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Japanese American Princess: A Linguistic Anthropological Approach to Transnational Identity, Political Ideology, and Pageantry within the Nikkei Community

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within the *Nikkei* Community

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Anthropology

by

Aiko Marie Matsumura Dzikowski

2024

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Japanese American Princess:
A Linguistic Anthropological Approach to
Transnational Identity, Political Ideology, and Pageantry
within the *Nikkei* Community

by

Aiko Marie Matsumura Dzikowski

Master of Arts in Anthropology
University of California, Los Angeles, 2024
Professor Paul V. Kroskrity, Chair

As a population that was forced to undergo mass incarceration and assimilation, Japanese American communities – and the language they use to perform, reproduce, and reconstruct their transnational identities – provide insight into our understandings of heritage language loss, linguistic forms of social differentiation, and surrounding political economies. Following a period of cultural suppression and language loss, Japanese American festivals and pageantry offer a glimpse into the racialized, gendered nature of language and semiotics as they are used to both challenge and reinforce existing social divisions. Utilizing ethnographic data, interviews, and archival research conducted within a Japanese American pageant program in Southern

California, I seek to examine racial, gendered, and generational divides within and surrounding the Japanese American community at large. As a participant myself – in a pageant program that seeks to foster the Japanese American community's next generation of cultural ambassadors – I aim to illustrate the linguistic and sociopolitical contexts surrounding transnational migration, racialized incarceration, and cultural performance as a means of either resisting or perpetuating ethnic assimilation. With a focus on language socialization and multimodal communication, I specifically draw on the work of scholars who study language ideologies and semiotic assemblages (Kroskrity 2021; Gal and Irvine 2019; Pennycook 2017). In doing so, I aim to illustrate the perceived benefits and detriments of Japanese language acquisition within spaces that promote intergenerational solidarity, cross-cultural exchange, and the vestiges of what it means to be either Japanese or American in an increasingly transnational world.

The thesis of Aiko Marie Matsumura Dzikowski is approved.

Norma Mendoza-Denton

H. Samy Alim

Asako Hayashi Takakura

Paul V. Kroskrity, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2024

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I am beyond grateful to my interlocutors, the Nisei Week Foundation and its Queen and Court Program, the surrounding Japanese American community, and my mentors at UCLA for enabling me to pursue my educational and personal aspirations. Throughout my graduate program, I have been especially moved by the support and guidance of Paul Kroskrity, Norma Mendoza-Denton, H. Samy Alim, and Asako Takakura Hayashi. I would also like to thank my inspiring court sisters: Kaitlyn Chu, Sara Kubo, Nancy Chin, Kama Higashiyama, Kaili Inouye, and Isabella Polizzotto. My research is dedicated to them, and to the community's mission of educating others on the heritage and legacy of Japanese American history.

Japanese American Princess

A Linguistic Anthropological Approach to Transnational Identity, Political Ideology, and Pageantry within the *Nikkei* Community

By Aiko Dzikowski

The rules of our contract are relatively simple:

> **Age:** Candidate must be at least 19 years old at the time of submitting an application with a potential sponsor, and not older than 26 years old on the day of the coronation.
>
> **Ethnicity:** Candidate must be a minimum of fifty percent (50%) Japanese ancestry.
>
> **Marital Status:** Candidate must not be married, divorced, or separated, and must not have children.
>
> **Conflicts of Interest:** Candidate must not enroll or participate in any other beauty or popularity contests from the date of submission of the Nisei Queen Candidate Application to the official completion of the Nisei Week Court's reign.

I read through the list one last time before signing my name – in full, as expected, to symbolize my Japanese and American heritage. "Aiko Marie Matsumura Dzikowski," as I became known, soon began to circulate within Southern California's Japanese American community – even making its way into the *Rafu Shimpo*, the nation's leading Japanese American newspaper. "2023 Miss Western L.A. Introduced," headlined my first featured article, and from that moment on I realized that my involvement with the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program was about to become more than just a summer research project. Nearly one year later – still only halfway through my "reign" on the Nisei Week Court – I can now reflect on my early stages as a program participant, and recognize that nothing could have prepared me for the year that was to come. Filled with awe, gratitude, and a critique here and there, I dedicate the following pages to my sisters – in every sense of the term – who embody the strength and resilience of what it means to be a woman in the Japanese American community. Our community's legacy is one of both hardship and triumph, and I hope to do it justice in the successive pages, months, years, and beyond.

Preface

While in college, I had gotten to know Ava and Bailey – two Japanese American women from Southern California who would eventually be crowned "Nisei Week Queen" during their respective reigns. I remember scrolling through Instagram, and being struck by the image of Ava on her coronation night: sitting atop a grand throne, she donned a crown, sash, red cape, and beaming smile. She was surrounded by six other women in ball gowns, each with their own crown, sash, and bouquet of flowers. Even at the time, I was taken aback by the incongruence of it all. Here was a group of what I had assumed to be young Asian American women, paying homage to what I could only describe as the British monarchy, while dressed and posed in a way that evoked images of 1980s Americana. I was overcome with questions, and I continued to follow Ava's social media posts with intrigue throughout the year that followed. In crown and sash, Ava and her court sisters appeared to attend hundreds of events related to Japanese and Japanese American heritage including sports games, *matsuri* festivals, golf tournaments, parades, luncheons, luaus, and even a trip to Japan. A few years later, I was once again surprised to find *Bailey* on my Instagram feed wearing the same crown, sash, and cape that Ava had elegantly displayed years prior. In the years that followed, Ava and Bailey would become my mentors and key informants as I embarked on the journey of a lifetime – not only as a researcher and participant observer but also, as luck would have it, as a Japanese American Princess.

I first began to consider Japanese American pageantry as a focus of study in the Fall of 2022, just after enrolling in my graduate program at UCLA. Within the Linguistic Anthropology PhD track, I knew I wanted to study language ideologies, and the language of race, gender, and transnationalism within the Japanese American community. While enrolled in Norma Mendoza-Denton's seminar in Multimedia Ethnography, I had been brainstorming pathways for

ethnographic research that I could conduct locally in Southern California. I ended up reaching out to Ava and Bailey about their experiences and, while I was ultimately unable to interview them for my multimedia project, I continued to think about their perspectives in the months that followed.

I was especially curious to learn more about how Ava and Bailey, two of my most politically-progressive friends, had become involved in what appeared to be a beauty pageant program. I had initially and wrongfully assumed that pageantry and women's competition were antithetical to social progressivism, and yet, in following Ava and Bailey's Instagram posts, I was forced to rethink my preconceived biases. "Thank you, Nisei Week Foundation…" Ava had written in her final post as queen, "...for continuing this tradition year after year to provide a platform for female empowerment." Moved by Ava's experience of women's empowerment and sisterhood, and perhaps motivated by the guilty reexamination of my own biases, I became passionate about researching ways in which Japanese Americans shape their identities and sociopolitical standings, with a focus on language, semiotics, gender empowerment, and pageantry.

In the spirit of participant-observation (with an emphasis on participation), I eventually found myself submitting an application to the "Miss Western LA" program – my gateway to the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program through the Venice Japanese Community Center and Venice West-LA Japanese American Citizens League. While I had initially sought the title for research purposes, I couldn't help but feel equally motivated by my "native" position as a Japanese American woman. Having just moved to LA, after growing accustomed to being one of a few Japanese Americans in the areas I had lived prior to graduate school including a women's college campus, I was eager to finally be a part of a Japanese American community, and to once

again be surrounded by a network of inspiring women.[1] Furthermore, upon reading more about the program, I learned that participants get to partake in cultural enrichment classes, dance rehearsals, leadership training, and community service, not to mention hundreds of community events including heritage night games for the LA Kings, Clippers, Angels, and Dodgers (I'd be lying if I didn't mention that I was partially motivated by my dream of meeting Shohei Ohtani). The benefits were seemingly endless, and when I received the call that I had been selected as the year's "Miss Western LA," I was overjoyed (and coincidentally at a Burger King, where I was able to place a paper crown on my head in celebration (Figure 1)).

At the time, I thought that I had managed to secure the funnest research project ever, without realizing the extent of what was to come. While I was eventually able to achieve my aspirations of better understanding Japanese American language and identity, of being part of a lifelong sisterhood, and of being within viewing distance of Shohei Ohtani, there were a number of hidden realities that continue to shape my experience within the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program. On top of the program's exorbitant time and financial commitments, my court sisters and I have struggled to grapple with the program's delineation as a "women's empowerment initiative," and with the local Japanese American community's reputation as "inclusive" and "welcoming." Rooted in linguistic and semiotic difference, the emergence of social differentiation has grounded my anthropological findings across racial, gender, and generational boundaries. As epitomized by Ava – when I finally got to hear her perspectives in-person, and not just through careful social media posts – "this community is very cliquey and exclusive…the program advertises itself as a women's empowerment program, but it's not. They silence us. It's

[1]For the purpose of my research and writing, I use the term "women" emically – while recognizing the socially-constructed nature of "womanhood" and "sisterhood" within and beyond the NWQCP. I would also like to acknowledge that my alma mater, Smith College – while historically a women's college – is inclusive of all gender identities.

a tyranny." Having been a participant in the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program for a year now, I believe I am in a position to say that, while I wouldn't subscribe to the level of disdain voiced by Ava and many of my other interlocutors, I am now acutely aware of social difference as it is both perpetuated *and remedied* through language and pageantry. In tracing Japanese American language and identity across contexts, I am now filled with immense admiration, pride, and respect for my program mentors, court sisters, and the greater legacy of Japanese American history and pageantry.

Background

Japanese American Pageantry provides a comprehensive context through which to examine the language of race, gender, and transnationalism within the *Nikkei* community. *Nikkei* is the Japanese term for people "of Japanese descent" and, as a population that was forced to undergo mass incarceration and assimilation during and after World War II, Japanese American communities – and the language they use to perform, reproduce, and reconstruct their transnational identities – provide insight into our understandings of heritage language loss, linguistic forms of social differentiation, and surrounding political economies. Following a longstanding period of cultural suppression and ensuing language loss, *Nikkei* festivals and pageantry, I argue, provide a glimpse into Japanese American linguistics and semiotics as they continue to be shaped by wartime incarceration, racial politics, and cultural performance as a means of either resisting or perpetuating ethnic assimilation.

Through my involvement with the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program, I have been able to pursue these issues of focus as they pertain to ethnic, gendered, and generational divides within the Japanese American community of Southern California. Consequently, I have refined my research questions across two distinct areas of study:

1.) **Japanese American Linguistics, Semiotics, and Language Ideologies**
    a.) How has WWII incarceration shaped language loss and revitalization within the Japanese American community, and what might this indicate about the effects of assimilation and acculturation on minoritized groups today?
    b.) What does it mean to look or sound "Japanese American," and how do linguistic and semiotic differences continue to produce and reproduce social differentiation across racial, ethnic, and generational divides?
2.) **Japanese American Women's Language and Oppositional Strategies**
    a.) How do Japanese American women utilize linguistic and semiotic resources in an effort to create change?
    b.) What oppositional strategies do Japanese American women employ in response to gender constructs, and within gendered communities?

After a year's worth of observant participation, archival research, and interviews with twenty Japanese Americans affiliated with the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program (NWQCP), I am now able to formulate answers to these research questions. I use the term "observant participant" as opposed to "participant-observer" due to my integrated participation within the NWQCP, which has included cultural workshops, intensive training, and frequent public appearances at Japanese American community events across Southern California. I have also been lucky enough to participate in program trips to San Francisco, Honolulu, and Japan as part of Nisei Week's partnerships with the Los Angeles Nagoya Sister City Affiliation (LANSCA), and the Cherry Blossom Festivals of Northern California and Hawaii. Throughout my fieldwork and analyses, I approach my findings from a multidisciplinary perspective spanning Linguistic Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, and Gender Studies. Specifically, I draw on literature pertaining to language ideologies and pageantry as they relate to semiotics and raciolinguistics, diasporic studies of empire and community, and intersectional feminist approaches to the construction of social categories.

As stated by Reyes and Lo (2008) in *Beyond Yellow English: Toward a Linguistic Anthropology of Asian Pacific America*, language use among Asian American groups continues to be understudied across disciplines. And while the Japanese American community exemplifies Asian Pacific America writ large with regard to assimilation and ethnic identity construction, its history of wartime incarceration allows for a unique examination of language loss and revitalization. According to Mendoza-Denton and Iwai (1993), speech differences in the English phonology of Japanese Americans are "linked to changes in identity and social networks brought about by the events which took place in the United States during the Second World War." Such historical events and subsequent language shifts refer to the period when, following Executive Order 9066, 30,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes and imprisoned in incarceration camps across the western United States (Watanabe 2023). While in "camp," to which it was euphemistically referred, Japanese Americans were prohibited from speaking Japanese and displaying many other aspects of their cultural identity (Mizuno 2003). This period of language loss continues to this day, and it is what distinguishes the Japanese American community as a unique and powerful focus of study within Asian American History and Linguistic Anthropology.

By focusing on World War II incarceration and the lasting effect it has had on language loss and intergenerational trauma within the Japanese American community, I expand upon the work of scholars who study language ideologies and semiotic assemblages. I especially rely on Kroskrity (2000), Gal and Irvine (2019), and Silverstein (1979)'s examinations of language ideology, which Kroskrity (2010) defines as the "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individuals speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation-states." While examining the beliefs and

feelings Japanese Americans exhibit toward the Japanese Language and *Nikkei* English varieties, I also turn to Kroskrity (2021) and Pennycook (2017)'s attention to "assemblage" as a means of understanding the "cluster" of linguistics, semiotics, and ideologies encompassing sociopolitical marginalization, language shift, and counter-hegemonic resistance (Kroskrity 2021). I address ensuing language practices as they both create and dismantle social differentiations within and surrounding the Japanese American community – including generational divides within the *Nikkei* community as a result of pre- and post- war assimilation, acculturation, and transnational migration.

