

Authorising *Nikkei* (Overseas Japanese) identity in two different times, different manners and different contexts: The porosity of diasporic Japanese identity in Australia within the locale.

Takeshi Hamano
University of Western Sydney

Key words

Identity, ethnicity, multiculturalism, diaspora, Japanese migrants in Australia, local community

Introduction

Contemporary Australian society consists of a variety of migrants and their new generations, who have often established their communities based on ethnicity. These organisations are known as an 'ethnic community' or 'ethnic organisation', and are widely recognised as being an integral part of wider social groups or local communities in multicultural contemporary Australian society. The purpose of creating such organisations is, as Fredrik Barth (1969, p.180) discusses, so diverse that it seems difficult to define briefly the role of the ethnic organisations of migrants (see also Castles 1993; Back 1996; Baumann 1996). However, generally speaking, there are two major roles within their performances of ethnic authenticity: the practical role of acting as a welfare institution (Baumann 1996; Romanucci-Ross et al. 2006); and the symbolic role of uniting members and maintaining their diasporic identity within their settlement (Back 1996; Alexander 2000). In other words, within ethnic organisations there can be seen a dynamic relationship between two significant roles: the constitution of welfare groups; and the moulding of diasporic identities in new local contexts.

1

Online Proceedings of 'Sustaining Culture' (2008)

Annual Conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australia (CSAA)
UniSA, Adelaide December 6-8, 2007
<http://unisa.edu.au/com/csaa/onlineproceedings.htm>



In the following, I explore how overseas Japanese groups in Australia generate their diasporic Japanese identity. Further, by focusing on internal diversity among Japanese-Australians, I argue that any representation of a collective diasporic identity results from a negotiation with their unique local and cultural contexts, even though they have immigrated to and settled in the same country. In so doing, I use as examples two ethnic Japanese organisations: the first a national Japanese-Australian organisation established in the early 1990s which identified itself with *Nikkei* (overseas Japanese), a concept which includes diverse Japanese diasporic communities around the world; and the second established in 2006 by mostly young Japanese settlers in a suburb of the Western Sydney region. By examining the social context and social characteristics of these two organisations, I illustrate how each in its own right has sustained a collective but distinctive ethno-cultural identity within the Japanese diaspora in Australia.

Ethnic organisations as welfare institutions

Ethnic organisations founded by migrants can be explained through two major functions that interactively sustain each other. The first role of ethnic organisations is to act as welfare institutions which assist settlement in the new environment and society, while, at the same time, providing a range of specific services on the basis of their common cultural heritage (Bottomley 1979; Jayasuriya 1990; Baumann 1996; Jayasuriya 1996; Romanucci-Ross et al. 2006). For example, by providing culturally specific products and care in their own language, such organisations often become institutions which look after aged first generations and pass on their cultural heritage to following generations, through language education, cultural events and activities. In addition, for those who have just arrived from their homeland, relying on the networks and local knowledge of these organisations can be the most convenient way of accessing information in the first stage of settlement.



Additionally, ethnic organisations are expected to play a role in representing their members' claims and demands, communicating or negotiating with local councils or other institutions (Amin 2002; Jayasuriya 2003; Uitermark et al. 2005). On behalf of members who have difficulty stating their claims or demands due to a lack of language proficiency and a limited knowledge of local manners, these ethnic organisations stand as a political organisation, representing the rights and interests of those sharing the same ethnic identity. At this point, the role of long-established members of the organisations is significant, as they mediate between members and their locale. In addition to the linking role of their leaders, well-established ethnic organisations can be conducted as though they are a government office abroad, sustaining a relationship with governmental institutions of the homeland. The role of such transnational ethnic organisations is, for the members in the settlement, to provide information, news and even material products from their homeland, as well as to intervene in the politics of the homeland regarding the welfare of the citizens living abroad (Basch et al. 1994; Castles 2002; Kennedy & Roudometof 2002). In particular, given the growth of transnational movements among migrants in the contemporary globalised world, ethnic organisations among migrants can even build broad and strong networks and symbolic ties not only between the homeland and the host country, but also among other diasporic communities of the same ethnic background throughout the world.

