

If You Say So: Articulating Cultural Symbols of Tradition in the Japanese Canadian Community

In a house I do not own
In a country of isolation
In a land that belongs to others
I sit on folded legs, bent by cultural impulse.¹

Haruko Okano wrote these lines in a volume of poetry she describes as “my personal journey to the present” (7). Okano is a third generation Canadian of Japanese ancestry who was raised in non-Japanese Canadian foster homes, knowing her *nisei*² mother only through memories now decades old. How has she come to identify herself as *sansei*? Okano walks, she says, on “[t]oes turned in to kick aside kimono hem.” What process fixes in Haruko Okano the sense of belonging—as these metaphors signal—to a nation she has only imagined?³

Such questions trouble a sense of tradition⁴ that depends on the translation of a historical past into a cultural present via the inheritance of core ancestral practices and ideology. But what happens when we consider the expression of perceived tradition as one step in a process of constructing and defining certain events or ideals as “traditional?” In this case, such events and ideals may be made imperative by historical incidents, and so achieve status as essential components of cultural identity. Then tradition is what one says it is. By examining received notions of history, origin, and “the past,” this essay explores the process by which certain ideas and actions have come to be defined as essential symbols of Japanese Canadian tradition.

A potent strain in canonical “western” philosophical thought has been the idea of what Foucault describes as the “lofty origin” (143). This now

clichéd premise of the point of origin informs a host of metaphors used to describe the fact and expression of human existence. The power of metaphors like *the journey of life* and *the roots of tradition* obtains in an accepted notion of temporality. Life's experiences have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and so one can talk about them. But it is the force and peerless quality of our beginning that sustain one perception of individual existence in community.

Provocative in this linear model of existence is the hierarchical participation of the past (which is only the beginning spoken) in the present creation of individual experience. Okano's narrator can learn the Japanese harvest dance because, she suggests in "Returning," the dance simply *was*.

My hands seek
the rightness of the place.
My feet carry me
along a near forgotten
path.
I reclaim lost pieces
to satisfy this longing
for moments remembered
yet not known. (50)

The harvest dance is contained in the place of its beginning, at the end point of a journey back, and it can be incorporated as Okano's experience because this origin is within her mnemonic reach. The poem offers the possibility of experience that exceeds a finite linearity dependent on the original moment: the narrator is "gathered into wholeness" in the celebration of seasonal cycles. But the force of this suggestion is undercut by the poem's assertion of the "rightness" of the source.

The belief in a cultural wellspring is a persistent one. For her study of Japanese Canadian women, Yuko Shibata visits the homes of sixty issei women and finds a picture of the Meiji Emperor on the wall of each (265). Japanese tradition becomes what the first immigrants brought with them from Japan, freeze frame. The closer one is to the source, in this case Meiji Japan, the purer and more constant must be its expression in that life. So the description of issei as 'the most Japanese' gains common acceptance. And if you cannot be near the origin, the artefacts that you name can take you there, as Gerry Shikatani describes in his poem, "Japanese Rice:"

My hands become wet;
the grains of rice I've

washed (circular action, cold
water and drained) steamed.
bowls of rice to satisfy,
fill my stomach: rice kome
circle ancestral gathering
(descendera) to self...⁵

The (un)necessary washing of rice. A printed message on every bag (“coated with edible cereal product”) excuses you from the task. But the circular action on the cold water is the way Obāsan does it, the way she taught you to do it, the way to return to ancestral source, “to self.” Thus tradition exceeds the processes of defining and enacting experience, in a fugal construction of individual identity.

With the epithet, “mythical baseline” (128), Estellie Smith dismisses the loftiness of the pure source of tradition. She then utilizes the paradigm of “continuity” to explore the construction of “all traditions of identity” (135).⁶ Smith defines continuity as

a synthetic phenomenon with the property of appearing flexible and adaptive under some conditions and persistent and self-replicating under others. (127)

By the time of Smith’s publication, theories advancing the concept of constructed identities abounded. Particular to Smith’s analysis, though, is her assertion that the academically polarized states of cultural transformation and persistence are expressions of the same process (of continuity), differing only in surface degree or detail. Further, unlike Eric Hobsbawm, who acknowledges a hierarchical persistence of “invented” over “genuine” tradition (10), Smith’s emphasis is more democratic: “invented” tradition can also be “genuine.”

