

ORIGINAL RESEARCH: Canadian *nikkei* institutions and spaces

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Abstract

Since their first arrival in Canada in 1877 to the present period, Canadian *nikkei* have established a variety of institutions and spaces that highlight their position within Canada as a minority group. Canadian *nikkei* history began with their labelling as “*yellow peril*”, followed by their internment during the Second World War, their dispersal after the Second World War, their award of Redress in 1988, and finally their place as a “*model minority*” in modern multicultural Canada. These main historical milestones have been reflected in various commemorative institutions and spaces such as Powell Street and Nikkei Place which function not just in a practical sense for gathering the Canadian *nikkei* together but also in an ideological sense to help shape their cultural identities extending transnationally across the Asia Pacific region.

Keywords: Canada, Cultural identity, Institutions and spaces, Minorities, Multiculturalism, *Nikkei*.

Introduction

The ‘*nikkei*’ are people of Japanese descent living outside Japan and no longer Japanese citizens. Canadian *nikkei* can therefore be defined as Canadians of Japanese descent. Some argue, such as the *Kaigai Nikkeijin Kyōkai* (Association of Nikkei & Japanese Abroad), that the term *nikkei* includes all Japanese living outside of Japan even if they hold Japanese citizenship (Hamano 2008: 5). Canadian *nikkei* are also known as “Japanese(-)Canadians” (with or without the hyphen), although this label has been criticized by some for essentializing both sides of the hyphen and thus not accurately reflecting their identity (Mahtani 2002). The Canadian *nikkei* have had a long and turbulent history in Canada, from being labelled as the “*yellow peril*”, when they first arrived, to a “*model minority*” in recent times. This paper shows the influence of history on cultural identity through commemorative Canadian *nikkei* institutions and (web) spaces.

Japanese immigration to Canada started in the late 19th century, mainly into the Pacific coast of Canada (Nakayama 1984). These early pioneers were then followed by a wave of early settlers (Takata 1983). After the early settlers the majority of whom were men, came the “*Picture Brides*” from Japan, encouraged by stories of economic and social freedom in Canada and a seemingly immigrant-friendly government policy (Makabe 1983). Many of these early immigrants began careers in fishing, mining, forestry, and commerce (Fukawa 2009). These initial groups of immigrants often retained many aspects of their cultural identity from their homeland but saw Canada as a chance to “*recreate themselves*” (Lemire 2012: 59). They lived together in enclaves and they had their own institutions (Yamagishi 2010: ch 2). Canada at that time was still in the early stages of its development as a nation-state, so Canadian *nikkei* pioneers were not able to relate to a ‘Canadian’ nation in the way in which people can today; they were open, however, towards learning more about their new place of residence.

Conditions changed from the 1930s onwards as the world cascaded into economic depression. Japanese immigrants felt a sense of isolation against increasing Canadian nationalism, so many of the *issei* (first generation) became more insular, although this depended on where they were located, and the numbers of other immigrants they were with (Canada History Project n.d.). The second generation (*nisei*) were more

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outward looking and torn between retaining traditions from their Japanese heritage whilst adapting to their life in Canada (Fujiwara 2012: np). They were fluent in English, well-educated, and interacted more with white Canadians (Fujiwara 2012: np). They considered Canada their home and had limited transnational ties with Japan (Sugiman in Agnew 2005: 65-68). However, they were still subject to racial prejudice from white Canadian society due to being a visible minority (Hickman and Fukawa 2011: 52).

The Canadian government forcibly interned Canadian nikkei in British Columbia during the Second World War. This was a response to the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Imperial Japanese navy. The Canadian government worried that people of Japanese descent in Canada might be (or might become) involved with spying (particularly on the British Columbia coastline) or acts against the interests of Canada. Canadian nikkei were branded “*enemy aliens*” under the War Measures Act (Fujiwara 2012b: 65) which gave power to intern “*all persons of Japanese racial origin*” (Tsuneharu 2003: np). There is evidence that some senior members of government and the RCMP did not see Canadian nikkei as a threat (Omatsu 1992: 12) and that opposition from the political left in Canada may have halted internment (Cohn n.d.). However, the Canadian government succumbed to the widespread fear of the “*yellow peril*”, rounding up twenty-seven thousand people in early 1942. These included women and children, making it the largest mass movement in Canadian history. About three-quarters of these were naturalized or native-born Canadians (Sunahara 1981: 46). They were relocated at least one-hundred miles from the British Columbia coastline to interior locations such as Lillooet Country, Tashme, the Okanagan Valley, and Slokan.

