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By GARY Y. OKIHIRO

## Religion and Resistance in America's Concentration Camps\*

RELIGION, IMBEDDED IN THE PSYCHE, folklore, and identity of immigrants, gave meaning and order to the individual, the family, and community, and helped them survive.<sup>1</sup> Religion has also been both a mobilizer for, and an expression of, resistance to colonialism, slavery, and exploitation.<sup>2</sup> While many authors have written on the resistance function of religion in African, Afro-American, and Native American societies, relatively few have explored that theme among other American ethnic minorities, especially among Asian Americans. That neglect is particularly notable because of the central role of religious belief in the Asian cultural heritage.<sup>3</sup>

This essay examines the role of ethnic religion in resistance among the Japanese confined primarily at Tule Lake concentration camp during World War II. The resurgence of ethnic religious belief is seen as part of a wider network of cultural resistance after the Manzanar model of resistance.<sup>4</sup> Cultural resistance was directed against the camp administrators' efforts to "Americanize" the Japanese, and was effective in preserving Japanese American families from total disintegration and in maintaining ethnic identity and solidarity.

There are two basic historical interpretations of Japanese reaction to life in America's concentration camps. The orthodox view characterizes the Japanese as defenseless, dependent, and abiding victims of circumstance. This image was fostered by the paternalistic War Relocation Authority (WRA) which administered the camps.<sup>5</sup> "The outstanding feature of the evacuation process was the complete absence of disturbance from the evacuees. Accepting without public protest the military orders, the evacuees appeared when called and got themselves on the trains without any compulsion by the public authorities."<sup>6</sup> Consequently, resistance by the "submissive" Japanese was depicted as sporadic and uncharacteristic.<sup>7</sup> The orthodox interpretation dismissed the various mass resistance movements in the camps as mere "incidents," and proposed that resistance was fomented by a small minority of

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g., Randall M. Miller and Thomas D. Marzik, eds., *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America* (Philadelphia, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> T.O. Ranger and Isaria Kimambo, eds., *The Historical Study of African Religion* (Berkeley, 1972); Vincent Harding, "Religion and Resistance Among Antebellum Negroes, 1800-1860," in August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, eds., *The Making of Black America, I* (New York, 1969), pp. 179-97; and Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China* (New York, 1971); and Masaharu Anesaki, *Religious Life of the Japanese People* (Tokyo, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, "Japanese Resistance in America's Concentration Camps: A Re-evaluation," *Amerasia Journal* 2 (Fall 1973): 20-34.

<sup>5</sup> Edgar C. McVoy, "Social Processes in the War Relocation Center," *Social Forces* 22 (December 1943): 188-90.

<sup>6</sup> Family Welfare Orientation Program, mss. in Barnhart Papers, Box 49, Folder 6, Japanese American Research Project (JARP) Collection 2010, University of California, Los Angeles (hereafter referred to as JARP Collection).

<sup>7</sup> See Okihiro, "Japanese Resistance"; and Arthur A. Hansen and David A. Hacker, "The Manzanar Riot: An Ethnic Perspective," *Amerasia Journal* 2 (Fall 1974): 112-57.

pro-Japan agitators and constituted a necessary release of tension. After the outburst, "normalization" was restored resulting in a peaceful, "happy" camp.

In contrast, revisionist historians regard the concentration camps as the culmination of nearly a century of anti-Asian agitation and racial discrimination in America, the essential thrust of which was exclusionism and cultural hegemony. Resistance for the pre-war Japanese, according to that interpretation, was a means of survival to maintain their physical presence and culture in the face of white supremacy. That historical struggle continued in the camps when the Japanese, stripped of their civil liberties and the bulk of their property, resisted manipulation of their lives and the administration's attempt to erase their ethnic identity. Two models of resistance were proposed by a revisionist historian.<sup>8</sup> The Poston model of resistance is protest which results in acceptable responses from the administration. Japanese resisters, in the Poston model, realize their goals and achieve greater camp stability. The Manzanar model, on the other hand, is protest which results in unacceptable responses from the administration. Resistance, in the Manzanar model, did not end with administrative intransigence but continued either in open defiance of the WRA or in "the redirection of resistance into new forms which would be para-administration."<sup>9</sup>

Cultural resistance is seen not as unique to the camp experience but as an intensification and revival of past modes of resistance from the pre-war Japanese experience in America, as Frank Miyamoto put the issue, "to most evacuees but especially to the Issei who frequently reminisced about their experience in America, the evacuation was only the most recent and most outrageous expression of the long history of anti-Japanese agitation on the Pacific Coast." Continuing, Miyamoto noted that, "The historical reaction of the immigrant Japanese to instances of anti-Japanese action has been one of very strong resentment against the attitudes of white supremacy, and one motivation behind their economic struggles in America has been the aim of showing the white majority group that they are a group to contend with as equals and not to be treated slightly." It appears, thus, that anti-Japanese activity frequently resulted in an upsurge of Japanese American ethnicity.

That phenomenon during World War II paralleled the rise of Buddhism within the Japanese American community during the 1920s and 30s in reaction to the anti-Japanese movement of those decades. Kashima, in his *Buddhism in America*, made that observation, citing a study of the Gardena, California Buddhist church.