Accordingly, I aim to contribute to literature that highlights the dominant language ideologies characteristic of "white public space," and demonstrate the ways in which Japanese Americans and other minoritized groups rely on linguistic and semiotic resources in their expressions of "authenticity" and "nationalism" amid racialized, English-only hegemonies (Silverstein 1996, Hill 1998, Alim et al. 2016, Woolard 2016). Existing research on racial trauma within the *Nikkei* community largely lies within the fields of History, Ethnic Studies, and Psychology, without much attention to the role of linguistics and semiotics in perpetuating ongoing forms of discrimination and social differentiation (Kurashige 2002, Tsuda 2016, Nagata et al. 2019). While taking a linguistic anthropological approach to these fields and findings, I seek to provide a more holistic understanding of the mechanisms by which social inequality continues to persist within and across ethnic groups. In doing so, I also hope to add to research on multimodal communication as clothing, makeup, and style continue to index multiple identities within the Japanese American and other minoritized communities (Mendoza- Denton 2008, Nakassis 2016, Gal and Irvine 2019, Eckert 1990, Hebdige 1979, Davis 2019).

As pointed out by Paul Kroskrity and H. Samy Alim, there is significant crossover between my research in Japanese American Studies and related literature within American Indian Studies and African American Studies. To build on this work, I analyze the forces of assimilation and acculturation on Japanese Americans and other minoritized groups by engaging with the work of Black feminists and interdisciplinary scholars such as Richard Alba, Victor Nee, Imani Perry, and W.E.B. Du Bois in his coining of Double Consciousness (bell hooks 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw 2014, Aimee Cox 2015, Statham and Foner 2024, Alba and Nee 2003, Perry 2018, Du Bois 1903). In "rethinking" assimilation theory through a contemporary lens that recognizes multiple identities and intersectional experiences, I analyze Japanese American attempts at "belonging" and "respectability" within the American mainstream – as *Nikkei* perspectives continue to be influenced by emic and etic understandings of what it means to be Japanese, American, or both. Similarly, I build on Alim (2005)'s development of "critical language awareness" as it relates to Lee (2017)'s examination of "critical indigenous consciousness," and to McCarty (2006)'s work on language loss and revitalization among Navajo youth – especially as Japanese Americans appear to fight back against mainstream, dominant ideologies that continue to prolong the effects of incarceration with regard to identity, power, and collective action.

By exploring Japanese American language loss and revitalization within the context of ethnic pageantry, I also draw on scholarship that lies at the intersection of Linguistic Anthropology and Gender Studies. Specifically, I utilize Inoue (2006)'s findings on "Japanese Women's Language" in order to reconceptualize Japanese *American* Women's Language as a cultural construct. I likewise draw on the work of anthropologists who study the politics of language pertaining to beauty pageants in Amazonian Ecuador, Tonga, Venezuela, the Navajo

Nation, Tanzania, and Asian Pacific America (Wroblewski 2014, Besnier 2008, Ochoa 2014, Jacobsen-Bia 2014, Billings 2013, Wu 1997). Focusing on the intersectional gender dynamics of cultural reproduction and ethnic representation, I seek to build upon work that specifically addresses the history of Japanese American pageantry and ethnic celebrations such as the Nisei Week and Cherry Blossom Festivals (Yano 2006, O'Riain 2006, Kurashige 2002, Matsumoto 2016). As these works are particular to the Japanese American community of the twentieth century, my research extends these findings and offers additional access and insights due to my position as a participant-observer directly involved with these communities.

Introduction

In the pages that follow – and in the years to come – I hope to illustrate the brilliance and resilience of Japanese American women and their communities, and the many reasons why I am truly honored to be a princess on the 2023 Nisei Week Court. I will begin with an overview of Japanese American history with a focus on ethnic festivals and pageantry, including details about the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program. I will then explain my methodology, as well as the peculiarities of my position as both a "doubly native" and "not-quite-native" ethnographer. After delving into the characteristics of Japanese American linguistics and semiotics – including both spoken language and multimodal communication as they relate to wartime history and transnational identity – I will analyze my findings with regard to language loss and revitalization, Japanese language ideologies, generational divides, and semiotic assemblages.

In particular, I aim to demonstrate how the history of World War II incarceration has created generational divides within the *Nikkei* community through Japanese language use and ensuing ideologies. Fueled by dominant language ideologies and the prevalence of linguistic racism, fractal recursions appear to occur as pre-war and post-war immigrant generations

continue to separate themselves based on Japanese language proficiency and collective memory (Irvine and Gal 2000, Hill 1998, Alim et al. 2016, Kroskrity 2021). Closely tied to notions of authenticity and nationality – as Japanese, American, both, or neither – Japanese Americans thus exemplify the need for a language ideological assemblage in understanding the contexts by which multiple ideologies and political economies emerge and evolve (Woolard 2016, Eisenlohr 2004, Kroskrity 2021). As such, I subsequently argue that *gaman* – the Japanese word for endurance – serves as a cultural gloss of a language ideological assemblage encompassing a complex, dynamic array of sociopolitical perspectives and intersectional identities specific to Japanese American community and pageantry (Kroskrity 2021).

For the second part of my analysis, I attempt to explore the multiple ideologies surrounding Japanese American Women's language, and the language of ethnic pageantry as it continues to highlight intersections of race, gender, and nationality. Drawing on Inoue (2006)'s examination of Japanese Women's Language – in tandem with Hill (1992)'s work on "nostalgia" and "respect" – I illustrate how Japanese American women's language is scrutinized within the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program, and the ways in which program participants utilize oppositional strategies in their resistance against dominant language ideologies. Exacerbated by our intersectional identities as Japanese American women, the linguistics and semiotics governing both oppression and resistance within the NWQCP further illustrate a language ideological and semiotic assemblage. Focusing not only on ideologies and semiotics themselves, but also on the contexts through which they occur – across intersecting racial, gender, national, and generational identities – I hope to articulate the political economies and underlying complexities that continue to exist within and beyond the Japanese American community.

Figure 1: The 2023 Nisei Week Court (and Me)[2]

[2] Pictured from left to right: *Rafu Shimpo* article introducing me as the 2023 Miss Western LA; coronation night after our titles were announced; the moment when I found out I had been selected as Miss Western LA; *Rafu Shimpo* article describing the Nisei Week Festival Opening Ceremony, and introducing the 2023 Nisei Week Queen candidates (first in English and then in Japanese); a photo taken of me after the court's appearance in the Nisei Week Grand Parade; a *Rafu Shimpo* article written about our experience as 2023 Nisei Week Queen Candidates.

Japanese American History & Nisei Week

Japanese immigration to the US began in the late nineteenth century, and successive generations of Japanese Americans continue to revere this first wave of immigrants as the *Issei* or *first* generation. In the early twentieth century, the Japanese American community of Southern California experienced a period of economic and cultural growth spearheaded by the *Nisei* or *second* generation (Watanabe 2023). Despite a precedence of anti-Asian sentiment in the region, Little Tokyo businesses prospered and – as Japanese traditions remained intact – the *Nisei* became a beacon of hope for community members hoping to bolster the growing diaspora while maintaining ties to a Japanese homeland (Watanabe 2023, Muranaka 2017). In response to the Great Depression and Little Tokyo's need to attract more business, the first annual Nisei Week Festival was held in 1934, and one year later the festival's first pageant contestants made their debut (Muranaka 2017).

According to existing literature on ethnic festivals and pageantry, events such as Nisei Week and its beauty pageant enabled marginalized communities and Asian American women to feel proud of their heritage, especially amidst ongoing discrimination and the imposition of western beauty standards (King-O'Riain 2006, Kurashige 2002, Matsumoto 2016, Wu 1997, Yano 2006). Furthermore, as the festival and pageant were created to bring more support to Little Tokyo, pageant contestants were known to help mediate interactions between the Japanese American community and their white American neighbors (Kurashige 2002). Nisei Week pageant contestants continue to regard themselves as cultural ambassadors as their – or, I should say, our – positions require constant and mindful communication within and across communities throughout Southern California, Northern California, Hawaii, and Japan.

Figure 2: The First Nisei Week Queen and Court, 1935

While the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program originated as a beauty pageant in which only the queen participated in cultural exchanges, it has since evolved into a "leadership development, women's empowerment, and cultural ambassadorship" initiative promising "cultural enrichment and opportunities to make lifelong connections" – not only for the queen, but for the rest of her court as well ("Queen and Court Program," 2023). As such, following four months of intense training – including leadership classes, dance rehearsals, and cultural enrichment workshops three to four times a week (sometimes for twelve hours at a time!), coronation night was "only just the beginning." Following Nisei Week's coronation ceremony (which happened to be one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life), the newly-crowned court begins to serve as "representatives of the Southern California Japanese American Community" at numerous events one to three times per week – sometimes including week-long excursions to Japan, Hawaii, and San Francisco as part of their festivals and sister city exchange programs. Beginning with our packed schedule of visitations to Little Tokyo businesses and

sponsors throughout the duration of the festival, my court sisters and I were suddenly propelled into a whirlwind of public appearances, meetings with dignitaries, and the unrelenting expectation that we "smile through it all."

As such, I have had the privilege of being able to conduct my research as what might be described as a "doubly native ethnographer." As both a Japanese American woman and a participant in the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program, my findings have been influenced not only by my interviews and participant-observations, but also by my own reflections regarding the experiences I continue to share with my interlocutors. That being said, I have learned – dishearteningly, I must admit – that I will never truly be considered fully "native" to the Japanese American community. Despite being demographically Japanese American, I embody a number of characteristics that denote me as an "outsider," – as I was once referred to during a mock judging session. I am not from California or Hawaii, I am mixed race, and I am *Shin-Nisei* or a "*new* second-generation immigrant," as exemplified by my ability to speak Japanese and by what many community members continue to describe as my "soft spoken" and "Japanese" demeanor.

While my court sisters and program mentors have only ever regarded me as one of their own, in ways that have nearly moved me to tears, the surrounding Japanese American community has often proved to be just as "cliquey and exclusive" as Ava and many of my interlocutors suggest – not only toward non-natives like me, but also toward my court sisters who had not grown up within the local Japanese American community despite being from Southern California. Although our positions on the Nisei Week Court enable us to be warmly and graciously welcomed by the surrounding community, my interlocutors and I understand that we are uniquely privileged in this position. As I continue to analyze social differentiation as

determined by racial, generational, regional, and linguistic difference, I remain mindful of my paradoxical position as both a "doubly-native" and "not-quite-native" ethnographer.

Reflexivity as a Nisei Week Princess

As the study of language ideologies invokes an emphasis on positionality, I would like to take a moment to discuss the complications and problematic aspects of being a native anthropologist in this regard. While my inherent distance from the Southern California *Nikkei* community enables me to recognize that which might otherwise be taken for granted by local Japanese Americans, my insider position within the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program has posed a number of difficulties. Such difficulties include the mistrust I have encountered from community members and program leaders, as well as the increasingly blurred lines that exist between that which is research, and that which is central to my own identity and relationships.

Firstly, as an observant participant within a community pageant program, my research is sometimes met with distrust and suspicion. I will never forget the chilling moment when I was sternly asked by a prominent community member, "Oh, what? So you're just going to write a book about me?" Or the moment when, following an interview with another prominent community member, I was interrogated about my intentions and motivations for joining the program: "Did you do all of this just for research? Is that why your parents didn't come to coronation? It's hard to believe you'd go this far just for your studies." Having approached my research project from a place of sincere admiration for Nisei Week, its Queen and Court program, and the surrounding Japanese American community, I was heartbroken to have been met with distrust by the people whose judgements I valued most. However, having been given the opportunity to explain myself – including my passion for Japanese American culture and

history, as well as my more personal reasons for joining the program – I am now closer than ever to those who had initially been wary of my research.

While nearly every Japanese American person I've met so far has been supportive of my research (sometimes even enthusiastically so), it has been difficult to gain support and access from leading members of the Queen and Court Program. As an organization that continues to be met with accusations of misogyny and corruption – particularly amid the competition and notoriety that pageantry invites – the program remains incredibly secretive and defensive against external inquiries. Especially as a former queen contestant myself, I am unable to ask questions about coronation results without appearing to act out of self interest or spite. Despite my curiosity, for instance, I cannot ask the judges why they ranked some contestants higher than others, or fully believe my trainers when they explain the criteria that goes into selecting a queen each year. "It depends on the day, and what each judge is looking for," they insist, and so most of the data I gather about judging criteria depends on the speculations that circulate within the community – rumors which, albeit, are tremendously telling of community values and ideologies.

Similarly, I continue to be influenced by the relationships I have built within the Queen and Court Program. Immensely grateful to those who have supported me throughout the duration of my community involvement, I am hesitant to say or publish anything that might jeopardize the trust I have so graciously received from my trainers, mentors, and fellow court sisters. Having gained a sense of belonging within both the local *Nikkei* community and the cross-court sisterhood (which spans across regions and generations), I am struck with anxiety at the thought of offending or disrespecting my newfound family, especially as my research includes certain criticisms related to gender oppression within Japanese American pageantry. While my own

critiques are largely reflective of community concerns as a whole – namely those held by younger generations of Japanese American women – I still fear how my research may be interpreted by older community members who have not only shown me great kindness, but who also have the power to shape my reputation as a Japanese American living in Southern California.

