

Reconciling Memories of Internment Camp Experiences During WWII in Children's and Young Adult Literature

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Memories of World War II in the Asian-Pacific War take us to the shocking news of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, to the mushroom cloud rising over Hiroshima, to images of American soldiers in the trenches at tropical locations. Yet there are also events of World War II that did not become a part of our personal and cultural shared memories of these war-torn years. The forced internment of mainland Japanese American citizens after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 is an event for which history is all but silent. Why do we not know Heart Mountain, Manzanar, Minidoka, and Poston as well as Auchwitz, Terezin, and Dachau? Through censorship and control of information in media and film, the US government sought to represent life in the internment camps as a benevolent exercise in civil obedience. This limited cultural representation of the camps was compounded by the protracted silence of many of the former internees due to their sense of humiliation and shame.

In spite of the silence and strategic forgetting, the internment of Japanese Americans produced memory in the narratives of the survivors passed down from one generation to the next (Issei, first generation; to Nissei, second generation; to Sansei, third generation). The Issei generation would never have spoken of the pain, or shame, or injustice inflicted upon them—even among their own family members—and so their experiences would have been irretrievably lost with their passing. Nissei survivors such as Jeane Houston, Yoshiko Uchida, Marcia Savin, Monica Sone and Shizuye Takashima have chosen to write about these difficult experiences and tell the stories of their Issei parents through fiction and autobiography, preserving their dignity and decency in degrading circumstances. While remembering can be painful, it can also be redemptive. Uchida says she continued to remember and to write “because I want each new generation of Americans to know what once happened in our democracy. I want them to love and cherish the freedom that can be snatched away so quickly, even by their own country” (1991, p. 133). So from the Eastern tradition, painful memories that remain personal and unspoken by the individual are, in the West, shared, spoken, and preserved by literature so that memory transforms not just the individual, but the culture as well. In “Memory as Travel in Asian American Children's Literature: Bridging Home and School” (2002), Ching and Pataray-Ching suggest four representations of memory – memory as recovery, as cultural

change, as catharsis, and as border crossing. Using this model of memory, we will examine the uprooting of Japanese Americans during World War II as portrayed in children's/young adult literature. In this pursuit, we will discover the triumph of the spirit of the survivors and replace suppressed images with empowering ones, so that if such a tragedy is preserved in the memory of the nation, memory may keep it from happening again.

Defining Memory as Travel Across Generational Experiences in the Japanese Culture

We look to story and narrative in literature as a resource through which we might shape our understanding of the Japanese Internment Camps. Ching and Pataray-Ching (2002) suggest a model that conceptualizes memory as travel as a way to examine and understand Asian cultural experiences. They suggest that “memory facilitates travel across generational differences and connects the individual to the home community's material past even as the individual travels to new psychic locations” (24). In addition, this model helps non-Asian readers to understand and value the cultural heritage of others. Ching and Pataray-Ching (2002) make several initial assertions about the nature of memory as travel. First, “memory becomes a form of cultural traveling by enabling ancestral recovery” (25). Remembrance of our ancestors brings a rebirth as these historical memories become personal. Memory as a form of travel, in this sense, “becomes a means of recovery, bringing ancestral memories home and, in accomplishing this, restoring one's own” (25). Because memories are so important to the culture, it becomes the duty of progeny to preserve the memories of the community linking the past to present and future generations.

Ching and Pataray-Ching also assert that, in addition to recovery, memory as travel becomes a process of transformation: “Memory gauges the proximity and distance between our ancestry and our present cultural existence and identity” (25). It is an issue of recognizing how the role of the stories we tell ourselves about our past assists in constructing our identities in the present. According to Morley and Robins, “Identity is a question of memory, and memories of ‘home’ in particular” (1995, 91). But to Ching and Pataray-Ching, “cultural legacy, in this sense, signifies more than a record that recovers our pasts. The term legacy represents recovery of the past, present and future. Each gen-

eration travels and co-creates its cultural legacy (or memory) by passing through the memory handed down by ancestry and by appropriating this memory in the current historical moment" (25).

What is this kind of memory that is passed through generations, that is already within the child? Marianne Hirsch has used the term "postmemory" to describe those children whose lives are dominated by the memories of events that preceded their birth. She writes, "Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. It is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (Hirsch 1997, 22-23). Thus by deliberately reconstructing and reenacting memories and their absence, one can shift personal memory into the realm of cultural memory. Cultural change results from such transformation as these travelers – whether readers or writers – affirm their cultural heritage while challenging the traditional values they find oppressive.

