CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with MASAKO HANADA

Interviewed

By

Arthur Hansen and Toni Rimel

On November 28, 1983

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NARRATOR: MASAKO HANADA

INTERVIEWER: Arthur Hansen, Toni Rimel

DATE: November 28, 1983

LOCATION: Fullerton, California

PROJECT: Japanese American Oral History Project

AH: —And the date is November 28, 1983. The conversation is being held in the room 252 in the library at Cal State Fullerton and the conversation is with Masako Hanada. The questions are going to be asked by Toni Rimel and Art Hansen. So we just want to talk very casually about some things concerning the geography of Japan and the dialects associated with the different parts of Japan. Masako, you were saying before we turned on the tape recording that this interview that you're going to do pretty soon with Toni with Mrs. Kanno, who comes from northern Japan, may be difficult because of the problem in the northern dialect. Could you elaborate on that a little bit? Could you explain what you mean by that? Where is she from and where do the northern dialects pose a problem for somebody like yourself who's been raised in southern Japan and gone to school in Tokyo, actually, right?

MH: Mrs. Kanno came from Fukushima prefecture and in that area, the people have very, very strong dialects, like Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, Aomori, Akita. The people from those areas have very strong dialects and sometimes it's hard for us to understand. But people who went to the university in Tokyo can speak the normal dialect of Japanese. But like the youngsters who come to work in Tokyo, first, they cannot speak our standard Japanese and they feel very ashamed of themselves and some youngsters just don't speak at all. And also, Ibaraki people sometimes have strong accents like Tōhoku people and that is the strongest accent in Japan. And sometimes—

AH: Which is the strongest accent in Japan? Ibaraki?

MH: No, no, Tōhoku.

AH: Tōhoku, okay.

MH: Yes.

AH: Now, when you say Tōhoku, where is that?

MH: It's Aomori, Akita—

AH: Oh, is that the northern region of Japan?

MH: Yes.

AH: Okay.

MH: But Hokkaido people are free from those accents. I don't know why.

AH: Yes.

MH: I think our people moved there from mainland Japan from various parts of Japan, so Hokkaido people speak a mixed language and that's why they don't have Tōhoku accents at all. And also, Kansai people have different dialects. Kansai included Kyoto, Hyogo, Shiga, Nara, Mie, Osaka, and that area. And they speak a very beautiful language and you can read that in *The Makioka Sisters*.

AH: Yes.

MH: And if you don't really understand those languages, it is said that you don't understand *The Makioka Sisters* fully. And Kyoto and Osaka used to be the center of culture and politics, so people always speak their language. But Tōhoku dialect is not respected. They're kind of looked down on.

AH: Where is that area that you were just talking about; the culture is respected but the dialect is not? (pause in recording)

AH: Okay, now is Japan divided into regions as well as prefectures?

MH: Yes.

AH: And the northern region, which comprises a number of these prefectures that you were talking about, is called what? And how do you spell it?

MH: We call the northern region Tōhoku, T-O-H-O-K-U, Tōhoku region. And we still use that—what is it—

AH: How did they come to speak so differently from people in other parts of Japan?

MH: I don't know, but as far as I know, the dialect developed in Edo period and at that time, people were not allowed to move around. They couldn't travel without special permission, and so when somebody came to your country, it was strictly known,

whether he is a spy or just some stranger, and that dialect was encouraged in the respect of finding spies, (inaudible)_____. And also, in Kyushu, they have a strong accent and Kagoshima dialect still remains very strongly.

AH: Very distinctive, then.

MH: Yes, yes. And—

AH: You were mentioning before that, when you were talking about Kyoto, you were talking about it being the cultural and political capital of Japan, but then you said something about the culture was very respected, but their—

MH: Oh no, because culture is respected, so Kansai dialect is respected, too. But Tōhoku culture is not respected.

AH: Where is that, now? Up in here where you were talking about originally.

MH: Yes.

AH: Okay, fine.

MH: So, it's a very strong difference.

AH: What can you tell us, since you come from southern Japan—you're from Yamaguchi, right?

MH: Yes, that's right.

AH: What can you tell us about this area here in terms of the way in which it's perceived by, say, cosmopolitan areas like Tokyo? When they think of this southern Japan, what kind of feeling do they have towards southern Japan? Because I'm trying to understand why Japanese Americans sometimes think that people in Japan look down on them. Is it something to do with the region, too? Coming from southern Japan?