The government detained Canadian nikkei without charge or trial. Many worked on sugar beet farms in the prairies, on road camps in the interior, or an internment camp in Ontario (Robinson 2013). In contrast to nikkei wartime internment in the United States, Canadian nikkei families were often split up with women and children in six inland British Columbia ghost towns (Maufort and Bellarsi 2002: 131). Conditions at the internment camps were often less than ideal (Fukawa and Hickman 2011), despite propaganda films by the Canadian government to show it as otherwise. The Red Cross had to send supplemental food shipments from Japan because the Canadian government only spent one-third the amount of the United States per internee. As in the United States, *nisei* rather than *issei* took the camp leadership positions, presumably because the people overseeing the camps saw them as more ‘Canadian’ and less ‘Japanese’ (Rogers and Bartlit 2005: 163). Some Canadian nikkei, such as Harold Hirose, tried to prove their allegiance to Canada by serving for the Canadian army (Omatsu 1992: 78).

After the war, Canadian nikkei were released but only given a choice of relocation within Canada east of the Rockies or deportation to Japan which was chosen by about 3,700 people (Broadfoot 1977: 309). The government did not return the vast majority of their seized assets despite promises beforehand that they would be, instead auctioning them for a fraction of their true value (Lenzerini 2008: 272). Many had to rebuild their lives from scratch, often scattered away from the community they had been a part of before the war. The Wartime Transitions Act, which replaced the War Measures Act, maintained the denial of civil rights until 1949 when the Canadian government finally allowed them back into British Columbia and lifted the remaining restrictions (Hickman and Fukawa 2011: 134). By then many did not have the resources or the inclination to return to British Columbia, and in any case had already restarted their lives elsewhere. Racism persisted, including at the top level of government. Prime Minister Mackenzie King’s wrote: “*It is fortunate that the use of the bomb should have been upon the Japanese rather than upon the white races of Europe*” (King Diary, 6 August 1945). Just after the war, though notably not so much during it, Canadian nikkei won the support of

some locals. Public protests against their treatment led to the appointment of a Royal Commission and the repeal of some anti-Japanese legislation (Yamagishi 2010: ch12).

The journey to Redress for the mistreatment of Canadian *nikkei* was not a smooth one; Maryka Omatsu's (1992) title "Bittersweet Passage: Redress and the Japanese Canadian Experience" is an apt one. Redress was neither accepted immediately nor unequivocally by the Canadian government (Miki 2004: 12). It did not gain the unwavering support of all Canadian *nikkei* either (Omatsu 1992: 5). The settlement day for Redress was 22 September, 1988. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney addressed the House of Commons. He agreed to the three NAJC resolutions offering respectively an apology for internment, Redress for individual survivors, and assurances it would never happen again. The government also reinstated Canadian citizenship for those forcibly repatriated to Japan. The Canadian government would provide C\$21,000 individual Redress to eligible persons, with an additional C\$36 million in total for the community and for the establishment of a Canadian Race Relations Foundation (Miki and Kobayashi 1991: 138-139). Much of this money went into the creation of some of the spaces and institutions that I shall discuss.

Methodology

The historical and sociological studies dominating research on Canadian *nikkei* are unsuited to providing a nuanced study of cultural identity. Situated within a cultural studies framework, this research takes an exploratory approach to researching the cultural identity of Canadian *nikkei* through their institutions and social spaces in Vancouver, Canada. This approach considers the social and cultural context of these spaces. This can provide a relatively sophisticated understanding the cultural identity of Canadian *nikkei* as well as other important related issues such as multiculturalism. This can then be compared and contrasted with other *nikkei* and diasporas. The research is positioned as an intervention in the study of Canadian *nikkei* that encourages understanding their cultural identity in a collective and multidisciplinary manner.

