

論文

Hapa People's Identity in Hawaii

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要旨

“Hapa”とはハワイ語で「半分」という意味。このHapaと呼ばれる人々はもともとはアメリカ大陸からの白人と現地ハワイアンとのハーフの人を指す言葉だったが、移民が多く、多民族社会のハワイでは、二つ以上の言語や文化を持つ人々を意味するようになった。ハワイ大学大学院留学時代に出逢ったこのHapaの人々に、著者が抱いた第一印象は、「分類できない」という感覚だった。日本のような単一民族、単一言語の環境で育った著者にとって、学校では英語、家では中国語、韓国語、フィリピン語などを操る彼らが自身のことをどのように分類し認識しているのか、とても不思議な存在だった。アメリカでは「What are you?」（あなたは何なのか?）という問いをよく見かけるが、これはどのような人種であるのかという意味である。この問いにHapaの人々が自分たちのアイデンティティをどのように捉えているのかをこの論文で探求し、実際にインタビューをしたHapa4人との談話をもとに、環境、文化、言語などの観点から検証した。

Keywords: Hapa (ハパ, ハーフ), Asian American (アジア系アメリカ人), Bilingual (バイリンガル), Hawaii (ハワイ), Identity (アイデンティティ・自己同一性), Multiracial Asians (多民族アジア人), Majority (多数派), Minority (少数派)

Introduction

The word “Hapa” originally means a half person who is mixed with a white and a Hawaiian, which comes from Hawaiian words. However, now it means that a person with any kind of mixed blood. When I first went to Hawaii, I noticed that there were so many Asian faces over there, but they were not Asians but Americans. There were also so many uncategorized faces which were hard to guess that he or she was even an Asian or a Caucasian. They were Hapa people who are the majority of the island because of its cultural and ethnic diversity from the time of immigration and colonization period in the past. The reason why I am interested in Hapa people in Hawaii is that interacting and seeing those people prompts me to think about ethnic identity which I never concerned when I was in Japan. As far as I see the environment where I grew up, Japan is linguistically and culturally homogeneous; therefore, there are not many opportunities for me to contact people with different ethnicities unless I try hard to meet them. So, it was the first time when I went outside of my county at the age of 19 that I started to think about my ethnic identity by seeing different colors of skin, hair, and eyes of people from different countries. However, at that time, I have to admit that I have assumed people’s identity only based on ethnicity and their language as I categorized myself based on them. I categorized people into which country they are from or personal appearances such as colors of skin, eyes and hair. My stereotype of people was usually only based on the ethnicities and language. However, especially in Hawaii, people’s ethnicity is naturally diverse and some people are bilingual by nature. For example, Chinese diaspora kids, speak English in public but they speak Chinese to their parents at home. On the other hand, Nikkei (Japanese American) people only speak English even though they have a root in Japan. Therefore, my way of sorting out people was not successful on people in Hawaii, especially on Hapa people at all, because they are so much different from my perspective and had a lot of roots in various cultures and languages despite their outlook. I only have one official language, Japanese, which is also my mother tongue in my country. It is hard to imagine a situation where I would have to use a certain language to communicate with people in a certain situation. It is very uncomfortable for me that I cannot place an ethnicity into one category which is supposed to match with my way of sorting out. Getting to know Hapa people’s experience of language and culture is unique and helps highlight how people perceive themselves.

In this paper, first I would like to refer to my research questions on those Hapa people.

Then I will explain its research method and show findings and analysis, and conclusion will be shown after that. So this paper is divided into four sections: (1) Introduction, (2) Research Questions and Methods, (3) Findings and Analysis, and (4) Conclusions and Further Questions.

Research Questions and Methods

I am interested in how Hapa people perceive themselves in terms of language and its culturally diverse background. Speaking Japanese and being ethnic Japanese is a very big part of identifying myself for me. I would rather say that I only have those factors to categorize myself compared with Hapa people's rich background. To collect information and get to know about Hapa people, I conducted four interviews: 1) Ms. Julia Simon who is Chinese and White Hapa, 2) Mr. Joseph Morton who is Pilipino and White Hapa also Julia's boyfriend, 3) Ms. Jenny McLaughlin who is Philipino and White Hapa, and 4) Mr. Patrick Anderson who is Korean and White Hapa. In interviews, I talked to my interviewees in English and Koreans, whichever is comfortable for interviewees. Each interview is 90 minute long. Fortunately it was not hard to pick up those Hapa interviewees because they are majority around there in Hawaii. However, I picked up those participants carefully by considering each background especially where they are originally from. Two of them are from the mainland U.S. and one is from Hawaii and lastly the other one has a military background, which means he has a lot of different places he spent when he was a kid.

