

## THE JAPANESE

George K. Yamamoto

Long conspicuous by their relatively large numbers, the Japanese represent, along with Chinese and Koreans, the peoples of East Asian culture origin in Hawai'i. Immigrants came from all the major islands of Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although the great majority were from western Honshu, northern Kyushu, and from Okinawa. The 217,669 Japanese enumerated in the 1970 United States census constitute 28 percent of the Hawai'i population, second only to the 39 percent share of the Caucasians of various European stock origins. While still being augmented by small annual numbers from Japan, today more than 90 percent of those of Japanese lineage in Hawai'i are American citizens. Those counted as Japanese continue to increase in actual numbers, mainly through an excess of births over deaths, but the peak of the Japanese proportion of population was reached 60 to 70 years ago when more than four out of every ten residents were Japanese.

For the Japanese as for the Chinese, Portuguese, Filipinos, Koreans, Puerto Ricans, and several other numerically smaller nationality groups, the original and major reason for their presence was work for plantation agriculture enterprises that expanded rapidly in the latter part of the nineteenth century right through the first third of the twentieth. With time, and with new generations replacing the aging and decreasing immigrant laborers, the role of the Japanese, not unlike several other plantation immigrant descendant groups but in larger numbers, expanded and shifted from that of being mainly providers of manual labor to significant representation in decision-making positions in economics and politics. Considered as a group, those of Japanese ancestry in positions of authority and power appear to some to constitute a threat to some ideal distribution of ethnic populations in the social structure. Viewed as an ethnic entity in competition with other such for a limited number of preferred niches, the Japanese may be expected to make further gains if Hawai'i continues to expand toward a greater preponderance of technical and professional jobholders, but without necessarily constraining opportunity for other groups.

This movement upward, however, will probably be accompanied by gradual decline in the high-visibility position of Japanese in politics and in the middle and upper levels of business, the professions, and government if other trends continue—the lower-than-average rate of increase in their numbers and the upward mobility of members of groups increasing more rapidly.

The first Japanese to reach the Islands were a few unsponsored, unintentional migrants—shipwrecked fishermen. The first sponsored immigrants were *Gannen Mono*, "first-year people," responding in 1868 to offers by plantation entrepreneurs and the Hawaiian government under contract conditions permitted by the Masters and Servants Act of 1850. These 148 First-Year People—1868 was the first year of the Meiji era (and the last year of the *samurai*-ruled feudal regime in Japan)—who came to Hawai'i on a 33-day voyage constituted a false start of sustained Japanese migration. Because of disagreements between Japanese and Hawai'i government agents over work conditions—arising from complaints by both laborers and plantation employers—no more Japanese came until 1885. Among plantation-sponsored immigrants, these Japanese were the third group of foreigners, following the Chinese and South Sea islanders, who joined the insufficient labor power supplied by Hawaiian workers. In the meantime, after 1868 and before 1885, workers from Portugal, Germany, and Norway were recruited, along with a continuing flow of Chinese. A number of economic and political developments in Hawai'i and Japan renewed immigration, continuing with such vigor that, by 1907, the year of the U.S.-Japan gentlemen's agreement curtailing the flow, over 180,000 had arrived. By 1910, resident Japanese, still mostly associated with plantations despite movement to small farms and to jobs in towns and cities, made up over 40 percent of the people, a source of some concern to many observers.

The overwhelming majority of Japanese immigrants up to 1908 were young adult males from rural areas, used to the hard work of farm life. This predominantly single, male population was augmented after the gentlemen's agreement by the stream of arrivals, ultimately nearly 15,000, of picture brides until immigration from Asia was stopped altogether by Congress in 1924. A family-based Japanese community had become a solidly entrenched part of life in Hawai'i.

Negotiations for contract immigrants by planters through the Bureau of Immigration of the Hawaiian

government had focused on relatively few regions of Japan, and subsequent immigration continued early regional patterns. The result was that, of the 40-odd *ken* (prefectures, comparable to states), Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Kumamoto, and Fukuoka provided more than two-thirds of the immigrants. A very important fifth regional source was Okinawa, whose plantation-bound workers did not begin coming until the early years after annexation, during the free immigration period. To this day, when the overwhelming proportion of Japanese are Island-born Americans and newcomers from Japan are used to life in modern Tokyo or other urban areas, any local Japanese dialect or twist of traditional custom is likely to have its origins in one or another of these prefectures.

