BALANCING IN-BETWEEN:
Emerging Concepts of Nikkei Identity Explored Through Hapa Young Adults in Multicultural Canada

by

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of Nikkei Place in 2000 was a turning point for the Vancouver Nikkei community. The term Nikkei, which is used throughout the world to designate those who are of Japanese descent and live outside of Japan, has been recaptured and redefined at a local level. This allows not only Japanese Canadians but also Ijusha (those born in Japan who are more recent immigrants), and Hapa (those born from a union of Japanese Canadian and non-Nikkei parents) to be embraced by and to rejuvenate the community. This research discusses the struggle and achievement of the Nikkei community in Vancouver, Canada that strives to remain as a community. I argue that Nikkei in Vancouver comprise a synthesis of ethnic community and cultural community that requires constant redefining of membership and expansion of boundaries.

As a method of my research, I conducted participant observation field work along with ten semi-structured interviews, eight of them with Hapa. Since many of the studies on the history of Japanese Canadians are narrative, an historical review provided not only background information but also served as a part of my method. The history of the Japanese Canadian community and its relation to multiculturalism in Canada explains the current nature of the Nikkei community in Vancouver. The results of this research suggest people hope to sustain a community by way of redefining the external boundary in relationship to multicultural Canada and the internal boundaries within the heterogeneous Nikkei community. Through interviews with Hapa young adults of Nikkei in Vancouver, much diversity was found among them which reaffirmed the diverse nature of the Nikkei community.
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INTRODUCTION

The year 2002 was a significant milestone for Nikkei in Canada and marked the 125th year since the first Japanese immigrant, Manzo Nagano, came to Canada in 1877. In commemorating this historical moment, "Nikkei Festival 125" was held at Nikkei Place in Burnaby, a suburban city adjacent to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The term Nikkei is defined on the website of Nikkei Place as "Persons of Japanese descent, and descendants, who have immigrated or are living abroad, creating unique communities and life styles within the context of the societies in which they live." True to this definition, Japanese Canadians, Ijusha, and both long-term and short-term residents from Japan who reside in the Vancouver area gathered and celebrated this remarkable footprint of Nikkei in Canadian history together. Nikkei Festival 125 brought together many Nikkei people throughout the Vancouver area, but the success of this festival was also strongly supported by the participation of non-Nikkei both as visitors and as volunteers. At this festival, Vancouver’s Nikkei community presented its diverse nature.

This research shows the struggles and achievements of Nikkei in Vancouver, who strive to remain as a community with diverse elements. I argue that Nikkei in Vancouver comprise a synthesis of ethnic community and cultural community that requires constant redefining of membership and expansion of boundaries. First, I look at the history of Nikkei and its relation to Vancouver to find out what generates the uniqueness of Vancouver’s Nikkei community. Second, I examine the term Nikkei through theoretical paradigms to identify the nature of Vancouver’s Nikkei community. Third, I focus on actors in Vancouver’s Nikkei community, which allows me to re-examine what Nikkei means. To grasp a better understanding of the Nikkei community in Vancouver, I have based this

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1 Nikkei Week 125 was held from September 14 to 22, 2002.
3 Ijusha means an immigrant. The term Ijusha is used especially to indicate those who immigrated to Canada after WWII, and is distinguished from pre-war immigrants and their offspring.
4 Long-term resident implies students and workers from Japan who remain in Canada longer than one year. Short-term resident implies English as a Second Language (ESL) students and people with Working Holiday Visas.
research on my ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation and personal interviews.

Nikkei Place uses the definition of Nikkei that was developed by the International Nikkei Research Project.\(^5\) This broad and inclusive definition has been presented to people who fit into this category and reside in the Vancouver area. However, the term Nikkei does not have one single definition. It is employed locally, collectively and individually in order to match the needs of Nikkei communities in various parts of the world. For example, the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) uses Nikkei to specifically differentiate Japanese Canadians from Ijusha who were born in Japan as Japanese nationals (NAJC 2002: 1). The Japanese Canadian History website lists Nikkei as “ethnically Japanese” in the glossary, and it emphasizes that Nikkei is an ethnicity not a citizenship.\(^6\)

One of the broadest definitions of Nikkei was delivered at the Eleventh Panamerican Nikkei Conference held in New York in 2001. Lane R. Hirabayashi writes in his summary report of the International Nikkei Research Project Workshop, “our approach to the definition of Nikkei was emic, historical, and ethnographic rather than stipulative” (Panamerican Nikkei Association 2001: 14). The workshop reached the following definition of Nikkei: “[A]nyone who has one or more ancestors from Japan, and/or anyone who self-identifies as a Nikkei,” and Hirabayashi explains that the emphasis was placed on self-definition and inclusiveness (Panamerican Nikkei Association 2001:15). This shows that the concept of Nikkei can be stretched to encompass not only geographically spread Nikkei but also individually diversified Nikkei. Nikkei Place in Vancouver has introduced a rather inclusive definition of Nikkei; however, more needs to be done to respond to the rapidly expanding nature of Vancouver’s Nikkei.

In the Census of Canada 2001, 27,035\(^7\) people in the Greater Vancouver Regional

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\(^6\) Starting in September 2003, the history of Japanese Canadians has been embraced in the curriculum for students in the fifth grade and eleventh grade in British Columbia. This website is a part of the project along with resource guide and educational materials such as Traveling Education Kits. See http://www.japanesecanadianhistory.net.

\(^7\) There were 85,230 people who identified Japanese as their ethnic origin in Canada.
District\(^8\) identified Japanese as their ethnic origin (Statistics Canada 2001).\(^9\) There is no central residential community for Nikkei in the Vancouver area. The Japanese Canadian residential communities had existed before WWII near Powell Street in Vancouver and Steveston in Richmond,\(^10\) but both dissipated due to internment during WWII. Nonetheless, Nikkei in Vancouver have established various organizations over the years which serve as centres of the network: the Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadians Citizens’ Association (GVJCCA), Tonari Gumi, the Japanese Immigrants Association (JIA), and the Japanese Canadians National Museum (JCNM)\(^11\) to name a few. Nikkei Place was built entering the new millennium with the leadership of the National Nikkei Heritage Centre Society (NNHCS). The mission of Nikkei Place is to preserve and share the heritage of Japanese Canadians, while focusing on the future of Vancouver’s Nikkei community.\(^12\)

Since its opening in 2000, Nikkei Place is making strenuous efforts to become the centre for all Nikkei in the Vancouver Area.\(^13\) This intention is clearly shown in the introductory slogan of the Nikkei Place website: “The heritage is Japanese, the history is Canadian, the future is at Nikkei Place.” The National Nikkei Heritage Centre is one of the main buildings at Nikkei Place, and it is now a home for pre-existing Nikkei organizations such as the GVJCCA, the JIA, the JCNM, and the Gladstone Japanese Language School. It is meaningful that Nikkei Place is located in Burnaby where many Nikkei now reside,\(^14\) not in the Powell Street area or Steveston which are two historical locations for Nikkei in the Greater Vancouver Regional District consisting of 21 municipalities and one electoral area surrounding Vancouver City.

\(^8\) The Greater Vancouver Regional District consists of 21 municipalities and one electoral area surrounding Vancouver City.
\(^9\) “Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic or cultural group(s) to which the respondent’s ancestors belong. Ancestor is someone from whom a person is descended, and is usually more distant than a grandparent. Ethnic origin pertains to the ancestral ‘roots’ or background of the population, and should not be confused with citizenship or nationality” (Statistic Canada 2003). See http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/defdemo28.htm.
\(^10\) Among 3,615 who identified Japanese as their ethnic origin in the Census 2001 in Richmond, about 70% live in Steveston. It is the most populated residential area for Nikkei in the GVRD (Yamada 2000: 146).
\(^11\) As of May 2003, the JCNM merged with the National Nikkei Heritage Centre Society.
\(^12\) See http://www.shinnova.com/nnhcs/Old/more.htm.
\(^13\) Nikkei Place consists of three buildings: the National Nikkei Heritage Centre, the New Sakura-So Senior’s Residence, and the Nikkei Home.
\(^14\) In Burnaby, 3,450 identified Japanese as their ethnic origin. See http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/publications/file.asp?ID=563.
Vancouver area (Suguro 2000). The concept of Nikkei introduced at Nikkei Place is inclusive, and it is ideally situated within Vancouver where the Japanese Canadian community has the longest history in Canada and also where a large number of Ijusha and both long-term and short-term residents from Japan reside.

Although the term Nikkei may be inclusive, the diverse forces generated among Nikkei in Vancouver are so strong that framing all Nikkei as one “community” is inaccurate. The most significant factor is that the intermarriage rate of Japanese Canadians is over 90% (Kobayashi 1989). As a result of this high intermarriage rate, Japanese Canadians have become more and more diverse. Moreover, out of 85,230 people who answered Japanese as their ethnic origin in Canada, 32,050 had multiple responses (Statistics Canada 2001). The diversity among Nikkei is so great that it seems almost elusive to define who Nikkei are and who can be Nikkei.

Children (including adult offspring) of Nikkei and non-Nikkei are called Hapa. Hapa is a term derived from “Hapa-haole” in the Hawaiian language meaning “half foreigner.” Once a derogatory word, this term is now embraced to describe a person of mixed racial heritage with partial roots in either Asian or Pacific Islander ancestry. Nikkei in Vancouver use this term positively to refer to children born to a Nikkei and a non-Nikkei. In this research I used the term Hapa to describe those who were born with two distinctive cultural heritages, and I excluded children from a union of a Japanese Canadian person with an Ijusha who were born as a Japanese national. Whether Japanese Canadian and Japanese are different cultures or not is a question discussed in this research. However, people’s presupposition defining those who are ethnically “pure” Japanese and “half” Japanese is so strong that it needs to be distinguished (Spickard 1989: 94-120).

Interruption also generates a question about whether non-Nikkei can be Nikkei through their marriage. Non-Nikkei partners often actively participate in the Nikkei community. A mother of a fourth generation Japanese Canadian mentioned that she could

identify with Nikkei through her daughter despite herself not being of Japanese descent. H, one of the interviewees, said that his non-Nikkei mother was finally welcomed by her Nikkei in-laws by giving birth to his older brother. Examples such as this reflect that non-Nikkei persons experienced being Nikkei through their children. This shows how younger generations extended the boundary of Nikkei.

The active participation of non-Nikkei in the Vancouver’s Nikkei community as participants or as volunteers is also notable. From my volunteering experience at the Nikkei Week Festivals and the Powell Street Festival, I learned that the non-Nikkei volunteers’ strong support has helped Nikkei community activities to continue. I worked with D, a non-Nikkei volunteer at Nikkei Week 125, who had also been a volunteer for the Powell Street Festival. According to her, she has lived near Powell Street and has been a guest at the festival for many years. One year, she decided to change her participation from that of a guest to that of a volunteer. I also got to know U, another non-Nikkei volunteer, who coordinates a monthly gathering for musicians at Nikkei Place. U’s major interest is *taiko*, a form of Japanese drumming, but she is also interested in Nikkei identity. The durability of the Nikkei community owes a great deal to the input from non-Nikkei.

