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# Nisei: The Quiet American?<sup>1</sup>

## A Re-evaluation

By James Hirabayashi

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### INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire, in his book entitled *Education for Critical Consciousness*, states that in a free society dialogue is maintained between the people but in an unfree society there are only decrees, and these render the people silent.<sup>2</sup> Freire, working among the poor, illiterate peasants in Latin America, describes them as having a "culture of silence" distinguished by a lack of critical perception of the prescriptive nature of the general society in which they live.

Upon reading his analysis of this condition, I began to consider the generalization, i.e., the "quiet Americans," often applied to Japanese Americans; and I wondered if there were any similarities to be found. In this essay, I wish to explore this issue and examine the nature of the adaptive process among Japanese Americans in our society. I am particularly addressing my remarks to the Nisei, my own generation, in the hopes that together we may critically consider our character and its evolution.<sup>3</sup>

The "quiet American" controversy arose from the initial publication of Bill Hosokawa's book, *Nisei*, in 1969, and became a focus of contrasting Japanese American views regarding styles of relating to the general American society.<sup>4</sup> Hosokawa believed the generalization ("quiet American") to be an apt description of the Nisei, so that it ultimately became the subtitle of the book. There were others,

however, who took exception to the phrase, for they held that its usage would have the effect of perpetuating a characterization which was untenable, particularly from the Third World perspective.<sup>5</sup>

While I cannot deny the existence of evidence supporting the validity of such a generalization, my sympathies were with the latter persuasion. Upon reflection, however, it seemed to me that the controversy remained focused on symptomatic factors rather than on the more basic issues underlying the adjustment of Japanese Americans to our society in general. Discussions at the superficial level tend not only to leave the question unresolved but further, and more importantly, they never clarify the issue. Thus, they impede a thorough understanding of the adaptive process. The following essay by no means constitutes a total or complete analysis of the Nisei adjustment process, but I do hope to make explicit some variables which seem to be influential in the culture change process and to point to some implications concerning Nisei society, culture, and character.

### THE ISSUE

What does "quiet" mean? Let us begin with Hosokawa's discussion of the Nisei character:

... they [Nisei] discovered they were painfully shy, which may have been a result of their youth, the influence of their culture, the effect of the times in which they lived, or perhaps a combination of these and other factors. They were inclined not to speak up — in class, in social gatherings, even in their meetings when they were discussing their own shortcomings. The bulk of the Nisei were the despair of their own discussion leaders; they simply sat on their hands. As a group the Nisei were not outgoing. They were inclined to be clannish. Some said they were too earnest and serious; they didn't know how to relax and have fun; they were born old. Others said they were overly self-centered; that they lacked aggressiveness; that their interests were too narrow; that they suffered from an inferiority complex.<sup>6</sup>

Monica Sone in an autobiographical account speaks specifically of a feeling of reserve in recounting her experiences within the context of the school setting:

High School was a startling experience. For eight years at Nihon Gakko (Japanese language school), Bailey Gatzert and Central Grammar, I had done only what I was told by my teachers. I opened my mouth only in reply to a question. I became a polished piece of inarticulateness. At high school, the teachers expected us to have opinions of our own and to express them. In classes like civics, history, current events and literature, the entire class hour was devoted to discussions and criticisms. Although I had opinions, I was so overcome with self-consciousness I could not bring myself to speak.

JAMES HIRABAYASHI



Some people would have explained this as an acute case of adolescence, but I knew it was also because I was Japanese. Almost all the students of Japanese blood sat like rocks during discussion period. Something compellingly Japanese made us feel it was better to seem stupid in a quiet way rather than to make boners out loud. I began to think of the Japanese as the Silent People, and I envied my fellow students who clamored to be heard. What they said was not always profound or even relevant, but they didn't seem worried about it. Only after a long, agonizing struggle was I able to deliver the simplest statement in class without flaming like a red tomato.<sup>7</sup>

In a more academic vein, Harry Kitano, in an article co-authored with Stanley Sue, briefly surveys social science literature on studies supporting certain generalizations concerning Japanese Americans, as follows:

Research on . . . Japanese students reveals some consensus between stereotypes and personality traits. On the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, Fenz and Arkoff (1962) found that Chinese and Japanese males were significantly lower than Caucasians in dominance, autonomy, aggression, exhibitionism, and hetero-sexuality . . . Japanese females showed more deference than their Caucasian counterparts. Other studies tend to support current stereotypes in the following characteristics: introversion of Japanese males (Merdeith and Meredith, 1966); passivity of Japanese (Kitano, 1969b); . . . Japanese quietness (Ayabe, 1971).<sup>8</sup>

The traits most often associated with "quiet" suggest a person who is unassuming, agreeable, and not too aggressive — in other words, one who behaves inconspicuously, does not "rock the boat," conforms to the "normal" patterns of behaving, and does well in any endeavor, while assuming a low profile. For most Nisei, these are thought to be positive characteristics, i.e., characteristics associated with being a "nice person" and, as such, are in conformity with behavioral standards representative of a certain set of values.

A close examination of these traits indicates that "quietness" essentially refers to a style of adaptation and especially to how one relates to the social environment. Many assessments of Nisei focus on the content of adaptation, and the Nisei are considered assimilated because many have achieved a semblance of material success and affluence. What is fundamental to the following analysis is to separate conceptually the *style* of adaptation from the *content* of adaptation. It is not the focus of this essay to examine the content of adaptation, which appears to be heavily influenced by American middle-class conceptions, but to concentrate on the style of behavior.

I shall now turn to an examination of the historical antecedents of the "quiet American" concept and an examination of these patterns

within the context of the American society. An assumption underlying this analysis is that the adaptive process of the Japanese Americans is not simply a continual change toward the ideal norms of the dominant society, but rather is a unique and creative adjustment; and that a detailed examination of this process, particularly from the perspective of Japanese Americans, is necessary for a thorough understanding of the Japanese American character.

## ANTECEDENTS

Focusing on this particular "quiet" style of adaptation among the Nisei, one asks the question, Where did this style originate? Was it newly evolved by the Nisei, or does it have cultural antecedents? If we look to the Issei and their character, particularly in regard to the Japanese cultural setting they came from, we begin to perceive some answers. There are several positively valued characteristics of the Issei, such as *otonashii* (to be reserved and unassuming) and *enryo* (a cluster of behavioral traits characterized as deference), which indicate a style of adaptation to the social environment similar to what is seen among the Nisei.

Looking further back to the cultural context in which these characteristics were formed, i.e., traditional Japan, we find, in terms of social relations, a relatively tightly knit society. Edwin Reischauer notes that the stress upon conformity in Japanese society reached its peak during the Tokugawa era (1600 to 1868), when the culture "suddenly took a much greater interest in Confucianism than ever before."<sup>9</sup> The essence of Confucian virtues which were emphasized by the Japanese lay in the "almost ritualistic embodiment of the virtues in specific patterns of conduct . . . Confucianism stressed human relationships and the creation of a more perfect society on earth through the proper regulations of these relations."<sup>10</sup> This emphasis upon conformity as a means to social harmony was reinforced by a number of aphorisms and proverbs such as *deru kugi wa utareru* (the nail that sticks out is the one that gets hit).<sup>11</sup>

It was within this cultural setting, with its heavy emphasis upon social conformity, that we also find the patterned reciprocal relationships embodied in the concepts of *on* and *giri*, which taken together cover a wide and deep range of social obligations, debts, and duties.<sup>12</sup> *On* is best exemplified in the obligations that children owe their parents for nurturing them. An example of *giri* is the etiquette involved in gift-exchanging, where the reciprocal gift is equal in value to the one received. The social obligations of *on* and *giri* heavily influence behavioral choices, so that when the Japanese speak of *ninjo*, a person's feelings or desires, those human emotions must always be tempered with a measure of social obligation. This cultural bias led the British historian, George Sansom, to observe that:



It is noteworthy that throughout Japanese history until the Restoration of 1868 the whole trend of social ethics, both in the native tradition and in the Chinese systems of philosophy as borrowed by the Japanese and adapted to their own requirements, has been to emphasize the duties of the individual and to neglect his rights.<sup>13</sup>