Ethnic organisations as a site of collective diasporic identity

Next, while the importance of ethnic organisations of migrants can be described in practical terms such as the establishment of welfare institutions, offering supporting networks for their members, and even undertaking political actions on their members' behalf, a number of anthropological studies (e.g. Back 1996; Baumann 1996; Alexander 2000; Campbell & McLean 2002) emphasise the point that these ethnic organisations also act as a site for maintaining a member's ethno-cultural identity away from the homeland. Insofar as the diasporic ethno-cultural identity is sustained by common ethno-cultural backgrounds or



memories of the homeland, this sense of diasporic identity is sometimes widely shared by dispersed migrants across the world. However, as many scholars have revealed (Hall 1990; Clifford 1994; Tölölyan 1996; Vertovec 1999; Ang 2001), it is also remarkable to note that for these diasporic migrants and their descendants, reconstruction of the self which relies on cultural heritage or collective consciousness leads to the generation of an alternative ethno-cultural identity, fusing their local situation (here) into their cultural heritage (there), rather than merely recovering their 'lost' ethno-cultural identity in retrospective ways. Significantly, bearing in mind that ethnic organisations work as a space in which to 'grow' diasporic identity, translating and accumulating aspects of the new social context of the location as the members congregate, it can be said that a sense of diasporic consciousness will develop, as members seek to accentuate a communal sense or a group solidarity within their ethnic organisations. In other words, ethnic organisations of migrants are a locus that both emerges from and provides the members with their collective diasporic identity, despite their accumulation of internal diversity among the members.

***Nikkei* : the identity politics of Japanese diasporas**

As studies in sub-culture have revealed (Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979), in order to highlight the presence of particular groups for political purposes, minority groups in society tend to appropriate major cultural symbols and popular concepts to their own ends. In this light, I investigate the recent use of *Nikkei* (overseas Japanese; a literary adjective meaning 'Japan-related') identity among contemporary Japanese diasporas. Recent statistical data (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2007) shows that in 2005 the number of overseas Japanese nationals passed one million. The Japanese Government defines the term *Nikkei* strictly as those who are descendants of Japanese migrants, without Japanese nationality. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the concept of *Nikkei* identity has recently been appropriated into a wider symbolic concept, describing a variety of Japanese diasporas, regardless of the ownership of Japanese nationality (Kikumura-Yano & Japanese American



National Museum 2002). For example, the Association of *Nikkei* & Japanese Abroad (Kaigai Nikkeijin Kyokai 1999) argues that the concept *Nikkei-jin* (Nikkei people) includes both overseas Japanese permanently settling in foreign countries and their descendants, regardless of the ownership of Japanese nationality. Consequently, the association estimates the number of so-called *Nikkei* at approximately 2.6 million throughout the world. Another notion of *Nikkei-jin* includes a wider range of Japanese descendants. According to the definition of *Nikkei* by the Japanese American National Museum (JAMN) (2007), the idea is seen to embrace 'people of mixed racial [sic] descent who identity themselves as *Nikkei*', while 'many of these *Nikkei* live in close communities and retain identities separate from the native Japanese' (JAMN 2007). Hence, the concept of this expanded idea of *Nikkei* indicates that it has been appropriated to a more abstract and symbolic term to include and unite diverse Japanese diasporas throughout the world, rather than merely referring to the ownership of Japanese nationality.

The rise and decline of the Japan Club of Australia

The Japan Club of Australia (JCA) was the only national ethnic Japanese organisation endorsed by leaders of ethnic Japanese groups in some capital cities of Australia. From the 1980s, a certain number of Japanese began to immigrate to Australia, some supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), a special public institution under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan at that time (JICA Agency 2007). One of the interviewees for my research described how, before leaving Japan, those who immigrated to Australia during that period, took English lessons and attended seminars on Australian society and culture at a training centre owned by JICA. Even after their settlement in Australia, their connections with JICA remained until JICA's withdrawal from Australia in the mid-1990s. In fact, these early Japanese settlers were expected to provide newcomers with local information via the institutional branches of JICA.



After a suggestion by JICA at the annual Japanese Club Conference in 1990, the JCA was established in 1991. The organisational policies of the JCA were to:

- encourage communication and an exchange of information among Japanese Clubs in Australia
- not only be the representative of ethnic Japanese in Australia, but also to be the official international organisation in regard to relations with other overseas Japanese communities and the Japanese Government (Kinenshi Henshu linkai 1998, p. 180).