Not only the high rate of intermarriage but also the high rate of interaction with non-Nikkei extends the boundary of Nikkei. The participation of non-Nikkei in cultural activities such as the tea ceremony, *taiko*, or martial arts is common, and their contribution to the Nikkei community is immense. Vancouver Shinpo, a Japanese newspaper in Vancouver, had an article on Nikkei Week 2003 that read, “Nikkei is not a nationality, but it is a term that designates people who share the Japanese cultural background” (Sumpter 2003, [my trans.]). Nikkei itself is a diverse concept that tries to accommodate a variety of people who trace their roots back to Japan, and whether non-Nikkei are part of the

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16 Names of individuals are replaced by random alphabet letters in order to protect their privacy.
17 Here I refer to Nikkei Week 125 (which took place in 2002), and Nikkei Week 2003. Nikkei Week 2003 was held from September 13 to 20, 2003 at Nikkei Place, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.
18 The Powell Street Festival is held on the first weekend of August every year. It is the oldest community festival in the city of Vancouver. It is held at Oppenheimer Park, located near Powell Street where the Japanese Canadian Community flourished before the evacuation during WWII.
community or “guests” of the community is an ongoing debate. Given these shifting dynamics in the community, along with the fact that the community includes many individuals with no Japanese descent at all, through for example marriage, the Nikkei community in Vancouver is addressing the question of whether Nikkei should be considered as an ethnic community based on the idea of an ethnic group, or as a cultural community enriched with Japanese cultural tradition that encompasses a diverse and complex population.

The following sections present my methods, historical and literature review, theoretical argument, and analysis of findings from ethnographic fieldwork in Vancouver. During the ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and interviews were used as the main method of research in order to obtain first-hand information. Another method employed was a review of the history and literature on Japanese Canadians since a lot of the literature on Nikkei in Canada is narrative, and it provides crucial information that explains the nature of the community. Based on these previous materials, a theoretical paradigm was deployed. Ethnographic data collected through fieldwork and interviews is presented to support not only the outcome of my research, but also the community’s suggested prospective future for Nikkei. Among the diverse elements within Nikkei in Vancouver, Hapa were chosen to examine the concept of Nikkei. Hapa are already diverse as individuals, and they can expand predetermined boundaries of ethnic groups. Overall, my research focused on individuals in a multicultural society who “happened to” have Japanese heritage and on their relationship to a community. The Nikkei community in Vancouver is as complex as a community can be and faces challenges to the concept of its ethnic and cultural boundaries.

METHODS

As one of my research methods, I conducted participant observation fieldwork between August 2002 and September 2003. During these months, I volunteered at the
Nikkei Week Festivals and the Powell Street Festival. My research field was also extended to the Vancouver Buddhist Church\(^{19}\) where I attended regular Sunday services for a month as well as attending a weekend retreat trip and the Obon service in July.\(^{20}\) Participant observation often establishes precious rapport that cannot be produced in any other way. Applying this method was very useful in this research in order to look at the Nikkei community in Vancouver from a more intimate perspective.

Along with participant observation, I conducted ten semi-structured intensive interviews with young adult Nikkei who were born in Canada, and now reside in Vancouver. Eight interviewees were Hapa who have a Japanese Canadian parent and a non-Nikkei parent. Another interviewee has a Japanese Canadian father and an Ijusha mother. Another has a Hapa father from Japan and a non-Nikkei Canadian mother. These interviewees ranged between 18 and 30 years of age. Based on the fact that more than 90% of Japanese Canadians have intermarried, I had assumed that there would be a large number of Hapa in the field around the age range. However, I found great difficulty locating them. I consulted with the GVJCCA to identify interviewees. At a monthly meeting, I found that the directors of the GVJCCA were also trying to recruit young adult Nikkei including Hapa to participate in their activities. I finally found five Hapa who were active in the Nikkei community and another five who were distanced from any Nikkei community activities at the time of the interview.

The utility of fieldwork and participant observation as research methods has been much discussed in the discipline of anthropology. In these discussions the problematic positioning of researchers in the field has been examined. Hammesley and Atkinson suggest that the ethnographer should maintain a “marginal position” (1995: 112). It is the balance between being an insider and being an outsider that a researcher needs to maintain. This is similar to what Smith discusses as “indigenous research approach” (2001:137).

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\(^{19}\) While most of the Japanese businesses and organizations have been relocated, the Vancouver Buddhist Church and the Vancouver Japanese Language School still remain near Powell Street.

\(^{20}\) Obon is a Buddhist festival that takes place in the middle of July (Lunar calendar) or August (Solar calendar). The ancestor’s spirits are said to return to this world during this period.
Smith researched her own Maori community as a Maori researcher. Being an insider researcher, she emphasized the importance of building "research-based support systems and relationships" as well as defining "closure" with communities in which one researches (Smith 2001:137). If I follow the definition of Nikkei that Nikkei Place addresses, my circumstances in Vancouver’s Nikkei community would be somewhat similar to Smith’s as I could be Nikkei being a Japanese student living outside of Japan. The major difference between Smith and myself is that I did not start as a member of the Nikkei community in Vancouver as Smith did with her Maori community. Another difference is that I do not consider myself as Nikkei yet; however, I felt I could be a part of Nikkei at some occasions when approaches were made by the community to include me in this definition.  

I sometimes found it hard to keep the balance between being a researcher and a participant as I was enjoying being involved in the Nikkei community. In order to hold the balance of insider and outsider, I introduced myself as a researcher and explained the purpose of my participation in any Nikkei activities straightforwardly. It was really important for me to establish a responsible relationship with the people with whom I was interacting. Stating my purpose first seems to have helped to remove misunderstanding or any discomfort. I attended the NAJC’s Emerging Leaders Forum in Thunder Bay, Ontario in November, 2003 that focused on youth involvement in community activities. With the financial assistance of the NAJC, I was able to join other delegates from Vancouver. Being chosen as a sponsored participant in this forum assured me that I was a part of the community as a researcher whose responsibility was to develop an on-going relationship with the community. 

The historical and literature review on the background of Nikkei in Vancouver was very beneficial in conducting my fieldwork. It enabled me to obtain not only the historical and statistical information but also a critical perspective as a researcher in anthropology. There are numerous writings on the history of Japanese Canadians, most of them by

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21 For example, along with Ms. Reiko Tagami, a Hapa from the Nikkei community in Vancouver, I appear on the cover page and in the featured article of the January 2004 issue of the Bulletin/Geppo as a Nikkei leader of the future.
Japanese Canadian researchers and Japanese researchers. Again, the question of insider-outsider was apparent. The construction of "otherness" between researchers and study subjects is discussed when writing ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:253). Clear distinctions between researchers and study subjects have both advantages and disadvantages which lead to the question: Who can write and talk about whom? Works written by Japanese Canadians about their own history and community are not only historical, but also narrative voices from within. Masako Iino, a researcher from Japan on the history of Japanese Canadians, wrote in the postscript that she had questioned herself about whether she had the right to research Nikkei while she herself is not Nikkei (1997b: 196). In the end, she decided her work as a non-Nikkei researcher was important. She writes:

Such anxiety is commonly felt by non-Nikkei researchers. However, at the same time, through this experience, I was reassured that it is necessary to analyze the forces that moved individual Nikkei and the community, and also the forces that moved the Canadian government that influenced the destiny of Nikkei, as well as the efforts that we as researchers make to understand the position in which Nikkei are placed. It was around this time [Redress] that I decided to compile the history of Canadian Nikkei (1997b: 196-197, my translation).

Iino's work has been recognized by the Nikkei community, and she is one of the participating scholars of the International Nikkei Research Project carried out by the Japanese American National Museum. Thus, historical and literature reviews form an important part of my ethnographic research, and this allowed me to gather background information about the field as well as to define my position in the research field.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO VANCOUVER'S NIKKEI COMMUNITY:**

**VANCOUVER AS A FIELD**

Canada is often referred to as a mosaic in terms of ethnic and cultural representation. Since its foundation in 1867, Canada has accepted immigrants as labour
power from the four corners of the world. Preference for certain “ethnic groups” or “race” is clearly shown in the changes in immigration policy (Driedger 1996:52-74, 240-6; Henry, et al. 1995: 72-5) up until the point system was introduced in 1967. In 1971, multiculturalism was officially recognized, and since then Canada has celebrated its rich ethnic and cultural diversity as a key for nation building. The original purpose of introducing multiculturalism was to encourage cultural diversity for national development. In the 1980s multiculturalism started to transcend the domain of “culture” and to engage with anti-racial movements for the rectification of social inequality (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis 1992: 367, Tamura 1997: 256). It is notable that the advancement of multiculturalism in Canada is in accordance with the growth of the Nikkei community. It was when Canada was in need of more labour power that Japanese “first generation” pioneer immigrants (Issei) arrived on the west coast of Canada in the 1880s. It was when Canada introduced the point system and multiculturalism in the 1960s to the 1970s that the number of Ijusha increased. Moreover, when the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement to rectify the government’s injustice of internment Japanese Canadians during WWII peaked in the 1980s, multiculturalism shifted its direction toward human rights movements. Vancouver now takes pride in being one of the richest multicultural settings in Canada with a strong Asian influence to which the Nikkei community has greatly contributed.

Among other ethnic minorities, Japanese Canadians have played a significant role in the history of Canada in terms of ethnic and racial issues and in relation to human rights. The internment of so-called “enemy aliens” during WWII on December 7, 1941 included not only Japanese nationals, who were living within 100 miles of the Pacific coast, but also Canadians of Japanese ancestry. This was not just an internment of enemy aliens, but a gross violation of civil liberties and basic human rights of Canadian-born Japanese Canadians who were British subjects by birth (Izumi 1999). A total of 23,000 people of

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23 House of Commons Debates, October 8, 1971.
Japanese ancestry were uprooted, of these 13,300 were Canadian-born (Henry et al. 1995: 70) and 6,000 were naturalized Canadians (Patton 1973: 7). It was not until April 1, 1949 that internment was lifted and Japanese Canadians were finally allowed to go back to the Pacific coast. Vancouver, where the largest Japanese Canadian community in Canada had existed before WWII, is therefore a very important locus for Japanese Canadians in their history.

Emergence of the Nikkei Community: Japanese Canadian History in Canada

The history of Nikkei in Canada started with Issei’s great hardships. Issei successfully established their community contrary to their own expectations. The idea of many Japanese immigrants was “Ikin Kikyo” (衣錦帰郷) or “Kinki Kikyo” (錦旗帰郷) which translates as “to wear a splendorous brocade,” or “to bring back a splendorous flag,” and “return home loaded with honours” (Iino 1997b:15). Between 1885 and 1942, it is recorded that 29,791 Japanese immigrated to Canada. More labour power was needed to develop the western part of Canada, and many Japanese immigrants were looking for ways to become prosperous and take a fortune back to Japan (Ito 1978: 20). However, Japanese immigrants were paid lower wages than white Canadians. Their life was never comfortable, and the hope of returning to Japan was low. In the beginning of the 20th century, Japanese immigrants started to show a tendency to settle in Canada and to establish communities such as kenjin-kai (prefectural people’s club) or sonjin-kai (village people’s club) based on their native prefecture or village in Japan. This was the beginning of the Nikkei community in Canada (Kobayashi 1986: 20).

The Japanese in Canada started welcoming picture brides from Japan prior to WWI as their settlement proceeded. Many began establishing a family during WWI since “anti-Oriental” pressure was relatively low (Adachi 1976: 91). The Report of the Royal

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25 Most of Japanese immigrants worked as fishermen or sawmill workers. Hastings Mill in Vancouver was one of the biggest job providers for Japanese immigrants.
26 Wakayama, Shiga and Hiroshima prefectures were sending over 50 immigrants in 1909 (Kobayashi 1986: 32-3). Kanada Mio-Mura Kenjin-Kai (Canada Mio Village Association) was established in 1900 (Iino 1997a:291).
Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, 1902 concluded that Japanese immigrants were more dangerous than Chinese immigrants as they were more independent and strong spirited (Takamura 1997: 281). However, the Japanese were protected by the Anglo-Japanese treaty of 1902 (Sunahara 1980: 95) because Canada by that time was still a colony of England and the treaty was valid. Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 was another factor that made the Canadian government treat Japanese immigrants better than other Asian immigrants (Omatsu 1992: 54). In 1907, the United States and Japan promulgated the Gentlemen’s Agreement which controlled the number of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. via Hawaii (Ringer and Lawless 1989: 177). It caused a sudden influx of Japanese immigrants to Canada.\textsuperscript{27} A riot by an angry white population against such immigration occurred near Powell Street where approximately 8,000 people of Japanese descent resided. The riot led to the conclusion of the Gentlemen’s Agreement between Canada and Japan in 1908 which restricted the number of immigrants from Japan to 400 per year (Adachi 1976: 81), and Japanese immigrants became the subject of further discrimination.

