IT IS FOOD THAT CALLS US HOME:
A Multigenerational Auto-Ethnography of Japanese Canadian Food and Culture

Shelly Ikebuchi and Takara Ketchell

The common idiom "You are what you eat" has significance that goes beyond the nutritional or biophysical implications of our diets. What we eat (or don't eat) can also speak volumes about who we are as social and cultural beings. As Marilyn Epp has argued, our relationship with food has social effects, but it also has semiotic importance as well.[1] Food not only tells us about who we are as people but also provides us with a semiotics or language of culture. In this paper we explore the link between food and cultural identity through a multigenerational auto-ethnography of food. As mother and daughter, we interrogate our own relationships with food and theorize our experiences of cultural loss, which we attribute to the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. Despite the fact that over seventy years have passed since the restrictions imposed by the *War Measures Act* were lifted, the effects continue to be felt in our family. While our experiences cannot be understood as representative of all, or even most, Japanese Canadians, what we offer here is a tentative and personal exploration of how our own relationships with food have been shaped, both directly and indirectly, by our family's history.[2] In

[1] Marlene Epp, "The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women," in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History,* ed. Marlene Epp and Franca Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 413–31.

[2] Given the diversity of how Japanese Canadians experienced internment, our analysis is at best partial and exploratory. Differences include, but are not limited to, geographical location, access to community, and family dynamics. While many Japanese Canadians were self-supporting during the war, others were relocated to ghost towns in the interior of British Columbia, while still others went to work camps or, as in the case of our family, to sugar beet farms. Some families remained together, while others were separated. All of these factors affected how families were able to transmit culture through food and how food was influenced by cultural and geographic factors. For examples of cultural diversity among Japanese Canadians, see Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, Heritage Committee,

Acquired Tastes: Why Families Eat the Way They Do, Beagan et al. explain that "because food is a multi-sensorial object that explicitly connects cultural ideas with corporeal experiences, it is a particularly valuable tool to examine mobilities and the performance of movement space."[3] Space and movement are "experienced through the body [and] help us construct 'emotional geographies' through which space becomes place, infused with particular meanings."[4] It is the theoretical triad of space, food, and identity that we explore here.

Location is central to how we define ourselves as individuals, as families, as communities, and as nations.[5] Arguably, one of the most formative locations is the home. Thus, the loss of home is often compounded by the loss of possessions and the uprooting and sometimes un-rooting of people's lives and identities. When forced to relocate, Japanese Canadians had to pull up their roots/rootedness in place, forever altering their links to the past and shaping their identities.[6] Transplanting living things involves trauma to the root systems. In fact, parts of the root system are often left behind through transplantation. It is this trauma and loss that we explore in this article. We contend that the loss of home is not only a loss of place but that it can result in the trauma[7] of memoricide or the loss of cultural memory.[8] For many Japanese Canadians, the internment, which brought with it both an uprooting and a label of "enemy alien," has had long-lasting spatial and affective consequences, which manifest multigenerationally.

Just Add Shoyu: A Culinary Journey of Japanese Canadian Cooking (Toronto: Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, ca. 2010).

3 Brenda L. Beagan, Gwen E. Chapman, Josée Johnston, Deborah McPhail, Elaine M. Power, and Helen Vallianatos, *Acquired Tastes: Why Families Eat the Way They Do* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 191.

4 Ibid.

5 Given the centrality of geography and location throughout this article, it is important to acknowledge that each of the family homes that we discuss were located on the territories of Indigenous peoples. For instance, our family's home in Mission, British Columbia, was on land that had been previously inhabited by Stó:lō First Nation people; our family's home in Picture Butte, Alberta, had been occupied by the Blackfoot Confederacy; our home in the Okanagan Valley was on land that was once inhabited by the Syilx/Okanagan people; and our home in Vancouver was on land previously occupied by the Coast Salish peoples, the Musqueam, Squamish, and the Tsleil-Waututh.

6 For a more comprehensive discussion of forced relocation, see Douglas Porteous and Sandra Smith, *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 62.

7 It is important to note here that, by trauma, we are referring to wounds that, to varying degrees, have effects on the individual, the family, and the community. We are conscious of the fact that trauma can take many forms, from the minor wound that heals quickly to deep wounds that result in pain and scars that last for years or, in the case of families, even generations.

8 Porteous and Smith, *Domicide*, 3.

For our family, Japanese Canadian internment meant not only the loss and subsequent (re)making of physical home spaces but also the cultural (un)making and cultural (re)imagining of home and identity. The impacts of this reimagining have, in turn, shaped how we, as third- (*Sansei*) and fourth- (*Yonsei*) generation Japanese Canadians, have experienced our own cultural identities. Culture infuses the creation of both physical and affective spaces of home. Culture permeates physical spaces through the presence of such things as family heirlooms, family photos, and even cooking utensils. Further, culture informs the affective spaces of our homes through how we experience family traditions, how we interact with others within those spaces, and how food conjures up not only pleasant memories but also connections to past generations. Studying Depression-era food practices among Ukrainian families, Zembrzycki found that, for children growing up in this era, food "left indelible marks on their memories, helping them maintain a sensual and tangible link with their pasts and, particularly, their Ukrainianess."[9] It is both in the home and *through* the home that culture is produced and reproduced. Culture infuses the home, but the home also acts as a conduit for informing our cultural legacies. In this way, the home is, as Porteous and Smith contend, both space and symbol. It is "*home as centre* – a place of refuge, freedom, possession, shelter and security [and] *home as identity* – with themes of family, friends, and community, attachment, rootedness, memory and nostalgia. Home is thus a spatial, psychosocial centre in which at least a portion of an individual's or group's identity resides."[10] If, as Porteous and Smith contend, the "home is also a 'memory machine,' causing us to relive our past through its contents,"[11] then the loss of home effectively short-circuits that machine. The loss of home for Japanese Canadians was more than relocation: it also meant the loss of many cultural artefacts. What, then, is left to fuel those memories? While interned Japanese Canadians experienced the loss of many possessions, including their homes, our focus on food reveals how the loss of some cultural artefacts and the passing on of others affected our own cultural memories.

