

## SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JAPANESE LANGUAGE SCHOOL CAMPAIGN IN HAWAII

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The social adjustment of the first generation Japanese or the so-called Issei in Hawaii after World War II was characterized by revival of their former institutions. The reopening of Japanese language schools was the most aggressive campaign in this social trend. It was first stimulated by the legal contest in November, 1946, by Chinese language schools over the constitutionality of the Territory of Hawaii's Foreign Language School Law.<sup>1</sup> After the Chinese language schools won their case in October, 1947, the proponents of the Japanese language schools launched a vigorous campaign to solicit active support for the reopening of their schools. Within a half year, 15 Japanese language schools had reopened in Honolulu with 45 teachers and 3,800 students.<sup>2</sup> By 1953 the number of Japanese language schools in Hawaii had increased to 74 with 70 principals, 246 teachers, and 13,470 students.<sup>3</sup>

The Japanese language school campaign was an example of how a new movement achieved success in a situation in which the bulk of the people had articulated no desire at the beginning for the goal they later achieved. Three aspects pertinent to this success may be discussed, namely, (1) from the standpoint of the characteristics of a specific social movement, (2) from the standpoint of the Issei in general and (3) from the standpoint of the proponents of the language schools.

1. From the standpoint of the characteristics of what students of collective behavior call a specific social movement:

The language school campaign was a specific social movement, having (a) a definite goal to achieve, (b) definite leadership, (c) definite logical appeal, although not sophisticated enough to be called an ideology, (d) definite tactics with effective propaganda machine by means of the vernacular press. The success of the language school campaign may be attributed to the following factors.

The first important factor was the condition of the Issei community when the campaign was initiated. The Issei community was characterized by disorganization resulting from the sudden loss of intimate ties with the larger community which they had had during the war in terms of direct participation in the war effort. With the termination of the war effort and withdrawal of its personnel, the Issei had nobody to assist them in their post-war adjustment. Since the Nisei in Hawaii operated outside of the Issei world as members of the larger community, the Issei had no one who

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<sup>1</sup> The foreign language school law of the Territory of Hawaii, promulgated by the 1943 session of the legislature, made it illegal to teach a foreign language to children under 10 years of age or to those under 15 years whose public school grades were below average. This regulation meant to exclude all the younger children who constituted a large portion of the language school students.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Lind, "What People in Hawaii Are Saying and Doing", Report No. 15.

<sup>3</sup> The Hawaii Jijo-Facts About Hawaii, Hawaii Times, Ltd., Honolulu, T.H. 1954, pp. 108-111.

understood their problems intimately from their standpoint. Their sense of loss of direction was exaggerated by their keen awareness of their being the only ethnic group of people who carried the distasteful stigma of defeated Japan. While it was a self-imposed stigma, they nevertheless suffered extreme humiliation and isolated themselves psychologically from the rest of the community. The mere lifting of all wartime restrictions against enemy aliens did not give them any clear-cut definition of the situation concerning their new status. In the atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity, they milled about in search for direction. In such a situation, if something catches the attention of the whole group, it provides a focus of attention, giving it a direction to act. Catching the opportune time to give such needed direction to the people by taking advantage of the Chinese language school litigation, the proponents of the Japanese language schools succeeded in arousing the Issei to act toward the desired goal.

In order to initiate a movement among the people who take their situation for granted, they must first be aroused to regard their situation with dissatisfaction. To arouse dissatisfaction, a contrast to their situation must be presented to them as an "ideal type" in terms of "what it ought to be," realizable if the whole group strives to achieve it. In order to achieve this objective, the role played by the Japanese vernacular press was very important.<sup>4</sup> Without such publicity and aggressive agitation, the reopening of the Chinese language schools would have been unnoticed by the bulk of the Japanese. By directing the attention of the Issei community to the Chinese language school case, the agitation aimed at creating doubts about the condition which the Issei had so far taken for granted. By continuously pointing to the significance of winning the case on the part of the Chinese language schools, the proponents of the Japanese language schools showed a concrete example which demonstrated that the absence of language schools was abnormal even among the Chinese and challenged the Japanese to correct their own situation. The legal victory of the Chinese language schools became a positive proof of success, providing them with an incentive to act.

As in the case of other social movements, the proponents usually develop some logical appeal to convince those with whom their movement is concerned. A common effort is to make the movement indispensable to attaining the goal for which the group as a whole is striving. In order to convince the Issei public about the unique and indispensable contribution by language schools, the proponents cited repeatedly the military records of the Nisei soldiers as interpreters as well as fighting men, stressing that the absence of language schools would deprive young people of such important training.

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<sup>4</sup> In the fall of 1947 while the Chinese language schools were engaged in litigation, the Hawaii Hochi published almost daily articles stressing the importance of winning the case on the part of the Chinese schools for the eventual reopening of Japanese language schools, urging the Japanese to combine their efforts in support of the Chinese language schools. These articles also stressed the role of Japanese language schools as supplementary to public schools in training loyal Americans, pointing out outstanding services of Nisei interpreters in the armed forces. While the Hawaii Times took a cautious stand about reopening of language schools, it nevertheless treated it as a major issue among the Japanese at that time.