\textbf{Belonging to Canada: From Japanese to Japanese Canadians}

When WWI broke out, Mankichi Omura took the lead among Japanese immigrants in believing it was a good opportunity for Japanese immigrants to show their loyalty to Canada. Two hundred Japanese volunteered to enlist in military activities. However, they were rejected because it was said that the “Japanese had peculiar customs, a strange language, and a different appearance, and they would never assimilate with other Canadians” (Ito 1978: 23). Racial minorities and Aboriginal people were not allowed to participate in military service for the first two years of WWI (Henry et al. 1995: 68). Finally in 1916, the 175th Overseas Battalion in Medicine Hat, Alberta was formed with Mankichi Omura and fifty-six Japanese volunteers (Ito 1978: 24). Their contribution then

\textsuperscript{27} According to the Division of Immigration, Department of Manpower and Immigration, Canada records there were 7,601 immigrants from Japan in the year of 1907. It is about three times that of 1906 (lino 1997b: 6).
was highly regarded, but was forgotten when Japan became a hostile country in WWII.

In 1921, the total population of people of Japanese origin in Canada was 15,868, of which 5,348 were female from Japan and 4,334 Canadian-born Japanese Canadians (Adachi 1976: 91). Roy quotes Evan A. W. Neil from a House of Commons Debate of June 26, 1931 stating “more trouble is caused by the stork than the immigrant ship...We have them and we must put up with them” (Roy 1980: 85). Hostility against Japanese or other “Orientals” was prominent. Assimilation into Canadian society was rushed, and it was the first goal of the school system. Children of Japanese origin attended regular school in the daytime and Japanese school in the evening. The Vancouver Japanese Language School (VJLS) was established in 1906 as the Vancouver Kyoritsu Nippon Kokumin Gakko, the English name of which was the Vancouver National Japanese School (Otsuka 1996: 3). Its original purpose states its goal as to educate Japanese Canadian children to become good Japanese citizens. Having Japanese schools was claimed to show disloyalty to Canada (Roy 1980: 85). Reflecting such pressure from the society, the school’s focus was changed in 1922, and it became the Vancouver Nippon Kyoritsu Go-Gakko (The Japanese School of Language) (Otsuka 1996:3).

Participation of Japanese immigrants in WWI as Canadian soldiers as well as the changes seen with the VJLS indicates that Issei were convinced that their hope to go back to Japan would no longer be possible, and the recognition that those second generation (Nisei) children were “Canadians” by birth and not Japanese. However hard they tried to integrate into the host society, international affairs, especially a war regime, influenced the living conditions of people of Japanese descent in Canada. After the Japanese intrusion into Manchuria in 1938, British Columbians focused their hostility on the Japanese, as they believed the Japanese were a fearful and militaristic people (Roy 1980: 87, Henry et al. 1995: 69).

Breakdown and Structural Change of the Nikkei Community

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the naval base of the United States at Pearl
Harbour in Hawaii, and declared its entrance into WWII. The Canadian government’s wartime emergency Power Acts was undertaken, and the internment of enemy aliens commenced. Citizens of the Axis were defined as enemy aliens, and taken as Prisoners of War (POWs). However, the case with people of Japanese descent was different. Not only Issei who had emigrated from Japan but also Nisei who were Canadian-born Japanese Canadians were seen as “enemy aliens.” The uprooting of persons of Japanese descent from the “protected area,” 100 miles of the Pacific coast, was officially carried out under Order in Council P.C. 1486 on February 24, 1942 (Miki and Kobayashi 1995: 51).

Although the Canadian government did not find any evidence of espionage or sabotage in the entire community (Patton 1973: 14), the internment of people of Japanese descent still took place. Sunahara claims that the government had planned the internment of enemy aliens almost three years before the attack on Pearl Harbour (Sunahara 1980: 100). The total population of people of Japanese origin in Canada in 1941 was 23,175, 95% of whom resided in British Columbia (Driedger 1996: 252). They were uprooted and relocated to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia, or to work on sugar beet farms in Alberta and Manitoba. Those who resisted were sent to the POW camps regardless of their nationality.

This uprooting broke up not only the community but also the family structure. The property of Japanese Canadians was confiscated and disposed of almost for nothing, and they were deprived of basic rights and freedoms. The British Columbian caucus insisted that evacuation of Canadian nationals was compulsory if they did not volunteer (Sunahara 1980: 108). This treatment was different from other “enemy aliens” such as Germans and Italians in Canada. The government made the argument that internment of people of Japanese origin resulted from “public feeling” stemming from people’s fear of those of Japanese descent because they had a different skin colour and peculiar customs. Sunahara argues that “public feeling” alone is not enough to explain the government’s action toward evacuees (Sunahara 1980: 94). Patton claimed Canada’s ideological stance and behaviour were inconsistent; that despite condemning the human rights violation of the Nazis, the
Canadian government was violating the human rights of Japanese Canadians within its own society (Patton 1973: 16).

The government ordered men between 18 and 45 years of age to work in highway construction camps (Sunahara 1980: 103). Among those who refused to move was a group of Nisei, the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group (Shimizu 1993). Various associations among Nisei were established during this period. In 1932, a group of Nisei established the JCCA in Vancouver. In 1936 the Japanese Canadian Citizen’s League was formed integrating the pre-existing JCCA, and they published *The New Canadian*, an English newspaper (Adachi 1976: 164, Ito 1978: 44). Nisei were restless and had no hesitation to ask for what they deserved as citizens, and did not like how Issei controlled their community (Ito 1978: 44). Issei who moved from Japan to Canada and Nisei who were born in Canada faced differences generated by growing up in different environments as well as generational differences.

Even before the war ended, Japanese Americans were able to return to their homes on the West Coast in 1945. However, Japanese Canadians were given only two choices: either move to the east of the Rockies or be deported to Japan. Japanese Canadians were not allowed to go back to the west coast where they used to live, and about 4,000 people left Canada. The government favoured having people of Japanese origin deported under the guise of “repatriation.” A sympathetic group of non-Japanese Canadians, called the Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians, was against the government’s decision.\(^{28}\) They worked with a group of Nisei in Toronto, the Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy\(^{29}\) to contest the deportation (Izumi 1999). It was not until more than four years after the end of WWII, on April 1, 1949, that Japanese Canadians were finally allowed to return to British Columbia. Japanese Canadians had lost everything under the War Measures Act, and several legal claims were made in vain (Izumi 1999).

\(^{28}\) This committee was active in the Toronto area with high participation of members of other Christian organizations.

\(^{29}\) The Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy is an embryonic form of the National Association of Japanese Canadians.
The destruction of the community during WWII brought a significant change to the Japanese Canadian community. The leadership was now in the hands of Nisei who were “more Canadianized” than “Japanese oriented” Issei (Otsuka 1995: 18). The breakdown of the community meant the breakdown of Issei’s authority, which allowed Nisei to act free from parental control. Some Nisei called the evacuation “a blessing” as they could get away from the authority of the traditional Japanese community (Adachi 1976: 361). Even before the evacuation, they were the target of the older generation’s complaints that they had “no respect for their elders, lacked good manners, didn’t work hard enough, and had no pioneer spirit” (Ito1978: 44). Namaiki was the term used by Issei to express Nisei’s nature.\footnote{Namaiki means impertinent in Japanese.}

Yanagisako’s study on Japanese Americans’ family structure shows how Nisei leaders rebuilt the community’s social organization (1985: 76). In Canada, Nisei asked for the right to vote in 1949, which Issei might not have dared to do (Ito 1978: 44). Issei’s tendency to accept their second-class status in Canada which derived from Confucian and Buddhist fatalism embedded in the phrase *Shikataga nai*, meaning “It cannot be helped,” was not accepted by Nisei (Omatsu 1992: 52). Nisei were accused of becoming Canadianized faster than their elders. Many Nisei converted to Christianity while Issei remained Buddhist, which also caused internal conflict (Adachi 1976: 114). However, Japanese Canadians were still not fully acceptable to the members of the host society because Japanese Canadians were not “Canadian enough” (Ito 1978: 45).

**Rebuilding of the Community: The Redress Movement**

By the 1950s, Japanese culture was attracting the attention of the Western world more (Otsuka 1995: 21), and by the 1970s, Japan successfully recovered from the disaster of WWII and started to get greater recognition in international society. Japanese Canadians in Canada were given the political right to preserve and claim their own cultural heritage (Iino 1997b: 158). In 1977, Japanese Canadians celebrated the centennial of their history in Canada. The first Powell Street Festival in Vancouver was celebrated with cultural events.
and many conferences. Young Nikkei held Japanese Canadian Youth Conferences in Toronto and Alberta discussing the possibility of creating a third generation (Sansei) organization (Izumi 1999). In Hamilton, Ontario, a conference on the War Measures Act was held, and it raised awareness that the War Measures Act must be reviewed and changed (Izumi 1999). Japanese Canadians began to reassess their culture and existence as a community, motivating younger generations to re-examine their ethnic identity.

In 1980, the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) was founded. The NAJC centralized various Japanese Canadian organizations, and became a political entity. The NAJC was active in introducing changes to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as Canada’s legal system had lacked the protection of human rights and civil liberties until the introduction of this legislation (Miki and Kobayashi 1995: 105). However, this legislation was still lacking the ability to protect all Canadians from another possible deprivation of rights such as Japanese Canadians had suffered during WWII (Iino 1997b: 159). Such protections were only granted with the legislation of the Emergencies Act in 1988. The NAJC was so concerned with the government’s potential abuse of power when faced with another emergency that it took action to prevent further injustice and suffering (Izumi 1999).

On September 22, 1988, the Government of Canada and the NAJC signed the Redress Agreement which recognized the injustice of the internment of people of Japanese ancestry and the violation of their human rights by the Canadian government during WWII.31 After a battle spanning more than a decade, the Canadian government followed the path taken by the U.S. government in granting individual compensation. The Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadians Citizens’ Association (GVJCCA) was the most active during the time of the Redress Movement. The Redress Movement emphasized the violation of human rights inherent in the internment of Canadian citizens who “happened

31 Monetary compensation of $21,000 was granted to each survivor of the injustice, and the official statement of regret from Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was issued. The Japanese Canadian community was granted $12 million to foster better race relations through educational, social and cultural activities.
to be of Japanese ancestry” (Miki and Kobayashi 1991: 80). The JCCA followed the course of the NAJC, and the JCCA Human Rights Committee sought justice in the matter of racial discrimination. The main actors of the JCCA and the NAJC during the Redress Movement were Sansei, and their purpose was to right the wrong of the country acting against its own citizens. What the Redress Movement strove for was not only financial compensation for the victims of the Act, but also future protection of all Canadians from any further menace of its nature.

Both Nisei and Sansei were very active in the Redress Movement, but each took very different steps. The NAJC’s council consisted of 90% males in their 60s which “mirrored” the Nikkei community’s traditionalism (Omatsu 1992: 24). Omatsu, a third generation Japanese Canadian, has written her own description to show generational differences between Nisei and Sansei. She writes, “[i]t was as though with each decade spent away from the chain of volcanic islands in the Pacific Ocean we were losing our ancestor’s iron-like Japanese core” (Omatsu 1992: 23). Nisei in earlier days were criticized as “too Canadian” by the elders; however, Sansei or Yonsei (fourth generation) were even “more Canadianized.” When it came to the post-WWII Redress Movement, Reitz claimed that being more afraid of maltreatment, the Issei and Nisei tended to keep silent whereas the Sansei and Yonsei were more active in the Redress Movement and community involvement (Reitz 1994: 200).

