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Acts of Being and Belonging:
Shin-Issei Transnational Identity Negotiations

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Asian American Studies

By

Eri Kameyama

2012
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Acts of Being and Belonging:
Shin-Issei Transnational Identity Negotiations

By

Eri Kameyama

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies
University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Chair

ABSTRACT:

The recent census shows that one-third of those who identified as Japanese-American in California were foreign-born, signaling a new-wave of immigration from Japan that is changing the composition of contemporary Japanese-America. However, there is little or no academic research in English that addresses this new immigrant population, known as Shin-Issei. This paper investigates how Shin-Issei who live their lives in a complex space between the two nation-states of Japan and the U.S. negotiate their ethnic identity by looking at how these newcomers find a sense of belonging in Southern California in racial, social, and legal terms. Through an ethnographic approach of in-depth interviews and participant observation with six individuals, this case-study expands the available literature on transnationalism by exploring how Shin-Issei negotiations of identities rely on a transnational understandings of national ideologies of belonging which is a less direct form of transnationalism and is a more psychological, symbolic, and emotional reconciliation of self, encompassed between two worlds.
The thesis of Eri Kameyama is approved.

Valerie J. Matsumoto
Letitia Rae Miyake
Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles
2012
For my parents,
and the Shin-Issei friends who lent their stories
for academia and for our communities.
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“Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states”

- Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 1994

1. Introduction

“For me, ‘Japanese’ are the people living in Japan, and are born there and grow up there, and don’t really go outside the country… Japan is so fast-paced; everything changes so fast in half a year. You can’t keep up with all the technology, all the popular stuff; you can’t really keep up with it. So when you go back, you kind of feel like you got lost…” These are the words of Satsuki, a 25 year-old Japanese national with an American green-card, now living in the suburbs of Southern California.

Satsuki immigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen, to immerse herself in an American high school and culture. Her parents, who are still in Japan, never intended for her to stay in the States for so long, thinking for some time that their daughter’s future was set as a career woman in a Japanese corporation back in her homeland. In fact, during Satsuki’s undergraduate years, she attended and navigated through the rigorous interview process at the Boston Career Forum, an annual event held for Japanese international students in the U.S. who are seeking jobs in Japan but cannot go through Japan’s customary job-hunting process due to their stay abroad. She successfully scored a final interview with multiple well-known companies, but in the last moments, she declined their offers and instead chose the path to becoming a
Japanese and Math educator in America. She is now working towards her teaching credentials at CSU Long Beach.

As a young adult with her world split between Japan and the U.S., she faces many life-altering choices such as desired occupation, place of residency and nationality, and commitment to relationships. As she makes these decisions, she also searches for her ethnic identity as a new Asian immigrant in America, searching for a sense of belonging in her host land.

Since the 1980s with the economic boom of Japan, stories like hers occur again and again where an ex-international student decides to stay in the U.S., forgoing their original intentions to return to Japan after their temporary study abroad experience. These college alumni in their early twenties are in a transition from temporary migrants to becoming America’s new immigrants. Their identities, though they may be ethnically Japanese by blood and birth, are challenged because of their decision to ground at least a part of their lives in America.

This thesis project will investigate the ethnic identity formation of these new first-generation Japanese immigrants called Shin-Issei. Shin, meaning “new” in Japanese, is a term used by scholars and members of the Japanese-American community to distinguish the new wave from the old wave of Japanese immigration. The old wave refers to the period between the late 1880s when Japanese emigration first began, to 1924 when nearly all Asian immigration was
halted by the National Origins Act which put strict restrictions on the number of immigrants coming from Asia. The new wave, in contrast, refers to any Japanese immigrants entering after 1945. With the passage of the War Brides Act after WWII, American G.I.s brought back their foreign wives, including women from Japan. However, most Shin-Issei came not as war brides, but as independent persons after the Immigration Reform Act of 1965, which overturned the 1924 quota system. Although it is uncertain how many Japanese came with temporary jobs, travel, or educational visas, an overwhelming number of those who have stayed have been female. In fact, Japanese immigration is more gendered than other Asian immigration. The Census reveals that 64% of recent Japanese immigrants are female as compared to 54% of the Chinese and 55% of the Filipino immigrants.¹

In my study, I explore a select cohort of Shin-Issei—those who came after Japan’s economic boom of the 1980s. More specifically, my respondents are ex-international students ages 20~30, residing in Southern California at the time of the initial interview and pursuing careers or continuing their academic endeavors. Two of my respondents are male and four are female, mirroring the larger Japanese immigration trend of gender imbalances. My research is a case-study on the Shin-Issei, and its findings should be treated as such with attention to its place,

¹ There have been several hypotheses to explain this gender imbalance. Some point to women fleeing from gender inequalities in Japan while others state that English language advertisements target women by featuring white male teachers. Still others have said that unfamiliar notions of US masculinity discomfit Japanese males and drive them to return where they are more marketable.
For my thesis, I have located this young group of Shin-Issei as my target population because through their life-changing decisions of occupation, commitment to relationships, and place of residency, they are currently transitioning from being temporary migrants to more permanent immigrants. In addition to navigating through the roadblocks of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in obtaining visas and permanent residency, Shin-Issei must also navigate the social and racial-cultural road-bumps that question their belonging as Asians in America. Shin-Issei, like many other immigrants, become “ethnic” upon entering the U.S. and almost immediately, their identity as Japanese is brought to the forefront of interactions and inter-personal relationships. In a context where their ethnicity is heightened, how do these young Shin-Issei understand their Japanese identity in Southern California? What racial, social, and legal forces inform the ways they seek a sense of belonging in their new immigrant lives? Finally, how do they redefine the meaning of being Japanese in ways that reconfigure its rigidity to better suit their transnational identities and situational needs?

I hypothesize that Shin-Issei are agents of their own identity negotiation, but are also confined and defined by the limits of larger transnational ideologies. While post-war pressures for globalization have on the one hand increased Japanese interest in the U.S., they have on the other hand, led to increased Japanese nationalism coupled with a stricter definition of Japanese
identity, which ultimately delineates the “insider” from the “outsider” of Japanese society. These ideologies of globalization, nationalism, and rights to claim oneself as Japanese challenge the Shin-Issei identities as Japanese ethnics. At the same time, the U.S., their host-land, has its own conceptions of where Asians fit into their societal web. The post-1980s Japanese newcomers, though legally admitted and economically welcomed, are not holistically accepted in their new environment because of their racial-cultural differences that keep their lives disparate from the rest of mainstream American society. Particularly in California with its multi-ethnic history, this type of segmented assimilation is both desired by the immigrants and accepted by the mainstream. These new immigrants, in search of their identities as neither fully Japanese nor fully American, exercise their transnational prowess through new advancements in media, travel, and technology as well as social networks in work and school in order to re-create their sense of being and belonging. They are agents of their own identity negotiation, but the larger structural forces such as ICE and ideological forces such as nationalism place limitations on whether they racially, socially, and legally belong in Japan and the U.S.

This new wave of immigrants from Japan is a heavily under-researched and often neglected area of study, even within Asian American Studies. Eiichiro Azuma, a rare Shin-Issei historian, emphasizes this when he says, “few historical accounts of Japanese Americans,
academic or popular, discuss the experience of Shin Issei as though they never existed.\textsuperscript{2}

Despite the changing dynamics taking place within the Japanese-American community with the integration of these newcomers and now their Shin-Nisei children, literature is not keeping up with the new influx. This research, therefore, attempts to shed some light on the Shin-Issei experience, giving them a space within academia as well.

Additionally, this research on the ethnic identity negotiation of immigrants from Japan will add to the literature on globalization, transnationalism, and new modes of understanding belongings by looking at the ways in which it impacts the individual. The transnational negotiations encountered through the Shin-Issei will expand the traditional understandings of direct and continuous transnationalism and instead examine how these individuals’ psychological, symbolic, and emotional transnationalism construct their understanding of self. Though my project is a small case-study and thus its findings are limited in scope, it can serve useful for cross-cultural studies in future scholarship.

\textbf{Post-War Japanese History and Context for Migration}

After World War II, Japan had been torn into pieces, hearts were broken, hope was lost, and it had no proper government leadership to replace the fallen Emperor. America stepped into this vulnerable Japan, politically, militarily, and culturally infiltrating their society. General

Douglas McArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, was ordered to rebuild the Japanese state government from 1945 to 1949. Under McArthur, the old Meiji constitution was thrown out and replaced by a liberal democratic one that granted universal suffrage, guaranteed human rights, outlawed racial discrimination, dismantled the military by renouncing war, and set up a bicameral legislature. Under the new constitution also, the Emperor became merely symbolic with no political power. This constitution, despite its drafting in one week, has been largely unchanged since its adoption.

In addition, American G.I.s were sent to the bases, largely in Okinawa and other southern parts of Japan, occupying Japanese soil for years to come. Some married Japanese women, and after the passage of the War Brides Act in 1945, those G.I.s were able to bring over their Japanese wives to start a new life together in America. However, the American G.I.s brought not just themselves, but also their cultural backgrounds, which re-introduced the West to Japan. Young Japanese, captivated by the newly acquired Hollywood films, became interested in learning English, dancing swing, and living in a foreign place. Post-war individuals desired to expand their horizons beyond the traditional ways of their parents.

Simultaneously, as the post-war world became more and more globalized, Japan, previously engrossed in its own imperial pursuits, felt the sudden need to catch up on their

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internationalization and globalization. Japan’s post-war economy, partly due to calculated engineering and manufacturing, skyrocketed to never before seen rates, hitting its peak in the bubble economy of the 1980s. This economic boom and the subsequent increased value of the yen pushed Japanese multinational corporations (MNC) such as Canon, SEGA, Honda, and Sony into the global capital marketplace. As Japanese MNCs sent workers and their families on three to five year terms abroad to Europe and the Americas, providing housing and other services through the corporation, small communities of new Japanese residents began to form, sometimes overlapping with the pre-existing Nikkei communities.

In another effort to globalize, Japan went through massive reforms in education as well in which the study-abroad experience, traditionally limited to upper class elites during the Meiji era, was now being promoted to average citizens. Soon, Japan became one of the top nations in issuing student visas. Many parents, usually the fathers, of my research participants had temporarily studied abroad in the U.S. during this time. Similarly, with the rising value of the yen, tourism was a new popular form of entertainment. Some of these Japanese migrant students and tourists became immigrant newcomers for one reason or another. Although there is no data that clearly shows what percentage of Japanese immigrants first entered on visa-status as opposed to immigrant-status, it has been noted by some that post-1965, more Japanese came as

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“non-immigrants” before adjusting their status to permanency. In Canada, Nobuko Chubachi found that most Japanese-Canadian immigrants actually went through “gradual immigration” in which they took a step-by-step process, experiencing “the West” typically first through a travel, student, or work visa before finally deciding to immigrate permanently. It is highly likely that most Japanese in the U.S. also came first on visas before becoming permanent residents with green-cards.

However, partly because of this visa-status popularity within the Japanese newcomer population, when compared to immigration from other parts of Asia post-1965, Japanese immigrants are relatively few in number. In California, in the year 2009, there were only a little over 100,000 persons of Japanese descent who were foreign born. In comparison, Chinese and Filipinos who were foreign born in the same year numbered over 800,000 and 700,000 respectively. Thus, it is clear that the Japanese are not coming over in huge numbers, and those who are staying on visas are not recorded by the Census.