After traveling through recovery and transformation, memory enacts a catharsis to the cross-cultural traveler. Ching and Pataray-Ching suggest that catharsis "results from the realization that through memory one may bear one's ancestors' hardship and, in doing so, save one's ancestors from strife and, even from death" (29). The belief here is that death becomes absolute only when it takes the form of the "death of memory" (Behar 1996, 42). The voices of the past speaking within the lives and stories of the present brings salvation for the ancestor and a continued and improved life for the progeny. This "duty-memory, the sense of responsibility that weighs upon the individual, 'It is I who must remember,' is as though one's salvation ultimately depends on the repayment of an impossible debt" (Nora, in Behar, 42-43). One way to realize this form of recompense is through remembering. Hence, in Asian American literature, "mourning an ancestor's death is one part of catharsis, but the emotional release accompanying this loss is not complete until the ancestor is mythologized in memory" (Ching and Pataray-Ching, 25). Once accomplished, catharsis brings both the ancestor's pardon from death and the preservation of that life in the cultural memory, uniting the past to the future.

Memory sustains travel not only within the culture, but also across cultural boundaries. "Stories are always positioned among other stories, other memories, other perspectives on history" (Ching and Pataray-Ching, 30). Therefore, as stories become intertwined and interwoven, the narratives come to represent memories that still reflect the uniqueness of the culture, but they also represent universal themes that connect diverse communities. In this way memories can transform stories and generate cultural change. "This kind of intercultural memory involves both sharing and revising why and what we choose consciously to remember personally, communally, and nationally" (Ching and Pataray-Ching, 26). From a human creativity standpoint, we learn more from people who are different from us than from those who are similar to us. At the individual level, creativity

involves a process of "taking in new ideas, of being thrown into disequilibrium and trying to reach some accommodation, achieve a new synthesis ... The same is true at the societal level. In most creative periods there has been a tremendous infusion of diversity: new ideas and cross-cultural encounters" (Goleman, Kaufman, & Ray, 1991, p. 173). With new connections, travelers may need to reinvent their identities in such a way that conforms to the values of their Japanese ancestry, yet integrates their lifestyle, marriage partner, and career goals with contemporary parts that are Japanese American. Thus, border-crossing results in the traveler developing new creations of self and change in society.

Using Ching and Pataray-Ching's memory as travel described above, "recovering ancestry and cultural heritage, transforming this heritage, staying the death of ancestry and then transforming death into the gift of life, and remapping the relationships, among cultural communities" (26), provides a model to examine Asian American literature. In this case, we will use this model to make sense of the children's and young adult literature reconciling the experiences of those youth confined in Japanese Internment Camps during World War II.

Memory as Recovery of Ancestry and Cultural Heritage

After the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, one of the most traumatic events for Japanese-American families was the sudden disappearance and imprisonment of prominent men in the community. For young children, losing their fathers with no explanation was only a prelude to losing friends, homes, and communities. In Uchida's *The Bracelet* (1976, 1993), seven-year-old Emi discovers the power of memory to hang on to her roots, the people and places that represent her heritage. After the FBI had taken her Papa to a prisoner-

of-war camp in Montana, Emi understood that she, too, would be sent to a prison camp with her family just because they *looked* like the enemy. Moments before their deportation, Emi's best friend from second grade, Laurie Madison, presents her with a gift, a bracelet,

as a remembrance of their friendship. After the painful separation, Emi and her family are transported to the center guarded by armed soldiers—a frightening scene for a young child. They are taken to Tanforan Racetracks where they would stay until sent on to a camp in the Utah desert. But in the traumatic events, Emi loses the precious bracelet that she vowed she would never take off. With the loss of the token, Emi feels she has lost the person. Mama wisely teaches her the power of memory to hang onto her heritage: "You don't need a bracelet to remember Laurie any more than we need a photo to remember Papa or our home or all the friends and things we loved and left behind. Those are things we carry in our hearts and take with us no matter where we are sent." Emi realizes that Mama was right. She doesn't need the symbol to hold fast to her friend. She knows she could travel back in her mind, recover this memory, and never forget her friend, family, home, and heritage.