The fieldwork for this research was undertaken in 2013 whilst the author was a visiting scholar at the University of British Columbia. It comprises a multi-layered approach including interviews with members of the Canadian *nikkei* cultural elite, textual analysis of cultural productions, archival research, ethnography, and site visits to the various institutions and spaces. This multi-pronged approach helps to unpack the impact of Canadian *nikkei* spaces and institutions.

Findings and Discussion

With Redress achieved in 1988, there were questions over the direction of Canadian *nikkei* as a community into the future and how the Canadian *nikkei* cultural elite involved with Redress would continue, if at all, working together. Cultural producers still revisit internment and Redress as themes in their works; however, the historical context is now over the place of Canadian *nikkei* within Canada's enactment of multiculturalism. A number of organizations sprang up both to remember the Canadian *nikkei*'s past, and to lead it into the future.

The term "cultural heritage" originates from the 1970s. It questions ideologies of social development, with linguistic and/or cultural turns emphasizing increasingly complex multiple personal identities as well as the effect of immigration on modern Western nations such as Canada (Sonkoly n.d.: np). Cultural heritage is therefore a responsibility of each current generation. It exists at the national level (including government) as

well as smaller chapters representing the interests of specific groups, such as Canadian nikkei. In Canada, the two main national heritage movements are “Heritage Conservation in Canada” and “The Canadian Register of Historic Places”.

I would like to highlight here the key organizations that seek to preserve the cultural heritage of Canadian *nikkei*: SEDAI, Multicultural Canada, The Historic Joy Kogawa House Society, and Nikkei Place.

SEDAI: SEDAI, The Japanese Canadian Legacy Project, “*is dedicated to collecting and preserving the stories of earlier generations of Canadians of Japanese ancestry for all future generations*” (SEDAI: The Japanese Canadian Legacy Project n.d.). Its website contains a collection of videotaped oral histories of *issei* Canadian nikkei, as well as speeches from CNCP and leaders such as Gary Kawaguchi, President of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC). The website also contains photograph archives of internment camps, POW camps, pre-war, and the war years. Documents are also available tracing the genealogy of Canadian nikkei families up to seven generations back. It is one of the best archives of primary materials on the history of Canadian nikkei.

SEDAI, which means ‘generations’ in Japanese, is in part a dialogue between generations of Canadian nikkei. Here, the *issei* elders can be appreciated by their descendants:

“[SEDAI] *is dedicated with respect, admiration and gratitude to the issei ... They worked hard, embraced the best values of their new country and triumphed over adversity to secure a place in Canada for their children and future generations. In so doing, they have set an example for all Canadians*”
(SEDAI: The Japanese Canadian Legacy Project n.d.)

The structure of SEDAI, being a freely accessible website, is easily accessible to Canadian nikkei (and everyone else). As a project, SEDAI is organized by the JCCC, run by volunteers, and relies on donations. Amongst the donors are the Japanese American National Museum, the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation, Densho (The Japanese American Legacy Project), and the National Association of Japanese Canadians Sustaining Fund.

As well as being one of the main donors, Densho also affects the ideology and methodology of SEDAI. Densho, based in Seattle (Washington, United States), is an organization formed with a mission to:

“... *preserve the testimonies of Japanese Americans who were unjustly incarcerated during World War II before their memories are extinguished. We offer these irreplaceable first-hand accounts, coupled with historical images and teacher resources, to explore principles of democracy and promote equal justice for all.*”
(Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project n.d.)

Densho in Japanese means “to pass on to the next generation”, implying that the oral histories it attempts to archive may later be used didactically in classrooms. This methodology, which in turn has influenced the methodology of the SEDAI interviews, may thus restrict both what the interviewers can ask and how the interviewees can answer. The general audience may therefore also have a highly curated experience strongly based on the ethos of Densho.

