

that its religious forces are fully intact and working for the benefit of her people” (p. 211).

Most of the women interviewed seemed willing, even eager, to tell of their lives and to tell the traditional stories. Mondalmi perhaps best expressed why the women were willing to talk: Of the “old people” she said, “They should have taught us these things, so we would know what to do. We can’t find out now—they all gone without telling us” (p. 34). These women do not want any more of their history and culture lost to future generations.

This collection would be excellent to use in courses including cross-cultural studies of women. What emerges clearly in the essays is the importance of the roles of these women within their communities. Jenny Green points out that “More detailed and insightful investigation of women’s business is now being undertaken in some communities, but the general view that Aboriginal women play only a minor role is still prevalent, though Aboriginal women themselves have never doubted the significance of their functions in all aspects of community life” (p. 57).

Photographs of the women and their families, often posed with the women who recorded their lives, bring the stories and women to life. The stories are not dull studies; they are vibrant and alive and reflect the intimate bonds which were formed in spite of differences in culture or age.

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Sylvia Junko Yanagisako. *Transforming the Past: Tradition and Kinship Among Japanese Americans*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985) xii, 289 pp., \$39.50.

Transforming the Past is a major contribution to our understanding of Japanese American experience specifically and to our sense of ethnic experience generally. Yanagisako’s study transcends its anthropological base to offer crucial insights previously precluded by both facile “understanding” and methodological limitations.

Yanagisako analyzes changes in Japanese American kinship behavior as related to marriage, filial relations, and siblinghood. (Hence three major sections in the book, each with descriptive matter followed by interpretive discussion.) Her work is based on imaginatively conceived,

thoroughgoing, and carefully recorded interviews of a representative sample of Issei and Nisei in Seattle. Her informing notions are that kinship relations in the past shed light on those in the present and that “kinship relations are structured by symbolic [not normative] relations and serve symbolic functions as well as social ones.” She reveals that rather than patterns of behavior that might be “predicted” under static or “inert” structuralist and cultural pluralist conceptions of ethnic culture, Japanese American kinship is comprised of constantly shifting notions of traditional (“Japanese”) and modern (“American”) family life and “negotiated compromises” between Issei and Nisei cultures—“between what is given in people and what they confront outside themselves.” Put simply: not having read the textbooks on the interaction of ethnic generations, Japanese Americans seem not to have lived in light of their formulations.

Probing research and analysis by Yanagisako reveal that simply coming to America almost immediately results in symbolic (and often only half-acknowledged) reshapings of received ideas and expectations, reshapings that will enable the individual to cope with a new culture. Thus, to actually live in America, Yanagisako demonstrates, means and asks different things of each person as a creature of his or her *perceptions* of culture, nationality, and time. “Becoming” American is for each individual, family, and ethnic generation to engage in a series of ongoing “historically situated symbolic processes.”

Yanagisako’s insights derive from her mistrust of interview data unaccompanied by rigorous attention to how that data is generated, recorded, and (crucially) interpreted. As she points out on numerous occasions, contextual analysis reveals that the meanings of such “obvious” terms as “family” and “relative” vary both between and within generations, and are functions of time and circumstance; the same individual can even use a given term in two different ways, neither of them coincident with the dictionary definition. Yanagisako has listened with great care and rhetorical perception to her informants, and explicates their testimony in culture and history-specific terms—in order to extract and explain the symbolic kinship systems their lives reveal. Yanagisako blends behavioral observation with humanistic interpretive strategies.

Responsible students of ethnic American experience—whatever their disciplines—will find it difficult to ignore either Yanagisako’s insights or the implications of her strategy. She gives us a perceptive and crisply rendered reading of her subject (the jargon is a necessary minimum, the redundancies minimal) and a method for pursuing the ethnic disciplines.

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