Nonetheless, this new immigration from Japan has not ceased. There has been a steady flow of new immigration from Japan, as the Census also shows. At the national level, of all newcomer Japanese identified as “foreign born” on the Census, 57.2% of them entered the U.S.

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between the twenty years of 1990 to 2009. This percentage is on par with other Asian immigrants such as 58.3% for Chinese and 53.6% for Filipino. What this shows is that recent immigration is taking place within the Japanese American community, even though actual numbers of people may be smaller than those of other ethnic groups. Therefore, it is crucial that scholars pay equal attention to this new wave of Japanese immigration that is undoubtedly changing the landscape and face of Japanese-America.

2. Theoretical Approach

I frame my study of identity through the lens of transnationalism as the Shin-Issei inhabit a space somewhere between the two nation-states, Japan and the U.S., a unique positioning that informs how they perceive and construct their ethnic identities. Immigrant identities are negotiated understandings of hegemonic discourses such as national belonging and are thus a product created from without and from within the individuals. I begin with an overview of transnationalism as it has traditionally been defined through Nations Unbound and then articulate the various ways of belonging (racial, social, and legal) that are informed by the respective nation-state’s hegemonic discourse that classifies people as an insider, foreigner, or somewhere in-between.

In 1994, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Christina Szanton Blanc published their
seminal work on transnationalism titled *Nations Unbound*. They were among the first to put into theory a practice that had been occurring for some generations prior to their “discovery” of transnationalism. In *Nations Unbound*, they argue that transnationalism is the byproduct of global economic restructuring and that immigrant identities are sites of nation-building processes of both their home and host land. They specifically define transnationalism as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”

Their work has been largely accepted in the social sciences for the last twenty years. Many scholars such as Alejandro Portes agree that transnational practices are not new, but the socio-historical theory is a relatively modern approach that situates immigrant communities within the larger phenomena of post-war globalization. Transnational theory describes the social practices of individual actors that are derivatives of globalization, a topic that became prominent in academia since the late 1980s. The difference between globalization and transnationalism has been articulated by Michael Kearney as follows: “Transnationalism overlaps globalization but typically has a more limited purview. Whereas global processes are largely decentered from specific national territories and take place in a global space, transnational processes are anchored

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in and transcend one or more nation-states.”

In these scholarships, transnationalism is often understood as a phenomenon that is direct and continuous involving a sending of remittances to their families back home, building infrastructure and programs in their country of origin, and/or travelling frequently for corporate jobs that carry them across the Pacific. However, my intervention investigates how immigrant identities are formulated less from these hands-on, direct acts of belonging to two politically discrete nation-states and more through a reconciled psychological, symbolic, and emotional understanding of belonging to these two worlds. Their identity negotiations, though arguably a less direct form of transnationalism, expand the category of transmigrants to incorporate a new transnationalism that is located in the personal sense of identity.

Kim-An Lieberman investigates this symbolic, yet still proactive transnationalism through her study on the Vietnamese-American intervention of homeland politics via the internet where pro-democracy Vietnamese diaspora practice transnationalism by “entering” Vietnam via the cyberspace. In a similar fashion, the Shin-Issei “enter” Japan not necessarily through physical movement of bodies but through the symbolic acts of transnationalism, in which the

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“entering” is done through social networks, ethnic communities, and workplaces located in greater Los Angeles.

Therefore, I use transnationalism to describe the processes of an immigrant’s social, cultural, emotional, and psychological participation in Japan and the U.S. where the individuals are agents of their own identity construction within the hegemonic framework enforced by the nation-states’ respective narratives of belonging. More importantly, transnational acts are not just physical travel to and communication with the home country, but also the psychological decision to associate with certain social circles and emotional attachments to Japan that inform immigrants’ identities as rooted in this complex nexus between two nation-states.

Transnational theory suggests that immigrants’ actions are linked to the global flows of capital and labor. Basch and her colleagues argue that “the development of an international division of labor and the integration of the world by transnational corporations that develop worldwide systems of production, distribution, and marketing affect the flow of immigrants and the manner in which they come to understand who they are and what they are doing.”¹¹ In the case of Japan, swift social and economic restructuring in the post-war period was integral to its growth and consequent sending of migrants and immigrants. Historian Laura E. Hein points out that post-war Japan prospered within the U.S. neo-colonialism that worked under “the

assumption that unfettered trade among noncommunist nations was the appropriate global economic structure.” She contends that Japanese economic growth of the late 1980s depended on the particular international environment and the global development of advanced capitalism of its time. First, Japan’s individual rapid growth led to a surplus of goods that they were able to then send abroad to places like the U.S. that sought Japanese merchandise such as electronics. Additionally, Japan established manufacturing headquarters and multinational corporation offices abroad. With these capitalist ventures, Japan became a sending nation of both capital and people—first to the U.S and later to other parts of Asia.

Nonetheless, what ignited scholarly interest in transnationalism was not the practice itself, which had been going on for decades, but rather the scale on which transnationalism came to be practiced in the post-globalized world. Alejandro Portes writes that “the ready availability of air transport, free internet long-distance calls, streaming videos, instant messages, and electronic mail “provide the technological basis for the emergence of transnationalism on a mass scale.” Makiko Nagoshi’s study on internet communication of the Japanese diaspora highlights how information technology has helped mediate Japanese migration by creating local and transnational networks. Furthermore, she states that with internet communication, migrants

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abroad are able to maintain “active participation in social relationships in Japan” which has been shown to be a “crucial factor for a person to be considered a ‘real’ Japanese,” indicating the significant role of the internet in the identity of those abroad.\(^{14}\)

Additionally, transnational theory supposes that immigrants engage in nation-building processes of two or more nation-states that involve both a reconfiguration of and incorporation into the ideologies of those nation-states. Furthermore, immigrant identities are contingent on the acceptance or rejection by the respective national ideologies. As Basch and her colleagues articulate, “[immigrant] identities and practices are configured by hegemonic categories, such as race and ethnicity, that are deeply embedded in the nation building processes of these nation states.”\(^{15}\) Moreover, immigrant identities are formulated from the national ideologies which are also in flux due to ever-increasing globalization. John Tomlinson argues that globalization multiplies rather than destroys identities.\(^{16}\) Benedict Anderson would add that as nationality becomes deterritorialized, immigrants establish “imagined communities” with other similar immigrants in search of a similar sense of belonging.\(^{17}\) In this search, Shin-Issei reconfigure

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what it means to be a Japanese ethnic, weaving together various notions of belonging.

Stuart Hall theorizes identities as socially-constructed concepts of self that “function as points of identification and attachment.”\textsuperscript{18} Oftentimes, scholars speak of identities as constructed out of an understanding of what one is not. Hall, citing Judith Butler, contends that “identities operate through exclusion-- through the construction of marginalized subjects.”\textsuperscript{19} In the case of the Shin-Issei, they are made ethnic or “othered” by the mainstream upon arrival. I define identity as a conceptual self that is both ascribed by society and inscribed by the individual. More specifically, Nobuko Adachi defines ethnic identity as an “imaginary home and origin” that are used by the dominant population to “classify minorities as an imaginary social class.”\textsuperscript{20} Taking this idea of “ethnic identity” as rising from their minority positioning, I use ethnic identity to refer to an immigrant group’s shared understanding of culture rooted in a common ancestry. Shin-Issei ethnic identities are formulated from garnered knowledge of ideologies of the host-land, the U.S., and of the motherland, Japan. Having physically lived in both countries and maintaining contact with both, Shin-Issei are constructing their identities in reference to these nation-states and their respective notions of belonging.

In the next section, I will articulate what transnational ideologies about racial, social,


and legal belonging, anchored by various institutions such as the workplace, filter down to the individual’s negotiation of identity as they live their lives transnationally on the brink of Japan and U.S.

**Post-war Ideologies of Belonging**

Yoshio Sugimoto and Ross Mouer propose that from a Japanese perspective, there are four criteria by which a Japanese person is considered a ‘real’ Japanese. These four include “holding Japanese citizenship, speaking Japanese, being ethnic Japanese, and living in Japan.”

Legal citizenship, language fluency, and blood are three aspects by which Shin-Issei can claim their Japanese identity. However, because they have gone beyond Japan’s borders, the last requirement of residency calls into question their authenticity as Japanese. This strict notion of who is “Japanese” is one that is rooted in Japan’s history prior to Meiji Restoration, imperialism, U.S. neo-colonialism and subsequent post-war recovery.

Literature suggests that since the Meiji Restoration, Japan has been trying to catch up to become equally powerful as the West-- culturally, economically, and territorially. This catching-up meant that they acknowledged their lagging behind, and Japan’s defeat in WWII

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amplified a sense of cultural inferiority. Interestingly, as John Lie articulates, “The search for Japanese essence was in part a reaction to the Westernization of Japan,” whereby Japanese state attempted to preach the unique greatness of Japan.\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Nihonjinron}, literally translating to “the discourse of the Japanese” is the first national ideology that really saw its peak in the postwar era and claims Japan is different from, and in ways, better than the rest of the world because their group orientation drives their culture and behavior.\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Nihonjinron} molds a singular Japanese identity and all “others,” according to this tenet, are forbidden from identifying as Japanese. Chris Burgess asserts that this is a historically constructed racial paradigm, dating as far back as the Tokugawa period where national identity was first created. Under Tokugawa rule and later in the Meiji Period, inside Japan (\textit{uchi}) was depicted as safe and pure whereas the outside world (\textit{soto}) was deemed dangerous and impure. This distinction further reinforced the distinction between “us” and “them,” and therefore, once a Japanese national lives outside the borders for too long, she is considered too foreign and thus too contaminated to be welcomed back as “real” Japanese. Shin-Issei, thus, are risking their right to claim Japanese identity by residing outside Japan’s borders for an extended period of time.

Hypothetically a Shin-Issei or any other immigrant could shed everything about them.


that they identify as Japanese and become 100% American by personal choice. However, the social-legal context of their host land may not welcome them into their new society, thereby excluding them from their confines of “one of us.” Existing hegemonic racial, social, and legal narratives of belonging from both Japan and U.S. push and pull at the identities of the Shin-Issei who are searching for their place as a new immigrant.

Racial Belonging

The Shin-Issei, while they were in Japan, blended into their racially homogeneous society and were not seen as outsiders. However, once they stepped onto American soil, despite the high Asian American presence in California, they became a minority, a colored-other in a place of majority whites. In the U.S., Asians have historically been deemed the “perpetual foreigner” regardless of their citizenship, linguistic acquisition, political engagement, or economic capital within the United States. Under the linear model of assimilation and homogenization of America, new immigrants who wanted American acceptance were encouraged to shed their old ways, their cultural baggage, to gradually acquire the new culture and ways of living. Monisha Das Gupta poignantly makes this clear when she says, “In the assimilation model, ethnic values and practices fall away as immigrants convert themselves into
Americans who then step out of their enclaves to fully participate in the economy and society.”