Recovering an ancestor plays an even more important part in the Japanese culture, as it represents salvation and immortality. In Eve Bunting's *So Far From the Sea* (1998), the

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Iwasaki family makes their pilgrimage back to the Manzanar War Relocation Camp to visit Grandfather's grave site. Not much remains of this camp now, but in telling his story to his children, father is recovering his memorable experiences at the camp and passing them on to the next generation. He recovers a vivid memory of the day the soldiers came to their home to take them away. He recalls demonstrating his loyalty to the United States by putting on his Cub Scout uniform and saluting the armed soldiers. As the family stands before Grandfather's grave, they observe all the offerings people have left at the monument—coins, broken glass, and origami. Laura decides to place her father's old Cub Scout neckerchief to a tree root in front of the tower where Grandfather's name is painted. Laura never knew her Grandfather, but she recovers her ancestor by marking her memory with a physical gesture (Ching and Pataray-Ching, 2002, 27). By laying claim to the grave and marking the place she has made concrete what had previously been only a distant recollection of her father's stories. According to Ching and Pataray-Ching, the neckerchief, like other memorabilia, enabled memory to become tangible (2002, 27). Her gesture allowed her to say "arigato" or thank-you to her

grandfather for his sacrifice and for her heritage. Now her father's story has become a part of her cultural legacy. In recovering this memory, she more deeply understands what it means to be American and in particular, Japanese American. In making the story her own, she has connected her family experiences with her roots that originate in Japan.

Memory as Transformation Leading to Cultural Change

In addition to recovery, memory as travel becomes a process of transformation which leads to cultural change. In Ken Mochizuki's *Baseball Saved Us* (1993), we find a character who learns to play baseball during his confinement in the internment camp and then uses his ability to play to overcome prejudice against him after the war. In this story, Teddy remembers the boredom, short tempers, and listlessness of the campers until his Dad convinced the community to unite in constructing a baseball field. Women make uniforms from mattress covers, while the men haul water to pack down the dust. As equipment arrives from friends back home, baseball games begin without interference from the guard tower. Teddy's playing steadily improves and in the end he makes the winning homerun in the championship game. While baseball saves them at camp, they return home to prejudice and hatred. Even on the baseball field, Teddy finds himself alone, one of a kind. When his team comes up to bat, he hears demeaning cries from the crowd and they roar when he missed the ball. At the last moment, Teddy draws on the memory of strength and confidence that he had developed playing ball during the internment and hits a homerun. The victory brings transformation and cultural change not only for him, but for his teammates. Teddy does not resist or reject his culture, but rather participates in cultural revision and social change. He becomes part of a network of friends who accept him for who he is—a Japanese-American. According to Ching and Pataray-Ching, this critical remembrance brought the boys to a more ethical way of living in the future (29). The white boys changed

heckling to tolerance. The Japanese American boy changed from feelings of rejection to acceptance. As Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997) suggest, these children became conscious of their operating world view and were successful in examining critically alternative ways of understanding social relations. They came to envision more just and inclusive possibilities for their social lives.

In Uchida's *Journey to Topaz* (1971) and the sequel *Journey Home* (1978), eleven-year-old Yuki's cultural identity is challenged and transformed by Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The FBI abruptly imprisons her father as "enemy alien" without informing the family of his whereabouts. Yuki experiences the racist rhetoric that springs up in White people that she once had considered to be her friends. For instance, the day after the Pearl Harbor attack, the boy who sat opposite her at school leaned over and hissed, "You dirty Jap!" (20). A further challenge to her ethnicity comes with the rumors of the internment camps to export all those of Japanese heritage.

Eventually, she and her family are sent to the Topaz Relocation Camp in Utah after spending the summer in a horse stall at the Tanforan Assembly Center. In addition to the horrors of living at the camp in

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the middle of the dust storms in the desert, Yuki comes to know the divisive positions taken by different factions in the camp. When army recruiters from the War Department arrive at camp to form a special all-Nisei combat team, Yuki's brother and his friends decide to join as a way of proving their loyalty and upholding their responsibility as American citizens. Others hotly refuse to serve in an army that has imprisoned them, and they seek repatriation in Japan. After her best friend's grandfather is shot walking with his friends too close to the barbed-wire fence along the southern fringe of camp, some internees become even more hostile toward their White perpetrators. These agitators form groups to harass sympathizers of the White administration. When Yuki's father is returned to his family at Topaz on parole, he works in the business office with the Caucasian administrators. He is a peace-maker as deacon at church, hospital committee member and block manager. As such, he is victimized by dissenting groups to the point where his family is in danger. Finally, father is granted a special clearance to go to the nearest big city to Topaz, Salt Lake City.

