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**Social Identity of Japanese Americans in Julie Otsuka's  
Historical Novels**

Sociální identita japonských Američanů v historických románech Julie Otsuky

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**ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the theme of social identity of Japanese Americans in historical novels *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) and *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) by Julie Otsuka. In those novels, Otsuka focuses on Japanese American experience in the first half of the twentieth century. In *The Buddha in the Attic* that chronicles the pre-war immigrant experience, she largely focuses on ethnic identity. In *When the Emperor Was Divine*, on the other hand, she examines national identity of Japanese and Japanese Americans during the wartime evacuation and the internment. Therefore, in both novels, Otsuka explores the social status of Japanese and Japanese Americans in the United States. The aim of this thesis is to explore and examine ethnic identity and national identity conflict that Japanese American characters in Otsuka's historical novels experience. For thorough study of the theme of social identity, this thesis adopts historical perspective for the literary analysis and will provide social and political background of the first half of the twentieth century in the United States.

**SEZNAM DOPORUČENÉ LITERATURY:**

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## Introduction

The purpose of this diploma thesis is to examine the theme of the social identity of Japanese Americans in historical novels *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) and *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) by Julie Otsuka. In both novels, Otsuka explores the social status of Japanese and Japanese Americans in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Being a minority in American society, Japanese Americans were met with prejudice and discrimination since the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants in the 1880s. Eventually, this prejudice led the U.S. Congress to pass the Immigration Act of 1924 that halted Japanese immigration. This relatively short period of Japanese immigration gave Japanese Americans distinct generational groupings. Different generations of Japanese Americans are referred to as Issei (the first generation), Nisei (the second generation) and Sansei (the third generation). After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japanese Americans, citizens and aliens alike, were regarded with suspicion and deemed the enemy. This resulted in the mass evacuation and the internment of all West Coast Japanese Americans. Each generation had lived through different socio-political circumstances, nevertheless all Japanese Americans experienced a social identity conflict in the first half of the twentieth century. In *The Buddha in the Attic*, which chronicles the pre-war immigrant experience, Otsuka largely focuses on the ethnic identity of Japanese Americans whereas in *When the Emperor Was Divine* she examines the ethnic and national identity conflict during and after the internment. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyze the ethnic identity and the national identity conflict that Japanese American characters in Otsuka's historical novels experience. The thesis mainly focuses on the social status and conflict of the first and the second generation of Japanese Americans. For a thorough study of this theme, the thesis provides a socio-political background of the first half of the twentieth century in the United States.

The first two chapters serve as an introduction to the concept of social identity and Japanese American literature. The first chapter defines the concepts of ethnic identity and national identity and it further focuses on the theory of Asian American ethnic identity development. These concepts are then applied in the literary analysis of Otsuka's historical novels. To put Otsuka's historical novels in some literary context, the second chapter presents

a brief introduction to Japanese American literature and to Julie Otsuka's literary career and work.

The next chapters focus on the literary analysis of Otsuka's work from the historical perspective. These chapters are structured chronologically, so the thesis examines the pre-war period first and then the internment experience of Japanese Americans. The third chapter analyzes the theme of the social identity in the historical novel *The Buddha in the Attic*. This novel depicts the pre-war experience of Japanese immigrant women and Otsuka mainly focuses on their ethnic identity. This chapter deals with the first Japanese immigrants and their relationship with the white majority group, and the eventual evacuation from their homes. It analyzes the scenes that feature the social identity conflict and also provides a socio-political context of the pre-war period. Furthermore, this chapter introduces Japanese (American) culture and also presents a profile of three generations of Japanese Americans since each generation has a distinctive collective identity.

The last chapter deals with the social status of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. Through anonymous Japanese American family Otsuka in *When the Emperor Was Divine* examines the conflict between Japanese ethnic identity and American national identity. This chapter is structured into three subchapters and discusses the psychological effect of forced incarceration on the development of Japanese American identity.

Otsuka focuses on the personal experience of Japanese Americans and the aim of this thesis is to extensively analyze the social identity conflict that appears in her historical novels. Therefore, this literary analysis adopts historical perspective because the social status of Japanese Americans is defined in relation to a specific socio-political context. I argue that the first-generation Japanese Americans in Otsuka's novels ultimately lost their unique identity and the second-generation Japanese Americans rejected their ethnic identity in favor of American national identity. In conclusion, the thesis summarizes the analysis of the Japanese-American social identity conflict and compares the formation of identity of the first-generation and the second-generation characters.

# 1 The Concepts of Social Identity

## 1. 1 Social Identity

In psychology, the term identity refers to self-image, self-esteem, and individuality. Development of one's identity is a process of constructing of one's self over time. Erik Erikson asserts that identity formation employs "a process of simultaneous reflection and observation" (Erikson 22). In his theory, he states that an individual constructs his identity in relation to his social environment: "the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him [...]; while he [simultaneously] judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them" (Erikson 23). So, in the process of identity formation, an emphasis is also placed on social roles as an individual negotiates the meaning of his identity with society. Erikson's theory suggests the importance of one's sense of belonging to social groups to identity formation. Membership in groups and one's value of this membership is an important part of one's self-concept. Therefore, a formation of personal identity and social identity constitutes a unified process of one's identity formation.

Every person has multiple identities and their relative importance and compatibility differ in various times and circumstances. Ethnic identity and national identity are components of social identity. Henri Tajfel defines social identity as: "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (social groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 255). Therefore, self-identification and feelings of belonging and commitment are key aspects of social identity. Members of a social group also share the same values and attitudes. Furthermore, Tajfel, in collaboration with Turner, asserted that individuals need a firm sense of belonging to a group in order to maintain a positive self-concept (Tajfel and Turner 283). Together, they developed the social identity theory based on this idea. They define certain patterns of intergroup behavior and in-group and out-group relationships. Tajfel and Turner state (282) a hypothesis that in-group members will discriminate against out-group members to enhance a positive social identity. Furthermore, they state that the evaluation of one's own group "is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and



characteristics” (284). Therefore, a low or high social status of a group determines one’s positive or negative social identity. In societies where the majority legally and socially discriminates against the minority, the members of minority groups may develop a negative social identity and have a low self-esteem. Members of such low-status group experience social identity conflict. Social identity conflict occurs in an individual when two or more social groups oppose each other in social interactions. Kriesberg further adds that for this intergroup conflict to occur: “the opponents must have a sense of collective identity about themselves and about their adversary, each side believing the fight is between *us* and *them*” (Kriesberg). Therefore, members of a low and simultaneously minority status group experience social identity conflict more intensively.

This issue concerns Japanese and Japanese Americans before and during the Second World War. Their social identity was defined in relation to their ethnic and/or national identity. Julie Otsuka in her novels *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) and *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) focuses on this issue and explores the sense of belonging of Japanese and Japanese Americans to the United States. The aim of this thesis is to explore and analyze the ethnic and national identity of Japanese American characters in her historical novels.

## **1. 2 The Concept of Ethnic Identity**

The term “ethnics” first came to be used around the period of the Second World War in the United States to refer to Jews, Italians, Irish and other ethnic groups that were deemed inferior to the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant group (Eriksen 4). Since the 1960s, the definition of “ethnics” became more broadened and the concept of ethnicity has been further studied in various fields such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology. In anthropology, ethnicity simply refers to “aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive” (Eriksen 5). However, an ethnic group is not only culturally distinctive, but also influenced by racial, natal, and symbolic factors (Trimble 415). These factors involve physiognomic features, ancestors’ origins, and other factors that typify an ethnic group, for example: language, values, patterns of behavior, foods, holidays, artifacts, etc. Symbolic and cultural factors imply that an individual can choose whether to actively associate with an ethnic group or not. Therefore,

within the social identity theory framework self-identification and sense of belonging are crucial aspects in the development of ethnic identity. Furthermore, a social anthropologist Erikson believes that ethnic affiliation emerges through social processes: “ethnic relations emerge and are made relevant through social situations and encounters, and through people’s ways of coping with the demands and challenges of life” (Erikson 1). Thus, ethnic identity is often defined as a component of social identity. Kurt Lewin was one of the first early social psychologists who argued that “individuals need a firm sense of group identification in order to maintain a sense of well-being” (qtd. in Phinney 501). According to this theory, belonging to a group contributes to a positive self-concept. However, this theory also acknowledges the potential problems resulting from participation in two groups. Supposedly, identification with two different groups “can be problematic for identity formation in ethnic group members because of the conflicts in attitudes, values, and behaviors between their own and the majority group” (Phinney 501). Therefore, depending on social and political environment, an individual either must choose between two conflicting identities or can establish a bicultural ethnic identity. However, establishing a bicultural ethnic identity is often impossible, if the dominant group in a society is prejudiced and discriminates the ethnic group. In this situation, the ethnic group members are potentially faced with a negative social identity and this may result in low self-esteem or internalized feelings of self-hatred. As Phinney observes, an individual may feel inferior and experience overall dissatisfaction with his/her ethnicity and eventually may reject his/her cultural identity (501–505).

The ethnic identity formation is a process that begins in early childhood. It is generally categorized along two main theoretical frameworks—primordial and situational. The primordial perspective argues that an individual has an innate sense of ethnic identity. (Le, C.N.). The situational perspective, on the other hand, asserts that ethnic identity is a socially defined concept. This means that the meaning and boundaries of ethnic identity are “constantly being renegotiated, revised, and redefined, depending on specific situations and set of circumstances that each individual or ethnic group encounters” (Le, C.N.). This thesis works with the concept of ethnic identity formation from the situational perspective since many Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during WWII discarded their ethnic identity after the end of the war, to avoid any association with the Japanese enemy aliens, however during the Redress Movement in the 1980s, they again proudly proclaim their ethnic

identity. Therefore, social and political contexts are important in the formation of ethnic identity.

Furthermore, even Erikson stresses the importance of social and historical development in the process of identity formation: “We cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor can we separate the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crises in historical development because the two help to define each other and are truly relative to each other,” (Erikson 23). Erikson states that this whole process is for the most part unconscious. However, during social and/or political crises, the process may become a conscious one (Erikson 23). For example, during WWII, the second generation of Japanese Americans had to consciously negotiate their social identity. The prejudice and discrimination that resulted in their forced incarceration led Japanese Americans to consciously examine their identity in relation to themselves and the mainstream American society. Since Japanese Americans form an ethnic group, their identity formation is closely related to the ethnic identity development. Erikson’s model implies the significance of culture in identity formation. Therefore, the concept of ethnic identity development is based on theories of identity formation and is studied from the situational perspective.

To summarize these theories, ethnic identity is a dynamic self-concept referring to one’s identity and a sense of belonging to an ethnic group. A member of an ethnic group shares with other members of this group common ancestry and at least some aspects of similar culture, religion, language and kinship.

### **1. 3 The Concept of National Identity**

According to a sociologist Smith, ethnic identity is a pre-modern form of collective cultural identity that eventually evolved into a socially constructed concept—a nation (Smith, *National Identity* 25). The nation is generally defined as “a named community possessing a historic territory, shared myths and memories, a common public culture and common laws and customs” (Smith, “When is a Nation” 15). It is important to recognize the difference between the term nation and the term state. A nation is viewed as a cultural community whereas a state is a political institution (Guibernau 131). Therefore, a modern nation-state is a cultural-political and socially constructed phenomenon. Individuals are either legally

identified as members of a nation-state (obtain citizenship) or subjectively identify with a nation. Therefore, for example, a person may be a citizen of a nation-state without emotionally feeling to be a part of it or, conversely, an individual may feel that he/she belongs to a nation-state without having any legal claim to it. Furthermore, according to Smith, nation-states have “a measure of common culture and a civic ideology, a set of common understanding and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together,” (Smith, *National Identity* 11). This sense of belonging to a nation-state constructs national identity. Within the framework of the social identity theory, national identity is then a self-identification and a sense of belonging to a particular nation. National identity also includes a strong emotional attachment toward one’s group. The mere sense of belonging to a group (a nation) invokes positive emotions and leads to the tendency to act on behalf of that nation (Tajfel and Turner 283). Guibernau stresses that national identity is a subjective feeling of sharing culture, history, traditions, symbols, kinship, language, religion, territory, founding moment and destiny with other members of the group regardless of one’s legal citizenship status (Guibernau 134). Therefore, national identity has a fluid and dynamic nature.

A state generally employs strategies to foster national identity capable of uniting its citizens. Through a public system of education, media, and popular culture, a state constructs and propagates a certain image of the “nation” often based upon dominant group’s views and beliefs. A state also creates a set of symbols and rituals and sets a well-defined system of civil and legal rights to reinforce the sense of community among its members (Guibernau 140). Depending on how much a person is exposed to this process of socialization, he/she may incorporate national identity to their personal identity to various degrees. However, people of immigrant origin and ethnic communities may stand in opposition to the national identity installed by the state. Therefore, in countries that have multiple ethnic groups, national identity and ethnic identity may be in conflict.

This conflict is examined in Julie Otsuka’s historical novels. Japanese Americans, aliens and citizens alike, experienced this conflict in the first half of the twentieth century. Belonging to an ethnic group, Japanese Americans were met with prejudice and were frequently socially and legally discriminated by the white majority group.

## **1. 4 Ethnic Identity in Relation to Assimilation**

Ethnic identity is meaningful in situations in which distinctive ethnic groups are in contact over a period of time. The United States is a nation formed by distinctive ethnic groups. Since the 17th century, immigrants from different nations came to America to start a new life. The first to arrive were Western European immigrants. Their goal was to form a democratic nation where every human being is given a right of liberty and “pursuit of Happiness” as is stated in the U.S Constitution. However, when new waves of Eastern European and non-white immigrants began to settle in the land of equal opportunities, these new immigrants were expected by the dominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant group to assimilate and adapt to their values and norms. Otherwise, they were met with prejudice, discrimination, and sometimes even with violent acts of terrorism. This naturally caused multiple identity conflicts among members of different groups. Before Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s, a bicultural ethnic identity was difficult to maintain and in some cases even impossible to establish. If individuals wanted to socially and economically participate in the mainstream American society, they had to assimilate values, norms, and culture of the dominant Anglo-Saxon group. Different factors affect this assimilation process. Sociologists make distinction between behavioral assimilation and structural or socioeconomic assimilation.

Behavioral assimilation, often referred to as acculturation, occurs when an individual absorbs the cultural norms, values, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the dominant society (Le, C.N). In the United States, this acculturation may involve learning the English language, adopting American values and cultural aspects such as consuming the popular culture, eating typically American foods, celebrating holidays, and aspirations (striving to achieve the American dream). Within this process, a member of an ethnic group may choose to retain some aspects of his/her traditional culture, norms, and behavior while still acquiring those of the mainstream society. Or he/she may entirely reject the traditional ethnic culture in favor of complete immersion and identification with the dominant society (Le, C.N). This process of acculturation is related to national identity—an individual has a strong sense of belonging to a nation and does not identify himself in terms of his/her ethnicity. Behavioral assimilation is often present among the second generation of immigrants. The first generation of Japanese immigrants maintained a self-sufficient ethnic community. Their children, however, possessed a strong desire to assimilate into the mainstream American culture since they felt

emotional attachment to the United States as a nation. As American-born citizens, they quickly adopted American values, beliefs and behavior patterns. Some of them were able to negotiate and establish a bicultural identity, but many, especially during WWII, openly rejected the traditional Japanese culture of their parents. During that time, however, Japanese Americans were met with discrimination and overt hostility. Therefore, they were neither fully Japanese nor Americans and many experienced identity conflict and confusion.

Structural or socioeconomic assimilation, on the other hand, occurs when an individual enters and becomes fully integrated into the social, economic, political and cultural institutions of the dominant culture (Le, C.N). That means when an individual begins to participate as a full member of the mainstream society. Alternatively, this assimilation process refers also to socioeconomic mobility and status equal to other members of the dominant society. In the United States until the late 1950s, Japanese Americans were racially discriminated and denied equal opportunities to achieve structural assimilation. However, after the internment experience, many Japanese American discarded their ethnic cultural heritage and aimed to blend into the American middle-class. Eventually, in a more tolerant socio-political environment, their strong academic and economic achievement orientation enabled them socioeconomic mobility into the urban middle-class. This socioeconomic achievement of Japanese Americans amazes the dominant white society to such a degree that in their eyes “enemy aliens” became “the model minority”.

Therefore, there are connections between assimilation and the formation of ethnic identity. Some sociologists, such as Andujo, Simic, and Ullah, argue that a strong ethnic identity is not possible to maintain, if an individual becomes involved in the mainstream society. They further argue that acculturation is inevitably accompanied by a weakening of ethnic identity (qtd. in Phinney 501). This perspective does not take into account that acculturation in today’s society is a two-dimensional process. According to this view, “minority group members can have either strong or weak identifications with both their own and the mainstream cultures, and a strong ethnic identity does not necessarily imply a weak relationship or low involvement with the dominant culture” (Phinney 502). Therefore, there are several ways of dealing with being an ethnic group member in a diverse society. Berry (9–10) observes that strong identification with both groups is indicative of biculturalism and integration. Exclusive identification with the dominant group indicates assimilation whereas

identification with only the ethnic group indicates separation. Identification with neither group suggests marginality. Thus, the first generation of Japanese Americans generally showed a tendency to separate from the dominant group by forming a close-knit ethnic community. The second generation, on the other hand, identified strongly with the dominant group. However, prejudice and discrimination of the first half of the 20th century prevented full assimilation. Later generations of Japanese Americans tend to show tendencies of complete assimilation or biculturalism.

### **1. 5 Theory of Asian American Identity Development**

Psychologist and sociologist Jean Kim worked with the concept of ethnic identity formation from the situational perspective and proposed a model of Asian American ethnic identity development. In her study, Kim interviewed Japanese American women about their ethnicity and identity conflict. According to Kim, identity conflict exists when individuals perceive certain aspects or attributes of themselves which they simultaneously reject. In the case of Asian Americans, Kim claims that “it is the awareness of self as an Asian which one rejects in favor of the White models that are pervasive in our society. The issue here is not lack of awareness of one’s ethnic self but how one feels about and values that aspects of oneself” (Kim 3). Kim asserts that this phenomenon of identity conflict in Asian Americans is manifested as a belief in one’s own inferiority, self-hatred, and alienation from his racial self, from other Asian Americans and/or society at large. She continues that these experiences of denial and/or rejection of anything Asian American contribute toward negative identity. According to her, negative self-concept and low self-esteem “are detrimental to one’s mental health” (Kim 3). Even though Kim interviewed Sansei women who lived in a different social environment than their parents and grandparents, her identity conflict theory applies to the second generation as well. After the war, many Japanese Americans alienated from their ethnic self in favor of white identification. Therefore, her theory is valuable for my analysis of Otsuka’s historical novels.

Based on these interviews and her research, Kim proposed a five-stage model of the development of Asian American ethnic identity. These five distinct stages are defined as: Ethnic awareness, White identification, Awakening to social political consciousness,

Redirection to Asian American consciousness, and Incorporation. The resolution of the ethnic identity conflict in the final stage leads, according to Kim, to the development of a positive racial and ethnic identity as Asian American (Kim 2).

The first stage, Ethnic awareness, occurs prior to entering elementary school (around 3–4 years old). The child is aware of his Japanese descent as family members and relatives serve as the significant models of ethnicity. In this stage, neutral or positive attitudes toward one's ethnicity are formed depending on the social environment and the amount of other ethnic groups exposure. According to Kim's research, Japanese Americans growing up in predominantly non-white neighborhood participated in various ethnic activities and experienced ethnic pride and had knowledge of Japanese culture and traditions. These Japanese Americans felt during their early childhood secure—being a majority in their neighborhood—and acquired positive ethnic awareness. Children living in a predominately white neighborhood were rather isolated from ethnic group experience and consequently felt neutral about their ethnic identity (Kim 8).

The second stage, White identification, is related to an increased contact with the white society. It begins when a child enters school and experiences a strong sense of being different from his/her peers. Children usually gain this sense mostly through encounters with other children's repeated racial prejudices. Most Asian American children do not immediately understand why it is happening and do not know how to respond. They mostly try to avoid any direct confrontation. Encounters with racial prejudice negatively impact their self-esteem and identity. Not knowing how to cope with this situation, children blame themselves for their "differentness". Their self-concept changes from positive or neutral to negative. They struggle with their Asian American identity, feel inferior and desire to escape it by identifying with the white society. According to Kim, children gradually internalize the white societal values and standards and see themselves through the eyes of the white society; they alienate themselves from their own ethnic identity and other Asian Americans. Kim observes that positive or neutral ethnic awareness in stage one plays a significant role in experiencing the White identification stage. Children who live in a predominantly non-white neighborhood and experienced positive ethnic awareness identify with whites passively. Children who live in a predominantly white neighborhood and experienced neutral ethnic awareness, on the other hand, identify actively with the white society (Kim 9–18). The second



generation of Japanese Americans experienced these conflicting feelings in their childhood. They wished to assimilate into the dominant white society with which they identified but at the same time they painfully realized they were strangers in the eyes of this society. Their negative feelings toward their own ethnicity were intensified during the internment.

In the third stage, Awakening to social political consciousness, adolescents and young adults acquire socio-political understanding of their social status. They realize they are an oppressed minority and are not personally responsible for their situation. However, if individuals do not acquire this sociopolitical information, they may get stuck in the White identification stage (Kim 37). Kim believes that involvement in political movements (such as the civil rights and women's movements) affected their perception of their ethnicity in a positive way. Generally, the second generation of Japanese Americans did not actively experience Awakening to social political consciousness until the 1980s during the Redress Movement. They were often stuck in the second stage of White identification. However, thanks to their children, Sansei, who fought against their unjust incarceration during WWII and demanded redress, Nisei realized they were not personally responsible for their incarceration.

The next stage, Redirection to Asian American consciousness, is defined by reconnection to one's Asian American heritage and culture. Adolescents and young adults realize that negative feelings in their childhood were caused by the white oppression. They feel more confident about their Asian American identity and regularly participate in activities associated with their ethnic group (Kim 23–27). After the Redress Movement, many Nisei stopped feeling ashamed about their internment experience and began to construct a more positive self-concept.

The final stage, Incorporation, represents the achievement of a secure positive Asian American identity. Asian Americans respect and are proud of their racial/cultural heritage. Individuals have a clear sense of who they are in the society and their Asian American identity is no longer “threatened by prevailing White values” (Kim 27). According to Kim, in this final stage of the ethnic identity development, they realize that being “an Asian American is important but not their only identity” (Kim 28). Therefore, they respect their racial/cultural heritage but do not necessarily maintain their ethnic languages or customs. This behavior is typical for some Nisei, but mainly for younger generations of Japanese

Americans who are proud of their Japanese heritage but do not usually speak Japanese or participate in their ethnic customs.

