

The Nisei: The Second Generation Okinawan-Filipinos in Metro Manila

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Abstract

How do second generation Okinawan-Filipinos or Nisei, who are offspring of intermarriages between an Okinawan and a Filipino, construct their ethnic identity? Based on interviews with eight Niseis residing in Metro Manila, the Nisei is found to have constructed his/her own identity by the use of the word 'Nisei'. While Nisei generally means second generation in Japanese, these Okinawan-Filipinos use the word Nisei to identify themselves apart from other Japanese-Filipino offspring (those whose Japanese parent comes from the Japanese mainland). Being offspring of an Okinawan mother and a Filipino father, Niseis assert the fact that they are of Okinawan heritage, and that Okinawans constitute a distinct ethnic group in the Japanese nation-state. While asserting their distinctiveness as Okinawan-Filipinos, their identities are shaped by social conditions, including that of time and place. Practicality has also become a reason for these Niseis to assert their 'Okinawanness', especially with regards to employment opportunities in Japan.

Introduction

Japan is commonly seen and portrayed as an ethnically homogenous society. The myth of mono-ethnicity and racial homogeneity has permeated the Japanese world-view, or the way the Japanese see themselves vis-à-vis the world at large. Even noted scholars, both Japanese and non-Japanese, seem to hold a common perception of Japan's unique characteristic of ethnic homogeneity (Lie 2001:1).

However, the presence of other groups of people in Japanese society challenges the long-held notion of Japanese society as ethnically pure. Foreign workers, Korean and Chinese residents, the

Ainus of Hokkaido, the Okinawans and the *burakumin* (village/hamlet people) are all part of modern Japanese society. The presence of these kinds of peoples contradicts the claim that Japan is mono-ethnic.

Aside from the aforementioned groups, it should also be noted that there are a significant number of Japanese as well as their descendants—products of Japanese and mixed marriages—living overseas. These overseas Japanese are those who migrated to other countries to seek greener pastures and lead new lives. Many of them have settled in their host countries, adopting them as their own. One country of destination is the

Philippines. The Japanese and their descendants then constitute a part of contemporary Philippine society.

Many studies have been done on the Japanese as well as their offspring in the Philippines. These offspring are mostly products of intermarriage between a Filipino¹ wife and a Japanese husband. In most cases, the Filipino wife was working in Japan as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) when she met her Japanese husband. However, cases wherein the wife is Japanese or Okinawan and the husband is Filipino are less common. During the post-war era (i.e., 1950s to 1960s), however, a significant number of Okinawan² women, married to Filipino men who worked as OFWs, migrated to and settled in the Philippines. They brought with them the families and dreams they have started to build.

In 1903, a group of Japanese were contracted to work on the construction of the Benguet Road, now commonly known as Kennon Road (Yu-Jose 1999:13). These Japanese were mostly composed of those coming from Hiroshima and Okinawa. After completion of the Benguet Road, some of these Japanese remained in Benguet and became farmers, with the others migrating to Manila and a significant number migrating to Davao (Ibid 14). Most of those who migrated to Davao worked on the famed manila hemp (abaca). From 1925 to the 1930s,

the Philippines was a popular choice for Okinawan migrants (Yu-Jose 2002:109). With the onset of World War II, however, most of the Japanese in the country were repatriated to Japan, most of them leaving their Filipino wives and families behind.

During the post-war era, it was the Filipinos this time who were tasked to go to Japan and Okinawa to work in military installations of the United States government. This was during the United States' occupation of Japan.³ The first group of these Filipinos were soldiers (Philippine Scouts) who formed part of the American forces stationed at Okinawa. Most of the non-soldiers, meanwhile, landed in contractual jobs as laborers, cooks, and clerks, as well as in white-collar jobs, as engineers, medical doctors, supervisors, and musicians, among others (Yu-Jose 2002:117). By the late 1940s to the early 1950s, there were an estimated 6,000 Filipinos in Okinawa, 90 percent of whom were male and single (Tobaru 1998:31). A number of these Filipinos, particularly those in Okinawa, married Okinawan women. When the contracts of these Filipinos expired and were not renewed, these Filipinos went back home, bringing their Okinawan wives⁴ with them. This marks a significant part of post-war Japanese migration to the Philippines, this time composed mostly of Okinawan women, who came in the 1950s-1960s.

This article is based on a study about

the offspring of intermarriages between these Okinawans and Filipinos, called Okinawan-Filipino Nisei⁵. *Nisei* is a general term meaning second-generation in Japanese (*ni* means two, *sei* means generation) and is particularly used by overseas Japanese communities to pertain to their Japanese ancestry. These second generation Okinawan-Filipinos choose to call themselves Nisei, distinguishing them from the first generation *issei* and the succeeding generation of *sansei* (third generation).

As a contribution to existing scholarly works on the Japanese in the Philippines, more particularly, that of the second generation Okinawan-Filipinos, hereunto referred as Nisei⁶, this article answers the question: how have the Niseis constructed their own distinct ethnic identity?