SEDAI is able to leverage itself in the contemporary era using modern technologies, the understanding gained from the development of heritage industries in general, and a spirit of volunteerism related to safeguarding cultural heritage. The SEDAI team, which operates as a committee under the auspices of the JCCC, consists mainly of Canadian nikkei volunteers. However, several notable Canadian nikkei cultural producers are “honorary advisors” for SEDAI. These include author Joy Kogawa, Judge Maryka Omatsu,

filmmaker Linda Ohama, and author Kerri Sakamoto. Of the fifteen Honorary Advisors, eight are from Toronto, three from the United States, and only two from British Columbia. This points as evidence that multiculturalism, and more precisely activism and politicization, differ between different areas of Canada.

Multicultural Canada (website): SEDAI and “Multicultural Canada” provide alternatives to cultural productions such as literary fiction to remembering the cultural heritage and expressing the cultural identity of Canadian *nikkei*. The emphasis with these websites is on primary sources with an implicit understanding that they are preserving Canadian *nikkei* memories. As we see with Hayden White’s (2009) argument that history is also a narration, the questions they ask their interviewees and the way they present their material on the website have implications. The angle taken is generally one of appreciating one’s ancestors particularly *issei*, but this does not take the tensions between these generations into account. Every archive is influenced by its founders and their politics, often imbued in the mission statements. However, such ‘social’ institutions are a handy yardstick to compare with cultural producers for their differences in how they envisage and seek to promote Canadian *nikkei* cultural identity.

When preserving oral histories with the angle of appreciating one’s ancestors, it begs the question of why is respecting them so important. It might be the approach of the board of directors of the institutions involved, something which they see as important or which they think their intended audience deems important. Respect for elders is seen as a key feature of Asian communities including Japanese (Sung 2001), so perhaps this ancestor respect is a specific feature for Canadian *nikkei* (or Asians in general). Many Canadian *nikkei* have, however, pointed out that this idea of Asian respect for elders is a myth (Sung 2000). Joseph Tobin (1987) in “*the American Idealization of Old Age in Japan*” shows this stereotyped understanding of an imaginary Japanese culture. Another possibility for ancestor respect could be Canadian multiculturalism itself which encourages connection with an ethnic group’s homeland culture and by extension their ancestors.

The “Multicultural Canada” website is similar to SEDAI in that it is a freely accessible website concerned with preserving the history and cultural memories of Canadian *nikkei* and other Canadian minority groups. There is dialogue between the two websites with each linking to the other. However, Multicultural Canada differs in that it is a national-level project with corresponding differences in structure, funding, and ethos:

“The Multicultural Canada digitization project grew from our conviction that the cultural groups that make up our country have little-known stories that need to be researched and told. Through newspapers, interviews, photographs, print and material culture people tell us who they are. Yet research into Canada’s multi-ethnic communities has been hampered by the relative lack of availability of non-English language materials and other artefacts originating from minority groups. Archives and libraries have long worked with individuals and cultural communities in Canada to collect and preserve the historical record of their experience; but these documents are seldom available beyond the walls of the institution. The intent of Multicultural Canada is to provide free and greater access to these existing collections.” (Multicultural Canada n.d.)

Multicultural Canada contains the Chung collection of archival material focusing on Canadian *nikkei* in Canada between 1900 and 1939, and the Japanese Canadian oral history collection. Although the ethos of the Multiculturalism Canada website is similar to that of SEDAI, based on the heritage of a minority group, there is a tendency in the Multicultural Canada website to group all minorities together as ‘others’. On the collections page, minority groups from Hungarian to Jewish to Indian to Japanese are all listed together as “ethnic groups”. Whereas SEDAI appears to be created by Canadian *nikkei* mainly for Canadian *nikkei*,

Multicultural Canada appears to be curated by mainstream white Canadians for the same group to learn about Canada's ethnic groups. The website also includes access to the Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples that provides essays on minorities such as Canadian nikkei and 'learning modules' to help teachers and students make use of the primary materials in the collections. There is some help by Canadian nikkei organizations for the Multicultural Canada website, with the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project and Japanese Community Volunteers Association listed as supporting agencies, as well as Dr. Yuko Shibata listed as an individual that has helped.