In what follows, we begin by contextualizing key moments in Japanese Canadian history in light of our theoretical framing concepts and our

[9] Stacey Zembrzycki, "'We Didn't Have a Lot of Money, But We Had Food': Ukrainians and Their Depression-Era Food Memories," in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History,* ed. Marlene Epp, Valerie J. Korinek, Franca Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 132.

[10] Porteous and Smith, *Domicide*, 61 (emphasis in original).

[11] Ibid., 37.

methodological approach. We then move to our auto-ethnographic analysis. Here, we offer three trajectories in order to mine the intersections of culture and space (physical and affective) through an exploration of our relationships with food. In particular, we map the routes that our family has taken as a way to explore the evolution of our own cultural roots. The first trajectory is to examine some of the impacts of the loss of physical spaces and cultural artefacts due to the internment. The second trajectory is the examination of the resulting multigenerational cultural loss, or memoricide, especially as it relates to cultural homemaking and food in our own lives. The third trajectory examines our cultural (and culinary) losses and our own journeys toward cultural reclamation through food.

MEMORICIDE AND CULINARY CULTURE

Given the centrality of house and home in people's lives, internment had the potential to disrupt many aspects of life, including but not limited to physical, economic, social, and cultural aspects. While the focus of this article is on the social and cultural aspects, these cannot be completely separated from the economic or the physical. Porteous and Smith contend that the "willful destruction of a loved home can thus be one of the deepest wounds to one's identity and self-esteem, for both of these props to sanity reside in part in objects and structures that we cherish."[12] Their contention that identity and self-esteem are connected to objects and structures underpins the argument we make here.

The objects we hold and the structures that we inhabit shape our relationships, our culture, and our memories. As Sugiman contends, for Japanese Canadians, "the loss of personal possessions meant the forfeiture of memory itself, and, as such, the loss of self and identity."[13] Here, she draws on the concept of memory households, which, according to Irwin-Zarecka, "are both autobiographical reminders and elements of the much more distant past (great-grandparents' chest, for example), with a special place often reserved for objects evoking people dear to us who are no longer here."[14] As such, memory households "represent extensions of our self. Being deprived of them, even if only temporarily, can result in a deep sense of loss. Not demanding our active attention, most of the time, a memory household offers an anchor, the comfort of

[12] Ibid., 5.
[13] Pamela Sugiman, "Memories of Internment: Narrating the Life Stories of Japanese Canadian Women," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 3 (2004): 371.
[14] Ibid.

continuity and identity."[15] The loss of this sense of continuity and identity can have lasting negative effects on both individuals and groups. These effects can be physical, emotional, spiritual, and/or social.[16]

Through our exploration of the relationship between physical structures (homes), objects (cultural memorabilia, food, and food-related implements), and cultural transmission (collective memory), we argue that the uprooting of families resulted in a form of memoricide, or the destruction of memories, which has had serious impacts on the transmission of culture and the sharing of cultural memories. Memoricide helps contextualize the impacts not only on those who directly experienced the loss of home but also on subsequent generations.

Food is one way that we can trace the effects of the internment on family and culture. Beagan et al. make important links between food and identity. They explain that the "food that makes up a person's diet, the recipes used to prepare it, and the way in which it is consumed are among the most visible symbols of ethnic identity. The preparation of food from home can be a major means of transmitting cultural practices and identities across generations."[17] Food, thus, provides physical and cultural sustenance through cultural practice. In fact, it is through the consumption and production of food that many come to know who they are as cultural citizens. Food is about performance, about movement, and about space in the making of self. Therefore, "the concept of performed movement-space – the embodied, emplaced practice of self – can be understood not only through the taste of food, but also through its preparation and consumption, which reflect social location and understanding of self."[18]

As an integral component of our day-to-day lives, food must be considered as "not only a substance for survival and nourishment; it is also part of a sign system, since it is strictly involved in processes of signification and interpretation."[19] In recent years there has been "a rich emergence of scholarly literature in the field of food studies on the importance of food and migration in the production and shaping of

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[15] Ibid.

[16] While the trauma discussed in their example has deeper historical roots, Bagelman, Devereaux, and Hartley's discussion of cultural loss and reclamation through food practices and food sovereignty highlights how loss of knowledge and traditional food practices affected health, community, and culture among First Nations peoples. See Jen Bagelman, Fiona Devereaux, and Raven Hartley, "Feasting for Change: Reconnecting with Food, Place and Culture," *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 11, no. 1 (2016): 6–17, doi.org/10.18357/ijih111201616016.

[17] Beagan et al., *Acquired Tastes*, 189.

[18] Ibid., 198.

[19] Simona Stano, *Eating the Other: Translations of the Culinary Code* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 4.

identities, particularly gendered identities, in families … highlight[ing] not only the transnational flows of goods and foods, but also women's roles in maintaining alternative sets of foodways."[20] Within the context of a multicultural society such as Canada, culture is often signified through references to food. Different cultures are referenced through the kinds of foods that are prepared and eaten within those cultures. Food preparation and associated practices "play a key role at the personal, familial and inter-group processes, and in the creation and maintenance of socio-cultural identities."[21] Although different cultural or 'ethnic' foods become part of a neoliberal consumerism, at the same time "the food we eat, the way we eat it, and who we eat it with are deeply embedded cultural practices that say much about who we are, where we are from, and what we value."[22] Sometimes these values are explicit in the discourses that surround these foods, but in some instances, these values can also go unspoken. This ability to pass on these values and cultural practices in an unspoken manner through food means that food and cooking practices provide a unique opportunity for those who have been silenced to share aspects of themselves and their culture with later generations. For this reason, a focus on food and food practices provides a richer understanding of culture as a fluid construct.