Ethnic Identity and Transnationalism

Ethnic identity is shaped by various cultural, social and political factors and depends mostly on the actor's perception of who he or she is in the context of these factors through space and time. It is a conscious awareness of who and what one is in relation to a group (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1975: 375). Identity is seen as fluid and understood only 'in relation to its own space and time as well as the space and time with which it intersects' (Aronowitz, in Rajchman 1995:

115). Hence ethnic identities currently change and are not only defined by the individual, but also according to the various loci of his or her social relations. Moreover, globalization has enabled the geographic mobility of actors through nation-state borders, hence creating other forms of ethnic identities.

Ethnic identities should not be etically seen as fixed in time, in the sense that a person can only have one single ethnic identity at a given time. In the case of an offspring of mixed parentage, which sometimes leads to confusion in ethnic identification, the usual recourse is to identify with either parent's ethnic lineage. However, in some circumstances, a dual or combined or even a multiple ethnic identity is even encouraged by these people (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1975: 378). It is then that ethnic identity markers such as Asian-American (as well as other 'hyphenated' identities), conceived of in the singular (as opposed to the Asian or American binary), arise, which in most cases, are recognized ethnic groups.

While identities are negotiated, in some cases the external ascription (as opposed to self-ascription) of a group's ethnic identity may be said to be a particular group's desire to gain control and dominance over another. Paine (in Cohen, 2000: 10) mentions the situation of the aboriginal people, when at first

contact with the (white) settlers, were 'scarcely' able to 'negotiate their claimed identities' as 'they were renamed and classified without much regard to their own sensibilities and concerns'.

These facets of ethnic identity as socially constructed and subjective, fluid, and not fixed in time, could take on a radical turn when viewed in the context of transnationalism. Transnationalism refers to the 'multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation-states' (Vertovec 1999: 447). Ong (1999 : 4), however, focuses more on the notion of a global culture, using the term transnationalism to refer to 'the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of culture'. On the one hand, transnationalism works towards the production of culture, while on the other hand, it could also be seen as a 'mode of cultural reproduction', the former through the processes of blending, syncretism, and hybridity, the latter through global media and communications (Vertovec 1999: 451). Ong (1999 : 4) meanwhile uses the term transnationality, or the 'condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space' to illustrate the cultural linkages generated by global capital in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly among the diasporic Chinese. While the Niseis in this study are technically not a product of the post-war Okinawan diaspora (which took place mostly in Latin America), they

are part of a global link of transnational individuals tracing their roots to an Okinawan heritage.⁷

Data

Eight Niseis currently residing in Metro Manila were interviewed, and case studies were constructed for each. A mail survey was also done in order to obtain demographical data of the Niseis currently living in Metro Manila. The sample was selected through non-probability (i.e., purposive) sampling. The Nisei population living in the Greater Metro Manila Area⁸ (GMMA) served as the sample frame. This is because many of the provincial addresses were incomplete.

Survey questionnaires⁹ were sent to 387 respondents through postal mail. Their names were obtained from a directory of members of the Philippine Okinawan Society (POS)¹⁰, appended in its 20th Anniversary Souvenir Programme dated 2002. Each respondent was given a pseudonym to protect his/her privacy. While a mail survey does not usually guarantee a 100 percent response rate, this method was the most inexpensive and least time-consuming compared to a self-administered or face-to-face survey, which would entail travel costs as well. With this, it was decided that the sample (n = 387) be the whole population of Niseis currently residing in Metro Manila. This is due to the fact that the probability of having a 70-80 percent response rate through mail surveys is not

high hence obtaining a probability sample from a population of 387 through this type of survey technique is not advisable.

This researcher also attended POS monthly meetings as well as an annual sports festival as an observer.

From the Kingdom of the Ryukyus to Okinawa Prefecture

As was previously mentioned, Japanese society is not entirely homogenous. The presence of different groups of people supports this claim. Okinawans, despite being Japanese nationals, are more often than not seen as a 'different kind of Japanese' and have been subject to discrimination. This section provides a short look at Okinawa's history from its beginnings as an independent trading kingdom to its current place in the Japanese nation-state.

Okinawa prefecture, located at the southern tip of the Japanese Islands, is comprised of some 70 islands from the Ryukyu archipelago. This archipelago was once known as the Kingdom of the Ryukyus, an independent kingdom strategically located between the Japanese mainland and South East Asia.

The Kingdom of the Ryukyus was known to be a trading state during the late 14th to the late 16th centuries and was part of a trade network that

spread to India, to the Persian Gulf, to Madagascar and beyond (Purves 2003). It had also fostered trade relations with neighboring countries such as Korea, China and Japan, in the north, and the South East Asian countries in the south.