The Historic Joy Kogawa House: The Historic Joy Kogawa House is the childhood home of Kogawa and serves as a cultural reminder of Kogawa and her work that symbolizes the suffering of Canadian nikkei during the Second World War. The Historic Joy Kogawa House Society purchased it in 2006 with the help of The Land Conservancy of British Columbia. It is used in a writer-in-residence capacity to encourage the development of Canadian writers and the appreciation of them. Here public and private, national and local, as well as cultural producer and community, all come together to preserve Canadian nikkei cultural memory. The first mandate of the society is "to operate and preserve the former Joy Kogawa family home at 1450 West 64th Avenue in Vancouver as a heritage and cultural centre and as a site of healing and reconciliation" (Welcome to Historic Joy Kogawa House 2005). Thus, in addition to commemoration and memorialization, there is active thought on how to lead the current generation of Canadian nikkei, particularly schoolchildren.

Although Kogawa tends to speak less of Kogawa House today than she does of her other political causes, she writes the house into her novels: "*The house then—the house, if I must remember it today, was large and beautiful*" (Kogawa, 1994b: 54). In a letter to a fan, Kogawa describes how she used the house in her novels, what she donated, and her fears of what might become of the house:

"The applewood table and chairs came with us, Mother's sewing machine, the Japanese 'kori', the trunk, their wedding gifts of dishes, the gramophone as described in Obasan, the Yellow Peril game, the little blue wool dress with flowers stitched along the bottom as described in both Obasan and Naomi's Road, the books we took to Slokan, The Book of Knowledge encyclopedia set that I've never parted with -- the stories in there gave me my moral training. There are items at the Galt Museum we might be permitted to return to the house. And there are other things I've kept with me. Will any of these things go back to the house? Well—the first question would be—can the house survive?"

(Joy Kogawa letter to Anton Wagner, 4 November 2013)

The Historic Joy Kogawa House differs from many of the other Canadian Nikkei institutions and spaces in a few important ways. First, it has emerged out of a single experience. Out of the Canadian nikkei oral histories I have read or listened to, Kogawa's personal experience is neither the most compelling nor original. Perhaps the value lies in her story's ordinariness, or, more likely, because of the way she has told her story. The resonance her story creates has led to its affective power and the commemoration of the Historic Joy Kogawa House. Second, it is different from other institutions and spaces because it was and continues to be a highly political issue with continued media coverage. Most recently, there have been concerns over the governing and financing of the house. This combination of its individual personality and high profile makes it one of the more important Canadian Nikkei spaces.

The politics around Historic Joy Kogawa House has two major implications. First, it shows that an individual such as Kogawa can become like an institution. She is already being memorialized and made a representative for Canadian nikkei. Kogawa herself is keen that the house be saved but less keen that it be

made a representative for Canadian *nikkei*. Second, it begs the question of why should this home be memorialized and not the other Canadian *nikkei* homes. The answer is most likely that Kogawa's home has been made famous by her novels providing the survivors of internment and their descendants an additional (or alternative) site of commemoration to visit and learn from.

Nikkei Place: Nikkei Place consists of Nikkei Place Seniors, Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, and The Nikkei Place Foundation. The mission of the National Museum & Cultural Centre is “to preserve and promote Japanese Canadian history, arts and culture through vibrant programs and exhibits that connect generations and inspire diverse audiences”.² To this end, the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre organizes the TAIKEN education program for schoolchildren, as well as weekly programs open to all. The TAIKEN program is led by Canadian *nikkei* elders and community representatives, aiming to teach about “internment, Redress, and regeneration all in one” (TAIKEN Education Programs n.d.). Weekly programs include arts & culture, cooking, education, health and fitness, martial arts, seniors programs, and the Gladstone Japanese Language School. There are also a number of events and exhibitions held throughout the year, including workshops, festivals, and lectures. These all help to bring together Canadian *nikkei* spatially and help them identify with their cultural identity:

“I was thinking of the museum which is in itself a community landscape where it is a place where people go and they identify and again I was there recently and they were holding a judo class and I would say just by looking, which you can't always tell, maybe less than half of the students in the class were Japanese Canadians but it still has a sense of the community, and the museum, I don't know if you've been there? They focus very much on...it's not just exhibits it's creating the actual, not the actual but coming as close as possible to the landscapes in which Japanese Canadians lived and worked and it is part of the curatorial philosophy to do that which you see in a lot of museums but by no means all.”