Central to Smith’s analysis of tradition as construct is the relative dispensability of individual volition. People’s traditions change because “things happen.” Regardless of one’s determination to either perpetuate or stifle a “traditional” event, changing contexts operate variously to determine the next stage of the process. Contexts such as environmental demands; the lag-time in realizing that today’s reality is not the direct manifestation of a long-ago yesterday; the difference in writing a story that was only ever told; the metamorphosis from private expression to public display; all operate on tradition to maintain no more, but no less, than varying states of flux. What then becomes an important focus is not the event of Gerry Shikatani washing his rice the way his grandmother taught him, but the persistence of his

compulsion to do so, regardless of changing contexts, as an act of contact with the origin of his ancestors. Yet more compelling to me is Shikatani's insertion of this cultural metaphysics into the center of a poem about sex, replete with conflated images of life-giving semen and white rice water, all wiped clean with toilet paper; a poem that is "nothing special / it's our lives, / that's it / after all."

Smith urges me to turn away from the event to the why of its enactment. But does that not mean I have decided, for Gerry Shikatani, that he is, in fact, performing another step in the process of cultural transformation, regardless of any conviction he may have that he is preserving, through its ritual enactment, the symbolic connection to his origin? Smith has already told me that my own methods are equally "grounded in and bounded by past knowledge and current perception" (127). Perhaps it is Shikatani's speaking the chance connection of rice, toilet paper, and messy drops of semen—not the (in)voluntary reenactment of ritual rice washing—that reinforces an idea of tradition by its very articulation.

Yet, says Smith, the individual does impose a taxonomy on cultural data. What may seem to be a random ordering is rather "generated from within some sociocultural matrix" to produce "idiohistory" (139). While Smith is convinced that individuals design, and are designed by, contextual experience, implications of origin inhere in her use of the terms "generation" and "matrix." Smith accedes to the plural existence of truths and would, I think, agree to a certain randomness in "events generated by the milieu" (129). After all, Shikatani could just as easily have "chanced" on an image of crumbled bits of tofu. The resultant metaphor would, of course, have little force: cultural connotations of eternity and centrality surrounding rice and its washing are what enliven Shikatani's poem about the "nothing more special" than life. These connotations make the poem possible. Consciously, the poet is shaping his context.

By qualifying her definition of continuity with the limiting concept of the generative matrix, Smith's emphasis shifts to the selective relativity of volition. Not only do things happen, but people happen to things, and thus the particular operation of the individual on her or his environment gains significance for its manner. Her conflation of both the dispensability and relativity of individual acts manifest in the single process of adaptation directs my gaze to one focal point—the interdepen-

dency of context and choice. Instances of this counterpoint happen at Vancouver's Powell Street Festival.

The festival began in 1977, under the direction of a young sansei named Rick Shiomi, as one celebration marking the centennial of Japanese Canadian history. That year's festival is described in the Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association newspaper, the *Bulletin*, as one of the "Japanese-oriented" activities concurrent with the more broadly defined Vancouver Heritage Festival. The *Bulletin* invites Vancouverites to the festival to enjoy "traditional food, art, music and dance displays [and] a cherry tree planting in commemoration of the Centennial" (16). Though not mentioned specifically, the *Sakura Singers*, a fixture of the festival throughout its history, were probably there. In a call for members in 1970, the Singers' mandate echoes that of the festival:

Through the singing of Japanese folk songs and other well-known Japanese songs, the choir hopes to introduce a bit of Japanese culture to the Canadian community.⁷

The invitation reassures potential singers who do not read Japanese that all lyrics will be printed in roman script. Like Okano dancing the harvest dance, another third-generation Canadian was about to orchestrate the public presentation of "traditional" Japanese culture, an invisible component of which had to be a phonetic representation of Japanese songs to accommodate its English-speaking members.