In 1879, the Meiji government of Japan annexed the Ryukyu Islands and officially made the islands into a prefecture, now known as Okinawa prefecture. Japan's annexation of Okinawa in 1879 forced a policy of cultural assimilation into the mainstream Japanese culture, thus putting the language/dialects and customs of the Okinawans in danger of extinction. A process of Japanization was carried out on the prefecture and its people to make them more 'civilized'. Okinawa was seen as backward, and hence to culturally assimilate into the mainstream Japanese culture, Okinawans forcibly underwent a process of cultural assimilation, which entailed the required study of the Japanese language as well as the adoption of Japanese surnames, among others. Okinawan lifestyles, such as their way of dressing and walking barefoot, were all seen as backward and hence, not Japanese, since the Japanese were 'progressive' (Christy 1993, in Weiner 2004: 178). However, while 'forced assimilation' made the Okinawans 'Japanese', they were and still are at the periphery of Japanese society (Amemiya 1998). These developments also coincided with the emigration of young

Okinawan laborers, both men and women, to the Japanese mainland (Molasky 2001: 14) as well as overseas, in the 1900s.

Okinawa was occupied by the American forces from 1945-1972, 20 years more than the occupation of mainland Japan, which lasted only until 1952. Prior to this, Okinawa was the site of armed combat during the Second World War and was Japan's last line of defense before its defeat (Lie 2001: 99). The Battle of Okinawa was said to be the longest and the hardest campaigns of World War II (Zabalka 1959: 19). There have been many casualties in this battle, including around 150,000 Okinawan civilians. Okinawa's role during the war can be said to be that of a 'sacrificial lamb' that bore the inevitable consequences of war and various atrocities.

At present, much of the American bases in the Japanese archipelago are found on Okinawa prefecture. The continued presence of the bases has stirred up problems and controversies, which are of great importance to present-day Japan, its relations with the U.S., as well as with the role Okinawa plays in the Japanese nation-state. However, this would open up another topic and hence would not be elaborated here.

A Look at the Nisei: Findings from Eight Cases

The Okinawan-Filipino¹¹ Nisei is an offspring of an Okinawan parent and a Filipino parent. Some of these offspring were born in Okinawa and raised in the Philippines. Some were born and raised in Okinawa and eventually moved to the Philippines, after spending their childhood in Okinawa. Others, however, were already born and raised in the Philippines.

Most of the fathers of these Okinawan-Filipino Niseis were employees in the United States bases in Okinawa during the American Occupation of the prefecture (1945-1972). A number of these Filipinos eventually married Okinawan women and started to raise families of their own. When the contracts of these Filipino workers expired, they had to go back home to the Philippines, bringing along their Okinawan wives and their children, to settle in their hometown. These Okinawan women are considered as isseis or first generation Okinawans¹² who settled in the Philippines during the post-War period.

It was not easy for these Okinawan women to marry a foreigner, more so a Filipino. For one, most Okinawans during that time frowned upon the idea of intermarriage with a person not of their own culture or ethnic background. This was attributed to the so-called 'clannishness' or the strong family ties

among these Okinawans. Marriage, for some of these women, however, gave them an opportunity to seek better living conditions, due in part to the fact that these Filipinos were being paid more than the Okinawan workers in the U.S. bases. With this, a number of Okinawan women experienced being disowned by their families when they married Filipinos. Thus, aside from the fact that their husbands' work contracts had expired, migrating to the Philippines with their Filipino husbands became a choice for most of these women.

Upon migration to their husbands' hometowns, these women were not spared from discrimination and suspicion from Filipinos, particularly those living in the same community as they were. Considered as Japanese, they were seen as enemies by the Filipinos during that time, owing much to the emotional scars left by the Japanese during the War. These Okinawan isseis experienced much taunting and were considered as outcasts, prompting them to 'consciously assimilate' (Maehara 2001: 16) into Filipino culture and learn the language and customs of the locals. They did this in order to hide their Okinawan identity. During the immediate post-War years (1950s-1960s), these women adopted a Filipino identity due mainly to a heightened anti-Japanese sentiment (Ibid, 72). Another factor in the conscious assimilation of Okinawan women was the absence of an Okinawan community that

would serve as a support group for these women. Hence, assimilation was a given option.

It should be noted that these Okinawan-Filipino Niseis are of both Okinawan and Filipino ancestry, unlike other overseas Nisei. Most overseas Okinawan Niseis, in Latin America in particular, are purely of Okinawan ethnicity. This is due to the fact that Okinawan emigrants to the Americas and other islands in the Pacific brought along their families with them. In some cases, Okinawan emigrants who were single during the time of emigration marry overseas Okinawans in their host countries. Hence, their offspring—the Nisei or the second generation—do not have shared 'shared' ethnic backgrounds.

The identity of these second generation Okinawan-Filipinos is constituted in the word Nisei. This word, while literally meaning second generation, has been used by these second generation Okinawan-Filipinos as a term by which to identify themselves. The usual term for 'descendants of the Japanese born outside Japan' (Sasaki 2002: 126) is *Nikkei* or *Nikkei-jin*. The term *Nikkei* encompasses a wider group (i.e., people of Japanese descent, regardless of generational differences). Therefore, a second generation overseas Japanese may aptly be called a Nisei *Nikkei-jin*. However, conversations and interviews with these second generation

