

THE PROBLEM OF ASSIMILATION¹

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In Hawaii, the assimilation of all people is taken too much for granted. Perhaps there is a need to bring out the process of assimilation in Hawaii, to talk about it, and actually to analyze and evaluate it. This is possibly a way of not only comprehending the past, but also being cognizant of the present, perhaps of foreseeing the future. What then is assimilation? According to Kimball Young, "We may define assimilation as an interactional process by which persons and groups achieve the memories, sentiments, ideas, attitudes, and habits of another person or group and by sharing their experiences become incorporated with them in a common cultural life of the nation."²

Constantly new factors in the assimilative process arise, or the relative importance of the factors involved changes. The whole process varies from one period of time to another. Inevitably then, the process becomes highly complex.

The Present Study

The present study is confined to members of the second generation of the Japanese group who have already become well established occupationally and who have started their own families. These men were interviewed by the two writers. How do they look at themselves now? What is their concept of themselves individually, and as a group? How do they define their present situation? What are the common factors in their past development? How have these shaped their current orientation? How do they regard the future?

These questions give some general indication of the reason this study was undertaken. This particular stage in the second generation's assimilation process has not been studied to any extent. This study is confined to a particular ethnic group, the Japanese, who are numerically the largest group in the Territory, comprising just under 40 per cent of the total population. During the war, this group was placed in a unique situation, in that their parents were citizens of a country which was at war with their own country. The tensions growing out of this were pointed up further by the fact that these young people were quite aware of the implications of the situation, and because of their age, were prompted into acting in a certain fashion. Then, too, this group has been very close to the first generation, a fact not always the case among the third generation or even the second generationsoof other ethnic groups. In some instances tools such as facility with the Japanese language have had to be retained for communication to take place between them and their elders. Yet the attitudes of their parents and the society at large during the crucial years have prompted them to venture out into the wider world. Their stage in the assimilation process, and the factors affecting them historically and currently thus differentiate our interviewees as objects of study.

¹Prepared by the writers in 1953.

²W. C. Smith, *Americans in the Making*, New York, 1939, p. 117 from Kimball Young, *An Introductory Sociology*, New York, 1934, p. 495. Cf. also R. E. Park and E. W. Burgess, *An Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, p. 735.

Shortage of time has, of necessity, limited the scope of the study. The subjects are known to have attained a fair degree of success in their particular occupation, as judged by themselves and their contemporaries. They are known in Honolulu and throughout the Territory for the positions they hold. They are of a certain business and professional level, have reached a certain economic status, a certain corresponding social and cultural status. These men are about the same age, roughly the years from 30 to 45.

Because of the limited number of interviews, the researchers must state that the findings apply to this small group alone and only hypothetically to other Nisei. Thus, this study has implications for future research. If the pattern of the study were applied to the study of other ethnic groups within the Territory, there could be derived the Territorial trend in assimilation, in general and as it applies to the different ethnic groups. A future study might also be based on a wider range of occupations within the Nisei group, and thus determine the relations of socio-economic factors in the assimilation process. The same would also be true of the other ethnic groups in the Territory.

As was mentioned, the interview method was chosen as the tool for this study. There seemed to be a definite need to have life-history material, in the words of the subjects, to point out the quality of feeling and thinking on certain issues, and to cut through to the fundamental way in which they looked at themselves and their experiences, for this was the final goal of our research.

We recognize the inevitable limitations growing out of the differential backgrounds and methods of operation of the interviewers. Perhaps the fact that one of us is Haole and the other Japanese, was an advantage and helped us in overcoming certain biases.

We will deal in our analysis with two broad categories. The external aspects of assimilation will deal with objective behavior, that which is visible and overt. Internal assimilation will then include the subjective, covert aspects of adjustment, attitudinal organization, and stated ratiocinations for participation in certain activities.

External Assimilation

These men are well-poised individuals, accommodated on the surface to the American culture and ways of acting. They are facile with the English language, their social presence embellished with Western cultural traits. Their homes are in Nuuanu, Manoa, Makiki, Aina Haina, and on the Heights, removed from the areas of first settlement in the city, occupied by the immigrant generation when they first moved to Honolulu from the plantations. From the standpoint of external assimilation, these facts suggest that they are assimilated. But by checking their statements, their presence and absence in certain situations, clues arise pointing out the inadequacy of their internal adjustment, their psychological feelings of "not-being-at-home" in some of the situations in which they find themselves. It is this contrast we hope to point up below.