Kim's findings are significant for my analysis of Otsuka's historical novels since this thesis argues that social environment of the first half of the 20th century—prejudice, discrimination and ultimate incarceration—led young Japanese American characters in Otsuka's novels to reject their ethnic identity and identify with the white society. Nisei reject their ethnic identity in favor of American national identity. During the internment, Otsuka's Nisei characters experience a negative sense of self, they feel inferior and blame themselves for their situation. Therefore, the theme of the ethnic identity and the national identity conflict is significant in Otsuka's historical novels. Based on Erikson's theory of identity formation, adolescence is a normative period in the formation of one's identity. Kim further agrees that the development of ethnic identity also occurs during adolescence. So, experiences from this period are crucial in constructing one's identity. Most Nisei were adolescents and young adults during the internment and this experience affected their development of ethnic identity. The aim is to apply Kim's models of ethnic identity development in the analysis of Otsuka's novels. I believe that young Nisei characters, especially in *When the Emperor Was Divine* experience the second stages of the ethnic identity development—the White identification stage. In the novels, however, they never resolve their identity conflict and do not achieve to construct a positive ethnic identity.

Therefore, in this literary analysis, the concepts of social identity, ethnic identity, and national identity are applied to explore the theme of the social identity conflict and to prove my arguments.

## 2 Japanese American Literature

### 2.1 Introduction to Japanese American Literature

Generally, literature mirrors the reality of its author. Therefore, it is important to briefly introduce Japanese American literature as it deals with social issues of the time of its production. Over the last decades, the standard American literary canon is revised and redefined. Today's American society is more diverse and this multiplicity of cultures, nationalities, traditions and personal histories is necessarily reflected in the American literature. The first Asian American writings, poems, short stories, and autobiographies, can be dated as early as the beginning of the twentieth century when first Asian immigrants had been arriving in the United States. However, the literary productions of this first generation are rather sporadic. It is the following generations, that contribute to the Asian American literature. Asian American literature achieved greater recognition in the 1970s. This breakthrough was accomplished by Chinese American writers Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan as they helped to popularize other Asian American writers. Especially Kingston developed a uniquely Asian American literary voice that inspired other Asian Americans to write in their own voices. Furthermore, in 1974 an important anthology of early Asian American literature was published, titled *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* edited by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong. This anthology contains samples of significant works by authors such as Carlos Bulosan, Diana Chang, Louis Chu, Toshio Mori, John Okada, Oscar Peñaranda, Hisaye Yamamoto, Wakako Yamauchi, and others, and helped to establish Asian American literature as a literary field. Central to the early Asian American literature are themes of cultural and generational conflict, assimilation, and establishing Asian American identity. To fully appreciate Asian American literature, it is necessary to understand social and historical contexts in which it has been produced. Focusing on their unique experience, Asian American writers aim to define what it means to be an Asian American.

Japanese American Literature examines topics of cultural conflict and assimilation as well. However, Japanese American literature distinguishes itself within the context of Asian American literature as it records and explores a unique Japanese American experience, mainly the treatment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. The internment

of Japanese Americans influenced generations of authors who have written and continue to write novels, stories, poems and plays in order to deal with this unjust uprooting. Therefore, the early Japanese American literary production reflects the social environment of the first half of the 20th century and explores the themes of ethnicity and national identity conflict. The whole body of Japanese American literature can be described as Yogi observes as “an ongoing construction of identity at numerous levels: individual, collective, political, cultural, and generational. Throughout various historical periods, Japanese American authors have grappled with major issues of their times and in the process, have examined the boundaries of ethnicity and nationality, often arriving at increasingly complex and sometimes antagonistic definitions of Japanese American identity” (Yogi 125). Japanese American identity and experience continue to be explored by numerous authors. In former years, first Japanese American writers expressed the desire to belong to American society. Nisei authors struggled to define their dual identity and to deal with the trauma of the internment. Sansei writers, on the other hand, rediscover their Japanese cultural heritage and challenge the old myths and stereotypes. The whole body of Japanese American literature thus focuses in one way or the other on the continual search for an identity in American society. This theme continues to be explored even in the work of contemporary writers, although younger Japanese American generations also focus on topical issues present in today’s American society.

## **2. 2 Julie Otsuka: Introduction to Otsuka’s Work**

Julie Otsuka is an award-winning Sansei writer. She is known for her two historical novels *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) and *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011). Both novels explore the Japanese American history and the internment experience. Otsuka did not personally experience the internment, but her family did and this gives her a unique perspective on this defining event in the Japanese American history. In her novels, Otsuka personalizes these significant historical events and is praised by critics for her spare style and the attention to detail that creates vivid image of the early Japanese American experience.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See reviews of her work on Otsuka’s official website: <http://www.julieotsuka.com/when-the-emperor-was-divine/>

Julie Otsuka was born in 1962 to an Issei father and Nisei mother. She was raised in California. After graduating from high school, Otsuka attended Yale University where she developed a passion for painting and sculpturing. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1984. In her early 30s, however, Otsuka abandoned her unfulfilling career in painting and turned to fiction. She spent time reading her “outdoor guys”—Ernest Hemingway, Richard Ford, Rick Bass, and Cormac McCarthy and started writing humorous stories about her love-life.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, she was accepted into Columbia University’s prestigious M.F.A. program in creative writing in 1994 and later graduated with a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1999. While she was a graduate student at Columbia, one of her stories “Evacuation Order No. 19” was selected for inclusion in the 1998 Scribner’s *Best of the Fiction Workshops*. This story would be later developed into the historical novel *When the Emperor Was Divine*.

This debut novel about the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War received a great attention from critics as well as from the public. Famous literary critic Michiko Kakutani praised Otsuka in her review for her “precise but poetic evocation of the ordinary that lends this slender novel its mesmerizing power”. According to Kakutani, Otsuka has “lyric gifts and narrative poise, a heat-seeking eye for detail and effortless ability to empathize with her characters” (Kakutani). *When the Emperor Was Divine* is loosely based on Otsuka’s family history. Her grandfather was arrested by the FBI as a suspected Japanese spy the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed and incarcerated in U.S. Department of Justice Camp in New Mexico. Her grandmother, uncle, and mother (only ten years old at that time) spent three years in an internment camp in Topaz, Utah. Her own family was uprooted from their home and permanently affected by the internment. Therefore, Otsuka drew on both research and personal experience to write her debut novel. In an interview, Otsuka said that she did not write the story to make a political statement, but to simply understand what her mother has gone through: “I think it [the internment] was something that, in my own family at least, was very suppressed and not really talked about, which I think is typical of many Japanese American families who went through that—through the war—just to remain silent about their experience. So, I think it was something that I needed to explore for myself in order to understand my mother better and why she was the way she was.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, as

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<sup>2</sup> Otsuka stated in the *GoldSea* interview: <http://goldsea.com/Personalities/Otsukaj/otsukaj.html>

<sup>3</sup> Otsuka said in an interview for National Endowment for the Arts: [http://www.neabigread.org/books/whentheemperorwasdivine/media/transcripts/05\\_Otsuka\\_bookorigins/](http://www.neabigread.org/books/whentheemperorwasdivine/media/transcripts/05_Otsuka_bookorigins/)

many other Sansei writers, Otsuka in her novel explores her personal Japanese heritage within a larger historical context.

In *When the Emperor Was Divine* Otsuka unfolds the story of the nameless Japanese American family in five different but interconnected narrative perspectives—the perspective of the mother, the girl, the boy, the plural perspective of both children, and the perspective of the father. This shifting of the narrative perspective allows Otsuka to focus on the psychology of individual characters and make the Japanese American experience more universal. In several interviews, Otsuka explains her motive to make the story universal: “I didn’t want to weigh down the novel with historical details. It was always the characters that interested me most, as well as the landscape, and the psychology of the situation. Lives interrupted by war, populations sent into exile, these are timeless and universal themes.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, while exploring her Japanese American heritage, Otsuka managed to write a universal story. In the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks, the story draws parallels between the government and media treatment of Muslim-Americans today and Japanese Americans during WWII. The story about oppressed ethnic minority, thus, resonates with many people even in the 21st century.

Her second novel, *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) is an innovative piece of art recording the collective history of young Japanese “picture brides” that sailed to America in the early 20th century. In a choral “we” voice, Otsuka in a series of linked and parallel narratives describes the struggle of these women: “Using the ‘we’ voice allowed me to tell a much larger story than I would have been able to tell otherwise.”<sup>5</sup> The novel forms a lyrical mosaic of hopes and fears of these “picture brides”. There is no traditional plot nor protagonist, Otsuka merely captures their life story. *The Buddha in the Attic*, therefore, in poetic prose displays the variety of Japanese immigrant experience.

*When the Emperor Was Divine* and *The Buddha in the Attic* both explore the themes of the ethnic identity and the national identity conflict, race, and abuse of power. In *When the Emperor Was Divine* the government ignores the rights of its citizens and forces Japanese Americans to forsake their ethnic heritage and question their national identity. In *The Buddha in the Attic* the first generation of Japanese Americans is unable to assimilate into the

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<sup>4</sup> An interview for National Endowment for the Arts:

<http://www.neabigread.org/books/whentheemperorwasdivine/media/transcript/>

<sup>5</sup> Otsuka stated in an interview for *Granta* literary magazine: <https://granta.com/interview-julie-otsuka/>

mainstream culture, seeking refuge in their ethnic community enclave. Therefore, in both her novels, Otsuka focuses on oppressed people who experience the social identity conflict and in order to endure they either lose their national identity or reject their ethnic identity. However, as she said in an interview, she is not interested in “writing a novel about injustice and victimization, [she] wanted to write a novel about real people.”<sup>6</sup> Her unique perspective of the third generation enables Otsuka to objectively explore the themes and topics that were too intimate and painful for Issei and Nisei to talk about. *San Francisco Chronicle* characterizes her writing as “accomplished, absorbing, and tight. Her spare prose is complemented by precise details, vivid characterization, and a refusal to either flinch or sentimentalize.”<sup>7</sup> For her remarkable historical fiction, Otsuka received several literary awards such as PEN/Faulkner Award, the Asian American Literary Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship and she was also a finalist for the National Book Award.

The aim of this diploma thesis is to analyze the theme of the ethnic and national identity conflict in Otsuka’s work. I adopt historical perspective for my literary analysis and I will focus on scenes which depict this social conflict.

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<sup>6</sup> An interview for *Asia Society*: <http://asiasociety.org/arts/literature/when-emperor-was-divine-and-when-japanese-americans-were-rounded>

<sup>7</sup> See reviews of her work on Otsuka’s official website: <http://www.julieotsuka.com/when-the-emperor-was-divine/>

### **3 *The Buddha in The Attic*: Being Japanese in America**

*The Buddha in the Attic* is a literary representation of the collective history of the first Japanese immigrants. It deals with Japanese ethnicity and identity conflict and simultaneously presents a valuable historical context. This section of the thesis mainly focuses on the early ethnic identity formation and the social identity conflict. This conflict is examined in relation to Japanese contact with the white majority group. Furthermore, Japanese values and early Japanese American family are also analyzed.

#### **3.1 The First Japanese Immigrants and Their Relationship with the White Majority**

In *The Buddha in the Attic*, Otsuka presents a collective history of Japanese “picture brides” that came to the United States in the early twentieth century. In seven chapters, Otsuka portrays their arrival to America, their family life, the hard, menial work they do, and their relationship with the white society. Underlying their stories is the common theme of social identity conflict.

The first Japanese immigrants came to the United States in the early 1880s. In this period, immigrants of Asian origin were prevented from owning land and legally denied American citizenship up until to 1965 when the Immigration and Nationality Act was passed. The first wave of Japanese immigrants arrived in Hawaii to work on sugar plantations. The mass Japanese immigration was initiated by The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882<sup>8</sup> that caused cheap labor shortage, and thus Japanese men were brought to fill in Chinese immigrants’ jobs—mainly menial work on farms. Most of these early immigrants came to America as sojourners aiming to gain wealth and later return to their homeland (Miyamoto 7). In those early years, Japanese population mainly concentrated in the states of California, Oregon,

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<sup>8</sup> The first Chinese immigrants came to the U.S. during the California Gold Rush in the early 1850s. These first Asian immigrants worked on the railroad constructions, mines, and helped American farmers during the harvest season. The white laborers were threatened by the cheap Asian labor and harbored anti-Asian sentiments. These attitudes led the government to create several anti-Asian laws, including The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 preventing immigration from China. Thus, prejudice against Asians became institutionalized in America and the white laborers’ fear of “yellow peril”—a notion that hordes of Asians threaten to invade and conquer the United States—was from early on producing unequal opportunities for immigrants of Asian origin.



Washington and the territory of Hawaii. The first Japanese immigrants would naturally form close-knit communities and in larger cities, like San Francisco and Los Angeles, Japanese immigrants founded *Nihonmachi* (Japantown), in which aspects of Japanese traditions and culture were maintained. Many of these early immigrants showed initiative to start their own businesses such as vegetable farms, groceries, hotels, laundries, gardening services and other businesses (Miyamoto 7). Unfortunately, this led to strong anti-Japanese attitudes from white workers and in response to anti-Japanese groups, such as Asiatic Exclusion League, the government passed the so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement” of 1907 limiting the Japanese immigration to the United States. However, the agreement allowed the spouses and family members of persons already in the States to immigrate. Thus, the influx of Japanese women came to the United States. The common practice of this time was to conduct arranged marriages. These circumstances led to the so-called “picture bride”<sup>9</sup> phenomenon (Ng 3). This type of marriage was common in Japan, as Wendy Ng points out (4), but in the States, this practice was frequently targeted as against Western values by anti-Japanese groups. Those “picture bride” marriages resulted in rapid increase of Japanese American families permanently settling in the United States.

In *The Buddha in the Attic*, Otsuka focuses on the experience of these picture brides. The first male immigrants had similar feelings and impressions of American life as these brides. Therefore, Otsuka’s account of the picture brides is universal for the Japanese immigrant experience. *The Buddha* opens with a powerful sentence: “On the boat we were mostly virgins” (*The Buddha* 3) establishing the choral voice. The choral voice seems appropriate to record the Japanese immigrant history since Japanese have collective mentality, considering the needs of the group rather than an individual. Throughout the novel, Otsuka sets with one powerful sentence the topic and mood of the whole paragraph. Her opening sentences are written in a precise language that strongly evokes a clear image of the immigrant experience. The first chapter “Come, Japanese!” depicts excited brides arriving in America. They obsess over the photographs of their future husbands and imagine their new

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<sup>9</sup> In Japan, matchmakers would set up arrangements between eligible Japanese men in America and Japanese women. The men would send their picture and in return they would receive a picture of their potential bride. The marriage was conducted without the presence of the groom in Japan and then the bride would come to America as a legal wife of the Issei man. These Japanese women often undertook great risks since it was not unusual for the potential husband to lie about his age and economic security.

life in America living in a house with “white picket fence and neatly mowed lawns” (*The Buddha* 4). The brides are also naturally anxious about their uncertain future in an unknown land:

The people there were said to eat nothing but meat and their bodies were covered with hair (we were mostly Buddhist, and did not eat meat, and only had hair in the appropriate places). The trees were enormous. The plains were vast. The women were loud and tall [...]. The language was ten times as difficult as our own and the customs were unfathomably strange. [...] What would become of us, we wondered, in such an alien land? [...] Would we be laughed at? Spat on? Or, worse yet, would we not be taken seriously at all? (*The Buddha* 7)

The brides see Americans as racially and culturally different. Since Japanese had little contact with foreigners until The Meiji Restoration in 1868, American customs naturally seemed strange to them: “was it true that the women in America did not have to kneel down before their husbands or cover their mouths when they laughed? [...] And were the houses in America really three times the size of our own? And did each house have a piano in the front parlor?” (*The Buddha* 14). The brides had little contact with foreigners in Japan and it is not surprising that they have stereotypical and naïve ideas about American life. They heard about the riches of the land of equal opportunities not only from various books of travels but also from their future husbands. Many brides carried with them a pamphlet *Come, Japanese!* and *Guidance for Going to America* that enthusiastically promoted the United States to immigrant laborers. Although some of the women were apprehensive about their future, they believed that life in America would be better than in rural Japan: “... it was better to marry a stranger in America than grow old with a farmer from the village. Because in America the women did not have to work in the fields and there was plenty of rice and firewood for all” (*The Buddha* 7). This idea, of course, turned out to be also naïve since most of the Japanese women had to work hard all their lives in America. In those passages, Otsuka conveys common fears that every new immigrant feels. These Japanese women see themselves as small in comparison to Americans and the vastness of American continent is astonishing to them. They are afraid that in “such an alien” land, they will be deemed inferior, strange. They realize that Japanese will be a minority in the United States. However, they are still sailing to America with a hope of a better future.

It is usual for the first generation of immigrants to bring old culture with them to America. The brides, for example, bring with them beautiful kimonos for every occasion, religious items such as tiny brass Buddhas and statues of the fox god, and calligraphy brushes and sheets of rice paper so they could write letters home (*The Buddha* 9). Those items may seem exotic and strange to the white Americans, but to the brides they are indispensable. Otsuka not only illustrates the difference between Japanese and American cultures but she also suggests that Japanese immigrants plan to maintain their ethnic identity in the United States. Even though, they are leaving Japan, they still consider themselves to be Japanese nationals and plan to maintain Japanese culture and customs in America. This strategy, however, will inevitably hinder the process of acculturation and cause identity conflict.

Finally, the brides arrive in California to meet their husbands and they are shocked to find out they were lied to: “On the boat we could not have known that when we first saw our husbands we would have no idea who they were. [...] [they] bear no resemblance to the handsome young men in the photographs. That the photographs we had been sent were twenty years old” (*The Buddha* 18). It was not unusual for the husband to lie about his age and/or socioeconomic status. And soon these women will also discover that their idea of a carefree American life was also a lie: “This is America, we would say to ourselves, there is no need to worry. And we would be wrong” (*The Buddha* 18). In this first chapter, Otsuka juxtaposes the excitement of new immigrants with disillusionment depicted in the next chapters. The first generation of Japanese Americans have experienced cultural shock and was forced to renegotiate their identity and place in the United States.

Hardly any Japanese man was able to achieve a higher socioeconomic status before the 1930s. Japanese were cheap labor and many of these men did only menial work. As soon as their wives arrived they joined their husbands in fields, laundries, hotels, and groceries: “... if our husbands had told us the truth in their letters [...] we never would have come to America to do the work that no self-respecting American would do” (*The Buddha* 29). These Japanese women were disappointed, disillusioned with their naïve American dreams, however they were also determined to endure the hardships and eventually become successful in America: “we tried to make the best of what we had” (*The Buddha* 34). Working hard and trying to impress their employers, Japanese started to pose as a real competition to other workers:

They admired us for our strong backs and nimble hands. Our stamina. Our discipline. Our docile dispositions. [...] They said that our short stature made us ideally suited for work that required stooping low to the ground. Wherever they put us they were pleased. We had all the virtues of the Chinese—we were hardworking, we were patient, we were unfailingly polite—but none of their vices—we didn’t gamble or smoke opium, we didn’t brawl, we never spat. We were faster than the Filipinos and less arrogant than the Hindus. We were more disciplined than the Koreans. We were soberer than the Mexicans. We were the best breed of worker they had ever hired in their lives. (*The Buddha* 29)

In this excerpt, Japanese workers are being compared by their employers to other “subordinate” groups in order to create competition among these groups. This creates social conflict not only between minority and majority but among minorities themselves. In *The Buddha*, Japanese alone are prejudiced against other Asians as well: “Stay away from the Chinese. [...] Watch out for the Koreans. [...] Be careful around the Filipinos. They’re worse than the Koreans” (*The Buddha* 69). In the social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner defined a behavioral pattern where minorities do not compete with the majority simply because they do not compare themselves to this dominant group (Tajfel and Turner 287). This is not entirely accurate for Japanese workers and union white workers. In the West Coast, white farmers were in direct competition with Japanese and passionately strived for Japanese exclusion. This competition naturally intensified the hostile attitudes toward Japanese and nativist organizations such as Asiatic Exclusion League and The Native Sons of the Golden West argued for the preservation of the jobs for white Americans. This and similar arguments motivated by fear of competition led to issuing the California Alien Land Law of 1913 that prohibited “all aliens ineligible for citizenship” from owning land (Ng 9). In the following passage, Otsuka depicts these anti-Japanese sentiments and nativist arguments for Asian exclusion:

They did not want us as neighbors in their valleys. They did not want us as friends. We lived in unsightly shacks and could not speak plain English. We cared only about money. Our farming methods were poor. [...] We worked in the fields all day long without stopping for supper. We never took a single day off. [...] We were taking over their cauliflower industry. We had taken over their spinach industry. We had a monopoly on their strawberry industry and had cornered their market on beans. We were an unbeatable, unstoppable economic

machine and if our progress was not checked the entire western United States would soon become the next Asiatic outpost and colony. (*The Buddha* 35)

Japanese were expected to quickly assimilate into the dominant culture. However, as is seen in this excerpt, they were often met with prejudice and discrimination, therefore unable to assimilate into the dominant group that socially excluded them. Richard Reeves, an Asian American historian, observes that even several distinguished Californians held anti-Japanese opinions. For example, Dr. Ross, a professor of sociology at Stanford, stated that Japanese immigrants are “unassimilable; and work for low wages and thereby undermine the existing work standards of American workmen.” He also added that “they lack a proper political feeling for American democratic institutions” (qtd. in Reeves 14). This lack of “proper political feeling” refers to the fact that Japanese were so far unable to form American national identity. This, of course, is mainly because the most of Japanese immigrants were not allowed to participate in social activities of the majority. They were uncertain about their place in American society and therefore resolved this social conflict between minority and majority by focusing on their positive self-concept arising from their ethnic identity.

In *The Buddha*, Otsuka further portrays in detail the complicated relationship of Japanese immigrants with the Caucasians. Those who worked on farms and lived in small villages or in rather isolated areas had little contact with the white population and managed to maintain a positive ethnic identity. In cities, it was harder to avoid experiencing the social identity conflict. Every bride, in the novel, was warned by her husband to “stay away from” the white Americans. And if the contact with them was inevitable, Japanese women had to quickly learn how to properly behave around them: “Approach them with caution, if you must. Expect the worst, but do not be surprised by moments of kindness. There is goodness all around. Remember to make them feel comfortable. Be humble. Be polite. Appear eager to please. Say ‘Yes, sir,’ or ‘No, sir,’ and do as you’re told. Better yet, say nothing at all. You now belong to the invisible world” (*The Buddha* 25–26). Otsuka does not exaggerate the caution with which Japanese approached the majority of white Americans. Japanese eventually learned not to draw attention to themselves. They avoided direct confrontation and tried to make themselves invisible. However, not only their racial features but also their dedication to work and resilience drew the attention of racist and/or jealous Americans. Afraid of Japanese competition, nativist continued to passionately argue for Asian exclusion.