Not all immigrants, of course, either came as permanent settlers or, having come, decided to remain. A good many returned to home villages after fulfilling their initial or second three-year contract. Others, in the post-annexation, free-immigration period, still with a sojourner orientation, pulled up stakes to return to Japan after they had accumulated sufficient savings to buy farm plots or more adequately to carry their share of working family farms. Still others, lured by the reputed economic attractions of California, left Island plantations by the thousands in the first decade of this century. Altogether, more than half of these immigrants sooner or later left Hawai'i. But many had not piled up even the modest capital they had hoped for, within a reasonable length of time, with which to return to their villages. These finally cast their lot as permanent settlers with their Hawai'i-born children and, in time, with their children's children. To those remaining laborers were added smaller numbers of the more educated—doctors and dentists, Buddhist priests and Christian ministers, language school teachers, newspapermen, and businessmen, all of whom provided essential services to their immigrant compatriots.

By the middle 1920s, the Hawai'i-born, American-citizen component of the Japanese group outnumbered their alien parents by about 67,000 to 59,000 in a total population of about 307,000. The question of any great bulk of them returning to Japan had become academic. Having a proportionately large group to begin with, and favored with a more nearly equal male-to-female ratio than several other important immigrant groups—and thus experiencing a high birth rate—their numbers grew rapidly despite departures and the severe reduction of immigration after 1924. In

1940 there were 158,000 Japanese, more than that of any other ethnic category, in a total population of 423,000. The Japanese in Hawai'i, now more than 90 percent Americans, have not only continued to increase in numbers—although at a decreasing rate and forming a smaller proportion of the total population than in the past—but have also permeated economic and political structures, with formal education as their major avenue of social mobility.

The geographical distribution of Japanese throughout Hawai'i still reflects to a considerable extent their early plantation days, despite the great pulling power of Honolulu in intervening decades. While census figures for 1970 indicate that 78 percent of the Japanese population resided on O'ahu, there were, nevertheless, more Japanese than members of any other ethnic category on Hawai'i, Maui, and Kaua'i.

In plantation communities the Japanese, as with other immigrant labor groups, lived in ethnically segregated camps, both by their own preference and for the convenience of plantation management. Those leaving plantations for Honolulu often first settled in camp-like concentrations in low-rent areas on the edges of the downtown business district as well as along the main and side streets of Pāwa'a and Mōili'ili districts and of Pālama and Kālihi.

Movement out of plantation employment was not wholly a matter of taking up work in urban areas. A good many of these peasant-stock Japanese, following a pattern set by the Chinese, bought or leased available land and took up independent farming—sugarcane to be processed by plantation mills, coffee, rice, vegetables, hog-raising—and to this day the small, independent farmer in Hawai'i is overwhelmingly Japanese. In some localities there was enough of a concentration of Japanese farmers—among the coffee growers of Kona, for instance, or the small clusters of fishermen families on the shores of Kāne'ohē Bay—to form rural communities that permitted or induced some of the solidarity-engendering mutual claims and expectations reminiscent of village life in Japan.

Economically and occupationally, Japanese experience has closely paralleled that of most immigrant groups coming to Hawai'i when the predominant economic activity was plantation agriculture. For twenty or thirty years (1890-1920), when Japanese were dominant providers of labor for sugar cultivation, they were themselves overwhelmingly laborers. A limited degree

of occupational mobility was possible on plantations, but there were opportunities for the less conservative—shop-keeping, truck farming, fishing, the building trades, service occupations like barbering and tailoring—outside the plantations that increased with the expanding economic structure accompanying a growing and increasingly urbanized population.

Greater movement into preferred levels of the expanding economic structure by Japanese began with the coming of age of *nisei* and *sansei* citizen generations. In the 1970s the average income of Japanese-headed households was closely bracketed with that of Korean, Chinese, and civilian Caucasian households. The proportion of Japanese relative to their numbers in the prestigious professions of medicine and law was similar to their position in family income, generally like and slightly smaller than that of the Chinese, Koreans, and Caucasians. Occupationally, in general, their relatively large numbers and also their relatively advanced schooling and training have allowed them to range widely in the white collar, technical, and professional fields, although they may at present be most conspicuous in local government positions. The present "over-representation" of Japanese among teachers and education administrators appears in large measure the result of an earlier emphasis to children of immigrant Japanese parents of the respectability and attainability of positions in teaching.