Although food is often thought of as a matter of taste, class, and survival, it also plays an important role in the social world. In fact, as Graham, Hodgetts, and Stolte argue, "food acts as a tangible, visceral nexus for the enactment of relational ties, heritage, identity and class,"[23] and, as such, food provides an avenue for exploring cultural identity and transmission. As food is linked to cultural identity, it also "becomes a tool to maintain culture, share and display heritage, and transmit elements of cultural importance to successive generations."[24] Important, too, are the ways that cooking and sharing in particular kinds of food can offer "a way for diasporic communities to re-member home."[25] The types of food that we prepare, consume, and share have histories that inscribe

[20] Psyche Williams-Forson, "'I Haven't Eaten if I Don't Have My Soup and Fufu': Cultural Preservation through Food and Foodways among Ghanaian Migrants in the United States," *Africa Today* 61, no. 1 (2014): 71.

[21] Rebekah Graham, Darrin Hodgetts, and Ottilie Stolte, "Dual-Heritage Households: Food, Culture, and Re-Membering in Hamilton, New Zealand," *International Review of Social Research* 6, no. 1 (2016): 4, doi.org/10.1515/irsr-2016-0002.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 12.

[24] Dwaine Plaza, "Roti and Doubles as Comfort Foods for the Trinidadian Diaspora in Canada, the United States, and Britain," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2014): 470, doi.org/10.1353/sor.2014.0021.

[25] Graham et al., "Dual-Heritage Households," 7.

our senses not only of inclusion and connection but also of exclusion and difference:

> People's very sense of their own identities and those of others is reflected in the multitude of foodstuffs they avoid or procure … and the myriad of ways in which they prepare, eat and share food with others ... Throughout diverse groups, traditional food practices are adapted to modern-day life in sustaining a sense of heritage and difference.[26]

The links between food, memory, culture, and (dis)placement are central to this article. How we approach these concepts is shaped by our positionalities, both in history and identity. In order to understand the processes that shape families' participation in cultural formation, it is vital to consider the multiple ways that history is (re)created within the present. In what follows, an analysis of historical events foregrounds our autoethnographic vignettes in order to bring together the past with what Jeffrey Weeks refers to as the "historical present."[27]

Attention to history is integral to the project of understanding how communities, as well as the connections that bind them, have developed and been undone over time. Weeks posits the idea of a "historical present," whereby the present is seen "not as the logical culmination of the past, but as a shifting configuration of traces of the past in a complex and living present, providing a survey of the battleground rather than a story of progress, a critical history rather than a conventional history."[28] Such an approach to history "stresses the otherness and openness of the past, and the discontinuities between past and present, but at the same time the strangeness of the past illumines the contingencies of the present, and its multiple time frames."[29] Similarly, Oikawa, argues that merely addressing history as "temporality masks the consequences and effects of national violence."[30] In order to make sense of present-day Japanese Canadian identities and/or communities, it is integral to consider how the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War disrupted and displaced strong and vibrant communities along the western coast of Canada.

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[26] Ibid., 4.
[27] Jeffrey Weeks, *What Is Sexual History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 21.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Mona Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence: Japanese Canadian Women, Memory, and the Subjects of the Internment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 226.

Japanese Canadian history is rooted in a national legacy of systemic and institutional racism that manifested in racial tension. Before the internment, over 95 percent of Japanese Canadians made the province of British Columbia their home.[31] Japanese immigrants built a close-knit society with a shared language and a concentration of certain occupations, such as salmon fishing, farming, and running grocery stores, to name a few.[32] It was this close-knit society that would be torn apart due to the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. The *War Measures Act* dictated the "resettlement"/dislocation/relocation of "some 23,000 men, women and children who had been categorized as 'enemy aliens.'"[33] It was primarily *Issei* (first generation) and *Nisei* (second generation), of varying ages, who made up the bulk of those who endured mass uprooting, dispossession, dispersal, and deportation between 1942 and 1949.[34] The internment meant that, regardless of citizenship, all Japanese were removed from the protected zone, which was marked off as one hundred miles inland from the coast of British Columbia. A small number of Japanese Canadian families, those who were wealthy enough to guarantee their own self-sufficiency, were allowed to move to self-supporting sites in the interior of British Columbia. However, those who could not afford to move themselves were interned in ghost towns or work camps in British Columbia, or on sugar beet farms in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario. Families were often split up, with men being sent to road camps or prisoner of war (POW) camps, and women, children, and the elderly sent to ghost towns in British Columbia's interior.[35] As we discuss, this history has had intergenerational impacts in our family.

Both theory and history provide useful lenses for exploring the broader societal processes of the internment and its aftermath. Yet it can be difficult for abstract theory and broad historical analysis alone to attend to the particularities and deeply personal effects and affects that, because of such trauma, emerge through the intersecting complexities of individual lives. Therefore, the use of the self as a theoretical vantage point is needed to both clarify and deepen such an analysis of culture.

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[31] Kim Kobayashi and Roy Miki, *Justice in Our Time: The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 19.

[32] Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 116.

[33] Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004), 24–25.

[34] Ibid.

[35] See, for instance, Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); Miki, *Redress*; and Mary Taylor, *A Black Mark: The Japanese-Canadians in World War II* (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 2004).

To this end, we have turned to autoethnography as a key methodological approach for teasing apart the varied and complex ways that the loss of home and culture has played out across multiple generations.