Subjective Reaction To The War

The recent war has served to hasten the assimilation process of the Hawaii Nisei, especially of those who were in the service or on the Mainland. As one of them stated:

During the war I was one of the first Nisei from here to go in. I didn't go in for the glory, but because I felt I had a job to do. We were sent overseas quite soon, and I always had the interests of the boys in mind. I had to interpret them and their way of thinking to the officers, and point out the differences in the islanders and the mainlanders. I refused each lieutenantcy they offered because that would further widen the gap between myself and the boys. I was the colonel's secretary and that was just the job that would put me in the best position to be useful to the boys. Did I have a rough time getting into the service! My wife went down to the draft board and 'signed me away,' saying that she could be financially independent. And I certainly was not the youngest volunteer that the army ever had.

One person evaluated the war experiences in a slightly different way:

In the war we were given responsibility and were rated accordingly. That was the beginning of a confidence in myself and my ability. We had a chance to mature and prove ourselves.

There was thus a generally favorable reaction to their war experience. It was considered helpful in establishing contacts, getting to know different ethnic groups, a true "eye-opener to many aspects of life previously unknown to us."

At the beginning, however, there were also indications of initial uncertainties as to their exact status on the Mainland during the war.

Coming into Camp McCoy (Wisconsin) was quite an experience. There was a PW camp there, and all of us were just sick because we thought we were going there. In fact, the train stopped, and backed the entire length through the PW camp into Camp McCoy to unload us. We certainly were relieved when we realized that we were to be free, after all.

Two of the men who visited Japan with the occupation troops immediately after the close of the war expressed their feeling about Japan and Hawaii this way:

It's dirty! The morale of the people is low. It's congested. After that, as far as we're concerned, Hawaii is and will always be home.

In the case of those who were not in service there was emphasis and re-emphasis of the work they had done during the war years. Their activities varied:

While I was still on the Mainland, the war broke out. I wasn't in the service but I taught at Camp Savage Interpreter's School (Japanese) and also worked for the Federal Government part of the time.

Although my brother was accepted into the army, I had to remain on Kauai because I couldn't qualify physically. So I took the next best step and became active in the Civilian Defense Mobilization Corps. We held the record for being the most active island organization, you know.

The Role of "Social Life"

In the area of social participation, most of the men were out of their homes two or three evenings a week to business and professional meetings. The ethnic group composition of those present at the meetings varied with the occupations. One man in a position at the University expressed it in this fashion:

When I meet with church groups, or my wife takes me to PTA, or when I go to political meetings, the group is well-mixed, racially. There is never any suggestion of differences, everything is cordial. Maybe the acceptance is due to similarities in academic backgrounds and the intellectual atmosphere.

Frequently business contacts lead into social contacts. In the words of a high government official:

Many of the cocktail parties to which I am invited are primarily for entertaining people visiting in the Islands. There the group is slightly cosmopolitan, with more Haoles than other groups. Frequently these are couple parties, too.

There were also indications of non-attendance at social functions on various occasions due primarily to such factors as the fear of having political favors asked of them which could not be granted, in addition to such personal factors, as, perhaps, certain self-conscious feelings about their ethnic background.

Social contacts are closely related to the positions that these men hold. In most instances, they were members of golf clubs and other social organizations.

I'm a member of two golf clubs, one very old and the other quite recent. The older, is, I think, solely made up of Japanese and the other has a Hawaiian, four Chinese, two Koreans, and the rest Japanese. Many might get the idea that we're being racial but what they don't understand is the fact that it isn't only golf that is holding us together. There are many other factors in operation to make the club a success. One of them is the pride we take in one another's accomplishments and the interest we have in one another. For example, in the older club, X, an official, is a member and when he was going to be sworn in, he invited all the members of the club to attend the ceremony. And do you know, every one of the members was present. X was very touched and very pleased. I don't blame him either. You see, the point I'm trying to make is the fact that all the members were proud of him and gave him their full support. It is really things like that which count. Golf is only a minor aspect of the whole thing.

It was found that in most of their social groups the Japanese were predominant. In social contacts ancestry seemed to outweigh economic and social class, but whatever association with Haoles existed, was with those of the same age, economic bracket, and business.

I have a number of Haole friends with whom I feel perfectly at ease. But they're all up and coming businessmen and not the stuffed shirts you see around here. I think the

young ones are beginning to realize that you have to cut across racial lines if you're going to get anywhere in Hawaii. The young executives from the Mainland are also quite friendly.