(Interview with Professor Audrey Kobayashi 2013)

The museum gallery itself usually has the ongoing TAIKEN exhibit displaying the history of Canadian *nikkei* from 1877 to present, along with another exhibition. Nikkei Place also collects and organizes materials relating to Canadian *nikkei*, some of which it makes available online. These include the Nikkei National Museum Oral History Collection, which in collaboration with Simon Fraser University holds over 230 digitized interviews and “Nikkei Images” a publication focusing on the history of Canadian *nikkei*. The Nikkei Place website contains news, a blog, an audio podcast, and other online materials relating to Canadian *nikkei*.

Nikkei Place, in contrast to other organizations representing Canadian *nikkei* such as the NAJC, is relatively new only having been established in 2000. Indeed, there was even disagreement just before its opening over whether or not to raise a Japanese flag there. For some Canadian *nikkei*, the nation Japan represented by its flag would at best be irrelevant to them and at worst would be damaging to how they wish to present themselves in Canada. The issue is further complicated because the Japanese government partially funds Canadian Nikkei institutions such as Tonari Gumi. This can be seen as using emigrants as “*dutiful agents of colonial development*” (Endoh 2009: 8). Calling it “Nikkei Place”, rather than including the words Japanese and/or Canadian, emphasized their special place within Canadian society. Canadian *nikkei* are defining the word ‘*nikkei*’ in their own terms at a local level. This new reworking of the definition allows the

²Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre. <http://centre.nikkeiplace.org> (accessed 18 February, 2015). Similar cultural centres for Canadian Nikkei exist in Burnaby, Calgary, Edmonton, Kamloops, Hamilton, Montréal, Ottawa, Steveston, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Vernon, and Winnipeg.

inclusion of not only those Canadian nikkei established in Canada for more than a generation but also *shin ijusha* (post-war Canadian nikkei immigrants) (Sekita, 2004). Nikkei Place is an attempt, perhaps a last-ditch attempt, to keep a Canadian nikkei community:

“The history of the Japanese Canadian community and its relation to multiculturalism in Canada explains the current nature of the nikkei community in Vancouver. The results of this research suggest people hope to sustain a community by way of redefining the external boundary in relationship to multicultural Canada and the internal boundaries within the heterogeneous nikkei community. Through interviews with Hapa young adults of nikkei in Vancouver, much diversity was found among them which reaffirmed the diverse nature of the nikkei community.” (Sekita 2004: ii)

Sekita’s description above is repeated in other cities across Canada (albeit with smaller Canadian nikkei populations). In Toronto, the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC) fulfils a similar role to that of Nikkei Place, as does the Calgary Nikkei Cultural & Senior Centre in Alberta. Many of these Canadian nikkei cultural centers have social facilities attached to them, especially for care of the elderly as well as liaising and advocacy functions for the Canadian nikkei community in general. Thus, the maintenance of heritage in such centers often has other functions in addition to serving any multicultural agenda.

Many of the programs at cultural centers such as Nikkei Place appear highly ‘Japanese’. For example, regular weekly programs at Nikkei Place include arts & culture (Japanese calligraphy, *kimono* dressing class, *sake* workshop, tea ceremony workshop); cooking (*sushi* class); education (Japanese school); and martial arts (*aikido*, judo, and karate). These classes are often run by *shin ijusha*. For *shin ijusha*, the JCCC is a way of maintaining Japanese culture. The deployment of traditional forms of Japan in terms of a homeland authenticity is something I noticed across my fieldwork contact with *shin ijusha* in Vancouver.

Powell Street: By having Nikkei Place as a formal space to represent Canadian nikkei, they are no longer invisible, at least not in Vancouver. After internment and the subsequent dispersal, Canadian nikkei tended to avoid staying together *en masse* in enclaves. The former Japantown in Vancouver, known as Powell Street, has few Canadian nikkei living there now, and there is a tug-of-war over how to represent it. Professor Audrey Kobayashi explains:

“I’m part of a group that has received a grant to address the rebranding of what the Vancouver City Council calls ‘Japantown’, which we do not call Japantown; we just call it ‘Powell Street’. Of course this is the area from which Japanese Canadians were uprooted at the beginning of the 1940s And it became the worst of the skid row of Vancouver. The housing has deteriorated, there are many, many social and economic problems in part exacerbated by the fact that Japanese immigrants had built boarding houses and small hotels as a way of accommodating all of the immigrants and these became single rooms mostly for single men. After the 1940s that housing deteriorated and now the City of Vancouver wants to rebrand what they call Japantown and there have been a number of good projects going on to revitalize the housing which is fine but we’re working with artist groups and activist groups to resist or set in perspective this rebranding so as not to turn it into a kind of tourist destination. So, I’m working with a group of Japanese-Canadian academics and artists as well as a group of people from the current community. I also have ongoing work looking at the history of Powell Street focusing on what happened in all of the buildings, trying to tell the stories of how that neighborhood emerged and I’m working with a group at the University of Victoria who are also doing additional research on the history of Powell Street buildings.” (Kobayashi 2013)

For some Canadian *nikkei* whose memories of Powell Street are of the poverty and racism they experienced whilst living there, it is not necessarily a good thing to rebrand it as Japantown. Besides, Canadian *nikkei* have already to some extent reclaimed Powell Street not in physical spatial terms but symbolically through the annual Powell Street Festival:

“Well, whether to say it’s a community I’m not sure – well let me first of all say the Powell Street festival which is not post-Redress but actually was part of the build up towards Redress and has only grown since and that is an example of maybe a tenuous relationship to the place that is Powell Street but at least transforms that landscape once a year to say, you know, this is our ‘furusato’ - do you know that term? In a way, we don’t live here anymore but we come back every year and it becomes the place that defines us, defines our roots and our origins; so that I would say is one.”

(Kobayashi, 2013)

The Powell Street Festival Society (PSFS) organizes the event as part of its overall mission *“to celebrate and cultivate Japanese Canadian and Asian Canadian arts and culture; to encourage Asian Canadians to take a leadership role in the development of the arts in Canada”* (About the Society n.d.). The PSFS is run by volunteers comprising a board of directors, various committees, and dozens of people helping during the event itself. Annual individual donation campaigns, corporate networking, fundraising events, and public funding sources fund it.

The Powell Street Festival is a rare example, since the days of ‘Redress’, of cultural producers working together with other Canadian *nikkei*, local governments, and other organizations. Although Canadian *nikkei* filmmakers are often part of elaborate production networks, other cultural producers (particularly writers and academics) work more in isolation. This is not to say that they are not part of an interconnected dialogue with other people involved in the construction of Canadian *nikkei* cultural identities. However, one effect of their isolation is a more abstract approach towards conceptualizing cultural identity than Canadian *nikkei* organizations and spaces where there is impetus towards the goal of maintaining ‘community’.

The Powell Street Festival is important because it fulfils a different role to other ‘Japanese’ festivals. It is a role based on heritage that contrasts to other festivals such as the Sakura Festival in Vancouver and the Japan Matsuri in London. These latter festivals are more commoditized and part of an affective world culture consumption. Powell Street, by focusing on history and memorializing, is much more political and concerned with the place of Canadian *nikkei* in Canadian society.

Nitobe Memorial Garden: Nitobe Memorial Garden is located within the Vancouver campus of UBC in British Columbia. It is a Japanese garden with a Tea Garden and Tea House *“considered to be the one of the most authentic Japanese gardens in North America and among the top five Japanese gardens outside of Japan”* (Nitobe Memorial Garden, n.d.). The garden pays homage to Inazô Nitobe a Japanese academic and politician who sought to improve relations between the United States and Japan, *“building a bridge across the Pacific”* (Howes, 1995: back cover). Nitobe is the author of *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Nitobe 1938) which sought to explain Japanese culture to the English-speaking world.

Nitobe is an unusual space amongst those I cover in this paper since it seems to be an institution used and appreciated more by *shin ijusha* and visiting Japanese rather than established Canadian *nikkei*. It is a construction of ‘Japanese-ness’ suggesting that cultural identities are distinct—that the ‘Japanese’ and ‘Canadians’ need to have a bridge built between them, as Nitobe said long ago, for mutual understanding. Therefore, Nitobe Memorial Garden does seem out of step with other organizations such as the Powell Street

Festival Society and *taiko* groups who now look at cultural identity more in terms of similarities, or intersections, with other cultural groups rather than differences. The garden seems more in step with the ethos of Canadian multiculturalism and preservation of ethnic racialized cultures.

