

# THE JAPANESE-CANADIAN: AN EXPERIMENT IN CITIZENSHIP

S. ICHIYÉ HAYAKAWA

## I

**D**URING last summer, a group of amateur sociologists were combing through British Columbia. Armed with thoroughly professional-looking questionnaires, they invaded the homes and shops of the entire Japanese population of the province, in order to discover the exact facts regarding the education, occupations, professional difficulties, amusements, reading, income, social contacts and future aspirations of all the Canadian-born Japanese over fourteen years of age. The results of this survey, when they are assembled, are to be published and distributed throughout Canada, for the general enlightenment of the people of the Dominion as to the status and condition of these young Canadians, whom British Columbia does not seem especially to love or to cherish.

To find that the sociologists who were conducting so ambitious a survey were all young men between eighteen and twenty-four was something of a shock. There was, throughout that summer, a little cluster of them gathered in the offices of the Japanese-Canadian Association on Gore Street, in Vancouver, poring over charts, making graphs, smoking cigarettes, comparing notes on cases, ordering each other about, speculating on the meanings of rows of tabulated figures,—in short, behaving like a very convincing group of social scientists indeed. From their clothes one knew that some were probably in college, or had recently graduated; others were obviously still in high school! All of them were themselves members of the social group under survey: young Canadian citizens of Japanese parentage. The funds for the survey, it appeared, were raised by means of a concert which these young men had themselves organized. After that, they had supplemented the fund by getting contributions from Japanese societies, religious organizations, and interested individuals. Having started their financial campaign and drawn up their preliminary plans during the winter of 1934-35, they were ready to go to work in the spring, when school was over. The technique of the survey they had learned from their teachers, and had adapted to meet their needs.

## II

It is not known to the majority of Canadians outside British Columbia that Japanese, Chinese and Hindus, even if they are British subjects by naturalization or by birth, are not permitted to vote in that province.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact not even all British Columbians are aware of this, since at every election time political canvassers frequently interview Japanese-Canadians to solicit their votes, and express great surprise on being told of the discrimination. "What do you mean? You can't vote?" they ask incredulously. "Aren't you a Canadian citizen?" The feelings of the Japanese-Canadian can easily be imagined: he has often asked the same question himself.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the strictly scientific purposes of the survey, therefore, it has a definite practical purpose: that of establishing the claims of the Japanese-Canadian to the same rights of citizenship enjoyed by other Canadian citizens.

These rights are to be obtained, the Japanese-Canadians believe, neither by agitation nor by prayer. They propose, therefore, with unassertive but genuine pride, to get a complete set of facts about themselves, so that they may objectively demonstrate their fitness for franchise rights by comparing their own intellectual and social standards with those of other immigrant groups and with those of the general Anglo-Saxon population. By so doing, it is their earnest hope, they will be able to make an appeal which British fair-play will not be able to deny.

## III

I refer to British fair-play advisedly. It is possible, of course, that these Japanese are not really interested in democratic citizenship, but are turning Canadian catch-words upon the Canadians in sly, oriental fashion, for the attainment of wicked, inscrutable, oriental designs. To an observer whose ideas of oriental psychology are not formed exclusively on Sax Rohmer and writers of movie-scenarios, such does not seem to be the case. The Japanese, as the world knows, are the most adaptable of people, responsive to the world about them, eager for praise (the Old English word *lof*-

1 Details on this law may be found in Sherwood Lett, "Legal Disabilities of the Japanese in British Columbia," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Japanese Students' Club of the University of British Columbia* (December, 1934).

2 This ignorance on the part of British Columbians has probably been reduced considerably by the efforts of the Liberal party in the last elections, "who published large advertisements informing the electors that there were 50,000 Asiatics in the province and that the C.C.F. was pledged to extend the franchise to them. 'A vote for any C.C.F. candidate is a vote to give the Chinaman and the Japanese the same voting right that you have.' Against this enormity the Liberals undertook to protect the state: 'A vote for the Liberal candidate in your riding is a vote against Oriental enfranchisement.'" (H. F. Angus, in "Liberalism Stoops to Conquer," *Canadian Forum* December 1935, p. 389).