Okinawan-Filipinos revealed their preference to call themselves (Okinawan-Filipino) Nisei and refer to themselves as such, instead of using the generic term Nikkei-jin or nisei Nikkei-jin. Likewise, they call the first generation issei, the third, sansei, the fourth yonsei, and so on. They classify themselves according to generation. The concept of an Okinawan identity had already become inherent in these generational terminologies. These terms have been used by these people to identify themselves. What is interesting to note here is the fact that, while the term issei actually pertains to the immigrant generation, which was born in Okinawa (hence the first generation to settle in the Philippines), the term has been used to refer to the Okinawan mothers themselves. The term Nisei, strictly speaking, should be used to indicate the first generation born in the country where their parents, who are usually both Japanese or Okinawan, immigrated. However, this term was used in the Philippine context to identify instead the offspring of an Okinawan and a Filipino, regardless of birthplace—whether he or she was born in Okinawa or in the Philippines. While the reasons for this may not be consciously apparent to the Nisei (or maybe even to the isseis) themselves, it may be inferred that the use of these terminologies for identification, may be an assertion of the value given to 'pure blood' or 'pure genes' by these Okinawans, particularly the Okinawan mothers married to Filipinos. Within the

context of the Japanese state, Okinawans are already marginalized, because they are seen as distinct from most Japanese. Tracing one's heritage to both Okinawa and another culture (i.e., Filipino), hence being of mixed lineage, may not be seen as favourable to a people who value 'pure genes', as in the case of both Okinawa and Japan. Hence, issei has been used to refer to the Okinawan mother (or in some cases, father), with Nisei used to refer to her offspring, which in the Philippine case, is of mixed Okinawan and Filipino lineage.

These people see themselves as Okinawans and distinguish themselves from the mainland Japanese. They acknowledge the fact that Okinawa is part of Japan and that Okinawans are considered as Japanese nationals, however, they see their Okinawan lineage as distinct from that of the mainstream Japanese. Most of these Nisei indicate Okinawan cuisine as distinct from that of the Japanese mainland. According to them, the importance given to pork in the diet, as well as the presence of other food and ingredients usually found in tropical climates (i.e., bitter melon), make Okinawan cuisine distinct. Most of the respondents also mentioned the warmth of the Okinawans in relating with other people, as well as their hospitality, as distinguishing these people from the mainland Japanese. These cases point out an assertion of 'Okinawanness' or being Okinawan, as distinct from being Japanese, which may be seen to result from the Okinawans'

Table 1. Demographic Indicators of Key Informants

Name	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Place of Birth	Education	Socioeconomic Status	Parent	Year of Birth	Language Proficiency
Rita	46-50	Female	Married	Okinawa	College	No info given	Mother	1961	Some knowledge
Mia	51-55	Female	Married	Okinawa	Post-graduate	Middle Class	Mother	1954	Not fluent
Joey	51-55	Male	Married	Okinawa	Post-graduate	No info given	Mother	1959	Not fluent
Agatha	56-60	Female	Single	Philippines	College	Lower Middle Class	Father	1938	None
Harry	31-35	Male	Single	Philippines	Some College	Middle Class	Mother	1957	Fluent
Robert	41-45	Male	Married	Philippines	College	Middle Class	Mother	1955	Some knowledge
Amy	36-40	Female	Single	Philippines	Post-graduate	Middle Class	Mother	1955	Fluent
Eric	51-55	Male	Married	Okinawa	College	Middle Class	Mother	1950s	Some knowledge

history of being an independent kingdom in early years. The term *Uchinanchu* is used by Okinawans as an identity marker to distinguish themselves from the Japanese from the mainland, whom they refer to as *Yamatonchu*. This then shows their ethnic consciousness as a people of Okinawan heritage. For the second generation, identifying themselves as Nisei sets them apart from other second-generation Japanese descendants in the Philippines.

Among the eight Niseis interviewed, four were born in Okinawa (refer to Table 1). Two of them, Rita and Eric, had spent their childhood and adolescent years in the Japanese prefecture before they moved to the Philippines at the ages of 17 and ten, respectively. In the case of Mia and Joey, their families moved to the Philippines when they were still small children—Mia was three years old, Joey was five. With this, it can be inferred that Okinawa, being the birthplace of these four Niseis, left an

imprint on their minds. Meanwhile, the other four Niseis interviewed were already born and raised in the Philippines, but were able to visit Okinawa.

Most of the Niseis interviewed were already POS members for more than ten years. Some joined the organization upon its inception in 1982. Some were invited by their family and friends; however some joined voluntarily, due to the fact that their friends and family were already part of the organization. Mia, however, joined voluntarily for the main purpose of keeping in touch with her Okinawan heritage. Meanwhile, Amy said that as long as a person is part-Okinawan, he or she 'automatically' becomes a member of the POS. While most of the stated reasons took into consideration kin and blood ties, as well as ethnic group identification (i.e., 'to have friends who have Okinawan blood'), it is interesting to note that Agatha saw the organization more for business networking.

In the POS meetings attended by this researcher, it was apparent that some of the members attended the meetings due to the fact that they are seeking assistance for work in Japan. While acknowledging their Okinawan ethnic identity through membership in the POS, membership in the organization has become more of a means for economic advancement through overseas work, particularly in Japan.