Identity may be conceptualized and operationalized in different ways such as census or other government forms, by the simple question "What are you,?" or by asking how strongly they identify with a racial group or groups. (Khanna, 2004) So, on this research interview, basically I keep asking this question: "What are you?," which actually comes up in a book *Part Asian, 100% Hapa* as well. This is a book which has intimacy, beauty, and powerful self-expression of Hapa people with simple head-on portraits. Hapa people describe how they perceive themselves with their own words to answer the question "What are you?" This question might be too direct way of asking identity instead of "Who are you?" However, it would focus on more non-biased perception. Therefore, I interviewed Hapa people by asking "What are you?" and interestingly they explained it to me with their own words and points of view.

Consequently, several findings have emerged through the research. Here are some

findings which I separated into two categories: 1) Reflections of how people treat you, and 2) Language and identity. In the following chapter, those findings will be analyzed with specific research facts.

Findings and Analysis

1) Reflections of how people treat you

All of interviewees said that they never thought about their identity until they were treated differently by people from other non-Hapa people. For example, one of interviewees Julia told me that she never felt that she is something different until she went to the mainland U.S. to go to a college. At that time she was placed into a dorm where students of color lived with international students from different countries just because she has a Asian-looking face. She didn't mean that she was offended to be a student of color or an international, but she was just shocked how people in the mainland treated her in a different way from other normal white American students. She was born and raised in Hawaii and people around her are mostly Hapas. Teachers, people at customer service, and other students in a class room treated her indifferently at all. So those experiences with outside people gave her an opportunity to think about who she is. Then when I asked her "Who are you?", Julia told me that she has a strong identity as being "Hapa":

I went to the school in the mainland, because I wanted to see something different world from Hawaii, and I was kind of tired of living this small island....but those experienced and people's different attitude actually changed my way to see the environment in which I was grown up. I used to think Hawaii was so small and always behind from the mainland...like a music, fashion...But, I started to appreciate Hawaii's rich cultural diversity and environment. Being a part of Chinese and being a part of American, both are a big part of myself. So I would say being Hapa is my identity.

As Julia experienced, the opposite case happened to Jenny. She was born and raised in the mainland, California. She was always a kind of target to be pointed out as something different from the majority of white group. People assumed her to be a Mexican most of the time because she has a little dark skin. One time when she was walking on the street, a little

kid asked her mother with pointing out her, “Why she looks different?” and the mother told her kid, “If you are naughty, you gonna be like that.” What is “like that”? The mother told her kid as if Jenny were something bad as a result of punishment. I cannot believe that actually happened to this real world. Is being different in terms of skin color that much big deal? Jenny told me that it frequently happened to her in the environment she grew up and those experiences actually pushed her to think who she is, too. However, I insist that it's very stupid to deal with people by their skin color or outlook, but I realized I am one of them who always sort out people based on their appearance as I categorized myself in a foreign country.

On the other hand, Jenny comes to feel more comfortable since she got in Hawaii. Being Hapa is very natural to everyone there. More than that, being mixed with three or four different ethnicities is very common in Hawaii. Therefore, she doesn't need to be bothered by a special attention from people around her while she is in Hawaii. As a Korean and White Hapa, Patrick also talked about this difference on how people treat him in the mainland or in Hawaii. He was used to be asked, “what half are you?” He always had to explain that his mother is Korean and his father is American. But while he is in Hawaii, people don't even ask him this question, because he is very “usual” in Hawaii.

As Thompson says, multiracials of Asian descent have a variety of choices available for self-identification: however, this “choice” may become obscured by others who may be quick to categorize based upon their own monoracial template of racial understanding (Thompson, 2000). The place to be involved is a big factor to create people's own perspective either positively or negatively. Obviously Jenny and Patrick show their comfort to be in Hawaii compared with the mainland U.S.

2) Language and identity

Language shapes part of someone's impression. This was what I strongly perceived while I was interviewing Patrick Anderson who is a Korean White Hapa again. He was born and raised in the U.S. but his mother was Korean so that he always could have an access to Korean language and culture. He can speak both Korean and English although his Korean is not as fluent as his native language English. When I talked to him, he first used English only. But once he changed language from English to Korean, he sounded a very different person. He explains like this:

Although English is most comfortable to tell what I'm really thinking, but I use Korean

when I talk to Korean friend and professors. Why? I think language shapes cultures, too. So I feel more comfortable to use a certain form of Korean speaking when I talk to elder people. English sometimes sounds too light. But I also didn't know that differences until I actually get interacted with Korean people from Korea though...

The same thing happens to me, too. When I speak in English, I tend to talk very fast. When I speak in Japanese, I talk very slow. Comparing to English, Japanese makes my character closer to the one I perceive myself. I even feel consciously that I act like a different person depends on which language I use. Besides, as Patrick explained to me, which language should be used to communicate people with highly affects whom you communicate with. Being Hapa means sometimes bilingual by nature. Language transmits its culture and implication so that Hapa people unconsciously could understand both sides of different cultures. Being Hapa has automatically two different personas which are by the name of language. Language is an inseparable companion of identity.