After the passage of the Immigration Law of 1924 discriminating against the Japanese, the number of Buddhists increased rapidly, and so did that of the Buddhist churches. Before that event, some of them had been hesitant in declaring themselves Buddhists, considering such an act impudent in a Christian country. But the immigration law made them more defiant and bold in asserting what they

<sup>8</sup> Okihiro, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-6.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Miyamoto, "The Structure of Community Relationships," Folder R 20.42, 6-7, in the Bancroft Library collection of material relating to Japanese American evacuation and resettlement, University of California, Berkeley (henceforth referred to as Bancroft Collection). See also, "B.B.," "Caucasian Staff at Tule Lake," Folder R 20.15, 8, Bancroft Collection.

believed to be their rights; it made them realize the necessity of cooperation for the sake of their own security and welfare, and naturally sought the centers of their communal activity in their Buddhist churches.<sup>11</sup>

The WRA program for the camps ostensibly included three principal goals. The first was to provide for the physical upkeep of the internees; the second was a longer range objective to relocate the Japanese out of the camps into "normal" communities; and the third was to deal with hostile anti-Japanese elements, especially in the national press.<sup>12</sup> All three objectives emphasized the importance of the WRA "Americanization" program — to demonstrate the loyalty of the Japanese in acquiescing to camp confinement, to enable assimilation into American life, and to refute the accusations of Japanese disloyalty by a hostile press. The WRA saw the camps as a critical trial period for the Japanese in America. "The entire future of the Japanese in America is dependent on their deeds during the emergency," noted the WRA deputy director. "If the Japanese assist in the war effort and prove by constructive deeds, that they are loyal Americans, the public will recognize this fact."<sup>13</sup> Thus, to the camp administrators, the "Americanization" of the Japanese was an essential element in their program.<sup>14</sup>

However, the concentration camps and the WRA's "Americanization" program were progressions in the anti-Asian movement and attacked the basis of Japanese American ethnicity. "Americanization," noted Berkson, meant Anglo-conformity, and sought to disperse the minority communities and alter their ethnic identities and culture including the family, language, and religious belief.<sup>15</sup> Within that context, then, the maintenance of ethnic culture constituted a form of resistance. "When cultures are whole and vigorous," wrote Blauner, "conquest, penetration, and certain modes of control are more readily resisted."<sup>16</sup> Despite the WRA's "Americanization" program, the Japanese retained ethnic beliefs and values, many rooted in religion, and sought to preserve the ethnic community in the face of cultural hegemony. A camp analyst observed that "the assembly of fairly large numbers of Japanese tended to revive some of the practices which had fallen somewhat into disuse. The emotional upheaval which was the inevitable consequence of the disruption of familiar ways of life manifested itself, for many Issei at least, in a return to religion."<sup>17</sup>

For the majority of Japanese in the camps, that efflorescence of formal religion meant Buddhism along with "informal" Shintoism.<sup>18</sup> "The camp

<sup>11</sup> Tetsuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America* (Westport, Conn., 1977), p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Dillon S. Myer, *Uprooted Americans* (Tucson, 1971), p. 29. See also, interview with Dillon Myer, May 20, 1968, Oral History Tapes, Box 397, No. 300, JARP Collection.

<sup>13</sup> War Relocation Authority, *WRA, A Story of Human Conservation* (Washington, D.C., 1946), p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> "Comments by the War Relocation Authority On Remarks of Representative John M. Costello Made in the House of Representatives June 28, 1943," U.S. War Relocation Authority Miscellaneous Publications, vol. 1, Documents Department, Main Library, University of California, Berkeley; and War Relocation Authority, *Community Government in War Relocation Centers* (Washington, D.C., n.d.), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Isaac B. Berkson, *Theories of Americanization* (New York, 1920).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York, 1972), p. 67. See also Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Francis Spencer, "Japanese Buddhism in the United States, 1940-1946: A Study on Acculturation" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1946), p. 164.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., the Inari cult, fox, cat, and badger stories, and *sumo*.

administrators could not suppress the religious needs of the Japanese people by encouraging the growth of Christianity and not of Buddhism," observed Horinouchi. "The masses of the Japanese people still identified with Buddhism in name, if not in practice."<sup>19</sup> A WRA survey in 1942 revealed that 61,719 or 55.5 percent listed themselves as Buddhist, while Protestants numbered 32,131 or 28.9 percent.<sup>20</sup> The designation *Buddhist* was politically significant because Buddhism was viewed as pro-Japanese and subversive and Christianity as American.<sup>21</sup> In the days immediately following Pearl Harbor, Shinto and Buddhist priests, along with Japanese language school teachers, were summarily arrested and interned in detention camps administered by the Justice Department. Christians, both white and Japanese, denounced these religions as "pagan," and many Japanese, fearful of being suspect, destroyed all traces of Shintoism and Buddhism such as the *kamidana* and *butsudan* (Shinto and Buddhist family shrines), scrolls, Japanese flags, and pictures of the emperor and royal family.

