

Contexts for Ethnic Identity of Japanese Canadians

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〈Key Words〉

- ethnic identity
- assimilation
- multiculturalism
- Japanese Canadians
- distribution of resources

Ethnic identity is neither a simply fixed ascriptive or primordial phenomenon nor a simply situational phenomenon: it is the combination of both. It is commonly believed in North America that visible minorities cannot escape external judgment of their ethnic identity and that for them this visible aspect plays a large role in formation of their ethnic identity. At the same time, one cannot ignore the situational aspect of ethnic identity even for visible minorities. Thernstrom et al., although themselves assuming physical invisibility as a premise for a flexible definition of ethnic identity, note the dynamic aspect of ethnic identity:

Ethnic identification, even when ethnic heritage is unmixed or fully understood, is a matter of individual choice, ratified on a

continuum from passive acquiescence to active participation, from denial through mild curiosity to passionate commitment. It may change over time and may vary from one situation to another (1980: vii).

In the following, attempts are made to understand the present contexts for ethnic identity of Japanese Canadians. In the first section literature review is presented to outline how the two spheres of resources in society, namely material and non-material are distributed to so called "other", that is, non-charter and non-native, ethnic groups in Canada. The second section focuses on particular contexts for Japanese Canadians among the other ethnic groups.

1. Reality for "Other" Ethnic Groups in Canada

Canada is neither a country with an official racist ideology and practice nor a utopia for all. On one hand, the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects individual rights regardless of ascriptive characteristics such as ethnic origins. And the Charter together with the 1971 multiculturalism policy accept and support the multicultural nature and heritage of Canada. In general individuals are entitled to pursue socio-economic opportunity and to maintain their ethnic heritage if they wish. On the other hand, the ethnic composition of the elitest and the most disadvantaged segments of the society appear to remain unchanged, and prejudice and discrimination against minority ethnic groups persists.

Ethnic identity of "other" ethnic groups may remain because of the persistent inequality, but ethnic identity may also remain

because of relatively liberal social climate of Canada which allows ethnic identity to come out of the closet. It is in this context of limited but still prevailing egalitarianism of today that studies of ethnic identity of "other" ethnic groups must be understood.

a) Material resources: individual meritocracy for mass and social closure for elites

On one hand, empirical evidence indicates that the elitest segment of Canadian society is virtually closed to members of non-charter groups. According to Dahlie and Fernando:

... even those who argue against Porter's analysis fail to counter Porter's crucial point that noncharter group Canadians are severely underrepresented in areas of political and economic decision-making (1981: 3).

On the other hand, Porter's ethnically blocked thesis - occupational class is determined by ethnicity - has been called to question lately. Comparing census data from 1931 to 1961, Porter concludes:

Within the total occupational system the vertical mosaic can be summed up as follows: "... the proportion of British in each class generally increases from the lowest to the highest class whereas the reverse is true for the French. The Jewish group follows a pattern similar to that of the British whereas all other origins follow the French pattern" (1965: 90).

Porter's thesis is re-examined by Darroch (1979) using different measures from Porter's. Darroch shows that "... neither the measured occupational dissimilarity between ethnic groups nor the inequality in occupational ranks of immigrant groups is very great" (1979: 1). Thus, Darroch concludes: "... in Canada as a whole it

is an exaggeration of any data available to date to suggest that ethnic affiliations can be counted as a primary factor sustaining structures of class or status" (1979: 22). In his analysis of 1981 census data in Canada Li finds visible ethnicity a factor in income inequality. According to Li:

The two non-white ethnic groups, Chinese and blacks, have an educational level higher than the national average....Despite the educational advantage, both groups suffer a loss of income due to their origin when education differences are accounted for. When variations in all variables are adjusted for, both groups still suffer the worst income discrimination which is attributable to their origin (1988: 136-7).

Li's findings suggest that ethnicity cannot be ignored as a factor in income inequality. Ethnicity, however, is not the determining cause of class. According to Li: "... ethnicity is only one of the many sources of income inequality. Class and schooling account for a large part of the variations in income" (1988: 127). Therefore, Li concludes: "Although ethnicity makes a difference in Canada, it cannot be said, on the basis of the 1981 Census data, that social class is determined by ethnicity" (1988: 139).

