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### Progression of Early Japanese-American Social Organization

The identity of Japanese-Americans has been shaped by many different factors. Perhaps the most defining factor is the internment experience of World War II. This internment affected each family, and individual differently. However, the most noticeable change in the community is observed in the transformation of social, educational, and largely recognized communal groups, before, during, and after World War II. At the outset of Japanese immigration, groups were sparse and only occurred due to necessity, and, as the Nisei emerged, these groups grew and sought to establish a certain identity for the Japanese-American community. During World War II, the internment acted as a catalyst, and split the communities until the Post-War period where the struggle of internment led them to become more socially oriented, as the identity of the Japanese-American community had been established during the war.

Initially, Japanese-Americans did not have any established “communities”, as they were all immigrants coming to America for their own reasons, albeit, similar reasons. Due to the Issei generation’s condition of frequent institutionalized discrimination, the community had many desires and needs that were not being met. Unfortunately, the cultural and language barriers made it even more difficult to meet these desires and needs as an individual or as a singular family, and these barriers were only reinforced by prejudice. This prejudice also created a lack of ability to expand, both societally and communally. Because the Japanese-American community was such a small minority with such severe prejudice, it was forced into a figurative corner that it could not grow its local communities into very powerful bodies unless they were a large

percentage of the ethnicities in the local area, like the Monterey peninsula. Due to these restraints, most of the groups that formed within the community were self-contained, and since the groups received little to no financial aid from outside organizations, they could only exist if they were necessary for the survival or success of a group of people, and they often dissolved once the initial problem regarding their creation had been solved. One such example is *Fujin Home*, a group created through affiliation with the Christian Baptist Church: “Some [prostitutes] couldn’t stand their lives and attempted to escape. But [pimps], in cooperation with a gang, would leave no stone unturned until they found the women and punished them by striking and kicking them. Later, *Fujin Home* [a Protestant rescue mission] was founded, and women could escape the lives behind pink curtain [in brothels] by entering the institution” (Oharazeki 95). This also provides evidence of the fact that many organizations had to solve multiple problems, like *Fujin Home*’s case, where they were required by their situation to act not only as a religious outreach organization, like their initial purpose; they also needed to act as a safe location for many refugees, orphans, and even handicapped people with no place left to live. A very similar case existed in Colorado, where a Japanese-American organization purchased a building to improve the lives of the young Nisei generation. The building and organization eventually became focused on social services, assisting sick Japanese-Americans when they had no support. Ironically, all this hardship is responsible for many different aspects of the nature of not only the early Japanese-American community, but many of those traits persisted through the years and became characteristics that the community is known for today. Things such as the religious nature of the Issei generation and many of the principles valued within the community reflect these kinds of short-lived social organizations, as many of them sprouted from Buddhist or Christian churches. Some organizations arose from less of an outstanding problem that had

arisen, but instead, other organization arose from a systematic need that was not met, or was taken away by social discrimination, or institutionalized racism. Enforced segregation in schools led to Japanese-only schools, which bound the community more tightly by forcing the younger generation to have many, if not all, Japanese-American friends. This necessary internal interaction was present in several parts of the early Japanese-American community, such as the practice of “Picture Brides”, or the act of arranging marriages between Japanese women in Japan with Japanese men that had emigrated and were living in America, and subsequently sending the women to live with the men in the U.S. While many differing facets led to the commonplace practice of Picture Brides, one notable factor is that Japanese were not likely to get married to American women due to the severe prejudice and overall lack of positive intermingling between white Americans and many minorities. The self-containment of the early Japanese-American community bled into every part of civilian life, including the economy: “The extensive network of ascriptive ties in the ethnic community became a very powerful source of both vertical and horizontal integration between individual ethnic entrepreneurs and their families... For example, a Japanese farmer would deal with a Japanese haulman who would deal with a Japanese packer-shipper who would deal with a Japanese fruit stand operator” (Fugita, O’Brien, 55). Most of these different connections within the community were not institutionalized beyond the local level, and this caused the community to become seen as self-sufficient. The importance of values like self-sufficiency, tight-knit community, and willingness to put the greater group’s needs before oneself may have originated from Japanese Neo-Confucian Buddhism, but they were reinforced through the creation and function of these communal connections that arose through necessity. Unfortunately, these reinforced traits of independence and separation only strengthened the isolation and reclusion of the Japanese-American community when compared to

mainstream America. As the Nisei generation came of age, they would drastically change the tone and purpose of groups formed within the community.

