

DISORGANIZATION OF THE FAMILY

Long before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the process of family disorganization was well under way among the Japanese on the Pacific Coast. The norms of behavior which dictated the relations between members of the family were no longer considered imperative by everyone concerned. From the time that the Nisei began coming of age in considerable numbers, the old family system of Japan began to break down. In the American environment, the Nisei learned new values and often failed to comprehend the significance of the values under which their parents lived. Economically, the Nisei learned to be more individualistic, and the stress on hedonistic satisfaction in American culture was taken over. Nor were the Nisei alone in this transformation; many of the Issei changed their attitudes, although quite often it was a matter of emulating American ways rather than accepting the new values.

In Japan, during the early part of this century, the family was an end in itself and its honor was zealously guarded, its traditions and ancestors being looked upon with much reverence. The emphasis was placed in the group and its perpetuation and not upon the feelings of the individual members. It was a comprehensive unit, and its nature conditioned all other aspects of social organization.

Within the household, the master's word was law. All property was held collectively; items were conceived of as

2

belonging to the family under the trusteeship of the master. Any breach of rules was considered an offense against the family gods. The individual was no more than the cell in the household.

All marriages were arranged by parents or relatives. Since the perpetuation of the family was the basic aim, the question of marriage could not be entrusted to the young people themselves. The desires of the individuals could not be allowed to thwart the needs of the household. Marriage was an affair of the family, a pure and simple business arrangement.

By December 7, 1941, many changes had already been made in this system. The Nisei had revolted against autocratic family control. While the remnants of familial sentiments may have remained, the reverence for ancestors was virtually nonexistent. Property was no longer held in common, each individual quite often keeping a share as 'his own' or even starting a separate bank account.

In marriage, individual desires became the foremost consideration. Go-betweens were retained, but they played no real function and were brought in as a matter of formality. Usually, the individuals seek their own mates -- sometimes with the aid of their parents -- and the individual has the last word as to whether or not he or she wishes to marry. Even if a Nisei should refuse to marry someone that his parents had picked for him, his action would not have caused much disturbance.

As one might imagine, considerable maladjustment did occur. As the evacuees were relocated to Tule Lake, the process of family disorganization had already gone quite far.

3

We are concerned primarily with the effect of the changed circumstances on the Nisei and the Japanese family. As one might expect, the majority of the families did make a bearable adjustment to the new environment. There were some, however, that failed to make this adjustment. True, many of these individuals were having difficulties on the outside and the changed conditions provided the opportunity for making the breach more complete. We are concerned, then, with the factors that led to (1) the breakdown of the rules that governed the relationship between members of the family in Tule Lake for the first time, and (2) the intensifying of the breakdowns in the rules of behavior that occurred prior to entrance to the center.

"Change of conditions is a factor, but not a cause of social happenings; it merely furnishes influences which will produce definite effects only when combined with definite preexisting attitudes and is a cause only together with the latter."¹ We must therefore seek new attitudes that have been brought forth by the changed conditions, which combining with the preexisting ones led to the breakdown.

A few cases of adultery were aired rather freely in Tule Lake. Ordinarily in a Japanese community such matters are not talked about in public, but these instances were rather widely known. True, adultery had been going on even in rural Japan where the primary-group controls were rather strong; however, it was never approved in spite of the relatively "low" moral standards among the working

1. W. I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, New York, Knopf, 1927, vol. II, p. 1034.

classes.²

Instances of suspected incest were also aired. Gossip made the rounds very rapidly in the ward where the deed occurred. Incest, of course, is taboo among the Japanese as well as among virtually all peoples in the world. However, perhaps because the authority of the father is great in Japan, the objection was not as great as it was against other irregularities.

Several cases have gone to the Legal Aid Department asking for a divorce. Reasons and charges were varied. In Japan, the feeling was rather high against divorcees and grass widows; however, it was possible to get divorces if it seemed quite obvious that the couple could not get along. In such an instance, the bride simply left the household or the husband asked her to leave. It was relatively easy to separate in Japan, but there was some sentiment against it.