Autoethnography "allows the researcher to take up each person's life in its immediate particularity and to ground the life in its historical moment."[36] The autoethnographic commitment to "exploring, understanding, and writing from, through, and with personal experiences in relation to and in the context of the experiences of others" is particularly well suited to this project of exploring and theorizing cultural loss as it affected multiple generations of experiences. [37] Autoethnography is useful for understanding how societal factors affect us in unique ways, and it can help deepen our understanding of the intimate particularities of cultural (and familial) memory. Using personal experiences ultimately creates a "way of acknowledging the self that was always there anyway and of exploring personal connections to our culture."[38] To this end, autoethnography frequently breaks down and challenges the idea of a clean divide between stories and theory as "for autoethnographers, theory and story share a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship."[39] The (re)telling of stories is especially meaningful in the context of the internment of Japanese Canadians as one of the prominent responses of those interned was silence. As a result, the process of cultural reclamation and of making sense of both the internment and Japanese Canadian identities has been long and complex.[40]

FINDING HOME: CONVERSATIONS ON PLACE AND FOOD.

Beagan et al. argue that it is through "the multi-sensorial aspects of food (involving touch, taste, smell, sight), [that] people perform their identities and connections with others across time and space."[41] Here, we seek to uncover/recover our stories of family, food, and culture to

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[36] Norman K. Dezin, *Interpretive Autoethnography* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), x.

[37] Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23.

[38] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5, no. 2 (2006): 11.

[39] Adams et al., *Autoethnography*, 89.

[40] See, for instance Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*; Shelly D. Ketchell (Ikebuchi), "Re-locating Japanese Canadian History: Sugar Beet Farms as Carceral Sites in Alberta and Manitoba, February 1942–January 1943" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2005); Kobayashi and Miki, *Justice in Our Time*; Miki, *Redress*; Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence;* Hisako Omori, "Eating Japanese Food in Diaspora as Identity Building: The Case of a Japanese Canadian Church," *Contemporary Japan* 29, no. 2 (2017): 148–61; Sugiman, "Memories of Internment."

[41] Beagan et al., *Acquired Tastes,* 189.

explore and deepen our understanding of how the internment has shaped our own cultural identities. Our goal is to journey through history in order to probe how the routes that our family has travelled have shaped our sense of culinary and cultural (dis)connectivity. Here, we use the metaphors of "routes" and "roots" to illustrate the importance of place in the transmission of culture.[42] By mapping our family's historical routes, we examine how our own cultural roots have been shaped through proximity (or lack of proximity) to other cultural root systems. Cultural transmission occurs on multiple registers, including but not limited to language, religion, tradition, familial history, artefacts, and food. In order for transmission to take place, our cultural roots must be allowed to grow out of and as part of a root system. When this system is disturbed through "transplantation" or relocation, parts of our culture have the potential to be lost. Further, as our roots connect with other root systems, our cultures become hybridized.

The internment meant that, along with the loss of homes, there was also an erasure of "the physical place of memory and source of identity."[43] In the case of Japanese Canadian individuals and families, after the internment this initial uprooting was magnified by state pressures to remain dispersed and not settle together in communities. In what follows, we explore some of the ways that this resulted in trauma to the cultural "root system" and how this has been navigated, resisted, and, in limited ways, overcome in our own family.

UPROOTING

Shelly (Sansei)

The first route of our journey is the one from the west coast of British Columbia to Alberta. Prior to the internment, my father's family owned a farm in Mission, British Columbia, where they grew hops and strawberries. Many of the stories that my father tells about this time-period revolve around that farm. The family hired several workers, and, in addition to these workers, family members took part in planting and harvesting. The growing of food not only sustained family members economically but also connected them to the land and to each other. When they were forced to relocate, it was likely their connection to the land, as well as their efforts to keep their family together that led them

[42] As we illustrate later, using this metaphor can help us understand cultural reclamation projects as a rerouting or re-rooting of cultural transmission.

[43] Porteous and Smith, *Domicide*, 62.

to sign up for the Sugar Beet Programme. However, due to the size of the family and the needs of the sugar beet farmers, the family ended up being split between two farms, with my grandparents going to one farm with some of their children, and their eldest son and his brother (my father) going to another. This meant that, for the duration of the war, my father, who was only fourteen years of age, had limited contact with his parents and the rest of his family. The loss of his family home was compounded by the loss of community as well as by the temporary disconnection from some family members.

While (dis)(re)location of peoples can often be mitigated by the comfort found in familiar foods,[44] this was not a luxury afforded to many interned families. Beagan et al. explain that food is one way that migrant families transcend "geographically distinct spaces": "Through daily food practices and attempts to re-create certain tastes, migrants perform their ethnocultural identities in efforts to transcend geographically distinct spaces."[45] However, for many Japanese Canadians, finding those familiar foods was difficult or impossible. Those sent to sugar beet farms were often unable to obtain familiar foods as they were isolated on these farms and, given that there had not been many Japanese in the area prior to the war, avenues for purchasing Japanese goods were limited. For our family members the loss of their home and the fracturing of their family meant that some cultural loss was inevitable. Even after the war the family remained fractured as my grandparents settled in Taber, Alberta, and my father and his brother settled in Picture Butte, Alberta. Both men eventually married white women, which resulted in families with hybrid cultural legacies, especially when it came to food. But this was a history that I was not to learn about until I was much older.