Basically our movement socially is determined largely by our economic status. There is little use in our running around with people of a higher social and financial status because it's foolish. For example, if they go to the Royal--and usually, if you belong to a certain social set, you do--you are more or less obligated to go, especially if you want to keep up your social prestige in that group. As far as I'm concerned, I'm out of that class although I probably make a lot more money than quite a few members of that group.

That the great concern for social life may undermine family life is suggested in the following account:

As for our own social life, my wife and I do go to dinner parties about once or twice a month. Poor wife. She seldom gets to go out. As for me, I usually end up about once a week at some night club with some of my close friends. They're of a mixed group though largely Japanese. When the group is mixed, it is predominantly Japanese but sometimes I go out alone with some Haole friends. You know, M, for instance. But that's largely for business purposes. When we go to night clubs, we usually end up in some place like the N. You know, it's funny, but very seldom do I see many couples, married, that is. I guess that's tied in with all the philandering I see going on. You can't seem to avoid it. I guess businessmen are notorious for that.

Family and Church Life

With those men whose jobs were not solely dependent upon making and keeping contacts, they gave indications of family-centered activities. They are more "arrived" and seem to feel less the need of constant effort to build reputations.

For recreation, my wife and I try to do things with our children. We have a boy and a girl. So we picnic and choose a movie that the kids will enjoy and then all of us go together. It's hard for my wife, for the kids are young and she is pretty tied down. When I fish I try to combine that with a picnic at the beach for the family. My golfing is rather recent but I try to hold that at a minimum because it is something that would keep me from my family.

I've seen neglected youngsters, and I've seen the trouble they get into. I try to spend every minute of free time with my family. That's why I don't golf. My girls mean too much to me.

When there is a definitely stated interest in church, it is interesting to note that it was for a Christian church whose membership is predominantly Japanese of middle class background. In the three instances in which the young men were actively engaged in YBA (Buddhist) activities as members of the board of officers of the organization, the men were sons of already well-established parents who were financially and socially secure. Perhaps there was less need of membership in a Christian Church for status or business purposes. Further, these young men are now advanced to the point

where they move with considerable freedom not only within their own racial group but in the broader society of the Territory. Other than this YBA interest, the rest of their views are similar to those of the other Nisei interviewed.

One of the men placed considerable emphasis on church and children.

I have been superintendent of the Sunday School with its twenty-five teachers for quite a few years. Probably that has influenced the way in which I look at my family and discipline my five children. Children need to be guided and taught what is proper, to distinguish between right and wrong. They must be taught respect for their parents so that they will develop respect for themselves. You don't always have to use corporal punishment--I reason with my youngsters and it works out well. We had visitors from the Mainland several weeks ago and they were amazed at the obedience we commanded, even from our year old baby, who disappeared into the children's room along with the other four and played there quietly while we had our buffet dinner. I am concerned about my children's English, their choice of words, their sentence construction. Actually they're at a disadvantage because of their mother's education in Japan, but my daughter passed her English standard test this year for the first time. I try to help her to finish her sentences and not talk in the abbreviated fashion that the kids in the neighborhood seem to favor.

There are also instances in which children draw their parents into social situations.

I have two children, both of them girls. They're going to Hanahauoli, which is one of the best schools in town. Better than Punahou. I myself think very highly of the school. They don't stress things like father's occupation, income, etc., which I understand some of the private schools do. But sometimes one can't avoid being embarrassed. Many of my daughters' friends are from very wealthy classes and sometimes the forms of recreation they suggest are way beyond our means. For example, during the Easter vacation, they asked me for permission to go to Hawaii to ride polo horses. Needless to say, that's way beyond our income bracket. I really had a hard time convincing them that that was not the thing for them to do. I think they finally understood--at least partially. They are nine and seven, and old enough to know.

Our youngsters play with Japanese children mainly, since we live in a primarily Japanese community. Their mother sometimes takes them down to the homes of their other school chums - Haoles - who live beyond the heavy traffic arteries. Children from both of these groups come to our house to play. If anything, we have closer relationships with the Japanese families, mainly because they are our close neighbors. (The mother in this instance is a Mainland Haole girl.)

In all instances, the youngsters are no older than elementary school age. Questions as to dating or marriage preferences, or even vocations for their children, were not yet of great concern.

Role of Formal Education and Travel in Assimilation

In the main, formal education was the vehicle by which these men rose to their present occupational positions.