Among the Japanese on the West Coast, "handy-men" were in a sense an institution. They were rather common on small farms where one man would become attached to a family and was almost considered one of the group. The children referred to him as ojisan and treated him like an uncle or grandfather. In Tule Lake, some of the handy-men relationships became disturbed. Sometimes the woman of the family had had relations with the handy-man and trouble arose as a consequence. They were no longer needed and

2. All documents are omitted. Inasmuch as the files of the Community Welfare Department are very incomplete and inadequate, the scant data taken out had to be supplemented with interviews and examination of other records. At the date of writing, this investigation has just begun and more complete records on individual cases will not be ready for months. Besides being incomplete, there are many inaccurate statements that must be checked.

were sometimes treated harshly.

Discord arose in several families because of the fear on the part of the husband of competitors and also because of the distrust of the husband by the wife. Charges and counter-charges were made of infidelity and sometimes even neighbors took part in the quarrels. Some families ended in the divorce courts; some suffered physical violence; other quarrels died down naturally.

Perhaps the two things that occurred that would have shocked the Japanese society most were (1) the desertion of a baby, and (2) the mistreatment of an aged mother.

Desertion of a baby would be inconceivable in the old Japanese family with its powerful primary-group controls. Inasmuch as the baby is considered the means by which the family is perpetuated, it is cared for very carefully. Sometimes babies were abandoned if they were deformed or otherwise lacking, but to desert a healthy and perfectly normal baby was considered almost a crime.

Another aspect of the Japanese family system was the care and reverence shown to elders. When an elderly woman is thrown out of the household by the children, it is very definitely considered an unpious act. In this particular case, the community was upset but not sufficiently unified to take any action. Gossip and ugly rumors made the rounds, but nothing was said after a few months had passed.

It seems that the changed conditions of the center have been a factor in the disorganization of the family in Tule Lake. Some of the families that were having difficulties on the outside found that the strain was too great and the final split occurred in Tule

6

Lake. In many instances, the conditions in Tule Lake served to change the relationships that existed on the outside.

Among the new attitudes that were important were the feeling that one could be free to seek new experiences and the feeling that one should guard more carefully the possessions that he considered justly his. These attitudes of course worked with the attitudes that existed before. It seems that the new economic system in which women were given more security had much to do with the changes. Desires that they had long entertained finally were given an opportunity to materialize. On the other hand, in the close quarters, many felt the necessity of protecting his family name and perhaps became over-cautious to the point where they became unbearable. The acquisitive attitude, which the Japanese probably picked up after some time in America, figured in strongly in the picture.

Almost without question, the close housing quarters had much to do with the situation. The fact that people lived in such proximity made gossip fearfully effective. Those entertaining ideas of infidelity were given a better chance to perform their deed. This in turn meant that greater care had to be exercised in any illicit relations and also that the family members had to watch each other more closely. The fear of idle talk was very great.

As we might expect, the mixed marriage families experienced great difficulty. Quite often, the non-Japanese party came along with his spouse and lived in the center. Few of them seemed to have made a satisfactory adjustment to camp life, but most of them

7

have left when the opportunity arose. Some have broken off their relationships.

In the close living quarters, in-laws presented a greater problem than they had before. Not only do they cause trouble by meddling in the children's affairs, but sometimes a fight among themselves has led to a separation or a strain in the family of the younger generation.

In a center where recreational facilities are restricted, one would expect sex activities to be over-emphasized. And so it seems to be. The desire for mutual response is sometimes satisfied outside the accepted channels. Handymenrelationships which existed on the outside have been altered too. On the other hand, because of the close quarters the injured party raises more objection to the continuation of illicit relations; on the other hand, greater opportunities are provided for those who wish to seek pleasure outside the family.

The possibility for working in the beet-fields seems to have brought some changes. Men who have been dissatisfied have left. On the other hand, women whose husbands are working in the fields away from the center have entertained other lovers.

One cannot help but emphasizing the importance of the changed economic system upon family disorganization. The fact that children are no longer necessarily dependent upon their parents and the fact that many women no longer have to look to their husbands for support have been important factors. The sense of temporary security along this line has made it possible for the emancipated individuals to go about in satisfying other desires that they have probably long entertained.

There have no doubt been many factors that brought about family disorganization in Tule Lake. Of these many factors, the changed conditions were no doubt one of the important ones.