While the label *Buddhist* made one vulnerable, *Christian* seemed to offer a measure of security. "Many Nisei Buddhists," wrote Kashima, "apparently were afraid to attend the religious institution of their parents: thousands listed 'no preference' in their religion, and many even became Christians."<sup>22</sup> Remarked a Japanese internee, "Buddhists and Shintoists went to the Christian churches because they felt that there would be more protection for them."<sup>23</sup> Those nominal Christians were ridiculed as "Christians of convenience" by both Buddhists and Christians alike.<sup>24</sup> Still, despite the pressure to conform, the large majority of confined Japanese openly espoused Buddhism, and in some camps, Buddhism gained new adherents. Kitagawa, a Christian minister at Tule Lake concentration camp, reported a "profoundly significant" revival of interest in Buddhism even among those previously disinterested,<sup>25</sup> while Gordon Brown, a community analyst at Gila River concentration camp, reported:

It is said that the Christians lost in numbers during life in the center. At the time of registration, a well-known Japanese-American minister spoke publicly supporting volunteering for the Army. He incurred the wrath of many and was labelled a "dog." This opprobrium was extended to all Christians and some extremists even today say that "all Christians are dogs." Many half-hearted Christians ceased to identify themselves as such and would not permit their children to attend Christian Sunday school. They were afraid of the consequences of being considered dogs.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Isao Horinouchi, "Americanized Buddhism: A Sociological Analysis of a Protestantized Japanese Religion" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis, 1973), p. 210.

<sup>20</sup> War Relocation Authority, *The Evacuated People — A Quantitative Description* (Washington, D.C., 1942), p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> Spencer, op. cit., pp. 127-8. Official WRA policy, nonetheless, declared religious freedom in the camps.

<sup>22</sup> Kashima, op. cit. p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander H. Leighton, *The Governing of Men* (Princeton, 1945), p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Spencer, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>25</sup> Daisuke Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei: The Internment Years* (New York, 1967), pp. 107-8. At the same time, the Buddhist church itself was undergoing fundamental change in leadership from Issei to Nisei and orientation from Japan to America. Kashima, op. cit., pp. 57-59.

<sup>26</sup> G. Gordon Brown, "Final Report on the Gila River Relocation Center as of May 20, 1945," Carr Papers, Box 55, Folder 5, JARP Collection. See also, Kitagawa, op. cit., p. 120; and Lester E. Suzuki, *Ministry in the Assembly and Relocation Centers of World War II* (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 34, 130.

It would be simplistic, however, to characterize Buddhism as "pro-Japanese" and resistant to assimilation and Christianity as "pro-American" and indicative of Anglo-conformity. While nativistic and "traditional" revivals might clearly be seen as assertions of ethnicity, adaptations and acculturated beliefs could also comprise aspects of an ethnic identity. For example, Buddhism underwent situational changes in America,<sup>27</sup> and a few Japanese Christian ministers advocated the ethnic church in the face of integrationist sentiment among the parent white churches. Further, those ministers linked their support for Japanese Christian churches with the wider struggle for ethnic community survival. "The ministry in the relocation centers," wrote Suzuki,

. . . was pregnant with the seed of the theology of pluralism. The emergence of that theology was being pressed down. The articulation and implementation of this concept was still in the future, but there was a feeling for it. The Japanese people had a self-consciousness as an ethnic people. They were trying to demand self-definition but their voices were not heard. They were trying to assert their dignity and humanity in the intrinsic worth of their own traditions and cultural inheritance . . . but they were being pressed down at every turn. The ministry tried to affirm their pride as a people of God, and show fidelity to their peculiar peoplehood as a part of God's intention in a pluralistic community.<sup>28</sup>

Spencer suggests that this resurgence of religious practice was attributable to the increased amount of leisure time in the camps.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, Horinouchi proposed that a more basic consideration was the psychological stress of the camp situation. "Students of religion," noted Horinouchi, "recognize that religious activity increases in relationship to the stresses of the uncontrollable, the threatening, and the unknown. The Buddhistic rituals of repeating and chanting the *sutras*, the offering of incense, and other ritualistic movements are part of the anxiety release or a reaction formation to the uncertainties of the future. Thus, the increased religious behavior in detention camps may be primarily a psychological behavior response to a unique situation and less attributable to the increased leisure time of the internees."<sup>30</sup> Perhaps even more fundamental, Japanese religious belief permeated the culture which in turn gave meaning to the lives of the internees and which stood in opposition to external hegemony and control. This is not to deny the cathartic function of ritual and belief; it simply proposes that in addition to that role, ethnic religious belief comprised a means to resist "Americanization" and anti-Japanese racism, and formed the basis for a wider network of cultural resistance in the camps. Wrote Brown of Buddhists confined at Gila River:

When asked what particular contribution Buddhism has for America the usual answer is "democracy." The Lord Buddha believed all men to be . . . spiritual equals. He attempted to break down the caste system of India. . . . Buddhism disregards race.

<sup>27</sup> Horinouchi, *op. cit.*, Cf. Kashima, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-20.

<sup>28</sup> Suzuki, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-1, 345.

<sup>29</sup> Spencer, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-2.

<sup>30</sup> Horinouchi, *op. cit.*, p. 216. See also Brown, *op. cit.*

This pat answer . . . is clearly a response to the particular situation in which Japanese Buddhism finds itself. Many priests are still excluded from California, some are interned. They belong to an "oppressed group." Buddhism is "against discrimination." Hence, both to aid themselves and to meet a hostile world, they must concentrate upon that particular interpretation of their religious teachings. . . .<sup>31</sup>

Buddhist church membership was simply one indication of ethnic religious belief. Religion in Japanese culture cannot be defined narrowly, but must be broadly defined as a people's beliefs and practices concerning their place in the universe and moral code of conduct. "The difference between the American view of religion and the Japanese view," wrote Hirano, "is that the Japanese did not compartmentalize religion. Religion was a part of and inseparable from life."<sup>32</sup> Thus, although it could be said that most Issei did not concern themselves with formal religion, religious belief, nonetheless, permeated their culture and daily activities. Japanese religious belief was syncretistic, containing elements of Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. The nature of this religious belief was compared by Prince Shotoku to the root, stem and branches, and flowers and fruits of a tree:

Shinto is the root embedded in the soil of the people's character and national traditions; Confucianism is seen in the stem and branches of legal institutions, ethical codes, and educational systems; Buddhism made the flowers of religious sentiment bloom and gave the fruits of spiritual life. These three systems were molded and combined by the circumstances of the times and by the genius of the people into a composite whole of the nation's spiritual and moral life.<sup>33</sup>

There are two fundamental features of Japanese religious belief. The first is filial piety and ancestor worship, and the second is the closeness of man, gods, and nature. Filial piety, as expressed in Confucian status ethics, was the cornerstone of Meiji Japan, and while the family unit may have arisen out of economic or political necessity, filial piety has its origins in religion.<sup>34</sup> This hierarchical system of moral and social conduct was codified in the New Civil Law of 1891 which stressed that (a) the family is the basis of society; (b) the family centers around the father; and (c) Japanese hereditary succession is to be strictly maintained (ancestral spirits dwell in the family house and the head of the household is the living embodiment of those spirits).<sup>35</sup> In that way, ancestor worship was simply an extension of filial piety, and both constituted religious belief and ethical morality. The spiritual basis of ancestor worship was enunciated by Bishop D. Ochi, a Buddhist leader at Gila River concentration camp, in his unpublished manuscript, *The Spiritual Life of the Japanese Evacuees*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> David Y. Hirano, "Religious Values Among Japanese Americans and Their Relationship to Counseling" (D.M. dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1974), p. 2. See also Anesaki, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion* (London, 1930), p. 8. *Sei-cho No Ie*, a popular cult in California especially among the Issei during the 1930s, combined Buddhist belief with some of the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy on health and healing. The cult reemerged at Granada concentration camp. Carr Papers, Box 55, Folder 1, JARP Collection; and Suzuki, op. cit., 212.

<sup>34</sup> Hirano, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 13; and Hideo Kishimoto, *Japanese Religion in the Meiji Era* (Tokyo, 1956). Filial piety and Confucian ethics were also taught in the public schools in a course known as *Shushin* where students learned warrior ethics (*Bushido*), filial piety, and loyalty to Emperor and country. Horinouchi, op. cit., pp. 33-4.

By devoting himself to the ancestral cult, a person may appear to be idolatrous. Yet the fact cannot be overlooked that by doing so he is adoring the Buddha in his heart. Buddhist philosophy holds that the Buddha essence melts into the spirit of one's ancestors. . . . On this basis, ancestral worship and the Buddha constitute an inseparable unit. Through sutras and services the ancestor is one with the Buddha. To the Buddhist in America the Buddha and the ancestors exist together as a meaningful part of the life of the individual.<sup>36</sup>

The other basic feature of Japanese religious belief is the closeness of man, gods, and nature. Neither Shintoism nor Buddhism claimed a monotheistic or transcendent god. In fact, Shintoism stressed a love for the land where the ancestors repose and where gods (*kami*) abound, while Buddhism, especially Zen, emphasized enlightenment and harmony with the cosmos. That view of the natural world and of a person's place within the universe formed the basis for various Japanese cultural expressions such as *bonsai*, *ikebana* (flower arrangement), landscape gardening, the tea ceremony, and *haiku* poetry.<sup>37</sup>

The WRA's "Americanization" policy threatened one of the most basic Japanese cultural institutions, the family. Filial piety — the respect for elders and the role of the father as head of the household and embodiment of the ancestral spirits — was disregarded by the WRA in its "Americanization" of camp government. The WRA maintained that "since the objective of the WRA was to create a community as nearly American in its outlook and organization as possible, policy should conform with American practice, and only citizens should vote and hold office."<sup>38</sup> Further, the WRA gave the Nisei special privileges and recognition because of their American citizenship. "In addition to making elective offices open only to evacuees who are citizens of the United States," stated the WRA national director, "it is our intention to give them preference in considering application for leave from relocation centers, in assignment of work opportunities, and in other respects. . . ."<sup>39</sup>

Although most studies point to this WRA policy as having caused or at least accelerated the generational breach between Issei and Nisei,<sup>40</sup> there is suggestive evidence which points to Japanese success in resisting such a split. This struggle for the control of the children was poignantly described in a WRA report. "But during their stay at the centers they continued their previous practices of religious worship, tried to achieve some semblance of order and dignity in their broken lives, and frequently showed an almost pathetic eagerness to hold their families together and to work back toward their prewar social and economic status."<sup>41</sup>

Revisionist historians have pointed to countervailing forces which worked against the "Americanization" of the Nisei. Hansen and Hacker, for example,

<sup>36</sup> Spencer, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>37</sup> Okakura Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea* (Tokyo, 1956); and Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, 1959).

<sup>38</sup> WRA, *Community Government*, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> See e.g., Leonard Broom and John I. Kitsuse, *The Managed Casualty: The Japanese-American Family in World War II*, Berkeley, 1973; Anne Umemoto, "Crisis in the Japanese American Family," *Asian Women*, Berkeley, 1971, 31-34; and Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 86-88.