In several aspects, the Nisei were the social pioneers of the Japanese-American community, and a large reason for this was their upbringing. While the original Japanese values passed on by the Issei had some part in this, the primary reason is the fact that most Nisei grew up in environments where they could see that they had been marginalized in many ways. The barriers erected and reinforced during the time of the Issei were still just as strong, but because the Nisei learned English and had a tie to America as the land that they were born in, these barriers were more transparent for them. At this point, the Japanese-American community had grown considerably due to the large number of children needed for assistance with agriculture, which was the main occupation for Issei. Due to this large growth, Japanese-Americans became much more noticeable in their local communities. As they became more noticeable, they became more subject to representations in media and backlash from local journalists. One example is the severe backlash seen in Seattle, when a Japanese-American second-grade boy, Fred Kosaka, had been chosen to play George Washington in a school play: “[Reporter] Marshall said that members of the audience were ‘abashed’ at the sight of a Japanese boy impersonating Washington...Several Japanese residents expressed anger at the [Seattle] *Star* and frustration at Kosaka’s predicament, seeing the whole matter as symbolic of the second-generation dilemma. Nisei were encouraged by their teachers to become Americanized, but they faced attacks if they assimilated to the point of surpassing their white classmates” (Lee 106). The uproar from these events emphasized the fact that the Nisei were belonging to neither Japanese nor American culture in many people’s eyes. This only created a strong desire to belong that vastly contrasted the generation beforehand, with the Issei being very self-sustaining and isolated from American

society. This changed with the Nisei, as they were culturally dependent on the United States as the country of their birth, so they could not remain isolated and feel “complete” as their parents had. It can also be said that the Nisei were forced into a social spotlight with the sentiments that ensued. In the dawn of the twentieth century, the US began widespread Progressive reform in many things, with one of the main focuses being in education, as this was reflected in the Kosaka incident. Despite the outcry of local anti-Japanese sentiment, the school officially supported Kosaka, and some teachers went so far as to say the community ought to pick more Japanese children as to play George Washington in the future (Lee 108). This expansion of education came as a nationwide response to growing immigrant populations, and the empowering rhetoric for the Americanization of these populations led to the intense spirit and patriotism showcased by many Nisei. As the Seattle Nisei came of age, they began to understand the context of their situations of discrimination, which created a sharp contrast to the near-righteous vocabulary of their schooling. This inclusive atmosphere persisted, and even magnified, in institutions of higher education, which Nisei attended in great numbers compared to their parents. Many of the local organizations formed by the Issei invested large amounts of resources towards the Nisei, as many of them had mission statement-like agendas of preparing the best possible future for the next generation. The transparency of previous barriers combined with the investment towards and social drama surrounding the second generation of Japanese-Americans led them to pursue an area that accepted them in large numbers: education. This can partially explain the reasoning as to why so many Nisei pursued degrees that were arguably frivolous. When the Nisei became old enough to step into leader roles occupied by the Issei, they did so, but with a new mindset. Many local groups expanded and became more centralized, with officer seats and presidents, with the most evident example being the dramatic expansion of the Japanese American Citizen’s

League (JACL). This new mindset came with a new agenda, and it culminated all the previous influences of the Nisei. Early in their development, the Nisei sought to establish themselves as an American community, and this desire rose from the marginalization throughout their lives. Next, the Progressive Era's rhetoric empowered them as they became educated members of society. Finally, they took their desire and empowerment they received through education and adapted those ideals into the loose organizations and values passed down from the Issei, albeit, with more of a focus on establishment when compared to Issei traditions. However, as the Nisei were growing into their roles as community leaders, their identity became established for them.