Most of the issei mothers have at least some knowledge of Tagalog or a Philippine dialect, although only two of them are fluent in Tagalog. This may be attributed to the level of assimilation of Okinawan women to Philippine society upon settling in the Philippines in the 1950s to the 1960s. Due to heightened emotions against the Japanese brought about by Filipinos' experiences during the war, these Okinawan women saw the need to hide their ethnic identity by assimilating or even adopting a Filipino ethnic identity. This was usually done through learning Tagalog or the dialect in the place of settlement. Such cases are evident in Maehara's (2001) study on Okinawan women married to Filipinos who came to the Philippines in the post-war years. Ethnic identity, for these Okinawan women, became flexible and consciously shaped and chosen according to social conditions in a particular time. While most of the Okinawan women during those times experienced discrimination, among the issei mothers of the seven respondents,

only three experienced discrimination by Filipinos.

Cultural transmission through cultural literacy helps in the formation of a person's identity. In the case of the Nisei's bicultural (and 'bi-ethnic') identity, exposure to either culture would increase a person's awareness of that particular ethnic identity. Cultural literacy would take the form of language learning and education, as well as exposure to the particular culture through media (e.g., television, radio, newspapers).

Child upbringing is also a factor in cultural transmission. In the case of the eight Niseis, majority mentioned that their Okinawan mothers were more influential in their upbringing than their fathers, who had to work abroad to support their families. They also attributed the values education at home to their mothers. The respondents said that values such as patience, industriousness, respect for elders and dead ancestors, humility, courtesy, and gentleness. While the values mentioned may be more universal in nature than culturally-specific, the mention of these values indicates that, since the respondents' mothers were influential in the respondents' values education, the values imparted are Japanese. This may also be seen as a stereotype attributed to the Japanese, in this case, to Okinawans.

Meanwhile, transmitting the Japanese language or the Okinawan dialect would obviously fall under the responsibility of the mother, herself an Okinawan. Among the four Niseis born in Okinawa, only Rita and Eric are fluent in Japanese. This may be attributed to the fact that they spent most of their childhood in the prefecture and attended school there. Environment very much plays a key role in language acquisition. Rita is even adept in the Okinawan dialect since her mother used to speak to her in Okinawan. In most cases, however, the issei mother, upon moving to the Philippines would have to assimilate into the local community, learning the local language as well as educating herself in the local customs, due to the post-war social conditions of those times. This then enabled her to 'live' as a local, as a Filipino. In some cases, the issei mother chose to hide her Okinawan identity in order to escape discrimination. Hence, her fluency or near fluency in Filipino, as well as the conscious adoption of a Filipino identity enabled her to raise her Nisei children in a more Filipino way, speaking the language of their fathers. Hence, Japanese language acquisition, as illustrated in most of the cases, took on a more formalized approach through study in language centers and institutions.

Exposure to aspects of Okinawan culture such as food (e.g., bitter melon which is not originally part of Japanese mainland diet), language (e.g., knowledge of an Okinawan

dialect and Japanese), customs (e.g., having a *genkan*, a space where shoes are left before entering the house), traditions, and values (e.g., having a Japanese name; giving son a Japanese name) contribute in generating awareness of a person's ethnic heritage. This creates an impetus for them to acknowledge and eventually take pride in their ethnic identities. Trips to Okinawa by these Niseis, be it for work, study, or visiting relatives, indicate awareness of their Okinawan heritage as well as a willingness to be in touch with their heritage.

Establishing contact with Okinawan relatives also helps in making one more aware of one's Okinawan identity. The presence of kin in Okinawa brings about a sense of connectedness to one's Okinawan roots, thus reinforcing one's acknowledgement of his or her Okinawan ethnicity. The presence of Okinawan relatives also helps in motivating Okinawan descendants to keep in touch not only with their kin, but also with aspects of Okinawan culture. This creates an interest or an increased interest in Okinawa and or aspects of Okinawan culture, such as food, tourism, and songs. For some, this may also motivate them to go to Okinawa to pursue further studies or find work there.

All of the respondents acknowledge the fact that they are of mixed Filipino and Okinawan heritage. Most see themselves as half-Okinawan and half-Filipino, although they see themselves as more Filipino

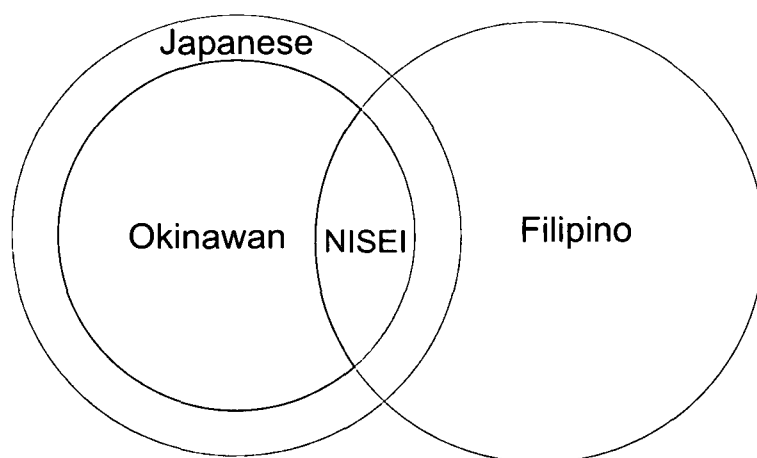
owing to the fact that they were born and raised in the Philippines. It is interesting to note though that the Niseis who were born in Okinawa (i.e., Rita, Mia, Joey, Eric) see themselves as more Filipino. This may be attributed to the fact that they have spent most of their lives in the Philippines and have become established individuals in both their professions and businesses. However, Eric, who has spent his childhood in Okinawa and only moved to the Philippines when he was ten years old, explicitly stated that he is 'more Okinawan than other Niseis'. This is due mainly to his adeptness in the Japanese language, which helps him to understand the isseis better and enable him to locate himself in their shoes. He sees himself as more Filipino than Okinawan mainly because he is already settled in the Philippines, and has been living in the country for more than 40 years already.