The cultural silence that infused my childhood home was part of a larger silence. As a response to "the violence of cultural displacement and cultural loss, for years many *Nisei* (second-generation), attempted to filter the painful memories of their internment – by not literacizing their stories, by not putting reminiscence to paper, nor verbally articulating their experiences as part of a public discourse."[46] While some have attributed this silence to Japanese stoicism, it is important to recognize that this silence was a politically and historically situated response to the

[44] See, for instance, Julie Mehta, "Toronto's Multicultured Tongues: Stories of South Asian Cuisines," in Epp, Korinek, Iacovetta, *Edible Histories*, 156–69.
[45] Beagan et al., *Acquired Tastes,* 193.
[46] Sugiman, "Memories of Internment," 83.

injustices and indignities of the internment.[47] Further, this silence was never complete; in many cases, memories and stories were passed down in fragments, incomplete and often out of context. Sugiman suggests a necessary contestation of the speech/silence binary and instead posits reading these partial and incomplete accounts as a matter of reticence rather than of stoicism. In this way, she acknowledges these partial accounts that occurred within the family as challenging the dominant representation of Japanese Canadians as silent.[48]

The silences surrounding the internment of Japanese Canadians meant a disconnection from my family's history of immigration and (dis)location. It was not until I was an adult that I began to explore that history.[49] It was my desire to reclaim some of my own family history that led me to investigate the Sugar Beet Programme as part of my master's thesis. The following excerpt from that thesis points to the power of food in my journey:

> Although much of my own childhood took place in the Interior of British Columbia, one of my earliest memories is sitting in the backseat of a car while my father used his pocket knife to peel away the tough outer skin of a sugar beet. I was six years old. My father had pulled the car over on a stretch of road in Southern Alberta, not far from where we then lived in 1968. There were sugar beets scattered in the ditches and gullies, and even on the shoulders of the road. It was not an uncommon sight. Many farming trucks, piled high with sugar beets would travel down these roads and some of the sweet cargo would escape. On this particular day, my father stopped the car and provided my sister and me with a lesson on sugar beets, which helped us to understand that inside these innocuous little roots was the sweet stuff of sugar. I can only imagine what drove him to pull over the car for this object lesson. After the lesson about sugar and a brief mention of how he used to pick sugar beets by hand, he said nothing. It is a fond memory, one that I cannot help remembering whenever I drive down a farming road.[50]

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[47] Pamela Sugiman, "Understanding Silence: Finding Meaning in the Oral Testimonies of Nisei Women in Canada," in *Changing Japanese Identities in Multicultural Canada*, ed. Joseph F. Kess, Hiroko Noro, Midge M. Ayukawa, and Helen Lansdowne (Victoria, BC: Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives, 2003), 354.

[48] Ibid.

[49] The redress movement in the 1980s created spaces and calls for Japanese Canadians who had been interned to tell their stories, sometimes for the first time. It is in part because of these stories that I decided to try to find a way to connect to my own. For a more complete discussion of the redress movement and storytelling, see Pamela Sugiman, "'A Million Hearts from Here': Japanese Canadian Mothers and Daughters and the Lessons of War," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 26, no. 1 (2007): 50–68.

[50] Ketchell (Ikebuchi), "Re-locating Japanese Canadian History."

At the time, my father never spoke about why he had been working in the sugar beet fields. I remember my father talking about working sugar beets, but I remember no mentions of war. Even in my own education, I remember classroom histories that told nothing of the horrors that were perpetrated in the name of that war. I remember how years later the apology issued by the Canadian government meant that, for my family, there was an end to the silence. And yet, the silence was not filled but, rather, was tentatively infringed upon. This partial storytelling was common among those who lived through the internment, and it represented a way of sharing their past without necessarily digging up painful memories. By leaving out the painful context, parents could speak of their family and history without fully broaching the topic of the internment. These partial stories were often the only starting point that *Sansei*, myself included, had when we went searching for answers about our own histories and identities. One of the only ways that history was to unfold for me was through the telling and sharing of food memories.

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

Shelly (Sansei)

The second route our family took was the one between Alberta and the Okanagan Valley, where I grew up. When I was ten years old, my father announced that we were moving away from Alberta. I don't remember being told why my father sold his business in southern Alberta or what precipitated the move, but I do recall on numerous occasions my father discussing our move as a move "*back* to British Columbia." I did not know why this move was significant until much later, but I now believe it was a desire to reclaim his childhood home in British Columbia. Although we did not make it to the West Coast, we did find a place to call home in the Okanagan Valley.

I never understood why being Japanese was something that was not explicitly mentioned in our home. It wasn't until I was an adult that I learned about our family's history. My father never spoke about the internment when I was growing up. But there were hints that would later make sense to me as I learned more about what that history had entailed. Yet food was an avenue for communicating in ways that did not require words. Sometimes this was fairly explicit as we shared Japanese food around the table. Other times, it was more tenuous and partial.

Because the trauma of uprooting was a direct result of racialization, cultural distancing was a survival strategy, a reflection of historical

habitus. Beagan et al. explain that habitus consists of "the internalized social and cultural influences that shape people's everyday behaviour."[51] Drawing on Bourdieu, they argue "that tastes and preferences learned during early childhood in a specific cultural context become internalized, embodied, unconscious, and part of one's common sense."[52] In many ways, food tastes and preferences are part of social capital. The desire to distance oneself from one culture and align with another can be understood as being one way of borrowing social capital to internalize and literally embody the tastes and preferences of a more powerful group. Given the importance of food to cultural identity, it is not surprising that, for a population who desired to "fit in" with the dominant society, this would mean putting away cultural connections to a marginalized identity and embracing more "Canadian" cultural norms.

My mother is white and my father had distanced himself from many Japanese cultural traditions, likely even before they married. Perhaps this was out of a need to "fit in" in a nation that had exhibited animosity toward Japanese people. Or perhaps having spent his formative years away from his parents had led to cultural distancing. Beagan et al. explain that, "because implicit learning occurs every day, the family kitchen and family table are crucial locations for embodied learning among children."[53] For my father, this implicit learning was halted at fourteen years of age.