Finally, and perhaps in defiance against accusations of dishonesty, I would like to clarify that I am not just a researcher within a Japanese American pageant ambassadorship program: I am also, and will forever be, a Nisei Week Princess. When asked about my research within the program, I often say "it started out as a research project, but now it's my life." I have spent hours on end preparing for my role as a cultural ambassador, serving my community as best as I can, and – most importantly – building lifelong friendships with some of the most inspiring people I have ever met. My trainers are now my idols, and my court sisters are now my best friends – and getting to know them all has been the best part of my experience. This comes with complications, however, as our late night chats, car talks, and post-event "yap sessions" sometimes offer great insight into my research questions. When my court sisters confide in me about certain topics, I am torn whether or not to include their words in my findings. As such, the interview genre itself becomes an issue as I am unable to create full separation between what I hear as a researcher, and what I hear as a friend.

That being said, friendship goes both ways. Just as much as I play a role in listening to my court sisters, they are always there to listen to me as well, and I am comfortable voicing my reflexive concerns to them during private conversations. Fully understanding and insightful on their own terms, my court sisters have provided a foundation and support group through which to fully explore language, identity, and pageantry within the *Nikkei* community. No longer working

alone as an independent researcher, I now regard my work as part of a collaborative project as my sisters, mentors, and I undertake the joint task of showcasing Japanese American culture and history – and the future of Japanese American women's empowerment – not only as community leaders but also, perhaps, as a new generation of doubly native ethnographers.

Japanese American Linguistics and Semiotics

Drawing on the scholarship of linguistic anthropologists who study language loss and revitalization, language ideologies, and assemblage – and informed by my research interviews and fieldwork as a participant in this year's Nisei Week Queen and Court Program – I have found a multiplicity of language ideologies that appear to shape the interactions, identities, and political economies of Japanese Americans living in Southern California (Kroskrity 2021, 2000; Irvine and Gal 2000; Pennycook 2017). After providing an overview of Japanese American linguistics as it has been shaped by World War II incarceration and language maintenance efforts, I will continue with a description of Japanese American History as it relates to language ideologies within the Nisei Week Festival and Pageant. Concomitantly, I will explain how linguistic differences perhaps perpetuate generational divides within the community as language ideologies surrounding authenticity and nationality continue to shape *Nisei*, *Sansei*, and *Yonsei* identities (Figure 3).

Issei 一世 1st generation	**Nisei** 二世 2nd generation	**Sansei** 三世 3rd generation	**Yonsei** 四世 4th generation	**Gosei** 五世 5th generation
Born in Japan	Born in the US			
Born mid-19th century	Born late-19th to early-20th century	Born mid-20th century	Born late-20th to early-21st century	Born early-21st century
Incarcerated as adults	Incarcerated as young adults or as children	Children of incarcerees (may have been incarcerated as children or as infants)	Not incarcerated (usually have family who were incarcerated)	
Native Japanese Proficiency → → → → → → → → → → → → → No Japanese Proficiency[3]				
Culturally Japanese	Culturally American and Japanese	Culturally American → Culturally "Japanese American"		
		↓	↓	↓
		Shin-Issei 新一世 New 1st generation	**Shin-Nisei** 新二世 New 2nd generation	**Shin-Sansei** 新三世 New 3rd generation
		Born in Japan	Born in the US	
		No family history of incarceration		
		Native Japanese Proficiency → No Japanese Proficiency		
		Culturally Japanese	Culturally “Japanese American” or "Japanese and American"	

Figure 3: A Generalized Overview of Japanese American Generations

[3] This row includes a very generalized spectrum of language proficiency, as does the corresponding row on the following page.

I will begin with an illustration of Japanese American linguistics as a reflection of wartime history and language maintenance. Following twelve months of ethnographic research within the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program, alongside twenty semi-structured interviews conducted with local community members affiliated with the program and festival, I have been able to gain an understanding of Japanese American English as it is used within the Southern California "JA" community. While "Japanese American" is often replaced by shorthand such as "JA" or *Nikkei*, the ongoing use of generational markers such as *Sansei* and *Yonsei* continues to shape discourse surrounding both cultural and linguistic identity, as older immigrant generations continue to incorporate Japanese words and phrases into their everyday vernacular despite "lacking the fluency of newer generations."

As is perhaps expected of diasporic vernacular, many of the Japanese words incorporated into Japanese American English sentences tend to relate to food, greetings, holidays, and "bathroom talk." That being said, when asked to share "which Japanese words or phrases [they] use or hear most often," most of my interviewees led with language that is very specific to the Japanese American history of incarceration. This includes *shikataganai* (it can't be helped), *kodomo no tameni* (for the children), and *gaman* (to endure) which I will later discuss in-depth. Furthermore, culturally-resonant numbers emerge within various forms of dialogue. These include "9066" from the executive order that led to the community's imprisonment, and "442" which refers to the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the segregated infantry regiment comprised of Japanese American soldiers who voluntarily served during WWII ("Going For Broke: The 442nd Regimental Combat Team" 2020). Represented by the continued use of Japanese words and phrases – especially those that "have a separate meaning for the JA community," as several

of my interlocutors remarked – Japanese American English emerges as an active preservation of Japanese American history and cultural heritage (Figure 4):

Japanese	Japanese American	English
我慢 /gamaɴ/	Gaman /g'aman/	To quietly persevere
仕方がない /ɕikataganai/	Shikataganai /shɪk'ataganai͡/	It can't be helped
感謝 /kaɴɕa/	Kansha /k'anʃa/	Gratitude
子供の為に /kodomonotameni/	Kodomo no tameni /kodomonotɑmɛni/	For the sake of the children
お陰様で /okagesamade/	Okage sama de /ok'agɛ: sama dɛ/	I am who I am because of you

Figure 4: Japanese terms specific to the Japanese American history of incarceration and redress

Figure 5: Entrance to the "Okage Sama De Exhibit" at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii. The Nisei Week Court visited this exhibit during our visitations in Honolulu. According to our tour guide, these Japanese terms embody the Japanese American spirit, and "their definitions are different for JA versus *Nihonjin* (Japanese)."

Despite the general decrease in Japanese language proficiency across successive generations, Figure 6 demonstrates the Japanese vocabulary that appears to have stood the test of time. While Japanese Americans' use of Japanese tends to lack the pronunciation, honorifics, and gendered distinctions typical of native Japanese, their continuation of now-antiquated terms and customs exemplifies strong diasporic ties to the traditions of pre-immigration Japan. As such, terms such as *benjo* (toilet), traditions such as *mochitsuki* (New Years mochi-making), and art forms such as *taiko* (Japanese drums) are no longer prevalent in globalized Japan, and yet they remain locked in what could be described as the time capsule that is Japanese American culture. Meanwhile, some Japanese American terms such as "botcha" – which are largely mistaken for Japanese – seem to be derived from Hawaiian pidgin and its incorporation of *Issei* colloquialisms (Furuichi 2006).

Japanese American	**Japanese**	**English**	**Usage**
Enryo /ɛnɾiǫ/	遠慮 /ɛ̨nɾi̯ǫ/	To refrain	"Don't enryo" (in reference to eating or to speaking one's mind)
Monku /m'onku/	文句 /moɴkɯ/	To complain	"No monku"
Mottainai /mot͡ai̯n͡ai̯/	勿体ない /mot:ainai/	Wasteful	"That's mottainai"
Nihonjin /nihondʒin/	日本人 /nihoɴdʑiɴ/	Japanese people	Used to refer to Japanese natives
Hakujin /hakudʒin/	白人 /hakɯdʑiɴ/	White people	"There are a lot of hakujin"
Baachan /baatʃan/	お)婆ちゃん /obaatɕaɴ/	Grandma	"My baachan"
Jiichan /jiitʃan/	(お)爺ちゃん /odʑiitɕaɴ/	Grandpa	"My jiichan"

Arigato-gozaimasu /aɾig'ato͡ugozaɪmas/	ありがとうございます /aɾigatoɯgozaimas/	Thank you (formal)	Usually used when speaking to Japanese natives
Yoroshiku-onegaishimasu /joɾoʃiku oneg'aɪʃimas/	宜しくお願いします /joɾoɕikɯonegaiɕimas/	"I look forward to having good relations with you" (formal)	Understood as a phrase used by Japanese natives
Bento /bɛnt'o͡ʊ/	(お)弁当 /beɴtoɯ/	Packed lunch	"I bought a bento"
Hashi /h'aʃi/	(お)箸 /haɕi/	Chopsticks	"I brought hashi"
Gohan /gohan/	ご飯 /gohaɴ/	Rice	"I packed gohan"
Shoyu /ʃoju/	(お)醤油 /ɕoɯjɯ/	Soy sauce	"Can you pass the shoyu"
Kanpai /kanpa͡i/	乾杯 /kaɴpai/	Cheers	Used during toasts
Omiyage /omij'agɛ/	お土産 /omiage/	Gifts	"I gave them omiyage"
-ne /nɛ/	-ね /ne/	"Right/isn't it?	"Interesting-ne?"
-san /san/	-さん /saɴ/	nominal suffix (formal)	"Aiko-san"
-chan /tʃan/	-ちゃん /ɕaɴ/	nominal suffix (for girls)	"Aiko-chan"
Shi shi /ʃiʃi/	シーシー /ɕi:ɕi:/	Pee	"I need to shi shi"
Unchi /untʃi/	ウンチ /ɯɴtɕi/	Poo	"Don't step on the unchi"
Yoisho/oisha /joiʃo/	ヨイショ /joiɕo/	(An expression of effort or strain)	Used when sitting down, standing up, or moving a heavy object

Figure 6: Japanese words most commonly used by Japanese Americans

Cultural naming practices also appear to maintain the use of Japanese linguistics within Japanese American vernacular. Not only do Japanese Americans often name their pets using Japanese words such as *yuki* (snow) and *hana* (flower), but they also tend to name community organizations and programs using relevant Japanese terms such as *Tadaima* (I'm home), *Okaeri* (welcome home), *Katari* (storytelling), *Kakehashi* (bridge), and *Kizuna* (enduring bonds between people). While it is common to have a Japanese middle name, for a host of historical and sociopolitical reasons it has become increasingly uncommon for Japanese Americans to have Japanese first names, as exemplified by the names of my interlocutors, and of the series of Nisei Week Queens who have been crowned since 1935 to the present. Before delving into the reasons why Japanese first names have become less frequently used within the JA community – perhaps as a reflection of postwar assimilation and acculturation movements – I will first present the distinctive semiotic indicators of what it means to be "culturally Japanese American" as referenced in Figure 3.

I have organized five main categories that can be used to dictate what it means to be "Japanese American," according to local community perceptions: in addition to the Japanese American language features mentioned above, Japanese Americans appear to index their "Japanese Americanness" through food, sports, holidays/celebrations, community organizations, and various forms of multimodal communication including JA-specific branding and merchandise. While accustomed to both traditional and contemporary Japanese cuisine, Southern Californian Japanese Americans also trace their transnational identities through the making and eating of what I now understand to be Hawaiian-Japanese American staples such as rainbow jello, spam musubi, and shaved ice. While the immigration and wartime origins of such dishes fall outside of the purview of this study, it is worth noting that even the image of spam musubi,

thought to have originated in WWII incarceration camps as a result of the US government's distribution of spam, is known to evoke Japanese American culture and identity in the form of modern design and merchandising (Figure 7):

Specific to Los Angeles, moreover, local Japanese Americans claim to find comfort and identity in the popular foods of Little Tokyo including *imagawayaki* from Mitsuru Cafe, blueberry matcha lattes from Cafe Dulce, and perhaps most of all, *mochi* and *manju* from Fugetsudo, a great source of pride for both the local and national JA community as it continues to stand as the neighborhood's oldest business – family-owned and operated since 1903. Recognized to have survived or originated during the period of WWII incarceration, cultural icons such as Fugetsudo and Spam Musubi continue to symbolize notions of historical resilience which are central to Japanese American identity-making. Similar symbols of Japanese American culture and history specific to Southern California include the Rafu Shimpo, Fukui Mortuary, and Tanaka Farms – all pre-war Japanese American businesses that managed to survive incarceration, and which are now proudly displayed in the form of Japanese American apparel and merchandise (Figure 8).