However, since the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, multiculturalism became the new national ideology. Under multicultural ideology ‘‘ethnicity’’ came to play an ever increasing role in which ‘ethnic’ refers to a set of cultural practices, beliefs, and values that are brought over from a shared nation or territory outside of the U.S” Soon, foreigners were allowed in America without having to entirely shed their cultural baggage. However, as Ronald Takaki notes, cultural pluralism and multiculturalism merely “presented a new agenda with which to construct a U.S. nationality that incorporated, and yet kept subordinated, people of color.” As Claire Jean Kim notes, Asian Americans for example, are still subject to a white-hegemonic discourse that deems inferior minority populations.

Therefore, feeling othered and ostracized in U.S., the Shin-Issei still racially belong to Japan where they can feel like an insider based on the color of their skin. Racial belonging, for the Shin-Issei, occurs in Japan, not in the suburbs of Southern California, except among their other Shin-Issei friends, as I will discuss below.

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Social Belonging

Social affiliations are another indicator of one’s identity. This may be a physical space such as an ethnic location with which one chooses to identify, or an institution such as a corporation, in which social (and gender) roles may be more aggressively imposed onto an individual’s identity. Social belonging also informs an individual’s identity through the people with whom they affiliate such as friends and mentors. Kaoru Oguri Kendis proposes that “ethnic identification provides a degree of psychological comfort” where the “continuation of ethnic behavior results in the ‘re-creation in the miniature’ of the more familiar life of the mother country, and thus, in a more manageable life. In this re-created lifestyle, the Shin-Issei find comfort through a shared understanding of ethnicity.”

In Japan, college graduates are expected to find work immediately and oftentimes, the company identity is one that becomes a part of your identity. However, expectations within the corporation differ, depending on one’s age and gender. Daisuke Akiba points out that “Many college-educated women encounter the reality that companies prefer to employ men to women, particularly for positions with potential for advancement and growth” and that “Japanese companies continue to prefer male candidates for positions with potential for advancement, as they expect women to resign in a few years to marry and have children-- following traditional

gender role expectations.” Given these corporate expectations regarding women in Japan, perhaps Shin-Issei women dis-identified themselves from these roles as defining a part of who they are and instead opted to work in a more liberal corporation located in America where gender roles are comparatively more egalitarian. However, many Shin-Issei women must still resort to working in Nikkei corporations because they are more likely to sponsor their employee visas.

Another way in which affinity identity is developed is through the various locations in which new immigrants can feel welcome and at home. This is done through the overlapping of the Japanese American community. The pre-war Japanese immigrants set up *nihonmachi* (Japantown) in various parts of the West Coast, establishing the very first Japanese communities—remnants of which can still be seen in places like Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. James Smith argues that “Shin-Issei are bringing transnational ties into the [Little Tokyo] enclave and sharpening its identity as a place materially and socially linked to Japanese cultural forms,” evidencing the layering of the Japanese American immigrant communities. As Lane Hirabayashi and George Tanaka contend, a strong self-sufficient Issei and Nisei community

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existed in Gardena Valley, which is now a hotspot for new Japanese immigration. The prewar establishment of a community space shaped the local environment in which the new wave would settle and start their new lives.\textsuperscript{33}

Takashi Machimura documents how the postwar economic success of Japan led to a surge of migrants to Southern California particularly to the South Bay area of Los Angeles. Here, a Japanese way of life was reproduced with their own services and facilities catering to their community. Heightened by the establishment of Asahi Gakuen, a Japanese-language school funded by the Japanese government, supermarkets, specialty stores, chain restaurants, and Japanese language media, the Shin-Issei are able to experience their homeland right in the suburbs of Southern California. Machimura states, “the daily life of Japanese nationals has become connected more closely and immediately to the homeland through the extension of the educational system, through imported consumer goods and services, and through the reproduction of media space.”\textsuperscript{34} In the late 1980s and 1990s, newcomers settled here to live their lives as Japanese cultural citizens within the multiethnic America without having to shed their Japanese selves. Adachi notes that “transnational migrants tend to rally together to provide


temporary comfort in an unfamiliar society, and to try to keep a little part of their old country alive,” but it is clear that these “comforts” are not just a temporary solution but rather a more permanent way of life.\(^{35}\) This highlights how the search for identity for the Shin-Issei is not merely an adoption of one pre-existing ethnic or gender identity, but rather an amalgamation and reconfiguration of transnational ideas about belonging.

**Legal Belonging**

One facet of identity, a person’s legal nationality, is another indicator of belonging. According to the 2009 Census, only 38% of Japanese foreign born in California became naturalized citizens. When compared to the 69% of Chinese and 67% of Filipinos who have naturalized, Japanese immigrants are not becoming American by citizenship. This may be attributed to many factors such as national pride, security of benefits, and/or economic and political stability of Japan that give them no urge to become American citizens. David Fitzgerald says, “transnational migrants [often] live in a country in which they do not claim citizenship and claim citizenship in a country in which they do not live.”\(^{36}\) For most Shin-Issei whose identities are divided between Japan and the U.S., throwing away their wine red passports means throwing

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away a part of their identity. Additionally, the naturalization process indicates an unwavering commitment to America, a sign of permanence that perhaps the Japanese immigrants are not ready to make.

Eiichiro Azuma, in writing about the agency of the pre-war Issei, states, “because they were always faced with the need to reconcile simultaneous national belongings as citizen-subjects of one state and yet resident members (denizens) of another, the Issei refused to make a unilateral choice, electing instead to take an eclectic approach to the presumed contradiction between things Japanese and American.”37 Until 1952, the Issei were barred from naturalizing and thus exercised transnationalism as a means to garner Japanese state support in the US. However, for the Shin-Issei, even though they have the means to naturalize, they choose not to and, instead, remain citizens of Japan while being denizens of the U.S.

The three layers of belonging – racial, social, and legal -- are not equally salient in all situations that Shin-Issei might face. Because identities are flexible and situational, different feelings of belonging become more pronounced at different times. Nonetheless, circumstances from one type of belonging may have an impact on another form. For example, due to the legal limitations of needing a work-visa in order to stay in the U.S., Shin-Issei are urged into Nikkei corporations that will not only be more likely to sponsor their visas, but will consequently

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introduce the Shin-Issei to more people like them, furthering their social affiliations with Japanese people. Or when a Shin-Issei is racially othered and alienated in spaces such as in Orange County community colleges, she may start to frequent areas where people look and act like her, leading her to areas like Torrance and Gardena. Therefore, these three belongings, despite their distinctive angle of study, are not mutually exclusive categories as identities are negotiated by navigating and balancing out of the different belongings.

Still, these three categories of belonging, informed by the hegemonic discourses from both Japan and the U.S. are part and parcel of the creation of Shin-Issei transnational identities. It is within these dominant narratives that Shin-Issei navigate their ethnic identity, being pushed out of certain spaces and feeling more welcomed in another. They navigate through the various racial, social, and legal road bumps to create a sense of self that is located somewhere in between Japan and the U.S. but neither fully here nor there.

3. Research Methodologies

In my research, I used a qualitative ethnographic approach as my means to collect data. As a first-generation Japanese immigrant myself and thereby an insider of the Shin-Issei community, I was privy to certain aspects of my interviewees’ lives which helped me get access to resources. However, at the same time that this insider status helped me, it also hindered me in
certain respects because de-familiarizing the familiar was a big challenge that I faced throughout this project.

To generate data for my project, I used participant-observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants identified through the snowball sampling technique. Through the snowball sampling technique, I initially located four individuals who I knew personally, and they introduced me to others who were likely candidates. In the end, this research was conducted as a case-study based on six Shin-Issei respondents living in various parts of greater Los Angeles and Orange County, California. This case-study of Shin-Issei participants between the ages 20~30 focuses on their experiences of being at that particular period in life where they face life-changing decisions such as desired occupation, place of residency, and commitment to relationships. Although the conclusions I draw from this project are case-specific and any larger generalizations are to be made with caution, I hope to provide a gateway for future comparative research.

**Participant Observation**

Even though I identify as a Japanese immigrant, my direct engagement with the Shin-Issei community and a self-awareness of my ethnic identity did not begin until I moved to San Diego, California in 2006 for college and jointed UCSD’s Japanese Students Association, a
student-led non-profit organization that aims to bridge the cultures of Japan and America for international students. Even though I was not actively researching the immigrant community until September of 2010, my years of experience within the community provided me with certain insights as well as the acceptance from the community to conduct research on them. Some of my respondents were, therefore, acquaintances I have known for years and others were found through snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling allowed me to extend my network circles in a relatively short amount of time and locate those who fit the rather strict qualification requirements that I set forth. Snowball sampling technique, though advantageous in situations where the population of study is hard to find, also has its drawbacks. Kath Browne’s investigation of the snowball-sampling method revealed that the recruitment technique of using participants’ and the interviewer’s social networks both includes and excludes certain people.38 This was true for my study as the majority of my participants were people I knew previously, and thus our behaviors and beliefs may have been similar due to our associations with one another, leaving out those who had contrasting motives and thoughts. She also notes how recruitment methods thus “(in)forms research accounts such that the way we sample partially makes what we find.”39 Nonetheless, snowball sampling

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39 Browne, Kath., 57.
allowed me to locate the research subjects in a timely fashion.

This project is regionally located in Southern California, more specifically, Los Angeles and Orange County. I chose this region because of accessibility and because of the rising Japanese population in this area. Although current research has shown that New York, Illinois, Washington, and Hawai’i are more common destinations for new Japanese immigrants, California is still popular because of its proximity to Japan, its availability of resources, and historically established Japanese American communities that ease their transition. The Japanese newcomer community is, in fact, growing in the South Bay since the 1980s economic boom. Most expatriates who were sent to California for work have returned to Japan. However, many others have decided to stay or have returned at a later time.

Torrance and Gardena are both regions in the South Bay that are encountering a layering of the Japanese American generations. Lane Hirabayashi provides a good example of this community layering through his examination of Gardena’s growing suburbs. He notes that even in the 1980s, 25% of the Japanese Americans in Gardena were foreign born, and many more were kaishain and shoshain expatriates here for work assignments and therefore missing from the census data.41

Torrance now houses the national headquarters for many large Japanese corporations such as Toyota Motor Sales, Honda Motor Company, and All Nippon Airway (ANA), as well as smaller corporations such as *Lighthouse Magazine* and Mitsuwa Marketplace. Takashi Machimura comments on the growth of these suburbs when he states: “this neighborhood therefore gradually took on the characteristics of being a largely Japanese self-contained community with a self-sufficient world of its own.”

Having all of their needs met through the Japanese language school, shopping centers, Japanese language media, and entertainment, the Shin-Issei have re-created a mini Japan in the suburbs of Southern California.

I conducted participant-observation, a community-based method, over the period of six months, in order to “collect data in a relatively unstructured manner to learn the explicit and tacit aspects of the lives and relations being studied.”

Participant-observation with the Shin-Issei involved conducting activities with my subjects on a regular basis to supplement and fact-check their interviews with real life interactions. Having the in-language and the privilege of being an insider helped because participant-observation did not feel like I was intruding on their space and time, and they became less conscious of the fact that I was conducting research on them over time. All participant-observation and interviews were conducted with informed consent and all

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gathered information is kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and erasure of recordings.

