

"Racial Paradises" Reconsidered:
National and International Significance of Local
Japanese American Values for Understanding the
Process of Cultural Pluralism*

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What are Japanese American values? And what are local Japanese American values? Are they Japanese Hawaiian values? How are Japanese Hawaiian values different from Japanese, American or Japanese American values? These questions may be answered only after conducting some specific researches accordingly. I have never lived in the Japanese American community in Hawaii. I am of course immensely interested in doing so and also in conducting a sort of field work with respect to the points mentioned above. So far, however, I have no experience of that sort, and therefore I really don't know what local Japanese American values are.

I have lived more than ten years among the Japanese Brazilian community in South America, and also have some experience engaging in anthropological field research among them, thus I know something about Japanese Brazilian values. I can maybe convey to you some of my comments about what the title of this paper may suggest, only in analogy to the Japanese Brazilian situation.

Local Japanese American values in Hawaii are of course a part of human culture. Culture is well defined in the proposal of this project: "Culture is defined as the complex set of meanings which a people activate in interpreting experience (intellectual history, values, projective experience in literature and the arts) and which pattern their daily life and institutions (politics, social stratification, government, behavior)." It is the complex set of subjective meanings formulated by the members of the community themselves. It is transmitted from one generation to the next within the community, learned socially, independently from the biological genes, and shared among the members of the community. It is a design for living,

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or a kind of "code" for interpreting our experience and guides our conduct in everyday life. Local Japanese American values are therefore something to interpret your unique experience and also something to be reformulated by yourselves on the basis of your unique experiences in the Hawaiian situation. It must be therefore a part of the unique Japanese-American-Hawaiian culture, in other words, it must be a subculture of the Japanese American subculture.

Local Japanese American values in Hawaii must be something new with new subjective meanings locally formulated, but they need not be necessarily very different from Japanese American values. Logically speaking, they need not be also necessarily quite different from Japanese values in reference to their contents.

This needs some explanation. My conviction is that the values in question may not be something completely different from Japanese values or American values, and also may not be simply a mixture of both. Important is the fact that these values are identified as such by the proper members of the community, but not that the contents of these values are different from or similar to Japanese or American values.

I will cite here an illustration from the Brazilian situation. Once I wrote: "Upon arrival in Brazil they (Japanese immigrants) became *Japanese*." This may sound a little strange to you. What I am talking about here is the problem of identification, but not that of their nationality nor their so-called "cultural baggages" brought from their mother country. The Japanese in Japan do not normally identify themselves as "Japanese" in their everyday life. Almost 100% of the total population in Japan being racially and culturally native Japanese who are in turn descendants of descendants of also native Japanese, do not formulate their daily actions in terms of "Japaneseness" in interacting with others. They cannot classify themselves and the people surrounding them in terms of "Japanese" within the purely Japanese context. In order to identify themselves and to classify others, they have many social categories of another dimension, for example, those from so-and-so prefecture, those graduated from such-and-such high school, and so forth. Ethnic identity is not important in uni-racial Japan.

Arriving in Brazil, however, they found that everybody called them "Japanese." Everything they did was labelled "Japanese." Every mistake, every success, every murder was understood "Japanese," and it was because of their "Japaneseness." A quarrelling with B was necessarily a Japanese quarrelling with an Italian. Thrown into a non-Japanese, multi-ethnic situation, and in need of crystallizing mutual solidarity among ethnic friends in facing a minority situation, they came, for the first time, to identify themselves as "Japanese," giving a new meaning and new interpretation to their ethnicity, to their being "Japanese;" in other words, they became Japanese upon arrival. The content need not be different, but the meaning attached to it is quite new and different.

Then what kind of Japanese Brazilian values may be pointed out here? What kind of cultural factors do they think they might contribute to the modernization of the Brazilian national culture? The evidence I have in hand indicate that there are minor differences in this respect by class distinction, by generation, and also between those who have more acculturated and those who have less acculturated. Most of them give high value to diligence and hard work; success-aspiration through school education; community-oriented mind; honesty and being a man of his words; respect for rule and authority; etc. Most of the Brazilians of non-Japanese origin who have had direct contact with the Japanese immigrants as well as their descendants usually recognize, in somewhat similar way, these as "Japanese values."

Interestingly enough, there is doubtless a strong continuity among the Japanese, the Japanese American and the Japanese Brazilian values. I suppose that the Japanese Hawaiian values also may not be very apart in this regard.

As far as the Japanese Brazilian values are concerned, these are not simply a continuity of the traditional Japanese values. They have been redefined under the minority situation in Brazil, gaining new meanings and interpretations. For example, diligence and hard work as well as success-aspiration through school education is highly evaluated among them due to the fact that, being minority members or proletarian alien immigrants, they have lacked other alternatives for upward mobility, such as property, capital, power, family name, functional kin as well as friendship networks, etc., with which most of the upper-class Brazilians are well equipped. For those who lack these traditional effective means for success in life, the only effective alternative means open are diligence, hard work, and success in competitive formal education through personal, individual effort. Therefore, high success of the Nisei and Sansei in competition for and in colleges and universities may be accounted for in terms of their socio-economic conditions of the minority as well as their reinterpreted Japanese Brazilian values, but not simply in terms of the "traditional Japanese values."