It is within this context of a tightly knit social pattern that the feelings of *hazukashii* (to be ashamed or shameful) and the social sanction of *haji* (shame, disgrace, or dishonor) become effective; and that notions of self-respect and "saving face" become defined in terms of those values stressed by the society.<sup>14</sup> Here I would like to focus on two aspects: hierarchical structure and acceptance of authority. Traditional Japan placed a strong emphasis upon hierarchy. Relationships of superiority and inferiority between classes, age groupings, members of a family, and men and women all point to relatively clear and defined positions within an hierarchical order.<sup>15</sup> Coupled with this vertical structure, there is a general acquiescence to authority. This relationship is embodied in the concept of loyalty, *chu*. According to Harumi Befu, "... loyalty is an expression of returning on to one's master, lord, or the emperor, and is essentially the same as filial piety in quality."<sup>16</sup>

Although modern Japan is changing to some degree, Reischauer claims that the Japanese,

... while moving away from a society of hereditary status retain many of the attitudes of such a society ... throughout Japanese society, authority is accepted with the unquestioning obedience one would expect only if the right to authority were unqualified and not merely a matter of comparative superiority.<sup>17</sup>

While I agree with Professor Reischauer that modern Japan appears to be changing, it is necessary to point out that the majority of the Issei migrants came at the turn of the century; that immigration was curtailed by the implementation of the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1908; and that it was terminated with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. Thus most of the Issei came more than fifty years ago and were therefore heavily imbued with influences from the traditional value system of the feudalistic era. It may be well to point out that while I am suggesting the relevancy of traditional values in the explanation of Issei values, Befu argues the continuity of those same values in modern Japan:

Although many Japanese nowadays disclaim the significance of these traditional values, calling them by the epithet "feudalistic," their own behavior patterns betray social relations which can best be described in terms of these concepts.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, there is much evidence to support the notion not only that

the traditional values of Japanese society emphasized conformity to a social order, but also that the social order was organized along hierarchical lines. When we take into account the fact that most of the Issei migrants came from the rural peasantry, we can argue one further point. The social order promoted not only knowing one's place and accepting it, but accepting it with a measure of fatalism. This culturally-induced attitude is what George Foster refers to as the "image of limited good" when he points out that:

... broad areas of peasant behavior are patterned in such fashion as to suggest that peasants view their social, economic, and natural universes — their total environment — as one in which all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply, as far as the peasant is concerned ... [and that] in addition there is no way directly within peasant power to increase the available quantities.<sup>19</sup>

Among the Issei, this quality of fatalism or powerlessness is exemplified in a variety of phrases and terms, such as *shikata ga nai* (it can't be helped) and *gaman* (to forebear, endure, or put up with), or, to use an aphorism again, *un wa ten ni ari* (fate is with heaven). The phrase *bun o mamoru* further illustrates this quality. It is a concept which is difficult to translate simply, due to its multiple meanings. In a positive sense, it means to do things within your capacity, to do what is appropriate for you, what you are comfortable with, or what fits you. However, in another sense, it is to know your place and to do what is expected of you. It is in the latter sense that it evokes a quality of fatalism which can be illustrated by the following aphorism: *saru ni eboshi* (a nobleman's headgear on a monkey). This is to say that a monkey remains a monkey even if he attires himself in the dress of a nobleman, the moral of the expression being "Don't attempt to be or do what is beyond your situation in life if you don't want to make a monkey of yourself."<sup>20</sup>

While noting this strain of fatalism in the peasants' acceptance of existing conditions, I do not mean to imply that they have always accepted the given. There were times when conditions became unbearable, as in the late Tokugawa era when the formal structure of centralized feudalism was crumbling under the stress of changing conditions in Japanese society. At that time the samurai class, suffering economic setbacks, began to impose intolerable rates of taxation upon the peasantry, which eventually provoked them to action. However, according to Hugh Borton,

... these uprisings were largely separate, disconnected incidents in which the farmers demanded improvement in their economic status or elimination of unjust local officials or feudal barons. Except in a few



cases . . . there was no concerted effort made to develop a national, anti-government movement or to force a change in the feudal system.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, even in the rebellious challenges of the peasantry, there was a general acceptance of the order of society; therefore these uprisings cannot be considered revolutionary movements.