The Nikkei Community Today

Yoshida points out that there is no longer a closed ethnic community for Nikkei in Canada, and many are scattered around urban areas (1999: 295). Yamada claims that the existing organizations in Vancouver, where the largest number of Nikkei reside, have been inactive (Yamada 2002: 244). However, at the same time she argues that the ethnicity of Japanese Canadians has been reactivated by grasping the “Nikkei identity” positively (Yamada 2000: 315). The increase of an aging population of Japanese Canadians as well as the increase of Hapa has changed the Japanese Canadian community drastically.
The GVJCCA publishes a monthly journal called *The Bulletin/Geppo*. The GVJCCA plays an active part in the Nikkei community in Vancouver. The GVJCCA is an active advocate of human rights, and it has posted numbers of reports regarding such issues along with publishing in 1995 a guide called, *Bilingual Human Rights Guide for Japanese Canadians.* The GVJCCA is looking into involvement of younger generations in their activities. *The Bulletin/Geppo* used to have a series called *Hapa Corner* which was replaced by *Kid’s Corner*, but issues regarding Hapa or mixed-race identity often appear as feature articles instead. In the interview with a musician and film director Nobu Adilman, who is a Toronto-born Hapa of Russian-Romanian-Japanese-Canadian descent, the editor John Endo Greenaway starts with the probing statement, “[i]t seems that being bi-racial is becoming hip these days” (*The Bulletin/Geppo* July 2003: 4). Greenaway is a Hapa himself as well as a parent of Japanese-Jewish-English-Irish children (*The Bulletin/Geppo*, June 2002: 2). It is well represented in *The Bulletin/Geppo* that the Nikkei community is greatly interested in issues related to Hapa, intermarriage, and identity. *The Bulletin/Geppo* also has a column written by Greenaway called *Turning Japanese* which started from the issue of June 2003. It deals with identity related issues, and it begins with an excerpt from a song called *Turning Japanese* by The Vapors: “Turning Japanese, I think I’m turning Japanese, I really think so” (Fenton 1981). In the issue of August 2003 Greenaway writes about cultural identity. He suggests that younger generations should make cultural identity a hobby (*The Bulletin/Geppo*, August 2003: 2). It is clear that the Nikkei community is facing the need to clarify what holds the community together as a community.

The Greater Vancouver Japanese Immigrant Association (JIA) was established in 1977 in order to support newly immigrated Japanese in Canada. Compared to other Asian immigrants, the number of Japanese immigrants to Canada is small. However, if one looks at this issue instead from the perspective of where Japanese relocate to, Canada ranks sixth in the world for the number of resident Japanese citizens including long-term...

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32 See *The Bulletin/Geppo* (February, April, June, 2003).
33 The number of immigrants in 1973 (1,105) was the largest of any year since the end of WWII to date.
sojourners. Canada has become one of the most popular destinations for Japanese sojourners—those who come to reside in a country for a few or several years without necessarily having an intention to stay permanently or become citizens—along with Australia and New Zealand. The JIA was active at the beginning when they were compiling Benri-cho, a guidebook for new immigrants from Japan, and during the Redress Movement in support of the Japanese Canadian community. Although the activity of the JIA has quieted down now, the Greater Vancouver International Marriage Association affiliated with the JIA hosts workshops periodically for the increasing number of intermarriage couples. The JIA also publishes the Kaiho Newsletter in The Bulletin/Geppo, but it only appears in the Japanese section.

Although the GVJCCA and the JIA have been acting closely, some discord between Japanese Canadians and Ijusha exists due to the language barrier as well as due to cultural differences. The NAJC held the Meeting Point Conference: Strengthening the Bond in the Japanese Canadian Community in November 2002. The focus of this conference was to foster mutual understanding between the Nikkei (the NAJC designates Japanese Canadians by this term) and recent Ijusha. In a workshop entitled “Intermarriage Identity” (NAJC 2002:35), participants discussed the issue of “Who is Nikkei?” The Ijusha community, consisting of those born in Japan as Japanese nationals who have come to Canada, is also maturing, and their children are the “new-Nisei” or Japanese Canadians born in Canada with Canadian citizenship. Thus, the former distinction between Ijusha and Japanese Canadians has become increasingly blurred. Both Japanese Canadians and Ijusha are seeking for a symbiotic integration in order to prevent the decay of the community. The establishment of Nikkei Place in 2000 was undertaken to bring the community in the Vancouver area together. Therefore, the intention of using an inclusive definition of Nikkei, that encompasses both Japanese Canadians and Ijusha, is crucial for Nikkei in Vancouver.

35 The Meeting Point Conference was held from November 30 to December 1, 2002 at the Toronto Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, Don Mills, Ontario by The National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC).
The impact of a recent Japanese influx to Vancouver is another critical factor for the Nikkei community. Although their stay in Vancouver is not permanent, the continuous flow of people with working holiday visas and English as a Second Language (ESL) students certainly make up a part of the multicultural setting of Vancouver. Numbers of Japanese magazines and newspapers are available in Vancouver such as Vancouver Shinpo, Oops, Fraser, and Vancouver Tonight Magazine. At the Powell Street Festival 2003, many ESL students volunteered for the Powell Street Festival Society. The 1100 block of Robson Street in downtown Vancouver marks the entrance to the Japanese quarter. Starting with Minna no Konbini-ya, a convenience store and Karaoke Box, there are many Japanese restaurants that are popular among Japanese from Japan, or as they are referred to in an article in the Bulletin/Geppo, “Japanese Japanese” (The Bulletin/Geppo July 2003: 2) to differentiate them from Japanese Canadians. Among these is a Japanese tapas restaurant named Hapa Izakaya, owned by two Hapa (or Nikkei), one of which spent a long sojourn working in Japan before starting the restaurant. Creating an atmosphere where both “Japanese Japanese” and Canadian customers can relax, the food there is contemporary Japanese. Hapa Izakaya is unique to Vancouver, well representing the Nikkei legacy as well as the nature of multicultural Vancouver.

The Nikkei community today owes a great deal to Japanese Canadian history as well as to Vancouver’s multicultural setting. At the same time, the influence of Japanese Canadians on Canadian history is immense in terms of human rights and multiculturalism. Japanese Canadians were once referred to as a “model minority” because of their success despite their status as a “visible minority” (Iino 1997b: 165). The scar left from the memory of the internment during WWII kept the Nikkei community passive, and integration into white society was once seen as a key to success. However, throughout many of the workshops and special seminars organized by the community, in articles in the community journal, and in the discussions around the construction and naming of Nikkei

37 Census Canada uses the definition of visible minority that the Employment Equity Act defines as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”
Place itself, members of the community frequently express and reaffirm the idea that passing on the memory to the younger generation is important. Through all of these activities, Nikkei in Vancouver are seeking a way to sustain and to rejuvenate the community through remembering the past and building the future.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: 
NIKKEI AS AN “ETHNIC COMMUNITY” OR A “CULTURAL COMMUNITY”

At the Powell Street Festival in 2002 one person said to me, “Is this a Japanese festival? I don’t see many Japanese people.” The Powell Street Festival is a community festival held every summer at Oppenheimer Park on Powell Street in Vancouver where the largest Japanese Canadian community existed before WWII. It is a festival celebrating Japanese Canadian cultural heritage organized by the Nikkei community in Vancouver under the leadership of the Powell Street Festival Society. At the festival, cultural presentations, music, martial arts demonstrations, along with food and craft booths provide entertainment for many guests from young to old. Comparing the Powell Street Festival to the summer matsuri held by the Nikkei community in San Juan, Bolivia, Creighton points out that the Powell Street Festival represents more of a “Nikkei” festival than a “Japanese” festival (2003: 21). The person I mentioned earlier decided the festival did not look “Japanese” as there were not enough people who looked “Japanese,” regardless of various cultural representations taking place in which the Nikkei community proudly expressed their “Japanese” roots.

In order to discuss whether Nikkei is an ethnic community based on the idea of an ethnic group or a cultural community that encompasses a diverse and complex population who identify themselves as Nikkei, we must consider two levels of boundaries: the boundary between the Nikkei community and the rest of Canada, and the boundaries within the Nikkei community. I propose that in Canada, “visibility” is often placed before ethnicity

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38 Matsuri means festival in Japanese.
when defining one’s belonging to a group. This indicates that external definitions assigned by outsiders, do affect internal definitions of identity. Those who “look Japanese” and are assigned this identity by outsiders might more likely identify with this, or might feel a stronger need to address this aspect of identity, than those with some Japanese descent who are not perceived as “looking Japanese” by outsiders. It might also be the case that appearing to be “Asian” or “non-white” to others, rather than specifically “looking Japanese,” affects someone’s understanding of identity. I will discuss the boundaries of the Nikkei community and will reveal their expansive nature.

**External Boundary of the Nikkei Community**

First, the boundary between the Nikkei community and the concept of a white Canadian mainstream, is predominantly defined by “visibility.” Many of my interviewees noted the experience of being referred to as Chinese. Racial distinctiveness historically has been an instrumental condition to create “they-ness” in a group “who lack common culture, an internal structure, and a sense of folk, but who share certain distributive characteristics” (Ringer and Lawless 1989:21). Van den Berghe (1978) points out that physical phenotypes or visual differences have come back as prominent criteria to define group membership or kin relatedness. He writes:

> In most cases, and until recently, cultural criteria have been predominantly used. Physical criteria became salient only after large, strikingly different-looking populations found themselves in sudden and sustained contact (van den Berghe 1978: 410).

Canada is a country that consists of diverse groups. Physical phenotype is frequently used to define “we” and “they” in the larger context of “majority” and “minority.” The usage of the term “visible minority” indicates the persistence of attempts to categorize groups by physical characteristics through which “difference” is thought to be “visible.”

Physical attributes are used as criteria believed to define “race,” and this idea of “race” that predates ethnicity is often incorporated into the idea of “ethnicity” (Henry, et al.
Among numerous definitions of "ethnicity," Barth's theory of ethnic boundary became influential in the discipline of anthropology after his publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* in 1969. Barth argues that the boundaries of ethnic groups are defined when the difference between an ethnic group and the others is observed rather than on the basis of a shared culture held by a group. Barth argues that the dynamics of "self-ascription" and "external ascription" have more to do with defining the boundaries of an ethnic group, than actual cultural traits shared by members of the group. Barth writes:

> To the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups in this organizational sense. It is important to recognize that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant (1969: 13-14).

Ethnicity is a subjective sense of belonging to a group, and one evaluates whether another person belongs to the same group or not. In the Canadian context, however, ethnicity and "race" overlap with each other under the umbrella of multiculturalism. The boundary of majority and minority is strongly based on "visibility" in Canada, referring to the distinction between those who are white and those who are thought of as "visibly non-white." Multiculturalism slowly changed direction towards anti-racism in the 1980s (Henry, et al. 1995:43) in order to battle the inequality based on "visibility."

Reflecting such circumstances, the strong association with Asians has been established as especially important in Vancouver. Sawagi Taiko, a taiko group that is comprised of all Asian females, is an example that shows "visibility" was the key to forming the group. This is because a criteria for being part of the group was being Asian or of Asian descent, not necessarily Japanese or Japanese descent. They represent taiko as a

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cultural practice of Nikkei, by referencing it as an aspect of Asian heritage rather than strictly of Japanese heritage. Another example is *Ricepaper*, a quarterly magazine published in Vancouver, which focuses on issues regarding Asian identity.40 Among other Asian Canadians, many young Nikkei are involved in this magazine. Yamada writes that such connection with other Asian groups is peculiar to Sansei and younger generations (Yamada 2000: 244-6, 290). Such pan-Asian heritage connectedness has gained popularity, and in 2001 Canada officially started to recognize May as Asian Heritage Month. Rather than just being a “visible minority,” “visibility” is now used as a tool of empowerment.