**In-depth Interviews**

As the second part of my ethnographic fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with six Shin-Issei immigrants. I interviewed four women and two men. Since Japanese emigration post 1945 has been majority female as explained previously, I had a limited sample pool from which to draw my male participants. My participants were identified through snowball sampling method, reaching out into the community through email, Facebook, and word of mouth. Each individual was selected for the following qualifications, which were laid out for them explicitly before their consent to participate.

**Qualifications:**
1. Born in Japan to both Japanese parents and have lived there for minimum of 10 years.
2. Be between the ages of 21 to 30.
3. Have graduated from an American college or university.
4. Resident of Southern California
5. Have made a decision to stay in America indefinitely

In-depth interviews allowed for a more personal and intimate look into the lives of the Shin-Issei as they become agents of their own personal stories. Interviews, although they carry their own methodological limitations, still help to “provide details in the context of the person’s
life, and augment information obtained from participant observation. Additionally, the semi-structured style allowed for even more flexibility on the part of the narrators to navigate their own stories. The themes for my open-ended questions were chosen based on the topics pertinent to understanding their globalized notions of self. The interviews usually lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. In a few cases, there were follow-up sessions that were conducted more informally via email and skype used to clarify and expand on earlier interviews.

Although the questions were asked in English, all respondents were given the option of answering in English or Japanese. All participants except one opted for Japanese. When appropriate, they also chose the location of the interview. Each interview was voice recorded with informed consent. All recordings have been destroyed with the completion of the project.

The interview topics and questions included the following:

A. Personal Background
   ① What made you come to the United States?

B. Citizenship
   ① Are you an American citizen? Japanese citizen?
   ② Do you ever think about becoming naturalized?

C. Ethnic Self-Identification
   ① What do you consider yourself?
   ② Who do you associate with most?

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45 Included at the end is an Appendix with the original Japanese transcriptions. The interviews have been translated by me.
D. Times in America
   ① What are some of the most difficult aspects of life in America?
   ② What do you enjoy about life here?

E. Engagement with Japan
   ① Tell me how you feel about Japan.
   ② Do you stay ‘in-the-loop’ with Japan?

F. Future Plans
   ① What do you see yourself doing in five years? Ten years? 50 years?

Research Respondents

Based on the qualifications from above, I located six Shin-Issei as my respondents. This is a list of their pseudonyms, age, gender, year of entry to the U.S., legal status in the U.S., and current occupation compiled in April of 2012. Their legal status and occupation thus reflect the up-to-date knowledge as of April 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name, Age (F/M)</th>
<th>Year of Entry</th>
<th>Legal Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satsuki, 25 (F)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Green-card</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misako, 30 (F)</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>F1 Visa → Green-card</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chisa, 23 (F)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>H1B Visa</td>
<td>Bookkeeping, Payroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiko, 24 (F)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>F1 Visa → Japan</td>
<td>Translations (in Japan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuta, 25 (M)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Green-card</td>
<td>Banker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daiki, 23 (M)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>F1 Visa → H1B Visa</td>
<td>TV station</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Satsuki who was quoted in the introduction, is a lively and driven girl who came to the
States when she was sixteen for high school. She had some previous knowledge of life in California as she annually visited her grandparents here when she was younger in order to keep valid her green-card status. She is not sure how her family obtained their green-card, but she knows that she has had it since she was young. Her father had also studied abroad in California before she was born. Now, she is finishing up her teaching credentials at a California State University in Southern California and lives in a Japanese family’s house in Orange County.

Misako is an organized and hardworking Ph.D. student at one of the University of California campuses studying Japanese Linguistics. She came to the U.S. for undergraduate education to continue her passion for English. She met her African American ex-husband as an undergraduate and they had a child together, causing her to take some time away from school. She obtained a green-card through her former husband. Misako raised her bi-racial daughter to speak Japanese, and sends her to Japan every summer for a Japanese school experience.

Chisa, super-outgoing and always positive, came to California with a firm decision to attend college here, not in Japan. She first attended a predominantly white, two-year community college and later transferred to a more diverse University of California campus. After graduating, she still did not want to return to Japan to work so she found a Nikkei corporation to sponsor her for an Optional Practical Training (OPT) visa that allowed her to stay longer while making a living. She currently resides in Torrance where she enjoys eating authentic Japanese food.
Aiko, a quiet girl with a Buddhist devotion to *Soka Gakkai*, is strongly interested in the multi-ethnic community of Los Angeles and desires to work in the U.S. in order to give back to the community. At the time of the interview, she was a recent graduate looking for a place to continue her OPT. Despite her parents’ wishes for her to return to Japan, she was actively seeking a way to remain in the U.S. through legal means. Unfortunately, she could not find a company to sponsor her, and she returned to Japan a few months after the interview. Now, she is working in Soka University as a translator.

Daiki, passionate about music both Western and Japanese, had just graduated from his university in Southern California, at the time of the first interview and was taking on odd jobs such as translating while searching for an OPT. However, by the second interview months later, he had moved to New York City and is now working for a Japanese TV broadcasting company that issued him a work visa. Although he is no longer located in Southern California, I included him in this project nonetheless because his insightful quotes still held relevant to the larger issue of transnationalism and Shin-Issei identity formation.

Yuta, quirky but shy at times, came to the U.S. already having a green-card. His family, all of whom still reside in Japan, won the green-card through the lottery system. However, he was the only one who was able to use the green-card because of other factors in their lives such as work and school. As Yuta was transitioning from high school to college, he decided to get his
education in California in order to make the most of his family’s big win. Thus, he took on the
family responsibility to come to the U.S. and one day get naturalized so that his family, mainly
his parents, can also become American citizens through the reunification clause of the 1965
Immigration Reform. Currently, he works at a Nikkei bank in downtown Los Angeles.

In understanding their unique histories and aspirations, I hope to paint a more accurate
picture of how and why they have made the choices they have. More importantly, I try my best to
allow the interviewees to speak for themselves by using direct quotations whenever possible.
This project is a culmination of their generous time and thoughts, and thus I owe my many
thanks to them.

4. Data Analysis

Racial Belonging

Back in their homeland, Japanese are not aware of race in their daily lives because Japan
is a largely racially homogenous nation despite the ethnic diversity consisting of Chinese,
Koreans, and indigenous Ainu to name a few. Naturally, the Shin-Issei had blended into their
society of majority Asians and thus their race was invisible or at least insignificant. It is only
once they stepped outside of Japan that they became cognizant of their Asian race and Japanese
ethnicity.

Chisa came to the United States as an international student for college. She had attended
a typical Japanese school up through high school. However, during her college selection period, she had no idea what field to pursue and needed time and liberty to figure it out slowly. Thus, she never took the entrance exams for Japanese universities and instead, opted for an American higher education, which allowed her to develop her interests through the community college system. At her college in Orange County, she first became aware of her physical difference, as well as racial tensions from her majority white classmates. She states:

“I think that if I hadn’t come to America, I wouldn’t even be thinking about my ethnicity. Like, there are a lot of races here, and you can know directly what other ethnicities think of Japanese people. If I had stayed in Japan, I would only be talking to Japanese people, and even if I did talk to foreigners, they’re usually in Japan because they are interested in Japan.”

In the United States, one’s awareness of race is heightened because one becomes the atypical other in the midst of white or other Americans. Once becoming a minority, the Shin-Issei begin to think consciously about their identity as Japanese. For some, it was the first time they had to point out that they were Japanese. Chisa articulates how she had to navigate her ethnic identity and find her place within white America.

“There were so few Asians at my community college that I was a real outsider. In class, it’ll be like ‘blond, blond, black.’ In fact, because I went to a super small Community College in Orange County, most of the white students only knew of that world there. So when I said I was Japanese, people didn’t really care or they’d just be like ‘oh, I see’ and it ended there.”

In at least half of the interviews, the Shin-Issei mentioned that they had initially attempted to make friends with white Americans in order to become more American and enhance
their study-abroad experience. Satsuki, who was introduced at the beginning, spoke of casting out her Japanese side in order to become American in high school when she first came abroad.

“I did try to become more American in high school... I didn’t have good internet connection at home so I totally shut my Japanese-ness out. I only hung out with white friends and there were 4000 students in high school but including Japanese American students, maybe 10 students were Japanese and...I tried so hard to stay away from Japan... I did that for 2-3 years and I think that made me strong too... But no matter how hard I tried to become American, I realized I can’t be American. I felt like I faced a huge wall between how I can’t understand my friends in certain ways. I don’t know if it’s because how I was raised or because I came from a different country... I don’t know when but I saw myself from an outside/third person perspective and I realized that no matter how hard I tried, I can never become someone who is born here.”

Like her, other Shin-Issei that had initially tried to fit into the white crowd realized that they could never fully belong in those circles and thus opted to hang out with other Asian Americans, if not others from Japan. Interviewees expressed feelings of distance and alienation, not knowing how and when to talk to their classmates who were not Japanese. Their attempts at becoming friends with their classmates often ended in futility. Take for example, Yuta and Aiko, two students who attended community colleges in Los Angeles and transferred to four-year universities, and how they expressed difficulties in making friends at school.

“And most of the time at UCSD, the classes were so big that I didn’t know when to talk to them. As a result, I didn’t have many friends in class. But in my community college, the classes were smaller and I would sometimes talk to the people that were next to me, like other Americans. The problem was, though, everyone went home after classes and so the friendship could never get that deep.”

“I tried to hang out with people that weren’t Japanese. So, at that time, I hung
out with Koreans and Taiwanese people.... Asians who were... hmm... Well, it was hard for me to be good friends with a (white) American so I tried to find other people with whom I can still practice my English.”

Another factor that heightened their sense of race and ethnicity was the multi-ethnic make up of California. Even though their classrooms may have been dominated by white students as in Chisa’s case illustrated above, many of the Shin-Issei immigrants had lived with roommates of other ethnic backgrounds, which increased their awareness of identifying as Japanese. Aiko, for instance, at one point early in her arrival lived with an African-Chinese, a Mongolian, and an Italian. Having been placed in a setting where there were other ethnic minorities, Shin-Issei repeatedly were asked to identify their ethnic background, becoming more aware of their otherness.

For some new immigrants, this multi-ethnic diversity in Southern California made them feel they have a cultural place in the United States, even though it was as a minority. Aiko, who felt as if she did not need to travel because the world has gathered here in Los Angeles, aspires to build a multi-ethnic daycare in California in her future. She stated that she wants to give back to this society through working here. Thus, though they may not racially belong in a sense that their race is not invisible as it would be in Japan, but instead highly visible, the diverse ethnic make-up of Southern California, particularly Los Angeles, allows Shin-Issei to feel some belonging and inclusion as one minority group among many.
Frequency of transnational temporary trips back home to visit family and friends may be an indicator of how at-home one feels in her host-land. With the availability of direct flights from LAX to Narita and Haneda, travelling is now much more accessible and affordable, leading to the hypothesis that Shin-Issei would fly back home relatively often. However, in asking the Shin-Issei how often they fly back, it became clear that racial belonging was not a primary factor in their decision to visit. For example, Yuta has not seen his motherland in over seven years, more than one fourth of his life. However, for him, he had set a personal goal before coming here—to not go back until he graduated from a university. He felt he was the only child who had the perfect opportunity, a family obligation to use the green-card won through the lottery, and therefore decided to attend college abroad. He had intended to visit once after graduation. However, upon graduating and landing a full time job as a banker, going back became increasingly difficult with his limited vacation time. Therefore, Yuta’s persistence in fulfilling his personal goal rooted in family responsibility kept him from visiting his parents in his homeland, over-powering any desire to be in an environment where he may find racial belonging.