In *The Buddha*, Otsuka subtly illustrates how the first generation of Japanese Americans dealt with this prejudice and socio-economic discrimination. It was difficult for Japanese immigrants to accept their racial “inferiority” in America. The Meiji Japan, that immigrants left behind, was racially a heterogenic nation. Now in America, Japanese were a minority and often treated as inferior. Inevitably, Japanese experienced the social identity crisis. In the novel, some Japanese immigrants choose as a defense mechanism to lose themselves in their work: “We threw ourselves into our work and became obsessed with the thought of pulling one more weed. [...] We stopped dreaming. We stopped wanting. We simply worked, that was all” (*The Buddha* 36–37). This was a natural behavior for Meiji Japanese. Japanese value a concept of *gaman*, which means “enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity,” promoting strength, perseverance, and suppression of anger and other negative emotions (Kitano 109). However, the concept of *gaman* did not ease the feeling of inadequacy. Americans in Otsuka’s novel treat Japanese as inferior and eventually they start to feel inferior: “We loved them. We hated them. We wanted to be them. How tall they were, how lovely, how fair. Their long, graceful limbs. Their bright white teeth. Their pale, luminous skin, which disguised all seven blemishes of the face. [...] They seemed so at home in the world. So at ease. They had a confidence that we lacked. And much better hair. So many colors. And we regretted that we could not be more like them” (*The Buddha* 39). Japanese start to internalize American values and beauty standards. They see themselves through the eyes of the majority. These Japanese characters experience identity conflict as Erikson described in his theory—they judge themselves in the light of what they perceive to be the way in which others judge them (Erikson 23). In Japan, they were the dominant group that felt superior to other ethnic groups such as Chinese, Filipinos and Koreans. Japanese were xenophobic toward other nations but in the United States they were the aliens; in the society that values individuality and assertiveness, Japanese seemed too meek and inscrutable. To emphasize the inferior status of Japanese Americans in American society, Otsuka portrays a scene in which Americans take their Japanese names: “They gave us new names. They called us Helen and Lily. They called us Margaret. They called us Pearl” (*The Buddha* 40). Names are important for one’s self-concept. It is what defines a person and by taking their Japanese names, Americans figuratively stole their identity. They usually gave Japanese new names because they could not pronounce Japanese name and/or did not want

to be reminded of the fact that a Japanese worked for them. Most of the Americans had a paternalistic attitude toward Japanese and did not treat them as their equals. Furthermore, Japanese immigrants were even ashamed of themselves for doing the job “no self-respecting American would do.” However, many of them could not return to Japan because their “failure” in America would bring shame to their family: “*If you come home, our fathers had written to us, you will disgrace the entire family*” (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 50). Some of them were so ashamed to even mention in the letters to their families their lowly status in American society that they lied about achieving the American dream: “We have quit the fields and moved into a nice house in town, where my husband has found employment with a family of the first rank. [...] I sleep in until nine every morning and spend my afternoons out of doors with the cat in the garden. [...] I am taking piano lessons. I have mastered the art of American baking and recently won first prize in a contest for my lemon meringue pie. I know you would like it here” (*The Buddha* 45). Otsuka in *The Buddha* implies that Japanese in Meiji Japan are a proud nation. However, in the United States their Japanese national identity was in conflict with their lowly status in American society. They lie about their status to their families in Japan which ultimately lowers their self-esteem. In the novel, Japanese feel that they cannot return to their homeland and they have to endure in their difficult social position. In this environment, many Japanese lost a positive concept of themselves and created a negative self-concept. Furthermore, Otsuka seems to suggest that Japanese resignedly accept their low social status. They try hard to avoid any direct confrontation with the Caucasians:

Most of them took little notice of us at all. We were there when they needed us and when they did not, poof, we were gone. We stayed in the background, [...] We spoke seldom. [...] We were gentle. We were good. We never caused any trouble and allowed them to do with us as they pleased. We let them praise us when they were happy with us. We let them yell at us when they were mad. [...] We did not bother them with questions. We never talked back or complained. We never asked for a raise. (*The Buddha* 44)

If they were directly confronted, Japanese quickly learned that “the only way to resist [...] was by not resisting” (*The Buddha* 52). Japanese generally value harmony in the society and avoid direct confrontations, however, this Japanese subservience is deemed as a sign of weakness in American eyes and therefore, they treated Japanese as inferior.

However, in their ethnic community, Japanese were able to maintain a relatively positive self-concept. A constant awareness of being inferior in the American society could permanently affect Japanese personality. But, one's status and position in Japantowns provided a positive reinforcement of one's worth and social identity. Therefore, some Japanese immigrants were not negatively affected by their status in the dominant society (Kitano 106). Otsuka records in few sentences a lively Japantown where people maintain a positive sense of themselves in a self-sufficient ethnic community and she suggests that a positive ethnic identity is important for person's well-being. To further strengthen her idea, Otsuka then juxtaposes the feeling of security in Japantown with the prejudice and discrimination that Japanese are met with in white neighborhoods:

Whenever we left J-town and wandered through the broad, clean streets of their cities we tried not to draw attention to ourselves. We dressed like they did. We walked like they did. We made sure not to travel in large groups. We made ourselves small for them—*If you stay in your place they'll leave you alone*—and did our best not to offend. Still, they gave us a hard time. Their men slapped our husbands on the back and shouted out, 'So sorry!' as they knocked off our husbands' hats. Their children threw stones at us. Their waiters always served us last. [...] Their barbers refused to cut our hair. [...] Their women asked us to move away from them in their trolley cars whenever we were standing too close. (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 52)

Japanese were mocked for their ethnic behavior. Yet when they behaved like Americans and tried to assimilate, they were not allowed to participate in the mainstream society because of prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, Otsuka, using juxtaposition, shows contrasting social environments and the effect of the environment on social identity: "Mostly, though, we stayed at home, in J-town, where we felt safe among our own. We learned to live at a distance from them, and avoided them whenever we could" (*The Buddha* 52). In their ethnic community, Japanese Americans felt safe and at ease but in the presence of Caucasians they felt inferior and avoided them. However, most of them were still determined to endure in this foreign land in hopes of better future. Eventually, Japanese in Otsuka's novel see themselves as indispensable for the American economy:



... we would stay in America just a little bit longer and work for them, for without us, what would they do? Who would pick the strawberries from their fields? [...] Who would scrub their toilets? Who would iron their shirts? [...] Who would cook their breakfasts? Who would clear their tables? Who would soothe their children? Who would bathe their elderly? Who would listen to their stories? Who would keep their secrets? [...] Who would flatter them? [...] Who would weep for them? Who would turn the other cheek for them and then one day—because we were tired, because we were old, because we could—forgive them? *Only a fool.* (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 53–54)

In this passage, Otsuka suggests that Japanese, in the end, internalized the feelings of inferiority and resignedly accepted their low social status in the American society. Their subservience, however, did not persuade nativists who still argued for Japanese exclusion.

Ultimately, prevailing nativist and xenophobic attitudes pressured U.S. Congress into passing restrictive immigration laws, mainly the Immigration Act of 1924. This act set European immigration by quota per country, but all “aliens ineligible for citizenship” (people from Asian countries) were prohibited from immigration to the States, consequently excluding new Japanese immigrants. Thus, the vast majority of Japanese immigrants came between 1885 and 1924. According to U.S. Census, the Japanese population in the US rose from around 2,000 in 1890 to 285,115 in 1940 before the internment (Ng 4). These immigrants were daily met with prejudice and discrimination in employment, housing, and education. They were virtually segregated from the mainstream society living in a social and economic enclave of their ethnic community.

Furthermore, the relatively short period of Japanese immigration gave Japanese Americans distinct generational groupings. Different generations of Japanese Americans are referred to as Issei (the first generation), Nisei (the second generation) and Sansei (the third generation). Each generation had lived through different circumstances which shaped its identity.

### **3. 2 Generations: A Profile**

Before further discussing the theme of social identity, it is necessary to introduce each generation of Japanese Americans. In her historical novels, Otsuka mainly focuses on the

first and the second generation of Japanese immigrants. However, she herself belongs to the third generation that did not experience first-hand the early prejudice and the internment. So, she has a unique perspective on these events.

### 3. 2. 1 Issei

The first generation of Japanese immigrants came to the United States in years 1885–1924 before the Immigration Act of 1924 banned Asian immigration. They are called Issei—a Japanese term denoting the first generation. Those first immigrants were the “pioneer” generation, often facing various challenges and difficulties associated with adjusting to a life in a new country. Not only the language of their adopted country represented a significant obstacle, but social and cultural customs were entirely different from their native land as well. In *The Buddha in the Attic*, Otsuka often stresses the cultural differences between Japanese and American culture by juxtaposition and she focuses on the cultural conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings. In reality, as well as in the novel, most of the Issei had low status in American society and did not feel to be part of it. However, in their Japanese communities, they were able to maintain their culture and customs. Therefore, their social identity was defined by their position in the ethnic community. Otsuka also depicts Issei as hardworking people who sacrifice their own needs in hope that their children would have a better future in America: “*Study hard. Be patient. Whatever you do, don’t end up like me*” (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 72). Otsuka’s portrait of Issei in *The Buddha* resembles in many ways Mary Matsuda Gruenewald’s description of them in her memoir *Looking Like the Enemy* (2005):

In all immigrant populations, the parents worked hard to establish a firm foothold in the new country. [...] They [my parents] were like most hardworking immigrants, sacrificing their own needs so their family could have a future in America. To a large degree, my parents continued with old country customs, spoke traditional Japanese, ate Japanese food, and celebrated Japanese holidays. Before 1941, the Japanese in America were culturally isolated, a people without a future. (Gruenewald 25)

The Issei settled mainly in the West Coast states, either in large cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, and Seattle or agricultural areas such as San Joaquin Valley. Most of the Issei earned living as farmers or worked manual and domestic jobs in the cities.

Socially isolated from the white minority and speaking English only to a certain extent, they formed self-contained communities, *Nihonmachi* (Japantown) in the larger cities, developing an unusually active and highly organized community life. Stores, boardinghouses, doctors, but also recreational clubs and sports organizations flourished and both Christian and Buddhist churches, businesses associations for gardeners, farmers and other merchants strengthened the ties in the community and provided a social outlet within the ethnic community (Ng 5). Miyamoto, furthermore, points out that entrepreneurs evolved a “self-sufficient ethnic economy that served virtually all needs” (8). In *The Buddha*, Otsuka evocatively describes a Japantown:

In J-town we rarely saw them [Caucasians] at all. [...] We bought our groceries at Fujioka Grocery, where they sold all the things we remembered from home: green leaf tea, Mitsuwa soap, incense, pickled plums, fresh tofu, dried seaweed to help fend off goiters and cold. [...] We bought our dresses at Yada Ladies’ Shop and our shoes at Asahi Shoe, where the shoes actually came in our size. We bought our face cream at Tenshodo Drug. We went to the public bathhouse every Saturday and gossiped with our neighbors and friends. [...] We went to Yoshinaga’s Dental Clinic for our toothaches, and for our back and knee pains we went to Dr. Hayano, [...] And all of this took place on a four-block-long stretch of town that was more Japanese than the village we’d left behind in Japan. *If I close my eyes I don’t even know I’m living in a foreign land.* (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 51–52)

Since interactions with their fellow Americans were rather sparse, Issei rather focused on strengthening the ties within the Japanese American community. Their social status in the community reinforced their positive self-concept. As Otsuka shows in *The Buddha*, Issei felt confident in their ethnic communities and: “safe among [their] own” (*The Buddha* 52). Nevertheless, this strong attachment to the ethnic community hindered the process of acculturation and Issei were often unable to form American national identity. Outside their ethnic community, Japanese immigrants attempted to blend into American society for example by wearing Western-style clothing and not bowing during social interactions. However, more importantly, they supported their children to participate in American customs and social activities and encouraged them to pursue a higher American education. They hoped that their children would achieve socioeconomic success in American society.

Although many of the Issei faced numerous difficulties in America, a vast majority of them remained in the United States for their whole lives. Some of those Issei even considered America their new homeland, even though they were still technically Japanese nationals since they were deemed ineligible for American citizenship. The war years and incarceration, however, disrupted the integrity of the ethnic community and many of the aging Issei generation were left disillusioned and helpless.

### **3. 2. 2 Nisei**

The second generation was born on American soil and by law automatically obtained American citizenship. Nisei have been often described as growing up in two worlds—one American, the other Japanese. Typically born between years 1918–1922 to a thirty-five years old father and twenty-five years old mother, the Nisei children were coming of age in the years 1939 and 1943 (Daniels 22), during the most turbulent period of Japanese American experience.

Despite their own cultural isolation, Issei insisted that their children not only attend American schools but also excel as students. Speaking Japanese at home and English at school, Nisei represented a cultural bridge between their own parents and American society.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, many Issei parents aimed to preserve cultural ties to Japan and they raised their children upholding Japanese norms and values. Most of Nisei participated in a variety of American activities such as basketball and bowling leagues, ballroom dancing clubs, and they were generally socializing with non-Asians as well (Ng 6). Brought up in the ethnic community, but educated in American schools, Nisei children were, therefore, forced to negotiate their Japanese and American identity. At school they were taught about American values, democracy, and equality. Yet when Nisei tried to enter the American mainstream culture or find an employment outside their ethnic economy, they still encountered prejudice and discrimination. In this racist environment, many Nisei experienced the ethnic and national identity conflict. As Mary Matsuda Gruenewald epitomizes: “I am an American yet

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<sup>10</sup> However, many Japanese American children could not read Japanese, so their parents would often send them to Japanese language schools. Additionally, some Nisei children were sent to be educated in Japan and after finishing their education, they returned to the United States. Those children were called Kibei and Wendy Ng (6) adds that Kibei often experienced a great conflict in loyalty between their two “mother” countries since they spend their formative years in Japan, but were U.S. citizen by birth.

I don't look like one. I am Japanese but ashamed that I am" (Gruenewald 17). Their social reality was often not the same as they were taught in American schools. To combat discrimination and social prejudice, educated Nisei formed the Japanese American Citizen League (JACL) (Ng 6). Serving as the social and political pillar of the Nisei community, the aim of this organization was to promote Americanization, assimilation, and exercise of civil rights as is reflected in the official creed of the JACL written in the year 1940:

I am proud that I am an American citizen of Japanese ancestry, for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantage of this nation. I believe in her institutions, ideals, and traditions; [...] Although some individuals may discriminate against me, I shall never become bitter or lose faith, for I know that such persons are not representative of the majority of the American people. True; I shall do all in my power to discourage such practices; but I shall do it in the American way, above board, in the open, through courts of law, by education, by proving myself to be worthy of equal treatment and consideration. I am firm in my belief that American sportsmanship and attitude of fair play will judge citizenship on the basis of action and achievement and not on the basis of physical characteristics. Because I believe in America, and I trust she believes in me, [...] I pledge myself to do honor to her at all times and in all places, [...] to actively assume my duties and obligations as a citizen, cheerfully and without any reservation whatsoever, in the hope that I may become a better American in a greater America. (Mike Masaoka qtd in Daniels 24–25)

This and similar patriotic outbursts demonstrated Nisei's resolution to be accepted into the mainstream society as equal fellow Americans. Generally, Nisei felt a strong attachment to America as a nation and believed in its values and thus constructed a strong American national identity. However, their American national identity was in conflict with their Japanese ethnic identity as Daniels observes in this comment of the JACL creed: "a good part of this overreaction is compensation and a conscious rejection of an alien heritage that is seen as retarding the aspirations of the second-generation" (Daniels 25). Nisei often felt ashamed of their Japanese heritage forming a negative ethnic self-concept and alienating themselves from their Issei parents. Young Nisei, therefore, identified with the white society as Kim describes in her theory of Asian American ethnic identity development.

Nisei were neither totally American nor Japanese, they were "a unique fusion of the two" (Uchida 45)—Japanese Americans. However, the internment experience forced them

to rethink and reformulate their identity and to deal with both aspects of their Japanese and American heritage. Otsuka depicts this issue of identity conflict in *When the Emperor Was Divine* which will be further analyzed in the next section of this diploma thesis.

### **3. 2. 3 Sansei**

In American history context, the term Sansei refers to grandchildren of the first Japanese immigrants who came to the United States before the issuing of Immigration Act of 1924. Although the vast majority of the Sansei were born after the war, some young Nisei couples started families during the war years and a small number of the Sansei children were born in internment camps. However, the traumatic experience of the internment shaped Sansei identity whether they directly experienced internment or not.

After the war ended and the camps were closed in 1946, Japanese Americans were urged by the government to resettle in Midwest and East Coast areas. Although a large number of Japanese Americans returned to their communities in the West Coast states, many Nisei families aimed to be socioeconomically integrated into the white middle-class neighborhood, suburbs, and cities (Ng 7). Thus, a vast majority of Sansei grew up in areas where there were few other Japanese Americans. Nisei parents placed a great emphasis on assimilation and encouraged Sansei's education. Wendy Ng (7) observes that Sansei tended to be high achieving, socially and educationally, and continually aimed to do one's best to prove themselves as model citizens. Generally, Sansei generation is fully integrated into American society and has achieved this assimilation through economic and social mobility.

However, as a cost of this full assimilation, the majority of Sansei were not able to speak Japanese and therefore communication with their grandparents (Issei) was rather difficult. Moreover, many Sansei were not told about their parents and grandparents' internment experience during the Second World War, because of complex feelings of shame and generally restrained behavior of older generations (Ng 7). Although Sansei had limited knowledge about the Japanese American internment, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s raised in American society awareness of the racial injustices of the past (Ng 7). Sansei began to ask their parents and grandparents questions about the internment and infuriated by this great injustice they started to work with politicians and activist to seek redress for all Japanese Americans who were affected by the internment during WWII. The passionate involvement

of Sansei in the Redress Movement serves as an evidence of the fact that that the internment shaped the identity of every Japanese American, whether he or she directly experienced it or not.

### **3. 3 The Japanese (American) Culture**

To fully understand the ethnic identity and the national identity conflict, it is necessary to introduce Japanese American culture. Knowledge of Japanese culture, norms and values helps to explain Japanese American behavior. Japanese behavior often seems incomprehensible to Westerners only because they do not understand the values and norms Japanese people adhere to. However, it is important to say that Japanese American culture is not wholly Japanese neither American—it is a culture that Issei passed down on their children and they on their children and so on. It would be an overgeneralization to say that all Japanese Americans behaved in accordance with these prescribed norms, nevertheless, the knowledge of Meiji Japanese culture provides the background for the understanding of Issei and Nisei behavior.

Kitano (101–102) defines “norms” as shared meanings in a culture that provide a guide for interpersonal behavior that is acceptable in that culture. “Values” then refer to a set of shared attitudes in a culture. Japanese culture, that Issei left behind, was highly hierarchical in structure, emphasizing discipline and behavioral reserve. From school age, Japanese are taught norms such as *on* (ascribed obligation to one’s family), *giri* (contractual obligation), *ninjou* (humane sensibility, empathy), and *enryo* (modesty in the presence of one’s superior, reserve and consideration for others). An outstanding characteristic of these Japanese norms is their adaptiveness to various external realities (Kitano, 102). Japanese always try to follow the path of the least resistance. Furthermore, these norms emphasize duty and obligation and Japanese generally value conformity and obedience. Because of this, Japanese might blindly follow government and other officials. Therefore, these normative patterns, that Issei learned in Japan and taught their Nisei children, helped Japanese and Japanese Americans to adapt to numerous challenges in the United States.

Kitano stresses that the norm of *enryo* is one of the most important norms that shapes Japanese American behavior: “The concept originally referred to the manner in which

‘inferiors’ were supposed to behave to ‘superiors’—that is, through deference and obsequiousness. As with many norms, however, the meaning and the use eventually expanded to cover a variety of situations —from how to behave toward the white man, to what to do in ambiguous situations, to how to cover moments of confusion, embarrassment, and anxiety” (Kitano 104). *Enryo*, therefore, has both a positive and a negative effect on Japanese American acculturation. For example, Japanese Americans may hesitate to speak at meetings or refuse any invitation, but they also behave politely and are able to react with grace in difficult situations. Kitano believes that the stereotype of shy, inscrutable, reserved Japanese is based on this norm. *Hazukashii* (shame, embarrassment, reticence) is part of the *enryo* norm. Japanese are generally concerned about how others will react to them. Even in childhood, parents emphasize *hazukashii* (“others will laugh at you”) and the norm is used as means of social control (Kitano 104). This may lead to a lack of aggressive behavior and to high dependency. *Hige* (self-abasement, humility, self-depreciation) is also part of the *enryo* norm. For example, if an American praises the Japanese wife, the husband may respond: “Oh no, it’s not true.” Or the Japanese may degrade his children or himself because praising oneself or one’s family in front of superiors is considered to be impolite (Kitano 104). This naturally leads to a social interaction that is very difficult for many Americans to understand. These norms, the lack of aggression and high conformity, helped Japanese Americans to be seen as the “model minority”. For example, during the wartime evacuation, the cooperative and docile behavior of Japanese Americans can be ascribed to these norms.

However, Japanese Americans did not constantly interact with others on “inferior” basis.<sup>11</sup> In their ethnic community, they interacted in a culture that respected the Japanese norms and values. A Japanese man may be deemed “inferior” and an inscrutable alien by a white man, but in the Japanese community, an Issei man is a well-respected member of the community and head of his family (Kitano 106). Therefore, his identity, status, and position in the ethnic community provide a positive reinforcement to his identity and self-esteem. Issei were able to maintain a positive ethnic identity. However, identity formation of the second generation of Japanese Americans is more complicated. In his family, a Nisei man is a child, “inferior” to the head of the family—an Issei father—and in the ethnic community, a Nisei has a hard time to establish himself as an individual. He was taught to behave in

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<sup>11</sup> These patterns of behavior might lead to a low self-esteem, internalized racism, and a negative identity.



accordance with Japanese norms and values, but was also educated in American schools, learning a different set of norms and values. A Nisei man was raised Japanese but identifies with American values. Nisei, thus, experienced the ethnic identity and the national identity conflict.