As I look back and try to figure out why I have attained what little success I have, it seems to me that the main reason is the excellent training I have had. You see, I did graduate work at the University of Minnesota (in fact, finished all but the orals and the thesis for an M.S. degree), and that more or less qualified me for handling the job I now have (in one of the largest Haole firms). I was most surprised when I was asked to teach some night courses. Training is very necessary, if for nothing else but the ability to feel competent in the situation.

All of these men have had experiences on the Mainland, if not through school, then during the war and on more recent business trips. That experience seems to have been used to good advantage, for example:

When I'm on the Mainland, I'm usually very busy and so I try to use all my time to broaden my Mainland contacts. That's why I just phone the Hawaii people there to say 'hello' and really make no effort to see them, and also, I can see them here in the Territory.

I feel that some of the things I learned while in the Federal Capital have been very useful to me in such organizations as the Volunteer Placement Bureau, the Territorial Employment Advisory Council, the Honolulu Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the Rotary Club. There I learned how to get along with everyone and especially Haoles, which I'm not sure I'd know if I had remained in the Islands completely or remained only with Islanders while on the Mainland.

Although, in many instances, the favorable attitudes regarding Haoles carried over from the Mainland, there are also indications from the interviewees of their awareness of the difference between the situation on the Mainland and here. The following portrays this feeling:

I went to school in New Haven. There we lived in small housing units, so there was little or no contact beyond the house. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, we Hawaii boys got together. Some of them were of the big Haole families, Big Five, you know, and we talked together just like we were old friends. Even now we still talk when we see each other on the street, always greet each other, but we never go beyond that and visit in each other's homes. I guess our speaking is an advance over what our parents would have done, but I'm always careful to ignore the alumni club notices and meetings here because I know they wouldn't feel comfortable if I were there.

Another individual expressed his feelings thus:

My wife is a Mainland Nisei. She was born and reared there and was graduated from college several years before me. Her father is in a profession there. I really don't know if she is really happy here thus far, but she seems satisfied. Her contacts have been largely Caucasian, although she had a large

number of Oriental friends as well. Here our contacts are limited primarily to the Oriental groups, composed largely, of course, of Japanese.

Attitude Towards Outmarriage

The men express approval of interracial marriages. Three of them have outmarried, two of them into the Caucasian group, and one of them a non-Japanese Oriental girl. All three of these wives are university graduates, as more or less befits this socio-economic class. In the cases where outmarriage has occurred, there is acceptance by the Niseis, and couples move as freely among the contemporary Japanese group as do other couples in which both are Japanese. This is, in a large measure, a contrast to the way in which Japanese of the older group or lower socio-economic levels would act toward an outsider married to a Japanese.

Perhaps this amalgamation, judged by many sociologists as the end result of assimilation, is evidence of the complete acceptance by these people of the "unorthodox race doctrine" in Hawaii mentioned by Romanzo Adams. Yet they have not accepted this situation without thorough and very careful analysis of the consequences involved, for example:

Right at this moment, I think that the only way, permanently, to cut across racial lines is to have intermarriage, and lots of it. I guess it will be hard even now because of parental opposition but I think gradually we might come to have more intermarriages and thus break down the racial barriers. Really when you get to the basic roots, you'll find that race is still the fundamental thing in deciding whom you are going around with.

The Role of the Wives

Mainly due to the limitations of time in our study, which made it difficult to know the individuals well enough to get concrete information on which to generalize, we should like to refrain from discussing at length the role of the wives in the occupational mobility of the men. It seemed to make little difference, when the wife was Japanese, in their social mobility. When the wife was Haole, there were some indications of broader Haole contacts, but no indication of easier relationships with Haole and other ethnic groups.

The Self-Conceptions of Marginal Men

In the above interview materials we have tried to pull out examples indicative of how these people behave and of their conceptions about their behavior. We have attempted to use this method to reach the core of their conceptions about themselves. We have seen the extent and the ease with which they move about among the Japanese, even among the older Issei. As Romanzo Adams stated in 1936:

You second generation Japanese inescapably bear a double responsibility. You must be good enough Japanese to get along with your parents and older Japanese, and at the same time, you must be good enough Americans to get along with the rest of the community. My people went through the same experience some ways back. This is a peculiar second generation responsibility. It is partly up to you to solve it.