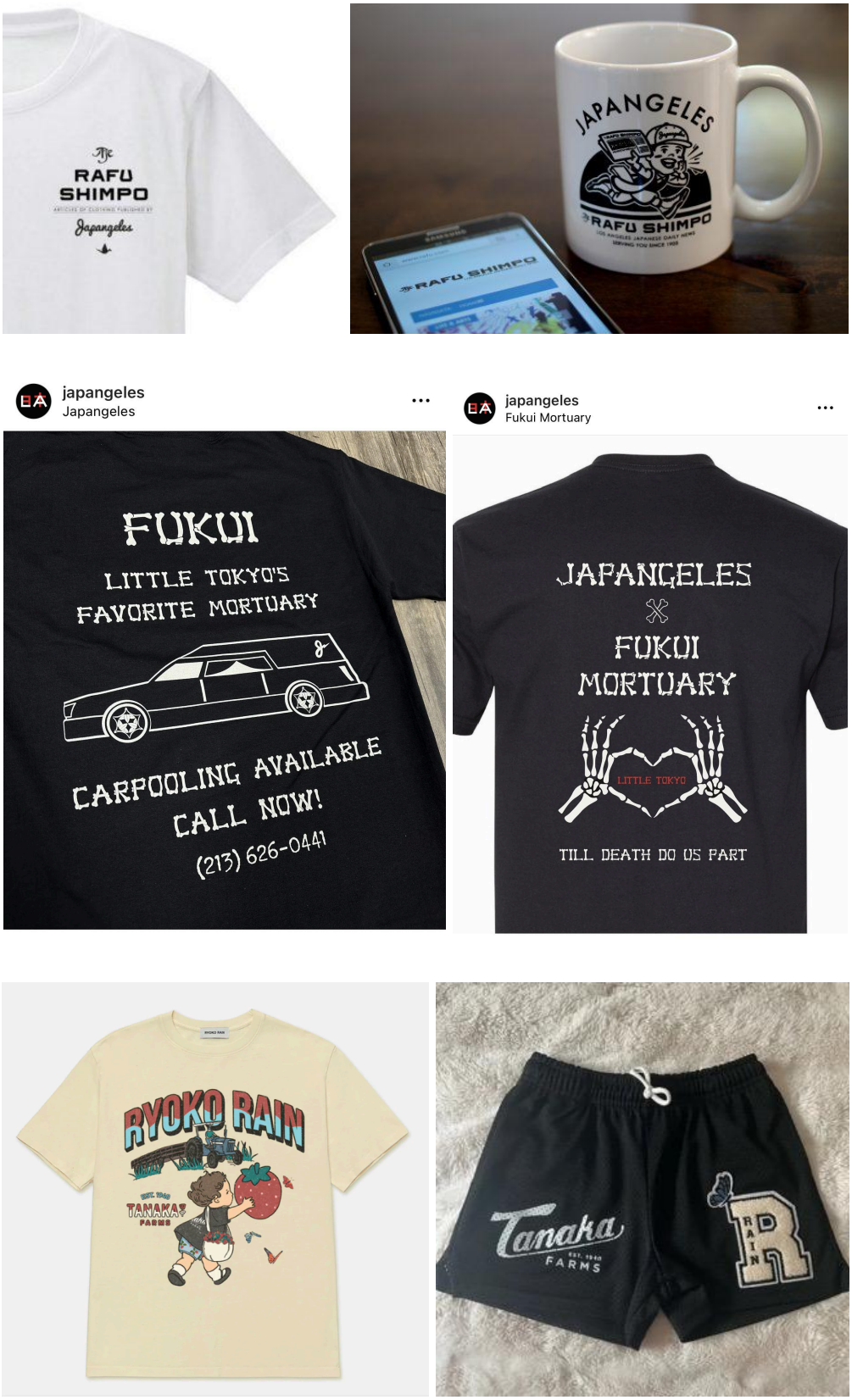

Figure 8: Rafu Shimpo, Fukui Mortuary, and Tanaka Farms Merchandise

Contemporary local businesses and brands include Japangeles, CRFT by Maki, and Ryoko Rain. These businesses utilize well-known Japanese and Japanese American symbols such as paper cranes, cherry blossoms, spam musubi, *yokai* demon masks, *maneki nekos* (beckoning cat figurines), and even Nisei Week itself (Figure 9):

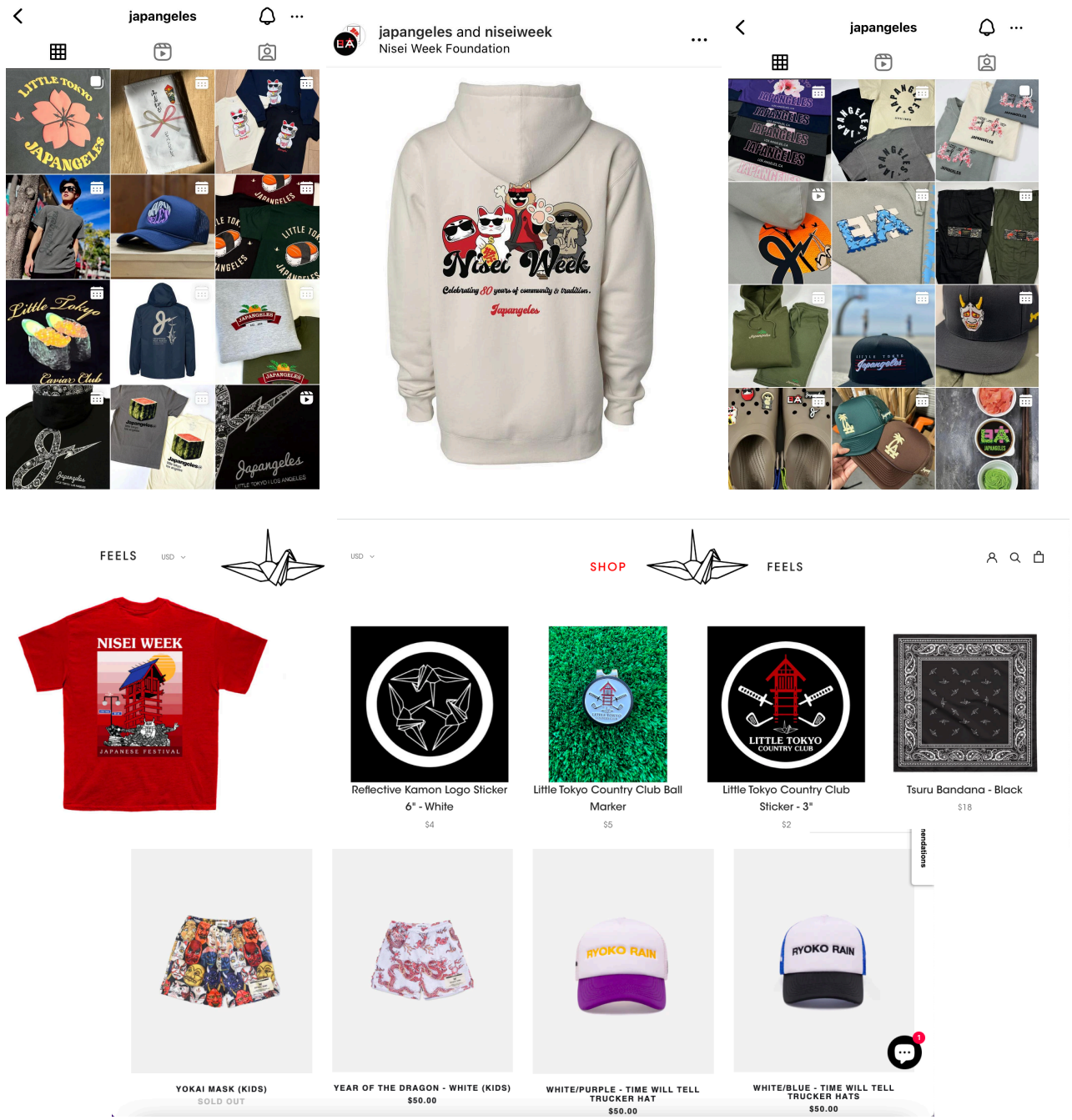

Figure 9: Merchandise from Japangeles, CRFT by Maki, and Ryoko Rain

Similarly, Japanese Americans can often be identified by the culture or heritage night merchandise they seem to proudly display as streetwear, including jerseys, hats, scarves, and bags (Figure 10). While Culture Night is the common name for annual celebrations organized by university Nikkei Student Unions (another marker of JA identity), heritage nights are annual sporting events hosted by various professional teams. Within Southern California, the sports teams that celebrate Japanese heritage nights – which feature public appearances by the Nisei Week Court – are the LA Kings, Clippers, Angels, and Dodgers. Each year, their highly-anticipated merchandise features symbolic elements of a traditional Japan (i.e. cherry blossoms, Kanagawa wave, etc) alongside logos and designs which are distinctly American and specific to Southern California. These juxtapositions are created almost as if to semiotically represent the cultural fusion that is Japanese American heritage.

Figure 10: Japanese Heritage Night Merchandise

In addition to Japanese heritage nights, Japanese Americans draw a sense of identity, community, and pride from sports – particularly baseball and, most prominently, basketball. While baseball is highly revered as a result of Shohei Ohtani's popularity, and of the emergence of baseball leagues during and following WWII incarceration, basketball appears to hold particular importance within the JA community of Southern California (Otake 2024, Ishii 2021). The first time I mentioned my research to a local community member, their immediate response was, "I hope you write about basketball! What's the history there? How did it become such a big thing?" While I have yet to dive deep into the history of JA basketball, I had realized early into my fieldwork that it is, indeed, a really big thing. Among my interlocutors, every single interviewee mentioned basketball as an indicator of Japanese American identity, either to state that they "feel JA because [they] played basketball," or that they *don't* feel JA because they *didn't* play basketball.

As one of my interviewees remarked, "I didn't grow up doing traditional Japanese American stuff, like basketball. I played soccer." In contrast, another one of my interviewees elaborated on the significance of basketball within her community: "Basketball was life. Everything was basketball. Every JA organization had a tournament, and we got to play. But that also meant we got to see our friends, and eat with our friends. Tournaments were fun because we got to see friends from Orange County, and friends from Gardena." It was very common for my court sisters to run into old teammates at community events, or to be approached by aunties and uncles saying, "Hey, I used to play basketball with your dad!" or "I remember you from when you did Yonsei!" (Yonsei in this context stands for "Yonsei Basketball Association," the basketball program for Japanese American youth living in Southern California). As such, not only does participation in JA basketball leagues signify Southern California Japanese American

identity, but conversations surrounding basketball — if you played, which league you were in, what team you played for, etc — appear to communicate a level of in-group awareness and belonging.

Alongside basketball leagues, participation in community organizations and events further index Japanese American language and identity, not only within conversations surrounding such participation, but also as a symbolic display of cultural diversity within the community writ large. Heavily influenced by Buddhism, Hawaiian culture, and the influence of Spanish in Southern California – all relatively uncommon in mainland Japan which is largely secular and ethnically homogenous – Japanese American gatherings and youth programs often center around Buddhist teachings and places of worship, and they are known to embody the "aloha spirit" or a "sense of aloha." This spirit of Japanese American communication is described by my interlocutors as "casual," "chill," "warm," "huggy," "loud," and "friendly" – especially in contrast to the communication styles of native Japanese speakers who are regarded as "quiet," "formal," and "polite." This serves as just one example of generational divides between older and newer immigrant generations, depending on their cultural proximity to the communicative customs of Japan versus those of Hawaii and the continental US.

Similarly, while Japanese Americans are known to celebrate the customs of traditional Japan, they are distinct in their recognition of February 19th as "The Day of Remembrance." On this day in 1942, President Roosevelt signed the executive order that led to the forced removal and incarceration of those of Japanese ancestry. And so, every year Japanese Americans in Southern California gather to commemorate the lives and livelihoods lost as a result of Executive Order 9066. This moment of remembrance is recognized by older immigrant generations of Japanese Americans, but is seemingly less well-known among younger immigrant generations

(unless they are involved with local community organizations heavily comprised of *Sansei* and *Yonsei* members). In this way, another generational divide appears to occur not only through language and communication, but also through other forms of cultural difference pertaining to tradition, celebration, and collective memory.

The Japanese American community of Southern California, in particular, is further distinguished by its association with racial and ethnic diversity. As many of my interlocutors have noted, "SoCal JAs are influenced by the Black and Latinx communities around them." "Historically, labor workers were Japanese and Hispanic, so there was a lot of integration between the two." For this reason, many of my interviewees grew up hearing or speaking Spanish, and several interviewees noted that they used to mistake commonly-used Japanese terms for Spanish. While Japanese Americans may continue to be racially typecast as "quiet" and "polite" within mainstream representations and stereotypes, older generations of Japanese Americans appear to defend and proclaim their multicultural – and, as I will later argue, Americanized – modes of communication which include multilingualism, the influence of Hawaiian culture, and a sense of warmth that is stereotypically lacking within mainstream Japanese society.

Still, Japanese Americans continue to take pride in preserving many elements of traditional Japan. These include the maintenance of Buddhist teachings and principles, the use of Japanese terms, the making and eating of Japanese food, and participation in cultural celebrations and customs. The esteemed status of cultural festivals and programs such as Nisei Week and its court, and public displays of cultural symbols such as cherry blossoms and paper cranes, further seem to reinforce Japanese semiotics and attempts at cultural preservation. Such symbols are prevalent throughout Japanese American festivals and community events, and it is

even stereotypically “Japanese American” (but not Japanese) to get tattoos of these symbols or of one’s family name, although one of my interviewees mentioned that her sister chose to get a “Hawaiian tattoo instead of a Japanese one, because she was afraid of being perceived as fully Japanese.” As such, Japanese American linguistics and semiotics appear to balance a fine line between being “too Japanese” or “too American” according to emic perspectives, and this balancing act can be complicated as it continues to be just as impacted by etic influences or what might be described as a perpetual state of “double consciousness” within the JA community.

In order to better understand the role of language and identity within the JA community, I will return to the history of Japanese American resettlement in the years following WWII incarceration. After Japanese Americans were released from the horrors of wartime imprisonment, they turned to the task of rebuilding the lives, dignity, and wealth that had been stolen from them. During this time, the *Issei* and *Nisei* generations, traumatized by what they had endured, were known to “keep quiet” about their experiences, and to hide their Japanese language abilities. “My grandma and family didn’t speak Japanese because they didn’t want to be seen as a threat,” shared a former program participant. “And my grandma never wanted to talk about her experience. All she told me was that camp was very cold, because the wood in the barracks were so far apart that wind and dust would blow indoors.” “Having gone to camp,” shared another former program participant regarding her *Nisei* parents, “they wanted their kids to be American. It was intentional that they didn’t speak Japanese. Even in the fifties, they had trouble renting an apartment because they were Japanese.” As a result of the shame and fear associated with speaking Japanese, which were only exacerbated by linguistic racism and dominant language ideologies in the US (Kroskrity 2021, Irvine and Gal 2000, Schieffelin et al. 1998, Silverstein 1996, Hill 1998), successive generations of Japanese Americans grew up

without having been taught the Japanese language, aside from the select words and phrases that continue to circulate within the community today.