Another important factor contributory to the success of the language school campaign was the consistent effort made by the proponents of the language schools to identify themselves with the prevailing sentiment of the Issei community at that time. In spite of the fact that practically all the former language school principals had been interned during the war and their families had suffered from deprivation, they make no open charge against the United States nor publicly expressed any bitterness toward it. This fact made their campaign more effective, because their effort was directed to conform with the general sentiment of the Japanese community which was moving toward Americanization despite the disorganization within the Issei community. If these proponents of the language schools should have associated their campaign with any feeling of bitterness toward the United States, they would have encountered a more organized resistance from those opposing the reopening of former Japanese institutions. Endorsing the prevailing sentiment among the Japanese and stressing that the language schools would facilitate the realization of their common objective of training the younger generation to become better Americans, the language school campaign served to channelize the common desire of the Issei. By presenting themselves as the champions of Americanization, the proponents became identified as the champions of the common cause of the whole Issei community, thus succeeding in securing the support of the majority of the Issei in realizing their goal. While the language school campaign was essentially a movement to restore a former order of things, it stressed Americanization of the future generation with open declarations of their policy for detachment from Japan and from Japanese type of training. A social movement cannot achieve a success if it is entirely contrary to the prevailing sentiment of the people concerned. In the case of the Issei, their identification with America was a result of their most recent experience with wartime participation. Hence, it was in the forward rather than backward trend and could not be blocked. Having incorporated the prevailing sentiment and desire of the Issei into their campaign, the proponents of the language schools articulated their common desire and channelized their common impulse, with the result that the language schools became regarded as indispensable for achieving their common goal.

## 2. From the standpoint of the Issei as a whole:

The reopening of language schools had an intrinsic appeal to the Issei generation. One reason for such an appeal was the promise the proponents made that the language schools facilitate communication between the Issei and their Hawaiian-born offspring and in addition, teach the latter such virtues as respect to elders and filial piety. Since the outbreak of the war, the Issei as a whole had been keenly conscious of the loss of their authority over their children and of separation from the latter. Any proposition which appeared to promise to restore some of their former close relations with the younger generation was reassuring to them.

The language school campaign gave tacit sanction for the Issei's loss of interest in learning English. During the war the Japanese language was banned as an "enemy language" and even when such wartime measures became less drastic, there was a Territory-wide "Speak American" campaign to Americanize the Issei. They struggled to learn to speak English while there was much pressure but when the acute shortage of manpower in the pineapple and other industries led to appeals to their patriotism by door-to-door solicitation, urging them to get employed, many found a convenient excuse for dropping their English study. By the time the subject of language schools was introduced to them, they were convinced that it would be easier for the younger generation to learn a second language than for them.

As in the case of other Japanese institutions, religious or secular, Japanese language schools provide the Issei who have meager education with a chance to have honorary positions of prestige within the Japanese community as members of boards of directors and officers and members of committees for numerous social activities. Language schools are among the few institutions which the Issei can manipulate as their own worthy projects and have the satisfaction of serving a "good cause." The very nature of the emphasis on Japanese helps the Issei to feel that they can claim their superiority to the Nisei.

3. From the standpoint of the proponents of the language school campaign:

The loss of livelihood and social status on the part of the language school principals was very crucial to the whole language school campaign. If the larger community had been able to give these principals upon their return from their Mainland internment something which they could have considered worthwhile or some project which would have given them prestige approximating their pre-war status as "educators," providing them with a source of self-respect, such widespread revival of Japanese language schools might have been avoided. While most of them had secured jobs for their sustenance as yardmen, semi-craftsmen, janitors, etc., such menial jobs were merely marks of their humiliated status without giving them satisfaction or incentive to advance and therefore, endurable only as a temporary measure. This fact was evident in that within a few years after the Chinese language schools won their case, a large number of pre-war Japanese language schools came into existence with the same principals. For the purpose of teaching the language a few good schools would have been sufficient. From the standpoint of providing "respectable" occupational positions to most, if not all, of the pre-war language school principals, however, it would not be sufficient. None of them would be willing to assume a position below their pre-war status of a head of a school. If such a thing should have been enforced, there would have been intolerable rivalry among them. To the principals the elimination of the language schools meant deprivation of their rightful means of livelihood. If the deprivation had been universal in the whole community or at least in the whole Japanese community and the financial hardships a general social phenomenon, these principals might have taken their lot more willingly. However, having found that most of the Japanese had prospered by taking advantage of the wartime boom and that they were a small unfortunate minority, they felt the contrast keenly and regarded their own lot as a reflection of unfairness to them.

The effort on the part of the returned internees including language school principals to revive their pre-war institutions was also due to the fact that, upon their return to Hawaii, they found fanatical groups comprised of several hundred Issei declaring belief in Japanese victory, operating without any punishment. They compared these groups with their own wartime internment which they considered too severe a punishment for being labelled as "potentially dangerous" persons. This consciousness of having been treated unjustly made them reassert their rights of operating their own institutions as the legitimate means of livelihood.

Basically, the language school campaign was an Issei movement. Japanese language schools will continue to provide a means of livelihood to those with Japanese education who cannot compete in the economic life of the larger community. On the other hand, the Issei, including the language school principals and teachers, normally expect their Hawaii-born offspring to compete in the larger community rather than to be their successors. In

Hawaii where the Orientals are accepted as part of the larger community, there is no need for the Issei to prepare future occupational opportunities for their offspring in the exclusively Japanese community. This fact suggests that with the passing of the Issei generation, Japanese language schools as an institution will decline in number and influence.