Therefore, the JCA was to be the authority for all Japanese-Australians dealing with both their domestic and international concerns. For instance, during the 1990s, the JCA and other overseas Japanese groups lobbied for the implementation of the right to vote for overseas Japanese, which was partially accepted in 1998. At the same time, the JCA sent delegates to the annual conference of the Association of *Nikkei* & Japanese Abroad, a special public institution for overseas Japanese (Kaigai Nikkeijin Kyokai 1999). Under these circumstances, the JCA took on international engagement with other overseas Japanese communities, and made an effort to become an authoritative Japanese ethnic organisation on behalf of all Japanese-Australians. Moreover, when investigating the records of the Club's newsletters and correspondence between members of committees, it can be found that the term '*Nikkei*' was often adopted in order to represent overseas Japanese in generic terms, including all Japanese-Australians under the JCA. As well, such an emphasis on collective *Nikkei* identity among the JCA was constructed in relation to the other authoritative sources of Japanese identity: the Japanese Government, along with Japanese society in the homeland.

However, after the withdrawal of JICA from Australia in 1994 (Kinenshi Henshu linkai 1998, p. 181), the JCA and other Japanese clubs lost their direct relationship with the Japanese Government. Due to the sudden loss of a connection with JICA, the JCA was faced with the



challenge of managing the organisation by itself. Furthermore, in my interview with Mr Hosaka, the first president of the JCA, who was also the secretary after his retirement as president, he mentioned how, by the late 1990s, the JCA had difficulty in sharing wider issues internationally with overseas Japanese organisations. Finally, in 2001, the JCA minimised its function, reforming as an e-mail list named Japan Network of Australia; however, this e-mail list was also closed in 2004.

To explain this malfunctioning of the JCA, Mr Hosaka explained that contemporary Japanese-Australians are 'lifestyle migrants' (Sato 2001, p. 2), whose objective in immigration is to experience or consume Australian ways of life which they would never experience living with other Japanese-Australian neighbours. At the same time, we should not overlook the rapid increase in female Japanese migrants as a consequence of mixed marriages to Australian spouses. For these female Japanese settlers, as I will describe later, life in a new country is a subtle balance between belonging to a Japanese community and interacting with local Australian neighbours, including in-laws. In raising children and keeping households, their lives are shared with the locals, rather than with those involved in ethnic organisations.

The Penrith Japanese Community

In the last section, I explored how, while the JCA attempted to become part of *Nikkei* community engaging with other overseas Japanese groups, the members were, in fact, not much concerned with sharing transnational solidarity with the Japanese diaspora. In fact, by taking the social characteristics of contemporary Japanese-Australians into account, I have suggested reasons as to why they prefer engagement with locals rather than with overseas compatriots. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to reconsider which ethnic identity Japanese-Australians articulate. To examine this more clearly, based on my fieldwork in



Sydney over a year, I discuss the Penrith Japanese Community (PJC) as an example of a local-oriented ethnic Japanese organisation.

Before exploring this new ethnic Japanese organisation, it is important to acknowledge the fact that, in Australia, Japanese females who have married Australian men represent the largest group of contemporary Japanese migrants to Australia. According to the 2006 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008) the gender ratio of Japanese-born females to males was almost two to one. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs also reports that this gender imbalance can be found among other overseas Japanese except those in Asia and Africa (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007).

Next, data from the Australian Department of Immigration (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007) shows that a large proportion of contemporary Japanese in Australia with Australian permanent residency are classified as being spouses or fiancées within the stream of family migrants. Therefore, considering this striking gender imbalance of Japanese arrivals in Australia, it appears that these female Japanese arrivals have settled in Australia primarily as the spouse or fiancée of an Australian partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003). Moreover, despite the proportion of Japanese-born migrants in Australia being still relatively small (approximately 30 000 in 2006) Japan was still placed in the top ten countries of migrant birth place between 2001 and 2005 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2006). It is also important to mention that the geographical distribution of Japanese settlers is currently spread across different regions (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008), while in the past they tended to settle in the middle class suburbs near the centre of the city (Mizukami 2007). As a result, sustained by the increase in the numbers of relatively young Japanese females, small local Japanese groups and societies are currently mushrooming in the major capital cities of Australia.