**Internal Boundaries of the Nikkei Community**

The second boundary occurs at the internal Nikkei community level among different categories of Nikkei, such as Japanese Canadians and Ijusha. According to external definitions of ethnicity, both Japanese Canadians and Ijusha are categorized in the same group as being of Japanese origin. Benedict Anderson (1991) questions concepts used to bind people as a “nation” and calls such a created boundary an “imagined community.” Japanese Canadians and Ijusha, who are said to share the same ethnic origin, have faced another sort of boundary resulting from cultural differences between members of these two sub-categories both contained within the larger boundary of Nikkei. Driedger points out the existence of a conflict between recent immigrants and those who have been in Canada for a longer period of time within a group (1996: 44). After all, Japanese Canadians and Ijusha do not share the same history. For example, the internment of Japanese Canadians is a pivotal historical focus of identity for Japanese Canadians, but not for Ijusha, who as Japanese do not share in this history. The “role of the past” is one of the important factors which shape “we-ness” (Ringer and Lawless 1989: 5). Since the contemporary Nikkei community consists of members with such divergent histories and cultural traits, in order for them to achieve their expressed goal of maintaining this community, “self-ascription” as discussed by Barth becomes a more important element than shared cultural criteria. When

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40 *Ricepaper* is published by the Asian Canadian Writers’ Workshop.
membership of the group is defined from within the group, such divergences are taken into consideration and dealt with. A problem arises when membership in the group is defined or assigned by outsiders, because often such internal divergences in cultural aspects are not taken into consideration or recognized.

Such “they-ness” forced upon them by the larger society is one of the triggers that spur ethnicity of Nikkei using “overt signals or signs” and “basic value orientations” (Barth 1969: 14). The external creation of “they-ness” adds to the internal creation of “we-ness” of the group (Ringer and Lawless 1989: 20). Tracing their roots to Japan, Nikkei in Canada use cultural activities, language, or ethnic considerations to form the boundary of being Nikkei. Breton (1964) argues that “institutional completeness” in one’s ethnic community is strengthened by having control over religious, educational, and welfare institutions that are crucial to the solidarity of the ethnic community. Yamada writes that the pre-war Nikkei community in Steveston had a high level of “institutional completeness” (Yamada 2000: 128). The current Nikkei community in Vancouver also has a certain level of “institutional completeness” by the presence of several different institutions, such as the Vancouver Japanese Language School (VJLS), the Vancouver Buddhist Church, and the Nikkei Home to name a few.

However, it has been observed that participants at any one of the Nikkei institutions do not necessarily participate in any other. Anzenavs researched people’s sense of belonging to the VJLS and the Japanese Canadian community (2001: 35). She found that participants at the VJLS did not necessarily participate in other community organizations. It is the interactions of members at various activities, and the networking that occurs between different institutions that often add to a sense of community. It is clear that actors in the Nikkei community do not always picture the entire community when participating in a particular institution or event.

The external boundary of the Nikkei community is rather elusive as “visibility” is one of the keys defining a group in Canada. Internal divisions within a group will appear due to the differences seen among members of the “imagined” group. The Nikkei
community in Vancouver has raised such self-awareness and has started re-examining its boundary by means of, for example, introducing the concept of Nikkei, focusing on Hapa, and discussing the role of members. The establishment of Nikkei Place was suggested in the 1980s and one of the proposed goals was contributing to a harmonious co-existence of Japanese Canadians and Ijusha under the bigger umbrella of Nikkei. By utilizing the concept of Nikkei, the community in Vancouver has gained a way of survival as a community by redefining the boundary to include those who are Canadians of Japanese descent (Japanese Canadian), recent arrivals from Japan who are not necessarily Canadian citizens (Ijusha) and those who are present as extended but temporary residents (sojourners). Shifting the definition of the boundary from Japanese Canadian only, to the more inclusive Nikkei, was a vital aspect of sustaining the continuity of the community. This reflects concepts developed by Barth. Barth writes:

The persistence of the unit then depends on the persistence of these cultural differentiae, while continuity can also be specified through the changes of the unit brought about by changes in the boundary-defining cultural differentiae (1969: 38).

The recent flow in the Nikkei community involves increasing intermarriage and growing numbers of Hapa and non-Nikkei participants as part of the community. Non-Nikkei participants are willing to join various activities within the Nikkei community although they are not ethnically Nikkei. A member of the group Portland Taiko, Zack Semke writes in The Bulletin/Nikkei:

So what does that mean for a white guy who’s touched by the taiko? If I get involved in taiko in North America, is that cultural appropriation? Could be. Is there a place for white people in an Asian American/Canadian art form? A good question. Can I lend my life energy to taiko in such a way that I become an ally to the Asian American/Canadian practitioners of the art form? I hope so! ... They [these questions] are a reminder of how lucky I am to be part of an Asian American/Canadian art form. And they are a reminder that I am a guest in North American taiko (Semke 2002: 7).
By adopting the term Nikkei, the Nikkei community has a greater ability to expand its external boundary and encompass diverse and complex populations. Allowing the expansion of the boundary brings the Nikkei community closer as Nikkei; nonetheless there are various internal boundaries. Events, workshops, and special seminars held by the Nikkei community, along with many Nikkei publications, suggest that it is important for members of the Nikkei community to be aware of and accept the diversity among them, but that it is also important that they still remain a community. The decision to switch to usage of the term Nikkei, and to name the new heritage centre, Nikkei Place, was consistent with the belief that members of this “Nikkei community” can identify themselves as Japanese Canadians, Ijusha, or Hapa, while still being defined as part of the Nikkei community as long as Nikkei embraces a larger concept not limited by a purely racialized description of an ethnic group.

ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA AND BALANCING IN-BETWEEN:
NIKKEI IDENTITY AS AN UMBRELLA CONCEPT FOR HAPA YOUNG ADULTS

Issues around ethnicity or ethnic identity have become one of the major concerns for the Nikkei community in Vancouver due to its elusive boundary as well as the diversity within it. Hapa, who will be the main actors of the Nikkei community in the near future exemplify those who are expanding the external boundary as well as increasing the diversity within the community. I am going to introduce eight Hapa interviewees who were born in Canada from a union of a Japanese Canadian parent and a non-Nikkei parent.41 Looking at Hapa from such backgrounds allows me to examine both the external and the internal boundaries. First, I introduce them individually in order to personalize the narratives derived from their interview voices presented in the thesis. Second, I analyze

41 This section is based on my fieldwork and interviews. In order to best utilize these primary sources, I intentionally used the narrative voice as it was uttered during interviews. Typical to oral speech communication, there were parts that were grammatically imprecise; however it is a part of qualitative method that reflects the nature of the interview. All of the interviewees are native English speakers.
them according to three themes: food, family, and foreignness. These themes were strongly related throughout interviews when it came to their own self-ascriptions as Japanese Canadian and as Canadian.

The term Hapa has gained in popular usage, and has begun to be widely used by Hapa themselves. For example, the internet has expanded knowledge of the term and created a place for Hapa from all over the world to establish their network through websites such as “The Hapa Project” and “Hapa Issues Forum.” Journals directed at the Nikkei community in Vancouver such as *The Bulletin* and *Nikkei Voice*, have adopted the term, and devote articles to the concept of Hapa. Volume 8.3 of *Ricepaper* magazine featured Hapa. In the issue, Cindy H. Woo writes:

A ‘mixed-race’ identity isn’t necessarily tied to bloodlines, and hybridity is more than skin deep—and it is certainly beyond the eye of the beholder. [...] Hybridity thus refers not just to mixed genotypes, but also to plural citizenships, mixed cultural practices, multiple narratives and multilingualism. These days, hybridity is a wide-ranging phenomenon and not just some freakish aberration (Woo 2003: 15).

Neither being “hybrid” nor “half” is anything new, and these have been foci in social science (Krebs 1999, Yon 2000). Hapa fits into the category such as Marginal Man (Park 1950), Middleman (van den Berghe 1981), or the Stranger (Simmel 1950). These concepts dealt with people who could not or did not categorize themselves with a particular group. Simmel’s “the stranger” is used especially for those who move between an ethnic community and the larger economic arena, but it depicts well the balance that “the stranger” holds being both “close” and “remote” to each arena (Driedger 1996: 49). Although the term Hapa has now gained wide use among Hapa, none of my interviewees actually referred to themselves as being Hapa while I was interviewing them. However, they all expressed being somewhere in-between. This suggests that Hapa is not a fixed identity.

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Eight Hapa and Their Relationship to Their Heritage

“It’s a blessing and it’s a curse at the same time.” T answered my question about carrying two cultural heritages. T is a 23 year-old Kelowna born college student, who is a fourth generation Japanese Canadian from his father’s side and third and fourth generation Irish Canadian from his mother’s side. I met T at a Sunday service at the Vancouver Buddhist Church where he sometimes joins the congregation. He agreed to be interviewed.

Among my interviewees, T was the only one who had lived in Japan for a long period. He lived in Yokohama for six years with his family when his father worked as a founder and principal of a multicultural international school. He also spent one year in Japan by himself, studying Japanese in high school. Interestingly, T was the only interviewee who mentioned the importance of carrying a non-Nikkei side of his heritage. He remembers his mother being concerned about her five children not being aware of their Irish heritage when they were in Japan. T recalls this time and says, “She tried hard to balance us, to keep us balanced with both sides.” T points out that it was his mother’s “parental urgency” that made him realize the importance of his Canadian or Irish heritage. He compares his experience in Japan to meetings with the parents and children at the Vancouver Buddhist Church. T says:

I think something happens when anybody from any culture immigrates over here [Canada], a lot of times there is... people who are immigrating like if it is a parent or something like that, there seems to be a sense of urgency to make sure that there is a running knowledge of where those people came from. If they have children, there seems to be the same emergency as kind of instilled into them, you know, ‘this is where you came from, this is your cultural heritage.’ It seems like that needs to be... come across.

He described his mother as a contemporary Canadian woman who emphasized “Canadian-ness and Irish heritage at the same time.” Being outside of Canada, where being Canadian is not the norm; T learned the meaning of being Canadian. T remembers some situations he encountered in high school, when he was placed in the situation where he had to be on “neither way at the same time, [but] both sides,” between white children and
non-white children. He thinks that it was because of trying to have multiple heritages, whereas some other mixed-racial people only pursue one:

It’s difficult for me because I really do have to challenge both sides, and not only both sides but I am also Canadian too, so it’s not two camps but almost three different camps. It is kind of strange.

T finds it difficult to balance between his three heritages: his Irish Canadian, Japanese Canadian and Canadian aspects. Balancing in-between not only two ethnic heritages while also identifying as a Canadian is very challenging. Nina Boyd Krebs calls this “Edgewalking” (Krebs 1999). She sees such struggles of self-identification based on ethnic or cultural multiplicity as a product of multiculturalism, a reaction to the pressure for conformity (Krebs 1999: 26). The need to reach beyond cultural boundaries supports her theory of “edgewalkers” (Krebs 1999: 38). T’s comment “It’s a blessing and it’s a curse at the same time,” truly expresses the hardship and the reward of having multiple cultural heritages. His multiple positioning makes him different from “ethnic-Canadian” or “just Canadian.” For T, it is important not to cling to a single cultural heritage or to give up any of them, but to keep the balance of what he has. Balancing to be Japanese-Irish-Canadian, T questions himself regarding what would become of his children if he were to marry a multicultural person like himself.