Incongruous by its ubiquity, this labelling as "Japanese" any public display by Japanese Canadians has been one pernicious marker of the dominant Canadian perception of Japanese Canadians. An early example is this expression of thanks from the president of the 1940 Vancouver Folk Festival, Nellie McKay, to the festival's Japanese Canadian participants:

We are very indebted to *our* Japanese friends. Personally, I am very proud of our new Canadian Japanese. They bring grace and poise to this Canada of *ours*. Some day when Canadian Art and Literature has [sic] taken real form, there will be found I am sure, a dignified and gracious charm, the gift of the Orient (emphasis mine).⁸

Aside from the patronizing effect of the possessive pronoun, "our," which simultaneously separates Japanese Canadians from the dominant center (this Canada of ours) and names them as a possession of that hegemony, this thank you note reinforces the concept of cultural tradition as an evolutionary form. At some future point, the artistic and literary symbols of

Canadian tradition, having reached their apogee, will include a subspecies of Japanese Canadian culture. But, unlike the host culture, the dignified and gracious charm of the Japanese Canadian “Oriental” contribution is expected to ossify at the moment of transplant, excluded from even this teleology.

The discourse surrounding the Japanese Canadian presentation of the festival has changed since its inception. The *Bulletin*'s announcement of the 1990 festival begins:

Powell Street Festival presents the performances, concerns, and changes of an ethnoculture... a presentation of the grass roots of Japanese Canadians.⁹

But this apparent move away from an essentialist definition of the festival as a traditionally Japanese event to a more inclusive orientation is compromised by the writer's contrast of the Powell Street Festival with other presentations of a more diverse nature, namely the “multicultural” event that “presents a lively and dynamic presentation of performances from a mosaic of cultures” (14). The rate of “intermarriage” among sansei is commonly quoted at “90%.” The Japanese Canadian community has a long history, having celebrated its centennial only ten years after Canada marked its own. Yet the community's annual festival is described as a polar opposite to “mosaic” events, offering “grass roots” over performance. I suggest that the Powell Street Festival is dedicated overwhelmingly to performance, especially of things “Japanese,” despite the mosaic face of the present community. The two-day event showcases Japanese dance, music, taiko, flower arranging, sumo wrestling, martial arts, sand painting, and food. One of the highlights is the Shinto ceremony involving the “traditional” shrine procession in which the “traditional” Japanese Canadian shrine bearers are doused with water. Change is apparent. With aging and other modulating demographics of the community, there are more non-Japanese Canadian actors. The flavour and force of participants is perceptibly different, and there are inclusions of performances less obviously “Japanese.” Displays of archival materials teach the general public and young Japanese Canadians about Japanese Canadian history. But seen in light of the persistent popularity of its “traditional” Japanese events, major changes in the face of Powell Street Festival are just beginning.

Regardless, it is the process of the constant, public, performative nature of the Festival, more than any alteration in its content, which defines changing Japanese Canadian culture. As Handler and Linnekin elaborate, the jux-

taposition of private life and public display contains a dynamic of change in which the artificial context (for instance, the exaggerated transformation of the festival's Oppenheimer park setting and the creation of a multi-ethnic audience), reinvents the private entity (280).¹⁰ Further, the selectivity in deciding what is to be performed—even if, as with the *Sakura Singers*, it must first be taught—organizes private expression into a catalogue of tradition which then signifies, for participants and audience alike, cultural identity.

Against this background of the Powell Street Festival and the expression of public perception of Japanese Canadian cultural tradition, I look now at the way in which the internalization of messages like Nellie McKay's is heard in the written and spoken words of this community.