### SOCIALIZATION AND THE NISEI CHARACTER

To summarize the discussion thus far, "quietness," as an idealized personality characteristic among the Nisei, may be seen as being historically based in the Issei, who brought with them a conformist style of adaptation evolved in a society which emphasized social relations heavily imbued with the social patterning of an hierarchical order. Furthermore, there was a fatalistic acceptance of the general social position occupied by the Issei and their peers.

But how were these values transmitted to the Nisei? Let us begin by examining the structure and function of the rural family in Japan, one of the primary socializing agents of the coming generation. Summarizing Professor Tadashi Fukutake's analysis of the rural Japanese family, we find that he emphasizes the importance of conceptualizing the *ie* (household) as a continuing entity which transcends the individuals within it.<sup>22</sup> This is to say, ideally for the Japanese, the family group as a unit took precedence over any given individual at any point in time. It was patriarchal in form and male-dominant, with the attendant preference for sons. Succession followed in the pattern, with the titular headship going to the first-born son. The dominant themes of socialization were filial piety, respect for age, male superiority, ancestor worship, and an emphasis upon the family name. Family customs, such as those at birth, marriage, and death, specifically reinforced the sense of unity of the family group. In such a system, the family is one of the chief agencies for the inculcation of primary social values and social control.<sup>23</sup>

Given these cultural antecedents, the development of a unique style of living among the Issei and their descendants was only natural. According to Frank Miyamoto: ". . . an immigrant people interpret their new world by their old world values and attitudes."<sup>24</sup> While it is impossible to duplicate old-world society and culture in their exact form and content, Miyamoto demonstrates the continuity of Japanese value-patterns, particularly in the evolution of the Japanese American family and community. To be sure, the new setting on American soil is not without its consequences; and as Leonard Broom and John Kitsuse readily show, the effects of American culture and society upon the Nisei have at times resulted in culture conflict between the Issei and the Nisei.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the Japanese American family represents a large degree of continuity of form and function, and it was within this context that the socialization of Nisei took place.

Cultural values may be transmitted either implicitly or explicitly. Nisei may learn of Japanese values simply by watching the behavior of their Issei parents. Dennis Ogawa, for example, in speaking of the *giri* relationships during weddings within the Japanese American community in Hawaii says:

As guests bring gifts of money, toasters or rice-cookers to the reception, each present is duly recorded. At this point begin the procedures which I must say appear to be very important for Japanese Americans. After the money is counted, each gift is appraised as to its monetary worth. Then the mother and father of both the bride and groom judiciously go over the list of gifts and determine whether the guests have kept up their obligations.<sup>26</sup>

I recall a situation in Seattle right after World War II, where a Nisei groom did not wish to relate to the elaborate social patterns within the Japanese American community and suggested that the wedding reception be dispensed with — only to have his parents insist upon it, for they needed to repay their *giri* to their Issei peers. In other words, the Nisei generation frequently actualize the continuity of reciprocal patterns prevalent among the Issei.

There are behavioral patterns which are taught explicitly. Monica Sone was sent to Japanese school by her parents so that she might internalize those ideal Japanese values:

Mr. Ohashi, the Japanese language teacher, and Mrs. Matsui, an older friend of her mother, thought they could work on me and gradually mold me into an ideal Japanese *ojoh-san*, a refined young maiden who is quiet, pure in thought, polite, serene, and self-controlled.<sup>27</sup>

In a recent study of Japanese Americans in Sacramento, California, Isao Horinouchi quotes an Issei parent's attitude toward certain Japanese values:

But I attribute the success of the Japanese people in educational pursuits, to some extent, to the Japanese *bushido* spirit of morality, loyalty, discipline, and obedience. Racial pride and bringing honor rather than shame were important factors also. The Japanese community centers and the language schools propagated and preserved these values. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Not only are there behavioral examples and specific exhortations which transmit certain values, but specific techniques may also be used to ensure the socialization process. Dennis Ogawa tells of the "final wish" technique used by Issei parents, where the parents rely upon the *on* obligation due them: "The 'final wish' never ends. It remains a constant pressure which hangs over the children of a Japanese American family helping them to remember how to keep the Family Image healthy."<sup>29</sup>



The socialization of the bulk of the Nisei took place within the context of the Japanese American family and community by means of those Japanese values, norms, and behaviors which were paralleled to a greater or lesser extent within the social structure of Japanese American society. The ethnic enclave and its institutions such as the family, kin, prefectural organizations, churches, and Japanese language schools, in addition to a variety of informal friendship relations, all contributed to the evolution of a life style which was heavily influenced by traditional Japanese values.

### NISEI CHARACTER AND THE AMERICAN SOCIETY

Thus far, I have focused on the continuity of certain Japanese values which, I have argued, influenced the behavior of the Nisei. This is but a part of the picture. In examining the situation within the context of the American society, one can see that the values and behaviors most likely to be maintained were those which were compatible with the structural position which the Japanese Americans occupied in the United States. This likelihood was enhanced by the visibility of the Japanese in a society which possesses a history of race consciousness. It is not necessary to document in this essay the extensive history of racial prejudice against the Japanese Americans. (The interested reader is referred to general studies, such as *Prejudice* by Carey McWilliams<sup>30</sup> or the excellent legal analysis in *Prejudice, War and the Constitution* by Jacobus tenBroek, Edward Barnhart, and Floyd Matson.<sup>31</sup>) The Japanese Americans were to inherit the legacy of anti-Chinese sentiment in the latter part of the 19th century. Incidents ranged from many kinds of subtle racism to periodic overt acts, the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II being only one of the most notorious of such incidents.<sup>32</sup>

The development of negative stereotypes of Japanese Americans is not surprising, given these conditions. Ogawa, for example, writes: "The 'Jap' before 1942 was an unassimilable, un-American creature, who was sly, dishonest, dirty, sexually promiscuous, and aggressive."<sup>33</sup> Although this earlier, extremely negative stereotype has essentially been replaced, Japanese American behavior is currently reinforced by other stereotypes, such as "quietness, conformity, loyalty, diligence, achievement, and group orientation."<sup>34</sup>

As I have suggested, the "quiet" style of adaptation among the Issei was evolved within the context of a vertical society by those with relatively little control over their lives. Initially, I had theorized that such a style of adaptation, developed within an hierarchical society, would be anachronistic in a democratic society; and thus that the continuity or the persistence of this style of behavior on the part of the Nisei would be detrimental to their adjustment to American society. Empirically, however, American society does not operate entirely as a

free or democratic society, and this is especially true of its relations with ethnic minorities. These relations cannot be characterized as being mutual and equilateral; rather, they are asymmetrical and unequal. Daniels and Kitano, for example, conclude that race relations in our society rest on a two-category system of white and non-white and that "generally, the two-category system refers to a paternalistic structure — that is, one group presumes superiority over the other. . . ."<sup>35</sup> Robert Blauner, reaching a similar conclusion, and citing the economic, social and political forms of racism extant in our society, states rather bluntly:

There is much that is unique and special about racial oppression but it shares the common elements and dynamics that make up social oppression as a generic phenomenon. In a racial order a dominant group, which thinks of itself as distinct and superior, raises its social position by exploiting, controlling, and keeping down others who are categorized in racial or ethnic terms. When one or more groups are excluded from equal participation in society and from a fair share of its values, other groups not so excluded and dominated are correspondingly elevated in position. The racist restrictions that strike at people of color in America result in a system of special privilege for the white majority. Whether or not particular racist practices are followed *consciously* in order to benefit whites is not the issue. Whatever the intent, the system benefits all strata of the white population, at least in the short run — the lower and working classes as well as the middle and upper classes.<sup>36</sup>

It is my central thesis, therefore, that the "quiet" Nisei style represents a continuity of cultural form, but that this cultural persistence is enhanced by the congruence of social structural relationships in the two societies. In other words, this pattern, developed in the context of one hierarchical society, became highly adaptive in the second hierarchical society, the main distinction being the different principles of hierarchy underlying the structures of these societies.