Traditional Japanese attitude is that of *gaman*. *Gaman* means “enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity”, promoting strength, perseverance, and suppression of anger and emotions. Issei also held a fatalistic perspective on life, often saying to their children “shikata ga nai” (it cannot be helped). *Gaman* and this fatalistic attitude helped Japanese Americans to deal with the immediate trauma of the uprooting and internment.

Japanese also respect different values than Americans. The biggest difference is between Japanese collective and American individual orientation. In Japanese culture, one’s needs are deemed to have a lesser priority than group needs. Keeping a harmony in the society, compromising and yielding to orders is highly approved, and disruptive behavior, on the other hand, is harshly censored. Japanese families also stress the concept of filial piety. Further, Japanese value discipline and gratitude and also believe that suffering and hard work are “necessary ingredients of character-building” (Kitano 107). Social status is important in Japanese culture as well. Therefore, age, sex, class, family lineage and other variables influence one’s position in the community. Finally, Japanese culture is an achievement-oriented culture. Because of these dispositions, Japanese Americans were often frustrated with their low social status in American society. The significant differences, therefore, between Japanese American and Caucasian values are conformity, obligation, and dependency.

In each succeeding generation of Japanese Americans, there is a change in Japanese norms and values. The change is toward acculturation and younger generations of Japanese Americans rather identify with American norms and values. In general, they reject their ethnic identity in favor of American national identity. Furthermore, some scholars believe that Japanese values are compatible with Protestant middle-class values and that this compatibility helped Japanese Americans to be viewed as the model minority in the post-war society. For example, Caudill states that:

The Japanese and American middle class cultures share the values of politeness, respect for authority and parental wishes, duty to community, diligence, cleanliness and neatness, emphasis on personal achievement of long-range goals, importance of keeping up appearances, and others. [...] Japanese and middle-class Americans characteristically utilize the adaptive mechanism of being highly sensitive to cues coming from the external world as to how they should act, and that they also adapt themselves to many situations by suppression of their real emotional feelings. (Caudill 1107)

Therefore, Japanese Americans and middle-class Americans value similar concepts. The process of acculturation and structural assimilation is then for each succeeding generation of Japanese Americans easier.

### **3. 4. The Pre-war Japanese American Family and the Generational Conflict**

Japanese began to permanently settle in the United States and form families in the early twentieth century. The phenomenon of arranged marriage affected the structure of Japanese families in America and often caused psychological and sociological tension between the spouses and generations. Generally, Issei husbands were ten or twenty years older than their wives. The first immigrants were men seeking wealth in the United States—working hard and establishing the first Japanese American communities. Those farmers and tradesmen soon felt the need for wives who could help them with their enterprises (Miyamoto 7) and provide for them a homelike atmosphere. Thus, a wave of Japanese women came to America and Japanese began to permanently settle in the United States. However as has been mentioned before, it is important to realize that these first immigrant women were taking a great risk—virtually speaking no English, these Issei women were completely dependent on their working husbands and lived in isolation and alienation. In *The Buddha*, Otsuka mainly focuses on struggles of these women and their families. In traditional Japanese culture, the husband is a head of the family, an authoritarian figure and the wife's loyalty to him is imperative. The age differences between the spouses only intensified the emotional distance between husband and his wife. These patriarchal families maintain gender division of labor.

Usually the wife takes care of children and the household and the husband only provides materially for the family:

Usually, our husbands had nothing to do with them [the children]. They never changed a single diaper. They never washed a dirty dish. They never touched a broom. In the evening, no matter how tired we were when we came in from the fields, they sat down and read the paper while we cooked dinner for the children and stayed up washing and mending piles of clothes until late. They never let us go to sleep before them. They never let us rise after the sun. *You'll set a bad example for the children.* [...] They rarely spoke to their children, or even seemed to remember their names. *Tell number three boy not to slouch when he walks.* And if things grew too noisy at the table, they clapped their hands and shouted out, 'That's enough!' Their children, in turn, preferred not to speak to their fathers at all. (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 63–64)

This distance and strict upholding of gender roles affected to a certain degree their relationship with their Nisei children—fathers were emotionally distant and only demanded filial piety and mothers were responsible for raising the children and taking care of all domestic chores.

Issei usually had 4 to 5 children, so an average pre-war Japanese family was rather big. Most of the children were born to lower class parents and from a young age Nisei helped their parents with the work. In keeping with old Confucian traditions, the first generation believed that stable families ensured a stable society, therefore Asian parents stressed the importance of collective mentality and interdependence within the community (Kitano and Kitano 313). Non-Asian American families, on the other hand, valued independence and individualism in their children. Parents, in *The Buddha*, raise their children according to Japanese norms and values which can be observed in this passage:

We told them stories about tongue-cut sparrows and grateful cranes and baby doves that always remembered to let their parents perch on the higher branch. We tried to teach them manners. *Never point with your chopsticks. Never suck on your chopsticks. Never take the last piece of food from a plate.* We praised them when they were kind to others but told them not to expect to be rewarded for their good deeds. We scolded them whenever they tried to talk back. We taught them never to accept a handout. We taught them never to brag. We taught them everything we knew. A fortune begins with a penny. It is better to suffer ill than

to do ill. You must give back whatever you receive. Don't be loud like the Americans. (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 68–69)

In the stories about birds, parents stress the importance of filial piety and obligation to one's parents (Japanese norm *on*). They also teach them humility and emotional reserve (norms *ninjou* and *enryo*). Kitano and Kitano (318) characterize the typical Issei family by "interaction based on obligation, strong involvement in family relationships, priority of filial bond over conjugal bond, male dominance, rigid division of labor by sex, emotional restraint with emphasis on compassion, respect, consideration, stability, and little verbal communication." In comparison to a typical American family, the pre-war Japanese American family was more hierarchical in structure, authoritarian, and patriarchal. Furthermore, the Issei generation upheld a cultural ideal realized in the phrase *kodomo no tame ni* ("for the sake of the children") which connotes an idea of sacrificing one's own life for the next generation (Kitano and Daniels 74). Thus, the Issei parents encouraged their children to acquire American education and to participate in all areas of American life. However, before attending American schools, most of the Nisei children lived in isolation on farms and Japantowns and were brought up according to Japanese norms and values. To apply Kim's theory of the ethnic identity development, those children had a neutral or positive ethnic identity. However, once they started to go to school, they were in everyday contact with their white peers and authority figures and naturally experienced the ethnic identity conflict. In *The Buddha*, Otsuka describes this identity conflict from the perspective of their non-Asian peers: "At school they sat in the back of the classroom in their homemade clothes with the Mexicans and spoke in timid, faltering voices. They never raised their hands. They never smiled. At recess they huddled together in a corner of the school yard and whispered among themselves in their secret, shameful language" (*The Buddha* 71). In their peers' eyes, Nisei are too strange, too Japanese. Many of them were ashamed and embarrassed. But slowly Nisei became accustomed to white Americans and their customs. Soon Nisei desired to escape their ethnic identity and eventually identified with the norms and values of the majority. In other words, they rejected their ethnic identity in favor of American national identity. In *The Buddha*, the loss of the ability to speak Japanese represents the rejection of their ethnic identity. In the novel, Nisei children quickly learn English language and slowly start to forget Japanese. Eventually, they speak only English,

however their parents hear them talk out loud in their sleep: “the words that came out of their mouths came out—[they] were sure of it—in Japanese” (*The Buddha* 73). Otsuka not only shows the importance of acquiring the language of majority for successful acculturation, but she also subtly suggests that by wanting to forget Japanese, Nisei unconsciously reject their parents, their ethnic identity. When the Issei mothers sadly state: “They gave themselves new names we had not chosen for them and could barely pronounce” (*The Buddha* 73) the generational and cultural conflicts that had arisen between Issei and Nisei only broaden.

Nisei also suffered from “the severe demands of an ancestral culture totally alien to the Americanizing influence of the classroom: a culture which emphasized strict conformity as opposed to individuality, duty more than rights” (Weglyn 42). During adolescence, Issei parents could barely recognize their Nisei children. In American manner they: “insisted on eating bacon and eggs every morning for breakfast instead of bean-paste soup. They refused to use chopsticks. They drank gallons of milk. They poured ketchup all over their rice. They spoke perfect English just like on the radio and whenever they caught us bowing before the kitchen god in the kitchen and clapping our hands they rolled their eyes and said, *Mama, please*” (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 75). According to Erikson, during adolescence many children rebel against the norms of their parents (Erikson 30). However, in *The Buddha*, Nisei not only rebel against their parents’ authority, they rebel against their cultural heritage. Furthermore, Otsuka depicts Nisei as ashamed of being of Japanese ancestry and their low social status in American society:

Mostly, they [Nisei] were ashamed of us [Issei]. Our floppy straw hats and threadbare clothes. Our heavy accents. *Every sing oh righ?* Our cracked, callused palms. Our deeply lined faces black from years of picking peaches and staking grape plants in the sun. They longed for real fathers with briefcases who went to work in a suit and tie and only mowed the grass on Sundays. They wanted different and better mothers who did not look so worn out. [...] They would not be seen with us at the temple on the Emperor’s birthday. They would not celebrate the annual Freeing of the Insects with us at the end of summer in the park. [...] They laughed at us whenever we insisted that they bow to us first thing in the morning and with each passing day they seemed to slip further and further from our grasp. (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 75–76)

The second generation of Japanese Americans, therefore, formed a strong American national identity. Nevertheless, they were still seen as strangers by the white society. They blamed their Japanese heritage for their social exclusion and never realized they were an oppressed minority in a racist society. Looking back at her adolescence, Yoshiko Uchida in her memoir *Desert Exile* (1982) realizes that she had internalized racist values: “Society caused us to feel ashamed of something that should have made us feel proud. Instead of directing anger at the society that excluded and diminished us [...], many of us Nisei tried to reject our own Japaneseness and the Japanese ways of our parents” (42).

Regardless of this generational conflict and feelings of shame, being a part of the ethnic community played an important role in the Issei and Nisei lives since they were socially excluded from the dominant society. The mutual solidarity and support in the Japanese American community were mainly essential to the survival of the Issei. However, as the second generation increased in number and maturity, Americanization of the community progressed and the interests and activities of the Nisei were not noticeably different from those of American youths elsewhere (Miyamoto 9). Eventually, by the year 1939, the Nisei outnumber their Issei parents making the Japanese American community predominantly young and acculturated.

During the war years and their incarceration, the generational differences were more evident. However, the strong ties in the community were essential for survival and well-being of Japanese Americans. Regrettably, after the war, the ethnic community lost its significance in the lives of Japanese Americans since younger generations fully adopted American national identity. Today’s Japanese American families raise their children according to American norms and values.

### **3. 5 Uprooting**

The decision to remove Japanese Americans from the West Coast was not only the result of the attack on Pearl Harbor, it was also a consequence of these anti-Japanese attitudes from the early part of the twentieth century. Distinctive physical and cultural characteristics set Japanese Americans apart from the Caucasian majority in the West Coast and created the atmosphere of prejudice and discrimination.

The foreign relations between the United States and Japan were slowly deteriorating throughout the 1930s. The American government disagreed with the Japanese invasion of Chinese Manchuria and with expansionist policy in the Pacific. The U.S. military was preparing for a possible assault from the Japanese army. This situation also worsened the public perception of the Japanese Americans and contemporary media were publishing xenophobic stories, and thus fueling the fear of the “yellow peril” (Daniels 30–31). Not only non-Asian Americans but also Japanese and Japanese Americans felt anxious about Japan’s militaristic tendencies and wondered what would be the impact of the possible military conflict between their country of origin and their new adopted homeland.

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, came as a shocking surprise to all Americans. Although the American government was aware of the potential threat from Japanese military forces, they were unprepared for the attack of such scale (Ng 13). The day after the attack, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared War against Japan; Japanese became the number one enemy of the United States and Japanese Americans, citizens and aliens alike, were suspected of fifth column activity, of sabotage. After the attack, people on the West Coast were hysterical and called for a massive removal of Japanese Americans. Those circumstances combined with the long racist anti-Japanese attitudes allowed American government without public protest to incarcerate both Japanese alien and Japanese American citizens into concentration camps.

In *The Buddha in the Attic*, Japanese and Japanese American characters are shocked to be suddenly treated as traitors. There are rumors of a list of potential saboteurs and Japanese men are reportedly taken from their homes in the middle of the night. Naturally, the Japanese American community is anxious about its uncertain future and Otsuka evocatively portrays the suspense many Japanese Americans felt during this time. Believing in American democratic principles, they try their best to ignore rumors about missing men and plans of mass evacuation. They also try not to draw any negative attention to themselves: “For several days we stayed inside with our shades drawn and listened to the news of the war on the radio. We removed our names from our mailboxes. We brought in our shoes from the front porch. We did not send our children to school. At night we bolted our doors and spoke among ourselves in whispers” (*The Buddha* 81). Their fear was well-founded. Immediately after president Roosevelt declared the war, FBI agents began to arrest Issei community leaders—

Buddhist priest, Japanese language teachers, newspaper publishers, and heads of various organizations. Those were hundreds of Japanese immigrants identified from “Suspect Enemy Aliens” lists secretly compiled by the FBI with the help of the Census Bureau before the attack on Pearl Harbor. In total, immediately after the attack, 1,219 Japanese were arrested (Ng 14). These arrests were racially driven since the Munson Report from November 1941 clearly stated that Japanese aliens present no threat to the United States: “There will be no armed uprising of Japanese. [...] For the most part the local Japanese are loyal to the United States or, at worst, hope that by remaining quiet they can avoid concentration camps or irresponsible mobs” (qtd. in Ng 14). The West Coast government, however, ignored these findings of Japanese loyalty and Japanese community leaders were shipped to Justice Department facilities (prisons) around the country. More often than not, their families had no idea where their husbands and fathers were being held (Reeves 18). In addition to these arrests, bank accounts of many Japanese Americans were frozen. Japanese American community was stripped of their civic leaders and many women and children were left without means of support.

In *The Buddha*, Japanese are stunned to find themselves in this situation: “Children took one look at us and ran away like frightened deer. Little old ladies clutched their purses and froze up on the sidewalk at the sight of our husbands and shouted out, ‘They’re here!’ And even though our husbands had warned us—*They’re afraid*—still, we were unprepared. Suddenly, to find ourselves the enemy” (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 85). Generally, Japanese were often despised by the dominant society, but now, after Pearl Harbor, they were viewed as dangerous. It was a new social role—the role of an enemy—that they did not wish to play. Japanese Americans were assigned a social identity by the dominant group with which they did not identify. Suddenly, they experienced not only the ethnic identity conflict but also the national identity conflict. In a hostile social environment, they had to resolve their national loyalties. Otsuka overtly blames the war hysteria fueled by sensational media coverage of the alleged Japanese American sabotage:

It was all, of course, because of the stories in the papers. They said that thousands of our men had sprung into action, with clockwork precision, the moment the attack on the island had begun. [...] They said we had signaled to the enemy planes with flares from our fields. [...] They said that our truck farmers were foot soldiers in a vast underground army. *They’ve got*



*thousands of weapons down below in their vegetable cellars. They said that our houseboys were intelligence agents in disguise. They said that our gardeners were all hiding shortwave radio transmitters in their garden hoses and when the Pacific zero hour struck we'd get busy at once. Burst dams. Burning oil fields. Bombed bridges. Blasted roads. Blocked tunnels. Poisoned reservoirs. And what was to stop one of us from walking into a crowded marketplace with a stick of dynamite tied to our waist? Nothing.* (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 85–86)

Based on these rumors of Japanese American fifth column activity, FBI agents organized vast searches through Japanese Americans' property and frightened Issei and Nisei quickly destroyed old family photos, letters, books, *kimonos*, and simply anything that could associate them with Japan and the Emperor. Japanese Americans destroyed their cultural heritage and tried to suppress their ethnic identity in order to appear less suspicious. This behavior is in accordance with the situational perspective which argues that ethnic identity is constantly being renegotiated depending on specific situations that each individual (an ethnic group) encounters. Therefore, during the war, Japanese characters suddenly formed a negative ethnic identity. In the novel, they even blamed themselves: "we wondered why we had insisted for so long on clinging to our strange, foreign ways. *We've made them hate us*" (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 87). Issei continue to further question themselves and their actions and in the middle of the night husbands quietly ask their wives: "Had they kept too much to themselves? Or was their guilt written plainly, and for all the world to see, across their face? Was it their face, in fact, for which they were guilty? Did it fail to please in some way? Worse yet, did it offend?" (*The Buddha* 91). Japanese Americans have internalized racist attitudes and blame their Japanese identity for this situation. This pattern of behavior seems to be in accordance with traditional Japanese norms and values—*enryo* and general conformity. However, by referring to their "enemy" face, this passage openly points out the racist nature of the dominant group's claims. So even though, Japanese blame themselves, Otsuka subtly criticizes the white majority. During these times, therefore, Japanese Americans suppressed their ethnic identity and renegotiated their national loyalties.

Not only media and press, but also government officials and Commanding General of Western Defense Command (WDC), Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt spread hysteria and advised for removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast states. However, as is

evident from the data in the Munson Report, the claims and accusations of Japanese American sabotage were in most cases completely false. Nevertheless, soon evacuation orders appeared. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. The order did not directly mention Japanese Americans or Japanese, but referred to them as non-alien and alien, never citizen. The Executive Order implied the evacuation is “a matter of military necessity” (Reeves 42) and the designated areas of the West Coast fell under the military jurisdiction “from which any and all persons may be excluded as deemed necessary or desirable” (Ng 18). Thus, the order enabled the military to remove Japanese alien and citizen from the West Coast into internment camps. And Japanese were “almost relieved, for it was the waiting that was most difficult” (*The Buddha* 89). Surprising the government, Japanese Americans adopted a fatalistic attitude and did not resist the orders: “Whatever would happen would happen, we told ourselves, [...] we had no choice but to do as we were told. *It’s the President’s order*” (*The Buddha* 99). Generally, Japanese Americans complied with the evacuation orders. Kitano suggests that this cooperative behavior can be ascribed to traditional Japanese norms and values (Kitano 105). Issei, in *The Buddha*, obey the orders because they feel they have no other choice—*shikata ga nai* (it cannot be helped). They rely on their Japanese values to endure this challenging situation. On the other hand, Nisei did not rebel against orders because they saw this as “an opportunity to prove [their] loyalty” (*The Buddha* 101). The novel, thus, again suggests that the evacuation presented the ethnic and national identity conflict. Issei characters resignedly accept their situation as they previously accepted their low socioeconomic status. Eventually, Japanese Americans left their homes and communities:

... weeping. And some of us left singing. One of us left with her hand held over her mouth and hysterically laughing. A few of us left drunk. Others of us left quietly, with our heads bowed, embarrassed and ashamed. [...] Most of us left speaking only English, so as not to anger the crowds that had gathered to watch us go. Many of us had lost everything and left saying nothing at all. [...] Most of us left in a hurry. Many of us left in despair. A few of us left in disgust, and had no desire to ever come back. (*The Buddha* 105–106)

This passage evocatively chronicles the vastness of Japanese American experience. Japanese were forced to leave part of their identity—their ethnic identity—behind: “Haruko left a tiny laughing brass Buddha up high, in a corner of the attic, where he is still laughing to this day”

(*The Buddha* 109). From this excerpt, Otsuka draws the title of this historical novel, suggesting that *The Buddha in the Attic* essentially deals with Japanese ethnic identity. Their ethnic identity was forcibly put aside in “the attic” and hopefully later, after the war, they will be able to retrieve it. Nisei characters, on the other hand, left their homes “wearing American flag pins” (*The Buddha* 111). This sentence implies that Nisei’s social identity conflict is not only concerning their ethnicity but also their nationality.

In the last chapter “A Disappearance”, Otsuka shifts the narrative perspective. This chapter is told from white women’s point of view written in the similar style as the previous chapters: “The Japanese have disappeared from our town. Their houses are boarded up and empty now” (*The Buddha* 115). This is the collective voice of the women that Japanese have all these years worked for. Through their eyes, Otsuka describes how Japanese disappearance transformed the cities: “Downtown, on Main Street, their dry cleaners are still shuttered. *For Lease* signs hang in their windows. [...] Murata Florist is now Flowers by Kay. The Yamato Hotel has become the Paradise. [...] Harada Grocery is closed, and in its front window hangs a handwritten sign none of us can remember having seen there before—*God be with you until we meet again*, it reads. And of course, we cannot help but wonder: Who put up the sign? Was it one of them? Or one of us?” (italics by the author, *The Buddha* 115–116). Abandoned Japanese businesses and houses were soon claimed by Okies and African American farmers and workers. However, these new neighbors are also not their “kind” and they soon “begin to long for [their] old neighbors, the quiet Japanese” (*The Buddha* 126). All the traces of Japanese were slowly disappearing. Furthermore, in this passage the in-group (us) and out-group (them) classification is clearly showed. Japanese were a distinctive ethnic group in American society—living in the United States but never viewed as a part of the nation. Still, Issei strived for good (casual) relationships with the Caucasians. After Pearl Harbor, they without protest accepted their fate. Otsuka describes this fatalistic attitude of Japanese through the eyes of their white neighbors: “What struck [us] was how quiet everyone was. How calm. Some of the Japanese were slowly nodding their heads. Others took notes. None of them said a word” (*The Buddha* 117). They are amazed by Japanese calmness. They do not realize that Japanese prefer not to show emotions in public. They do not understand and naively blame inscrutable Japanese behavior for the evacuation: “If only, we say to ourselves, we’d know. But the last time any of us saw Mr. Mori at the fruit stand he was just as friendly

as ever. *He never mentioned to me that he was going away.* Three days later, however, he was gone” (*The Buddha* 122). Japanese American characters did not protest or resist in any way. They believed they had no other choice. However, their docility, as Otsuka suggest, caused to a certain degree the indifference of their white neighbors. The general population had no idea where the Japanese had gone: “Our mayor has assured us there is no need for alarm. *The Japanese are in a safe place.* He is not at liberty, however, to reveal where that place is” (*The Buddha* 116). Otsuka, therefore, to a certain degree justifies the indifferent reaction of the majority of the population to the Japanese evacuation. However, she also includes the perspective of more prejudiced citizens:

There are certain members of our community, however, who were more than a little relieved to see the Japanese go. For we have read the stories in the papers, we have heard the whispered rumors, we know that secret caches of weapons were discovered in the cellars of Japanese farmers in towns not far from ours, and even though we would like to believe that most, if not all, of the Japanese here in our own town were good, trustworthy citizens, of their absolute loyalty we could not be sure. (*The Buddha* 118–119)

Again, Otsuka suggests that Japanese general restraint made them seem alien. Japanese value of reserve is in conflict with American values. Therefore, she again focuses on Japanese ethnicity and racist beliefs of the white American society. Eventually, their white neighbors slowly forget about Japanese for “things happen and life goes on. [Their] attention has turned to other things” (*The Buddha* 124–125).