MH: I don't think so. Many Japanese people think that people went to America as immigrants because they are the sons or daughters of a poor farmer, and they probably were not doing well in Japan, so they had to leave their country. So—

AH: But when you were saying how northern Japan, the dialect is looked down upon, you indicated that it had to be looked down upon by somebody. Who looks down upon it? The people from Tokyo?

MH: Tokyo people.

AH: Okay, would they also look down upon sort of the dialects, customs, practices, and things of people who come from southern Japan?

MH: I don’t know.

AH: I just wondered if they looked down upon anybody who’s not in Tokyo?

MH: Yes. Like you New York people.

AH: Sure.

MH: Tokyo people are just like that. (laughs)

AH: Okay.

MH: But Tōhoku people very often are the target of the funny stories, even more than (inaudible)_____ are here.

AH: Right.

MH: And in Japan, we have people like that and they just make fun of Tōhoku people because of their language.

AH: Okay. What would be—can you think of a word that would be said one way in standard Japanese and then another way in the north?

MH: Yes.

[00:10:00]

AH: Give us an example of a word which they would use as a basis for a joke.

MH: It’s just my experience, but my grandfather and grandmother came from Fukushima prefecture and one time, I was talking with my grandmother and she said ‘chu’ and I didn’t understand it means cheese.

AH: And how would you say it in standard Japanese?

MH: Cheese.

AH: Oh, you would use the word cheese?

MH: Yes, yes.

AH: Oh, I see.

MH: And when you say konnichiwa, that means hello. Tōhoku people said “ko-nutswa.”

AH: Right.

MH: So they used that as an insult.

AH: Are there any other areas in Japan where the language is distinct for one or another reason? They either have—like in the United States in the south, they have a drawl. Do you hear it in this, too?

MH: Yes, a Kansai dialect is just like your southern accent. Very elegant, very slow—

AH: Yes. Oh, that's from around—

MH: Osaka, Kyoto area.

AH: And you said that that's looked up to.

MH: Yes. The same thing, just different.

AH: Okay.

TR: You mentioned that it was unusual for people to immigrate from the Fukushima province.

MH: Yes, I think that's very unusual. Before the Meiji period, or at the just beginning of the Meiji period, I know that warrior class—samurai class are from Fukushima prefecture went to California, northern part of California.

TR: The samurai class?

MH: Yes.

TR: Rather than the peasant class? Or had the samurai in the present integrated there?

MH: Just the samurai class, yes. And they made their own colony called Wakamatsu colony.

AH: Yes, here in California.

MH: Yes, but they failed.

AH: That was the earliest settlement here in California.

MH: Is that after 1868, or'64?

AH: Yes, just about right after they opened up Japan. Are there any prefectural differences that you can think of that come to mind right away among the different southern

prefectures? I mean, as opposed to just the southern region or just the Honshu or Kyushu islands or something like that. Are there any sort of things that you would see as distinctive, like between, for example, Wakayama people and between Hiroshima people? Or between Yamaguchi people, et cetera? Can you think of some things that would be helpful to most of the Wakayama people that came to California settled at Terminal Island and were mostly fishermen and things, and I was just wondering if—

MH: Oh, were they originally fishermen? In Japan?

AH: I don't know, see.

MH: I think so. Because Wakayama prefecture is a place in the sea.

AH: Yes.

MH: They might well be fishermen when they were in Japan. And Yamaguchi, Hiroshima, Okayama prefectures are farming areas, especially at the time of Meiji or Taishō. And Kyushu is also farming. And I think before World War II, most Japanese were farmers. We didn't have very much industry.

AH: What about in the north? Is that mostly farming, too, or no?

MH: Still now, it's farming area. And now we cannot have very cheap labor around Tokyo, so a lot of industry is moving into the northern part of Japan, Hokkaido area.

TR: Isn't mining up there, too?

MH: We have very little.

AH: Were there very many cities of major population size in southern Japan at the time of Meiji, or does that all come later, like something like Hiroshima didn't get big until Taishō or later, did it?

MH: I think it's the same thing. But Kyoto was a center of politics. There was a lot of government and (inaudible)_____ local Kyoto families were very distinctive and they had gone up at will, so (inaudible)_____ was a big consultation.

AH: Political, governmental.

MH: Yes. And I think they also encouraged some industry, I think.

AH: Why don't you talk a little bit about Okinawa, since that seems to be looked down at a lot, too.

MH: Yes.

AH: I'm wondering, is it because it's separate from Japan?

MH: Yes, I've never been to Okinawa. (laughs)

AH: But you've heard things about it.