Now let us look at some other implications of adaptation to a vertical relationship. Vertical, hierarchical or asymmetrical relationships are all basically defined in terms of an unequal distribution of power. This theme formed the subject of an essay by Frank Chin and Jeffrey Chan, and they begin directly on the issue:

White racism enforces white supremacy. White supremacy is a system of order and a way of perceiving reality. Its purpose is to keep whites on top and set them free. Colored minorities in white reality are stereotypes. Each racial stereotype comes in two models, the acceptable model and the unacceptable model. The unacceptable, hostile black stud has his acceptable counterpart in the form of Stepin Fetchit. For the savage, kill-crazy Geronimo, there is Tonto and the Hollywood version of Cochise. For the mad dog General Santa Ana there's the Cisco Kid and Pancho. For Fu Manchu and the Yellow Peril, there is Charlie Chan and



his Number One Son. The unacceptable model is unacceptable because he cannot be controlled by whites. The acceptable model is acceptable because he is tractable. There is racist hate and racist love.<sup>37</sup>

Given this hierarchical structure, definitions imposed by those in superordinate positions upon people who occupy subservient positions are inadequate on several grounds. Take, for example, the stereotype which is constructed from the perspective of the dominant society norms and then applied to the Japanese Americans. It must necessarily be in error, for the primary experiences of the Japanese Americans are perceived and interpreted in terms of external standards by people who are not intimately a part of the experience. Furthermore, stereotypes focus on specific characteristics which are caricatures of isolated traits and are then generalized to define a group of people. The conceptualization, selection, and interpretation made from an outside perspective further compound the error if these judgments are based on values which are often not fully accessible to the Japanese Americans. In other words, because of the existing forms of racism in America, the full range of goals in our society is not completely and equally attainable by members of ethnic groups. Thus, the universal application of those values and standards which underlie the ideal goals of our society places the Nisei in a double bind. On the one hand, they are given the goals to achieve, but, on the other hand, they are prevented from the full attainment of these ideals.

Thus, to the extent that Nisei accept this vertical relationship and its attendant standards without question, it becomes particularly destructive: the Nisei are placed in the position of having to "prove" themselves, but must do so in terms of criteria established outside of their own experiences. To the degree that these standards have little relationship to their actual experiences, ultimately they tend to dehumanize the Nisei who choose to accept them. How could Americans, for example, understand their own experiences, if they attempted to use English values to judge these experiences (even though there is an historical relationship)? But many Nisei, in their anxiety to achieve acceptance, have succumbed to the demands of the dominant society and have placed themselves in the position of trying to earn, or to prove, their rights to citizenship, something which is theirs by birthright. Groups accepting values foreign to their own experiences, and modeling their behavior after these extraneous demands, do so only superficially and at the expense of alienating themselves from their own real life experiences.

Finally, given this analysis, a new meaning emerges for the term "model minorities," a label often applied to Japanese Americans.<sup>38</sup> The tacit acceptance, without challenge, of the vertical relationship to the dominant society makes the Nisei "good" Americans who know their place; indeed, some Nisei are not satisfied even with that, but

adhere so closely to the ideal values of middle-class society that they have come to be characterized as "outwhiting the Whites."<sup>39</sup>

## CONCLUSION

S. I. Hayakawa, the president of San Francisco State University during the strike of 1968-1969, said of the Sansei:

The radicals among the Sansei declare proudly that they are not quiet, like the generation of their parents. They believe in loud protest against American imperialism and capitalism.

As they tool around in their Jaguars and Mustangs purchased for them by affluent parents, they cry, "Down with the white power structure." Believing themselves to be racially oppressed they call each other "brother" and "sister" and shout "Right on!" in farcical imitation of radical blacks.<sup>40</sup>

While I take exception to this over-characterization of the Sansei, it does indicate a type of judgment made by some of the Nisei about the Sansei who engaged in direct confrontational tactics in order to seek social change. But it appears to me that this judgment is made from the perspective of "how Japanese Americans ought to behave if they are to assimilate into the dominant society."