Life chances of Canadians are generally open although ethnicity is still one of the factors influencing class position of individuals and the elitest segment in society where non-charter ethnic groups are virtually excluded. Focusing on Asians, we find the general upward mobility over the post-World War II era. Even within Porter's analysis (1965: 87) it is found that Asians were 4.3% under represented in 1931 but 1.7% over represented in 1961 in the professional and financial occupational class. The same data show the reverse for

the primary and unskilled occupational class: Asians were 10.2% over represented in 1931 but 3.6% under represented in 1961.

b) Non-material resources: cultural pluralism and ethnic status ranking

"[Ethnic] consciousness of the late sixties and early seventies" (Thernstrom, Orlov and Handlin, 1980: v) in America also hit Canada. Although multi-ethnic composition of Canada had been a reality, the reality started to be revealed only then by both international and domestic factors. Burnet lists such factors:

... the decline of Great Britain as a world power, the rise of nationalist feeling throughout the world, the Black Revolution in the United States, the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, upward mobility of sons and grandsons of early non-British, non-French immigrants and most of all, massive postwar immigration (Burnet, 1981: 34).

At the time, "... the state intervened substantially to restructure and reorient the symbolic order ..." (Breton, 1984: 129). The British blood and culture having been so rigidly believed to be superior gradually gave way to more tolerant Canadian identity which could encompass various ethnic groups. Introduction of the multiculturalism policy was one of such changes in Canadian society. Breton states:

... when the policy on multiculturalism was introduced, the non-British, non-French element was not primarily concerned with cultural maintenance. Rather, a status anxiety existed, fear of being defined as second-class citizens, marginal to the identity system that was being established.... One of its objectives was

to affirm symbolically that Canadian society is open to all cultural identities, indicating its recognition of them all, and the implications of cultural equality (1984: 134).

The purpose of the multiculturalism policy when introduced in 1971 was to integrate new immigrants to Canadian life and to assure all Canadians freedom to retain and share their cultural heritage with others so that individuals would develop their own cultural identity and make other Canadians aware of cultural diversity in Canada. The first purpose of aiding integration of new immigrants such as learning of the official languages still continues, but the second purpose of cultural heritage preservation and sharing is less emphasized and programmes such as songs and dances are not funded any longer. Instead, a new focus is placed on human rights issues to fight discrimination against visible minorities (Retson, 1990: E2).

Some opponents to the views of cultural pluralism believe in a homogeneous society based on individual freedom and equality. Patterson, for example, criticizes the search for ethnic identity among minority groups and maintains that the only society which can provide scope for individual freedom, prosperity, and creativity is "the universalist culture of a democratic and egalitarian state" (1977: 185). Porter also takes the universalistic ideal and opposes cultural pluralism. Porter states:

It would seem then that the promotion of flourishing ethnic communities is directly opposed to absorption, assimilation, integration, and acculturation and could lead to a permanent ethnic stratification and thus is likely to interfere with the political goal of individual equality (1980, 328).

Porter considers ethnic communities as the cause of ethnic stratification and thus maintains they need to be dissolved for individual social mobility. Porter's view is based on his concept of ethnicity. In Porter's view ethnic culture is maintained in a biological descent group which excludes others by endogamy (1980: 331). Thus, Porter rejects values for maintenance of culture, a group, and endogamy as they are forms of exclusion.

The shortcoming of the above universalism thesis is a false picture of ethnic groups and confusion between ideal and reality. Ethnic groups in North America are neither biological descent groups nor culturally uniform groups. Biological definition of ethnic groups are often a product of outsiders' attempts to discriminate against certain groups. Maintenance of pure traditional culture, as Porter implicates, is not practiced and almost impossible if interaction among different groups is to occur. Culture is not such a static concept as Porter believes. We must also understand universalism is an ideal and not reality. Human beings are not necessarily impartial in their behaviour. Knowing the egalitarian principle, people may not act according to the principle. Conflicts over power often result in behaviour contradictory to democratic ideology. For example, anti-Japanese regulations such as the Alien Land Acts that was passed in the California legislature did not bring profit to anybody and nobody was keen about the law itself (Simpson and Yinger, 1958: 131). Creating the anti-Japanese law was used simply to attract anti-Japanese votes. The politicians skillfully disguised the division between social classes, which was the real issue, by using anti-Japanese sentiments of the time. Economic and political reasoning may provide a rationale for discrimination against the

Japanese, but some acts of discrimination are not even rational. For example, economic reasons may be used to explain the firing of skilled and cheap Japanese sawmill workers during the Depression, but the fact that more expensive and often less skilled white workers were kept in sawmills instead of the Japanese cannot be explained in economic terms only. Hiring discrimination was sometimes promoted by irrational fear of immigrants.

Cultural pluralism as a state policy provides a legitimate framework for egalitarianism, and minority cultural and political rights in Canada. A liberal social climate expressed in the multiculturalism policy has led to changes in the immigration policy and in the demographic composition of Canadian society in the post-World War II era and their positive effect on attitude toward so-called "other" ethnic groups – non-charter immigrant ethnic groups, which constituted one-third of the population by 1971 (Christopher, 1987: 333-4, 341). Strong maintains:

Incorporation of cultural diversity is most important to the so called 'non-charter' Canadians whose languages have no official status. The political activity of this segment of Canadian population has kept multicultural issues in the public forum (1984: 89-90).