<sup>41</sup> WRA, *WRA, A Story*, 95.

enlarge upon the lead provided by Yatsushiro's thesis which maintains that pre-war Japanese culture contained several basic values and beliefs which governed behavior and promoted ethnic solidarity.<sup>42</sup> These, according to Hansen and Hacker, were "strengthened by the pre-evacuation discriminatory practices, reinforced by the evacuation crisis, and expressed within the concentration camp culture."<sup>43</sup> Filial piety, ancestor worship, and family and ethnic collectivity were cultural values which were emphasized in the home and stressed in the Buddhist churches and Japanese language schools.<sup>44</sup> Those internal values were reinforced by external forces such as anti-Japanese agitation, barriers to Nisei assimilation and restrictive employment opportunities, and the concentration camps themselves which were pointed reminders to the Nisei that they were not considered to be "true Americans."<sup>45</sup>

The dislocation caused by the evacuation and the conditions of camp life reinforced the need for group solidarity and mutual aid. There is evidence to suggest that the traditional family roles were strengthened with the Issei father as the hierarchical head. The Issei, from the beginning, resented the WRA "Americanization," which threatened the group's traditional family structure. Nisei, who were previously drifting away from Japanese culture, were drawn back to the family unit. Discrimination and the denial of their rights disillusioned many Nisei. They now looked more to their families and ethnic community for security and acceptance. Evidence of this was seen in the reasoning of Nisei who answered "No-No" to the loyalty questions, 27 and 28. Two brothers were closely questioned on why they had renounced their American citizenship:

Board Member: "You want to be American citizens?"

Subject #1: "Well, there's our parents."

Board Member: "You are over 20 years old."

Subject #1: "But the parents come first no matter how old you are."<sup>46</sup>

(Emphasis added.)

As time progressed, the block, a camp residential unit consisting of fourteen barracks, emerged as a primary unit of ethnic solidarity. Although many families within the block were from different geographical areas prior to evacuation, living in close quarters resulted in a degree of cohesiveness through group endeavors in improving conditions around their blocks and in self-governance. Solidarity was evident, for example, in boasts of talented chefs or well landscaped grounds within a block. The Issei, respected for their knowledge which comes with age, became the central core of block leader-

<sup>42</sup> Toshio Yatsushiro, "Political and Socio-Cultural Issues at Poston and Manzanar Relocation Centers: A Thematic Analysis," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1953).

<sup>43</sup> "Manzanar Riot," 121.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g., Marian Svensrud, "Attitudes of the Japanese Towards Their Language Schools," *Sociology and Social Research*, 17:3 (January-February 1933), 259-64; and Chotoku Toyama, "The Japanese Community in Los Angeles," MA thesis, (Columbia University, 1926).

<sup>45</sup> Hansen and Hacker, "Manzanar Riot," 121-22. See also John Modell, "Class or Ethnic Solidarity: The Japanese American Company Union," *Pacific Historical Review*, 38:2 (May 1969), 193-206; and Jere Takahashi, "Japanese American Responses to Race Relations: The Formation of Nisei Perspectives," *Amerasia Journal*, 9:1 (1962): 29-57.

<sup>46</sup> Yatsushiro, "Political and Socio-Cultural," 364. See also, Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camp U.S.A.*, New York, 1971, 104-29; Morton Grodzins, *The Loyal and the Disloyal*, Chicago, 1956, 131; and David A. Hacker, "A Culture Resisted, a Culture Revived: The Loyalty Crisis of 1943 at the Manzanar War Relocation Center," MA thesis, (California State University, Fullerton, 1979).

ship. That was in direct conflict with the WRA mandate on internal camp government which had disenfranchised the Issei but in harmony with traditional Japanese culture. The success of resistance against that aspect of WRA rule has been documented elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> The block eventually became equated with the extended family in the common camp expression, "My block is like my family."

The block took on the characteristics of the family in stressing conformity of the individual to the collective will. Thus, block residents disciplined children who lacked parental control and brought discredit to the collective. The slogan, "Keep Children Within the Block," was widely circulated. The Young People's Association, a block organization, was initiated and supervised by the Issei as a means of promoting morals and obligations through social activities. With group conformity a policy, members within the block were required to subject their individual wishes to the will of the majority. Rumors and gossip were oftentimes used as tools to maintain conformity and solidarity.<sup>48</sup> Rebels were ostracized from the group and branded *inu*.

The block community merged into a camp-wide group identity by referring to such phrases as the *Japanese spirit* and *We're all Japanese*. On the few special cultic occasions such as New Year's Day and *Obon*, Japanese of all ages observed and participated in the rituals. Traditional speeches extolled the people's Japanese ties. Such occasions were "a means whereby members renewed their solemn allegiance to the group, reaffirmed the established themes in their center culture, and thereby nourished the solidarity of the group."<sup>49</sup> Phrases which exemplified that Japanese spirit were not essentially nationalistic or anti-American. Instead, the phrases sought to remind the internees of the virtues of their cultural ancestry and to enable them to resist the forces of "Americanization" which threatened their existence as a people. The following is a typical exhortation for ethnic solidarity: "It is not possible to be an informer as we are all Japanese. We should have loyalty to our own group. A Japanese cannot kick another Japanese. . . ."<sup>50</sup> The excerpt below exemplifies the use of ethnic cultural values to promote ethnic solidarity, and at the same time illustrates its neutral nationalistic content. *Yamato damashii* or "Japanese spirit" was a patriotic rallying cry for Japanese militarists and an expression of anti-Americanism for the WRA camp authorities; within this context, however, it was employed to depict customary virtues of perseverance, loyalty, forbearance, and sacrifice for the common good. The speaker was a Nisei at Minidoka and the occasion a farewell banquet for the volunteers of the all-Nisei combat team.