Under these circumstances, structured and multi-purpose Japanese ethnic organisations are beginning to emerge. For example, the PJC was established in 2006 at Penrith City in the Western Sydney region. The number of members in the PJC is around thirty, but regular and active members number around fifteen. One unique aspect of the PJC as an ethnic Japanese organisation is that it consists almost entirely of Japanese females who have married Australians and have moved to the Western Sydney region as they consider it a better living environment. The PJC runs a Japanese-language playgroup as well as meetings every fortnight. At these meetings, the community coordinates both topic-based group discussions and formal lectures given by guest speakers on health, the education of children, finance and legal concerns. In addition to these practical aspects of the PJC, I also found it that it has a symbolic role in the community. Most of the members represent their ethnic identity in association with other aspects of gendered identity, such as being 'female', a 'wife' or 'mother', rather than seeing themselves as merely part of a 'Japanese diaspora' in the community. Also, it is significant to note that participating in the PJC brings them a situated ethnic identity: being 'Japanese in Western-Sydney', as opposed to developing a sense of being diasporic Japanese in the transnational *Nikkei* network. In my interview, these respondents commented that the PJC has given them a feeling of solidarity with other Japanese members, they share the experiences of being 'Japanese', 'female migrant', or 'mother' in the Western Sydney region. The topics they discuss in the community are strongly connected to their common experiences of housekeeping and raising children in suburban life.

In summary, it is important to note that while the JCA attempted to rely on the transnational *Nikkei* identity in order to accommodate the internal diversity of Japanese-Australians, the PJC is articulating a specific identity of feminised and localised Japanese diasporic identity, building their collective identity within the community. In this sense, this community regards itself as a group of 'Japanese wives' or 'Japanese mothers' who draw much attention to engagements with the locale in everyday life, while belonging to an



ethnic Japanese organisation. In this sense, they are also concerned that any representation of an excessive ethnic authenticity for the community may interfere with their integration into local communities. Therefore, instead of referring to their experiences of displacement and linking themselves to the transnational *Nikkei* community, the ethnic authenticity within the PJC is very much sustained by the local and domestic practices of the members.

Conclusion

Functional aspects of ethnic organisations acting as welfare institutions are being sustained in this case by sharing a sense of diaspora among the members, and as such a collective consciousness, in turn, encourages the members to take part in the organisation and aid each other. Bearing these two aspects of such ethnic organisations in mind, it can be said that, for migrants, the ethnic organisation is a space 'in-between' (Bhabha 1996) in both practical and symbolic terms. In comparison with the JCA, the PJC consists of relatively homogenous Japanese settlers made up of new female Japanese migrants, who have married Australians, and constitute the largest proportion of contemporary Japanese settlers in Australia. For them, it is imperative to demonstrate the performance of authenticity through a Japanese ethnic organisation negotiating with local neighbours rather than by associating with overseas compatriots across the world, although, in a broader sense, the PJC can also be located as an organisation operating within diverse *Nikkei* communities throughout the world.

In this light, considering their representation of gender and acknowledging the feminine identity in this ethnic organisation is essential. The growth of mobility in the contemporary globalised world has resulted in an increase in the internal diversity of migrant populations. When considering their diasporic identity in relation to this, I argue that the efforts made here to integrate into the host society are also becoming more diverse, depending on the



social, cultural and even economic contexts of settlement, as well as the socio-economic background in the homeland. Therefore, in contemporary Japanese diaspora, one sees that while migrants may attempt to integrate their diasporic identity into a wider and more abstract ethnic identity such as that represented by *Nikkei*, they may also differentiate a vernacular diasporic identity, in association with other social identities, such as gender, class or locality, in relation to their engagements with the locale in everyday life.

References

Alexander, C 2000, *The Asian Gang: Ethnicity, Identity, Masculinity*, Berg, Oxford.

Amin, A 2002, 'Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living with Diversity', *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 34, pp. 959-980.

Ang, I 2001, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*, Routledge, London, New York.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003, *Marriages and Divorces Australia*, viewed 13 June 2008, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/productsbyCatalogue/893C1288678FD232CA2568A90013939C?OpenDocument>>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, *Census of Population and Housing*, viewed 30 March 2008, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/Home/census>>.