Historians have documented well the ironic futility of the campaign to assimilate (that is, make invisible) Japanese Canadians.¹¹ Government policy and social pressure from the Powell Street riot of 1907,¹² through the immigration quotas of the early and mid-twentieth century to their dispossession and uprooting during the second World War bespeak historical Canadian reluctance to accept Japanese Canadians into the fabric of mainstream Canadian society. Despite commands to “assimilate,” the impossibility of that process was underscored by such patronizing praises as McKay's (and they were many), and the fervent “Keep B.C. White” campaign of the early twentieth century.¹³ Yet many Japanese Canadians, especially nisei, were persuaded that assimilation was a desirable, obtainable state, and accepted the assignment determinedly. Internalized assimilation rhetoric was rewarded by the Japanese Canadian community with publication in the pages of community newspapers like *The New Canadian* and the *Bulletin*, and pride of place in oratory and essay contests. Often lists of objectionable Japanese behaviours were followed by substitute “Canadian” ways, as in this passage from an elementary school essay quoted in *A Dream of Riches*:

We Japanese are now facing discrimination. How can we avoid it? We should not do what white people do not like. Before going to school we should wash our hands and faces well. And we should make sure that our necks and ears are always clean. If we eat tsukemono too much we will be disliked for our bad breaths [sic]. It is also very bad to go out in dirty clothes. We should wear clean clothes but not too fancy. In the school playground it is better to play with white children. This way we can also learn English. In school we should listen to our teachers carefully and get higher marks than white children. Then white children and teachers will like us (64).

As Muneo Kawasoe, winner of the 1940 Vancouver Island Challenge

Trophy for oratory put it, the “ultimate victory” would be to be known, “not as Japanese Canadians, but simply as Canadians.”¹⁴

In this climate of assimilation, *The New Canadian* published poetry by young nisei in most issues of the late 1930s and early 40s (before the uprooting of the community in 1942), the majority of which spans the range of so-called western forms from High Romanticism to doggerel. Most of these poets and speech winners were teenagers and, as Audrey Kobayashi has suggested, novices by any standard.¹⁵ What is significant is that despite the mainstream’s assertions of irremediable difference, the young poets were imitating, not Japanese, but British and, to a lesser degree, American, poetic form. One way for the nisei to try and resolve the tension of being discriminated against by their fellow Canadians was to erase the difference they believed lay at the root of the discrimination. Thus they integrated even more the symbols of the dominant rejecting culture, in this case poetic forms, into their own cultural memory. These nisei poets reveal a strong conviction, or hope, that they share an identity more with their non-Japanese Canadian classmates than with their very “Japanese” parents.

Intentions aside, Japanese Canadian poetry written at this time exhibits influences that are, as defined by the poets and dominant Canadian society, distinctly un-“Canadian.” Eiko Henmi composed a song for the 1939 “Nisei Convention” that, as these first lines show, reads much like an addendum to the Canadian national anthem:

Hail to new Canadians,
Pledging loyalty,
To the land that gave us birth
And our destiny...¹⁶

Yet, despite the poem’s lack of what Nellie McKay might call “Oriental charm,” Henmi instructs the reader that “A Nisei Song” be sung to the tune of the militant Japanese refrain, “Aikoku-koshin-kyoku.”¹⁷ Thus, the poet synthesizes two seemingly disparate elements from her Japanese Canadian “sociocultural matrix” (the perceived Canadian words and the stated Japanese melody) to construct a “new,” that is adaptive, tradition. As Kobayashi points out, the issei, who brought with them to Canada the practice of writing Japanese haiku and tanka, formed poetry clubs on their arrival in Canada (44). Unarguably, they were conscious of their new context, and often incorporated obvious concessions into their poetry.¹⁸ But it is the sometimes less apparent expression of this altered poetic, like

Henmi's, that holds particular significance for continuity.