Similarly, Aiko purposefully delayed going back home and has only returned once since her arrival. Her parents’ expectations for her to come back and stay in Japan pushed her further and further away from Japan. She said,

“My parents believe one hundred percent that I’m going to come back. I actually haven’t told them that I want to stay here.... Every time I talk to them on the
Having a whole ocean in between her parents and her, then, is her way of temporarily escaping the pressures placed on her. Both Yuta and Aiko have not visited their homeland in a while, and their reasons were similar in that they felt certain family obligations that they were fulfilling or drifting away from, respectively. Their desires not to go back, though complex on their own, were not rooted in their feelings of finding racial belonging in the U.S.

In contrast to Yuta and Aiko, Chisa articulated that she returned almost every six months and spent time with her family and friends back in Japan. She still has friends from high school with whom she hung out after their work. However, she spoke briefly of how she cannot stay in Japan for too long at a time because she tends to get bored—“like a housewife” waiting for her working friends to make time for her. Evidently for her, despite the racial belonging she feels in Japan, there is still a feeling of “not being one of them” because of the responsibilities that she lacks while she is in Japan when compared to her friends who are making a living while she vacations.

In another case, Misako, a Shin-Issei mother, stated that she has sent her child to Japan every summer for the past several years to attend a local school. Her daughter, bi-racially Asian and Black, is now being raised by her single mother and speaks Japanese at home. They have been taking annual trips to Misako’s father’s and mother’s homes, in order to teach her daughter...
what it means to be Japanese. For Misako, racial belonging is undoubtedly in Japan but for her
daughter, being racially ambiguous or “ha-fu” as the Japanese call it, may serve as point of
contention for her sense of inclusion despite her language acquisition. Perhaps the fact that her
daughter is bi-racial and more may feel more racially accepted in the US, led Misako to stay in
America longer than she might have originally intended. Interestingly, Misako skirted the
discussion of race during the interview, and it was only afterwards that I discovered her
daughter’s father was African American.

Me: Is your husband Japanese?
Misako: There was a husband, but we got divorced. Now I’m single.
Me: Oh. A single mother?
Misako: Yes, and my husband, he was an American.

Erasing race from her story, I had assumed that the father was a white American and did
not probe further. I had done what many interviewees had done in equating being “American”
with being “white.” Although this is highly problematic, it best highlights the very contention I
have made regarding racial belonging. Even in this Post-Civil Rights Era, some still confound
the meaning of an “American” to connote being born here and most importantly, being white. It
is hard to determine whether the interviewee meant “white American” in their use of the term
during the interview, and there were many instances where I was not sure what exactly they had

\[46\] Misako’s parents are divorced and live separately. In comparison to the U.S. this is less common in Japan, though

\[47\] In Japan’s racial hierarchy, fully Japanese are at the top, and white-Japanese bi-racials above black-Japanese
bi-racials.
meant by the use of that term. Take the following for example.

“At first when I came here, I had home-stay arranged for me. So I lived with a host-family... It was a Filipina wife and an American husband. They had a child, and the grandmother also lived there. The grandmother was from Philippines and couldn’t speak any English. But then she was the only person that was always home! Her and the child. So it was difficult to communicate...”

If the grandmother was from the Philippines, that indicates that she is a first generation immigrant, and there is a high chance that the “Filipina wife” is then a second generation person, who is by birth an American citizen. Or, her wife could have become naturalized through her “American husband” as well. However, the interviewee does not refer to her as a “Filipina- American” and instead, only uses the word “American” to reference her husband. In fact, it turned out that the husband was white-American and from what the interviewee presumes, the wife was an American citizen as well.

This convoluted usage of the word “American” suggests how racially, many immigrants still feel that America is presumed to be a nation for whites. Racially belonging in America, then, is seemingly impossible in their colored skin. Nonetheless, even if the Shin-Issei sense of race and ethnicity is heightened as they realize their “racial other” identity, they still feel other forms of comfort and belonging in Southern California that encourage them to stay to build new lives.

Social Belonging

Since the late 1980s, a Shin-Issei community has been emerging within the suburbs of
Southern California, particularly in Torrance and Gardena, bringing in new Japanese investments such as the multinational corporations as well as contemporary Japanese culture ranging from dress to media to colloquial slang. These new immigrants are consequently adding another layer to the pre-existing Japanese American communities in this area. In their new environment, the Shin-Issei of my study find a sense of belonging because the abundance of ethnic resources generates the transnational feeling of being in their homeland. For example, one of my interviewees suggested doing the interview at a Japanese-owned cake shop in Torrance. Eating a small slice of sesame flavored cake, we were reminded of the cute patisseries in Japanese department stores. Similarly, on a ski and snowboard overnight trip consisting of all Shin-Issei and Shin-Nisei, we planned on having Japanese curry for dinner and thus bought our ingredients from Mitsuwa Marketplace in Torrance before heading to the mountain, knowing that something like curry roux and fukujinzuke toppings would be difficult to find there. Essentially, in these burgeoning ethnic suburbs, Shin-Issei are able to live as Japanese individuals without shedding their “cultural baggage.”

This sense of being Japanese in California was reflected in my interviewees’ responses. Many of my interviewees, regardless of the fact that they have been here for more than four years, felt that having been born and raised in Japan, by definition, they were still Japanese. In the interviews, under the topic of ethnic self-identification, one of the questions I asked was:
“What do you consider yourself?” to which they responded:

Aiko: I’m Japanese but... (long pause)...yes I’m Japanese.
Me: So if someone asked you, “What ethnicity are you?” You’d answer, “Japanese?”
Aiko: Yea, I’d say I’m Japanese because I was raised there.

Michiko: Right now, I’d say I’m Japanese. When I was young, I used to say “I’m myself.” I thought, more than citizenship or anything that I could have my own identity, but as I got older, I started realizing that I am Japanese. I mean, I was born and raised there so I am Japanese.

Chisa: I think I’d say I’m Japanese. That’s basic.

Chisa, in particular, was proud to identify as Japanese. When I conducted her interview after the March 11, 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami disasters, she referenced how even though it hurt to see “people from [her] country suffering,” it also made her proud to see in the media how the Japanese were being portrayed as recovering quickly. In this way, she was proud to be affiliated with the people of Japan, whose strengths were being praised all over the world.

However, throughout the interviews, many also distinguished themselves from the Japanese in Japan, whom they sometimes refer to as “Japanese-Japanese.” In their reference to Japanese in Japan, they seemed to connote a strict homogeneous definition of who constituted that group. Some of these articulations were gendered in that they specifically distinguished themselves from being “male” in Japan from being “male” in America. For example, Daiki felt that the duration of his stay, as well as the purpose of his stay, here has “Americanized” him to a point where his values no longer matched-up with those in Japan:
"I've been here for five years now and I've even worked here so... there are times when my value-systems don't match up with Japanese-Japanese."

He elaborated that in Japan, he feels like he must always say the right things at the right times, be overly deferential to elders and superiors, and not stick out like a sore thumb in society in general but especially when it came to business. When it was Daiki’s time to job-hunt with the rest of his classmates, he said he got an eerie feeling seeing everyone dressed in similar looking suits with the same black haircuts and knew it was not the place for him.

Misako also reiterated feelings of being different from the others in Japan and therefore ostracized in her home society. She stated,

“I was often told that I don’t seem like a Japanese person. And I guess while I was living in Japan, I always felt like I was floating, like I was somehow different from everyone else.”

For Misako, her life now is considered atypical in many gendered ways if she were still in Japan. She mentioned how she enjoys a lot more freedom here, being able to find her own path with enough passion and dedication. Having a child at a young age, being a single-mother, and going to graduate school are all exceptional in the eyes of a Japanese native and thus she feels more liberation here in the U.S., being allowed to pursue what she desires.

Chisa also distanced herself from Japanese in Japan. She had dated a Shin-Nisei who spoke Japanese for some time before the interview. She said that he understood
Japanese culture and was therefore relatable but was not “Japanese-Japanese.” In fact, she clearly articulated, “I wouldn’t want the person I date to be Japanese-Japanese.” Chisa’s, as well as Satsuki’s, image of Japanese-Japanese men is one where they are too hard-working at their jobs, but are flirtatious and uncommitted when it comes to relationships. The men, they presume, frequent hostess clubs and commit other adulterous acts even in marriage. As they became familiar with American ways of serious dating, it was clear to them that a Japanese-Japanese relationship was undesirable and unfit in their expectations of men.

In other words, although the Shin-Issei self-identify as being ethnically Japanese because of their birth and upbringing, having lived outside of Japan for a while now, they repeatedly draw distinctions between themselves and those Japanese in Japan. Because of this unique tension between being Japanese but not Japanese-Japanese, they find their social belonging mostly among other Japanese newcomers like themselves. In fact, all six of my interviewees expressed that they were most comfortable with people who understood their culture, language, gender roles, and/or had a similar value system to which they could relate.

Me: Why do you think you are closest with Japanese people?
Chisa: Hmm… maybe because our common sense is the same. There are a lot of things that you don’t have to pay attention to but you just know, right? Like if you had the same culture or same background. But if they’re from a different culture, you’ll have to explain things to them. And I mean, that can be fun too, but rather than getting super close from there, I think it’s easier to be friends with someone who already shares the same common sense. That way, you can be friends faster, get closer, and I think I’m more comfortable with it.
By comfort, the respondents are actually referring to the ways in which they understand and live out their ethnicity. With those whom they share the same understanding of what it means to be a new Japanese immigrant, they are able to connect with them without extensive effort. Through shared experiences of micro-aggressions and alienation coupled with a fundamental understanding of Japanese culture, they are able to feel more comfort with those who are ‘high-ethnic,’ insiders by their own definition.

This comfort was echoed by another interviewee, in reference to who her ideal marriage partner would be. Though she did not insist on an ethnically Japanese husband, for her, being culturally aware was a crucial characteristic in her ideal man.

“I will be careful with what language they speak. Well, I want to get married to someone that at least has knowledge of Japanese culture. It will be better if they know Japanese, but I don’t expect them to. [I hope he is] at least willing to learn the Japanese culture.”

From my observation and interactions with the Shin-Issei and Shin-Nisei community, they seem to truly abide by these unwritten rules and hang out primarily with other Japanese immigrants or people with an interest in Japan unless the circumstances require them to do otherwise. For example, when we went on the snow trip, some of us were trying to find more people to invite for our large cabin that housed eight occupants. As we sat around brain-storming for people who might be interested, every ‘potential’ acquaintance named was either a Shin-Issei or Shin-Nisei. No one stated that non-Japanese were not allowed, but it
seemed to be the unspoken rule for this overnight trip. I do not think they were being discriminatory in this setting, merely trying to find people who would feel comfortable being in a house with seven other Shin-Issei and Shin-Nisei.