Among the twenty community members I interviewed – across immigrant generations and between the ages of 20 and 70 – five identified as proficient speakers of Japanese. Of those five, only one identified as *Yonsei* while the remaining four identified as *Shin-Nisei,* which is the term used to designate "new" second-generation Japanese Americans whose parents immigrated to the US after the war. As the only *Shin-Nisei* member of this year's seven-member Nisei Week Court and the only one with a Japanese first name, I am the one program participant who speaks Japanese (due to the linguistic influence of my *Shin-Issei* mother). Similar anomalies apply to my position among the nineteen women currently participating across all three Queen and Court Programs, including the Cherry Blossom Courts of Hawaii and Northern California. While all but one of us have a Japanese middle name, only one other program participant has a Japanese first name. Furthermore, only one other member also speaks Japanese, as a result of language schooling and her passion for the Japanese Language which was shaped by her family's history of forced assimilation.

While more than half of my interviewees attended "J-school" at some point in their lives – following the postwar restoration of Japanese Language Schools in Southern California ("Japanese Language Schools" 2020) – most lament their inability to remember the Japanese they used to know. Many explained that, as a result of wanting to "fit in" with their white peers, they neglected the Japanese language throughout their childhoods, which they have now come to regret. As such, while the prominence of J-school and shared feelings of dismay toward language loss may indicate a period of language revitalization, monoglot standard English (Silverstein

1996) and other standard language ideologies characteristic of white public space (Hill 1998) continue to negatively impact contemporary language movements.

Throughout my fieldwork, I continue to encounter Japanese Americans who directly attribute their generation's language loss to the history of WWII incarceration, often in contrast to the experiences of other Asian American groups. "Most of my Asian American friends still speak their mother tongue, and I feel bad that I can't. But I know it's because of our history as Japanese Americans," said one of this year's candidates during her interview with the Miss Western LA program. "When I think about my Asian American friends who aren't Japanese," said another interlocutor during an interview I had conducted for an unrelated project, "I think about how they still have artifacts, and they still speak the language. As Japanese Americans, our assimilation was so forced and so fast – we didn't even have a choice. It's so common for us to not have these things, to not speak the language, because of this one event. Even leading up to incarceration, our artifacts were burned. It was the burning of our heritage, and it shaped all of us" (Dzikowski et al. 2023)

At a benefit concert for the Japanese American National Museum, which the Nisei Week Court recently attended, artist Kishi Bashi performed the song "Forgotten Words/Theme for Jerome" which is a tribute to Japanese American language loss as a result of WWII incarceration. Jerome is the name of an incarceration camp in Arkansas, and the lyrics are as follows:

There was a girl

She fell in love

And on the sun-dried land

They settled in and started again

And when they'd sleep

She'd sing this melody

To her beloved sons

Forgotten words from Japan

As such, regardless of my own linguistic anthropological approach to Japanese American identity, members of the Nikkei community already appear to be cognizant of the relationship between language, culture, identity, and history. Many of my interviewees thus expressed a fondness for the Japanese language, and a desire to strengthen their language skills, perhaps indicative of changing language attitudes and growing efforts toward language revitalization. Drawing on Kroskrity (2010)'s definition of language ideologies, my interlocutors expressed only positive "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions" toward the Japanese language throughout their interviews. My first experience as a Nisei Week Queen candidate even involved my fellow participants asking me if I would teach them Japanese. Having evolved since its heyday as a festival-affiliated beauty contest, the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program now advertises itself as a leadership development program providing Japanese cultural enrichment. And so, my fellow participants and I had assumed that Japanese language training would be included in our lengthy list of cultural lessons – and that language proficiency would be useful during our public appearances and cultural exchanges.

On the contrary, as one of my interviewees remarked, "Japanese has really left the program. 'Nisei' is the only Japanese word that's broadcasted." Several others expressed their surprise at the program's lack of language revitalization: "It's interesting and weird that language wasn't incorporated at all even though it's such a big part of culture," noted one participant. "It's interesting that they want to maintain cultural traditions but don't even speak Japanese,"

commented another. In demonstrating their own language ideologies – including an ideology of rhematization wherein a language indexed to a particular group becomes emblematized to a subsequently "ethnolinguistic" identity (Kroskrity 2024) – my interviewees exemplify an unforeseen hindrance to language revitalization within the Japanese American community.

In order to understand the multiplicity of language ideologies surrounding Nisei Week's Queen and Court program, I will return to the history of Nisei Week, and to its embodiment of both *Nisei* and *Sansei* Japanese language ideologies. Following the postwar resurgence of Nisei Week in 1949, the festival and pageant began to embody not only the culture and resilience of the Japanese American people, but also their ability to assimilate into mainstream American society (Kurashige 2002, Watanabe 2023). As such, Nisei Week Pageant participants began to represent the *American* side of "Japanese American," as was reflected in the program's choice to forego kimonos for ball gowns as their standard dress in 1950, alongside fashion designer Riye Nakamura's proud declaration: "We are American born!" (Higashiyama). 73 years later, Riye's sentiment was reiterated by one of my *Sansei* interviewees as she described her own identity in relation to the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program: "That's why we showcase our community – to educate, and to inform people. I was raised in America. I'm an American person of Japanese heritage. What does a Japanese person act like? Subservient? Exotic? What is a Japanese person supposed to be, and how am I supposed to act? As an American, I don't lead with Japanese American. I am an American."

In congruence with the sentiment of our *Nisei* and *Sansei* sisters, my fellow court members and I grew to understand that "Japaneseness is not really a factor" in the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program, as was explained by one of our trainers during an interview. Many of my older interviewees even shared anecdotes from years past in which Japanese language was

either prohibited or judged negatively during the pageant contest. Similarly, I was told during a mock judging session that I am "very Japanese. It's clear that [I] speak Japanese," and that I "need to be bigger and bolder." Not only do the comments I received demonstrate language ideologies that associate the Japanese language with typical Japanese stereotypes (quiet, submissive, etc) – as do the preceding quotes about subservience, exoticism, and "Japaneseness" – but they also point toward divisions that appear to exist within the JA community, as some members are labeled more or less "American" than others. As the only *Shin-Nisei* in this year's program – and having learned so much from my fellow participants throughout our interviews and additional time spent together – I have come to understand that divisions within the JA community can often be attributed to generational differences which pertain to a history of both immigration and incarceration.

Such generational divides, and their connection to Japanese American notions of authenticity and nationality, are reflected in my interlocutors' own Japanese language ideologies relative to their identities as either *Sansei*, *Yonsei*, or *Shin-Nisei*. I first became curious about this language ideological divide during a Japanese Values lesson I attended as part of "princess training" leading up to coronation. Our trainer at the time, a former court member who identifies as *Shin-Nisei*, had shared one of her biggest takeaways from participating in the Queen and Court program: "Before Nisei Week, I was arrogant. I used to look down on other Japanese Americans who didn't speak Japanese, because I didn't understand Japanese American history or culture at all. One of my court sisters who is *Yonsei* explained to me that her grandma couldn't speak Japanese because she had been incarcerated, and I realized I had been so ignorant for looking down on Japanese Americans who don't speak Japanese." This ideology around the supposedly "superior" way of being Japanese American was reiterated by my *Yonsei* and *Sansei*

interviewees: “I want more people to understand why we lost the language. If there was more understanding, the newer generations wouldn’t look down on us so much.” As another interviewee put it, “a few see fluency as exceptional, but sometimes Japanese language abilities are used to outcast [newer generations].” “The Japanese American community is not as accepting as you’d think. It’s hard to break in.”

One of my interviewees who identifies as both *Yonsei* and *Shin-Nisei* is passionate about bridging the gap between newer and older generations: “The two communities are ethnically the same, but culturally so different. The older generation was touched by war, and had to lose the language so they would be accepted as Americans…but then they say things like ‘fresh off the boat’ and look down on [newer generations] who kept the language. Speaking Japanese is seen as a negative thing, and that’s why I used to be ashamed to speak my own language.” In this example of what might be interpreted as fractal recursion or an axis of differentiation (Irvine and Gal 2000, 2019), the divide between newer and older generations is reflected in conflicting language ideologies regarding Japanese language use within the community. While newer generations appear to look down on older generations who don’t speak the language “properly,” older generations seem to retaliate against this sentiment by emphasizing *why* they don’t speak the language, and by excluding newer generations for being foreign, ignorant, and culturally different, thus mirroring the dominant language ideologies that continue to marginalize ethnic minorities within and beyond the United States (Irvine and Gal 2000, Kroskrity 1998, Silverstein 1996, Hill 1998).

Similar recursions appear to occur not only between generations, but also within the older generation itself. This is exemplified by my *Sansei* and *Yonsei* interviewees’ language ideologies regarding “correct” vs “incorrect” pronunciation of Japanese. The same program participants

who had articulated their dismay toward the "language superiority complex" of newer generations interestingly voiced similar disapproval of Japanese mispronunciations: "My pet peeve is when Japanese Americans mispronounce Japanese. I worked hard on my pronunciation, and wish others would too. It's your culture and heritage. I feel really uncomfortable when I hear Japanese with an American accent." Likewise, "Japanese with an American accent feels forced. It sounds very *American* as if it were learned from a textbook" shared a *Sansei* interviewee.

Not only do such comments represent another fractal recursion in which dominant language ideologies hierarchize people and languages – this time, within the Japanese language itself – but they also highlight another barrier to language revitalization and generational solidarity. Afraid of mispronouncing or making mistakes, some of my *Yonsei* and *Sansei* interviewees expressed that they refrain from using Japanese words altogether. Among the older generations I interviewed who do incorporate Japanese words into their vocabulary, most emphasized their intention to pronounce Japanese "the right way," which largely includes the vocalization of /ɾ/ as opposed to /ɹ/, as well as various stress differences. Meanwhile, my *Shin-Nisei* interlocutors exhibited relative apathy toward Japanese pronunciations within Japanese American English. "I just pronounce everything the American way," one of my interviewees noted, before explaining why her Japanese mother doesn't partake in the Japanese traditions that are now central to Japanese American culture: "My mom is from Japan, so she never had to prove her culture or Japaneseness." In this way, not only do Japanese Americans feel pressure to act *American* in many contexts, but they also appear to defend their *Japaneseness* within and beyond their own communities.

Expanding upon Woolard (2016) and Eisenlohr (2004)'s research on nationalism and authenticity within the study of language ideologies, I have found that generational and language

ideological divides among Japanese Americans also rest on the debate over who is more or less "authentic" – as either Japanese, American, or Japanese American. While Japanese language abilities might authenticate someone as *Japanese* – which can be interpreted as either positive or negative, depending on varying ideologies – the absence of Japanese appears to authenticate someone as Japanese *American*, as someone who is not only American but who has also suffered incomparable loss as a result of their transnational heritage. This construction of authentic Japanese American identity, and its entanglement with language and ensuing ideologies, is demonstrated by one of my *Yonsei* interviewees: "Not being able to speak Japanese is central to JA identity," she asserts. "It's very JA, because of immigration and incarceration." As I continue to identify as culturally *Shin-Nisei* but technically also *Yonsei*, as a result of my Japanese grandmother having been born in the US, I often find myself in JA spaces looking for opportunities to talk about my family history and ties to incarceration, almost as if to say, "Hey, I'm Japanese American too." In this way, I have become my own example of a language ideological assemblage that reveals not only the "social worlds profoundly shaped by political economic disparities," but also "speakers' own desires to belong…and to use their linguistic resources to create and/or authenticate relevant, and often intersectional, identities" (Kroskrity 2021).

Gaman **as a Language Ideological Assemblage**

Further drawing on the notion of language ideological and semiotic assemblages, I now hope to illustrate *Gaman* as an assemblage of language practices and a cluster of ideologies (Pennycook 2017, Kroskrity 2021). In order to do this, I must once again refer to the history of Japanese American incarceration and the years that followed. After decades of endurance – first while in "camp," and then afterward through the quiet rebuilding of life without mention of the

injustices incurred – the *Issei* and *Nisei* generations exhibited what the Japanese American community refers to as *gaman*. According to "The Art of Gaman," a Smithsonian exhibit showcasing arts and crafts collected from deserted incarceration sites, *gaman* in Japanese means "enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity" ("The Art of Gaman" n.d.). As an "expanded version of language," I would argue that *gaman* embodies a linguistic and semiotic assemblage (Pennycook 2017) – of dignified conduct, of the spirit of a people, and of silence. Having quietly endured the pain of unlawful imprisonment and ethnic discrimination, the *Issei* and *Nisei* generations are known to have kept from their *Sansei* children the truth about their community's history. But as the *Sansei* generation grew older and started asking more questions – and noticing more discrepancies within their parents' stories – the reality of incarceration gradually started to unravel (Kato-Kirayama et al. 2023). Grief-stricken and outraged on behalf of their families, the *Sansei* generation became the driving force for redress and reparations. "We will *gaman* no more" became the slogan of *Sansei* activists who – in establishing the federal Commission on Wartime Relocation, and getting their parents to testify at subsequent congressional hearings – eventually spearheaded the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 which provided surviving Japanese Americans with monetary reparations (Kato-Kirayama et al. 2023, Yoshida 2021).