This we feel they have accomplished for we have seen how they come out into the larger society, armed with an education, ready to compete for jobs and status in the larger community. From the external standpoint, they are acculturated and accommodated. They are marginal in that they return frequently to those like them, and they seem to move reservedly among the dominant economic group of the Territory, the Haoles:

I tried to help my wife as much as I could. (The wife is a Mainland Haole girl.) That is why we moved in from the country. She had always lived in a city, and it was hard for her to live in rural Oahu. Even now, I try to help her as much as I can with the children, and we both feel that our family is most important. There are times when I try to explain the half-caste background of our youngsters to them, for they get all mixed up with the Haole-Japanese business, particularly when the neighborhood kids are all Japanese and ask our kids what racial background they are. But I guess the kids do pretty well. Anyway, I suppose they are pretty normal in behavior and adjustment.

Statements such as the following point to some of the more typical conceptions of self held by many Nisei in Hawaii.

Everyone thinks I am a college graduate. That means I have a lot to live up to. And I have had to work with some pretty well-educated people on a DPI Advisory Board, a Church Board, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Lions Club. But I always remember how well our high school principal treated me expressing faith in my ability to be a success. And I had always given everyone a square deal when I was an assistant manager at X (a big Haole firm), so I acquired a fairly good reputation and could work from there. I couldn't have done as well as I did with this business, particularly through the war years, if I hadn't had that reputation on which to build.

I really came up the hard way and I know how difficult it is to work when the boss is loafing. One must work hard and produce before you can even think of getting a raise or a promotion. That's what I did. I had my record to speak for me when I went to the management and demanded a raise. You have to be able to show the company the profit you're making for them. You have to do your share of the work to get anywhere. Right now, I prove to our customers that this company can offer them service--real service. Sometimes on Sundays, people call my home and ask for a rush job and even when I am out in the garden, I get down to the office as soon as possible to fix them up. I don't charge for that special service but I keep a record of it and if business from one of these companies for whom we have done favors decreases in volume, I take the situation right to them, put the cards on the table, and they come through. They can't deny anything, and our volume comes up again. I fully believe that it is these little things that count. At the present, I can walk in to any of the big offices in town and sit down with the big boss and just chat. They all call me by my English nickname.

It really took pull to get my daughter into nursery school after the war. It was just because I was in Europe in the army, because I felt it was my duty to the boys to go with them, that

my wife had to take the children to another island to be with her mother and the record of my son's registration in this school was lost. Although my daughter had been too young to attend school I did have her registered with this nursery school, too. But her records were also lost. Actually she could have qualified for enrollment on all points, but it was just the fact that she was Japanese which held the school back from letting her enter. So I took the matter to various people of influence and finally something was done. But if I hadn't known the ropes or been persistent, my children would not have been enrolled in the school.

Another thing, I'm the only college graduate at my place of work, at least the only one who keeps coming back to school to take more courses. Things get a little strained down at work sometimes mainly because I've got more education than some of my superiors. It even hits me when I am out doing my work with the schools. One principal didn't want me to talk to the students because he doubted my facility with the English language. But that principal changed his mind when I corrected a grammatical error he made on the stage when he introduced me. It sure seems as though I have to cope with a lot of things, but when they find out more about you or you have a basis to validly correct their approach or statements, things seem to go much better.

Thus, even though these men have the training, the social finesse, the economic resources, they move in an unsure fashion in the wider society. The conception they have of themselves is marked, in that sense, by a bit of insecurity as to when and where and how far they can go. To this extent, there is social distance between them and the other ethnic groups. Whether it comes from their own group or from the group beyond is a moot question. But the important point is that they feel a bit reserved in the wider society and thus prefer to tread lightly. To this degree, they still have not completed the process of assimilation. On the whole, they're not "cocky," or militant, or braggarts--they are sound-thinking, evaluating individuals who are making the most of opportunities that are coming their way.

Just as their parents held the highest regard for education, these men also conceive of academic training as the means for bettering themselves and their group. But their identification with the Occident has been greater so that other things associated with more education and a consequent higher plane of living are also important, such as golfing for recreation, relaxation with a highball, proper education for their offspring in the area of purely social graces. They are not yet highbrow, according to the Life magazine criteria, for many in this group are almost completely ignorant of the "fine arts," such as music, painting, and literature. This is perhaps largely due to the plantation background, for they are equally ignorant of such aspects of Japanese culture. The situation will undoubtedly be different with their youngsters, for the Sansei are being broadly trained early in life in such schools as Punahou and Hanalei as well as in their homes. The prevailing social values of the world at large have left their influence as seen by the emphasis on materialism and money.

The assimilation process of these men is thus evident in the areas noted in this paper. In this respect, we hope the study can be conceived of as a measure of social change in one small segment of the population of the Territory of Hawaii.