In the context of larger society, at the time of the interviews, three of my interviewees were working full-time, two were pursuing academia at the graduate level, and one was job hunting. Chisa, Yuta, and Daiki work for different Nikkei corporations while Satsuki and Misako continue towards their diplomas in order to teach Japan-related subjects in the future. Although not representative of the entire Shin-Issei community, the individuals of my study were surprisingly all connected to their Japanese background through their work or school, even in the context of the larger American society.\(^\text{48}\) This may be a reflection of their feelings of comfort being in a Japanese context, utilizing their bi-cultural identity as an asset, or possibly their perceptions of their own limitations of being a foreigner in America.

Chisa, Yuta, and Daiki work for Nikkei companies: a recruitment company, a bank, and a TV station. With workplace as one social space where identity may become re-constructed or reinforced, it is interesting that they are all working in a semi-Japanese environment. Although they gave multiple reasons for working at a Nikkei corporation, one common thread was the linguistic aspect, in both positive and negative ways. Seen through a positive lens, their bilingual

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\(^\text{48}\) With the exception of Aiko who was still seeking a full-time position at the time of the interview and has since returned to Japan to do translation work.
fluency gave them an advantage particularly in Nikkei corporations and thus proved to be an asset. On the flip-side, however, they felt that their imperfect English made them less competitive in an “American” job market and therefore they steered away from it. Consequently, all three of those employed use Japanese at their workplace, thereby reinforcing their social belonging amongst other Japanese-speakers. Incidentally, in-language usage caused some ethnic tension in Yuta’s office.

“There are about ten people in my department and three of us are Japanese. And well, when we’re talking in Japanese, they’ll make a fuss about it now telling our bosses and such. They don’t like that we speak Japanese amongst ourselves… I don’t like to associate with those people so I avoid them. I mean, I kind of understand because they were born here so… but then again, they’re both Hispanic. They sometimes speak Spanish to each other, too. But I heard that they didn’t use to. It was only after more Japanese people started working here, and we started communicating in Japanese. Then they started retaliating by speaking in Spanish themselves.”

This anecdote evidences how language can be a form of identity creation and negotiation.

Yuta thought that being able to use Japanese language would be an advantage in this setting, but rather, it created divisions and heightened a sense of otherness for the Hispanic employees, which reinforced that Yuta was not an “other” but one of those Japanese employees.

Misako and Satsuki have gone a different route from those above and have instead remained in academia. Both of them have aspirations to teach one day — Misako as a university professor and Satsuki as a high school teacher. Misako is working towards a
Ph.D., focusing her dissertation research on Japanese language from a linguistic point of view. Satsuki is working towards obtaining teaching credentials in Japanese and Mathematics. She is currently a student-teacher of Japanese at a high school in Orange County. Again, similar to the full-time working Shin-Issei from above, these two women also related their future occupations to Japan-related fields, albeit in teaching.

In Japan, few people pursue a graduate level education and historically, women have been particularly discouraged from becoming professors. For Misako, in particular, the route to continue onto a PhD program is fairly uncommon in Japan. When I asked her what her parents expect of her now, she responded:

“To get a solid job somewhere after graduating. I mean, I came here and graduated undergrad and then decided to go to graduate school... After that, it takes a while, right? But my parents aren’t really familiar with that system. So I think they’ve been worried about me for some time now.”

However, she does not think that her opportunities are in any way different from if she were in Japan, perhaps reflecting the changing mentality of Japan. She states that because she was always interested in linguistics, she believes she would have pursued graduate school in Japan. She expressed no particular advantages to pursuing graduate school in the States. Despite the feminist movement in the U.S., she believes that it is still hard for women to become professors in the U.S. as well. In fact, she articulated positive thoughts about working in Japan

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49 Misako is very open to any opportunities for work that may come her way. She says that she would not mind working in Japan or even in another country if there was work for her.
as a professor:

“I heard that in Japan, the title of being ‘professor’ is more established and it is seen as a very respectable job. I also heard that the pay is better in Japan... But then, I think, there are a lot of people doing Japanese Linguistics and there is something like a community... so no matter where you are, if you know what you want to do, then it doesn’t matter the location.”

With the increased availability and accessibility of communication technology, people can stay connected to their friends and families abroad with ease. Email, instant message, and Skype have all shrunk the distance between Asia and U.S., and immigrants are instantaneously able to speak with and see those who are an ocean away. They are able to socialize using platforms and social networks such as Facebook, Google+, and Meebo that allow for a constant contact despite geographical distances. Perhaps it is this readily available communication technology that keeps one another accessible in times of need but distant otherwise. Shin-Issei of my study actually do not utilize these communication technologies to socialize with their friends and family as often as one might expect. Daiki, who goes back to Japan about once a year stated,

“I do contact my friends every once in a while, but I mean... I can just use MIXI⁵⁰, or Twitter, or Facebook to contact them. Oh and Skype. So I’ve never really had any problems with keeping in touch.”

Chisa also expressed similar ideas that constant contact is not necessary or even desired with her busy schedule. She hinted that perhaps the reason why she is able to stay in the U.S. for so long away from her family and friends is because of the

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⁵⁰ Mixi is a Japanese social networking website that focuses more on blogging and less on the use of visuals such as personal photographs or video uploads although these are possible features as well.
technology that allows for fast instant communication. I asked her, “How do you contact
your friends and family in Japan?” to which she answered:

“Skype, international call, regular phone, or email, I guess. Recently, it’s become
so convenient. No one has to write letters anymore… Now, you don’t have to
meet them to talk to them. Well, there’s a little bit of time difference. But still,
because it’s so convenient, I never really get homesick.”

In summary, it is clear that the Shin-Issei have found a strong sense of social belonging
in their suburban lives working or going to school in Southern California. In the neighborhoods
of Torrance and Gardena, the Shin-Issei have access to abundant Japanese resources that permit
them to live as Japanese in America. Still, they distinguish themselves as being different from
Japanese in Japan, whom they see as one homogeneous, rigid group of people. In their minds, the
Japanese they left back in Japan are lacking a multicultural/racial experience, limited in their
acceptance of difference, and thus confined and defined within their island nation-state. They
perceive the “Japanese-Japanese” as having different value systems such as work-habits that they
no longer fully relate to those whom they left behind in their homeland.

Because they are so grounded in their social networks in Southern California, and
because of the readily available communication technology that keeps them always loosely tied
to their friends and family in Japan, they do not feel the need to frequently contact their loved
ones back in their homeland. Therefore, even though they do not practice acts of
transnationalism such as calling or emailing as frequently as expected, they are still negotiating
their immigrant identity as one that is transnational because of their continued reliance on their
Japanese side through work, school, and friendships that make them feel that they belong in this
land.

Legal Belonging

According to the U.S. Census, the new Japanese immigrant population has
extraordinarily low rates of naturalization. This is reflected also among my interviewees as well
since none of the six Shin-Issei had become American citizens at the time of the interview. Some
of them--Misako, Satsuki, and Yuta--have gone as far as obtaining a green-card but the others are
here on other visas such as work visas (H-1B) or extended student visas (F-1) under the Federal
Optional Practical Training (OPT) program.

Initially, I had thought that their lack of interest in naturalizing had to do primarily with
the fact that they did not want to have to choose one nationality. Currently, Japan does not
recognize dual citizenship. Therefore, I thought that becoming an American would put them in
an uncomfortable situation where they would be forced to forfeit their Japanese-side. However,
neither does South Korea, China, or Vietnam legally allow for dual citizenship. So what is
different about the Japanese? Why do other Asian immigrants have higher rates of
naturalization? More comprehensive comparative studies are necessary to answer these questions,
but it is highly likely that the findings will reflect the socio-political context of the country of
Although it is in no way easy to become an American citizen and it is a process that can take many years, besides the institutional roadblocks that were preventing them from naturalizing, the interviewees articulated three additional reasons why they do not wish to or feel a need to change their citizenship. Their reasons highlight how they find their sense of belonging legally in both Japan and America even though they have not yet become American citizens.

The first reason is that if they were to naturalize, they felt they would be discarding, literally “throwing away,” their Japanese side. In Misako’s words, “It’s like you’re Japanese, but you won’t be Japanese anymore.” Yuta stated this very clearly when he said:

“I think that inside, I don’t want to throw away being Japanese. I think if I were to change my citizenship, it’s like... I don’t want to become an American... I don’t like thinking I have to throw away being Japanese. But I’m not sure. I might become a citizen one day. I’m still debating.”

His irresolute response reflects his recognition of the family pressures placed on him to one day get American citizenship. Due to other circumstances in his family, Yuta was the only one able to use the green-cards they had won through the lottery system. His parents having had previous exposure to life in America, wish to one day live in the U.S. and thus the only hope for them to do so is through Yuta. They expect him to become a naturalized citizen and use the family reunification program from the 1965 Immigration Reform Act to bring them over. In doing so, conflictingly, he would have to forgo his Japanese citizenship which psychologically makes him
feel no longer Japanese.

The second reason can be encompassed under feelings of economic and political security with Japan in which they feel no immediate need to change their political allegiance. Perhaps in comparison to immigrants from other parts of Asia, Japanese newcomers seem to feel that their country is relatively safe from any political violence or economic threats. They believe that the security of the current state of Japan gives them no urgent desire to change their nationality. Other immigrants may be fleeing political oppression, civil unrest, economic turmoil, etc. whereas Japan is relatively stable. For example, Misako, who has been living with a green-card for some time now, said:

“'I don't feel like I have a reason to change my citizenship now. Like, there are some people who think it’s better to change their citizenship. Not people from Japan, but from different countries, right? They have their reasons. I can understand that, but for me, I don’t really have any difficulties with Japanese citizenship so… I don’t really think about it.”

None of the interviewees articulated any fear of deportation or spoke negatively of having to live back in Japan. In similar vein, Chisa felt that her political allegiance to Japan and her wine red passport as a sign of this allegiance give her an advantage compared to other nationalities. She compares the advantages of having a different country’s passport to that of having Japan’s and concludes:

“I do think it would be nice to have an American citizenship. But then with an American passport, there are places you can’t go to--like Cuba...Or Chinese, they can’t go to Mexico. But there isn’t anywhere that we can’t go as a
Japanese.”

Related to this last point, the third reason why the Shin-Issei have not naturalized may have to do with the fact that, because they still see Japan as a safe and familiar home, they have not been able to commit to living in United States whole-heartedly and more importantly desire the flexibility to return to Japan whenever they wish.

“Even though I don’t really want to live there (Japan) now, I want to have the choice to live there again. I don’t want to be told that I can’t ever go back. Like, if I had a green-card, then if I thought, “I want to go back to Japan!” then I can just return to Japan. And if I think, “I want to go to America!” then I could just come back again. I think that’s enough for me.”

Naturally, their current age and the transient nature of their lives also create a situation in which they must consider the possibilities of their futures such as marriage and careers. For Daiki who was job-hunting at the time of the first interview, it was important for him to weigh the merits and demerits of becoming an American. He came to the conclusion that though he feels America will have more opportunities for him, his attachment to Japan is strong enough to pull him back home.

“For work, it’s probably better for me if I stay in America, but quite honestly, I’m so accustomed to Japan so I’m more at ease there. I don’t think I want to live in America forever.”