While the history of Japanese American redress is central to *Nikkei* legacy and identity, I believe it also illustrates two competing language ideologies within the Japanese American community: one which favors *gaman* and the Japaneseness it embodies, and another which condemns it as antithetical to American values. Endlessly reflected within the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program and the surrounding Japanese American community, *gaman* embodies a language ideological assemblage that includes not only a number of competing ideologies, but

also a communicative framework, a shared and respected history, and a dynamic restructuring of Japanese American identity – across racial, gender, and generational divides.

I first began to think of *gaman* as a language ideological assemblage while reading through the field notes I had written as a newly-crowned queen candidate. Having attended a number of cultural workshops and leadership training sessions, I realized I was receiving the same type of messaging from adults within the JA community – specifically in relation to my identity as an Asian American woman. After a beloved karate lesson, our *sensei* sat us down and gave us a heartfelt speech about anti-Asian sentiment and perceptions of us as "perpetual foreigners," "forever tied to incarceration where we were treated as the enemy." He recounted a number of incidents in which he was told "your English is so good," despite having been born in the US, and in his final words of advice he said the following: "As Asian Americans, you might end up wanting to punch someone. But don't. You are now representatives of your community. This is about more than just yourself." Weeks later, during an interview training workshop geared toward "women in the business world," I asked our trainer what we should do if someone ever says something that makes us uncomfortable. In response, she instructed us to "remain neutral. Don't come off as too strong or assertive, and change the subject." As an embodiment of *gaman,* our instructors' words represent a language ideological assemblage that appears to hold *Nisei* ideology and Japanese American history and tradition at one end.

On the other end, the previously-quoted words of my mock judges and interviewees – who advocated for "boldness" and an American opposition to supposedly "Japanese" traits – resemble the majority of my interlocutors who display similar *Sansei* ideologies in their progressive views on anti-racism, feminism, and the shared desire to combat stereotypes using a variety of linguistic and semiotic strategies. While the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program

prides itself as "a women's empowerment program," every young participant I've interviewed so far has voiced her disagreement with this statement. Unable to fully break free from the confines of what was traditionally a beauty pageant, the program continues to serve as an additional embodiment of *gaman*: despite my sisters' and my various grievances with the program, we remain silent. In spite of our radical ambitions, we have learned throughout our time together that – as two of my interviewees communicated so thoughtfully – we "have to reconcile and realize that this isn't about *me*. This is about the community I represent." "There are so many things about the program that need to change, but a part of me wants to maintain it for the older generations.[4] It's of more value to them. Why take that away from someone?"

This tension and reconciliation – between Japanese and American values within the Japanese American psyche – is further reflected by my interlocutors' "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions" toward "*gaman"* itself (Kroskrity 2010). When asked which Japanese words or phrases she knew, one of my interviewees answered, "*gaman*…but that leads to contradictory feelings. There's a push for *gaman*, but also shouldn't I reject that and embrace my true self? I feel confused about it." Likewise, my most vehemently *American* interviewee expressed a similarly contradictory ideology surrounding *gaman*. Despite having declared her authenticity as an American moments prior – and eventually expressing her disapproval of my sisters' and my hesitancy to speak up for ourselves within the program – she said the following: "The majority of the American public doesn't truly understand quiet strength. *Gaman*. It's always about *gaman*. There's something to be said about that word. Quietly going about your business. Taking the pain but working through it." One of my interlocutors, a young Japanese American woman who herself is not affiliated with the court program, likened the concept of *gaman* to another Japanese

[4] Here, and in the sections that follow, "generation" is being used in the typical sense with regard to age group.

phrase specific to the incarceration experience: *shikataganai*, or "it can't be helped." "My mom said I shouldn't think of it as a bad term," she said, "even if it limited the Japanese and Japanese Americans during the war." As the ideologies surrounding *gaman* relate to its assemblage – as not only a word, but also as a cultural mindset, a communicative framework, and a history – I believe its effect on Japanese American identity and sociopolitical movement can be summarized by the words of one of my trainers: "In Japan, you respect others so much that you put yourself down. But in the US, if you do that too much you get trampled on. Being Japanese American is about trying to balance Japanese culture in the US while trying not to get walked all over. It is the art of being Japanese American."

And so, as my court sisters and I continue to *gaman* – in recognition of both Japanese and American values, and of both *Nisei* and *Sansei* language ideologies – we embody yet another component to the *gaman* assemblage as a whole. "Balanced with a much larger understanding of context that includes the various political economic forces that have brought particular people, languages, and places together" within and surrounding the Japanese American community, *gaman* embodies a "cluster of ideologies," "cultural action," and an "emphasis on becoming" (Kroskrity 2021, 2024). Seeing as communication "transcends language," and "involves diverse semiotic resources" (Pennycook 2017) – specific to the art of *gaman*, in this case – my court sisters and I employ "[trans]linguistic resources to create and…authenticate our intersectional identities" as Japanese American women (Kroskrity 2021). Meanwhile, we are aware that this is only just the beginning. Within the Queen and Court Program, we continue to restructure our view of language and *gaman* with the goal of one day enacting change, especially for the sake of young women and girls who will participate in the program in years to come. And while we are still figuring out the exact linguistic and semiotic resources that will enable us to enact these

changes, we embody a dynamic process of "becoming" (Kroskrity 2021), not only as young Asian American women, but also as members of the Japanese American community writ large.

Japanese American Women's Language & Oppositional Strategies

Miyako Inoue describes Japanese Women's Language as a "vicarious language," one that "universally represents and speaks for the voice of Japanese women that is not theirs," and which is "intimately bound up with the emergent social formations of modernity, capitalism, and nationalism" (Inoue 2006). Within the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program, I aim to explore how Japanese *American* Women's Language is also linked to national and capitalist modernity specific to the history and contemporary experiences of Southern California's Nikkei community. Meanwhile, I seek to examine the oppositional strategies that program participants employ in their resistance toward language ideologies that value "tradition," "nostalgia," and "respect" over individual pursuits of freedom – referring, in this case, to each participant's autonomy to disagree with those in power without fear of retribution – and to choose how they look, speak, and behave not only as representatives of the Southern California Nikkei Community, but also as Japanese American women on a greater scale.

I can vividly remember my worst experience as a newly-crowned princess. Two days into our reign, the Nisei Week Court had been in the midst of back-to-back "visitations" within and surrounding Little Tokyo, including a public appearance at LA City Hall in the morning. We had been looking forward to the visit, as we had been told that we would be able to meet with city council members and share information about our backgrounds, accomplishments, and motivations for participating in the NWQCP – including our shared desire to become more involved with the local community, to serve as cultural ambassadors, and to educate others about Japanese American culture and history. Dressed in our mandated crown, sash, makeup, heels,

and fitted dress – as chosen by members of our overseeing "Queen's Committee" (QC) comprised of former program participants – we arrived at city hall with hope and excitement.

However, as we entered the building we were met with winks from male staff, cringe-inducing comments about our appearances, and a disturbing interaction with none other than Kevin de León, the city council member whose anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racist language had been leaked earlier that year (Mason 2023). Having learned nothing from his scandal, it seems, de León proceeded to use an anti-Black racial slur while speaking to the court, after which he led us into the council chamber where he introduced us as "beauty queens" to a crowd of seemingly-judgmental council members and visiting spectators. We were given no opportunity to speak for ourselves, before a cacophony of shutter clicks and flashing lights signaled that it was time for photographs. In no mood to smile, I looked out into the crowd and met eyes with one of our chaperones. When she saw me, her eyebrows furrowed, and she placed one finger on each cheek as she pulled her lips into a smile, thus instructing me to do the same. Disheartened but not wanting to disappoint, disrespect, or get in trouble with the Nisei Week Foundation, I grudgingly obeyed as I mustered a smile, and felt my face get redder and redder with each passing moment. After photos ended, we were again given no opportunity to speak, before being ushered out of the chamber.

Afterward through hushed tones and knowing glances, my court sisters and I discussed how "demeaning," "patronizing," and "diminishing" the experience had been, and it would become the first of many in which we would be made to feel like "dolls," "meat at a market," and "nothing more than a pretty face," as articulated by many of my interviewees. Often accompanied by inappropriate comments from men, and by constant policing by the women in charge of our program, our time on court would ultimately result in the following sentiments:

“It’s defeating,” began one participant during an especially emotional conversation. “They say we’re cultural ambassadors, but the crown, sash, red lip…it doesn’t feel like it. Before every event I have to dissociate in order to participate. I feel used and taken advantage of, for money and for publicity.” As echoed by another participant, “It’s supposed to be an empowerment program that helps you find yourself, but I feel like it made me lose myself. It made me lose sight of who I am.”

These quotes accurately convey the way I had felt after our visitation to LA City Hall. Later that night during an individual “QC Check-in” with three of my trainers, I broke down in tears while recounting the experience. Before I knew it, all three women had rushed to my side with concern in their eyes, tissues in hand, and a series of gentle back rubs amid kind words of comfort. “We understand. We know how you feel,” whispered one of my trainers. “Please be patient with us,” pleaded another. “We joined QC because we want to change things, but it’s really difficult and will take time.” In that moment, I began to realize the significance of what I had become a part of. Caught in the crossfires between so-called tradition and modernity, the women of the NWQCP – both participants and trainers alike – are in a constant battle for collective respect and autonomy, while still remaining loyal to the people and histories that have shaped the community into what it is today. As voiced by one of my trainers during a particularly moving conversation, “I joined QC to protect you girls. I wanted to be able to say something, or to stop things from happening.” And so, halfway through my ethnographic research on “Language and Identity within the Japanese American Community,” I started to become more and more fascinated, motivated, and – ultimately – empowered by the language of resistance within Japanese American Pageantry.

Drawing on Inoue (2006) and Hill (1992)'s examination of "nostalgia" as representative of political ideology, I will analyze similar discourse as it appears to exist within the Japanese American community of Southern California. As noted by many of my interlocutors, "there is a huge divide between younger and older generations within the foundation." "The Nisei Week board is mostly made up of older men, and then there are conservative past court members who run the shots." "People keep saying 'that's the way it's always been.' But why? What can't things change?" To answer my interlocutor's question, I will turn to Hill (1992)'s analysis of nostalgia as a "discursive system" in which high-ranking community members communicate their desire to return to a "social order of the past" – such that any form of language change or "counter discourse" comes to be interpreted as the younger generation's "lack of respect."

Inoue (2006) expands upon this analysis by demonstrating the effects that discourses of nostalgia have on the imagined existence and supposed extinction of Japanese women's language. Provoked by the onset of westernization and industrial capitalism, a "crisis of social order" is shown to have emerged in the late twentieth century, thus resulting in widespread scrutiny of Japanese women's language as a distressing symbol of femininity in decline. "Japanese women's speech – as if merely one other disassembled and fetishized part of a woman's body," Inoue argues – "now draws intensive international attention as indexical of how far Japan has progressed or caught up with America in terms of 'equality' and 'modernity'" (Inoue 2006). For Japanese Americans, this relationship between Japan and the US, as reified by women's language, takes on particular meaning as members of the Nikkei community remain in a state of "in-betweenness," as similarly defined by Nakassis (2016) in his analysis of South Indian youth style. Caught not only between nations, but also between generations (to use both immigrant- and age-based definitions of the term), Japanese American women embody a

closely-monitored group whose linguistic and semiotic choices perhaps threaten to dismantle social order within the Japanese American community writ large.

And so, despite ongoing efforts to create change within the Nisei Week Foundation and its Queen and Court Program, clothing, makeup, and speech styles remain trapped in time as nostalgic choices from the 80s and 90s continue to dictate our mandated appearance and behavior as members of the Nisei Week Court. Concomitantly, conflicting language ideologies persist as supposed symbols of femininity evoke differing "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions" dependent upon generational divides and social hierarchies. As court members, for example, we are required to attend events while wearing matching outfits, pearl earrings, pulled-back hair, and a full face of makeup – including false eyelashes and bright red lipstick which every single one of my interviewees has mentioned with resentment. "Who is the makeup for?" questioned one participant. "It's for men. For old Japanese men," answered another. While this exchange occurred in private, it is clear that many of our trainers and co-chairs would disagree. To them, it appears that old-fashioned makeup and hairstyles are indicative of respect and respectability. "Clothes, hair, makeup – all of that matters," stated our program co-chair during a training session. "Presenting yourself well physically makes it seem like you have respect and forethought. You must be matching, and if you aren't matching, you're disrespecting."

Not only does this align with Hill (1992)'s examination of "respect" as a "pragmatic claim" on the present that values practices of the past, but it also aligns remarkably well with Inoue (2006)'s findings which reveal the *imagined* existence of such practices in the first place. As noted by a former participant who was on-court in the 1970s, "the program didn't always used to be this way. We weren't as tightly controlled down to the color of our lipstick – it's a lot more strict now." As such, the semiotics of tradition, respect, and nostalgia – as interpreted by

program overseers – appear to reflect competing language ideologies regarding how best to either maintain or resist various status quos. I believe a multitude of ideologies and social norms can be demonstrated by our co-chair's earlier comments, and through the many quotes we had heard from QC members during our intensive training as queen candidates:

> Enunciate. Don't up-speak. Smile constantly. Keep your answers short and sweet. It's not what you say, but how you say it.
>
> Always be aware of how you speak and look – someone is always watching. Cameras are everywhere. You're representing not only yourself, but also the community and the foundation. We receive comments about you from community members. They gossip.
>
> Don't be stiff, rehearsed, or robotic. Do whatever it takes to engage with others. Pretend you're talking to a seven year old. Look at what politicians do.
>
> Body language is important. Don't slouch, face whoever's speaking, and sit up straight – especially in Japan. Everyone [in Japan] is always standing up super straight, and they listen engaged. Sitting up is also important because you don't want to show cleavage.
>
> Speak deeper and slower – in male-dominated spaces, you want people to hear your voice. Regulate your emotions. You can't be emotionally explosive the way that men are.
>
> Be assertive but not aggressive. Be personable, but not too passionate. Always watch your word choice. This will affect your personal and professional lives.