<sup>47</sup> Okihiro, "Japanese Resistance"; and Hacker, "Culture Resisted."

<sup>48</sup> Toyama, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> Yatsushiro, *op. cit.*, pp. 513-14.

<sup>50</sup> Yatsushiro, *op. cit.*, p. 529. Kitagawa sees the subordination of the family to the collective will as an indication of the breakdown of Japanese society in the camps, which he termed "primitive tribal community" and an "ostrichlike community." *Issei and Nisei*, p. 106.

We have been kicked around and kicked around. We have lost most of what we had. We have been stuck here in these centers. And we don't feel too good about it. But we know our future will depend on what these boy volunteers will do. They have had the courage to risk their lives in spite of this. We know that they will go in there and fight and we know that they will never do anything to dishonor the spirit of *Yamato damashi*.<sup>51</sup>

Camp life had achieved a degree of security in the retention of such virtues as filial piety and ancestor worship, in the family unit, and in the ethnic community. In a speech delivered in San Francisco, Dillon Myer, WRA national director, categorically stated: "The bulk of Nisei or second generation groups are wholehearted Americans . . . and have absorbed Americanism almost as naturally as they breathe. To claim otherwise is equivalent to asserting that American institutions exercise a less potent influence over the youthful mind than the transplanted institutions of the Orient. I deny that assertion. I have faith in the strength of American institutions. . . ." <sup>52</sup> In contrast, in a report filed by Myer's own agency, a camp high school principal noted the realities of the "struggle with family institutions for the possession of the future of the child. . . ." The principal wrote of the difficulty in combating the language problems of the students. The Nisei were said to have been greatly influenced by their ties with the ethnic community, thus affording little opportunity to speak English. The report went on to point to "regressive tendencies in the Issei community" as the cause for the decline in the students' English vocabulary "by as much as four full grades since Fall of 1942."<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the languishing English medium schools, the Japanese language schools flourished. For example, at Tule Lake, there were three established Japanese schools with branches dispersed "in all corners of the camp." The schools enrolled 5,355 students and maintained a teaching staff of 160. The English schools, on the other hand, enrolled only a total of 2,529 students from preschool to high school, with a staff of just over fifty-five.<sup>54</sup> Along with the deterioration of English, the Nisei invented a camp jargon called *Evacuese* which reflected the bitterness and irony of camp life. *Evacuese* combined English and Japanese with an underlayer of resistance humor. The term *barracks*, for example, became *buraku* in *Evacuese*; *buraku* to these Nisei implied a primitive, tribal colony. The word *foreman* was substituted for the *Evacuese* term, *foeman*.<sup>55</sup> Suzuki, in his study of the ethnolinguistics of the camps, concludes: "the total camp experience became embedded in a matrix of words used to circumscribe a segment of their lives, of which the images and memories conjured up by some of the slang terms and phrases to account for that experience, although latent for many Nisei, even today evoke powerful emotions that cannot be readily dissociated from a unique phase of Japanese American history."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Peter T. Suzuki, "The Ethnolinguistics of Japanese Americans in the Wartime Camps," *Anthropological Linguistics* 18 (December 1976): 422.

<sup>52</sup> Dillon Myer, "The Truth About Relocation," mss. in McGovern Papers, Box 119, Folder 1, JARP Collection.

<sup>53</sup> Family Welfare Orientation Program, Barnhart Papers, Box 49, Folder 6, JARP Collection. See also Suzuki, *op. cit.*, pp. 416-27.

<sup>54</sup> Austin Papers, Box 44, Folder 9, Document 2, JARP Collection. See also, "Letter to friend from a teacher in Tule Lake (Oct. 30, 1944)," Austin Papers, Box 44, Folder 6, Document 7.

<sup>55</sup> *The Pen*, mss. in Barnhart Papers, Box 49, Folder 7, JARP Collection. See also Suzuki, *op. cit.*, pp. 416-27.

<sup>56</sup> Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

Besides the revival of formal organized religion in Buddhism, there was a resurgence of Japanese folk beliefs and practices at Tule Lake.<sup>57</sup> Marvin Opler, a community analyst at the camp from 1943 to 1946, observed the rise of a "nativistic cultural revivalism" during that period and documented its swift decline after the closing of that camp in 1946. Following Linton's analysis of nativistic movements,<sup>58</sup> Opler distinguished between perpetuative-magical movements or ones invoked to perpetuate a culture or group, and revivalistic-magical movements or ones in which "revival is a part of a magical formula designed to modify the society's environment in ways which will be favorable to it" and thus take on more intense forms. At Tule Lake, according to Opler, all 19,000 internees participated in this folkloristic revival which took the form of Linton's revivalistic-magical movement. "Folklore which had been remembered by a handful of Issei," wrote Opler, "and perpetuated in a small circle, was seized upon by Issei and Nisei alike in a broadening sphere where it was deemed important to strike back at administrative pressures, programs, and policies with the dignified weapons of Japanese culture."<sup>59</sup>

One of the more prevalent beliefs was the *hidama* or "fireball" which was an omen of bad luck, and the *hinotama* or "ghost seen as a fireball presaging death." These were reportedly seen by Issei and Nisei alike signifying impending death. Two accounts of *hinotama* are excerpted below.