What transplanted Japanese knew as familiar and proper ways of conducting themselves in the family, with others, and with their gods served as important guides in their new homeland. Some of these cultural traits have retained their vitality even as they underwent modification, their bearers adapting themselves through the generations to the prevailing American way of life. But other old-country traits have either faded or survive without original functional and emotional meanings. In the critical transitions of the life cycle, marriage by match-making is a thing of the past, but funerals, for other than committed Christians, still generally call for a Buddhist ceremony and serve as occasions for relatives as well as for acquaintances beyond the kin group to recognize and reaffirm established ties. The mixing of peoples and cultures that is Hawai'i has, of course, involved the Japanese. They have retained some traditional food preferences while acquiring a taste for other types of food, and have, at the same time, seen some of their distinctive dishes—like *sushi*, *sukiyaki* and *tempura*—become part of the more widely appreciated cuisine. Celebrating the new year tends to be

more of a family affair, and elaborate preparations for feasting, setting up pine and bamboo branches at the door, and other good luck symbols, and visiting shrine or temple are clearly on the wane. Festivities for the return to earth of departed ancestors, especially the *bon* dance, appear to be a summer fixture, although they involve smaller and smaller proportions of the increasing population of Japanese descent.

Certain arts, now primarily regarded in Japan as desirable accomplishments for young ladies—flower arrangement, the tea ceremony, the dance associated with *kabuki*—were, at the time of large-scale immigration of Japanese villages, refinements of living among families of social classes with more extended opportunities for leisure and formal training. Some of these traditional artistic skills, along with judo, karate, and other martial arts now, especially after World War II, have a wide group of participants that includes but is not confined to those of Japanese descent. Both the Japanese language schools and the Japanese press, important immigrant-established institutions before World War II, still survive, but with a decreasing sense of urgency with each passing decade. American-born Asians are now encouraged by the entire community to learn and use the tongue of their immigrant forebears. Japanese has had a revival; it is now taught not only in the after-school-hours Japanese language schools but also as part of the regular curriculum of many public and private high schools. At the University of Hawai'i, Japanese is the most popular foreign language.

Religion—in the sense of personal faith related to an organizational structure of a priesthood, regular congregational meetings for worship, and officially pronounced sacred literature—has been taken rather lightly by most Japanese, in modern Japan as well as in Hawai'i. This is not to deny the comforting and educating role the various Buddhist sects, and to a lesser extent the Shinto representatives, have played; the *butsudan* (altar for departed ancestors), for example, was a common household object in most Japanese homes for decades. But the long-established traditional religious sects in modern times, in Japan as well as in Hawai'i, have not so much contended with competing religions like Christianity as functioned among a secularly oriented people. Indeed, in Hawai'i as in Japan, the most vigorous religious movements that call for wholehearted commitment and proselytizing zeal have been the so-called "new religions" of Japan, some of which seek with some

success to gain adherents from people of any and all ethnic backgrounds.

This brief description of some of the facets of Japanese culture in Hawai'i has postulated a high degree of homogeneity in ethnic identity, language, customs, and even in social class origins. Important exceptions to this sense of ethnic and cultural homogeneity—with little else to serve as a basis for significant distinctions within the Japanese community—have been the social division between the *Naichi* (those from Japan proper) and those from Okinawa, and the less significant distinction, maintained for a while among immigrants, between the "ordinary" Japanese and persons from the social outcast, or *eta*, sections of homeland villages.

That a group's status in the community should vary as the group's role and actions shift or become more diversified—and as the conceptions of the group held by others change—is a commonplace phenomenon, and the Japanese in Hawai'i have not been any exception. As an addition to and for a while the numerical mainstay of the labor force of the burgeoning plantations, immigrant Japanese were at first desirable newcomers, to the planters and to the government, despite the annoyance of periodic complaints about working conditions and the watchful concern of the Meiji government. The general picture today is of the Japanese as a well-established, accepted (albeit somewhat grudgingly), predominantly American group several generations removed from the poorly educated foreign plantation workers. This may suggest plodding, uneventful progress within and into the evolving, complex social fabric of modern Hawai'i, but the Japanese, no less than many other newcomer groups and more conspicuously than most, underwent critical experiences in their status changes.

As plantation workers the Japanese were quite satisfactory, but their large numbers in the fields in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented problems of efficient management. Major sugar strikes by Japanese workers in 1909 and 1920, for example, clearly were threats to management's labor control policy, no longer supported by the contract system permitted by the Masters and Servants Act of pre-annexation Hawai'i. And important as their conduct might be on the plantations, where Filipino workers outnumbered them from the early 1920s, who the Japanese were and what they were doing more generally came to be defined in a number of critical ways.

Thanks to a predominance of families over single men in the immigrant generation, the numerically significant, Confucian-tradition Japanese community not only grew rapidly through natural increase but also exercised effective social control over its members. Juvenile delinquency, adult crime rates, and other indices of family breakdown and individual and social disorganization were usually lower than the community average over the decades.