Interestingly, even though they were not responding to any particular question, almost all of the participants stated somewhere in their interview that after having lived away from Japan, they developed more attachment towards the country they left behind. Many of them expressed this same feeling of “After I left Japan, I’ve grown to like it more.” It seems this
lingering sentiment toward Japan hinders them from committing to becoming full American
citizens.

Regardless of the fact that they have not become American citizens, all of the Shin-Issei
of my study were legal residents. As stated earlier, three of them have permanent resident status
through the green-card. Additionally, others were working either under the OPT program or with
H-1B work visas. For those who do not have green-cards, there are only a handful of ways for
them to stay in the U.S. One is to engage in an OPT program that extends their F-1 student visas.
Another is to find a company that is willing to sponsor them in applying for an H-1B visa. With
the H-1B visa, the employee is able to stay for three years and this visa can be renewed once for
another three year stay. Often times, this is one of the biggest reasons why Shin-Issei seek Nikkei
jobs because they are more likely to offer sponsorships. This is what Chisa did and she is now in
the process of applying for an H-1B through her company, converting her OPT to a more secure
visa.

Another means is to marry an American citizen and apply for a green-card through the
spouse. This is how Misako obtained her green-card. Last, a Shin-Issei could stay illegally, and
there are an increasing number of undocumented Japanese immigrants living in California and
Hawaii, often times making a living working in Japanese bars and restaurants. None of my
interviewees were undocumented.
From the picture I have painted above, it seems as if all of the Shin-Issei hold on tightly to their Japanese citizenship and wine-red passports. However, this is not the case for all individuals. Aiko is an individual who wants to become an American although she identifies herself as ethnically Japanese. She says:

“I want to become American. After living here and comparing Japanese and American society, I realized my ideal place is be America...And since I decided that I want to give back to American society, I feel that if I kept the option of being able to go back whenever I wanted to, then psychologically, I wouldn’t really commit fully here. If I’m gonna do something, I wanna do it 100%.”

For Aiko, being able to give back to the American society through her work is enough reason to naturalize. Although she is here on an F-1 visa and OPT now, if given the opportunity to change her citizenship and thus forgo her Japanese nationality, she states that she will do it. Others were not willing to naturalize unless circumstances made having an American citizenship more beneficial than not having one. Misako told a story of her friend who told her a cautionary tale.

“My friend’s husband found a job in Australia so they had moved there. Her husband was American. She had a green-card, but her citizenship was still with Japan and so now they’re trying to move back here and apparently, it’s been really tough for her. She says it’s hard to get back in without an American citizenship. So she says, ‘You have to get naturalized if you’re gonna leave the States!’ I mean, it’s all practical reasons.”

Therefore, paradoxically, an American citizenship becomes necessary only when one is about to leave the country for an extended period of time. Having American citizenship and a U.S. passport increase individuals’ ability to be transnational, to keep one foot planted in
America and another in the new place of residence.

In looking at the interviewees’ current nationality as well as what they articulate about what they foresee as their future nationalities, it can be generalized that most of them feel a strong sense of allegiance to Japan, except for Aiko who hopes to become an American. Additionally, although all of them are still Japanese nationals, they currently reside in California and New York through legal means, whether that be through visas or green-cards. In this way, their legal sense of belonging is highly transnational. They are legal denizens of America and also legal citizens of Japan. They use their legal status (green-card or citizenship) as a means to enhance this transnationality in bridging two nation-states.

Having been a permanent resident alien since high school, I often think about what the advantages of becoming an American would be precisely because I see no disadvantages in being Japanese. When I make trips to Japan, at the Immigration portion of the airport, I line up at the booth for “nationals” and pull out my wine-red passport. They usually ask me, “What was the reason for your stay?” to which I get very confused because my more permanent home is in California. On the way back, at the Los Angeles International Airport, I will line up, also in the “nationals and permanent residents” line and they will ask me the same question. This time, I say, “vacation.” My legal status in both nations gives me the flexibility and a transnational sense of belonging in both nations, as it undoubtedly does for the other Shin-Issei of my study.
5. Conclusion

The Shin-Issei of my study constantly occupy a complex space between America and Japan. On the one hand, they are subject to the forces of nation-state ideologies of belonging that push and pull at the strings of their ethnic identity formation. On the other hand, they are also taking agency over their own identities by creating social networks and geographical spaces within California that make them feel at home. Despite the larger ideologies that try to define who they are supposed to be, they actively negotiate their ethnic identity within America and are shaping the meaning of being new Japanese immigrants. While traditional understandings of transnationalism emphasize active participation in the home country such as through sending of remittances, building infrastructure and programs, and/or frequent travels for work to their country of origin, the exploration of these Shin-Issei identities illustrate how an immigrant’s psychological and emotional reconciliation of balancing the two nation-states is also a form of transnationalism that deserves scholarly attention.

Coming from a racially, ethnically, and culturally homogeneous nation, they are thrust into an environment where they are seen as a racial other within Southern California. They navigate their ethnic identity by self-identifying as Japanese, but clearly differentiating themselves from the “Japanese-Japanese” who are still living in Japan. Their racial sense of belonging is low in the multi-ethnic America, but this does not necessarily mean that they
frequently travel back to Japan to gain that sense of racial belonging.

Socially, the Shin-Issei have found a strong sense of belonging in the suburbs of Southern California where they work in Nikkei corporations or pursue higher education in Japan-related fields. Their closest social network tends to be that of others like them, Shin-Issei or other Asian-Americans/immigrants. The abundance of Japanese resources in the suburbs of California propagates transnationalism because they are able to live Japanese lifestyles even in America. The burgeoning ethnic suburbs enhance their sense of belonging, though it may be confined within their community bubble.

Legally, Shin-Issei find a sense of belonging in both Japan and the U.S. because they are legal denizens of America and yet remain citizens of Japan. They strongly feel that their nationality is a significant part of their identity and do not wish to change their political allegiance unless the circumstances put the American citizenship at an advantage above the Japanese one.

Through these different arenas of belonging, it is evident that, as Stuart Hall and Judith Butler would say, Japanese ethnic identity is constructed out of what Shin-Issei feel they are not. They dis-identify themselves from the Japanese in Japan and yet are clearly not the same as white-Americans or even the other ethnic-Americans who do not share their same understanding of culture and language. Additionally, for the Shin-Issei of my study, being transnational does not
necessarily mean frequently participating in transnational modes of communication or travel as Alejandro Portes proposes, but rather taking on social roles and responsibilities that are Japan-oriented.

In this way, it can be argued that transnationalism manifests itself in a multitude of ways depending on the population’s socio-historic background, needs, and motives for being transnational. The Shin-Issei, for example, find legal transnationality and keeping Japanese citizenship to be highly important to their sense of being Japanese abroad. However, other Asian immigrants such as Southeast Asian refugees who arrived with permanent visa status, seek more permanence in the U.S. and security from deportation through American naturalization. Or, for transnational capitalists whose investments are located in two or more nation-states, physical transnational travel become crucial in maintain their status. In order to comprehend transnationalism as it plays out in local communities, it is crucial then to understand the role that both nations’ hegemonic narratives of belonging plays in shaping immigrant lives and consequently their identities.

Identity is never stable. It is always changing and is situational. The ethnic identities of the Shin-Issei of my study are no exception. Every day, they are negotiating and re-configuring their identities to best suit the given context. In certain contexts such as with their fellow Shin-Issei and Shin-Nisei acquaintances, they feel a strong sense of social belonging and comfort.
whereas in other contexts such as in majority-white classrooms, their sense of belonging in this
country is low. As they navigate what it means to be a minority in the United States, they learn to
balance their Japanese side with their increasingly American side. In this fashion, they are agents
of reconfiguring the definition of being Japanese newcomers. Although the Shin-Issei may not
always adequately fulfill the four prongs of being a “real” Japanese-- Japanese citizenship,
speaking Japanese, Japanese ethnicity, Japanese residency-- they negotiate their own identities in
ways that refortify their feelings of belonging in their own Japanese communities in Southern
California.

In Daiki’s thought-provoking words, he is “like a returnee that hasn’t returned.” The
Japanese word for “return” is kikoku, which is composed of two Chinese loan-characters “return”
(帰) and “country” (国). Daiki and others in my interviews are essentially the Japanese who have
not returned to their country of birth and nationality. Typically, the word kikoku implies one who
was away for a period of time, but is back for good. Unfortunately, the world of the Shin-Issei is
far more complex than a simple un-return story. Aiko, who had decided so intently on becoming
an American, was forced to return to Japan because she could not obtain a work-visa that would
permit her to stay legally. Her human body, limited by exterior forces of immigration laws and
regulations, was forced back to Japan, thus making her a kikoku individual by definition.

However, in her mind, she still desires to come back to the U.S. someday to start a multi-ethnic
daycare center. Therefore, her identity is still one that is transnational, as her conceptualization of home and belonging are located across two nations.

Transnational migrants that they are, Shin-Issei identities are informed by the two nations Japan and U.S. I conclude by stating that these transnational immigrants are challenging the conceptualization of belonging, citizenship, and migration from one that is stable, one-way, and bounded to one that is flexible, two-way, and unbounded to any particular nation-state or place.

6. Coda

Japanese America is rapidly changing. Before 1965, Japanese Americans were one of the largest populations of Asian Americans in the U.S. Now, the 2010 Census reveals that Japanese Americans are sixth in the nation, following the Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean populations. The Japanese American community has a higher proportion of the population above 65 than the general population, leading to its dwindling population.\(^5\) Additionally, with high rates of interracial marriages from post-war dispersal, war-brides, etc. and the consequent increase of mixed-race children, the face of Japanese America has changed dramatically since the pre-war days of Issei and Nisei. As current Yonsei and Gosei children are

far removed from their Japanese ancestors, what it means to be Japanese American has also
shifted to include a more diverse experience of culture and heritage. After the war, and most
specifically after 1965, the influx of new Japanese immigrants has also added to the changing
landscape of Japanese America, challenging the traditional confines of who has rights to claim
Japanese American identity.

The Shin-Issei presence has been felt at large since the 1980s in California with the
overlapping of Japanese/American communities in areas like Gardena and Torrance as well as
Little Tokyo and the influence of transnational capital. Some Shin-Issei who arrived in the early
to mid-80s have raised Shin-Nisei children here on American soil, many of whom are now
college-aged young adults. Whereas the Shin-Issei community has been relatively quiet on
matters pertaining to old-timer Japanese Americans due to their language barrier and naiveté
regarding Asian American history, their American sons and daughters are tapping into
traditionally defined Japanese American spaces, challenging the confines of Japanese America.

For example, this year, UCLA’s Nikkei Student Union’s (NSU) annual Culture Night
theme revolved around issues pertaining to Shin-Nisei identity. In this show, the main character,
a Shin-Nisei college student, goes on a search to understand her identity when she is told by
another Yonsei Japanese American that she cannot be both American AND Japanese. The story
concludes by emphasizing that Japanese American identity is open to multiple interpretations,
taking into consideration generation, location, and personal preference.