The Nisei's identity is situational, in that they see themselves depending on various situations or circumstances. For most of them, their ethnic identity is constructed more by spatial or geographical, as well as temporal ('historical time') factors. Being situated for a greater period of time in the Philippines, the Niseis began to see themselves as 'more Filipino', while still acknowledging the fact that they are half-Okinawan and half-Filipino. They do not see themselves solely as Filipino. They see themselves as half-Okinawan and half-Filipino, but more Filipino—an assertion

that may seem problematic at first, for how can being half-Okinawan and half-Filipino translate into being more Filipino? Being more Filipino, while asserting that they are half-Okinawan and half-Filipino then is the Nisei situating himself or herself in his or her current geographical location. Being in the Philippines would presuppose more identification with the Filipino people and culture since this would give a sense of belongingness to that particular society. There is a need to connect oneself to what is familiar, and not see oneself as different. A similar case would also be seen when the Nisei is situated in Okinawa. To belong to Okinawan society, he or she should assert his or her 'Okinawanness' by identifying himself or herself as Okinawan. They are then able to shuttle between being a Filipino and an Okinawan.

Identifying oneself as Okinawan, as opposed to one's identification as Japanese, is an attestation of one's desire to situate oneself in a position of difference within the Japanese nation-state, contesting the myth of Japanese ethnic homogeneity held by most Japanese, as well as by outsiders. An Okinawan is considered to be a Japanese national, as Okinawa is currently considered part of Japan and is one of Japan's prefectures. However, the identity marker Japanese, as used by these Nisei respondents, mainly pertains to those from the Japanese mainland. Hence, the term Okinawan or Uchinanchu

Figure 1: Location of Nisei Identity



is used to distinguish themselves ethnically from the rest of the Japanese people.

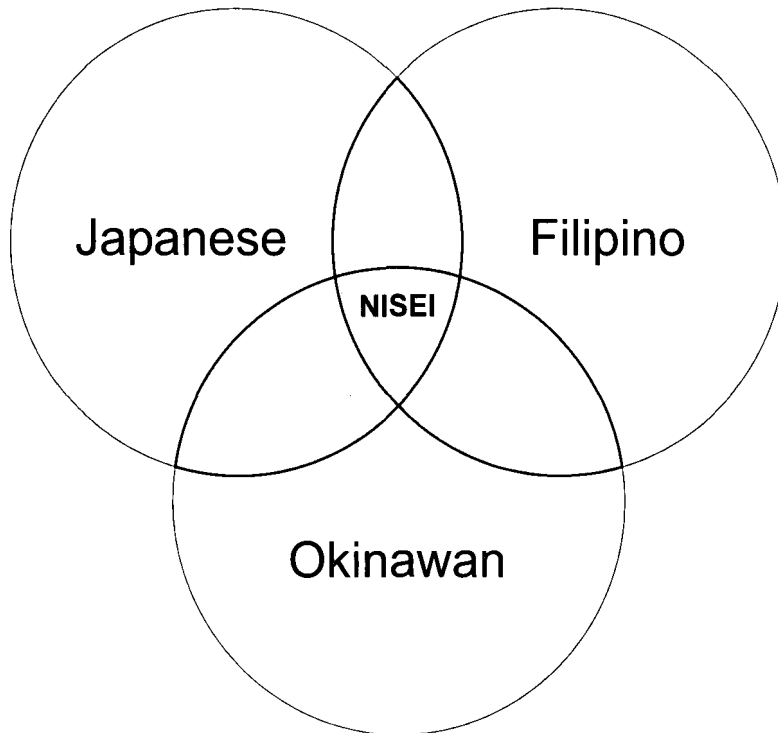
Having a certain ethnicity is usually attributable to parentage. The respondents primarily see themselves as Filipino because their father or mother is Filipino; they also see themselves as Okinawan due to their mother's or father's Okinawan lineage. A Filipino or an Okinawan identity is usually construed by these people to be related to birthplace. Aside from owing their Filipino identities to their Filipino parent, most of the Niseis see themselves as Filipino due to the fact that they were born and raised in the Philippines. For those born in Okinawa, meanwhile, being Filipino translates into being settled and spending most of their lives in the Philippines. Ethnic identity then is being defined according to spatio-temporal considerations. Where one is at a given time, is where his or her ethnic identity is.