MH: Yes. But as far as I know, Okinawa is a mixture of Japan and China, and it is very far from Japan, so sometimes it was governed by Japan and sometimes it was governed by China, so they suffered a lot through our wind of government change. And their culture is just a mixture of Japan and China. So, I think they have a very strong identity of their own, you know? Deep in their heart, they think they don't belong to Japan or China. They're just by themselves.

AH: Okay, so they're kind of between.

MH: Yes, that's right. And so they're very different and we didn't have very much connection and Okinawa doesn't have any (inaudible)_____ of their own, so they're mostly very poor farmers and a lot of them come to work in Tokyo and I think they also speak a different language. And their culture is rather different. So many Tokyo people just don't understand.

AH: Do you think that difference is looked down upon more in Japan than in the United States?

MH: Yes.

AH: So, to be different is a problem, right?

MH: Yes. Have you ever heard of that term "grouping?"

AH: Yes.

MH: That is very, very important in Japan. And if you are not doing like the other people, you know, you—

AH: What do you get called if you're not doing like the other people?

MH: We don't—

AH: Like here, they would say something like a "non-conformist" or something.

MH: Oh, no.

AH: Do you use words?

MH: Oh, no, no, no, we don't have special terms for that, but you are not to think—you are not a full part of your group.

AH: (laughs) Not Japanese then or whatever it is.

MH: Yes. And I felt that a lot, you know.

AH: Yes, I know. You mentioned that and I was wondering if you had insight.

MH: So like the Okinawa people preferred their own.

AH: But that's still a very strong sort of thing; that being different is being wrong.

MH: Yes, and I think they have a little darker skin, you know—like Japanese—

AH: —the Okinawan people?

MH: Yes. And I heard if you go to Tokyo and have a rather unhappy life, you'd rather go to the United States. There, you know, over here, your definition is different from other people.

AH: But that's expected, right?

MH: Yes. That's why they can't leave.

AH: Somebody told me in an interview though—I was just looking at this map here as we are, you can see how close everybody lives to the sea, really. Like in England, nobody is more than, say, at the most fifty to one hundred miles away from the ocean. And in Japan, it looks like the same thing, no matter where you would be. And yet, this woman who was being interviewed—she's a Nisei, and she said that her father used to like to go swimming when he was here in the United States and said that was very rare for a Japanese to go swimming. And it just seemed to me that the ocean is nearby and Japan has always had a great swimming—she was even talking about the Olympic team and they had the Japanese Olympic swimming bath thing out on their farm from the 1932 Olympics and yet, she said it was so unusual for her father to swim. Is that true now, or no?

[00:20:52]

MH: No, not now. But I think we didn't think of swimming as a sport at all a long time ago. And we couldn't expose our skin in public.

AH: Oh, was that it? That was the prohibition, then, exposing—because of getting it too dark then, or—

MH: No, just—well, what do you say? Just more—

TR: —modest.

AH: Oh, for men as well as women?

MH: Yes, I think so. Swimming is a part of the martial arts, and in the Edo period before that, samurai did a little swimming. We didn't think it was a pleasure or a sport at all.

AH: I know that—remember the Kokoro, how that opens the novel—Soseki's novel opens at the beach—

MH: —at the beach, walking through—

AH: —But they're not in bathing suits or anything. Did they use the ocean as resort areas, though?

MH: No. What time are you thinking of?

AH: That would have been right around the turn of the century, so I think he picked it around 1900 or something.

MH: 1900. I don't think so. So swimming came in as a sport from the west.

AH: Oh, so it was introduced more as a western thing.

MH: Yes.

AH: Then when did the prohibitions against exposing your skin, et cetera, end in Japan? Or did they end?

MH: (laughs) After World War II.

AH: Oh, after World War II.

MH: Yes.

AH: So when you were brought up, it was okay to go to the beach?

MH: Yes.

AH: But you mother still might have had some concerns about it?

MH: Maybe at the beginning of Shōwa. My mother went with these, but maybe when it was just beginning.

AH: Is it popular now?

MH: Yes, very popular. You know, we have a lot of congestion in the Tokyo area, and this beach in Kanagawa prefecture, near Yokohama and Kamakura. It is a beautiful beach and you'll see one, medium, two, medium, people on the beach.

AH: Oh, so it's just packed, huh? (laughs)

MH: So, you know, when somebody goes to the beach, we sometimes ask "Did you see the water at all?" You just see people.

AH: So actually, people then that came from Japan and came to the United States around the turn of the century, they would've been people who didn't got to the beach very much. Because they did a lot of fishing. Now, fishing was allowed more because you had to use it to live, right?

MH: Yes. That's right.