The change of perspective is crucial for it encompasses not only Japanese immigrant experience but also attitudes of some more tolerant members of the dominant group. Otsuka aims to depict two sides of the wartime experience. She does not simply demonize and stereotype the white society, she portrays them humane—something that the wartime propaganda failed to do with Japanese Americans. Even though throughout the novel she subtly condemns the behavior of the white society toward Japanese, she also realizes that in those times social and political atmosphere toward minorities was generally very different from the present.

Finally, Otsuka concludes her account of pre-war Japanese immigrant experience foreshadowing the transformation of Japanese American identity: “All we know is that the Japanese are out there somewhere, in one place or another, and we shall probably not meet

them again in this world” (*The Buddha* 129). This final sentence implies that the pre-war Japanese American community is gone. After the war, many Japanese suppressed their ethnic identity in favor of acculturation and the ethnic community lost its significance in Japanese Americans’ lives. In *The Buddha in the Attic*, Otsuka, thus, argues that the displacement and internment definitively transformed the Japanese-American ethnic identity.

In the historical novel *The Buddha in the Attic*, Otsuka mainly explores the theme of the ethnic identity and the place of Japanese immigrants in American society. Issei characters maintain a strong ethnic identity in order to survive in the discriminatory society. However, this rigid adhering to Japanese culture hinders acculturation. The majority of the first generation of Japanese Americans is unable to form American national identity. For this, Otsuka subtly blames the prejudiced American society in which Issei are prevented from achieving socioeconomic mobility. Upholding traditional Japanese norms and values, characters in *The Buddha* eventually accept their low social status in the dominant society isolating themselves in their ethnic community. The novel also explores generational conflict between Issei and their Nisei children who rejected their ethnic identity in favor of American national identity.

## **4 *When the Emperor Was Divine*: Being American, Looking Japanese**

Julie Otsuka wrote the historical novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) to explore her family history and experience. As the third-generation Japanese American she knew little about the wartime experience of her parents and grandparents. In her family, it was rather a taboo topic, talked about only lightly in funny anecdotes. Therefore, after the thorough research, Otsuka decided to write a novel about the internment to understand this part of her Japanese American identity. Her debut novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* deals directly with the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. She explores the psychological effect of the internment on Japanese Americans and their place in American society. Otsuka mainly focuses on the ethnic identity and the national identity conflict since during the war Japanese Americans were forced to renegotiate their identities. The aim is to analyze this conflict and social status of Japanese American characters depicted in this historical novel. I argue that Japanese American characters rejected their ethnic identity in favor of American national identity.

*When the Emperor Was Divine* unfolds the story of the nameless Japanese American family in five different but interconnected narrative perspectives. The first chapter “Evacuation Order No. 19” is told through the eyes of a woman who prepares for the evacuation. The next chapter “Train” describes the journey from Tanforan Assembly Center to Topaz from the perspective of an eleven-year old girl, the woman’s daughter. In chapter “When the Emperor Was Divine” life in the internment camp is told from a dream-like perspective of a seven-year old boy, the woman’s son. In chapter “In a Stranger’s Backyard” the narrative shifts again and the girl and the boy in plural “we” describe their return home. The brief final chapter “Confession” is an angry satirical confession by a man, the father, who was arrested by FBI right after the attack on Pearl Harbor and held in U.S. Department of Justice Camps till the end of the war. Furthermore, the story of the family is written mostly chronologically, following the events of the evacuation, the internment and the family’s return home. However, Otsuka often retrospectively describes events that happened before the main narrative to give details about the family members. This shifting of the narrative

perspective allows Otsuka to focus on the psychology of individual characters and make the portrait of Japanese American experience more universal.

#### **4. 1 Evacuation**

*When the Emperor Was Divine* opens with an evocative scene of a woman reading the sign—Evacuation Order No. 19. She acts pragmatically, reading the sign carefully and taking notes: “She read the sign from top to bottom and then, still squinting, she took out a pen and read the sign from top to bottom again. The print was small and dark. Some of it was tiny. She wrote down a few words on the back of a bank receipt, then turned around and went home and began to pack” (*The Emperor* 3). The woman shows no heightened emotions. All this is described from the third-person objective narrative point of view. Otsuka employs so-called camera eye perspective to objectively portray the internment experience. Deliberately, Otsuka does not mention her name nor describes the woman in detail. She wants the reader to see the woman only as a woman. Otsuka’s aim to make the story universal is evident from the first scene. Nevertheless, the internment experience is specific to Japanese American identity and the anonymous characters only facilitate this experience to the reader who is then able to more easily empathize with the Japanese Americans.

After Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were apprehensive about their future in the United States and for several months they were kept in unbearable suspense. So, when the Evacuation Order No. 19 was finally issued, Japanese Americans were in a strange way rather relieved because as characters in *The Buddha in the Attic* describe “it was the waiting that was most difficult” (*The Buddha* 89). As I have mentioned before, Japanese Americans, especially the first generation, are generally rather restrained in public. They also dutifully comply with governmental orders since this behavior is encouraged by Japanese social norms and values (Kitano 105). Therefore, the emotionless reaction of the woman in *The Emperor* is not extraordinary.

In the following scenes, the woman prepares for the evacuation. During the spring of 1942, all West Coast Japanese Americans, citizens and aliens alike, were ordered to evacuate to temporary assembly centers. They usually received these orders in ten days’ notice—having hardly enough time to make necessary arrangements and to prepare for the

evacuation. During this short time, they were registered, given an evacuee family number, and allowed to bring only “what they could carry,” usually two suitcases. In the meantime, the government and its designated department, War Relocation Authority (WRA), were building permanent concentration camps east of the Sierra Nevada and in desolate places of, for example, Utah, Idaho and Wyoming. Otsuka depicts the woman methodically packing her family belongings:

She rolled up the Oriental rug in the living room. [...] She carried the tiny bonsai tree out into the yard [...]. She brought the wind-up Victrola and the Westminster chime clock downstairs to the basement. [She] removed the pictures from the walls. There were only three: the painting of Princess Elizabeth that hung in the dining room, the picture of Jesus in the foyer, and in the kitchen, a framed reproduction of Millet’s *The Gleaners*. In the living room she emptied all the books from the shelves except Audubon’s *Birds of America*. In the kitchen she emptied the cupboards. [...] Everything else—the china, the crystal, the set of ivory chopsticks her mother had sent to her fifteen years ago from Kagoshima on her wedding day—she put into boxes. (*The Emperor* 7–8)

She then continues to pack her children’s possessions: “Upstairs, in the boy’s room, she unpinned the One World One War map of the world from the wall [...]. She wrapped up his stamp collection and the painted wooden Indian with the long headdress he had won at the Sacramento State Fair. She pulled out the *Joe Palooka* comic books from under his bed. [...] She placed his baseball glove on his pillow” (*The Emperor* 7). The description of the house represents the family’s identity. Their home is a combination of their Japanese and American identities. There are items that imply their acculturation (the Westminster clock, pictures of Jesus and classic Western artworks, Audubon’s *Birds of America*, the wooden Indian, the baseball glove) but also their Japanese heritage (the oriental rug, the bonsai tree, chopsticks). The house, therefore, illustrates the possibility of cultural pluralism. Otsuka suggests that Japanese and American identities can coexist. Furthermore, it is fair to assume that the family is a Christian family since there is a picture of Jesus on their wall and later in the novel the mother prays to Jesus. Members of Christian church usually came from middle-class families and they were educated in Christian schools and colleges where they learned to speak English (Uchida 6). Therefore, I believe that the first-generation parents were Christian. They already learned to speak English in Japan and when they finally came to the United States, they had



no problem to communicate. Speaking English language facilitated their acculturation. And since the parents easily adopted American culture and customs, their children probably quickly acculturated without consciously thinking about their Japanese ethnic identity; only adopting their parents' customs and values. In Japan, Christians were a religious minority and definitely do not represent the average Japanese immigrant experience. Even in Otsuka's second historical novel *The Buddha in the Attic*, where she chronicles collective immigrant experience, she mentions Japanese Christian immigrants only sporadically. I believe it is because Otsuka wanted to make the family experience universal, she chose to depict a family that has quickly acculturated to American culture and customs so the readers can more easily empathize with their internment experience.

Furthermore, average Japanese American family had low socioeconomic status, however, the family portrayed in *When the Emperor was Divine* belongs to middle-class or even upper-middle class. Their house is also a symbol of their social status. The family lives in "Berkeley, in a white stucco house on a wide street not far from the sea" (*The Emperor* 25). They live in a predominantly white neighborhood; not in the Japanese ghetto nor near their ethnic community, as is evident from Otsuka's description of their neighbors: "the Gilroys and the Myers, the Leahys, the Wongs, the two elderly Miss O'Gradys" (*The Emperor* 115). In fact, Otsuka does not mention any other Japanese family living near their neighborhood. Only wealthy families were able to live outside their ethnic community (Uchida 4). Therefore, I believe that the husband, absent throughout the novel until the last two chapters, had a white-collar job. The husband (the father) was arrested immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor as many other influential Issei men. I assume he worked for an American branch of some Japanese company and had a very high position within this company. Otsuka implies that before the war, the woman was not employed. Furthermore, before the war, the family used to employ a Japanese maid Mrs. Ueno. They run into Mrs. Ueno in the internment camp where she automatically wants to assume her role of a housekeeper. However, the woman explains to her that she is no longer working for her and that: "here [in the camp] we're all equals" (*The Emperor* 56). The family managed to live outside their ethnic community even during the Great Depression. And since the family is Christian, they probably took part in a local Christian community, being socially active among their white neighbors. I assume, Otsuka chose to portray middle-class acculturated

Japanese American family, so her story of their internment experience is more universal and less ethnocentric.

After the woman almost finishes packing, Otsuka, in one scene, describes the general reaction of the family's white neighbors and acquaintances to the evacuation. The woman needs some supplies before they leave for the assembly center. She, therefore, puts on her white silk gloves—another symbol of her status since white silk gloves are associated with wealth—and goes to Lundy's Hardware. It seems the woman shops here often since the owner Joe Lundy makes small talk with her: "How's your roof holding out?" he asked her. "I think the shingles are rotting. It just sprung another leak." "It's been a wet year." The woman nodded. "But we've had some nice days" (*The Emperor* 5). Her response may be ambiguous and she could be also referring to Japanese American relationship with the white society—even though they were sometimes met with discrimination and prejudice (bad rainy days), there were also acts of kindness and hints of friendliness. The leaking roof then represents the difficult situation Japanese Americans have to live under and ultimately endure after the attack on Pearl Harbor. However, Joe Lundy, as her neighbor who knows the family, feels guilty. He does not want to accept the woman's money for two rolls of tape and a ball of twine saying: "You can pay me later" (*The Emperor* 5). Then he nervously starts to wipe the register because there is "a dark stain there that would not go away" (*The Emperor* 5). The dark stain symbolizes his guilt about the Japanese American internment. For several years now, many people compare the internment to a dark stain/spot in U.S. history<sup>12</sup>. Especially since, in 1988 during the Redress Movement, the Japanese American internment was declared unconstitutional and caused by "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership" (CWRIC, *Personal Justice Denied*, 459). Otsuka also includes this comparison to ultimately condemn the internment and the indifference of the majority of American population who did not protest for Japanese American human and citizen rights. Furthermore, in order to keep her face, the woman does not accept his charity, she only takes two caramel candies that Joe gave her for her children. Therefore, when she refuses his generosity, the woman does not alleviate his sense of guilt. Joe, however, gives her at least a compliment to feel better: "'That's a nice red dress,' he called out after her. She turned around

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see article by Todd Purdum in *The New York Times*:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/20/us/us-starts-to-dust-off-a-dark-spot-in-history-for-all-to-see.html>

and squinted at him over the top of her glasses. ‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘Thank you, Joe’” (*The Emperor* 6). The woman immediately realizes that in all these years she has been going to the Joe Lundy’s store “she had never before called him by his name. Joe. It sounded strange to her. Wrong, almost. But she had said it. She had said it out loud. She wished she had said it earlier” (*The Emperor* 6). This passage implies that even though the woman was living in a predominantly white neighborhood, she had not formed deeper more meaningful relationships with her neighbors. She was socially active but not a significant member of the community. Her Japanese face and emotional reserve made her inscrutable and unapproachable. Therefore, even though the woman was acculturated to American customs and culture, her Japanese ethnic identity prevented her from being an important member of the dominant society. The woman now regrets her Japanese behavior and similarly to the women in *The Buddha in the Attic* she wonders why she had clung to her “strange, foreign ways” (*The Buddha* 87) for so long. Therefore, in both novels, Otsuka shows Issei’s regret of their Japanese behavior. Her Japanese characters believe to some degree that the internment is their fault.

The woman then returns home after her errands and finishes packing. While in the kitchen, she stares at the painting of Millet’s *The Gleaners*: “She wondered why she had let it hang in the kitchen for so long. It bothered her, the way those peasants were forever bent over above that endless field of wheat. ‘Look up’ she wanted to say to them. ‘Look up, look up!’ *The Gleaners*, she decided, would have to go. She set the picture outside with the garbage” (*The Emperor* 8). Although she acts distant during the packing, she directs her bottled up frustration on the painting. She wants the peasants to “look up,” to resist their social status; she transfers her repressed urge to protest the evacuation onto the painting. However, she does not realize that she is being as oppressed as those peasants. She obediently accepts the injustice of her family’s internment. Even though the family almost achieved the American dream, living in a big suburb house with a white picket fence, Otsuka throughout the novel suggest that the American dream is not achievable for ethnic minorities. Even if the family may have American national identity, Japanese Americans were not regarded as rightful American citizens during the war.

Throughout the novel, animals represent Japanese Americans and/or foreshadow their fate. Evacuation orders clearly stated that pets are not allowed in the relocation camps. So

the woman, follows the rules and gives the cat to the neighbors and kills the chicken. Then she impassively kills the old family dog:

White Dog raised his head. The woman was his mistress and he did whatever she asked. She put on her white silk gloves and took out a roll of twine. “Now just keep looking at me,” she said. She tied White Dog to the tree. “You’ve been a good dog,” she said. [...] “Now roll over,” she said. White Dog rolled over and looked up at her with his good eye. “Play dead,” she said. White Dog turned his head to the side and closed his eyes. His paws went limp. The woman picked up the large shovel that was leaning against the trunk of the tree. She lifted it high in the air with both hands and brought the blade down swiftly on his head. (*The Emperor* 11)

The old White dog represents Japanese Americans. He is obedient, doing whatever his mistress asks similarly to many Japanese Americans who were eager to please the white Americans to prove their loyalty. The woman, however, kills White Dog out of mercy because he is old and probably would starve to death in their absence. The American government, on the other hand, sends Japanese Americans to camps—figuratively to their death since they lose their identity—justifying it as “military necessity”. Therefore, similarly like the dog trusts his mistress, Japanese Americans trust the American government to protect them. Furthermore, during the execution of White Dog, the woman wears her white silk gloves. The gloves are no longer white, they are stained with blood and dirt, and the woman drops them into the White Dog’s grave she has just dug up. Again, there is the motif of dark stains. Otsuka ties this terrible but merciful act to the violence of the war. The violence that stains one’s identity.

The pet macaw also foreshadows the family’s internment experience. The woman releases him from his cage into the wild. However, the macaw does not immediately flee (*The Emperor* 20). The bird is domesticated and spends his life in a cage. He has learned the security that comes with the imprisonment—food, shelter, safety. Similarly, Japanese Americans are put behind the barbed wire fence. Eventually, they grew familiar with their “cage” like the bird and are apprehensive about leaving the relative safety of the internment camp. In this scene, Otsuka, therefore, foreshadows the psychological effect of the incarceration on Japanese Americans and the bird symbolizes the family struggle to reclaim their freedom when they return home after the war.

In the garden, where the woman kills White dog, she remembers her husband. Finally, Otsuka addresses his absence: “She had not seen her husband since his arrest last December. Every few days he was allowed to write her a letter. Usually he told her about the weather. [...] On the back of every envelope was stamped ‘Censored, War Department,’ or ‘Detained Alien Enemy Mail’” (*The Emperor* 10). As many other influential Issei men, the husband was arrested immediately after the Pearl Harbor. Therefore, the family lost its patriarch and the woman has to prepare for the evacuation all alone. Being treated like a dangerous enemy, his communication is censored by the government. This makes his absence even more profound. Throughout the novel, the father’s absence marks the disintegration of the family and haunts each member of the family, especially the young boy. The boy in the camp remembers the night his father was taken in his bathrobe and slippers and this humiliating image haunts him all the time during his internment. For the boy, the father was, before the war, a respectable, gentle, wise and ultimately invincible figure. However, the American government degraded him in the boy’s eyes by declaring him an enemy alien.

Retrospectively, Otsuka, in later chapters, describes the events following the father’s arrest from the boy’s perspective:

That evening she [the mother] had lit a bonfire in the yard and burned all of the letters from Kagoshima. She burned the family photographs and the three silk kimonos she had brought over with her nineteen years ago from Japan. She burned the records of Japanese opera. She ripped up the flag of the red rising sun. She smashed the tea set and the Imari dishes and the framed portrait of the boy’s uncle, who had once been a general in the Emperor’s army. [...] The next day, for the first time ever, she sent the boy and his sister to school with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in their lunch pails. “No more rice balls,” she said. “And if anyone asks, you’re Chinese”. (*The Emperor* 75)

Since FBI agents organized vast searches through Japanese Americans’ property, the woman burns anything that could suggest she has enemy ties. The frightened Japanese Americans destroyed anything that could make them look suspicious. Therefore, she and her children suppress their Japanese ethnic identity—the mother tells them to even pretend to be Chinese—in order to appear less suspicious. This supports the theory that ethnic identity is fluid, transforming according to the demands of social environment.

Later in the afternoon, after the woman finishes packing and takes care of the family pets, children return from school. The next morning, they will be leaving: “they were going on a trip. They could bring with them only what they could carry” (*The Emperor* 12). The girl replies that she already knows that. The children are aware of their situation, but they choose to ignore it, talking about trivial things that had happened in the school. Otsuka introduces the girl as a fully American girl: “She was ten years old and she knew what she liked. Boys and black licorice and Dorothy Lamour. Her favorite song on the radio was ‘Don’t Fence Me In.’ She adored her pet macaw” (*The Emperor* 13). The girl is prepubescent and is interested in pop culture as any other American girl is. Ironically, she likes the song “Don’t Fence Me In” that was rather popular during that time. The song, in the novel, foreshadows the internment. The girl is an American citizen and she has formed American national and cultural identity. However, she looks like the enemy and the government wants to imprison her and other Japanese Americans. “Don’t Fence Me In” is a cowboy song about freedom and similarly as the cowboy sings: “Let me ride through the wide open country that I love//Don’t fence me in//Let me be by myself in the evenin’ breeze” (Porter and Fletcher) Japanese Americans also feel. Especially, the second generation of Japanese Americans love America and even though they look Japanese and follow some Japanese values and customs, they identify as Americans. So, when the government “fences them in,” Japanese Americans are not allowed to be themselves in the “wide open” country that they love.

The boy is younger than his sister and he has adopted values, believes and culture of his family and peers. The boy is seven years old and wears “small black fedora [that] was tilted to one side of his head” (*The Emperor* 13). The fedora is too big for him and it belonged to his father. The boy keeps wearing it because he naturally misses him. He even talks like his father, assuming his role in his absence. When looking for White Dog he matter-of-factly concludes: “That dog just gets deafer every day,” and he even scolds his sister: “Sit down and drink your water” (*The Emperor* 13, 16). The absence of the head of the family transforms the family dynamics and heightens their negative emotions. They have to face this experience alone without the patriarch.

The wartime circumstances made young second-generation Japanese Americans question their identity. The children lived in a predominately white neighborhood yet it seems they have never questioned their Japanese appearance until now. The girl suddenly asks her

mother if there is anything wrong with her face because people were staring at her. The mother carefully examines her face and concludes that the girl looks fine. Still, the girl is not convinced: "If there was something wrong with my face," the girl asked, "would you tell me?" "Turn around," the woman said. [...] "Now look at me." The girl looked at her. "You have the most beautiful face I have ever seen." "You're just saying that." "No, I mean it" (*The Emperor* 15). The girl questions her face because she looks like the Japanese enemy, however, the woman deliberately does not mention any Japanese features. She, as any other mother would, wants her child to feel confident and safe. Therefore, she omits to mention anything that would confirm the girl's fears that she looks like the enemy. Furthermore, since the girl likes Dorothy Lamour and questions her appearance, I assume she has internalized white beauty standards; she identifies with the white dominant group and during the war when her race was suddenly an issue she starts to develop a negative ethnic identity in her young age. She internalizes racist attitudes of the dominant white society. The girl even tries to ignore the evacuation. She studies for her Monday's test and when the mother reminds her to practice the piano for Thursday's lesson the girl asks: "Do I have to?" The woman thought for a moment. "No," she said, "only if you want to." "Tell me I have to." "I can't." The girl went out to the living room and sat down on the piano bench" (*The Emperor* 16). The girl needs to be reassured that everything is normal just as before the Pearl Harbor, however, her mother is unable to lie to her. The girl, therefore, chooses to ignore the evacuation and continues with her role of a typical American little girl. As Kim described in her theory, it is usual for children who live in a predominantly white neighborhood to reject their Japanese identity in favor of white identification to suppress negative feelings and to ignore their situation (Kim 11). The girl does not want to be reminded of her Japanese ethnicity because she has formed a strong American national identity. However, her loyalty to America is being questioned by the American government. The boy, on the other hand, is too young to internalize racist attitudes. He is fully acculturated to American customs and culture but it seems that all his world revolves around his Japanese father. Nevertheless, the internment experience will challenge their American national identity and definitively transform their Japanese American identity.

After the dinner, children go to bed and the woman is alone. Finally, after everything is prepared for the evacuation, the woman has allowed herself to break down, realizing she

is just the same as the peasants in *The Gleaners*—she also does not resist her forced evacuation:

[She] looked at the place on the wall where *The Gleaners* had hung. The white rectangle was glowing in the moonlight. She stood up and traced around its edges with her finger and began to laugh—quietly at first, but soon her shoulders were heaving and she was gasping for breath. She put down the bottle and waited for the laughter to stop but it would not, it kept on coming until finally the tears were running down her cheeks. (*The Emperor* 20)

The woman voluntarily leaves her home and Japanese identity. She resignedly accepts her incarceration. Japanese Americans did not resist the governmental orders because they believed they had no other choice and that by complying with the evacuation and internment they would ultimately prove their loyalty to the United States. However, as the peasants in *The Gleaners*, the majority of Japanese Americans fail to realize that they are being oppressed.