This brings us then to ask where the Nisei and the Nisei identity is located. Figures 1 and 2 further illustrate this.

Figure 1 shows the location of the Nisei's identity, as consciously constructed by these individuals. The Niseis interviewed see themselves mainly as Okinawan-Filipinos, giving emphasis to being Okinawan vis-à-vis being Japanese. While consciously or unconsciously done by these individuals, they assert the fact that Okinawans constitute a distinct ethnic group in the Japanese nation-state, and that Okinawans, being Japanese nationals, are generally subsumed under a singular identity marker, that of Japanese.

While generally seen by many as Japanese-Filipinos, these individuals assert their difference by referring to themselves as Okinawan-Filipino Nisei, or

Figure 2: Location of Nisei Vis-à-vis the Japanese and Philippine Nation-States



plainly Nisei. Hence, the Nisei, as can be gleaned from the diagram, is a subset, of the intersection of Japanese and Filipino ethnicities.

Figure 2 shows the interrelation between Filipino and Japanese identities as well as the interrelation between Japanese and Okinawan, and Filipino and Okinawan identities. The relationship between the Filipino and the Japanese identity here in this diagram may be seen vis-à-vis the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) of a nation-state, where its citizens or nationals swear allegiance

or loyalty to. Membership in a particular nation-state usually entails the right to participate as a socio-political entity.

The Nisei can be viewed as the integration of Japanese, Filipino, and Okinawan identities. This may be attributed to the following factors: 1) the Filipino nationality of the Nisei, and hence the identification as Filipino, 2) the Okinawan parentage of the Nisei, which they acknowledge and see as a factor in their identification as Okinawan, 3) geographical location or residency, wherein living in a particular place (even

just for several years) could define one's identification to either Okinawan or Filipino, 4) the desire to participate in the Japanese labor market, and the advantage the Nisei has over other people in gaining employment, and 5) the interest to acquire a Japanese citizenship, a privilege they have over other people. The fourth and fifth factors may be attributed to the location of Okinawa in the Japanese nation-state, as a prefecture, and the location of Okinawans in Japanese society, as Japanese nationals. Thus, people of Japanese descent, including those of Okinawan descent, are given an opportunity to be part of the Japanese nation-state, as well as take part in the Japanese labor market and its socio-political affairs.

The acknowledgment of having a distinct Okinawan ethnic identity vis-à-vis a Japanese one may be seen as asserting one's difference within the context of the Japanese nation-state, challenging the commonly-held myth of Japanese cultural homogeneity. This desire to connect to Okinawa may be seen as an assertion or reassertion of Okinawan identity and the desire to belong to an Okinawa, and be part of the transnational community of Okinawans, thus enabling them to take part in it. While asserting difference, the possible shuttle to a Japanese identity would indicate the desire to be part of the Japanese nation-state, since Okinawa is part of Japan, and Okinawans, Japanese

nationals. Shuttle to a Filipino identity would mean the acknowledgment of one's Filipino nationality as well as one's Filipino ethnic identity, which could be attributed to parentage. Hence, parentage, geographical location, and privileges of Okinawans and their descendants in terms of employment and the acquisition of citizenship, are important factors in the Nisei's construction of their ethnic identity.

The Nisei: A Syncretic Dualism

The Nisei is characteristically able to shuttle to and from one ethnic identity to another—that of being Okinawan and Filipino—while still remaining an Okinawan-Filipino Nisei, the identity they have constructed to define themselves. Being an Okinawan-Filipino Nisei sets them apart from other Okinawan descendants as they share both Okinawan and Filipino cultures owing much to their parentage. Hence, they are able to shuttle from being Okinawan and being Filipino at a given time and space. Their shuttling involves identifying with either ethnic identity, since for these Nisei, there is no greater ethnic identity—they are half-Okinawan and half-Filipino. They are equally Okinawan and Filipino.

Instances wherein these Niseis identify themselves as more Filipino or more Okinawan depend on certain

circumstances, particularly that of current locale. This continuous shuttle has defined the Okinawan-Filipino Nisei's ethnic identity. Hence, the Nisei is a syncretic dualism. The Nisei is syncretic, in the sense that the Nisei is a hybrid of both Okinawan and Filipino ethnic identities. The Nisei is also characteristically dualistic, in the sense that they have an ability to shuttle to and from either of these ethnic identities. However, the Nisei should be seen as devoid of any ethnic or cultural binaries despite their ability to shuttle from one ethnic identity to another. This shuttle cannot be seen as entirely identifying with either being Filipino or being Okinawan. A shuttle to a Filipino identity does not mean an entire identification with being Filipino; the identity as Nisei is still present since a shuttle to a Filipino or Okinawan identity is usually momentary and is defined according to the external conditions such as locale, time, and even social conditions. Shuttling should be seen as transitory but continuous. The Nisei would continue to shuttle as long as particular situations demand it. The Nisei identity then, as characteristic of other ethnic identities, is fluid and situational.