Back, L 1996, *New Ethnicity and Urban Culture*, Routledge, London, New York.

Barth, F 1969, 'Introduction', in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Differences*, ed. F Barth, Little Brown and Company, Boston, pp. 9-38.

Basch, L, Glick Schiller, N & Szanton Blanc, C 1994, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, Gordon and Breach, Amsterdam.

Baumann, G 1996, *Contesting culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Bhabha, HK 1996, 'Cultures In-between', in *Questions of Identity*, eds S Hall & P du Gay, SAGE publications, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, pp. 53-60.



Bottomley, G 1979, *After the Odyssey: A Study of Greek Australians*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, QLD.

Campbell, C & Mclean, C 2002, 'Representations of Ethnicity in People's Accounts of Local Community Participation in a Multi-ethnic Community in England', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 12, pp. 13-29.

Castles, S 1993, 'Ethnicity, Community and the Postmodern City', *Communal/Plural*, vol. 1, pp. 47-61.

Castels, S 2002, 'Migration and Community Formation under Conditions of Globalization', *International Migration Review*, vol. 36, pp. 1143-1168.

Clifford, J 1994, 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, pp. 302-38.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007, *Settlement Reporting* DIAC, viewed 15 September 2007, <<http://www.settlement.immi.gov.au/settlement/enterSelectReport.doc>>.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2006, *National Report: Settlement Needs of New Arrivals 2006*, Canberra.

Hall, S 1990, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. ed. J Rutherford, Lawrence and Wishart, London, pp. 222-237.

Hebdige, D 1979, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Methuen, London.

Japan International Cooperation Agency 2007, *Japan International Cooperation Agency* viewed 28 December 2007, <<http://www.jica.go.jp/english/index.html>>.

Japanese American National Museum 2007, *Discover Nikkei*, viewed 28 December 2007,

Jayasuriya, L 1990, 'Language and Culture in Australian Public Policy: Some Critical Reflections', *International Migration Review*, vol. 24, pp. 124-48.

Jayasuriya 1996, 'Immigration and Settlement in Australia: An Overview and Critique of Multiculturalism', in *Immigration and Integration in Post-Industrial Societies: Theoretical Analysis and Policy-Related Research*, Macmillan, London and New York, pp. 206-26.

Jayasuriya 2003, *Australian Multiculturalism: Past, Present, and Future*, viewed 4 October 2007, <http://www.socialwork.arts.uwa.edu.au/_data/page/33070/diversity.pdf>.



Kaigai Nikkeijin Kyokai 1999, *The Association of Nikkei & Japanese Abroad*, viewed 28 December 2007, <<http://www.jadesas.or.jp/EN/index.html>>.

Kennedy, P & Roudometof V (eds.) 2002, *Community across Borders: New Immigrants and Transnational Cultures*, Routledge, London, New York.

Kikumura-Yano, A & Japanese American National Museum 2002, *Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas: An Illustrated History of the Nikkei*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Kinenshi Henshu Iinkai (ed.) 1998, *Osutoraria No Nihonjin: Isseiki o Koeru Nihonjin no Sokuseki (Japanese in Australia, 1867-1998)*, Japan Club of Australia, Asquith, NSW.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2007, *Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas*.

Mizukami, T 2007, *The Sojourner Community: Japanese Migration and Residency in Australia*, Brill, Leiden and Boston.

Romanucci-Ross, L, De Vos, GA & Tsuda, T 2006 *Ethnic Identity: Problems and Prospects for the Twenty-first Century*, 4th edn, AltaMira Press, Lanham, MD.

Sato, M 2001, *Farewell to Nippon: Japanese Lifestyle Migrants in Australia*, Trans Pacific, Melbourne.

Tölölyan, K 1996, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, no. 5.

Uitermark, J, Rossi, U & van Houtum, H 2005, 'Reinventing Multiculturalism: Urban Citizenship and the Negotiation of Ethnic Diversity in Amsterdam', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, no. 29, pp. 622-640.

Vertovec, S 1999, 'Three Meanings of 'Diaspora', Exemplified among South Asian Religions', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, no. 7.

Willis, PE 1977, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* Saxon House, Farnborough.