The poets of both generations were in the process of discovering the implications in their present Canadian today that was not a direct manifestation of a long-ago Japanese yesterday. At this moment in their history, young nisei like Eiko Henmi were not clinging to a remembered tradition, as they perceived their parents were, nor even revisiting it, as Shikatani may be doing thirty years later, but enunciating an altered form of those remembrances in the process of their conscious struggle not to do so. In the nisei's naming of certain behaviours and poetic forms as "traditionally Japanese," and then attempting to stifle the expression of those elements, tradition became, as Sylvia Yanagisako observes, a reconceptualization of the past in terms of the present (2). The apparent irony in all of this is that the internalized stifling of perceived tradition, in concert with the uprooting of Japanese Canadians, were both catalysts in an unexpected next stage of cultural flourishing in the continuity of the Japanese Canadian community.

One might predict the dispersal of Japanese Canadians during the second World War, coupled with their internalization of injunctions to assimilate, to have subdued distinct expressions of tradition. Smith counters that such forced migrations can alter without extinguishing the spatial dimension of a socioculture (131). In fact, a review of writing from and about the internment camps reveals a startling revival and revamping of "old" traditional symbols of Japanese culture, as well as an integration of new Canadian symbols into the internment milieu.

In the introduction to his recent textual gathering of issei wartime writing, Keibo Oiwa writes:

They [those interned] continued observing both traditional and Western festivals and rites of passage, and inventing substitute ornaments for the children. It was a highly creative period. If we wish to speak about "Nikkei culture," here is a moment in which it was being forged. (22)

Oiwa's collection opens with excerpts from the diary of Koichiro Miyazaki, who describes himself as a "rightist" Japanese national. Miyazaki was incarcerated in the prisoner-of-war camps at Angler and Petawawa for defying the government order to leave his family for a road camp in the interior of B.C. Miyazaki's diary emphasizes his expressed loyalty to Japan and his strong identification as a Japanese. He writes of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour as "the day when our great nation asserted itself against the

white race” (72). He dedicates his free time in camp to “climbing the mountain” of his Japanese identity, reading Japanese philosophy and poetry, and participating in multiple recreations of Japanese ceremonies. For instance, in his entry for 5 May 1942 (sekku, or “Boys’ Day” in Japan), Miyazaki decries the lack of koi¹⁹ banners to fly for the celebration; remarks that he was heartened by the arrival of a package of Japanese food from his wife; notes that he passed the day reading *Oku no Hosomichi* (a poetic journal by the seventeenth-century poet, Bashō), and ended the holiday by participating in a sumo match. Miyazaki reflects: “I feel my present circumstances somehow made me closer to the wandering poet, Bashō” (56). Recalling the patriotism of “A Nisei Song,” and the especially unjust internment of Japanese Canadian citizens, it is easy to empathize with the anger that the nisei writer, Joy Kogawa, describes on reading such professions of “an identity with a country that was the enemy country of my youth” (6).

However, my intention is not to scale degrees of individual loyalty, but to consider the symbolic manifestations of Japanese Canadians’ cultural tradition in the enforced state of migration that tried all of their social values. In that vein, I choose rather to examine the unity in Japanese Canadian reflections on certain aspects of the wartime experience, despite the provocation there may have been in the protest of the seven hundred gambariya or “diehards” (Oiwa 21), such as Miyazaki, who were imprisoned in Petawawa and Angler, as well as in the less articulated dissent of those who complied only physically with the government’s orders.

There is a particular paradox in the Japanese Canadian descriptions of the gambariya who resisted the uprooting. Throughout the literature about the Nikkei community in Canada there is a tendency to classify as “Japanese” any expressions of compliance within that community. In fifteen personal history interviews with Japanese Canadians, actions ranging from a lack of socializing outside the home, to cooperation with the government orders to “evacuate,” are described—without exception—as indications of “Japanese” passivity.²⁰ And, like the symbolic presence of the Meiji Emperor which Shibata found in so many issei homes, the evaluation of “the” issei personality, like the issue of language, usually depends on a perception of the issei as being most connected to Japan. In response to the yonsei interviewer’s compliment of his “good Japanese,” S. retorts:

No. I speak the Japanese that was spoken eighty years ago, from the old Japanese immigrants.... To you, I must sound like I just come [sic] out of the

mountains somewhere. Just like the hillbillies in Tennessee. Maybe it's like Rip Van Winkle. (SP 23:16)

The obvious irony inheres in the individual's simultaneous devaluation (again, in the interviews and in written texts) of any resistance during their uprooting by even the "most Japanese" issei, as either a minor aberration or the harmless foolishness of youth. H. describes the gambariya as

kind of young and mixed up.... In any society you find there are people that will say no to anything. (23:5)

How, then, did this overwhelmingly "passive" group of community members manage such bold resistance?

In the context of the uprooting of Japanese Canadians, some individuals chose compliance as the way to survival. In retrospect, this can be construed as a canny choice. Prior to the politicization of the community over the struggle for redress of this injustice, many Japanese Canadians did just that by pointing to perceived benefits of the internment. Understandably, such rationalizations have grieved those who fought for redress, but the cruel paradox is that compliance with the order to relocate meant that Japanese Canadians were now relatively free of those very external controls, such as curfews, that had hindered their gathering and, therefore, their communal exercise of tradition. Possibly, the heightened sense of community and even commiseration in the camps fostered the synthesis of certain Japanese Canadian traditions, prompting those interned to refashion the cultural symbols they deemed helpful or necessary. For the purposes of this paper, greater significance lies in the indications that the form and content of these symbols, whether considered particularly "Japanese" (like the ofuro²¹) or "Canadian" (like Sunday School) were altered by the new context.

For those suffering the even harsher injustice of being imprisoned for their non-compliance, the experience of containment provided a different, but at least as equally powerful, incentive to maintain or restore certain traditions. One might argue that punishing individuals for their perceived subversion—for prisoners at Petawawa and Angler, this meant seeming "too Japanese"—would extinguish external signs of that disposition. But, as experiences like Miyazaki's demonstrate, internment did not just "alter ... the spatial dimension" of Japanese Canadian culture. For reasons as varied as the individuals uprooted, that community's culture flourished in the state of internment. And the "tradition" of variously naming the Japanese

Canadian “essence” as passive or aggressive sustained continuity within the changing context.

One final area this paper addresses is the creation of language as a symbol of cultural synthesis, specifically the perception that maintaining a pure form of the “mother tongue” is the best defence against the erosion of “mother culture.” After S. corrects the interviewer about his Rip Van Winklian Japanese, he goes on to qualify it as “the pure Japanese,” in contrast with the Japanese of the *shin-issei*, or new immigrants, who speak “with a lot of American... so many English words” (SP 23:16). As with the above-mentioned essentialist perceptions of Japanese compliance, the majority of interviewees agree with S. that a pure Japanese language persists, not in contemporary Japan, but in the Nikkei community as a link with Meiji Japan, and as a conspicuous cultural marker of Japanese Canadians which distinguishes them from more recent Japanese immigrants. In other words, the ability to speak “real” Japanese shows you are a “real” Canadian.

Roy Kiyooka writes:

i had meant to write about a pear tree i knew as a child

when i lived over the mountains in a small prairie town but
the language of that pear tree belonged to my mother tongue. it
bespeaks a lost childhood language one which the pear tree in
our backyard in chinatown has a nodding acquaintance with.

how many languages does a pear tree speak? (32)

In this poem, the metonymic relation of Kiyooka’s pear tree to his larger experience as a child on the prairies is secondary to the tree’s symbolic representation through language. Allusions to the phallic interruption (pen writing, tree piercing the prairie sky) of the Lacanian mother-child dyad and its language of plenitude do not diminish the force of Kiyooka’s poetic images of Japanese language as a cultural mnemonic for a “Japanese” childhood on the Canadian prairies. The loss of the pear tree “mother tongue” is perceived as a severance from the mother(country), not only Japan or Canada, but neither both.