*georn* expresses it almost exactly, for most Japanese still live in a heroic age), and sufficiently sociable so that they are cheerfully willing to share the ideals of whatever kindly neighbors they may find around them. The Japanese-Canadian who is born in Canada, and who accepts with more than the usual school-boy's docility the patriotic and idealistic sentiments of his Canadian teachers (since accepting some kind of idealistic program such as "the kingly way," "the seven-fold path," etc., etc., is almost a racial habit), seems to be a curiously loyal Canadian. In British Columbia he occasionally feels cynical about the people who glory in democratic institutions at the same time as they withhold from him those common privileges which enable a society to call itself democratic; nevertheless, he accepts with joy any chance that offers of conducting himself as a political being in the political system in which he lives. He enjoys testifying in court; he loves to be elected to committees and secretaryships and chairmanships in church clubs and high-school classes; one suspects that he would even serve on juries, if he were permitted to do so, with conscious dignity and a sense of responsibility. The young Japanese-Canadian, denied the rights of citizenship in all but name, is nevertheless (or, perhaps, *therefore*) a fervent believer in representative government, parliamentary procedure, and individual rights. Moreover, he is, like other believers in democracy, an optimist. He believes that the society which professes such ideals will ultimately practise them. He therefore doggedly prepares himself for citizenship in Canada as a Canadian.

If this analysis is correct, the Japanese-Canadian has to a great extent his Canadian school-teachers and professors to thank for his present admirable attitude. It is they who, for better or for worse, inculcate such political ideals into him, and it is also they who have encouraged him to persevere in those ideals. (For all that is said against the teaching profession, the school-teachers are the ones who do the real work in the matter of spreading and perpetuating the ideals of a society among its members). Consequently, whenever political parties bring misery to the young Japanese-Canadian by pointing him out as the little yellow rat that is gnawing out the vitals of provincial prosperity, it is teacher who re-assures him and comforts him, and tells him that democracy *is* democracy, or will be. If, then, Robert Hamaguchi or Lillian Suzuki make an appeal to British fair-play in the matter of a franchise, the British Columbia tax-payer may feel that he has got value for the money he has spent on having Canadian ideals taught to the children of immigrants, however much he may be embarrassed by the consequences.

## IV

It is hard to find documentary evidence of the attitude of these young Japanese-Canadians; first, because they are too few to have anything in the way of an articulate press, and secondly, because they are too young to have written much as yet. So young are they, in fact, that the average age of all Canadian-born Japanese is thirteen years. The oldest of them is a man of forty-one; the second oldest is thirty-five, and there is a handful around the age of thirty. There are quite a few in their early twenties, but the vast majority are under eighteen.<sup>3</sup> According to the only figures I have available, there were altogether only 7,508 Canadian-born Japanese in British Columbia in 1931, of whom 867 were over the age of twenty. (At that time, the Canadian-born constituted "practically one-third" of the Japanese population). Professor H. F. Angus estimates that the franchise extended to Canadian-born Japanese would mean, at the present time, some one thousand new voters.<sup>4</sup>

Few as they are, a group of Japanese-Canadian students managed to organize a small, monthly, six-page newspaper expressing their views. It was started in the spring of 1932, and carried on for a little over a year. From this publication (somewhat hopefully called *The New Age*), and from a couple of even shorter-lived ventures which these young people started, we are able to glean interesting statements of their attitude, and estimate the breadth and limitations of their views. None of these publications are mature, nor even particularly well-edited. Nevertheless, interspersed among the jejunities of school-boy "kidding," and triumphant accounts of the exploits of the Asahi baseball team, are evidences of serious thinking.

Their practical recommendations are, on the whole, pretty well agreed upon: we are Canadians, they say again and again,—let us be thoroughly Canadian. Christianity is recommended in preference to Buddhism. Proficiency, and even grace, in the use of the English language are strenuously demanded. (They manage to achieve the former, and although their English is far from flawless, they do not commit many more errors per page than some notable Americans one could name). The relinquishing of such Japanese habits and ways of life as might seem strange or offensive to delicate British Columbian sensibilities is strongly urged. Most important of all, *The New Age* advises, for the sake of more thorough

<sup>3</sup> All these figures, given to me verbally, are, of course, subject to correction upon publication of the census.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*

Canadianization, the abandoning of dual nationality on the part of any who might still possess it. Unimportant as dual nationality may be in actuality (it means only that when one is in Japan, the Japanese government will regard him as a subject), the Japanese-Canadians are well aware of the kind of issue that can be made of it by their enemies. I shall let the Japanese-Canadian speak for himself. The following is quoted from a high-school girl's essay; under the circumstances, I make no apologies for her naivetés of expression:

We, who claim this Golden West as our birthplace, must strive to become the kind of people Canada really wants—men and women who will live, work and die for Canada, people who will dedicate their whole lives to Canada and to God. . . Education! It will be the key to success in the future. It will take the place of wealth in years to come. Therefore, if we are to become a part of this great Dominion, we must start on an unceasing quest for knowledge. It is everywhere! In each delicate, pink-tipped daisy, in the gurgling rush of the streams, in the lucid notes of a bird, Nature is the Universal Teacher. In schools, from printed pages. . . we garner learning. In loving homes, we are taught the meanings of peace, sympathy and understanding. Here is our opportunity to grasp the best of both the mother-country and our adopted land! . . . We respect Japan: we love Canada. The sunset glories of Canadian skies, the spiritual loveliness of snow-clad mountains, the precious friendships formed in Canada—the great heritage that is ours—are more dearer (*sic*) than the wealth of Pluto's mines, aye, more dearer (*sic*) than we can ever express. Therefore, with the inherent constancy of our race, yet with an optimistic joy in our future way, we pledge allegiance and undying love to the land that gave us birth.