The *nisei* studied diligently in public schools and extended their school day, learning Japanese in private language schools. They absorbed parental emphasis on family cohesion and family reputation, married overwhelmingly within their own large group that offered many choices for mates, and in general strove to "make good" in an unspectacular, conservative manner, a way that appeared quite consonant with both the traditional values of their parents and the Protestant ethic of the American middle class. (Very recent figures, however, show a third of Japanese mate selections outside the ethnic group, contributing significantly to "mixed-blood" in the Islands.)

But the very conformity to those cultural values that produced upward-aspiring, law-abiding, family-respecting, group-cohesive, non-wave-making, Hawai'i-born Japanese was subject to less than laudatory interpretation. Their assimilability into the mainstream of American life in Hawai'i was suspect. They seemed to be retaining their Oriental physical features, the cultural habits of their parents and ancestors, and their boundary-maintaining clannishness. At levels beyond what Island Japanese did or did not do was the fact of deteriorating relations between the United States and Japan in the 1920s and 1930s and the presence of a large Japanese population in this vital outpost of the American military in the Pacific. The *issei* leadership's successful challenge of government attempts to curb, if it did not eliminate, private Japanese language schools, deemed by some an obviously assimilation-retarding institution that fostered psychological if not political loyalty to Japan, did not endear the Japanese to those who saw them as a threat to military security. Japanese participation in sugar strikes had threatened the economic well-being of the community. The aberrant but sensational kidnap-murder in 1928 of the youngster of a kama'āina haole family by a disturbed youth named Fukunaga helped to define further the "spot" the Japanese were in. In an even more sensational case a few years later, the fact that two Japanese youths were among five accused of raping Thalia Massie, a navy

lieutenant's wife, did not help the low-profile wishes of the self-conscious Japanese, although the focus of opprobrium this time was more widely diffused. Members of the Japanese community were finding themselves so defined that they were expected to behave according to standards of conduct not equally applied to other ethnic groups.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 by Japanese planes, the four years of war, and the total defeat of Japan settled questions of ambiguity about the loyalty of Japanese-Americans. Along with young men of other groups in Hawai'i, thousands of Japanese marched off to war. Their special status prevented them from being drafted or voluntarily joining any armed service after Pearl Harbor until they were permitted to volunteer to form, in early 1943, a special, segregated regimental combat team, the 442nd, which fought with distinction and heavy casualties in Europe along with the 100th Infantry Battalion, whose members were pre-Pearl Harbor *nisei* draftees. There were others who served primarily in the Pacific as interpreter-soldiers in American army and navy units. Japanese at home, aliens and citizens alike, carried on homefront activities along with the rest of the residents.

World War II and its end settled some issues as to who or what the Japanese in Hawai'i were, and the energies of the Japanese as well as others were now directed toward resuming or beginning their lives, of getting an education—the G.I. Bill benefits were a godsend to many veterans—of making a living, climbing up the economic ladder, raising families, and participating in government. Within a decade after the close of World War II, Japanese Americans, who had made up more than a fourth of the eligible voters even before Pearl Harbor, were ethnically the major source of active members in a revived Democratic Party under John A. Burns. The Japanese as a group have become highly visible, politically, with many individuals elected as county councilmen, state legislators, and representatives in Congress. In 1974 George Ariyoshi was elected governor of the State, the first person of Asian descent to hold that office. Fujio Matsuda, named president of the University of Hawai'i in 1974, is the first non-Caucasian to be appointed to that office.

That the "peoples of Hawai'i" will retain their ethnic identities, some in greater degree than others, at the same time that they increasingly become more and more "Hawai'i's people" appears to be a prospect for some time to come. The nearly one-third of the

resident population who are Japanese, whose young adults are mainly two and even three generations removed from their immigrant forebears in the heyday of plantation agriculture, readily acknowledge their ancestry at the same time that they are aware of how little they are actually Japanese and how much they are part of the American middle class—or aspire to be a part of it. Few know the Japanese language except as they laboriously learn it in school. Most are probably involved in closely knit family ties but not because, as may have been the case in *issei-nisei* relations, it is constantly dinned into their ears that good Japanese respect their parents and do not bring shame to their families. They are vicariously proud of the esthetic traditions of Japan, of the capabilities of the feudal *samurai*, of the people of industrialized Japan, and of the humbler contributions of their immigrant ancestors in Hawai'i. But like others who grow up in the Islands, and as they usually and quickly find out when they are abroad, on the Mainland, in Japan, or elsewhere, their identification with Hawai'i as their home is pronounced.

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