the use of “pidgin English.” Pidgin English developed as a means of communication between the Japanese, Filipino, and Chinese laborers, especially on the plantations. It became the lingua franca, the hybrid language of the non-Caucasian workers. Pidgin was a mixture of several

languages, a simple spoken language with a limited vocabulary. It was useful for the issei to communicate with other ethnic groups with minimal understanding of English. Pidgin English did come to define race and status. Those who could speak pidgin were considered "local," while those who could not were outsiders. Standard English was associated with the haoles. The school system promoted Standard English, and in Honolulu, Stevenson Middle and Roosevelt High were known as Standard English schools. Standard English was necessary to be Americanized and to be able to advance socially; pidgin prevented one from finding better paying jobs. Today, pidgin is used in intimate associations and with siblings and peer groups. It is used in speaking to elderly people or parents who do not understand English.

By the 1970s, the third generation began to take over as many of the older nisei approached retirement age. The nisei had made an impact in the political realm becoming the dominant ethnic group in Hawaiian politics. In the economic field, they made-up the middle class, were owners of small businesses, were active in the unions, and were represented in just about all of the professions. As we have seen, they advanced socially taking on American cultural norms. In all, the Japanese Americans accomplished a great deal, a remarkable accomplishment in just two generations.

## CONCLUSION

The issei managed to retain their ethnic identity with its values, cultural arts, and behavioral patterns; they survived albeit with modifications in a multicultural society. It was accomplished by undergoing acculturation, the process of adopting traits and patterns of other cultures but not succumbing to the larger society. Their ethnic identity was strong enough to maintain group solidarity, while at the same time flexible enough to allow for their culture to be adapted to the Hawaiian multicultural environment.

Plantation life brought together several cultures in close proximity. The Japanese interacted with Filipino and Chinese workers and with the Portuguese overseers. They also related and identified with the outside local Hawaiian way of life. We have seen how pidgin English developed as a special shared language among the non-haole workers. It helped the issei to bond with other ethnic groups and with the local community.

If the challenge of the issei was acculturation, the challenge of the nisei was assimilation, the process whereby an immigrant group is absorbed into the broader community and its culture. One generation made a tremendous difference. The nisei witnessed the blending of Japanese and American heritages. The nisei became so Americanized, few spoke Japanese, and they had little knowledge of Japan. They found it difficult to understand and relate to what their immigrant ancestors had experienced. However, even though assimilation had taken place, there were still



patterns of continuity. Traditional values were so ingrained they found expression in family circles and in intimate group settings. The nisei were reminded constantly to respect their parents and not bring shame to their families. Traditional practices persisted in the life cycle events, such as weddings and funerals.

Moreover, the nisei identified with the local island life style and wore aloha shirt, muumuu (women's loose-fitting dress), used pidgin, and enjoyed the distinctive local food and entertainment. Underlining all this was the "aloha spirit," the open and friendly attitude to everyone even strangers. The nisei fully embraced the "aloha spirit," thereby making them stand out when compared to the mainlanders.

The acculturation and assimilation processes of the Hawai'i Japanese were different than that of the mainland Japanese. The Japanese in Hawai'i were not scattered as on the mainland; they were confined in a rather limited space. The Hawai'i Japanese mixed in with the multicultural society, whereas the mainland Japanese lacked such an opportunity. The way of thinking was different. Ethnic cohesiveness and minority consciousness was less in Hawai'i. Exhibiting the "aloha spirit," the Hawai'i nisei did not have a haughty attitude; instead they were extroverted and outspoken, and they displayed more togetherness than the mainlanders. An expression like "go for broke" could only come from local nisei. Therefore, acculturation took hold faster in Hawai'i because of attitudinal differences and enabled the Hawai'i Japanese to break through faster in the political, economic, and social arenas.

But what about the younger generations, the sansei (3<sup>rd</sup> generation), yonsei (4<sup>th</sup> generation), and beyond? They inherited a position where they enjoy higher status and influence, so much so that they do not feel strongly about ethnic exclusiveness and cohesiveness and do not feel the need to be actively involved in ethnic community activities. But the younger generations seem to have an interest in learning about their roots, their heritage, and the contributions made by their ancestors. There is also increasing interest and appreciation of Japanese cultural tradition and arts. How do you balance this increased awareness of things Japanese and pride in their ethnic culture with the desire for interracial mingling? How is ethnic exclusiveness balanced with cultural pluralism? This is the challenge of the younger generations. Do you actively participate or do you just symbolically associate with the ethnic community?

There is the myth of the Hawai'i Japanese being the "model." We have seen, however, how the Japanese moved from plantation life with its contract labor system and paternalism into a unique multicultural environment. It made the Japanese in Hawai'i, especially the nisei, quite different from its counterpart on the mainland. All this took place in a confined geographical space that made the Hawai'i Japanese experience quite unusual. The environment and the circumstances cannot be duplicated. This makes the Hawai'i Japanese *sui generis* – one of a kind.