Not only do such comments mirror the overwhelming and conflicting set of social rules that women are often expected to follow, but they also reflect our uniquely intersectional identities as Japanese American women. While advice about "upspeak" and hiding one's body are relatively standard for women of all social identities, our trainers' attention to Japanese customs and to quiet or "robotic" expressions are evocative of existing literature on Asian American stereotypes and culturally-learned communicative behavior (Reyes and Lo 2008, Sabo et al. 1996, Bailey 1997). Just as we were trained on how to communicate respect, and how to receive respect in return – within both Japanese and Japanese American communities, and in male-dominated spaces – we were also made to become hyper-aware of our appearances, perhaps further reinforcing the hypervisibility of minoritized groups and the double-consciousness that female-presenting individuals face amid rampant oversexualization in today's society (Hill 1998, Du Bois 1903). Ultimately, while recognizing the well-meaning intentions of our trainers, my court sisters and I gradually became inundated and dissatisfied with the rules of our program – rules which, I would argue, govern Japanese American women's language both within and beyond the NWQCP.

I believe it is important to note that, despite our criticisms of the program, every participant I interviewed has expressed that overall "the positives outweigh the negatives." Touched by the warmth, kindness, and support that accompanies community and sisterhood, I too remain grateful to everyone involved with Nisei Week and its Queen and Court Program. That being said, Japanese American pageantry continues to maintain a number of oppressive traditions, and many participants – including those on the Hawaii and Northern California courts – have expressed their internal conflict and guilt surrounding whether or not to recommend this program to future generations of women and girls. As such, court members have taken it upon

themselves to defy certain traditions within the program, and it is precisely these oppositional strategies that I hope to explore in the pages and years to come. I will now continue with an illustration of the oppressive norms that dictate participant dissatisfaction with the NWQCP. Then, I will demonstrate how the language of oppression – as interpreted by Nisei Week Court members – serves as semiotics against which "ideological challengers" base their "counterdiscourse" (Hill 1992).

Before delving into the linguistics and semiotics governing both oppression and resistance within Japanese American Pageantry, I will now attempt to delineate the symbols of oppression that appear to exist within the NWQCP. Similar to what Inoue (2006) might refer to as "a complex ensemble of practices, institutions, representations, and power in which the Japanese woman is…evaluated, studied, [and] staged," court members' semiotic expressions continue to undergo intense scrutiny from trainers, co-chairs, former program participants, and affiliated community members. During an online training session, for example, we were shown a series of photos of us at events, and asked to point out who specifically was not adhering to "standards" in each photo (guilty as charged)! Similarly, during a recent trip to Honolulu, our co-chair messaged our chaperone with the following feedback after seeing photos of us from the previous night's event: "Nancy needs to fix her hair. Aiko needs to straighten her posture. Kaili needs to do something about her piercings." Our overnight trips are especially restrictive, as we are prohibited from leaving the hotel except for sanctioned activities, and reprimanded when we fail to meet certain standards – or when we try to voice our disagreement with specific aspects of the program. All in all, to quote one of my interviewees, "the amount of control placed over us is ridiculous. They tell us that we are empowered leaders, and then treat us like children. There's no freedom."

And so, court members appear to identify certain symbols of oppression within the program, and base their subsequent oppositions accordingly. As exemplified by one of my interlocutors' impassioned declaration, "I don't care how many hours [our co-chair] is going to waste telling us how to do our hair. I'm still going to wear my hair down. I don't want to wear the red lip. We are good people, and the community loves us [regardless of how we look]. Don't put your hair up. Don't cover your earrings. No one actually cares. The [Nisei Week] board has been fucked up for too long." Within my interlocutor's speech, she identifies several components to the NWQCP's semiotic ensemble of oppression: constant policing by program overseers, an unwillingness to change within the foundation, and control over our appearances with regard to red lipstick, hairstyle, and certain accessories. In addition to these symbols, court members are also not allowed to tan, show tattoos, or hold hands in public. (While I had initially assumed that there were racist or homophobic origins behind the rules on tanning and holding hands, QC members insist that they only exist to prevent community gossip regarding court "factions," as well as unsightly tan lines per our ballgown designer's request.) Likewise, our oftentimes mandated high heels, pantyhose, and dresses also appear to be regarded as symbols of oppression by both court members and traditional feminists alike – not because they are stereotypically feminine but, rather, because they are either "painful," "uncomfortable," or "*not* a sign of women's empowerment," as criticized by my interviewees.

In opposition to such symbols, Nisei Week Court members thus take it upon themselves to create their own semiotic ensemble of resistance. Utilizing a communicative framework that upholds secrecy and "small steps," program participants gradually appear to make subtle changes "little by little" – while often hiding said changes from various modes of surveillance. Following my interlocutor's speech, for example, court members began to attend events while wearing less

and less makeup, and without covering more and more tattoos and piercings – acts of disobedience which would normally be followed by a stern lecture about "respect" or a lack thereof. Glasses and hairstyles further serve as semiotic representations of resistance and empowerment. As declared by one of my interlocutors: "I'm the first court member to ever wear glasses, and that's fucked up. I'm going to keep wearing glasses so future court members and little girls can feel comfortable doing that too." Hairstyles serve a similar purpose, as this year's court members (I'll admit) have been letting out strands of hair little-by-little to test the limits on how far we can circumvent program rules. Hair, moreover, especially seems to serve as a reflection of comfortability, freedom, and – alternatively – suppression. "I want to shave my head," lamented one participant, "but [the co-chair] would kill me. I'll wait until after our court year." A former participant, after her court year, changed her hairstyle and stated the following: "I cut my bangs as part of a new chapter. I'm reclaiming my identity…without having to worry about what others think of me."

Self-introductions and purposeful communication also serve as linguistic means by which program participants combat various expectations. When advised not to include community college backgrounds in their self-introductions, for example, court members obeyed accordingly…up until coronation night, when they proudly declared their educational backgrounds "so that the young women and girls in our audience know that it's not something to be ashamed of." Likewise, "goofiness" continues to emerge as a way for court members to "be ourselves and push back against expectations." While attending events, for instance, my court sisters and I make a point of joking with community members, holding hands or linking arms, dancing at every (appropriate) opportunity, and behaving in ways that best fit our given personalities – regardless of how "unladylike" or "unprincess-like" they may be.

Subsequently, this year's Nisei Week Court appears to have charmed many members of the local community, such that our physical appearances have proven to be an insignificant part of our effectiveness as cultural ambassadors and community leaders. And so, while continuing to hide many aspects of our disobedience from program overseers, court members sometimes enlist community members for support in our semiotic ensemble of resistance. "Uncle Ron told me we don't have to wear our red lip and pearl earrings tomorrow! Just make sure not to be in any photos so QC doesn't see," instructed one of my court sisters the day before our public appearance at the Pasadena Nikkei Seniors Luncheon – where our chaperone would be a former court member who we knew "wouldn't tattle" (unlike some others as we would eventually and disappointingly learn). Otherwise trusting of the local community's support, even I have found myself asking QC members for changes in attire only when in the presence of community members who I know would "have [my] back" – as kindly expressed by those whom we now consider to be our closest aunties, uncles, and "mamas."

While attempting to enact change, moreover, court members appear to interact with program overseers using a variety of communicative strategies such as indirectness, politeness, and rapport. "Wearing our blazers at the event really meant a lot to me, since it made me feel like more of a cultural ambassador," I remember saying to a beloved trainer, in a strategic attempt to indirectly push for more business attire and cultural ambassadorship opportunities within the program. Likewise, when hoping to wear pants and sneakers as opposed to a dress and heels at a recent heritage night, my court sisters asked me to reach out to our attire coordinator – partially because she is a former Miss Western LA with whom I've been able to build rapport. While I was ultimately unable to change our general attire for the event because it was part of a brand deal, I was able to advocate for a blazer to be "added to the spreadsheet" for our next event.

Throughout the interaction, I recall trying to be as respectful as possible through polite wording, and strategic in the ordering of my questions so as not to come across as "asking for too much all at once" – a tactic recommended to me by a number of my interlocutors.

Although our collective strategy of being polite and indirect when asking for change doesn't always work and, in fact, has sometimes resulted in miscommunication and accusations of "disrespect" by overseeing members of our program, we continue to feel motivated by the various successes that have been achieved through subtle acts of resistance. Last year's court, for example, was successfully able to change their "opening ceremony" attire from a dress to a pantsuit – a symbolic act now recognized as a "milestone" for the NWQCP. Initially unable to receive approval for the change, last year's court turned to a well-liked, high-ranking QC member for help. After what seems to have been an arduous process, the 2022 Court finally got the co-chair's stamp of approval, and they still speak fondly of their victory. Similarly, in 2022 the Northern California Cherry Blossom Court started an initiative known as "leadership forum," which has since been implemented among the Nisei Week and Hawaii Cherry Blossom Courts as well. Under the guise of "leadership training," these forums have been instrumental in facilitating cross-court conversations about our shared grievances – and they continue to serve as empowering, galvanizing moments of inspiration for participants hoping to create a better future for our successors within and beyond the world of Japanese American pageantry.

Upon interviewing older members of the Queen's Committee who have been especially kind and supportive – of all program participants, and of me as both a participant and researcher – I was inspired to learn that the NWQCP has had a long history of resistance and triumph in its pursuit of women's empowerment. Beginning in the late 1970s (when my court sister's mom happened to be a newly-crowned princess), the Nisei Week Foundation decided to eliminate the

swimsuit portion of its pageant competition. Although this change sparked significant pushback from members of the community – namely from "men and chauvinists," as noted by my court sister's mom – it became a major turning point for the NWQCP. Following this victory, the program began to be advertised as less of a beauty pageant, and as more of a leadership program benefiting not only the queen but her princesses as well. I was surprised to find, moreover, that a few of my trainers have even tried to do away with the title of "queen and court" altogether – although this seems to be a widely-shared pipe dream that is well beyond any sort of horizon. Even so, program participants have been trying to implement this change since at least the late 1990s, and it continues to reemerge as a point of contention within the Nisei Week Foundation.

Consequently, a number of language ideologies appear to have formed alongside collective pursuits of freedom and empowerment within the NWQCP. Here, I use the term "language ideologies" no longer in reference to Japanese American "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions" toward the Japanese language and Japanese American English but, rather, in relation to perceptions and judgements surrounding Japanese American women's communicative choices – in English, and within the context of gender oppression. On the one hand, for example, many of my interlocutors have expressed positive – or, at least, tolerant – "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions" toward communicative choices that uphold patience, respect, and harmony "between multiple generations." As further explained by one of our favorite trainers, "when you try to do too much at one time, you get pushback. That's why you have to rely on implementing little changes here and there." Similarly, this approval of *subtle*, *respectful* opposition is exemplified by my court sisters and my semiotic ensemble of resistance, and by our trainers' emphasis on "small changes" while recounting the program's history and future trajectory.

On the other hand, a conflicting language ideology appears to value directness and honesty in the pursuit of women's empowerment. According to a former court member, for instance, previous courts have been able to implement bigger changes within the program's history "because [they] were honest. No sugar coating." Likewise, I have encountered several community members who remain negatively judgmental of program participants' apparent subservience to antiquated ideals: "Why do you let them control you like that," expressed a young Japanese American woman, upon hearing about my court sisters and my complaints. "If I were you, I'd revolt. You should publish a manifesto." As such, two competing language ideologies exist within and beyond the local Japanese American community – each with its own accompanying opinion of how exactly women should respond to forms of oppression.

As one language ideology values indirectness and subtlety while the other values the opposite, ensuing communication practices are perhaps reflective of Brown and Levinson (1987)'s discussion of politeness, and to Bailey (1997)'s work on respect – both of which allude to cultural differences in the expression and interpretation of certain forms of communication. While indirect communication may represent a form of "negative politeness," and of respect toward older generations – thus aligning with *Nisei* or supposedly "Japanese" ideologies – direct communication and the "positive politeness" it embodies appears to align more with *Sansei* or "American" ideals. This connection between generational and national identity, as outlined by my previous discussion of generational difference, poses particular complications for young Japanese American women who are neither *Nisei* nor *Sansei* – and who perhaps feel neither "Japanese" nor "American."

In alignment with Nisei vs Sansei ideologies – and thus "Japanese" vs "American" modes of communication – competing language ideologies within the NWQCP thus reflect not only

different approaches toward tradition, respect, and progress, but also toward women's empowerment as an objective. While the oppositional strategies demonstrated by recent court years are regarded as "disrespectful" by some members of QC – even by those who continue to advocate for women's empowerment – the indirectness, secrecy, and *gaman* with which we conduct our counter discourse has also been met with accusations of "submissiveness" and "conservatism" within and beyond the program. In this way, Japanese American women are once again shown to be "objectified, evaluated, studied, staged, and normalized" across multiple recursions (Inoue 2006). Within women's communities which remain united in our pursuit of gender equality, ensuing divisions form around the supposedly "correct," "proper," or "right" way of being empowered as a twenty-first century woman. Compounded by our intersectional identities as Japanese American women, we are thus subject to debate across multiple generations as demarcated by age, immigration history, national identity, collective memory, and ideological differentiation.