Criticism of the multiculturalism policy has focused on power allocation. Power, especially political power, has not yet been allocated equally and the emphasis of the policy seems to be on expressive culture retention and public display. The policy is in the hands of the dominant group and it will remain so, as long as the dominant group holds secure power. That is, once the power of the dominant group is endangered, there is no guarantee for multiculturalism. Peter points out the weakness of multiculturalism not concerning

about equal distribution of material power among ethnic groups.

Peter states:

That "we" and "they" syndrome, the notion of Canadian society on the one hand and the existence of ethnic groups as something independent of this society on the other is a most devious concept. It relegates the role of ethnic groups to that of contributors of quaint cultural practices and upholders of individual identities, while at the same time it denies them a political and economic reality in Canadian life (1981: 57).

Lupul also focuses on material power and criticizes implementation of the policy as not promoting sharing of power. According to Lupul:

A deeper appreciation of multiculturalism as the sharing of power and opportunity is therefore essential if ethnic pluralism in Canada is to receive the attention accorded to religious and political pluralism (1982: 101).

The ultimate goal of the multiculturalism policy does not remain simply cultural but is political. Bullivant notes: "... 'cultural pluralism' cannot exist without provisions and safeguards for minority participation in social power and decision-making at all levels" (1981:). This, of course, raises questions about inequality in society. Both functionalists and Marxists find inequality in society corresponding with the class position and ethnic status of an ethnic group. Thus, functionalists believe ethnicity should be eliminated if one wishes to achieve social mobility, while Marxists believe class inequality itself is to be eliminated. These ideas, however, can be questioned on the basis of data showing only small socio-economic differences among various ethnic groups in Canada (Darroch, 1979).

In some cases discrepancy is found between socio-economic status and ethnic status. Jews, Chinese, and Japanese are known to have relatively high socio-economic status (Driedger, 1989: 312) but are located low at the hierarchy of social standing (Pineo, 1977: 267). Thus, conceptual separation of class and ethnicity is essential when we deal with the relationship between them. Some scholars maintain that class and ethnicity are not reducible to each other although they may influence each other (Driedger, 1989; van den Berghe, 1981; Weber, 1978b). This approach has an advantage because it can deal not only with the material order but also with the non-material order of power.

Abu-Laban and Mottershead (1981) examine types of pluralism and recognize a movement towards "integrated pluralism" in Canada. In their view of "integrated pluralism", unity and diversity are applied to separate domains of life. Abu-Laban and Mottershead cite Canada as an example of society with integrated pluralism:

In an 'integrated pluralist' society, economic and political rewards are allocated on the basis of universalistic standards of performance – on individual merit, not group membership. However, official societal norms recognize the right of every ethnic group to take pride in and develop its religious, cultural and linguistic heritage, while at the same time emphasizing the goal of integration and unity within the context of diversity (1981: 53).

Unity is sought in the economic and political, that is material, spheres of life, while diversity is accepted in the cultural, that is non-material sphere of life in Canada. Then, it is assumed that stratification based on individual merit in the material sphere of life is acceptable but cultural differences are not to be used to

stratify individuals in Canada.

Despite multiculturalism policy, ethnic status ranking and prejudice toward ethnic minorities especially non-white racial minorities remains. Brym states: "According to one survey ... a full 31 per cent of Canadians supported the idea of an all-white Canada...." (1989: 105). According to Pineo's finding, visible minority groups are located at the lowest in social standing in both English Canada and French Canada (1977).

The recent renaissance of ethnic groups is a search for egalitarianism in both the material and non-material orders of power. The policy of multiculturalism has had important implications for both the material and non-material spheres. On one hand, the policy is weak because only expression of cultural heritage is recognized for non-charter ethnic groups. Unlike bilingualism which is instrumental for social mobility of French Canadians, multiculturalism has no direct material implication. On the other hand, the policy of multiculturalism guaranteed minorities freedom to express their identity and rights by redistributing status among ethnic groups (Breton, 1983: 29). This aspect of status redistribution is important since it can break ethnic prejudice and discrimination against members of minorities, which still persist even after cultural assimilation.