More pragmatically, many Japanese Canadians hold the opinion that the Japanese language must be spoken or, not Japanese, but Japanese Canadian culture will be lost. There have been instances where this ideology has been complicated by more expected (perhaps) connections of Japanese language

with Japanese culture,²² but the former process dominates this discussion as a component in the stereotyping of two deviant groups within an essentially defined Japanese Canadian community: recent (that is post-war) immigrants, and the gambariya.

Smith categorizes the stereotyping of deviance within a socioculture as a function necessary to the integration of difference, in order to maintain the predictable and repetitive milieu which marks “a relatively bounded socioculture (134).” The wartime interruption of Japanese immigration to Canada meant that the Japanese Canadian community was, for decades, free of foreign interjection. Regardless of the diversity that was reflected in response to the uprooting, H. remembers the community of these years as one where “there’s no difference” (SP 23:5). Then immigration resumed, and Japanese Canadians were confronted with receiving as members of their community (in addition to non-Japanese Canadian spouses and the gambariya) the “deviant” shin-issei. As S. describes the new immigrants:

Well, they’re a very aggressive people.... And they don’t have the manners like our old Japanese. They’ll just trample all over you. (SP 23:16)

The descriptions vary only in detail. Shin-issei are “flamboyant,” “outgoing,” and “let [their children] run all over the place.” To some, the shin-issei do not speak “pure” Japanese, like the Canadian-born nisei. Again, it is only an apparent paradox that S. uses American folkloric allusions like “Rip Van Winkle,” and “hillbillies from Tennessee” to describe his proficiency in Japanese. Such perceptions of language impose on community members predictive expectations that privilege Meiji Japanese. For those who do not speak Japanese, Okano tells us in her poem, “Tongue Tied,” the loss is palpable and cruel:

Ghost words, like ice cubes
jammed against the back of my teeth.
Cold pain shoots up the roots of my teeth
into my brain.
But none of it changes, nothing
turns the volume up
on the silent movie of how we were
when I was a child. (30)

And ideological challenges like Eric Sokugawa’s attempt to publish a “Nikkei Pidgin Language Dictionary” expire through community neglect.²³

The glaring deviance which the “Japlish”-speaking shin-issei introduce into this context is defined as symbolic of that deviance and, therefore, able to be integrated, however marginally, into the community.

I have nodded only slightly toward the discussion of memory in this paper, not because I think it unrelated, but because its complexity requires separate consideration. My emphasis has been on the larger process of continuity as it applies to the Japanese Canadian community, and I only pause at this point to suggest that interdependency of context and choice in the symbolic perception of tradition shapes, and is shaped by, complicated processes of memory.

As one example, I point to the clear—and official—identification of the Japanese Canadian community with other visible minorities, especially those, like First Nations peoples, seeking government redress of past wrongs.²⁴ Absent from the literature and tapes I have reviewed is any mention, as reported in the *New Canadian*, that in 1942 the Native Brotherhood and the Native Sisterhood of B.C. urged the federal government to demand compulsory deportation of all Japanese Canadians to Japan.²⁵ Because I agree with Yanagisako that recollections re-interpret rather than erase historical events (2), I am not implying that the Japanese Canadian community has forgotten injustices received from those with whom they now unite in a type of meta-community. What I am suggesting is that the function of memory as it relates to the process of sociocultural continuity invites further detailed study.

One place to start may be Roy Miki’s latest volume of poetry, entitled *Saving Face*. In it Miki includes poems (like “failed tanka” and “beginning middle end”) which are actively engaged with challenging essentialisms: “...the whole truth / & nothing but the truth / no no no no no no / ...a pure language doesn’t exist...” (49). Also inviting consideration are current debates on representation, community-specific issues across Canada, and Japanese Canadians’ efforts to circumscribe their communities and continue those traditions they deem necessary for their survival. Together, these voices speak the symbols enabling individuals like Roy Kiyooka to remember the unlikely “ukiyoe” pear tree of his Canadian prairie childhood (32), or Haruko Okano to find “[t]he rice bowl is familiar in [her] palm. / Some distant memories, interrupted for years” (41).