Whatever the reasons, Japanese culture was largely absent in my BC childhood home. There were certainly remnants of the culture, in the form of cultural artefacts, many of which centred on food and food practices. Thus, food practices became one way that Japanese Canadian cultural legacy was transmitted. Mixed in among my mother's English bone china were little rice bowls and small plates that we would use on the rare occasions that my father cooked. Chopsticks lay neatly next to the silverware in the kitchen drawer. The rice cooker was the most used appliance in the house, and the daikon radish grater bore the dents and scratches of a much-used utensil. For me, these cultural artefacts were both comforting and alienating. My cultural roots, both Japanese and European, were entwined and grafted, producing cultural environments and practices that were, at the same time, distinct and hybridized.

While we usually reserved Japanese meals for special occasions, rice was a staple in our home. It was not uncommon for us to have roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, gravy, and rice. It was and still is one of my favourite

[51] Beagan et al., *Acquired Tastes*, 12.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 209.

Figure 1. Daikon Radish Grater. Photo by Shelly Ikebuchi.

meals. Growing up, I was not familiar with teriyaki, inari, or Japanese curry. At least I didn't think I was. My father, who only spoke Japanese when he went home to visit his mother, never told us that his "Japanese Chicken" was called teriyaki or that the "rice bags" that we took on road trips were called "inari." It was not until I first tasted Japanese curry in a restaurant that I made the connection between this dish and my father's liberal sprinkling of curry powder on my mother's beef stew. I am not sure whether he never told us the Japanese names because he no longer remembered them or because he wanted us to have only the sanitized "Canadian" renderings of these dishes.

Yet all of these dishes hold fond memories. I learned my (Canadian) identity through these dishes. "Teaching taste infuses foods with value-laden meanings. Children learn what 'good' food is, where the definition of good is classed, gendered, ethnically marked and linked to place."[54] What I learned was that Western food was good and that Japanese food

[54] Ibid., 211.

was what marked me off as different, as inferior. So the very food that brought me joy and comfort also brought with it shame through internalized racism. Despite the fact that Japanese food was always a favourite of mine, as it signalled comfort and connection with my father, outside of our immediate family, it was something I associated with danger and discomfort. When friends came for dinner, I always set the table so that they would not see the chopsticks in the drawer, and I would always ask for pizza or lasagna so that there was no risk that the rice pot would make an appearance at the kitchen table. Food, in this sense, was always a reminder of my difference, a difference that was always already apparent in school hallways and on the playground as racial epithets such as "Jap" and "Nip" were familiar taunts. There were very few Japanese families where I grew up, and I did not associate with them as I feared that, much as with my own Japanese family, I would never fit in. My cultural roots felt stunted in the inhospitable environment that they inhabited.

Takara (Yonsei)

Much like my mom, I did not have much exposure to Japanese people growing up. Until I was a teenager, I had attended a school in which the majority of the students were white. Most of my extended family were also white. I have faint memories of visits from my grandpa's side of the family, but outside of these rare instances I had few reference points for what it meant to be Japanese or why it was, or should be, relevant in my life. Even though I knew that my family was part Japanese, I could not point out what, if anything, about our family was actually Japanese, other than our love of eating just about everything on rice.

All of these things came together to mean that I rarely, if ever, gave much thought to my own "Japanese-ness." I often chose to do school projects on Japan, but I never really thought of these things as being linked to my own life or identity, and I did not see commonalities between what I had learned about Japanese cultures or religious practices and the practices of my mostly Christian family. This did not change until I was in middle school. My best friend at the time was dealing with racism from other students. My frustration with the behaviour of my peers prompted a discussion with my mom that would spark a decades-long struggle to make sense of what exactly my Japanese heritage meant. I don't remember the whole discussion, but I do remember telling her that, while I felt kind of bad about it, I was still kind of glad that I was white (and that therefore I didn't have to deal with racism myself). I

remember my mother turning to me and saying, "It's interesting that you think of yourself as white. Where does your grandfather fit, then?"

Shelly (Sansei)

I remember this conversation clearly. I remember having to force myself to take a breath, to consider my words before I spoke them. I felt erased by my daughter's claim to whiteness. Yet I had a deep awareness that her "whiteness" was a legacy that she did not yet fully understand. She was born less than three weeks after the Canadian government issued its official apology for the internment of Japanese Canadians. She had been born into a different world, a world in which "race" was purported to have far less relevance, especially for someone who could "pass." Yet I felt a sense of responsibility to right the wrongs of history, to make space for Japanese Canadian history in her legacy. So I did not speak of my own erasure but, instead, asked her to consider her grandfather, my father. I hoped that, by asking, she would find a way to consider her own place in Japanese Canadian history and identity.

Takara (Yonsei)

Despite my own claims of whiteness, I was not ignorant of the fact that my grandpa was Japanese. I remember this incident so strongly because this was the first time that I realized that my family had a cultural history that needed to be considered. Perhaps this shows my own privileged and sheltered upbringing and the fact that I could generally "pass" as white. However, this incident spurred in me a drive and desire to make sense of my own identity and find the traces of my own cultural history, to answer the question of "where does my grandfather fit?" For the first time in my life, I had been made to question where and how my family's Japanese history and heritage factored into my own life and identity. This was not a question that had an easy or readily available answer, and, in many ways, I am still searching. Identity in the context of multiculturalism is always already complicated by the partial and intersectional nature of culture as groups become integrated into the larger society, but the loss of home and culture during and after the internment complicates my own Japanese Canadian identity even further.