Eventually, the woman calms down and falls asleep. In the middle of the night, there is a storm ominously foreshadowing the unsettling times to come. The family does not know where they are going nor how long they will be gone. Nevertheless, in the morning, they “pin their identification numbers to their collars and grab their suitcases and climb up onto the bus and go to wherever it was they had to go” (*The Emperor* 22).

In spring of 1942, over 112,000 Japanese Americans were removed from the West Coast states. They were hastily rounded up and sent to the temporary assembly centers until the War Relocation Authority built permanent camps. Otsuka describes Japanese American uprooting evocatively focusing on characters’ behavior and emotions. However, she does not directly interpret her characters’ feelings, she only shows it. As a former painter, Otsuka merely paints a scene in which unspoken feelings of each family member are visible.

Generally, Japanese Americans were apprehensive about their uncertain future. Nevertheless, they obeyed the governmental orders without resistance. Even the Japanese American Citizens League collaborated with the War Department, encouraging Japanese Americans to comply with the evacuation orders, telling them: “You are not being accused of any crime. You are being removed only to protect you and because there might be one of you who would be dangerous to the United States. It is your contribution to the war effort. You should be glad to make the sacrifice to prove your loyalty” (Reeves 49). The



representatives in JACL were convinced that it is the best approach to cooperate with the government. Therefore, Japanese Americans, aliens and citizens alike, accepted their fate often saying “shikata ga nai”—it cannot be helped. This phrase accurately sums up the whole attitude of the majority of Japanese Americans. This fatalistic mindset is also represented throughout *When the Emperor Was Divine* as the family passively deals with the evacuation and eventually the internment experience.

## **4. 2 The Incarceration**

### **4. 2. 1 Journey from Tanforan to Topaz**

In spring of 1942, Japanese Americans, citizens and aliens alike, were evacuated from the West Coast states. Before permanent camps would be built later in October, they were sent to temporary assembly centers. These centers had to be large enough to house several thousands of evacuees. Thus, seventeen assembly centers such as Tanforan, Santa Anita, Fresno, and Manzanar were hastily set up in spacious public areas such as racetracks, fairgrounds, and livestock auction grounds in eastern California. When the evacuees arrived at assembly centers they were shocked to discover their new makeshift accommodation where more often than not stables served as housing. One of the evacuees summarizes his impression of the centers as being filthy, smelly and dirty, observing that “where a horse or cow had been kept, a Japanese American family was moved in. Suddenly you realized that human beings were being put behind fences just like on the farm where we had horses and pigs in corrals” (qtd. in Takaki 275). These conditions naturally reinforced their feelings of inferiority. Japanese Americans were treated as animals not people. Furthermore, over sixty-two percent of evacuees were American citizens (Ng 32). However, now behind barbed wire fence they were forced to question their national identity and ethnic identity. At school, the second generation of Japanese Americans was taught about American democratic values, citizenship and equality yet they were incarcerated only because they looked Japanese—the whole relocation was racially motivated. Officially, the government claimed that the evacuation of Japanese Americans was necessary for their protection from their fellow white Americans (Reeves 60), but the first thing that Japanese Americans noticed about the

assembly centers, and later camps, was that the machine guns on watchtowers were aimed in at them, not out.

The living conditions of assembly centers were crowded, noisy and for most evacuees absolutely uncomfortable. The centers were built according to the army model of living—communal latrines and shower facilities, large recreation halls, and mess halls (Ng 35). Since the assembly centers were only temporary camps, at the beginning, there was little to do for evacuees to constructively fill the time. Furthermore, as Wendy Ng (35) observes, living under these conditions, family and community life was severely disrupted from the routines of the pre-evacuation life. However with time, the evacuees began transforming the racetracks and livestock grounds into “something like poor and overcrowded small towns” (Reeves 62) with schools, churches, newspapers and recreational centers.

The evacuees knew that their stay in the assembly centers was temporary and they were anxious not knowing what might happen next. Some of them were optimistic, hoping that the more permanent relocation centers (internment camps) would be in much better condition. Finally, the transfers to permanent camps were completed by October 30, 1942, and Japanese Americans were taken by trains and buses to new, more desolate places.

This is where Otsuka begins the next chapter “Train”. This chapter is told from the perspective of the girl in the third-person objective narrative voice. The girl with her mother, brother and other Japanese Americans is leaving the Tanforan assembly center and traveling to a permanent relocation center, Topaz in Utah. The ride on the train is uncomfortable for the family as the seats are hard and stiff and they have been traveling for a day unable to sleep. Usually, in those trains, windows were blackened or the window shades were down. However, the girl is able to observe the landscape they pass on the train. In this chapter, Otsuka often focuses on descriptions of peaceful yet impassive scenery. The depiction of landscape is important in *The Emperor* since it enhances and symbolizes several things—characters emotions and their situation. In this particular description, the train full of apprehensive Japanese Americans is leaving to an unknown location. The train passes through a town in Nevada and the girl sees people in their Sunday clothes walking home from the morning service. It seems like her tragedy does not affect them (*The Emperor* 26–27). The majority of American population was indifferent to Japanese Americans’ fate. The girl does not understand why she is not allowed to participate in American society. She is an

American just like them. A soldier then orders her to put the shades down. The girl is suddenly cut out, isolated from the outer world: “There were the people inside the train and the people outside the train and in between them there were the shades” (*The Emperor* 28). She imagines what the people outside the train must think: “A man walking alongside the tracks would just see a train with black windows passing by in the middle of the day. He would think, There goes the train, and then he would not think about the train again” (*The Emperor* 28–29). She also remembers that the last time “they had passed through a city with the shades up someone had thrown a rock through one of the windows” (*The Emperor* 29). Unconsciously, the girl knows that Japanese Americans are not considered to be part of the American nation. She may identify as an American but she is not regarded as such. An old Japanese man, a fellow passenger, says something to her in Japanese but the girl does not understand him since she only speaks English. Otsuka always depicts the girl as a typical American girl. She avoids mentioning her race so the reader sees her identity based only on her behavior. However, American government identified her as an enemy based only on her racial features. The man who sees the train with the shades down, sees only a train but when the shades are up, people realize the train is full of enemies and attack it. Therefore, Otsuka implies that to the majority of the white American population, it does not matter what is inside—loyal American citizens—but what is outside—the enemy Japanese face.

The girl is uneasy when she realizes that she is banished from American society. She resists her banishment in the only way she can right now—by tossing a lemon out of the window. The soldiers had left a crate full of lemons and oranges in the train to cover the smell of vomit and sweat. The girl takes the bitter lemon and in a rebellious act she tosses it out to disturb the monotonous desert landscape. She wants to leave a mark of her presence in the desert. The bitter lemon symbolizes her frustration that has built up inside her since they have left their home. Her mother scolds her, but the girl cheekily talks back. She rebels not only against her situation but also against authority. This behavior is natural for a prepubescent American girl but not for a Japanese girl. Japanese children are strictly taught to behave in public and respect their elders and other authorities. The girl, however, does not respect her mother’s authority and she also does not follow the soldiers’ orders about keeping the window shades down. When she is sick from the train ride she even rejects her mother’s tenderness: “Don’t touch me, [...] I want to be sick by myself” (*The Emperor* 26). Therefore,

she acts independently and rebels against authorities as any other American child. She has formed American identity and adheres to American norms.

The girl continues to be restless. To change the scenery a little bit, she goes to the front of the car to wait for the toilet. When the girl is waiting, she starts a conversation with the man behind her. The man is older Issei. He is gentle and elegantly dressed: “Are you a rich man?” the girl asks, “Not anymore,” the man responds (*The Emperor* 33). During their incarceration, the majority of Japanese Americans lost most of their assets. Now, they were all equal in the internment camps. Again, Otsuka chose to depict not an average Japanese American. This Issei man speaks English fluently, was wealthy prior to the evacuation and seems to be acculturated.

However, she is still agitated and lets her hair loose, yanking the ribbon to the floor. The older Issei man behind her asks her if she is all right. The girl helplessly responds: “I don’t know. [...] How do I seem?” (*The Emperor* 32). Again, the girl is uncertain about her appearance. There must be something wrong with her if she is being sent away into the desert. The man, however, quickly assures her: “I think you’re all right” (*The Emperor* 32). Nobody directly acknowledges the girl’s Japanese features. Otsuka deliberately describes her characters’ faces without focusing on their distinctive Japanese features. The girl is, therefore, confused, because she knows she is American yet there must be something wrong with her face since she is expelled from American society. The girl then goes into the bathroom and stares at her face in the mirror, she sees “plain girl in a plain blue scarf” (*The Emperor* 34). The girl has internalized white beauty standards and her plain Japanese face is not considered beautiful by the mainstream media. However, she only sees a plain girl, not the face of the enemy. Therefore, she has not formed a negative self-concept just yet. When the girl leaves the toilet, she sees a little girl playing with a curly yellowed haired doll. The girl politely asks what the doll’s name is and the young girl proudly says Miss Shirley. The girl replies that the doll is beautiful. In that time, the young actress and dancer Shirley Temple was extremely popular. American media passionately supported her image as the ideal of American girl. Japanese Americans are exposed to this ideal from a very young age. If they do not form a strong ethnic identity, they may develop a negative self-concept and low self-esteem because they internalize white beauty standards. Asians, on the other hand, were not represented in American media—only as caricatures. Otsuka, thus, suggests that children will

adopt the prevailing values of American culture, even when those values are overtly racist. The little girl possessively holds the doll and says: “You can’t have her,” however, the girl resignedly replies: “That’s all right” (*The Emperor* 35). Otsuka implies that the girl accepts her “plain” Japanese face. She unconsciously acknowledges that she does not look Caucasian and she is all right with this fact. Therefore, slowly, she starts to realize that her face does not shape her national identity.

In the following passage, Otsuka foreshadows the silence about the internment experience. During their journey to the camp, the boy realizes that he has forgotten his umbrella. His mother tries to comfort him saying: “You can’t remember everything.” The girl immediately contradicts her mother: “And even when you can you shouldn’t” (*The Emperor* 39). Indirectly, the girl argues that they should forget things that pain them. This represents the reaction of the majority of Japanese Americans after the war. The first and the second generations were reluctant to talk about their internment experience. Japanese Americans were ashamed that once they were deemed alien enemies. Naturally, they wanted to forget this experience. Japanese American scholar Kashima talks about so-called “social amnesia” (Kashima 111). Japanese Americans buried the trauma of the internment deep inside themselves and rather focused on assimilation and being exemplary American citizens. Thus, creating the “model minority” myth. Furthermore, the American government did not openly discuss this unjust treatment of its citizens until 1988 when the internment was declared officially unconstitutional. Therefore, the accusation of disloyalty still pained Japanese Americans after the war until they got the official apology from the government.

During the train ride, the girl is bored and wants to play cards. The boy, however, is not in the mood. So, the girl slips the cards one by one out of the window. Until only one card—the six of clubs—is left in her hand. The girl fondly remembers the family trip to Yosemite park where she had bought the cards at the gift shop. Suddenly, she realizes it is all lost, in the past. She is not in California anymore, her family has disintegrated and she herself has changed. Only her name is the same. The girl writes her name down on the card and tosses it out of the window (*The Emperor* 40). She figuratively sheds her old identity. She is maturing and she has to form a new Japanese American identity in the internment camp.

In the following passage, Otsuka again addresses the disintegration of the family. The boy tries to draw a picture of their father. He unconsciously draws the father inside the square of a prison. The boy adds a mustache to his father's face but it is too wide so he erases it. With it he also erases the mouth and forgets to fix it (*The Emperor* 41). This passage shows how quickly children internalize their difficult situation. The father is unable to directly speak with his family, his letters are censored and he is allowed only to talk about trivial things; as in the boy's drawing, the father has no mouth of his own. The displacement and the internment transformed the Japanese American family unit. Otsuka further addresses this forced change in following chapters.

In *When the Emperor Was Divine*, Otsuka often mentions horses. Domesticated horses symbolize Japanese American incarceration. Wild horses, on the other hand, represent freedom Japanese Americans long for. In the Tanforan assembly center, the family lived for four months in a former horse stable. The American government, therefore, essentially dehumanized Japanese Americans, treating them as animals rather than human beings. Furthermore, the boy becomes so obsessed with horses during their stay at Tanforan that he wants to be a jockey (*The Emperor* 30–31). He wants to be in control of a horse, to control his identity again. The girl, however, points out to him that jockeys are always small men and the boy is torn. When their neighbor, Mr. Okamura, hears their conversation, as there was no privacy in barracks, he dismissively says: "Ride horses! [...] Eat lots, grow up to be big American boy!" (*The Emperor* 31). Older man's reaction only demonstrated the acculturation of Otsuka's characters. The man knows that jockeys are dependent on their horses to win. But an ideal American man is independent—the maker of his own fate. Independent orientation goes against Japanese collective mentality (Kitano 107). Therefore, the man encourages the boy to reject his ethnic identity and fully accept his American identity. Otsuka's characters identify as Americans and consequently have a weak ethnic identity.

Eventually, in the middle of the night, during their ride through Nevada, the children see wild mustangs galloping across the desert: "The sky was lit up by the moon and the dark bodies of the horses were drifting and turning in the moonlight and wherever they went they left behind great billowing clouds of dust as proof of their passage" (*The Emperor* 45). These horses are the embodiment of freedom the children long for. The children are mesmerized by

the scene. Then, suddenly, a soldier walks down the aisle and the girl pulls the shades down again. Otsuka juxtaposes the presence of wild horses with the soldier. The horses are wild, independent, and free to go wherever they want. The presence of the soldier, on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that Japanese Americans are going away toward their imprisonment. Otsuka uses the motif of horses to illustrate both Japanese American confinement and desire for freedom. Also, the image of wild horse represents American Wild West. Images of Wild West appear throughout the novel, only to demonstrate the family's acculturation and American national identity.

Finally, in the next morning, they arrive at the Topaz Relocation Center, their new home. The first thing the girl notices are: “hundreds of tar-paper barracks sitting beneath the hot sun. She saw telephone poles and barbed-wire fences. She saw soldiers. And everything she saw she saw through a cloud of fine white dust that had once been the bed of an ancient salt lake” (*The Emperor* 48). It is hardly a welcoming place. The desolate landscape only intensifies their trauma of displacement and incarceration. However, they have no other choice but to endure the conditions of the desert. Together, the family steps out “into the blinding white glare of the desert” (*The Emperor* 48).

Otsuka's depiction of the train ride to the permanent internment camp through the perspective of the girl only emphasizes the racism of the whole situation. In the train, we see innocent civilians, families with children, not enemy aliens. Those people were loyal to the American nation. Most of them, as any other American citizens, believed in democracy and equality, yet the American government betrayed their trust. Because of that Japanese Americans were forced to question their American national identity and suppress their ethnicity.

#### **4. 2. 2 Slowly Disappearing in the Internment Camp**

Japanese Americans had no idea where they were going nor where their new “homes” will be located. The trains, some of them taking several days to reach their final destination, took them to ten internment camps—Manzanar and Tule Lake in California, Poston and Gila River in Arizona, Topaz in Utah, Amache in Colorado, Minidoka in Idaho, Heart Mountain in Wyoming, and Jerome and Rohwer in Arkansas (Takaki, 276). The permanent relocation centers were managed by the War Relocation Authority (WRA). The director of WRA was

Dillon S. Myer, a former bureaucrat from the Department of Agriculture, who tried to manage the camps as humanly as possible despite the unconstitutionality of the whole Japanese American removal. The camps were built in desolate isolated regions such as deserts and swamplands, far away from strategic military areas. The combination of harsh climate and barren land posed various challenges for the internees. The largest camp was Tule Lake in California at its peak with 18,789 internees. In contrast, the smallest camp was Granada in Colorado with 7,318 internees. Altogether, more than 112,000 Japanese Americans were held in WRA custody during the Second World War.

Japanese Americans were led to believe that the conditions of the relocation camps would be more hospitable than in the assembly centers and most of the evacuees were eager to leave those temporary centers and to move to more permanent living arrangements (Ng 40). All of the relocation camps were built upon the army model of housing and the camps were surrounded by barbed wire fences with watchtowers and armed guards. The privacy in the camp was non-existent and everything had to be done communally. Wendy Ng in her historical account of the internment describes the camps as follows:

The evacuees lived in barrack-style housing. Each barrack measured 20 by 100 to 120 feet, divided into four to six rooms, each from 20 by 16 to 20 by 25 feet. Each room housed one family, no matter how large the family. In a few cases, two families might share a room. The barracks were arranged in what was called a "block," consisting of twelve to fourteen barracks, a communal mess hall, bath and shower facility, toilets, laundry, and recreation hall. The barracks were constructed of planks nailed to studs, covered with tar paper, with no interior wall. Since they were newly constructed, many had cracks in the floors and walls, which let dust settle into the living area. The Caucasian military and administrative personnel had their own housing, which was generally larger and better equipped than the internee living quarters. (Ng 40)

Initially, when the internees arrived, each room had an army cot for each person, a blanket for the bed, a potbellied stove, and a single electric light hanging from the ceiling. There was no running water nor household equipment to create a home-like atmosphere of permanent living.

To lower the cost of running a camp, the WRA employed, besides white administrative employees, internees for mainly menial, but sometimes even for a highly



qualified, work. The workers were classified as unskilled, skilled or professional earning monthly wage rates of \$8, \$12, and \$16 respectively. Most of the internees were employed as teachers, doctors, nurses, cooks, handymen, newspaper editors, workers in laundry, and etc. Busy and active before the internment, many Japanese Americans regarded their job as the only fulfilling activity they could do in the camp. Nevertheless, internees were not forced to work if they did not desire it and some of them, mainly older Issei who worked hard all their life, welcomed the opportunity to relax. The incarceration enabled them to retire from their busy lives not worrying about their housing, meals or health since the WRA took care of all of that. Some of the internees, however, especially younger Issei and Nisei men, became bored and lethargic. Furthermore, the WRA administration believed that internees should be as independent as possible, and therefore establishing a work program in the camps was a high priority (Ng 43). Besides working in the camps, internees had an opportunity to be temporarily released to find seasonal work outside of camps in the Midwest or East Coast (outside the Military Zones) since there was workforce shortage because of the war.

Although sharing a common Japanese ancestry, camps' population was very diverse. Besides economic and social class differences, people were of different religious background (Buddhist and Christian) and came from different places (rural and urban) (Ng 44). Now, they were confined in one all-Japanese community, living under challenging conditions. Not to descend into chaos, each camp developed an inner form of governance that cooperated with the WRA. Eventually, each camp functioned in ways similar to a small town. However, Japanese Americans were still internees, prisoners, and the army still controlled and scrutinized their lives.

The WRA administration encouraged various social and recreational activities in the camps. Internees could attend *ikebana*, *origami*, and other creative classes or participate in *go* (Japanese board game) tournaments. Some of the Issei even formed a garden club and, to some extent, managed to fertilize and irrigate the dry land to grow some flowers and vegetables. They also organized dances, screening of movies, and festivals. But the most popular were athletic activities. Internees entertained themselves by playing baseball, basketball, and football and formed several teams and leagues that competed with each other (Ng 43). Thus, the forms of recreation accommodated both Japanese and American activities. In addition to that, all camps had a camp newspaper. They were written in English and their

main purpose was to circulate information about important issues to the camp population (Ng 47).

A large number of internees was of school age yet the camps were not designed to have a proper school building nor to give quality education. Nevertheless, the WRA administration and eager Nisei teachers were able to provide an adequate learning environment for the students. Not surprisingly, at the WRA command, underlying standard education was an emphasis on Americanization, citizenship and loyalty to the United States and every morning, the students recited the Pledge of Allegiance, and saluted the flag of the United States, while, ironically, being behind the barbed wire. There was no provision for higher education, but outside the camps, National Japanese Student Relocation Council, help to relocate promising students to colleges and universities outside the Military Zones in the Midwest and East of the United States (Ng 42). After the war, many of these students as well as seasonal workers decided to permanently resettle in the Midwest and East Coast, establishing small new Japanese American communities in those areas. Altogether, around several thousands of people left camps to work or study in the Midwest and East before the camps were closed in 1946. However, a considerable number of Japanese Americans for various reasons stayed in the camps.

Overall, in the first year of their confinement, Japanese Americans were more or less determined to endure their difficult situation. They tried their best to recreate their pre-evacuation lives.

In *When the Emperor Was Divine*, Otsuka evocatively captures the life in the middle of the nowhere. The life at the Topaz internment camp is portrayed through the perspective of the boy. Again, Otsuka uses the third-person objective narrative voice, but this time she also focuses on boy's dreams and imagination, and retrospectively describes events that had happened before the family's incarceration.

For the first time in his life the boy is surrounded by Japanese Americans and every man looks like his father: "In the beginning the boy thought he saw his father everywhere, [...] wherever the boy looked he saw him: Daddy, Papa, Father, *Oto-san*" (italics by the author, *The Emperor* 49). The boy misses his father who not only represents his home and stability but also his Japanese heritage. The girl is fully acculturated, rejecting her Japanese identity easily. But the boy is still too young and unconsciously tries to keep both his Japanese

heritage—his father’s identity—and American national identity. He has not yet formed a negative ethnic identity. The boy used to live in a predominantly white neighborhood, not consciously thinking about his ethnicity. He has just unconsciously acquired behavior, perceptions, values and attitudes of his parents, mainly his father, sister and peers.