In the same manner, the community-oriented mind as a Japanese Brazilian value may be better interpreted in reference to the necessity of in-group ethnic solidarity. Honesty and being a man of his word as well as respect for rule and authority may be understood as some of the good strategies of the subject people or of employees for getting good confidence of their superordinate people.

Once Hawaii and Brazil were considered as two representative "racial paradises" in the world, where "racial democracy" is a reality, and where social laboratories of interethnic marriage and racial intermixture are offered for theoretical consideration in world sociology and anthropology. There has been a dominant ideology in the social sciences with respect to racial and cultural "melting pot" and resultant new generalized "cosmic race" which might take the place of existing racial and cultural diversity and hostility, resulting in uniformity and harmony.

Now we know that these ideological "racial democracy" and romantic new "cosmic race" were direct offsprings of the past plantation systems and slavery, being a one-sided ideological interpretation by the dominant class people as well as by the colonialistic dominant world powers. The acculturation-assimilation approach in interpreting interethnic and interracial relations, modernization, culture contact and socio-economic development of underdeveloped countries in the world is now less and less influential. Once it was generally assumed that acculturation, assimilation and Americanization might bring about liquidation of racial and ethnic problems in American as well as Brazilian society, and that industrialization, urbanization, modernization, and Westernization by means of diffusion of "international," "democratic," and often Christian values might solve all the existing socio-economic problems of non-Western "backward" areas. The ideas of "racial democracy" and "cosmic race" were some of the representative symbolic manifestations of these ideological interpretations of human culture and society.

As for the Brazilian society at least, I agree with the interpretation offered by Pierre L. van den Berghe and Roger Bastide, indicating that the Brazilian racial situation is transforming itself, in facing twentieth century industrialization, from paternalistic to competitive race relations, resulting in more rigorous discrimination. Thus realization of "racial democracy" and "cosmic race" is more and more unrealistic.

Discussions of cultural pluralism in sociology and anthropology is quite recent, emerging mainly in the early 1960s, on the one hand, on the basis of analyses made on the Caribbean as well as African complex societies, and on the other hand on the basis of the fact that the acculturation/assimilationist approach has largely failed in diagnosing many social phenomena. In many parts of the world, interracial and interethnic relations were found to be far more complex than have been generally assumed. Melting pots were found to be triple, rather than only one, or to be simply a "scientific fiction;" many subcultures were developing rather than disappearing; acculturative processes have not been, in many cases, accompanied by structural assimilation; and so on.

Thus we are now in a transitional epoch for reformulating our general/theoretical frameworks of looking at and interpreting human culture and society. In place of the equilibrium/assimilationist model of society, another basic model of human society, that is, conflict/pluralistic model of society is in demand. Hawaii and Brazil as two representative "scientific fictions" of "racial paradises" in the past may be now transformed into another kind of "sociological laboratories" for crystallizing new theoretical frameworks as well as new popular visions on the fundamental nature of human society.

Cultural pluralism as a sociological paradigm is not so much limited in its sphere. "Plural society" in its restricted sense may be better applied only to some specific

types of societies, but cultural and social pluralism as an analytic, more generic model may be extended to interpret any society. In the United States, for example, pluralism has been widely accepted as an ideal system in the political processes (c.f. two party system), but it has been long rejected as a generalized system in the cultural as well as social processes.

"Racial paradises" of Hawaii and Brazil were born as offsprings of the plantation systems, chattel slavery, and the great migration of uprooted, hungry emigrants; traditional Japanese values of diligence, hard work and respect for rule and authority have their historical-sociological roots in Japanese systems of feudalism, of exclusive, monopolistic inheritance of property based on ancestor worship and primogeniture; plural societies in the Caribbean are in part results of indentured laborers system and coolie trade; many of the Japanese American and Japanese Brazilian values are, like the Nisei and Sansei, fruits of hardship experienced in the plantation life.

"Bad" history does not necessarily result in a "bad" situation today. Most of us were born under shadow of long dark historical background. We can only start with this background. We can, however, re-activate this background, giving another meaning and interpretation. I understand that the Japanese ethics of diligence and hard work are "heritages" of Japanese feudalism, having long played, notwithstanding, positive roles in industrializing and modernizing traditional Japan. Traditional values inherited from "ancient regime" may be reinterpreted, reformulated, and reactivated by ourselves with new meanings and with new missions. Culture is something transmitted from one generation to the other, learned from others, and shared among most of the members of the society, but it does not mean a simple continuity. It receives constant redefinition and reformulation despite the fact that it is not necessarily constantly and rapidly changing. It is in this sense that I understand local Japanese American values must be something new and unique, and that studying these values means necessarily studying human society and culture on the national as well as international levels.

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