While free of imprisonment, Yuki's family confronts racism and hostility in their journey from Salt Lake City back to Berkeley, California, once the military revoked the exclusion order against the Japanese from the West Coast. Home is no longer the house they longed to return to, but rather a rundown hostel of their former church which had been neglected and vandalized while they were gone. Their precious belongings have been vandalized in the Buddhist Temple, so nothing remains from their former life except the bags they carried with them. There are no jobs, no places to rent. In this time of despair, Yuki remembers that her grandfathers had died in Japan long before she was born. She is proud that they had been samurai warriors, but it means that as a grandchild, she has to be brave, courageous and loyal. "It meant being strong when necessary, but still having a gentle heart capable of loving beautiful things" (1992, 19). It meant she had a past to live up to—a difficult chal-

lenge in these circumstances, especially since her grandfathers were "more like people she'd read about than anybody linked to her by blood" (20). By appropriating this memory that connected the unfamiliar aspects of her heritage, Yuki was able to endure and re-invent a new identity in the present circumstances. Eventually, the group of Japanese American families pooled their resources, bought a grocery store, moved in upstairs, and resumed their lives, in spite of the hostility directed at them. Yuki endured extreme racism against her heritage and she has been transformed by them moving her into a new understanding of her legacy. Yuki's remembrance and transformation has shown the complexities of trying to establish a dual sense of ethnicity and heritage in a world that considers them "enemy alien."

Memory as Catharsis

By reconciling the competing motives of recovery and transformation, remembrance generates a form of catharsis for the cross-cultural traveler. As the main character in the story recovered a painful experience and became transformed by it, she/he released the emotional tensions "in the realization that through memory one may bear one's ancestor's hardship and in doing so, save one's ancestors from strife, and even from death" (Ching & Pataray-Ching, 29). In *Moon Bridge* by Marcia Savin (1993), Japanese-American Mitzie Fujimoto endures the pain of racism at school, the disgraceful life of internment at Tanforan and later Arizona, then has to make decisions about her family and friends upon her return. The story takes place in San Francisco as World War II begins. Amidst the war effort and anti-Japanese sentiment, Mitzie befriends Ruthie Fox, which changes their fifth-grade year dramatically. The girls suffer the shunning and harassment of their friends and teachers at school. Their strong friendship suddenly changes when Mitzie and her family are abruptly sent to Tanforan War Relocation Camp, a former racetrack. Because Japanese culture teaches its people to accept shame in silence, there was no way for Ruthie to understand the suffering of Mitzie's life in the internment camp. The internees had done nothing wrong, but many felt shamed by being singled out, locked away, accused of disloyalty; to criticize the government might seem to prove they were in some way guilty. When the war was over in January of 1945, the camps began to close and the people struggled to find new homes, new jobs, and new lives. Mitzie wrote to Ruthie to arrange to meet her at their favorite location, Moon Bridge. The girls have been changed by the war experiences. Mitzie remains angry and silent for awhile before she opens up and tells her about the dreadful experiences in the Arizona internment camp. "Now do you see why I didn't write? I hated everyone and everything" (222). Cathartic remembrance and sharing her memories in the safety of a close friendship begins Mitzie's healing process. She is proud of her brother's return from the battle zone with a chestful of medals. She fears for her father who is angry, bitter, and ready to leave the country. She finds hope in her Uncle Joe, who although hurt and insulted, would talk to people and find a new shop to earn a living. Mitzie remembers so she can save her father and family members. By remembering and sharing her burden with Ruthie, she also saved them from silence and death of memory, and in doing so, she saved them from death itself.

Remapping the Relationships Among Cultural Communities (Border Crossings/Intercultural Memory)

In addition to looking at those who travel within the borders of culture, memory also sustains travel across cultural boundaries. In the autobiographical stories of Nisei survivors, we find travelers that cross borders of cultural communities, affirm their family connections, and remap their positions in the larger culture. For instance, in *Nisei Daughter* (1953, 2000), Monica Sone describes not only the innocence of her childhood in Seattle and her life at Camp Minidoka in Idaho, but the post-internment process of reintegration into society. When the War Relocations Authority begins opening channels for the Nisei to return to the mainstream of life, Kazuko, now Monica, is offered a scholarship to continue her schooling by attending Wendell College in southern Indiana. Then, just before Christmas of her second year in college, she receives a letter from her parents requesting her return to Camp Minidoka for the holidays, especially since her father is sick. Arriving at the camp, she is again startled by the MP's and barbed-wire fences. The camp is ghostly and the old barracks a shell of a prison since most of the Nisei children have relocated to the Midwest and East to jobs and schools. But the Issei who still want to go back to their businesses and homes in the West remain in the camps, hoping that the military restrictions on the Coast will be lifted at the end of the war. During this visit, Monica sees that her parents suffer for being her Japanese parents. Monica comforts her parents; "I don't resent my Japanese blood anymore. I'm proud of it, in fact, because of you and the Issei who've struggled so much for us. It's really nice to be born into two cultures, like getting a real bargain in life, two for the price of one... I used to feel like a two-headed monstrosity, but now I find that two heads are better than one" (1979, 236).