Thus, one further conceptual separation must be made to clarify this situation. If the norms of behavior are conceptualized in terms of the sub-cultural experience, and from its own perspective, rather than that of the dominant culture, quite a different view emerges. In terms of their own social and cultural integrity within the Japanese American community, certain values and their attendant behavioral patterns operate very well because there is commonality in the acceptance of the sub-cultural life styles. Patterns of reserve and deference, for instance, operate advantageously, since these behaviors are understood within the context of the community setting and reciprocated. (I might add here, also, that there are many situations when "quietness," as such, is not exhibited — for example, the boisterous interchange at wedding parties or during informal gatherings, such as poker games, or even the bantering which takes place among friends during athletic events held within the community.)

If we make a conceptual separation between sub-cultural values operating within the Japanese American community and those values which are idealized in American middle-class society, then it is clear that there must be a re-examination of the arbitrary application of one set of values (i.e., the middle-class American values) to every situation involving Japanese Americans, whether it be a situation within the Japanese American community or between the sub-culture and the dominant society. It makes no difference who is making the assessment, whether it is a member of the dominant society, or, as in



the case of President Hayakawa, a Japanese American. As Japanese Americans, the Nisei must keep the entire issue at least conceptually separate. It is then, and only then, that the Nisei will begin to understand the nature of their own sub-culture and their relations with the larger society and of the two worlds within which they live.

To return to the central thesis, that the "quiet" Nisei style represents a continuity of cultural form and that the cultural persistence is enhanced by the congruence of social structural relationships in the two societies, the detrimental effects of such a congruence are readily apparent. To quote Chin and Chan:

One measure of the success of white racism is the silence of that race and the amount of white energy necessary to maintain or increase that silence. Likewise, the failure of white racism can be measured by the amount and kind of noise of resistance generated by the race.<sup>41</sup>

Quietness in this sense, I would submit, becomes non-functional, considering the fact that the evolution of a pluralistic, democratic, and free society requires not a quiet acceptance of the given — particularly when based on hierarchical relationships — but a critical assessment of the totality of the life situation in which we live. Freire puts it succinctly when he says:

This habit of submission led men to *adapt* and *adjust* to their circumstances, instead of seeking to integrate themselves with reality. Integration, the behavior characteristic of flexibly democratic regimes, requires a maximum capacity for critical thought. In contrast, the adapted man, neither dialoguing nor participating, accommodates to conditions imposed upon him and thereby acquires an authoritarian and acritical frame of mind.<sup>42</sup>

If, as Japanese Americans, we can understand our own actual life style as being a legitimate variant of that of middle-class America, then we need not make negative judgments of our own evolving cultural norms by applying the standards of the dominant society. It is only within this context that we shall then be able to develop a dynamic and critical consciousness of our own life experiences, and from that base help to build a positive setting for all of the members of the total society.

## POSTSCRIPT

Although this essay has been addressed in particular to the Nisei and more generally to Asian Americans and other ethnic minorities, there are also implications for members of the dominant society. The unilateral imposition of cultural norms from a superordinate position is harmful to the perpetrator, too, for a number of reasons. Psychological issues aside,<sup>43</sup> it robs the dominant society members of a true

exposure to a rich set of experiences of the ethnic minorities. Furthermore, in a democracy, heterogeneity is a healthy condition, for the adverse (i.e., the socialization of all members of a group to a uniform model) is a step towards a static society and the dehumanization of its people. A truly democratic and progressive society does not achieve the integration of its members through universal conformity to a single pattern, but rather allows a positive relation of all of its members to their own unique life experiences. Upon that base, it then builds a free and integrated society — one which, surely, cannot be achieved at the expense of destroying those constructive, diverse, and primary life experiences which are the source for the enrichment of the whole.