B, the youngest among eight interviewees, identifies herself as Japanese Canadian rather than an “edgewalker.” B is an 18 year old from Port Moody, a suburb of Vancouver. I met her at the Vancouver Buddhist Church where her family attends Sunday service regularly. The interview with B was carried out over lunch after a service in June, 2003. B is a fourth generation Japanese Canadian from her mother’s side, and “just Canadian and white” from her father’s side as she herself describes. She used many Japanese words during the interview, noticeably terms related to family activities. B proudly affirms that she finished Japanese 12 in high school, and she also took Japanese private lessons with her younger sisters since she was in grade two.

At the Vancouver Buddhist Church, seasonal celebrations, rituals and formality
have been kept in accordance with the Buddhist temple Nishi Honganji located in Kyoto.

B’s exposure to the Buddhist Church from a young age nurtured in her a strong sense of
being a Japanese Canadian. B talked about how her family gets together for the New Year
at her “baachan’s” for the feast of “Gochiso” after attending the New Year’s service at
the Church. Her “baachan” went back to Japan during WWII, and came back to Canada at
her marriage. B says that her grandmother keeps her family ties back in Shiga prefecture. B
visited them when she was in grade ten, and stayed with her “baachan’s” cousin’s family. B
visited Japan with the church group in order to attend the Nishi-Honganji Youth Conference
in Tokyo. It seems that her sense of being Japanese Canadian revolves around the
Vancouver Buddhist Church, but it is her “family” that keeps her involved in the Church
activities. Both B’s parents are active participants at the Vancouver Buddhist Church as
well as her younger sisters. That is the reason for her strong adherence to the Japanese
Canadian side of her heritage as opposed to the “just Canadian and white” side of her
heritage.

K is 19 years old, born and raised in Vancouver. She went to French Immersion
schooling from kindergarten through high school. K is a fourth generation Japanese
Canadian from her mother’s side, and “Canadian” from her father’s side with a German and
Scottish background. K’s ancestors are from Mio-Village in Wakayama, from where a large
number of Issei emigrated before WWII. K’s interaction with the Nikkei community is
very fragmented compared to B’s constant participation at the Vancouver Buddhist Church.
K’s only exposure to the Nikkei community was when she went to Japan with the
Wakayama Kenjin Kai (Wakayama Prefectural Immigrants Group) when she was in high
school and through participation in the Bon-Odori once a year at the Vancouver Buddhist
Church with her grandmother. K says that her family does not do a lot of activities related

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43 Baachan is an affectionate form of Obaasan which means grandmother in Japanese.
44 Gochiso means feast in Japanese.
45 Canada proclaims official bilingualism of English and French. In English speaking provinces,
some public schools offer French Immersion schooling that gives children instructions in French.
46 K’s great-grandparents immigrated to Canada as Issei. Her grandparents went back to Japan
during the war, and came back to Canada after the war.
to their Japanese heritage except for those involving food. Her grandparents live nearby, and family gatherings take place with a “big feast of sushi and everything.” She says that she is so happy to live in Vancouver, where many Japanese restaurants exist.

K’s grandfather says that she should learn Japanese. K wishes she had studied the Japanese language, but she quit when she was five years old. K wishes to go to Japan and spend a year as her mother did by teaching English. Although the language was not passed down, K thinks that Japanese points of view were implanted in her through activities such as reading. K remembers reading Japanese folktales such as *Momotaro* in English. She thinks that these activities have given her a wider perspective:

> It’s not so..., you know, close minded. Like I have the Western view and I have the Japanese view, so I kind of mix it, you know, take the best from both worlds.

Although she does not actively participate in any Nikkei activities, she has felt her Japanese heritage internally as a passed-on heritage from her family. K does not think heritage from her father’s side has affected her much because “it is basically white.” Throughout her interview, she frequently used colour related terms to express culture and ethnicity. K also used the term “half” in order to describe being bi-racial. K pointed out an interesting overview regarding how other people define her being bi-racial. She says:

> [A] lot of Asian people will think I look more white, and a lot of white people think I look more Asian. So like when I went to Japan, I stuck out because I don’t really look... totally Asian, but I don’t really... like to white people I don’t look very white. So it’s kind of strange.

She mentioned how people define her based on her appearance as a person of Asian descent. She especially felt she stood out in Japan more so than in Vancouver. She thinks Vancouver is unique in a sense that it is very multicultural with a strong Asian presence. K enjoys being “different,” but she likes living in Vancouver since she does not

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47 *Momotaro* is a Japanese folk story in which the hero defeats ogres.
necessarily feel being "different." K's link with the Japanese heritage is her own pride in being herself.

J is 22 years old, and is K's older brother. J lives in his grandparents' basement. J studies graphic design and marketing in college, with a prospect of going into the comic industry. His connection to Japanese heritage is through his own interest in Manga through which he learned a lot about Japanese culture. J says that he is not religious like his grandparents, and that the only Japanese thing he is attached to is food. He said that he was surprised to hear from his mother that he could be an interviewee for a research project. He did not think he had a lot to offer since he was very much "Western." J thinks himself to be primarily Canadian, with little sense of Japanese heritage. He says:

I think, like for me, I am fourth generation Japanese, right? So I mean my parents grew up here, my grandparents lived here a lot. They had to go back to Japan because of the war I think. So I think they grew up in Japan, but they were born here too, do you know what I mean? So we've been Canadian I guess for a while. So I think I am pretty detached from the Japanese side of values, you know?

J said he never gave much thought to his life whether he was either white or non-white. Since he felt his relationship to Japanese culture is established, he does not put much effort in identifying with that part of his culture. Hearing stories from Ojiichan and Obaachan about Japan gave him familiarity with Japanese culture, and J did not find it hard to fit into a Japanese setting when he visited there with the Wakayama Kenjin Kai (Wakayama Prefectural Immigrants Group). Although he is more used to hearing Japanese "traditional" ways of thinking, he finds it hard to accept such a way of living. He positions himself basically as a "white Westerner" with a strong familiarity with Japanese culture. Due to his physical appearance, Japanese people do not necessarily assume that he knows their language. He claims this adds to his feeling of not being "pure" Japanese.

I think maybe the reason that I like it [Manga] so much is I am sort of

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48 Manga refers to Japanese comics.
49 Ojiichan is an affectionate term for Ojiisan which means grandfather in Japanese.
used to it, you know what I mean? Like it’s not...some people don’t like
the Manga or the Anime, because they cannot relate to it as easily, you
know what I mean? As it has very Japanese values and systems behind it.
So to some people, it’s not interesting or it’s not accessible, but I do
understand it. So I think I am more familiar to it. Like Japan, too. I have
been to Japan a couple of times, and I love Japan. I think it’s really cool,
and I love it, you know what I mean? But a lot of people, it’s a big
culture shock, you know what I mean? Because it’s very different from
the United States or from anywhere else, you know what I mean? It’s not
familiar at all. But with me, you know, I am used to it, you know what I
mean? The food I am used to, and the way they live I understand. I don’t
know if I agree with it, but I understand [it]. So, I think that might be a
bit too. It’s definitely there, but it’s never been a conflict, and it’s never
been a major factor of my life, you know what I mean? [...] But I also
think that’s like the distance thing that I was talking about, you know
what I mean? Like the further you are removed from it, I guess the less
they expect of you. And yeah, I don’t feel any pressure at all because I
was raised Canadian, you know what I mean? If I speak Japanese it’s a
bonus, not required, you know, so. But I can understand like especially if
they have family back there, you know what I mean? You wanna be able
to talk to them, I guess.

J thinks growing up in Vancouver has had a great influence on him in terms of
being able to appreciate a variety of cultures and people. J is a proud Canadian who
happened to have a Japanese heritage as his asset, and it is so “natural” for him to have it
flowing in his daily life that he does not need to problematize its existence. Whether this is
the outcome of Anglo-conformity or the ideal level of multiculturalism, needs to be defined
by J himself. When J writes his comics and Manga, he appreciates the influence he has had
from his Japanese heritage. In the future he wants to work for the comics industry in North
America, not in the Manga industry in Japan. J and K’s reaction to their Japanese heritage
relates strongly to their relationship to their family; in particular, their attachment to their
grandparents is strong. They are not active members in the Nikkei community in
Vancouver; however, they represent the Nikkei community at the individual level.

M is a 30 year old, third and fourth generation Japanese Canadian from his
mother’s side and third generation Danish Canadian from his father’s side. M grew up and
still lives in Steveston where there is a long Japanese Canadian history. He is a Nikkei by
descent, and he has also been influenced by his step-mother who is an Ijusha from Japan. He mentioned that he did not know many of the Japanese aspects until he met his step-mother. M thinks the major source of the Nikkei heritage in his family was food, but he says it was “Japanese Canadian” food not “Japanese” food. He understands that it was a Japanese Canadian “passed-on heritage” that he grew up in. He says:

In Steveston, the Japanese Canadian population, especially the older population is sort of funny because they really keep their old traditional values, and you can see it. Nothing, it doesn’t change, the values and all their beliefs stay the same as, I guess, when they learned it, so they try and pass it along. But they won’t... it doesn’t evolve. Whereas of course the same value when they left Japan originally, it continued to evolve right? Because people weren’t, you know, sort of naturally growing. Whereas here is a memory, so you want to keep the memory. So there is a part of the population that still holds old beliefs, but of course the younger generations, everyone is getting more and more diverse.

While M’s Japanese heritage was passed on, his Danish heritage was not. M thinks it is because of the visibility of his Japanese side. However, despite being “half,” as he phrases it, nobody recognizes that he has a Japanese background. He prefers to say that he is Canadian not Japanese Canadian. He travelled in Japan with his brother as “Canadians in Japan.” For M, it was a foreign experience, but it was the best way to see and experience where his Japanese Canadian heritage had started. M enjoys being diverse, and believes he never experienced any disadvantage from being “half.” He thinks it is important to pass on heritage to younger generations, but this should not be used to prevent changes. M thinks it is important to give children language education of their heritage since it is a tool of communication. He quit Japanese language lessons at a very young age, but he took a night school course to study Japanese in 1997 for practical, not cultural purposes. He is married to a Chinese Canadian person, and hopes that his children will be open to diversity and people from different backgrounds. He thinks his Japanese Canadian heritage is an advantage that was given to him from his parents rather than being something to protect:

It’s very tricky, and for some people in different cultures very
controversial. I find that it is a fine line because, you know, I think it is correct and appropriate to promote multiculturalism as people sharing ideas and learning things, and I think it is great that each group has the values. But I think it shouldn’t be forgotten too that each group has to be tolerant of other cultural values, and also tolerant and acceptable that those values will change over time. Because it is just gonna be a natural current, as cultures and children of inter-mix, will change, and it evolves. It’s not … A bad thing [is] to try and prevent that. I think it is very natural, and you should let it continue.

N is 27 years old, was born in 100 Mile House, B.C., and has lived in the Vancouver area since 1989. She is a fourth generation Japanese Canadian from her mother’s side, and “probably” fourth generation Canadian with an English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish background. N occasionally participates in Nikkei activities. She has been volunteering at the Powell Street Festival; at the same time, she helps her mother, who is active in the GVJCCA activity. N’s aging grandmother is starting to use more and more Japanese recently, and N regrets that she did not study Japanese when she was younger. N’s mother never pushed her and her brother to learn about the Japanese language or culture when they were growing up. N does not think she would have minded if her mother pushed her a bit more. She decided to take a beginner’s Japanese course at a night school in 2002. N’s link to Nikkei is strongly tied to her family. She remembers going to the Buddhist Church regularly after her grandfather’s death, and the Buddhist Church became an important aspect of identity to N’s family.