Shelly (Sansei)

My daughter grew up in a nation that was committed to multiculturalism. In some ways, this commitment is rife with contradictions. Under multiculturalism, "race" and culture are made to matter. Yet it is also a policy under which racism is meant to be a thing of the past. Multiculturalism asks us to celebrate our unique cultures. Part of our journey, then, has been to come to terms with what that means when our cultural roots have been torn up, transplanted, and hybridized. Our legacy is a collection of shards that have been unearthed as we dig through our kitchen drawers. It is memories of food, of sights, sounds, and smells as we shared our lives in kitchens and around kitchen tables. But it is not a legacy that fits neatly into the boundaries of multiculturalism because our cultural roots have been uprooted and hybridized in such a way as to make them unrecognizable as a single culture. Our culture is *multicultural* and it is not ahistorical. It is a hybridity that has resulted from the loss of culture, the denial of culture, and the reclamation of culture. It is rice and gravy, beef stew with curry powder, and a daikon grater that would not find its place of honour until our move to the West Coast.

FINDING FERTILE SOIL

Shelly (Sansei)

In 2003, I moved to Vancouver to complete my master's degree. A year later, my daughter came to live with me. It was there that our route toward cultural reclamation began. As I studied the sugar beet farms of southern Alberta, links between my family's past and my own emerged. I got glimpses of losses that went far beyond what the history books were just beginning to tell. As I uncovered stories of Japanese Canadians who were sent to the sugar beet farms, I started to make connections to my own family history. I began to feel a connection to Japanese-ness that I had not felt before, as I imagined my grandmother and grandfather making the trek to Alberta. As I uncovered photos of Japanese men, women, and children working in the sugar beet fields, I squinted to see if maybe some of them were my kin. I was drawn back to those childhood drives and seeing the sugar beets littering the side of the road, and this took on a new and personally profound meaning. I remembered the sweet taste of that sugar beet in the back seat of my father's car, and I knew that this, too, was my legacy.

Takara (Yonsei)

My family, like many others, experienced a separation and loss of cultural community, which has resulted in a sometimes disconnected sense of cultural identity. I learned of this history alongside my mother as she researched the Sugar Beet Programme. However, it is not only this history that informs my Japanese Canadian identity. I am *Yonsei*; I am fourth-generation Japanese Canadian and the particularities of this identity are important. For me, at least, the use of generational labels in Japanese Canadian identity are meaningful as they indicate that, while the link to Japan is important, so too is the time spent in Canada. Despite the different routes our families have taken, the identities of *Sansei* or *Yonsei* link us to past generations. My desire to make sense of what it means to be a fourth-generation Japanese Canadian ultimately led me to research the Powell Street Festival, the largest Japanese Canadian festival in the country and the longest-running community arts celebration in Vancouver. While much of the advertising for the festival focuses on Japanese food and the celebration and performance of Japanese culture (fun things like martial arts, dance, drumming, and the art of dressing as sushi), the history of internment echoes throughout the festival. Through the festival, a sense of community is (re)created and questions of identity can be broached. Through proximity to other Japanese Canadians, the Powell Street Festival allows for a rerouting of cultural transmission. It is in these spaces where I met others who had grown up questioning what it meant to be Japanese Canadian, others who had grown up with little mention of or focus on their Japanese heritage and yet ate startlingly familiar "family" dinners that blended elements of Japanese cooking with more Western fare. And it is in these spaces that I have seen multiple generations of Japanese Canadians working to re-form and re-contextualize the flavours of Japanese culture that we have inherited.

Growing up, there were a number of things that connected me to my own Japanese heritage. However, due to the disruption of community and the silence surrounding the internment, most of our "Japanese" roots manifest in family practices, traditions, and recipes that echoed a past but that were also stripped of context. As a result, it felt difficult and problematic to claim Japanese-ness as a part of my cultural identity. Yet I was deeply interested in learning about a variety of Japanese things: I dabbled in drawing in an anime or manga style, joined and performed with a taiko drumming group, and took to folding origami to pass the time. And yet, I always found myself questioning how exactly my

"reclamation" of these fragments of Japanese culture differed from the commodification and consumption of the ethnic "other." As a result, I am left with the lingering and (as of yet) unanswerable question: What/where is the line between cultural reclamation and cultural appropriation? And, ultimately, what does it mean to be *Yonsei*?

Shelly (Sansei)

Setting down roots in Vancouver meant that both of us were able to begin our unique journeys into cultural reclamation. For me, food was a big part of reclaiming a culture that often felt so distant from me. As I journeyed into Japanese restaurants, I was faced with familiar sounds and smells. When I was growing up, at least a few times a year, we would travel to Alberta to visit my grandmother and my aunts and uncles who had settled there after the war. Most of my extended family spoke both English and Japanese, although my grandmother spoke only a little English. In the homes of many of my relatives, Japanese was often spoken. Knowing only one or two words of Japanese, during our visits I spent most days curled up with comic books on the couch. I was an outsider. This was especially true at meals, which often consisted of unfamiliar tastes and smells. Yet, looking back, it is through food that I was able to connect with my grandmother. We called her "Bubblegum Grandma" because she always had a handful of bubble gum to squeeze into our hands when we left her house. But I also remember her homemade noodles, the familiar smell of rice steaming, and the ever-present bottle of soy sauce on her table. Food offered a point of connection, of warmth, and of comfort, despite the fact that we did not share a language. It was through food that I learned to feel at "home." To this day, when I walk into a Japanese restaurant, I feel a sense of home. Japanese language draws me in, even though I do not understand what is being said. The smell of rice cooking and the sounds of Japanese being spoken take me back to another time and I feel a part of that culture. It is not a culture that permeated my home growing up, except in bits and pieces. But food is one way I remember and honour a past to which I have only tenuous connections.

Takara (Yonsei)

Despite the ruptures that took place as a result of Japanese internment, in my own home there were still traces of "Japanese" culture waiting to be identified. Growing up, my brother and I referred to our mom's

parents as Apple Grandpa and Grandma. This was mostly because they never came to visit without bringing a gift (and while we were young this was often a box of apples). I attributed this practice of bringing gifts as a form of good manners. I did not question the provenance of its roots. Like many of the fragments of Japanese culture that have been passed down to me, the deeper history and meaning behind them were often missing. It was not until much later that these fragments gained context and character. Although, at the time, I did not know that my grandfather grew up not far from Vancouver, it was there that I began to realize the relevance of these fragments. It was there that I began to connect history, culture, and identity.