Similarly, in the San Francisco Japan-town, five Shin-Issei and Shin-Nisei candidates were announced at the 2012 annual Cherry Blossom Queen pageant, dramatically changing the feel of this traditional Japanese American contest. As Dean Adachi, a Japanese American scholar who is himself half Shin-Nisei and half Yonsei stated, “I’ve never heard of this happening before!”

I use these examples to highlight how young Shin-Nisei are venturing into historically defined old-timer Japanese American spaces such as NSU and pageants in order to assert their presence in Japanese America. As a result, they are challenging the confines of Japanese-America, though not without resistance and controversy, and adding another layer to the social changes occurring within this community. Scholarship would serve well in keeping up with these changes.

My research was thus an endeavor to articulate some of the historical context in which the Shin-Issei have arrived as well as to investigate the ways that they have formulated their ethnic identity as a transnational one. The research findings should not be treated as representative of the whole Shin-Issei experience, but rather as a very specific case study involving a particular geographical space, people, and time. The findings do not profess to provide generalizations on transnational Shin-Issei migrants. However, given these specificities,
my findings and approach can be a gateway for further comparative research. Future research on
the Shin-Nisei, for example, would prove fruitful to understanding the dynamic nature of the
Japanese American community.

7. Appendix

Racial Belonging:

“I think that if I hadn’t come to America, I wouldn’t even be thinking about my ethnicity. Like, there are a lot of races here, and you can know directly what other ethnicities think of Japanese people. If I had stayed in Japan, I would only be talking to Japanese people, and even if I did talk to foreigners, they’re usually in Japan because they are interested in Japan.”

Chisa

“There were so few Asians at my community college that I was a real outsider. In class, it’ll be like ‘blond, blond, black.’ In fact, because I went to a super small Community College in Orange County, most of the white students only knew of that world there. So when I said I was Japanese, people didn’t really care or they’d just be like ‘oh, I see’ and it ended there.”

Chisa

“My parents believe one hundred percent that I’m going to come back. I actually haven’t told them that I want to stay here... Every time I talk to them on the phone, they always tell me how excited they are for me to come back.”

Aiko: 親は反対してます。100％帰ってくるものだと思うんですけど、こっちに残りたいって言うのはちゃんと言ってないんです。実は。
Eri: いいかげんですか？
Aiko: そうですね。もう、結構すごく楽しみに
“At UCSD, the classes were so big that I didn’t know when to talk to them. As a result, I didn’t have many friends in class. But in my community college, the classes were smaller and I would sometimes talk to the people that were next to me, like other Americans. The problem was, though, everyone went home after classes and so the friendship could never get that deep.”

“I tried to hang out with people that weren’t Japanese. So, at that time, I hung out with Koreans and Taiwanese people…. Asians who were... hmm... Well, it was hard for me to be good friends with a (white) American so I tried to find other people with whom I can still practice my English.”

“最初にホームステーでアレンジしてもらって。住んでいたんですけれど、家族で、フィリピン人の奥さんと、アメリカ人のだんなさん。子供がいて、おばあちゃんがいて、おばあちゃんはフィリピンの人なんで英語がまったくしゃべれないのですよ。でも、家にいるのはおばあちゃんだけなんですよ。おばあちゃんと子供。それでも、Communicationを取るのが・・・年も取っているし、大変です。

Me: Is your husband Japanese?
Misako: There was a husband, but we got divorced. Now I’m single.
Me: Oh. A single mother?
Misako: Yes, and my husband, he was an American.
### Social Belonging

“"There are about ten people in my department and three of us are Japanese. And well, when we’re talking in Japanese, they’ll make a fuss about it now telling our bosses and such. They don’t like that we speak Japanese amongst ourselves... I don’t like to associate with those people so I avoid them. I mean, I kind of understand because they were born here so... but then again, they’re both Hispanic. They sometimes speak Spanish to each other too. But I heard that they didn’t use to. It was only after more Japanese people started working here, and we started communicating in Japanese. Then they started retaliating by speaking in Spanish themselves.”

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“I do contact my friends every once in a while, but I mean... I can just use MIXI, or Twitter, or Facebook to contact them. Oh and Skype. So I’ve never really had any problems with keeping in touch.”

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I heard that in Japan, the title of being “professor” is more established and it is seen as a very respectable job. I also heard that the pay is better in Japan... But then, I think, there are a lot of people doing Japanese Linguistics and there is something like a community... so no matter where you are, if you know what you want to do, then it doesn’t matter the location.

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“"To get a solid job somewhere after graduating, -bindai"... So there’s a movement to get good jobs somewhere after graduating, and MIXI and Twitter and Facebook and so on... and I’ve never really had any problems with that.”

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"日本の方が「教授」って言うその地位ちゃんと確立されてて、尊敬される職業であるって事を聞いたので。給料もいいって聞いてましたし...でも、基本的にそのやっぱり、言語学日本語をやっている人たちはまあたくさんいらっしゃますけど、でも、ちゃんとしたCommunityじゃないけどあるので。基本的にどこにいても自分のやりたいことがちゃんと分かってで、それができるって意味ではそんなにどこに行っても変わらないのかな。

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“ちゃんとした仕事に就くことですね。それはも
I mean, I came here and graduated undergrad and then decided to go to graduate school... After that, it takes a while, right? But my parents aren't really familiar with that system. So I think they've been worried about me for some time now.”

Aiko: I’m Japanese but... (long pause)...yes I’m Japanese.
Me: So if someone asked you, “What ethnicity are you?” You’d answer, “Japanese?”
Aiko: Yea, I’d say I’m Japanese because I was raised there.

Right now, I’d say I’m Japanese. When I was young, I used to say “I’m myself.” I thought, more than citizenship or anything that I could have my own identity, but as I got older, I started realizing that I am Japanese. I mean, I was born and raised there so I am Japanese.

I think I’d say I’m Japanese. That’s basic.

“I’ve been here for five years now and I’ve even worked here so... there are times when my value-systems don’t match up with Japanese-Japanese.”

“It was often told that I don’t seem like a Japanese person. And I guess while I was living in Japan, I always felt like I was floating, like I was somehow different from everyone else.”

“T wouldn’t want the person I date to be Japanese-Japanese.”

Me: Why do you think you are closest with Japanese people?
Chisa: Hmm... maybe because our common

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| Me: Why do you think you are closest with Japanese people? |
| Chisa: Hmm... maybe because our common |
sense is the same. There are a lot of things that you don’t have to pay attention to but you just know, right? Like if you had the same culture or same background. But if they’re from a different culture, you’ll have to explain things to them. And I mean, that can be fun too, but rather than getting super close from there, I think it’s easier to be friends with someone who already shares the same common sense. That way, you can be friends faster, get closer, and I think I’m more comfortable with it.

Me: How do you contact your friends and family in Japan?
Chisako: Skype, international call, regular phone, or email, I guess. Recently, it’s become so convenient. No one has to write letters anymore... Now, you don’t have to meet them to talk to them. Well, there’s a little bit of time difference. But still, because it’s so convenient, I never really get homesick.

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Legal belonging

“My friend’s husband found a job in Australia so they had moved there. Her husband was American. She had a green-card, but her citizenship was still with Japan and so now they’re trying to move back here and apparently, it’s been really tough for her. She says it’s hard to get back in without an American citizenship. So she says, ‘You have to get naturalized if you’re gonna leave the States!’ I mean, it’s all practical reasons.”

“友達のだんなさんがオーストラリアで仕事つけて、オーストラリアに移住したんだけど、グリーンカードは持っていたんだけど、国籍は日本のままで、オーストラリアに行ったら、こっちに帰ってくるのが大変らしくて、国籍がないと。「絶対取っておきなよ！」って Practical なことですよね。
- Misako

“It’s like you’re Japanese, but you won’t be Japanese anymore.”

日本人だけど日本人じゃなくなっちゃうような
- Misako

“For work, it’s probably better for me if I

仕事的にはアメリカのほうがいいかなって気
<table>
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<th>stay in America, but quite honestly, I’m so accustomed to Japan so I’m more at ease there. I don’t think I want to live in America forever.”</th>
<th>がするんですけど、やっぱり住みやすいんですよね。一生アメリカにいたいとは思わないですかね  - Daiki</th>
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<td>I want to become American. After living here and comparing Japanese and American society, I realized my ideal place is be America…And since I decided that I want to give back to American society, I feel that if I kept the option of being able to go back whenever I wanted to, then psychologically, I wouldn’t really commit fully here. If I’m gonna do something, I wanna do it 100%.</td>
<td>こっちに住んでみて、日本の社会とアメリカの社会を比べて自分の理想なのはアメリカ社会なのか。アメリカで貢献したいなって思ったら、なんていうか、日本にいつか帰っていう  Option があると意識的な問題なわけそけど、いつか日本に帰ってるって意識があるとなんか、こっちで適当にやっても大丈夫だって油断が生まれちゃような気がして。やるならとちゃんとやろうと思って。 - Aiko</td>
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<td>“I do think it would be nice to have an American citizenship. But then with an American passport, there are places you can’t go to-- like Cuba...Or Chinese, they can’t go to Mexico. But there isn’t anywhere that we can’t go as a Japanese.”</td>
<td>アメリカの Citizenship 持ってたらいいなって思うときあるけど、アメリカの Citizenship では入れない国とかあるじゃん。Cuba とか。日本だと基本的どこでもいけるじゃん。強いなって思うけど。チャイナだったら、メキシコとかいけないんだよね。 - Chisa</td>
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<td>“Even though I don’t really want to live there (Japan) now, I want to have the choice to live there again. I don’t want to be told that I can’t ever go back. Like, if I had a green-card, then if I thought, “I want to go back to Japan!” then I can just return to Japan. And if I think, “I want to go to America!” then I could just come back again. I think that’s enough for me.”</td>
<td>今はあんまり住みたくないけど、そこにもう住めないって言うね、際限、ずっと一生永遠に住めないってチョイスはないと嫌だなと思う。グリーンカードがあったらさ、「もう帰りたい！」って思ったときに帰れるじゃん。 また「アメリカ行きたい！」って思ったたらまた戻ってこれるじゃん。それくらいでいいかな？ - Chisa</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| “I think that inside, I don’t want to throw away being Japanese. I think if I were to change my citizenship, it’s like... I don’t want to become an American... I don’t like thinking I have to throw away being Japanese. But I’m not sure. I might become | 自分の中では日本人って言うのを捨てたくないかな。なんか、やっぱ、国籍変わると、なんかアメリカ人になりたくないと思って言うか・・・日本人って言うのを捨てらって言うのが嫌かなぁと思って。でもまあ、まだ分からないもんだ。いつするかも分からないし、いつその...
“I don’t feel like I have a reason to change my citizenship now. Like, there are some people who think that it’s better to change their citizenship. Not people from Japan, but from different countries, right? They have their reasons. I can understand that, but for me, I don’t really have any difficulties with Japanese citizenship so... I don’t really think about it”

- Yuta

“なんか特別、今アメリカの国籍に変えなきゃいけないっていう理由がないので。なんか、変えた方がいいって言う人もいるじゃないですか？日本じゃなくて別の国から来てる人で、ねぇ？そういう理由がある人？それだったら変える理由が分かるんだけど、特に別に日本の国籍でも困るところがないので ・・・そんなに考えないかな。

- Misako

8. Bibliography