NOTES

- ¹ "Sansei," Okano 41.
- ² Issei, nisei, sansei, and yonsei refer respectively to first, second, third, and fourth generation Japanese Canadians. Nikkei are individuals of Japanese descent living outside of Japan.
- ³ Although I make no direct references to Benedict Anderson in this paper, my thinking has been influenced by his theorizing on community and culture in *Imagined Communities*. Especially relevant are those strains in Anderson which speak to "nation-ness" as a creation of "cultural artifacts... capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains..." (4).
- ⁴ Throughout this essay, "tradition" is held to be a problematic term, enclosed in quotation marks or not.
- ⁵ "Japanese Rice," Shikatani 38.
- ⁶ Any discussion of "continuity" is based on my understanding of the concept as developed by Smith, rather than any "traditional" connotations of the word.
- ⁷ *Bulletin* 8 Feb. 1970:1.
- ⁸ *Bulletin* 1 Nov. 1940: 2.
- ⁹ *Bulletin* July 1990: 14.
- ¹⁰ Even, Smith maintains, to the point where we witness an event and describe it as tradition, because the performance has been identified as such (128).
- ¹¹ See, for example, *The Enemy That Never Was*, Adachi; *The Politics of Racism*, Sunahara; and *A White Man's Province*, Roy.
- ¹² In which a crowd demonstrating against Asian immigration into Canada descended on Chinatown and the Japanese Canadian length of Powell Street, causing damages to the Japanese Canadians, according to claims made by the community, of \$13,519.45 (Adachi 79-80).
- ¹³ This was a campaign, in the most official political sense of the word. As Roy quotes B.C. Premier Richard McBride saying in 1912: "British Columbia must be kept white... we have the right to say that our own kind and colour shall enjoy the fruits of our labour" (229).
- ¹⁴ *Bulletin* 15 Nov. 1940: 6.
- ¹⁵ Private communication, 14 Nov. 1991.
- ¹⁶ *New Canadian* 30 Jan. 1943: 2.
- ¹⁷ The militant nature of this song was impressed on me in personal communication with M. Ayukawa, 27 March 1993. Also in personal communication, F.K. Iwama recalled hearing this song during wartime parades in Japan (10 April 1993).
- ¹⁸ For instance, this haiku by Chōichi Handō Sumi in *Paper Doors*, 29.

Setsugen no
kumo no masshiroke
saihate no

shōten to naru
gurein erebetā

¹⁹ carp

²⁰ That is, if they are described at all. Many are still reluctant to discuss either the events of the second World War, or their parents' part in those events. Even with the understanding that these interviews were intended as a compilation of the community's oral history, those who avoided or refused to talk about this time (and they were mostly men who, given the sexual stereotypes of the day, would be more likely to have had access to and involvement in resistance activities) concentrated determinedly on their occupational history.

²¹ bath

²² One locus of this debate was the function, in its early years, of the Japanese Language School, and the role of its first principal, Mr. Sato. When asked whether he attended the school as a child, M. recalls that his father equated learning Japanese at the school with learning Japanese nationalism (as did many mainstream politicians and citizens of the day), and so refused to let M. attend. And H. recounts Sato's receipt of the "Emperor's medal, the 'Order of the Rising Sun.'" Sato countered the charges with his assertion that he was teaching his students to be "good Canadian citizens" (NC 15 April 1939:2). Certainly, the force of the "debate" is weakened by the attention the *New Canadian* gave patriotic Canadiana written by these young citizens.

²³ *Bulletin* 11 Mar. 1985.

²⁴ In 1991, the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association sponsored the conference "Injustice," as a forum for minorities to share experiences of injustices received at the hand of the state, and work together for justice. As well, the *Bulletin* has printed messages from Art Miki, the president of the NAJC, urging participation, for example, in Native land claims (*Bulletin* Jan. 1992: 18).

²⁵ NC 15 Dec. 1942:2.

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