N lived one year in Prince Edward Island with her father when she was in elementary school. She remembers missing being close to the extended family of her Japanese Canadian side in Vancouver. At the same time P.E.I. by then was really a “white oriented,” small community where there was no tolerance toward newcomers or to differences. This experience certainly made N interested in discussions on racism, multiculturalism and being among “the others.” She actively participated in some discussion groups in elementary school and in her high school. N thinks that being half white and half Japanese descent does not make her half-Japanese. She says:
It can make you like kind of anything in society, sort of, because the way people view you. They don’t know what to... they cannot figure out what you are, so. That’s... I always thought that was kind of annoying and also kind of interesting too.

N enjoys being an insider and outsider at various settings; at the same time, she finds it frustrating when people ask her nationality. She says:

*Yeah, they say, ‘Where is your mom from?’ ‘Canada!’ ‘Oh where is your dad from?’ ‘Canada!’ ‘Oh where are your grandparents from?’ ‘Canada!’ ‘Where are your great-grandparents...?’ So I can keep going if I want to... But I don’t know. I think it is kind of a rude question, though. I think it is kind of rude when people ask that.*

N travelled to Japan several times, but she always felt it to be a foreign country. One of the reasons could be that Japanese people can never tell N is part Japanese whereas Caucasian people can tell that she is half-Asian. With the rise of popularity of Japanese pop culture in North America, being from Japan has become somewhat trendy. Although she does not exploit the fact that she has a Japanese heritage, she definitely enjoys such an atmosphere in Vancouver.

G is 29 years old, and was born and raised in Vancouver. G is a fourth generation Japanese Canadian from her mother’s side, and her father is a Jewish Canadian. G grew up in an artists’ family; her mother is a performer and her father is a writer. G manages artists while she herself is a musician. Through her work, she has been involved in the management of the Powell Street Festival for which she has been a coordinator for several years. In addition to that, she connects to the Nikkei community as a performing artist. Art for G is something she grew up with in her own family setting. She has formed several music bands previously, and has performed on several stages. By getting involved in the Powell Street Festival, G’s enthusiasm blossomed in various art forms. She says that regardless of how small the Japanese Canadian community in Vancouver is, it is broadening

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50 G’s mother is a third generation Japanese American, who immigrated to Canada from the United States, and gained Canadian citizenship.
51 G’s father gave up his American citizenship when he immigrated to Canada.
with the participation of other Nikkei and also broadening interaction with people who are interested in the Japanese Canadian culture and arts. As an active participant in Nikkei activities, G also finds it important to have the younger generation involved in community activities. At the Powell Street Festival in 2003, she programmed the Hip Hop Dance performance for youth entitled *Hip no Odori*. She thinks it was a successful start to bringing in youth involvement.

G emphasizes the meaning of the Powell Street Festival as the centre of Japanese Canadian community. The Powell Street Festival is where Japanese Canadian history lies, and their sense of community comes alive during the festival. Although the festival happens only once a year, the programmers for the festival meet constantly throughout the year. G discusses the enormous effort that she puts into the festival, and says “There is a little more theoretical than it is physical.” Because of their active participation, they built a network of similar minded people which adds to the sense of community. She confessed that she had been asked what Japanese Canadian means, to which she had had no response. However, she says, “I mean when I come to the Festival it makes sense to me.”

Being involved in activities with various artists, G has realized that there are many artists who do not want to be associated with or be labelled as being an Asian Canadian artist. She thinks that they are creative, but do not want to be too political in involving their ethnic heritage. G values being a part of a group of Asian artists, and also being a woman. She describes herself as being an anti-racist and anti-sexist artist. She thinks “visibility” is part of the reason for her involvement in the Japanese Canadian community:

Most of the people I know that are of “mixed” heritage, they are more involved in the side of them that is, that’s what visibly they are... I think it’s partly it’s just the comfort level and perceptions, you know. It’s not that it bothers me necessarily, but it’s just something I am aware of, and it’s weird to be aware of that. And also, I think it’s just being in the arts community, it’s [a] very distinct, scene related event, and just we are all completely mixed faces. And then I mean the music community, it’s just very white.

G is actively exploring her Nikkei heritage, and she is right now reading letters
that her grandmother sent to her friends during the internment. She has explored little about her Jewish side. G’s father, who is a window to the Jewish side of her heritage, is an active participant of the Nikkei community whom I happened to meet while volunteering at the Powell Street Festival. The fact that both of her parents are active in the Nikkei community made her more inclined toward the Nikkei heritage as opposed to her Jewish heritage. However, G underscores that people need to realize that “[i]t is something for yourself not for your family” to be more active in the community. In her late teens she felt a sense of alienation from the Nikkei community. However, after this period she became more involved in the community again. She sees her involvement in the Powell Street Festival as a personal achievement.

H is 28 years old, and was born in North Vancouver. H is a third and fourth generation Japanese Canadian from his father’s side and second generation Scottish Canadian from his mother’s side. He now lives in Burnaby with his wife and a daughter. His wife is Japanese, but she spent most of her life outside of Japan as Nikkei until her family settled themselves in Vancouver. They met through volunteering at the Powell Street Festival. H became more involved in the Nikkei community after he established his own family. He became a GVJCCA board director as one of the youngest members in 2002.

H points out that one of the major reasons for the lack of community sense among Nikkei in Vancouver is the lack of willingness among some Nikkei to be more active participants in the community. He remembers going to the GVJCCA picnic once a year as a child, where he says “a thousand Japanese Canadians” gathered, which does not happen any longer. (This is the expression H used in order to express his childhood memory of the JCCA picnic, and emphasized his recollection that there were a large number of people present. The actual number of participants is not known.) The decrease in the number of participants in community activities is due not only to a lack of sense of community, but also to aging of active community members. Even with the establishment of Nikkei Place which serves as a centre for Nikkei gatherings, the Nikkei community does not regularly come together physically. H acutely feels the need to rejuvenate the community, to arouse
people’s interest to participate, and he is actively seeking a way to start a youth group.

I mean, right now is the time we need to get the youth involved again... We wanna start looking and getting the young 20s and late teens more involved, and get them. Because what the idea of getting the youth involved is getting them organized themselves, and do all that on their own with our help, but for them to have the skills to do that on their own.

H was not necessarily exposed to many Japanese Canadian activities while growing up in North Vancouver. He never went to Japanese language school, nor did any of the cultural activities pertaining to his Nikkei heritage. He says that his parents wanted to raise him and his brother as “Canadian.”

I had asked my mom one time, you know, after we [H and his wife] started going out. I asked them, ‘Why didn’t you put me into a Japanese school?’... But my mom said that they never wanted to push that on me or my brother. They wanted to raise us “Canadian” not as Japanese and not as Scottish. They wanted to raise us as Canadians, so they didn’t feel it was necessary for us to do, be forced to do something language or cultural things.

He had little to do with his Nikkei heritage in his adolescence, which makes him think that he was almost always a part of a majority group rather than a minority group in his school. He thinks it was great that his parents never forced him to do anything to celebrate his cultural heritage as a child, and he thinks it is important that such interests come naturally to children. Recently, he has started taking Japanese lessons from his mother-in-law.

H’s involvement in the Nikkei community made him realize how unbalanced some people are when it comes to cultural or value issues. He pointed out that mutual understanding and balance is necessary among those who only identify themselves as Japanese or Japanese Canadians.

And I mean, for me that’s now being a part of the community, is finding that balance of... ‘Okay, well, come with us, and we will show you.’ But that’s another part is that Japanese Canadians would rather wash their hands sometimes, and say, ‘Well, they [Ijusha] don’t wanna deal with us, you know, so let them do their own thing.’ So now that side of that they
don’t care about the new people coming in. And there is the other hand of that they wanna stay [persisting in their own values], and... you know, they’re used to doing, they grew up like that. So there are two groups. I mean it’s, for me, the more I have been in the community, the more I have seen that. And that’s right now, we are trying to get a balance.

People grow up Canadian, and they don’t look at their history, community. So I mean... that’s... we see a gap there, partly language and partly growing up Canadian, being taught Canadian ways, living as Canadian not as a Japanese Canadian.

H defines himself as Canadian, growing up speaking only English. He thinks that Japanese Canadians’ history is Canadian history, and Japanese Canadians and Ijusha are two distinct cultures. For example, he says that he always ate rice, which is considered as an important part of the Japanese diet, but he understands that the rice was eaten in an adapted Canadian style. Although there is a similarity between the Japanese Canadian diet and the Japanese diet, they are different in many ways. He joined the GVJCCA board of directors with the hope of contributing to the community; however H struggles with the lack of willingness of the members. H says:

Being involved with it [the community] now, I don’t know what to do. I wanna do something. That’s why I joined because I’m passionate now about the community, my background, and my history. And... but I don’t..., like I want to go out there and I want to make a difference, and I want people to be involved, but I don’t know how to do it because there is too much division, no clear identity of people any more, it’s hard for what I have seen and my history to try to get people to see that. Most people they don’t want to, and they want to live their own lives, and they wanna live Canadian, they don’t wanna deal with Japanese Canadian. That’s just what they are. They don’t need the community group to tell them that they are Japanese Canadians. They know their history from their family sometimes, and but not everyone does, that’s the thing, I didn’t until growing up. And it is very difficult to one, know, you know what group, how to unite the groups, and two, what to do. It’s a question that has been, I think with the community for a long time, people just don’t want to, not that they don’t want to. They just don’t know how to deal with it.
H is an individual who has multi-dimensional relations to the Nikkei community in Canada. He is third and fourth generation Japanese Canadian, Hapa, a husband of an Ijusha, and a father of a Nikkei child, and he is not the only such example. It is possible that such individuals could be a bridge to all generations and subdivisions within the community.

Food, Family, and Foreignness

Each of the eight interviewees is distinct, and it is not possible to identify them in a word. Even using a term like Hapa does not seem sufficient after witnessing their diversity and complexity. However, it is possible to find commonalities among them. Reviewing my interview and fieldwork data, I chose three themes, food, family, and foreignness to discuss their identity. After I had made this choice, it was suggested that I read Hiromi Goto’s novel about a Japanese Canadian family, called Chorus of Mushrooms (1994), because these three elements are reflected in it. The story of the Canadian Nikkei family that appears in this fictitious work shows the importance of these three elements to the issue of their identity. Chorus of Mushrooms is a novel that explores three generations of a Nikkei family on the prairies: grandmother Naoe who could never give up being Japanese; mother Keiko who decided to become Canadian with no sense of being Japanese; and granddaughter Murasaki who explored her own identity through observing her grandmother and her mother. Naoe and Keiko are examples of extreme cases, where they become introverted through their self-ascriptions. This book is fiction, but it reflects Goto’s real experience as a daughter of Ijusha.

B, M, K, and J all said that food was the only thing they have kept in their family as Nikkei heritage. Food habits have been strong cultural patterns that last over generations in terms of ethnicity (Henry, et al.1995: 40). Also food is one of the most important factors of family and community. Goto writes:

There are people who say that eating is only a superficial means of understanding a different culture. That eating at exotic restaurants and oohing and aahing over the food is not even worth the bill paid. You haven’t learned anything at all. I say that’s a lie. What can be more basic
than food itself? Food to begin to grow. Without it, you’d starve to death, even academics. But don’t stop there, my friend, don’t stop there, because food is the point of departure. A place where growth begins.” (Goto 1994: 201).

Food and the sharing of food, have been topics of scholarly discussion. Creighton’s discussion of commensality shows that food nurtures a sense of belonging, and it helps to create a sense of community (1998: 194). Murasaki in Goto’s novel (1994) discovers that her last name Tonkatsu is the name of a Japanese food, and later realized tonkatsu was not a “real” Japanese word but a Japanese constructed half foreign word (Goto 1994: 209). Projecting herself over the word Tonkatsu, Murasaki finds her own hybrid self. Tonkatsu, as both a food and a word that results from joining elements of two different traditions, becomes a metaphor for the idea of being Nikkei. Food plays an important role in the Nikkei community, but it is also changeable over time, and transformations occur.