In this way, language ideological and semiotic assemblage can be used to understand not only multiple language ideologies pertaining to the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program, but also language shift, sociopolitical marginalization, and counter-hegemonic resistance within the surrounding Japanese American community (Kroskrity 2021). With an emphasis on Japanese American history – including immigration, incarceration, and the political economic disparities that followed – Japanese American English, Japanese American Women's Language, and related language ideologies can only be understood within the context of the forces that have brought "particular people, languages, and places together" (Kroskrity 2021) Highlighting gendered and generational divides as they pertain to authenticity, nationality, and tradition – as Japanese, American, both, or perhaps neither – an examination of Japanese American language shift

uncovers the political economies that continue to exist across multiple recursions within and beyond Japanese American echelons (Irvine and Gal 2000).

Conclusion

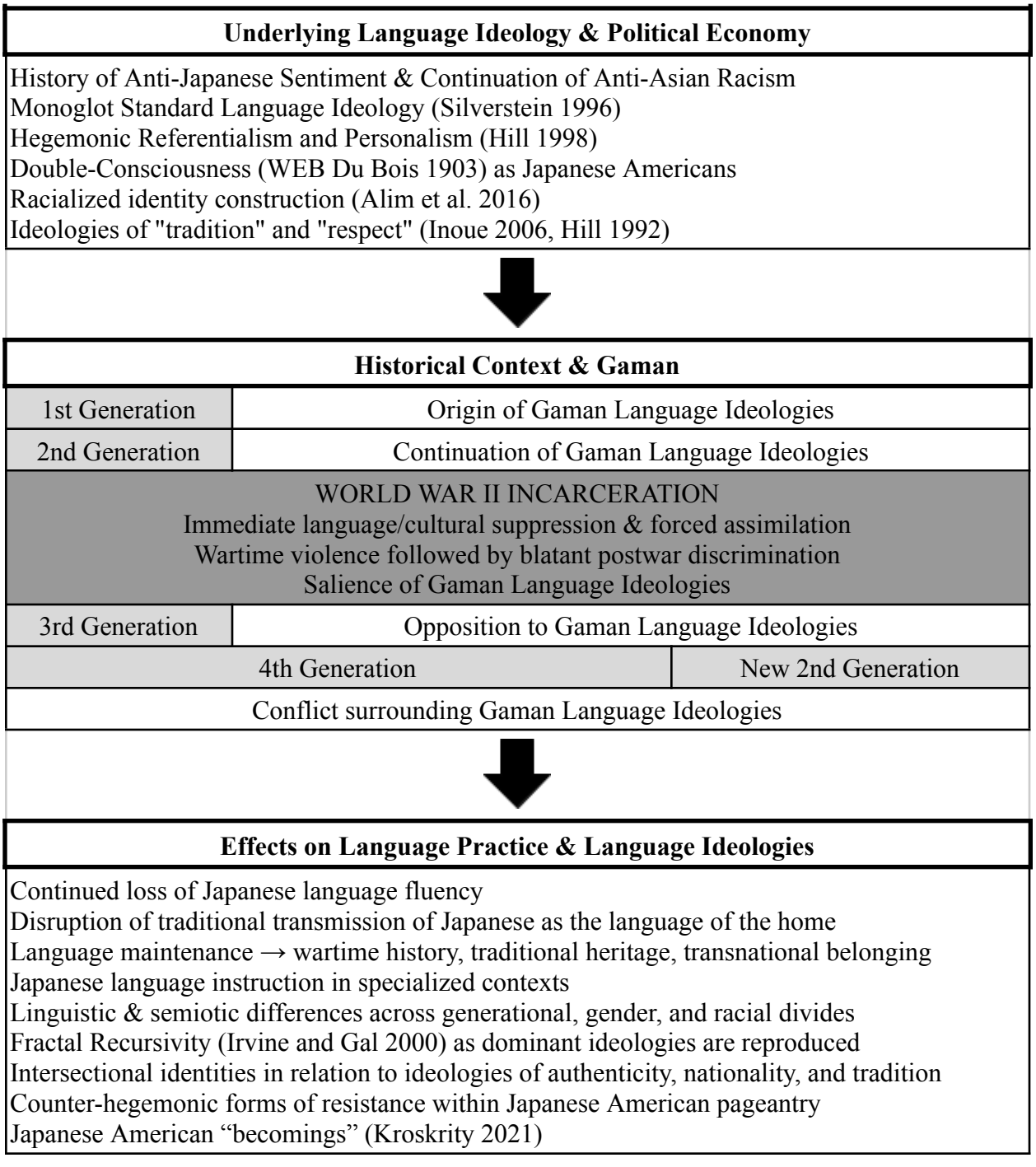

Figure 11: The Japanese American Language Ideological Assemblage

Throughout the course of my research, I have arrived at conclusions across two focuses of study within my linguistic anthropological approach to transnational identity, political ideology, and pageantry within the *Nikkei* Community. They include 1.) "Japanese American Linguistics, Semiotics, and Language Ideologies" and 2.) "Japanese American Women's Language and Oppositional Strategies." While both research areas are distinct in their attention to language's role in the construction (and perpetual reconstruction) of intersectional identities – as Japanese American, as Japanese American women, or as Japanese American princesses – I believe they can be linked through the recognition of language ideological and semiotic assemblage, with an emphasis on the multiple ideologies surrounding *gaman* as a cultural symbol that perhaps extends "beyond the borders of language itself" (Kroskrity 2021). Focusing on the contexts that explain why such ideologies occur, and how they "make contact and interact along with the people, [histories], institutions, political economic factors, and national considerations" specific to the Japanese American community of Southern California, I hope to continue to investigate the social differentiations and counter-hegemonic forms of resistance that guide Japanese American becomings at large (Kroskrity 2021, 2024).

So far, in examining the lasting effects of World War II incarceration on Japanese American language loss and transnational identity, I have found a cluster of oftentimes-competing ideologies that continue to perpetuate social differentiations across racial, gender, and generational divides. As generation and language proficiency play a significant role in such ideologies and accompanying identities not only across age, but also across (trans)national identity as Japanese, American, or Japanese American – and across generational identity as *Sansei*, *Yonsei*, or *Shin-Nisei* – I believe *Nikkei* communities offer unique insight into the roots of sociopolitical marginalization as they are understood within Linguistic

Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, and Gender Studies. In particular, I hope to further examine how incarceration, language loss, and dominant ideologies continue to impact gender and ethnic minorities beyond the Japanese American communities of Southern California.

In addition to further exploring ideologies of respect and "respectability," racial politics, and multimodal communication – especially as they relate to the experiences of Indigenous Americans, Black women, and other Asian American Pacific Islander groups (Davis 2019, Aimee Cox 2015, Perry 2018, Reyes and Lo 2008) – I aim to someday examine Japanese American language ideologies within the context of regionality and global political economies. Just as Japanese Americans differentiate themselves within *Japanese American* spaces, how might fractal recursions exist across racial, ethnic, and regional divides? Amid discussions of "model minority" politics, post-colonial movements, and the NWQCP's "blood quantum" requirement, how can I broaden my research questions to extend to the topic of interracial, interethnic, or international relations (Ruiz, Im, and Tian 2023; Harrison 1991; Ingber 2018; Ahmed 2024)? Furthermore, in examining Japanese American pageantry, what can women's communities teach us about gender constructs as they pertain to cultural diplomacy, "sisterhood," or even anthropology as a historically male-dominated discipline?

Eager to answer these questions in the years to come, I seek to maintain the theoretical and methodological approaches that I have established throughout the course of my current project. Drawing on a multitude of fields and disciplines – and expanding upon existing literature from a contemporary, doubly-native perspective – I aim to cultivate a multimodal research approach that blurs the line between observer and observed. In doing so, I continue to feel motivated and touched by the support of community members who have been kind to share their stories with me, and who have expressed how much my research means to them. As we

undertake the joint task of showcasing Japanese American history, culture, and resilience, I hope that I will be able to make a lasting impact on solidarity efforts across ethnic, gender, generational, and disciplinary boundaries – as a participant-observer, as both *Shin-Nisei* and *Yonsei*, and, of course, as a Japanese American Princess.

Appendix

Figure 1: Interview demographics – organized by age, generation, and Japanese language proficiency

Age	Generation	Japanese Language Proficiency
Early 20s	Yonsei (4th)	None
Early 20s	Yonsei (4th)	None → Beginner
Early 20s	Yonsei (4th)	Beginner
Early 20s	Shin Nisei (New 2nd)	Proficient
Early 20s	Shin Nisei (New 2nd)	Proficient
Mid 20s	Yonsei (4th)	None
Mid 20s	Yonsei (4th)	None
Mid 20s	Yonsei (4th) and Gosei (5th)	Beginner
Mid 20s	Yonsei (4th)	Beginner → Intermediate
Mid 20s	Yonsei (4th)	Proficient
Mid 20s	Sansei (3rd)	None
Mid 20s	Sansei (3rd)	Intermediate
Mid 20s	Sansei (3rd)	Intermediate
Late 20s	Sansei (3rd)	None → Beginner
Late 30s	Shin Nisei (New 2nd)	Proficient
Early 40s	Yonsei (4th)	None
Late 40s	Shin Nisei (New 2nd)	None → Beginner
Late 50s	Sansei (3rd) and Shin Nisei (New 2nd)	Intermediate
Late 50s	Sansei (3rd)	None → Beginner
Early 70s	Sansei (3rd)	None → Beginner

Figure 2: Semi-structured Interview Questions

- Identifying information
    - What is your name, and is there a pseudonym you would like to use?
    - What are your pronouns?
    - How old are you?
    - What is your ethnicity?
    - How would you describe your race?
    - Where did you grow up? Please be specific.
    - Where did your parents grow up? Please be specific.
    - What languages do you speak? What languages are spoken in your home?
    - What is your level of education?
    - How would you describe your and your family's Japanese and Japanese American background?
    - What year were you on the Nisei Week Court?
    - What was your title on the Nisei Week Court?
- Language
    - What Japanese words do you use or hear most often?
    - How would you describe the Japanese language?
    - How would you describe Japanese American English?
    - How do you react when you hear these forms of Japanese, and how are they distinguishable from one another? Do you have examples of what this might sound like?
        - Native Japanese
        - Japanese American Japanese
        - English with a Japanese accent
        - Japanese with an English accent
    - Do you ever "codeswitch" or change the way you speak depending on who you're talking to – based on race, gender, ethnicity, immigrant generation, age, role within the community (business owners, coronation judges, trainers, etc)?
        - How do you change the way you communicate when you find out someone else is…
            - Japanese American
            - yonsei vs nisei, etc
            - older or younger
        - Do you ever change the way you pronounce Japanese words, depending on who you're speaking to? Vise versa, does someone's Japanese (or English) pronunciation ever change the way you perceive or interact with them?
    - How might you speak differently as a Nisei Week Court member – to community members/in public settings, with other court members on your court, with members of older or younger courts?

    - How do you think Japanese language abilities are perceived within the NWQCP, by judges, trainers, sisters, etc
    - How is Japanese language used within the program/pageant? (advertisements/promotional material, trainers, candidates/court members)
- Experiences with the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program
    - Why did you become involved (and, if you are a former court member, why are you still involved)?
    - What has been your experience with the program? What are your favorite and least favorite parts of the program?
    - How do you perceive the program, and how do you think the program is perceived by the surrounding community and beyond?
        - Has this changed over time?
    - How has the program changed over time?
    - How do you hope to see the program continue to change, or is there anything you wish you could change about the program?
    - Why is this program important to you, and why is it important to the surrounding Japanese American community?
    - The program aims to provide leadership development and women's empowerment. In what ways does it accomplish or not accomplish this task?
    - How did you feel about your title when it was first announced? How do you feel about it now?
    - How do you think judges would describe an ideal Nisei Week Queen?
    - If different from your answer above, how would you describe an ideal Nisei Week Queen?
    - What questions were you asked during your interview and Q&A? How did they make you feel?
        - How did you answer them? How would you have answered them when talking to a friend/family member vs a judge/audience?
    - How do you feel about the NWQCP "uniform"? (makeup, clothes, shoes, etc)
    - What sort of language/communication features were you taught as a member of the court? How do you feel about using them?
        - Are they tied to Japanese or Japanese American identity and, if so, how?
    - Did your language use or communication style change throughout your involvement with the program? If so, how?
- Identity
    - How has the program influenced your identity (gender, racial, ethnic, etc)?
    - How would you describe the difference between Japanese and Japanese American? (cultural values, communication styles, etc)
        - What are Japanese American stereotypes? What are Japanese stereotypes?
            - Are there any gender differences in these stereotypes?
        - How can you tell a Japanese or Japanese American person from…
            - A Chinese or Chinese American person

            - A Korean or Korean American person
            - A southeast Asian person or southeast Asian American?
        - How has being Japanese American influenced your identity?
        - How closely do you identify with the following markers and why: Japanese, American, Japanese American, Asian American.
        - How do your Japanese language skills influence your Japanese or Japanese American identity?
            - How does it influence your relationship/interactions with your court sisters, trainers, etc
            - How did it influence your coronation title predictions or role within the program?
        - How might your race, gender, and ethnicity influence the way you communicate?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share that you would like me, the community, your fellow court members, or the Nisei Week Queen Committee to know?

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