AH: But the swimming went—well, that's interesting. Because I was wondering why she said that. It just seemed—today, we'd go—her father would take them down to Laguna Beach and she said he loved to go swimming, which was very odd for Japanese men at that time and it had to go back to something in Japan.

TR: They have a very rocky coast, also. I wonder how many beaches they actually have.

AH: Well, now they've got a million or two million. (laughs)

TR: Well, now.

AH: Except the geography doesn't change, though.

MH: We have—it's a very, very mountainous country.

TR: Yes.

MH: So we have flat lines along the coast.

AH: Where's the best beaches right now if you were going to go on a vacation or something?

MH: Okinawa.

AH: Is it really?

MH: Yes. Okinawa or the Ryukyu Islands.

AH: Okay.

MH: They have very beautiful beaches.

AH: Okay. Is it too cold up in here or how is it up in Hokkaido?

MH: How do you feel about the water in California?

TR: Cold.

AH: It's cold.

MH: Yes?

AH: It's much colder then, huh?

MH: Yes, it's as cold as right here in Hokkaido. When I was in college, I went to Hokkaido with my girlfriends and I just dipped my leg into the water, you know?

TR: Oh, we do know. (laughs)

MH: Just one or two seconds.

TR: Have you seen many islands?

MH: Yes.

TR: Are they in colonies, or?

MH: No. They have their own colonies, like India.

TR: And how are they accepted?

MH: Oh, they're accepted okay. I'm not quite sure, but some maybe ten years ago they had difficulties in getting a job.

AH: What kind of language do they speak? Standard or is it a dialect? Don't know?

MH: I have no idea.

AH: You saw some, right? Some are supposed to have blonde hair and blue eyes and things, is that right?

MH: I didn't know very many island people. In fact, they—I don't remember, but they don't have blue eyes or blonde hair. But they're closer to you than to us.

AH: Are there any geographical concentrations of eta people in Japan? Or do they tend to be distributed throughout or are there certain parts of the country where—you know.

MH: I don't know, but I heard in the western part of Japan, we have more eta people.

AH: In the western part?

MH: Yes.

AH: So in the central area in the country—

MH: Yes. When I was brought up, my mother would stop and give eta bills in the area and I don't go to that area. And last time I was in Japan, still, one of my girlfriends was talking about eta people and I really—

AH: Still talking about it.

MH: Yes.

TR: Was she a university friend (inaudible)_____?

MH: No, she was from high school and went to (inaudible)_____

TR: Do you think education had anything to do with it?

MH: Oh, yes. Yes, definitely.

TR: More and more accepting.

MH: Yes, yes. Of course you know Mishima and Mishima's family (inaudible)_____

AH: Area? No, you didn't tell me that. I didn't know that.

MH: Yes. His grandfather or grandmother—oh, I don't know—where it came from, but there's a biography about him written by John Nelson.

AH: Yes, that's the one that spoke at your college, you told me.

MH: Yes. And I read that in English, and I didn't know this, but if you're a careful reader, as (inaudible)_____

AH: You really have to read carefully. (laughs)

MH: So somebody tried to translate that into Japanese, but misused (inaudible)_____. So, the book was (inaudible)_____ John Nathan, one (inaudible)_____

AH: Was it your uncle that did the biography of Soseki?

MH: No, no, no. He did the—what is it?

AH: Chronology?

MH: Yes, chronology. Oh, I should have some of (inaudible)_____

AH: Yes, you said it was almost a detailed sort of thing—

MH: Yes.

AH: —Following him day by day.

MH: Yes. I completely forgot.

AH: Oh, that's okay. No, I just remembered you telling me that and—Okay, well I think we can stop, thanks. (pause in recording)

[00:30:07]

AH: Okay, I'm doing a paper—actually, a book—that deals with a problem that existed during the evacuation in the various camps, and every time somebody would do something that certain people didn't like, they called them dogs, inu, and they said that they were informers and they were giving information to the administrators on the various people in the camp, the Japanese people in the camp. And they had big meetings, and they had—a lot of times, they just ostracized them. They wouldn't speak to them and things, but sometimes there were threatened and sometimes beaten and sometimes even killed. So, it was a very powerful thing and the only thing I heard about its origins was that back in the Tokugawa period, the overlords used to use spies and everything to find out information and so they said they used to come around like dogs sniffing on their floor, but maybe you could tell me whatever you know—anything that you can think of in connection with whatever you've ever heard about it or how it's used in Japan now; if it has any connection with foxes and folklore or anything. Anything that—and it doesn't matter if it's just a little bit, whatever you've heard.

MH: Uh—

AH: It doesn't matter—

END OF INTERVIEW