At the beginning of his incarceration, the boy resists giving up the Japanese part of his identity. When his mother tells him to pretend to be Chinese before the actual evacuation (*The Emperor* 75), the boy is unable to deny his Japanese part. A Caucasian man stops the boy on a street and asks him: “Chink or Jap?” and the boy answered, ‘Chink,’ and ran away as fast as he could. Only when he got to the corner did he turn around and shout, ‘Jap! Jap! I’m a Jap!’” (*The Emperor* 76). The boy lies about his race because he is afraid of the man, but when he gets out of the immediate danger he loudly admits he is, in fact, a Japanese. He holds onto his ethnic identity despite the external forces (American society) that compel him to suppress and reject his Japanese part. Even in the internment camp, the boy quietly resist. On their first day in the desert, his mother warns him to be careful: “Do not touch the barbed-wire fence,’ she had said, ‘or talk to the guards in the towers. ‘Do not stare at the sun. And remember, never say the Emperor’s name out loud” (*The Emperor* 52). For Japanese, the Emperor was a divine figure. The mother is afraid that if guards hear the boy say the Emperor’s sacred name, they will be suspicious that the boy and his family are aligned with the enemy. The boy, however, in the act of resistance sometimes quietly, quickly whispers “Hirohito, Hirohito, Hirohito” (*The Emperor* 52). The boy says the Emperor’s name as a way of holding onto his Japanese identity. Furthermore, the boy keeps dreaming about the Emperor. He has a reoccurring dream about a beautiful small wooden door. Behind the door, there is a picture of the Emperor, which no one was allowed to see.<sup>13</sup> The boy keeps dreaming about opening the door and seeing the holy and divine Emperor, but something always goes wrong and the boy is unable to see him (*The Emperor* 73). In this dream, the Emperor is not Hirohito but the boy’s father. The boy wants to see his father who is forcibly taken away from him hidden in a faraway place. He yearns for his Japanese father to rescue him from his confinement so they can be together again. But his father is imprisoned as a dangerous alien enemy and the boy knows that the Emperor is the true enemy so he connects these two notions

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<sup>13</sup> Japanese keep a small shrine with a wooden door behind which there is the Emperor’s picture. On ceremonial days, such as the Emperor’s birthday and National Foundation Day, they open the box and bow to the picture of the Emperor.

in his head—the father becoming the Emperor and the Japanese part of his identity. Throughout the novel, the figure of the father interchanges with the Japanese Emperor Hirohito. Both ultimately symbolize the boy’s longing for the Japanese part of his identity and the freedom to express himself.

In his letters, the father often tells the children to be good to their mother. Lately, however, when their incarceration and separation continues, he urges his children to be patient and to remember: “it’s better to bend than to break” (*The Emperor* 78). This is a typical Japanese attitude. Generally, Japanese rather comply than rebel against authorities. A well-known Japanese proverb “the nail that sticks up gets hammered down” characterizes this Japanese behavior. The father adopts this attitude and asks his children to do the same. Therefore, to endure their incarceration, they adopt Japanese attitudes—*gaman* and *shikata ga nai*. Even though the camps were designed to promote Americanization, Japanese Americans rely on Japanese values to survive the internment.

The children, Nisei in general, still, however, identify as Americans. They have a strong American national identity and a weak ethnic identity. The boy not only associates his father and Japanese identity with Hirohito, but he also uses American cultural images to mitigate the fact that his beloved father is the Japanese enemy. The boy imagines his father as a cowboy: “My daddy’s an outlaw,” he whispered. He liked the sound of that word. Outlaw. He pictured his father in cowboy boots and a black Stetson, riding a big beautiful horse named White Frost. Maybe he’d rustled some cattle, or robbed a bank, or held up a stage coach, [...] and now he was just doing his time with all of the other men” (*The Emperor* 83). The boy grew up consuming American culture. He uses American images instead of Japanese—he visualizes his father as a cowboy, an outlaw rather than a samurai. He is, therefore, acculturated, American and he has a weak Japanese identity. Still, he holds onto his Japanese identity as long as possible because it is his father’s heritage. However, when the boy remembers that his father was arrested wearing a bathrobe and slippers, he feels humiliated. He is ultimately ashamed of his Japanese heritage.

Eventually, the boy internalizes the racist attitudes and is ashamed of his Japanese face. In the camp, surrounded by other Japanese Americans he paradoxically starts to form a negative self-concept. In this chapter, Otsuka uses for the first time racial slurs to describe Japanese Americans: “For it was true, they all looked alike. Black hair. Slanted eyes. High

cheekbones. Thick glasses. Thin lips. Bad teeth. Unknowable. Inscrutable” (*The Emperor* 49). Because only Japanese are incarcerated and Caucasians are in power the boy starts to form a negative ethnic identity. Furthermore, during the winter, Japanese Americans are given oversized winter coats from the First World War to keep them warm. The boy puts on a coat and stares at his reflection in the broken mirror: “His hair was long and uncombed and his face was dark brown from the sun. The coat hung down past his knees. He narrowed his eyes and stuck out his two front teeth. *I predege arregiance to the frag... Whatsamalla, Shorty? Solly. So so solly*” (italics by the author, *The Emperor* 87). The boy mocks his face and Issei’s accent. He has internalized the racist attitudes of the white society he identifies with. With his father gone, the boy has formed a negative ethnic identity in the internment camp. Ultimately, the boy stops to see his Japanese father as a divine figure. The internment experience forced him, as many other Japanese Americans, to reject his Japanese identity.

In *The Emperor*, the desert landscape ultimately underlines the family’s loss of identity. Otsuka often evocatively describes the desert landscape to demonstrate its negative effect on a human spirit. This hostile landscape has a suffocating effect on the family since there is only “the wind and the dust and the hot burning sand” (*The Emperor* 53). The dust is ever present and the characters cannot escape it. It seems to slowly bury them alive—physically and mentally—causing the characters to lose a sense of themselves. The frequent dust storms also embody the characters’ ethnic identity and national identity conflict. One evening, the boy writes his name in the dust across the table (*The Emperor* 64). Names are important for one’s self-concept. It identifies us as a person. Not revealing the names of the family, Otsuka also wanted to convey that their names belong only to them, not to the American government. However, in the camps, the characters even slowly lose their names, their unique Japanese American identity. The girl has already discarded her name during the train ride, but the boy’s name (identity) disappears in the camp in the desert: “All through the night, while he slept, more dust blew through the walls. By morning his name was gone” (*The Emperor* 64). The dust blows his identity away. In *The Emperor*, the dust and the desert figuratively represent the social and political environment of the first half of the 20th century. The prejudice and discrimination toward Japanese Americans were ever present in the West Coast states. And similarly as the dust, its prevailing presence slowly erodes the Japanese

American identity. Through the dust, Otsuka illustrates the way the government forcibly pressured Japanese Americans in the camps to assimilate into this racist society.

In this chapter, Otsuka again uses animals to demonstrate the situation of Japanese Americans during the war. The American government dehumanizes Japanese Americans by giving them identification numbers. In the camp, the boy is so confused by his situation that he does not give a name to his new pet tortoise. He only scratches his family's identification number into its shell (*The Emperor* 60). Furthermore, Otsuka again uses the motif of a horse to emphasize the effect of the internment on Japanese ethnic identity. In the previous chapter, domesticated horses symbolized imprisoned Japanese Americans and wild horses their freedom to express their Japanese identity. In the camp, the internees eat horse meat. The boy asks his sister where does this meat come from and she casually answers: "from wild horses. They round them up in the desert and shoot them" (*The Emperor* 89). Otsuka, therefore, suggests that the internment experience slowly eats away the concept of a positive Japanese identity.

The internment experience, eventually, forces the children to reject their Japanese identity. Even though the American society banished them to the desert and ultimately stated that Japanese Americans are not a part of the American nation, Nisei still identified as Americans. In the camp, they continued to enjoy American culture—the boy still likes baseball and cowboys and the girl enjoys various American activities, and she even won a prize in jitterbug contest (*The Emperor* 60). The children do not hate their captors, they hate themselves for being Japanese, for looking like the enemy. They long to be part of the American society again and imagine the life outside the fence where there are tree-lined streets, dark green lawns, boys throwing balls, girls playing hopscotch, mothers preparing casseroles and fathers carrying black briefcases (*The Emperor* 66). They miss drinking the "coke"—the drink that symbolizes American culture. They have formed a strong American national identity. Therefore, the children are ready to reject their Japanese heritage in order to never be mistaken for the enemy again. Otsuka illustrates this effect of the internment on Nisei in the next chapter when the family returns to their home.

Furthermore, in the camp, the family slowly disintegrates. In the absence of the father, the girl distances herself from the family. She leaves their barrack early in the morning and returns long after dark. She eats all her meals with her friends and never with the boy and her

mother (*The Emperor* 92). In the camp, the girl is independent. The woman, on the other hand, is unable to maintain her role of a caring mother. She withdraws from her children, escaping into her dreams. The boy is all alone, desperately longing for his father. The camp conditions, thus ultimately transform the family unit.

In the desert, there are no trees only sagebrush. The lack of trees in the desert emphasizes the fact that Japanese Americans were uprooted from their homes. Similarly as trees, not even Japanese Americans can take root and flourish in the middle of a desert. Their forced incarceration prevents them from thriving and instead, their human spirit slowly deteriorates. Constantly, the family longs for their Berkeley home and fondly recollects their pre-war life. To a question what the mother misses the most, she answers: “The sound of trees at night,” and “plums, I’ll always miss plums” (*The Emperor* 79). The mother, naturally, misses her stable home, but she also craves plums. In Japan, pickled plums are traditional food and delicacy. In the novel, plums symbolize her positive ethnic identity. She wants to feel good and confident again about being Japanese. The woman is not an American citizen since she was denied citizenship and even though, she is acculturated to American customs and culture, she is still legally a Japanese national. Eventually, the unbearable conditions in the camp break her resilient spirit and she retreats to her dreams: “One day, she said she couldn’t bear it anymore. The wind. The dust. The endless waiting. [...] she lay down on her cot and she closed her eyes and she slept. She dreamed” (*The Emperor* 94). She dreams about her happy childhood in Kagoshima. The Issei mother, therefore, misses the feeling of belonging somewhere, of having a positive self-concept. Otsuka further depicts the woman’s social identity conflict when she remembers that she has lost an earring on the train. She says: “I haven’t felt right ever since” (*The Emperor* 86). The boy, to whom the mother speaks, does not remember her wearing any earrings. In this context, the earring symbolizes her social status. The pearl earring clearly represents her wealth and middle-class status. The woman is mournful about the loss of her pre-war social status, however, in the camp, she internalizes the racist attitudes believing she had “no business wearing those earrings in the first place. No business at all” (*The Emperor* 86). The woman comes to an understanding that she had no right to strive to achieve the American dream. She even fatalistically accepts that her pre-war social status is “just gone. Sometimes things disappear and there’s no getting them back. That’s just how it is” (*The Emperor* 86). The incarceration of Japanese Americans clearly

states they do not belong to the mainstream American society. In this scene, Otsuka, therefore, implies that the American dream and the economically secure middle-class life are not available to minorities.

Even in the camps, Japanese Americans had to prove their loyalty. In 1943, the American government designed the loyalty questionnaire to “weed out” potential disloyal Japanese Americans from the loyal ones. However, the main purpose of this questionnaire was to draft Nisei men and women. Eventually, all adults of Japanese ancestry were required to answer the “Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry”. This loyalty questionnaire was administrated as a part of the Application for Leave Clearance to determine whether an individual would pose a potential threat if released from the relocation center (Ng 56). The questionnaire asked about family background, education, and employment to assess the “Americanness” of the respondents. The two critical questions in this form, that received the most attention at that time, were questions number 27 and 28. The question 27 asked: “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?” This question basically asked if Japanese Americans were willing to help with the war effort whether on combat duty or to work in any war-related industry. Everyone, especially eligible young Nisei men, was worried that answering “yes” to this question would automatically mean that they are volunteering for service. This was followed by the question 28: “Will you swear unqualified allegiances to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or other foreign government, power or organization?” This question was inadequately phrased. Asking Japanese American citizens to renounce loyalty to the Emperor of Japan implied that Nisei born in America were always loyal to Japan. For Issei, the question 28 was even more difficult. They were not permitted by law to become U.S. citizens on the basis of race, so renouncing their only citizenship would leave them stateless. They were required to forswear their allegiance to Japan, their birth country, but they remained aliens, ineligible for citizenship in the United States. Naturally, Japanese Americans resented being asked these questions. Nevertheless, the vast majority of internees simply answered “yes” to both questions. Only several thousand, around 17% of internees, answered “no” to those questions, being either confused or angry at the implication of the questionnaire (Lyon). Those persons who answered “no”



to both questions became known as “No-No boys”.<sup>14</sup> They were separated from the loyal Japanese Americans and transformed to Tule Lake internment camp with increased security. Ultimately, more than 18,000 Japanese were detained in Tule Lake camp. The disloyal Japanese Americans were given the option to renounce their U.S. citizenship and repatriate to Japan but in the end, only few hundred repatriated to Japan (Lyon). Consequently, those persons who were segregated in the Tule Lake camp and branded as “disloyals” faced discrimination within the Japanese Americans community after the war as well.

In *When the Emperor Was Divine*, the woman does not hesitate to answer both of these questions positively for her family. The woman is even outraged that the government has dared to question her loyalty to America: “What allegiance?’ asked the boy’s mother. She said she had nothing to forswear. She’d been in America for almost twenty years now” (*The Emperor* 99). Even though before the war the woman had a strong ethnic identity, she identified as an American national. She is acculturated and more importantly her children are American citizens. She has no reason to be disloyal to the United States. She does not want to return to Japan, saying: “There’s no future for us there. We’re here. Your father’s here. The most important thing is that we stay together” (*The Emperor* 99). The novel suggests that the woman rejected her Japanese national identity long ago. She now identifies as Japanese American. As her Berkley home demonstrates, her Japanese and American identity coexisted before the war. However, during the war, she had to suppress her Japanese ethnicity, eventually forming a negative ethnic identity.

In this chapter, Otsuka depicts the life in the Topaz Internment Camp. She mainly focuses on the psychological effect of the internment on the family. Before the war, the family’s Japanese and American identities were able to coexist. In the camp, however, each family members experiences the ethnic identity and the national identity conflict. The woman suppresses her ethnic identity and in the process loses a sense of herself. The girl quickly rejects her Japanese heritage and fully accepts her American identity. The boy, on the other hand, struggles to renounce his Japanese identity since it represents his beloved father.

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<sup>14</sup> *No-No Boy* (1957) is also a title of John Okada’s novel that depicts the internment aftermath and is regarded by scholars as the classic of Japanese American literature. Okada portrays the struggle of young Nisei, Ichiro Yamada who must accept his decisions made during the war and reinvent his identity. Ichiro is regarded as disloyal by the American government as well as within the Japanese American community and throughout the novel he feels that he is neither Japanese nor American. Ichiro’s story defines the struggle of the majority of “no-no boys”.

Eventually, however, his confinement in the desert pressures him to reject his Japanese identity and fully adopt American national identity. Still, the place of the family in the American society is uncertain. Otsuka answers the question of where they belong to in the United States in the following chapter.

### **4. 3 Return Home**

In late 1944, the American government started to seriously consider ending the internment program and to lift the exclusion orders from the West Coast. The loyalty questionnaire enabled the authorities to identify a loyal Japanese American from an enemy who posed a potential threat. Furthermore, near the end of the year 1944, it was more than obvious that the United States was going to win the war in the Pacific, and both the War Department and the Relocation Authority were eager to close the camps to cut off expenses. The loyalty questionnaire then served as a basis for receiving the security clearance. Thus, the exclusion orders were lifted and by the beginning of the year 1945, Japanese Americans were allowed to return home. However, those who responded “no-no” to the questions number 27 and 28 were held at Tule Lake Segregation Center and were not allowed to leave until March 1946 as well as the detainees at Justice Department Camps.

In the end, Japanese Americans were given a train ticket and \$25, similarly like prisoners when they are being released, and prompted by the government to return to their old lives. However, many Japanese Americans were anxious about the return to their homes and communities on the West Coast. Rumors were spreading among former internees about violence against Japanese Americans. In some West Coast cities and towns, anti-Japanese sentiments and organizations were still present and some people “welcomed” Japanese Americans with signs such as “No Japs Wanted, No Japs Allowed” (Ng 125). Furthermore, in some rural areas, the Japanese Americans had no homes to return to, their property and farms stolen. And those who were able to reclaim their property, often found their belongings missing and houses vandalized. Nevertheless, the anti-Japanese attitudes subsided within the few months and many supportive and sympathetic fellow Americans genuinely welcomed Japanese Americans back and aided them to reestablish their former lives.

After the camps closed, the president advised Japanese Americans not to congregate in big Japanese American communities and rather scatter around the United States. He assumed that if Japanese lived in smaller communities their presence would not scare and offend other (white) Americans. Therefore, after the war, most Japanese Americans lived outside the comfort of their ethnic community and strived to assimilate into American mainstream society. The internment, in the end, hastened the assimilation process of Japanese Americans.

Over the next decade, postwar economic boom and more tolerant social and political atmosphere helped to improve the situation of many Japanese Americans. Inspired by the wide publicity of the heroic exploits of Japanese American soldiers, the image of Japanese Americans changed, and many of the discriminatory laws—including bans on naturalization and alien land laws—were repealed (Niiya). In fact, in the following decades, the Japanese Americans had a new image as a “model minority” and Caucasians praised Japanese Americans for their collective educational accomplishments, economic achievement, law-abiding behavior, and highly moral character. This “model minority” image is a rather exaggerated concept of Japanese American success and largely ignores the many, particularly Issei, who could never recover their lives after the internment.

*When the Emperor Was Divine* also chronicles the family’s return home. In the chapter “In a Stranger Backyard”, Otsuka portrays post-war events through the eyes of both children. Using the first-person plural voice “we”, the children describe the few first months after the internment.

The woman, the girl, and the boy return home during the fall. The gloomy fall day mirrors their mood. The family is nervous about their return because they heard rumors about people “who would not be happy to learn [they] had come back into town” (*The Emperor* 107). The family is so afraid of a potential attack that the first few nights they do not sleep in their respective rooms but in the living room together. Unconsciously, they choose this room because it has similar dimensions as the room in the barracks where they had lived during the internment. They even sleep in the same configuration as in the camp. The family is physically out of the camp but their mind is still behind the fence: “Without thinking, we had chosen to sleep, together, in a room, with our mother, even though for more than three years we had been dreaming of the day when we could finally sleep, alone, in our own rooms” (*The*

*Emperor* 112). The family, similarly as their pet macaw, has internalized their imprisonment and status of a prisoner. They have lived in the camp for three years, their sense of self slowly deteriorating. They have accepted the relative security of their cage sacrificing their freedom. Now, when they are finally free, they are unable, as the macaw, to quickly seize their freedom. Finally, after somebody throws a bottle of whiskey through their window in the middle of the night, the family is ready to gain their freedom back (*The Emperor* 18). They were waiting for some form of acknowledgment of their presence and when they are acknowledged, they can finally reestablish their lives.

The house represents their identity. Before the war, it was full of Japanese and American cultural items, demonstrating the possibility of bicultural identity. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, the family was forced to destroy their Japanese cultural heritage. And during the internment, their white stucco house was suddenly empty. Their neighbors and some vagabonds stole their belongings as the government took their rights. In the camp, the mother desperately holds onto the key to their house. It is the key not only to their home but also to their past pre-war lives. The woman is a “gatekeeper” of their pre-war Japanese American identity. However, now their past selves, as the home, are forever changed. When the family returns home, their house is damaged, violated by strangers. But the children do not care. They are just happy to be home, running around the house and gleefully shouting anything that comes to their mind (*The Emperor* 108–109). However, they are quickly reminded of the reasons for their incarceration. In the upstairs room the children are shocked to find racial slurs written in red ink on the wall. The words have such an impact on children’s self-concept that “for years [they] could not get those words out of [their] heads” (*The Emperor* 111). The family, as the house, is damaged after the war. Before the war, the family had formed bicultural Japanese American identity. During the internment, they were pressured to reject their Japanese identity and denied American identity. After the war, similarly to the house, they are empty. Now, they have to slowly renegotiate their ethnic and national identity again. They gradually rebuild the house as they rebuild their Japanese American identity.

The mother spends days cleaning, she works methodically, slowly wiping away the traumatic experience of the internment. In the garden, she finds a stone Buddha lying face down in the dirt. She is pleased to find the still laughing, fat bellied Buddha: “So that’s where

you were,” and again she displays the statue in her garden (*The Emperor* 125). In this scene, Otsuka suggests that the mother did not completely reject her Japanese identity, she only suppressed it during the war. In contrast to the children, the mother finds comfort in her Japanese identity after she was left disillusioned with the American beliefs of democracy and equality. However, the woman still considers America her adopted nation since her children are Americans. She, therefore, has to adapt to the new socioeconomic circumstances. To keep her family well fed and secure, the mother looks for a job. Before the war, there was no need for her to work, however, now as the family lost its patriarch and socioeconomic status, the woman as the head of the family has to provide for her children. First, wherever she went to ask for a job, she is turned down: “The position’s just been filled. [...] We wouldn’t want to upset other employees. [We are] afraid of offending the customers” (*The Emperor* 128). Once the woman is offered to work in a small back storeroom at the department store, where she used to buy hats and silk stockings. However, the woman proudly declines, jokingly justifying her decision: “I was afraid I might accidentally remember who I was and... offend *myself*” (italics by the author, *The Emperor* 129). I assume the mother is desperately mocking her situation. She does not hate her Japanese features, she is just bitter that she is Japanese in America. She realizes that she is being discriminated because of her race but she cannot complain. Eventually, she accepts a job of a housekeeper. A job that “no self-respecting American would do” (*The Buddha* 29). This hurts her self-esteem, but she pretends that the work is not hard: “You just smile and say yes ma’am and no ma’am and do as you’re told.” She also tells her children that she is friendly, but not too friendly because: “If you’re too friendly they’ll think you think you’re better than they are” (*The Emperor* 129). She is eager to please her employers and afraid of offending them. She knows that she could be declared an alien enemy again if she upsets the dominant group. Therefore, the woman resignedly accepts her situation, her inferior status in the United States so her family can survive. After the internment, she has lost her pride and positive Japanese American identity. Now, she is only a shadow of her former self and has to again renegotiate her Japanese identity and American national identity.

When the children leave the camp, they want to believe that they can simply return to their old lives: “Nothing’s changed, we said to ourselves. The war had been an interruption, nothing more. We would pick up our lives where we had left off and go on. We would go

back to school again. We would study hard, every day, to make up for lost time. We would seek out our old classmates” (*The Emperor* 114). They expect a warm welcome from their friends and neighbors and imagine that the world would be their once again. But, of course, it did not happen like that (*The Emperor* 127). The internment has changed them and their relationship with the white society. Even if the neighborhood looks the same, they are not. The internment experience forced them to reject their Japanese ethnic identity. The children are now determined not to be mistaken for the enemy ever again: “We would join their clubs, after school, if they let us. We would listen to their music. We would dress just like they did. We would change our names to sound more like theirs. And if our mother called out to us on the street by our real names we would turn away and pretend not to know her. We would never be mistaken for the enemy again!” (*The Emperor* 114). They reject their ethnic identity, their parent’s cultural heritage in favor of American national identity. Furthermore, the children are now more self-conscious around Caucasians resolved not to be in any way different. They long to belong to the mainstream society, to be accepted, but their friends, although polite, avoid them.