There are ghosts seen over there, *hinotama*. Greenish lights, they say, bigger than a fist. Last winter, I heard only one story of light coming out of the camp smoke above the field on a foggy morning, but now all sorts of stories are going around. We wouldn't go near too early in the morning or at night around that barrack. It's the worst place.

A young girl . . . was walking back to her apartment . . . when something prompted her to look over her shoulder. She glanced up and was chilled by a strange glow hovering over the latrine roof. She shivered violently and hurried home to tell her mother, fully expecting her not to believe it. But her mother look worried, opens the door, looks out, but says nothing. The girl insisted on knowing what it was and her mother told her she must have seen *hinotama*. A few days later an elderly bedridden block resident died.<sup>60</sup>

Another folk belief made popular in the camps was of the fox, cat, and badger. These animals were connected with the widespread and important cult of the rice goddess Inari, who descended from heaven to Japan during a time of famine riding on a white fox and holding in her hand sheaths of grain or cereal. Inari was a bearer of food, and thus was not only connected with agriculture and farming but also with commerce. The worship of Inari in Japan, particularly in the agricultural regions from whence most of the Issei derived, was so widespread that it was nearly a distinct cult and religion.<sup>61</sup> The Inari cult was revived in the camps and a number of shrines were maintained

<sup>57</sup> This was not the only such camp. See e.g., Spencer, op. cit., pp. 173-75.

<sup>58</sup> R. Linton, "Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist* 45 (April-June 1943): 230-40.

<sup>59</sup> Marvin K. Opler, "Japanese Folk Beliefs and Practices, Tule Lake, California," *Journal of American Folklore* 63 (October-December 1950) 385-87.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 388-89.

<sup>61</sup> Morris E. Opler and Robert Seido Hashima, "The Rice Goddess and the Fox in Japanese Religion and Folk Practice," *American Anthropologist* 48 (January-March 1946): 50.

by Japanese families in their apartments.<sup>62</sup> The fox on which Inari rode had white hair, denoting age and wisdom, and had the ability to see into the future. Farmers consulted the Inari shrine master before undertaking any important event such as a long journey; thus, many Issei immigrants had in their possession a little image of a fox which had been blessed by the Inari shrine master upon leaving for America. Besides being prescient, the fox, cat, and badger were tricksters and could take possession of a person's mind and body. Although the Inari shrine master could exorcise the victim, the person would nonetheless have a shorter life because fox possession supposedly ate away some of the life force (*ki ga nukeru*, "spirit leaks out").<sup>63</sup> A Tule Lake internee recalled the prevalence of stories of fox, cat, and badger possession.

I had never heard much of Fox, Badger, or Cat until this camp. Back in Gilroy, where I was born, I had heard it only once and forgot it until here. Then it was a newcomer had arrived and the old people found he kept several foxes on his farm. They talked about it until it became a choice story among the young that he could set these foxes to bewitch anyone he didn't like. It started when he threatened an oldtime resident. . . .<sup>64</sup>

The functional usefulness of this revival of ethnic folk belief during the period of camp confinement was evidenced in its rapid decline once the camps had been disbanded. Commented a former Tule Lake internee: "Oh, those fox and badger stories back in the Center; well, people used to believe a lot of things in the Center they never believed before and haven't believed since!"<sup>65</sup>

Other cultural resistance manifestations, rooted in religious belief, included the revival and resurgence of study groups and clubs which promoted such cultural activities as *shibai* and *kabuki* (drama), *utai*, *shigen*, and *nanaewabushi* (song), *haiku* and *senryu* (poetry), various dance forms and the playing of traditional musical instruments, *ikebana*, *bonsai*, and rock gardens, and *sumo* and *judo*. Orthodox writers point to the rise of these activities to illustrate internee recreation and the great amount of leisure time available in the camps.<sup>66</sup> Revisionist historians, in contrast, see these not merely as recreation but also as a means of cultural resistance. Like Japanese religious belief itself, however, the ethnic arts, including poetry clubs, did not arise situationally in the concentration camps but flourished in the pre-war Japanese American community.<sup>67</sup> The social and political context of the camps, nonetheless, highlighted their resistance function and meaning to the confined ethnic culture.

Perhaps the most expressive of these cultural resistance forms which we have today and which distills the sensitivity of the people and the bleakness of the camp experience is the *senryu* poetry produced at Tule Lake by members of the Tule Lake *Senryu Kai*.<sup>68</sup> "To understand the poetry," wrote Opler, "one must understand the people. In general, they are all, except the very young,

<sup>62</sup> Opler, "Japanese Folk Beliefs," pp. 389-90.

<sup>63</sup> Opler and Hashima, "Rice Goddess," pp. 43-50.

<sup>64</sup> Opler, "Japanese Folk Beliefs," p. 391.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Myer, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-7; and Michi Weglyn, *Years of Infamy* (New York, 1976), p. 82.

<sup>67</sup> Peter T. Suzuki, "Wartime *Tanka*: Issei and Kibei Contributions to a Literature East and West," *Literature East and West: Journal of World and Comparative Literature* 21 (July 1977): 242-54.