2. Particular to Japanese Canadians

About three fourths of the Japanese Canadian population at present consists of pre-World War II immigrants and their descendants and only one fourth consists of post-World War II immigrants and

their descendants. Among the "other" ethnic groups, the Japanese belong to visible minorities. For visible minorities integration in the larger society is not always easy, because prejudice and discrimination is a heavier burden for them. Prejudice and discrimination against the Japanese were severe before the war in the west coast, where they faced unfair hiring custom and wage, anti-Asian movement, and lack of franchise. The climax of many incidents of discrimination against Japanese Canadians, however, came with the Pearl Harbour. The impact of the war-time exclusion experience on Japanese Canadians is enormous: forced relocation and dispersion, destroying the west coast community and depriving the properties, not only affected the economic aspect but also the psychological aspect of life. Angry as they were, many Japanese Canadians remained silent and tried to recover their lives in a new environment: some protested the mistreatment of the government but found the efforts in vain, others were afraid of backlash of the white people, and great many others simply tried to forget. This is especially evident in the second generation because they were hurt most: many of them were young adults at the time of exclusion, and most of all, they grew up as Canadians and yet were not treated as Canadians. Dispersed across Canada by the order of the federal government, a small minority lost many aspects of community life, which included loss of culture and weakening of organizational capacity, on one hand. On the other hand, economic opportunity increased after the war and young Japanese Canadians could move into the economic structure of the larger society. Thus, socio-economic achievement and loss of Japanese culture and community progressed at the same time. When the multiculturalism policy was announced, the younger

Japanese Canadians, the third generation, did not know much about Japanese culture or history of their parents and grandparents.

If "... the declining importance of ethnic constraints serves as a condition for the emergence of ethnic consciousness" (Isajiw & Makabe, 1982: 3), it is expected that ethnic consciousness of Japanese Canadians would exist rather than disappear today. It is clear that contemporary Japanese Canadians particularly the third generation and thereafter have relatively fewer constraints as a minority group members than the immigrant generation or the second generation who had to face severe discrimination and strong forces of assimilation before the World War II. Overt discrimination against any minority group member is discouraged in a relatively tolerant social climate in Canada, which has made Japanese Canadians, already immersed in the Canadian way, some not even knowing the Japanese way, free from efforts of assimilation into Canadian culture that their ancestors tried so hard to achieve. In this sense the third generation Japanese Canadians could have ethnic consciousness without constraints.

Gans makes this point clearer in his discussion of the concept of Americanization. The essence of Americanization is forced cultural assimilation without total acceptance in the structure of the larger society. Canadianization, while not being a common term used to explain assimilation in to Canadian society, existed as much as Americanization and still exists to a certain degree. Americanization like assimilation and acculturation is criticized as "a form of domestic imperialism or colonialism", which consists of contradictory conditions made in "an arrogant dismissal of any possible virtues of their native cultures and an insistence that they recast themselves

as Americans”, but with “no intention of accepting the members of the new groups as equals” (Glazer, 1977: 4). Gans has a less critical view of Americanization and perceives it as transient reality for immigrants. Although originally limited in its perspective of dealing only with European Americans, in Gans’s view “‘the Americanization cultures’, the immigrant experience and adjustment in America” (1979: 6) in generational contexts could be applied to Americans and Canadians of other origins. Gans notes that:

The old ethnic cultures serve no useful function for third generation ethnics who lack direct and indirect ties to the old country, and neither need nor have much knowledge about it. Similarly, the Americanization cultures have little meaning for people who grew up without the familial conflict over European and American ways that beset their fathers and mothers: the second generation which fought with and was often ashamed of immigrant parents (1979: 6).

Following this line of thought the third generation have lost the traditional ethnic culture but they are also free from shame or efforts to get rid of it. Once their cultural assimilation is complete, the third generation can face ethnic identity securely. For Japanese Canadians these generational patterns of assimilation and the changing social climate toward minorities had cumulative effects. The second generation, whose majority grew up before World War II, were made to believe in assimilation and had to face the cultural gap with immigrant parents at the same time. The third generation, who grew up in a more egalitarian social climate, were relatively free from either of the above efforts. The third generation Japanese Canadians are, however, still visible as endogamy was the

rule for the second generation. Indeed, ethnic consciousness of the third generation may arise as a consequence of security; or as a consequence of prejudice toward them.

3. Summary

In this paper I reviewed the literature in order to gain a broad understanding of the contexts for ethnic identity of Japanese Canadians guided by the premise that ethnic identity is a situational as well as a primordial phenomenon. Two main areas were reviewed – the pattern of distribution of resources in Canadian society and the particular situation in which Japanese Canadians are placed.

In the distribution of material resources, individual meritocracy for mass and social closure for elites exist. In the distribution of non-material resources, cultural pluralism and ethnic status ranking exist. Overall, there exists limited but still prevailing egalitarianism in Canadian society.

Japanese Canadians share many experiences with the rest of the “other” ethnic groups. There are, however, some characteristics and experiences particular to Japanese Canadians. The war-time exclusion especially affected them psychologically and speeded up assimilation of the second and subsequent generations. The mainly post-WWII third generation Japanese Canadians are thus culturally assimilated, but they are not necessarily without ethnic consciousness.

It is suggested that these contexts for Japanese Canadians need to be considered in understanding the formation of their ethnic identity.

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