The eight interviewees varied in terms of how actively they participated in the Nikkei community. B, N, H, and G are rather active participants through different organizations or subdivisions of the Nikkei community while M, T, K, and J have been out of touch with the Nikkei community. However, their intimate relations with their families were a common thread that I found among them. B, N, K, and J talked about their relationship with their grandparents. J… strongly insisted on being Canadian, and described his relation to Japanese culture as one of familiarity. Things that take place at one’s household become one’s norm, and that norm subconsciously builds up within oneself. For some of the interviewees, this familiarity denies that Japan is a foreign country and gives them “emotional attachment” (Anzenav's 2001: 34). K feels Japan is a “bond” to her, and it is “not foreign but different.” G has never been to Japan, but she thinks she would feel

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52 Tonkatsu is deep fried battered pork. “Ton” means pork in Japanese, and “Katsu” is derived from “cutlet” which became a Japanese word.
53 Conversely, sometimes I discovered the preservation of elements of Japanese culture in the Nikkei community, that had undergone transformation in Japan. For example, manju is a Japanese sweet made with pastry and sweet red bean paste. Handmade manju is rarely seen in Japan nowadays, but it is still made in the Nikkei community. It is one of the popular items that are sold at the Powell Street Festival or served at various events.
some connection when she goes there. T, who has actually lived in Japan for six years, struggles with how to define Japan:

I will be honest with you, it’s home but at the same time it’s not. Before, not even now, to be honest, it’s not even home to me unless it’s a certain place like Yokohama that I think of often. To me, those places are like home, just you know, but Japan as a whole like culture, and everything like that, no. It is, but at the same time it isn’t. You know, I love it more than anyone else, but sometime at the same time, I don’t more than anyone else at the same time too. Sometimes, you know, there are things about Japanese culture that are very abrasive, sometimes that happens to me. And at those moments, I don’t feel very, I don’t feel close affinity to Japan at those moments.

M and N expressed their feeling that when they were traveling in Japan, they were “Canadians in Japan” and felt foreign to Japan. Familiarity and foreign-ness takes place when one steps out of one’s family and “home” and feels the difference.

Hapa interviewees ascribed their interchangeable identity between Japanese Canadian and Canadian depending on who asks them that question. H said that he would answer Canadian since his Japanese background is just a cultural background. Their self identity is more complicated than one would presume. K describes:

Usually I just say I am Canadian because I think especially here, being Canadian doesn’t mean you are white, blond hair blue eyes. It means, you know, you could be anything pretty much because there’re so many different people in Canada. So I usually, I just say I am Canadian, and then if they ask more, then I will say, “Oh, I am half Japanese half white.”

K’s comment also points out how Vancouver’s multicultural setting affects ethnicity or ethnic identity. T, who moved to Vancouver to start post-secondary schooling, looked at younger generations of Nikkei objectively and marked their strong identity as Canadian, whereas children from other cultures were more introverted regarding their ethnic identity. T cannot equate himself to either of these categories as he takes the path in-between. Although many take the cultural and ethnic diversity of Vancouver positively in relation to
their ethnicity or ethnic identity, the possibility of overt racism and ethnocentrism in Vancouver was also recognized and addressed.

Family, food, and foreignness seem to interplay and affect how the eight Hapa saw themselves and their relationship to the Nikkei community. None of the eight interviewees identified themselves as Nikkei. Some did not know what Nikkei meant, and some had learned it only recently. Given that, after much discussion about the term and the identity issues involved, the leaders of the community and those active in it, have chosen to adopt the term Nikkei, and have incorporated it into the titles of prominent Nikkei places and organizations, it seems likely that the concept of Nikkei will further root into the soil of Vancouver. However, that those I interviewed did not use this term specifically to identify themselves, suggests that it may take more time before all members of the community are familiar with or use this term regularly. Identifying themselves as Japanese Canadian or Canadian, eight interviewees answered Canada to be their home. Although Nikkei may not be an expressed form of identity for them yet, their relation to Canada and Japanese culture makes them a part of the Nikkei community in Vancouver. As the definition of Nikkei on the Nikkei Place website states that Nikkei is “creating unique communities and life styles within the context of the societies in which they live,” the concept of Nikkei can be detached from ethnicity or ethnic identity and become a term to express one’s affiliation to the community.

CONCLUSIONS

The term Nikkei has been sown in Vancouver by members of the community, partly because of its ability to embrace greater inclusivity. That there has been a shift from the concept of “Japanese Canadian” to “Nikkei” from within the community is shown in the fact that more recent organizations have “Nikkei” in the title rather than “Japanese Canadian” such as the National Nikkei Heritage Centre, and the decision to name the site established with the funds to enhance community from the Canadian redress settlement
Nikkei Place. Since this trend seems to be in place, it is likely to continue; however, it may take more time before the term is in regular usage by all members of the community. Vancouver’s Nikkei community has become a distinct community with diverse members. The Vancouver Nikkei community, with the pride of being the originating historical locus of Japanese Canadians now spread throughout the country, is seeking a way for co-existence of the “new” and the “old.” This has become an increasingly relevant issue because of the high rate of intermarriage, and the rising number of Hapa, or mixed heritage individuals in the community deriving from a highly multicultural setting. Being in-between an ethnic community and a cultural community, the Nikkei community in Vancouver is trying to find a balance in a culturally diverse society while balancing its diverse elements. The concept of Nikkei helps to provide a greater bond among various Nikkei members, because it provides the Nikkei community with both a sense of definition, while expanding the sense of belongingness to the various elements within the community’s boundaries.

The second Nikkei Week Festival (Nikkei Week 2003) was held in September 2003. Nikkei Place was established under a mission that welcomes not only Japanese Canadians but all members of the public. Reflecting this mandate, the Me & We taiko concert was held during the festival at the National Nikkei Heritage Centre. Along with the performance of Katari Taiko, various drumming groups in the Vancouver area from Lil’wat Nation, Indo Canadian, and African Canadian groups performed and entertained the guests. This reflects a vital attempt by the Nikkei community to open its door to the outer community. Nikkei Place as a community centre can be a positive force to pull various actors together, and revitalize and strengthen community networking. The existence of Nikkei Place along with historical sites such as Powell Street and Steveston gives Vancouver’s Nikkei a renewed setting to help re-establish a basis for the Nikkei community, from which to help pass on the history to younger generations and to allow the community itself to be rejuvenated. That it is doing this is shown by the fact that it has become a hub of

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54 Katari Taiko is the first taiko group in Canada, which was incepted in 1979.
community activity. For example, the annual community New Year dinner is held there and is well attended, and also it is now the hosting venue of Nikkei Week each year, along with many other community events and workshops.

Through interviews with eight Hapa and two other Nikkei, I found that some of these may consider themselves only as Canadians with some Japanese background who happened to have it because of their ancestors, while others may consider themselves strongly as Japanese Canadians and try to maintain the heritage as much as they can. Hapa, as a term defining someone with mixed heritage, does not define a person’s ethnicity or identity, as much as a status of “in-between-ness.” However, the “in-between” positions of these very individuals are potentially the key to fostering a harmonious multicultural society. They foster the society’s “multiculturalization” because they can be bridges between ethnic or cultural communities and the overriding multicultural society of Canada. A large number of younger Nikkei are Hapa. Active attempts to recognize and include Hapa as community members show that the focus of the Nikkei community in Vancouver is toward the future and toward reinvigorating the participation of younger generations.

The Nikkei community in Vancouver is an example of Canada’s multiculturalism. From the hardship of the Issei (first generations) who were not planning to stay in Canada to the Redress Movement in the 1980s as Canadians, Nikkei in Vancouver have seen ups and downs as a community. With a rich historical background, Vancouver’s Nikkei community is diligent in prompting the involvement of younger generations who can create the future of the community. Such efforts are reflected in having workshops targeted at youth in community conferences and events, in sponsoring youth to attend special symposia directed at young people as potential Nikkei leaders of the future, and by devoting special columns of Nikkei publications to youth issues or articles written by youth.

The Nikkei community in Vancouver is not a fixed but an open entity. Granting the community a more expansive nature brings the community closer together rather than causing diffusion. Recent and currently on-going attempts to define community identity in terms of Nikkei reflect the desire to look toward the future, by adopting a term capable of
embracing a wide range of people, and allowing for a greater inclusiveness of the community’s diverse individuals.
APPENDIX 1

List of Abbreviations

GVJCCA (The Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens’ Association)
JANM (The Japanese American National Museum)
JCNM (The Japanese National Museum & Archives Society)
JIA (The Japanese Immigrants’ Association)
NAJC (The National Association of Japanese Canadians)
NNHCS (The National Nikkei Heritage Centre Society)
VJLS (The Vancouver Japanese Language School)
PANA (Panamerican Nikkei Association)
Appendix 2

List of Interviewees

<Eight Hapa Interviewees>

M 30 years old, male, self-employed; lives in Steveston, British Columbia; introduced to me through his father; interviewed on April 22, 2003 at a restaurant in Vancouver

H 28 years old, male, manager at a home-furnishing store; a member of the board of directors of the GVJCCA; interviewed on June 3, 2003 at his house near Nikkei Place

N 27 years old, female, film industry; introduced to me through her mother who is a member of the board of directors of the GVJCCA; interviewed on June 5, 2003 in her apartment in Vancouver

B 18 years old, female, student; an active participant at the Vancouver Buddhist Church; interviewed on June 15, 2003 at the Vancouver Buddhist Church

T 23 years old, male, student; only interviewee who has previously lived in Japan; met at the Vancouver Buddhist Church; interviewed on June 24, 2003 at a café in Vancouver

K 19 years old, female, student; younger sister of J; introduced to me through her mother; interviewed on July 21, 2003, at a café near her house in Vancouver

J 22 years old, male, student; older brother of K; introduced to me through her mother; interviewed on July 25, 2003, at a café near his house in Vancouver
G 29 years old, female, artist/art management; an active participant in the Powell Street Festival; met at the Powell Street Festival 2003; interviewed on August 27, 2003 at a café in Vancouver

<Two other Nikkei Young Adult Interviewees>

C 22 years old, male, student; his father is a Hapa who grew up in Japan and migrated to Canada; an active participant in the Powell Street Festival; met at the Powell Street Festival 2003; interviewed on September 22, 2003

Y 29 years old, female, hotel sales manager; her mother is an Ijusha from Japan and her father a Japanese Canadian; has been away from the Nikkei community; sees her Japanese side through her work ethics; interviewed on May 13, 2003
Abu-Laban, Yasmeen, and Daiva Kristina Stasiulis

Adachi, Ken

Anderson, Benedict

Anzenavs, Lori Kathleen Ann

Barth, Fredrik

Breton, Raymond

Breton, Raymond, Isajiw, Wsevolod W., and Kalbach, Warren E., and Jeffrey G. Reitz

Creighton, Millie


Driedger, Leo
Driedger, Leo, and Shivalingappa S. Halli, eds.

Fenton, Dave (The Vapors)

Goto, Hiromi

Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson

Henry, Frances, Tator, Carol, Mattis, Winston, and Tim Rees

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Morita, Katsuyoshi

National Association of Japanese Canadians

NIRA Citizenship Kenkyu Kai

Omatsu, Maryka

Otsuka, Chihiro

Panamerican Nikkei Association

55
Park, Robert Ezra

Patton, Janice

Reitz, Jeffrey G.

Ringer, Benjamin B., and Elinor R. Lawless

Roy, Patricia E.

Semke, Zack

Shimizu, Yon

Simmel, Georg

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai

Spickard, Paul R.

Statistics Canada
Suguro, Ed  

Sumpter, Takako  
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