The ethnic identity constituting the concept of Nisei is a conscious construction of these second-generation Okinawan-Filipinos which distinguishes them from Japanese, Okinawans, Filipinos, second generation Japanese-Filipinos, and other second generation

overseas Okinawans (non-Okinawan-Filipinos). There is awareness and a need to assert their identity as Nisei (or Okinawan-Filipino Nisei) vis-à-vis the Japanese and the Philippine nation-state. Their identity as Okinawans gave them more opportunities to find work in Japan. It has also enabled them to be Japanese nationals, an opportunity not easily available to those without Japanese or Okinawan lineage. This was also evident in the POS, wherein the organization has become a means for some Niseis to seek better lives overseas, particularly in Japan. Practicality then becomes the basis for choosing ethnic identities, and in the case of the Niseis, for shuttling to either identity.

Conclusion

Overseas Okinawans, in particular those having mixed Okinawan and non-Okinawan ancestry, have extended the scope of Okinawan ethnicity, creating a transnational community of Okinawans linked primarily through their Okinawan lineage. The assertion of an Okinawan ethnic identity within the Japanese nation-state and even overseas points to the fact that there are groups, while considered as Japanese, which try to distinguish themselves by turning to distinct cultural markers to set them apart from the mainland Japanese.

One of these groups is the Okinawan-Filipino Nisei. A hybrid of Okinawan and Filipino cultures, it has created its own identity distinct from other groups. This has characterized the Nisei's identity as fluid and capable of shuttling to and from an Okinawan. However, a shift to either ethnic identity does not mean an entire identification with that particular ethnic identity. This is because the shuttling that happens is not only transitory, but also continuous and that the Nisei would continue to shuttle as long as particular situations demand it.

Endnotes

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¹'Filipino' is a highly problematized concept, and throughout history the term has been used differently. For the purpose of this study, the term Filipino is used for those who are Filipino nationals, despite their ethnic backgrounds. Hence, a Filipino national who is ethnic Chinese would be considered a Filipino, in this study.

²The term 'Okinawan' is used in this study to mean a person from Okinawa prefecture and will be used throughout this study to

differentiate these people from the so-called 'mainland' Japanese. Despite being Japanese nationals, Okinawans, in this study are to be identified as 'Okinawans', while those Japanese from other prefectures are to be identified as 'Japanese'.

³It should be noted here that U.S. occupation of mainland Japan ended in 1952, while in Okinawa, it ended 20 years later, in 1972.

⁴Some of these workers already had children (by their Okinawan wives) when they returned to the Philippines.

⁵A first generation Okinawan or issei, in this context, is the Okinawan parent. A Nisei or second generation Okinawan, in this study, refers to the offspring of an issei (Okinawan parent) and a Filipino parent. While a third generation Okinawan or sansei is an offspring of either: a) both Nisei parents, or b) a Nisei parent and a non-Nisei parent.

⁶For this paper, the term Nisei is to be written as a proper noun, with the first letter capitalized. This is for the purpose of establishing the term Nisei as an identity marker in itself.

⁷A worldwide network of Okinawan organizations exists. Networking through the internet illustrates this. Examples of websites are: <http://www.uchinanchu.org>, and <http://www.uchinanchu.com>.

⁸The term Greater Metro Manila Area or GMMA is used in this study to refer to the cities and municipalities covered in the National Capital Region (NCR) as well as those cities and municipalities that are in close proximity to the area, such as those in Bulacan and Rizal (i.e., Valenzuela, Malabon, Antipolo, and Cainta).

⁹It should also be noted that advance-notice letters were sent prior to the sending of questionnaires. This was primarily done for the purpose of formality. This also served the purpose of monitoring probable respondents to be sent questionnaires, based on the rate of undelivered mail (i.e., 'return to sender' mails).

¹⁰The Philippine Okinawan Society (POS) was established in 1982 by a group of Okinawan businessmen as well as some students studying in the Philippines at that time. Membership is open to individuals of Okinawan ancestry, although those who would like to be part of the POS, despite not having Okinawan lineage, are welcomed as honorary members.

¹¹The term 'Okinawan-Filipino' is more specific to those tracing their roots to Okinawa prefecture. In this study though,

the term is more specific to those who trace their parentage to both Okinawa and the Philippines. The term itself is also general and encompasses all Filipinos of Okinawan heritage, whether they belong to the second, third, or fourth generation. The term usually denotes someone having a Filipino nationality and an Okinawan or part-Okinawan ethnicity, much like the Chinese-Filipinos and the Filipino-Americans. With this, a Japanese with Okinawan lineage who became a naturalized Filipino may theoretically be seen as an Okinawan-Filipino as well.

¹²While a significant number of Okinawans arrived in the Philippines before the War, most of the presently living isseis are Okinawan wives of Filipinos who worked in Okinawa during the Allied Occupation of Japan. These women also form the core of the POS. Strictly speaking, issei refers to the first generation immigrants. Hence, the pre-War Okinawans who settled in the Philippines were also isseis. Since most of the current Okinawan-Filipinos trace their Okinawan roots to first generation migrants, the term issei in this study mainly refers to an Okinawan mother.

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