Julia also told me that she saw a different aspect in her mother when she talked to relatives and family in Chinese in China. She thought her mother's way of talking in Chinese sounded assertive and aggressive. It's not because she can't understand what she says. Although Julia could understand conversational Chinese, she was raised in the U.S. in English at home. Especially her father is an American so her family tends to use English which most members can understand. So she was used to communicate with her mother mostly in English. Seeing her mother in different language must have given Julia different impression.

I had a similar experience. When I talk to someone who was older than me, using English to communicate with them is a little bit awkward. Because Japanese has a honorific ways of speaking. Although English might have polite forms, I still feel uncomfortable to use English which has a decisive and directive tone. Language plays an important role in how to communicate with others and how to express oneself.

I used to believe that identity was shaped by language and ethnicity as I categorized myself. However, those Hapa interviewees have shown that while these affect identity to some extent, other factors are involved as well. These factors are not always easy to see at first, and sometimes it takes stepping outside of the situation to get a better view. I became more Japanese by being in Hawaii, just as they were forming their own identity by looking at it from an outside perspective through the interaction with people from different

community and background. At the same time, I realized that how silly it was to sort out people into certain categories by only their outlook and its language. Even though it is easy to categorize people, people have a different perspective and create its own identity no matter how they look. As one of girls who shows up on a book *Part Asian, 100% Hapa* says, as a response to “What are you?”, “I am a person.” This answer stuck me very strongly and I figured out that there are no points to sort out people only based on their outlook and background. We are all the same person and we don't need to be categorized into a certain group. I would rather to say that we should not categorize others and we should not be categorized by others.

I also used to believe that where we were born and where we were raised occupies the main factors to perceive our identity. But I am inclined to think there are more factors that shape our own identity. From the interview with Hapa people, one is highlighted which is “a sense of belonging”. This sense could give a person a clear guide as to where they are. One of interviewees Joseph describes like this:

If I chose which places is my hometown, I would say Hawaii. It's just because of people here and environment here gives me more feeling of “belonging”. I am not from here, I am not a loco boy but still the way people treated me, is very different from the mainland. I like it. It's different from being in a military, too. Besides, there are a lot of Hapa people like me in Hawaii.

It is not easy for Joseph to decide which cities and places are a hometown because he has moved to several places such as Guam, Saipan, and several Asian countries with his family. Doing military service could also give him “a sense of belonging,” but it's not stable feeling and it only happens when he was in a military life which was located in temporary places and different countries. It seemed that he didn't want to talk about his identity. He told me that he was no one else or nothing to response to a question “what are you?” at the beginning of my interview. However, as we talked about places he used to live before and Hawaii's unique perspectives with rich cultural diversity, he gradually started to think about how he perceives himself through the environment which he is actually in now.

Conclusions and Further Questions

Identity has multiple aspects including culture and religion as well as language. However, as long as I perceive those Hapa people, “a sense of belonging” is a very important factor when they tried to see where they are and what they are. Since being Hapa cannot really be shifted to one side of both ethnic and cultural background, the environment and the way in which people treat them highly affected their identity. Hawaii seems to be a very ideal place for everyone who want to be anyone else they define because of its rich cultural diversity and people’s sense of appreciation for those differences.

Through this research, new questions have come up to my mind, which is that identity is not necessarily to be good. The factors to perceive our own identity has both good and bad aspects. One of interviewees, Jenny, told me an interesting story of why she feels uncomfortable sometimes to some extent in Hawaii. When she was in the mainland, she usually joined a Pilipino or Mexican group. For both in a positive and negative way, she always got an attention from people of a different group. Even though most of the time people’s attention to her implies curiosity or exclusion towards someone different, she got used to be treated differently very much. However, it is totally different in Hawaii. She rarely gets attention because everyone is different which is very natural there. However, at the same time, it makes her think about “I am one of them, nothing special.”

“A sense of belonging” is a very important factor to perceive identity but at the same time, it might give people lower self-esteem. People tend to prefer to be something different from others, so that being Hapa in Hawaii has both positive and negative factors which are very similar feeling of my experience in Hawaii. I was tired of being Japanese when I was in Japan before, but when I was in Hawaii I realized I feel comfortable to be categorized into “Japanese” to some extent.

To the end of this research, according to Tina, racial categorization of people can sometimes, through not always, ‘trump’ or override ethnic designations. That is, people’s ethnic identities may be subsumed within broader racial identities which are imposed by others. (Tina G Patel, p.124). People might want to be categorized to a greater or lesser extent to see their identity more clearly.

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