The children remember that before the war, they were part of their neighborhood community. The war hysteria, however, transformed their social position. Now, even though still Americans, they feel like aliens among their former friends. The children consider the reasons for their social exclusion, however, never blame the white society. It almost seems like they are justifying the behavior of their friends: “Perhaps they were embarrassed, [...] Or maybe they were afraid. [...] Perhaps they had never expected us to come back and had put us out of their minds once and for all long ago” (*The Emperor* 121). The children have internalized the racist beliefs of the dominant group. They believe there must be something wrong with them, not with their white friends and neighbors. The internment experience damaged their self-esteem.

Therefore, they keep to themselves and try not to draw attention. Before Japanese Americans were released, the government gave them a lecture on “How to Behave in the Outside World”: “Speak only English. Do not walk down the street in groups of more than three, or gather in restaurants in groups of more than five. Do not draw attention to yourselves in any way” (*The Emperor* 122). Ultimately, the American society wanted Japanese Americans to repress their ethnic behavior. However, now, the children adopt Japanese

values to help them integrate into the society again. They follow the rules, are always polite and are high achieving in the school (*The Emperor* 114, 120–122). They are not independent individuals—as their plural voice suggests. They adopt Japanese values *enryo* and *gaman* and are emotionally reserved. Furthermore, determined to survive, they accept their inferior social role and act accordingly in the white society, afraid to offend. However, they cannot change their Japanese face. The children blame their Japanese features for their internment, not the racist society. When American soldiers return home from the war and tell stories about the cruelty and torture they endured at the hands of Japanese soldiers, the children feel disgusted to look in the mirror: “We looked at ourselves in the mirror and did not like what we saw: black hair, yellow skin, slanted eyes. The cruel face of the enemy” (*The Emperor* 120). They feel guilty. They believe it was their fault. Ultimately, they form a negative ethnic identity. According to Kim’s theory of Asian American ethnic identity development, the children identify with the dominant white society and form a negative self-concept hating their Japanese features. Generally, most Japanese Americans adopted this attitude after the war. They rejected their Japanese identity in favor of American national identity. This behavior led to the “model minority” myth. The fear of being mistaken for the enemy again, forces the children to construct a form of a psychological prison for themselves. They repress their emotions and desires, afraid that their behavior would offend the dominant group. They accept the racism of the mainstream society without complaints. Therefore, the children may have escaped their physical prison, but back home their mind is still imprisoned.

In December, the father returns home and finally, after almost four years, the family is reunited. The children are excited and nervous about his return. The family, especially the boy, has feverishly longed for the father the whole time of their separation. The father is not only the head of the family but he also represents the Japanese part of the children’s identity. When he was incarcerated as an alien enemy, the children started to negatively perceive their Japanese heritage. However, the strong memory of their gentle and loving father prevented them from completely rejecting the Japanese part of their identity. When the children finally meet him, they are shocked. They do not recognize their father: “...a small stooped man carrying an old cardboard suitcase stepped out of the last car. His face was lined with wrinkles. His suit was faded and worn. His head was bare. He moved slowly, carefully, with the aid of a cane, a cane we had never seen before” (*The Emperor* 131). Although they have

been waiting for this moment for almost four years, they are paralyzed. Their father has unexpectedly changed. He has lost his youth and health. He is not the man the children remember: “He was somebody else, a stranger who had been sent back in our father’s place” (*The Emperor* 132). The reunion is not as the family imagined and the father is a different man. The incarceration has transformed their father as it has transformed their identity. The shabby appearance of the father symbolizes the state in which their ethnic identity now seems to be. The internment has damaged and altered their identity. However, in contrast to children who lost “only” their Japanese identity, the father has lost everything in the camp—his ethnic identity, national identity and social status. Now, he is a broken man with no prospects of assimilating into the American society ever again. The father emotionally isolates himself from his family. He is suspicious of everyone and gets angry easily. He is no more the gentle father the children remember. Furthermore, the father never mentions the years he had spent in imprisonment. And the children are somewhat relieved because they want to forget about the internment: “We didn’t want to know. We never asked. All we wanted to do, now that we were back in the world, was forget” (*The Emperor* 133). Their desire to forget is, however, futile. The internment experience is now part of their identity. It altered their self-concept and their behavior toward the white society and ultimately forced them to reject their Japanese identity. The defeated state of their father only reinforces this fact. After the end of the war, the U.S. government forced Emperor Hirohito to renounce his divinity. In the novel, the father is also no longer as the Emperor divine in the children’s eyes. He is just a small Japanese man who they slowly reject. Therefore, the loss of the Emperor’s (father’s) divinity corresponds to the loss of children’s ethnic identity.

Throughout the novel, the father is a silent figure described through his family. In the final chapter “Confession”, however, Otsuka gives him his own voice. In the first-person narrative point of view, the father satirically confesses to his alleged crimes. In this confession, Otsuka conveys the repressed anger of Japanese Americans. The father enumerates all the things that he is being accused of doing: “You were always right. It was me. I did it. I poisoned your reservoirs. I sprinkled your food with insecticide. I sent my peas and potatoes to market full of arsenic. I planted sticks of dynamite alongside your railroads. I set your oil wells on fire. I scattered mines across the entrance to your harbors. I spied on your airfields. I spied on your naval yards. I spied on your neighbors. I spied on you” (*The*



*Emperor* 140). By listing them all together, Otsuka shows the absurdity of those allegations. In his confession, the man also satirically confirms the racist stereotypes about Japanese and to further show how ridiculous it is to generalize a group of people, he stereotypically describes white American identity. The man resents the American government and understands that the internment was racially motivated. The government treated him like an alien enemy until he became an enemy, resentful toward the American society. They see the man through a stereotypical mask of a Japanese man and in this way they take his right to individuality. In the end of his confession, the man apologizes: “I’m sorry. There. That’s it. I’ve said it. Now can I go?” (*The Emperor* 144). His apology implies that he is truly innocent and only confessed to those crimes in order to be set free. Although the man is outraged, in the end he is apologetic as a typical Japanese man. His apology mirrors the immediate post-war reaction of Japanese Americans. Generally, Japanese Americans, especially the second generation, blamed themselves—their Japanese identity—for the internment. They quickly assumed the role of the apologetic model minority. The children, in the novel, are always polite to Caucasians and “If we did something wrong we made sure to say excuse me (excuse me for looking at you, excuse me for sitting here, excuse me for coming back). If we did something terribly wrong we immediately said we were sorry (I’m sorry I touched your arm, I didn’t mean to, it was an accident)” (*The Emperor* 122–123). The trauma of the internment frightens them into subservience.

After the displacement and the internment, the family in *The Emperor*, is transformed. The internment ultimately led to the disintegration of the family unit. The father comes back as a ghost and the mother assumes the role of the head of the family. The children are independent now and gradually reject their parent’s heritage. The family lost its pre-war bicultural identity. The woman and the man (the first generation) are socially isolated, having lost their positive ethnic and national identity. The children (the second generation), on the other hand, assume the role of the model minority and completely reject their ethnic identity in favor of American national identity. Thus, the internment experience drastically affected the Japanese American identity.

Otsuka, however, ends the story of this Japanese American family in a hopeful tone. In the spring, the atmosphere in the United States becomes more tolerant toward Japanese Americans: “The sun was in its place. There, up above us, but not too high. Strength was

slowly returning. Speech was beginning to come back. In the school yard. At the park. On the street. They were calling out to us now. Not many of them. Just a few. At first we pretended not to hear them, but after a while we could no longer resist. We turned around and nodded, we smiled” (*The Emperor* 138). Unlike their parents, the children quickly adapt. Gradually, they are able to reclaim some parts of their pre-war identity: “in our dreams we could hear singing and laughter and the endless turning of the leaves in the wind and in the morning, when we woke, for one brief moment we could almost forget we had ever been away” (*The Emperor* 128). By rejecting their Japanese ethnic identity, the children again easily assume the role of good American citizens. Nevertheless, Otsuka expresses a certain sadness for their lost Japanese identity. This is represented in their mother’s beautiful rosebush. Before the war, the family was proud of this unique rosebush, but during their incarceration, it was stolen from their garden. When the children return home, they are occasionally looking for this rosebush, but never find it. Still they: “...never stopped believing that somewhere out there, in some stranger’s backyard, [their] mother’s rosebush was blossoming madly, wildly, pressing one perfect red flower after another out into the late afternoon light” (*The Emperor* 138). The rosebush symbolizes their Japanese identity. Once, they were proud of their parent’s heritage, but now it was stolen from them by the government. Still, the children are hopeful that somewhere, in a stranger’s backyard the rosebush is blooming wildly.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine the theme of the social identity of Japanese Americans in historical novels *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) and *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) by Julie Otsuka. In this analysis, I adopted historical perspective to extensively explore the social status of Japanese and Japanese American characters in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Both novels provide an account of Japanese American experience and development of their social identity. However, *The Buddha in the Attic* focuses on the collective history of the first generation's experience, whereas *When the Emperor Was Divine* presents a rather personal story of an oppressed family. Therefore, in *The Buddha*, I defined the social identity of Japanese Americans in pre-war socio-political context; and in *The Emperor*, I mainly explored the psychological effect of the internment on Japanese American identity.

*The Buddha* chronicles the lives of Japanese immigrant women but simultaneously depicts the pre-war Japanese American identity; its purpose is to portray average Japanese American experience. It primarily focuses on the theme of the ethnic identity conflict and it defines the social status of Japanese Americans in relation to the white dominant group. The Japanese immigrant characters have low socioeconomic status in American society and *The Buddha* portrays their collective experience in rural and urban areas. In both instances, Japanese Americans are socially isolated from the dominant group. Therefore, Issei form close-knit ethnic communities where they maintain a strong ethnic identity in order to survive in the society that legally and socially discriminates against them. However, this rigid adhering to Japanese culture and customs hinders the process of acculturation and the majority of the first generation of Japanese Americans is unable to form American national identity. This leads to social conflict between Japanese and Americans. Japanese culture and values are distinct from the American ones since Japanese have collective mentality and emphasize discipline and behavioral restraint. Japanese American identity is especially shaped by the *enryo* norm that describes the proper behavior of an inferior group toward a superior group. Therefore, Japanese Americans avoid direct confrontation with Caucasians and appear eager to please them. This Japanese subservience is deemed as a sign of weakness in American culture and consequently Japanese immigrants are treated as inferior.

Eventually, Issei in *The Buddha* resignedly accept their low social status in American society and isolate themselves in their ethnic community. Their Nisei children, however, experience the social identity conflict more intensively. They are American citizens and quickly adopt American culture and customs. The majority of them have a weak ethnic identity and they strongly identify with the American nation. Essentially, Nisei reject their parents' cultural heritage and this creates a generational and ethnic identity conflict between the first and the second generation. Nevertheless, Nisei are still socially excluded from the dominant society. *The Buddha*, therefore, suggest that the socioeconomic assimilation of Japanese Americans is impossible in the pre-war American society. The social conflict between Japanese American minority and the white majority intensifies after the attack on Pearl Harbor and Japanese Americans are forcibly removed from the West Coast area.

*The Emperor* focuses on this mass removal and the effect of incarceration on Japanese American identity. However, in contrast to *The Buddha*, *The Emperor* explores the identity of an anonymous Japanese American family. This family does not represent the average Japanese American internment experience because Otsuka's purpose was to write a universal story of oppression and identity conflict. Therefore, *The Emperor* personalizes the internment experience. It portrays a Christian family of high social status that was able to maintain the bicultural identity before the war. The Issei parents and Nisei children are acculturated and have a neutral or positive ethnic identity. Nevertheless, the wartime experience negatively affected the social identity of each family member. Before the war, the family lived in a predominantly white neighborhood and were socially active in the community. Although the first-generation parents had a strong ethnic identity, they were acculturated to American customs and culture. The Nisei children adopted their Japanese values and beliefs, but fully assimilated American culture. The children, therefore, had a weak ethnic identity and identified as Americans. However, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the family was forced to suppress their Japanese ethnic identity and renegotiate their loyalty to the American nation. During the war, the head of the family is forcibly taken and the family unit is disintegrated. Collectively, Japanese Americans are treated as the enemy and consequently incarcerated in the desert where they slowly form a negative self-concept. After the war, the family has lost its high social status and the family unit is transformed. Ultimately, both generations are ashamed of their wartime experience but deal with the trauma of internment in different ways.

Having lost his ethnic and national identity, the man returns from the camp as a ghost of his former self. The woman suppresses her Japanese identity and forms a negative self-concept. Both Issei are socially isolated from American society and, after the war, they are left disillusioned with the American beliefs of democracy and equality. The Nisei children, on the other hand, completely reject their ethnic identity in favor of a strong American national identity. They are determined to fully assimilate into the mainstream American society and assume the role of the model minority. Therefore, the internment experience permanently affected the Japanese-American social identity.

Both novels explore the social identity of Japanese Americans, however, *The Buddha* provides a historical account of the collective pre-war Japanese Americans experience, whereas *The Emperor* focuses on the universal story of oppression and identity conflict of one Japanese American family. For analysis of *The Buddha*, I adopted mainly historical perspective, but in *The Emperor*, I focused on the psychological effect of the internment on the social identity of each family member. Ultimately in both novels, the first-generation Japanese Americans maintained their ethnic identity but after the Second World War are forced to suppress their Japanese ethnic identity and are left disillusioned with the American beliefs of democracy and equality. The second generation, on the other hand, quickly adopted American customs and culture and developed a weak ethnic identity. Even when their loyalty and social status were questioned during the war, they still identified with the white dominant society. After the war, they completely rejected their Japanese ethnic identity in favor of American national identity. They assume a new role of a model minority and are determined to never be mistaken for the enemy again. In both novels, Otsuka, therefore, chronicles the formation of a unique Japanese American identity.

## Resumé

Tato práce zkoumá téma sociální identity japonských Američanů v historických románech Julie Ocukey *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) a *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011). V obou románech Ocuka popisuje sociální postavení japonských Američanů ve Spojených státech amerických v první polovině 20. století. Japonští Američané představují v americké společnosti etnickou menšinu a v této době byli značně diskriminováni bílou většinou. Jejich diskriminace vedla až k zavedení proti-imigračního zákona „Immigration Act of 1924“, který omezil japonskou imigraci do Spojených států. Dají se tak snadno rozeznat jednotlivé generace japonských Američanů: první generace se označuje termínem Issei, druhá generace Nisei a třetí generace se označuje Sansei. V roce 1941, po útoku na Pearl Harbor, se Japonsko stalo úhlavním nepřítelem Spojených států a americká vláda podezřívala japonské Američany ze sabotáže a napomáhání Japonskému císařství. Během druhé světové války byly proto osoby japonského původu žijící na západním pobřeží Ameriky přesunuty do internačních táborů ve vnitrozemí USA. Celkově bylo uvězněno přes 112 000 japonských Američanů, jak přistěhovalců, tak právoplatných amerických občanů. I když jednotlivé generace žily v jiném sociopolitickém prostředí, každou z nich definuje uvěznění v internačních táborech během druhé světové války. Cílem této práce je popsat sociální konflikt japonsko-amerických postav v historických románech Julie Ocukey. V románu *The Buddha in the Attic*, Ocuka zachycuje zkušenosti první generace japonských imigrantů v předválečném období a zaměřuje se především na jejich etnickou identitu a na sociální konflikty mezi Japonci a americkým obyvatelstvem. Román *When The Emperor Was Divine*, naopak líčí příběh anonymní japonsko-americké rodiny, která byla během druhé světové války přesunuta do internačního tábora. V tomto románu, Ocuka rozebírá konflikt mezi etnickou a občanskou identitou japonských Američanů a popisuje psychologické následky neoprávněného uvěznění. Literární analýza historických románů Julie Ocukey je doplněna historickým kontextem první poloviny 20. století, který je nutný pro vykreslení sociopolitického prostředí definujícího sociální postavení japonských Američanů.

První část práce vymezuje základní odborné termíny a koncepty, se kterými tato historicko-literární práce pracuje. Především je vymezen termín sociální identity, který zahrnuje koncepty etnické a občanské identity. První kapitola také popisuje teorii vývoje

asijsko-americké etnické identity. Druhá kapitola představuje japonsko-americkou literaturu a zařazuje tak Julie Ocuku do širšího literárního kontextu.

Druhá část diplomové práce se věnuje literární analýze historických románů Julie Ocuky. Romány jsou zkoumány chronologicky: nejprve se práce zabývá předválečným obdobím a poté zkoumá zkušenosti japonských Američanů během druhé světové války. Třetí kapitola se zaměřuje na analýzu díla *The Buddha in the Attic*. Ocuka zde zachycuje kolektivní zkušenost první generace a popisuje jejich etnickou identitu. Především se soustřeďuje na sociální konflikt mezi první generací japonských Američanů a americkým obyvatelstvem. První generace často čelila rasovým stereotypům a předsudkům a všeobecně byla od Americké společnosti společensky odříznuta. Proto první generace vytvořila silnou etnickou komunitu, kde byly udržovány japonské zvyky, a tudíž si byli japonští Američané schopni zachovat pozitivní sociální identitu. Nicméně lpění na japonských zvycích zpomalilo proces amerikanizace první generace. Druhá generace ovšem vyrůstala v americkém prostředí a silně se identifikovala s bílou většinou. I když byli vychováni podle japonských hodnot, většina druhé generace se považovala za Američany japonského původu a vytvořila si silnou občanskou americkou identitu. Ani to však nezabránilo rasovým předsudkům americké společnosti a nízký socioekonomický status japonských Američanů se víceméně nezměnil. Román *The Buddha in the Attic* tudíž naznačuje, že asimilace japonské etnické menšiny nebyla v předválečném období možná. *The Buddha in the Attic* zobrazuje také mezigenerační konflikt mezi první a druhou generací.

Čtvrtá kapitola analyzuje dílo *When the Emperor Was Divine*. Tento román líčí příběh anonymní japonsko-americké rodiny během druhé světové války a zaměřuje se především na sociální postavení této rodiny a na konflikt mezi etnickou a občanskou identitou. Oproti románu *The Buddha in the Attic* nepopisuje toto dílo typickou zkušenost japonských Američanů. Ocuka se naopak snaží zachytit univerzální příběh, který popisuje zkušenosti kterékoliv utlačované menšiny. Nicméně tento román konkrétně popisuje psychologické následky neoprávněného uvěznění Američanů japonského původu. Před válkou měla tato japonsko-americká rodina v americké společnosti vysoké socioekonomické postavení a žila mimo etnickou komunitu. V tomto prostředí si byla rodina schopna udržet biculturní japonsko-americkou identitu. Ovšem během války rodina ztratila své společenské postavení a byla přesunuta do internačního tábora. Zde si členové rodiny vytvořili negativní etnickou

identitu. Po válce rodiče (první generace japonských Američanů) potlačili svou japonskou etnickou identitu a izolovali se od americké společnosti, která jim vzala iluze o demokracii a rovnocennosti. Naopak jejich děti (druhá generace) zavrhly japonskou etnickou identitu a plně přijaly americkou občanskou identitu. Jsou odhodláni se zcela asimilovat do americké společnosti a přijmout sociální roli modelové menšiny.

V obou románech tedy sociopolitické prostředí první poloviny 20. století a neoprávněné uvěznění během druhé světové války ovlivnilo sociální identitu japonských Američanů. Před válkou byla první generace společensky izolována v etnické komunitě, avšak po válce byla nucena svou japonskou etnickou identitu potlačit. Převážná část první generace si ovšem silnou americkou identitu nevytvořila, jelikož válečné zkušenosti ji zbavily iluzí o americké rovnocennosti a demokracii. Druhá generace naopak vyrůstala v americké společnosti a rychle si americké zvyky a kulturu osvojila. Převážná část se identifikovala s bílou většinou, a tudíž si vytvořila slabou etnickou identitu. Po válce pak druhá generace japonskou etnickou identitu zavrhla a plně si osvojila americkou občanskou identitu. Historické romány *The Buddha in the Attic* a *When the Emperor Was Divine* od Julie Ocukey tedy zachycují společenské postavení japonských Američanů ve Spojených státech během první poloviny 20. století a s tím spjatý vývoj japonsko-americké identity.



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## **Annotation**

Name: Lucie Lemonová

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Title of the Thesis: Social Identity of Japanese Americans in Julie Otsuka's Historical Novels

Supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc.

Number of pages of the thesis: 101

The purpose of this diploma thesis is to examine the theme of the social identity of Japanese Americans in historical novels *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) and *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) by Julie Otsuka. In both novels, Otsuka explores the social status of Japanese and Japanese Americans in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. In *The Buddha in the Attic*, which chronicles the pre-war immigrant experience, Otsuka largely focuses on the ethnic identity of Japanese Americans whereas in *When the Emperor Was Divine* she examines the ethnic and national identity conflict during and after the internment. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyze the ethnic identity and the national identity conflict that Japanese American characters in Otsuka's historical novels experience. The thesis mainly focuses on the social status and conflict of the first and the second generation of Japanese Americans. For a thorough study of this theme, the thesis provides a socio-political background of the first half of the twentieth century in the United States.

Key words: Japanese Americans, social identity, ethnic identity, national identity, Julie Otsuka, the internment of Japanese Americans

## **Anotace**

Jméno: Lucie Lemonová

Fakulta: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Sociální identita japonských Američanů v historických románech Julie Ocuky

Vedoucí práce: Prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc.

Počet stran: 101

Tato práce zkoumá téma sociální identity japonských Američanů v historických románech Julie Ocuky *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) a *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011). V obou románech Ocuka popisuje sociální postavení japonských Američanů ve Spojených státech amerických v první polovině 20. století. V románu *The Buddha in the Attic* Ocuka zachycuje zkušenosti první generace japonských imigrantů v předválečném období a zaměřuje se především na jejich etnickou identitu a na sociální konflikty mezi Japonci a americkým obyvatelstvem. Román *When The Emperor Was Divine* naopak líčí příběh anonymní japonsko-americké rodiny, která byla během druhé světové války přesunuta do internačního tábora. V tomto románu Ocuka rozebírá konflikt mezi etnickou a občanskou identitou japonských Američanů a popisuje psychologické následky neoprávněného uvěznění. Cílem této práce je popsat sociální konflikt japonsko-amerických postav v historických románech Julie Ocuky. Literární analýza je doplněna historickým kontextem první poloviny 20. století, který je nutný pro vykreslení sociopolitického prostředí definujícího sociální postavení japonských Američanů.

Klíčová slova: japonští Američané, sociální identita, etnická identita, občanská identita, Julie Ocuka, americké internační tábory pro Japonce