The outbreak of World War II transformed every aspect of the Japanese-American community, and the groups within it became divided. The war broke out at a transitional period, with the older first generation making way for the younger second generation. While the Nisei were educated, they were young and unexperienced as community leaders, and were beginning to experience division with the older ideologies of the Issei along with division over the direction to steer certain cultural events, like the annual Nisei Week in Los Angeles, CA. The sensitivity of the situation created a larger gap between the Issei and Nisei, and there was a small but emerging third generation of children that were immensely affected. The war came as a shock to all Japanese-Americans, but it was less of a surprise, but rather, it was a fear that became realized, especially for the Nisei. Many of the community leaders in power right before the Pearl Harbor attack began to confront the idea of possible war between Japan and American following the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, but most plans were prospective at best. A symbolic example can be seen in the following recount of Mike Masaoka, a new JACL executive secretary, on the days leading to the Pearl Harbor attack: "I pointed out the location of JACL chapters already in existence in inland areas and the places where I hoped new chapters would be formed..."

Inadvertently I was also outlining potential military targets-Cheyenne and Denver were the sites of air bases, Pueblo had a strategic steel mill, and North Platte was a railroad center' ... Masaoka was in the middle of his presentation when two federal officials, who did not identify themselves, broke up the meeting and took Masaoka to the local jail. Only later did he learn that, without warning, Japanese navy planes had bombed the Pearl Harbor U.S. naval base in Hawaii" (Hosokawa 86). The community and its groups began to scramble, to decide on a course of action, but their options were limited, as Executive Order 9066 called for the forced relocation of all individuals of Japanese descent. The internment only complicated relations inside the community, and the subsequent loyalty questionnaire further increased these divisions. Before the war, the primary focus of Japanese-American organizations was to establish an American identity, and for a large portion of the community, this remained as the focus, albeit with significantly less resources. The perspectives that have only recently become explored are the dissenting opinions within the internment communities, largely known as "No-No" families. While there was a small group of "No-No" Japanese-Americans that truly wanted Japan to win the war, the loyalty questionnaire was a multifaceted issue, and the primary schools of thought on the answer given form from the application of the Nisei's pre-war condition to the problem presented during internment. One side of the questionnaire was the majority of the "No-No" group, via the justification that their rights as citizens were taken away, so the U.S. had no right to ask service of disenfranchised people. This argument aligns with the spirit of the empowering education that the Nisei experienced in the pre-war community. The other primary argument of "Yes-Yes" aligned with the traditional values of the Issei and the basis of organization that had been laid out in the initial waves of immigration. Such values emerged due to the similar isolation that the Issei endured as they grew as a population, and "Yes-Yes" groups loosely

congregated and justified their arguments based on necessity and survival. As the war neared its end, members in both communities faced vastly differing situations, but with the same social objective: creating a communal identity that could exist beyond the circumstances of the war. Members of the “Yes-Yes” community were often veterans, so they were more likely to be defended by non-Japanese-Americans or receive aid in other forms. This put that group in a spotlight, and therefore, a position of social power. Many organizations and individuals used this platform to call of activism from the American people so that the injustices of the war would not arise again. The “No-No” group faced a very different dilemma of reintegration, as the condition of Japanese-Americans in mainstream was no longer in the process of establishment, it had already been established during the interment as a group that could possibly never fit into the American mainstream. Both groups had to take the image that they envisioned for the Japanese-American community and adapt it to the opinions that had formed during the war. They also needed to adapt this vision to their own personal hardships and use that new image as an example of a very human, communal identity, rather than trying to establish an ideal ethnic identity for an already existing mainstream. The “No-No” perspective can be seen in an analysis of John Okada’s *No-No Boy*: “...the “limited cultural space” allowed for him becomes rather a space wherein a contingent formation of Japanese American identity appears in relation to multiple contingencies—caring for postinternment Japanese American community, a sense of control over one’s recent historical trauma, a renewed sense of self-respect, public recognition, and reclaiming American identity (Yoon 62). While this account is from the point of view of a “No-No” individual, the “contingencies” that Yoon apply to all Japanese-Americans as the entered the post-war period, the difference is the method in which was used to meet these contingencies.



Throughout the early history of the Japanese-American community, the social organization of individuals greatly attributed to the identity that exists today. As post-war Japanese-Americans struggled to find themselves in the aftermath of World War II, each group that emerged entered a brief and loose “reformatory” stage, where they each found a way to coalesce into a community that would eventually become the community that exists today. Although they initially existed as survival-based groups, the groups formed by the Issei eventually entered a formation phase before they were forced enter a time of adaptation and acceptance, and this progression shaped the modern Japanese-American identity.

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