Nitobe Garden also highlights a key difference in the dynamics of cultural identity between *shin ijusha* and established Canadian nikkei, suggesting the groups are somewhat divided. Indeed, *shin ijusha* have an almost entirely different experience constructing their cultural identity in Canada in terms of their local experiences. For example, the various institutions in Vancouver for those of Japanese descent seem to be divided in their patronage between the two groups. The Vancouver Mokuyokai Society is organized for “*fostering greater cultural, linguistic and economic understanding between Canadians and Japanese*” (Canadian Japanese Society Vancouver Mokuyokai Society n.d.). From visits to their events, they seemed to be split evenly in terms of numbers of each group. However, socially at meetings the distinct group members tended to congregate with each other.

Conclusion

In this paper I have showcased the roles of a variety of Canadian nikkei institutions and spaces. I have shown the similar ways in which many of them work, as well as the similar objectives they work towards. Such institutions and spaces provide an alternative to Canadian nikkei cultural producers in the construction of cultural identity. Often they are just as concerned with identifying and preserving Canadian nikkei cultural identities from the past as they are with the present. Cultural producers are not completely separated from these institutions and spaces since they are often on the committees or hold other influential roles.

As numbers of Canadian nikkei dwindle due to intermarriage, one would expect a corresponding decline in the size of memberships of these spaces and institutions or even their closure. However, the trend seems to be a move instead towards a widening of their scope. For example, cultural centers such as Nikkei Place now perform multiple roles simultaneously in addition to their original purpose of being a cultural center. Another major change into the future will be the move towards the curation of primary source materials on Canadian nikkei history online rather than in physical archives. Projects such as SEDAI and Multicultural Canada are examples of this. Websites offer not only a cost-effective way of preserving such materials but also make them easy to search and accessible to anyone, anywhere, and at any time. This will allow organizations such as Densho the best chance to fulfil their remit of passing cultural identity on to the next generation.

Whereas websites such as SEDAI currently focus on Canadian nikkei almost as a self-contained cultural identity, other websites such as Multicultural Canada incorporate Canadian nikkei into a wider generalized ‘others’ category. One can expect the negotiation of Canadian nikkei cultural identities to continue with the creation of new websites, social network groups, and so on with less of a focus on the Canadian nikkei’s past (particularly internment and multiculturalism) and more on future wider conceptions of nikkei and pan-Asian cultural identities. This is an important new trend because many existing minority communities around the world still construct identity locally.³

This paper demonstrates the role of Canadian history and multiculturalism in shaping the various Canadian nikkei institutions and spaces. On the face of things, Canadian multiculturalism policy with its ethos of supporting different cultures within a general Canadian mosaic culture would appear to strengthen the

³ See for example “Identity construction among the Magars of Okhaldhunga District in Eastern Nepal” (Magar & Mani 2014).

cultural identity of Canadian *nikkei*. Unlike during the Second World War or earlier, Canadian *nikkei* would actually be encouraged by institutions such as the government. However, intermarriage rates for Canadian *nikkei* at 95% are higher than any ethnic community within Canada. Documentaries such as “*One Big Hapa Family*” by Jeff Chiba Stearns suggest that this may be a legacy of the racism faced by Canadian *nikkei* previously.

What multiculturalism has achieved is a widening and strengthening of Canadian *nikkei*. Their cultural institutions such as Nikkei Place and the Vancouver Mokuyokai, indirect results of Canada’s multicultural policy, have led to a review of who are included as (Canadian) *nikkei* at a national and provincial level. Canadian *nikkei* now refers to both established people of Japanese descent in Canada (those descendants from the first settlers who came to Canada starting in the late 19th century) right up to the *shin ijusha* from the postwar period. Although there are still differences and occasionally tensions between the different generations and groups comprising modern Canadian *nikkei*, there is an increasing willingness to consider *nikkei* as something that goes beyond the nation-states of Canada and Japan.

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