<sup>68</sup> See Suzuki, *op. cit.*, for similar expressions of the people in other poetic forms such as *haiku* and *waka*.

embittered and disaffected by the journey inland.”<sup>69</sup> The poetry captures that mood and records the barren landscape of camp life: the barbed wire fence, watchtowers and sentries, the searchlights, fingerprinting and cataloguing, mass feeding, interrogations on loyalty-disloyalty, and a dull, regimented life. Of the 558 *senryu* poems written between January 4 and August 31, 1943, only about seventeen dealt with camp life. That, concluded Opler, pointed to the essentially escapist nature of the poetry. “It may . . . be assumed that they desired to forget the drab existence of the Center, and as a matter of fact sought in *Senryu* a method of escape from it. Cultural revivalism and folk expression are, then, the prime purposes of *Senryu* poetry. The cultural form itself provides the refuge, the recreation, and the escape.”<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless those poems which did speak to the conditions of camp life were eloquent, reflecting protest, disenchantment, sorrow, and dreams of a better tomorrow. No poem directly attacked the U.S. government or the WRA, but *senryu*, through its techniques of “restraint, suggestiveness, and studied understatement,” was clearly an expression of cultural resistance. Examples of such *senryu* follow below.

| <u>Original</u>  | <u>Literal Translation</u>   | <u>Free Translation</u>   |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Onaji Yane</i><br><i>Nagamete shinobu</i><br><i>Shyu-yo-sho</i>   | The uniform roofs,<br>Looking at, lost in<br>reminiscence<br>In the Center                 | Here, reminiscence comes<br>When looking at<br>The endless rows of<br>barracks' roofs                   |
| <i>Kibana naki</i><br><i>Haru o zoka ni</i><br><i>Miru haisho</i>    | With few natural flowers,<br>Spring is seen in the<br>artificial flowers,<br>In the Center | Here, where natural flowers<br>are rare,<br>Spring is seen<br>In artificial ones                        |
| <i>Henka naki</i><br><i>Haisho ni henka</i><br><i>Aru kion</i>       | Changeless<br>In the place of exile<br>Is the temperature                                  | Here in the exile's<br>Monotonous life<br>Only the seasons change                                       |
| <i>Mata shimon ka to</i><br><i>Oyaji no</i><br><i>Nigai loa</i>      | Again, the fingerprints<br>The old man's<br>Bitter face                                    | "So, the finger-printing again!"<br>See the old man's<br>Bitter face<br>(We are not criminals)          |
| <i>Chyu, fuchyu</i><br><i>Mojiga men-shimu</i><br><i>Kino-o, kyo</i> | Loyalty, disloyalty<br>The words make eyes sore<br>Yesterday, today                        | "Loyalty," "disloyalty"<br>Such words to plague us<br>yesterday, today<br>In eyes made red with weeping |
| <i>Yume dakega</i><br><i>Jiyu no ten chi</i><br><i>Kake meguri</i>   | Dreams only<br>Of freedom and earth<br>and sky<br>Running about                            | Only in dreams<br>In a world of freedom<br>Earth-bounded, we walk<br>(And here, the fence)              |

The America of “freedom and earth and sky” was “dreams only”; what was reality was “here, the fence.”<sup>71</sup> A satirical wedding song portrays a similar

<sup>69</sup> Marvin K. Opler and F. Obayashi, “*Senryu* Poetry as Folk and Community Expression,” *Journal of American Folklore* 58 (January-March, 1945): 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

mood. The song deals with the seagulls which fly to Tule Lake in the summer, and the chorus translates as follows.

The sea-birds fly inland to the dry and waterless desert. They stop here, but will not stay. Too dry, too weary here. They fly away. Even the sea-birds find no reason to remain.<sup>72</sup>

Cultural resistance was a reality within the concentration camps and ethnic religious belief provided an ideological basis for that resistance. The pattern of cultural resistance was established even before the creation of the camps largely in reaction to white supremacy. The concentration camps and “Americanization,” manifestations of racism and cultural hegemony, reinforced that historical pattern. Before World War II, the various Japanese institutions such as the ethnic church, language schools, and mutual aid and economic associations served to preserve the ethnic identity.<sup>73</sup> Those pre-war institutions were temporarily shattered in the removal and confinement, a process which not only separated family members but also dismantled entire communities. The former means of resistance in the camps were thus lost, though not completely. The ethnic church, language schools, and even unofficial “unions” persisted in the camps; indeed they flourished. The traditional values of filial piety, the primacy of the family, and ethnic solidarity continued to be upheld as cardinal virtues. The family unit merged into the block collective which in turn merged into the wider camp community of the “Japanese spirit” of cooperation, loyalty to the collective, and community participation in cultural activities. Formal religion prospered, as evidenced in the growth of the Buddhist churches and revival of magical and cultic beliefs — perhaps because of the pervasive feeling of insecurity, but also because religious belief constituted the core of Meiji Japanese culture and ethics. The ideals of filial piety and ancestor worship, and of the closeness of man, gods, and nature, were manifested in the wider network of cultural resistance in the various aesthetic expressions through music, drama, and poetry. Resistance was rechanneled away from open rebellion into ethnic beliefs and practices, which, because of the nature of the oppression, themselves constituted resistance. Japanese religious belief, therefore, was both a vehicle for and an expression of the people’s resistance.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>73</sup> See e.g., Shotaro Frank Miyamoto, *Social Solidarity Among the Japanese in Seattle* (Seattle, 1939); and Kashima, *op. cit.*