Unlike my mom, who grew up all too aware of the things that marked her as different from her white friends, the foods and other artefacts of Japanese culture seemed normal to me. There was the rice cooker, which held a place of honour on the countertop in all of my family homes, even when kitchens were small and counter space was in high demand. There was the ever-present soy sauce container that lived on the ledge at the back of the stove and the sizable Rubbermaid container that we always used to store our rice. My favourite foods growing up were chili with rice and hamburger and shredded carrots cooked with soy sauce and sugar. If anything, I thought it was odd that my friends' houses did not contain a rice cooker. While there was nothing that marked these things as different or unusual, without proximity to other Japanese Canadians or a larger community, these fragments lacked vibrancy and meaning.

Although I did not know what it was for, the daikon grater that had belonged to my great-grandmother was, in all its scratched and dented splendour, a familiar part of the kitchen landscape. I only learned what this grater was and its history after moving to Vancouver. My mom and I were eating hotdogs from a popular stand called Japadog, which sold hotdogs with Japanese toppings. One, in particular, was topped with a pile of grated daikon and a soy-based sauce. While we were eating, my mom mentioned how she used to eat rice with grated daikon and soy sauce when she was young. She proposed making it again at some point in the future, and, after I wondered aloud how one grated it so finely, she informed me that we already had such a tool. After a short description, I immediately recognized it and was surprised that it had such a specific purpose and long history. The more we came into contact with Japanese culture, the more we ended up discussing the familiar connections to my mom's childhood/family. Although the proximity to Japanese culture made it easier for those cultural roots to take hold, the route that they

took was anything but straightforward. Familial links to culture were filtered through cultural exchanges with food and with people outside of my family. As I met other *Yonsei*, I began to see similarities between what we ate and what they did. Ironically, it was the cultural hybridity, a legacy of the internment, that became the very thing that reminded me that I was a part of a larger community. I realized that these legacies were richer for their hybridity. They were reminders, as Graham, Hodgetts, and Stolte suggest, of who I am and where I come from.[55]

Shelly (Sansei)

My relationship to Japanese culture is complex. Growing up in a largely white community, being (half) Japanese was isolating. In many ways, I felt disconnected from that identity, despite constant reminders from outside of my family of my Japanese Canadian identity.[56] My mother's china cabinet and our "hybrid" meals tell a lot about how culture was transmitted in my home. We were a mixed or hybrid family, and although we never talked about what it meant to be Japanese (or even half-Japanese), there were always hints that the past still held some relevance in our lives. Every year, my father and my mother would make the trek from their home in the Okanagan Valley back to Alberta. In the car, they took with them boxes of fruit for family who still lived there, and when they returned to British Columbia, it was always tradition to bring back large bags of rice. I used to think the fruit was just a kind gesture on my father's part. Now I believe that, through food, he was bringing reminders of their BC home back to his family and bringing a piece of home, culture, and identity back to us.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR ROOTS

Our family, like many others, experienced a separation and disruption of cultural community that resulted in a sometimes disconnected sense of cultural identity. However, it is not just this history that we seek to remember by continuing to identify with our Japanese Canadian roots. Despite the ruptures that took place as a result of the Japanese internment, there were still traces of "Japanese" culture waiting to be identified. Much of this revolves around food and around practices and stories associated

[55] See Graham et al., "Dual-Heritage Households," 4.

[56] Forms asked for racial or ethnic identity, teachers encouraged me to choose Japan when doing school projects on other countries, and some of my school peers taunted me with racial epithets.

with food. Although many were lost, recipes and stories were passed down from generation to generation. Our family always cooked rice; it was probably one of the first things that we each learned to cook. Rice has been passed down like a family heirloom. And, like a family heirloom, it became part of our everyday, mixed in with other mundane pieces of our existence. Rice was a part of our celebrations, a comfort when we were ill, and a mainstay that became part of our identities. It is a reminder that, even in the face of cultural loss, food has always been a legacy of connection and a legacy of difference, of familiarity and of strangeness.

Cultural food practices evolve in response to many factors, including, but not limited to, geography, social relations, availability of ingredients, and cultural tradition. This was evident during a recent trip Shelly took to her birthplace in Alberta. While there, she visited a Japanese restaurant and was surprised by the prevalence of potatoes on the menu. While rice was certainly a central part of most meals, fried potatoes were included with most dishes. While it is impossible to know the reasons for this unique approach to Japanese food, we do know that, after the war, many Japanese who were sent to the sugar beet farms took up potato farming. Perhaps, like our family, the routes that these families had travelled had shaped the restaurateur's food practices. What we have illustrated here is that, where our family members have lived, and their proximity (or lack of proximity) to cultural community, has changed their relationships with food.

Food is, of course, only one small aspect of the complexity that is culture. Culture and cultural identity is formed through a (re)imagining of community; the connections, imagined or concrete, that form between members of a group play an important role in how cultural identity is transmitted and internalized. That said, food is a noteworthy focus as it grounds storytelling and theorizing in a spatial context and acts as a key mechanism for building connections between identity and culture. Furthermore, by taking an intergenerational approach to auto-ethnographic storytelling, we foreground the possibilities of change in a more reparative way. The legacies that are maintained and transmitted through the sharing of food practices also provide an important space and opportunity to rebuild and reconnect to a Japanese Canadian identity and, ultimately, to reframe our understanding of what it means to belong to a scattered, diasporic community with whom we share both a history and an identity.