Monica and other Nisei come to a clearer understanding of America and its way of life. She admits her bitterness when the government failed her, but has come to understand that she is just as responsible as the representatives in Washington for her country's actions. It makes Monica value her country more. She sees that the Issei losses during the war are far greater. After this visit, Monica returns to college more confident than ever. Still looking through her Oriental eyes, she has a different outlook. "I felt more like a whole person instead of a deadly split personality. The Japanese and the American parts of me were now blended into one" (1979, 238). She has traveled across cultural borders, reconciled her ethnicities, and re-entered the world with a changed perspective.

In her autobiography, *The Invisible Thread* (1991), Yoshiko Uchida tells her story of crossing cultural borders that transformed her stories, causing her to take a new critical stance in society. Uchida confronts disturbing issues of heritage when her family takes a trip to Japan to visit grandparents. "Here, at least, I looked like everyone else. Here, I blended in and wasn't always the one who was different" (1991, 52). And yet, she is embarrassed to admit she couldn't read or speak Japanese and soon "longed for hot dogs, chocolate sodas and bathrooms with plumbing" (52). She realized she was a foreigner in both countries. "I wasn't totally American, and I wasn't totally Japanese. I was a mixture of

the two, and I could never be anything else" (52). This realization empowers her to value her cultural legacy as Japanese American in a new way.

Like Monica Sone, Uchida and her sister find a way to leave camp early. Through the National Japanese Student Relocation Council organized by the Quakers, both Yoshiko and her sister are offered graduate fellowships at Smith College and Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts, respectively. With their leave papers in hand, the girls begin their transformation and reintegration back into American society. Uchida finishes her Master's Degree in education and accepts her first real teaching position in a small Quaker school near Philadelphia. After struggling to find a homeowner that would rent to Japanese-Americans, Yoshiko and her sister are finally in a position to provide a home for their parents. "It was a joyous reunion for us in the outside world" (128). The despair and helplessness of the camp life are transformed by the empowerment of job, home, and family reunited.

Although Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston was only seven years old when her family was uprooted from their home and sent to live at Manzanar Internment Camp, the experience drastically changed her life. In *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973, 1995), Jeanne not only details her experiences during the internment, but her struggle over the ensuing thirty years in coming to terms with her experiences. She crosses cultural borders: she is the first member of her family to finish college and the first to marry out of her race. But as she comes to understand what Manzanar has meant, it fills her with the "shame for being a person guilty of something enormous enough to deserve that kind of treatment" (185). In 1972, she packed up her husband and three children to make the pilgrimage back to Manzanar Camp. When they arrive at this once biggest city between Reno and Los Angeles, the barracks and guard towers are gone. Only the gate houses, the elms planted by internees, and the rock gardens remain. They spot an obelisk off by barbed wire with the inscription in Japanese with "A Memorial to the Dead." She thinks of her mother who passed away seven years ago. She remembers that her father's life ended at Manzanar even though he lived for twelve years after leaving the camp. She feels the presence of those who had died at Manzanar. Through the spiritual experience of this pilgrimage, Jeanne is able to say "Farewell" to the Manzanar mentality that has enslaved her for so many years. She realizes that the experience has made her who she is. By reenacting these memories, Jeanne returns home with her family, Japanese heritage reconciled with her American citizenship.

Exploring Ching and Pataray-Ching's four representations of memory, we have traveled across cultural boundaries in the historical narratives of these Japanese Americans and shared in the grave injustice done to them in our country. Just as these stories have shaped their memories, may they serve to inform and reshape our remembrance of the internment years. Despite the payment of reparations, despite the attempts of national atonement, the internment continues to be treated as a regrettable step that appeared necessary for its time. These are an effort to move personal memory into the larger cultural memory of World War II. They speak both to the continuity of memories and to the crucial role

survivors have in speaking to history. As these discourses become interwoven, the memories transform, and these critical remembrances can teach us a more ethical way of living. As Uchida says, "For although it is important for each of us to cherish our own special heritage, I believe, above everything else, we must all celebrate our common humanity" (1991, 132). As we travel, let us not only affirm our own culture, but come to know and understand the experiences of cultures that differ from our own.

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