(And who will say that she is not Canadian to the last spurt of her untidy Wordsworthianism, which is practically identical with that of some leading bards of the Canadian Authors' Association?)

Unlike some other immigrant groups in Canada, and more especially in the United States, the Japanese-Canadians are not turning their backs completely upon the traditions of their fathers in those frenzied endeavors to be indistinguishable from their neighbors which constitute one of the greatest tragedies and wastes resulting from the melting-pot ideal. (How many of the second-generation Germans, Poles, Russians, Italians, and Finns possess that inestimable gift of a dual culture?) Some of the older people (as older people always do) may bemoan what they feel to be the complete disappearance of traditional virtues; others of the older generation, however, advocate a complete separation from Japanese ideals, even urging the abolition of the Japanese language schools

which most Japanese-Canadian children attend after their regular school hours. But the young people themselves are not too sure as to the wisdom of the latter advice. Every issue of *The New Age* contains articles on aspects of Japanese culture; and not every contributor forgets, in his plea for better Canadianism, that better Canadianism for a race as civilized as his own means not only conforming to Canadian culture, but enriching it with his own special talents and inheritance, which no other race can supply. "There are many points in eastern civilization," writes one high-school boy, "which excel those in Western civilization, and these the Canadian-born Japanese should retain. It is our duty to introduce these ideas to western lands." "We must contribute to Canada the best of our oriental ideals—simplicity, contentment, courtesy and filial piety," says another, high-school girl. "Ours is the heritage of a venerable two-thousand year old dynasty," exults a college student, "which claims a deep and satisfying philosophy, an unusual artistic genius, cardinal virtues of loyalty and filial piety, and a Samurai tradition. And these can be our golden gifts to the enrichment of western culture." Regarding himself thus, the young Japanese-Canadian quite excitedly discovers himself to be a sharer in the Canadian pioneer tradition, facing social hardships with stout Japanese heart, even as earlier pioneers in British Columbia faced physical hardships with stout Scotch and English hearts. So confident does he become of his Canadianism at this point that he undertakes, as final contribution, to help to Canadianize his parents, "binding them more closely to the Canadian soil!"<sup>5</sup>

## V

These, then, are the intellectual backgrounds (if that is not too dignified a term for the ponderings of people so young) of the activity which led to the Japanese-Canadian survey conducted by the students last summer. The publication of the results is awaited with interest, of course, by all students of immigration. In addition to the new light that is expected on the standards of living, education, and occupations of the Japanese-Canadian population, a surprise is expected with regard to the much-talked-of Japanese birth-rate which, according to present indications, seems to be lower than the general British Columbia average. But whatever the results may prove to be, it is apparent from what we already know that the Canadian-born Japanese is by no means an object

<sup>5</sup> These quotations from articles and essays in *The New Age* (Vancouver) are from the issue September, October and December, 1932.

of pity. Behind all his efforts towards political self-realization lies the heavy, and, to a westerner, almost oppressive sense of social responsibility of his parents—for social conscience is the crowning virtue of the Japanese man in society. He is fortunate in his parents, therefore, for they maintain an intelligent press which never lets the problem sleep, and they never cease discussing with him the ways in which he may overcome his social and legal disabilities. "I shall die in peace," one parent said to me, "if my Canadian children get their franchise." The Japanese-Canadian is fortunate, too, in his allies—the school-teachers and college professors—for they do not let him down.

What civic and political virtues other than those already exemplified by these young Japanese-Canadians the province of British Columbia may demand of her electorate, it is hard to imagine. They appear to be capable of self-criticism as well as of self-government; their loyalty is apparently real, without being blind; in their survey, they have cheerfully undertaken a task which graduate students in the greatest American universities would not tackle without the supervision and guidance of mature sociologists; while, throughout, they are displaying a faith in and an understanding of the very kind of political procedure which Canada, like every other democracy, prides itself on maintaining. If the child is in any way the father of the man, it looks as if British Columbia is depriving herself unnecessarily of some quite promising political intelligence. Nevertheless, no political party in British Columbia has yet seen fit to take up the cause of the Japanese-Canadian. An exception might be made of the C.C.F., but for the fact that it tells the Japanese that it believes in the enfranchising of Orientals, but takes very good care to tell as few others as possible.