## NOTES

1. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Asian Studies Pacific Area Conference, June 14-16, 1964, San Diego, California.
2. Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 24.
3. The terms *Issei*, *Nisei* and *Sansei* will be used consistently in this essay. The *Issei*, the first generation, refer to the original Japanese migrants to America, the *Nisei* are the second generation offspring of the *Issei*. The *Sansei*, the third generation, are the children of the *Nisei*.
4. Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1969).
5. I am using the term *Third World* in this essay to refer to those ethnic minorities in the United States who have been advocating social change so that they might exercise self-determination of their own lives.
6. Hosokawa, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
7. Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), p. 131.
8. Stanley Sue and Harry H. L. Kitano, "Stereotypes as a Measure of Success," *Asian Americans: A Success Story?*, Sue and Kitano, eds., *The Journal of Social Issues*, 29, No. 2 (1973), 92.
9. Edwin Reischauer, *The United States and Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 135.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
11. Compare, for example, the American aphorism: "The squeaky wheel is the one that gets the grease." The moral is the exact opposite.
12. For a recent discussion of these concepts, see Harumi Befu, *Japan: An Anthropological Introduction* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 166ff.
13. George Sansom, *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1943), p. vi.



14. There is a similar heritage of the "meek and mild" syndrome argued for the Chinese Americans, where the values, social structure and the reinforcing behavior of the traditional Chinese cultural and social system come to bear upon the Chinese American population. See Ben Tong, "The Ghetto of the Mind: Notes on the Historical Psychology of Chinese America," *Amerasia Journal*, 1, No. 3 (Nov. 1973).
15. Even as recently as 1970, a Japanese anthropologist has focused on what she determined to be the fundamental vertical (*tate*) organization of present-day Japanese society. Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 40ff.
16. Befu, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
17. Reischauer, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
18. Befu, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
19. George Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," *American Anthropologist*, 67, No. 2 (1965), 296.
20. Daniel Buchanan, *Japanese Proverbs and Sayings* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), p. 46.
21. Hugh Borton, *Peasant Uprisings in Japan of the Tokugawa Period* (New York: Paragon Book Corp., 1968), introduction, no pagination.
22. Tadashi Fukutake, *Japanese Rural Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).
23. With the focus of this essay on the Nisei, I will not spell out the details of the traditional rural Japanese family but refer interested readers to Fukutake, *ibid.*, pp. 39-51.
24. Frank Miyamoto, *Social Solidarity Among the Japanese in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1939), p. 59.
25. Leonard Broom and John Kitsuse, *The Managed Casualty: The Japanese American Family in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), p. 9.
26. Dennis Ogawa, *Jan Ken Po: The World of Hawaii's Japanese-Americans* (Honolulu: Japanese American Research Center, 1973), p. 76.
27. Sone, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
28. Isao Horinouchi, *Educational Values and Preadaptation in the Acculturation of Japanese Americans* (Sacramento: The Sacramento Anthropological Society, 1967), p. 37.
29. Ogawa, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
30. Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice—Japanese Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1945).
31. Jacobus tenBroek, Edward Barnhart, and Floyd Matson, *Prejudice, War and the Constitution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).
32. For a popularized account of the imprisonment of the Japanese Americans during World War II, see: Allan Bosworth, *America's Concentration Camps* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1967).
33. Dennis Ogawa, *From Japs to Japanese: The Evolution of Japanese-American Stereotypes* (Berkeley: McCutchan Press, 1971), p. 22.
34. Harry Kitano, *Race Relations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 222.
35. Roger Daniels and Harry Kitano, *American Racism: Exploration of the Nature of Prejudice* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 5.
36. Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 34.
37. Frank Chin and Jeffrey Chan, "Racist Love," *Seeing Through Shuck*, ed. by Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), p. 65.
38. Harry Kitano and Stanley Sue, "The Model Minorities," *Journal of Social Issues*, 29, No. 2 (1973), 1-9.
39. "Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites," *Newsweek*, 21 June 1971.
40. S. I. Hayakawa, "The Meaning of the Melting Pot," *San Francisco Examiner*, 9 March 1974, p. 11.
41. Chin and Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
42. Friere, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.
43. Psychologically, one who builds his character structure upon a base of an oppressive relationship with others in his society necessarily dehumanizes himself. See Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) for an extensive analysis of this condition.